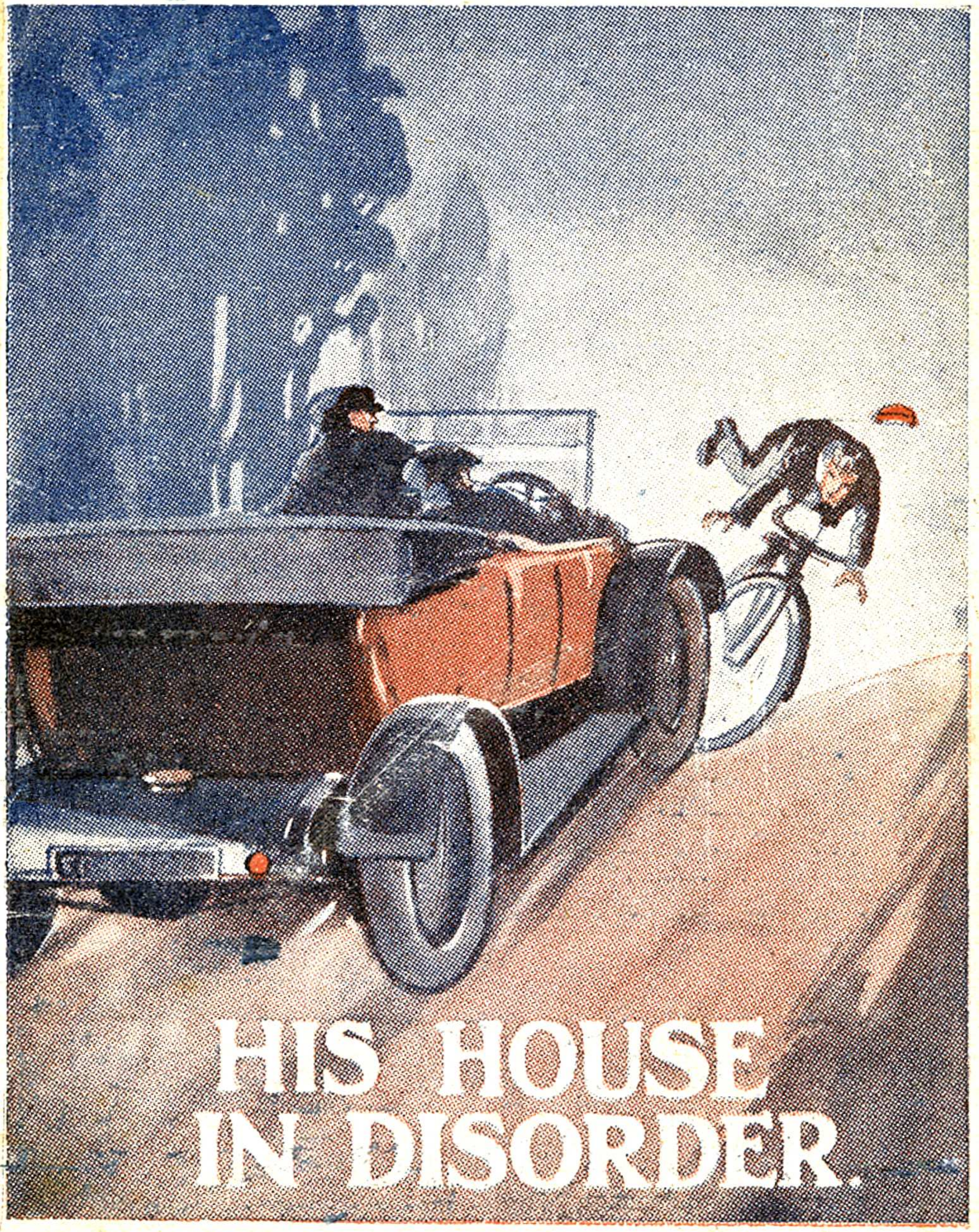
No. 328.—FINE NEW "FOOTER" SERIES BEGINS IN THIS NUMBER!

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY 1½D



HIS HOUSE IN DISORDER.

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, LORD DORRIMORE, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Valley of Gold," "The Traitors of Caribou Pass," "The Fury of Thunder Rapids," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A SORROWFUL HOMECOMING!

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST carefully adjusted his necktie, and surveyed himself with extreme favour in the big mirror.

"Yes, dear old boys, I think I'll do," he observed critically. "The waistcoat is not exactly accordin' to my fancy—but, after all, it is really not so bad. What do you think?"

"I think you look like a walking advertisement for a tailor's shop!" said Tommy Watson, grinning. "Still, that's your concern. If you will go about in such a condition——"

"Begad!" interrupted Sir Montie severely. "You are shockin'ly rude, Tommy, old boy. I really must protest against this frightful levity. Clothin' is a very serious matter, an'——"

"Oh, my hat!" I groaned. "He's started off now! We can't allow it, Tommy.' Let's take him outside quickly, and bundle him into a taxicab. You needn't be particular how you handle him."

Sir Montie gasped with horror. For the first time for weeks he was his own elegant self—as neat as a new pin from top to toe. And he was justly proud of the fact that his tailors and his outfitters had done him well. As Tommy remarked, they had probably done him in another way, too.

We were at Lord Dorrimore's town house, and we had only just got back from North-West Canada, where we had passed through some stirring adventures. Most of the juniors had gone on to their own homes. Nelson Lee had accompanied Lord Dorrimore to the latter's club, and they were afterwards making for Nelson Lee's place in Gray's Inn Road.

Sir Montie was just off to see his aunt, Lady Helen Tregellis-West, and Tommy Watson was booked for his parents' address. As for myself, I should go to Gray's Inn Road. But, beforehand, I had promised Reginald Pitt that I would pay him a call.

He was quite anxious that I should meet his father and mother. They lived in Duncan Square, W., and Pitt had gone home already. I told him that I would follow, and it was my intention to go straight off. Afterwards, I would join the guv'nor and Dorrie at Gray's Inn Road.

Sir Montie and Tommy went off, and I was soon on a 'bus bound for Duncan Square. The 'bus did not actually go through the square, but near by it. I got off the vehicle, and walked briskly along to Duncan Square, looking for No. 59.

It was late afternoon, and quite warm, for the September day was very cheerful and sunny. I had not proceeded twenty yards into the square before I saw Reginald Pitt's figure standing on the pavement some little way ahead of me.

He looked rather undecided, and I

wondered what he was doing there. And, just at that moment, he glanced round and saw me. As he did so he came hurrying along the pavement as though upon urgent business.

Reginald Pitt, of the Remove, was quite a decent fellow—one of the best. He and I got on very well together, and I was coming along to see his people because I didn't want to offend him—although I must admit that I wasn't exactly keen upon being introduced.

"My hat! I'm glad you've come, Nipper!" exclaimed Pitt, as he hurried up to me. "I'm in a muddle—I can't make it out! I've just been into my house, and it's not my house at all! The butler let me in—or, rather, he wouldn't let me in, and I pushed past him, and then——"

"Steady on—steady on!" I interrupted. "My dear chap, you're talking rubbish! The fact is, you seem to be pretty excited——"

"Excited!" echoed Pitt anxiously. "It's not that! I—I'm worried—I'm bewildered! I can't make head or tail of it! It's the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me!"

I took him by the arm.

"Calm down, my son," I exclaimed. "Now, shall we go straight to your house, or not?"

Pitt looked at me in a very peculiar way.

"No—nunno!" he said hesitatingly. "We—we'd better not go there just now, Nipper. I say, I'm tremendously pleased you're here," he went on eagerly. "I was all alone, and I didn't know what to make of it. But now I've got you to talk to, and you're a jolly keen chap, Nipper."

"You're a keen chap, yourself," I reminded him.

"Not the same way as you," he exclaimed. "Besides, I'm feeling too jolly upset just now to think at all. I can't understand it, and I can only conclude that something must be terrifically wrong!"

"Just inside the square green there are some seats," I said. "Come on, old chap. We'll go in there, and squat down and have a little talk. We shall attract attention if we stay here."

"Good idea," said Pitt.

He welcomed the suggestion, and we crossed over the road and made our way into the gardens which decorated the central portion of Duncan Square. It was a kind of miniature park, with many flowerbeds, and neat paths.

We selected an empty seat, and sat down. I could see quite plainly that Pitt was unusually agitated. I had never seen him in quite this condition before. As a general rule he was remarkably cool and clear-headed, and it took a good lot to put him off his stroke, so to speak.

"Tell me what happened," I said shortly.

"Well, you see, the butler——"

"Blow the butler!" I interrupted. "I want to know everything from the start—providing, of course, that you care to tell me. I'm not anxious to pry into your affairs, Pitt——"

"My dear chap, there's nothing I should like better than to tell you the yarn," interrupted Pitt. "As you know, I left Dorrie's place to come straight home, didn't I?"

"Yes; and you were rather worried because your people hadn't turned up or sent any message," I agreed. "Well, you came straight home?"

"Yes—and I took a taxi, if you'll recollect," said Pitt. "I dropped at the gate, walked up to the house, and then knocked upon the door. I expected it to be opened by Marshall, my pater's old butler."

"And wasn't it?"

"No. The door was opened by a stoutish man—a butler right enough, but not Marshall," said Pitt. "Of course, I walked straight in."

"Naturally," I said. "A chap generally does walk straight into his own house."

I couldn't understand what Pitt was getting at, and why he was explaining this to me so fully.

"There was nothing queer about that," he went on, "but the butler looked at me as though I were an intruder. He asked me what I meant by it, and said his name was Hawkins. And when I asked him where my mother was he didn't seem to know what I meant."

"Evidently a fool," I observed.

"No, he wasn't," said Pitt. "This butler chap got a bit nasty, and then told me that his master was at home. Naturally, I took it to mean that he referred to my father. You'd do the same, wouldn't you?"

"Of course," I said.

"Well, the butler told me that if I

didn't get out he'd put me out—and then fairly took the wind out of me by saying that Mr. Pitt didn't live in the house at all. He said that his master wasn't my father. And then he added that the chap who lived in the house was named Simon Raspe."

"What a pretty name!" I commented.

"Blow the name!" said Pitt. "Of course, I looked at the chap blankly."

"I should think you did," I remarked. "Jolly careless of you, Pitt. You evidently went into the wrong house. Fancy you making such a bloomer! And you didn't have anything strong before you left Dorrie's——"

"Oh, don't rot!" protested the junior, impatient with worry. "I thought the same as you did—I came to the conclusion that I had blundered into the wrong house. Of course, I apologised on the spot, and walked out. But now comes the extraordinary part of it. When I got outside I found that the house was No. 59, and that it was, without doubt, my pater's place."

I looked at Pitt curiously.

"It was really your pater's house?" I said.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

"But if it's your father's house how is it that this butler told you it belongs to a man named Simon Raspe?" I asked.

"Goodness knows!" said Pitt, "I was so bowled over I didn't know what to do. Then I spotted you, and—and there you are! What do you think I ought to do now?"

I considered for a moment.

"Either the butler was pulling your leg, or your pater has let the house furnished to somebody," I said slowly. "That's about the most likely explanation, I should think."

"But my people wouldn't let the house furnished!" said Pitt. "They've never done such a thing—and wouldn't dream of it! Besides, if that was the case the butler would know about it," he added shrewdly. "The butler would certainly know that the house really belonged to my father, and he would have told me at once."

"H'm! I suppose he would," I agreed. "It's a bit mysterious, my son, but there's no reason why you should get the wind up. It's just one of those little problems that explain themselves if you only go to work in the right way. Did you happen to recognise any of the furniture in the hall?"

"I didn't take any notice of it," said Pitt. "You see, I was dead certain it was my pater's place, and didn't even look round. My only hat! It's—it's amazing! Here am I, just got back from a long holiday in America, and I haven't even seen my people yet! And when I go home, I find—this!"

"It's certainly a bit queer," I admitted. "The best thing we can do is to go to the house at once, and make inquiries. Perhaps that butler chap was a bit dotty. I'll stay outside, if you like."

"No fear!" said Pitt quickly. "I want you with me!"

"Good enough! I'm your man!"

We rose from the seat, and soon walked out of the enclosure, crossed the road, and pushed open the gate of No. 59. Pitt went first, and I followed, quite interested in the little problem which he had provided. I had certainly never expected anything of this kind when I came to Duncan Square.

We arrived on the big doorstep, and Pitt gave a brisk tattoo upon the knocker.

"He kept me waiting hours before," he remarked.

But this time the door was soon opened. Without a doubt, the man in the hall was Hawkins. He was a portly individual in butler's uniform, and as he looked at Pitt he frowned. He transferred his attentions to me, and frowned even more.

"Come on!" said Pitt grimly.

Without compunction he pushed the butler aside, and strode into the hall. I followed while Hawkins was making a vain attempt to grab my companion. Pitt was standing in the middle of the hall, looking round him.

"Yes, this is the pater's place all right!" he exclaimed warmly. "That hall-stand—the stags' heads! I should know 'em in a thousand! And there's this picture, too—this lovely oil painting by an old master! And the barometer—why, it's got my initials carved in the woodwork! I did it when I was about ten, and got a good hiding for it, too!"

"Well, what's to be done now?" I asked.

The butler was furious.

"You confounded young rascals!" he

said hotly. "What do you mean by pushing your way in here like this? Clear out at once, or I'll——"

"You'll do nothing!" snapped Pitt. "Look here, I've had enough of your blessed bounce! This is my father's house—it belongs to Mr. Reginald Pitt, and all your rot about a man named Simon Raspe——"

"See here, my lad!" interrupted the butler fiercely. "I know what I'm doing, and I've got orders——"

"Confound your orders!" roared Pitt. "This is my father's house, and I've got more right here than you have! Do you think I'm going to stand here and be ordered out by a blessed servant?"

Pitt was boiling now, and I stepped forward.

"There's no need to have an argument about it," I said gently. "Why can't we talk about this calmly, and get at the truth? Now, look here, Hawkins, do you really mean to say that this house doesn't belong to Mr. Reginald Pitt?"

"It does not!" snapped the butler. "And I'm not going to be questioned by a couple of young whipper-snappers ——"

"Steady on!" I interrupted. "We're just trying to get at the truth, that's all. My chum here knows for a fact that this is his pater's house, and he's just come home from a trip abroad. Yet you say that the house belongs to Mr. Simon Raspe!"

"And so it does!" exclaimed Hawkins.

"Are you sure he hasn't rented it, furnished?"

The butler looked impatient.

"My master's not the kind of man to rent a furnished house," he replied curtly. "And, what's more, there's something about it all that I didn't care to say—if you want to know the truth. I thought I'd spare this youngster's feelings. I told him I didn't know anything about a man named Pitt—but I do!"

Reginald Pitt stared.

"You do!" he echoed. "Spare my feelings! What—what in the name of wonder do you mean?"

"I'm not saying any more!" replied the butler sullenly.

For a moment Pitt hardly knew what to say.

"Is Mr. Raspe at home?" I asked.

"Yes, he is—in the library," replied the man. "It's a good thing that baize door shuts it off from this part of the house, or he'd be out here clipping your ears! Now, run off before I——"

"We're not running off just yet," I interrupted. "Look here, Hawkins, I suggest that Pitt should go in and see Mr. Raspe at once. This house really belongs to Pitt's father, and it's only natural that he should be flabbergasted to find all this. A short talk with Mr. Raspe would explain things."

The butler shook his head.

"It can't be done!" he said grimly. "The master gave strict orders that he wasn't to be disturbed—and I'm not going to let you boys go bothering him just as you like. Understand?"

Pitt glared.

"I understand that you're a lot too big for your boots!" he snapped. "I'm going to see Mr. Raspe now—and I'm going to find out what this means! A stranger in possession of my father's house! My goodness! We'll jolly soon get to know the truth!"

He moved towards the baize door at the end of the hall.

"Don't you go there!" shouted the butler angrily.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Pitt. "Come on, Nipper!"

I had been thinking about stopping behind, but since Pitt had invited me, I followed him, in spite of the butler's attempt to detain me. We pushed beyond the baize door, and found ourselves in a wide corridor which ran at right angles to the hall. Pitt, of course, knew exactly where the library was. He was fully acquainted with every nook and cranny in this house. He had been born in it. He had spent the whole of his childhood here.

He rushed to the library, and threw open the door. I arrived at the same moment, and the portly butler came blundering behind. I found myself looking into a well appointed room, with a soft carpet on the floor, a fine mahogany pedestal desk in the centre, and the walls of the room were completely lined with beautiful book cases. It was a library of the finest description.

And, seated in a luxurious lounge chair, a stranger was smoking a large cigar. He looked up calmly as we appeared, and laid aside a book. As I looked at him I felt a strange chord of remembrance in my mind. It seemed to me that I had seen that face before.

"Well?" he asked smoothly. "May I ask the meaning of this—this extraordinary intrusion?"

The butler, from the rear, answered.

"I tried to keep the young rascals out, sir," he panted. "But they dodged past me. I couldn't catch them——"

"That will do, Hawkins," said Mr. Simon Raspe smartly. "Leave these boys here; you may go."

The butler, taking a deep breath, departed, closing the door upon us. We were in the library, and Pitt advanced. In spite of myself, I couldn't help feeling that I was an intruder. After all, this affair was nothing to do with me. But Pitt had asked me to come, and I couldn't back out.

For a few moments nobody spoke. Mr. Simon Raspe sat in his chair toying lazily with his cigar. He was a biggish man, inclined to be stout, with fat, baggy cheeks and a very unhealthy complexion. His nose, in contrast to the rest of his face, was long and sharp, giving him a curious hawk-like appearance. His eyes were piercing, and looked out from beneath black eyebrows.

In appearance, he was immaculate, and his black-grey hair was brushed back, and looked unpleasantly oily. In fact, Mr. Simon Raspe looked oily altogether. He was just that type of individual.

"This is most interesting," he said, in a silky voice. "You evidently know me, but I must confess that you have the advantage."

"My name is Reginald Pitt, and this is a chum of mine—a school friend," said Pitt. "I want to say something to you, Mr. Raspe."

"You are at liberty to say what you please," replied the other.

I felt relieved, for some reason or other, that Pitt had not introduced me by name. I didn't want this man to know that my name was Nipper—for he would immediately associate me with Nelson Lee. As it was, he didn't know me from Adam.

"First of all, will you please explain what you are doing in this house—in my father's house?" asked Pitt grimly. "Will you explain why you are in my father's library, sitting in my father's easy-chair, and reading one of his books?"

Mr. Raspe knocked the ash from his cigar.

"You are mistaken," he said smoothly.

"Mistaken!" shouted Pitt. "I'm not——"

"This house is my property," interrupted Mr. Raspe. "This library is my property, this chair is my property, and this book is my property! Your father owns nothing whatever here!"

"But—but I do not understand!" panted Pitt. "When—when I went to America on a holiday, my father was here——"

"A great deal can happen in a short space of time," said Mr. Raspe smoothly. "In fact, a great deal has happened. It is no wish of mine to hurt your feelings. Perhaps it would be as well to put the matter bluntly. Your parents were kicked out of this house a month ago!"

"Kicked out!" gasped Pitt hoarsely.

Mr. Simon Raspe nodded.

"I kicked them out!" he added, with casual contempt.

Reginald Pitt flamed into fury at the man's callous brutality.

"You—you rotter!" shouted Pitt, rushing forward with clenched fists. "You confounded rogue! It's not true—it can't be true! My father and mother have lived here for years and years——"

"I will overlook your insults this once—but not again!" interrupted Mr. Raspe curtly. "Let me speak! While you have been absent your father and mother have left this property for good. If you wish to know the truth, your father made a bad speculation, and lost everything he possessed. Much against my wish I was compelled to seize everything, including this house and its contents. It rather took my fancy, and so I have come to live in it personally."

Pitt staggered back. The words were uttered with a calm, deliberate maliciousness, and I felt that I'd like to go forward and smash my fist into the smooth-tongued brute's smirking face.

"It's a lie!" panted Pitt dazedly. "It's an infernal lie! My—my parents haven't lost everything—you—you must have swindled them——"

Mr. Simon Raspe jumped to his feet.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Do you think I will allow you to speak to me in that way in my own house?"

"It's my father's house!" shouted Pitt furiously.

Mr. Raspe touched the bell, and the butler at once appeared.

"Show these boys into the street!" ordered Mr. Simon Raspe. "If they give you any trouble, call a footman and kick them out!"

Reginald Pitt clenched his fists. And then, before I could stop him he rushed forward, and his right shot with full force into the sneering man's face. His fist landed with a thud, and Mr. Simon Raspe staggered back.

And then, of course, we were thrown out. That punch of Pitt's did the trick properly. Almost before we knew it we found ourselves upon the steps, and the door slammed behind our backs.

CHAPTER II

AT GRAY'S INN ROAD.

REGINALD PITT almost sobbed with rage and helplessness.

We were walking along Duncan Square, and, indeed, were were attracting attention. For Pitt's face was flushed, and his eyes were literally blazing. I knew that he wanted calming down.

"Let's get back to that park seat," I suggested.

He accompanied me without a word, and in a few moments we were back upon the seat, and Pitt looked at me fiercely.

"By Heaven!" he said chokingly. "I—I wish I'd hit him more than once! The brutal rotter! I—I don't know what to think—my mind's in a maze. What do you make of it, Nipper?"

"The first thing, my dear chap, is to cool down," I said. "Getting excited like this won't do any good."

"But—but it's awful——"

"I know it's awful, and I'm tremendously sorry," I interrupted gently. "I felt just the same as you—I wanted to punch that sneering, gloating rotter, but I held myself in check. Punching him doesn't do any good—and, in any case, it wasn't for me to do it."

"It's my father's house—I know every stick of it!" muttered Pitt brokenly. "Oh, Nipper, what does it mean? He—he said that the pater had made a bad speculation and lost everything, and he seized the house."

"I expect he was telling the simple truth," I replied. "At least, I mean he seized the house because your father had made a bad speculation. Whether Raspe's part of it was honest remains open to query. Your pater's a financier, isn't he?"

"I—I've never troubled to think," said Pitt. "I know he's always done big things in the City—stockbroking, and all that kind of business. My pater's rich—he's got pots of money!"

"It's easy to lose a lot of money at that game," I said quietly. "It's as clear as daylight, Pitt, that your pater has met with a disaster while you were over in Canada with us."

"I—I never expected anything of this kind!" said Pitt, almost ready to break into tears. "Oh, Nipper, you—you can just imagine how I feel! It's—it's almost more than I can bear to think of!"

I put an arm round his shoulder.

"Cheer up, old man," I said. "Giving way to despair won't do any good. You'll learn the whole truth from your father——"

"But—but I don't know where he is!" interrupted Pitt desperately. "Raspe didn't tell us, and I can't go back to inquire!"

"Well, come along with me to Gray's Inn Road," I said. "That's the best thing that can be done. Would you care to tell Mr. Lee anything about it?"

"I'll tell him everything—why shouldn't I?" asked the other. "Perhaps he'll be able to find my people. Oh, that scoundrel! I've got an idea he's a horrible rogue, Nipper!"

"I'm jolly well certain of it," I said. "His very look was enough for me—the slimy, sneering bounder! Look here, I rather fancied I recognised him. Anyhow, I believe I've seen his face somewhere—— By Jove! I've got it! I saw a face like his in the guv'nor's gallery of crooks!"

"What?" gasped Pitt, staring at me.

I jumped up.

"Come on!" I said. "We'll soon make sure—although my memory for faces isn't often at fault. We'll go along to Gray's Inn Road at once."

Pitt was much calmer now, but it was the calmness of despair. We arrived at the guv'nor's house in Gray's Inn Road within twenty minutes, and we found that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had not yet arrived. I was rather pleased about this, for we had the place to ourselves.

I took Pitt straight up into the consult-

ing-room, and then went off into Lee's private sanctum. From the bookcase I selected a bulky volume—a photograph album, in fact—but one of a peculiar nature.

Pitt and I went over it together, and, when we were nearly through it, we both gave vent to exclamations. For there, staring at us from one of the pages, was a photograph which we could not mistake. We saw the face of a man about ten years younger than Mr. Simon Raspe.

His cheeks were not so puffy, and his hair was quite black. But there was no mistaking that face—no mistaking the sharp nose. We were looking upon a photograph of Simon Raspe, taken many years earlier.

"That's the chap!" exclaimed Pitt excitedly. "But—but it's not him, after all—this chap's named Beckett——"

"My dear chap, you can't take any notice of names," I interrupted. "Now, what does it say? 'Horace Becket, convicted of blackmail and fraud in the Lombard Street case. Sentenced to three years penal servitude. One of the cleverest blackmailers in existence. A man to be closely watched. Dabbles in fraud and conspiracy if an opening arises.'"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Pitt.

"That's our merchant," I said grimly. "A blackmailer who served three years in chokey, my son!"

"And—and he's the man who's turned my father and mother out of their home!" gasped Pitt. "Oh, Nipper, what can we do? I—I——"

"Why, boys, I didn't expect to see you here," exclaimed Nelson Lee, coming into the room. "Hallo! Anything wrong, Pitt? You are looking extremely agitated, my boy. I hope nothing has happened——"

"It has, sir!" gasped Pitt. "I—I can't tell you—I feel so awful about it! Nipper will explain."

I did explain, as shortly and as concisely as possible. Nelson Lee listened and Lord Dorrimore, who had come in first, had discreetly retired into another room.

Nelson Lee was looking rather grim when I had finished.

"I needn't tell you, Pitt, how very grieved I am to hear this," he said quietly. "It pains me more than I can tell you. But, as Nipper says, it is fairly evident that your father had a financial battle with this man, and—well, he lost. He lost everything at one blow."

"But this fellow's a criminal, sir!"

"Quite so, Pitt, but he has served his sentence, and as long as he keeps on the right side of the law he cannot be touched," said Lee gently. "And it is quite possible for a convicted criminal to engage in financial enterprises of this kind. Raspe, as he now calls himself, is one of the cleverest crooks in this country."

"Do you think there's anything fishy about this business, sir?" I asked.

"Frankly, I do," replied Lee. "And, what is more, I will certainly look into the matter as early as possible. Don't worry, Pitt. If Raspe has defrauded your parents, I will put matters right."

Pitt's eyes gleamed with gratitude.

"Oh, it's ripping of you, sir!" he said huskily.

For the life of him he couldn't keep his eyes from filling. He fumbled for his handkerchief, and jerked it out of his pocket. As he did so a telegram envelope came out, too, and fell to the floor. Pitt caught his breath, and grabbed at the wire.

"Why, this—this was given to me this morning—at Lord Dorrimore's house," he panted. "I—I forgot to open it, and stuffed it into my pocket. Oh, what an idiot! Don't you remember, Nipper?"

"I remember the wire being handed to you," I replied.

"He tore it open, and held it shakily while he read the words. They were as follows:

"Cannot come to greet you. Will explain when we meet. Come straight to 25, Oakland Grove, Fulham. Your mother is here.—FATHER."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Pitt. "If I'd only opened this before, I should have known. I must get off at once, Mr. Lee, if you'll excuse me. I want to see my pater and mater awfully badly."

Pitt went off almost before we could say anything else to him. He was tremendously excited, and there was little wonder for this. This blow had come as a great shock to him.

But, on the whole, I thought it was better that he had found out in advance. For it would save his father and mother

the pain of telling him what had happened.

As quickly as a motor-'bus would take him, Pitt hurried to Oakland Grove. To his dismay, he found this to be a somewhat squalid by-street off the Fulham Road. It tried to look very respectable, but failed.

And No. 25, to Pitt's further horror, was a boarding-house—at least, a place where apartments were to let. He went up the steps, feeling strangely perturbed and sick at heart. He had never dreamed of a home-coming like this!

He knocked upon the door, and it was soon opened by a slatternly maid-servant. She looked at Pitt with a suspicious eye.

"Does—does Mr. Pitt live here?" asked the junior.

"Yes; him an' his missus," replied the girl carelessly. "You'll find 'em on the first floor—back room. You want to see 'em?"

"Yes."

"All right; you can go straight up."

Something seemed to be clutching at Pitt's heart. His parents living in a first floor back room in a boarding-house! His proud father—his gentle, queenly mother! It was almost too awful to be believed.

Pitt bounded up the stairs three at a time, and burst into the room like a whirlwind. And he stood there, breathing hard. Yes, there was no mistake. His father was seated on a fairly comfortable couch, and he half rose as Pitt entered. By the window sat Mrs. Pitt, her face sad and weary looking. But, as she saw Reginald, the sad look disappeared, and she gave a low cry of joy.

"Why, Reggie, you gave me quite a start!" said his father.

"Oh, my boy!" said Mrs. Pitt.

Pitt rushed to his mother's side, and for a moment or two he was embarrassed by her embraces. He had not seen them for weeks, however, and they were just as moved as he was.

But, after the greetings were over, Pitt looked about him, and then gazed at his mother and father. They were no different, except that both were looking somewhat haggard and worn.

His father was as straight as ever—a tall, well-built man with a strong, keen face. His mother was just her own gentle self. She seemed absolutely out of place in this somewhat disreputable apartment.

"Now, my boy, I've got to tell you something that will come as a grave shock to you," said Mr. Pitt hesitatingly.

"I know, pater—I—I know all about it!" interrupted Reginald Pitt. "I—I went straight to our house in Duncan Square——"

"It is our house no longer, Reggie," put in Mrs. Pitt gently.

The junior told his parents exactly how it had come about, and what he had done. A quiet gleam of satisfaction entered his father's eyes when he heard of that incident when Pitt had punched Mr. Simon Raspe in the face.

"I can't blame you for doing that, my boy," said Mr. Pitt. "Upon my soul, I felt like treating him that way myself. The scoundrel! You needn't think that this disaster was the result of a fair speculation. You don't understand business, but I can at least tell you that Simon Raspe swindled me out of everything I possessed. But I can't touch him—he's too clever!"

"Can't—can't you tell the police?" asked Pitt.

"I can tell the police everything—but what will be the good?" asked his father wearily. "I've no proof—not a shred. I am convinced that such proof actually exists, but it is locked away somewhere in Simon Raspe's papers. The scoundrel was too smart for me—I didn't realise his game until it was too late."

"But—but he left you something, surely?" asked Reginald.

"Nothing!"

"But—but how can you live?" panted the junior.

"We are having a grave struggle," said his father. "My boy, I don't like to distress you, but sometimes we do not even have enough to eat! We have great trouble in paying the meagre rent for these two rooms——"

"Oh, you shouldn't have told him!" said Mrs. Pitt, sobbing.

"It is better that he should know!" replied his father. "No good will come of keeping these sad facts from our son. But you needn't worry, Reginald. I am doing my very best to obtain a post——"

"You—you're trying to find work!" exclaimed Pitt, horrified.

"It is the only thing to be done," said Mr. Pitt. "Is there anything disgraceful in that? We are in low water, my

boy—so low that sometimes I almost despair. But when I am in a position to do so, I will expose Simon Raspe for the brutal scoundrel he is. Then I shall have my revenge—then the world will know the truth!"

Pitt was staggered.

"But—but there's no need for this surely," he asked, waving his hand round the room. "Can't you get some money, pater? We've got friends——"

"Friends!" echoed his father bitterly. "Oh, yes, plenty of friends! The kind that leave you as rats will leave a sinking ship! There are some, I will admit, who are staunch and true. But do you suppose for one moment that I would borrow money? My boy, I would prefer to starve! I have some pride left—and I will never take one penny from a friend, no matter how hard he presses me to accept. No, we will struggle on until the position improves."

"But—but they all know?" asked Pitt. "Our friends, I mean?"

"I don't think they do," put in his mother. "At least, they have no idea of our true position. I hope to Heaven they never will know of this disaster, Reggie. It was cruel of your father to tell you so much. It will make you unhappy whilst you are at school——"

"At school!" echoed Pitt blankly. "But I'm not going back to St. Frank's, mother! I couldn't think of it! I'm going to stop here—with you—I'll find a job. There's plenty of work——"

"No, no, my boy; you must go back to St. Frank's," put in Mr. Pitt firmly. "I positively insist upon it. I will not hear of anything else. There is no reason why you should not continue your education—for this one term, at least."

Pitt stared.

"But the fees, pater?" he asked. "The fees are terrible at St. Frank's! You can't possibly pay that money——"

"Fortunately, your fees for the coming term are already paid Reggie," interrupted his father. "They were paid before the crash came. I always believed in keeping those things well in advance. Indeed, your headmaster has even a comfortable little sum to provide you with pocket-money throughout the term."

Pitt looked at his father grimly.

"I won't go, pater," he said.

"My dear boy——"

"I won't go!" declared Pitt firmly. "It—it would be like—like treachery! I couldn't leave you here, knowing all this, and go on just the same as ever at St. Frank's. Look here, I've got an idea! Why not get the money back from the school? It'll be pounds and pounds! Look how handy that'll come in——"

"Reggie, I wish you would listen to me!" put in Mr. Pitt firmly. "I cannot recover the fees from St. Frank's. Such a thing is impossible. And, indeed, if the recovery of the money was easy, I would not think of it. Think of the comment it would cause—just to mention one point. No, you must go back to St. Frank's, and keep on just the same as ever."

"I—I don't like to, dad!"

"But you must like it!" insisted his father. "Your presence at St. Frank's will help us. The very fact that you are there will delude people into the belief that things are still fairly well with us. Don't you see, Reggie? If I took you away suddenly like this—well, it would get talked about. It will be far better in every way for you to go to St. Frank's as if nothing had happened."

"If you put it like that, pater, I suppose you're right," said Reginald slowly. "But—but what about you and mother? How will you get on? What about money—haven't you got any at all?"

"Twenty-seven shillings!" said Mr. Pitt ironically.

"Great Scott!" gasped Reggie. "Twenty-seven shillings! But—but there must be some more! Couldn't—couldn't we go and pawn something? Oh, doesn't it sound awful!"

"Not in the least," said Mr. Pitt. "There is nothing whatever dishonourable in borrowing money on one's own property, Reggie. A pawnbroker's business is just as straightforward as any other. I don't believe in this cant—this ridiculous idea of a visit to a pawnbroker being something disgraceful. As a matter of fact," he added dryly, "I have already called upon 'uncle' on three occasions, and there is nothing left to warrant another visit."

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Pitt blankly. "And—and suppose you don't get something to do, pater?"

"I don't suppose anything of the sort," said his father. "I shall get some-

thing to do. Good gracious, can't you trust me to earn enough money to keep just your mother and myself?"

Reginald was silent. He was horrified at the very thought of his father seeking for a job! Mr. Reginald Pitt, the well-known financier of Lombard Street! It seemed incredible that Mr. Pitt should be compelled to seek employment! But there was nothing dishonourable about it, after all.

Mr. Pitt had been ruined, and left destitute by the evil machinations of a rival financier. And now, instead of giving way to despair, Pitt's father was determined to start all over again. It was a fine spirit. He was not ashamed to tell his son pointedly that he meant to "find a job."

Gradually, Pitt adjusted his ideas, and realised that there was nothing else to be done. The only way for his father was to earn money, not borrow it. But when Reggie thought of his father going from place to place, seeking employment, he experienced a dull pain within him.

Getting employment would be twenty times more difficult for Mr. Pitt than it would be for a man who had been in employment before. Mr. Pitt had been his own master for twenty-five years. He would be turned down at place after place—for he could never ask for employment where he was known. His natural pride would prevent him from humiliating himself in such a way.

"Oh, pater, I don't know what to say!" muttered Reggie at last.

"Say nothing, but keep your courage up," said Mr. Pitt gently. "And now we will dismiss all this talk. We want to hear about your adventures in America. We want to know how you enjoyed yourself. And on Monday you will go back to St. Frank's—and you must do your very best to keep in your usual spirits. Is that a promise, my boy?"

"I—I'll do the best I can, dad," said Pitt, in a low voice.

And the matter was dismissed, and Reginald cheered his parents up by telling them of his stirring adventures in Montana and North-West Canada. But even while he was relating the most exciting events, that dull pain still troubled him.

Reginald Pitt knew that this term at St. Frank's would be a difficult one.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING WRONG WITH PITT.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grinned cheerfully.

"My sons, you're late for the fair!" he observed. "It's all over—I've told the whole yarn to everybody!"

"Good!" I replied. "It's saved us the trouble. I've been funking the ordeal ever since Friday."

We had arrived at St. Frank's, and Handforth evidently thought that he would cause dismay by his statement. Morning lessons were just over, and we were all ready for dinner, as soon as the bell sounded.

We had all come down by the same train, with the exception of Pitt. He hadn't arrived, and I wondered if he would ever come at all. Knowing all the facts, I thought it quite likely that we should not see him at St. Frank's again.

I was very sorry for this, for Reginald Pitt was one of the best fellows in the Remove—and, what was more, an extremely valuable member of the junior football eleven.

On the liner, during our trip across the Atlantic, I had suggested a little football practice. There had been plenty of room for this on deck; and we had got ourselves into trim quite nicely, Pitt showing particularly good form.

I should be very sorry to lose him now. But I realised that it would be almost out of the question for his people to pay the heavy fees at St. Frank's. Mr. Pitt was in very low water now, and I knew well enough that he could not afford these fees.

I was therefore quite surprised when, in chatting with Jack Grey, he told me that Pitt would arrive later.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Why, I got a letter from him this morning," replied Grey. "He's my study mate, and he told me to expect him by the afternoon train. He'll be down, of course. What's the matter with you, Nipper? You speak as if he might not come!"

"Oh, no, not at all," I hastened to say. "But I thought perhaps he might not be down to-day—that's all."

I couldn't quite understand why Pitt was coming, and I concluded that his father's position was not so bad, after

all. But then it struck me that these St. Frank's fees might have been paid months before. And I finally decided that I had hit the solution. As the fees were paid, Pitt was coming.

Everybody was very pleased to see us all, and, although Handforth had already told the yarn about our adventures, the fellows wanted to hear everything from me. There was a great deal of surprise when it was found that my account practically coincided with Handforth's.

"Is this all true?" asked Singleton, in surprise.

"True? Of course it's true!" I replied.

"But we thought that Handforth was spoofing," said Armstrong. "You know how he tells the tale, and exaggerates ——"

"Do you want a thick ear?" bawled Handforth.

"This time Handy couldn't very well exaggerate," I explained. "Our adventures were so startling that there was no room for exaggeration. Well, how's everything going on?"

"Oh, fine!" said Somerton. "But it'll be a lot better with you here, Nipper. We've been a bit lost since the beginning of the term—only a few days, I know. But what's a ship without its skipper?"

"I'm glad you think that," I said. "Well, you chaps, I'm going to make things hum this term—I can tell you that straight off. We're going to break all records in the football line. I want to get the best team together we've ever had, and win every giddy match of the season!"

"That's easier said than done," remarked Hubbard. "Of course, I'll do my best for the team——"

"Thanks all the same, Hubby, old son, but there's nothing doing," I interrupted blandly. "If you want to play football, apply to the Third-Formers! You don't know a goal-post from a chicken-run!"

"Why, you ass, I'm in fine form!" said Hubbard indignantly.

"You'll be given your chance, if you're good enough," I replied. "I'm not a chap who believes in wasting time. To-morrow, we're going to have a good old trial. Those chaps who promise well on the field will be required to practise like old boots!"

"By jings!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd. "I don't reckon I'll be much good at football, chum. Still, I'd like to try my hand."

"Your foot, you mean," I said. "Well, you'll have a chance, Doddy—although cricket's your line. By the way, who's the new merchant—with the burnt cork complexion?"

"Oh, the Indian kid?" said Armstrong.

"Yes."

The juniors grinned.

"He's a queer sort, if you like!" said Singleton, with a chuckle. "Got pots of money, and his pater's a nabob, or something. He's got a name a mile long, and he speaks English at thirteen to the dozen. He uses about twenty words where one would do."

I was quite anxious to make the acquaintance of the new Indian junior. I soon found out that his father was a very big pot in India, and the dusky youth had come to St. Frank's to receive education before going up to Oxford. His name was Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan.

This, of course, was altogether too long for the juniors to articulate, or even remember. And he was generally known as "Dusky." This name had offended his highness greatly at first, but he soon got used to it.

Jack Grey introduced me after dinner. Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan was out in the Triangle strolling underneath the chestnut-trees. He was a dandy, something like Sir Montie, wearing the finest cut clothing, and he was partial to fancy vests and swagger neckties.

"Here you are Dusky!" said Grey cheerfully. "This is Nipper, the captain of the Remove. He's only just arrived, you know."

The Indian boy bowed.

"It is with extreme pleasure that I make your magnificent acquaintance," he said, in a soft voice. "I am charmed and excitedly exuberant."

"There's no need to be excited," I grinned. "I hope you'll enjoy yourself at St. Frank's, Khan. Anyhow, you can be quite certain that you'll have a good time in the Remove."

Hussi Khan smiled.

"I am already enjoying the utmost enjoyments from the magnificent companions around me," he observed. "The stupendous nature of their extraordinary conversation has already charmed me beyond comparison. And I

am overwhelmingly benefited by the knowledge that you are the captain of our august Form."

"Good!" I chuckled. "Do you generally talk at this length, or is it just a passing fancy?"

"I speak the English that is preposterously correct," replied the Indian junior. "It is ridiculously fine, this great language. It gives me the most wonderful pleasure to speak the elongated words, since they convey the most extraordinary meaning. Is not my command of the language strikingly imperfect?"

"It is!" I grinned. Evidently Hussi Khan had meant to say "perfect." But I was soon to learn that he generally used wrong words—with the result, frequently, that his remarks were extremely funny without intending to be.

"You don't play football, I suppose?" I inquired.

"I must regretfully announce that my qualifications do not extend to that ludicrous game," replied Khan. "My sorrow is most enormous, and I can only apologise with all humidity for such outlandish shortcomings."

"That's all right," I chuckled. "Football is a great game, my son, and you might be a dabster at it, for all I know. Anyhow, you'll have to practice, whether you like it or not."

The Indian boy nodded.

"It is most extraordinary desire to practice," he observed. "I have already witnessed with my terrific vision the becoming antics of the boys upon the field of football."

"And you think you'll be able to play?"

"My thoughts are of the most marvellous description," replied Hussi Khan. "I am determined that I shall become an exceptional kicker, and my greatest endeavour will be to learn this wonderful game before many days have passed. I shall be most charmingly obliged if you will instruct me in the various variations. My agility is quite disgusting, and I am confidentally certain that I shall prove to be a most sinister player."

"I suppose you mean singular player?" I said gently. "We don't want any sinister players, my son. Well, if you'll present yourself on Little Side to-morrow, I'll give you a few of those instructions in the various variations."

"My obligation is singularly preposterous," said Hussi Khan, bowing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He had grown quite accustomed to hearing the juniors yell with laughter at his remarks, and he took very little notice of them now. He walked away, smiling, and just then I was attracted by the fact that a junior had walked in through the gateway. It was Reginald Pitt.

I went up to him at once.

"Jolly glad to see you" I said. "Hallo! You mustn't look so glum old chap. Feeling all right?"

"Yes, fairly all right," said Pitt quietly.

Jack Grey came dashing up.

"You awful bounder!" he yelled, grabbing Pitt's hand, and wringing it. "What the dickens do you mean by coming now, instead of this morning? I say, I've got some special stuff in for tea, and we'll have a gorgeous feed!"

Pitt smiled rather wanly.

"That's jolly decent of you," he said. "You're looking just the same, Jack, old boy. Let's hope we have a decent time this term."

Jack Grey looked at his study mate critically.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked bluntly.

Pitt started.

"Wrong with me?" he repeated.

"Yes; you look as blue as a packet of Reckitt's!" said Grey. "Had a row with your people before you came away, or what? You look healthy enough, but there's something troubling you. I can see it."

Pitt tried to laugh naturally.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "What a chap you are to imagine things, Jack! Of course there's nothing wrong with me! Nothing at all."

The very emphasis that he put into the words told its own story. Jack Grey said nothing more at the moment, but hurried Pitt off into Study E, in the Ancient House. Once there, he closed the door, and faced Reginald squarely.

"Now, then, out with it!" he demanded.

"Out with what?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Jack. "You're in trouble of some kind—it's written all over your giddy face! You've got to tell me all about it, or I won't speak to you for a month!"

"I—I can't—there's nothing at all!" said Reginald Pitt hesitatingly.

"Did your father lam you before you left home?"

"No, you ass!"

"You didn't have any bust up?"

"Of course not!"

"Short of cash?"

"No!"

"Have you fallen in love?"

"Oh, don't be such a fathead!" protested Pitt impatiently.

"Well, I know chaps generally do look miserable after they've fallen in love," said Jack Grey. "Queer thing, of course, but it happens like that."

"I tell you I haven't fallen in love!" snorted Pitt. "Do you think I'm such a silly ass as all that?"

"Well, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing!"

"Then you must have got a pain somewhere," declared Grey. "My dear chap, it's no good trying to bluff me like this!" he went on earnestly. "We've been together in this study for a pretty decent time, and you've always been as cheerful as anything. And now, instead of coming here with your usual sunny smile, you look as though you've lost a quid and picked up a bad half-penny!"

Pitt looked at his chum squarely.

"What a persistent beggar you are, Jack!" he said. "As a matter of fact, there is something wrong. My people have had a bit of trouble—family worry, you know. I can't very well explain, but it's upset me, and I suppose I haven't quite got over it."

Jack Grey was all contrition.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry for pestering you so," he said. "I didn't know it was anything like that. I won't say another word, Reggie. But you really must try to look more cheerful. Mooning about won't do any good, you know."

Much as Pitt liked his study chum, at this present moment Jack Grey's presence jarred upon him. He badly wanted to be alone. But it was better, perhaps, that he was not alone.

Pitt had been miserable ever since he left London. There was one thought throbbing in his mind all the time.

How would his parents manage?"

How would they get in enough money to pay their rent, and feed them? Supposing his father didn't get work? What would happen then? These were the points which were worrying Pitt more than he could possibly say.

And he thought of his own position.

This, in itself, made him terribly miserable. Here he was, living a life of comparative luxury. A comfortable bed—good food, and as much as he wanted. Even pocket-money at the end of the week!

It didn't seem right to him—he felt he was mean and contemptible in coming to St. Frank's at all. But what else could he do? His father had positively ordered him to go in the finish.

That morning Pitt had protested again and again, begging that he should be allowed to stay with his parents, and find some work. But neither his father nor mother would hear of it.

Finally, Pitt had rebelled—until his father became angry. Then he gave in at once, and promised that he would try to be as happy as possible. But his thoughts were bitter as he wondered what form this happiness would take.

Jack Grey was not the only one who noticed the difference in Pitt. He kept to himself—he avoided meeting the other fellows. When he did meet them, he had nothing to say. His usually witty remarks were absolutely lacking. And, of course, this was all noticed.

"There's something wrong with Pitt!" declared Handforth firmly. "Goodness knows what it is, but he's totally different now. And it's all happened since he came home. I'm blessed if I can understand it!"

"Family trouble, I expect," said Church. "It's none of our business, anyway."

But all the fellows were not like Church. Junior schoolboys are not generally delicate, and at first Pitt was pestered with questions. But everybody was fully in agreement with Handforth's opinion—that there was something wrong with Pitt.

I had an opportunity of speaking with him just before bedtime. We happened to be alone in the lobby, and I went up to him at once.

"You found your people all right?" I asked softly.

"Yes."

"Everything all serene?"

"Well, yes," said Pitt slowly.

"I'm not going to bother you, old son," I said. "I can easily imagine how upset you are——"

"I say, you won't tell any of the other chaps, will you?" he broke in. "I—I mean about my people being pitched out of their home?"

I pressed his arm.

"My dear chap, I wouldn't breathe a word," I said. "You can rely upon me to keep what I know to myself. And don't forget that the guv'nor is looking into the matter. That means that something's going to be done."

Pitt's eyes gleamed.

"Do—do you really think so?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't think anything about it—I know it," I replied. "Look here, Simon Raspe is a dead wrong 'un, and the guv'nor knows it. It's a sure certainty that he dished your pater. Once Nelson Lee gets on the right track, he'll never leave it until the truth comes out."

"Oh, I hope he does get on the track!" exclaimed Pitt tensely. "Look here, my dad said something about Raspe having proofs of his own guilt—they're in his own possession. If we could only get hold of them——"

"There's not much chance of that," I interrupted. "No, the guv'nor will get to work in another way. He'll unmask this blighter—don't you worry. And, until then, you've got to carry on with a smiling chivvy. Understand?"

"Yes!" said Pitt dully.

"Well, then—smile!" I commanded.

He smiled, but it was forced.

CHAPTER IV.

PITT'S BIG IDEA.

BREAKFAST was the first meal which Pitt partook of in the St. Frank's dining hall. And, somehow, he felt that the food was choking him as he consumed it. He ate very little, in any case.

For, while he was eating, he kept thinking of his father and mother.

He wondered what they were having—it even crossed his mind that they might not be having any breakfast at all. With such a little store of funds at their disposal they were possibly going without breakfast.

Even Mr. Crowell noticed that something was very wrong with Pitt, and breakfast was not over before the Form-master commented on it.

"Pitt!" said Mr. Crowell gently.

Reginald Pitt stared straight before him, eating mechanically.

"Answer, you ass!" muttered Jack Grey, nudging him.

"Eh?" said Pitt, with a start.

"Pitt!" called the Form-master.

"Speaking to me, sir?" said the junior, confused.

"I addressed you before, Pitt, but you were evidently busy with your thoughts," said Mr. Crowell. "I am somewhat concerned to see that you are not eating with your normal heartiness. Is there anything the matter, Pitt?"

"I—I don't feel very hungry, sir."

"Why is that?"

"I—I don't exactly know."

"Well, I won't press you, my boy, but I cannot help thinking that something is on your mind," said Mr. Crowell kindly. "If you are in trouble of any sort, do not hesitate to come to my study and I will do my best to advise you."

"Thank you, sir," said Pitt quietly.

"Since yesterday I have observed that your attitude is quite different to what it was before you left St. Frank's for the summer holidays," went on Mr. Crowell. "I always thought, Pitt, that you were one of my brightest scholars. It worries me to see you so ill at ease."

"There's nothing wrong with me, sir," said Pitt. "You need not worry. I—I'm quite all right!"

"I hope you mean what you say."

Mr. Crowell said no more, and Pitt went on with his breakfast, making a pretence of eating more heartily. But I could see plainly enough that it was only with great difficulty that he swallowed the food.

As soon as prayers were over, after the meal. Pitt hurried away, without even waiting for his study chum. And he went straight off by himself—away behind the gymnasium, where he thought he could find some solitude.

He tried to pull himself together—he vainly attempted to make himself think that everything would come right if he only waited.

"It won't do!" he told himself grimly. "All the chaps are talking about you now, and they'll talk even more if you don't buck up. Nipper's advice was right—what you've got to do is to keep smiling!"

But it was one thing to decide to smile,

and quite another to do the actual smiling. Pitt was in a very despondent frame of mind, and nothing seemed to get him out of it. He thought he would be left undisturbed behind the gym. But he had not been there more than five minutes before Jack Grey appeared. The latter gave a snort.

"So here you are!" he exclaimed. "Mooning off by yourself!"

"I—I—— My head aches a bit," said Pitt lamely.

Jack Grey took a deep breath.

"Do you think I believe that yarn?" he asked. "Do you think I take in that rot? Your head doesn't ache, and there's nothing the matter with you physically. You've got some terrific worry on your mind, and you won't tell me what it is."

"But--but I did tell you!" exclaimed Pitt.

"You simply told me that it was some family trouble——"

"And you promised not to bother me!"

"Perhaps I did, but this is too thick!" said Grey. "I've had family trouble, but it's never worried me to this extent. I say, old man, can't you confide in me? Perhaps I shall be able to suggest something, or help you out of a hole. Two heads are better than one, you know."

"It's decent of you, Jack, but you couldn't do anything, really!" said Pitt earnestly. "If you want to please me, don't refer to this again. I'll try to buck up--honestly, I will!"

"Well, that's one good thing, anyhow," said Jack Grey. "An idea has struck me—have you been getting into any scrapes?"

"No."

"I mean, owing money, and all that sort of thing," said Jack awkwardly.

"I don't gamble, or bet on horses, if that's what you mean," replied Reginald Pitt quietly. "I give you my word, Jack, it's nothing of that kind. As I told you before, it simply concerns my mother and father and myself. If you want to know the real truth, it's a question of finances. My pater's had a pretty big blow recently, and—and—— Well, things are rotten. I can't tell you any more."

Grey shook his head.

"I'm blessed if I'd let money troubles worry me like that," he said. "Your pater will soon make things buck up, and there's certainly no need for you to get into a stew. Still, I'll let you alone now."

He placed his arm in Pitt's, and marched him off into the Triangle. He was just in time to run into me as I was making off in the direction of Little Side, with a football tucked under my arm.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Come on, you chaps."

"That's the idea!" said Grey. "There's plenty of time before lessons to have a decent kick."

"Oh, leave me out," said Pitt.

"I don't think!" I said promptly. "Come on, you slacker!"

"But—but I'm not in footer togs——"

"Neither is Grey—and what about myself?" I inquired, surveying my Eton suit. "Football isn't particularly comfortable in these clothes, but there's no time to change. Drag him along, Grey!"

Pitt was reluctantly compelled to come with us. But, such is the magic of football, he was kicking the leather about with all his accustomed spirit and vim before five minutes had elapsed.

His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes sparkled. For ten minutes or more he completely forgot his troubles in the exhilaration of footer practice. And, what is more to the point, he revealed splendid form.

His dribbling was perfect, and he had complete control of the ball. His speed was better than I had ever seen, and I knew very well that he would prove to be a very valuable man in a match.

"You're going in at outside right, in our very first match," I declared. "You're simply made for the position, my son. You've only got to practice a good bit, and you'll be top hole!"

Pitt's eyes gleamed.

"It was ripping!" he declared. "By jingo! I never thought football would make me feel so fine!"

"It's just what you want," I said. "A little exercise of a healthy nature to clear away the cobwebs."

When we went into morning lessons Pitt looked better than he had looked since his arrival. He tried hard to concentrate his attention upon lessons, but he could not quite manage to do so. More than once Mr. Crowell found him day-dreaming when he ought to have been hard at work.

Mr. Crowell watched him for some little time.

"Pitt!" he said sharply.

"The man's a scoundrel!" exclaimed Pitt fiercely.

"Eh?" Mr. Crowell started. "Upon my soul! What on earth do you mean by that exclamation, Pitt?"

Reginald Pitt flushed deeply.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," he said confusedly. "I was thinking."

"You need not tell me that, Pitt," said Mr. Crowell. "I require you to think of your lessons, and not of unknown scoundrels. Doubtless you have been reading some highly sensational fiction. Attend to your work, my boy, or I shall be compelled to punish you."

Pitt bucked up after that, and he managed to get through lessons without any further trouble. I was probably the only fellow in the Remove who knew what he had meant when he had referred to a scoundrel. Without a doubt, Pitt had been thinking of Mr. Simon Raspe.

Try as he would, he could not get himself into a cheerful frame of mind. His thoughts were in confusion. He could see Simon Raspe before his vision. He could see the man lolling back in his father's library—which he had stolen. And then Pitt pictured his father and mother, in their meagre lodgings. And he clenched his fists with helplessness and inward rage.

By the afternoon he had got a stronger hold on himself, and he was more like the old Pitt. Mr. Crowell had no fault to find with him. When lessons were over, he went straight to Study E and Jack Grey.

"I think I shall go out for a bike ride this evening," said Pitt. "Anything decent for tea to-night? I'm not particularly hungry, old son, but I dare say I could eat a mouthful."

"Well, I'm glad to see you're a bit more cheerful," said Jack. "And what's the idea of going for a bike ride? You want to put in some time at footer practice. Nipper'll be on your track if you sheer off."

"Oh, it doesn't matter for this evening," said Pitt casually.

"Do just as you like, of course—I sha'n't interfere," said Jack. "As a matter of fact, I'm fed up with jawing at you, Reggie. If you're going down to the village, you might as well take a letter of mine to post. You might as well earn an honest penny as anybody else!"

Pitt suddenly started.

"By Jove, yes!" he exclaimed tensely.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all!"

Jack gave his chum a queer look, but Pitt did not refer to the matter again. However, during tea, Jack noticed that his chum was quite different. He was more talkative, more full of spirits.

Grey simply couldn't understand it—he couldn't make out why Pitt should change so quickly. Nothing had happened to alter him, so far as the other junior could see. But Pitt was thinking.

And later, when he got out, he went straight to the bicycle shed, got his machine out, and literally sneaked off, mortally afraid that somebody would call him back.

An idea had come to him—an idea which filled him with enthusiasm.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "It might come off—there's no telling! My only hat! If I could only get a few shillings it would be better than nothing."

Those words of Jack Grey's had set him into this train of thought. Earn an honest penny!

It was a big idea!

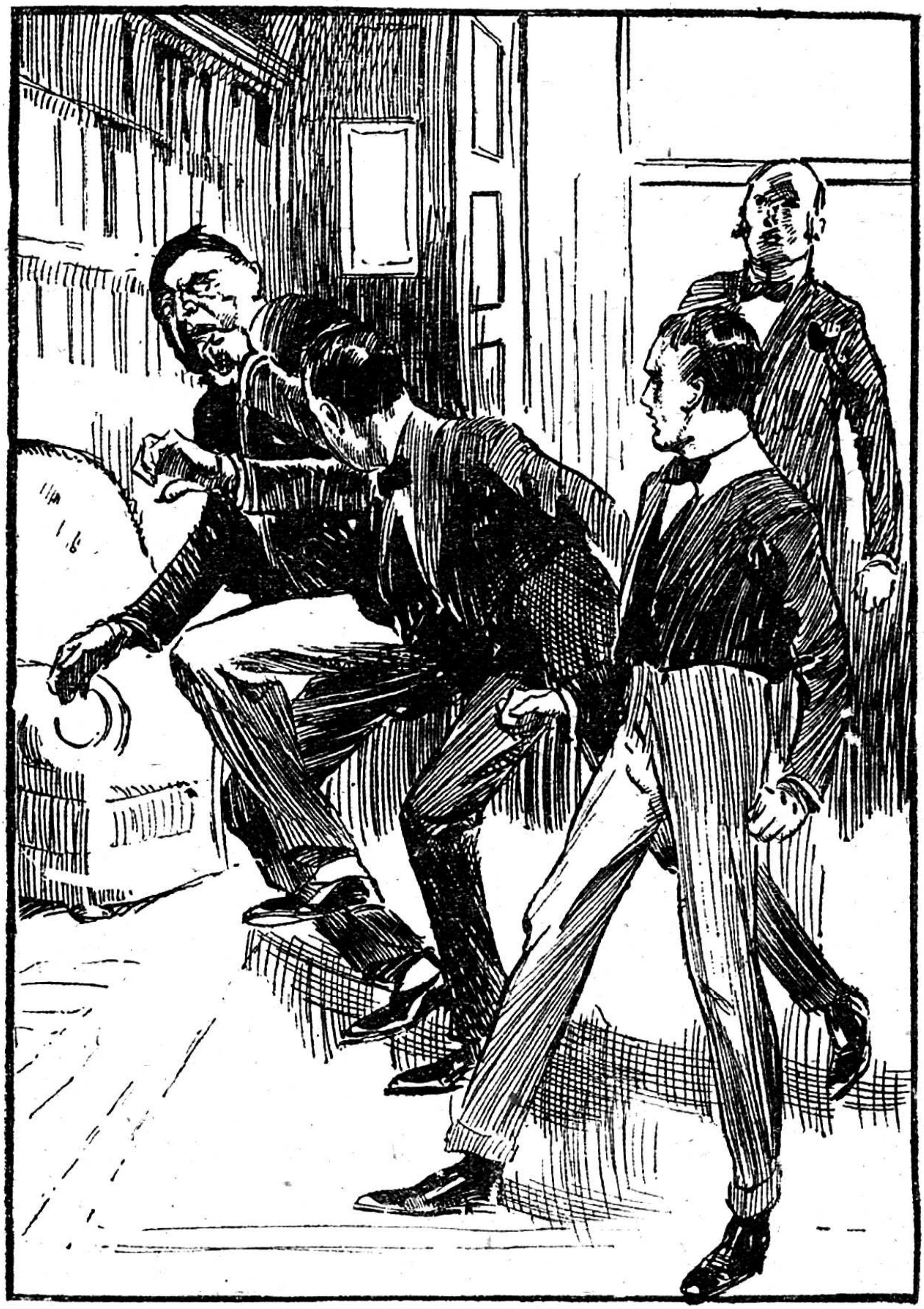
And why couldn't it be done? Pitt had urgently wanted to remain in London with his parents, so that he could find a job. Well, why couldn't he find a job here—in Bannington, say?

He was rather vague about what kind of job would be suitable, but he had an idea that it would be possible to do something every evening, for example. His time was his own after lessons, and he could easily put in a couple of hours before locking up time. It was a chance, anyway.

"I could take medicine round for a doctor, or—or even groceries!" he told himself grimly. "I don't care what it is! I'd be willing to do anything if I could only get some money honestly!"

It was rather a wild and woolly idea, but Pitt didn't see it in this light. He was full of enthusiasm. Ten shillings a week would be better than nothing! And surely he would get that amount if he worked for somebody every evening?

When he arrived in Bannington he was full of hope. And he went straight to work without any compunction. The first place he called at was a large grocery store in the centre of the town. He went in, and looked about him. There were several assistants and one



And then, before I could stop him, Pitt rushed forward, and his right shot with full force into the sneering man's face. (*See page* 6.)

elderly man who was quite well dressed, and who was wearing an apron. Pitt approached this individual.

"Are you the manager?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly, young man," was the reply. "I happen to be the owner."

"Oh, good," said Pitt. "I—I was just wondering if you had a job going."

"A job going?"

"Is—is there anything that I can do?"

The owner of the grocery store opened his eyes wider.

"Are you asking me for employment?" he inquired.

"Yes."

The man looked at Pitt's school cap, and smiled.

"Look here, young man, my time is valuable, and I can't waste it in this way," he said crisply. "If you want to play these kind of jokes, you must go somewhere else. I can't afford the time."

"But it's not a joke!" insisted Pitt. "I really want a job—say, for a couple of hours every evening. I don't mind what I do——"

"Good-evening!" said the other.

He simply wouldn't listen to Pitt any more, and ushered him out of the shop. It didn't seem such an easy matter to get work, after all. But Pitt was not despondent because of this first failure.

He next paid a visit to a chemist near by, and suggested that he should go round with the delivery bicycle. He was briefly told that there was no job open.

From place to place Pitt went, and he met with nothing but disappointment. Then he noticed a card in a big cycle repairing establishment. The card said "Boy wanted," and Pitt's heart jumped.

He marched in at once.

"Yes, sir?" said the manager, coming forward. "What can I show you this evening? We have a splendid selection of new bicycles just now—going quite cheap. Rather late in the season, you see——"

"I haven't come in to buy a bike," interrupted Pitt.

"A lamp, perhaps, or tool bag?" suggested the manager. "Anything you like we'll get in if we don't happen to have it in stock!"

"I—I came about that card."

"Card?"

"You want a boy, don't you?" asked Pitt bluntly.

The manager stared, and then smiled.

"Of course, you will have your little joke," he said.

"Joke!" snorted Pitt. "Everybody thinks it's a joke! I want a job—really! Why can't you take me seriously?"

"My dear young sir! You surely do not think I should believe such a statement?" asked the man pleasantly. "You are a scholar of St. Frank's College—and I hardly think a St. Frank's schoolboy requires employment!"

"But I do!" persisted Pitt.

"Well, you won't get it here, my lad," said the visitor, his politeness diminishing. "The boy I want must be prepared to work all day, and he must have some knowledge of mechanics——"

"I'm rather mechanical," said Pitt. "I'd like to work in the evening, if I could. I don't mind what I do——"

"No!" interrupted the manager. "I cannot possibly entertain the idea—neither can I waste any more of my time. Good-evening!"

Pitt was literally pushed out into the street, and his heart was heavy within him. He tried two more places, and then gave it up. He was beginning to realise that there was no hope for him.

And now he knew why.

He hadn't considered the point before, but it struck him that nobody would employ him because he belonged to St. Frank's.

Any ordinary working-class boy, yes. But Pitt was not of that kind, and therefore he could not have a job. And he knew that it would be quite useless to come dressed in different clothing, for he was well known in the town.

And so, in the dusk, he started off back for St. Frank's, miserable and despondent.

"It doesn't matter what I do, it's all no good!" he muttered. "And I'm trying my best, too! There's no chance for a chap to do anything—to earn any money! What does it matter to them whether I belong to St. Frank's or not? I can do the work just as well as anybody else!"

But he realised that, however willing he was, there was not a soul who would employ him. And, after all, the tradesmen were not to be blamed. Pitt himself could see this now.

It would not look well for them to have their goods delivered by a public

schoolboy. In fact, such a thing was impossible. But Pitt had to have experience before this was brought home to him.

At the same time, it was rather hard.

As he cycled along he tried to think of other means of getting some money. He wondered if he could do anything at the school, in his spare time. He had heard that some firms advertised for people who were willing to do work at home. Perhaps he would find some outlet for his activity in this direction. But that wouldn't do, either—because the other juniors would know about it.

And so Pitt gradually came to the conclusion that his big idea was out of the question, and could never be materialised. Whichever way he looked at things, there was nothing to hope for.

And, all the time, he pictured his father and mother, in their two rooms at Fulham. Had his father been able to obtain work? If so, would he be able to get enough money to keep things going comfortably?

And then he thought of Simon Raspe. He pedalled more fiercely as these thoughts passed through his mind. And he remembered, with a glow of satisfaction, that he had delivered one good punch, at all events.

He was cycling along almost aimlessly, and the dusk was rather deep, although it was still comparatively early in the evening. He didn't particularly care which side of the road he went upon.

As a rule, he was a careful cyclist, but now, with his thoughts far away, he was quite the opposite. Strictly speaking, he ought to have lit his lamps, but he quite forgot to do so.

And disaster followed.

The junior was just passing a side road, where quite a lot of traffic passed—for this road led directly to Caistowe. It was possible to get to Caistowe by this means, or by going through Bellton.

Pitt had just got to this corner when a large motor-car came sweeping down. Certainly, the car was going at a greater speed than it ought to have been. But, if Pitt had been on the alert, he would have come to no harm.

As it was, he was on the wrong side of the road, and there was no time for him to swerve, or get out of the way.

The car swung round, and there was a sudden shout from the driver.

"Good heavens!" gasped Pitt.

Too late! He tried to get out of the way.

One of the big wings of the car caught the front of his bicycle. The next second, Pitt was off, sprawling in the roadway. He had turned a complete somersault, his head coming into sharp contact with the hard road.

By miraculous good fortune, the car did not touch him, but swung round, missing him and his bicycle by mere inches. Pitt lay just where he had fallen, quite still and silent.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERIES!

"CONFOUND the boy!" snapped the driver of the car.

He had pulled up with a jerk, and now he swung himself out of the driving seat, and dropped to the road. His companion was a biggish man, and he was looking rather concerned. They both left the car, and ran swiftly back along the road to the spot where Pitt was lying.

"Badly hurt?" asked the second man.

"I don't know," said the driver. "Have you got a torch?"

"Yes!"

The big man produced an electric torch, and the light of this was flashed upon Pitt. The driver turned him over, and breathed a sigh of relief when he found that the car had not touched him. But Pitt was stunned.

"Thank Heaven it's not much!" said the driver. "He must have fallen on his head, and knocked himself out."

"The car didn't pass over him?"

"Of course not; but what are we going to do?" asked the driver. "We can't leave the boy here, can we?"

"It's an infernal nuisance!" snapped the other. "If somebody comes along we might get into trouble. There were no witnesses, and you know what the police are in this kind of case. They'd probably side with the boy at once, and there'd be no end of a fuss."

"It was the kid's own fault," said the driver.

"Of course it was—absolutely!" agreed his companion. "But how is that going to help us? The brat will probably declare that it was our fault, and we shouldn't be believed. You know well enough that I was fined only three

weeks ago for exceeding the speed limit."

The driver swore.

"Yes, it'll be pretty bad if this gets about," he said. "The police are bound to know, and then we shall both catch it in the neck. I think the best think we can do is to shove the boy in the car, and take him up to the house. A dose of brandy will put him right, and we can give him a fiver for himself. That ought to settle it, and it'll be cheaper in the long run."

"Yes, you're right," replied the other. "Lift him in the car!"

He put his torch away, and between them the two men took Pitt from the road, and put him in the back of the car. His bicycle followed, and then the car was turned round, and it sped back up the side lane. Within five minutes it turned into a big gateway, and went up to a large house, standing in its own grounds. It pulled up on the drive, just outside some open French windows. One of the men went in, and switched on the light.

Pitt was just beginning dimly to see things. Consciousness was returning. The blow upon his head was not a very severe one, and its after effects would be very slight. He was now dazed and dreamy, and hardly cared where he was, or what he was doing.

By being lifted out of the car, however, he was somewhat aroused, and when he felt himself sink into a soft sofa, he partially opened his eyes.

"He'll do there," said one of the men.

Pitt abruptly came to his wits. That voice, smooth and oily, was strangely reminiscent. When he opened his eyes he found that he was looking into a mirror on the wall, for his back was towards the men.

And he saw the reflection of—Simon Raspe!

In spite of Pitt's dulled senses, he knew this man at once, and his first instinct was to struggle up and denounce him for a scoundrel. But, instead, he remained quiet. He wanted to feel himself stronger before he did that.

Simon Raspe turned, and looked closely at the junior. Then, suddenly, he started, and uttered an ejaculation.

"It can't be—yet—yet——"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the driver.

"This boy looks just like young Pitt—the son of Reginald Pitt!" exclaimed Raspe quickly. "I ought to know him, the young brat! I told you how he came into my library and struck me in the face!"

The other man bent close over Pitt, and Pitt remained quite still, although he heard and understood every word which was being spoken. From being dull, his wits were now acutely sharpened.

"Well, what does it matter, anyhow?" asked the driver.

"What does it matter?" repeated Simon Raspe. "It matters everything, Stretton! Yes, it's young Pitt right enough—and he's a scholar at St. Frank's College. How far is St. Frank's from here?"

"Two or three miles—you ought to know, considering that you've lived in the district for years," said Stretton.

"I never go out that way at all," said Raspe harshly. "But I know that St. Frank's is near by. What an extraordinary thing for this boy to be at St. Frank's, Stretton! And how can his father afford to keep him here, after I've ruined him?"

"There's no need for us to worry about that," said the other man. "The main thing is for us to bring him to his senses, and pack him off."

Simon Raspe considered.

"Well, I don't want to be seen," he said. "I don't suppose he knows that I live here, and there's no reason why he should know. You can tell him this is your house, and get rid of him as soon as possible."

"He may not believe it," said Stretton.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked the other. "This house is off the main road, and in all probability Pitt doesn't know that I ever lived here. Not that it matters particularly, in any event. But I would rather keep it from the boy, if possible. It's infernally awkward, his being at St. Frank's."

"I don't see how it matters; you're making a fuss over nothing," declared Stretton. "Still, if you want it this way, it doesn't matter to me. You'd better get out of sight."

Raspe nodded, and left the apartment.

The other man put some brandy into a small glass, and crossed over to the sofa. Pitt thought it wise to stir a trifle. Except for a throbbing headache, he was quite himself again. He knew

all that had been spoken, and he was fully aware of the fact that this house belonged to Simon Raspe.

And he also knew that Raspe was anxious that Pitt should be kept in ignorance of the fact.

Pitt groaned slightly, tossed about, and breathed hard. Some of the brandy was forced between his lips. He spluttered and choked, and then opened his eyes. He looked about him dazedly.

"Where—where am I?"

"It's all right, young 'un—don't be scared!" said Stretton. "Take a drop more of this—it'll do you good."

Pitt pushed the brandy away.

"I don't want it," he said. "I—I'm better now."

"It was entirely your own fault—although it's no good telling you that, I suppose," went on the man. "I thought I'd better bring you straight up to my house, and see what I could do. My name's Stretton."

Pitt nodded.

"I—I'm awfully sorry if I've caused you any trouble," he said. "I believe it was my fault—but you were driving too fast, weren't you? And accidents of that kind will happen if you're not careful."

"Well, we're not going to make a fuss about it," said Stretton. "How do you feel now?"

"Oh, better!"

"Think you can walk all right?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Try!"

He assisted Pitt from the couch, and the junior staggered up and down the room once or twice. He didn't put this on at all, for, as a matter of fact, he was feeling very unsteady now that he was on his feet.

"That's all right; you'll be able to get home," said Stretton. "And look here, my lad, if I were you, I wouldn't say anything about this little accident. It was entirely your own fault, and you'll probably get into trouble if you talk about it."

"All right," muttered Pitt.

"Let's have a look at your head."

Pitt bent his head down, and the man examined it. There was certainly an ugly bump there, but the skin wasn't torn, and the bruise was only visible from close examination. Stretton was quite relieved.

"Oh, it's nothing!" he said. "Feel fit enough to start away?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

Pitt was led out of the French windows, and across a short stretch of lawn to the gravel drive. Near the motor-car he was brought to a halt by Stretton. And while Pitt stood there, the man took his bicycle out of the car, and lit the lamps.

"Now you're all right," said Stretton. "Go steadily, and you won't come to any harm. You promise you won't speak about this little accident?"

"You can rely on me to be careful," said Pitt. "I don't want to get into trouble with the Headmaster."

"Good!" said Stretton. "Here's something for you. I realise that the fault was partly mine, and you can take this as compensation for the bruise. And I don't want you to say anything, because I shouldn't like my license to be endorsed. You understand, don't you, my lad?"

"Yes," said Pitt.

The man produced three pound notes—he considered this sum to be quite sufficient—and he held them out to Pitt. The junior looked at them queerly for a moment or two, and then drew away.

"No, thanks!" he said curtly.

"But you've got to take it——"

"No, I don't want it," said Pitt. "I wouldn't touch that money if—if I was starving! I don't want it, I tell you!"

A thought had come into Pitt's mind. This money wasn't Stretton's at all—it was Simon Raspe's. And Pitt told himself that he would never touch that scoundrel's tainted money.

Then, a second later, another thought struck him.

Three pounds!

His father and mother could do with that money—it would be wonderfully welcome at such a time as this. And where else could he obtain such a sum? How would it be possible for him to get three pounds by any other method?

And, looking at it in a different light, the money was not so distasteful, after all. For didn't it actually belong to his own father? Simon Raspe had robbed his father—therefore Raspe's money was Mr. Pitt's! By accepting this sum, Pitt would only be taking some of his father's cash!

So he changed his mind.

"Come along!" said Stretton. "Don't be a young idiot! Take this money, and

keep your mouth quiet. I'm sure you're just as anxious as I am to have this little mishap hushed up. It's nothing much, anyway."

"All right, if you insist," said Pitt. "I'll take it."

He seized the notes, and stuffed them in his pocket. And Stretton mentally decided that he didn't deserve them. He wheeled his bicycle out through the gateway, and then mounted.

Stretton went back into the library, and within a moment or two he was speaking with Simon Raspe. And, after all, it was not so very strange that the man's country house should be in this district. It was a surprise to Pitt that the man was here—and it was a surprise to Raspe that Pitt was at St. Frank's.

"He doesn't know that I'm aware of his secret," Pitt told himself, as he rode slowly away. "But it's not much of a secret, though, unless he's living here under another name. That's quite likely—that's why he didn't want me to see him. By Jove! This makes all the difference."

His thoughts were rapid as he rode along.

Simon Raspe was living near by—within an easy distance of the school. Perhaps it would be possible to do something. Pitt's eyes gleamed as this idea struck him.

He knew that Raspe had some proofs of his own guilt, and it came to Pitt that he might be able to obtain those proofs. How glorious it would be if he could bring this scoundrel to justice, and right the wrong which had been done!

It was a dream, of course, and even Pitt himself hardly thought that it would ever be realised. However, there was no telling, and he certainly made up his mind to do everything possible.

He had one advantage over Raspe.

The man thought that Pitt didn't know—but Pitt did know. And he would be able to come back and make investigations on the quiet. This was Pitt's idea. It would be better, of course, to do so, when Simon Raspe himself was out of the way.

Pitt rode along quietly, and he glowed inwardly when he thought of the three pounds in his pocket. He would post the notes off to his parents the first thing in the morning, and the money would probably come in very handy.

But how would he explain them?

This was the difficult point, and Pitt thought over it. He couldn't tell his father where he had actually got the money from—that would never do. And, at the same time, he couldn't concoct a false story.

He decided, in the end, to enclose the notes without explaining anything. He would just say that he was sending them in the hope that they might be of use. His parents could think what they liked.

And so, with these thoughts in his mind, he went on towards St. Frank's.

He knew that he would be a bit late for calling over, but this would only mean fifty lines, and the adventure had been well worth it.

Now and again, as Pitt rode along, he felt slightly dizzy.

His head was still throbbing, and once or twice he felt himself swaying on his bicycle. He wanted to sleep—he knew that. By the morning he would probably be himself again, and none the worse.

And then, just before he was entering Bellton, he came over quite giddy for a moment. In vain he tried to keep his balance, but it couldn't be done. He and the bicycle went over with a crash.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Pitt. "What a fatheaded thing to do!"

He picked himself up, and while he was doing so he heard the sounds of running footsteps. The next moment a stranger came into view.

"Had a spill?" asked a cheery voice.

"Oh, it's nothing much!" said Pitt.

"Caught on a stone, I suppose?" asked the newcomer. "That's the worst of these country roads—they never repair them properly. They leave stones lying about everywhere. I've stumbled over dozens as I've been walking."

Pitt found that the stranger was a man of about twenty-three. He was attired in a blue serge suit, and a soft collar. He looked an athletic young individual, and his face was fresh, and a tuft of curly hair escaped from beneath his cap. He had twinkling eyes, and a humorous mouth.

"I don't know how it happened exactly," said Pitt. "I think I lost my balance for a second. No, it's all right—you needn't help me. I shall be as right as rain, now."

"That's all right, then," said the young man cheerfully. "You belong to the school, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Junior?"

"Yes; I belong to the Remove."

"I heard you play rather decent football up there," went on the other. "Somebody told me that you juniors are hot stuff."

"Somebody told you right, then," said Pitt. "Do you take an interest in football, by the way?"

"Yes, a bit," smiled the other. "I'd like to see you youngsters playing. Will there be anything doing to-morrow?"

Pitt thought for a moment.

"Yes; it's a half-holiday, and Nipper is arranging a practice match for the afternoon," he replied. "Of course, it won't be up to our usual standard, but it'll be worth watching."

"Good! I might come and have a look."

"Well, you're welcome," said Pitt. "Strangers are always at liberty to come and watch our games. We're not like some schools, where the members of the public can't get in."

"Who's Nipper?" asked the cheerful one.

"Oh, he's our captain!"

"Nickname, I suppose?"

"No, of course not," replied Pitt. "He's really the assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee, the detective."

"By Jove, you don't say so!" exclaimed the stranger. "I've heard of him, of course. I shall certainly have to come and have a look at that game to-morrow. You'll be playing—eh?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Right; I'll look for you!" said the cheerful one. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Pitt.

The other nodded, and passed on. Pitt wondered who he could be, and why he took such an interest in football. But even that short conversation had acted as a tonic to Pitt, and when he got on his bike again, he was feeling altogether better, both in body and in spirits.

He arrived at St. Frank's, feeling more like himself than he had felt the whole day long.

Josh Cuttle, the porter, reluctantly declared that he'd have to report the junior, but Pitt didn't mind this. He made his way straight along the Remove passage to Study C, and put his head in the doorway.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed, as I looked up. "Come in!"

Pitt entered, and closed the door.

"I'm glad you're alone, Nipper," he said. "I was afraid that Watson and Sir Montie might be here."

"They won't be back just yet," I said. "They're in the common-room."

"I've got something to tell you," said Pitt. "Something that might be of importance. Coming home from Bannington I met with a bit of an accident. I was knocked down by a car, and——"

"What!" I said, staring at him.

"Oh, I wasn't hurt much," said Pitt. "You needn't look like this. I'm jolly glad I was knocked down, in fact."

I grinned.

"There's no accounting for tastes," I remarked.

"I'm not pleased at having a bump on my head as large as an egg," he went on. "But it led to something which I never dreamed of. Do you know that Simon Raspe lives in this district?"

"Does he?" I said, with interest. "That's rather a queer coincidence—although there's no reason why he shouldn't live here. There are quite a lot of big country houses knocking about. How did you find out?"

Pitt explained, and I listened with greater interest than ever. I was very thoughtful when he had done.

"Certainly, this information might be useful," I said slowly. "I'll tell the guv'nor about it to-night before I go to bed. You've no objection, I suppose? I can tell him?"

"Of course," said Pitt. "He knows all about it, anyhow. And, besides, he's promised to work on the case. It's quite likely that he knows Raspe's address already. But it's rather queer the rotter trying to spoof me."

"Yes," I agreed. "That seems to indicate that he doesn't much relish your presence so near to his house. And it clearly indicates, too, that he's got something to hide. He's swindled your dad, and now he's constantly fearing that something might crop up to unmask him. Something will crop up as soon as the guv'nor gets really busy," I added grimly.

Soon afterwards Pitt left, and went along to Study E. Jack Grey wasn't there, so he spent ten minutes in preparing a letter for his father and mother. He didn't write much—only a few lines, and he enclosed the three notes in the envelope. He didn't post it then, but decided it would be better to take it down to the post-office in the morning.

The thought that this cash was going to his parents cheered him up greatly, and when he went to bed that night, he was feeling in comparatively high spirits. The position was not seeming quite so bad to him now.

CHAPTER VI.

FORGETTING HIS TROUBLES.

LONG before breakfast the next morning Pitt was down at the post-office, and he dispatched his letter without anybody being the wiser. He was feeling a lot better this morning. The bruise on his head had gone down, and his headache had vanished. He was feeling bright and fresh.

The September morning was sunny and crisp, with a touch of autumn in the air. And when Pitt got back to the school the bell was just ringing.

After breakfast I got hold of him, and held him firm.

"We've got five minutes," I said grimly.

"What for?"

"To change into footer togs," I replied. "Then we've got to have a brisk hour on Little Side. I've got you in mind for outside-right, and I'm going to see how you shape. No objections, mind! Buck up!"

Pitt was only too glad, for he had discovered that football relieved him tremendously. It made him forget his troubles, and provided him with healthful recreation.

Within ten minutes we were on Little Side with a number of other juniors. And I was quite delighted with the form which Pitt displayed. My determination to give him the outside-right position was strengthened.

I kept my eye on the other fellows, too. Montie was doing well as an inside forward, and Talmadge, of the College House, struck me as being the very fellow for centre-half. He was particularly useful with his head.

Handforth, of course, was only good in one part of the field. As a goalkeeper he was not to be equalled. His pet idea was that he ought to play centre-forward. But, of course, this was quite wrong. Handforth always got into everybody else's way, and he always wanted the ball for himself.

In goal, he was safe. He looked after his charge well, and there was no doubt that a very sharpshooter was needed to get the leather past the vigilant Handforth. The previous season he had helped us well in all our matches.

Just before morning lessons I had a chat with the fellows.

"This afternoon we're going to have a practice match," I said. "You've all got to turn out. Christine and Co. are going to play us, and if we buck up we ought to wipe them to bits."

"Rather!"

"We'll wipe up the College House!"

"You bet!"

"Oh, will you?" said Christine grimly. "We'll see about that! Do you think we're going to be whacked by a crowd of Fossils?"

For some moments there was a heated argument, and then the bell for lessons brought it to a close.

Lessons that morning were considered to be a bore. They were always a nuisance, of course, particularly so to-day, when all the juniors had the football fever pretty bad.

It was just the beginning of the season, and on the Saturday afternoon we were booked to play Bannington Grammar School—on our own ground. This was to be the first real match, and I was determined that it would be a win, if possible.

The House match of this afternoon was in the nature of a test. The best fellows of both Houses would be picked out, and played on the Saturday.

Morning lessons were over at last, and then we had a wait until dinner was ready. But, at last, dinner was disposed of, and then we all streamed out on to Little Side.

The afternoon was dull, but there was no sign of rain. All the fellows were enthusiastic about the match.

The Ancient House team consisted of Handforth; McClure, Burton; Church, Armstrong, Somerton; Singleton, Grey, myself, Tregellis-West, and Pitt.

The College House team was composed as follows: Oldfield; Clapson, Harrop; Page, Turner, Nation; Christine, Yorke, Talmadge, Cobb, Gale.

One or two fresh fellows were being

tried by Bob Christine, for he had an idea that they would turn out well.

Quite a number of fellows in the Ancient House were sore because they had not been included in my eleven. But I always chose my team according to merit. And I was quite convinced that I had picked out the best fellows for the purpose.

Chambers, of the Fifth, had, with great condescension, agreed to act as referee for the match. He was several kinds of an ass, but he knew the laws of football all right, and could be relied upon to referee successfully, without any undue favouritism to either side.

The match started.

It went with a swing from the very first. Jack Grey soon had the ball, and he swung it up the field quickly. One of the College House backs attempted to rob him, but Grey neatly dodged, and sent the leather straight over to outside-right—a long, neat pass.

Pitt was on the ball in a moment.

He streaked up the touch with rare speed. He tricked both Clapson and Page in succession, and ran up until he was close upon the goal line. Then, with beautiful precision, he centred the ball.

It fell right at Sir Montie's feet.

Slam!

Before Oldfield knew anything about it the ball was in a corner of the net, and the whistle had blown.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ancient House scores first!"

"Good old Montie!"

Sir Montie shook his head.

"They're wrong, dear old boys," he said, as we congratulated one another. "It wasn't my goal, begad!"

"Whose was it, then?"

"Pitt's, of course!"

"And so it was!" I agreed. "Pitt had a great deal to do with it, anyhow. That centre of his was a beauty. Good for you, Pitt!"

"It's a ripping game!" said Pitt heartily.

We lined up again, and the whistle blew.

Christine and Co. were now aggressive, and for some time they forced the pace. Our backs had to deal with several swift attacks upon the goal. They were steady and certain, however, and Handforth was only called upon twice. Christine sent in a glorious shot, it is true.

But Handforth leapt at it, and punched the leather out with such force that it went almost into midfield.

Church was on it in a moment. He didn't keep it, but passed it quickly across to Sir Montie. Tregellis-West, however, was not able to keep it, for he was hard pressed. It seemed for the moment that he would be robbed, but with one of his deft little touches he slipped the ball over to Pitt.

It was glorious to see the way Pitt shot away with it.

His speed was tremendous, and again he got right up to the goal-line before the defenders could be upon him. He gave the leather a touch, and sent it just in front of goal. Jack Grey was there, and he shot hard and true. But, this time, Oldfield was ready.

He met the ball with his fist, and sent it out some distance. It was sent in again by one of the half-backs—a deadly shot. Oldfield would have been beaten to the wide, but the leather struck one of the uprights, and rebounded into play. A College House back pounced upon it, and sent it up the field.

Bob Christine was on it in a flash. He was off like lightning, and neither McClure nor Burton could stop his determined rush. He ran right up close, taking no notice of the appeals for "offside" which many of the juniors round the ropes yelled.

Christine shot low.

Handforth dived at the ball, and just touched it; but it slipped from his grasp, and rolled to the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Good old Christine!"

"One all!"

Handforth picked himself up and glared.

"I thought I'd stopped the blessed thing!" he shouted indignantly.

"Never mind, Handy; there's plenty of time yet," I said.

And within three minutes the Ancient House was ahead once more. And this goal was Pitt's in real earnest. The game had hardly restarted before Armstrong sent the ball to outside-right—for the half-backs were consistently feeding that wing. Pitt was doing so well that he was being given a great deal of work.

Reginald got the ball at once, and

sailed up the field. This time he didn't kick near the touch-line, but made for goal, for there were no inside forwards ready to accept a pass.

Clapson and Harron, the College House backs, came charging upon Pitt with tremendous speed. He tricked them both, one after the other, and it was done so neatly that Pitt hardly seemed to exert any effort.

And then he sent in a beautiful cross drive which left Oldfield nowhere. The custodian, indeed, probably didn't see the ball at all. It was a rising shot which crossed over the mouth of the goal, and went into the net near the upright. It was certainly one of the finest shots I had ever seen.

"Hurrah!"

"Goal!"

"Well played, Pitt!"

"Ripping, old man!" I said exultantly, as I wrung his hand. "You're like a giddy professional! My hat! We'll give the Grammarians something to think about on Saturday! If you play like this you'll twist them into knots!"

"I'm enjoying the game hugely," said Pitt, "and I'm feeling in fine form, too."

No more goals were scored before half-time, but we were one ahead, and we were quite satisfied.

After the interval the College House were the first to draw blood. This was totally against my decision, but it couldn't be helped. Handforth did his best, but the shot which beat him was a lucky one. The ball was tapped into the net during a scramble near the goal-mouth.

After that, however, things woke up.

Again Pitt saved the situation. The times he took the ball up the field were almost without number. His centres were always accurate and true. But, of course, most of them were wasted. It is always galling for a good outside man to see his perfectly placed centres come to nothing.

The left wing hardly had anything to do. Pitt was the finest player on the field during this match. He literally sparkled. He gave a performance of the highest ability and cleverness.

And he was rewarded.

Two of his centres materialised in quick succession. I shot one goal, and Sir Montie the other. The score now stood four-two.

Christine and Co. did not get another look in. We kept the game almost entirely in their half of the field. And it was only by terrific efforts on the part of their backs that their defeat was not converted into a rout.

Within five minutes of the finish Pitt scored again by another dashing individual effort. And then the whistle went, and Christine and Co. were properly whacked.

"Good for the Ancient House!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well, you licked us all right," said Christine ruefully. "But we haven't got an outside-right like you have. My hat! Pitt's a perfect terror! He ought to do wonders in Saturday's match!"

Pitt himself was moving off the field when he heard a hail. Glancing round, he saw a young man with a very cheerful face, standing near the ropes. He waved his hand, and Pitt recognised him as the young fellow who had chatted with him on the road the previous evening. He crossed over at once.

"Let's have your hand, old son!" said the stranger enthusiastically.

Pitt gave it to him.

"Splendid—absolutely tophole!" exclaimed the young man. "Why, I've hardly ever seen such a first-class performance! You're too good to be in schoolboy football—you're as hot as mustard!"

"Oh, don't talk rubbish!" said Pitt, flushing.

"It's not rubbish—it's the truth!" said the other. "I know a bit about football, and I'm a decent judge, I think."

"You take a pretty big interest in it, don't you?"

The stranger chuckled.

"Well, my name happens to be Tom Howard," he said. "I generally play inside-left for the Bannington Football Club."

Pitt stared at the other with renewed interest.

"You're a professional?" he asked curiously.

"Yes."

"Oh, that's awfully interesting!" said Pitt. "I didn't know that before. You didn't really mean that about me, did you?"

"I did!" said Tom Howard. "You've got the makings of an International in you, my son. If you'd care to call at the Bannington Club ground any time, I shall be pleased to see you. You can look in just when you like, and watch the team at practice, if you care to."

"Thanks very much," said Pitt.

"We don't usually let schoolboys in while we're practising," said Tom Howard. "But you're an exception. Pop in any time you like."

Pitt promised that he would, and he was more than ever interested in the cheerful young professional.

Little did he realise what this opening was to lead to!

Reginald Pitt was made a big fuss of in the Remove that evening. But, now and again, his thoughts reverted to Tom Howard, and he told himself he would certainly look up his new friend at the Bannington Football Club before long.

If he could only have known what was to come of this offer, he would have been very excited indeed!

THE END.

To My Readers.

The present "Footer" series should not be missed by any follower of the great winter game. All the glamour and thrills of the football field will be faithfully reproduced in these pages, and you will follow with keen interest Pitt's progress from one success to another, until he steps into the limelight of fame as a professional. Apart from his ability to achieve this success, Pitt has to face difficulties of another kind. We know that he does not want his family troubles to leak out at the school, and that, however praiseworthy his intentions may be, permission to become a professional footballer while a schoolboy at St. Frank's would certainly not be granted by the Head. To fulfil his object, therefore, secrecy would be imperative. And for a player so much in demand as Pitt, it would be no easy matter to absent himself from the school to play in professional matches. Besides, he might be recognised by the St. Frank's enthusiasts who attend these matches. But to avoid recognition, Pitt adopts a ruse, which is suggested in the title of next week's story: "THE MYSTERY FOOTBALLER."

THE EDITOR.

BRANDED A CAD.

"There was an old couple at the table next to them. The man was fat, grossly fat, and the lady was fat too. There was a girl with them, evidently their daughter—a beautiful girl.

"'War profiteer, I'll lay any money,' one of his pals whispered to Jerry.

"Then Dinsmore told a story of his Army days, and they all laughed, Jerry as loud as any. The party at the adjoining table rose suddenly, and turning, Jerry saw the girl, and blinked at the vision of loveliness.

"But she, her face white, her lips tightly compressed, cast a glance at him of unutterable scorn. There was hatred, loathing, contempt in her brilliant eyes as she swept past him. From the tightly clenched teeth and the red lips came the one word:

"'Cad!'"

(An extract from "Proud as a Peacock!" or "Gerald Harrington—Valet," H. St. John Cooper's wonderful new novel which appears in this week's "Answers' Library," which is now on sale. By the author of "A LAGGARD IN LOVE.")

The Ghosts of Marsh Manor

BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

CHIEF CHARACTERS.

NELSON LEE, *as Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A., secures a position as games master at Marsh Manor School in order to investigate strange visits of ghosts at the school.*

NIPPER, *Lee's assistant, comes to the school as Barton, a backward boy.*

THE REV. OCTAVIUS CHARD, *Headmaster of Marsh Manor School.*

ADOLPHE MALINES, *a Belgian refugee, living near the school, who has invented a new method of colour photography.*

JULES TROCHON *and* MADAME TROCHON, *compatriots and neighbours of Malines.*

INGLEBY-CHARTERIS, *wealthy stockbroker, who befriends the Belgian refugees.*

MONSIEUR VILOTTE, *French master at the school, an avowed enemy of the Belgians, and against whom suspicions are directed.*

SEYMOUR, GURLING, *and* TULK, *boys at the school, who seem to know more about the ghosts than they will admit.*

SOL CLITTERS, *forger and desperate character, who is up against Nelson Lee.*

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER VIII. *(Continued.)*

Who Was It?

STANDING there, he reconstructed the happenings of that previous occasion when he had started in pursuit. The figure had glided across the corridor's end, down the stairs to the entrance-hall, up the grand staircase to the corridor again, where he had caught the whisk of the white garment, and, by sprinting past the dormitory doors, Monsieur Vilotte had time to vanish into the servant's lobby, and return at leisure under Lee's very feet.

"All right, my friend," said Nelson Lee to himself. "We'll make assurance doubly sure before we spring a mine on you."

And, retracing his steps, he armed himself with a packet of drawing-pins and another ball of black worsted.

When, at the end of a quarter of an hour, he sat down in his study chair, and heard the boys coming up to bed, the fancy seized him to open the hole he had cut for the camera-lens and watch them unseen. He wanted to gauge their demeanour, and see who were the timid ones and who the brave. But as Gurling and Tulk went into their room and closed the door behind them, Lee experienced a feeling like an electric-shock.

At the far end of the corridor stood the ghostly figure of the White Abbot again, and, without pausing to reflect, Lee wrenched his door open and dashed along the passage, only to see the monk step back into the servant's lobby as he switched on his torch.

The lobby was empty, as he expected to find it, but the three strands of worsted he had placed on the outside of the secret door were unbroken!

It was not Vilotte then, after all! And, almost as if in derision, he heard the wailing strains of the Frenchman's oboe coming faintly through the green baize door!

CHAPTER IX.

What Nipper Heard Behind the Pagoda!

NELSON LEE clasped his head in his hands, and stood for a moment thoroughly nonplussed. But he had made so much noise when he burst out of his study that, as he returned, utterly bewildered, the astonished faces of Gurling, Seymour, and Tulk gaped at him from their dormitory.

"Then you're back, sir!" cried Seymour.

"It looks like it, doesn't it? Shut that door, unless you want me to report you to Mr. Chard!" was the reply, given in so sharp a tone that the heads vanished in dumb amazement.

"What on earth's up?" whispered Tulk. "Never thought Drake could possibly get the rats." And their joy at seeing the popular master in their midst once more was considerably damped.

"He's upset about Guy Barton, that's what's wrong," said Gurling. "Don't you see, he could only have just heard of it? Wonder what has become of that kid?"

Nelson Lee, annoyed with himself at his exhibition of ill-humour, closed his own door and felt for his pipe. He had been so con-

fident five minutes before that he had tracked the masquerader down at last that this disappointment left him "at the end of his Latin," as Monsieur Vilotte would have put it.

But it was not the only surprise in store for him that night, for there came a tap upon the panel, and, opening it, he found Boyle, the Butler, who smiled with an honest brightness in his eye, and said:

"Good evening, sir. Very pleased to see you back again after your accident. Mr. Chard has sent me to say he would like to have a word with you in the study, sir."

Lee replaced the half-filled pipe in his pocket, and went downstairs; and the first object his eyes fell on as he opened the Head's door was Nipper, bubbling over with excitement.

"The Head thought you'd like to see me alone," said the boy, understanding the glance Lee threw round the room. "I've got the most extraordinary news for you, guv'nor. You'd never guess it if you tried from now till Christmas."

"Come to the point, Nipper," said his master. "Have you been successful?"

"Success isn't the name for it!" replied Nipper, coming up to him and lowering his voice. "Sol Clitters went straight to Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, and was received with open arms!"

"Ha!" was Lee's only comment, but it was delivered in a tone that spoke volumes. "Now then, youngster, right from the beginning," and, loading his pipe up to the rim this time, he listened to the minutest details of Nipper's narrative without a muscle of his face moving.

"Expected, was he?" he said at last.

"I should rather think he was! There was Charteris in a great fur-lined motor-coat waiting on the platform; and I thought they'd never have done pump-handling each other when the crook got out of the train. Charteris had hold of his arm all the way to the station yard, and I nearly missed them, for I had to pay excess on my ticket; but, luckily, one of the headlights was wrong, and I was able to watch their departure. And, I say, chief, the funny part of it was, Clitters was in the driving-seat, and drove the big car himself as though he had known the road all his life!"

"That shows he's been there before," said Lee thoughtfully. "I begin to see daylight."

"So do I," said Nipper, showing his white teeth.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this. When Mr. Adolfe Malines was in your study, waiting to photograph the ghost for three nights running, there wasn't any ghost at all. You've proved it wasn't Vilotte just now. It's the man with the dirty hands!"

Nelson Lee looked at him fixedly for some time without speaking.

"If that's the case, the whole affair is much more serious than we've anticipated," he said at last, as an inner door opened and Mr. Chard came in.

"Well, my conspirator friends," said the Head, smiling in spite of his worried look, "I thought you'd better have your confabulation in private. As for you, Barton," and he laid a very kindly hand on Nipper's shoulder, "I shall have to put you mildly through it before the whole school to-morrow. You understand that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I don't mind," grinned Nipper.

"No, of course you don't. But if you can ape the contrite as well as you have done the backward boy, everything will pass off all right. You must plead an overwhelming attack of homesickness, and I shall give you your choice of a sound caning or five thousand lines, with a terrible threat of expulsion if you should ever do it again."

"I know which I shall choose," grinned Nipper, and Mr. Chard laughed heartily for the first time for several days.

Then he looked anxiously at the great detective.

"I'm afraid I haven't very much to report, Mr. Chard, just at present," said Lee, "but I can promise you some extraordinary developments before many days are past."

How extraordinary those developments were to prove even the speaker himself had no idea. Lives were to tremble in the balance, discoveries undreamt of were to be made, and that quaint old Manor House in the peaceful village was destined to spring into sudden notoriety in the annals of crime!

They were both shaking hands with Mr. Chard at the door of his study, when Lee said:

"Stop a moment, sir, I've just remembered that I don't wish Master Barton to reappear among the boys for another day or two. No one has seen him but Boyle, and a word from you will silence the lips of that discreet man."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Lee."

"Drake, Drake, if you please!"

"Oh, dear me, I keep forgetting!" said Mr. Chard. "Really, this state of things is beginning to get on my nerves."

"If you will leave it entirely in our hands the whole thing shall be cleared up much sooner than you think," smiled the great detective reassuringly, and, turning to Nipper: "You said you told your taxi-man to wait for an hour?"

"I did; and more than half that time has gone already," replied Nipper.

"Most excellent youth!" said his master. "Follow me to my room on tiptoe;" and they went up the staircase.

"Look at this, Nipper," said Lee. "It caught my eye only yesterday. Mr. Ingleby-Charteris is advertising for a page-boy. Must have first-class references; uniform provided; good wages to suitable applicant. Apply personally or by letter.' Do you understand? You will apply personally to-morrow."

"But do you think he'll remember me from last Sunday?" said the boy.

"Not if I put some of this black dye on to that brown hair of yours, and you've changed that Eton jacket for a ready-made suit in Peterborough. Monday is really one of Charteris's days for going up to town, but the possibilities are that with his new visitor in the house he won't go back till Tuesday. Try it, anyway, but get the job whatever you do; and if Sol Clitters leaves, follow him like his own shadow, and wire me here. You can dye your own hair whilst I'm providing you with testimonials."

Nipper bolted into the bedroom, while Nelson Lee selected a sheet of paper with a coronet stamped in one corner, and wrote:

"The Dowager Duchess of Linlithgow can strongly recommend Peter Johnson, who has proved himself truthful, honest, and willing during the two years he has been in her service."

"That ought to do the business," he said; "but perhaps I'd better give you another one"; and he altered his handwriting to a bold, masculine scrawl.

"This is to certify that Peter Johnson has been employed by me for twelve months, and left at his own request in consequence of the death of his mother. I am sorry to lose him, as he was a pukka lad in every respect, and waits well at table.

"MARCUS McMANUS, Lieut.-Col."

In ten minutes Nipper, his hair having passed a critical inspection, left the Manor House with a bottle of dye in his overcoat pocket, and, walking along the road until he came to the taxi-cab, whose driver was just looking at his watch, he was carried back to the cathedral city with a very delicate mission entrusted to his young hands.

At ten o'clock next morning Nipper, alias "Peter Johnson," wiped the dust from his shoes with his cap, and approached the entrance of the wealthy stockbroker's domain.

Like everything connected with that prosperous gentleman, it was loud and garish. Between two florid brick piers were a pair of ornamental iron gates, and the gates were gilded, giving an ample view of the well-kept grounds within them, gay with a blaze of flowers, bright scarlet and bright blue for the most part.

Mr. Ingleby-Charteris kept seven gardeners, always hard at it. Not a blade of grass was out of place, and the very leaves that had begun to flutter down from the trees seemed to be pounced upon and hurried out of sight almost as soon as they had touched the ground. The gravel on the drive was too yellow, the very grass itself seemed too green, and as one turned the angle of the drive and came in sight of the house, which he had built on the top of the slope, the red of the brick and the white of the paint-work hurt the eyes.

There was no repose about the place. It shouted the one word "Money" wherever you looked, just as Mr. Ingleby-Charteris himself, with his white spats and absurdly waxed moustache, spoke of pompous prosperity as he came down the terrace with another man beside him.

"Hi, there! What do you want?" called out the master of the mansion, as Nipper continued his way towards the front door. "The servants' entrance is round that bend to the left."

Nipper raised his cap respectfully, and hesitated, and the stockbroker bore down upon him.

"Have you some message for me?" he asked.

"No, sir. I've come in answer to your advertisement for a page-boy."

"The dickens you have! Come here," said Mr. Ingleby-Charteris. "You can walk on the grass. Now, then, what's your name?"

"Peter Johnson, sir."

"And where was your last place?"

Nipper presented his credentials, and the crest on the first envelope caught the stockbroker's eye.

He was a rather good-looking man of perhaps fifty, with a white slip inside his waistcoat, and a pearl of great price in his necktie; and when he had fixed his eye-glass he passed the duchess's letter to his companion and opened the other one.

"Hum!" he said, with a grunt of satisfaction. "Your references are very good. Can you wait at table?"

"Yes, sir."

"Help the butler with the silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Willing to come for a month on trial to see if you suit me, and keep your hands out of my cigarettes, eh?"

"I don't smoke, sir," said Nipper.

"Then I'd engage him on sight, and count the tablespoons," laughed the other man. "Looks a smart boy, Chart. You might do worse."

"Seems to me I couldn't do better," responded Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, lowering his voice. "When can you come in?"

"Whenever you wish, sir."

"Very well, Peter Johnson. Go round that way, and tell Mr. Friday, the butler, that I've engaged you, and the sooner you're into your uniform the better. You're just about the same size as the young thief I kicked out last week; and if you study me you won't regret it."

"Thank you very much, sir. I promise you I'll do my best," said Nipper gratefully; and he was turning away to the servants' entrance when his new master stopped him.

"You see that summer-house on the knoll

yonder?" said the stockbroker, pointing to a gaudy little pagoda embosomed in flowering shrubs. "As soon as you're fixed up, bring a bottle and a syphon and a couple of tumbers there by way of a start."

"Yes, sir," was the prompt response, and Nipper vanished briskly, with his tongue in his cheek.

"That youngster's no fool!" said Clitters.

"All the better. I've no use for fools," laughed Mr. Ingleby-Charteris. "Let's go up there. We can talk without interruption."

The livery of the last boy fitted Nipper like a glove, and so well did the new page perform his duties that when he carried the solid silver tray, bearing the things that his master had ordered, neither the decanter nor the syphon, nor the handsome cut-glass tumblers, touched each other to betray his approach, and he was able to gain the back of the pagoda unseen, and glean a most useful item of information at the very start.

The mellow voice of Sol Clitters was speaking with the slightest suspicion of American accent, which he could suppress altogether when he wished.

"All I think about the matter, my boy, is this: you've been a thundering long time dislodging the enemy," he said.

"That's all very well," responded the stockbroker rather testily. "You overlook one thing. A ghost attracts nothing beyond merely local attention, and, sooner or later, the ghost is going to do it. One could blow the house up or burn it down, or a thousand things, but then you get the police on to it, with a pretty good chance of their discovering the whole stunt. Besides, I want to live there myself—for reasons."

"Quite so," laughed Clitters; "but it seems to me that if the parson clears you'll only have another tenant to boost out."

"I don't think so, and I'll tell you why. Chard has it on a seven years' lease, and the old girl who owns the place will be so sick when his solicitor hands it back to her that this time the chances are she'll sell to me."

"I hope you're right," said Clitters, with an ugly little chuckle; "but your methods are slow to my idea. Now look what I did. There's only one man I really feared in London—that scut, Nelson Lee; and instead of waiting for him to get me set, I went straight into the lion's den and laid him out."

"We haven't seen his death in the papers, Sol," said Mr. Ingleby-Charteris.

"Don't suppose you will; but if he isn't dead he's a hopeless imbecile for life, which is near enough for our purpose."

"One minute," interrupted his host. "That looks like the landlord of the Red Lion at Marsh Manor on his motor-cycle. If the Belgians have anything of importance to communicate they generally send it by him"; and, standing up, he waved an imperious arm, which the figure that had just come through the gate saw, and obeyed.

"Good-morning, Withers," said the stockbroker, as the newcomer approached with a letter in his hand. "Something from my little colony?"

"Yes, sir," replied the messenger. "Madame Trochon asked me to give you this."

"Then trot round to the servants' hall, Withers, and ask them to give you a bottle of Bass, and here's a cigar. I think you've no objection to the brand?"

"Wish I'd always got a box handy for my own smoking, sir," laughed the innkeeper. "There's nothing like 'em to be had in these parts. Thank you kindly, sir. Shall I come back for a reply?"

"Yes, you might do that," said Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, in an abstracted tone, for he had already opened the envelope, and was reading the letter.

"It's from Vilotte," he said aloud, when the man was out of earshot. "He plays French master at the school, you know, and signals when the coast is clear. This is what he says: 'Monsieur, the new master is giving much trouble here. He is very active in his efforts to solve the mystery of the ghost, and I suggest that for the present it would be safer to discontinue it. It was nearly caught last night, and would have been had he not made so much noise in leaving his room. It will take quite a week to print the third million. After that the apparition might walk again with greater safety. In fact, why not then two ghosts?

"'Accept, monsieur, the assurance of my continued sentiments the most profound.—Antoine Vilotte.'"

"Writes a good letter for a foreigner, doesn't he? And you hear what he says? How long are you going to stay, Sol?"

"I sail this day fortnight," said Clitters. "You know my opinion of your ghost stunt, and I think you play it too light. Ghee-whizz! I'd have had six if I'd been running the show. I'd have made the old place howl and moan and sob at night. I'd have dropped stink balls all over the place until the sanitary authorities condemned its drains. That's what I'd have done. Anyhow, that's your affair, and the sooner I get on to my end of the business the better. Are you going to put me over to-morrow?"

"Yes, we'll have the little car out with the changed number, and pick up our bird at the station."

"That'll do. But I say, Chart, that whisky's a long time coming. Ring 'em up again."

As the stockbroker stretched out his hand to the electric button, the new page came round the angle of the pagoda with his burden, which he deposited on the bamboo table.

"Oh, you've come at last, Johnson. You must be quicker another time," said his master.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we had to decant a fresh bottle"; and Nipper vanished.

(To be continued.)

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Limited. The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, 11s. per annum, 5s. 6d. for six months. Abroad 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 5d. for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company Limited.