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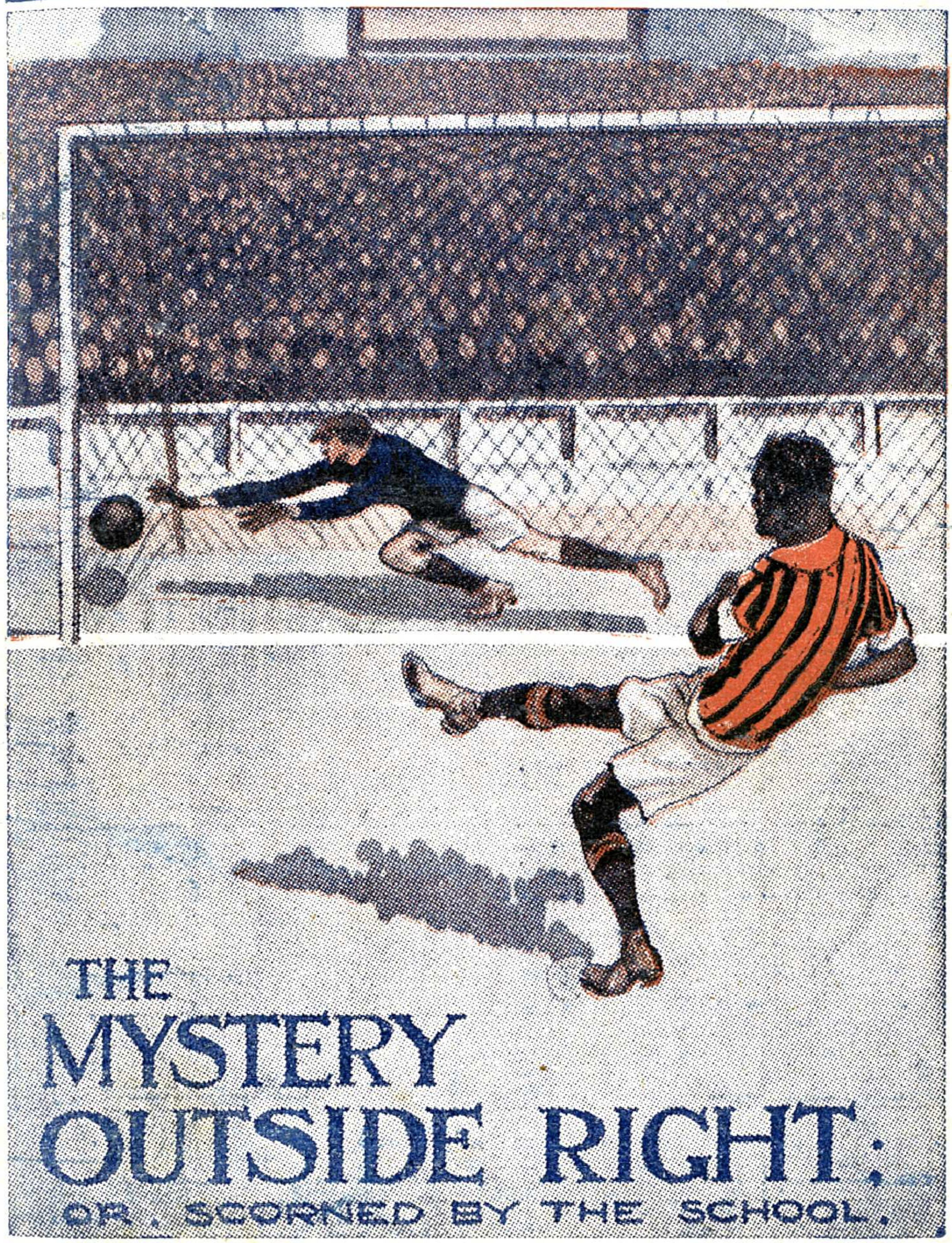

THE MYSTERY OUTSIDE RIGHT:

OR, SCORNED BY THE SCHOOL.

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A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Mystery Footballer," "Playing For the League," "Missing From the Match," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

NOT QUITE SUCCESSFUL.

BIFF!

Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan, the Indian junior in the Remove at St. Frank's, gave a start as his gloriously shiny topper was neatly knocked off his head, and rolled down the steps of the Ancient House.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry!" grinned Church. "Pass it back, old son!"

This was rather cool, considering. Church had kicked the football rather carelessly, much to the detriment of Hussi Khan's headgear. Several other juniors who were in the Triangle chuckled mercilessly.

The Indian junior gazed at his dusty topper, and then gazed at Church.

"You frightfully person!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "You have carelessly and ridiculously removed the hat from my head. It was an act of extraordinarily absurd uselessness. My protestations are powerful."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hussi Khan generally spoke in this way. He was particularly partial to long words, and he generally used about ten when two would have sufficed. Quite frequently, too, he used words which were not applicable.

"Sorry, old chap!" chuckled Church. "Quite an accident."

"It is impossible that accidental mishaps of such a charming character could behave themselves!" said Hussi Khan severely. "I must regretfully exhibit my intolerance at such absurdity. My fury is illimitable."

"My hat!" said Owen major. "He's getting worse than ever."

Reginald Pitt, who happened to be passing at the moment, gave the football a kick, and sent it spinning back to the other fellows in the centre of the Triangle. Then he bent down, recovered Hussi Khan's topper, and handed it to its owner.

"My obligation is marvellous," said the Indian junior politely. "Thank you, Pitt. May I tender my excellent respects for your abundant and ludicrous courtesy? Your manners are irrevocably preposterous."

Pitt smiled.

"That's all right," he exclaimed. "I'm in a bit of a hurry, old man, or I'd stay and have a few words. But once you start, there's no telling when you're going to stop!"

"I am not of the full understanding of your ridiculous meaning," said Hussi Khan. "However, I am greatly conversant with your unfortunate politeness. My thanks are of the biggest description."

"Don't speak to that cad, Hussi!"

"Why can't you let him alone!"

"Yah, rotter!"

Several of the juniors shouted at once, and Hussi Khan looked round with astonishment in his dark eyes. Pitt was next to him, and a somewhat hard expression had crept into Pitt's face.

"Your shouts are mysteriously un-

fathomable," said Hussi Khan. "Why is it that you advise me not to speak with Pitt? Is he not a person of extreme and glorious goodness? Is he not of the frightful politeness and charm?"

"Oh, I don't suppose you'll understand," said Owen major; "but Pitt's on the black books just now—he's been up to some pretty beastly games, and we're not having anything to do with him."

"My astonishment is supreme," said the Indian boy.

"Take my advice, and have nothing to do with the rotter," put in Armstrong. "He'll try to drag you into his beastly ways, particularly if you've got any tin to shove on gee-gees!"

Hussi Khan opened his eyes wider.

"I'm greatly saddened!" he declared. "I was convinced that my knowledge of the amazing English was absurdly perfect; but you are unquestionably using words which are beyond my conprehension!"

"Well, I sha'n't trouble to explain," said Armstrong; "but what you've got to do is to give Pitt a wide berth. He's a rotter; we've proved that as clear as daylight, and the whole Remove is up against him."

"I am preposterously astounded," said Hussi mildly.

Reginald Pitt turned on his heel and walked into the lobby. There was rather a bitter expression in his eyes. He had said nothing out there on the steps, but he felt like punching Armstrong for his words.

But that would have done no good, since Armstrong was a fairly harmless junior, and merely voiced the general opinion of the Remove.

Pitt arrived at Study E, opened the door, and went in. The little room looked bare and somewhat cheerless. Many familiar objects—books, articles of clothing, and so forth—were missing.

For Jack Grey—Pitt's study chum—had moved into other quarters. Just for the present he was occupying a portion of Study M, so Pitt had this little room to himself. It was not his own desire, but, since Grey had gone of his own accord, Pitt was content to let things be as they were.

He closed the door, and sat down in the easy-chair. And he stared straight before him, seeing nothing that he looked at, for his thoughts were far away. Reginald Pitt, once one of the most popular juniors in the Remove, was now scorned by practically every other fellow. The fact that he did not deserve this scorn made the pill all the more bitter to swallow.

Pitt had been having rather a hard time of it this term; in fact, his worries had commenced even before he came to St. Frank's—when he learned that his father was ruined and penniless, and that his parents had been turned out of their home by Simon Raspe, the scoundrelly financier.

Pitt had only come to St. Frank's because his school fees had been paid in advance, and because it would be senseless to abandon them. And for some time past he had been earning money, so that he could send it to his parents, and help them in their troubles.

It was a worthy effort, and Pitt deserved full praise for what he was doing. It was no easy task. He had found that he could earn money by playing football, for this term he had shown wonderful prowess as a wing forward.

And on half-holidays he had been in the habit of playing professional football for the Bannington club—playing football in regular League games; and he had been wonderfully successful.

As it was impossible for him to appear in such games in his own identity, he had adopted the ruse of darkening his skin by means of a simple dye. And thus, at periodical intervals, Reginald Pitt became Abdullah, the wonderful Egyptian outside-right of the Bannington first eleven.

Pitt could not explain this to his fellow juniors in the Remove. He had to keep everything quiet, for he dared not explain that he was playing professional football, and earning six pounds a week, so that he could send the money to keep the wolf from the door of his parents.

Such a story, in fact, would have sounded ridiculous, and would probably have been laughed at. And the thought of being laughed at on such a subject made Pitt seal his lips. Even his own study mate was kept in ignorance of the real truth.

And so this trouble had begun; misunderstandings had arisen. Pitt and his former friends had been at cross purposes; and the culminating point had been reached when Pitt had been seen in

the company of two men—one a bookmaker. And this had happened on the Saturday afternoon when the Remove had urgently wanted Pitt to play against the River House School.

But Pitt had been in a difficult position. He had undertaken to play for the Bannington club, and he was compelled to fulfil his contract. The juniors had jumped to hasty conclusions, believing that Pitt had gone on the "razzle" instead of playing for his school.

And, such is the hasty temperament of schoolboys, a feeling of animosity had risen at once. Thoughtlessly, cruelly, the bulk of the fellows in the Remove had turned their backs upon Reginald Pitt. He was an outcast.

In the Triangle, in the common-room—everywhere, in fact—he was discussed; and he was condemned without having had the slightest chance of speaking up for himself. It was hardly surprising that Pitt's feelings were bitter.

He couldn't altogether blame the fellows, for he knew how hasty and reckless they were; he knew how they accepted the slightest ghost of a suspicion as positive proof. But, at the same time, it cut him to the quick to know that many of his former chums "cut" him deliberately.

"Well, after all, what does it matter?" he muttered, as he lay back in the chair. "My pater and mater are more to me than these unthinking asses. They'll never know the truth, that's one certainty! And I don't care a snap for them—I don't care a jot for the whole blessed crowd!"

He glared ferociously at the opposite wall.

"They can say what they like!" he went on bitterly. "Do they think I care? I know I'm doing the right thing—that's all that matters. They can all go and eat coke!"

He laughed with something like real amusement as he remembered the accusations which had been made—he had been betting; he had been gambling; he had attended race-meetings. And all this without any evidence!

He hadn't even troubled to refute the statements. It wasn't worth wasting his breath. But he grew somewhat serious as he remembered how Jack Grey had doubted him; and he and Jack Grey had been the best of pals always. Losing Jack's friendship was the biggest blow of all.

Tap!

Before Pitt could speak, the door opened, and three juniors marched in. They were elegantly attired, and were possessed of great assurance. They looked round the study and nodded casually to Pitt. These juniors were Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, the three precious nuts of Study A.

Pitt didn't move an inch as he eyed the cads of the Remove. He was rather curious to know why they had honoured him with this visit.

"Feeling a bit lonely, ain't you?" asked Ralph Leslie Fullwood, as he sat on a corner of the table. "You mustn't take any notice of those rotters—they don't understand things."

"I don't think I understand you?" said Pitt.

"No?" said Fullwood. "I'll soon explain. You've been going the pace a bit, haven't you?"

"Is that your business?"

Fullwood grinned.

"My dear chap, there's no need to ride the high horse," he said. "Of course you've been going the pace—backing gee-gees, and all the rest of it. We know—you can't kid us!"

"That's very interesting," said Pitt grimly.

"You've been left on your own, and we've got a fellow feeling for you," went on Fullwood. "That's the size of it, my son. What's wrong with the idea of us palling together?"

"Oh, it's glorious!" said Pitt, with sarcasm.

"You see, we've been thinkin' things over," put in Gulliver. "We can see you've been havin' a rough time of it, and we know what it's like—the chaps treat us in the same way. Just because we happen to be sports, they think we're unclean, or somethin'."

"A chap must have a flutter now and again," added Bell.

Fullwood nodded.

"That's the idea," he said. "We reckoned you'd be lonely, Pitt, so we've come to invite you to a nice little game of nap in Study A."

"I'm overwhelmed," said Pitt grimly.

"You're one of us," continued Fullwood. "You've come round to the

same ideas; we can understand. In brief, you've learnt sense."

"Have I?" asked Pitt.

"Rather!" said Fullwood. "You've realised at last that there's no fun in going through life in a humdrum way. Dash it all, a fellow must have a bit of excitement now and again."

"Oh, exactly," agreed Pitt.

He felt that he would like to punch every one of these conceited, feather-brained young fools. But it rather pleased him to let them run on, and to see exactly how much they would say. And so, for the moment at least, he was not showing his hand. He pretended to be interested.

"So you suggest that we should pal up?" he asked.

"Exactly," said Fullwood. "You've got some money, I suppose?"

"Oh, heaps!" said Pitt sarcastically.

"Good!" went on Fullwood. "We'll show you the way to increase it. We've heard all these yarns about your going to the races, and missing football, and all that sort of thing. We'll become real pals, if you like. This evening, for example, we can have a little gamble, and I was thinking about going over to the Helmford races on Wednesday. How does that strike you?"

"Not half so hard as something will strike you in a minute!" replied Pitt quietly. "Have you got anything more to say?"

"No, I think that's about all," replied Fullwood. "What do you say?"

"Get out!"

"Eh?"

Reginald Pitt pointed to the door.

"That's what I say—get out!" he exclaimed curtly.

"But—but——"

"Clear out of this study, before I lose my temper!" snapped Pitt. "Vamoose before I kick you out on your dirty necks!"

"Why, you—you silly ass!" started Fullwood.

"Did you think that I'd lower myself by becoming pals of yours?" shouted Pitt fiercely. "Did you think these yarns about me are true? I've listened to you pretty calmly, but I'm fed up with it now. I don't believe in mincing matters. Will you go out quietly, or shall I chuck you out?"

"By gad!" said Bell blankly.

"You cheeky rotter!" snapped Gulliver.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was looking unpleasant.

"Oh, so this is the way you treat us when we come to you in a friendly spirit!" he said nastily. "This is all we get for our expressions of sympathy!"

"You can keep 'em to yourselves!" retorted Pitt.

"We come here trying to be pally," said Fullwood. "We know you've been left in the lurch, and we thought we might as well——"

"You thought you might as well rook me of any money I happen to have!" snorted Pitt. "You thought I'd become one of you—you thought I'd suddenly changed into a cad and a fool. Well, I haven't! I don't play cards, and I don't back horses, and what's more to the point, I don't make friends with contemptible cads like you!"

Fullwood started back.

"What!" he roared. "You—you insultin' bounder!"

"I don't want to hear any more—I've finished!" shouted Pitt fiercely. "I give you fair warning, I shall lose my temper completely in two seconds. Get out of this study!"

"Why, we'll——"

"Get out of this study!" thundered Pitt furiously.

"By gad! We're not standing this!" said Gulliver.

"We're not!" agreed Fullwood "Come on, you chaps! We've had about enough. Grab him!"

Biff!

"Yow—yaroooh!" howled Fullwood wildly.

Pitt was exasperated beyond measure. On the top of his trouble these precious cads had come to him fondly believing that he would welcome their friendly overtures. It was more than Pitt could stand.

His fist shot out, and Fullwood staggered back, roaring. Before Gulliver and Bell could escape they were fiercely attacked, too. Pitt went for them hotly, recklessly. He was just in that mood when he didn't care.

He didn't care for his own safety. All he considered was the idea of getting these cads out of Sturdy E. And he attacked them with such whirlwind force

and energy that they were not prepared for the onslaught.

At the best of times Fullwood and Co. were not great fighting men. And when they had a determined foe to face they generally crumpled up.

They were three to one, but Pitt was a very volcanic one.

Slam! Crash! Biff!

His fist shot out like piston rods.

Gulliver caught a beautiful drive on the nose, Bell was sent staggering back, howling wildly, and holding his ear, and Fullwood was not quite sure whether all his teeth were intact.

Study E was filled with wild sounds—howls, crashes, gasps and thuds.

Up to now the visitors had not even thought of retaliating—they had really had no chance, for Pitt had kept up the offensive with terrific energy. And now Pitt dashed to the door and flung it wide open.

"Out you get!" he shouted fiercely.

"You—you miserable cad!" hissed Fullwood. "We're goin' to slaughter you for this! Ow! By gad! Ow!"

Fullwood received a blow on his chest which made him gasp. He tottered back, lost his balance, and fell headlong through the doorway into the passage. Pitt turned to Gulliver, and Gulliver yelled.

Before he could escape he was sent flying after Fullwood, and he crashed down on top of his chief. Bell, thoroughly demoralised, fled precipitately. And just then Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I came along.

Handforth and Co. hove in sight, too.

"By George!" said Handforth. "There's something going on here!"

"Sounds like it!" grinned Church.

"Dear old boys, Pitt seems to be havin' a lively time," observed Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "Be gad! I entirely approve of this—I do, really! Pitt has just been havin' a little argument with Fullwood and Co."

"And they seem to have got the worst of it," I said grimly.

Pitt came striding along the passage, his face deeply flushed, his eyes gleaming, and his fists clenched.

He didn't take any notice of us. He walked straight on as though the juniors did not exist. But I thought I caught just a contemptuous little curl of his lip. And I was more than ever convinced, in my own mind, that Reginald Pitt was true blue to the core.

His actions of late had puzzled me—had worried me—but I secretly believed that he had not acted without good cause. And, as it happened, it was not to be so very long before I made an interesting discovery.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING RECKLESS.

"COME in!" sang out Pitt shortly.

It was Friday evening, and he was sitting in Study E hard at his prep. Things had been quiet during the last day or so. Pitt had been left severely to himself, for the most part. He had been ignored, and this, although he hardly recognised it, hurt him more than anything.

Fullwood and Co. nursed their newly born hatred for Pitt, and did nothing. But the venomous glances which they cast towards him on different occasions plainly hinted that they had not forgotten.

Pitt looked up as four fellows entered the study. I was the first, and the others, who followed me, were Tommy Watson, De Valerie, and Bob Christine. We closed the door and looked at Pitt.

"Well," said Pitt curtly.

"We want a word with you, my son," I began easily.

"I'm busy!"

"We sha'n't keep you long——"

"Sorry, but I haven't got time!" said Pitt. "You don't mind closing the door as you go out, do you?"

"You cheeky bounder!" snapped Bob Christine. "If you think——"

"Steady on!" I interrupted smoothly. "After all, Pitt's in the middle of his prep., and we've interrupted him. And he hasn't been treated so nicely in the Remove that he welcomes this visit."

"Well, he shouldn't act the giddy ox!" said De Valerie.

"The fact is, Pitt, we want to know about to-morrow," I said. "That's all we've come about."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Well, what about to-morrow?" asked Pitt.

"Don't pretend you don't know," I replied. "To-morrow's Saturday, and we've got an important match on with Helmford College. We're playing at home, and we want to put the best possible team in the field."

Pitt nodded.

"Very interesting," he said, "but is this anything to do with me? I always thought you were the junior skipper."

"I am," I said patiently. "It may interest you to know that I've gone against the general advice of the Remove, and I've selected you to play outside-right. The other fellows don't like it, but I haven't taken any notice of them. You'll play, of course?"

Pitt shook his head.

"No!" he replied quietly.

"What!" shouted Christine. "You—you——"

"The Remove has chosen to regard me as an outsider—as a rotter in general," said Pitt deliberately. "I've been accused of all manner of things, and I'm practically shunned. But it seems that I'm wanted when the occasion demands. Well, I'm not going to be used in that way."

"But, look here, Pitt——" I began.

"I refuse to play," he interrupted.

"Well, my hat!" said Tommy Watson blankly. "You ass—you rotter! You have been selected for the Eleven, and you refuse? You can't refuse! It's not allowed! If you're selected, you've got to play!"

Pitt smiled without any humour.

"Oh!" he said. "How do you propose to make me play?"

"Of course, we can't do it!" I put in. "If you refuse, there's an end of it. But, look here, Pitt, don't act the goat. You're the best man we've got—in fact, you're the best footballer in St. Frank's, better than any man in the first Eleven. If we go into the field against Helmford without you it'll be a catastrophe. You're a sportsman, I think?"

"I hope so," said Pitt.

"Well, then, it's a question of football now," I went on. "You're wanted to play for the school, and you ought to sink all petty differences. I thought you'd be broad-minded enough to see it in that way, Pitt. I selected you as a matter of course, because there's no other man who can hold a candle to you."

"That's very nice of you," said Pitt. "I appreciate the honour. I'm sorry, but I can't accept the invitation."

"That's your last word?"

"It is!"

The other juniors glared at Pitt grimly.

"You rotter!" said De Valerie heartily. "We'll show you——"

"Don't argue—that sort of thing doesn't do any good," I interrupted. "Pitt's given us his final word, and there's an end of it. We shall play without him."

"And lose the match!" snorted Bob Christine.

"That's most probable," I agreed quietly. "The Helmsford chaps are as hot as mustard this term. Still, we've got plenty of other good men in the team, and we might pull through. If we had Pitt it would be a certainty."

"And Pitt won't play!" said Pitt, with a kind of grim relish.

The other fellows wanted to continue the argument, but I marshalled them out of the study and closed the door behind us. They went off growling. But I remained in the passage, and I was rather thoughtful.

I had my own ideas about Pitt, and they were not in any way similar to the wild suspicions which had been circulated in the Remove For I was in possession of certain knowledge of which the other fellows knew nothing.

For example, I knew that Pitt's people were in dire trouble; I knew they had been turned out of their home by Simon Raspe, and, furthermore, I had an idea that, Reginald Pitt was up to some little game of his own. But I had a better opinion of him than to imagine that this game was a shady one.

I re-entered Study E.

Pitt was hard at work again, and he looked up impatiently.

"I sha'n't keep you a moment," I said. "Look here, old son, what's the trouble? You needn't think that I believe all the rotten stories that have been going the rounds. I know how your people are in trouble, and I'm awfully sorry. Can't you tell me what's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong," muttered Pitt—"at least, nothing more than you know about. I'm hoping that Mr. Lee will be able to find out something about

that villain Raspe, but he doesn't seem to do anything, and time drags on. I'm beginning to give up hope."

"Don't you worry," I said. "The guv'nor hasn't said much to me, but he's got the matter well in hand. And you can be absolutely certain that he'll bring off a coup before long. Nelson Lee doesn't shout much about what he's doing, but he does it."

"By Jove, I hope he succeeds," said Pitt, with gleaming eyes.

"And so do I," I agreed. "And now, about the football——"

"Oh!"

Pitt looked at me uncomfortably, with a pained expression, and his exclamation was involuntary.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I wish you wouldn't think about the football," he said earnestly. "Look here, Nipper, I can't play to-morrow."

"Why can't you?"

"Because—oh, because—— Well, there are several reasons," said Pitt confusedly. "The fellows are against me—they've taken it into their heads to believe all sorts of rotten things. And, to tell you the honest truth, I don't feel inclined to play. You can call it unsportsmanlike, or anything else, but if you were in my position you'd think the same way."

I nodded slowly.

"Well, perhaps I would," I agreed. "It's been rough on you, Pitt—beastly rough. And you needn't think that Grey isn't upset. It's a terrible pity he and you had a bust-up."

"It wasn't my doing," said Pitt. "Jack chose to believe all manner of rotten things, and I got wild. I couldn't do anything else. We had a row—and, well, we've hardly said a word to one another since."

"But you must admit things have looked very queer," I said. "Dash it all, Pitt, you've been acting jolly queerly. You've never explained why you slipped away from the River House match. That's what made the fellows wild in the first place. And then you were seen with a bookmaker——"

"I don't care who I was seen with, or anything else," snapped Pitt.

"But, look here, can't you tell me?" I urged. "What's your game?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you anything about it," said Pitt quietly. "And what's more, I can't play in to-morrow's match. It'll hurt me a lot—to think that I'm letting the side down. But it's not my fault."

"Do you mean that you won't be at the school?"

"Yes. That is——"

"You're compelled to go out somewhere?" I asked keenly.

"My dear chap, if you're trying to pump me, it won't work!" said Pitt, with a sudden grin. "Thank goodness, there's somebody in the Remove who believes I'm still decent. Thanks, Nipper. I knew I could always trust you."

"But you're not trusting me," I said. "You won't explain——"

"I can't—really, I can't!" said Pitt earnestly. "Please don't ask me any more—I don't want to tell you a collection of beastly lies, and I shall have to do something of that sort if you don't ease off this questioning. I can't explain anything else."

"And you really refuse to play against Helmford."

"Yes."

I looked at Pitt squarely.

"Another chap might be wild about this," I said. "But I'm not. I'm pretty certain that you've got a good reason for missing the match. You can't kid me, my son, so don't try to."

"Kid you!"

"Precisely," I said. "It won't work. You've refused to play in this match simply because you've got to go somewhere else. Right down in your heart you've got the honour of St. Frank's in a special place, and it hurt you pretty deeply to leave the Remove in the lurch. You love football too well to miss a game like this of your own free will. You've got some particular reason for it."

Pitt looked at me, somewhat alarmed.

"Rot!" he said. "What reason could I have? I say, do leave me alone!"

I nodded, and passed out of the study—positively convinced that my idea was correct. And as soon as I had gone, Pitt lay back in his chair and regarded the ceiling contemplatively.

"I'm afraid of that chap!" he muttered. "He's too jolly keen—he guesses things! Still, he'll never be able to know the absolute truth. And he's jolly decent—one of the best."

He chewed the end of his pencil absently.

"I never thought this giddy League playing was going to lead me such a dance," he pondered. "But I can't play in two places at the same time—and I've got to think of the Bannington Club first. I've undertaken to play for 'em, and I get six quid a week for it. I must send that money to the pater—it's absolutely imperative, and ten times more important than a hundred school matches."

But Pitt was somewhat doubtful as he thought of the morrow. Bannington was making a trip to London, for they had an away fixture with Brompton Athletic—the well-known West London club.

Pitt had intimated to Mr. Page, the manager of the Bannington Club, that he might not be able to play. For it was very doubtful if he could get off. It was a long trip to London, and there was the getting back to be thought of.

However, Mr. Page had declared that the team would not set out from Bannington until half-past twelve. It was travelling to London by char-a-banc, and could easily do the trip in plenty of time, for the match was not due to start until three-thirty.

And now Pitt was feeling reckless.

"I'll go!" he told himself grimly. "I don't care! Rats to the lot of them! I'll go and snap my fingers at the whole crowd!"

And he adhered to that decision. He felt he didn't care after the way he had been treated. It was his duty to do his best for the Bannington Club, for he had been treated well by the professionals—by Mr. Page himself, and every member of the team. They all liked him, and admired him for his skill.

His resolution was just as firm in the morning, and he anxiously eyed the clock as morning lessons neared their close. I could not help noticing Pitt's furtive glances at the clock. Between eleven-thirty and eleven-fifty, he must have looked at the clock a dozen times. And this made me think.

"He's anxious to be off!" I told myself. "I'll bet he means to slide away somewhere before dinner. That's his game. Goodness knows where he's going to, though. There's a mystery about this!"

I didn't say anything regarding my suspicions to the other juniors. At twelve o'clock to the minute the Remove was dismissed, and the fellows went crowding out of the form-room.

I made straight for the Triangle, and lounged casually in the doorway of the gymnasium—practically unseen. From this point of vantage I could watch the Ancient House steps and the bicycle shed.

In my opinion, Pitt had given himself away by his repeated glances at the clock. If he had not intended going until after dinner, it would not have mattered to him if the class had been a minute or two later in being dismissed.

And, sure enough, my suspicions turned out to be correct.

I had not been waiting for more than five minutes before Reginald Pitt came hurrying out. I whistled softly to myself. He was no longer wearing his Etons, but was attired in a grey Norfolk suit, with a tweed cap.

"Phew!" I murmured. "He must have hustled pretty well to change so quickly. Ah, I thought so! He's off to get his bike! Well, I'm in on this—I mean to find out what he's up to."

I had no compunction whatever in deciding upon this. I didn't regard it as spying, or prying into Pitt's affairs. I simply wanted to know what his mysterious movements meant—and, when I did know, I should keep the information to myself. But I was determined.

Within a minute, Pitt went speeding out of the gateway.

The very instant he disappeared, I raced across to the bicycle shed, got out my own jigger, and jumped upon it. I sped out of the Triangle, taking no notice of the hails from Tommy Watson and Sir Montie, who were on the Ancient House steps.

When I got into the lane, I could see no sign of Pitt. But I could see a slight haze of dust down in the direction of the village. I pedalled for all I was worth. And it was not until I was nearly at the end of the village High Street that I caught a glimpse of my quarry.

Pitt was just speeding along the Bannington Road.

I slackened down a trifle now, for I was fairly safe in assuming that Bannington was his destination. And I did not wish to be seen. If I kept him in sight, it was quite on the cards that he might

glance back and see me. And that would never do, because I didn't want him to know that I was after him.

That journey to Bannington was a fast one. I soon found that I couldn't slacken very much, for Pitt himself was riding all out. Indeed, it was as much as I could do to get within sight of him again before the outskirts of the town were reached.

I was perspiring very freely, after a hard run, when I caught a glimpse of his speeding machine going into the main street.

He went straight through the town, and here I was fairly safe, for there was plenty of other traffic about, and Pitt was not likely to notice me—for he had no idea that he had been followed from St. Frank's. He went on, and turned off down a side road on the other side of Bannington.

I just got round the corner in time to see him dismounting from his machine in front of a high brick building. There was a high brick wall, too, with several gates in it. And, beyond, I could see a great stand with a corrugated iron roof. I knew that I was looking upon the grounds of the Bannington Football and Athletic Club. And Pitt had gone in by the private entrance.

Just outside in the road, a small char-a-banc was waiting. It was one of the newest fashioned type, with huge pneumatic tyred wheels, and was evidently capable of attaining a good speed.

Two or three men were lounging about.

And these, I had noticed, had waved to Pitt as he entered, and had cheerily hailed him. He was evidently well known here.

I dismounted from my machine, and took it into a little alley-way, where I was quite unseen, and could watch. I was breathing pretty heavily, and felt very hot. And my thoughts were busy.

"The Bannington Football Club!" I murmured. "Now, why the dickens does he come here? He seems to be known, too!"

I had not had the pleasure of seeing the professionals at play, and I knew very little about them. The only fact I did know—the only thing which came instantly to my mind—was that the Bannington Club had lately got hold of a coloured player—named Abdullah, and popularly supposed to be an Arab or an Egyptian.

I remembered that Handforth and Co. had seen a match, and they had spoken very highly of Abdullah's ability at outside-right.

Outside-right!

That was the position which Pitt always played in! Rather a curious coincidence, I thought. And I waited there, in the alley, wondering what would come of this little expedition of mine.

I was not destined to wonder for long.

Pitt had arrived just after twelve-fifteen—for we had done the journey from the school to Bannington in a minute or two over the quarter-hour. And at exactly twelve thirty-five, several figures appeared.

They were all laughing and talking together. One figure was small, and at first I thought it belonged to Pitt. He was just Pitt's size, and build. Then he turned his face towards me.

I realised my mistake.

This was Abdullah, the wonderful coloured winger. His face was very dark, and he had flashing white teeth. Then, as I looked at him, I suddenly gave a big start. My eyesight was keen, and I knew that I had made no mistake.

Reginald Pitt had come to this place—Reginald Pitt had vanished—and Abdullah had come into view. What could it mean? Simply that Reginald Pitt and Abdullah were one and the same person!

The very idea took my breath away.

But, the more I thought of it the more convinced I became. I watched closely. All the men got into the char-a-banc, most of them were carrying hand-bags, and they were all well-dressed, and gentlemanly in appearance.

The char-a-banc started, and came towards me.

I crouched round the corner of the brick-work, and watched.

The vehicle came close by. In that flash, as it sped past, I had one clear view of Abdullah, he was sitting in the rear seat, and he had removed his cap. His dark hair was waving in the wind. And, although the change was startling, I knew the truth—now that I had guessed it.

This coloured footballer was Reginald Pitt.

And a great light flooded upon me. I understood everything—all that had

been obscure now became clear. I knew why Pitt had hurried so much, for Bannington was playing an away match during the afternoon.

I knew why Pitt had slipped away on the previous Saturday, instead of playing in the school match against the River House. Of course, he had been at Helmford; for the Bannington Club had played there on that day.

But it was extraordinary, all the same. Pitt, a junior schoolboy, to be playing with professionals! It said much for his prowess, and for his pluck. I knew what a remarkable footballer he was. and it pleased me to think that his skill was appreciated in this way.

And another point came home to me.

Why was Pitt doing this? Why was he playing for a professional club in preference to his school? Obviously because he was paid for doing so! And he needed the money to send to his parents—whom, I knew, were in a bad way.

I saw the whole thing. And, although I was just a little bit annoyed with Pitt for keeping me in the dark, I could not help feeling a great admiration for him. Because I knew that he was doing this from an unselfish motive.

He was getting the money for his parents—and his self-imposed task was costing him dearly. For he was scorned by many fellows in the Remove. and he had fallen foul of his own study mate. It was hard lines for Reginald Pitt.

But I was very pleased to know the truth.

CHAPTER III.

PLAYING THE GAME.

"ONLY just in time," said Mr. Page.

The manager of the Bannington Football Club had been rather anxious, in fact. He had waited for Pitt until the very last moment, and, consequently, the team had started somewhat late from Bannington.

The char-a-banc had made fast progress on the road, however, and now it was only just a few minutes after three. The Brompton Athletic ground had been reached, and it was a scene of bustling activity.

Within twenty minutes the match would start.

But there was plenty of time for the visiting team to change into their colours, and to take the field at the sound of the whistle. The ground was filling rapidly, and the Brompton supporters were expecting a good game.

It was a fine afternoon, and there was every prospect of a record gate. Brompton had been doing well, and was only fourth down on the League table. But Bannington had done better. For Bannington was only one down from the top.

And every member of the team knew that if they won this game, and took both points away with them, they would probably go up. For the League leaders were playing a strong side, and were likely to go down, or draw, at the best. Even if they drew, and if Bannington won, the latter would go to the top.

So much depended upon this game.

Mr. Page knew well enough that it would be far better for his eleven if Pitt played in his usual position. The other members of the team were used to him, and were well accustomed to his style of play. And Mr. Page, being a good manager, knew that the side which consistently wins its matches is the side which makes no changes in the team.

However, there was one slight change this week—but that all to the good. Tom Howard was partnering Pitt on the right wing. Howard was an excellent inside man, and he and Pitt worked together like machines. Their passing was wonderful to behold, once they got going.

Howard was a cheerful young fellow, and it was he who had first introduced Pitt to the Club. Pitt had found him to be a sportsman and a gentleman, and he got on famously with him.

"Boys, you've got to do your best to-day," said Hogan, the trainer, in the dressing-room. "Porthampton are likely to drop a point, and if we win we shall go to the top. It's worth going all out for!"

"You bet it is!" said Fred Hearne, the captain. "And you can trust the boys to do all they can, Hogan. Brompton are pretty good, but we've got a side that'll whack 'em!"

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Page, coming in. "But you mustn't be too confident, lads. And don't forget to feed the right-wing. Our coloured pet is feeling in good form to-day, I believe."

Pitt grinned and nodded.

"I'm just itching to get on the field!" he said.

"Well, be careful of Robson—he's the Brompton left-back," said Mr. Page. "Robson's got rather a reputation for fouling, and he's a big, hulking fellow. If you got in his way he would half-murder you with one charge. So be careful!"

"Thanks," said Pitt. "I'll remember."

Meanwhile, the ground was rapidly filling. The stands, indeed, were already packed, and close upon twenty thousand spectators were eagerly waiting for the commencement of the match. Needless to say, they were all confident of victory; football crowds always are.

Only a very few Bannington supporters had come up to London. The trip was too expensive for most people. However, there was a staunch little band of Banningtonites in the central stand.

The teams came out, and the cheering was tremendous.

The visitors received a big ovation from the little band, which created a surprising amount of noise, considering its size. For some few minutes the two teams gathered round the opposite nets; then the referee blew his whistle.

The two captains tossed, and Brompton won—not that there was much in it, for there was no sun and practically no wind.

The teams lined up, and the game commenced.

During the first five minutes the home team did everything but score. It was their plan, evidently, to rush the visitors off their feet. They attacked fiercely and continuously, and practically all the playing was in the Bannington half.

But for the skill of Carden, the Bannington goalkeeper, Brompton would have been two goals up in next to no time; but Carden played extremely well, and saved two corners in quick succession.

After that the play drifted into midfield for a time; then Bannington got a look in. The leather was passed over to the left wing, and both forwards took the ball up the field in fine style.

The outside man was baulked at the last moment, however. Just as he was about to send the ball, it was taken off his toe by one of the Brompton backs The winger was a shade too slow.

Then the play swept back into the home half. The Brompton centre-forward seized one of those chances which frequently occur—and which, as a general rule, are thrown away.

The centre-forward got his foot to the ball, and rammed in a first-time shot with deadly speed and precision. Carden leapt at it, but he was a fraction of a second too late.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Brompton!"

"Goal!"

The crowd roared and cheered as football crowds will. One might have supposed that the very League championship depended upon that goal. The delighted spectators grinned with sheer pleasure.

Pitt was looking rather grim when the match restarted. He had had no chance so far, and he was somewhat annoyed by the sarcastic remarks of the spectators near the touch-line. Many of them had referred to him quite plainly within his hearing, and their criticisms were of an uncomplimentary character.

Pitt was determined to show them what he could do.

His chance came almost at once. From a throw-in the ball was taken by the Bannington centre-half. Without hesitation he lifted the leather, and dropped it up the field ten or fifteen yards from Pitt. Pitt raced forward like a deer, and easily beat Robson, the opposing back.

Robson vainly attempted to catch Pitt, but he was like a cart-horse running after a thoroughbred. He was left behind, and Pitt fairly tore up the field near the touch-line, and then sent over a perfectly placed centre.

Fred Hearne was there.

He took no chances, for two men were upon him. He did not make the mistake of heeding the yells of "off-side" which proceeded from Robson. As a matter of fact, Hearne was not off-side, and the referee waved his hand towards the goal.

He was too late in any case, for Hearne had kicked.

It was a glorious shot, but the Brompton goalie was waiting for it. He fisted out coolly and cleared; but Howard was

near, and he rushed in and literally took the ball into the goal, himself and all. Down went the custodian, and down went Howard.

But the ball was at the back of the net.

"Goal!" shrieked the staunch little Bannington band.

"Foul—foul!"

The home supporters were indignant, and claimed that Howard had fouled the goalie. Several of the Brompton players claimed a foul, too; but the referee shook his head, and pointed to the centre of the field.

"Good man!" whispered Pitt, as he grasped Howard's hand.

"You had a great deal to do with it," grinned Howard. "That was a glorious centre of yours—and a glorious shot of Hearne's, too. Good thing I happened to be near by, wasn't it?"

Tom Howard was limping, for in the collision with the goalkeeper he had slightly hurt his ankle. But he didn't care much, and he was quite fit to go on.

Bannington had equalised, and the game was on square terms once more. It was in vain that Brompton tried to regain the lead. They almost exhausted themselves before half-time, battering against the stone-wall defence of the visitors.

Half-time came, and the score remained equal, one—one.

This was very satisfactory, as Hogan pointed out while he attended to the wants of his charges in the dressing-room during the short interval.

"We're fresher than they are," he declared. "Keep it up, boys, and you'll win. They've shot their bolt, you can take it from me. Go it as hard as you can, and don't slacken down, however many goals you get."

"Even if we get a dozen?" grinned Howard.

The trainer did not deign to reply to this facetious remark, and, a few minutes later, the two teams took the field for the second half. And there was no doubt that the Bannington men were fresher.

The football for the first ten minutes was of a somewhat poor quality. Somehow or other the visitors could not get going, although they tried hard. Brompton made several attempts to break away, and failed.

And then came a bit of excitement.

Once again it was Pitt who caused it. He trapped the ball as it came down the field, and found that he was well in advance of the inside man. There was one thing to be done, and that was to race in and take a shot on his own. Hesitation, in League football, is a fatal mistake. While a man hesitates his opponents are upon him, and a good chance is thus thrown away.

Pitt didn't hesitate.

He rushed for the goal. Robson, the left-back, came charging at him, and Pitt seemed to be running straight towards the back. At the last second, however, he dodged, and twisted round the man like an eel. Robson scowled, and flung himself flat. His outstretched foot hooked itself round Pitt's leg just as he was about to shoot. Pitt went flying, and lay still.

The whistle blew sharply, and the referee ran up. The home crowd was silent, but the band of Bannington supporters easily made up for it by the noise they created.

"Foul—foul!"

"Penalty!"

"Turn him off the field!"

"Foul!"

And undoubtedly it was a foul—and a particularly deliberate one. What was more, Robson had fouled Pitt in the penalty area. Pitt himself was in the arms of the trainer and Tom Howard. He had been shaken up considerably, and his left shoulder was bruised; but otherwise he was all right. His shins and ankles were unhurt.

"I'm all right now," he said, spluttering, as Hogan jammed a wet sponge into his face. "G-r-r-h! Take that blessed thing away!"

The referee, seeing that Pitt was all right, turned to Robson, the Brompton back.

"I warned you once before in this game," he said curtly.

"What do you mean?" growled Robson. "It was an accident——"

"I've got eyes of my own!" snapped the referee. "I sha'n't warn you again, Robson. The next time you'll go off the field."

The referee turned and pointed to the penalty spot.

"Hurrah!" howled the Bannington supporters.

"Good old ref!"

"Let Abdullah take it!"

There was some hooting from the crowd, for the referee's decision was an unpopular one. Most football crowds are very partisan, and a number of spectators in such crowds are unsportsmanlike.

Fred Hearne glanced at Pitt.

"You can take it if you like," he said.

Pitt thrilled at the idea, and nodded. He had expected Hearne to take the kick, and he felt the responsibility which had been imposed upon him. What if he failed? Well, it couldn't be helped, he reflected. Hearne himself had failed many a time in taking the penalty.

The Brompton men, looking glum, took up their positions outside the area The goalie crouched between the posts.

Pitt took a short run, and felt perfectly cool. He made no attempt at trickery, but simply drove hard and true. He did take one chance, however; instead of driving straight at the goalie, he sent the ball to the extreme left side near the post and very near the ground.

And it is always risky to take such a chance, for, unless the aim is absolutely accurate, the leather will probably go outside. But Pitt's judgment was perfect.

The goalkeeper had no chance whatever.

The ball went in like a bullet, and, although the custodian leapt at it, he got nowhere near it.

"Goal!"

"Good old Blackie!"

"Keep it up, Bannington!"

"Let's have another one!"

The Bannington players were only too eager to oblige. It would be glorious if they could gain both the points—and there was a distinct chance of it now. Brompton needed two goals to win, and Carden was determined that they would not get them. He was sure that they would not even get one more.

And the Bannington men were further encouraged by the fact that Porthampton were one down at half-time—they had seen the figure on the board. This was splendid. If Porthampton lost, they—Bannington—would go to the top of the League table.

And so it was a live, determined team that played for the victory. The game resolved itself into a swift, ding-dong struggle. The goalkeepers had very little to do, for most of the play was in mid-field.

Now and again there was a break-away. Twice the Bannington goal was in grave danger. But Carden was splendid; the home forwards could not get the leather past him. It must be admitted, too, that they were unlucky.

On one occasion the Brompton centre-forward sent in a shot which would have beaten Carden or any other goalkeeper; but it just touched the cross-bar and rebounded into play.

The Brompton goalkeeper was equally as grim, and when at last the final whistle blew, the scoring remained the same, two—one.

But Bannington were the victors!

It was a splendid result, and Mr. Page and Hogan and all the others were more than delighted with the show that Pitt had put up. Once again he had been of invaluable assistance to his side. Once again he had proved that he was equal to any first-class professional footballer—and better than most.

It mattered nothing to Mr. Page that he was a schoolboy. He was willing to come and play for the team, and he was willing to appear in this disguise. Mr. Page didn't want to ask any questions—he wasn't curious to know why Pitt chose to do this. The manager was only too glad to have the lad's services.

"Splendid, young 'un—absolutely great!" said Mr. Page, clapping Pitt on the shoulder, after he had changed.

"What about getting back?" asked Pitt, rather anxiously.

"Well, we're not starting until about half-past six," replied the manager, "and we shall probably arrive at Bannington about half-past nine or ten. That's how we reckon, anyway."

Pitt drew a long face.

"But I can't wait till then," he protested.

"I'm afraid you'll have to——"

"I shall have to go by train;" interrupted Pitt. "There's bound to be a train from Victoria, and it doesn't take long by rail. The time's only just after half-past five, and I want to get back to the school soon after eight, if I can."

Mr. Page nodded.

"Well, of course, that's important," he agreed. "We mustn't forget that you're an exceptional case, my lad. Since you've played so well to-day I'll pay your fare home, in addition to your usual money."

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Page," said Pitt.

And, very shortly afterwards, he started out—having ascertained by 'phone that there was a fast train from Victoria at six-twenty-five. This gave him loads of time to get to the station.

But Pitt had hardly walked a hundred yards away from the big football ground before he felt a touch on his arm. He looked round at once, and then gasped.

"Dad!" he exclaimed joyfully.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING THROUGH THE MILL.

MR. REGINALD PITT pressed his son's arm affectionately.

"Hardly expected to see me, eh?" he smiled. "And I must say, Reggie, that your appearance at the moment does not entirely meet with my approval. You look as though you need a thorough good wash!"

The junior, of course, was still wearing his "dye disguise." He did not mean to take this off until he reached Bannington—he thought it safer and better from every point of view.

"But—but this is ripping, dad!" he exclaimed. "How on earth did you spot me? I'd no idea——"

"My dear Reggie, you must give me credit for having just a few brains," chuckled his father. "I was already aware of the fact that you were playing football regularly for the Bannington Club. You revealed that dark and dreadful secret to me when I came to St. Frank's the other day."

"Yes, I know, dad."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Pitt. "You know that your mother and I are staying in Fulham, which is in the same district. And for days past various placards from various hoardings have announced to all and sundry that Brompton would be playing Bannington this afternoon."

Pitt's eyes sparkled.

"Did you see the match, then?" he asked eagerly.

"I did."

"And—what did you think of it?"

"Splendid! And your performance was quite wonderful, Reggie!" said Mr. Pitt. "I was seriously alarmed when that brute tripped you up, but you don't seem to be much the worse."

"Oh, I'm all right," declared Pitt. "What a surprise! I'm tremendously glad you saw the game, dad!"

"Of course I wasn't sure that you would be up here. I thought the journey might be too long," went on Mr. Pitt. "However, when I saw the teams come out, and when I saw a certain dark-skinned young man among them I knew that you were present. My dear lad, you look terrible—you look positively hideous!"

Pitt chuckled.

"Oh, it all comes off in a tick," he said. "How's mother?"

"Your mother is in excellent spirits, considering everything," replied Mr. Pitt. "Weren't you coming to see us?"

"Well, I hardly knew what to do," replied Pitt. "I didn't know that Fulham was near here—it's all been a rush, you know. And I simply must get back to St. Frank's in good time, or I shall get into a terrible row. I'm catching the six-twenty-five train from Victoria."

"Good!" said his father. "We'll run along to the underground station, and go by District—it's the most direct. Come along."

Before they had gone many yards Pitt handed his money over to his father. The latter took it with much reluctance, and for a moment or two there was rather an uncomfortable feeling.

"I don't like doing it, my boy—it doesn't seem right," said Mr. Pitt slowly.

"Oh, chuck it, dad!" protested the junior. "Of course it's right—and I just love doing this. You don't know how it bucks me up. How are things getting on at home?"

Mr. Pitt smiled rather bitterly.

"I'm afraid things are bad," he said. "I am singularly unsuccessful in all my efforts. To be quite truthful, Reggie, I don't know what we should have done without this money of yours. But it's wrong—absolutely wrong! That you, only a schoolboy, should provide——"

"But everything's exceptional, dad," protested Pitt. "Therefore, it's only to be expected that we should act exceptionally. I'm jolly pleased you told me this, because it'll keep me going—it'll make me all the more determined to carry on.

I enjoy it, too--it's glorious. Money for nothing!"

"I don't agree with you there," said his father. "Football may be a game, but I consider you worked exceedingly hard this afternoon, my lad. Well, here we are."

They turned into the Underground station, and were soon speeding along towards Victoria. Conversation was rather difficult in the noisy train, and not much was said. But there was over twenty minutes to wait at Victoria, and Mr. Pitt and his son sat on a seat in the station.

"I've rather a piece of bad news for you, Reggie," said Mr. Pitt, after a few moments hesitation. It concerns our home."

"Do you mean our real home, dad, in Duncan Square?"

"Of course I do," said Mr. Pitt. "It is our home, in spite of the fact that Simon Raspe is in possession at the moment. But I'm afraid that it will soon be lost to us for ever."

"Even though Raspe is exposed and arrested?"

"Yes," said Mr. Pitt sadly.

"But—but I don't see——"

"There are announcements out to the effect that No. 59, Duncan Square is to be sold by auction, with all the furniture," said Mr. Pitt gravely. "The sale will take place nearly three weeks from now."

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Pitt blankly. "But—but it may be all right, dad," he went on. "If Raspe is exposed—and I believe he will be—you'll get all your money back, and then you'll be able to buy the house and the furniture back."

Mr. Pitt shook his head.

"It is just possible, of course," he said. "But it is more than likely that the property will be purchased by a big firm of dealers or estate agents—that, indeed, is the most probable. In that case the furniture will be removed and distributed broadcast within a week, and it will be impossible to recover it."

Pitt looked unhappy.

"Oh, that's rotten, dad!" he said. "Goodness knows what we shall do. Unless Raspe is exposed and arrested before that sale, we shall never get our home back. The scoundrel—the villain!"

"Not so loud, my lad, not quite so loud!" said Mr. Pitt. "Raspe is a scoundrel, I will admit—a swindler and a heartless rogue! Quite apart from the harm he did me, he has to answer for the dastardly way he treated poor Lockwood!"

"Lockwood!" repeated Pitt.

"Lockwood, you remember, was the name of my private secretary," said Mr. Pitt.

"Oh, yes," said Reggie. "But what's happened to him?"

"Of course, you don't know all these things," said his father. "I was forgetting that. You were away holidaying in America at the time. Lockwood was arrested and sent to prison. All the charges were false—faked-up charges of the most villainous character."

"And he's in prison?" asked the junior.

"Yes, poor man," replied Mr. Pitt sadly. "One of the best men in the world, Reggie. He's absolutely innocent Of that there is no question. But Simon Raspe made one big swoop and caught us all in his net. I was careless and unprepared. But I was never expecting anything of the kind until the blow actually fell."

Pitt looked thoughtful.

"Of course, I remember Lockwood now," he said. "I saw him two or three times when I came to your offices. What a shame! This chap, Raspe, is a bigger villain than I ever thought him to be."

"And I am afraid it will be impossible to trip him up," said Mr. Pitt, shaking his head. "That's just the trouble, Reggie. Lockwood, I am convinced, could say a great deal if he were only at liberty. But in prison what can he do? Nothing—absolutely nothing! Well, this kind of talk won't make things better, and I think your train is already in."

Mr. Pitt was very cheerful after that, but Reggie knew quite well that it was a forced cheerfulness, put on specially so that the junior would feel better in mind.

And, soon afterwards, the train slipped out of the station, taking Pitt with it. In spite of his father's encouraging words towards the end, Reggie was feeling very despondent.

The time went on, and nothing seemed to be done. Simon Raspe was still master of the situation. Pitt clenched his fist helplessly as he thought of everything, and he wondered how

long it would be before Nelson Lee made a move. The junior was unaware of the fact that Lee had already made a very big move, and had discovered some very important facts.

Bannington was reached at length, with Pitt in a somewhat gloomy mood. He tried to shake it from him, but could not. It was dark, and he had no difficulty in slipping into the football ground, and getting into his little dressing-room. Here he quickly removed his brown stain and became himself once more.

Then, mounting his bicycle, he rode swiftly to St. Frank's. Calling over was later on Saturday evenings than ordinary evenings, and he thought he would just be in time, if he pedalled hard.

As it happened, however, he was not to be allowed to slip in unawares, as he had been hoping. He was not far from the gates when three figures loomed up in the gloom. They were the figures of juniors.

Pitt thought it just as well to dismount.

"Hello, you chaps," he said calmly.

"By gad!" said one of the juniors. "It's Pitt! Grab him, you fellows! This is a ripping chance!"

Fullwood and Co. fell upon Pitt. They had been nursing their grievance for some time, but had never had the opportunity of exacting revenge. And it was only by sheer chance that they were given the opportunity now.

Pitt, knowing what was coming, leapt on his machine, and would have got away. But at the last second, Fullwood reached out and grasped the carrier. He gave it a savage jerk.

Pitt was pulled up, and he fell sideways with the machine. And, before he could extricate himself and pick himself up, the three vindictive juniors were upon him.

Pitt gasped and struggled, but it was no good. Gulliver was sprawling across his chest, Bell sat on his feet, and Fullwood held his head down. And, once down like this, it was impossible for Pitt to get up.

"We've got you now!" gloated Fullwood savagely. "And you're going through the mill, my lad! We're going to put you through it properly. By the time we've finished you'll wish you hadn't been bally well born!"

"You cads—you cowardly rotters!" gasped Pitt. "I'm willing to fight you, if you like—I'll fight the three of you with one hand. You don't call this playing the game——"

"It doesn't matter what we call it. We've got you," snapped Fullwood. "And now we're going to give it to you pretty strong. And the more you yell, the more you'll get!"

Pitt ceased struggling, and lay still.

He knew that it was no good arguing with these cads—and it was equally useless to speak reasonably with them. His only course was to wait—to see what their intentions were.

He knew within a minute.

"It's a good thing I brought this cane out with me," said Fullwood, in a satisfied tone. "It's just the thing—light and whippy. Turn him over, and mind he doesn't get free!"

Pitt was rolled over in the road, and then Fullwood raised his cane. It was a light affair, with a gold knob at the top, and quite thin and flexible.

Fullwood swished it through the air, and seemed to like the sound of it so well that he swished it three or four more times.

"We'll show you, you cad!" he snapped viciously. "We'll show you whether we'll stand any nonsense with you."

"If you touch me with that cane, Fullwood, I'll——"

"Sit on his head!" snapped Fullwood roughly.

Gulliver obliged. He pressed Pitt's head down into the grass which bordered the road. It was utterly impossible for the junior to speak now, and Fullwood raised the cane.

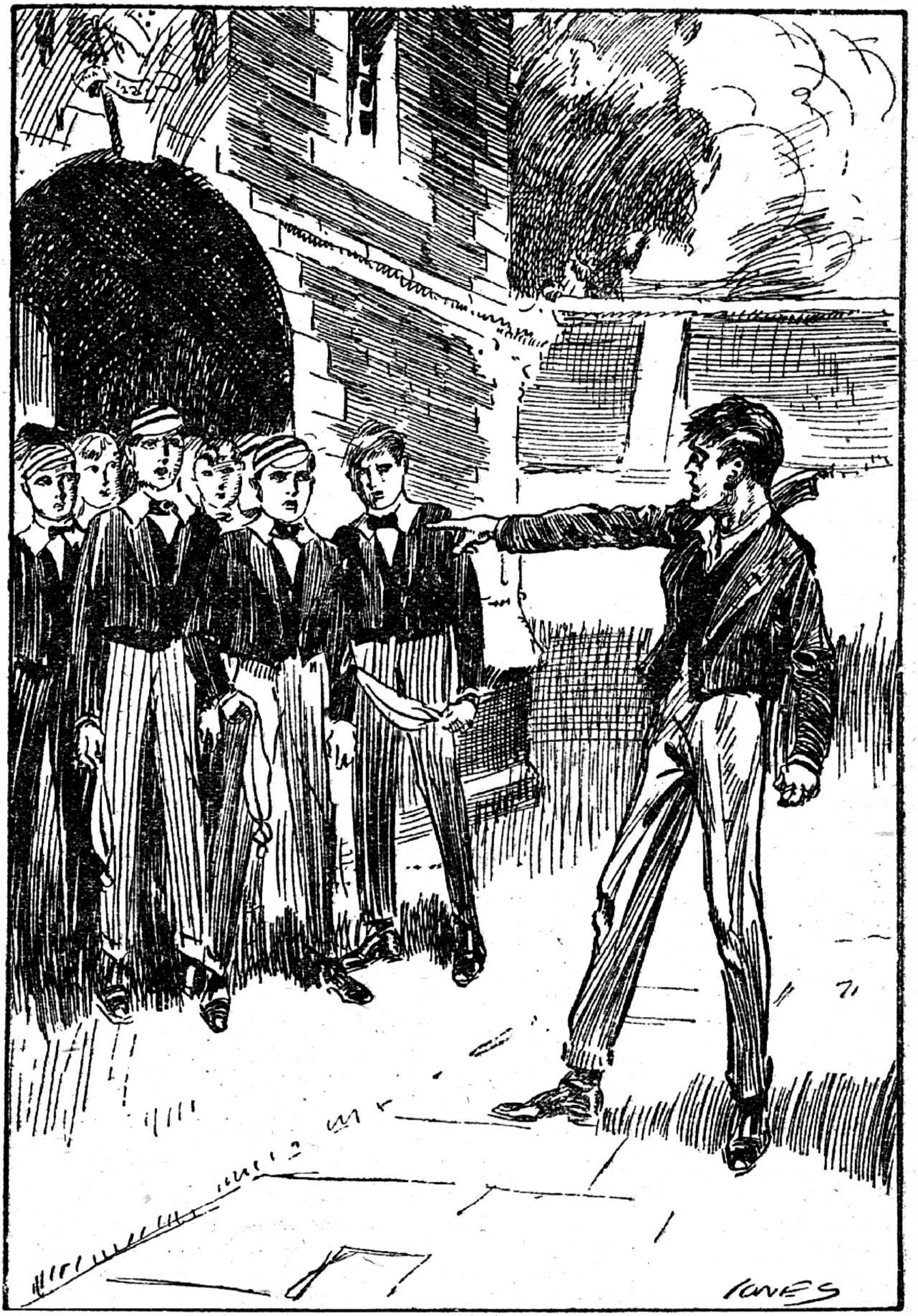
Thwack!

He brought it down with all his force on Pitt's back—a stinging, slashing blow. Pitt squirmed involuntarily, but he could make no outcry. Indeed, he would have made no outcry in any case. He would never have allowed these young ruffians to say that he yelped.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Again, and again, and again Fullwood brought the cane down. He slashed Pitt across the back, shoulders and legs. The agony was appalling. Each slash felt like the sear of a red-hot iron.

It was a terrible punishment, and Pitt felt sick and weak with pain. After a



"You accuse me of everything that's rotten and blackguardly," panted Pitt. "You can think what you like—I don't care a snap for the crowd of you!"

few minutes had elapsed his back and legs were covered with burning weals. And Fullwood was laying it on with all his strength—with savage, brutal vindictiveness. He hardly realised what he was doing.

At last Gulliver became somewhat uneasy.

"I say, stop it, Fully!" he protested. "That's enough."

"Yes, he'll do now," said Bell.

"Oh, will he?" snarled Fullwood. "We'll see."

Slash! Slash!

Several times more he brought the cane down. Then, suddenly, Pitt became limp. Gulliver was the first to notice it, and he started back. Bell got up, too; but Pitt still lay there.

"I—I say—I believe he's hurt!" muttered Gulliver anxiously.

"Rot—he's shamming it," snapped Fullwood.

"He's not—You hit too hard, Fully!" gasped Bell. "I told you to be careful! Oh, my hat! What—what shall we do?"

Fullwood began to get somewhat scared.

"Don't be a silly ass!" he rapped out. "There's nothing wrong with him. It's only spoof! I'll soon make him get up."

He touched Pitt with the toe of his boot. At first there was no sign of movement. Then, gradually, Pitt stirred. And, finally, and after a struggle, he pulled himself up and rose unsteadily to his feet.

His pain was so great that he could hardly see.

"You—you cowardly hounds!" he panted huskily. "I can't go for you now—you're safe enough! But I'll make you pay for this—I'll—I'll——"

"Oh, leave him there!" interrupted Fullwood roughly.

The three cads of Study A walked away, and went towards the school chuckling. Now that Pitt was on his feet and recovered, they were quite relieved. They did not know what agony their victim was suffering.

It is quite certain that if a master had come upon the scene just then, and the weals on Pitt's back had been revealed, Fullwood and Co. would have been expelled from St. Frank's on the spot.

But they knew that they were safe—they knew that Pitt would never split. And so they went into the Triangle laughing and easy in mind. A crowd of other juniors were there, excitedly talking about the match that he should have played in that afternoon. Helmford had nearly won, but, in the last minute, St. Frank's had equalised.

"Of course, it's all Pitt's fault, the miserable cad!" said Owen major. "If he'd been playing we should have won hands down. It would have been a walk-over for St. Frank's."

"Oh, absolutely."

"But the rotter buzzed off before dinner, and he hasn't been seen since," said Armstrong. "He sneaked away deliberately—just so that St. Frank's should be let down. He'll catch it hot when he comes back."

Fullwood lounged up.

"Looking for Pitt?" he asked casually.

"Yes!" shouted several juniors. "Where is he?"

"Just coming in, I think," said Fullwood.

"We'll give him beans!" said Griffiths, with relish. "We'll put him through the giddy mill for leaving the school in the lurch like this. He's been on the razzle, I suppose."

Fullwood and Co. chuckled, and stood back in the gloom. They omitted to mention to the rest that they had already given Pitt as much punishment as he could reasonably stand.

A moment later Pitt appeared in the gateway. He was wheeling his bicycle, both the lamps of which were out, having been extinguished when the machine crashed over. Pitt was dragging one leg behind the other, and his whole frame was racked with pain. Within him burned a fire of rage.

But he could do nothing now—he didn't feel up to it.

"There he is!"

"Collar the cad!"

"Grab him!"

Before Reginald Pitt could realise what was happening, the juniors were upon him. They swooped down in a crowd. His bicycle was torn away, and he was carried off to a corner of the Triangle.

He recognised who his captors were: Owen major, Hubbard, Armstrong, Griffiths, Skelton, and a few others. Most of them were fairly decent chaps,

but they had never been particularly intimate with Pitt. Fellows like De Valerie or Somerton or Handforth would never have joined in this rag.

"I say, stop all this!" said Pitt quietly.

"What?"

"I don't feel up to the mark!" exclaimed Pitt. "You can rag me tomorrow, if you like. But don't do anything of that kind now. I—I'm feeling pretty bad. You're all decent chaps."

Owen major would probably have agreed, but Hubbard pushed forward.

"Rats!" he shouted. "He's only spoofing—there's nothing wrong with the bounder! Don't take any notice of him!"

And the die was cast.

"Of course there's nothing wrong with him," said Owen major, as thoughtless as the rest. "He nearly spoofed me at first. Now then, Pitt, my son, we're going to hold a tribunal here—a giddy court of law!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good idea!"

"You're the prisoner!" went on Owen major. "And you've got to answer all the questions that we put to you. See? Where have you been to?"

Pitt shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"I may as well tell you at once that I sha'n't answer any questions," he said. "You can do what you like, but I'm not telling you a fib. But there's a limit to my patience, and it's nearly reached."

"Don't take any notice of him!"

"I'm not going to!" said Owen major grimly. "And if you don't answer our questions, Pitt, you'll get it in the neck! Where did you go to-day?"

Silence.

"Where did you go to?" persisted Owen major.

"Answer, you rotter!" said Hubbard.

"I won't answer," muttered Pitt doggedly.

"Why didn't you play for St. Frank's against Helmford?"

"I have nothing to say."

"You rotter!"

"You traitor!"

"You'll jolly well pay for this!"

"Yah, cad!"

Pitt faced his tormentors with grim features.

"You don't know what you're doing!" he said fiercely. "You don't realise what all this means. But I'm getting fed up—I'm getting sick and tired of the whole thing. And it won't be long before I'm through!"

"Why don't you answer our questions, then?" demanded Armstrong.

"I told you at first I wouldn't answer——"

"Oh, it's no good!" interrupted Hubbard. "We shall have to frog-march him, or make him run the gauntlet. That'll make him change!"

"Rather!"

"Grab him!"

Pitt was seized and held firm. Meanwhile, all the other juniors knotted their handkerchiefs and formed themselves into a double row. At any ordinary time, Pitt would have laughed at this form of rag.

But now, sore in every limb, and with his back literally quivering with pain, he almost shrank from the ordeal. Fullwood had slashed his back so cruelly that it was one livid sore—it felt to Pitt as though every scrap of skin had been taken off. This, of course, was not the case. His back was merely wealed.

"Now for it—start him off!"

"Come on, you cad!"

Pitt was given a push, and the only thing to do was to run forward. He did so, with his head bent down, and with the rage in his heart surging almost to breaking point. He had warned them that the limit was nearly reached, and he had meant every word of what he had said.

Slash! Slash!

As Pitt ran, the knotted handkerchiefs were pelted down upon him. Many of them struck his back—mere stinging blows at any usual time. But now each touch caused him to gasp with agony, and he was compelled to clench his teeth hard in order to prevent himself from crying out.

And the humiliation of it!

It was almost more than Pitt could stand. It was far worse than the pain. To be thus seized by his own schoolfellows and scorned and held up to contempt. And he had done nothing to deserve it—nothing! On the contrary, every action of his this term had been one which was worthy of the highest praise.

And because he was acting in this way—because he was doing everything within his power to help his parents—his former friends were turning upon him and treating him in this way. Human endurance can stand a lot, but just now, Pitt's capacity of endurance was at an end.

How he got through that double line of fellows he never knew. They struck him with the knotted handkerchiefs again and again, yelling and laughing as though the whole thing were a great joke. And, indeed, it was something of the kind. Making a fellow run the gauntlet was a common occurrence in the Remove.

"Now we'll frogsmarch him!" shouted Hubbard.

"Good!"

"Grab hold of him!"

"Yah! Rotter!"

"Traitor!"

These cries accompanied by boos and hisses fell upon Pitt's dulled ears. He stood back, his cheeks pale, his eyes blazing like fire. And when two or three of the juniors came forward to seize him he flung up his hand.

"Stand back!" he shouted hoarsely.

"You cad——"

"Don't touch me!" gasped Pitt. "Don't touch me!"

There was something in his voice which made the juniors hold back, and which made them suddenly quiet. Reginald Pitt's voice was quivering with pain and fury. His words almost came in sobs.

"We don't want any of your spoof——" began Armstrong.

"I've finished with you—I've had enough!" shouted Pitt passionately. "Do you call yourselves sportsmen? Do you call yourselves decent fellows? You're cads, all of you—miserable, contemptible cads!"

The juniors said nothing—they were held there by the force of Pitt's voice—by the withering scorn which he expressed in his tones. They had never seen him like this before.

"Steady on!" muttered Owen major. "You'd better be careful——"

"I'm not going to stay here any longer!" went on Pitt, his voice coming in sobs. "I'm going—you won't be bothered with me any more. And perhaps it'll please you to remember that you've driven me out!"

"Oh, don't rot——"

"I'm serious—I swear that I mean what I say!" shouted Pitt, in a quivering voice. "At one time I thought you fellows were decent—I thought you were friends. But now I know different—I know what you're made of!"

"Look here——"

"Let me speak!" panted Pitt. "You accuse me of gambling, of betting, of drinking—you accuse me of everything that's rotten and blackguardly. And all this just because I have missed one or two football matches, and because I've been away from the school—without telling all my business to everybody! You can think what you like—you can have you own opinion—I don't care a snap for the crowd of you!"

"He's mad!" muttered Griffith uneasily.

"I reckon we went a bit too far!" said Armstrong.

"Schoolboys are said to be fair minded—but that's all rot!" shouted Pitt. "I have proved differently. Fair minded!" he added bitterly. "Good heavens! And I've been scorned and treated worse than any dog would be treated! And all for nothing—for nothing—for nothing! You can go anywhere you like—you can make a thousand inquiries, and you won't find a soul who'll say an evil word against me! You've accused me without proof—without evidence! You've made up your minds that I'm a blackguard, and you've treated me as though I were one—without having a shred of real evidence to go upon. And I'm sick of it—I'm tired to death of the whole business, and I don't want to see any of you again!"

"I say, ring off!" exclaimed Owen major concernedly. "We didn't mean——"

"I tell you I'm sick of it!" shouted Pitt passionately. "I'm going—I'd rather live in the woods and feed on berries than stay a minute longer in this place with such miserable cads as you are. And after I'm gone perhaps you'll find out that you were wrong—wrong from the first. I can't stand any more of it—it's more than I can bear!"

Pitt was worked up to such a pitch that his voice broke and trailed away

into a kind of sob. Then he turned on his heel and strode off into the darkness.

Nobody moved—nobody tried to follow him.

CHAPTER V.

MISSING FROM ST. FRANK'S.

OWEN MAJOR looked rather scared.

"I—I say, he doesn't mean it, does he?" he muttered. "The ass hasn't really gone."

"Of course he hasn't," said Hubbard. "It's only his spoof. He'll be in at bedtime—don't you worry."

"Of course!"

The juniors crowded into the Ancient House, all of them feeling a bit scared. They went down into the Common-room and crowded in, looking about them with rather pale faces. I was in there chatting with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Handforth.

"My hat!" said Tommy, as the juniors came in. "What's been happening? They all look as if they've seen a dozen ghosts!"

I turned round and regarded the fellows.

"Anything the matter?" I asked.

"No—nunno!" said Griffith. "Nothing at all!"

"Oh, yes there is!" said Handforth. "You wouldn't look like that if there was nothing the matter. You've been up to something, you bounders, I'll bet!"

"Well, it wasn't our fault!" growled Armstrong.

"What wasn't your fault?" I asked sharply.

"Pitt going off like that."

"Pitt?" I said. "Is he back?"

"Yes; and we met him in the Triangle," said Owen major. "We think he's a cad, and so we told him about it and made him run the gauntlet."

My eyes blazed.

"You rotters!" I shouted.

"Eh?"

"What was the idea of treating him like that?" I asked. "What harm has he done to you?"

"But—but—everybody knows he's been blagging lately——" began Owen major.

"Everybody knows nothing of the sort!" I snapped. "Just because a crowd of you idiots make up your minds that way, it doesn't mean to say it's the real truth. You ought to be downright ashamed of yourselves!"

"Oh, don't act the goat, Nipper!" growled Armstrong.

"What proof have you got?" I demanded grimly. "What proof have you got that Pitt has been blagging, as you call it? Not a shred—not a tittle! It's nothing but gossip and talk from start to finish! How do you know that Pitt hasn't got a good reason for being away! He's never told us why he's been away, and it's not our business, anyhow. And just because you want to know his affairs, and he refuses to tell you, you treat him as though he were a leper!"

"Hang it all, there's no reason for you to jaw at us like this!" said Owen major uncomfortably. "We didn't know——"

"Didn't know be hanged!" I broke in angrily. "I can tell you straight from the shoulder that Pitt's as true as a die—he's one of the best chaps who ever came into the Remove. I'll admit he's let us down badly at the football—but I'm absolutely convinced he couldn't do anything else—it wasn't his fault."

"But we're not convinced!" said Hubbard.

I glared at him.

"Who wants you to be?" I demanded.

"Eh?"

"What's it got to do with you?" I snapped. "Who wants you to be convinced? What the thunder have you got to do with the football, anyhow? I'm the skipper, and if Pitt doesn't turn out he's got to answer to me—and nobody else! You fellows seem to poke your noses into everything that doesn't concern you, and it's about time you were told a few home truths! You're a set of contemptible cads!"

Owen major took a deep breath.

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" he said. "Pitt told us just the same thing, Nipper. He went on at us like one o'clock. But now you've put it like this, I'm beginning to see it's true. We have been cads, and when Pitt comes in I'm going to apologise. That's what I say!"

"Good man!" I said, calming down. "And if you other fellows don't apologise you won't be worth a cent! Where is Pitt now?"

"I don't know," said Owen major uneasily. "He told us he was going away—he said he was "fed-up." But that was all spoof, of course."

"Spoof?" I broke in. "How do you know? So this is what you've done! You've driven him to such a pitch that he's cleared out. You ought to feel pretty pleased with yourselves!"

"Oh, but that was all rot!" said Skelton. "He didn't mean it—he couldn't mean it. Besides, I can't make it out. After all, we only made him run the gauntlet, and yet he seemed to crumple all up. We didn't hurt him much."

"Of course we didn't," said Hubbard.

I noticed that Fullwood and Co. were grinning. They were standing at the back of the crowd, and I suspected something because of that grin.

"When did Pitt come in?" I asked sharply.

"Oh, about half an hour ago," said Owen major. "Fullwood told us he was coming. I think Fullwood saw him out in the lane——"

"We didn't!" shouted Gulliver nervously.

That was enough for me.

"Grab hold of those three cads!" I said grimly. "That's right—I mean to get the truth of this. I'll bet a penny to a pound that Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell made hay of Pitt before he ever got into the Triangle."

Owen major started.

"By Jove! I believe you're right!" he exclaimed. "I noticed how they chuckled—and I noticed how pale Pitt was. There was something different about him. The cads! The awful rotters!"

"We didn't touch him!" said Fullwood sneeringly.

Handforth went forward and grabbed hold of Gulliver.

"Now then, my son, you're going to speak!" he said grimly. "You know me, don't you? When I say a thing I mean it! If you don't tell us what you did to Pitt by the time of counting ten, I'm going to punch your nose—hard!"

"We—we didn't do anything!" stammered Gulliver.

"One — two — three — four—five—six——"

"I tell you we didn't do anything!" yelled Gulliver. "It was Fullwood who swished him with the cane! We told him to stop! He laid it on too hard altogether——"

"Shut up, you fool!" snarled Fullwood.

"Oh, so that's the truth, is it?" I said, pleased at Handforth's direct method of gaining the truth. "So you collared Pitt out in the lane and held him down and swished him? You blackguardly ruffians!"

"Look here——"

"Say one word to me and I'll give you the hiding of your life!" I said tensely, going up to Fullwood and facing him. "This matter isn't ended, so don't think it is. If it never gets to the ears of a master, you'll have to answer to the Remove!"

I strode out of the Common-room, breathing hard. Out in the Triangle I vainly searched for Pitt. There was no sign of him, and I went over the College House, and over the Ancient House. Reginald Pitt had not been seen.

Suppertime came, and still Pitt did not put in an appearance. All the juniors who had forced him to run the gauntlet were uneasy and penitent. They were more sorry than they could say—now that it was too late. That's generally the way of things in this world.

I thought it advisable to pop in and see the guv'nor—before bedtime. It was only right that he should know what had been happening.

I found Nelson Lee in his study, busily looking over some typewritten pages. He looked up as I entered, and nodded.

"I'm rather busy now, Nipper," he began. "Please be quick——"

"I want to speak to you about Pitt, sir," I interrupted. "He's gone!"

"Gone? What do you mean?"

"Well, it looks as though he's gone away."

"Nonsense!"

"He hasn't come in, and it's nearly bedtime," I said. "I think you ought to know about it, guv'nor. The chaps got larking about, and ragged him. The poor chap was fed-up, and thoroughly miserable, I suppose. You must have

seen it, sir—for the past few days he's been having an awful time."

"Yes, Nipper, I have seen something of it," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But I hardly think there is sufficient reason for Pitt to run away from the school. And your fears are probably groundless."

But after I had told the guv'nor everything—without giving any names—he was rather more serious. And then I went on to explain what I had discovered that morning. I told Nelson Lee that Pitt was none other than Abdullah—the clever coloured forward in the Banning Football and Athletic Club.

"Of course, guv'nor, this is absolutely in secret, and you're not supposed to know it," I said. "Pitt's doing it for the sake of his people—it's obvious. And I'm jolly proud of him, too. He wasn't doing any harm to anybody—and he gets ragged like this. It's—it's rotten!"

"I feel very sorry for the lad," said Nelson Lee. "He has been doing his best for his parents, and it is distinctly hard for him to bear these expressions of scorn and contempt which have been levelled at him. No doubt he took the name of Abdullah, and stained his face so that he would not be recognised at St. Frank's. H'm! Rather a smart ruse!"

"Well, what are we going to do if Pitt doesn't come in?" I asked.

"I expect he will come in—but, in any case, you may leave the matter in my hands," said Nelson Lee. "If he has run away I rather fancy we can lay hands on him just when we like. For it is practically certain that he has gone to one of his new footballer friends in Bannington."

"Yes, I expect that's the truth of it, sir," I agreed. "What are you doing there, with all those papers?"

"Well, Nipper, if it will interest you, I am looking through some very interesting documents connected with the Pitt case," replied Nelson Lee. "And it may interest you to know, further, that Mr. Simon Raspe is nearly within my power. I don't think it will be very long before the net is closed completely round him."

My eyes gleamed.

"By Jove! That's good news, sir!" I exclaimed. "Those papers you found in Raspe's place are good, then? That was a ripping stunt of yours to make up as that old colonel!"

"Raspe, I am sure, is unsuspicious, even now," said Nelson Lee. "Yes, these papers are very instructive. Pitt's father will soon be relieved of all his worry, and the matter will come right. I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity of taking part in this case. I don't think I need say any more now—and the bell for bed is ringing now."

I said good-night to the guv'nor, and hurried away. The Remove was being herded up to the dormitory by a prefect. And there were many concerned faces when it was noticed that Reginald Pitt had not put in an appearance.

"All there?" asked the prefect, looking round. "Hallo! Where's Pitt?"

"He—he doesn't seem to be here," said Owen major.

"Infernal nuisance!" snapped the prefect. "I shall have to go and and rout him out, now, I suppose. I'll give him a couple of hundred lines to be going on with when I do find him!"

But Pitt was not found. The school was searched high and low—not by one prefect, but by many, and by masters as well. And it was an absolute fact that he had really gone.

He had run away from St. Frank's.

And the juniors who had been concerned in the gauntlet running episode were so scared that it was a long time before they could get to sleep. And to say that they were sorry would be putting it mildly. Their one anxiety was to see Pitt back among them. They had driven him out.

It was they who had made him an outcast.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER IN THE DARK!

REGINALD PITT was in Bannington.

Exactly as Nelson Lee had surmised, the unhappy junior had gone straight to one of his footballer friends, and it was only natural that this friend should be Tom Howard, the cheerful young forward who had first brought him to the club.

Pitt had recovered his strength by the time he reached Bannington. He took the trip slowly, and he had thought matters out very thoroughly. He was sure that he had done right in leaving St. Frank's.

To go on in the same way, keeping up the mystery, and being unable to explain, was unbearable. And so he had decided that it would be far better to stick to his resolve, and clear right out. There was nothing for him to remain for—he could foresee only trouble and worry in the future.

He could not play in the school football matches because he was required for professional games. And it would be impossible for him to go on, week after week, keeping everybody in the dark. Sooner or later, as he had known, it would have to come to an end.

Well, it had come to an end now.

And Pitt was feeling relieved. His back was feeling much better now. It was still sore and raw, but that dreadful burning ache had gone. And his rage had subdued, leaving him calm and cool and self-reliant.

He went straight to a little house in one of the small side streets of Bannington. Tom Howard lived here—and Pitt was overjoyed when he remembered that Howard was alone. He generally lived with his mother, but she was away in London, with some relations, and would probably be there for some weeks. Tom, as he expected, was "grubbing" along, on his own.

Pitt was pleased when he saw a light gleaming through the glass-fronted door. The front of the house was in darkness. He only knocked once, and the door was soon opened by the young footballer. He stood just in the hall, peering out into the gloom.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Tom——" began Pitt.

"Why, hallo, it's Abdullah, the mysterious Egyptian wizard of the football!" said Tom cheerfully. "What are you doing out at this time of night, young man? I thought you were in bed and dreaming about playing for England against Scotland! Come in, Pitt—don't stand there."

"Thanks!" said Pitt.

He went in, and Tom Howard closed the door.

"I'm all on my own," said the young professional. "Only got back about two hours ago. By George! It was a ripping match, eh? We put it across Brompton gloriously, didn't we?"

He led the way into the little kitchen at the back, and Pitt saw that he had disturbed Tom at his supper. For there, on a neatly placed cloth, reposed a plate of cheese and pickles, with some hunks of bread near by.

"Feeling peckish?" asked Howard. "Squat down my son, and pile in. Not quite so good as the Trocs, perhaps, but it's good honest grub. Help yourself to what you like—— I say! What's wrong? You're looking a bit pale about the gills."

"I've had some trouble," said Pitt quietly.

And, while Tom Howard was continuing his supper, Pitt told him all about it. Tom was so interested that he forgot all about eating, and when Pitt had finished he looked quite ferocious.

"The young blighters," he said warmly. "I don't blame you, Reggie, hanged if I do! You don't mind me calling you Reggie, I suppose?"

"I like it," said Pitt.

"Well, it's just as well to know," said Howard. "But you're a swell, strictly speaking, aren't you?"

"I'm no more of a swell than you are," replied Pitt. "Well, I've run away—I've cleared out. And I've come to you, Tom, because I was thinking that you might be able to put up with my presence here for a bit. Of course, I'll pay you——"

"If you want to make me wild, say that again!" snapped Tom fiercely. "What rot! I'm only too jolly pleased to have you here—it's rotten being on your own. Nothing I'd like better, my son! You're as welcome as flowers in May! You can stay as long as you like,

"It's jolly decent of you," said Pitt gratefully. "You see, it's my idea to put that brown stuff on, and become Abdullah altogether. They won't know anything about me at the school, and I shall be safe. And I shall be able to go everywhere with the team—it doesn't matter how far."

"Better and better," grinned Tom. "Page'll be absolutely delighted. Of course, I don't pretend to know your affairs——"

"I'm going to tell you everything now," said Pitt. "You're the best friend I've got at the present moment, and it's only right that you should know."

"Well, let's go for a stroll, while you're telling me," suggested Tom Howard. "I always like a pipe after

supper, and it's better out in the open. Come along. You can jaw as we go along."

They went out, and Pitt told him everything—how his father had been ruined by Simon Raspe. And how he—Pitt—was playing professional football so that he could obtain money. He didn't mind telling all this to Howard, for he instinctively knew that Tom would understand.

"Ah, now I'm beginning to see light!" said the young footballer. "Well, I'm hanged! You're a plucky kid, and no mistake! You deserve a tremendous lot of praise for what you've done, Reggie—and all you got at the school was scorn and contempt."

"Well, after all, they didn't know the truth," said Pitt. "And I suppose I was a bit hasty in condemning them as I did. But I couldn't help it—I was worked up to such a pitch. It simply had to come out."

"Yes, and I'll bet it did the young beggars good, too," said Tom. "It's jolly serious about your dad, and I hope Mr. Lee will be able to make that scoundrelly Raspe dub up. And you say that this chap Lockwood was shoved into prison?"

"Yes."

"Well, if Mr. Lee's successful, he'll be released, I suppose?" went on Howard.

It was rather curious that they should be talking on this subject just then. For a very surprising coincidence occurred within a minute or two. And yet, after all, it was not so very strange.

They were walking along one of the quiet lanes when they saw a dim form in front of them. It ran along stealthily, as though trying to find a gap in the hedge through which to escape.

"Hallo!" muttered Howard. "What's that chap up to?"

The dim form was running hard now. Suddenly it stumbled, and went sprawling—the reason being quite simple. The stranger had been speeding along the grass beside the road, and, in the darkness, he had failed to observe one of those piles of stones which one sees along country roads at irregular intervals. Consequently, the man stumbled full tilt into the heap, and went sprawling.

Pitt and Tom Howard were upon him before he could rise.

"You won't get me—you won't, I say!" panted the stranger huskily.

"What on earth's the matter with him?" asked Howard, striking a match. "I say, we're not going to hurt you—— Great Scott!"

For the flickering light of the match had revealed a startling fact. The man was attired in the drab, hideous garb of a convict.

"A convict!" muttered Howard. "By Jove! I heard a rumour that a convict had escaped from the big prison, but I didn't take any notice of it. I expect this is the Johnny! We'd better grab him, and hand him over——"

"Don't do that!" panted the man fearfully. "I'm innocent—I swear before Heaven I'm innocent! I got a chance to get away. An accident happened at the prison—there was a collapse of one of the walls, and in the confusion I slipped out. Don't give me up—I'm absolutely innocent!"

"If you were innocent, you wouldn't be in gaol," said Tom Howard grimly. "It's no good——"

"Why, well I'm blessed!" gasped Pitt suddenly. "It's—it's Lockwood!"

"What!"

"You—you know my name?" panted the convict.

"Why, of course I do," said Pitt. "Don't you know me, Lockwood? I'm Reggie! I'm Mr. Pitt's son! Haven't you seen me at the office sometimes?"

The convict gasped for breath.

"Heaven be praised!" he exclaimed fervently. "Master Reginald! I didn't know you in the darkness. What an extraordinary thing that you should be the first one to see me. You won't hand me over to the police, will you? I'm innocent, Master Reginald! It was Simon Raspe who got me into this——"

"You needn't say any more, Mr. Lockwood," said Pitt. "My father told me all about it, and I know the truth. I know you were falsely charged, and I know that Raspe's lying evidence was the cause of your being condemned. It must be Fate! Your escape may mean that everything will come right. Hand you over to the police? Never!"

"Yes, but what shall we do?" asked Howard dubiously. "He's perfectly welcome to come home to my place, but—but—— Well, I don't want to be landed into a pile of trouble, do I? Mr. Lockwood is innocent—I'm satis-

fied about that—but in the eyes of the law he's a convict."

"I wouldn't dream of troubling you, sir," said Lockwood quietly. "But if you could just give me a little food and an old suit of clothes I might be able to manage. I can hide in the hedge until you come back——"

"Hang it all, I'm not going to be like that!" interrupted Howard. "You can come along—it'll be safe enough for an hour, anyway. And you can get a decent skinful of food and a change of clothes, and clear out. We'll burn all your togs and destroy the traces."

Lockwood's gratitude was so great that he could hardly express himself. Such a happening as this was the last thing he had expected—to find two true friends who would do such a lot for him.

"This is a nice go, if you like," said Tom, as they walked along. "Aiding and abetting a convict to escape. Why, it'll mean five years if we're copped! Not that I care a toss!"

That was just Tom Howard's nature. Cheerful, full of good spirits, and always willing to do another a good turn. Pitt had told him all about Lockwood, and now, almost immediately afterwards, Lockwood himself came upon the scene. It was, without doubt, a surprising position.

If Howard had been older he might have hesitated before agreeing to take the convict to his house. But he was only a young fellow, and did not realise the danger. And this was very lucky for Lockwood. Pitt was anxious to question him, and to find out what was the best thing to be done.

But the main thing was to get him safely indoors out of sight.

And this was soon accomplished. Not a soul was passed on the way, and it would hardly have mattered if anybody had passed, for it was so dark that the convict's garb would never have been noticed.

They soon found themselves in Tom Howard's house. And then Lockwood was provided with a suit of clothes by Howard, and Pitt gave him his own cap, and this fitted him perfectly, and Howard's caps didn't. The change in the man was remarkable now.

He was a good-looking man of about thirty, tall, gentlemanly and with kindly brown eyes. Only his shortly-cropped hair marred his appearance. He did not seem to be very strong.

"Now we've got to consider what to do," said Tom Howard. "I can manage a quid, if you like, and you're welcome to a good blow-out before you go. We'll see about burning all your prison togs, and we'll take the chance of being collared for helping you to bunk."

"I don't know what to say—I don't know how to thank you for your kindness," said Lockwood gratefully. "Yes, I'll go away, and my one aim will be to get even with Simon Raspe. By Heaven! I shall never rest until I have proved that villain's guilt and exonerated myself and restored Mr. Pitt to his rightful position."

"Hold on—hold on!" said Tom Howard suddenly. "I've got an idea—a terrific, large-sized brain wave!"

"What is it?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"Well, I don't see any reason why Mr. Lockwood should go off on his own and probably be recaptured," said Howard. "The warders are bound to be searching the countryside, and the police will be on the lookout, too. It's all right at night, but in the daytime he'll probably be spotted. He ought to lie low for a bit."

"Yes, but where?" asked Pitt.

"That's just it!" grinned Howard. "That's the wheeze! Look here, I've got a little bathing hut down by the river—only about half a mile away. It's locked up all the other part of the year."

"By Jove!" said Pitt softly.

"It's a comfortable show," went on Howard. "Not very big, of course, but strongly built, with a good door, and heavy lock. There's a bunk in it—because I used to sleep there occasionally. All you've got to do, Mr. Lockwood, is to take the key and some blankets and a bag full of grub and lock yourself in. The police would never dream of looking for you there."

Lockwood's eyes sparkled.

"That would be wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I could stay there two or three days until the excitement is over, and then I should be comparatively safe. Yes, I'll do this, if I may."

"Of course you may!" said Tom Howard promptly. "We'll aid and abet you in the shocking crime. Come along! We'll soon pack some grub up and grab

a couple of blankets. Then we'll go down with you to this place and leave you nice and snug."

They were soon making preparations, and presently they all went out and proceeded to the little bathing hut, which proved to be quite as comfortable as Tom Howard had declared.

Then, having seen that the escaped prisoner was securely locked up, Pitt and the young footballer left—after promising to come back the next night with more food. Pitt's heart was beating rapidly as he walked back.

An astounding train of incidents had happened to him that day, and he marvelled at the way in which things had planned themselves. If he had not run away from St. Frank's he would never have come into contact with Lockwood. And Pitt was convinced that everything was for the best.

He little realised the startling events which were shortly to take place.

This episode was over, but other, and even more startling episodes were to follow!

THE END.

To My Readers.

Just a few words about next week's story, "THE INTERRUPTED MATCH; or, Arrested On the Field." Simon Raspe, the swindling financier, is soundly thrashed by a mysterious visitor. When the servants arrive on the scene, Raspe's assailant has disappeared, and the financier is found to have been badly knocked about. A boy's cap, bearing Pitt's initials, is picked up and shown to Raspe, who on seeing it declares that he had been murderously assaulted by a schoolboy, who had stealthily crept into the library by the window, and taking Raspe unawares, had flung a heavy object at him, causing him to fall down unconscious. The police are called, and everything points to Pitt as being the culprit. A warrant is made out for his arrest, and it is while he is playing in an important League match in the disguise of Abdullah that he is put under arrest. A tremendous sensation is caused, and it looks very black against Pitt. But I must not tell you any more, or I might spoil the story.

THE EDITOR.

The Ghosts of Marsh Manor

BEGIN TO-DAY THIL-LING NARRATIVE OF THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

INTRODUCTION.

NELSON LEE, *the great detective, as Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A., secures a post as games master at Marsh Manor School in order to investigate strange visits of ghosts at the school. His young assistant,* NIPPER, *comes to the school as Barton, a backward boy. Unless the ghost can be laid, the Head, the* REV. OCTAVIOUS CHARD, *will be obliged to close down the school. Lee suspects Monsieur* VILOTTE, *the French master as being implicated in the ghostly manifestations.* ADOLPHE MALINES, JULES TROCHON, *and* MADAME TROCHON, *Belgian refugees and friendly neighbours of the Head, are found to be living on the hospitality of* INGLEBY-CHARTERIS, *known by Lee to be a financier of ill-repute. The mystery deepens, and Lee finds that he is up against some very desperate and clever criminals, including SOL CLITTERS, the notorious forger, who, learning of the famous detective's presence at the school, plots to murder him. Vilotte is to do the deed, but is cleverly foiled by Lee, who puts the French master under lock and key and compels him to write a letter to Charteris saying that Lee has been killed. Lee lays in wait for the ghost. When it reappears a shot is fired with astonishing results.*

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XIV. *(Continued.)*

A Shot in the Dark.

AND as something fell to the floor, Lee stooped and picked it up.

It was a human finger, shot off at the second joint, still warm, and stained purple and orange and green from the effect of chemicals.

"Look at this!" he said, when Mr. Chard joined him, and Mr. Jackson loomed gingerly at the foot of the stairs. "We're a step nearer, anyway. The ghost is Ado'fe Malines. I've suspected it for some time."

Mr. Chard made a wry face as Lee slipped the gruesome clue into his pocket.

"Not a word to Jackson about our find," whispered the detective, his feet coming in contact with an army revolver, which the robe had hidden. "He must have been bleeding like a pig, and we ought to be able to track him easily."

They switched on their torches, and there, indeed, was an ugly trail which led them to the end of the passage, where it suddenly ceased in an exasperating way

The passage forked there, and, though they followed each branch, there were no more signs on the oak flooring.

"He must have put the stump in his mouth as he ran," said Nelson Lee. "We seem destined to be thwarted every time."

CHAPTER XV.

The Finger of the Man with the Dirty Hands.

A TREMENDOUS hubbub came up from the first floor, as the terrified sleepers, awakened by the firing beat on the locked doors.

"I must go and reassure them," said Mr. Chard.

While he and Mr. Jackson went down with the keys, Nelson Lee remained above stairs, watching and listening; but of the wounded man there was no sign, and they dreaded lest the enemy should take flight in real earnest.

Nipper, smuggled into one of Mr. Chard's private apartments, whose window commanded a full view of the hostel and the road, watched all day, but, to their great relief, nothing unusual seemed to be taking place among their neighbours.

Madame Trochon went into the village with a basket, and returned. Professor Felix walked in the garden after his usual habit, and Trochon himself appeared at the front door, calling him in to dinner.

"Do you think they'll come to-night, guv'nor?" he said

"Malines won't," replied Nelson Lee. "You may bet your life on that. "They must have some important reason for sticking to their guns, and I admire their nerve, but to-night will settle everything. You're still ready to face it, Nipper? The bulk of

the business will rest on your shoulders, you know."

Nipper laughed.

"Never felt fitter in my life, guv'nor!" he said. "I'm absolutely counting the minutes."

As evening approached, with a strong north-west wind tossing the branches of the walnut-trees, and bending the grey willows along the high road, the Rev. Octavius Chard began to walk about in a curious nervous fashion, like a cat on hot bricks. Half a dozen times he popped in through the panelling from the infirmary to Lee's room, and the last time he did so he started to find himself confronted by a strange figure.

It was no ghost, but a grey-haired, unmistakable English butler, with a little tuft of thin whisker on each cheek, and evening clothes that might have fitted him better in parts, but were still quite in keeping with the rôle he was going to play.

"Have you any orders about the wine, sir?" he said, in a quiet, deferential voice that filled Mr. Chard with uncontrollable merriment, and smoothed away his fears.

"Upon my soul, Lee, you're the most extraordinary man I ever met!" he exclaimed. "You might have made a fortune on the stage. What name are you going under to-night?"

"I hadn't thought of that!" laughed the great detective. "Something short and simple. What's the matter with Chiffey, eh? It comes easily off the tongue."

"Very well, Chiffey, so be it," assented the Headmaster. "That suit of poor Boyle's fills the bill very well."

"I wish I didn't fill it quite so well," said Lee. "It's very tight across the back, and if it splits I don't know what's to be done."

As he moved about the room, gathering up the contents of his make-up box, all trace of the athletic games-master had disappeared. In fact, as Mr. Chard put it, his own mother wouldn't have known him.

"Provided your Belgian guests don't, that is all I care about," said "Mr. Chiffey."

And then they fell to talking things over, for their visitors were expected between half-past six and seven.

When they came the new butler opened the door, as Madame Trochon entered first, followed by Professor Felix and Jules Trochon, who carried his 'cello by the neck in one hand and the bow in the other. But what was Lee's astonishment to see Adolfe Malines bringing up the rear, green trilby hat, yellow gloves, and all!

For a moment the new butler almost forgot his duties, and had to pull himself up with an effort; but as the gentlemen divested themselves of their coats, and madame took of an evening-wrap, he ushered the party, with due gravity, into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Chard and the two girls were waiting to receive them.

"This is so nice of you to come, Madame Trochon!" said Mrs. Chard, advancing to meet the Belgian woman, who was rather showily dressed in bright blue silk, hardly in keeping with the character of a homeless refugee.

"It is very good of you to 'ave us, madame!" she said effusively. "But then you are very good; all you English are very good."

Professor Felix made his bow with that fine, old-fashioned courtesy that became his tall, stately figure, and when big Trochon had shaken hands and stood his 'cello in a corner, and Adolfe Malines had peeled off his yellow gloves and shaken hands likewise, Mr. Chard came in, and they drew round the big log fire that blazed cheerfully on the magnificent hearth.

"You anticipate us, madame," said Professor Felix, spreading his thin, taper fingers to the genial warmth. "We have not started fires yet, but Trochon is very busy with a great saw, preparing for the winter."

"What do you think of our new butler?" said Mrs. Chard, who had drawn Madame Trochon on to the settee beside her. "You heard about Boyle leaving us so suddenly, did you not?"

"We heard that he had gone, but not why," said madame.

"Oh, for the same reason that all our servants go! I am losing all my maids on Monday, and so far I have not been able to replace them."

Madame wrinkled her nose with a look of extreme commiseration.

"You do not mean that that folly still continues?" she said. "Why do you not inform the police?"

"Oh, they've been here!" said Mrs. Chard, who had been remarkably well schooled by her husband. "And all they did was to tumble down a flight of stairs, and go hobbling away like a couple of lame dogs."

The Belgians evidently seemed to think this was a good joke, for they laughed uproariously, especially big Trochon, while Adolfe Malines rubbed his stained and discoloured fingers together gleefully.

The butler had already counted them, and found that there were five on each hand, and just then he was standing outside the drawing-room door, with his face very puzzled.

"We know how the French serve their frogs," he muttered to himself. "But you can't grow a new finger in one night. And yet it is Adolfe Malines, sure enough!'

"Will you not sing something, mademoiselle?" said Trochon to the eldest Miss Chard, with his most insinuating smile.

And Joan and Monica rose without hesitation, and complied, the former accompanying her sister, in "Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses."

"I'm glad to see you've brought your clarionet, professor," said Mr. Chard.

"Ah, I am 'orribly out of practice," said the old gentleman, with a deprecatory shrug. "What a pity Monsieur Vilotte is not here to join us with his oboe. What does the doctor say?"

"He's getting on all right, and taking nourishment, but we're still keeping him quiet," said Mr. Chard. "I only hope he doesn't give me notice when he recovers."

They were very musical, those Belgians, Adolfe Malines especially, playing the piano with the touch of a professional, and as Lee listened to the trio from the passage outside he grew more and more mystified.

"I'm going now, guv'nor," whispered Nipper, stealing up to him on tiptoe, and they exchanged a look that both of them realised might be an eternal farewell, though there was not a tremor in the boy's figure as he let himself noiselessly out of the front door and ran softly down the avenue in his rubber shoes.

It was very cosy in the drawing-room, with plenty of candles alight and the rosy blaze of the fire, and they played and sang and played and sang without any outward sign of uneasiness visible.

Presently, in response to Monica's pull upon the bell-rope, "Chiffey" came in with a tray of coffee and cakes and dainty little sandwiches, which the refugees had tasted before and enjoyed immensely.

Only, when the sonorous bell of the hall-door clanged, all their eyes seemed to meet at once, and Trochon, who was talking French to Joan, thrust his hands into the pockets of his short, black coat.

"Rather late for visitors," said Mr. Chard. "I wonder who this is? Was the doctor coming again to-night, my dear?"

"He didn't say so," responded his wife, keeping up the fiction.

Then the butler appeared again, and big Trochon found there was no necessity to keep his hands in his pockets any longer.

"Dr. Hartop and Mr. Miles to see you, sir," said the butler.

"Dear me, I'd quite forgotten the specialist!" said Mr. Chard, rising. "Have you shown them into the study, Chiffey?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then excuse me for a few moments," said the Rev. Octavius, and he went out.

Only "Mr. Chiffey," who was removing the tray, noticed that Malines, at the piano, was playing very softly, and all the Belgians had ceased talking.

The Headmaster reappeared in a moment.

"My dear, I think perhaps you'd better take Hartop up to see Seymour."

"You will not mind if I leave you, under the circumstances?" said Mrs. Chard apologetically to their guests.

"Oh, madame, we shall be so anxious to hear what the doctor says about poor Seymour. We are so fond of him!" replied Madame Trochon.

"My wife has no objection to smoking here, as you know," said Mr. Chard. "Chiffey, hand the cigarettes round to these gentlemen—unless you would prefer your pipes?"

"Thank you, monsieur!" said Adolfe Malines. "I smoke nothing but the cigarette."

And as he helped himself from the open box which the deferential butler held before him, Nelson Lee made a discovery.

The nails of the stained and discoloured fingers were bitten to their quicks. That of the one reposing in his pocket was a taper nail, well-manicured, which had been a peculiarity of Adolfe Malines.

"So, my friend," thought the observant "Chiffey," "you do not smoke the herbal mixture, and you bite your nails. You are not Adolfe Malines, after all. Then who the dickens are you?"

Trochon declined the box, filling his big cherry-root instead, and when the butler retired he went straight upstairs to the infirmary.

"I want a word with Rogerson," said Lee. "I've had no opportunity so far. What on earth has he come down for?"

"Rather a remarkable thing" said Dr. Hartop. "He has a paper to show you which he swears contains Miss Ingleby-Charteris's signature, written three months after her strange disappearance. Roddy Miles brought him round to find out whether you were back just as I was setting out, so we all came together in his car. He's dying to see you."

"And so he shall," said Nelson Lee; "but in the meantime I want you to look at another patient. Of course, Miles has told you what I'm after down here, and I've got one of the scoundrels. He's been tied up like a trussed fowl for the last three days, and I want to know how long we may keep him in that condition."

"Up to your old tricks, Lee?" smiled the doctor. "Where is he?"

And he turned to the door.

"No; better come this way," said his friend, opening the way into the secret passage that came out at the head of the grand staircase. "The boys will be coming up to bed in a few minutes, and I'm not taking any chances."

The moment Dr. Hartop set eyes on Vilotte he gave a low whistle.

"I say, we'll have to slacken his bonds a little, unless you're prepared to face an apoplectic seizure. He's a man of fairly full habit, and another twenty-four hours in this position would see the end of him.

"I'm not sure that the world would be any the poorer," said Lee. "But what do you suggest? You've no idea how slippery these fellows are."

The specialist looked round the room.

"We'll put him on the bed," he said. "He's handcuffed already, and, if we tie his feet to the bottom rail and his wrists to the other one, he'll still be here when you want him, and his circulation will have a chance."

Vilotte, a curious, dull purple, was breathing stertorously, and seemed half-dazed; but as they loosed the cords and lifted him on to the bed, it was well that he was gagged, for he gave a succession of agonising screams as the blood began to pulse again through vein and artery.

It was a good half-hour before tney left him, quieter, and sullenly resigned to his fate, and Lee, meanwhile, told the doctor what we already know.

"This is indeed a house of mysteries," said the specialist.

"And they seem to deepen," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Do you know, I shot a man's finger off at the other end of the corridor there last night, and yet, only just before I came upstairs to you I could have sworn that man was sitting in the drawing-room here, playing divine music, with every finger in its right place. Look at this!"

And, drawing out the thing he carried, he passed it to his friend.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hartop. "We seem to be working round in a very narrow circle. I dressed the hand this finger belonged to this morning, in Harley Street."

"Impossible! It was only eleven o'clock last night when I fired."

"Far from being impossible, my dear fellow, it is an absolute fact," said Dr. Hartop. "This is the first finger of a right hand, hideously discoloured by chemicals. Ingleby-Charteris brought a man to me in his car, his hands stained exactly in the same way, and it was the first finger of the right hand that was missing. I can tell you his name. He was a Mr Malines, and he is lodging at Verodini's Restaurant, in Rupert Street. I am to dress his hand tomorrow, if I get back in time."

Nelson Lee wrapped up the severed member, and led the way quickly down to the Headmaster's study.

"Roddy," he said, to his solicitor and friend, "I want you to do something for me at once. Drive quietly until you get to the other side of the village, and then make Huntingdon for all you're worth. 'Phone from there to Scotland Yard, and ask them to oblige me by arresting a man named Malines, with a bandaged hand, at Verodini's, in Rupert Street."

"What a lot of trouble you are to your pals, Lee!" laughed Roddy Miles. "But your word is my law, and in twenty minutes the Yard shall know of this thing. Do you want a reply when it's done?"

"Just as well," said Nelson Lee. "One can't be too careful of these beggars."

When Roddy Miles, alias "Captain Barton," had taken his departure, which he did forthwith, Nelson Lee turned to the grave-faced man, who had been sitting silently there, with a strange light in his eyes.

"Now, major," he said, "I am running fifteen things at once, as usual, but I can spare you five minutes. Hartop tells me you have found something."

Major Rogerson drew a folded paper from his pocket, handling it as though it were very precious as he laid it on the table.

"Can you explain this to me?" was all he said. "You see the date, and that it is an authorisation for the withdrawal of seven thousand pounds standing in her name. Ingleby-Charteris drew that money three months after she disappeared, and two before her body was supposed to have been found."

"There is only one inference to be drawn," said Lee, in a low voice. "Charteris was in low water about that time, and must have known all about her going."

"More than that!" exclaimed the man. "He must have murdered her! You must come with me to his house to-night. I am going to tax him with it!"

"That is impossible," said Lee firmly.

"Then I go alone!"

"No," said the great detective. "You have waited very patiently, Rogerson, while I have been closing a net you little dream of tighter and tighter round Ingleby-Charteris. To-morrow you shall see him, and he will be in custody!"

The drawing-room bell rang.

"That is for me," said Lee quickly. "Show him the force of what I say, Hartop, and tell him what I have told you. I have to take the whisky in, and, if all goes well, it will be the last drink these people are likely to have for some years to come!"

CHAPTER XVI.

The Secrets of the Vault.

THERE was something invigorating in the blast of that north-west wind that met Nipper full in the face as he carefully reconnoitred the high road. The clock in the hall had pointed to half-past seven, and he counted on three hours of uninterrupted investigation.

There had been two things in Lee's mind when he had asked Mr. Chard to invite his Belgian neighbours, and the principal one was to leave the coast clear for his assistant. He would have dearly loved to have gone himself, but that was out of the question, for, to begin with, there was not a window on the ground floor wide enough to admit a man of his girth, so he gave the boy carte blanche to do as he liked, well knowing that if he were undisturbed he would discover the mysterious means by which the forgers entered and left the Manor House at will.

When Nipper saw that the drive gate of the hostel was closed and secured by a chain and padlock, he smiled.

"Charteris isn't here, anyway," thought the boy, "and isn't expected. He and his pal, Clitters, are no doubt making merry at Peterborough. The only person I am likely to encounter is that mysterious woman in the furs they picked up at the railway station on the night of my arrest, and as the house is in darkness, she has probably gone to bed."

He climbed the gate nimbly, and having previously mapped out his course, made straight for a mullioned casement on the north side of the old gate-house.

Lee, whose eyes had seen everything there was to be seen, had, told him that he would find it fastened on the inside by a heavy wrought-iron catch, and, climbing on to the sill, the boy took out a pocket-knife with many blades. One of these he passed under the leading in which the diamond panes were set and, carefully prising it up, drew out the pane intact, passed his hand in and opened the window.

It took him nearly half an hour, but to replace the glass and press the lead lightly down again was only a matter of a few moments.

Even he found it difficult to squeeze through the narrow space and reach the floor without making any noise, and he listened for a long time before he ventured into the laboratory and switched on a light.

Although he had only been there on that Sunday afternoon when Malines and the Professor showed them their wonderful colour prints, the room seemed perfectly familiar, with the exception of a large square hole in the floor at one end, which had not been there then!

As he groped towards it a draught of cold air laden with a sense of rotting fungus met his nostrils, and the light showed him the head of a flight of stone steps, worn smooth by the frequent passage of many feet.

Leaving the light on in the laboratory he descended, counting twenty before he reached the bottom and found himself in a passage lined with stone.

"This must lead due east," thought Nipper. "Consequently, the Manor House is somewhere on my right hand."

Turning on one of the torches he carried, and taking careful tally of his strides, he walked slowly forward, expecting every moment to discover an opening in the wall, which was lined with blocks of stone, but there was none.

A hundred paces—a hundred and fifty paces—two hundred paces—with nothing but the solid masonry all the way, and then the passage came to an end, and the boy stopped, marvelling, for it had led him into a great vault, brilliantly lit by electric light, which showed him rows upon rows of stone pillars supporting a groined roof, and he knew that he was underneath the abbey ruins!

When he had recovered from his astonishment, the thing that struck him was the curious silence that pervaded the place, the sense of desolation, and the contrast between the ancient stonework of those monkish builders and the cold, hard glitter of the Osram lamps of high voltage that were set at regular intervals of a dozen yards or so.

"Oh, how I wish the chief were here" was his first thought, but a glance at his wristlet-watch showed him that three-quarters of an hour had already passed, and there was no time for anything but action.

Just above his head an electric wire and a two-inch compo pipe passed side by side to the first pillar in the vault, and seemed to point out the way, just as one follows the telegraph poles on the high road. Right and left were the aisles of pillars, casting strong black shadows against the electric glare, and on the other side of the vault a low archway led him into another one.

His keen eye, that missed nothing, saw the spent matches and cigarette-ends that strewed the stone-slabbed floor, and he knew now that the laboratory he had left was merely an elaborate blind to conceal an underground workshop, where the forgers could follow their felonious calling undisturbed.

"No wonder," thought Nipper, "that the rascals were straining every nerve to get possession of the Manor House," lest some tenant more fortunate than his master and himself should chance upon the secret passage which obviously existed. "But how on earth am I to find the thing?" and coming to a stand, he was looking round about him with an uncomfortable feeling of helplessness, when a low groan fell on his ear.

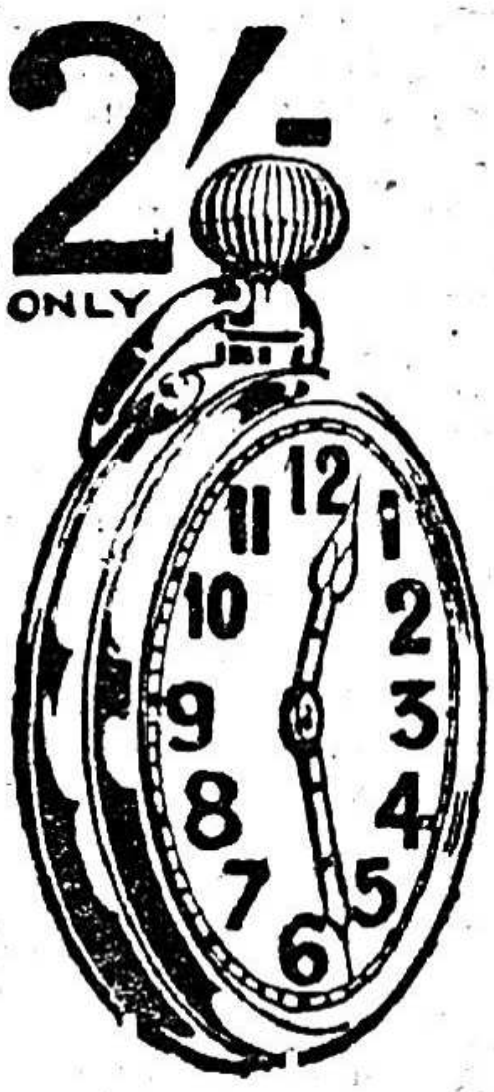
"Hullo, what's that?" thought the boy, and a faint voice said quite audibly: "Not a drop of water left!"

Nipper located the sound as coming from the other side of the next pillar, and, going down on all fours, crept a few yards away to the right, keeping well in the shadow until he saw the figure of a man seated on the ground with both legs stretched out before him, and his back resting against the pillar itself.

In an instant he recognised the missing butler and, springing to his feet, ran quickly towards him.

(To be continued.)

NICKEL SILVER WATCHES.



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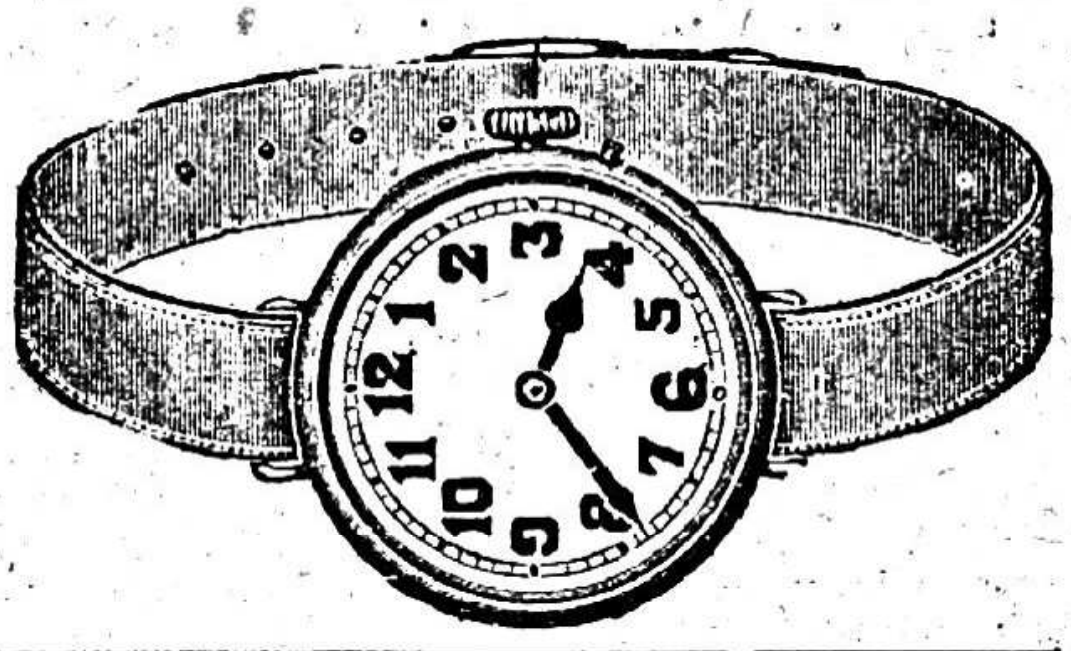

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No. 332. D/Y **October 15, 1921.**