This Week's NELSON LEE Detective Mystery— **"THE STENCIL CLUE!"**

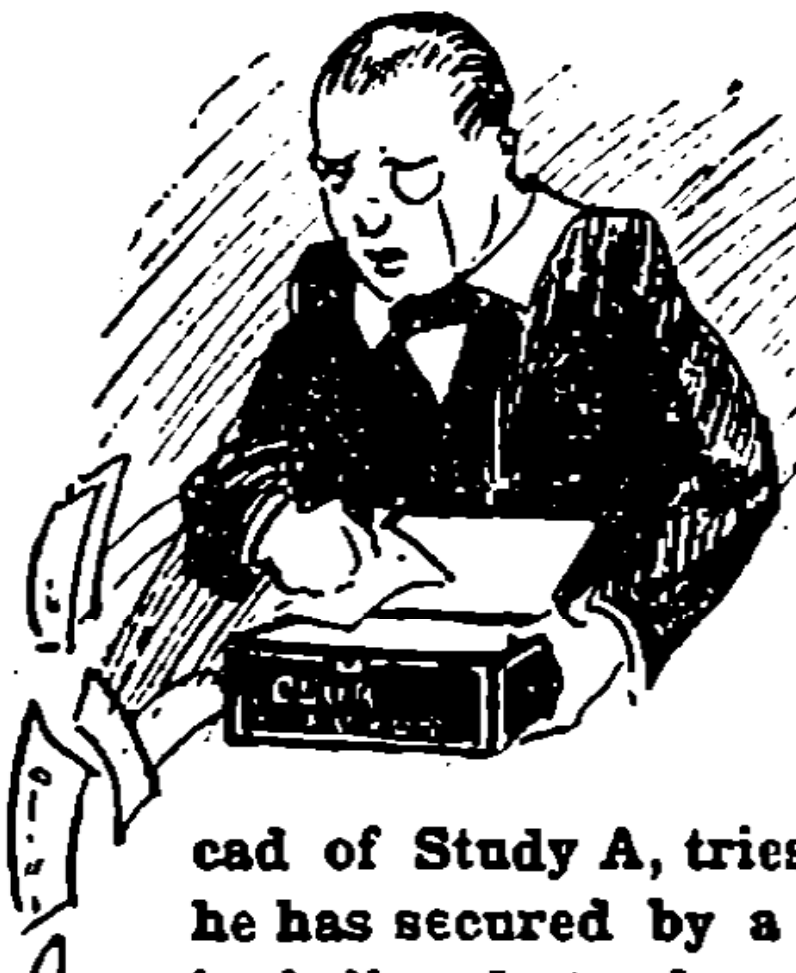
The NELSON LEE LIBRARY Twopence.

A dramatic incident from this week's story:—

The Price of Folly

No. 382 EVERY WEDNESDAY SEPT. 30, 1922

But Handforth was ready. He gave one great leap, and turned the ball round the post.



The PRICE OF FOLLY!

In this gripping story of St. Frank's it will be told how Fullwood, the cad of Study A, tries to retain the captaincy of the Remove, which he has secured by a display of unusual generosity and wealth. He is believed to have come into a fortune, but this is far from the truth, as the reader will discover as he proceeds with the story.

THE EDITOR.

(*THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.*)

CHAPTER I.
UP AGAINST IT!

BIFF!

"Ow-yow!" roared Church. "What the—— Hi! Yarooh!"

Crash!

Church descended into the coal-scuttle, and there was a devastating clatter. The unfortunate junior lay there with his face smothered in coal-dust, and with his arms and legs waving wildly.

"That's for being a silly ass!" said Handforth tartly. "Perhaps you won't be quite so talkative in future. Pass the anchovy paste, Church!"

This, of course, was quite a commonplace proceeding during tea in Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was nothing for Edward Oswald Handforth to interrupt the proceedings and pitch one of his chums into the fender.

Church picked himself up, fuming.

"You—you dangerous maniac!" he said fiercely.

"What?"

"You heard what I said!" snapped Church. "I don't care! I'm not going to be bashed about like that! You think you can do anything you like, but you can't, you—you bully!"

Handforth rose deliberately.

"What's that?" he said, in ominous tones.

"Bully!" repeated Church recklessly. "That's what you are! And if you like, I'll meet you in the gym after tea, with or without gloves! I'm not afraid of a hulking rotter like you!"

McClure fully expected to see his chum picked up and slaughtered on the very spot.

Now and again they would tell Handforth off in no uncertain terms—but it was always a risky proceeding.

On this occasion, Handforth glared, and then relaxed.

"You don't mean that, do you?" he asked.

"Yes, I do!"

"Hang it all, I let fly now and again," said Handy. "But I don't allow anybody to call me a bully! I bar bullies! They're rotters and cads! If I went a bit too far, I'm sorry. It's all right, old man. Come and have tea, and we'll forget all about it. Pass the sardines, Clurey—don't scoff the lot, you glutton!"

Church calmed down, and dusted himself.

Under the circumstances, he decided to let the matter drop. In the heat of the moment he had challenged Handforth—but he knew well enough that his leader could knock him into the middle of next week with ease.

There was never any knowing how Handforth would act.

He was an uncertain quantity. Sometimes he would get so violent that the only course was to flee. And at other times—generally when his chums expected dire danger—he would suddenly cool down.

"We'll forget all about the whole matter," said Handforth. "Goodness knows I'm not the chap to rake things up. But I will say that you are a pair of idiots. If you think the Remove is going to stand Fullwood's rot, you've made a mistake."

Church and McClure were silent.

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"We didn't speak," remarked McClure.

"Can't you make a civil comment?" demanded Handforth. "I talk and talk—and all you can do is to sit there like a pair of stuffed dummies! Fine chaps to talk to, ain't you?"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "If we talk you fly at us, and if we don't talk you call us stuffed dummies! I'm blessed if I know what to do with a chap like you! Let's talk about the weather!"

"The weather's all right," said Handforth. "No need to talk about it, you fathead! We were discussing Fullwood——"

"Yes, and just because I made a remark, you pitched me backwards into the fender," exclaimed Church indignantly. "It's no good arguing with you, Handy. You don't give a chap a chance."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "You shouldn't talk such piffle! I say that Fullwood has got to be chucked out of the Remove captaincy. And all you can do is to argue, and say that the thing can't be done!"

"Well, can it?" demanded McClure tartly.

"Of course it can!"

"How?"

"How?" repeated Handforth. "There's a mad thing to ask! All we've got to do is to go to Fullwood and tell him that if he doesn't resign, we'll bump him round the Triangle, and then punch his nose until he can't see straight!"

"But Nipper won't have that," objected Church.

"Blow Nipper!"

"It's all very well to say blow Nipper," said Church. "He's our real skipper, and it's for him to say what's to be done. Fullwood was elected by the Remove. He got more votes than Nipper——"

"Yes, by buying 'em!" interrupted Handforth warmly. "The cad! The rotten cheat! He gets elected by a lot of blackguardly trickery—and Nipper is content to let things rest!"

"Nipper knows what he's doing," said McClure. "He's pretty deep, and I believe he intends to let Fully run on. Give him enough rope, and he'll hang himself."

"Who's talking about rope?" Handforth demanded.

"Well you know what I mean——"

"How should I know?" asked Handforth. "And Fullwood can get all the rope he wants from old Cuttle's wood-shed. He wouldn't hang himself, either—he hasn't got enough pluck——"

"It's only a saying!" yelled McClure impatiently.

"Don't bark!" snapped Handforth. "I'm not deaf. If you don't mean these idiotic things, you shouldn't say 'em!"

Handforth was a most difficult fellow to get on with. He always insisted upon taking everything literally. If his chums ever made use of a proverb, or a commonplace saying, Handy would take it literally.

"It's no good talking to you fellows," went on Handforth. "Fullwood has got to go. That's certain. If Nipper won't do anything, I shall. I've a good mind to become Remove skipper myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Church.

"Eh?"

"Ah! Oh! Got it!" gasped Church, pretending to cough. "A crumb, you know——"

"It sounded as though you were laughing," said Handforth suspiciously. "You'd better not laugh at me my son! Yes, I'll be skipper! Then you'll see the fur fly, I can tell you!"

"Well, it's no good talking and talking," said McClure. "It only leads to arguments. Better drop the subject. What about the footer? We shall be playing Helmford College next week. I hope we whack the beggars!"

"We ought to, with Handy in goal," said Church tactfully. "Handy's a marvellous goalie, you know. He won't let the leather pass him!"

"Rather not!" said Handforth. "I don't want to boast, of course, but I think I can safely say that there ain't many fellows who can beat me between the sticks. Of course, my real place on the field is centre-forward. If it wasn't for favouritism I should always play centre."

His chums had cunningly changed the subject, and during the remainder of the meal Handforth talked on football—or, to be more exact, he talked about himself.

There had been a lot of controversy in the Remove of late.

A good few of us had only recently returned from our big adventure abroad—and we had discovered, upon our return, that Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the cad of the Ancient House, had appointed himself captain.

And he was still captain.

This was my job, strictly speaking. But Fullwood had spun a yarn about coming into a fortune, and he had distributed tips with the most prodigal liberality. As a result, he had obtained large numbers of votes. And when a rough-and-ready election was held, Fullwood beat me.

By reason of his bought votes, he came out on top.

Well, he was captain of the Form, and I did not grumble. The Remove had elected him, and the Remove would have to take the consequences. Fullwood was hardly the kind of fellow to make an ideal captain.

Of course, it couldn't last.

That was why I was content to let matters run on. Fullwood would soon make his position an impossible one. And then the old order of things would return, and I should be re-elected.

But Handforth was not content to wait. He was always in a hurry. He wanted things done at once. If they weren't, Handforth grew impatient, and his one remedy was to apply force.

In spite of the efforts of Church and McClure, the conversation veered back to Fullwood. Handforth was very keen upon the subject. He hated the very idea of Fullwood being skipper.

For some few moments he had been silently sipping his tea. Then, suddenly, he brought his fist down with a crash.

"Yoo-hoooh!" hooted McClure wildly.

His own cup of tea, just poured out, and steaming hot, had jumped into the air. And it descended into McClure's lap. He leapt to his feet, gasping and yelling. Hot tea is not exactly comfortable in a fellow's lap

Handforth looked round.

"Careless ass!" he said. "I've never known such clumsy bounders! Always spilling something——"

"You did it, you—you——"

"I did it?" repeated Handforth. "Well, I like that!"

"Didn't you crash your fist down on the table?" yelled McClure. "Look at my trucks! Ruined! And I'm soaked——"

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" said Handforth impatiently. "What's a little drop of tea, anyway? I've got an idea! It just came to me, you know. A ripping, terrific wheeze to get Fullwood chucked off his perch!"

"What about my trousers——"

"Blow your trousers!" roared Handforth. "This idea of mine is to kidnap Fullwood in the middle of the night. See? Then we'll cart him off into an old barn somewhere near."

"But what's the idea of doing that?" asked Church.

"The idea?" repeated Handforth. "You dense fathead! Once we've done that we'll put it to him plainly. If he agrees to resign, we'll let him off. But if he refuses we'll keep him a prisoner!"

"For weeks?"

"Yes, if necessary," said Handforth grimly. "We'll keep the rotter locked up until he gives in!"

"That's no good!" said Church. "It couldn't be done. The police would be after him, and then we should get it in the neck. The idea wouldn't work, Handy. Better think of something else."

Handforth glared.

"Everything I say is the same!" he roared. "All you can do is to grumble at it! Nothing but bickering and growling from morning till night! I'm fed up with it! You're both going out of this study now!"

"Look here, Handy," said Church hastily. "Be sensible! That wheeze of yours may be all right, but it needs thinking over, and—and——"

"I don't want to hear any more!" bellowed Handforth. "Out you go! Understand? Will you go out quietly, or shall I hurl you out on your necks?"

It was a most difficult position.

If the juniors departed of their own accord, Handforth would say that they had deserted him when he needed them most. And if they waited until he tried to pitch them out, there would be a most unholy commotion. When Handforth was in one of these moods, he was a terror.

They tried to argue, but it was useless.

He shouted all the more. And he was just in the middle of a choice flow of eloquence—delivered with foghorn-like power—when the study door opened, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood himself appeared.

Handforth was so surprised that he dried up.

"What's all this?" asked Fullwood curtly.

"Speaking to me?" gulped Handforth, when he found his voice.

"Yes, I am!"

"You swindling rotter!" roared Handforth. "I was waiting for you to come along! I'm going to kidnap you! I mean, I'm going to do something to make you resign from the captaincy——"

"That's enough," interrupted Fullwood sourly. "Your voice is filling the whole junior passage. I don't like it."

Handforth clutched at the table.

"You—you don't like it?" he repeated dazedly.

"No, I don't," said Fullwood. "And

you've got to stop it at once. I don't allow these uncouth noises to go on."

"You don't allow 'em?" said Handforth, in a faint whisper.

"No," went on Fullwood. "The way you go on is disgraceful, and you've got to stop this kind of thing. I'm captain of the Remove, and I'm going to put a finish to your nonsense, my lad!"

Handforth thought he was dreaming for a moment.

Fullwood—the cad—the rotter! Talking to him like this! And with such a supercilious, superior air, too! Handforth recovered himself with a jerk, and he turned his sleeves up.

"By George!" he said thickly. "By George!"

"You'd better not——"

"Put up your hands!" roared Handforth. "Put 'em up, because I'm going to smash you to pulp! You don't like my voice, eh? You don't allow things, eh? Perhaps you don't allow this?"

Crash!

Handy's fist thudded violently into Fullwood's face.

"Yaroooooh!" bellowed Fullwood wildly. "Help! Help!"

"And perhaps you don't allow this?" yelled Handforth.

Biff!

"Yow-ow-yow!" shrieked Fullwood, as he got another fearful swipe. "You madman! Help! Get away, confound you! Don't touch me again, you fool——"

"Hallo! Hallo! What's this?"

Kenmore, of the Sixth, stood in the doorway.

"Mind your own business!" shouted Handforth. "I'm just giving this worm something to be going on with——"

"Help!" groaned Fullwood. "He's half killing me, Kenmore! I was just doin' my duty as Form-skipper, too!"

Kenmore nodded.

"I can quite understand," he said grimly. "I know what a young hooligan this Handforth is!"

"Hooligan!" repeated Handforth thickly.

"Yes!" snapped Kenmore. "You're a confounded young bully! If I ever catch you touching Fullwood again, I'll take you straight before the Head for a flogging! As it is, you'll write me a thousand lines!"

Handforth staggered.

"You're mad!" he gasped. "I won't do anything of the sort——"

"And if I have any further lip I'll double the impot!" interrupted Kenmore. "Don't forget that I'm a prefect, and if this matter gets reported to the Headmaster, he's bound to support me!"

Handforth tried to speak, but couldn't.

"I shall expect those lines to-morrow by dinner-time," said Kenmore. "If they're not ready I'll give you another five hundred!"

He turned on his heel and walked away—Fullwood having already passed out into the passage. And as Handforth stared glassily out he saw a twisted kind of smile on Fullwood's face—a malicious sneer.

The captain of the Remove was protected! His friendship with Kenmore of the Sixth made it impossible for the other juniors to touch him.

Certainly, something had to be done!

CHAPTER II.

KEEPING IT UP!

"ANYHOW, it gave the cad somethin' to think about," said Fullwood viciously. "The confounded rotter! One of these days I'll think of somethin' that will settle him for good an' all!"

"He's made a nasty mess of your face——"

"By gad!" snapped Fullwood, looking at himself in the mirror. "I'm just about tired of him. He thinks he's everybody because he's got fists like sledge-hammers. But there are ways an' means."

Fullwood was in Study A, with Gulliver and Bell.

The three cads of the Remove had been "going it" pretty strongly of late. With Fullwood captain of the Remove, they had done pretty much as they liked. And it was very pleasant.

It seemed, however, that the game couldn't go on for ever.

"Of course, the chaps will soon tumble to the truth," remarked Bell. "It's a bit of a pity, because we're all right as long as you are captain. But if Nipper gets the job back——"

"He won't get it back," said Fullwood.

"How do you know?"

"I do know," exclaimed Fullwood. "I'm not going to resign——"

"Perhaps not," said Gulliver. "But there'll be another election soon, an' you won't get many votes, my son. It's no good blinkin' at the facts. Unless you chuck money about, the rotters won't vote for you."

"We'll see," growled Fullwood.

"It was all right as long as you had plenty of cash," said Bell. "But we're all broke now. I haven't got more than five bob, an' I believe you're stoney. How can you expect to keep the giddy game goin'? All the chaps still think that you've come into a fortune—but they won't think it long, when they see that you ain't worth a couple of beans!"

Fullwood scowled.

"Yes, an' I had over a hundred quid!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Did you ever know such rotten luck?"

Fullwood had really gained the captaincy of the Remove because he had spread the

yarn that he had inherited a great fortune. He had made a big display of wealth, and had distributed money wholesale. As a consequence, large numbers of juniors had voted for him.

But then a rude awakening had come.

Fullwood had really obtained a reward for finding an emerald pendant—but, in an attempt to make more money, he had handed the pendant over to a clever criminal, instead of the real owner. And the criminal had paid Fullwood with forged notes!

Before he had really started enjoying himself, the notes had been confiscated and Fullwood found himself without any cash whatever. And he had gained the confidence of the Remove by a display of that money. When the fellows found out that his yarn about a fortune was spoof—well, he wouldn't remain skipper for very long.

There was only one thing to be done—and that was to keep up the fiction. The juniors would have to believe that the fortune was genuine. And the cunning Fullwood already had a deep scheme in his mind.

"Yes, we've got to keep it up!" said Fullwood. "Do you think I'm goin' to knuckle under now—just when I've got the reins in my hands? Not likely! Nipper's not goin' to shove me out!"

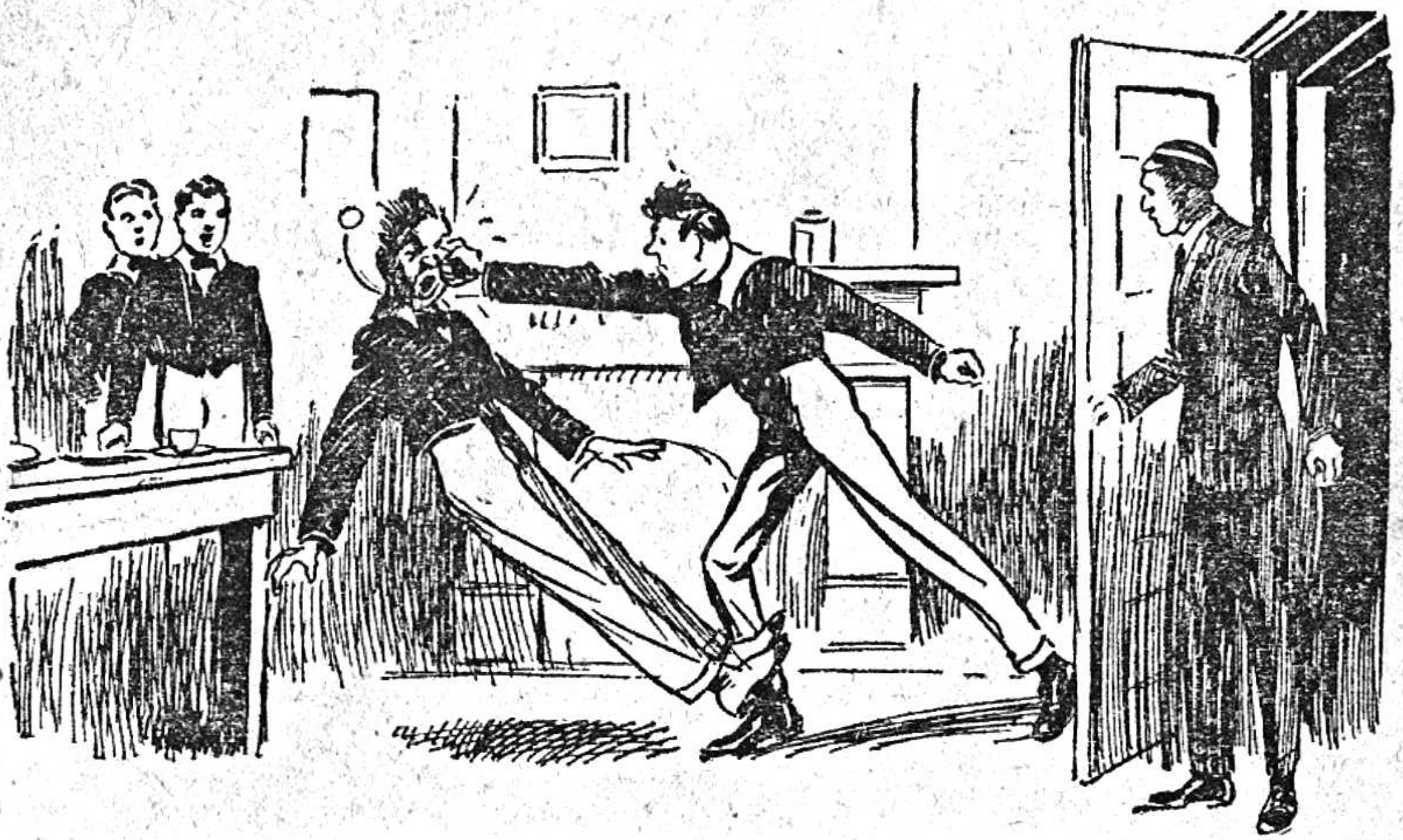
"It's all very well to talk like that," said Gulliver. "But you seem to forget that the whole success of the thing depends upon you havin' pots of money. When you were elected you did have pots. But that money was all dud, an' now——"

"Don't keep harpin' on it," snapped Fullwood. "I know it as well as you do! It was just a piece of rotten luck—filthy luck! Of course, I expect I shall get the reward all right, but it'll be sent to my pater to keep for me. An' that's a fat lot of good, ain't it?"

"Can't you get your pater to send it down?"

Fullwood sniffed.

"Don't be a fool!" he said. "Do you think my pater's goin' to send me a hundred quid? No—that money's gone, so we can't reckon on it. But if we can't have genuine money, we'll try a bit of wanglin'."



"Yow-ow-yow!" shrieked Fullwood, as he got another fearful swipe. "Hallo! Hallo! What's this?" Kenmore, of the Sixth, stood in the doorway.

"Wanglin'?"

"Yes!"

"But I don't see——"

"Of course you don't see," interrupted Fullwood. "The worst of you chaps is that you can't use you giddy brains. I'm captain of the Remove, an' if the truth gets out that I haven't come into any fortune—an' that I'm really broke—well, the rotters will desert me like rats desert a sinkin' ship. An' it'll be all up with our little game!"

"Is it worth it?" asked Bell. "After all, bein' skipper is a beastly bother——"

"I don't care about that!" said Fullwood, his eyes glittering. "It's fine to be in a position of power—to know that I'm above all others! An' I'm not goin' to give it up."

"But you can't distribute any more cash," persisted Gulliver. "An' some of the fellows are already talkin', you know."

"They can't talk much," replied Fullwood. "They don't know anythin' about that pendant, or the reward. They still think I came into a fortune——"

"They thought so at one time, but they're gettin' a bit doubtful now," said Bell. "You haven't splashed any money about for a couple of days, an' the chaps are wonderin' why you've eased up."

Fullwood nodded.

"I know it!" he said grimly. "Well, I've been fixin' things up. I've arranged with a chap I know in Bannin'ton. He's a pal of one of the bookies, an' quite a decent sort in his way. Used to be an actor, I think. Anyhow, I've fixed it up with him."

Gulliver and Bell stared.

"What have you fixed up?" asked Gulliver.

"Never mind now—you'll find out before long," said Fullwood. "But you can take it from me that my position will be made strong enough."

The three "nuts" continued talking, and when they emerged from their study shortly afterwards, they were all looking rather pleased with themselves. They lounged out into the lobby, and then made their way out into the Triangle.

The September evening was wonderfully bright, and the sun was shining warmly. The three "nuts" took up their position near the Ancient House steps.

"Better stick round here, somewhere," murmured Fullwood. "He's bound to spot us then. An' besides, the other chaps will be near by, too. An' don't you talk—leave it all to me."

"All right—we'll keep mum," said Bell.

They waited, and while they stood there chatting, Teddy Long came sidling up, looking careless.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he exclaimed.

"You can clear off, you little worm!" snapped Fullwood.

"Oh, really!" protested Teddy Long. "I—I was just going to ask you if I could borrow five or ten bob——"

"You can't!"

"But—but I'm awfully hard up!" said Teddy. "Only five bob, don't you know. I'll pay you back on Saturday——"

"No need for that!" said Fullwood kindly.

"Oh, thanks awfully——"

"Because you'll have nothin' to pay back!" went on Fullwood. "I'm not lendin' you any more money, my lad! Clear off while you're safe. Another word, an' you'll get a clip on the ear!"

Teddy Long looked somewhat indignant.

"You won't lend me anything?" he demanded.

"No!"

"Not even five bob, and you're simply rollin' in tin!" exclaimed Long. "All right—don't you jolly well come to me for any more votes! Yah! I wouldn't have voted for you last time if I'd thought you'd turn on me like this!"

"There you are!" muttered Bell. "They'll all be like that!"

Fullwood scowled darkly.

"All right—under the circumstances, I'll spring somethin', Long!" he said, putting his hand to his pocket. "Here you are!"

Teddy Long came over eagerly. Fullwood withdrew his hand, and then suddenly made a dive forward, and grabbed Teddy by the back of his jacket. The sneak of the Remove was taken by surprise.

"I said I'll spring somethin'—an' now you'll get it!" growled Fullwood. "This is just to show you that you can't cheek your Form captain an' get away with it. How's that?"

Fullwood twisted Teddy Long's arm with vicious enjoyment.

"Yow—ow—yaroooh!" howled Long madly.

He wasn't very much hurt, but Teddy believed in yelling first. He had always found that the greater the noise he made, the less the punishment. Fellows who took pain without yelling, generally got a double dose.

"Stop that confounded row!" snarled Fullwood.

"Ow—yow!"

Instead of stopping it, Long yelled harder than ever. And it so happened that Archie Glenthorne was strolling out through the lobby at that moment. He paused, and adjusted his monocle. From this position he could see the cause of the yells of agony.

"Gadzooks!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, it appears that some poor chappie is in the final throes! Death cries, and all that kind of rot! This is simply fearful—absolutely!"

Archie looked about him, but all was blank.

"The fearsome sounds appear to be waltzing around from the offing!" murmured Archie. "What-ho! What-ho! Well, this is really poisonous! Dash it all! A chappie has simply got to shove himself forward. There's nothing else for it. Archie, as it were, is largely required!"

He had just caught a glimpse of Teddy Long out on the steps. And he could see at once that Teddy was in the grasp of Fullwood. Archie detested seeing anyone being bullied. And now he strode forward and he squared his shoulders, and he grasped his cane more firmly.

He stalked out into the open.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed. "Kindly cease the rough stuff, laddie!"

Fullwood glared at him.

"Talkin' to me?" he snapped.

"Absolutely!"

"Then you can fry your face!"

"I mean to say, what?" ejaculated Archie. "Fry my face? Well, really, how absolutely prepos! My dear old thing, it couldn't be done. Absolutely not! Moreover, I gather that the old dial is somewhat more handsome in its present condish. But we are straying from the point, old dear. What, may I ask, is the idea of putting it across this poor chappie?"

"He's—he's twisted my arm, Glenthorne!" wailed Long.

"So, as it were, I observe!" replied Archie. "I must request you, you frightful blighter, to chuck it! Absolutely!"

"Mind your own business!"

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "There, to be absolutely exact, you jolly well are! This thing is my business—absolutely! And I must broadcast the information that unless you unhand the chappie, I shall sail in with considerable chunks of the old wrath!"

"You don't know what you're talkin' about!" snapped Fullwood. "You'd better clear off while you're safe, Archie."

"As a matter of fact, old scream, I consider that I'm most dashed safe as it is," said Archie. "In other words, you fearsome bounder, I don't care a snap of the jolly old digets for the three of you. That, as it were, can be churned round in your bally old gear boxes! And if you don't like it, you can do something else. Absolutely! And I must demand the release of this chappie without delay!"

Fullwood released Teddy Long abruptly.

"Look here, Glenthorne, I'm not standin' any rot from you!" snapped Fullwood, pushing up against Archie. "I wouldn't like to spoil that elegant nose of yours, but I may be compelled to. How would you like to have it twisted?"

Archie shuddered.

"The 'semsash' would probably be most foul!" he observed. "But there is no fear of such a disaster taking place. Absolutely not! For you, my dear old buck, I have nothing but the vilest contempt. Absolutely! The fact of the matter is, you need ticking off. A chappie who bullies another chappie is really a most frightful ruffian. And that, as it were, is that!"

Archie deliberately snapped his fingers in Fullwood's face, and strolled elegantly away. He could see that he had done all that was demanded of him, and he had not the slightest fear that Fullwood would attempt to molest him. Fullwood only went for those fellows who were his inferior in strength.

Ralph Leslie would probably have said a few things, but just at that moment an elderly gentleman appeared in the gateway. Fullwood caught sight of him at once, and he gave his chums a significant glance.

"Here he is!" he muttered. "This is him!"

CHAPTER III.

ROLLING IN IT!

REGINALD Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie were over by the main gates, and they were chatting together—having finished a little conversation with Mr. Cuttle, the school porter.

And then, before they could leave, a stranger appeared.

The stranger came in from outside—a smallish man, elderly, attired in a frock-coat and top hat. He had neat little side whiskers, and looked eminently respectable. He paused to adjust his glasses.

"H'm! Quite so—quite so!" he said. "This, no doubt, is St. Frank's College! Yes, yes! I must inquire of those young gentlemen."

He approached the juniors, and beamed upon them.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed fortunate. Can you kindly tell me, my boys, where I can find a young gentleman of the name of Master Ralph Fullwood?"

Pitt shook his head.

"There's no young gentleman here named that, sir."

"No?" repeated the stranger. "That is most remarkable! I thought——"

"There's a fellow named Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of course," went on Pitt. "But I don't think he can be described as young gentleman."

The other juniors grinned, and the old gentleman chuckled.

"Just one of your little jokes, eh?" he said. "Quite so! I was a boy myself once! Well, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where I can find Master Fullwood?"

"You needn't go far, sir," said De Valerie. "Fullwood's lounging over by the Ancient House now—there he is, on the steps."

The stranger peered across the Triangle, and nodded.

"Ah, yes—yes!" he exclaimed. "I will go to Master Fullwood at once. A remarkably fortunate young gentleman, indeed! I should say, the most fortunate young gentleman I have ever come in contact with."

"Fortunate?" asked Pitt. "Why?"

The old gentleman looked surprised.

"But, surely, you know? Surely Master Fullwood has not kept his good fortune a secret? I was under the impression that he had informed his schoolfellows——"

"About his inheriting a lot of money?" asked De Valerie.

"To be sure!" said the stranger. "Then he has told you. I thought so—I certainly thought so! You see, I am Mr. Grimshaw, of the firm of Hollingwell and Grimshaw, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Oh, you are a solicitor, sir?"

"Yes, my boys—yes!" replied Mr. Grimshaw. "Quite so. Yes, Master Fullwood is

an extremely fortunate young gentleman. Not many boys of his age have money to spend as he has. Not merely a few pounds—a few hundred pounds. The lad has thousands at his disposal!"

"He said something like that, sir," said De Valerie.

"Yes, I was quite certain that he would speak on the matter," said Mr. Grimshaw. "However, it is none of my business to remain here gossiping. Thank you, my boys—thank you!"

He bowed, and proceeded on his way. And he found Fullwood and Co. waiting against the Ancient House steps. A few other fellows were in the near vicinity, including Handforth and Co.

Handforth himself was pushing up his sleeves in a suggestive manner. It may have been mere force of habit, but he was certainly looking very closely in Fullwood's direction.

And then Mr. Grimshaw joined the three "nuts."

"Ah, Master Ralph!" he exclaimed. "I am very pleased to see you looking so well!"

"Master Ralph won't look so well when I've done with him!" said Handforth in a whisper—which could have been heard across the Triangle. "Who's this queer-looking old buffer? His nose looks a bit suspicious! I'll bet he doesn't know what prohibition is!"

"Shush, you ass!"

The solicitor looked round, frowning.

"There is apparently some very rude boy here," he said severely. "But I will take no notice—I cannot waste time. To tell you the truth, Master Ralph, I must hurry away as quickly as possible."

"That's all right," said Fullwood easily. "I suppose you really came down about the money?"

"Precisely, Master Ralph."

"Did you bring the cash?"

"Yes, and it is here!" exclaimed the solicitor, opening his bag. "Oh, and by the way, I have taken the liberty, Master Ralph, of opening an account for you at one of the banks in Bannington. I thought it might be handy for you to have a banking account, in case you have reason to make any large payments. A cheque is so much better than cash!"

Fullwood nodded.

"Yes, I quite understand," he said. "It was a pretty good idea of yours, Mr. Grimshaw. What's this? Oh, the cheque-book? All right. And what about the notes? Got them?"

"I have here a small bundle to be going on with, Master Ralph," said the solicitor.

He handed over a fat sheaf of currency notes which were held together by an elastic band.

Fullwood carelessly ran his finger over them.

"How many here?" he asked.

"Two hundred, Master Ralph" said Mr. Grimshaw. "I trust that will be sufficient for your immediate needs."

"Well, I think so—but there's no need for us to keep talkin' out here," said Fullwood. "These inquisitive nosey-parkers can't mind their own business! Come inside, Mr. Grimshaw."

"Only for a moment, Master Ralph—only for a moment!" said the solicitor, consulting his watch. "I really cannot stay long."

They passed inside, and the juniors looked at one another somewhat blankly. They were very surprised.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Owen, major. "I was beginning to doubt it, you know! But there's no spoof about the thing, after all!"

"No fear!" said Conham. "Did you see that? Two hundred quid notes! Lucky bounder! I wish I had twenty!"

"Rather!"

"It's queer how the rotters always get the best of it!"

"I wonder if it's genuine?" said Pitt, thoughtfully.

"It must be!" said Grey. "We saw the notes—a big bundle."

"They looked like notes, anyhow," replied Pitt cautiously. "But, after all, there's no reason why we should interest ourselves in the matter. Blow Fullwood! And blow his money! I wouldn't touch either with a barge pole!"

But a large number of juniors were not so particular.

"My hat!" exclaimed Merrell, his eyes gleaming. "Fully's got two hundred quid! And a banking account—and thousands and thousands! We shall jolly well have to look alive, or we shall be left out!"

"Plenty of time," said Marriott. "Fully's not a bad sort. He'll shell out some cash if we want it."

"If we want it!" said Noys. "There's no 'if' in it."

They all waited eagerly for further developments.

And it was only a short time before the whole Remove was buzzing with the news that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was fairly rolling in cash. He had two hundred pounds in cold money, and thousands more in the bank, with a local account of his own. Fullwood had suddenly blossomed forth into a person of the highest importance. Hitherto the fellows had only had Fullwood's own word that he had inherited a lot of money.

But now the whole thing had been put upon a sound basis, so to speak. There could be no question about the matter.

And, in the meantime, while this discussion was going on, Mr. Grimshaw was in Fullwood's study, in the Remove passage. As soon as the door closed behind them, Fullwood grabbed the visitor's hand.

"Jolly good, Sam!" he said. "I didn't think you could do it so well!"

"It's nothing to me!" grinned the visitor lightly. "I've acted all sorts of parts in my time. But still, I think I spoofed the

young idiots pretty well, didn't I? And it was the right stuff?"

"Rather!" said Gulliver. "It was marvellous!"

"You looked like an old solicitor to the life!" declared Fullwood. "Of course, you look like him now—but you spoke like one, too. Well, you'd better shift off as soon as you can."

Mr. Grimshaw nodded.

"You bet!" he agreed. "I was a bit of a mug to come in at all. If any of the masters collar me, it might be blamed awkward. So I think I'd better hook it while I've got the chance. See you in Bannington some time, I suppose?"

"Of course," said Fullwood.

"Just one minute," said the visitor. "What's the idea of this silly business? You coming into a fortune, and me handing you bundles of notes—which are really pieces of blank paper? What's the big idea?"

"Just a little strategy, Sam," grinned Fullwood. "You see, I want to spoof the chaps over somethin', an' I'm doin' it, too. It would have been very difficult without you—but now I'm all right."

"Some of your little tricks, eh?" said Mr. Grimshaw, grinning. "All right, I won't ask any more questions. No time. So-long, laddies!"

The supposed solicitor made his way out down the passages, and as he crossed the Triangle his progress was followed by many eyes. And at last he vanished. And the juniors who were out in the open looked after him enviously.

"I wish a blessed solicitor would come for me!" said Armstrong. "I'd like to have a fortune—and bundles of notes, and banking accounts! Just fancy a cad like Fullwood having such luck."

"Disgusting!" said Doyle.

All the fellows were discussing the situation. They took it for granted that everything was quite straight and above board. At first, perhaps, a few fellows had been rather suspicious. They had suspected Ralph Leslie of spoofing them. But this latest development took away all doubts.

Not quite all, however.

For I was by no means convinced.

I had heard the facts—and I caught a glimpse of Mr. Grimshaw as he was leaving the Triangle. There was something about the man that seemed slightly familiar. And I was quite sure that his aged walk was assumed. I came to the conclusion that the man was disguised.

But, unfortunately, I was not able to get a close up view of him. In spite of this, however, I felt certain that there was something fishy about this whole business.

"If Fullwood thinks he can spoof me, he's made a mistake," I said grimly. "All this theatrical business doesn't go down."

"What theatrical business?" asked Watson.

"Why, that solicitor fellow coming here with all his talk about banking accounts, and the bundle of notes——"

"But some of the chaps saw the notes," said Watson.

"They were intended to see," I said. "If this thing had been absolutely straight, the solicitor would have gone right in to Fullwood—and, besides that, he would have seen the Housemaster, too. No, my sons, this is simply a part of Fullwood's plan to hoodwink the Remove."

"But why should he do it?" asked Watson.

I smiled.

"For the simple reason that he wants to pose as a big pot," I said. "By doing that he'll make his position more secure. He'll make the chaps kowtow to him, and he won't be in such danger of losing their votes. The whole thing's obvious."

"Dear old boy, I believe you're right!" said Sir Montie. "I do, really!"

"I know it!" I said firmly. "And, what's more, I'm going to look into the whole affair. I'll say nothing—but I'll be watching!"

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING SERIOUS!

ENOCH SNIPE insinuated himself through the doorway of Study A.

Snipe was a most peculiar fellow. He seemed to cringe his way through life. Every time a fellow spoke to him, he cringed back as though he were afraid of something. And now he blinked in at Study A, and contorted his face into what he thought was a smile.

"Oh, I—I am so sorry to interrupt——" he began.

"Good!" said Fullwood. "Shut the door after you!"

"I was wondering——"

"Wonder outside!"

"Please let me speak!" said Snipe, standing there and rubbing his hands together. "Do—do you think you could convenience me with a slight loan? Only for a temporary period, let me hasten to say——"

"You're wasting your breath, and if you want to wash your hands, use some water!" interrupted Fullwood. "I'm not lending any cash this evenin'!"

Snipe stepped forward eagerly.

"Only—only a matter of a few shillings," he exclaimed. "I will do anything I can in return. I know you have plenty of money, because I saw the gentleman hand you a great amount of notes."

"You see too much!" said Fullwood grimly. "An' it doesn't matter whether I've got two hundred notes or two thousand! I don't choose to lend you any. But if you come some other time I might be in

a different frame of mind. Now you can scoot!"

"Oh, really! I thought——"

"Buzz off!" roared Fullwood.

"But, I—I——"

Fullwood took one step towards the door, and Enoch Snipe uttered a little squeal and vanished. Fullwood saw that he completely disappeared down the passage, and then he came back.

"Little worm!" he said. "That chap gets on my nerves. Long's bad enough, but Snipe is like one of those bally creepy, crawly things."

Gulliver and Bell looked at their leader curiously.

"Well, what about the great wheeze?" asked Gulliver.

"Eh?"

"It doesn't seem to be working very well."

"What do you mean?" asked Fullwood.

"Well, you've just had an example of it," said Gulliver. "It's no good pretendin' to have a lot of money—it's worse than havin' nothin'. If you've got nothin', fellows won't come round tryin' to borrow."

"Well?"

"But by makin' out you're all over quids—by showin the chaps that spoof packet of notes you simply make them think you're rollin' in tin," went on Gulliver. "Snipe thought you had piles that's why he came."

Fullwood nodded.

"Yes, I admit that's a drawback," he said. "There might be one or two others coxin' for loans, an' I shall have to make some excuse. I needn't lend any cash unless I choose to. An', anyhow, everybody believes that I'm wallowin' in filthy lucre."

"An' yet, as a matter of fact, you're broke?" asked Bell.

"Not quite—I've got about fifteen bob——"

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "Fifteen bob! An' you've made the chaps believe that you've got two hundred quid! I'm blessed if I can see the reason for it. It's all so useless——"

"Don't be so dashed impatient!" snapped Fullwood. "You don't know what the scheme is yet. Of course, I've got to have some money—plenty of money. Then I can flash it about, and the chaps will never know that that package was a spoof one."

"It's all very well to say you must have money, and plenty of it," said Bell, "but where's it comin' from? You can't grab money out of the air, I suppose? You're not a wizard!"

"There are other methods of gettin' it easy," said Fullwood. "I've thought it all out—I've got it all planned. An' I've got a scheme that absolutely can't fail. You can take it from me that it's absolutely a dead certainty. An' on Saturday I shall have tons of money."

"It seems jolly decent," said Bell, unconvinced. "But I've heard of your schemes before——"

"Oh, don't be so confoundedly clever!" snapped Fullwood. "I wasn't goin' to tell you about it—but I think I will. You've got to keep mum, because if a word gets out we shall be sacked."

Gulliver and Bell looked startled.

"Is it—is it somethin' shady?" asked Bell quickly.

"No, of course not," said Fullwood. "Some silly snobs might call it shady, but there's nothin' in it at all. Look here."

He took a key from his pocket, went over to the desk and unlocked it. And from the desk he took a neat little cash-box. He unlocked this, too. And there, inside, were a number of pound and ten-shilling notes and quite a lot of silver."

"There's eighteen quid there!" said Fullwood. "To be exact, eighteen—pound—three—an'—six."

"Yes!" gasped Gulliver. "But it's not yours!"

"I know it isn't," said Fullwood calmly. "This money is the funds of the Remove Football Club—the general sports fund. Most of the chaps were called upon pretty heavily because some new nets are wanted, an' some other things. They're goin' to be bought next week. But there's the money——"

"Yes, I can see!" panted Bell. "But—but you can't touch that!"

"Why can't I?"

"It—it would be criminal!" said Bell, in a scared voice. "I've heard of other chaps takin' club funds, an' all that sort of thing, an' they always come a fearful cropper——"

"Yes, if you're found out," sneered Fullwood. "I mean to borrow these funds—an' I'll put every quid back, an' have about four times as much for myself."

Gulliver and Bell were looking rather scared.

"But—but you can't do it!" protested Gulliver. "It wouldn't be right, Fully! Why, it would mean the sack for all of us——"

"Rot!" put in Fullwood. "It would mean the sack for me, but you chaps wouldn't suffer. You can't be blamed for anythin' I do. Bein' skipper of the Remove, I've got charge of these funds. That's one advantage of bein' captain."

"Look here, old man, don't touch it!" urged Gulliver earnestly. "Goodness knows, I'm not squeamish. But don't touch it! If anythin' goes wrong, an' you can't put it back, you'll get in a shockin' mess!"

Fullwood brushed him aside.

"Don't talk piffle!" he said curtly. "I'm takin' a chance, I'll admit—but as I'm standin' the racket, why should you worry? An' this thing is practically a dead certainty. It'll be absolutely a cinch. I can put the club funds back, and line my own pocket at the same time."

"But how?" asked Bell.

"At Helmford—on Saturday afternoon."

"You—you mean the races?"

"Of course!" said Fullwood. "You can't get easy money any other way!"

"But—but it's mad!" shouted Gulliver. "To take the club funds, an' to put all the money on horses——"

"Don't yell, you fool!" snapped Fullwood. "Do you want the whole passage to hear? I wish I hadn't told you now—I might have known what a pair of weak-kneed idiots you are!"

But Gulliver and Bell were genuinely alarmed.

"I—I didn't mean to shout?" said Gulliver. "But I'm worried, Fully! This thing might end horribly for you——"

"Don't be an idiot!" snarled Fullwood, exasperated. There's every chance that I shall win the lot. An' if the worst comes to the worst, I'm bound to get it back—even if I shove money on four or five losers! I'm bound to get the original capital back."

"Well, it's almost certain, anyway!" admitted Bell.

"Then what's the need to worry?" demanded Fullwood. "An' if I lose every giddy penny—well, I sha'n't worry even then."

"But the funds will be gone, you ass!"

"Exactly," said Fullwood calmly. "An' then I shall fake up a burglary, an' make out that thieves took the club funds, an' all my cash as well. See? That'll account for me havin' no money—an' I can't be blamed for what burglars do. In fact, it'll be covered by insurance—the whole school is insured—and I shall click in that way!"

Gulliver and Bell felt somewhat calmer. Fullwood's cool assurance was rather wonderful. He had absolute confidence—and he seemed to brush aside difficulties as though they never existed.

"I've looked at it from every point, an' it's all settled," went on Fullwood. "But there's no reason to fear the worst, because I shall win. There's no question about it. I've got to win. Have you been studyin' the papers lately?"

"Yes, every day," said Gulliver.

"I suppose you really came down about the money?" said Fullwood easily. "Precisely, Master Ralph, and it is here," exclaimed the solicitor, indicating the bag.

"Have you noticed the second favourites?" asked Fullwood keenly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can always tell from the bettin' forecast," said Fullwood. "An' you can pick out the second favourite of each race without any trouble. Have you been watchin' em?"

"Yes—they've been winnin'!"

"Every day!" said Fullwood. "Sometimes two or three in a day—but always one. I've watched it for weeks, an' it's never failed. Not on a single day has it gone wrong!"

"But what's the idea?"

"Why, when we go to Helmford Races on Saturday, I'm going to work on a system," said Fullwood confidently. "It's a system that can't fail. I must win—absolutely must."

Gulliver and Bell began to get excited.

"You mean on the second favourites?" asked Bell.

"Yes, of course," said Fullwood. "We'll get there in plenty of time for the first race. We'll back to win every time. On the first race we'll shove ten bob to win on the second favourite. If that goes down, we'll double up on the next race."

"Double up?"

"You know what that means, you ass!" said Fullwood impatiently. "I'll double the stake. That is, I'll put a pound to win on the second race. If that goes down, I'll put two pounds to win—an' then four pounds to win. If the two-quid horse doesn't come home, the four-quid one is bound to! An' think what it'll mean if it's a decent price—say six to one. That'll be twenty-four pounds clear winnin's. An' we've still got some races left."

"But are you sure it'll work?"

"Sure! I'm dead certain of it!" said Fullwood. "Don't I keep tellin' you that it can't go wrong? It's quite likely that we shall lose until we've got eight pounds on a single horse. An' it might come in at seven-to-one!"

"Phew!" whistled Gulliver. "That would mean over fifty quid clear winnin's, you know!"

"Of course it would!" grinned Fullwood. "That's just the beauty of it. I tell you, I can make a fortune like this! All I've got to do is to put some money aside after this meetin', an' then go even heavier on the next. I can keep us all supplied with tons of cash through the whole giddy term."

"By jingo!" breathed Bell. "I believe you're right! I remember somebody talkin' about that second favourite stunt! Some chap in Bannin'ton made two hundred quid at one meetin'!"

"Of course!" said Fullwood. "It's easy. It's money for nothin'! There's no risk at all in takin' these club funds—absolutely none for you, an' precious little for me. An' not a soul will know that I haven't really got a fortune behind me. It's the greatest thing that ever worked!"

And Gulliver and Bell, greatly impressed, were at last beginning to realise that Fullwood was on what they term a good egg.

But all eggs look alike on the outside.

The "nuts" of the Remove would have to be very careful that this particular egg did not turn out to be decidedly rotten.

CHAPTER V.

REAL FOOTBALL!

REGGIE PITT strolled out into the Triangle, and looked round.

"A bit warm for football, but we must be thankful it isn't raining," he said. "After all, we can't expect much else in September. What time did those Eastwold chaps say they'd be here?"

"About two o'clock, or even before," I replied. "I think they were trying to fix it for half-past one."

"Well, it's half-past one now," said Pitt. "And they ought to be showing up soon."

It was Saturday, and dinner was just over. The weather was quite mild, although there was no sun. This made it all the better for football—for footer in a glaring September sun is hardly comfortable.

I was particularly keen upon this match. Because I wanted to show Dalton and his companions that St. Frank's could put out a really first-class junior team. The Eastwold fellows had met Fullwood & Co. on their previous visit. And Fullwood's team had given a somewhat complete exhibition of caddish fouling.

In the end Dalton and his team had stopped in the middle of the game, and left, swearing they would never come again. But I had met Dalton quite by accident afterwards, and had explained things. And he, being a decent chap, had promised to come over this afternoon to meet the proper St. Frank's Junior Eleven.

While Pitt and I were chatting in the Triangle, a number of cyclists appeared in the gateway.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "Good! Well on time, and we shall be able to start before two. That'll leave us a nice long evening afterwards. They look a decent crowd."

Dalton and his men were certainly a well-set-up team. They came forward, and I went to meet them. But before I could even say a word, a shout came from the Ancient House steps.

Fullwood & Co. had just come out, and they were in Norfolks, and tweed caps—evidently bent on cycling. As a matter of fact, they were just about to start for Helmford—and they would have to put a hustle on to get there in time.

But Fullwood scowled as he saw the visitors.

"Who told those cads to come here?" he snapped.

"Goodness knows!" said Bell. "They're that rotten set who refused to finish the game earlier in the week."

Fullwood strode forward.

"You chaps can clear out!" he shouted. "You're not wanted here."

I turned.

"What's that, Fullwood?" I asked sharply.

"I wasn't talkin' to you!" retorted Fullwood, as he came striding down. "These young blackguards are not wanted——"

"You—you rotter!" shouted Dalton hotly. "How you've got the nerve to stand there and call us blackguards, I don't know! Why, it was you and your pals who acted like hooligans——"

"That's enough!" snapped Fullwood curtly. "I'm the captain of the Remove,

and I don't allow any Eastwold juniors here. The sooner you clear out, the better. Understand?"

Dalton looked at me.

"It's all right—I'm sorry this has happened," I said quietly. "But I asked you to come, Dalton, and you'll stay. We've fixed it all up, and the full Remove Eleven is all ready to give you a game."

"Oh, is it?" snapped Fullwood harshly. "Who said so?"

"I did!"

"And what right have you got to say anythin'?" raved Fullwood. "You're nobody—you've got no more say than a kid like Long! I'm skipper, an' if I don't choose to allow this match, it won't be played!"

"It will be played!" I said grimly. "I don't want to do anything drastic, Fullwood, but if you persist in this caddish attitude——"

"Are you callin' me a cad?" roared Fullwood.

"Yes."

"Then take that!" he thundered.

Crash!

Fullwood staggered back, howling, and sat down in the Triangle with fearful force. He had certainly invited me to take something, but before he could even get his fist up, my own was planted fairly between his eyes. My blood was up, and I put some strength behind that blow.

"That, as it were, is somewhat priceless!" observed Archie Glenthorne, strolling up: "What-ho! The mighty skipper chappie grovels! Of course, he's been fairly yelping for a large dose for some time. Absolutely!"

Fullwood scrambled up, breathing hoarsely.

"You'll pay for that!" he snarled. "I'll show you who's master in the Remove! I'm not goin' to allow these dirty cads to play! Understand? I'm not goin' to let this filthy set of——"

"Fullwood!"

The cad of the Remove gulped, and turned. It came as a great surprise to him to find that Nelson Lee was just behind him. And Nelson Lee was looking very stern and severe.

"Just—just a little argument, sir," said Fullwood sullenly.

"I think not!" said Nelson Lee. "To whom were you referring when you used the terms 'dirty cads' and 'filthy set'?"

"I—I didn't say that, sir——"

"How dare you, Fullwood?" asked Lee grimly. "You shouted the words so that everybody in the Triangle could hear them."

"He was referring to us, sir," said Dalton.

"These fellows are from Eastwold College, sir!" I explained. "I asked them to come over for a match this afternoon. But Fullwood's the junior skipper, and he objects."

"Oh, indeed," said Nelson Lee. "What cause have you for objecting, Fullwood?"

"They're a rotten crowd, sir——"

"If you dare to speak that way in my presence again, Fullwood, I will take you indoors, and flog you!" exclaimed the Housemaster-detective. "I have heard a few rumours concerning a game you played with Eastwold College earlier this week. I will not ask for any particulars, but I think I am safe in saying that any faults during that game were entirely on your side."

"They were, sir," said Dalton promptly.

"I am very pleased to welcome you to St. Frank's, boys," said Nelson Lee, turning to the Eastwold juniors. "You may certainly play this match, and I hope you will not take too much notice of this insolent young fool!"

"Thank you, sir," said Dalton gladly.

The other Eastwold fellows were equally pleased. Fullwood stood there, clenching and unclenching his fists, and hardly able to contain himself.

"As for you, Fullwood, I am ashamed that one of my boys should make such a disagreeable exhibition of himself," went on Nelson Lee coldly. "Unless you can conduct the affairs of the Remove in a much better way, I shall take matters into my own hands, and deprive you of the captaincy. You will write me one thousand lines for insolence and disgraceful behaviour. You may go."

"But I—I——"

"You may go!" repeated Lee sternly.

Fullwood crawled away—utterly squashed. It was certainly not a very pleasant position for a Form captain to be in. And as soon as he had gone, Nelson Lee turned to the visitors, and all his frowns vanished. He made them very welcome, and promised to come and have a look at the match itself.

"My hat!" said Dalton, as he went towards Little Side. "And we thought all the St. Frank's chaps were the same. We didn't know there were any fellows like you about."

"It is not wise to judge by first appearances," I smiled. "Fullwood and his set are—well, you can judge what they are by what you've seen. There's no need for me to say much."

"No—we can size them up all right," said Dalton.

"And now, you've got to forget that rotten crowd and enter into this game for all you're worth," I went on. "We're rather out of form, because we've had practically no practice. Still, we'll do our best to whack you."

"Good!" said Dalton. "I'm beginning to like St. Frank's tremendously."

"You mustn't think any school can be composed of rotters alone," I said. "Even in the worst place you'll find a number of very decent chaps. Here, the majority are decent—they've got faults, like everybody

else, but they're true blue. Fullwood and his gang are a minority."

We were now on Little Side, and before so very long both teams had changed into footer togs. As usual, there was a little argument beforehand, because Handforth wanted to make a change.

"Of course, I'm not grumbling," he said. "I never believe in grumbling, because it's bad form. But it strikes me that I should do better to-day by playing centre-forward."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The team yelled.

"There's nothing funny in that!" snapped Handforth. "I'm goalie, I know—and there's no better chap for the job, of course. But I'm simply wasted in goal. My place is in the field——"

"Oh, for goodness sake don't start now, old son!" I grinned. "If all the other members of the Eleven are agreeable to the change, I won't object. I'll change places with you."

"Good!" said Handforth. "That's settled."

"Is it?" grinned Pitt. "The team does object, my son."

"What?"

"We want to win this match—and if you play centre-forward the whole thing will become a rag-time business," said De Valerie. "I vote we keep the team just as it is, without any messing about."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, who was an interested spectator.

"Who asked for your opinion?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, as a matter of fact, nobody!" confessed Archie.

"What do you know about football?"

"Dash it all!" said Archie. "Football? The fact is, old thing, I'm most frightfully ig on the sub. I know that a vast horde of chappies stagger forth on to the old battlefield, and there you are! Once there, they proceed to batter the old chunk of leather like the very deuce!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got a priceless idea that I should shine at the old game," said Archie. "I mean to say, like a belly beacon, don't you know. Just shove me into the fray, and there you are! One of these days I shall have to get most dashed busy and learn the jolly old rules!"

I suspected that Archie was trying to pull the legs of his bearers—for I believed that he knew the rules of football as well as anybody else. He certainly intended to be a keen spectator of the match.

We had been fortunate enough to secure the services of Morrow to referee the game. Morrow was a keen member of the First Eleven, and he was one of the straightest players in the Sixth.

Dalton and his men looked very business-like as they punted a ball about their end of the field. I could see them turning every now and again, and looking at us critically.

They still had a kind of idea that they might be in for a rough game. Their previous experience at St. Frank's had left them with a very bad impression. But this would soon be removed when the game started.

The St. Frank's team consisted of eleven fellows who had been practising very keenly since our return from the holiday trip. In fact, we had all been practising hard, but I judged that the team I had selected for this game was the best we could turn out at the moment. I was filling the centre-forward position myself. The other fellows agreed that this was my right place.

The team lined up on the field in this way—Handforth; McClure, Armstrong; Tommy Watson, Yorke, Grey; Reggie Pitt, De Valerie, myself, Bob Christine, Tregellis-West.

Considering that we had had only a small amount of practice, I was hoping that we should do well. If we drew with Eastwold I should be quite satisfied.

Dalton won the toss. But this made little difference, as there was no sun, and the slight breeze was blowing across the field, and gave no advantage to either side.

"All ready, youngsters?" asked Morrow.

"Yes, you can go ahead!" I replied.

Morrow consulted his watch, fixed the time, and blew his whistle.

The match started. And in a very few minutes the Eastwold fellows were made thoroughly conversant with the fact that this was to be a game of football—and not a caricature of the great sport.

They appeared to imagine that their task would be easy. On the previous occasion they could have scored goals every minute or so—for Fullwood's lot had been incapable of any real defence.

But Kenmore, the bully of the Sixth, had refereed that game, and he had consistently refused to pull up Fullwood and Co. for fouling. And the game, long before the finish, had been abandoned.

Dalton and Co. possibly thought that they would be able to run through our defence without any difficulty. If so, they were brought up suddenly. For two of their forwards took the ball neatly towards Handforth, and seemed in rather a dangerous position.

But McClure bore down, took the ball in his stride, and sent a perfectly judged pass over to the right wing. And Reggie Pitt gathered up the leather with that extraordinary skill which was his own particular speciality.

It was wonderful. Before the ball was on the ground, Pitt had it under perfect control. And away he went up the touch line like a race-horse. The Eastwold back on that side charged down upon this new menace. But he didn't know his man. Pitt was round him and away again almost before the back knew what had happened.

Whizz!

The ball left Pitt's foot, and rose perfectly—to drop right into the goal mouth. I was there, and I got my head to it with just the right judgment. But the Eastwold goalie was alert. As the ball was plugging into the net, he met it with one blow of his fist.

"Oh, well saved!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's the stuff, Pitt!"

"Same old Reggie!"

"Well tried, St. Frank's!"

It had certainly been a narrow escape for the Eastwold goal, and Dalton gave me a quick grin as we happened to pass.

"That winger of yours is hot stuff!" he called out.

"Mustard!" I replied. "Just wait bit!"

They didn't have to wait long. But before Pitt got another chance Dalton himself showed what kind of a footballer he was—he gave us an exhibition of his sterling qualities. From mid-field he took the ball right down—although he feinted to pass out to the left wing.

He left Armstrong beaten, and McClure was dashing to the rescue when Dalton paused, collected himself together, and shot.

Slam!

Handforth did his best, and made one wild leap which ought to have met with success. But the ball slipped just out of his grasp, and struck the top netting, to roll to the back of the goal.

"Hurrah!"

"Goal!"

"My—my hat!" gasped Handforth. "That—that wasn't a goal, you know!"

"Good old Dalton!"

The Eastwold fellows yelled with delight, and the crowd of St. Frank's juniors who were looking on cheered, too. For that goal had been an excellent one—well worked for, and thoroughly deserved.

Handforth was about the most disgusted fellow on the field.

"Of course, it was a pure slip!" he said, as McClure looked at him. "Don't glare at me like that, you ass—I couldn't help it! The giddy ball was past me before I knew anything at all!"

"Keep your hair on," grinned McClure. "It's all in the game, Handy. And we've only just started. Plenty of time yet."

There was certainly no reason for us to be disheartened—although, within the next five minutes, Eastwold scored again. This was more by luck than real skill. There was a scramble in the goal mouth, and Handforth was unfortunately bowled over by Armstrong.

And during the momentary confusion, one of the Eastwold forwards backheeled the ball into the net. Handforth, who was on the ground, had no chance whatever. But Eastwold were two up.

"You wait till after the game!" roared Handforth, glaring at Armstrong. "You clumsy fathead! It was all your fault——"

"Sorry!" gasped Armstrong. "I was trying to clear, you know. You butted in the way, and——"

"I butted in the way!" howled Handforth. "Why, you idiot——"

"Now then—dry up!" I exclaimed crisply. "It's no good crying over spilt milk. We're two down—but don't be disheartened."

I was more afraid of this than anything. When a team seems to be in a hopeless position, the fellows sometimes lose heart, and they also lose their dash and vigour. There's not much fun in playing a losing game.

When the match restarted, Dalton and his men were in the highest of spirits, and they went off with terrific dash—with the intention of knocking more spots off us. And I must admit that most members of the St. Frank's team were feeling that we had no chance.

Then our own forwards got busy.

From a well-placed pass by Jack Grey, De Valerie trapped the ball, and then passed neatly to me. We were well on-side, and our forward-line raced up the field like one piece of machinery.

Pitt was on the alert, and when danger threatened me, I lifted the ball out to him, and he returned it with such accuracy that it fell right on Bob Christine's foot.

Crash!

Christine sent in a first-time shot which no goalie could have saved. The leather simply sang into the net, leaving the custodian helpless.

"Hurrah!"

"Goal!"

"Well played, Christine!"

"Well played, Pitt, you mean!" said Christine. "That wasn't my goal—I couldn't help scoring. It was given to me!"

All the same, Christine had nobly seized the opportunity when it had arrived. And now the St. Frank's juniors had received a great buck. They restarted the game with all their old fire and vim.

It developed into a brisk struggle, and the onlookers were treated to a fine spectacle of keen, vigorous play.

There was no fouling, and the Eastwold juniors were now beginning to thoroughly understand that we were a decent team. They understood it still more by half-time. For, from a corner-kick, I managed to head the ball past the Eastwold goalie. And half-time found us on level terms.

"Jolly good!" said Dalton, after the whistle had blown. "This is the stuff, you chaps! I'm sorry we doubted you. Why, you're the best team we've played this season! We've won all our matches up till now."

"We shall be glad to spoil your record!" said Handforth.

"You haven't won yet!"

"My dear chap, it'll be easy!" said Handy. "If I was playing centre-forward you would be two or three goals down——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was allowed to ramble on. And after a short rest, the second half of the game commenced. It proved to be even more exciting than the opening stages. Eastwold scored again after twenty minutes' play—a fast drive from Dalton being more than Handforth could deal with. And it really seemed that our visitors would leave the field victorious.

Try as we would, we couldn't equalise.

With only twelve minutes to play we felt that we should do extremely well even if we forced a draw. But this seemed remote. Again and again Pitt sent over the most beautiful passes—only to see them wasted. Somehow or other, the inside men—including myself—couldn't find the net.

There was no mistake that St. Frank's was doing all the pressing now. But the Eastwold defence was very sound. We couldn't get past it. And when we did shoot for goal, bad luck dogged us.

And then, with only ten minutes to play, Sir Montie managed to get away. He curved inwards as he ran up the field. Then he let fly—a powerful drive which only just missed. The leather struck the crossbar, and rebounded into play. I got my foot to it, and the next second it was past the Eastwold goalie.

"Good old Nipper!"

"We've equalised—three all!"

"And only another three minutes!" I exclaimed grimly. "If we're going to do it, you chaps, we've got to put some buzz into it."

We lined up, Morrow blew his whistle, and I could see the look of grim determination in the eyes of our visitors. They would do their absolute utmost now. If they couldn't score, they would certainly work like demons to prevent us scoring.

Right at the very start De Valerie took a long shot at goal, but this proved disastrous—or nearly so. For the Eastwold custodian kicked down the field so forcibly that the leather fell at Dalton's foot. He sent out a splendid pass to the right wing, the ball was returned, and sent crashing at the St. Frank's goal. But Handforth was ready.

He gave one great leap, and turned the ball round the post. The resulting corner kick failed to bear fruit, and McClure managed to get the leather up the field, and the danger was averted.

Morrow already had his whistle in hand. And Reggie Pitt, sweeping up like a whirlwind, gathered the ball up in his stride, and tore through on his own. I could see that it was a valiant attempt to get the winning goal.

Indeed, there was no time for Pitt to pass, or to try any fancy work. Only a few seconds remained. Both the Eastwold backs attempted to stop Pitt—but he was far too smart for them.

And with only the goalkeeper to beat, he let fly.

Whizz!

The ball went low and true—a really magnificent shot. The Eastwold goalie flung himself at full length, and saved—a splendid effort. But he only succeeded in stopping the ball. It rolled away from him. And Pitt, leaping up, gave one tap which decided the issue.

The ball crossed the line—and a roar went up from the ropes which could be heard all over St. Frank's.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"St. Frank's wins!"

And St. Frank's had won. The teams merely lined up, and kicked off, and the whistle blew. And we streamed off the field, highly pleased with ourselves, Dalton and his merry men were rather disappointed, but their eyes had been opened. They knew our true worth now!

They had been beaten fairly—without a single intentional foul throughout the game. To play football cleanly is to play football well.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARVELLOUS SYSTEM!

"JUST in time for the three o'clock race!" said Fullwood briskly.

The Nuts of St. Frank's had only managed it by rushing. After reaching Bannington on their bicycles, they had been lucky enough to catch a fast train to Helmford. And now they were on the racecourse, and the time was close upon three o'clock. They had plenty of time to put their money on.

The course was crowded.

It was a fine afternoon, and the scene was an animated one. Fullwood & Co. had paid extra to go into one of the reserved enclosures. And even this was well packed. The bookmakers were shouting on all sides.

"Better to come in here," said Fullwood. "We shall be certain of our money—no chance of being swindled by a rotten welsher. I shall bet with a big bookie, an' stick to him."

They looked about, and the most substantial stand was near by. It was a grand affair, with brass fittings, and bore the name of "Sam Riddell, of Clapham," in huge letters. Mr. Riddell was using his voice to good advantage. He was a stout, cheery-looking gentleman.

Fullwood pushed up, and studied the bookmaker's board.

"No giddy trouble with this second favourite business," he said, with a grin. "You can't make a bloomer. There you are—evens Long Jack. He's the favourite, an' no good to us. Three-to-one Sandbag. That's our horse, my sons."

"I don't think much of him," said Bell. "We backed Sandbag two weeks ago——"

"An' he went down," interrupted Fullwood. "All the more reason why he should romp home to-day. I'm stickin' to this system, anyhow. It's the only safe way. We're bound to click sooner or later."

Fullwood went up to the bookie's stand, and soon came back with a little oblong card—a rather gaudy affair, with big numbers on it, and with Mr. Riddell's photograph in the centre.

"How much did you bet?" asked Gulliver.

"Ten bob."

"That's not much," said Bell. "Even if you win, you'll only get thirty."

"I couldn't put more," said Fullwood. "I've got to be prepared for losing, an' if I double up every time it soon runs into a lot of money. There are five races, an' if we lose the first four, I shall have eight quid on the last—which means fifteen-pounds-ten in bettin' altogether. An' I haven't got much more than that."

Gulliver looked doubtful.

"An' if the eight quid goes down, what then?" he asked. "All the club funds——"

"Shut up, you fool!" snapped Fullwood. "Don't talk about that here! An' I sha'n't lose. You needn't get scared. Great Scott! What does it matter to you, anyway?"

"Well, we don't want you to be sacked——"

"Don't talk blitherin' rot!"

Fullwood turned away, scowling, and he studied the race-card. And a few moments later the three o'clock race was run. Long Jack cantered in an easy winner, and Sandbag was unplaced.

"I knew you'd lose," said Bell.

"Oh, don't croak," growled Fullwood. "There's plenty of time."

The second favourite in the next race was a horse named Little Tess, and Fullwood made a bet of one pound—to win. He obtained a fairly good price—six-to-one. And he was very hopeful of winning, for Little Tess was a good horse, and was fancied by several racing experts. Fullwood saw this by studying the early edition of the London evening papers.

The time soon passed, and the three-thirty started.

"They're off!" said Gulliver tensely.

"Good!" exclaimed Fullwood. "Our colours are green an' yellow. You'll see Little Tess runnin' away from the other giddy horses——"

"She's leadin'!" shouted Gulliver. "She's leadin'!"

The horses came thundering along the turf. There was a great hush among the crowd. Then the field went shooting past, with Little Tess an obvious winner. Gulliver and Bell were in high spirits, and greatly excited. Fullwood remained calm.

"I knew she'd win," he said easily. "No. 5—that's Little Tess. You'll see the number come up——"

"Golden Rose wins!" said a bookmaker near by.

"Eh?" ejaculated Fullwood, turning.

"You wait until after the game!" roared Handforth, glaring at Armstrong. "You clumsy fathead! It was all your fault——"

He had brought a pair of binoculars with him—borrowed, without permission, from a Sixth Form study. And Fullwood uttered a growl of disgust as he read off the numbers on the card.

"Three—seven—five!" he said. "Well I'm dashed! Little Tess came in third! I thought she was a certain winner!"

"But she's got a place——"

"What's the good of that when we backed her to win?" demanded Fullwood tartly.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bell. "Why, she was well in advance. There must be some swindle about it. I jolly well know she was the winner——"

"Don't be an idiot!" interrupted Fullwood. "The judges on a racecourse don't swindle. It's always difficult to judge when the gee-gees are flashin' by. I expect the rotten horse stumbled or somethin', just in the last second."

"That's thirty bob gone west!" said Gulliver. "Thirty bob that ain't yours——"

"You—you rotten croakers!" hissed Fullwood savagely. "You've got no more pluck than two lumps of mud! Supposin' the money has gone west? I've got plenty more. Before the afternoon's out I shall have pots of money. Just you see. If you want to make any more grumbles an' growls, you'd better clear off."

Fullwood's chums said no more.

And now the bookmakers were making busy preparations for the four o'clock race. This was the big race of the afternoon on this course, and there were a large number of runners.

The bookies were shouting the odds with great vocal strength, and the punters were putting their money on readily. It was most difficult to pick out a winner with such a large field. But Fullwood was not

worried over matters of this kind. He simply went for the second favourite.

This was a horse called Blue Gown, and he had picked it from the forecast in the racing edition of the London paper. It was far safer to pick the horses in this way, for it was difficult to judge by the bookmakers on the course. The various bookies differed greatly in their prices.

Besides, the second favourite system, as watched by Fullwood & Co. during the past three or four weeks, had always been gauged from the newspaper. So it was only following it up in the right way to do the same here.

So Fullwood put two pounds to win on Blue Gown.

"She's the second favourite, according to the papers," said Ralph Leslie. "An' she's ten-to-one, too! What do you think of that, my sons? If she wins, it'll mean twenty quid for us, in addition to the stake. So we'll be well in pocket."

"You ought to have backed a quid each way!" said Gulliver.

"I don't want any advice," said Fullwood sourly.

The four o'clock race was soon off.

The time seemed to pass very quickly on the course. In fact, almost before Fullwood & Co. could realise that four o'clock had arrived, the crowds were shouting. And then came that same expectant thrill.

The horses swept by with a thud of hoofs, and a flash of various colours.

"Hang it!" snapped Fullwood harshly.

"She hasn't lost, has she?" gasped Bell.

"Yes."

"But—but I didn't see——"

"The blessed horse is a donkey!" said Fullwood curtly. "Right behind, among the last three! Now, don't you chaps croak! I've lost three-pounds-ten, so you needn't tell me! I know it! But I'll get it back before the last race!"

Gulliver and Bell said nothing.

Blue Gown had lost—in fact, the horse had never stood an earthly chance, by the look of it. Probably it had started badly, and this had finally spoilt its chances. Anyhow, the money was gone.

"Only two more races!" said Bell. "Look here, Fully, you'll be mad to double up now. Fancy shoving four quid on one horse! It's mad! Take my advice, an' only shove a quid each way. There's nothin' like safety."

"That's what I say," agreed Gulliver.

Fullwood frowned.

"I've started on this system, an' I'm goin' through with it," he growled. "If a chap loses his pluck, he loses everythin'. Many an' many a fellow has done himself out of a small fortune by goin' into a funk when the stakes get high. But I'm not like that. I'll see the thing through!"

"Just as you like," said Gulliver. "It'll be your giddy funeral if you lose!"

"If you don't like to take my advice, you can jolly well go down!" said Bell.

"I'm gettin' fed up with the whole thing!"

"All you can do is to growl an' growl!" exclaimed Fullwood savagely. "Instead of givin' a chap a bit of encouragement, you do just the opposite. I tell you this system can't fail——"

"It's failed three times this afternoon!"

"It hasn't!" yelled Fullwood. "Why, I've noticed it day after day. Sometimes it's not until the last race—but it always comes off sooner or later. You silly asses! It's all the better if we win now! We shall have a lot more money on—therefore we shall win a lot more."

"Yes, if the horse comes in first," said Bell doubtfully.

"Oh, rats!"

Fullwood turned away, and he studied the newspaper.

"Pictureframe is our horse," he said. "An' you chaps can do what you like—but I'm puttin' four quid to win on him."

"It's your own look out!" said Bell. "I've finished."

Fullwood went up to Mr. Riddell's stand, and his eyes sparkled as he noted that Pictureframe was put down at twenty-to-one. Mr. Riddell stared when Fullwood put four pounds to win on the horse.

"Sure of this, young gent?" he asked curiously.

"Yes."

"Four quid to win, Pictureframe?"

"Yes," said Fullwood.

"All right—if you're fond of backing losers," said Mr. Riddell pleasantly. "I'm not making any objections to raking in four quid. Here you are, my lad—it don't matter if you lose it!"

He handed Fullwood the ticket with a grin, and Fullwood strolled off. Gulliver and Bell had heard the little conversation, and they did not know how to smile. They looked at Fullwood in a rather scared way.

"There's another four quid gone!" exclaimed Gulliver. "Why, even the bookie jeered at you. He didn't want to take the money at first——"

"You fools!" said Fullwood curtly. "Can't you understand? The bookie didn't want to take it because he stands a chance of paying out eighty quid! I shall keep my giddy eye on that stand."

"He won't run away!" said Bell. "All I can say is that you're a mug to bet four quid on a rotten outsider. Far better back the favourite two-to-one an' be pretty certain——"

"The horse isn't an outsider!" interrupted Fullwood. "It's second favourite in bettin' in the London papers. Hallo! There you are! He's altered the price! I thought he would! Only fifteen-to-one now!"

"Well, that's a good sign," admitted Gulliver.

They waited in a kind of fever until four-thirty arrived. And then it seemed that an age had passed before the shout came.

"They're off!"

"Thank goodness!" muttered Fullwood. "We'll soon know now."

He and his chums watched. Fullwood was trying to remain calm and impassive. But, try as he would, he couldn't manage it.

He was excited, and worried.

If this horse went down, there was only one other race left—and it would be a terrible risk to put eight pounds to win on one horse. But it was the only thing to be done. He had to stick to the system.

But he was hoping against hope that Pictureframe would win.

And then the horses came thundering by. It was a small field—only seven horses running. And this ought to have told Fullwood that Pictureframe was not much good—otherwise the price would not have been so high.

The horse came past fourth—and finished fifth.

Fullwood looked absolutely crushed.

"I—I thought it was goin' to win!" he muttered. "Well, I don't care! I'm goin' the whole hog now!"

Gulliver and Bell looked thoroughly scared this time.

"Chuck it up, old man!" said Gulliver earnestly.

"I'm not goin' to!"

"But can't you see that your luck's right out?" asked Gulliver. "It's no good fightin' against Fate. You've been losin' all the afternoon, an' it's a dead certainty you'll lose on the last race, too."

"The last race is always uncertain," said Bell.

Fullwood set his jaw doggedly.

"I'm goin' through with it," he declared.

"But——"

"I'm goin' through with it!"

"Don't be an ass, Fully——"

"I'm goin' through with it!" said Fullwood, for the third time. "If you rotters try to say anythin' more, I'll walk away. Ever since we came you've done nothin' but sneer an' growl. I'm fed up with you! The next time I come to a race meetin', I'll leave you behind!"

His chums dried up.

They had only spoken because they were worried because it scared them to see him betting so rashly. If it had been his own money he would not have risked it in this way. Even Fullwood, reckless though he was, very seldom had a bet of more than a pound.

And then, too, he nearly always picked a favourite, and bet for a place as well as a win.

Gulliver and Bell were quite keen on a little flutter themselves, but when money was put on at this rate it took all the fun out of them. They didn't like it at all. But Fullwood ignored them.

"I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he muttered. "What difference does it make, anyway. I'm seven-pounds-ten down already! I can't make it up, an' I might as well risk the other eight quid. If I lose, I'll stand the racket. If I win, we shall be O.K."

"What's the name of the horse?" asked Bell.

"Theodora," said Fullwood.

"What!" exclaimed Gulliver. "Theodora's ten-to-one! It's an outsider! The second favourite on Riddell's board is only three-to-one——"

"I don't care about Riddell's board—I'm goin' by the paper," said Fullwood. "An' ten-to-one's better than three-to-one, any day."

For one minute he hesitated, and then he took his courage in both hands and strode forward. He wasn't going to back out now! If he lost his courage, and only put a miserable pound on, the horse would win! That was just the way of things. So Fullwood was determined to go right through with it. Although he was several kinds of a cad, he had plenty of will power.

So he put eight pounds to win on Theodora.

Again Mr. Riddell stared.

"What's the game, young man?" he asked. "Eight quid to win on Theodora?"

"That's what I said," replied Fullwood.

"Right you are—just as you like," said the bookmaker. "I stand to lose eighty quid, but I'm a sportsman! Take my advice, and put the money on Winter Lily. I'll offer you six-to-one, and you'll have a good chance of clicking."

Fullwood shook his head.

"I want the money on Theodora," he insisted.

"You won't touch the Winter Lily?"

"No."

Fullwood received his ticket, and felt slightly better as he joined his chums. He even found it possible to grin.

"Did you hear that?" he asked. "Riddell offered to put the money on Winter Lily! A bookie, mind you! That jolly well proves he expects Theodora to win."

"Rats!" said Bell. "If he expected Theodora to win, he wouldn't be offerin' ten-to-one. You've shoved your money on a stumer."

"All right—you see."

Again came that wait—which seemed so interminable. The course was much clearer now, for a large number of people had not waited until the last race. It is quite possible that many of them had no more money left.

But at length came the signal.

"Hurray!" hissed Gulliver. "They're off! Now we sha'n't be long!"

"Yes, we shall go home broke!" said Bell.

Fullwood uttered no word. He knew that the colours of Theodora's jockey were red and green. And he was watching for them with a fever of anxiety which he had never previously known. He had not believed it possible that he could be so worried over the result of a race.

He could hardly contain himself.

For everything depended upon this minute.

If he won, he would be in luck's way—he he would have money to throw about, as he so dearly loved. But if the horse lost, the heavens would crash down. He would be utterly and absolutely finished.

He had talked confidently to his chums about faking up a burglary to account for the lost club money. But his own common sense told him that a ruse of that sort would never succeed.

Even if the police were fooled, Nelson Lee wouldn't be fooled. Lee was on the premises, and would soon jump to the truth. Fullwood's reputation was none too good—and Fullwood was aware of this. He hardly knew what he would do if Theodora failed to win.

He wouldn't think of it.

He made up his mind that Theodora had to win. There was no question of it. He couldn't look upon any other possibility.

And then, before he could let his mind wander further, the horses came tearing past, their hoofs thundering upon the soft turf. One horse was leading by a clear length—and the jockey wore red and green!

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Bell. "Theodora's leadin'!"

"So she is—so she is!" muttered Fullwood tensely. "It's goin' to win—I know it! It's bound to win! The system can't go wrong—it never goes wrong! We'll win, you chaps!"

"They're past the winnin' post by now!" said Gulliver thickly. "It's all over—one way or the other! But Theodora was winnin' all right—she was goin' like a giddy streak of lightnin'! A ten-to-one outsider! By gad!"

Fullwood held his glasses so that he could read the numbers when they came up. His face had an unhealthy flush, and he could hardly hold the glasses steady enough to see.

Then suddenly he became rigid.

"Number three's the winner!" he shouted, in a cracked voice.

"Number three!" panted Gulliver. "Are—are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure—three—seven—one!" said Fullwood. "They're the first three. By glory! An' number three is Theodora!"

"Then—then you've won!" gulped Bell.

"Of course I've won!"

"It—it's too good to be true!" said Bell. "Eight quid on a horse at ten-to-one! Why, you've won eighty quid!"

Every ounce of Fullwood's confidence returned.

"Of course!" he said calmly. "Eighty quid, my sons—an' that fat bounder can afford to pay it, too. He's been rakin' in money like dead leaves all the afternoon!"

Gulliver and Bell could hardly contain themselves. They were flushed and excited. They were absolutely trembling with the whole thrill of it. After taking it for granted that Fullwood was going to lose all the club funds, he had not only recovered all his losses, but had won a small fortune.

He could replace the funds, and still have over sixty pounds. It was almost too marvellous to be real. But that is just the way with betting. One may become comparatively rich in a minute.

"An' now to collect the cash!" said Fullwood pleasantly. "I'll bet old Riddell will be sorry to see me."

"He'll be sorrier when he has to pay out!" grinned Bell.

They went up to the bookmaker's stand in a body. Mr. Riddell was paying out a few small punters, and he affected to take no notice of Fullwood as the latter pushed up.

But at last the others were cleared away, and Fullwood handed up his card.

"Eighty-eight quid, please!" said Fullwood.

Mr. Riddell stared hard.

"None of your little jokes, young man!" he said gruffly. "You clear off."

Fullwood started.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "I backed Theodora, an' I've got eighty-eight quid to come!"

"You'd better think again, my lad!" said the bookmaker pleasantly. "You backed Winter Lily, unless I'm mistaken, and Winter Lily came in fifth! Now sheer off before things get unpleasant!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD stared at Mr. Sam Riddell, and all the colour fled from his cheeks. For one flashing instant he wondered if he had, indeed, backed Winter Lily. But it was only for a second.

He knew that he had put his money on Theodora.

"You're wrong!" he exclaimed hotly. "What's this game? You know well enough that I backed Theodora! I came into this enclosure because I thought I should be able to back with a reliable bookmaker——"

"If you say anything against me, young man, there'll be trouble!" interrupted Mr. Riddell angrily. "I always pay—Sam Riddell's never been known to do the dirty on anybody! If you backed Theodore, I'll pay you. I'm a straight man—the straightest on the whole course!"

"In that case, you'll pay," said Fullwood. "I don't want to be nasty, but you scared me for a minute. You've made a mistake, that's all. You did talk about Winter Lily, but I didn't put the money on Winter Lily."

"All right, we'll soon have this clear!" exclaimed Mr. Riddell grimly. "Jim, let's have a look at that book. I'm not having these youngsters saying things against me with other folks listening! And they

needn't think they can come round with any yarn they like!"

Quite a little crowd had collected by now, and they had been listening to the altercation with interest. Fullwood was feeling better. He knew that Mr. Riddell had made a mistake. He had certainly backed Theodora—and the book would prove it, for the clerk had entered the bet down in the ordinary way.

"Yes, here we are," said Mr. Riddell. "Eight quid to win, Winter Lily!"

"What!" shouted Fullwood hoarsely.

"In black and white!" said the bookmaker.

He held the book up, with his finger on a certain place. And not only Fullwood, but a number of other people, including Gulliver and Bell, could see that the entry was made out for Winter Lily. Fullwood stared at it, and breathed hard. He was pale with consternation and fury.

"It's a lie!" he shouted wildly.

"What the thunder——"

"It's a rotten lie!" yelled Fullwood. "You twister—you thief! I put the money on Theodora, and, as soon as Theodora won, you must have rubbed the entry out and substituted Winter Lily. It's a filthy trick to swindle——"

"One more word, my lad, and I'll call a policeman!" exclaimed Mr. Riddell hotly. "If you think you can accuse me——"

"Yes, you'd better get off while you're safe, my lads!" said one of the spectators.

"But—but I put the money on Theodora!"

"That sort of game won't work!" said the man. "I'm not particularly in love with bookmakers myself—I've lost thirty bob this afternoon. But this kind of game won't work. You can't expect the man to pay out when you didn't back the horse!"

"I did back it!" howled Fullwood. "I've got to draw over eighty quid——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd roared with laughter.

And Fullwood and Co. found themselves pushed away from the vicinity of Mr. Riddell's stand. They stood some little distance away, and Fullwood tried to collect his scattered wits.

"I say, we're going to clear off!" muttered Gulliver. "Everybody's takin' notice of us, an' we might be recognised. Fancy you makin' a bloomer like that, Fully."

"What do you mean?" snapped Fullwood harshly.

"You put the money on Winter Lily——"

"You mad fool!" snarled Fullwood. "I put it on Theodora!"

"But it's in the book——"

"Yes—in pencil!" panted Fullwood. "That rotten thief rubbed the entry out as soon as he saw that Theodora had won! He knew that he'd have to pay eighty quid, an' so he adopted that trick! Only a few people backed on the last race, an' he was able to do it. By gad! But I'm not finished with him yet!"

"I say!" said Bell. "Are you really sure about this?"

"Of course I'm sure!"

Fullwood was fairly panting with anger. And, certainly, he had every cause for fury. He had put the money on Theodora, and Theodora had won. Even so, he had lost the eight pounds!

This was one of the delightful risks of betting on horses.

He had picked a winner, and he had a big sum to draw. And yet, owing to the rank dishonesty of this bookmaker, not a penny would be forthcoming. Surely this ought to have convinced Fullwood, more than anything else, of the utter futility of backing horses.

It was a mug's game—a fool's practice. There was absolutely no certainty of getting any money. Even if he won, probably the bookmaker wouldn't pay. And there was no redress.

The only certainty about betting was that the money went. It was very doubtful if any ever came back. Only fools back horses. Even those who have an occasional bet generally come out on the wrong side at the end of the season. It is impossible to beat the bookmakers.

"This—this means that everythin's gone!" said Gulliver dully. "What the deuce will you do, Fully? I mean, about that money? You've got to put that eighteen quid back. They'll want the club funds on Monday. I heard one of the fellows sayin' this mornin' that there was goin' to be a meetin'——"

"I've got the money—an' tons more!" panted Fullwood. "This—this rotten swindler has got to pay me yet! If he thinks I'm going to stand by and take this kind of thing lyin' down he's mistaken!"

"You'd better come home with us——"

"I won't!"

"But it's no good tryin'——"

"Go home by yourselves!" snarled Fullwood fiercely. "You're nothin' but a pair of rotten cowards! If you had any pluck you'd help me to expose this chap!"

"Expose him? How can you?" asked Gulliver. "The crowd won't believe a word, and if we apply to the police it will be just the same. We can't prove anythin'!"

"Besides, we should only get our names taken, an' all that sort of thing," put in Bell. "An' then there would be inquiries at St. Frank's. It would mean the sack for the three of us. The chap won't pay, so the best thing you can do is to come home with us."

Fullwood grunted, and went back to Mr. Riddell's stand. It was now being pulled to pieces and the crowd had disappeared. Mr. Riddell paused, and took a big cigar out of his mouth as Fullwood approached.

"What do you want?" he demanded curtly.

"You know what I want?" replied Fullwood. "I want eighty quid from you, an' I'm going to have it!"

"If you don't clear off, my lad, I'll call a policeman quick!" thundered Mr. Riddell.

"Of all the infernal nerve. Coming round here expecting to pull off a fool trick like this!"

"I put my money on Theodora!"

"That's enough!" interrupted the bookmaker. "I'll give you just one minute to clear!"

Even Fullwood realised the hopelessness of the position.

It was quite useless for him to remain—for Mr. Sam Riddell was very obviously a scoundrel. And if Fullwood remained he would only make things worse. He had to force himself to the conclusion that the money was gone—and that he would never get any of it back—or any winnings, either.

Fullwood turned away, sick at heart. Even now the full realisation of the whole thing had not come to him. His brain seemed dull. The shock was really too much for him, all at once. If the horse had lost it wouldn't have mattered so much. But it had won! And, after being in the seventh heaven of delight, he was now cast down into the depths of despair.

And he still had to pay the price of his folly!

He had to put eighteen pounds back. That money belonged to the Remove Football Club, and it would be required on Monday. Eighteen pounds had seemed a mere trifle to Fullwood a short time earlier—just a little proportion of the eighty he had won.

But now, suddenly, the figure seemed enormous.

Where could he get eighteen pounds from? How was it possible for him to obtain such a sum in time for the football club meeting? It was, of course, out of the question. And Fullwood knew what would happen if the fund was not forthcoming. The matter would be reported to the Housemaster—and then to the Head.

And after that the whole thing would come out.

It would mean exposure—disgrace—expulsion!

Fullwood gritted his teeth with fury and savage hatred. And it was all because of this swindling bookmaker! That was what Fullwood told himself. He didn't realise that the fault was entirely his own—for having had the dishonesty to touch the money in the first place.

Like many another, he had been certain of getting the cash back. But now it was too late. The panic which had been rising within him died down. He felt desperate. And he was resolved that if he fell, he should not fall alone.

Gulliver and Bell had been with him—and they should share his disgrace.

Fullwood was not one of those generous individuals who would admit his own fault, and shield his companions. He would rather take glory in the fact that they should be dragged down with him. Why, indeed, should he suffer alone? Why should he allow them to go free?

He found the two juniors by his side—although he did not remember joining them. They knew exactly what had happened, for they had been standing fairly close by. And instead of sympathising, and offering him their condolences, they adopted another attitude.

"It was your own mad fault—right from the start!" declared Gulliver, in a kind of panic. "We told you what would happen—we knew it! Eight quid on a horse! Why, it's absolutely insane——"

"Of course it is!" put in Bell frantically. "An' now that money's gone, an' you won't be able to put it back! There'll be an inquiry, an' all the facts will come out."

"Of course they will!" snarled Fullwood. "Oh yes! All the facts will come out, you miserable worms! You'll be drawn into it too! You'll be shoved on the carpet, an' I'll take good care that you cop out!"

"You—you rotter!" shouted Gulliver thickly. "It was your scheme all along—we didn't want to come here—you know we didn't! It was your idea right from the very start——"

"Don't snivel!" snapped Fullwood. "If you chaps had shown a different kind of spirit I might have won! But you've been nothin' but wet blankets all the afternoon! An' you'll get the same as me!"

"Oh, shall we?" grated Gulliver. "We'll see about that! Bell an' I will deny that we ever came to the rotten place! It'll be your word against ours, an' we haven't got such a reputation for dyin' as you have!"

"You—you——"

"Besides, you're captain of the Remove, an' the club funds were in your possession—not ours," went on Bell bitterly. "We don't have to answer for anythin'. Besides, I thought you said it was all right? I thought you said you'd make up a burglary——"

"Don't be such idiots!" said Fullwood hotly. "That's no good—you ought to have had sense enough to know it. You can clear off—I'm fed up with the pair of you! I don't want to see your beastly faces any more."

Gulliver flared up.

"All right—we'll go!" he shouted fiercely. "You can dashed well get out of this mess yourself! It's your trouble, anyway!"

"Of course it is!" said Bell. "We've finished with you!"

They walked off, leaving Fullwood staring after them with glittering, burning eyes. His fists were clenched, and his teeth set. Even his own chums had deserted him. He didn't realise that he had practically driven them away.

He felt that he could get hold of any object and smash it to atoms. Anything to relieve the fearful rage which surged within him.

And he walked off the racecourse, and made his way to the railway station. But he went slowly, and just missed a train for Bannington—a train which carried Gulliver and Bell. And Fullwood had to wait an hour for the next.

And he was so utterly lost in his bitter thoughts that when the train got to Bannington he sat there and continued his way onwards to Bellton—quite forgetting that his bicycle was in the town.

When he got out of the train at Bellton it was growing dusk. The sky was overcast, and one or two fine spots of rain were falling. The very evening was depressing in the extreme.

There seemed to be nothing which could possibly bring a spark of hope to the miserable junior.

He had had flutters before, and he had lost as much as three and four pounds at a time.

But never had he lost such an amount as this—particularly when it was money which did not belong to him. This money was the property of the Remove. He was the captain of the Remove, and the cash had been placed in his care. And now it had vanished! And he had no means of putting it back.

A number of juniors had already remarked about the fact that Fullwood was not the kind of fellow to trust money to. Indeed, at the forthcoming meeting it was going to be suggested that a special treasurer should be appointed, so that the Form captain would not be bothered with the financial affairs of the club. On Monday, however, it seemed that no treasurer would be necessary!

The exposure would come—and then the crash.

Fullwood walked from the station to the village, wondering dully—turning over all sorts of wild and impossible schemes in his mind. He thought of everybody he knew, wondering if it would be possible for him to borrow such a sum. But his commonsense told him that there was not a soul to whom he could turn.

He might borrow a pound here, and a pound there—but eighteen, never! And even if he was only a fiver short, the trouble would crop up just the same. He would have to explain.

He felt desperate—absolutely maddened with despair. And soon after he had passed through the village another thought came to his head—a thought which was even more horrible than any of the others.

His father had once told him that if ever he got himself into trouble, and disgraced the name of Fullwood, he would be turned off. He would be sent away from home as though he were an outcast. His father had sworn that he would never allow him to enter another school.

And Fullwood knew that his father had been serious. If this exposure came about, it would be the final smash. There would be no going up to Oxford for him—no future of any sort. It was like the end of all things. And this had come about owing to his insane folly. His vanity was at the bottom of it, for he had liked to boast that he was rich. And he thought that he could get money easily by backing horses with the Remove funds. But he had found out to his cost that even if he put the money on the right horse—which was purely a matter of luck—he had to reckon with the honesty of the bookmaker before he would see his money again.

Just then Archie heard a gurgling gasp. And turning, he was suddenly startled to see a head protruding from the water about ten yards from the shore.

And now he was broke—and he couldn't replace the stolen cash.

Just for a few minutes Fullwood went into an absolute panic. Everything seemed to be closing in upon him—to his distorted mind it seemed that hands were clutching out of the gloom. And the river suddenly had an awful fascination for him—for he was walking home by the towing path, and the Stowe flowed swiftly and silently by.

And he was just at the point where the water was deep—deep, with treacherous currents. In that panic he hardly knew what he was doing. In all probability it would have passed over in a few minutes—he would have gained his right sense of proportion again.

And then he would have gone to the school, and would have schemed in his old cunning way—desperately trying to avert the coming catastrophe.

But he didn't get over that point.

He saw the river—he saw nothing but blackness and disgrace ahead. And with a wild cry, half of rage, and half of terror, he leapt to the bank.

Then with one splashing plunge, he went into the deep water, and disappeared below the surface.

This was the price of his folly!

CHAPTER VIII.

ARCHIE'S WAY!

"WHAT-HO! What-ho! Sundry drops of wetness, and all that kind of stuff!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "Dash it! I mean to say, this is somewhat fearful, and so forth!"

Archie was just coming out of the post-office in the village, and he had been thoughtless enough to venture out without a mackintosh or an umbrella. But the rain was only very slight, and Archie needn't have worried.

However, he decided to get off home by the shortest cut—and this, of course, was by the towing-path. Those few drops of rain were to mean the saving of Ralph Leslie Fullwood's life.

Archie hastened along at a pace altogether faster than his usual elegant mode of travel. He was wearing a favourite suit, and the thought of this suit getting soaked made him shiver slightly. And any moment the rain might increase. One glance at the sky unnerved him.

"I mean to say, this is positively poisonous!" he muttered. "Huge quantities of inky clouds in the offing, and all that! How the dickens can a chappie exist in such a filthy climate? The whole thing is most frightfully frightful. Absolutely! But here goes—a huge dash, as it were."

And Archie proceeded to dash.

He gathered himself up, and trotted along the towing-path as fast as his patent leather boots would permit him. And then out of the gloom came a curious kind of sound.

It was like a cry of sheer anguish and terror.

And it seemed to come from a point just beyond some willows ahead. Archie peered through the gloom, but it seemed to him that he was utterly alone. He paused, and jammed his monocle into his eye.

"This, as it were, is decidedly strange!" he murmured. "The old wail, and all that! Floating on the breeze, so to speak! It seems to me that some poor chappie is in the most awful kind of ag.!"

Seeing nothing of an alarming nature, he went on again.

He peered straight ahead, and did not even think of looking towards the river. But just then he heard a gurgling gasp. And turning, he was utterly startled to see a head protruding from the water about ten yards from the shore. The face was white and drawn and terrified. An arm broke through the water and splashed wildly.

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie, his monocle dropping.

One glance had been sufficient to tell him that somebody was in bad trouble. He didn't recognise the face. He had no idea, in fact, that it was the face of a St. Frank's fellow.

But he did know that he was required to do something.

And Archie with all his peculiar ways, was a fellow of action when it came to the point. Without wasting a second he waved his hands as a signal to the drowning figure in the water.

"Hang on, dear old laddie!" he shouted. "It's all serene—I'm here. Absolutely on the old spot! It seems to me that large lumps of rescue stuff are required. Well, here goes, so to speak. The good old trucks are finished, but no matter!"

He dived in promptly, and struck out with powerful strokes across the deep water. He could feel the current tugging at him below the surface.

For at this point the current was very deadly. There was a kind of undertow which had the effect of dragging inexperienced swimmers down. And Fullwood was was not famous for his swimming.

Archie, however, was like a fish in the water. He reached Fullwood's side in a very short time, and grabbed the desperate junior by the back of the neck. And Fullwood was now clinging to life with a desperation which was frantic.

The shock of the cold water—the fear that he would die within a few seconds—had brought him to his wits with a jerk. And now he was striking out weakly and feebly.

He knew that he could not save himself—he knew that it would be death.

And then, when all hope seemed gone, Archie had appeared. The genial ass of St. Frank's seized Fullwood, and held him up.

"Well, that, as it were, is that!" gasped Archie. "Absolutely! It's all right, laddie—kindly cease the old struggles! Archie will yank you to the good old land! Everything is frightfully O.K.!"

"I—I'm drownin'!" gulped Fullwood wildly.

"My dear old scream, you're doing nothing of the sort!" said Archie. "The idea is not only absurd, but absolutely ridic.! If you will cease the gyrations, everything will be top-hole! I mean to say, that's better! That, in fact, is the real stuff! Good lad! Now we're on the go!"

Fullwood had ceased struggling, and Archie made his way towards the bank with deliberate, powerful strokes. By this time he had seen the identity of his companion. It came as a bit of a shock to him, but it made no difference to his actions.

And at last he managed to get Fullwood ashore.

The leader of Study A was breathing hard. His face was deathly white, and he looked just about spent. But, after all, he had not swallowed very much water. The cause of his condition was mainly fright.

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "Here

we are, old bean! Pull for the shore, sailor, and so forth! There's absolutely nothing to get the wind up about! Of course, we're baily wet, and so forth, but a chappie has to——"

"You—you saved my life, Glenthorne!" muttered Fullwood thickly.

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "That is, of course, don't be prepos.! A mere helping hand, old lad! I don't mind telling you that I think you're a most fearful person, but there you are. A chappie can't let another chappie buzz down into the depths without shoving forth the assisting fist, what?"

"I—I meant to kill myself!" said Fullwood.

"What? What? But, really, old thing——"

"I tell you, I did!" said Fullwood fiercely, his eyes still burning. "I meant to finish it all—but as soon as I got into the water I wanted to live! Oh, Glenthorne, I—I'm done!"

Fullwood buried his face in his hands. He was soaking wet, but he didn't care. And the juniors were not likely to come to much harm, for the evening was mild, with practically no wind.

Archie looked at his companion very queerly.

"I mean to say!" he said. "What? You, as it were, deliberately hurled the old carcase into the wetness?"

"Yes!" muttered Fullwood. "I wanted to finish it all!"

"But, my dear old onion, the whole thing's priceless!" observed Archie, shocked. "I mean to say, what a perfectly ghastly scheme! Hurling yourself into the flowing tide, as it were! I can't help thinking, laddie, that you're in some particularly poisonous predic.!"

"I—I'm ruined!" moaned Fullwood brokenly.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Pray confide in me, old lad. Trot forth the yarn, and Archie will listen."

Fullwood was not himself yet. He still felt panicky, and he also had a feeling of intense gratitude towards Archie. It was most unusual for Fullwood to have such feelings. But even the worst of us have their good points—and their good moments. Just now Fullwood was like any other boy.

"I I've lost all my money!" he muttered brokenly. "Everythin'! I went to the races this afternoon, an'——"

"But that's fearful!" said Archie severely. "I mean to say, a chappie who goes backin' horses is really a fearful cad! Of course, no offence, old darling! But there you are! I'm forced to speak the old mind. So you've been hurling money into the pockets of various bookmakers, what?"

"The the rotten scoundrel——"

"Absolutely!" put in Archie hastily. But there you are, laddie. If you don't want to lose your money, you mustn't deal with the blighters. Absolutely not! It's a foul proposition, if you grasp the old trend. But what about it? I mean, hardly bad enough to do the old river business——"

"It—it wasn't my money—it wasn't my money!" said Fullwood desperately. "I had eighteen quid—do you hear? Eighteen quid?"

"A somewhat formidable sum, as it were!"

"It was the club fund, Glenthorne!" muttered Fullwood. "The money belongin' to the football club, you know! It was in my charge. I'm skipper of the Remove, and —an' I took it to use for —— Oh, but why should I tell you?"

Archie considered for a moment.

"Well that, as it were, is somewhat extraord.!" he admitted. "Why, I mean to say? Most unexpected from you, laddie. But still, in moments of stress a chappie does strange things. But I say! I say! I say! The club funds, what? That's most horribly fearful!"

"I—I'm ruined—I shall be sacked!"

Fullwood sobbed with remorse and terror. He was absolutely unnerved. He only knew that somebody was here—somebody he could babble the story out to. Under any ordinary circumstances, Ralph Leslie would have cut a finger off before admitting such things to Archie Glenthorne.

But now he was desperate—he hardly knew what he was doing or saying. And, after all, he was only human.

"I say—buck up, you know!" said Archie. "Of course, we're getting frightfully chilled. In fact, we're positively insane to stay out here, old thing. But what about it? I mean, what about this cash? Eighteen pounds of club money, what? You seized it, so to speak, and dropped it into a bookie's bag?"

"The—the man swindled me——"

"Well, there you are!" interrupted Archie. "A chappie has to be prepared for such things when it comes to betting. But the cash has gone? Absolutely trickled away and staggered forth? That, I take it, is the posish?"

"Yes," muttered Fullwood. "An' I I couldn't stand it, Archie! I knew that there would be an inquiry—I knew that the Head would know all about it. An' an' then I should be sacked! The pater will get to know, an' he'll turn me off ——"

"My dear old onion, kindly desist!" said Archie. "Betting is a most frightful piece of rot. Chaps who bet are nearly fit to go into the jolly old luny bin. I mean to say, they're candidates for Colney Hatch, and so forth. The fact is, you ought to be baily well whipped!"

"Oh, don't growl at me!" moaned Fullwood. "I shall be flogged, in any case—an' an' then sacked! Oh, it's—it's——"

Fullwood couldn't continue. He sobbed convulsively—too unstrung to take a good hold on himself. And Archie looked at him with a sort of compassion. Archie didn't like Fullwood, but to see him in this

condition was a revelation. And Archie's heart was very soft.

"Buck up, old dear!" he said softly. "Dash it all! I mean to say, this makes a chappie feel most frightfully uncomf.! And you've made a bloomer. In fact, I might say with truth, that you've made a most frightful bloomer. You're absolutely off the rails, old bean."

"I—I don't know what you mean——"

"Well, the fact is, about the club funds," said Archie. "What priceless rot! Gadzooks! You're dreaming, laddie. The bally old funds are intact. Absolutely! Tucked away in the old what-do-you-call-it that is to say, the cash-box!"

Fullwood looked at Archie dully.

"I—I don't understand!" he muttered.

"But, my dear old sportsman, it's most frightfully clear," said Archie. "I take it that the jolly old funds are contained in some kind of a beastly box?"

"I—I kept the money in my desk—in a little cash-box."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "And that box is in your desk now?"

"Yes, but it's empty."

"Absolutely not!" put in Archie. "Eighteen quid, I think you said, laddie? Eighteen of the best, what? Well, as a matter of absolute fact, and between you and me and the little birds, the cash is there. To be precise, the cash is positively intact!"

Fullwood looked at Archie, and his heart gave a great leap. An expression came into his eyes which caused Archie to turn away—it was a look of hope, of wild, wonderful relief.

"You—you mean——"

Fullwood paused, gasping.

"I mean, old son, that we've got to buzz along like the very dickens," said Archie. "Dash it all! The old glad rags are positively clinging to me like the deuce! We've got to make distinct tracks for St. Frank's. And after you've changed, just stagger down into your study, and I shall be most frightfully surprised if the good old cash-box is still empty."

Fullwood understood.

"Oh, Archie you—you don't mean it!" he muttered brokenly. "I—I didn't expect anythin'——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "But, that, of course, is beside the point. This affair, laddie, is between ourselves. Just you and I and that's all. I mean to say, there's no need for a chappie to go hurling chunks of unnecessary information around."

"You—you mean that you'll say nothing!"

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "I'm an easy going kind of hounder, and talking is a most bally bore. So why talk? You get me?"

(*Continued on next page.*)

"I—I didn't think you were such a real brick!" muttered Fullwood. "This—this will save me from disgrace—from expulsion! An' I'll remember it, Glenthorne! I'll never do anythin' like it again."

Archie helped Fullwood to his feet. The leader of Study A was still rather unsteady, and it was nearly dark. But by the time the pair had got off at a trot towards the school they were feeling much better in every way. Fullwood began to recover some of his old spirit.

He had passed through a time of horror in the river—for he had thought that death was certainly upon him. And now the whole horizon was clear and bright. Archie would let him have the money. The danger was averted. And for once Fullwood found gratitude within him.

"I—I don't know what to say!" he muttered, as they trotted along. "I've never done anythin' to make you like me, Archie."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "To be quite exact, old bird, I've always considered you to be a particularly foul proposition. That, of course, is speaking plain. But a chappie needs to remove the old gloves when it comes to a thing like this. Absolutely! You grasp the trend?"

Fullwood nodded.

"Well, that, so to speak, is something," said Archie. "If a chappie realises it at times, he can't be absolutely fearful all through. But I must say that horseracing and betting is a frightfully rotten sort of game."

"I—I know it!"

"So there you are—we'll say no more!" went on Archie. "But there's just one little thing, old chappie. I hate to mention it. The old tissues wither at the thought, but it's got to be done. It's an unpleasant sub., but I must be firm. To be exact, about the captaincy, what?"

"You—you mean I must resign?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie promptly.

Fullwood gulped.

"Of—of course, I'll do it!" he said huskily. "After—after this, I can't refuse. I'll resign, Glenthorne, an' ask Nipper to take over the captaincy."

"Well, that's absolutely topping," said Archie. "And just one other little thing, old sport. It pains me to bring it up, but it's got to be done. About the fortune, what? The rolling in quids stuff? That, I take it, is off?"

"I—I was trying to fool the chaps," muttered Fullwood.

"Dashed unwise!" said Archie. "And don't forget, you've got to broadcast the old news that there's no fortune. That, I mean to say, is most essential. Absolutely! You agree?"

"Yes!" whispered Fullwood.

They had just come within sight of St. Frank's, and they hurried as quickly as possible across the playing fields, until they were in the Triangle. By great good fortune they managed to get into the Ancient House without being observed. For most of the fellows were in their studies, or in the common room, owing to the spitting rain.

Fullwood went into the dormitory, and Archie into his own little bedroom. As a rule, Archie took a long time over dressing, and he generally had Phipps—his valet—to help him.

But on this occasion he beat his own record. He had changed his clothing completely and was downstairs before Fullwood. He hurried straight to the Remove passage, and entered Study A.

He had been half afraid that Gulliver and Bell would be there—but the study was empty. Two minutes later Archie emerged, smiling urbanely. Then he went upstairs again to put the finishing touches to his attire.

He met Fullwood on the landing.

"All serene, old lad!" he smiled. "You gather the trend?"

Fullwood was looking pale and shaky.

"Yes, I—I think so," he said quietly. "I—I don't know how to thank you, Archie—you've done too much——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Cheerio, laddie!"

He passed on, and Fullwood went downstairs. He had recovered his composure, but was a changed being. His soaking had not done him much harm, and in all probability he would suffer no after effects.

In the lobby he met Gulliver and Bell. They looked at him curiously.

"Come into the study!" said Fullwood quietly.

They went. Even Fullwood himself trembled a little as he took out the cash box and opened it. There, in a neat pile, were eighteen pound notes. Archie Glenthorne had made up the loss, and had saved Fullwood from disgrace. There was no reason why Archie should have done this—but it proved his generous, kindly nature.

. . . . . .

Soon afterwards, in the common room, Fullwood surprised everybody by saying that he wished to resign the captaincy. He came to me and asked if I would become Remove skipper as of old. Archie was there, and I saw him nodding and smiling to himself. I knew that something unusual had happened, but I made no inquiries.

And now it seemed that things were to go on in the old way. But had Ralph Leslie Fullwood learned his lesson?

Personally, I was doubtful!

THE END

Nipper's Magazine

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BACKING GEE-GEES!

By REGINALD PITT.

BACKING gee-gees is, of course, an ancient and time-honoured institution. The number of people who have made fortunes by putting money on horses could easily be counted on one hand. The number of people who have lost fortunes by backing horses couldn't be counted by the ears of corn in a wheatfield. That's just the difference.

Then, again, those lucky fellows who make tons of money by backing winners, nearly always lose the aforementioned tons by backing losers immediately afterwards. There's no doubt about it, it's a great game—for those people who want to find a quick road to poverty.

We'll imagine, for example, that we're on the racecourse. Thousands of people, bright sunshine, jollity and large chunks of life. This, of course, is imagination. The reality is sometimes rather more depressing.

Our pockets are full of money, and we suddenly come upon a gentleman who is standing on a box performing a somewhat peculiar ceremony known as shouting the odds.

With much persuasiveness, he invites you to "have a bit on." You listen to him, and then you study the race card, and the bookmaker's board. After a while, you come to the definite conclusion that Jazz Lightning is absolutely a dead certainty for the two-thirty. You study the horse's form—not literally, but according to its past performances.

And there's no question about it, Jazz Lightning is the best horse in the race. By putting ten shillings each way on Jazz Lightning you are positively guaranteed a return of five pounds odd. There can't be any question about it.

Of course, your calculations are somewhat upset when Jazz Lightning trickles in about half an hour after the rest of the field. The bookmaker doesn't mind. He wouldn't—he's got your quid. And very shortly afterwards he gets another quid, because you put another ten shillings each way on Green Thunder. This gee-gee is a favourite, and you're only certain of about thirty shillings. Still, you get your pound back, and you make up the loss on the first race. Then you can start afresh. The idea, as you can see, is perfectly simple.

Green Thunder, being a favourite, is bound to win, because favourites have been winning for the past week. Naturally, Green Thunder comes in fourth—just because you backed it. So, instead of being in pocket, you're exactly two pounds out of pocket.

The next move, according to traditional custom, is to plunge. This system is generally fatal—but everybody tries it. You've lost two quid—therefore you back heavily on the three-thirty in order to recover. If you're born under a lucky star, you might. But the chances are you'll go down again. This means only a faint jingle in your pocket

Then, perhaps, you'll risk your shirt with dire consequences if it comes on to rain.

Finally, you take out your last bit of cash, and shove it on the final race.

This means, without question, that you'll either have to walk home, or pawn your watch. Sometimes this is not possible, as your watch is already pawned. Then, perhaps, you'll risk your shirt with dire consequences if it comes on to rain. And so you go home and call yourself unlucky. You say that things will be better next time. When next time comes, it happens all over again.

And they wonder why bookmakers are a cheery crowd!

THE THORNTON HEATH MYSTERY.

A Thrilling Adventure of Trackett Grim, the Famous Criminal Detective.

By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

The Stolen Diamonds.

THE big racing-car drew up with a jerk outside Trackett Grim's magnificent residence in Baker's Inn Road, London. The September evening was perfect, and the man who jumped out of the car was pale, shaky and altogether he looked pretty rocky about the knees.

He dashed up the steps, five at a time, and gave a terrific peal at the bell. In a flash the door was opened by a sharp-featured youth who whisked the visitor upstairs to the great detective's consulting-room. Splinter, Trackett Grim's assistant, did not believe in wasting time.

"Mr. Grim—Mr. Grim!" shouted the visitor, as he dashed in. "I've lost ten thousand pounds' worth of diamonds! You must recover them!"

Trackett Grim laid aside his blackened briar, and wrapped his dressing-gown more tightly round his tall, athletic figure. He took out his magnifying lens, gave the visitor one swift scrutiny, and tossed the lens aside.

"Your diamonds are as good as found!" he said calmly. "Any man who comes to Trackett Grim is certain of success. What I don't know about detecting could be scratched on a pinpoint! The facts, please—quickly!"

"My name is Joshua Hankerspike, the famous millionaire," said the visitor. "An hour ago I was crossing Thornton Heath in the dusk. Two figures loomed out of the fog, stopped my car, and robbed me of a bag of diamonds worth twenty thousand pounds! I want you to recover them, Mr. Grim."

"Enough!" cried Trackett Grim. "I will succeed! Good evening! Come, Splinter—we must be off!"

On the Wide Heath.

In a trice, the famous detective and Splinter were in their own racing-car, tearing towards Thornton Heath. Trackett Grim was at the wheel, and the great car roared through London at sixty miles an hour.

"You didn't get any details from Mr. Hankerspike, sir!" said Splinter.

"Details!" sneered Trackett Grim. "A man of my ability needs no details! A real detective can discover things without details!"

And Splinter lay back, dumb with admiration.

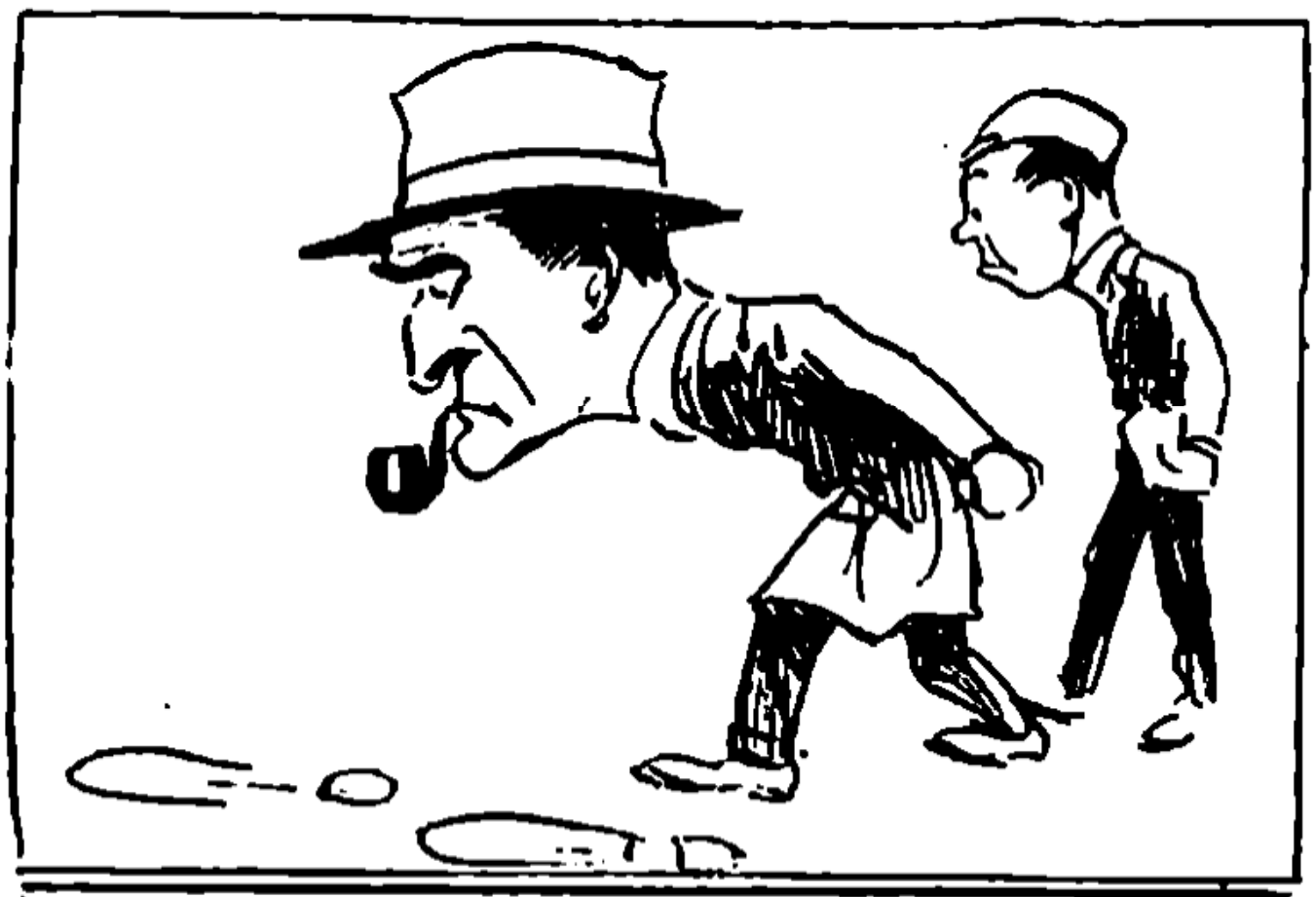
And in less than ten minutes they were at the outskirts of Thornton Heath. The great, wide stretch of moorland lay before them, undulating and picturesque, mile after mile, rising hills visible in the far distance*.

The car dashed towards the middle of the heath, but Trackett Grim was obliged to go cautiously, for the thick fog enshrouded the road, which was bordered with gorse and heather.

Suddenly Trackett Grim jammed the brakes on and leapt out.

"Ha, ha!" he cried triumphantly. "See! Footprints!"

There, on the ground, were the tracks of two sets of feet. Trackett Grim and Splinter hurried off over the heath, following these tracks. To any ordinary eye they were invisible, but Trackett Grim was never at fault.



There, on the ground, were the tracks of two sets of feet.

And, soon, a strange building loomed up out of the fog. It was a great wooden structure, set there on the deserted part of the heath. There were no windows, but a shaft of light shot upwards through the clear atmosphere from a skylight.

"The diamonds are here!" said Trackett Grim curtly. "Wait, Splinter! I will have them in about two shakes of a lamb's tail!"

And with these stirring words, Trackett Grim gave one mighty leap, and landed on the roof. And then misfortune came upon him—unexpectedly and violently. So great was his strength, so keen his determination, that he was carried through the air in one great leap. And, instead of alighting on the roof, he plunged headlong through the skylight before he could check himself. He fell with a crash and a thud.

Splinter clutched at the air, dumb with horror.

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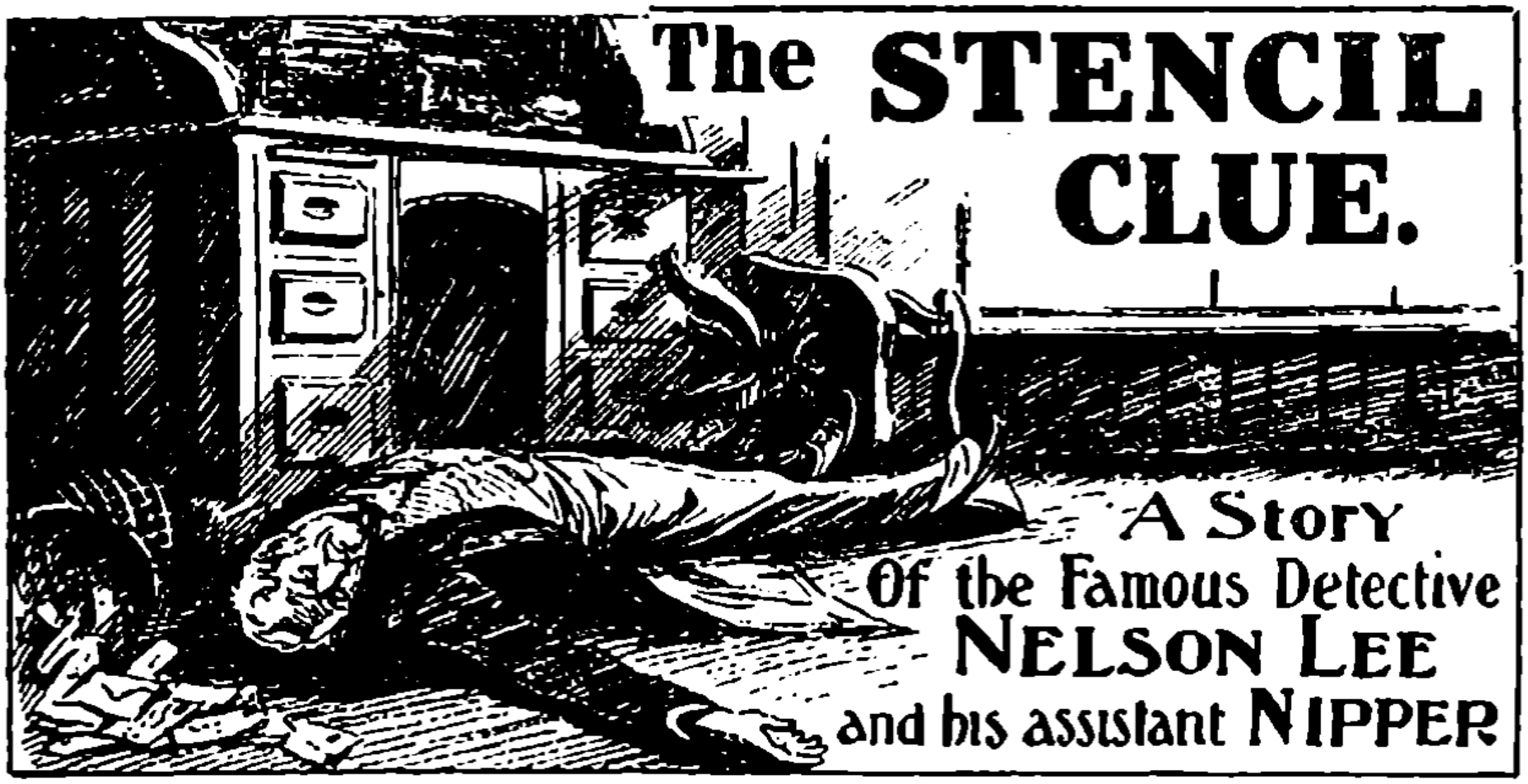
* *Handy has evidently never visited Thornton Heath. As far as I know, it is a thickly-populated area, alive and bustling, with no sign of a heath whatever. It doesn't do to judge by the name of a place!*—ED.

(Part 2 of this stirring mystery will appear next week.)



The STENCIL CLUE.

A Story Of the Famous Detective NELSON LEE and his assistant NIPPER

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE LIGHT OF A MATCH REVEALED!

THROUGH the open window of old John Ladbrook's private office, situated in a building close to Lime Street, Liverpool, floated the medley of sound always to be encountered in a busy city.

The shrill of a locomotive's whistle, the jarring and grinding of carriages or trucks being shunted, could be heard at the adjacent station. Out in the street, directly facing the office, arose the hoarse cries of newsboys selling a final edition, mingled with the rumbling of traffic and the warning "honk, honk!" of some motor vehicle.

Yet, quite undisturbed, John Ladbrook, who for some forty years had been head of this important import business, sat writing busily at his desk.

It was a Friday evening and the 11th of August, and the old man was anxious to get his work cleared up in order that he might shoot grouse on the morrow with an easy mind.

He was a keen shot and, as well as the well-equipped private establishment he kept up in a residential part of Liverpool, he possessed a shooting box some thirty miles from the city, where every year he was wont to celebrate the opening of the season with a house party.

At length, John Ladbrook finished the entries he had been making in his private ledger and laid aside his pen. He ran his hand through his rather scanty white hair and, with a smile playing about his firm lips, took up a telegram that lay before him.

"Delighted to accept your invitation"—It ran—"Will be with you this evening with Nipper—Nelson Lee."

"And I am delighted he has found time at last to make one of my yearly shooting party," the old merchant murmured, half-aloud. "It must be three years ago since I last saw Lee—when he regained the Whistler stolen from my private house. It was a good idea of mine to invite him to join me there, prior to going to the shooting box. It will give me another night with him and I'll induce him to yarn to Kenneth and myself about some of his recent cases."

He sat for a moment, thinking of the famous London detective, whom, as the reader will have realised, he had invited to make one of his guests at the forthcoming shoot.

After Nelson Lee had cleared up for him a case involving the loss of a valuable picture, the detective and the merchant had become very good friends and each year that had elapsed since John Ladbrook had sent an invitation to join his shooting party to Nelson Lee. Until now, however, the investigator had found himself too busy to be able to leave town.

John Ladbrook's keen old eyes wandered to two guns which stood in the corner of the office.

One was his, the other belonged to his nephew, Kenneth Cartwright, who was his right hand in the business and, who, as his marriage had been childless, the merchant looked upon almost in the light of a son.

The guns had been brought to the office on the previous day by Kenneth, with the idea of taking them to a nearby gunsmiths to be cleaned and overhauled. But, a rush of work had prevented the young man from taking them to the shop and his uncle, who was an expert where any sort of shooting-piece was concerned, had said that he himself would attend to them.

"I must look to those before I leave for home," John Ladbrook murmured. "I wonder how long Kenneth will be engaged at the shipping company over those bills of lading?"

As if in answer to his thought, the door leading from the general office opened and there entered a handsome, dark-haired young fellow of about five and twenty.

"The query about the last shipment from America is settled, uncle," he said. "The shipping company were in the wrong."

The old man nodded and Kenneth Cartwright seated himself at a table on the other side of the room, upon which stood a "Royal" typewriter. He typed a couple of letters, signed them and, ringing a bell, handed them to an office boy to include in the night's post. Then, he sat before the empty machine, his fingers idly toying with the ribbon manipulator and his brows drawn together as if in thought.

"Uncle, I wonder if it would inconvenience you at all if I did not join you at the shooting box until Saturday night or Sunday?" he said suddenly, as he rose to his feet.

The old merchant bent his gaze upon him and his strong, clean-shaved face grew stern.

"New Brighton again?" he enquired, in a meaning tone.

Kenneth Cartwright started and flushed.

"Yes, but how did you know, uncle?" he asked.

"I have known about your foolish infatuation for the girl at the Grand Hotel for some days, Kenneth," the old man retorted, with a dusky flush of slowly-rising anger stealing into his cheeks. "I used to wonder why you were always slipping away there on Saturdays and Sundays, but I did not dream of the truth until a certain friend acquainted me with how you have been hanging about her. Look here, my lad, I have other ideas for you in the direction of matrimony and it has got to stop. I do not intend to have a barmaid brought into the family."

Kenneth Cartwright's eyes flashed indignantly.

"Barmaid? She is no barmaid, uncle!" he cried angrily. "She is in the reception desk and Mary Barrie is one of the most refined and sweetest girls you could hope to meet."

"I do not wish for that honour," his uncle snapped, with a sarcasm he regretted almost immediately he had been guilty of it. "You know well enough that it has always been my ambition to see you and Lord Seton's daughter make a match of it and——"

"Please stop, uncle!" Kenneth said coldly. "I like the lady you mention as a friend, but nothing more, whereas I love Mary and I intend one day to make her my wife."

John Ladbrook jumped to his feet with a snort of rage.

"Oh, you do, do you!" he thundered. "You would make this nobody, this hotel employee, the future mistress of my house, without the least thought as to my wishes! By heavens, she shall never fill that capacity, for, as sure as you give her your name, I will alter the will that now leaves my business and my private fortune to you and cut you off without the proverbial shilling, you ungrateful scamp!"

By this time, Kenneth was as angry and indignant as his uncle and he raised his voice, as he retorted, so that it carried to the clerks in the general office.

"Keep your confounded money!" he cried, a little wildly. "It shall certainly never induce me to marry a woman I do not love and, come what may, I will not throw over the lady at whom you see fit to sneer."

"Lady?" John Ladbrook began. "A girl employed in an hotel, who probably flirts with any and every young fool who comes along and——"

"Take those words back, uncle!" Kenneth blazed, his fists clenching, as he took a sharp stride forward. "Take them back, or——"

"Or what?" John Ladbrook enquired. "You forget yourself, young man! Would you dare to raise your hand to me?"

"No I would not do that, uncle—I respect you too deeply," Kenneth said, his voice suddenly quiet, as he turned on his heel. "I think I had better leave you. It is useless to continue this discussion, for my mind is made up. Money or no money, I shall marry Miss Barrie, if she will do me the honour of becoming my wife!"

The clerks eyed him furtively and curiously, as, having snatched up his hat, he flung open the door of the private room and strode into the general office. He quitted that, slamming the door after him and the clerks heard him make his way through the hall of the building towards the street.

One by one the employees of John Ladbrook closed their desks and went home, until the offices were empty save for the old merchant himself, who still sat in his private sanctum.

"Have I been too harsh with the boy?" the old man was murmuring, as he jerked himself out of the reverie into which he had fallen. "I seem to remember quite a nice little girl in the reception desk of the Grand, when I was over there a fortnight ago. If she was Mary Barrie, I must say the lad's taste is good and well, youth will always call to youth, as long as the world goes round."

It was an hour later that a wire fused and all the lights in the building abruptly went out. The housekeeper and the cleaners, who had come in to tidy the various offices, procured candles in order to carry on whilst an electrician made good the defect.

An elderly woman, a broom in her hand, opened the door of John Ladbrook's private room with a master key and entered. She set a candle upon the table where the typewriter stood and, then, struck a match.

Next moment, the charwoman had started back with a horrified scream, the match dropping from her nerveless fingers.

For, its flickering light had revealed a grim sight. Stretched prone upon his back on the carpet lay old John Ladbrook, a terrible wound in his throat!

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL OF NELSON LEE.

"STATION House! This is the place, guv'nor. I suppose we shall find the police in possession."

It was Nipper, Nelson Lee's assistant, who spoke and he and his famous master had halted outside the building in which the Ladbrook offices were situated.

On arrival at John Ladbrook's private residence, they had been horrified to learn that a tragedy had occurred at the merchant's offices, which had robbed him of his life. For, when the charwoman had summoned assistance, it had been found that the old man was quite dead. His nephew's gun lay on the carpet beside him and the wound in his throat had been caused by the contents of a cartridge fired from the weapon.

"Yes, the police are sure to be on the spot by this time, Nipper," Nelson Lee nodded, as they made their way into the entrance hall. "Poor old Ladbrook! I wonder how it happened—if it was an accident, suicide or murder?"

"Hardly suicide, after the cheery letter he sent you a few days ago, guv'nor," objected Nipper, shaking his head. "He was in good spirits enough then, anyway, and looking forward to the opening of the grouse shooting season.

The electric power had been restored and Nelson Lee and Nipper were attracted to the scene of the tragedy by the shaft of light which issued from the private office of the dead merchant.

A police constable stood at the door, but he saluted and stepped on one side respectfully, as he glanced at the visiting card Nelson Lee showed him.

A uniformed inspector and a plain clothes detective were within the office, in company with the dead man's manager, a rather nervous little man named Ferguson, who had been summoned from his home. John Ladbrook still lay near the chair before the table on which stood the typewriter, though the gun that had laid him low was no longer beside him but lying on the table, for the police had been examining it.

There was no need for Nelson Lee to introduce himself, for he had some slight acquaintance with both the inspector and the detective from the Liverpool police station.

"Well, what's the verdict, Phillips?" the famous detective enquired of the plain clothes man, after giving the body of his friend a quick, all-embracing glance.

The Liverpool detective shrugged his shoulders.

"It's murder, Mr. Lee, I fancy," he answered grimly. "According to Mr. Ladbrook's manager here, there was a violent quarrel between the old gentleman and his nephew, Mr. Kenneth Cartwright, late this afternoon and"—his tone grew significant—"the old man was killed with the nephew's gun."

Nelson Lee looked grave. He remembered Kenneth Cartwright and, although he had judged that he might be quick-tempered at times, he had hardly thought him capable of so dastardly a deed as this, and he felt horrified.

"Have you made an arrest?" the private detective queried.

"Not yet," was the reply. "Cartwright is nowhere to be found, but I have had a warrant issued and have it in my pocket now. By the way, he inherits the business and the old chap's money, as things stand now. But Mr. Ladbrook threatened to alter his will during the row, so that Cartwright had everything to gain if he died quickly. I do not expect it will be long before we get him."

There happened then a surprising and dramatic thing. A quick step sounded in the entrance hall and the very man of whom they had been speaking thrust his way past the constable on guard and entered the office.

"What is this about my uncle?" he asked. Then, as he saw the lifeless form upon the floor, he drew his breath in sharply and recoiled, his face blanching with horror. "Good heavens! How did this happen?" he cried hoarsely.

For a moment, the detective from the Liverpool station was silent, his keen eyes searchingly studying the young man's working face.

"I think you might be able to say that better than we, sir," he snapped. Then, as he moved forward and dropped his hand upon Cartwright's shoulder: "It is my duty to arrest you on suspicion of having wilfully murdered your uncle, John Ladbrook. I must warn you that anything you say may be taken down in writing and used at your trial in evidence against you."

Kenneth Cartwright appeared dazed for a moment. Then, a horrified cry burst from his grey lips.

"You—you are mad!" he gasped. "I certainly quarrelled with him, but I would not have harmed a hair of his head. I——"

"I have warned you, sir," the detective reminded him, "that——"

"I need no warning, for I am innocent," Kenneth Cartwright cried, almost fiercely. "I suppose you think that I returned and murdered him, when the clerks had gone, but I must have been miles away when this terrible thing happened. I was worried and pained over my quarrel with him, for he has been more than a father to me since my own parents died many years ago, and

I walked and walked, thinking our hot words over, until I had left the city behind and was out at Aintree, near the race-course."

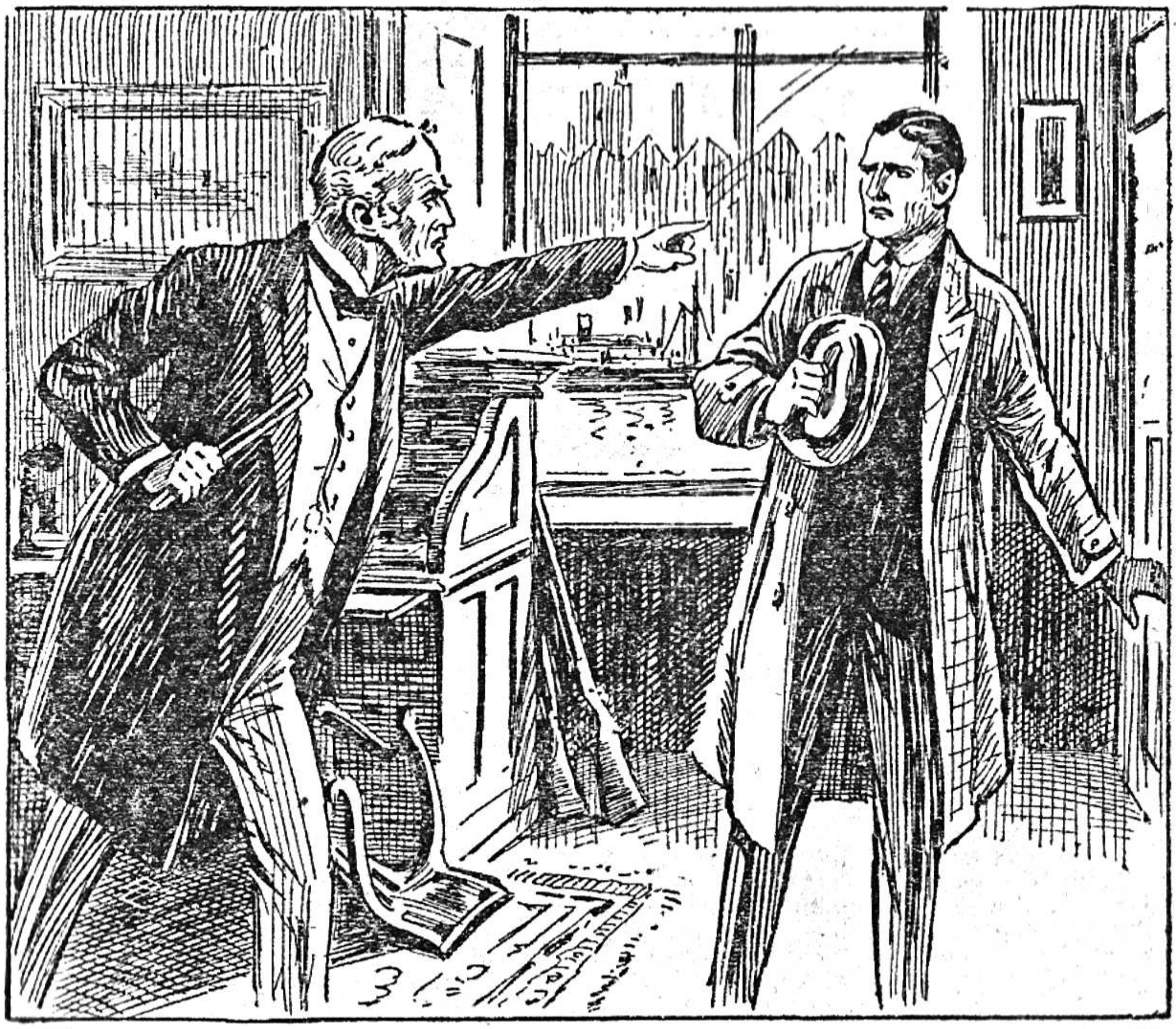
"Ah, perhaps you met someone there you know?" enquired the inspector, though it was sceptically.

"No, I didn't," Kenneth Cartwright had to admit. Then, as he looked again at his dead uncle—"This is awful! I can see how black everything looks against me and there seems no way of proving that I did not return here and kill him."

"You will have to accompany me to the station, Mr. Cartwright," the detective said. "I'll leave you in charge, inspector."

Nelson Lee looked after Kenneth Cartwright as, like a man in a trance, he allowed the detective to conduct him from the office, en route for a cab the policeman had been given a signal to fetch.

During the young man's avowal of innocence, the London investigator had been closely studying him and he felt that Kenneth Cartwright's story had been true and that he had been nowhere near the office at the time his uncle had met his death, as he declared. Nelson Lee was a keen judge of character and, somehow, to him Kenneth Cartwright had not looked like a guilty man.



"I will alter my will and cut you out, you ungrateful scamp!" declared the enraged merchant.

The detective dropped to one knee and minutely inspected the wound in the merchant's throat, which was inclined to be beneath the chin at the left-hand side, the shot having entered there and lodged in the nape of the neck.

"What was the medical opinion?" Nelson Lee enquired. "Did the police surgeon think that death was instantaneous?"

"He said probably not—that the deceased might have lingered and even been

conscious for some time after the wound was inflicted," answered the inspector. "The wound missed the jugular vein, you see, Mr Lee."

The detective nodded, but made no verbal comment. He rose to his feet and inspected the chair before the table, on which there were traces of blood. He noted that there was blood, too, on the keys of the typewriter, which had been left uncovered; whilst, as his eyes fell on the ribbon manipulator, he saw that it was pushed over to the word "Stencil," so that the ribbon was thrown out of action.

Nelson Lee's glance next went to some business papers lying in a pile beside the machine. Upon these was a blank sheet of the firm's headed notepaper—at least, it was blank save for the scrawling signature of John Ladbrook which appeared near its foot.

The detective stooped and picked up from the floor a fountain pen, with which he thought it likely the signature had been executed. His brows contracted in puzzlement, then he concluded that John Ladbrook had signed his name on the letter paper, whilst having the pen in his hand and had intended to type something in above it. He might have been prevented from doing this by someone—not necessarily his nephew—who had entered, taken up the gun and shot him.

For a further quarter of an hour, Nelson Lee remained on the scene of the tragedy, inspecting the contents of the office and evidently thinking deeply. Then, without making any comment upon his investigations, he wished the inspector "good-night" and left with Nipper.

"Well, guv'nor, what do you make of it?" the latter asked eagerly, as soon as they were in the street. "Do you think young Cartwright did it?"

"Somehow, I do not, Nipper," Nelson Lee returned, shaking his head. "There was a ring of truth about his statement of walking out as far as Aintree, thinking over his quarrel with his uncle. The difficulty is to prove him innocent, supposing he is so. The circumstantial evidence is very black against him."

Nelson Lee booked rooms for himself and Nipper at the North Western Hotel, adjoining Lime Street Station. He remained within doors all through the next day, smoking innumerable pipes and cigarettes and scarcely speaking a word. His drawn brows and the manner in which his lids veiled his keen eyes, as he drew at pipe or cigarette, told Nipper that his brain was hard at work on the problem of John Ladbrook's death, so that the lad at no time ventured to break in upon his thoughts.

The day following had been fixed for the inquest, at which Nelson Lee learned Kenneth Cartwright would be present in custody, he having been brought up in the police court and remanded.

It was within a few minutes of the proceedings being due to start that the detective suddenly tossed away the cigarette he was smoking, bounded up from his chair and brought his clenched fist thudding into the palm of his other hand.

As Nipper looked up from a newspaper he had been reading with a start, he saw that Nelson Lee's eyes were shining with an unwonted excitement.

"Nipper, Nipper, I have been blind!" he cried. "Get away to the inquest at once, if you wish to see the conclusion of this case. I will follow you and I shall surprise the coroner and the jury, unless my calculations are all wrong. Why did I not realise the significance of that signed sheet of blank notepaper before? Please heaven it has not been destroyed. A man's life hangs upon it!"

CHAPTER III.

THE INQUEST—A STARTLING REVELATION—THE END.

THE inquest upon the body of John Ladbrook was almost over.

The thrill of excitement that had run through spectators and jurymen alike when Kenneth Cartwright had been led in, in custody, was forgotten, as was the damning evidence of Mr. Ferguson, the manager, and the several clerks, who had overheard the violent quarrel between the accused man and the deceased shortly before the tragedy.

Nipper removed his eyes from Kenneth Cartwright, who stood handcuffed, between two detectives, and transferred his glance to the pale, yet sweet face of a dark-haired girl of about twenty, who sat in the front row of the seats allotted to the public.

Nelson Lee's assistant had heard the sharp, agonised breath the girl had drawn when Kenneth Cartwright had been brought in and she had seen the gleaming handcuffs upon his wrists. She had sat forward in her seat and raised the veil that had hitherto partially hidden her face; and bravely she had stilled the trembling of her lips and smiled encouragingly at the prisoner.

That she was Mary Barrie, the girl whom Cartwright loved and over whom the hot words had arisen, Nipper was certain, and he felt terribly sorry for her. It was plain that she would remain loyal to Cartwright to the last, no matter what the rest of the world thought of him.

The coroner was summing up the evidence for the benefit of the jury and Nipper glanced anxiously towards the door. Where was Nelson Lee? he wondered. Had the

paper he had apparently rushed to the late John Ladbrook's office to seek been destroyed, so that whatever evidence it held in Kenneth Cartwright's favour was gone for ever?

"You have heard the evidence of the manager and clerks of the deceased as to the quarrel that undoubtedly took place between him and the accused on the day of the tragedy," the coroner was saying. "You have also listened to the accused man's statement of having been as far out as Aintree at approximately the time when the deceased must have met his end. It is now for you, gentlemen, to decide whether you will bring in a verdict of wilful murder—there is scarcely a doubt that Mr. Ladbrook's death was that—against the man already in custody or against some person or persons as yet unknown."

The jury conferred together in lowered tones, then the foreman rose to his feet.

"Mr. Coroner," he said, "we are all agreed. We decide for a verdict of wilful murder against Kenneth Cart——"

"Stop!"

The ringing voice that came from the doorway drowned the little cry of mental anguish that had broken from the lips of Mary Barrie. All eyes were turned towards Nelson Lee as, holding a sheet of paper in his hand, the famous detective strode to the coroner's table.

"Pardon this interruption, Mr. Coroner, but it was more than necessary, as the jury were apparently about to bring in a verdict against the man in charge of the police," the detective said. "Mr. Ladbrook's death was not wilful murder! He died by accident!"

There was a buzz of excitement, then a tense, expectant silence.

"When I paid a visit to the office of the deceased shortly after the arrival of the police," he said, "I took rather particular notice of a typewriter standing upon the table near where the body lay—took note of it because there were traces of blood upon the keys. I must here mention that I saw that the little lever connected with the ribbon attachment was thrust over to the word 'Stencil,' thus throwing the ribbon out of use. For the benefit of any member of the jury not conversant with a typewriter, I ought to explain, perhaps, that when the ribbon manipulator is so adjusted, the type does not strike through the inked ribbon, as in ordinary typewriting, but straight on to the roller, so that waxen stencils can be cut for duplicating purposes. I noted these points, gentlemen, and then my eyes fell upon this sheet of Mr. Ladbrook's business paper, which you will see bears his signature near the foot. Now, at the cost of making both the table and my fingers in a mess, I am going to indulge in an experiment."

Speaking the while, Nelson Lee laid the sheet of letter paper on the coroner's table and produced from his pocket a small package, which, to the surprise of those who watched, proved to contain lamp-black, which he must have purchased at some oil-shop on his way to the court.

Nelson Lee emptied the lamp-black over the signed sheet of headed paper and rubbed the black powder well into it. It was blackened, but the indentations Nelson Lee had spoken of now stood out, plain and white, in contrast.

As he passed the paper to the coroner, the latter uttered an exclamation of excitement he could not suppress. For the impressions formed a message—a message a dying man had left behind him for the world to see.

"I was about to clean my nephew's gun which I did not suspect had had a charge left in it," it read. "The lights suddenly went out and, with the room plunged in darkness, I stumbled against a chair and the gun was discharged by its trigger coming into contact with the edge of the table. I am terribly wounded and feel that I cannot live. I am leaving this statement, in case my nephew, Kenneth, should be suspected of causing my death on account of the recent quarrel between us, a quarrel I now bitterly regret. May he be happy with the little girl he loves." (And then followed the signature the merchant had scrawled with the fountain pen he had doubtless carried in his pocket—"John Ladbrook").

"This means, Mr. Lee," exclaimed the astounded coroner, as he passed the message to the jury to inspect, "that after the gun had accidentally exploded, though dreadfully wounded, Mr. Ladbrook contrived to stagger to the chair before the typewiter and to leave this message, but, because of the darkness, he was unaware that the ribbon was not in action?"

"Precisely!" Nelson Lee agreed. "He collapsed after he had signed the statement and was thus found stretched upon the floor beside the gun that had killed him. I suppose the verdict will now be 'Accidental Death' and that the gentleman accused of murder will be entirely exonerated?"

"I think the jury will agree," the coroner answered, with a smile. "I offer my congratulations to Mr. Cartwright upon being so thoroughly cleared."

* * * * * * * * *

Kenneth Cartwright could not find words in which sufficiently to thank Nelson Lee for what he had done on his behalf. But, the detective had his reward, when he witnessed the meeting between the young man and Mary Barrie, after Kenneth had again been brought up in the police court and formally discharged.

The love light and the happiness in the girl's eyes were good to see and remained in the famous detective's memory for many a long day to come.

THE END

The NEW USHER

BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF Tom Tartar at School

EVERY BOY SHOULD READ THIS ABSORBING STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE!

FIRST CHAPTERS.

Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor at Wrasper's School, is a man of angelic appearance, but behind his innocent exterior there lurks something foreboding and mysterious. Shortly after his arrival at the school his alleged uncle comes to stay with him. Tom Tartar, the leading spirit at the school, makes some startling discoveries concerning the new usher.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XLI.

Snacks Takes Refuge Up the Chimney.

SNACKS could do big things when he thought there was no danger, and he was perfectly sure in his own mind that there was nobody about.

He gave the bag of provisions to Winks, who, with his friends, retired to the school wall to await the result of the daring venture.

Snacks, with his hands in his pockets, went round the side of the house, opened the gate, and passed into the garden.

The moment he had done so he heard the front door of the house open and the voice of Wooden Jerry addressing his companions.

"Here, what are you doing here?" he demanded. "Clear out, or it will be the worse for you."

This was bad enough, but a good deal worse had to come.

Jerry, instead of returning to the house, came towards the garden, and the sound of his footsteps sent the alarmed Snacks down its paths at a canter.

He turned round the back of the building and saw an outhouse, into which he plunged for refuge.

It was a sort of outside kitchen, probably used in case of emergency, or in the summer-time, when a fire in the principal kitchen was not desirable.

There was a big iron kettle on the grate, but there was no fire.

On one side of the place stood a knife-cleaner, but no other sign of fitting or furniture.

"Here's a blessed mess!" thought Snacks. "What shall I do? Oh, here he comes!"

Wooden Jerry was coming on leisurely, whistling, as usual, his movements accompanied by a faint rattling of steel.

Snacks, terrified half out of his wits, ran to and fro like a rat in a pit, and finally, as Wooden Jerry drew near, bolted for the chimney.

Any port in a storm, and any hiding-place in a moment of great peril. Snacks only did what hundreds of others might have done.

It was a big, wide chimney, and two or three feet up there was a ledge, on to which he scrambled, dislodging a lot of soot.

A moment after Jerry entered the place and sniffed; then he said aloud:

"More soot down! We must get that chimbley swept."

He put down a knife-box he carried under his arm, from which the rattling of steel emanated, and after a long rest, set to work cleaning the contents.

He was not at all in a hurry—he never was—and proceeded at a snail's pace to fix in the knives and turn the handle.

There were a lot of them to clean, and it took him quite an hour to get through with his job, but even then he did not go.

Instead of departing he filled a pipe and lit it, smoking for a while with the true relish which attends all surreptitious enjoyments.

Snacks sat in his hiding-place, clothed with misery—and soot—as with a garment.

Even if he succeeded in getting away, he was in such a filthy state that he could not traverse the highway.

The best thing for him to do was to wait for the night, and then make his escape.

But what a long time it was to sit up there, without anything to eat or drink!

Jerry didn't worry himself even when his pipe was finished, but hung about, whistling and singing in a low tone, until the voice of Jane was heard.

"Jerry! Jerry! Where are you?"

"Where am I?" replied Jerry, picking up his knife-box. "Where should I be but doing my work?"

Jane came into the outhouse and immediately smelt tobacco.

"Smoking again, Jerry?" she said. "I've a good mind to tell missus."

"It's the only comfort I get now," sighed Jerry. "Don't be too hard on a broken man."

"Be off with you!" said Jane. "And I want that kettle. I asked you three days ago to bring it indoors."

She hurried across the outhouse, and was about to pick up the kettle, when the unhappy Snacks sneezed.

Jane stepped back in amazement and terror. Looking round, she saw that Jerry was gone.

"As I live," thought the girl, "somebody's up the chimney! It must be burglars!"

She got out of the place as fast as she could, and hearing the voices of the boys as they poured out into the playground, hastened in that direction.

Close by the garden gate she found Baynes, the carpenter, having a chat with Sam Smith and George Hammerton.

"Oh, come quick, please!" she gasped. "There's a burglar up the kitchen chimney!"

Tom had an old riding-whip in his hand, for the purchase of which he was just then negotiating with Baynes.

"A burglar in the day-time, Jane!" exclaimed Baynes. "Show him to me, and I'll burglar him!"

He began to roll up his sleeves, as they all followed Jane, who was now getting over her first fright.

Entering the kitchen, Baynes made for the stove, and stooping, looked up the chimney.

Sure enough, he saw the dangling feet of Snacks.

"He's there, right enough!" cried Baynes, then called up the chimney:

"Hi, you villain! Come out o' that! Drop down, and let's see who you are!"

But this invitation Snacks was not disposed to comply with. Instead of doing so, he tried to draw his feet up on to the ledge.

"Well, if you won't come down o' your own accord, I s'pose I must pull you down!" announced Baynes.

He whipped off his apron, got into the grate, and, thrusting his arms up the chimney, just succeeded in reaching the feet of Snacks.

Then he gave a jerk, and down came Snacks with about half a bushel of soot!

"Got him!" cried Baynes triumphantly. "Go and fetch the constable, somebody!"

"Ow—ow, please don't do that!" whined the soot-covered Snacks. "I didn't mean to do any harm!"

"Crumbs!" yelled Tom, recognising the voice. "It's Snacks!"

And then off into shrieks of laughter went the boys and Jane; while Baynes peered closer at the sooty one.

"Yes," he said, after his scrutiny. "It's that self-same young varmint o' Bouncer's as I went to rescue from the old well, and wasted me time an' spiled me clothes in so doin'! What was you up to in that there chimbley?"

"I went there to hide!" moaned Snacks.

"When?" put in Tom.

"Some time this morning—but it seems like a week ago!" was the reply. "I came into the garden for a lark, and hearing somebody coming, bolted in here. Whoever it was, has been cleaning knives, and smoking all the time!"

Another yell of laughter greeted this dolorous explanation.

"Well, just come outside and show yourself!" said Tom. "The other chaps will like to have a look at you. You're a perfect picture, Snacky! Come along!"

"You let me alone, you beast!" said Snacks sullenly. "I'm not going to be made a show of! I'm going home through the fields, where nobody will see me."

"Oh, no you're not, Snacky!" answered Tom. "You've got to be taught a lesson! So out you come, into the playground! Just pop out, Sam, and tell the others that His Serene and Dusky Highness, the Rajah of Sootypore, is about to appear amongst them!"

Sam Smith dashed out, and Tom gave Snacks a flick of his riding-whip.

"Geo up, Rajah!" he commanded. "The chaps mustn't be kept waiting!"

"I tell you, I won't go!" shrieked Snacks.

"And I tell you that you've got to go!" said Tom, raising his whip again.

Snacks saw that resistance would be useless. With a snarling threat at Tom, he made a rush from the kitchen into the playground, intent on gaining the shelter of Bouncer's Academy at the earliest possible moment.

The waiting boys outside greeted his appearance with yells of delight, but none of them attempted to impede his progress. Snacks was much too grimy to be grappled with.

He fled like a frightened hare out of the playground and towards the village, followed by the laughing boys, and finally disappeared through Mr. Bouncer's gate.

The Wrasper boys gave him a parting cheer, and then returned to the school-

house, well pleased with the gratuitous entertainment which Hautleboy Snacks had provided them.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Secret Revealed.

THAT night was destined to be a momentous one in the history of Wrasper's School.

It was early in the evening when Tom received a brief note from Ralston, warning him to expect great news on the morrow, but advising him to lie close at the school and not to arouse Mr. Chopp's suspicions by watching the usher's movements too closely.

"I think I can safely promise," the note concluded, "that the 'Chopps Mystery' is within a few hours of being solved."

There seemed to be an ominous quietness in the school that evening. The boys in the class-room, engaged in preparing their lessons for the morrow, were not half so noisy as usual, although none of them knew of the letter Tom had received. Perhaps it was Tom's unwonted quietude that influenced the rest.

And it was the same at the supper-table. Chopps sat at the head of it, looking pale and anxious. There was no longer any cheeriness, real or affected, about him.

"Looks as if he's expecting trouble," whispered Sam Smith.

"Like a man going to be hanged!" agreed George Hammerton.

"Shut up!" said Tom softly. "Take no notice of him. Don't look his way at all, or he'll guess we are discussing him."

The quietude was maintained after supper, and when the boys went to their dormitories, the same ominous silence prevailed. Tom said scarcely a word. He seemed to be taciturn and abstracted.

"There's something in the wind," thought Sam Smith, as he got into bed. "Tom knows something, but won't let any of us into the secret. Oh, well, we shall know all about it in due time, I expect."

And curling himself up snugly, Sam dropped off to sleep.

The report of a gun or pistol being discharged outside the schoolhouse awoke him, and, sitting up in bed, he heard a commotion among the boys.

"Steady on, there!" cried Tom. "Don't rouse the house—we can do nothing."

"But we can look out, I suppose?" said Sam, springing out of bed, and making for the window with Tom and some of the others.

Although they could see nothing unusual, they heard much. The report of firearms was not repeated, but angry shouts and the sounds of struggling reached their ears.

There was a commotion in the house, too, and Mr. Wrasper was heard below calling for Wooden Jerry to get up.

At last the voices ceased, and the school gate was heard to open and shut.

By straining their eyes the boys could make out the dim form of a man as he hurried into the house.

Tom said it was Mr. Ralston.

"Somebody's coming upstairs!" said George Hammerton.

Immediately there was a scampering back into bed.

"Keep quiet!" was the word passed by Tom, and they all lay still.

Presently they heard two men ascending the stairs, talking together.

Their voices were those of Mr. Wrasper and Ralston.

They entered Chopps' room together, and closed the door.

How long they were there none of the boys ever really knew, for they fell asleep one by one, and heard no more of them.

Tom had a troubled night, the result of previous wakefulness and excitement, and he did not wake until the morning-bell was clanging loudly below.

The boys tumbled out, washed and dressed, and then hurried downstairs.

It was soon perceived that events of importance had happened during the night.

The boys were told to go into the school-room by Mrs. Wrasper, and not to go out without special permission.

Pubsey Wrasper did not show in the school-room until some time after the rest.

He seemed to be excited, and came over to Tom and his chums, who had gathered together.

"There's been a precious row in the night," he said.

"So I guess," replied Tom, laughing "Can you tell us what's been done?"

"I don't know much about it," said Pubsey. "But they've got that precious Uncle Josiah, who's no more an uncle than I am, nor much older than Chopps, and they say he's his brother."

"Where's Chopps?" asked Tom.

"Oh, got clean away!" said Pubsey. "He dodged 'em in the dark. But what is it for?"

"Smuggling!" said Tom.

Pubsey stared, and there was a deal of hard breathing round Tom, who felt that he might speak out now.

He sat upon one of the desks with his feet upon a form, and the whole school gathered in a wondering body about him.

"Yes," said Tom. "I reckon that Chopps will turn out to be a leviathan smuggler. Do you recollect that afternoon when he talked to us about the smugglers of old?"

Yes, they all remembered it; at least, all those he talked to on that occasion.

"That was what set me thinking about him," said Tom. "And although nothing has been quite clear, I've put this and that together, and you will find I am right."

"Of course you are," said Sam.

"This is how I reckon it has been done," continued Tom. "The sea is about seventeen miles from here. It's a lonely country for the most part, and the coast is rugged and almost deserted. The smuggled goods have been landed here and brought on by carts and lodged in different places, as time served. One hiding-place has been the quarry."

"But what sort of carts?" asked Pubsey.

"One cart was a hearse!" said Tom. "And it was so constructed, like another sort of cart found in the village, to be blown up, if necessary, and the evidences of the smugglers' guilt scattered into the air!"

"They did not blow up the cart in the village," said Cautious Johnny.

"No. I will give them credit for not being such reckless brutes as that," said Tom. "They never intended to kill or maim anyone. I judge that the cart broke down, and they had time to empty it, but not to get the cart away. And I think that some of us can make a pretty good guess where the things were hidden, but I am not going to say anything more about it now."

He could not say anything more, for the breakfast-bell rang, and the boys trooped off to the dining-room.

Mrs. Wrasper, looking very grave and quiet, sat at the head of the table, in the seat usually occupied by Mr. Chopps.

Mr. Wrasper was not there, but both Wooden Jerry and Perks were in attendance.

On the face of Wooden Jerry there was that subdued, sanctimonious expression which some people put on when there is a general row in the air and they are not in it.

It is thinly-veiled joy at the confusion and mortification of others.

As for Perks, that unlucky youth seemed to be on his last legs.

He was as one who had been already condemned, and was only waiting the arrival of the public executioner to finish the business.

Mrs. Wrasper announced nothing, nor did she make any remark about her unwonted presence at the breakfast-table, but grimly gave orders to the two attendants.

Wooden Jerry obeyed with a corky alacrity, quite new to him. But poor Perks!

Every word of command brought him out of a day-dream with a jump, and when he tried to obey he did all sorts of wrong things that brought withering remarks upon his head.

He even allowed Wooden Jerry to "lord" it over him.

When told in subdued but decisive tones to "get out of the way," he got out of the way, and took a surreptitious "shove" without a remonstrance.

Broken was Perks upon the smuggling wheel!

And yet it did not appear that he was openly implicated, otherwise he would have been either in the hands of the police, or a fugitive, as Chopps was said to be, flying across the country.

Breakfast over, Mrs. Wrasper said:

"Tartar, will you go to the study? You are wanted there."

Tom heard the request with a bounding heart.

At last he was about to hear all that had been discovered and done. He bowed in acknowledgment of the request, and went out first.

As he passed Perks the boy's wild eyes were lifted up to his, and Tom thought of a hunted rabbit he had once seen bound into the road from a field with a couple of terriers behind it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Mr. Ralston Explains the Mystery.

MR. WRASPER and Ralston were in the study. They had breakfasted together, and Jane was coming out with the tray as Tom went in.

They looked like men who had been up all night, but Ralston, despite his air of weariness, spoke briskly.

"Well, Tartar," he said, "we've got through with the business at last!"

"I'm glad of that," said Tom; "but Mr. Chopps, I hear, has escaped."

"Oh, he isn't far off," replied Ralston. "My men will have him before another twenty-four hours are over."

Tom, on hearing the words, "my men," opened his eyes wide. Ralston noticed the look of surprise, and laughed.

"Ah, my boy," he said, "I am no longer Ralston, the retired city clerk, but Ralston, the—ahem—famous excise-officer. My very comfortable apartments in this village will soon be to let!

"I am tolerably high in the excise service," he went on, "and I don't usually tackle cases of this sort. But the thing threatened to be carried on with impunity, and somebody had to get to the root of it. So I decided to come down here myself, and investigate.

"For some time past," proceeded Ralston, "it has been known at headquarters that vast quantities of excisable goods were being smuggled into the country. But for a long time we could not get on the track of the smugglers. When we thought we had a clue, we lost it—doubtless because the chief of the gang, Chopps, changed his mode of action. Fancy Chopps, that prince of dodgers, coming to this school as usher! What a blind!"

He laughed heartily, as did Tom. Mr. Wrasper tried to laugh, too, but he wasn't over-successful.

"Chopps has been all sorts of things in his time," continued Ralston, "and I'll do him the justice to say that I don't believe he would indulge in ordinary theft,

or do anybody an injury if he could help it. He's got the idea, however--and it's by no means an uncommon idea, either--that there is nothing criminal in robbing the State.

"The man who came here as his 'Uncle Josiah,' is really his brother, Joseph Chopps. Joe hasn't half the brains of his brother. He's a cleverish mimic, and might have done well on the stage, but as a smuggler he's no good. The other members of the gang are mere subordinates, and you won't know anything of them except when you hear that they've gone to prison because they can't pay the heavy fines that will be inflicted on them."

"May I ask, sir, what happened last night?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, of course," said Ralston. "I was forgetting for the moment that you didn't know. The gang had got a lot of contraband at the quarries—cigars, brandy, lace, and goodness knows what else until we thoroughly overhauled it--and they had brought a gipsy's van to run it into the country from the coast. Well, we stopped that van outside here last night—and we could have done it before, only we wanted the two brothers Chopps.

"After a bit of a tussle we nabbed the lot, except Achilles. I had him, as I thought, but he slipped his overcoat, and bolted."

"And now," put in Mr. Wrasper, "hadn't you better tell Tartar what is wanted of him?"

"Yes, I'll do so at once," replied Ralston.

"Now, my boy," he went on, addressing Tom, "when that cart broke down in the village, the contents of it were stored away, as we believe, in this house. From what you have told me at various times, Perks assisted in that job, and it occurred to me that the place called 'Solitary' was the right spot to search. Well, last night we did search, and found—nothing!"

"But something has been there," said Tom. "Those odds and ends which Sam Smith and I found there prove that."

"No doubt," agreed Ralston. "But they managed to shift the stuff elsewhere, and Perks knows where it was shifted to."

"I expect he does," said Tom.

"But from what I've seen of Perks, he would sooner die on the rack than tell me of the new hiding-place. I think, however, that you might do something with him."

Tom shook his head vigorously.

"I don't like the idea of playing the spy on Perks," he said.

"That wasn't my idea," returned Ralston. "I want you rather to be his friend in this affair. You see, the boy has been led, or forced, into the business, and if he will make a clean breast of it, nothing will be done to him. But if he stubbornly keeps his mouth shut, because he's afraid of Chopps, he will be sent to prison. You'll really be doing him a good turn by persuading him to confess."

"Very well," said Tom. "In that case I'll see what I can do with him."

"Don't hurry with it," said Ralston. "A day or two's delay won't matter. Catch him at a favourable moment."

After a few more words, Tom left the study, and succeeded in getting a few minutes' talk with his chums ere the bell rang for morning school.

But morning school that day was a farce. Mr. Wrasper did his best, but his mind was in a state bordering on chaos, and the classes might just as well not have been held for all the knowledge that was imparted to the pupils.

As Pubsey Wrasper remarked, when at last school was dismissed, he had never seen his father more upset in his life—not even by the Foster Moore episode.

"It is because he feels rather ridiculous," said Tom.

No doubt it was so.

Ridicule is a hard thing to bear, and no small amount of fun would be made out of the cherub tutor who was a veritable king among modern smugglers.

Then those presents to Mrs. Wrasper—they would have to be given up.

There was also Uncle Josiah, alias Joe Chopps, who had been fed and coddled, and practically paid nothing.

Mr. Wrasper had one drop of comfort.

He need not pay Chopps any salary, and could, for Uncle Josiah's board and lodging, levy a distress on the ornaments and odd things of his in the tutor's room.

Then there was Ralston, the "retired clerk"—an excise officer.

Well, it was all a big joke, and somebody would get a good laugh out of it, which would be beneficial to their health.

"Suppose we go to the village, Sam," said Tom, "and see how matters are there?"

Sam was ready, and at a convenient moment the pair stole away; but they did not get to the village quite so quickly as they expected.

As they turned into the road they saw Perks scuttle away into the wood opposite.

He did not see them, and Tom thought it would be a good opportunity to try and get him to make a confession.

So he and Sam followed him, and saw he was making for the old hut.

A stumble on Sam's part attracted his attention, and, turning, he saw them.

Perks would have fled, but Tom sprang forward and grasped him by the collar.

"Oh, dear, don't kill me!" cried Perks, as he sank upon his knees.

"Out with the whole thing!" said Tom sternly. "Make a clean breast of it!"

At that moment Sam, who had drawn away under the shadow of the old hut,

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

(*Continued from page 40.*)

saw a face flash up for a moment from some bushes opposite and then disappear.

It was the face of Achilles Chopps!

CHAPTER XLIV.

Tom Gives Mr. Chopps a Sporting Chance.

"TOM," cried Sam, "Chopps is behind the bushes!"

Tom let go of Perks and faced about.

At the same moment Chopps reappeared, and, parting the bushes, came forward.

Tom expected some exhibition of violence, but was agreeably disappointed.

The manner of the usher was mildness itself.

"Don't worry that poor fool, Tartar," he said. "I am solely to blame about the whole business."

"He seems to have been your accomplice, anyway," replied Tom.

"Against his will," said Chopps, smiling. "The truth is, he accidentally discovered that I was in the habit of going out at night to my friends, and we played rather a rough game on him. I lured him into this very hut, and then we tried him, and condemned him to death as a spy."

Perks shivered. The memory of that scene lingered with him still.

"He begged to be spared," resumed Chopps, "and he was spared on condition that he took an oath to obey me in all things wthout demur. He took it, and was allowed to depart—my slave.

"Of course, the trial was all humbug," Chopps explained with a laugh. "We are not a murderous lot, although our pursuits have been unlawful. The lad's life was safe, whatever he might have said or done. But I daresay if he had betrayed me I should have given him a good spanking. As it is, he has been faithful, and it is my duty to release him from all obligaton."

"Then you never meant to kill me?" gasped Perks.

"No," replied Chopps.

"I wish I had known that," said Perks, breathing hard.

"Well, what would you have done?"

"Blown upon you, and taken the spanking! I have felt like a thief all the time!"

Chopps winced a little, but he kept up his cheery air as he replied:

"Well, you can peach on me now, and so save yourself from unpleasant consequences. Tartar, I wish you to be a witness of what I say. Perks was forced and terrified into doing what he did. That night when our cart broke down in the village he helped me to bring up the goods and hide them in that den you call Solitary. We had a narrow escape of being clean bowled out by you, Tartar, but we dodged you."

"By hiding in the ditch," added Perks. "Oh, wasn't it damp and cold?"

"Well, we got the things into Solitary," proceeded Chopps, "and we have since moved them here. They are buried inside the hut. Perks will show you where. The game is up, as far as I'm concerned."

He stood for a moment with his eyes fixed on the ground and his hands in his pockets, softly rocking to and fro upon his heels.

"Boys," he said suddenly, "I have a favour to ask of you."

He raised his eyes and looked at Tom as he spoke.

Tom was beginning to feel very sorry for him.

"I want one hour's grace," Chopps went on; "no more. Promise me that you will be silent for an hour about having seen me here."

"I promise that," said Tom.

"And I," said Sam.

But Perks was silent, and Chopps fixed an angry eye on him.

"If you say a word," he said, "I will make arrangements for punishing you. If you have been forced to work for me you have been well paid for it. Now mind me. You've got to keep silent for an hour. D'ye hear?"

Perks heard, and evidently felt it would be risky not to heed.

Shiveringly he declared he would say nothing until "Mr. Tartar gave him leave to."

(*To be continued.*)

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