

THE CROOK SCHOOLMASTER!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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THE CROOK SCHOOLMASTER!

BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



Told by NIPPER of the REMOVE.

Master of the St. Frank's College House by day and a crook by night! Mr. SMALE FOXE'S scholastic position and the help of a twin-brother provide a safe alibi for his criminal activities. But Mr. Foxe little knows that there is one who is wise to his game—NELSON LEE, the schoolmaster-detective!

CHAPTER 1.

The Eve of the Great Fight!

"IMPOSSIBLE!" declared Church firmly.

"Rot!"

"I tell you it's impossible——"

"And I tell you that you're talking out of the back of your silly neck!" roared Handforth, glaring across the table. "Nothing's impossible—that's my motto! Absolutely nothing is impossible!"

"Oh, don't talk piffle!" put in McClure. "I suppose if you were

asked to climb up the wall to the ceiling, you'd do it?"

Handforth gave his chum a withering look.

"We won't go into details of that sort!" he said sourly. "I like to talk to people who've got sense. When I say impossible, I mean——"

"Goodness knows what you do mean!" said Church wearily. "But all I know is that we can't go to this boxing match in London. It's all very well to talk about it, but that's all it'll come to. I'd like to go, too—and so would McClure. We'd all like to see Lawrence

knock the stuffing out of this Welsh. But we're at St. Frank's, and this fight is going to take place in London, on Wednesday evening. If either of you chaps can suggest how we can be in London—well, I'd like to hear it!"

"There are several ways of going," said Handforth. "Wednesday is a half-holiday, and we could go on the afternoon train—"

"And get back the next day, I suppose?" asked Church. "That would be first-class, wouldn't it? What would we say to Mr. Lee? Oh, we could see the fight all right—it's not impossible, provided we are prepared to be severely punished. But, personally, I don't fancy it's worth it."

Handforth looked at his chums pityingly.

"My dear sloppy, senseless asses!" he said politely. "You're all right, both of you, but you've got no brains. You can't think of things. All we've got to do is to find some decent excuse that will keep us in London overnight. Then we shall be O.K."

"But I'm not going to tell a lot of lies—"

"It won't be necessary to tell any lies," said Handforth. "All we need to do is a bit of wangling. And you can leave that to me."

"Oh, of course—certainly!" said McClure. "But if we leave it to you, Handy, you'll wangle such a terrific lot that you'll get everything into a hopeless muddle—and it'll end by the three of us being wangled out of St. Frank's—on our necks!"

Handforth glared.

"That's the worst of having chums like you!" he said bitterly. "Whenever I need support, all you can do is to sneer. Whenever I get a decent idea, all you can do is to pull it to pieces. One of these days I shall walk out of this study and never come back!"

"When do you think that day will be?" asked McClure hopefully.

Handforth ignored the remark.

"Now, this idea of mine—" he began.

"Which idea?"

"The one I'm going to tell you, of course!" roared Handforth. "Am I going to speak or not? I'm getting fed up with you chaps! I'm the leader of this study, and you fellows jaw and jaw and never let me get a word in edgeways! There's nothing heard in this study except your voices!"

Church and McClure thought it as well to say nothing. Considering that Handforth spoke ninety words out of every hundred in the study, the last statement of his was hardly accurate. But Church and McClure had no desire to start an argument. Once an argument commenced in Study D, it generally ended in a powerful display of Handforth's fistic ability—much to the detriment of the good looks of Church and McClure.

The three famous chums had come into their study in the Ancient House at St. Frank's to have a chat before breakfast. It was quite early morning, in fact, and decidedly early for the trio to commence squabbling. They usually started in earnest after dinner.

"There's no need to get excited," continued Handforth. "Now let's get the facts. Lawrence, of the College House, has decided to fight the lightweight champion of London, a chap named Kiddy Welsh. Of course, this is a secret—"

"It won't be a secret long if you talk in that tone!" said Church. "Why can't you speak quietly, Handy?"

"What's the good of whispering to you chaps?" demanded Handforth. "You won't take any notice even if I yell. And don't keep interrupting! It's a secret—at least, only a few chosen fellows at St. Frank's know about it. It would be pretty serious for Lawrence if the Head got to know that he was fighting professionals in the ring. Things like that ain't allowed at St. Frank's. That's why Lawrence appears in the ring under the name of Young Ern. And, by what I can understand, he's only been doing it because his pater's hard up. Well, anyway, that's

not our business so we needn't discuss it. All we need know is that Lawrence is going in for the fight of his life to-morrow evening, and this fight is to take place at the West End Sporting Club Hall, in Kensington. I'd give quids to see the fight, because it's going to be a corker. And I'm pretty certain that Lawrence will win. If I was a betting chap, I'd lay ten to one that he'll knock Welsh out stiff before the fifteenth round."

"Well, you're not the only chap who's got that opinion," said Church. "Nipper thinks so, too, and so does Christine. Lawrence himself has got an idea that he might go under. But he always was a modest chap. He certainly is the best boxer I've ever seen, and it oughtn't to take long to polish off this professional. In any case, whether he wins or loses, he'll get five hundred quid."

"Phew!" whistled McClure. "I can hardly believe it, you know."

Handforth sniffed.

"Some chaps get all the luck," he said. "It's influence—that's what it is. Now look at me! You chaps know what a ripping boxer I am, and do I get any chance? No! It's because I was born unlucky. If I'm not as good a boxer as Lawrence, I'll eat my hat!"

"There's nothing like modesty!" murmured Church.

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Church.

"I don't want any sneers!" said Handforth tartly. "I don't expect you chaps to back me up. You're supposed to be my chums, but you generally manage to hinder me all you can. I've learnt that it's never any good relying on friends. If only I had my chance, I could go and earn five hundred quid, just for having a scrap with somebody. Why, I'd fight anybody for ten bob!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"We seem to have gone off the mark," said Church. "We were talking about Lawrence, I believe, not about you, Handy."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "Lawrence is going to London to-morrow—although I don't know how he'll get the time off. Still, that's his business. We've got to decide how we can do the trick. And I've got an idea!"

"Another one?" asked McClure.

"No, you ass—it's the same idea."

"Oh, we haven't heard it yet—of course not!" said Church, yawning. "You're always so giddy brisk, Handy. You get to the point so rapidly."

"It's no good getting to the point before the right time," said Handforth. "Now, this is my wheeze. We three chaps want to get to London, and we want to do it without telling any lies. Now, this is where brain power comes in. To-morrow morning, at dinner-time, Church, you'll be taken ill!"

"Shall I?" said Church in surprise.

"That's frightfully interesting."

"You'll be taken horribly ill!" declared Handforth. "Dr. Brett will be sent for, but you won't be able to speak to him—you'll be so bad. You'll be rolling about in agony—"

"How do you know?" asked Church, staring. "Are you going to poison me, or something?"

"No, you babbling ass!"

"Then how do you know that I shall be rolling about in agony?"

Handforth sighed.

"Haven't you got sense enough to realise that you'll be spoofing?" he demanded. "You won't tell any lies, because you won't be able to speak at all. Dr. Brett won't be able to do anything, and you'll still be squirming with pain."

"What a ripping idea!" said McClure enthusiastically. "Oh, top hole! It ought to take the first prize at any well-organised lunatic asylum!"

"Can't you wait until I've finished!" bawled Handforth fiercely. "I haven't finished yet!"

"Oh, sorry!" said McClure. "I thought that was all!"

"Church will be writhing about in agony," went on Handforth. "Brett

won't be able to do anything, and then I shall come in!"

"Oh," said Church. "And you'll touch me with a wand, I suppose, and I'll get well?"

Handforth nearly choked.

"If you continue this fatheaded rot, I'll slaughter the pair of you!" he snorted. "Keep quiet until I've finished! I shall appear, and I shall make a ripping suggestion. I shall say that I know a specialist in London who can put Church right in next to no time, and I shall insist upon McClure and I taking Church to London by the afternoon train. Once we're in the train, we shall be O.K. And as soon as we get to London we'll send a wire to say that Church is better, and we shall be back on Thursday morning. Now, how's that for a ripping idea?"

"Gorgeous!" said Church. "But there's one thing I'd like to know before we go any farther. If I'm so ill that I'm writhing on the floor, how the dickens am I to go to London by train?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Handforth.

"Nothing at all!" agreed Church. "And do you suppose Mr. Lee wouldn't smell a rat? Do you think he'd let us go?"

"Of course he'd let us go," said Handforth. "He can't do anything else. With a chap rolling about on the floor, howling with agony, he'll simply be compelled to agree to anything—"

"Rats!" said Church. "What Mr. Lee would do would be to send me into the sanny, and there I should stick until I pretended to get better! But I'll tell you what, Handy. We can work the idea as you suggest, except for one detail. You can be the chap to writhe on the floor."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth.

"You can do it a lot better than me," said Church firmly. "I don't pretend to be such a good actor as you, old man. But the best thing we

can do is to forget that idea. It's too dotty. And there goes the breakfast bell."

Church and McClure were heartily glad, for they were saved from any further ideas which Handforth's brilliant brain might conceive. One was quite enough for them. Another idea of the same kind would have ruined their appetites.

But Handforth would not be subdued. He still considered that the scheme was terrific. He was tremendously anxious to see the forthcoming fight which had been arranged between Ernest Lawrence, of the College House, and Kiddy Welsh, the light-weight champion of London.

There had been quite a lot of excitement at St. Frank's recently.

Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House, had provided most of it.

A good many years earlier Mr. Smale Foxe, then a young man, had held a position of undermaster at St. Frank's. He had been caught red-handed in some dishonourable affair, and, naturally, had been instantly dismissed.

He had failed to obtain another post, for he had been blacklisted. For two years he had almost starved, and he had nursed a bitter hatred towards St. Frank's. He did not realise that his misfortunes were the result of his own folly.

Years had passed, and then Mr. Foxe's twin brother, also a schoolmaster, had obtained a temporary position of Housemaster at St. Frank's. Mr. Smale Foxe had literally forced himself upon his weak-willed brother, and had stepped into the other's shoes. His time had come—he would take revenge!

But, somehow, this was not so easy as it had seemed.

Mr. Foxe's plan was to bring as much disgrace upon St. Frank's as possible. He had had no real chance until Dr. Stafford had been called

away, leaving the College House in charge of the Housemaster.

Then Mr. Foxe had acted.

He had given the boys their full liberty. He had told them that he wanted to make an experiment. He placed the boys on their honour, and informed them that there would be no school rules as of old, and that they could do as they pleased. He would trust them to remain honourable and straightforward.

Mr. Foxe had known well enough that many of the boys would abuse their new rights, and thus bring disgrace upon the school.

This had actually happened.

However, Christine & Co., of the Remove, had taken a hand in the game. They had realised that the College House was going to rot. And so they had formed a secret tribunal, which punished the fellows who disobeyed the rules.

By this means, order was being gradually and steadily restored. Mr. Foxe's precious scheme had come to nothing. He had been foiled by the Remove. Mr. Foxe was furious, but he could do nothing since he could not discover the identity of the ring-leaders.

However, the main thought at this present moment was the great fight which was due to take place on the following evening. In a way, it would be an amazing contest. For Ernest Lawrence, a junior of St. Frank's, would pit his skill and strength against that of a professional champion.

On the face of it, the match seemed absurd.

But Lawrence was no ordinary boy. His boxing was marvellous. Not only skilful, but masterly. And there was a power behind his punch that many a professional heavy-weight would have envied.

Lawrence was being "handled" by Mr. Norman Rook, a boxing promoter who had discovered the junior some weeks earlier. Mr. Rook had placed

implicit faith in Lawrence, and he had not been disappointed.

In arranging this match with Kiddy Welsh, Mr. Rook knew well enough that he was taking a big risk. But he had seen Lawrence fighting on several occasions—and he knew exactly what Welsh could do. Upon the whole, Mr. Rook came to the conclusion that the schoolboy had an excellent chance of winning. But it would be a stiff fight.

Not many of St. Frank's fellows knew the truth. Lawrence had only taken a few into his confidence, and these few, naturally, were eager and anxious to see this great contest. One of those who was most eager was myself.

And, needless to say, I had exercised my wits a great deal. But I was by no means confident that the thing could be managed. True, the headmaster was away from St. Frank's, and it would only be necessary to obtain Nelson Lee's permission. But I had doubts as to whether the gov'nor would see eye to eye with me. In all probability he would squash the idea at once, and tell me to go and eat coke—or words to that effect.

But I was feeling quite cheerful after breakfast on that morning, and I had every reason to. As soon as the meal was over I went to Study C with my two chums, Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"The others will be here presently," I said, "and then we can go and look up Christy. We'll see what he's got to say."

"About that letter, you mean?" asked Watson.

"Yes, of course."

The door opened and admitted Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie, but before they could say a word Handforth came charging in after them.

"Oh, good," said Handforth. "I'm glad you chaps are here. I've got a ripping idea to suggest—"

"Don't," pleaded Pitt. "Go away and bury it!"

"You—you ass——"

"We've heard of your ideas before," went on Pitt.

"But it's about this fight," said Handforth, lowering his voice. "I've thought of a way that Church and McClure and I can get to London tomorrow."

"My dear chap, there's no need for you to strain your enormous brain power," I interrupted. "That idea of yours, whatever it is, needn't be discussed. As a matter of fact, I think that we shall manage it all serene. By a piece of luck, I heard from Tinker this morning——"

"Tinker?" asked Handforth. "Do you mean Sexton Blake's assistant?"

"I do," I replied. "Tinker and I are old pals, you know. We don't see one another very often, but we still write. It seems that Tinker is on his own at present—Sexton Blake is up North, engaged upon a case. And I got a letter from Tinker this morning."

"That's very interesting," said Handforth. "But I don't see——"

"You're not supposed to see," I broke in. "Wait until you've read the letter. Then, perhaps, you'll be enlightened. This is what it says:

"Baker Street, London, W.

"My Dear Nipper,—I haven't heard from you for ages, and I'm wondering if you're still alive. It's getting near the end of the term at St. Frank's, I believe, and perhaps things aren't very strict down there. I was wondering if you could accept an invitation. I'm giving a little party on Wednesday evening, and it would please me if you could come up and bring a few of your friends with you—say, five or six. I shall be awfully delighted if you can. Tell Mr. Lee that I particularly want you to come, and that I'll be responsible for your safety.

"Ask him about it as soon as you get this note. If it's all serene telegraph at once, and I'll be down at St. Frank's in the big car by midday on Wednesday. Then we can all have a nice ride to

London, spend a ripping evening, and you can come home here, to Baker Street, to sleep. And you can all be back at St. Frank's quite early on Thursday morning. That's the programme, old son.

"Do try to persuade Mr. Lee that I want you and your friends very urgently. And don't forget to send that wire.

"With kind regards to Mr. Lee and yourself,—Yours, as ever,

"TINKER."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Pitt. "What a piece of luck!"

"Rather!" said De Valerie. "If Mr. Lee will only agree, we shall be on velvet. And Tinker is coming to fetch us, too! But what about this party of his? If he's arranged something of that sort, we can't very well go to the boxing match."

I grinned and winked.

"Oh, we'll manage it somehow," I said. "You leave it to your uncle. Of course, I'm a bit nervy about going to the guv'nor, but I'll do my best. I think I might be able to manage him all serene. If I stroke him the right way he might purr!"

"There's no telling," said Tommy Watson. "Anyhow, it's a chance, and I think Tinker is a brick for coming to the scratch like this. He couldn't have sent his letter at a more opportune moment!"

"Well, there's no time like the present," I said briskly. "You fellows wait here while I go along to the guv'nor's study. I'll see what can be done."

Without saying anything further I hurried out, and went straight along to Nelson Lee's study. I felt that my task would be a comparatively easy one, for, after all, Nelson Lee was not like an ordinary Housemaster—to me, at all events. I could generally manage things that were reasonable.

I found Nelson Lee reading the morning paper, and he nodded to me cheerfully as I entered.

"Good-morning, young 'un," he said.

"Good-morning, sir," I replied. "Lovely morning, guv'nor."

Nelson Lee laid his paper aside, and removed the cigarette from his lips.

"I can detect from your looks and by your tone, Nipper, that you have come here to ask me a favour," he observed dryly. "What is it this time?"

"Just have a squint at this, sir," I said. "It will explain everything."

"This letter?" said Nelson Lee, taking it. "I will read it, if you wish, but I definitely decline to squint!"

I grinned as the guv'nor glanced through Tinker's note, and I felt rather anxious until Nelson Lee looked up.

"An invitation!" he observed. "The infernal impudence!"

"Eh?"

"And do you seriously mean to imagine, Nipper, that I should excuse you?" asked Lee. "Do you think I shall let you and certain other boys leave here to-morrow afternoon and not return until Thursday morning?"

"Yes, sir," I said promptly.

"And why are you so sublimely confident?"

"Why, because I know you're a good sort, guv'nor," I replied. "And, after all, it's not such a big thing. Tinker will come down for us, and we shall be well looked after. We shan't be missing any lessons, because to-morrow's a half-holiday, and we shall be back quite early on Thursday morning. I say, sir, be a sport! It's not often that Tinker can invite us up to Town, and it's only for a few hours, after all."

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"And what do you propose to do in London?"

"Why, we're going to this—this—er—party," I replied.

"Quite so, quite so," said Nelson Lee. "Well, Nipper, perhaps I shall agree to it. You generally manage to get round me. What boys do you propose to take with you?"

"Tregellis-West, Watson, Pitt, De Valerie, and Handforth, Church and McClure," I replied promptly. "And,

if possible, three fellows from the College House, although that's nothing to do with you."

"Good gracious!" said Nelson Lee. "Eight boys! My dear Nipper, I think it's quite impossible—"

"Now, guv'nor, don't make a fuss!" I protested. "What does it matter whether eight of us go or four? We shall be all right. And you're in supreme control here. There's nobody to—"

"I am well aware that you are taking advantage of the fact that Dr. Stafford is away," said Nelson Lee dryly. "Well, Nipper, I will be weak as usual, and succumb. But you must be back early on Thursday morning; this is quite essential."

I rushed across the study, grabbed the guv'nor, and hugged him.

"You're a brick, sir!" I exclaimed enthusiastically.

And, a second later, I dashed out, in order to spread the good news.

CHAPTER 2.

A Startling Adventure!

ERNEST LAWRENCE strolled across the Triangle carelessly, and without any appearance of being hurried. It was Wednesday afternoon—quite early. Dinner had been over only a few minutes, in fact. To all intents and purposes, Lawrence was as unconcerned as ever. He did not appear excited or nervous.

Yet the College House junior was about to leave for London. There were no restrictions in the College House. Lawrence could go where he pleased, and get back when he pleased, and no questions would be asked. For this one occasion Lawrence was finding the new order of things very satisfactory. If he had to answer to the secret tribunal he would not mind, for he had an excellent excuse to offer.

Hardly anybody at St. Frank's had any idea of what was to occur that evening. The few fellows who were in

the know did their utmost to conceal the fact, and to appear unconcerned.

Nobody approached Lawrence as he crossed the Triangle and went to the gates. He smiled and nodded at me as I strolled round from the Ancient House. I knew that he was just off. Tinker would arrive with the car later on, for, of course, it was not necessary for us to go early.

Lawrence was going by train however, since Mr. Rook wanted him to be on the spot quite early in the evening. Lawrence would catch the early afternoon local to Bannington, and then join the express there.

He knew exactly where to go to in London, so he would have no difficulties.

He caught the train comfortably, and arrived at Bannington. Here he strolled about the platform, for there was a wait of fifteen minutes before the express was due to come in. And Lawrence had much to occupy his thoughts.

He knew that he had very strenuous times ahead of him. It would be the stiffest contest he had ever entered into, and, although he was doubtful as to the result, he was determined to put up the fight of his life.

If it was humanly possible, he would win.

He had been training hard, and was feeling as fit as a fiddle. But he knew quite well that he would require all his strength and reserve of energy for the evening's ordeal.

He was thinking of these things when, quite suddenly, somebody touched his arm. He looked round quickly, and found himself facing a short man, dressed in the clothing of a chauffeur. The fellow touched his peaked cap respectfully.

"Master Lawrence, I think, sir?" he said.

"Yes, that's right," said Lawrence.

"Mr. Rook thought you'd be waiting on the platform for the express, sir, and he sent me here," said the man. "I want you—"

"Mr. Rook!" ejaculated Lawrence. "Is he in Bannington?"

"Yes, sir, at the Grapes."

Lawrence looked astonished.

"But I understood that Mr. Rook would be in London to meet me!" he exclaimed.

"I don't know anything about that, Master Lawrence, but I do know that Mr. Rook is here, and he wants to see you," said the chauffeur respectfully. "He's got his car here, and I think he means to go to London at once. I dare say you'll come with us!"

"Oh," said Lawrence. "I see! I'll come at once!"

He was quite pleased with the prospect, but he wished Mr. Rook had told him in advance, for he had bought his ticket to London, and that would be money wasted. However, that was a detail.

He followed the chauffeur off the station, and out through the booking-office. There in the big station yard, stood a powerful motor-car.

"Step in, sir," said the chauffeur. "I'll have you down at the Grapes inside two minutes—its only just down the road."

He held the door open, and Lawrence jumped briskly into the car. The door closed smartly behind him. Then, for the first time, Lawrence found that the car had two occupants. They were both somewhat flashily dressed individuals, and they smiled amiably as Lawrence looked at them.

"So you're the young gent!" said one of the men. "Pleased to meet you, Master Lawrence—or, I should say, Young Ern. By thunder, you're a real champion!"

The man seized Lawrence's hand, and shook it. The next moment he was seated between the two strangers. Lawrence didn't quite like it, and he wondered why Mr. Rook had acted in this way. He even began to wonder whether Mr. Rook had had any hand in it at all.

To tell the truth, Lawrence was becoming suspicious.

"It's all right, young man, you needn't look scared," said one of the

strangers. "Everything is all serene. We shall go up to London in this car, and that'll get you to Kensington quicker than the train. Mr. Rook had a special reason for doing this."

The car was already speeding along the High Street, and as Lawrence glanced out of the window he noticed they tore past the Grapes Hotel at quite a rapid speed. This was somewhat strange considering that the chauffeur had said that Mr. Rook was waiting at the Grapes.

"I say, we've gone past!" exclaimed Lawrence abruptly. "Great Scott! I believe this is a trick! Mr. Rook was not there at all!"

"I'm afraid it's a bit too late, now, young man!" grinned one of his companions.

"Too late!" said the junior. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean if you wanted to smell a rat, you ought to have smelt it sooner," said the man. "It's no good now, because you're not in a position to get away, even if you want to. You'd best take things quietly, or it'll be the worse for you."

Lawrence nodded.

"What—what do you mean?" he asked huskily.

"Well, I thought you had more sense," said one of the strangers. "The fact is, young man, you're a prisoner, and you'd better not try any tricks. Understand?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Lawrence hoarsely.

For, in a second, he realised the truth.

He had been trapped! In the most simple manner possible he had walked into the net which had been spread for him. What an idiot he had been to fall into the trap so easily!

But what did it mean? Who had done this, and for what reason?

Lawrence was absolutely mystified, and he could think of no plausible explanation. But it was quite certain he was a prisoner. Escape was out of the question. At the least attempt he

would be seized. He could not even cry for help, for the car was rather a noisy one, and his voice would certainly be drowned.

"Who paid you to do this?" the junior demanded angrily.

"If you don't ask questions, young gent, you won't hear no lies," replied one of the men. "We've got to carry out instructions, and that's all."

"But—but there must be some reason for kidnapping me like this!" protested Lawrence angrily. "It—it's outrageous! I must be in London this evening. Do you understand?"

Both the men grinned.

"I don't reckon you'll be in London this evening, young man," said one of the captors. "In fact, I'm pretty certain you won't be in London. We shall see to that!"

"You won't let me get to London?" gasped Lawrence. "But—but, I must be there, I tell you—I must. I've got an important engagement to keep!"

"Important or not important, it makes not a mite of difference," said the man who had been doing all the talking. "And there's no sense in your jawing like this—it won't do you no good!"

Lawrence suddenly felt dazed.

A prisoner! And he would be unable to get to London to keep his engagement! What did it mean? Who could be responsible for this?

All sorts of alarming ideas and thoughts raced through Lawrence's brain. He could picture Mr. Rook waiting—and waiting in vain. There would be terrible confusion caused—and probably a great deal of fuss. And Lawrence would be blamed. It would be thought that he funk'd the fight, and had been afraid at the last minute! This was what cut the junior to the quick.

And he felt like making a desperate effort to get free. One dash—and he could reach the door. Then he could fling himself out before the men could prevent him. But what would be the use?

The car was travelling at well over forty miles an hour, and even if Lawrence escaped broken bones—which was doubtful—he would certainly be bruised and sprained and grazed—and quite unfit to meet a man like Kiddy Welsh in the ring.

His best course was to remain quiet and still—apparently submissive. And he would await his opportunity—always hoping that one would come. At all events, there was nothing to be gained by acting now.

After a while, the junior's thoughts were quieter. Try as he would, he could not think who could have organised this abduction—for that is exactly what it was. Certainly not any supporters of Kiddy Welsh—for they were red-hot in favour of their own champion, and were convinced that "Young Ern" would be licked into a pulp. Neither Welsh nor his backers, had any fear of this young, almost unknown, boxer. And, in any case, they would never have resorted to such methods as this.

Who, then, was the perpetrator?

Lawrence could not imagine. All these men were strangers to him—he had never set eyes on them before. He judged them to be from London—and they were obviously performing the work for somebody else who remained in the background.

The miles sped by. Helmford was reached, and left behind. Then, some time later, Lawrence realised that the car was passing through Guildford. It was, at all events, making straight for London.

The junior's sole thoughts were occupied with wondering if he could escape—or if he could do anything which would lead to his rescue.

He remembered suddenly, that a number of St. Frank's fellows had arranged to travel to London by road that very afternoon. Their car would, in fact, come along this very highway.

But, after all, how would this help him?

Lawrence was almost giving way to

despair when he saw that the chauffeur had turned round, and was tapping on the glass which divided the chauffeur's seat from the rear seats. Evidently he wanted to speak to one of the men. The man on Lawrence's left side lowered the window and leaned out. What he said to the chauffeur, Lawrence could not catch.

His shoulders were firmly grasped by the other man—evidently as a precaution. The fellow did not mean Lawrence to get too near the window.

The junior, however, was seized with a sudden impulse.

When the window was closed—as it would be within a few seconds—he would have no further chance. It was now or never.

And so, without appearing to move at all, Lawrence grasped his cap—which had been on the cushions next to him, and deftly flung it through the open window. The movement was such a quick one that neither of the men saw it. And the next moment the window was closed. But Lawrence appeared to be as listless and sullen as ever.

But that cap of his lay somewhere on the road—or, perhaps, just on the grass border. It was his College cap—which he had intended changing before reaching London. It was quite likely that it would lay there undisturbed for an hour or so.

And then the car, carrying the St. Frank's juniors, would come along. If anybody in that car spotted the cap, immediate investigations would be made. For the cap would be recognised on the instant—and Lawrence's initials were on the inside. The fellows would know that the cap was his.

It was a forlorn hope, but Lawrence clung to it. And, anyhow, he had done the only thing possible. Whether it would bear fruit remained to be seen.

The car continued its journey, until it was somewhere not very far distant from Esher. Lawrence did not know the road thoroughly, but he guessed

that he was getting near to the outskirts of London.

And then, unexpectedly, the car slowed down, and turned off the main highway into a quiet, muddy side lane. It proceeded up this for some distance—at length coming to a halt at the gateway of an old, tumble-down farmhouse. It was deserted, and it had apparently been empty for many years. It was long past repair, for in many places the roof had caved in. In one corner of the building, however, the place appeared to be fairly whole.

There were no human beings within sight. Indeed, this old deserted place seemed to be standing quite by itself, away from all other human habitation. Lawrence wondered why he had been brought here, and he was still rather bewildered.

"Now, then, you've got to come with us!" said one of his captors. "It won't be any good your trying to get away. You'd best take it quietly—"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to bind the kid's hands behind his back!" put in the other man. "That'll make him safer. He's a bit of a problem, you know—we mustn't forget that he's got fists that can hit pretty hard. And I, for one, don't fancy taking any chances."

The other man grinned. And, a minute or two later, Lawrence's wrists were secured behind his back. It was now quite impossible for him to lash out, if he felt inclined to do so.

He was taken out of the car, and rapidly walked between the two men towards the old house. Even if Lawrence had felt like shouting for help he knew very well that it would merely be a waste of breath. There was nobody to hear—nobody to heed.

He found himself inside the farmhouse. Everything was damp and dismal. The floor was a stone one, and grass was springing up through the crevices. The walls were all falling to pieces with dampness and decay, and there was an unpleasant, earthy

smell about the place which assailed the nostrils at once.

Lawrence's captors did not keep him long here. They passed through to a passage and then made their way up a circular, crazy staircase. Some of the stairs were missing, and others were extremely worn. But, at last, the trio reached the upper floor. And now it was necessary to go very cautiously. For some of the boards were rotten; others were missing altogether.

One of the men led the way, testing each board before he placed his weight upon it. But it was found that by keeping near the wall there was very little danger. And, at length, a doorway was reached. Lawrence was pushed through this and the door was closed.

Lawrence looked round quickly. He heard a bolt being shot into its socket. A prisoner!

He had not the faintest idea as to why he had been captured or what the reason could be. Lawrence was in a complete state of mystification.

But this did not last for long.

Hardly five minutes had elapsed before steps were heard by Lawrence out in the passage. The lad had been examining his prison. The walls were thick, and there was no prospect of his breaking through. There was one window in this attic, but it had been carefully boarded up—heavy planks had been screwed down tightly, making it practically impossible for any daylight to come in. Certainly, it was quite out of the question for Lawrence to think of getting out through the window. And the door was strong, although old.

Left completely to himself, Lawrence might have burst the door down. But he could not do so without making a considerable amount of noise. And he was fairly certain that the men were somewhere below, and they would be attracted at once if he commenced an onslaught upon it.

Lawrence stood quite still as he heard the bolt being shot back. Evidently his

captors were determined. And Lawrence was curious to know why. The door opened and a man entered. But it was not a man that Lawrence had seen before during this venture. But the junior recognised the newcomer at once.

"Mr. Foxe!" he gasped huskily.

"Precisely!" said Mr. Smale Foxe, in a smooth, calm voice. "You hardly expected to see me, Lawrence, I imagine?"

"Do—do you mean to say that you are responsible for this—this affair?" asked Lawrence fiercely. "Did you cause me to be kidnapped like this, brought to this house?"

"It was my idea entirely!" said Mr. Foxe, "and what is more, Lawrence, I have a further plan in view. I am extremely gratified that you fell into the trap so easily. I was quite sure that you would do so."

"It's too bad!" shouted Lawrence. "You've no right to do this, Mr. Foxe! It's—it's scoundrelly. Why have you done it? Why have you brought me here?"

"Surely you can understand?" said Mr. Foxe. "It ought not to be so very difficult for you to grasp the truth, Lawrence. You have defied me once or twice—but you shall not defy me on this occasion!"

"I—I don't know what you mean!" said Lawrence warmly.

"I rather fancy you do!" replied Mr. Foxe. "Once or twice you have had fights, and you have won quite considerable sums of money. On these occasions you have refused to part with any of that money—and, unfortunately, I have been unable to take action. But this time, my lad, there is a different story to tell!"

Lawrence was breathing hard.

"I can't believe it, Mr. Foxe!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe that you—a Housemaster, should descend to such a thing as this! It's beyond all understanding—"

"My dear boy, I don't want you to

talk in that way!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "There is no misunderstanding between you and me. At the present moment I am not a Housemaster. I am your captor, and I intend to have my way. If, on other occasions, you have defied me, you will not do so on this. It was quite easy for me to discover that you had arranged to meet a man known as Kiddy Welsh in the ring in London this evening. Well, Lawrence, I made my plans, and I have had you brought here. Can you guess why?"

"I think I can!" said Lawrence grimly. "Blackmail!"

"You put it rather bluntly, my lad," said Mr. Foxe. "But since you choose to speak in that way, I might as well agree. Yes—blackmail! The word is an ugly one, but that does not matter. We may as well be quite frank with one another. You wish to attend this fight, I presume?"

"I shall attend it!" said Lawrence grimly. "You can't prevent me, Mr. Foxe—"

"I can't!" echoed the Housemaster. "We will see about that, young man! If it pleases me, you will not go to London this evening. And there will be no fight between you and Kiddy Welsh. In that event, you will lose the sum of five hundred pounds!"

"But—but you daren't do it!" gasped Lawrence, suddenly alarmed. "I must have that money—I must—" He paused, and pulled himself together. For he had suddenly been filled with a wild feeling of alarm. If he did not obtain that five hundred pounds he would not be able to help his father. And it was for this very reason that he had consented to the fight. He had never dreamed that Mr. Smale Foxe would interfere in this way. Such an idea had never occurred to the junior.

"Five hundred pounds is a large sum, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe. "I am quite certain that you do not require all that money. In any case, you

will not get it. Now, I will come to the point. It is not my way to beat about the bush. I want you to sign a document, in which you will promise to pay me the sum of two hundred pounds—"

"I won't do it!" interrupted Lawrence sharply.

"You won't, eh?" said the other. "We will see about that, my lad—we will see about that. Until you sign this document, you will not get your liberty. That means that you will be unable to turn up at the West End Sporting Club's hall this evening. The matter rests entirely with you, Lawrence. Merely sign this paper, and you will be released at once."

Lawrence did not reply for a moment. He was thinking hard. This was a terrible blow—an unexpected catastrophe. He needed every penny of that five hundred pounds. He meant to send the whole sum to his father. It was the exact amount his father required to put things straight. Three hundred pounds would be a help—but it would not be sufficient. And the very thought of Mr. Smale Foxe annexing two hundred pounds for himself made Lawrence's blood boil. It was blackmail of the worst type—and here he was, absolutely unable to lift a finger.

His hands were tied behind his back, so it was even impossible to lunge out at Mr. Foxe's evil face. Lawrence had never felt quite so helpless in all his life before.

"Well?" inquired the Housemaster. "You have surely come to a decision, Lawrence? It is not a matter that requires very careful thought. You sign this document and go to the fight, and obtain three hundred pounds. You refuse to sign, and you remain here—and you get nothing. What is your answer?"

"I won't sign!" said Lawrence grimly.

"You infernal young fool! Don't you realise—"

"I realise that you are a scoundrel, and I'm not going to be blackmailed!"

shouted Lawrence furiously. "You can do what you like, Mr. Foxe—but I'll never sign. I'd rather give up the fight. If I signed that paper, and you had it in your possession, you would use it against me at other times. And I'm not going to take any risks. If you think you'll be able to persuade me to try it, you've made a mistake. You won't. You've had all your trouble for nothing!"

Mr. Foxe frowned.

"You had better think carefully, Lawrence!" he said curtly. "I will not press you any more now—but I will leave you alone for a period, to think the matter out. When I come back, I fancy your answer will be very different!"

"My answer will be the same!" said Lawrence quietly.

Mr. Foxe did not say any more, but went to the door, passed out, and bolted it behind him. Lawrence was feeling furious, helpless, and indignant.

But he was grimly determined upon one thing. He would not sign any document that Mr. Foxe presented to him. He would sign nothing. He would rather give up the whole fight. These, at all events, were his thoughts at the moment. Perhaps, later on, as Mr. Foxe had suggested, he would change his mind. When he found the time flying by, and escape impossible, he would probably alter his opinion.

One thing was certain—Ernest Lawrence was in a corner from which there was no escape.

CHAPTER 3.

On the Trail!

"HERE we are, as large as life, and twice as natural!"

This remark was made by Tinker as he jumped neatly out of the driving seat, and landed in the Triangle nearly on my toes. I grabbed his hand and shook it warmly.

"By jingo, it's good to see you again,

old man!" I exclaimed heartily. "You're a brick!"

"Don't mention it," said Tinker, grinning. "You see, the gov'nor is up North somewhere, nosing about. I don't suppose he'll be back until next week, so I'm on my own, with nothing particular to do. I've been kicking my heels at Baker Street for two or three days, and I was rather fed-up. This is a bit of a change. Anyhow, it's giving the old car some exercise!"

They were soon the centre of an admiring crowd of juniors. He had just arrived at St. Frank's, and the "old car" which had brought him was in reality a big open sports car. It was a powerful vehicle, and was capable of accommodating a dozen juniors with a squeeze.

"Well, if you chaps are ready, we'd better be getting off soon," said Tinker. "I'll just run in and have a word or two with Mr. Lee——"

"I don't think you will," I broke in. "The gov'nor's out, old son. He went out directly after dinner."

"Oh, well, we might as well be buzzing off, then," said Tinker. "I reckon we shall be landed up in London by tea-time. I'm going to take you to my place and treat you to some tea before carting you off to the—er—party!"

"Good!" I said. "That's the style!" It was not long before we were all ready. Handforth, Church and McClure, Pitt, De Valerie, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and myself, and Christine, Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House. With Tinker, this made a dozen. We should be quite a merry little party. Christine & Co., of course, did not have to ask permission, since they were at liberty to go where they pleased, and as they had been invited by Tinker, it was a special occasion.

"Lucky beggars!" exclaimed Owen major enviously. "I wish I could buzz off to London like this and spend a giddy night there—and miss morning lessons the next day."

"Rather!" said Hubbard. "Some chaps have all the luck!"

"Well, we can't take everybody," I said smiling. "We should need a fleet of motor-cars if we took the whole crowd."

"I say, you can find room for me, surely?" inquired Fatty Little anxiously. "There's bound to be a good feed in London, and I'd just love to go. I say, Nipper, be a sport, you know! Great doughnuts! Squeeze me in somewhere!"

Tinker looked at Fatty and shook his head.

"There's only one way to take you," he said. "Every other chap would have to stay behind. The car is certainly a pretty strong one, but it couldn't stand an elephant for a passenger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Fatty. "Am I coming or not?"

"Not!" said Tinker briefly.

"Oh, but really——"

"My dear Fatty, it's absolutely impossible," I said. "We'd take you in a minute if there was room, but there isn't. So do be reasonable. All ready, Tinker; we'll be off!"

As a matter of fact, I was anxious to escape. All sorts of fellows were asking to come. And a good many of them were chaps I liked; and it is always hard to refuse anything to a friend. But, of course, there was a limit.

At length, however, we managed to get away; and then, with Tinker at the wheel, we went speeding down the lane towards Bellton. Once through the village Tinker opened the throttle, and we fairly roared along the road to Bannington. I was sitting in front, next to Tinker, and he looked at me and grinned.

"You sly boulder!" he exclaimed, with a chuckle.

"Eh?"

"You wangler!" said Tinker, with a wink. "For sheer, unadulterated nerve

this wheeze of yours is just about the richest I've ever heard of."

I grinned.

"Well, something had to be done," I said; "and this seemed to be about the most effective."

"It wouldn't have been any good, only I happened to be twiddling my thumbs," said Tinker. "Of course, I'm quite delighted to come down and lend you a hand. And I rather fancy I shall enjoy this boxing match to-night, too."

"You've got the tickets all right?"

"Rather!" said Tinker. "I attended to that at once. I've got them all together in the front row of the giddy seats."

"First rate! You deserve a medal, old son!"

Of course, that letter from Tinker had been no mere coincidence. I had written to him previously, explaining our difficulty, and asking him if he could think of any way out. In fact, I had suggested that he should write, inviting us to go to London to a party, although, of course, he wasn't to mention that the party consisted of the boxing match at the West End Sporting Club's hall. It wasn't necessary to go into details of that kind.

I also requested Tinker to secure all the seats we required for the evening. If, by any chance, he didn't want them, if we couldn't come, it would be easy enough to sell the tickets to somebody else.

And Tinker had fallen in with my plans to the letter. He had written exactly as I had requested, and the wheeze had worked. Nelson Lee had given permission for us to go. Whether the gov'nor knew that we were going to this boxing match I wasn't quite certain. But, somehow or other, I had an idea at the back of my head that Nelson Lee was not quite so ignorant of the truth as he appeared to be.

There wasn't very much that escaped the gov'nor.

"The limit—that's what it is!" said

Tinker pleasantly. "You planned the whole thing, and then I get the praise for inviting you all to Town. And I don't suppose I should have thought of the plan if you hadn't suggested it."

"We shan't see Mr. Blake?" I asked.

"Considering that he's up in the North of England, I don't see how that's possible," replied Tinker dryly. "But it's just as well on the whole. He'd probably jib if he were there. And he might haul me off on some detective work or other, which would probably put the tin hat on our plans. We can have a fine old time on our own. These pals of yours seem to be decent sorts, Nipper. We'll go straight to Baker Street, then, after a jolly good feed, we'll saunter off to Kensington. I rather fancy we're going to have an enjoyable evening. I'll run you all down again in the car to-morrow morning."

"That's the idea," I said. "Well, I can tell you one thing, Tinker. You're going to see a good fight this evening."

"Think so?" said Tinker. "I've seen this fellow, Kiddy Welsh. He's rather hot stuff, too. Your champion must be a bit of a marvel if he can possibly hope to beat Welsh. Personally, I don't see how it can be done. It strikes me as being absolutely impossible for a schoolboy to stand much chance against a professional in the ring. So you'd better prepare yourself for a disappointment. This fellow Lawrence is going to be whacked to the wide!"

"Don't you believe it," I said. "It's possible that Lawrence will fail, but he won't be whacked as you suggest. It'll be a near thing, and they'll probably go through the whole fifteen rounds, without either of them being knocked out. And if the match has to be settled on points our chap will be the winner. He's absolutely a wonder at boxing—a kind of wizard. He never keeps to the same style. He's always changing—he always has his man on the jump and guessing."

We had reached Bannington by this time, and we sped swiftly through the

town, then on the road to Helmford and London.

Tinker was a good driver, and he made the car fairly roar. If anyone else had been behind the wheel I should have been slightly nervous, but not so with Tinker. He was a speed merchant, but he was not a road hog.

When it was necessary he slowed down to a very sedate pace. He only opened the throttle wide when the road was clear, and when he could see what lay in front.

And, as the time went on, we came nearer and nearer to the spot where Lawrence had flung his cap out of the car. Of course, we knew nothing about it—then. We thought Lawrence was in London by this time. We had no suspicion that he had met with foul play.

But that cap lay in the grass, quite visible to all who passed. It lay there, prominent and unmistakable. And we were destined to pass along the same road, right by the spot.

The miles flew by, and at last we were only a few hundred yards distant from the spot. There, in the grass, at the side of the road, lay the cap.

And then, by some stroke of fate, Tommy Watson pointed to an aeroplane, which was flying rather low over the tree-tops away to the left. Everybody looked in that direction, staring at the aeroplane. Tinker, of course, kept his eyes to the road, for the car was moving fast.

And we shot by the spot where that cap lay without seeing it.

But for the fact that our eyes had been attracted by the aeroplane one of us would undoubtedly have spotted the St. Frank's colours. That would have meant a halt, and investigations, and we should have guessed at the truth. As it was, we went on our way, sublimely unconscious of the fact that anything had happened to Lawrence. His cap still lay there in the grass, unheeded and forlorn.

Later on we passed the little side

road, never giving it a glance. We would have been rather startled could we have known that Lawrence was there even then—a prisoner up in the attic!

But we knew nothing. We went straight on to Esher, through Esher and Surbiton, and then through the back streets of outer London.

At length, at about tea-time, Tinker pulled the big car to a standstill in Baker Street, opposite his own door. We all tumbled out, rather glad to get a stretch, for we had been somewhat cramped in the car. It had not been made to accommodate twelve.

"Well, here we are," I said briskly. "No mishaps, and no trouble. I'm jolly hungry, too. I hope you've got a decent tea ordered, Tinker."

"Rather," said Tinker. "I told Mrs. Bardell to get something particularly appetising. You needn't worry about that, my sons."

Tinker led the way in, after opening the door with his latchkey. Then we all trooped upstairs, somewhat noisily. The first thing was a wash, for we were all somewhat grimy after our motor ride. Tinker took us straight into the consulting-room to begin with. And we stopped there while he went to prepare the bath-room for our use.

But before Tinker could get out of the doorway another door opened on the other side of the room, and to our astonishment a well-known figure appeared—the tall, well-built figure of Sexton Blake, the famous criminologist!

"Dear me!" he exclaimed smoothly. "What is the meaning of this, Tinker? What is this invasion?"

Tinker grunted.

"Well, I call this too bad of you, guv'nor," he complained. "It's just about the limit! Who told you to turn up this afternoon?"

Sexton Blake elevated his eyebrows.

"Really, Tinker, I rather fancy I have a right to come into my own place if I want to!" he exclaimed. "My

business up North was concluded rather sooner than I had expected. And so I came home fully anticipating that you would be here, on duty. Instead of that, Mrs. Bardell informs me that you have gone gallivanting off in the big touring car to the South Coast, and now turn up, as large as life, bringing with you a whole Public school!"

But Sexton Blake was smiling, and he was in a cheerful mood as he shook hands with us all.

"I was only joking, of course, boys," he said. "I am quite glad to see you all. But you hardly expected to meet me, eh? I really hope that I have not disappointed you. I trust that my presence here will not embarrass you in any way."

"Rather not, sir," I said. "We're jolly glad to see you. But Tinker told us you wouldn't be here——"

"And, strictly speaking, he oughtn't to be here!" put in Tinker. "It's just like the guv'nor to turn up in this way. He's always doing unexpected things. You never know when to be safe. I thought we should have been all serene for this evening—and here he is, butting in and spoiling everything!"

"Really Tinker, I have no intention of doing anything of the sort," said Sexton Blake. "I should not like to butt in on your amusement—that is, if you have planned anything. I suppose you are thinking of going to a theatre this evening, or some such amusement as that? How on earth you managed to get leave from St. Frank's rather astonishes me. It is quite extraordinary how you youngsters arrange these things."

It did not take us long to explain to Sexton Blake why we had come, and how we had wangled the whole affair.

Sexton Blake was quite amused, and he was rather interested when he learned that we were going to the West End Sporting Club Hall that evening, to witness the fight between Young Ern and Kiddy Welsh.

"And you tell me that this young

boxer is really a St. Frank's boy?" he said at last. "Most surprising! Surely he cannot hope to put up much of a fight against a professional?"

"You wait and see, sir," I said. "I shall be surprised if Lawrence doesn't win. He's absolutely a wonder—a living marvel! I only wish you could see him in the ring!"

"I have a mind to come with you boys. I dare say I shall be able to find a seat somewhere. I always enjoy witnessing a good boxing contest; and this promises to be excellent, by all that I can hear."

"Good!" I said. "That's the style, sir! I'd love you to come!"

Sexton Blake decided that he would come with us, although we were not disappointed when he learned, over the telephone, that he could not obtain a seat immediately adjacent to ours. Not that we did not want Sexton Blake to be with us, but the majority of the fellows declared that they would be more comfortable if we were just by ourselves in a group.

There were one or two minor contests billed to take place before the fight between Young Ern and Kiddy Welsh, and we decided to get there in time to see the whole show. There was no reason why we should not.

We had a very excellent tea, and when we finally left for Kensington we were all feeling fit and ready for the night's entertainment.

We found the West End Sporting Club Hall to be quite a palatial place. It was large and brilliantly illuminated outside and in. There were crowds of people there already, and every seat in the place had been booked in advance. Sexton Blake had only been able to obtain one because a few stray seats had been returned.

Tinker had booked our seats all in a row—twelve. They were excellent seats, too, for we could obtain a full view of the ring, without any obstruction hindering our view.

They were in the front row of the balcony, and, in my opinion, were much better than the ring-side seats. They were exorbitantly dear and rather too close.

We were not wearing St. Frank's caps, and there was really nothing about us to indicate where we had come from at all. For we were all wearing light overcoats over our Etons, and soft felt hats. But in spite of this, we were soon recognised by one man, at all events.

This individual was Mr. Norman Rook. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed before Mr. Rook came hurrying up to the balcony. He sent an attendant for me; and I lost no time in leaving my place, and going to the spot where Mr. Rook was waiting. I found him looking very anxious and concerned. And there was a light of worry in his eyes which could not be mistaken.

"Good-evening, Mr. Rook," I said. "I think I have met you once before."

"Very possibly, my lad—very possibly!" said Mr. Rook. "To tell you the truth, I am extremely anxious and worried."

"Yes, you look rather concerned, sir," I said. "Is anything the matter?"

"Good gracious! Is anything the matter?" echoed Mr. Rook. "Where is Lawrence? Can you tell me where he is, my lad?"

"Lawrence!" I echoed. "Why, he's here, isn't he?"

"No—he is not here—I expected him quite early this afternoon," said Mr. Rook. "He promised me that he would leave by the early train, and that he would be in this hall between four and five. It is now nearly seven, and there's no sign of him!"

I looked very astonished.

"But I can't understand it, sir!" I ejaculated. "Lawrence left almost immediately after dinner. He caught the afternoon train from Bellton, and I can't possibly think how he went

wrong. I know he didn't miss the train—because he started with plenty of time to spare."

"Dear me! This is most extraordinary," said Mr. Rook. "I have been waiting for the lad for over two hours, and heaven only knows what will happen if he doesn't turn up very soon. I shall find it necessary to secure a substitute—and that will be almost impossible. The whole thing will be a fiasco, and I am quite certain there will be trouble. Are you sure, Nipper, that you have no idea where Lawrence could be?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," I replied. "He said he'd come up by train, because he wanted to get here early, otherwise he would have come along in the car with us. But he couldn't wait until then."

"Amazing—quite amazing!" said Mr. Rook. "He left, and he ought to have been here before tea! And yet he has not turned up. Can anything have happened to the boy, do you think? Have you heard of any accident, or—"

"There's been no train accident, sir, if that's what you mean," I replied. "At least, I've seen no report of it. And if Lawrence had met with a mishap in London, surely you would have received a telephone message, or something? He's bound to turn up soon, sir."

"I sincerely hope so, my boy—I do, indeed!" said Mr. Rook. "The officials are already bothering me, and I do not know what to say. I assured them that my man will turn up soon. That is all I can do. And now I must wait—wait impatiently until Lawrence appears."

Mr. Rook went off, looking more worried than ever. Now he was puzzled, too. He knew that Lawrence had left by the train as arranged. Therefore, something had happened on the road, that was obvious. But what could have happened? What could possibly have delayed Ernest Lawrence for so long?

Where was the lad? And why didn't he appear?

CHAPTER 4.

The Mysterious Tramp!

MEANWHILE, Lawrence was a prisoner in the old farmhouse.

He was now wild with anxiety and disappointment. Over an hour had elapsed since Mr. Foxe had left him, and there had been no sign of the Housemaster returning. But Lawrence had not changed his mind. He was still firm—he was still determined to refuse all attempts at blackmail. It was against his principles—and he would not consent to it.

And then, at about five o'clock, footsteps sounded out on the landing—the bolt was shot, and the door opened. Mr. Smale Foxe entered.

"If you've come to ask me to sign that paper, you might as well have saved yourself the trouble!" said Lawrence grimly. "I won't do it, Mr. Foxe—I'm not going to be blackmailed."

"Don't be in quite such a hurry, my lad," said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I fear you have not considered this matter fully. Do you realise the consequences? If you accept my terms, you will at least receive three hundred pounds for your own use. If, on the other hand, you remain obstinate, you will receive nothing whatever."

"If I go in for this fight, and I win it, I shall have earned that money!" exclaimed Lawrence passionately. "It doesn't belong to you, Mr. Foxe—you've got no right to demand any at all. It's disgraceful—it's shameful! I want that money for a certain purpose—every penny of it. If you take this two hundred pounds, it will be robbery—absolute robbery!"

"You ought to consider yourself very lucky that you are able to obtain even three hundred," said Mr. Foxe. "You have defied me time after time—but this time you are not in a position to do so. Please understand that fully, Lawrence. I am not inclined to put up with any further nonsense. And I now intend to make you pay for your previous actions."

"And supposing I do sign this docu-

ment?" asked Lawrence suddenly. "what guarantee will you have that I shall pay the money?"

"I shall have your signature!"

"That's of no value at all," said Lawrence. "I'm a minor, and my signature wouldn't be valid. You know that as well as I do—"

"Quite so; but I know that if you signed this paper, you would keep your word," said Mr. Foxe grimly. "I rather fancy you have a high code of honour, Lawrence, and if you signed, you would keep faith. If you do not sign the paper, you will not only sacrifice the whole prize—but you will find yourself expelled from St. Frank's. For, by heaven, I shall make every effort to get you sent away from the school in disgrace!"

Lawrence's lips curled as he looked at the Housemaster.

"Those threats don't have any effect on me, Mr. Foxe," he said contemptuously. "I'm not going to be frightened by you, anyhow. And I still stick to my original decision. I am not going to be blackmailed."

Mr. Foxe frowned.

"I will give you only twenty minutes longer!" he rapped out. "And, then, Lawrence, if you do not agree to sign this paper—I shall use force. I shall compel you to do so. And my terms will be hardened. Remember—twenty minutes only will you have. Then I shall return, and I shall bring other men with me, and you will regret this obstinate spirit of yours!"

The Housemaster turned on his heel, and strode out of the attic, slamming the door behind him. He was furious, for he had expected that Lawrence would now be submissive. He shot the bolt home, and passed down the corridor. Lawrence remained alone in the attic.

If only he could escape! It would be wonderful if he could disappear before Mr. Foxe returned. But this was quite out of the question—and Lawrence knew it. There was no escape. He had succeeded in getting his arms

free, which had not been a very difficult task.

But the evening was coming on. Unless he escaped very soon, it would be too late altogether—he would arrive at the West End Sporting Club Hall too late for the contest. It was an appalling prospect.

And while Lawrence was thinking in this way, Mr. Foxe had descended to the ground floor. He went outside, into the grounds, pacing up and down angrily. He had just turned a corner of the building, when he came to a halt, for there, in full view, stood a somewhat disreputable figure. It was a man attired in old clothes, a ragged old hat, and patched boots. His face was unkempt, for he wore a straggly, wispy beard. His nose was extremely red, and he did not look at all prepossessing. Mr. Foxe frowned angrily as he saw the fellow.

"Get out of here!" he shouted curtly. "Don't you know you're trespassing?"

"What's that, guv'nor?" asked the man in a beery voice. "Who's trespassing? This place ain't anybody's property! I can have a doss here if I want to, I suppose, without asking you? The show don't happen to be your property, I suppose?"

"It is my property, and if you don't get off it at once, I'll have you thrown off!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "Do you hear me?"

"Well, I ain't deaf," said the tramp, as he came nearer. "And you'd best understand that I don't take no orders from you. See? As a matter of fact, I've been waiting my chance—and now I've got it!"

"You've been waiting your chance, you ruffian?" demanded Mr. Foxe. "What do you mean?"

"Them two coves was hanging about," explained the tramp. "They've just gorn—I dare say they've got thirsty, or something, and have gone up the road to 'ave a drink. Any'ow, I've got you to deal with now—and I don't

think it'll be very difficult. Put up your hands!"

Mr. Foxe staggered.

"Why, what—"

"Put up your hands!" said the tramp in a cold, firm voice.

"You—you infernal rascal!" roared Mr. Foxe, suddenly alarmed and frightened. "If you dare to attack me—"

But, at that moment, Mr. Foxe had caught sight of the revolver which the tramp had produced. It was an extremely wicked-looking article, and Mr. Foxe did not care for its appearance. He further observed that the tramp's finger was on the trigger, and this fact caused Mr. Foxe to raise his hands hurriedly. The Housemaster was bewildered. He could not understand what this meant—why this man had taken it into his head to interfere. Robbery could be the only motive.

"By heaven, you shall pay for this!" snarled Mr. Foxe. "I will—"

"You will walk straight into the house, and do exactly as I command—that's what you'll do, matey!" said the tramp. "And you'd best not give me any back answers—because when I'm irritated my fingers is twitchy. Go on—walk into the house!"

Only for a moment did Mr. Foxe hesitate. Then with a muttered curse he commenced walking along the path, and, at length, entered the doorway. He now stood in one of the dilapidated rooms.

"There's a cupboard over in the corner," he said. "Go to that cupboard, open the door, and get inside!"

"I refuse—I absolutely refuse!" shouted Mr. Foxe fiercely. "I will do no such thing—I—I—good gracious."

Mr. Foxe felt the barrel of the revolver pressing into his back, and, with surprising alacrity, he hurried across the room, opened the cupboard, and scrambled inside. The tramp closed the door with a slam, and turned the big, rusty key in the lock. Mr. Smale Foxe was now a prisoner—the tables had been turned with a vengeance.

But why had the old tramp interfered? What connection had he with this peculiar case?

Mr. Foxe was a prisoner; but, of course, he would be able to make his escape if he was only allowed time. He would soon be able to break the door down and regain his liberty. Apparently this is what the tramp desired. For he made no effort to secure the door in a more thorough manner.

Instead, he left the room, and quickly mounted the stairs, and then went to the attic. A moment later, he was within the room, standing face to face with Ernest Lawrence. The junior looked at him fiercely.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Why have you come here?"

"It's all right, young 'un—you needn't be scared!" said the tramp calmly. "I ain't one of them—and as for the Foxey fellow—well, he's fixed up nice and comfortable in one of them cupboards. I reckon you ought to escape, don't you?"

"Escape!" said Lawrence. "I—I—is this a trick?" he added suspiciously.

"Not on your life, young gent!" said the tramp. "There ain't no trickery about me. You want to escape, and all you've got to do is to walk out. There's a motor-car waiting outside, and we'll take the liberty of getting into it, and driving into Esher. I dare say you'll be able to catch a train from there to London—and maybe you'll be able to keep your appointment after all."

"Do—do you really mean it?" asked Lawrence, husky with relief.

"Of course I mean it—what do you take me for?" asked the tramp. "Come along—there ain't any time to waste."

Lawrence, with his mind in a whirl, followed the tramp down the crazy staircase, and then out into the open. They had heard fierce hammerings from Mr. Foxe's cupboard.

The tramp's eyes were twinkling as he made his way to the motor-car which was standing just on the road in a little yard.

"Jump in!" said the tramp briskly. Lawrence jumped in—for, although he had been suspicious of this man at first, he was suspicious no longer. There was something about him which inspired confidence. But it seemed strange that he should be able to drive a motor-car. This, however, proved to be the case. The tramp started up the engine, and a moment later they were off, speeding down the lane towards the main road.

The tables had been turned on Mr. Foxe. The rascally Housemaster's scheme had come to nothing, after all—and yet, only a few minutes earlier, it had seemed certain of success.

Lawrence was still rather dazed by this sudden turn of fortune, and he had not succeeded in fully collecting his wits when the motor-car pulled up at Esher station.

"Just pop in, and see how the trains go!" said the tramp, as Lawrence opened the door at the rear. "Best not waste any time—there might be a train within two minutes."

Lawrence hurried into the booking office, and, to his joy, he discovered that a train was due almost at once. It was a fast train, too, and it would land him in London in excellent time. Lawrence had never felt so light-hearted as he did at that moment.

He searched through his pockets as he hurried out through the station yard. He had decided to give the tramp practically everything he possessed, two pound notes, and some silver. He could really do nothing less—for the tramp's assistance had been of the most wonderful value.

Then Lawrence received a surprise. He hurried out of the booking-office and was just in time to see the rear light of the motor-car disappearing in the distance! His strange benefactor had vanished without waiting to be thanked—without waiting to be rewarded.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Lawrence blankly.

He stared around him with absolute bewilderment expressed on his face. He could not possibly understand this.

The tramp had rescued him from Mr. Smale Foxe's clutches—he had even brought him to the station, so that he could catch a fast train to London. And yet the man had gone off without waiting a moment.

Who could he be? And why had he done this? If Lawrence had only known the tramp's real identity, he would have been greatly surprised.

The tramp's movements, after leaving Esher station, were rather queer. He drove the car up a small side lane, and left it there. And then he wandered away, apparently in an aimless fashion. But, as a matter of fact, the tramp knew precisely what he was doing.

For he was no less a person than—Nelson Lee.

The famous schoolmaster detective had been on the track for quite a long while, and he had seen through Mr. Smale Foxe's game from the start. And he had been successful in rescuing Ernest Lawrence, and in sending him unharmed on his way. Just at the moment, however, Nelson Lee did not intend taking any action with regard to Mr. Smale Foxe. He thought that it would be better to let the man remain in ignorance of the actual truth. And then, at the right moment, Nelson Lee would pounce.

Lawrence, meanwhile, was hastening towards London. Upon arrival at the terminus, he did not hesitate to charter a taxi. And, in this, he was rushed off to Kensington. Soon he arrived at the West End Sporting Club Hall just in time to run into the arms of Mr. Rook—who was coming out to see if he could see any signs of the absentee.

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated Mr. Rook, an expression of infinite relief coming into his eyes. "I am more delighted than I can say to see you, Lawrence. Where have you been?

Why did you not turn up? You cannot tell how worried I have been—"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir, but I couldn't help it!" panted Lawrence. "I was kidnapped—"

"Never mind explaining now," said Mr. Rook. "Come into the dressing-room, and have a chat there, and you can explain everything. Now that you are here I don't mind. There is still just time."

"Thank goodness!" said Lawrence fervently.

He followed Mr. Rook into the building, and before long they were facing one another in a comfortable dressing-room. Lawrence was not quite certain as to what he should tell the boxing promoter. He did not want to invent any story to excuse his lateness, and, at the same time, he had no particular wish to tell Mr. Rook the actual truth. He did not want to relate all the facts connected with Mr. Smale Foxe.

So he compromised.

He told Mr. Rook exactly what had taken place. He explained how he had been lured into the motor-car at Bannington, and how he had been taken to the old deserted farmhouse near Esher.

But Lawrence did not explain that his captor had been Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House. That was the only point which Mr. Rook remained in ignorance of. And when Lawrence had done, the boxing promoter shook his head gravely.

"Well, my lad, it's a good thing you've turned up now!" he said. "If I didn't know you to be straightforward and truthful, I should be a bit sceptical about this story. It doesn't seem quite convincing."

"I know that, sir," said Lawrence quietly. "I hardly expect you to believe me. But I've told you the absolute truth. If everything had gone all right I should have been here hours and hours ago!"

"And what about this tramp?" asked Mr. Rook. "Who was he?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, sir," said Lawrence truthfully.

"Why did he let you escape—and then go off without any reward?"

"That's been puzzling me all the time," replied Lawrence. "It's so mysterious, Mr. Rook. I can't make head or tail of it."

Mr. Rook looked at Lawrence critically.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Oh, as right as anything!"

"No ill effects from your adventure?"

"None at all, sir."

"You feel fit for this fight?"

"Rather!" said Lawrence. "Oh, you needn't worry about that, Mr. Rook. I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I shall go into the ring full of confidence. Of course, I don't expect to win——"

"Because this Kiddy Welsh is a famous boxer?" asked Mr. Rook. "Nonsense! You've got to go into the ring, my boy, with the firm belief that you will be the victor. Don't forget that. You'll have a pretty tough job, but you stand an excellent chance of winning. And now we've got to attend to all the preliminaries. You'll have to be weighed in, and then there are a good many other things to attend to."

Ernest Lawrence was light hearted.

In spite of his adventure with Mr. Smale Foxe he had arrived at the West End Sporting Club Hall in time. And now the big event of the evening would soon begin, and it was to be a grim struggle!

CHAPTER 5.

For His Father's Sake!

"JOLLY queer about Lawrence!" remarked Church. "I wonder if he's turned up yet?"

"Oh, he's bound to have turned up," said Handforth. "We should have heard something otherwise. Why, this fight between Young Ern and Kiddy Welsh is the next event on the programme. If Lawrence hadn't turned

up the scrap would have been cancelled."

"I can't imagine why he was delayed, in the first place," said Reginald Pitt. "We know he went by the early train, and he ought to have been in London hours before we arrived. It seems a bit mysterious to my mind. But I suppose we shall hear all the details later—after we get back to St. Frank's."

"Of course," said Bob Christine. "And don't speak so loud, either, you ass. We don't want to give the game away."

The juniors had taken a good deal of interest in the preliminary bouts. They had been exciting in their way, but, after all, they only filled in the time until the big event of the evening came off.

Everybody in the great hall was waiting to see Kiddy Welsh and the youngster who had sprung so rapidly into prominence. Everyone wanted to see Young Ern battling against the London champion.

As a matter of fact, all the preliminaries were over; the big fight was due to begin almost at once, and everybody was waiting expectantly.

I sat next to Tinker, and we had been having quite a long chat about things in general. The other fellows were greatly interested in all the proceedings, and they were somewhat critical, too. They declared that too much time was wasted. They wanted to see more for their money.

"Positively disgraceful—that's what it is!" declared Handforth. "Unless they buck up there won't be time for the next fight. They're messing about

"Shut up!" whispered Church. "Here they are!"

Quite a stir had manifested itself at the ring-side. And then Kiddy Welsh appeared, surrounded by a perfect company of white-sweated gentlemen who wore canvas shoes.

Kiddy Welsh needed no introduction to the crowd, although this ceremony

was gone through as a mere matter of form.

He met with a big reception, a perfect storm of handclapping and cheering greeting him as he bowed near the ropes.

By what I could see, Welsh was only a small man, quite a young fellow, too. His face bore the marks of many a grim battle, and he was by no means handsome. My private opinion of him was not extremely flattering.

I took rather a dislike to Welsh at the very first. He struck me as being a conceited swaggerer, and there was a look about his eyes which stamped him as a bit of a brute. However, the fight would soon show whether my conclusions were right or wrong.

Kiddy Welsh was attired in a long dressing-gown, and he lounged about the ring in a free-and-easy, careless style. He certainly gave everybody the impression that he was perfectly at his ease, and that he rather regarded the fight as a bit of a farce.

Whether Welsh actually thought this we did not know; he certainly led the spectators to believe that such was the case.

And then Young Ern was introduced.

He was brought forward by the referee and presented to the spectators. The St. Frank's fellows had a great deal of difficulty in restraining themselves from cheering with all their strength.

They recognised Lawrence at once, and all their natural instincts told them to give him a tremendous welcome. They clapped furiously, and Handforth cheered quite a lot. But, somehow, they managed to refrain from shouting to Lawrence by name.

There were not many people in the audience who followed the example of the St. Frank's fellows, for Young Ern was new to London; these people did not know what he was capable of. They had only heard a few rumours concerning the youngster who had knocked out Mike Connor at Helmford, and many people regarded Young Ern's

success, in that bout, as something of a fluke.

The result of this present fight was regarded as a foregone conclusion. Everybody was anticipating an easy victory for Kiddy Welsh. Ninety per cent of the crowd felt convinced that Young Ern would not be able to put up much of a show.

Lawrence's attitude was very different from that of Kiddy Welsh. He walked straight to his corner, and sat down, with his seconds about him. Lawrence had no air of over-confidence. He was quiet and calm, and the audience read these signs in one way only. They assumed that Young Ern was nervous of the result—that he was serious and grave, knowing full well that he was in for a defeat.

And there was one man who had a seat at the side of the balcony who seemed extraordinarily interested. He was leaning forward, staring intently at Lawrence. He was an elderly man, well built, and with a rugged but good-humoured face. This face was lined, as though with recent worry. And the man's hair was grey at the temples. There was a startled look in his eyes, and he gazed down with a kind of bewildered amazement in his expression.

"Impossible!" he muttered tensely. "Oh, it's impossible! But—but by—I could swear the figure—"

He hastily pulled out some pince-nez, placed them upon his nose. Again he gazed down, but he could not see distinctly. He was a good way from the ring; and just then he noticed that a gentleman near him was using a pair of opera-glasses. He leaned over with almost feverish anxiety.

"Excuse me, sir, but may I borrow your glasses for just a minute?" he asked huskily.

"Certainly—certainly!" said the stranger, glancing round.

He handed over the glasses, and the man with the rugged face seized them. He placed them to his eyes, focused them, and then stared fixedly and in-

tently at Lawrence. Young Ern's features came into sharp prominence, and the man who held the glasses drew in a deep breath.

"Yes, I was right—I was right!" he muttered tensely. "It's Ernest—Ernest himself! Good heavens! What can this mean? What is the boy doing here? Is it possible that he—that he —"

The elderly man broke off, and seemed quite dazed for a moment or two. It will not be revealing a secret to explain that this gentleman was Mr. Ernest Lawrence senior.

Just as the schoolboy boxer had feared, his father was in the hall!

And Mr. Lawrence, at the very first moment, had recognised his son. It was a blow to him, a tremendous surprise, and even now he could not believe it. Although he knew he had made no mistake, this discovery was altogether too much for him.

His own boy here—in this boxing-ring—about to meet Kiddy Welsh, the professional! It seemed too ridiculous to be true. Ernest was at St. Frank's, attending to his lessons—a schoolboy! How was it possible for him to be here, on the point of engaging in a professional prize fight?

Mr. Lawrence was a man of action, and it was not long before he came to a decision. He had dropped into this hall because he wanted some relaxation from his worries.

And now he discovered one of the principal fighters of the evening was his own son! And not only this. His son was fighting under an assumed name—at least it was a name which gave no clue to his real identity. Mr. Lawrence was determined to find out the truth without any delay.

He knew he had time; the fight would not begin for ten minutes yet. Returning the glasses, he made his way out of the balcony, and quickly descended the stairs. His expression was grim. He remembered how he had told his son never to enter a pro-

fessional boxing-ring, and now, it appeared, Ernest had deliberately disobeyed him.

But not from his own choice, Mr. Lawrence was sure of that. He had been persuaded somehow—he had been tricked into this business.

And Mr. Lawrence meant to find out the truth.

Arriving in the big vestibule of the hall, he had no difficulty in locating an official in evening-dress. He went up to this man at once.

"Excuse me, but can you tell me the name of Young Ern's manager?" he asked bluntly.

"Why, yes, sir," said the official. "You want Mr. Rook, don't you?"

"Mr. Rook, eh?" said Mr. Lawrence. "Yes, that is the gentleman I wish to see."

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I don't think you'll be able to see Mr. Rook just now," said the official. "The big fight is about to begin, and I am certain that Mr. Rook cannot be disturbed—"

"Mr. Rook will be disturbed!" interrupted Mr. Lawrence grimly. "You will please take my card to him at once!"

He produced a slip of pasteboard from his pocket, and handed it to the official. The latter glanced at it for a moment, and then, shrugging his shoulders, he turned away.

"I'll do my best," he said. "But I'm afraid it will be no good. Will you please wait here, sir?"

Mr. Lawrence nodded, and he paced up and down while the official was away. At last, after a few minutes had elapsed, the man returned.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Lawrence sharply.

"If you will follow me, sir, I will take you to Mr. Rook at once," said the man. "Mr. Rook will be obliged, however, if you will detain him for as short a space of time as possible. You will quite understand that he is very busy just now."

"Yes, I understand," said Mr. Law-

rence. "I will get my business over as quickly as possible."

He was taken down several passages until, at length, he found himself in the rear of the hall. And then he was ushered into a little office, where Mr. Norman Rook was waiting, not without feelings of worry; for Mr. Rook knew now that Lawrence had been right.

His father was on the premises, and his father had come to find out the truth. Perhaps it was just as well, although Mr. Lawrence could have chosen a more favourable opportunity.

"You are Mr. Rook?" demanded Lawrence's father, as he stepped into the office.

"That is my name, sir," said Mr. Rook. "I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Lawrence. I have an idea that you have come here with the object of—"

"My object is to discover why you have brought my son to this place!" interrupted Mr. Lawrence grimly. "I don't want any fabrications, sir, and I don't want any excuses. Young Ern is my son—"

"Please keep your temper, Mr. Lawrence—"

"I insist upon an explanation!" interrupted the other angrily. "My son is supposed to be at school—at St. Frank's, in Sussex. Why is he here? Why is he about to meet Kiddy Welsh in the professional prize-ring? It is absolutely against all my wishes, and I will not permit this fight to take place. Do you understand that, Mr. Rook? In no circumstances will I allow my son to meet this man Welsh!"

Mr. Rook looked grim.

"I am afraid it is too late for you to say that now, sir," he exclaimed. "Young Ern will meet Kiddy Welsh almost at once, and nothing you can say or do will stop the fight. It is too late for any objection to be made now. Apparently you do not appreciate the position—"

"I know well enough that my son did not willingly agree to this fight!" interrupted Mr. Lawrence hotly. "He has

been tricked into it—or forced into it. I do not know which. When I came to the hall I had no suspicion of the actual truth, but now that I do know I have decided that my son shall not fight Kiddy Welsh in the ring this evening!"

Mr. Rook looked very grim.

"Oh, indeed!" he exclaimed. "It is no wish of mine to have a quarrel with you, Mr. Lawrence, but I can assure you that this fight will take place—"

"And I say it shall not!" roared Mr. Lawrence. "This boy is my son, and I have a perfect right to take him away if I wish to do so. I fully intend taking this course. And, furthermore, Mr. Rook, I demand an immediate explanation on your part. How is it that you have got my boy here? I am convinced that he would not have agreed to this of his own free will—"

"One moment, Mr. Lawrence!" interrupted the boxing promoter. "Since you wish to know the truth I shall tell you, and I rather fancy that it will come as something of a surprise. In the first place, your son agreed to this of his own free will—"

"I don't believe you!" snapped Mr. Lawrence.

"You are trying my patience rather severely, sir," said Mr. Rook grimly. "I repeat that your son agreed to this fight of his own free will. He had been hoping that it would be kept from your ears. But he feared that you might be here this evening, and, at first, he refused to appear in this hall. However, after due consideration, he decided to risk it, and there is now nothing to be gained by keeping the truth back. I may as well explain that your son has been perfectly frank with me. He has told me the exact truth, and you must not be offended, Mr. Lawrence, if I repeat—"

"You are at liberty to say exactly what you please," interrupted Mr. Lawrence. "I insist upon a full explanation. You must realise, Mr. Rook, that I am amazed. I had assumed that my son was at St. Frank's school, attend-

ing to his lessons, and now I discover him here, about to engage in a professional prize-fight with Kiddy Welsh. Surely you must see that it is a staggering surprise for me?"

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Lawrence, that the whole affair must seem extraordinary from your point of view," said Mr. Rook quietly. "However, if you will only listen for a few moments, you will understand the full position. I first met your son quite by accident, in Bannington, which is near St. Frank's. It was at a small boxing-booth, and your son had just given a sound thrashing to a young fellow who went by the name of 'Lightning Left' Ned. The proprietor had offered the sum of twenty pounds to anybody who could beat Ned within so many rounds. Well, Young Lawrence earned that reward, and I believe he sent the money direct to you."

"Direct to me!" echoed Mr. Lawrence, starting.

"That is what I believe," said Mr. Rook. "Since then, Lawrence has fought two contests at Helmford, and he has been successful in both. He received large sums of money—eighty pounds in the first instance, and something over one hundred pounds in the second. To the best of my knowledge, the lad sent all this money to you, although I rather fancy he did so anonymously. He did not want you to know the exact truth. He explained your position to me—he told me how you had lost all your money in the crash of Scarbrooke's Bank—and young Lawrence was very anxious to help you in some way; and this was the only method in which he could obtain money. It is against all his own wishes and inclinations to appear in the prize-ring, but he is doing it for your sake, Mr. Lawrence, and for your sake only!"

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Lawrence, staring straight before him.

"To-night your son will receive the sum of five hundred pounds," went on

Mr. Rook. "You may be quite sure that this five hundred pounds will be sent to you at the first opportunity. Young Lawrence is particularly keen, for I understand that such a sum will be very useful to you at this particular time. But, after all, Mr. Lawrence, this is none of my business, and I warned you beforehand that I did not wish to discuss it. I merely wish to put the boy right in your eyes. What he is doing he is doing for your sake only, and not from any motive of his own. Indeed, he does not care for this prize-fighting, and he would never do it for personal gain. His one and only object is to obtain money so that he can send it to you."

"Upon my soul!" said Mr. Lawrence huskily. "For me—for my sake! And he will get five hundred pounds!"

"As a matter of fact, he has already got it," said Mr. Rook. "He was promised that sum whether he won the fight or whether he lost it. I may as well tell you, Mr. Lawrence, that I have wagered somewhat heavily on this fight. I have received quite remarkable odds, and while I do not stand to lose so very much, I stand to gain a very great deal—if your son wins. All the experts are convinced that Welsh will beat his opponent within a few rounds, but my own opinion is quite the opposite. I know your son to be a marvellous boxer, and I believe that he will win. By gad, sir, if he does win he will receive another two hundred from me, and I shall give it willingly and gladly! And you must allow me to compliment you most heartily for the manner in which you have trained your boy."

Mr. Lawrence was still rather thunderstruck.

"You needn't do that, Mr. Rook," he said, shaking his head. "I certainly trained Ernest, but his ability is natural. I agree with you when you say that the lad is a wonder. And he has been doing this for my sake! Good gracious, I might have guessed! And

to think that I came round here for the purpose of creating a disturbance! I apologise, Mr. Rook, and I trust that you will forgive me!"

The promoter smiled.

"My dear sir, please say no more about it," he said. "And now I must ask you to excuse me, for the fight is just about to commence. Do you intend going back to your seat?"

"I do!" said Mr. Lawrence, his eyes shining. "I wouldn't miss this contest for all I possess! For something tells me that I shall see my boy win!"

Mr. Norman Rook nodded.

"I have no doubt of it!" he said heartily.

CHAPTER 6.

The Boxing Marvel!

"SECONDS out! Time!"

The big crowd in the West End Sporting Club Hall was tense with eagerness. The big fight of the evening was about to commence, and everything was ready.

The referee stood in the ring, and Kiddy Welsh and Ernest Lawrence emerged from their respective quarters. It was the opening moment of the contest. Everybody in that big hall felt strangely stirred, but fully ninety-five per cent of the crowd felt rather sorry for the clean-cut, white-limbed figure of "Young Ern." It was assumed by nearly all that he would be vanquished.

Tinker, who sat next to me, was greatly interested. He had even forgotten to look once in the direction where Sexton Blake was sitting; he had overlooked the fact that his guv'nor was present.

Handforth & Co., Pitt, and the rest, were leaning forward in their seats, excited and eager. They, too, were just a little doubtful. But, at the same time they hoped that Lawrence would be able to acquit himself well. To be knocked out in the first or second round would be disastrous.

"Oh, he'll do it all right!" said De Valerie. "He'll put up a decent show,

you mark my words! And if he loses, it won't be a walk-over for Kiddy Welsh."

Tinker shook his head.

"I'm afraid your man has taken on a bit more than he can chew this trip," he remarked. "Why, he's inches smaller than Welsh, and lighter, too. He doesn't stand a chance. It'll be absolutely a romp home for the professional."

"Think so?" I said. "Don't be too sure!"

We did not talk any more, for all our attention was centred upon the ring and those two lithe figures who went forward to face one another in battle.

There was nothing particularly startling about the first round. Like the first round in nearly all important contests, it was a quiet, somewhat tame affair. The two opponents were attempting to gauge one another's capabilities. Kiddy Welsh was obviously full of confidence, as he made one or two tentative thrusts, which were meant to test his opponent's defence.

Lawrence seemed rather clumsy and slow, and he did not give a good exhibition. And the effect upon Kiddy Welsh was quite marked. He went back to his corner at the end of the round smiling openly. He came to the conclusion that he was on a soft job, and he was quite convinced that he could bring the fight to a conclusion just whenever he pleased. But, of course, it would be necessary to play about with Young Ern for several rounds in order to give the crowd value for their money.

The second round was somewhat more lively. The combatants circled round one another, sparring for openings. They leapt in and out, exchanging a blow now and again, but doing no great damage.

I gave great attention to the footwork, and it did not take me long to decide that Lawrence was far cleverer than his opponent. Towards the end of the round he was feeling his way better; he was gaining confidence, and

he did not give Welsh a single opportunity of delivering a really telling thrust.

There was not the slightest doubt that Kiddy Welsh was a clever boxer. He was swift and dangerous, and it appeared to be his method to attack all the time, and he used both his fists with equal dexterity.

"Time!"

The second round came to an end as uneventfully as the first. From the spectators' point of view the fight, so far, had been a tame business. But it is nearly always this way.

Curiously enough, it was Lawrence who delivered the first really severe blow, and everybody had been expecting quite the opposite. After being driven back for a pace or two by a grim attack on Welsh's part, Lawrence suddenly countered. His action was as swift as a flash of lightning, and totally unexpected.

Slam!

His fist went home with terrific force on Welsh's neck. It was really a long range blow, but it had enormous sting behind it. Welsh himself was more amazed that Young Ern should possess such a long reach. He fell back, so surprised that for a second or two he dropped his guard.

But Lawrence did not take advantage of this, and then Welsh bunched himself up and came charging in furiously. It was his idea to repay that blow with interest. But somehow he found it impossible to discover the whereabouts of Young Ern's face, and his body seemed equally inaccessible.

Every thrust was guarded with an ease and coolness which quite surprised many of the spectators. It was a fierce attack, but Lawrence did not turn a hair. He dealt with it calmly, coolly, and with perfect sang-froid.

For what seemed to be a long time the boxers were engaged in a sharp mix-up. They moved across the ring in a stirring battle which sent a wave of excitement through the crowd.

And then the gong sounded, and the

fighters immediately broke away and went to their own corners. A stirring round of applause sounded, and I knew that a great deal of that applause was meant for Lawrence. He was showing his mettle already; he was revealing to the Londoners what kind of stuff he was made of. And Kiddy Welsh was not smiling quite so confidently now.

"Oh, good!" muttered Tinker. "I'm blessed if that chap isn't putting up a ripping fight, after all! He's a good man, Nipper, if you like!"

"You wait until later on!" I said confidently. "He hasn't surprised anybody yet, not properly. He'll cause a sensation before long."

"Time!"

There was something about Lawrence's attitude as he came forward that inspired confidence. As one looked at him it seemed impossible that Young Ern could be beaten. He possessed a kind of magnetic personality, and even Kiddy Welsh was affected. He could deal with men who blustered and who forced the pace; but this lithe youngster was different. He did not seem to care. He wore the same calm expression of quiet equanimity and confidence, and there was just a touch of grim relentlessness in his bearing.

Kiddy Welsh clenched his fists hard, and determined to show the spectators something worth seeing in this round. He was tired of free-and-easy tactics; he would change his methods altogether, and get to grim business.

His plan was to deliver a series of rapid lunges and hooks, leaping in and out constantly and bewildering his opponent.

He succeeded in doing this for a moment or two, for Lawrence had not been quite prepared for the sudden change of tactics. But then suddenly Kiddy Welsh discovered that his new scheme was not working properly.

Welsh dodged in with a straight left which would have knocked Lawrence completely over if that blow had gone home. But the junior was now fairly

on the alert, and the amazing rapidity with which he dodged the blow was a joy to witness. He gave a sudden swift leap, crouching low at the same time, and it took him right beneath the outstretched arm, and he delivered a return hook which had behind it enormous power.

This, combined with the surprise attack, proved absolutely staggering. Lawrence's gloved hand landed upon Welsh's jaw—which had been left entirely unguarded—with such force that the professional went backwards with a low, gurgling grunt.

He staggered, and nearly fell, and now there was a bewildered expression in his eyes. He was sluggish for a second, and Lawrence did not wait—he seized the advantage which his own attack had given him.

Thud! Smash! Crash!

Three powerful body punches hit Kiddy Welsh in rapid succession. The professional went back, utterly at Lawrence's mercy. He was dazed, quite incapable of defending himself during those brief, fleeting seconds.

He fell against the ropes—and then, by a big effort, he recovered himself in a partial degree. And with something which sounded like a snarl, he attempted to make a fierce, vicious hook at his opponent.

But, of course, it was a wild blow, and Lawrence had no difficulty in avoiding it. He dodged with the greatest of ease, and fetched round a left which struck Welsh on the cheek. Then came another terrific swing.

Welsh swayed as the junior pressed his attack. He was outclassed—and his one desire was a longing for the gong to sound. Unless it did sound almost at once, he would be beaten—beaten by this youngster.

Clang!

The round was at an end, and Kiddy Welsh staggered back to his corner, as nearly out as any boxer could be. That sound of the gong had been the most welcome note that had ever come to his ears. And he gritted his teeth as

he heard the enormous roar of cheering which rose from the crowd.

Those cheers were for Young Ern.

Lawrence was surprising the natives with a vengeance. Everybody had fully expected to see him wiped up. And—instead of that, he was doing all the wiping up. And Lawrence was now feeling quietly confident. His experience in the last round had told him that Kiddy Welsh was not to be particularly feared. So long as he—Lawrence—kept his eyes well open, and did not relax his guard, he would have nothing to fear from Welsh's attack.

On the other hand, Lawrence felt assured that he would be able to give his rival a great deal of trouble before the contest came to an end. Another attack such as had occurred in the previous round, and Welsh would be done. But it was not likely that the professional would give Lawrence any more openings of that nature. He had been taught a lesson which he would not speedily forget.

Welsh's seconds were working with a will, taking advantage of the brief breathing space—and when the gong sounded for the next round, Kiddy walked into the centre of the ring with a springy step. He appeared to be as fresh as ever, and quite recovered from the effects of Lawrence's blows.

The next three rounds were exciting, but not particularly spectacular. Blows were exchanged freely, but Lawrence was not severely marked. Indeed, Welsh found it very difficult to deliver his blows with the force he desired. And Lawrence, for his part, was content to let matters go fairly evenly.

But there was one striking difference which was noticeable to all the on-lookers. At first Welsh had been almost contemptuously confident—he had tried to play with his man. But now his tactics were totally different. To a large extent he limited himself to defence—and when a man does that it means that he has begun to lose confidence in himself.

During those next few rounds Ernest

Lawrence worked hard—steadily. He did not actually deliver many blows, but, on points, he was unquestionably the better of the two.

He was doing nearly all the attacking, and when one of his blows did happen to go home, there was no mistake about it. It went home—hard.

"He's wearing him down—slowly, but surely!" said De Valerie. "That's the game—and before long we shall see something worth looking at."

And De Valerie was right.

In the very next round there was some excitement which stirred the crowd. When the round started, both boxers entered into the battle with tremendous vim, and the spectators looked on tensely.

The scraping of the combatant's feet, the thud of the gloves upon bare limbs, were the sounds audible above all else.

And then, half-way through the round, the excitement started. Lawrence sent home a left hook—a punch which thudded against Welsh's head, as the latter turned aside in order to avoid the blow.

But it was a stunning thrust, nevertheless, and Kiddy staggered back for a moment. Lawrence closed with him, and succeeded with quiet ease in avoiding a counter swing. There followed a series of rapid half-arm punches—the majority of which thudded upon Welsh's chest and ribs.

To the spectators these blows did not seem particularly forceful—but Kiddy Welsh apparently thought differently. For he grunted audibly as Lawrence's fists struck him again and again.

The professional fell into a clinch, attempting to press his opponent's arms down.

"Break away!" rapped out the referee.

Welsh loosened his grip at once, and stepped out to distance. And as Lawrence dropped into his guard, Kiddy made a swift, powerful lunge—a savage attack, in fact. Before Lawrence knew it, he was giving ground, backing away before that hail of blows.

But, with amazing skill, he countered, and not for one second did he lose his head. His brain was as cool as ever, and he was waiting—waiting for an opportunity to bring this attack to a close.

Welsh was fighting with both hands—fighting with all the skill and knowledge he knew. And he thought he saw a good opportunity of bringing the fight to a dramatic finish. He was anxious for it to finish now, because he had an idea that if it was prolonged he would get the worst of it.

And, without fully realising Lawrence's skill, he made a sudden, panther-like attack. But it was hastily planned, and met with a fate which Welsh had never anticipated.

Instead of backing before the attack, Lawrence literally smashed through it, giving blow for blow. His right crashed upon Welsh's face with a power that brought the professional up with a jerk.

And then, before he could cover, Lawrence landed two more telling blows on the body—blows which drove the champion back step by step.

It was a change which nobody had expected—which had not been anticipated at that moment. It sent a thrill through the crowd.

"Oh, good man!" muttered Handforth, clenching his fists and working his arms unconsciously. "That's the style—now your left—like that—"

"Steady on, you ass!" gasped McClure. "Mind what you're doing with your silly fists!"

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth.

For Lawrence was fighting like a fellow possessed. Welsh had given him his opportunity, and he seized it with both hands. He smashed into Welsh again and again, forcing him round the ring, and the thud-thud of his blows could be heard distinctly above all other sounds.

Kiddy Welsh was so confused that he could hardly guard himself. It was a whirlwind—a hurricane.

Swift as light, Lawrence feinted with his left fist, causing Kiddy Welsh to

swing round. And then, putting every ounce of strength into the punch, the junior brought his right fist round with the strength and power of a battering ram.

Crash!

The right went home full on the point of Welsh's jaw. The professional went down with a thud, rolled over, attempted to rise, and then fell again. He lay there like a limp rag, with no sign of movement.

And now confusion reigned.

The crowd was on its feet, yelling and shouting. Lawrence stood by panting heavily from his great exertions—but quite ready for a renewal of the battle, if necessary. And the count was being taken.

"Three—four—five—six——"

Kiddy Welsh did not move—that last blow had knocked him out.

"Nine—out!"

Everybody was staggered. The fight had come to an end so unexpectedly—so dramatically. Nobody had believed that the battle would finish so early as this. And there was no question of luck about it. Ernest Lawrence had won because he deserved to win—because he was by far the better man of the two.

The schoolboy boxer hardly knew anything until he found himself in the dressing-room—hot, flustered, and overwhelmed by the excitement of it all. And then he found himself face to face with his father. The sight of Mr. Lawrence standing there was like a cold douche. Abruptly—suddenly—Ernest Lawrence came to himself.

"Dad!" he gasped faintly.

"My boy, it was wonderful—positively wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence, seizing his son's hand and grasping it firmly. "I knew you'd win all along—but you acquitted yourself in an amazing manner!"

Lawrence stared in fresh astonishment.

"But—but dad!" he exclaimed. "Aren't—aren't you cross?"

"Cross!" shouted his father. "Good gracious, Ernest, why on earth should you think that? I am proud of you—more proud than I can say! Mr. Rook has told me everything, and I know the truth."

"Oh, dad!" said Lawrence happily. "This is—just splendid!"

And then he looked up, right into his father's face.

"And—and is everything all right?" he whispered.

Mr. Lawrence nodded.

"Yes, my boy—everything is all right!" he replied quietly.

And the junior knew exactly what he meant.

As for Mr. Smale Foxe—that questionable gentleman was foiled. Owing to the intervention of Nelson Lee, he had been unable to carry out his project. And the time was slipping away—and Mr. Foxe had been unable to gain the ends he so much desired.

But in Mr. Foxe's cunning mind a new scheme was being evolved—a scheme which, if successful, would mean disgrace for St. Frank's.

It was a last attempt—a final throw. Whether it would succeed or not, remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 7.

The Meeting in Belton Wood!

MR. SMALE FOXE frowned. He was sitting in the privacy of his study in the College House at St. Frank's, and apparently he was not in a very good humour.

The Housemaster of the College House, in fact, was intensely angry and irritated. He had received another setback of late, and he was beginning to feel that all his schemes would come to naught.

And now, within a few days, the headmaster would return. On that day Mr. Foxe would have to go, for

he knew that he could not remain after the Head came back.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Mr. Foxe frowned. He was wondering if he would be able to carry out a plan to bring disgrace on St. Frank's—a plan which had been discussed by him and his brother.

This brother of Mr. Foxe's was no scoundrel. But he had been compelled against his will to perform actions which were totally against his principles.

"I wonder if the fool has done everything I told him," muttered Mr. Foxe. "I feel that I can't quite trust him, but he was the only man for the work. If only this plan succeeds the disgrace which will fall upon St. Frank's will cause a sensation throughout the country."

Mr. Foxe rose to his feet and paced up and down for some time. Then he glanced at his watch, and passed out of the study. He had discarded his cap and gown, and was wearing a tweed overcoat and a soft felt hat.

It was evening, and dusk was already falling as Mr. Foxe crossed the Triangle towards the gates. It was quite a mild spring evening, and the sky was clear and bright. Everything looked fresh and green, and the juniors who were about seemed more than usually contented.

One reason for all this was that the Easter holidays would soon be at hand, and the fellows were always happier when holidays were near.

Mr. Foxe passed down Belton Lane towards the village. But he did not go all the distance. When he arrived at the stile he crossed this and turned into the wood. He continued on his way until he found himself in a very dense portion of the wood. Here he halted, waiting beneath a huge oak.

"He should be here within five minutes," muttered Mr. Foxe, consulting his watch. "I expect the infernal idiot will be late."

But he was wrong.

Two minutes had scarcely elapsed before a man came down the path from the opposite direction. He was attired in a thick overcoat, a muffler, and a soft hat. He wore large tinted spectacles, and a neat moustache on his upper lip.

This man was Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe, the brother of James Smale Foxe. The two men were strikingly alike—and it was for this reason that Ralph wore a slight disguise. He was compelled to by the order of his domineering brother.

"So you have managed to get here on time," said Mr. Foxe nastily. "Wonderful, Ralph! And have you done everything I told you?"

The other man looked at his brother coldly.

"There is no reason why you should sneer, James," he said bitterly. "I have done what you have suggested merely for the sake of peace, not because I approve of this wicked, preposterous—"

"Oh, don't start any of your complaints now!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "They have no effect upon me whatever. I told you to rent the big old house on the outskirts of Bannington. It is to be let furnished, and I hope you have been successful in obtaining it for the month."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I have. By the aid of your cleverly worded references, and by paying the rent in advance, I succeeded. But why do you want this house, James? What earthly reason can you have for paying such a large sum for the accommodation for which you have no earthly use."

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"If I had no earthly use for the place I should not have rented it," he said. "You have done well, Ralph. I hardly expected to hear that the deal had gone through so smoothly. Have you got the key?"

"Yes."

"Good. Hand it to me," said Mr. Foxe.

Ralph did so, and his brother transferred it to his own pocket.

"That is one step forward," he said—"a big step. Splendid, Ralph! I do not think we shall have any difficulties over the other part of my programme."

"And what is this programme?" asked Ralph. "Some vindictive plan, I'll warrant."

Mr. Foxe shrugged his shoulders.

"You call it vindictive, but I have a different name for it," he said. "I have made up my mind to pay my debt—my debt of hatred. And it shall be done before the end of this present week—before Dr. Stafford returns to St. Frank's. I will bring such disgrace on the school that the name of St. Frank's will be sneered at from one end of the country to the other."

"Why can't you give this up?" asked Ralph earnestly. "It's madness!"

"I want to hear no criticism from you!" said Mr. Foxe curtly. "You will help me to carry out this scheme—although we cannot go into full details now. But my plan, after all, is quite a simple one. I shall lose no time in obtaining a complete roulette table, and one or two other similar necessities. These will be installed in the house at once. Do you understand?"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the other man. "Are—are you thinking of opening a gambling den in Bannington?"

"Yes."

"But the police——"

"The police will know nothing until I choose to let them," said Mr. Foxe, with a chuckle. "You do not seem to realise the depth of my scheme, Ralph. In a few words, it is merely this: Under some pretext or other, I shall get a large number of St. Frank's boys to come to this house. Then, at the crucial moment, I shall ring up the police. Do you understand, my dear brother?"

"Good heavens! You cannot mean——"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Foxe. "The police will arrive in force, and they

will find the house overcrowded with St. Frank's boys—a house which is filled with gaming tables! What a sensation! You may be quite sure that I shall see that all the London papers get hold of the story."

"It is terrible, James. It is terrible."

"Maybe. I want it to be terrible," said the other harshly. "St. Frank's will have to wait a long time before it recovers from this blow which I intend to deliver."

The other shook his head.

"Why don't you give it up, James?" he asked earnestly. "What good will it do you? Why should you make yourself criminal in this way—just for the sake of your revenge? Why can't you act sensibly, and give it all up? Sooner or later, you will regret this mad action——"

"I have told you before, Ralph, that I do not require criticism," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I have made my plans, and I will carry them out. Whatever you say will make no difference. I have decided on my course, and I shall go on with it."

"I should like to know what your exact plans are, so that I may know what services you require of me," said Ralph. "For, frankly, I detest this whole business. You have taken a scoundrel's advantage over me, and therefore——"

"You need not fear that you will be held responsible for anything that occurs," said Mr. Foxe. "After the damage has been done the truth will come out. And then you will be exonerated from all blame. As for myself, I do not care. I shall have achieved my object—and that is all that matters."

"But your plans?"

"I will tell you of them later—if I think it advisable," said Mr. Foxe. "On the whole, I am not certain whether I shall take you fully into my confidence or not. But you must hold yourself in readiness to come if you are required. That is quite understood."

"I do not like it——"

Mr. Foxe's eyes glittered.

"I do not care whether you like it, or whether you dislike it!" he snapped. "You will hold yourself in readiness, Ralph. Within a day or two I shall be compelled to get completely out of this neighbourhood, but when I do go I shall take good care that I do not leave empty-handed."

"What—what do you mean?" asked the other twin.

"Never mind what I mean—you will know soon enough!" said Mr. Foxe. "But I have a chance here that will not occur again. I have a certain mission to accomplish to-night, and I shall require your services, so that I shall be provided with an alibi."

"You want me to take your place?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Foxe. "You will meet me just outside the school in the dark, behind the hedge opposite the main wall. Be there at ten o'clock!"

"But what am I to do?"

"I shall give you my cap and gown, and you will go straight to my study in the College House," said Mr. Foxe. "You will remain there until I return, which will probably be between two and three o'clock in the morning. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear," said Ralph. "But what is this mission you speak of—"

"You will learn about that later," said Mr. Foxe. "I do not wish to discuss it now. And you must come without your disguise—for you are to fill my shoes at St. Frank's. Furthermore, you will allow yourself to be seen as much as possible. I want this alibi to be absolutely cast iron."

Ralph shook his head.

"I have an idea that you are contemplating something of an unscrupulous character, James," he said. "Think well before you go on this mysterious mission of yours. And what if I refuse to do as you request? What if I refuse to become a party to this deception—"

"By heaven, if you refuse, it will be the finish of all things for you!" snarled Mr. Foxe harshly. "Do not

forget that! It is within my power to ruin your character—to wreck your whole career."

"You have apparently done that already!" said Ralph bitterly.

"Nonsense! When the truth of this matter comes out, you will be exonerated from all blame," said Mr. Foxe. "I do not mind bearing the brunt. I am prepared for it. But if you thwart me in any way, I shall take my revenge! Do not forget that! I shall so arrange things that the consequences of my misdeeds will fall upon your shoulders. Oh, I know it sounds harsh and brutal, but you are compelling me to speak out straight. It is the only way. Follow my instructions, do as I require, and you will come to no harm."

Ralph had nothing to say. He knew well enough that his brother would carry out his threats. And Ralph was entirely in the hands of his rascally brother. He could do nothing but agree to everything that was proposed.

And so shortly afterwards the two brothers parted. And Mr. Smale Foxe went back to St. Frank's in a satisfied mood. But his was a grim satisfaction.

For many days past he had been making some plans, but now the time had almost arrived when those plans were to be put into operation.

CHAPTER 8.

A Grim Decision!

BOB CHRISTINE nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, it's been successful—up to a point!" he said thoughtfully. "But we can't exactly call it an unqualified triumph."

"What do you mean, you ass?" said Talmadge. "The tribunal has been a roaring success all along. The College House is practically in its normal state again. The fellows daren't do anything against the rules for fear of being hauled up before the tribunal. Not a triumph? You must be off your rocker!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Christine. "I'm simply speaking the truth. The tribunal hasn't been as successful as I should like."

"Well, I don't know what you require," said Yorke. "We've collared dozens of chaps, and swished them in the tribunal chamber. We've put a stop to smoking in the College House, and to gambling, and to other rotten games of the same kind. We've even made Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, pull in their horns. They're as docile as anything now."

I nodded.

"That's quite right, Christine," I said. "I can't quite understand what you're getting at. How has the tribunal failed? And what are you grumbling at?"

"I'm not exactly grumbling," said Christine, "but things aren't right in the College House. And I don't suppose they will be right until Mr. Foxe has gone, confound him! He's the chap who needs a lesson—far more than the fellows. He's the cause of all the giddy trouble, and he wouldn't be getting more than he deserved if he were boiled in oil!"

There were several of us chatting in a corner of the gymnasium—Christine, Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House, and Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Reginald Pitt, and myself. And we were discussing the affairs of the College House Tribunal.

"Dear old boy, I must confess that I do not agree with you," remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez and eyeing Christine with interest. "In my opinion, the tribunal has been amazingly successful—it has, really. There is no more smokin' goin' on, no more gamblin', and the College House has been reduced to a state of quiet."

"That's just it," interrupted Bob Christine. "That's just where you're wrong, my son."

"Begad! I thought——"

"Let me finish," said Christine. "Things aren't quiet in the College House, not by a long chalk. The tribunal has been successful in putting down gambling and smoking and that kind of thing, but there are all sorts of irregularities going on all the time—dozens of 'em at once. Chaps go about whistling, singing, and creating all sorts of noises. They don't get in for calling over, they come up to bed in two's and three's, and some of them are over half an hour late very often. Then, in the morning, a lot of chaps don't take any notice of the rising bell. They slack about in bed until the very last minute, and get down late for breakfast. Everything is disorganised and wrong—and we can't deal with these cases; they're too numerous. Not only two or three fellows are responsible, but dozens; and we can't collar these chaps and haul them before the tribunal. In many cases the offence is so small that it's not worth a swishing. But it's all the lot put together—all the whole collection—that makes things bad. That's where the tribunal has failed."

"And I'm afraid it will continue to fail," I said, shaking my head. "You won't be able to restore complete order, Christine, whatever you do. You can put down smoking and gambling; but you can't make all the chaps get to bed at the right time, or get out of bed at the right time. There aren't any prefects or masters to look after the chaps, and they take advantage. As far as I can see, there's nothing that we can do—unless, of course, we go to extremes."

"What do you mean—go to extremes?" asked Christine.

"Well, there's one thing—one step we could take!" I grinned. "I'd be perfectly willing to lend a hand, but I'm not sure whether you fellows would like to chance it."

"We'd chance anything," said Bob Christine promptly.

"Well, we'll see," I chuckled. "This idea of mine is perfectly simple, and

it could be put into operation without any trouble at all."

"And what is it?"

"I'm getting to that," I said. "It seems to me that Foxey himself is mainly responsible for all the trouble. You know that as well as I do. Well, what's wrong with the idea of collaring Mr. Foxe himself——"

"What?"

"And hauling him before the tribunal——"

"Great pip!"

"And giving him a good swishing!" I concluded.

"Great Scott!"

"Foxey himself?" said Bob Christine, taking a deep breath. "By Jove, you've got it, Nipper!"

"You're willing to do it?"

"Rather!" said Christine. "It's the very thing—the best idea of all!"

"You—you ass!" gasped Talmadge.

"We—we couldn't collar Foxey!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—because——"

"Because he's the Housemaster, I suppose?" said Christine. "That doesn't make any difference at all. I don't look upon him as a Housemaster—I look upon him as a rotter. He's not a bully or a tyrant, but he's a wrong 'un, all the same. And Nipper is quite right—the best thing we can do is to give Foxey a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry!"

The other juniors were rather startled.

"But—but how can we manage it?" asked Yorke.

"Easily," I said. "All we've got to do is to hang about to-night—after bed-time, for preference—and then we shall have everything quiet. There won't be any fear of interruptions. Mr. Foxe is bound to be in his study, or knocking about somewhere. Then we can pounce upon him, collar him, and take him along to the tribunal chamber. When we get him there, we'll put him through the mill."

"Swish him straight away?" asked Talmadge.

"Not necessarily," I replied. "We can take our time over that. As a beginning, we can jaw to him. We can tell him that his system is all wrong, that he's got to change it. In fact, we'll give him a chance."

"A chance?"

"Exactly," I said calmly. "We'll tell him that if he likes to reinstate all the rules and regulations from tomorrow onwards, we'll let him off."

"My only hat!"

"But if Mr. Foxe refuses, we'll swish him until he agrees," I went on. "That's the idea. And we won't take his word for it, either. We'll make him promise in writing that he'll put an end to this present state of affairs in the College House. Of course, he'll refuse at first—that's only natural; but after he's had two or three good wallops with the birch, he'll probably change his mind. And then we shall have him on toast!"

"Great!" said Christine, with a chuckle. "Nipper, my son, your brain is worth its weight in gold! It's a first-class, gilt-edged notion. We'll get busy on this straight away; we'll make all preparations, and soon after bed-time we'll get to work and collar Foxey!"

"Hold on," said Talmadge. "We shall be able to do it all right, but what about these Ancient House fellows?"

"Well, what about them?" asked Christine.

"How will they be able to take a hand in it?" asked Talmadge. "They'll be in their dormitory——"

"Don't you worry, my son," I grinned. "There are more ways of getting out of a dormitory than through the doorway! Not that we shall be obliged to try any other method. We shall be here all right. We'll fix the time for half-past ten precisely. We'll all meet in the tribunal chamber—that is, the old garage at the back of the College House—at ten-thirty to the

minute. Then we'll get into our ceremonial robes, and start on the business. It's all settled, you chaps. Thirty to the minute. I'll bring some other fellows as well. It'll be much more effective if we have a big crowd."

"Right you are!" said Christine. "That's agreed upon."

We continued talking for some little time, and then broke up. I went into the Ancient House without delay, and went round to one or two of the studies, to give certain fellows the tip.

Handforth & Co., of Study D, were three of these fellows. Edward Oswald Handforth, of course, was quite in love with the scheme. He went so far as to say that he had already thought of something of the kind, but had been unable to tell any of the other chaps about it.

"Just my luck!" said Handforth bitterly, after I had gone out of the room. "You may remember that I said that Mr. Foxe ought to be taken before the tribunal——"

"We don't remember it!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

Handforth glared.

"Of course, you wouldn't!" he snapped. "You never do remember when I think of something brilliant!"

"And that never happens!" said Church.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"If you can't speak in a proper voice, you'd better not speak at all!" said Handforth. "And if I hear you muttering again, I'll give you a punch on the nose! This idea about Foxey is a good one—that's why I thought of it first. We'll make him restore order in the College House. If he doesn't promise, we'll give him a terrific swishing. And I'll have the birch—Foxey won't get any mercy from me!"

"Wouldn't it be better to punch him on the nose?" asked Church sarcastically. "You're well practised at that, Handy!"

"If you're going to try to be funny, you'll jolly soon feel what kind of a

punch I possess!" said Handforth grimly. "Talking about Mr. Foxe, it's high time that something was done. I shan't forget what happened the other day when I made that terrific discovery."

"Which terrific discovery?"

"Ah, you've forgotten all about it!" sneered Handforth. "I don't expect anything else from you chaps! What about when I went out and saw Mr. Foxe talking to himself?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Or, to be more exact, I saw Mr. Foxe talking to a second edition of Mr. Foxe," went on Handforth. "Nobody believes me, but, sooner or later, the truth will come out. And what about that time when I saw Foxey in Bannington, and you chaps declared that he was in Caistowe?"

"Oh, come off it, Handy!" protested Church. "You know as well as I do that there's only one Mr. Foxe. It wouldn't be possible for two chaps of his nature to be knocking about! One's enough, anyhow. The chap you saw in Bannington wasn't Foxey at all——"

"If it wasn't Foxey, it was his double," argued Handforth doggedly. "Do you think I'm an idiot? Do you think I'm blind? I saw both of them in Bellton Wood, as plain as I can see you. There were two men, and they were the same size, they had the same features and everything. They were as alike as two peas."

McClure grunted.

"Well, peas aren't always alike," he said. "Some peas are big and smooth, and others are shrivelled——"

"You—you ass!" roared Handforth. "You know jolly well I was only using an ordinary simile. I saw two Mr. Foxes—and if you don't like to believe me, you can do the other thing! And let me tell you this, my sons—I'm not going to be sneered at and laughed at by you chaps! I'm the leader here, and I'm going to have my own way!"

"Oh, there he goes again!" sighed

Church. "Once he gets on the high horse—"

"Do you believe this or not?" demanded Handforth grimly. "Do you believe that I saw two Mr. Foxes?"

Church and McClure glared.

"No, we don't!" they said in one breath.

"What?" bellowed Handforth. "You—you— My only hat! I'll—I'll—"

But Church and McClure did not wait to see what Handforth would do. They had a very good idea that he would exercise his fists, and so they thought it advisable to make a hurried and undignified exit. They were quite near the door, and they wrenched it open and scooted out. Handforth came in hot pursuit, and he went charging down the passage.

When he arrived in the lobby, he found that Church and McClure had dodged out into the Triangle, and were now making full speed over towards the College House.

"Come back!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to punch your noses!"

"No thanks!" shouted Church. "We're not keen upon it just at the moment!"

Handforth gritted his teeth, and gave chase. Church and McClure went into the College House, and rushed along the passages. They were just turning a corner when they nearly collided with Mr. Smale Foxe, who was coming along that way. Handforth was just behind, and did not see Mr. Foxe—and, consequently, a violent collision took place.

Mr. Foxe and Handforth met at the corner, and there was no time to dodge past.

Handforth charged full tilt into the Housemaster, and Mr. Foxe went flying. He staggered back several paces, and then fell with a thud, floundering on his back. The breath was knocked out of him; and Handforth stood there, startled and somewhat scared. And, as it happened, I came along at that very moment, and witnessed the whole thing.

Mr. Foxe sat up, gasping.

"By Heaven!" he snarled. "You— you infernal young ruffian! I—I—"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Handforth. "I—I didn't see you, you know, sir!"

"You didn't see me!" bellowed Mr. Foxe, rising to his feet, and literally quivering with rage. "You confounded young fool! What do you mean by rushing about the passages as though you were a madman?"

"Well, I don't see that you ought to grumble, sir," said Handforth boldly. "After all, the fellows are allowed to do exactly as they like in this House, and there's no harm in hurrying along a passage!"

"Not another word!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "I shall report this affair to Mr. Lee, and see that you are punished. You must learn to be more careful in future!"

"I've apologised, sir, and I can't do anything more than that!" he exclaimed gruffly. "I didn't knock you over on purpose—it was quite an accident."

"Be silent, boy!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I will hear no more! Good gracious me! Look at my wrist—"

"Oh, your arm's bleeding, sir!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Smale Foxe glanced at his wrist.

"Infernal nuisance!" he snapped angrily. "I will make the boy suffer for this!"

"I was standing quite near, and I looked at Mr. Foxe's wrist closely. It was grazed on the inner side—indeed even gashed. And I assumed that when Mr. Foxe fell he had caught his wrist upon a loose piece of flint on the hard stone floor. And now his wrist was bleeding somewhat.

"Can I be of any help, sir?" I asked.

"Help?" snapped Mr. Foxe. "No!"

"But I have some court plaster here, sir—"

"I want none of your court plaster!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "It is only a scratch, anyhow!"

He stalked off, still fuming with rage, and Handforth turned to the other fellows and snorted.

"Just as if it was my fault!" he exclaimed. "Of all the nerve! How the dickens was I to know that Foxey would come charging round the corner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you grinning at?" demanded Handforth, staring round.

"Well, you might as well stick to the facts, Handy!" I chuckled. "I rather fancy that you were the fellow who was doing all the charging. You went round the corner like a whirlwind, and it's a wonder Mr. Foxe wasn't knocked into the middle of next week! It ought to be a lesson to you not to go rushing about the passages—"

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth. "If you start preaching, I'll dot you on the nose! Where's McClure? Where's Church? I'm going to smash the pair of them to bits, the cheeky rotters!"

And Handforth went rushing off on his search. Unfortunately, he went in the wrong direction, for Church and McClure were taking shelter in the doorway of a study quite near by. Fortunately for them, Handforth was unaware of this fact, and he rushed away from the spot.

It was only a small incident, after all; but later we should have cause to remember it.

Mr. Smale Foxe went to his own study, and he rapidly attended to his wrist. When he had wiped the blood off, the wound proved to be a very trivial one—just a slight cut and a graze. The blood soon ceased flowing, and Mr. Foxe concealed the place by means of a piece of flesh-coloured court plaster. Having a stock of his own, he had declined mine.

Ten minutes later Mr. Foxe had forgotten all about the cut.

And he was pacing up and down his study, thinking deeply. He had been making very careful plans for this particular night—sinister plans. It was highly necessary that this twin brother should take part in the scheme, for, without the co-operation of Ralph, the

project could not be carried out thoroughly.

As it was getting on towards ten o'clock, Mr. Foxe made certain preparations. From a locked cupboard he produced several curious-looking tools. These he stowed away in various pockets, and finally donned his mortar-board and gown. Then he went to the window and raised the blind. Anybody who happened to be in the Triangle could now see Mr. Foxe clearly, for the study was well lighted. This was what Mr. Foxe required. He sat down at his desk, and pretended to be busily writing.

"Publicity is what I require now—not secrecy!" he told himself. "And when Ralph comes in—when he steps into my shoes—everybody here will assume that I am still on the premises. The alibi will be complete and absolute. Without such a safeguard I would never risk this particular game!"

Five minutes before the appointed time Mr. Foxe rose to his feet, and made his way out of the study. He went leisurely down the passage, passed out into the Triangle, and then went through the schoolmasters' gate into the lane. Everything was dark and quiet. Not a soul could be seen in any direction, and Mr. Foxe made his way through a gap in the hedge and found himself in a meadow. He passed along for several yards, and then a dull form loomed up in the gloom ahead.

"You are here?" said Mr. Foxe. "Good! Now, Ralph, we must lose no time!"

The other man was Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe, and he was now wearing no disguise whatever. He looked exactly like his brother in every trivial detail. The resemblance was astounding.

"Yes, I am here, James!" said Ralph grimly. "I wish you would tell me what mission this is you are about to embark upon. I have no doubt that it is a strange one—"

"In that guess you are probably correct," interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly.

"But if you think I am going to give you any details, Ralph, you have made a mistake. I have no time to waste now—I must be off at once. And it is most important that you should show yourself in the Triangle and in my study without any loss of time. Speak as little as you can, but make yourself seen as much as you can. That's understood?"

"Quite understood," said Ralph. "But what does this mean, James? Why are you doing this? And when will you return?"

"I shall only answer one question—the latter one," replied Mr. Foxe. "I shall return, as near as I can judge, some time between one o'clock and two o'clock. You will remain in the study all that time, Ralph. Be reading, writing—anything you like—and leave the blind up, so that everybody can see you. Take a walk round occasionally; go into one or two dormitories before the boys are asleep. It is essential that there should be plenty of witnesses to prove that I—I, mind you—remained in the school on this particular night."

"But if I am to stay in the study, how can I go round to the dormitories—"

"Oh, do have some sense!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "You will remain in the study after the school has gone to sleep, but, until about eleven o'clock, or just later, you can be walking about, showing yourself. That is all I need say. We have wasted quite sufficient time already. Here, slip on this gown and this cap!"

Two minutes later Ralph was wearing the cap and gown—and it would have needed a very keen-eyed individual to detect the change. In broad daylight—indeed, in glaring sunlight—it would have been well-nigh impossible to discover that the man who returned to the school was not the man who had emerged shortly before.

And Mr. Foxe went away into the night, on his grim mission!

CHAPTER 9.

An Astonishing Discovery!

"EVERYBODY here?" I asked crisply.

"Yes, I think so," said Bob Christine. "Sixteen of us—that ought to be enough!"

I nodded, and glanced round the old garage, which was situated at the rear of the College House. At the present moment the place did not look very much like a garage, for it was draped with heavy curtains, and only one shaded electric light glowed from above. The place was completely disguised.

And so were its occupants.

There were sixteen juniors altogether, including myself. These comprised Christine, York and Talmadge, of Study Q, Clapson and Oldfield, and two more College House juniors. The rest belonged to the Ancient House—Tregellis-West, Watson, Handforth and Co., etc. It was quite impossible to detect the identity of the figures which stood about.

For every junior wore a long, flowing cloak, and these cloaks were fitted with cowls, which came completely over the head. Even the face was invisible, for this was effectually concealed by means of a hideous—or a humorous—mask. There were all kinds of masks—some with red noses and quaint whiskers, some without whiskers at all, and with high cheek bones, some with big, protruding teeth.

"Well, what's the programme?" asked Handforth. "It's all very well to say that we're ready, but how are we going to get to work? How are we going to collar old Foxey?"

"It will be the easiest thing in the world," I said. "He's still sitting in his study, reading. Very obligingly, he's left the blind up, so that we can see everything in the room. The best way will be for us to take him by surprise, and cut off his retreat."

"And how shall we do that, dear old boy?" asked Montie.

"Eight of us will go to the window, and break in that way; meanwhile, the other eight will creep round through the passages, and enter by the door. It will be then impossible for Mr. Foxe to get away. We'll have him collared within two minutes, and he won't have a chance to shout for help."

"Good!" said Christine. "That's the ticket. Well, buck up!"

We all left the tribunal chamber, and emerged into the gloom of the night. It was quite dark outside, and rather chilly, but we did not mind. And the school itself was silent, for the remainder of the boys were in bed.

Bob Christine took seven fellows, and they made their way to the window of Study Q. It would be quite easy to enter the house by this means, and then to slip along the passages until they arrived outside the door of Mr. Foxe's sanctum. Meanwhile, I took seven other fellows towards the Housemaster's study window.

We crept up like shadows, hardly making the slightest sound. If anybody had chanced to come upon us then, they would probably have received the fright of their lives, for, in the gloom of the night, we looked a collection of unearthly figures.

I noted with satisfaction that the window was not fastened; it was, indeed, slightly open at the top. It would, therefore, be quite a simple matter for me to slip the lower sash up. When I did so, this would be the warning for the others to surge in by the door. If this proved to be locked they would wait out there until one of our number turned the key. Mr. Smale Foxe himself would not be able to get away.

"Good!" I murmured, as I peered through the window. "He's still sitting there reading, in front of the fire. We shall take him completely by surprise."

"I'd like to get just one punch in!" said Handforth. "If I could dot him on the nose——"

"There'll be no dotting done to-night, Handforth!" I interrupted grimly. "This affair is going to be conducted in the right way, so don't you interfere. And remember, there's to be no speaking. Everybody has got to keep absolutely silent; not a single word is to be uttered until Mr. Foxe is in the tribunal chamber. And then I'll do all the jawing!"

Handforth grunted, and said no more. We were now collected just outside the window, and Mr. Foxe, within the apartment, had no idea that we were there.

As a matter of fact, we were under a delusion. We believed that the man in the study was responsible for all the trouble in the College House; but, of course, this was not the case, for he was Mr. Ralph, the unfortunate twin brother of the rascally Housemaster. He was carrying out the instructions that Mr. Foxe had given him. But we weren't to know this.

"All ready?" I breathed. "Go!"

As I whispered the last word I sprang forward, clutched at the window sash, and flung it up. At the sound of the noise, Mr. Foxe started in his chair, and turned round. Then his eyes opened wide, in amazement and alarm. His face went quite pale for a second as he jumped to his feet and faced about.

For what he saw startled him enormously.

Weird and amazing figures were piling into the study through the window—cloaked and cowed figures with awful, horrible faces! But after the first moment Mr. Foxe realised that the figures were disguised—that they were wearing masks. Then, before he could find his voice, other figures of the same kind poured in through the doorway. It was a regular invasion.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Ralph Foxe. "What—what on earth——"

He paused as the figures came charging towards him.

"Good gracious me!" stammered Mr.

Foxe. "Is—is this some practical joke? What are you doing here——"

Not a sound came from the intruders; they simply flung themselves at the Housemaster, and he was sent flying. He went over on his back with a thud, the figures piling on top of him.

"Why, what—upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Foxe. "This—this is outrageous! Release me at once, confound you! Release me—ugggh!"

Mr. Foxe made an inarticulate sound, and then subsided into silence as a thick muffler descended over his mouth and nostrils; and was drawn tight. And Mr. Foxe's struggles only lasted for a minute or two, for he was quickly bound, hand and foot, and, with his mouth closely muffled, he could do nothing. Even his eyes were blindfolded, for the muffler went completely over his face.

He was bewildered, and he could not possibly imagine who had captured him, or why he had been taken prisoner. It was a startling adventure, and Mr. Foxe's mind was in a whirl. He felt himself lifted from his feet and carried, and he knew that he was being taken through the window. And not a word had been spoken all this time.

The prisoner guessed that the masked and cloaked figures were those of schoolboys, and he also guessed that he had been mistaken for his brother. But he could not save himself by telling his captors that he was not the right man.

He really had no idea how far he was taken, but it seemed that he was carried for quite a long distance, right away from the school. This was because we carried Mr. Foxe round the Triangle two or three times, in order to give him no clue as to his real destination.

And at last he was placed upon his feet. He could not move, since his ankles were bound, and his wrists were also tied behind his back. The scarf, however, was removed from his eyes

and mouth, and he could see exactly where he was.

Mr. Foxe stared round, rather bewildered.

He found himself in a curious apartment, hung with heavy curtains, and with only a dim light gleaming down from above. All round him, in a circle, were sixteen extraordinary-looking masked figures. Not a word was spoken, and Mr. Foxe stared uncomfortably. It was a most uncanny experience. Those set, expressionless faces were staring at him from all sides, some grinning, some snarling, others merely vacuous.

But Mr. Foxe took hold of himself, and clenched his teeth. He was angry, for he guessed that this was the work of a party of juniors. He looked round with flashing eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded huskily. "You confounded young rascals! Do you think for a moment that I am deceived. I know that you are junior boys belonging to this school! And you shall suffer for this outrage——"

"Silence!" The voice came from a masked figure which was sitting upon a kind of raised platform; and the voice was quite unknown to Mr. Ralph Foxe. It was deep and penetrating.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated the prisoner. "You—you dare to tell me to be silent——"

"You must only speak when you are directed to do so!" went on the voice grimly. "Please understand, Mr. Foxe, that you are in the hands of the College House Tribunal. The time has now come when you must answer for your various misdeeds. And, unless you decide to give the tribunal a distinct undertaking that you will alter your methods, you will be forthwith birched."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Foxe, startled.

"You will be subjected to twenty-five strokes!" went on the voice.

"This—this is scandalous!" ejacu-

lated Mr. Foxe hotly. "You young rascals! I quite realise that this is some kind of practical joke, but you will be well advised to give it up now—before you go too far. If you release me at once, without any further nonsense, I may overlook the whole affair. But—"

"Silence!" exclaimed the chairman once more. "You must answer the questions which are about to be put to you—and you must answer them truthfully."

Mr. Foxe swallowed hard, and said no more at the moment.

The chairman, of course, was Bob Christine. He was doing all the talking at the moment. I stood fairly close to Mr. Foxe, watching him rather curiously. For it struck me that our prisoner was not quite what I had expected. He was behaving differently; he was taking the whole affair more or less calmly. I had expected quite a different attitude on Mr. Foxe's part.

"Now, prisoner, pay attention," said Christine in his deep voice. "Have you, or have you not given the boys of the College House full liberty to do as they please?"

"Confound your impudence—"

"Answer the question!"

"Yes, I have given them their liberty," said Mr. Foxe angrily. "But—"

"Enough!" broke in the chairman. "Answer the next question. Have you abandoned all rules and regulations in the College House?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said the chairman. "Now think carefully before you answer this question. Has this experiment of yours been a success? Give me a truthful answer—your real opinion. Has this experiment been a success?"

Mr. Foxe took a deep breath.

"I will answer no more questions!" he said between his teeth. "You may do as you please, but I will not be subjected to this humiliation."

"It will be better for you if you

answer the questions," said Christine. "You will see that it is quite useless for you to resist. You are our prisoner, and we can do exactly as we please. I will waste no further time. The tribunal's object in bringing you here is a clear one. You must give a distinct undertaking that you will restore all rules and regulations tomorrow. You must put a stop to this present state of affairs. Do you agree?"

"I will agree to nothing!" said Mr. Foxe angrily.

"Very well—we will see!" said the chairman. "Nos. 1 and 8, forward!"

I stepped forward with Reginald Pitt, who was No. 8.

"Seize the prisoner by the wrists!" went on the chairman.

We did as we were commanded. We grasped Mr. Foxe firmly and waited for further orders. And then I noticed something. Mr. Foxe's wrists were in the full gleam of the electric light. I looked at them closely, and then bent down so that I could see even more clearly. And when I drew myself upright my lips were pursed, and there was a gleam in my eyes.

"Bring the prisoner forward!" went on the chairman curtly.

But I held up my hand.

"Wait!" I said in a thick, gruff voice. I left Mr. Foxe's side and mounted the platform. Then, bending close to Christine, I carried on a whispered conversation with him—so low that Mr. Foxe could not hear a single word.

"We must release the prisoner at once!" I breathed.

"Eh?" said Christine.

"We must not keep him here," I went on. "I will explain afterwards, old man."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" muttered Christine. "We've got him here now, and we're going to keep him—we're going to swish him, if he doesn't agree to what we say—"

"I tell you, we must release him. He is not our man!"

"Eh?" gasped Bob. "Not—not—"

What rot! You must be dotty, Nipper!"

"No, I'm not," I said. "We've got to let him go free!"

And I added a few words while Bob Christine listened in amazement. Finally, however, he nodded.

"The tribunal has come to a decision," said Christine in his loud, deep voice. "Prisoner, pay attention!"

"You young rascals!" said Mr. Foxe. "This farce has gone far enough——"

"We realise that what you say is correct!" said the chairman. "In the circumstances, Mr. Foxe, you will be given your liberty without any further delay. No more questions will be asked, and you will be allowed to go."

The other members of the tribunal listened to these words in blank amazement. They could not possibly understand why Mr. Foxe should be released. Indeed, many of the fellows were indignant. But it was impossible to speak out, for they would have given themselves away.

"Nos. 1, 5, 6, and 8," commanded the chairman. "seize the prisoner, and muffle him once more. He must not be allowed to speak, and his eyes must be blindfolded."

While this was being done Christine whispered instructions to several of the juniors, who were quite in the dark, but could do nothing but obey; and then Mr. Foxe was lifted from his feet once more and carried out. He was taken out of the garage, round the Triangle once or twice, and finally found himself in another building. What this was he could not tell, for it was in pitchy darkness.

However, he was released from his bonds and the muffer was taken from his face. He was now quite free, except for the rope which bound his ankles. This one had been left. It was a strong rope, and it was very securely tied.

And Mr. Foxe was left there, in the total darkness. He heard a door close,

he heard a soft patter of footsteps, and then came absolute silence.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Foxe. "What—what an extraordinary adventure!"

It seemed to Mr. Foxe that the fellows had been rather afraid of carrying out their threat, and had given up the project half-way through.

It took him two or three minutes to untie the knots of the rope—he had no knife handy. And when, at length, he rose to his feet, he struck a match. Then he discovered, rather to his surprise, that he was in the woodshed—a building tucked away in a corner of the Triangle.

Mr. Foxe came out into the Triangle and looked about him. Not a soul was to be seen. He had the whole place entirely and absolutely to himself. And the mysterious members of the College House Tribunal had completely vanished. They had left no trace behind them, and Mr. Foxe, still bewildered, made his way back to his study.

Meanwhile, the tribunal had returned to the old garage to have a consultation. Most of the fellows were very excited, not to say incensed. They had taken all the trouble to capture Mr. Foxe, and then he had been allowed to go. He had been given his freedom before he had agreed to any undertaking.

Handforth was particularly indignant.

"You asses!" he snorted. "You—you blithering idiots! It's your fault, Christine, and yours, Nipper! What did you let Foxey go for? What's the idea? We couldn't say anything—you took advantage of us! You must be dotty——"

"Hold on, Handforth!" I interrupted. "I will explain the whole thing."

"I don't see how you'll do it!" said Pitt, warmly. "Personally, I think you're an ass, Nipper! Why did you want to let Foxey go—just when we had him secure? We could have forced him to agree——"

"If you'll only give me a chance, I'll explain," I said. "But I don't think Christine believes me—"

"I don't," said Bob Christine. "You are off your rocker."

I looked round.

"All right—listen!" I said grimly.

"You think that I have acted wrong—"

"Yes."

"You have!"

"You've acted the giddy ox!"

"Well, I say that I acted in the only possible way, in the circumstances," I went on. "It would have been quite useless for us to keep Mr. Foxe here, because he wouldn't have agreed to sign any document."

"We should have forced him to agree!" said Christine promptly.

"Perhaps so; but that document would have been useless," I went on. "And to have birched the prisoner would have been grossly unfair."

"Unfair!" exclaimed Talmadge. "Unfair, after what Foxey has done!"

"The prisoner was not Mr. Foxe!" I said.

"Eh!"

"What?"

"Not Mr. Foxe?"

"It was not our Mr. Foxe, anyhow," I went on grimly. "You can believe it, or disbelieve it, but I know what I'm talking about."

The fellows were absolutely astounded by what I said. And they all thought that I had suddenly taken leave of my senses. But I went on to explain.

"Do you remember when Handforth bowled Foxey over in the passage this evening?" I asked.

"Of course we remember it!" said Christine. "Handy sent him flying!"

"And do you remember that Mr. Foxe cut his wrist?"

"It was only a graze," said Handforth. "I couldn't help it, either—"

"I am not saying that you could help it," I went on. "But the fact remains that Mr. Foxe cut his wrist. In or-

dinary circumstances, that little place would have taken at least a week to heal up, and even then there would have been traces of it left."

"What on earth are you getting at?" asked Bob Christine impatiently.

"Simply this—the man we had in here—the man we thought to be Mr. Foxe—had no cut or graze on either of his wrists!" I declared quietly.

"What!"

"I looked at them both carefully," I said, "and both of them were absolutely clear, without the slightest trace of a cut or a graze. Therefore that positively proves that he was not Mr. Foxe."

"My only hat!"

"Are—are you sure, Nipper?" asked Christine incredulously.

"I am positive," I said. "I examined both the wrists. I even felt them. And I can tell you positively that there was no cut or graze. What does that prove? That gash couldn't have healed up in such a short time as this—you know that as well as I do. The man wasn't Mr. Smale Foxe!"

"I can't believe it!" said Reginald Pitt.

"Great pip!" shouted Handforth suddenly. "I knew it! I knew it all along! Nipper's right—it wasn't Mr. Foxe at all! By George! This proves it!"

"Proves what?" asked Christine. "What's the matter with you, Handy?"

"Why, don't you remember?" said Handforth tensely. "Don't you remember what I told you some weeks ago? I said that I'd seen two Mr. Foxes in the wood—two men, exactly alike in every detail! You wouldn't believe me then—"

"By jingo!" I muttered. "That's right. I do remember it!"

"You all yelled at me," went on Handforth. "You thought I was spinning a yarn, or that I had been seeing things, or something. But I knew I was right all along. I saw two men in the wood, and they were absolutely identical in appearance. Mr. Foxe has got

a double—and we must have collared him to-night.”

“Great Scott!”

“My only Aunt Jane!”

The juniors were positively astounded.

“Yes, Handforth, you are right,” I said. “That explains it. Our Mr. Foxe must be away somewhere, and he left this other man here as a substitute, so that nobody should guess. That’s about the truth of it. I remember seeing Mr. Foxe go out at about ten o’clock, and he came back shortly afterwards. It must have been this other man who came back!”

“Of course!” said Handforth. “It’s as easy as winking to understand. And perhaps you fellows will beg my pardon now—perhaps you’ll acknowledge that I’m pretty keen!”

“I certainly think we owe Handy an apology,” I smiled. “We did ridicule his story when he told us about it the other day, but he was right, sure enough.”

“Of course, I don’t want to boast, or anything of that sort,” said Handforth, with a careless wave of his hand. “But I think you chaps will admit that I did the thing properly. I’ve always maintained that I’m jolly keen when it comes to detective work—and I didn’t make any bloomer this time. I was the first to discover that Mr. Foxe had a double—and now it’s been proved.”

“Yes, we know all about that, Handy,” I said. “And we give you all credit for what you did. But what we’ve got to do now is to consider the situation. The man we got hold of was not Mr. Smale Fox—we know that. Who, then, was he?”

“Goodness only knows!” said Pitt.

“I’ll bet anything I’ve got that the man wasn’t disguised,” I went on. “He wasn’t wearing any make-up at all. Neither was Mr. Foxe, for that matter. They’re both alike—one is the double of the other. And the most

natural explanation is that they are twins!”

Bob Christine shook his head.

“It’s a bit thick, you know,” he said slowly. “Are you sure about that graze on the wrist, Nipper? It wasn’t very big, you know, and you might have missed it——”

“I didn’t miss it,” I interrupted. “The man we captured had no cut or graze whatever. I’ve said it before. I don’t pretend to understand it, but I mean to make investigations. Taking it for granted that this man is Mr. Foxe’s twin brother we arrive at the conclusion that Mr. Foxe himself is absent from the school. He went out at ten o’clock, leaving his brother here, in his place.”

“Why?”

“Simply because he wanted everybody to think that he still remained in the school,” I said. “That’s obvious. He’s using his brother to provide an alibi. There’s no doubt on that question whatever. And, when you come to think of it, it was rather strange that Mr. Foxe should leave his study blind up all the time. I can understand that now—he wanted everybody to see into his room. He wanted everybody to notice that he was on the premises.”

“Yes, by jingo!” said Christine. “That reminds me of another thing. Foxey went round to several of the dormitories. He looked into the Fifth and the Third! And he dodged into one or two studies, too, all very late in the evening. I’ll guarantee anything that he did that just on purpose to show himself.”

“Sure enough,” I agreed. “There’s a plot here, my sons—a deep-laid conspiracy! We’ve got to find out what it means. We’ve got to find out what has happened to the real Mr. Foxe!”

“And what are we going to do now?” asked Handforth. “What’s the immediate programme?”

I rubbed my chin.

“We’ll wait,” I said slowly, “and see!”

CHAPTER 10.

Nelson Lee on the Trail!

MEANWHILE, Mr. James Smale Foxe was bent upon his grim errand.

He was not hurried in his movements. After proceeding down Bellton Lane, he turned into the wood, and made his way along the footpath. He was walking easily, and without any undue haste. He reckoned that he had three or four hours before him, and there was no necessity for him to worry.

His place at St. Frank's was being filled by his brother, and, therefore, no questions would arise owing to his absence from the school.

But as Mr. Foxe went through the woods he was unaware of one very important fact.

Not very far behind him, but creeping along as silently as a shadow, came a figure. It was the figure of a man. He was so stealthy in his movements that Mr. Foxe had not the least suspicion he was being shadowed.

All his movements were under observation.

Nelson Lee, to tell the truth, was on the trail.

The great detective had not been very far distant when Mr. Foxe had met his brother. Nelson Lee, who knew a great deal more about Mr. Foxe's affairs than the latter could guess, had taken up the task of shadowing the rascally Housemaster. He was now well on the trail, and he did not mean to lose his man. He would follow him wherever he went, and he would discover exactly what his object was.

The climax was near at hand, and Nelson Lee knew this. It would only be a matter of hours now, before Mr. Smale Foxe came to the end of his tether.

As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee had many suspicions about Mr. Foxe, but he lacked evidence. That was what he was after now. And something seemed to tell him that he would be provided with plenty of strong evidence

before Mr. Foxe returned to St. Frank's.

The Housemaster did not take the direct route to Bannington. Upon arriving at the other side of Bellton Wood he made his way down the lane, skirting the village of Edgemore, and then he went across meadows and foot-paths, joining the Bannington road not very far distant from the town itself. And Mr. Foxe did not actually enter Bannington.

When he arrived at the outskirts he walked along for some little way, and then took a sharp turning to the left. This carried him along a small, little frequented lane. There were only one or two houses here, and these were of the larger variety.

Upon the whole, the people of Bannington were not late birds, and nearly all the windows of the houses were dark. The householders were in bed and asleep. For now the time was very close upon eleven.

At length Mr. Foxe came to his destination.

At least, it appeared to be so. For he came to a halt near the hedge, just outside a big, rambling old house, which stood well back from the road, in its own grounds. The grounds were extremely well looked after, neat and tidy.

And the house, which was an old-fashioned one, had been recently redecorated from top to bottom. It was in total darkness, indicating that the household had gone to bed.

And Nelson Lee knew that this residence was that of Mr. Montague Forbes, J.P., one of the most influential men in the county. In addition, Mr. Forbes was extremely rich. He was a retired business man, and was somewhat elderly. Nelson Lee had met him on one or two occasions, and knew him to be a cheery, genial old gentleman.

What could Mr. Foxe's object be in coming to a halt outside Mr. Forbes' residence?

It was not so very long before the



At the same moment as we jumped into the room through the window, Christine & Co. entered by the door. It was a complete surprise for Mr. Foxe. He whirled round, the colour fleeing from his cheeks at the sight of the masked and hooded figures. "What—what—" he gasped, "Good heavens!"

nature of the Housemaster's mission became obvious.

He waited there for some little time—until close upon midnight, and then, as silent as a shadow, he entered the garden, and flitted across the lawns towards a pair of big french windows. Having arrived at the windows, Mr. Foxe stood quite still for some little time, listening, and with his eyes wide open.

But he saw nothing suspicious. He certainly did not see a dim, shadowy form over by the hedge—the form of Nelson Lee.

The detective had a pair of night-glasses to his eyes, and he could distinctly see the figure of Mr. Smale Foxe as he stood there, crouching by the french windows. Then Mr. Foxe's movements became quite interesting. He produced two or three delicate tools, and commenced work upon the big glass doors.

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Burglary!"

There was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Smale Foxe was bent upon breaking his way into the house. And there could only be one possible object in his doing so, and that was to burgle the place.

The rascally Housemaster knew that he would be obliged to leave St. Frank's almost at once. He was well aware of the fact that he could not last much longer—and he thought he might as well line his pockets before leaving the district for ever. He could do so now in safety, while he had a perfect alibi.

The french windows did not prove to be a very difficult obstacle. With scarcely any sound, Mr. Foxe managed to force the catch.

And then one of the doors swung noiselessly open. Mr. Foxe passed inside and closed the door behind him. Everything was as still as the grave. And, before taking any action, Mr. Foxe remained like a statue for two or three minutes. He did not move, and he hardly breathed. He was taking no chances.

Upon his hands there were a pair of tight-fitting gloves. There would be no finger-prints left after Mr. Foxe had finished! He was armed with an electric torch, but he did not use this yet.

He felt cautiously in front of him, and found some heavy cloth curtains were drawn across the window. He silently moved these aside, and passed into the room itself. Then, after satisfying himself that the curtains were closely drawn, he switched on his torch.

One flash round told him that the room was empty. In the grate there were the embers of a dying fire, and the atmosphere of the room was quite warm. It was the library—as Mr. Foxe had known before entering. And in one corner of the room stood a stout, burglar-proof safe. It was not exceedingly large, but it seemed quite powerful enough to resist the efforts of any ordinary safe-breaker.

Mr. Foxe only gave it slight attention at the moment. He had other things to think about. The first thing he did was to go to the door and turn the key in the lock. By doing this, he knew that he could not be suddenly taken by surprise; should any of the household awaken; and it was quite likely they would awaken before long, for Mr. Foxe's operations were not likely to be absolutely silent.

The Housemaster wasted no time.

Having satisfied himself that the door was secure, and having had a good look round the room, he went over to the safe and knelt down before it. Then he proceeded to take many curious things from his pockets. The electric torch was now on the floor, switched on, and a beam of light directed upon the safe door.

One of the objects which Mr. Foxe took from his pocket was a compact little metal drill. He fixed this together, and was not long in getting to work. He oiled the bit thoroughly, and the drill worked with hardly a sound. But

it was very hard labour, for the steel was toughened.

It was well past midnight before Mr. Foxe had finished his labours. And then quite a lot had been accomplished. But the door of the safe was by no means open, and it never would have been opened with merely the aid of that small drill. But he had accomplished the preparatory work.

Next he took a small charge of high explosive and inserted it into the cavity he had prepared. There was a small length of fuse attached to the high explosive.

Mr. Foxe knew that when the explosion came it would be far from silent. However, he would do his best to muffle the report. He would be prepared, even if the household was awakened.

For a few minutes would elapse before anybody could be on the spot. During those few minutes Mr. Foxe could ransack the safe and make his departure.

He had planned it all over to the very minute, and reckoned that he was on perfectly safe ground. And there was always the possibility that the muffled explosion would not be heard at all. From upstairs, in the bedrooms, the noise would be taken for the banging of a door—if anybody happened to be awakened. Whatever happened, Mr. Foxe was prepared.

He lit his fuse after packing a series of rugs, cushions, and other articles against the safe door.

Mr. Foxe seized his torch, went to the other side of the apartment, and waited. His heart was beating rapidly now. It seemed ages before the explosion came.

And then—
Thud!

There was a dull, thudding bang. It did not sound like an explosion at all. But, although the noise was not so tremendous, the force of that explosion fairly shook the floor upon which Mr. Foxe stood. The cushions and the rugs went flying, and a cloud of smoke arose.

Without waiting for it to clear, Mr. Foxe dashed across the room to the safe.

One glance told Mr. Foxe that his operations had been successful.

The safe door was a wreck, and it swung open at a touch. The door had been completely shattered.

Feverishly Mr. Foxe searched in the interior of the safe.

He held the torch, and turned over papers, books, etc., with the other hand. There were drawers, too, to be examined. Mr. Foxe worked like lightning, and it was not long before his efforts were rewarded.

He was half choked by the pungent, acrid smoke caused by the explosion. But he did not care. At any moment he expected someone to come banging at the door.

In one of the drawers he discovered a large bundle of currency notes, and he stuffed them hastily into his pocket. And in another drawer he came upon something that caused his eyes to glitter. For he had now discovered a prize well worth the taking.

Jewels—several magnificent diamond rings, three exquisite pendants, bracelets, and other articles of a like nature. They were all immensely valuable, and obviously the property of Mrs. Forbes.

Mr. Foxe stowed them into his pocket, and he was about to search in other parts of the safe when he was brought up short, standing absolutely rigid.

For thunderous hammerings had sounded upon the door of the library! "Good heavens!" muttered the intruder huskily.

He had been half expecting it, but at the same time he was startled, and he knew that he could not remain a moment longer. The lock of the door was only a flimsy one, and a good heave would send the door flying inwards.

There was no time for hesitation. Mr. Foxe left the safe and slipped across to the french windows. He

dashed the curtains aside, arrived at the windows, and burst them open.

Then he went charging across the lawns to the outer wall. He did not care whether he left footprints or not. In fact, he was rather anxious to do so. For Mr. Foxe had not overlooked this most important detail. He was wearing boots two or three sizes too large for him—boots which were fitted with hobnails and heel irons.

And then, without the slightest warning, something happened which promised to upset the whole of Mr. Foxe's plans. A dim form loomed up out of the darkness, right in front of the fleeing man. It was impossible to recognise the form, owing to the gloom, and certainly Mr. Foxe had not the slightest idea that the stranger was Nelson Lee.

But the detective had been waiting outside—waiting patiently. He knew that Mr. Foxe would emerge before long. It was Lee's intention to seize his man then, but for the moment luck was with the rascal.

"Stop!" commanded Nelson Lee curtly.

Mr. Foxe did not even pause in his stride. He took in the situation at a glance. In a moment he whipped the drill out of his pocket and swung it with full force at Nelson Lee's head—and his aim was accurate.

Crash!

The drill hit Nelson Lee a grazing blow on the side of the head, and the famous detective had been quite unprepared for it. He had been expecting a struggle, and he had been almost certain that he would not capture Mr. Foxe without a grim, desperate fight; but never for a moment had he believed that the Housemaster would take such an action as this.

Nelson Lee staggered back, half dazed for a moment. He tripped over a flower-bed and went sprawling, and Mr. Smale Foxe went straight on. He arrived at the wall, leapt over it like a panther, and found himself in the road.

Then he sped away, running like a deer. Before long he dodged through a gap in the hedge, and away across the meadows, towards the River Stowe. At last he came to a halt, and stood quite still, breathing heavily. He listened, but there was no sign of any pursuit. He had succeeded in eluding capture. And on him he had the proceeds of his burglary. He had been successful, but it had been a narrow shave!

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee picked himself up, furious. His head was stinging, and it ached abominably. He picked up the drill, put it in his pocket, and then looked round. He knew that it would be useless to go in pursuit, for Mr. Foxe had got a good start. But after a moment's consideration Nelson Lee did not worry. He knew who his man was, and he was pretty certain that Mr. Foxe would go straight back to St. Frank's.

He would get his man before morning came—of that he was certain. So he did not worry. He made his way towards the house, with the intention of seeing Mr. Forbes and explaining matters to him.

But Nelson Lee had hardly moved four or five paces before three men came dashing out of the library. They were all attired in trousers drawn up over their night attire, and Nelson Lee judged them to be a butler, a manservant, and probably a chauffeur.

"There he is!" shouted one of them excitedly.

Before he could even begin to explain the situation, he was seized. He was held tightly—roughly. Nelson Lee was not annoyed; on the contrary, he was rather amused. After all, it was only natural that these fellows should assume that he was the burglar. And appearances were against him, for one of the men found the drill in Nelson Lee's pocket. He held it up triumphantly.

"This is the fellow all right!" he shouted. "The master has already telephoned for the police, and it won't

be long before they're here. We'll be able to hand this man over to them straightaway!"

"My dear friends, I think you have made a mistake!" put in Nelson Lee boldly. "I am not the man you are after——"

"The best thing you can do, mate, is to hold your breath!" put in one of the other men—obviously the chauffeur. "You've been caught red-handed, and it's no good you saying you're innocent. Take my advice, and say nothing."

At that moment Mr. Montague Forbes himself appeared—stoutish, elderly, and wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

"What's this—what's this?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "You've got him?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good—splendid!" said Mr. Forbes. "The rascal—the infernal scoundrel! Bring him here, and mind that he doesn't produce any weapons! He's probably a desperate character!"

"Have you sent for the police, sir?" asked one of the men.

"I 'phoned them at once," said Mr. Forbes. "They'll be here within ten minutes. Ah, so this is the rascal, eh?"

"I'm afraid your men have made a mistake, Mr. Forbes," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I had the pleasure of meeting you only last week, I believe. My name is Nelson Lee and——"

"Eh? What's this?" shouted Mr. Forbes. "Mr. Nelson Lee? Good gracious! Why, so it is—so it is! Mr. Nelson Lee, the most famous detective in England!"

The three men who were holding Lee looked startled, and they let go of their prisoner as though he had become suddenly red-hot.

"You dolts! You confounded idiots!" roared Mr. Forbes angrily. "What on earth do you mean by seizing Mr. Lee? I'll discharge every one of you——"

"Please calm yourself, Mr. Forbes."

interrupted Nelson Lee, smiling. "And do not be harsh with the men—they only did what they thought to be right. I attempted to explain matters to them, but they did not listen, and I can hardly blame them for that."

"We're very sorry, sir!" said one of the men. "We thought—we thought——"

"And while you're thinking, you let the burglar escape!" snapped Mr. Forbes acidly. "What a parcel of block-heads!"

"I am afraid you must include me, too, Mr. Forbes," smiled Nelson Lee. "The burglar ran right into my arms, but I failed to hold him. If you can give me a short interview in private, I think I shall be able to explain matters. As it happens, I know who this burglar is, and I can assure you that I shall have him before the night is out—and I shall also be able to recover any property that may have been stolen."

Nelson Lee entered the house with Mr. Forbes, and very soon they were chatting together. Mr. Forbes was rather anxious.

"I hope that you will be able to find the rascal, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "He has succeeded in making off with a bundle of currency notes to the value of one hundred and twenty pounds."

"Is that the whole extent of your loss?" asked Nelson Lee.

"The whole extent?" said the other. "Good gracious, no! My wife's jewels have gone—diamonds, rubies, pearls! They are worth every farthing of three thousand pounds!"

"I do not think it will be long before they are in your possession again, Mr. Forbes," said Nelson Lee. "Now I will explain the affair to you, if you will listen. I cannot go into close details, but you will learn everything later on. I was on the track of this man who came here. I suspected his purpose, but I could take no action until I was certain."

And while Nelson Lee was talking

with Mr. Montague Forbes, J.P., Mr. Smale Foxe was hurrying towards St. Frank's. He was feeling easier, but by no means secure. He wanted to get into the school, and he wanted to stow his spoils safely away. Until then he would not be comfortable.

At last, just as the school clock was chiming one o'clock, Mr. Foxe slipped into the Triangle. Everything was dark and still—with the single exception of his own study window. This was lighted, and the figure of Ralph could be seen sitting back in a chair, reading. Mr. Foxe had no fear that he would be seen, for the whole school was asleep. Without making a sound, he crossed the Triangle, arrived at the window, and tapped upon it. In a moment Ralph was on his feet, and he crossed to the window. He raised the lower sash.

"Who is that?" he asked sharply.

"Not so loud, you fool—not so loud!" whispered Mr. Foxe. "Help me in!"

Within a few seconds Mr. Foxe was in the study, and he dragged down the blind at once. There was rather a hunted expression in his eyes, but, at the same time, a look of relief.

"You'd better go, Ralph—now, at once!" he said curtly.

Ralph looked at his twin brother curiously.

"What is the matter, James?" he asked. "You seem excited and agitated. Has anything happened? Where have you been all this time? What have you been doing?"

"Confound you!" rapped out Mr. Foxe. "Keep your infernal questions to yourself! You mustn't stay here now; it is important that you should go. Make your way to Bannington as quickly as possible—and you had better adopt that disguise in the wood."

"Yes, but I want to tell you——"

"We can speak the next time we meet!" interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "Go, Ralph! Do you hear? You are endangering my safety by remaining. Clear out!"

Ralph smiled slightly—and it was rather a bitter smile. Two minutes later he had gone, and Mr. James Smale Foxe was left alone in the study. He sank down into a chair with a sigh of relief.

It had been rather a strenuous time, and he was glad of the breathing space. All he wanted to do was to sit there and rest for the time being. He even had no inclination to examine his booty, which was stowed away in his pockets.

And as Mr. Foxe sat there he reviewed the situation, and he came to the conclusion that he was safe—absolutely safe. The smartest detective in the kingdom would never be able to trace the burglar to St. Frank's. And if by some miracle the police did come to the school, they would draw a blank, for there would be plenty of witnesses to prove that Mr. Foxe had been at St. Frank's the whole evening, right up till midnight.

"Yes, I am safe!" muttered Mr. Foxe, in a satisfied tone. "I'm as safe as houses!"

But even houses collapse sometimes!

CHAPTER 11.

The Right Mr. Foxe!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was fairly bubbling with triumph.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he whispered victoriously. "Didn't I say it all along? I suppose you'll admit now, you chaps, that I am a bit smarter than you thought?"

"Oh, dry up!" muttered Pitt. "Stop cackling like a giddy bantam! We give you credit, Handy, for what you discovered, and all the rest of it, but there's no need to keep on crowing."

Handforth glared.

"I've just been pointing out——"

"Yes, we know you have," I interrupted. "You've been pointing out the

fact that you're a marvel—a living wonder. We know all about it, Handy. We think you're enormously clever. But this isn't the time for jawing; we've got to keep quiet, and watch."

But Handforth could hardly restrain himself. Only a few minutes before a dim form had entered the Triangle, and slipped across to the window of Mr. Foxe's study. But that dim form was quite unaware of the fact that his movements were watched—and watched by many pairs of eyes.

For, to tell the truth, the tribunal was waiting and watching. We had decided to remain in the Triangle, for we felt certain that the real Mr. Foxe would turn up before many hours had elapsed, and now, at one o'clock, he had appeared. Our surmise had been correct, and our vigil had not been in vain.

We were all concealed in the shadows of the old chestnut-trees, and we had a clear vision of Mr. Foxe's window. And, watching, we had seen Mr. Foxe cross the Triangle, go to the window, and tap upon it. And then for a brief space we had seen Mr. Foxe and his twin brother—we had seen them both together—and there had been no mistake. And then the blind had been drawn swiftly down, shutting out the scene from us, and now we were waiting for developments.

"I wonder where Foxey has been to?" whispered Tommy Watson. "What has he been doing, the rotter? I'll warrant he's been up to no good."

"Dear old boy, you are probably correct," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "In fact, I am pretty certain that Mr. Foxe has been doing something fishy. Begad!"

Montie broke off as the blind was pulled up for a second, and then a form came out through the window and dropped lightly to the ground. It crossed the Triangle, and disappeared into the shadows near the wall, and we knew that Mr. Foxe's twin had gone.

The right Mr. Foxe was now in the study!

"But what's the idea of it?" whispered De Valerie.

"Well, there's only one explanation," I said. "Mr. Foxe provided himself with an alibi—at least, he thinks he has done so."

"But why should he want an alibi?" asked McClure.

"Mr. Foxe knows that better than we do," I replied, "but perhaps we shall find out before long. It's pretty certain, though, that he has been up to something of an unlawful nature. This precious alibi of his isn't worth a cent, because we can prove that Mr. Foxe was absent for two or three hours. If he thinks he is safe, he is under a little delusion."

"And what are we going to do now?" asked Pitt. "We know that the right Mr. Foxe is now in the study, and he might go off to bed at any minute. It's late enough, anyhow."

Bob Christine nodded.

"The best thing we can do is to get busy on the job," he remarked. "What do you say, Nipper? Don't you think it would be advisable to repeat our little performance?"

"Exactly," I said. "That is precisely what we shall do. We'll act in the same way we acted before—eight fellows will get in by the window, and eight by the door. We'll take Mr. Foxe by surprise, make a prisoner of him, and trot him off to the tribunal chamber. We shall have the right man this time, and we'll go through the whole programme."

"Good!"

"That's the style!"

"Buck up!"

The fellows were soon prepared, for they had their gowns and masks all ready, and attacked the study in just the same manner as on the former occasion. We carried out the plan without any alteration.

I crept to the window, with the other fellows about me. Then, at the word, the lower sash was flung up, and we hurled ourselves into the room. At the

same time, Christine and his seven followers entered by the door. It was a complete surprise for Mr. Foxe.

The rascally Housemaster was sitting in the chair before the fire, and he was just about to examine the spoils he had obtained from Mr. Montague Forbes safe. He almost had them out of his pocket, and he suddenly whirled round, the colour fleeing from his cheeks. There came a look of startled amazement and fear into his eyes.

"What—what— Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

The masked figures closed round him relentlessly.

"What is this?" snarled Mr. Foxe, partially guessing the truth. "You—you infernal scoundrels! How—how dare you! If you touch me—"

He got no farther, for he was not only touched, but firmly seized and borne to the floor. Then his ankles and wrists were bound, and his face was muffled in just the same way that the other Mr. Foxe had been muffled.

And not a word was spoken the whole time. The tribunal had seized Mr. Mr. Smale Foxe, and the tribunal was not going to be satisfied until Mr. Foxe had agreed to all its demands.

Mr. Foxe was taken through the window and carried several times round the Triangle. Then he was taken to the old garage at the rear of the College House; and the muffer was not taken from his face until the door was closed. And now Mr. Foxe saw that he was in a curious apartment, draped with heavy curtains, and with only one dim electric light shining overhead. All around stood the cloaked, masked figures.

Mr. Foxe was startled—far more startled than the fellows realised. For in his pockets lay concealed the proceeds of his burglary. And Mr. Foxe was beginning to realise that his alibi would not be good. He realised that these mysterious figures must have witnessed his return to St. Frank's—and they had probably witnessed other

things, too. Mr. Smale Foxe, in fact, was feeling desperate.

But he realised that no good purpose would be served if he flew into a rage, and resisted these boys; for Mr. Foxe was quite convinced that his captors were juniors. He was not deceived. But, of course, it was impossible for him to know the identity of the fellows. The disguises were complete in every case.

"Mr. Smale Fox, you have been brought here for a special purpose!" said Bob Christine in his deep disguised voice. "I am the chairman of the College House Tribunal, and you will please understand that you must do exactly as you are told, and without question. If you refuse—if you prove to be obstinate—you will be severely birched!"

Mr. Foxe caught his breath in sharply.

"You—you confounded young—what does this mean?" he exclaimed, choking back his rage with difficulty. "Who are you? Why have you done this? Release me at once!"

"You will be released in due course—if you agree to our proposals" said the chairman. "Matters in the College House have been reduced to a deplorable state of late. They must alter—they must be completely changed. Your experiment has been a complete failure—as you know as well as I do. It is not right that the boys should be given their full liberty—that they should be allowed to do exactly as they choose. The tribunal demands that the full rules and regulations shall be brought into operation again at once!"

"By heaven!" said Mr. Foxe glaring round. "You—you dare—" He checked himself with an effort. "Well? What is it? Let me hear the finish of your proposal!"

"It is perfectly simple," said Christine. "To-morrow morning you must call the whole College House together and address the boys. You must tell them that the rules and regulations are to be restored in every particular—from that moment onwards."

For a moment it seemed that Mr. Foxe was going to choke.

"And—and what if I refuse?" he demanded thickly.

"If you refuse, you will be flogged!" said the chairman grimly. "You will be laid across a box and subjected to severe punishment. That is the decree of the tribunal."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Smale Foxe harshly. "Very well—I agree!"

The tribunal was quite astonished at this tame surrender.

"You—you agree?" said Christine, almost forgetting to disguise his voice.

"You promise that the old rules shall be reinstated?"

"Yes!"

"Are you prepared to sign a document to that effect?" asked the chairman curtly.

The Housemaster's eyes blazed.

"Yes!" he said, with an effort. "Yes, I will sign!"

The chairman of the tribunal waved his hand.

"Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 8!" he commanded. "Step forward and release the prisoner's hands."

Four members of the tribunal strode forward. It was quite a simple matter to untie the bonds which bound Mr. Foxe's wrists. Christine knew that it would be quite safe in doing so—Mr. Foxe would not be able to escape. For his ankles were still secured, and he could not move a yard.

But, somehow, as I looked at Mr. Foxe I was slightly uneasy. There was a gleam in his eye which I did not like—a gleam which seemed to indicate that he was desperate and dangerous. I could not understand why he should be like this—we had not given him sufficient cause. But, of course, I did not know all the facts—then.

Mr. Foxe now had his hands free, and he looked round feverishly.

"I do not know who you are—but I can guess!" he exclaimed harshly.

"And you shall pay for this, you infernal young hounds! You cannot de-

ceive me—I know that you are boys of the Remove!"

"Silence!" said the chairman sternly. "It is your place to speak only when you are spoken to. You must remember that you are a prisoner of the tribunal. We intend to censure you severely for your conduct since you have been at St. Frank's—"

"Enough of this nonsense!" snarled Mr. Foxe. "Where is this paper you wish me to sign? Bring it to me—do you hear—"

He broke off abruptly, for he had been shaking his fists, and the effort rather upset his equilibrium. He attempted to keep upright, but his feet were tightly bound together, and he could hardly move. As a consequence, he toppled over, and fell headlong; and as he did so something rolled out of one of his pockets. And I saw at once that the something was a superb diamond pendant. There was also a ring set with rubies. Mr. Foxe snarled out an oath as he saw those objects lying on the floor.

The results of his burglary were being displayed before the eye of these masked figures! It was a terrible calamity and Mr. Foxe almost lost his head. He knew in any case, that secrecy was now out of the question. It was even impossible for him to remain at St. Frank's. For these boys would talk. The whole school would be in possession of the facts on the morrow! And the police would get to know; the police would come—Mr. Foxe would find himself—

But his thoughts went no farther. He only knew one thing—he must get away from St. Franks now—without a second's delay! And the very fact that he was a prisoner, and helpless, drove Mr. Smale Foxe into a frenzy. His plans had all gone wrong—they were completely upset; and this was because of the interference of the tribunal!

"Help me up!" shouted Mr. Foxe fiercely. "Do you hear? Put me on my feet again!"

He attempted to struggle up, and two or three members of the tribunal assisted Mr. Foxe to his feet. I bent down and recovered the pendant and the ring. I handed them to Foxe wondering at the same time what they were doing in his possession. For I could see that they were very valuable.

"You dropped these, Mr. Foxe!" I said gruffly.

The Housemaster snatched them and put them into his pocket.

"Yes—yes!" he panted. "I did drop them! And now I have the upper hand! You will all remain still—perfectly still! The first one who moves will receive a bullet!"

While he was speaking, Mr. Foxe jerked something from his pocket—and the juniors saw, with sudden alarm, that it was a revolver! Mr. Foxe pointed this straight at the figure of the chairman, Bob Christine.

"My words are not idle ones!" he exclaimed tensely. "If any of your companions attempt to touch me from the rear I shall shoot at once—I am in no mood to be trifled with!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Christine in his natural voice.

He was staggered—and the other juniors were in a similar condition. I was surprised myself, and I realised that Mr. Foxe was in deadly earnest—this was no joking matter. Until a moment or two before the whole affair had been in the nature of a very daring jape. But it had completely altered its character now. It was grim—desperate—deadly.

"Hold still, every one of you!" I said urgently. "Mr. Foxe may be bluffing, but we don't know; we can't take any risks."

"I am glad that somebody realises the gravity of the situation!" said Mr. Foxe, his voice cold and cutting. "One of you will come forward and release my ankles."

Nobody seemed to care for the task, but I moved forward and bent down, then I proceeded to unfasten the rope which secured Mr. Foxe's feet. As I

was doing so I realised that it was in my power to give those feet a sudden jerk and send Mr. Foxe flying to the floor.

In that way it would be easy to capture him and render him helpless. But I did not try any such trickery. I was convinced that Mr. Foxe was in earnest, and, even if I did bring him down, he would probably fire away with the revolver, blindly. Perhaps all his shots would go wide; but, on the other hand, there was a distinct chance that somebody would be hit. And it wasn't worth risking. I did not feel justified in endangering the other fellows by taking any such chance.

A moment later the rope was untied, and Mr. Foxe backed away until he stood close against the curtains. He was now facing all the members of the tribunal. The juniors stood there quite still, their hearts beating rapidly. They had never dreamed of anything like this. They had never imagined for a moment that Mr. Smale Foxe would adopt such methods. It was startling in the extreme:

"Now, my young friends, you will obey my orders!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "One of you will open the door, and then you will all stand back, quite clear. If there is any attempt to intercept me, or to prevent my escape, I will shoot. This revolver is fully loaded."

"Don't move, you fellows!" I muttered. "He's desperate! I'll open the door!"

The juniors remained quite still, and I flung back the curtains and opened the door wide, so that it could be plainly seen by Mr. Foxe. It was very galling to know that our prisoner would escape in this way but there was nothing else to be done. It would have been madness to take risks with this armed desperado—for that is what Mr. Smale Fox had suddenly become.

I went back to the others and stood quite still. I could see that Handforth would have risked anything; he never took any notice of arms. And his main desire now was to dash forward

and grapple with the prisoner. But I gave the impulsive leader of Study D a word of warning.

"Hold still, Handy!" I muttered.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm fed up with this. I'm going for the rotter —"

"Don't be an ass!" I broke in fiercely. "He'll let fly with that revolver, and somebody might get hurt. For goodness sake keep calm!"

Mr. Foxe moved rapidly over to the door and passed out. As he did so he turned, still keeping the tribunal covered.

"Sooner or later I will make you pay for this night's work!" he said harshly.

As he stood there, Mr. Foxe realised what this sudden change meant. All his plans would have to be forsaken. He would not be able to carry out his complete scheme.

Indeed, even his own safety was in danger.

For his cards were on the table now, and there would be no rest for him. It was quite out of the question for him to remain at St. Frank's; because, after this incident, all secrecy was impossible. The boys would talk of that ring and the pendant; and it would be known, before many hours, that Mr. Foxe had been away from St. Frank's—secretly. The police would soon put two and two together at once, and would act.

Mr. Foxe came to the conclusion that his health would be far better preserved if he put St. Frank's as far from him as possible. And his scheme to bring the school into disrepute would have to go by the board. He would not be able to carry out that project at all.

He felt furious, but it was quite useless for him to let his temper get the better of him. So he slammed the door and stowed his revolver away. He noticed that the door was fitted with an iron fastening, and a padlock hung there with a key in it. He slipped the padlock into place and locked it. Then he turned on his heel and vanished into the darkness. He knew that he

would be able to get quite a long way away before the members of the tribunal escaped from the garage.

But Mr. Smale Foxe had overlooked the fact that there was a door at the rear of the building. And this door was opened without any loss of time, and we streamed out into the open, having cast aside our cloaks and masks. The fellows were thoroughly excited, and hardly knew what to do.

"Leave it to me!" I said briskly. "I'll go straight to Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it. You fellows had better wait out here until I know exactly how things are going."

We hurried across the Triangle in the direction of the Ancient House. But suddenly we checked. For a figure was moving across towards us, and it stopped abruptly.

And in spite of the gloom I recognised the figure at once.

"The gov'nor!" I exclaimed tensely.

We had run right into the arms of Nelson Lee himself.

CHAPTER 12.

The End of the Chase!

NELSON LEE frowned as the juniors surged all round him.

"Boys!" he exclaimed severely.

"What is the meaning of this? What are you doing out here now, fully dressed, at this hour of the night?"

"Have you seen Mr. Foxe, sir?"

"He's just dashed away."

"And he was armed with a revolver, sir."

"He threatened to shoot us."

"He must have come this way, sir, and I expect you met him."

"Only two minutes ago, sir."

Nelson Lee held up his hand, for all the fellows were talking at once.

"Really, boys, you must calm yourselves!" he exclaimed. "What are you trying to tell me? What is this about Mr. Foxe?"

The famous detective, of course, was greatly interested. He had guessed

that Mr. Foxe would return to St. Frank's, but he had not imagined for a moment that any of the juniors would be up and about. But it was fairly evident, from what Nelson Lee had just heard, that Mr. Foxe had come straight to the school. And the detective was determined to get the whole truth at once.

"Now, Nipper, you must be the spokesman," he said crisply. "Have you seen Mr. Foxe?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" I replied. "You see, we had planned a little jape, although I don't think I need go into any details about that——"

"Perhaps it would be just as well if you do not," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Playing a jape, as you call it, on a Housemaster is decidedly reprehensible. But we will pass that for a moment. Go on, Nipper."

"Well, the fact is, sir, we made a mistake at first," I said. "We got hold of the wrong man—somebody who looked exactly like Mr. Foxe in every particular. We thought it was Mr. Foxe at first——"

"As it happens you were quite correct, although he was not the Mr. Foxe you expected to find," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Foxe has a twin brother, and you probably confused him with——"

"Yes, that's it, sir!" put in Handforth excitedly. "I said days and days ago that there were two of 'em, but these fatheads wouldn't believe me——"

"Quite so, Handforth—quite so!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "But please remember that Nipper is doing the talking. You must be silent."

It did not take me long to put Nelson Lee in possession of the facts.

I explained how we had waited in the Triangle, believing that the real Mr. Smale Foxe would turn up, and I told the gov'nor how Mr. Foxe had appeared, and how he had entered the study window. Then I went on to describe the events which immediately followed. Nelson Lee listened intently,

and with rather a grim expression in his eyes.

"A ring set with rubies, and a diamond pendant, eh?" he exclaimed, when I told him of that incident. "And these articles dropped out of Mr. Foxe's pocket?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I thought it was rather queer, although it was none of our business. But as soon as Mr. Foxe got to his feet he drew out a revolver and held us all up!"

"It was frightfully exciting, begad!" put in Sir Montie. "We weren't expectin' anythin' like that, sir—we weren't, really!"

I finished the story, and Nelson Lee looked rather grim. He was thinking deeply. He knew well enough that Mr. Foxe had now gone for good—that he would never dare return to the school.

"It is very unfortunate that you boys should have chosen this particular night for your escapade," he said at length. "I am afraid it has upset my plans considerably, but it cannot be helped. The climax will come all the sooner, that is all."

"Has Mr. Foxe been doing something shady, sir?" asked Pitt.

"There is no reason why you should not know, boys," said Nelson Lee.

"But, at the same time, I must ask you to say nothing about this to any of the other fellows. Keep it to yourselves—the matter will soon be quite public, I can assure you. Mr. Foxe is not what you have always thought him to be. He has committed a burglary to-night, and the ring and the pendant you saw are part of his spoils."

"A—a burglary?"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Foxey—a burglar!"

"The awful rotter!" said Christine.

"And—and he was our Housemaster!"

"He's escaped!" said Handforth.

"Oh, what asses we were to let him go! It was your fault, Nipper. We ought to have collared him, in spite of that revolver! We could have grabbed him without any difficulty——"

"No, Handforth. Nipper was quite right in what he did," put in Nelson Lee. "Mr. Foxe is desperate, and he would not have hesitated to use that weapon of his. And quite possibly the result would have been disastrous. It was far better to let him get away. You need have no fear—he will not go far. I shall soon succeed in rounding him up!"

"Are—are you going on the trail now, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, Nipper, I am."

"And may—may I come, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee only hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, if you wish, my lad," he said.

"You can come."

Of course, all the other juniors wanted to come as well—that was only natural; but Nelson Lee put his foot down firmly. He would allow only two other juniors in addition to myself to join in the chase, and, naturally, those two juniors were Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. It was only to be expected that I should select my two personal chums. The others were rather disappointed.

We were not long in getting off. There was only a very short delay while Nelson Lee telephoned to the police in Bannington. Meanwhile, all the juniors, with the exception of Tregellis-West and Watson and myself, were packed off to bed, and they were warned by Nelson Lee not to awaken the other juniors, and not to talk. But it was fairly certain they would talk—such a secret as this could not be kept for long.

We were soon off to Bannington, and we went in Nelson Lee's sports car. I was rather surprised to find that the guv'nor turned in the opposite direction—towards the moor. Bannington could be reached in this way, certainly, but the distance was at least three miles farther.

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked.

"I have every reason to believe that Mr. Foxe will make for Bannington," replied Nelson Lee. "We do not wish

him to know that we are on the way there, too. So, by taking this road, we shall avoid all possibility of that—and we have plenty of time in front of us."

"Why do you think Mr. Foxe will go to Bannington, sir?" I inquired.

"Because he has rented a furnished house there, and his brother is already on the spot, I believe," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think I am far wrong in assuming that Mr. Foxe will make straight for this house in Bannington. For, you must remember, there is no hue-and-cry after him as yet. At least, he is convinced that he is secure, so he will make straight for this house."

It seemed quite likely that Nelson Lee's shot would prove to be a true one. In any case, it was the only thing we could do at the moment.

"You seem to know all about Mr. Foxe's business, sir," I remarked.

"Exactly," smiled Nelson Lee. "I have taken good care to watch Mr. Foxe's movements very closely of late. He has been quite unconscious of these attentions on my part. I have rather suspected Mr. Foxe of shady behaviour, and now I have got my proof. It will not be long before the rascal is under lock and key."

It was evident from what Nelson Lee had been saying that he had been considerably active of late. Outwardly it appeared that he had been taking practically no interest in Mr. Smale Foxe. But the very opposite was the case. Working quietly, unobtrusively, Nelson Lee had been fully alive to the true situation all the time.

We arrived at Bannington without incident, and Nelson Lee brought the little car up in front of the police-station. Leaving us outside, Nelson Lee mounted the steps, and was quickly in the presence of Inspector Jameson.

This gentleman was looking very important—he was rather an officious sort at the best of times. But just now he appeared to think that he was the most important person in the whole town.

For Inspector Jameson had just come

away from the residence of Mr. Montague Forbes. He had, in fact, been investigating the robbery, and it was very seldom indeed that Inspector Jameson had a decent case to work on.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed, shaking hands. "I understand that you know something about this robbery? Mr. Forbes has told me that you were somehow connected with it."

"I was on the spot at the time, certainly," agreed Nelson Lee. "And, as it happens, I know the identity of the thief."

"Oh, indeed!" said the inspector. "That's splendid, Mr. Lee—splendid! Who is the rascal? Probably some well-known London crook——"

"On the contrary, the thief is Mr. James Smale Foxe, a Housemaster of St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee quietly. The inspector started.

"A—a Housemaster of St. Frank's!" he ejaculated. "Great Scott! Surely you are not serious, Mr. Lee?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said the detective. "But, if it is at all possible, Jameson, I should like this affair to be kept out of the newspapers. Mr. Forbes, I know, will be agreeable. At the moment, we must set about another task. I have every reason to believe that I can lay hands on Mr. Foxe quite easily, and I want you to help me."

"Most certainly, Mr. Lee—most certainly!" said Inspector Jameson. "If we can get hold of this man now, all the better."

"I think it is quite possible that Mr. Foxe will be found in a certain house on the outskirts of the town," went on Lee. "I know for a fact that Mr. Foxe and his brother rented this house only a few days ago. Foxe has fled from St. Frank's, but I do not think he would go out of the district to-night. He imagines himself to be fairly safe, and so his first move would be to join his brother in this furnished house.

If we go there at once, it is quite likely that we shall find them together."

And Nelson Lee went into further details, while the inspector listened intently. Finally, arrangements were made, and a strong party of police was got ready.

And then a definite move was made. Nelson Lee joined us in the motor-car, and we were soon on our way to a quiet road near the outside of the town, and it was in this road that the furnished house was situated. This house had been rented by Mr. Foxe, and Nelson Lee's surmise that the Housemaster would make for the place was not entirely wrong.

As a matter of fact, at the very moment when the police were stealthily surrounding the building, Mr. Smale Foxe was inside, facing his twin brother. He had arrived only a few moments before, and he had no suspicions that capture was so near at hand. He had entered the house by means of his latchkey, and had found Ralph asleep in bed. But the two brothers were now down in the sitting-room, and the gas was alight. The blind was closely drawn, but from outside it could be seen that there was a light in the room.

"What is the meaning of this, James?" Ralph was saying. "Man alive, you look scared! What have you been doing? Why are you not at St. Frank's?"

"Because things have gone wrong—badly wrong!" snapped Mr. Foxe curtly. "I must get out of this district at once—I must be quite clear of Bannington before daylight comes. But I came here first because I want your help. I must have a disguise——"

"But why?" asked Ralph, astonished. "What have you been doing? Good heavens, you have not set yourself against the Law——"

"The situation is desperate, I tell you!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Look here—look at these!"

He took from his pockets the results

of his burglary—the bundle of notes, the rings, pendants, and other articles of jewellery, and placed them on the table. Ralph gazed at them, horrified. He guessed at once what his brother meant.

"You—you have stolen these?" he said.

"Yes, confound you, don't look so startled!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Do you think I was going to leave St. Frank's—leave this district—empty-handed? If everything had gone right, there would have been no trouble at all, but, owing to those interfering boys, my whole plan has been upset. And now I've got to flee. I must hurry away!"

Ralph was almost dumbfounded.

"But—but this is terrible!" he panted. "You must be mad, James! Think what this will mean if you are caught——"

"Oh, I shan't be caught!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Have you got your clothes here? I want a complete change, another suit, and then, afterwards, I must disguise myself. Your clothes are upstairs in the bed-room?"

"Yes."

"Right! I will be down in about ten minutes' time!"

Mr. Foxe passed out of the room, and found himself in the dark hall. He was just making his way to the staircase when he paused. He could see dim figures ahead of him, and two of those figures were wearing helmets!

The police!

Mr. Foxe went rigid. He clenched his teeth, and stood perfectly still. He had been trapped, after all. This was the end. Somehow or other, the police had entered the house, and they were here, right upon him!

As a matter of fact, Inspector Jamieson had led his men into the house stealthily. A window had been found at the rear which had been easily forced, and now there were several constables in the hall itself. They moved forward rapidly as they saw Mr. Foxe come to a halt.

"By heavens, you shan't take me!" shouted the Housemaster fiercely.

He turned about and rushed to a door, which was just near to him. It came open, and Mr. Foxe went dashing through. He slammed the door behind him, and the next moment he went tumbling down some steps. Inadvertently, he had walked into the cellar.

But when the cellar was searched a few minutes later, it was found to be empty—the bird had flown! And it was not long before the searchers found out how Mr. Foxe had escaped. There was a heavy grating at one end of the cellar, and it had been a comparatively simple matter for the fugitive to push this grating aside and get out into the open.

There had been police on the watch, certainly, but they had not been on the look-out for a stealthily creeping figure under the bushes. And so Mr. Smale Foxe escaped. Although the grounds were thoroughly searched, no sign was found of him; he had slipped away into the night.

"Of course, it wasn't your fault, guv'nor," I said. "You led the police to the place, and put them right on the track. They're to blame for letting old Foxey escape. But thank goodness the police have recovered the stolen property."

"Yes, that is quite excellent," said Nelson Lee. "And I do not think it will be very long before Mr. Foxe himself is arrested. He cannot get far."

Without a doubt, Nelson Lee had triumphed.

Mr. Smale Foxe's scheme had come to nothing. He had been compelled to forsake his spoils in the sitting-room, and he was now a hunted criminal—a fugitive from justice. His career at St. Frank's was at an end, and within a day or two, probably, everything would be normal.

Mr. Montague Forbes' property was restored to him intact, and he immediately agreed that the matter should be kept quiet and not made public in

any way. He even went so far as to state that he did not wish to prosecute, and he requested the police to make no attempt to capture the fugitive Mr. Foxe. It would be better if the rascal was allowed to go free, since, if he were arrested and charged with the crime, the whole thing would become public, and the disgrace would be reflected upon his brother, and upon St. Frank's. More harm than good would be done.

But, as it happened, St. Frank's had not seen the last of Mr. James Smale Foxe even yet!

CHAPTER 13.

A Welcome Visitor!

CLAPSON, of the Remove, descended the staircase at express speed.

He dispensed with the use of his feet during this operation—quite a simple performance. For Clapson merely seated himself on the balustrade and let himself go. He descended towards the College House lobby with ever-gathering velocity. And, of course, at that very moment Mr. Smale Foxe appeared.

Clapson landed at the foot of the staircase with a thud, and nearly staggered into the arms of the Housemaster who was standing looking on rather grimly.

"How dare you, Clapson!" said Mr. Foxe.

"Why, I was only coming downstairs, sir!" gasped Clapson.

"In future, Clapson, you will descend the stairs in the orthodox manner," scolded Mr. Foxe sternly. "To impress this upon you, you will write me fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir!" said Clapson meekly.

The Housemaster passed along, and Clapson stared after him, scratching his head. And just then, Bob Christine and Yorke appeared from the Triangle.

"Fifty lines for sliding down the giddy balustrade!" said Clapson. "How the dickens was I to know that

old Foxey would appear just then?"

Bob Christine grinned.

"You've got to be more careful now, my son," he said cheerfully. "Things aren't the same in the College House as they were last week—not by long chalks. We're ourselves again, thank goodness! And you ought to be jolly glad to get fifty lines for sliding down the giddy balustrade!"

Clapson grunted, and did not look very pleased. There had been big alterations in the College House during the last day or so. Mr. Smale Foxe was in charge, but not the same Mr. Smale Foxe. This gentleman was the real Housemaster. His rascally brother who had taken his place for several weeks was still a fugitive from justice.

Dr. Stafford himself had returned, and he had learned all the facts from Nelson Lee. The school itself did not know that Mr. James Smale Foxe had burgled a house in Bannington, and had been compelled to flee from the police, although a few juniors of the Remove knew all about it. But Nelson Lee had warned them to say nothing, and the boys had given Lee their promise.

And so it seemed that the whole matter would blow over without becoming public.

And now the fellows had something else to occupy their thoughts. Before many days, the Easter holidays would commence. And already all sorts of preparations were being made for the vacation.

Lessons were over for the day—in fact, tea had been dispensed with—and quite a number of fellows were gathered out in the Triangle. For it was a beautiful evening, mild and bright. And practically the sole topic of conversation among the various groups of juniors was the forthcoming Easter holidays. All sorts of plans were being made, and other plans were being discussed.

"The question is, what shall we do with ourselves?" inquired Tommy

Watson, who was helping to prop up the wall of the gymnasium. "We shall have to fix things up, you know. You're going to be in London, Nipper, aren't you?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "The gov'nor and I will go up together, and we shall probably make straight for our place in Gray's Inn Road. We're bound to meet during the holidays, at some time; but it's just as well to have things cut and dried."

"Rather, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Now, look here——"

I paused abruptly.

For at that moment a low, sporting car had come worming its way into the Triangle, through the big gateway. It was a magnificent car—a powerful racer, rakish looking and painted a brilliant yellow. It contained one solitary occupant, who lounged back behind the wheel as though he were in an easy-chair.

The car was almost noiseless, and it came gliding across the Triangle with easy smoothness. I started forward, my face flushed, for I recognised the occupant of the car at once.

"Great Scott!" I yelled. "It's Dorrie!"

"Begad!"

"Lord Dorrimore!" said Tommy Watson excitedly. "Oh, good!"

We raced across the Triangle, and arrived near the Ancient House just as the car came to a standstill. We were glad to see Lord Dorrimore, for he was one of the best. The sporting peer was Nelson Lee's greatest friend. They had been together in all parts of the world, had shared dangers, and had passed through many perils side by side.

As a matter of fact, I had been with them—to say nothing of a good many other St. Frank's juniors.

Dorrie looked just the same as ever, as he sat there in the car—tall, broad, clean-shaven, and scrupulously attired. He wore the same old expression of lazy good humour, and he grinned

cheerfully as we climbed on the foot-board.

"Dorrie!" I ejaculated, grabbing for his hand. "This is great! We didn't expect to see you!"

"No, I suppose not," said his lordship languidly. "But these sort of shocks do come occasionally. You've been having a frightfully quiet time down here, so I thought it was about time for me to stir things up a bit. When you've finished treading on the engine, you might make way for me to get out!"

"Same old Dorrie!" I grinned. "My word, it's splendid to see you again! I suppose you've come down to see the gov'nor?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was thinking of having a few words with the Professor," replied Dorrie lightly. "If he's knocking about handy, there's no reason why I shouldn't bother him. How's his hair?"

"His hair?" I repeated.

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "How's it gettin' on?"

"It's just the same as it always was, as far as I know——"

"Oh, I'm glad to know that," interrupted his lordship. "You see, I thought it might be turning grey. I know what a shocking job he has got here, looking after you terrors!"

"Oh, it would take more than that to turn the gov'nor's hair grey!" I chuckled. "I wondered what the dickens you were getting at, Dorrie. How long are you going to stay?"

"Oh, about an hour," replied Lord Dorrimore, lighting a cigarette.

"Only an hour——"

"Well, I might stay until to-morrow," went on Dorrie, grinning. "There's no tellin', you know. It all depends whether I'm kicked out or not. It's quite likely that Lee will groan when he sees me, and present me with the order of the boot. Whenever I come to St. Frank's, I generally upset all the works and create havoc in general. It's a queer thing, but that's

how it happens. And yet, I'm quite an inoffensive chap!"

All the juniors were grinning, and they listened to Dorrie with enjoyment. He was always the same—always light-hearted and full of jokes.

"You'd better come along to the gov'nor's study," I said. "He's there now, I know, and he'll be delighted to see you. Come on, Dorrie! I'll escort you!"

"Frightfully good of you, I'm sure, young 'un," said Lord Dorrimore. "And it's just as well that I should have a guide, because I might go blundering into some study where I don't belong. I haven't chained Lizzie up; but I don't suppose she'll run away!"

"Lizzie?" I repeated.

"The old bus!" explained Dorrie, with a jerk of his head. "I call her Lazy Lizzie, because I can't get more than ninety miles an hour out of her!"

I grinned.

"Oh, she'll be all right!" I said. "The fellows won't interfere. Now you come along."

Dorrie followed me through the lobby and along the passages until we arrived at Nelson Lee's study. Quite a number of other juniors followed, out of curiosity. I tapped upon the door, and entered.

"Somebody to see you, sir!" I said cheerfully. "The one and only!"

"Why, Dorrie, this is a delightful surprise!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, jumping to his feet. "Come in, old man!"

A moment later the pair were shaking hands vigorously, and Dorrie was forced into an easy chair. Nelson Lee was genuinely pleased to see his old friend, and I stood by smiling.

"Well, what has brought you down, Dorrie?" asked Nelson Lee, after the greetings were over.

"Oh, nothin' much," said his lordship. "As a matter of fact, Lizzie wanted some exercise, so I thought I would bring her out. And as I felt

rather depressed, I thought I might as well come in this direction, to catch a glimpse of your smilin' faces. It's bucked me up wonderfully, by gad! I'm feeling top hole already!"

"And you had no other motive in coming?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"Well, to tell the truth, I was thinkin' about scatterin' a few invitations," said Dorrie. "These young gentlemen are comin' out on bail for the Easter vac, aren't they?"

"On bail?"

"Oh, beg pardon," said Dorrie. "I was forgettin' for the moment. But the school is breaking up for the holidays, soon, I believe—somethin' seems to tell me so!"

"That's quite right!" said Nelson Lee. "Within two days, to be exact."

"Good!" exclaimed the visitor.

"Well, my idea was this. I thought some of the young bounders might like to spend a few days at my little shack in Suffolk. I don't often go there, but when I do I like to have company. An' it would be rather like old times to have a few dozen of these jape experts about me!"

I was eager at once. Dorrie's shack in Suffolk—as he called it—was really a magnificent mansion. Dorrimore Hall, in fact, was one of the most beautiful buildings in Suffolk, and it was surrounded by a wonderful park.

"Of course, I should want you to come as well, Lee, old man," went on Dorrie. "I couldn't think of being there without you. What do you say? Is it a go?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Well, Dorrie, you're rather sudden," he smiled. "Personally, I shall be delighted to accept the invitation. A week at Dorrimore Hall would be most enjoyable, I am sure. But you said something about two or three dozen boys. You did not mean that literally, surely?"

His lordship nodded.

"Why not?" he asked. "The more

the merrier, by gad! I'll leave it entirely to Nipper. He can bring as many fellows as he wants to—or as many as want to come. They're all welcome. He can bring the whole bally school if it pleases him! There is plenty of room at the Hall, and there'll be plenty of grub, too. Just let me know, a day or two before you arrive, how many to expect, and then things will be all serene. I'm gettin' up a big party, and we'll have quite a merry old time."

"Ripping!" I exclaimed. "You can bet we'll be there, Dorrie; and I shan't have any difficulty in finding a number of fellows to come—they'll all be falling over themselves to be invited. And when do you want them—as soon as the holiday starts?"

"Well, not exactly," said Dorrie. "We must give the chaps a chance to go to their own homes first, you know. We don't want to spoil their holiday altogether. Those little things can be arranged later on. But I came down now just to give you the tip."

"Good!" I said. "You're a brick, Dorrie!"

"Of course, I'm doin' it from a purely selfish motive," went on his lordship, lying back languidly. "I'm properly fed up with London, by gad! Nothin' to do—nothin' to see! It's the most deadly dull spot on the face of the earth!"

"Opinions differ, old man," smiled Nelson Lee. "It would be unfortunate for London if the rest of humanity sharpened your opinion. But, of course, you would prefer to be prowling in the depths of an African forest, or staggering along under a blinding sun in the Sahara, or sweltering in the humid heat of the Amazon——"

"Anythin' like that," interrupted Dorrie, nodding. "But don't keep on talkin', Lee; you fairly make my mouth water. Gad! I'd love to go on some more adventures—somethin' really thrillin'. I suppose there won't be

time for us to take a trip abroad during the holidays?"

"It all depends what you mean by 'abroad,' Dorrie," he smiled. "We could run over to the Continent, perhaps, for a day or two; but as for going farther afield, I'm afraid it is quite out of the question."

"Of course," sighed Dorrie. "That's just what I expected. By the way, Lee, when I come to look at you closely I can see a remarkable difference in you. You're gettin' frightfully thin!"

"Thin?"

"Yes; an' your face is lean an' haggard!" said his lordship gravely. "You haven't got any colour, an' you're nothin' better than a physical wreck. I don't like to tell you these things, old man, but I feel that I must."

"All I can say, Dorrie, is that my feelings belie my looks," smiled Nelson Lee. "I was never fitter in my life!"

Dorrie wagged his finger reprovingly. "You mustn't take any notice of your feelin's," he said. "It's your looks that give you away. What you want, Lee, is a thunderin' long rest—a change of air—tropical climate, by gad! I advise you to chuck up this school stuff for a month or two, and put yourself in my hands. I have mapped out a rippin' trip——"

"My dear Dorrie, you might as well save your breath!" interrupted Lee, with a grin. "I fully understand your game now, and I can tell you that it won't work. Moreover, if I put myself in your hands for a 'thundering long rest' as you call it, I'm afraid I should find myself in for a very strenuous time. I'm sorry, old man, but I can't think of any prolonged trip abroad just now."

Dorrie shrugged his shoulders.

"Just what I expected," he said. "What's the good of tryin' on any wheeze with you, Lee? It's too bad of you to stick here, month after month, leavin' me in the lurch. Can't you do somethin' with him, Nipper?"

"Nothing at all!" I grinned. "But

look here, Dorrie, let's drop the subject. Now, with regard to this party. Do I understand that I can invite as many fellows as I choose?"

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "I leave it entirely in your hands."

"And can't we come to some definite decision now?" I asked.

"Definite decision?"

"Yes; about our time of arrival at Dorrmore Hall, and all that kind of thing," I said. "If we fix things up now I can tell all the fellows before they go home for the holidays, and that will save no end of trouble later."

His lordship nodded.

"That's quite right," he admitted. "Now, lemme see. I'll tell you what, Nipper. I'll have a chat with your guv'nor, and I'll let you know exact details later, before I go. How will that suit?"

"First class!" I replied. "It's awfully decent of you, Dorrie, to ask us down to Dorrmore Hall."

His lordship politely requested me not to talk out of the back of my neck, and I withdrew. I found Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson waiting for me. We went along to Study C at once.

"Good news, my sons!" I said. "Dorrmore wants us to spend a part of the Easter holidays at his country place in Suffolk. It's left to me to invite as many chaps as I choose."

"This is ripping of Dorrie. I've often wanted to see his country place," said Watson. "Have you ever been there, Nipper?"

"As it happens, I haven't," I replied. "You see, Dorrie is never at home, generally speaking. He's a restless chap, and for nine months out of the year he's dodging about in different parts of the world. I don't suppose he'll ever settle down to a quiet life."

"It'll be jolly interesting," went on Watson. "And the chaps will be only too ready to accept invitations."

"Begad! That'll just be the trouble," remarked Sir Montie.

"You've hit it, Montie," I said. "I dare say I could invite fifty or sixty chaps, and they would all be only too willing to accept. But I reckon we must limit the number to about two dozen, and they must all be from the Remove. Hang it all, I couldn't have the nerve to take more than twenty-four chaps with me."

We discussed the situation with interest, and practically decided who should be invited.

And then, Dorrie looked in.

"About the little party," he observed languidly. "We must give the fellows a chance to spend some time with their people, an' so I suggest that you all come down to Dorrmore Hall on the first day of the month."

"Good enough!" I said. "That'll do fine, Dorrie!"

"You might as well all come down together—by the same train," went on his lordship. "There's a good train from Liverpool Street at two-thirty. You'd better tell all the chaps to collect together at Liverpool Street at two o'clock. Then you'll all be able to come down together, and I'll meet you at the other end."

This was eminently satisfactory, and I had nothing to say against it. And so the plan was decided upon. We should all go down to Dorrmore Hall on the first of the month, by the two-thirty train from Liverpool Street. The plan was simple and straightforward.

After Dorrie had left the study, I made out the list of guests, and it ran as follows: Ancient House: Watson, Tregellis-West, and myself; Handforth, Church, and McClure; Reginald Pitt, Tom Burton, Justin B. Farman, the Trotwood twins, Fatty Little, Cecil de Valerie, the Duke of Somerton, and Dick Goodwin. College House: Bob Christine, Yorke and Talmadge; Oldfield, Clapson, and Nation; Turner, Page, Harron, and Ernest Lawrence.

Upon examination, this list revealed the fact that there would be fifteen Ancient House juniors, and ten College

House juniors, making twenty-five altogether.

"I don't think we can improve on this list," I said, after looking it over. "Solly Levi would have been included, but I know for a fact that his people are taking him over to Paris for the vac. Of course, there are a lot of others we could include, but we must draw a line somewhere."

"What about Jack Grey?" asked Wat son. "He's a decent fellow, and —"

"His pater is taking him off to Scotland, so he'll be out of it," I interrupted. "Then there's Hart. He can't come, because he's booked for a holiday in Norway. It's the same with a lot of the chaps. But all these on the list are free, I imagine; but we shall soon know for certain."

For the remainder of the evening we were engaged in going round the various studies scattering invitations broadcast. The lucky juniors were delighted, for Dorrie was universally popular, and they knew that they would have a first-class time at Dorri-more Hall.

And by the time the bell clanged out for bed, practically all the arrangements were made. The invitations had been accepted, and it was fixed that the whole crowd should collect together at Liverpool Street Station on the first of the month, at two o'clock.

But if the juniors could only have known what these apparently simple invitations were ultimately to lead to, they would have been filled with excitement.

CHAPTER 14.

An Unwelcome Visitor!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH came to a halt in the middle of the upper corridor, not far distant from the door of the Remove dormitory. And he glared ferociously at Church and McClure, his faithful and long-suffering study mates.

"You—you prize asses!" he said witheringly.

Church and McClure stared.

"What's the matter now?" asked Church in surprise.

"You dummies—you've got memories like sieves!" snapped Handforth. "Didn't we arrange to bring up a writing block and a pencil, so that we could map out our movements for the holidays—with exact times, and all the rest of it? Where's the writing pad? Where's the pencil?"

McClure grunted.

"We can't be expected to remember everything," he said. "In any case, it doesn't matter now. We're the last fellows up, and we shall be the last in the dormitory. We'd better make haste, or we might get into a row—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "This is what comes of trusting to you chaps! I might as well trust—"

"Yourself?" suggested Church sarcastically.

"Eh?"

"Oh, it's no good getting your rag out, Handy," snapped Church. "You jaw about our memories. What about your own? Why couldn't you remember to bring up the pad—"

"I'm not going to argue, and if you fellows give me any more of your cheek, I'll punch you on the nose!" said Handforth aggressively. "The best thing you can do is to buzz down to the study and get those things! Buck up, one of you!"

"No fear!" said Church. "I'm not going to be collared by a prefect—"

"Are you going or not?" roared Handforth.

"Not!" said his chums in one voice.

Handforth glared. Defiance of this kind was not usual.

"Oh, all right, we'll soon see!" he snorted. "Take that!"

He lunged out at Church, but that exasperated junior ducked in the nick of time, and Handforth went sprawling forward. His momentum caused him to sail headlong over Church's back,

and he hit the floor with a thud, and rolled on his back. Without wasting a second, Church fell upon his leader.

"Lend a hand, Clurey!" he gasped. "It's a ripping chance to get some of our own back."

"Good!" said McClure, with enthusiasm.

Practically the whole evening they had been listening to the sound of Handforth's voice; they had been worried and troubled by his constant orders. And now, for him to blame them for his own forgetfulness was rather more than they could stand. They had been exasperated beyond ordinary endurance, and their endurance was, as a rule, quite remarkable.

"You—you traitors—you turncoats!" snorted Handforth hotly. "Lemme go! If you don't get up, I'll half slaughter you when——"

"Don't take any notice of him!" panted Church. "That's right—hold his feet. Now, I'm going to slosh him until he promises——"

"Hallo, hallo! What's this?" exclaimed a voice from the rear. "Two of you kids smashing another? You don't call that cricket, do you? All right, Handforth, I'll rescue you from these bullies!"

It was Chambers of the Fifth who had appeared upon the scene. Chambers was a big fellow, and an amiable sort of ass, and it was one of his favourite habits to butt in when he wasn't required. He seized Church by the coat collar and yanked him backwards. The next moment, Handforth was on his feet, fuming.

"That's all right," said Chambers kindly. "No need to thank me, Handforth. I'm always ready to lend a hand when I see a youngster in trouble!"

"Trouble?" bellowed Handforth fiercely. "Who was in trouble? You—you interfering fathead! Who told you to lend me a hand?"

Chambers stared.

"Steady on!" he said, in a patronising voice. "None of your nonsense, Handforth. I did you a good turn, and the least you can do is to thank me!"

"You—you did me a good turn?" gasped Handforth. "Why, you prize dummy! I was just going to knock these idiots down the stairs! I was going to slaughter them. Take that for interfering!"

Biff!

Handforth's fist landed squarely in the centre of Chambers' chest, and the Fifth Former went staggering backwards. He was taken by surprise, and he gazed at Handforth blankly. Then he frowned.

"You—you ungrateful young sweep!" he said hotly. "I'll never do you a good turn again!"

His dignity was upset, and he hurled himself forward. Handforth wasn't exactly looking for an attack; and before he knew what had happened, Chambers' fist caught him a beautiful swipe on the nose.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Handforth wildly.

He was in pain, and by the time he recovered himself, Chambers was walking sedately into the Fifth Form dormitory. His dignity was satisfied. He had avenged the insult. And Handforth fairly foamed at the mouth.

"By George!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll——"

"Steady on, Handy!" muttered Church. "You can't go after Chambers now!"

"Can't I?" roared Handforth. "You'll soon see! I'm going to——"
"Cave!" hissed McClure suddenly.
"Old Crowell!"

Before Handforth could say anything further, Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, came round the corner of the corridor. McClure had recognised his footstep. Mr. Crowell frowned severely as he surveyed the juniors.

"Are you responsible for the extra-

ordinary noise I heard a moment ago, Handforth?" he asked sharply.

"I—I—I—" began Handforth.

"You will take fifty lines, Handforth, for creating a disturbance," said Mr. Crowell curtly. "And you will get into your dormitory at once—all three of you. You are late already. Now, boys, obey me!"

Handforth clenched his fists, looking helplessly at his chums, and then went along to the Remove dormitory. As soon as he was inside, he turned and glared at the other two juniors.

"I'll deal with you to-morrow!" he said darkly. "There's something more important to do to-night! As soon as the lights are out, I'm going into the Fifth dormitory, and I'm going to knock that ass Chambers into the middle of next term!"

"Oh, don't be an idiot, Handy!" whispered Church anxiously. "Forget it! If you go into the Fifth dormitory and pounce on Chambers, you'll have half the Fifth on to you, and then you'll be—"

"I don't care about that!" snorted Handforth. "He swiped me on the nose, and I'm going to repay him with interest. I don't care what happens to me afterwards. The main thing is to wipe up Chambers!"

Church and McClure gave it up. It was obviously useless to argue. When Handforth made up his mind there was no holding him. And he had certainly decided to invade the Fifth Form dormitory—whatever the cost might be.

Accordingly, shortly after lights-out, Handforth rose from his bed. Most of the juniors were already asleep, and the others were dozing off. Handforth didn't trouble to dress. He crept out of the room attired only in his pyjamas.

All was quiet out in the corridor. He padded his way along the cold linoleum until he came to the door of the Fifth Form dormitory. He turned the handle, and entered. Dead silence reigned.

Then a startling thing happened.

A brilliant light flashed into Handforth's eyes, completely dazzling him.

"Thought so!" muttered a voice.

"Now then, you chaps!"

A blanket, appearing from nowhere, enveloped Handforth's head and shoulders. It fell upon him heavily, and the next moment the valiant leader of Study D was on the floor, held down by many strong hands.

He tried to struggle, but the odds were too great. He tried to yell, but the blanket drowned his voice and rendered it into a dull, muffled murmur. The blanket was drawn tight round his neck and round his waist.

"Got him!" chuckled a voice, which Handforth had no difficulty in recognising as Chambers'. "Can you hear me, Handforth, old son?"

"Mmmmm!" came from behind the folds of the blanket. "Grrrr!"

Chambers grinned.

"I had an idea that you would come along, Handy, and so I prepared things," he said cheerfully. "We're going to teach you to be a good little boy. 'Oo mustn't show 'oo's ickle temper! Naughty, naughty!"

Handforth literally writhed; but that was all he could do.

He was lifted from his feet, and then he felt a rope being passed round his waist. It was drawn tight. Then Handforth was carried some way and hoisted up. He wondered what was going to happen; and he was considerably startled when he felt himself dangling in space. The coldness of the atmosphere round his feet and ankles—which were bare—told him that he was in the open air.

Then his feet came into contact with some hard, icy, stone substance, which he recognised as gravel. He was in the Triangle! He had been lowered from one of the upper windows, and was now stranded.

This was the Fifth Formers' idea of a joke. Handforth fumed as he rolled over, for he found it impossible to keep his balance. Dimly, the sound of

chuckles came down to him, and then a window was softly closed.

It took Handforth exactly five minutes to extricate himself from that blanket.

"The rotters!" he gasped breathlessly. "I shall probably catch a cold over this, and then it'll turn to 'flu, or pneumonia, or—even scarlet fever! The cads! I'll smash Chambers for this!"

He drew the blanket round him closely, and then moved forward. Then he gasped afresh, for the gravel was painful to his bare feet. He was more careful after that, and he picked his way like a ghost towards the window of Study D. By chance it would be unlatched, and Handforth would be able to get in.

Fortunately, he saw that the window of Study B was not fastened, so he did not investigate any further. He was just about to push up the sash when he fancied he heard a slight sound—as though a boot had grated on the gravel.

He turned, his heart in his mouth. If a master saw him in this plight he would be unable to give any explanation; for, of course, it was impossible to sneak. Handforth would have bitten his tongue in half before sneaking.

In the gloom he saw a figure in the Triangle. It was crossing to the College House. And curiously enough, it was not making for the door, but in the direction of a lighted window. It was the window of the Housemaster's study.

Handforth stared, filled with curiosity.

Behind that lighted window sat Mr. Smale Fox, who had taken up the duties of Housemaster after his rascally brother's escape. And as Handforth stood there, he had a vague suspicion that the dim figure he had seen belonged to none other than the rascally twin brother himself.

And so, Handforth waited. He thought it quite likely that James had come back to have a quiet word with his brother while the school was

asleep. And Handforth was filled with indignation at the thought. He knew well enough that Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe would not welcome any further intrusion by his brother.

Almost immediately afterwards, Handforth's suspicions were confirmed.

For the figure reached the lighted window and tapped upon the glass. After a very short interval the lower sash was pulled up and the Housemaster's form appeared. Handforth stood stockstill, listening.

"James!" said Mr. Foxe, in surprise.

The word came distinctly over to Handforth, and he knew that his suspicions had been justified. And as he watched, the visitor slipped in through the window, the sash was lowered, and the blind fell into place.

"By George!" muttered Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "So that rotter's had the nerve to come back—after all that's happened! The Remove will have something to say about this!"

Without waiting any longer, Handforth slipped into Study B, passed through, and was soon mounting the stairs. He entered the Remove dormitory without any attempt to be silent. And I was awake on the instant. I sat up, staring into the gloom.

"Who's that?" I demanded. "Me!" said Handforth ungrammatically. "I say, Nipper——"

"You ass! Why aren't you in bed?" I asked. "What games have you been up to now, Handforth? You'll have a master on your track——"

"Oh, do dry up and let me get a word in!" snapped Handforth. "I've just been out in the Triangle—those Fifth Form rotters had the nerve to tie me up and lower me down from one of the upper windows!"

"I grinned. "Well, I dare say you asked for it!" I said calmly. "If you go about looking for trouble, Handy, you won't have much difficulty in finding it. Perhaps you'll have the sense to get into bed now, and——"

"Am I going to sleep or not?"

snorted Handforth. "Never mind about those Fifth Form asses—I'll deal with them to-morrow! There's something that must be attended to at once, and you, as captain of the Remove, ought to be enthusiastic. Old Foxe is here! The rotten Foxey, I mean!"

"I'm not very enthusiastic about that," I answered. "But how do you know?"

"I just saw him out in the Triangle, creeping across to the College House—to the Housemaster's study window!" said Handforth. "By George! The rotter! Having the sauce to come here again! You can bet your boots that the decent Mr. Foxe doesn't want him. I vote we rise in our might, pounce upon the cad, and kick him out!"

I considered for a moment.

"Are you sure about this, Handy?" I asked suspiciously. "You're a famous chap for giving false alarms, you know. I agree that we ought to chuck Mr. Foxe off the premises; but we don't want to make asses of ourselves!"

"Oh, you make me tired!" snapped Handforth. "There's no doubt about this, at all!"

And he explained the exact circumstances. When he had finished I was convinced that on this occasion, at least, he had made no blunder. He had distinctly heard the visitor greeted by name, and that was good enough.

I slipped out of bed.

"Wake some of the chaps up," I said briskly. "Your own chums, Tregellis-West, Watson, Pitt and some of the others. We'll swoop down on Mr. Foxe's study, and relieve him of the presence of his beautiful brother. He may not like it, but he'll be grateful to us afterwards."

And in less than three minutes, the Remove dormitory was alive and active.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe was regarding his unscrupulous brother with decided disfavour. James had just entered the study, and he looked very different now. His clothing was untidy and muddy, his collar was dirty,

and he had a three day's growth of beard on his chin. And there was a wild, hunted look in his eyes. There was not the slightest difficulty in distinguishing one brother from the other. There was now a great deal of difference between the two.

"Why have you come here, James?" demanded Ralph angrily. "Heaven knows you have caused me enough trouble already—"

"Don't start your snivelling!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "You've got to help me, do you understand?"

"Help you?"

"Yes; to get away from this district!" said the other. "I've been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you, and at last I have been compelled to come here. For days I have been half starved. I have lived in the woods—unable to show myself. There's no sense in mincing matters. You know all about that burglary, and everything else. Curse that interfering brute, Nelson Lee, for upsetting my plans! Now I'm hunted, and I'm afraid to show myself—"

"If that's your trouble, you may as well set your mind at rest," put in Ralph curtly. "It may interest you to know that no proceedings will be taken, James. You can walk out of this district freely, and you won't be interfered with by the police. I have no sympathy with you. You made your own bed and you must lie on it. Don't come whining to me. But if you need a little money, I will give you some."

"What false story is this?" snarled Mr. Foxe. "Do you think you can deceive me? Do you think I believe this story—that the police will not interfere, and that proceedings have stopped? You are simply doing it to get rid of me, Ralph, and I tell you at once that I won't put up with any nonsense!"

"If you'll only listen—"

But just at that moment an interruption occurred—an interruption which was as startling as it was unexpected. The window sash was flung up abruptly,

and a swarm of juniors came surging into the room. I led the way, and Handforth and many others swarmed after me. There were no College House fellows; but this was only because Christine & Co. could not be reached. They would be sorry, afterwards, that they had taken no part in the affair. But it couldn't be helped.

"All right, Mr. Foxe, don't worry!" I said, as I tumbled into the study. "We've come to relieve you of this gentleman here!"

"Rather!" said Handforth grimly.

Mr. Foxe started back, scowling.

"You young hounds!" he snarled.

"If you dare to lay fingers on me——"

"Boys—boys!" protested the Housemaster. "You must not——"

But no notice was taken of him. Mr. James Smale Foxe was seized by many strong hands, and resistance was useless. There was no possibility of our making a mistake, for it was obvious which was the right Mr. Foxe and which was the wrong.

Struggling, cursing and protesting, Mr. Smale Foxe was dragged to the window and hurled outside. There were at least a dozen juniors on the job, and Mr. Foxe had not the slightest chance. And we had no pity; we were going to teach him a lesson which he would not forget.

"The frog's-march!" shouted Handforth.

"That's a good idea, begad!"

"Rather!"

Mr. Foxe was flung into an inverted position, and spreadeagled out, he was carried round the Triangle. The fellows had forgotten all about caution now, and they were shouting lustily. A complete circuit of the Triangle was made, and by that time, Mr. Foxe was feeling the effects.

"Good!" said Handforth. "Now we'll duck him in the fountain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But I put the veto on this drastic treatment, and Mr. Foxe escaped a ducking by a very narrow margin. As an alternative, I suggested that he

should be compelled to run the gauntlet. This idea was at once accepted.

And Mr. Foxe, in spite of all his protests was forced to run. Two lines of fellows were formed up, and Mr. Foxe was given a start from the end. And as he dashed by he received jeers, punches, and blows from knotted handkerchiefs. It was drastic treatment, perhaps; but the rascal deserved it.

Handforth was at the end of the line, and when Mr. Foxe reached that section, the leader of Study D thoughtfully assisted him on the way with a boot. And Mr. James Smale Foxe was literally kicked out of St. Frank's. For he reached the Triangle wall, gasping and swearing, and gave one leap upwards. He clutched the top, swarmed over, and dropped in the darkness beyond.

And that was the last that St. Frank's ever saw of the rascal.

CHAPTER 15.

ON for the holidays!

CURIOUSLY enough there was no inquiry as to the cause of the disturbance that night. It was obvious that Dr. Stafford must have known about the affair, for the whole school had rung with the shouts of the excited juniors.

After Mr. Foxe had gone—for good—the Removites scuttled back to the dormitory, and they were very astonished to find that they met no master on the way. I had been quite prepared to receive a flogging for my part in the escapade; but I received nothing. The matter was not even mentioned.

And we could easily understand it.

Mr. Ralph Foxe had obviously intercepted the Head and any other master who had happened to come on the scene. Brief explanations had followed, and it had been decided to let the juniors finish their job. It was most irregular, no doubt, but the Head probably thought it wiser to wink at

it and say nothing. It would save all inquiry and trouble. And so the affair blew over.

Lord Dorrmore left that day, after promising that he would meet us all at the local station in Suffolk, on the first day of the new month. And on the following day, St. Frank's was in a turmoil. For it was holiday time, and the school would "break up."

There were no lessons, of course, and the fellows had all their time occupied in packing, etc. Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House, with their arms full of various items of personal property, went charging into Study Q shortly after breakfast. And they were rather astonished to find Bob Christine sitting there, staring straight before him in a dreamy kind of way.

The other two juniors set their things down, and stared at their leader. "What's the idea?" asked Yorke curiously.

"Eh?"

"Why the boiled owl expression?" demanded Talmadge.

Christine started.

"What's that?" he said absently.

"Who's looking like a boiled owl?"

"You are!"

"Since you've never seen a boiled owl, you must be talking out of your hat!" exclaimed Christine. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking!

"Oh!"

"I was thinking deeply," went on Christine. "In fact, I've got a wheeze!"

"Connected with the holidays?" asked Yorke. "We've made all our arrangements!"

"Yes, I know that, but this is something else," interrupted Bob. "It's a jape, my sons. A first-class, gilt-edged, number-one-sized jape against those giddy Fossils. It's going to be the jape of the season."

His chums stared.

"You must be dotty!" said Talmadge. "Who ever heard of japes on the last day of term? We've got no

time for messing about like that, Chris! Don't be an ass! Japes are all very well in the middle of term—"

"If you'll only listen, instead of jawing so much, you'll understand," said Christine patiently. "I'm not suggesting that we should jape the Fossils to-day; but later on. Go and fetch some of the fellows together—Clapson and Page, and some of the others. We're going to hold a conference."

His chums couldn't quite see the point; but they did not argue. They went out and searched for a number of other Monks, and presently returned with a fairly large crowd. Study Q was packed with impatient juniors.

"This is a bit too thick, Chris!" protested Oldfield. "We're right in the middle of packing, and—"

"Never mind the packing," said Christine. "I've been thinking things over, and I've come to the conclusion that we've been presented, free gratis and for nothing, with a ripping opportunity to jape those Ancient House chaps. We've all been invited to go down to Lord Dorrmore's place, haven't we—every fellow here?"

"Yes, except me," said Steele. "I should have been included, too, I suppose, but my people are carting me off to the Riviera."

"Well, you needn't stay," said Christine. "This affair doesn't concern you, Steele, old man. You can buzz off as soon as you like."

Steele buzzed off, as he was busy and wanted to catch an early train. The other Monks looked at their leader expectantly.

"You know the arrangement, don't you?" said Christine. "We're all to be at Liverpool Street Station at two o'clock, on the first day of next month. We shall all gather there, Monks and Fossils alike."

"Yes, of course," said Yorke. "Well, what about it?"

"Hasn't it ever struck you that the date is a significant one?" said Chris-

tine mysteriously. "Think of it, my sons!"

The juniors thought.

"Well, it's All Fools' Day, if that's what you mean," said Yorke.

"Of course!" said Christine. "And what's more, we're going to fool the Fossils! Do you get me, Steve? We're going to fool those Ancient House fellows properly!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Talmadge. "I hadn't thought of that. Now you come to mention it, Christy, it will be the first of April. But what's your scheme? How do you reckon we shall be able to fool the bounders?"

"I've thought it all out," said Christine carelessly. "After all, the idea is a simple one. The best wheezes are always simple. But it'll come a bit expensive, that's all."

"Then it's off!" said Yorke firmly. "Those Fossils aren't worth spending a lot of money over!"

"We can fool them without incurring any expense!"

"Of course!"

"We shall have to get some other idea, Christine."

"A cheap one!"

Christine glared round.

"Am I going to speak, or not?" he roared. "When I say expensive, I don't mean that it'll cost us very much, after the exes. have been divided up. Half-a-crown each, or something like that. In my opinion, it'll be well worth the money!"

"Well, let's hear it!" said Yorke. "We can't stay here all the morning, you know. We've got to finish our packing, and get to London, and—"

"Well, I'll put it in a nutshell," said Bob Christine. "Early on the morning of April the first, all the chaps who are going down to Lord Dorrimore's place will receive a telegram."

"Eh?"

"A telegram?"

"Who from?"

"From Lord Dorrimore," replied Christine calmly. "And each telegram will run something like this: 'Plan

altered. Be at Victoria Station noon. Join others there. All will catch twelve-twenty to Brighton. College House boys coming later. Look out for me outside station—Dorrimore.' How does that strike you?"

"Go to Brighton?" said Yorke, staring. "Meet at Victoria Station? What on earth are you talking about?"

"We're not going to Brighton, you ass!" said Clapson. "We're going to Suffolk—"

"Oh, you poor, pitiful asses!" said Christine witheringly. "It's only spoof! Can't you understand? Those telegrams will be part of the jape!"

"Then Dorrie won't send them at all?"

"Of course he won't!" said Christine. "As a matter of fact, Clapson will send them."

"Oh, shall I?" said Len Clapson. "This is the first time I've heard about it!"

"You'll send them, my son, because your home is in Suffolk," explained Christine. "You'll be in Suffolk for the holidays, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Clapson. "Then, on the first of April, I shall just get on my bicycle, and take a run to Dorrimore Hall—it's only about ten miles from my place. You chaps, of course, will come along by train from London."

"Exactly," said Christine. "That's why you will have to send these telegrams, Clapson. You'll be in Suffolk, so the telegrams will be sent from Suffolk. Then, when the Ancient House fellows get them they won't suspect anything. They'll take it for granted that Dorrie himself had sent the wires off."

"But I don't quite understand, even now," said Yorke, frowning. "What's the idea of sending all the chaps to Brighton?"

"To fool them, of course!"

"Oh!"

"And I suppose this is the jape?"

"Of course, it's the jape, you duffers!" snorted Christine. "Don't you think it's a good one? Personally, I reckon it's top hole! Those gidd-

Fossils will be fooled completely. They'll assume that Dorrie had decided to entertain them at Brighton, and they'll all go off by the twelve-twenty train; but when they get to Brighton they'll find themselves stranded. Dorrie won't be there, and they'll be all upside down until they realise the truth. Then they'll be kicking themselves."

Several grins broke out on the faces of the juniors.

"It's a pretty good wheeze, I must admit!" chuckled Talmadge. "Yes, by Jingo, those Fossils will be fooled beautifully. It's a great idea, Christine, to send them off on this wild-goose chase. They'll look as small as microbes when they finally turn up at Dorrimore Hall, late in the evening!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good!"

"First class!"

"Well, I'm glad you think so," said Bob Christine, smiling. "But, as I said, it will come just a little bit expensive—those telegrams will cost something, you know. So I was going to suggest—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Oldfield. "I've a suggestion to make."

"Oh? Let's hear it!"

"First of all, I want to ask you a question," said Oldfield. "Are you reckoning to send Nipper a wire, just the same as the others?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Then don't do it!" said Oldfield firmly.

"Why not?"

"Because, for one thing, Nipper is a jolly cute bird," said Oldfield. "He might think there was something fishy about his wire, and it wouldn't take him long to make the other chaps suspicious, too. Then our scheme would fall to the ground, and the laugh would be on us. We don't want anything of that kind, you know."

"Why should he suspect?" asked Christine doubtfully. "He may be cute, but there'll be nothing to lead

him to suppose that the wire is a fake —"

"We don't know about that," interrupted Oldfield. "Lord Dorrimore is a special pal of Mr. Lee's. For all we know, Dorrie might send Nelson Lee a wire on that very morning, and then Nipper would know that something was wrong. He might even go so far as to send through a trunk call on the telephone, and speak to Dorrie about it. My advice is to leave Nipper out of it—it'll be safer."

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Christine, after thinking for a moment or two. "We don't want to endanger the whole thing, do we? The other chaps will probably assume that he's gone on with Mr. Lee. I'd better leave it at that."

Christine proceeded to do some reckoning, by the aid of a scrap of paper and a piece of pencil—to say nothing of his brains. And he reckoned out exactly how much the jape would cost, and then divided it by ten, since there were ten College House fellows invited to Dorrimore Hall. In the end it worked out that every Monk would have to contribute two or three shillings. The juniors did not object, but paid up willingly. Like Christine, they considered that the jape was well worth the money.

"Now, Clapson, my son, you've got to take charge of this little pile," said Christine, pointing to the money on the table. "You'd better put it in your pocket. It's left in your charge, and what you've got to do is to send off all the telegrams at about eight o'clock on the morning of the first of April."

"Right you are!" said Clapson. "You can leave it to me—I won't fail. But what about the addresses? Have you got them?"

"Not yet," replied Christine. "I've got some, of course, and you'd better put them down now. And I'll have the others within an hour, don't you worry. It won't be hard to get the addresses out of the chaps. I can make any old excuse—say I want to send them a

picture-postcard, or something. I shall send a picture-postcard, of course, but that'll only be a blind."

Bob Christine was busy for about an hour, buttonholing Ancient House juniors. He obtained all the addresses without much difficulty, and he was exceedingly pleased to find that every one of the fellows who had been invited to Dorrimore Hall would be in London. The only exception was Clapson, and he was a College House junior. All the Ancient House chaps would either be with their people or with relatives in London; therefore, it would be quite easy for them to get to Victoria Station by noon.

"My sons, it'll be easy!" said Christine to his two chums. "It'll be the jape of the season! Those Fossils will be fooled as they've never been fooled before. They'll never suspect us; they'll never dream that we planned the whole thing before going home for the holidays. That's the beauty of it."

Throughout the morning, the Monks continued to chuckle with glee. Not much notice was taken of their high spirits, since high spirits were general on this particular morning. The Ancient House juniors had something better to do than to watch Christine & Co.

But I noticed their grins. I noticed Christine and his chums whispering together, chuckling, and suddenly yelling with laughter. And these outbursts generally occurred when there were some Ancient House fellows in sight. Clearly, the Monks were amused at something connected with the Fossils. What was it?

"Montie, my son, I'm suspicious!" I said, as I stood looking out of the window of Study C.

"Dear old boy, why are you suspicious?" inquired Sir Montie Tregellis-West mildly. "Is anything the matter?"

"Well, I'm pretty certain that something is on," I replied. "It's only a vague guess, but I don't believe I'm far wrong."

"Something on?" repeated Montie. "Begad! What do you mean, old boy?"

"Haven't you noticed the way Christine and the other monkeys are grinning?" I asked. "They've been at it for an hour past. Just look at that crowd out there now; they're cackling like a set of old hens! It smells like a jape to me."

"Begad! Surely Christine is not thinking of playing a practical joke to-day?" asked Sir Montie, in alarm. "That would be frightfully inconsiderate, dear old boy! We shall have to be on our guard—we shall, really!"

"That's just what I was thinking," I said. "I advise you to keep your eyes open, my son. There's mischief afoot!"

The study door opened, and a fat face appeared. It was the face of Jimmy Little, of the the Remove.

"I say, Nipper," he said, edging his way into the study. "Just a word."

"What's the trouble?" I asked. "Have you lost your appetite, Fatty?"

"Great bloaters!" said Fatty Little. "Have I lost my appetite? Why, I'm as hungry as a hunter—I'm half starving! There's nothing like packing up and bustling about for giving a fellow an appetite. I had a decent breakfast, I'll admit, but I am famished again. How the dickens I shall last out until I get to London, goodness only knows!"

I grinned.

"I dare say you'll survive," I said. "Well, what's the idea of coming here? What's the word you want to say?"

"About our trip to Dorrimore Hall," said Fatty anxiously. "Have you ever been down to Dorrie's place?"

"No."

"Then you don't know what the grub's like?"

"No; but you can bet your best Sunday topper that it'll be first class." "Plenty of it?" asked Little.

"Even enough to satisfy you," I replied. "There's no need for you to worry your head about grub at Dorrie's

place, my fat porpoise. As a matter of fact, there'll be too much; you'll overeat yourself, and be ill for a week. Dorrie always does things on a large scale, and he doesn't care a rap about expenses. This party of his will be a first-class affair, and the grub will be of the highest quality. Now you'll be able to sleep peacefully!"

Fatty Little grinned.

"Well, it is a bit of a relief," he admitted. "I was uncertain about it, you see. Great doughnuts! If there was any likelihood of a shortage of grub, I should make some excuse and fail to turn up. But if you say the grub's all right, I'll take your word about it. When a fellow's got an appetite like mine, he's got to be careful. I—I suppose you haven't got anything in the cupboard now—just a snack, for example?"

"Well, hardly a snack," I replied, shaking my head. "There are one or two things in here which we shan't want—two or three jam tarts, half a dozen sausage rolls, three doughnuts, and a scone. But a bite like that isn't any good to you, Fatty. It wouldn't last you for more than a minute!"

Fatty Little's eyes lighted up.

"Oh, I don't know!" he said. "I might as well clear it up for you, Nipper. There's no sense in leaving it here, to go bad. Thanks awfully, old man. These sausage rolls are A1."

Fatty had already commenced operations, and we left him in the study working at full pressure. I chuckled as I went down the corridor with Sir Montie.

"If Dorrie isn't ruined by the time Fatty ends his stay, I shall be surprised," I grinned. "Anyhow, Fatty's people will be tremendously pleased to get rid of him, I should say. I reckon they'd rather keep him a week than a fortnight!"

And so, not long afterwards, we left St. Frank's for the holidays. We were off to enjoy Easter. I had mapped out quite a long programme with Tommy

Watson and Tregellis-West. We had arranged to meet in London on Easter Monday, and then we were going on the spree.

When we left St. Frank's that day we were all feeling very happy and content. For we had a very pleasant prospect in front of us, and we were quite certain of an excellent finish up to the holidays by our visit to Dorrimore Hall, in Suffolk. But before we arrived at Dorrimore Hall, a few surprising events were destined to happen.

CHAPTER 16.

Not Quite a Success!

I STARED blankly at Nelson Lee as he entered the consulting-room at Gray's Inn Road.

"Great Scott!" I ejaculated, in horrified tones.

"My dear Nipper, what on earth is the matter?" asked the gov'nor. "What are you staring at?"

"Your—your face, sir!" I gasped. "Have you just been shaving?"

"Yes."

"But—but what have you been doing to your face?" I asked huskily. "Look at it, sir! Oh, my goodness!"

Nelson Lee, wearing a puzzled expression, turned round and gazed at his countenance in the mirror. Then he looked at me again.

"Really, Nipper, I do not see the reason for your startled—" he began.

"Caught you, gov'nor!" I grinned. "April Fool!"

Nelson Lee burst into a laugh.

"Upon my word, Nipper, you did catch me!" he chuckled. "I had forgotten all about the date. Yes, to-day is the first of April, my lad. I shall have to make a point of catching you before long!"

"You'll have a job on hand, sir!" I smiled. "I was on my guard, but you weren't."

Nelson Lee, still chuckling, walked over to the window, and gazed out

upon the busy thoroughfare below. The sun streamed in the windows gloriously, and the sky was blue, with a few fleecy clouds here and there.

"Quite glorious weather, Nipper," commented Nelson Lee. "It seems that we shall have a nice journey down to Suffolk to-day."

"Looks like it, sir," I agreed. "I'll bet we have a ripping time at Dorrimore Hall. I'm enjoying the holidays tremendously!"

So far everything had gone smoothly. I had spent a very enjoyable Easter with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. I had taken them out for motor-car rides, and we had had a really topping time all round. On two or three evenings Nelson Lee had taken us to theatres, and we had seen some splendid shows.

Now it was the morning of the first of April, and we were due to go down to Suffolk, to Dorrimore Hall.

And while we were in the middle of breakfast, my thoughts were interrupted. I had planned with Tommy and Montie to meet them at Liverpool Street Station, according to the programme. They would be there at two o'clock, which would give us plenty of time. And just as I was thinking of these things, the interruption came.

A light step sounded on the stairs, and as I looked up, the door of the dining-room opened, and Dorrie appeared. He was attired in a motoring coat and a check cap. He grinned at us, and nodded.

"Lazy bounders!" he said, as he entered the room. "I had my breakfast hours ago. How goes it, professor?" Nelson Lee smiled.

"Quite an early visitor, Dorrie," he said, laying aside his newspaper. "You surely don't mean to say that you have come up from Suffolk this morning?"

"I can assure you that I have," said Dorrie. "I did the trip at an average speed of forty miles an hour. Not too dusty, what?"

"Man alive, you'll break your neck

one of these days!" said Nelson Lee. "But what's the idea?"

"Oh, one of his usual harebrain stunts, guv'nor," I grinned. "How the dickens did you manage to turn out so early, Dorrie? How many people were you obliged to hire to haul you out of bed?"

His lordship frowned.

"I don't want any sarcastic remarks young man!" he said cheerfully. "It was such a glorious morning that I simply couldn't resist running up to London to see your smiling faces. Lizzie is behaving splendidly, and I'm going to give her a long drink soon. By gad! She's got a terrific thirst, you know, and she has a strong partiality for spirits!"

"Meaning petrol?" I grinned.

"Well, I don't know about petrol," said Dorrie. "They call it petrol, I believe, but it isn't! But we don't want to go into any arguments concerning the quality of motor spirit. The question is—are you ready, Lee?"

"Ready?" said Nelson Lee. "What for?"

"I'm going to carry you off in triumph," said Dorrie. "I've come up here specially to take you down to the Hall in my car. So you'd better buck up, and throw one or two things into a valise, and come along."

"Oh, that's ripping!" I said. "So we're going down by car, Dorrie?"

"No, we're not!" said his lordship promptly.

"But you said——"

"I was speaking to your respected guv'nor—not to you," said his lordship. "You'll stick to the original arrangement, my son. You've got to go to Liverpool Street, and catch the two-thirty train, with all the other fellows. I couldn't think of allowing you to desert them. The professor and I will go down by road—alone."

"Oh, all right; have your own way," I said. "Be selfish, if you want to. I don't care!"

Dorrie chuckled.

"But, joking apart, Nipper, I think you had better go down by train," he said. "I don't want to hurry you particularly, Lee, but the sooner we're off, the better."

Nelson Lee had no objections to make, and before ten-thirty he and Dorrie had left. I was now in sole command of the establishment, so to speak. I was left quite alone, and I had two or three hours to kill before it was necessary to make my way to Liverpool Street Station. I was somewhat surprised, therefore, when Sir Montie Tregellis-West strolled in at about half-past eleven. He was attired in all his glory. His topper was glittering, and his shoes were like mirrors. He was spotless from head to foot.

On the other hand, I was dressed anyhow. I had not yet commenced changing. Of course, I had no intention of going down to Dorrimore Hall in Etons. I had a sports suit all ready, and I had been on the point of strolling into the bed-room when Sir Montie arrived. He regarded me with some show of consternation.

"Begad!" he ejaculated. "You'll be frightfully late, dear old boy!"

"Late?" I said. "What the dickens are you talking about? And what's the idea of your blowing in now? I'm glad to see you, Montie, but I thought we arranged to meet at Liverpool Street?"

Sir Montie nodded.

"So we did, dear old boy," he agreed. "But that was before we knew of the new arrangement. You haven't started dressing yet, and you'll never be able to do it in time!"

I laughed.

"I'm not like you, Montie," I said lightly. "I don't take three hours to dress. And I've got a good two hours, anyway. We needn't leave here before half-past one!"

"Half-past one!" echoed Sir Montie, staring at me through his pince-nez. "Begad! What are you talking about,

dear old fellow? The train leaves Victoria at twelve-twenty!"

"Victoria?" I said wonderingly. "I think it's up to me to ask what you're talking about, Montie? What do you mean—Victoria?"

"But Victoria is the station for Brighton, Nipper boy!" said Montie mildly.

"Brighton?" I yelled.

"Begad! You don't seem to understand!" said my noble chum. "Haven't you had a telegram?"

"Not this morning," I replied.

"That's frightfully queer—it is, really," said Tregellis-West. "I received a wire this morning, and I assumed that you had had one, too. Begad! I've got it in my pocket now. It came about half-past nine, and I thought I might as well call for you. I've got a taxi waiting outside."

I looked at Montie rather queerly.

"Let's have a squint at that wire," I said abruptly.

Sir Montie took out a crumpled envelope from his pocket, and handed it over to me. I extracted the flimsy sheet and spread it out. And this is what I read:

"Sir Montie Tregellis-West, West House, Grosvenor Square, London, W. Holiday arrangement altered. Join others Victoria Station noon. Party catching 12.20 to Brighton. College House boys coming later. Look out for me outside station.—DORRIMORE."

I read the telegram in surprise, and then looked up at Sir Montie.

"Is this a joke?" I asked. "Are you trying to fool me, you duffer?"

"Begad, no!" protested Sir Montie. "That telegram came, and I assumed that Dorrie sent it. As you see, dear old boy, it was dispatched from Suffolk this morning."

I had a look at the form, and saw that Sir Montie was right. The telegram had certainly been handed in at Stowmarket, at eight-five a.m.

"Well, this is rather curious," I re-

marked, staring at the telegram. "And it's certainly a hoax!"

"A hoax?" said Montie, nearly dropping his pince-nez.

"Yes, my son—a hoax!" I repeated. "My only hat! Who's been getting up to this game? Surely Dorrie hasn't attempted to fool us? He's not above that kind of thing, you know—he's a born practical joker—and to-day's All Fools' Day!"

"Begad!" said Tregellis-West. "I'm frightfully bewildered, dear old boy!"

I thought for a moment or two, and then I whistled.

"I don't think Dorrie would have done this," I said at length. "And if he meant to fool the whole crowd of us, why didn't he send me a wire? Oh, wait a minute, though!" I added. "He couldn't have sent that wire—and I'll guarantee that he knows nothing about it. Dorrie was here only about an hour ago!"

"Here?" said Sir Montie. "Really, old boy, I'm more puzzled than ever!"

"Dorrie came up from Suffolk this morning by car," I went on. "He and the gov'nor went off only about an hour ago. And I'll guarantee anything you like that Clapson of the College House sent you this wire. And he's probably sent a similar wire to every other Ancient House fellow—that is, every fellow belonging to the party."

Tregellis-West passed a hand over his brow.

"Why should you conclude that Clapson sent this telegram? I know you're frightfully cute, and all the rest of it. But this seems a bit too thick, old man!"

"It's not too thick, when you come to think of it!" I said. "Clapson lives just outside Stowmarket, you know—his people have got a country residence there. Clapson's pater is lord of the manor, or something. And it would have been quite easy for the ass to run into Stowmarket this morning and send off a sheaf of telegrams."

"But what for?" asked Sir Montie.

"Don't you remember how Christine

& Co. were chuckling and cackling on the last day of term?" I said keenly. "Well, nothing came of it—until now. I'll guarantee anything you like that Christine planned out this wheeze then. It's a dodge, my son—a trick to fool us. Christine's idea is to send us all down to Brighton on a wild-goose chase. And when we get there we shall find that we've been fooled. It's the first of April to-day, don't forget!"

Tregellis-West took in a deep breath.

"Dear old boy, I believe you're right—I do, really!" he said. "What a frightfully deep scheme, begad! I didn't think Christine was capable of it. But what shall we do?"

"What's the time?" I said sharply.

"About twenty minutes to twelve, dear old boy."

"Good!" I said. "I'll be dressed in about ten minutes, and then we'll rush off to Victoria."

"But you aren't thinkin' of catchin' that train to Brighton—"

"Of course not," I interrupted. "But we're going to Victoria to prevent the other fellows catching the train! You can be quite certain that they've all had telegrams, and they'll all collect together at Victoria. We've got to put a stop to this scheme, old son, and then we'll get busy on our own account. We'll beat Christine at his own game!"

It didn't take me long to get dressed. And while I was engaged in this occupation I thought of that telegram and exactly what it meant. And I was more than convinced that Bob Christine was at the bottom of the whole scheme.

Dorrie was certainly not responsible. If he had actually sent the wire, he would not have shown himself at Gray's Inn Road that morning. For he knew well enough that Sir Montie or Tommy Watson might probably drop in, and then the whole thing would be ruined. No, Dorrie was not the culprit.

Who else, then?

Christine & Co. were the only people left—and I not only suspected them, but I was positively certain. I remembered their behaviour at St. Frank's on the last day of term, and then I remembered something else.

"The last link!" I said with conviction.

"Eh?" said Sir Montie, who was watching me as I dressed. "A link, dear old boy? But you put them on only two or three minutes ago——"

"I'm not referring to my cuff links, you duffer!" I grinned. "I'm talking about the last link in the chain of evidence. I've solved it. Christine & Co. are the jokers. Don't you remember how the Monks were grinning and chaffing before we left St. Frank's?"

"Yes, I remember that, old boy."

"Do you remember if Christine came up to you, and asked for your address in London?"

"Begad, yes!" said Sir Montie, with a start. "He said that he wanted my address, so that he could send me a picture-postcard, or something. As a matter of fact, he did send me a postcard——"

"That was only just for the sake of appearances," I interrupted. "Christine went round to nearly every fellow in the party—every Ancient House fellow—for his address. Why should he be so anxious to know where we were all staying? Simply for this one reason—so that he could send these telegrams this morning!"

"Nipper, old boy, you've hit it!" said Sir Montie. "And what a frightfully lucky thing I decided to call upon you. Otherwise we should all have gone down to Brighton on a fool's errand! How shockingly ridiculous that would have been!"

I nodded.

"Yes; and the Monks would have had the laugh of us for days," I said grimly. "You see, they missed me out—probably because they thought that Dorrie might look in here. Anyhow,

we'll show Christine that what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

And within another five minutes we were off. The taxi was still waiting outside, and we jumped into it and drove straight away to Victoria. We arrived there at about ten minutes past twelve, and, sure enough, just inside the station, against one of the larger platforms, we found a group of St. Frank's juniors. All the Ancient House fellows were there, including Tommy Watson, Handforth & Co., Reginald Pitt, De Valerie, Farman, and the others. They spotted us at once.

"You asses!" said Pitt. "We thought you were going to lose the train. I suppose you got telegrams, the same as we did? I wonder why Dorrie has changed his plans like this. I'm not particularly disappointed, anyhow. Brighton will suit me all serene——"

"I thought as much!" I said grimly. "Have you all got your tickets?"

"Yes," said Tommy Watson.

"All right; we shall have to go to the booking-office and get the money returned," I said briskly. "We're not going down to Brighton to-day!"

The juniors collected round me, asking all sorts of questions.

"What's the matter, Nipper? Why aren't we going?" asked Pitt. "Has anything happened?"

"Not yet—and it's not going to happen!" I replied. "My sons, this is just a genial attempt on Bob Christine's part to make fools of you all!"

"What?"

"An attempt to fool us?"

"Precisely!" I said. "Dorrie didn't send those telegrams at all. They were dispatched by Clapson, of the Remove, who lives just outside Stowmarket, in Suffolk!"

"My only hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"The—the awful rotters!" roared Handforth indignantly. "I'll give Clapson a punch on the nose when I see him next time! As a matter of fact, I was suspicious of those tele-

grams all the time, and I don't suppose I should have gone to Brighton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It did not take me long to explain the situation, and when I had done the juniors were excited. Another ten minutes and they would have been on the train for Brighton—they would have been fooled!

"It was jolly cute of you, Nipper, to see through the wheeze!" said Pitt.

"Rats!" I replied. "I knew all along that Dorrie hadn't sent the telegrams. There was nothing cute about it. I was suspicious at the very start."

"Of course, Christine & Co. will go to Liverpool Street, as arranged," said De Valerie. "They'll be a bit surprised when we turn up, as large as life, and with smiling faces!"

I grinned.

"That's just it!" I said calmly. "We shan't turn up at all!"

"Eh?"

"We shan't be at Liverpool Street at two-thirty!"

"But—but—"

"I'm going to pay Christine & Co. back in their own coin," I said cheerfully. "I've got an idea, my children, and those giddy Monks will be beautifully dished before long. Leave it to your uncle, and everything will be all serene!"

The juniors looked at me curiously.

"Yes, but what's the idea?" asked Pitt. "You might let us know!"

"Say, hand out the information!" put in Justin B. Farman in his easy Western drawl. "I guess we're sure puzzled a heap. Come across with the idea, Nipper!"

I shook my head.

"I can't tell you all about it now," I said briskly. "There are one or two things to be done. But I may as well tell you this—we shan't go down by the two-thirty train at all, but by the four-thirty!"

"I've got you," said Farman. "But what's the all-fired stunt?"

"Well, for one thing, we can't show

ourselves at Liverpool Street at half-past two, because Christine & Co. will be there, and they would know that their own scheme had failed," I went on. "We shall have to arrange a meeting-place, and then all you fellows will catch the four-thirty from Liverpool Street to Stowmarket—that's where Dorrie is going to meet us."

"Exactly!" said Tommy Watson. "Dorrie will be at the station to meet the first train—"

"No, he won't," I interrupted. "I'm going to send Dorrie a wire now, saying that we can't come down until four-thirty. He'll know what to do then, and we'll easily explain things afterwards. Christine & Co. planned to leave us stranded at Brighton, but we'll go one better."

Having dispatched the telegram to Lord Dorrimore, I thought it just as well to let the rest of the fellows into the secret. I told them of my scheme, and it was received with chuckles, grins, and, finally, yells of laughter.

CHAPTER 17.

Fooled!

BOB CHRISTINE chuckled.

"Just ten past two!" he remarked. "Those Ancient House bounders have been in Brighton for a long time now, and I'll bet they're feeling small, too! What a joke, my sons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other Monks who were gathered round Christine roared with laughter. They considered the joke to be an excellent one, and they were greatly enjoying it.

They were all gathered together in Liverpool Street Station, almost under the great clock. Their train was not due to leave for another twenty minutes, so they did not see any reason why they should get on the platform. Besides, they were waiting for Billy Nation, who had not yet

turned up. All the others, with the exception of Clapson—who lived at Stowmarket—were there. They comprised Christine, Yorke, Talmadge, Ernest Lawrence, Oldfield, Turner, Page, and Harron. And they were all grinning delightedly over the successful jape which had been perpetrated on the Ancient House juniors. For, of course, by this time the Fossils were in Brighton, kicking their heels, and probably themselves. They had been fooled in a glorious manner.

"Of course, we shall get down to Stowmarket at the right time," said Christine. "Dorrie will meet us, and we'll explain what happened. He's a sport, and he'll enter into the joke. And Handforth and Pitt, and all the rest of them will probably turn up about nine o'clock this evening!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll chip them to death!" grinned Talmadge.

"Rather!"

"Yes, but what about Nipper?" asked Yorke. "He didn't get a wire, and, therefore, he didn't go to Brighton."

"Oh, I suppose he'll go by this train, the same as us," said Christine. "He ought to be turning up soon, then we'll explain things to him. My hat! Won't he stare when he hears how his pals have been dished?"

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Christine & Co. went off into fresh outbursts of hilarity.

And they were in the middle of this when Nation appeared, hurrying up with a rug over one arm, and a port-manteau in his hand.

"Oh, good!" he panted. "Have I kept you fellows waiting?"

"You have," said Bob Christine.

"Never mind, there's heaps of time. If you chaps will give me your tin, I'll dash along to the booking-office, and get all our tickets. There's no need for us to go separately. We're going first class, I suppose?" he added with a grin.

"Rather not!" said Yorke. "We'll order a special train while we're about it, including a Pullman car, with lounge chairs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Third class is good enough for us," said Oldfield. "Money is none too plentiful nowadays!"

The juniors proceeded to shell out, and they were in the middle of this occupation when an alert little man appeared. He was attired in smart livery, and he touched his cap with respect as he came to a halt in front of the juniors. Christine looked up, and regarded the man curiously. His face was red, and he wore little side whiskers, and his teeth were prominent.

"Beg pardon, young gents!" he said apologetically.

"That's all right," said Christine. "What's the trouble?"

"Can you tell me if there's a young gent here named Master Nipper, sir?" said the man.

"No; Nipper doesn't seem to be here just now," said Christine. "He hasn't turned up yet. What do you want him for?"

"It's awkward, Master Nipper not being here," said the man, scratching his head. "Mebbe you could tell me if Master Bob Christine is here, sir?"

Christine grinned.

"Yes, he's here all right—talking to you now!" he replied. "What do you want me for?"

"Oh, you're Master Christine, sir?" said the man in livery. "That's good! I've got instructions to take you all away, sir!"

The juniors stared.

"To take us away?" asked Christine. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"Well, you see, young gents, I am employed by the Hadley Motor Coach Company, of Kensington. Our manager received instructions this morning to send a motor-coach to Liverpool Street Station to collect a party of boys. I'm to take you all to Dorrimore Hall, sir, in Suffolk—just near Stowmarket."

Christine & Co. looked at one another in astonishment.

"But—but we're going down by train!" said Yorke.

"If you'll pardon me, young gents, you're going down by motor-coach," said the man in livery. "Them's my instructions. I can't say for sure, of course, but it looks to me as if there might be some upset near Stowmarket. Maybe there's been a railway accident, or something, blocking the line. Anyhow, I've got instructions to take you down by road."

The critical moment had arrived.

Would Christine & Co. suspect? Certainly there was no reason why they should; but, if they had their wits about them, they might be able to detect something rather suspicious in this circumstance. Why had the arrangement been altered at the last moment? Why were they being taken down by road instead of being allowed to go by train?

Christine himself looked rather thoughtful, but, fortunately, the other fellows started speaking.

"So we're going down by coach?" asked Page. "I say, that's ripping! I'd ten times rather go by road than rail—and, besides, we shan't have any fares to pay!"

"My hat!" said Yorke. "I'd forgotten that! It'll be heaps better to go by road. We shall be taken straight to Dorrimore Hall. There won't be any trouble or anything, and a motor-coach is nearly as quick as a train nowadays."

Bob Christine nodded.

"I suppose Lord Dorrimore must have planned this out at the last minute," he said. "Have you got the motor-coach outside?" he added, addressing the man in livery.

"Yes, sir, waiting now," said the man. "My name is Reppin, sir, and I've been instructed by the manager to take you all away."

"All right, Reppin, you'd better get busy," said Yorke. "We're ready—and

it's a jolly good thing we didn't buy our tickets!"

"But I understood, young gents, that there would have been twenty-four of you altogether," said Reppin, looking round. "There seems to be only nine."

"Yes—er—exactly!" said Bob Christine hurriedly. "The fact is, the other fellows are delayed, and won't be along until later on in the afternoon. It's no good waiting for them, Reppin."

The driver shook his head doubtfully.

"Well, I dunno whether I'd better start, young gents," he said. "My instructions was to take twenty-four schoolboys. It don't hardly seem worth while to use a big motor-coach just to take nine of you."

Christine winked.

"The fact is, Reppin, we've played a joke on the other fellows—it's April Fools' Day, you know," he said confidentially. "It doesn't make any difference to you, does it, whether you take twenty-four or nine?"

And Christine slipped five shillings into the man's ready palm. Reppin winked and nodded.

"Right you are, young gents," he said briskly. "I savvy. Then we'd best be going straight away."

And, followed by the animated juniors, the man led the way out of the station into the yard. Standing there was a big red motor-coach. It was not one of the very largest, although a brand-new vehicle. It was fitted with huge pneumatic tyres, and looked capable of attaining a high speed.

Christine & Co. tumbled in with enthusiasm, and before long the driver took his place and started off. He went very easily and very cautiously through the East End, and then straight on through Mile End Road to Stratford.

It was a glorious day, and the juniors were delighted with the change of plan. Travelling by road was far better than travelling by rail, and, after Romford had been passed, the driver put on speed, and he fairly made the coach romp along.

If Bob Christine had had any suspicions, he had cast them aside. It was too late now, anyhow, to say or do anything. They were well on the road to Suffolk, and the juniors were certainly enjoying themselves. The green fields were superb in the sunlight of the spring day.

"This is glorious, you know," said Yorke enthusiastically. "Miles better than the blessed old railway! These modern motor-coaches are making the railway companies look a bit sick, you know. Why, we shall get down to Dorrimore Hall practically as quickly as if we had gone by train."

"Rather!" said Oldfield. "This beats everything. And what a ripping motor-coach!"

The road was unfamiliar to nearly all the juniors. They were greatly interested in the countryside as they passed along.

The coach fairly roared up the hill into Brentwood, and passed through that quiet little town at a greater speed than the inhabitants cared for.

And then straight on through Shenfield, and then towards Ingatestone.

The driver hardly said a word. He sat behind the wheel, all his attention centred upon the driving. But, now and again, a quiet little smile appeared in his eyes—unobserved by the juniors.

Through picturesque villages the motor-coach roared its way until, finally, Chelmsford was reached. The driver went cautiously through this town, but as soon as the open country was reached he opened the throttle again. And so the coach went straight on through Hatfield Peverel to the fairly large town of Witham.

So far everything had gone smoothly, and the juniors had nothing whatever to complain of. There had not been a single stop—the coach had been on the go ever since it had left Liverpool Street Station.

But at Witham a slight halt was called for refreshments. The driver was tipped, and instructed to go off and

find himself some beer. But he winked, and said that the beer would do later—he had his motor-coach to look after.

A fresh start was made, and everything went well at first. The motor-coach fairly roared on its way to Kelvedon, but, soon after passing through this place, the driver turned off the main road. The juniors wondered why he was doing so, and one of the fellows ventured to ask the reason.

"It's all right, young gent," said Reppin. "Makes the journey shorter."

"Oh, a near cut!" said the junior.

They went on, down lanes where the hedges were bright green, and where flowers were springing out under the influence of the warm spring sunshine.

"Essex seems to be a fine county!" remarked Christine. "Not particularly grand when it comes to scenery, but jolly homely-like and old-fashioned. And this air is as good as a giddy tonic!"

"Rather!"

"Why, this ride beats the railway trip into a cocked hat!" remarked Yorke. "We've come along without a trace of mishap—"

"But there seems to be something a bit wrong with the engine now," put in Christine. "It's spluttering a good deal, anyhow."

There was no doubt that the motor-coach was not running as smoothly as it had been, and, after going several hundred yards farther, it appeared to be missing fire badly. The driver applied his brakes, and drew into the side of the road.

"Carburettor trouble, I expect, young gents," he said. "But it won't take me more than five minutes to adjust. Most likely a speck of grit in the jet. I should advise you to get out and stretch your legs a bit."

"Oh, good!" said Clapson.

The other fellows were pleased, too, and they all tumbled out of the coach. The driver climbed down, went to the front, and lifted one side of the bonnet. Then, armed with a spanner, he began

to make his adjustments, whistling cheerfully.

Four or five of the juniors wandered some distance away into an adjoining meadow, but two or three remained in the lane. After a few minutes the driver closed down the bonnet, and climbed back into the seat.

"All ready now?" asked Turner.

"Well, I'm not quite certain yet, young gents," said Reppin. "I'm just going to give her a try. I'll run up the road and back—there's a place just ahead where I can turn her round. I'll let you know when to climb in."

The juniors watched with interest. The engine now seemed to be running smoothly, and when the motor-coach moved off, it did so without a trace of a splutter. It fairly roared up the lane.

And when the coach had gone a short distance the waiting juniors saw that the somewhat cumbersome vehicle was turning. But, after it had turned, the driver brought it to a standstill. And now he proceeded to behave in a somewhat curious manner. He left his seat, and proceeded to throw all the luggage on to the grass beside the road. Bags, portmanteaux, suit-cases—everything, in fact, went overboard. And then, with an astonishingly agile leap, the driver regained his seat.

"My only hat!" said Oldfield. "What the dickens has he been up to? What's the idea of chucking all our bags out? He must be dotty!"

"It's a mystery!" said Christine, frowning.

And then the motor-coach came shooting towards them at ever-gathering speed. It did not seem as though Reppin intended coming to a stop.

Zurrrrr-zurrr!

The electric hooter sent out a jarring note of warning. Obviously the driver meant to indicate that the road must be kept clear. And the motor-coach came sweeping up, the juniors staring at it wonderingly.

And then suddenly Bob Christine started back, his mouth wide open.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "It's—it's—Look!"

"But—but I can't see—"

"Nipper!" bellowed Christine hoarsely. "The driver—is Nipper!"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"Great Scott!"

"But—but it can't be—"

"It is—Nipper himself!"

And there was no doubt that the Monks were quite correct. The driver of the coach was little me. With a few deft strokes I had pulled off my wig and false whiskers—a disguise which had been prepared with particular care. But it is far easier to remove a disguise than to don one.

I continued to buzz the hooter, and I knew that I should not endanger any of the fellows by dashing past at full speed.

And as I came opposite I grinned all over my face, and waved my hand.

"April fools!" I roared. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Christine collapsed helplessly into the arms of Talmadge and Yorke. And upon his face there was a sickly expression of consternation and alarm. He recovered his strength after the coach had shot by.

He gazed down the lane, but all he could see was a cloud of dust. The motor-coach had gone, leaving the College House fellows stranded, with their luggage in a heap on the grass farther up the lane.

"Nipper!" panted Yorke. "It—it was Nipper all the time!"

"Great corks!"

"And—and we didn't see through his blessed disguise."

"Oh, what asses—what hopeless idiots!" snorted Christine wrathfully.

"Well, you were just as bad—"

"I'm including myself!" rapped out Christine. "I'm blaming myself as much as anybody. I'm an ass—I'm a duffer—I'm a dolt! And we're all the same! There aren't words in the English language fit to describe us. Nipper! And we've been dished—"

fooled! Oh, what a yell they'll have over us!"

"I don't know!" said Yorke. "We fooled the other Fossils, anyway!"

"What's that on the road?" asked Page suddenly. "I thought I saw something flutter down. I believe Nipper threw something out."

One of the juniors dashed forward and picked up an envelope. The other Monks crowded round him at once, eager, excited and curious.

"What is it?"

"Let's have a squint?"

"Open it, you ass!"

On the envelope were the words: "Bob Christine & Co." Christine herself tore it open, and extracted a single sheet of notepaper. And the Monks read the following message with mingled feelings:

"My dear Fools (this is only meant in the April 1st sense),

"It may interest you to know that your little game did not work. Not a single Ancient House fellow went to Brighton. Your jape was sat on from the very start. How do you like the tables being turned?"

"I have selected the spot where you now stand with great care, and you will soon discover that you are just over five miles from the nearest railway station—which happens to be Mark's Tey. The Ancient House fellows are leaving Liverpool Street by the 4.30 train, and I shall join that train later. It stops at Mark's Tey, and if you step out lively, you'll just manage to catch it. If you don't catch it, you'll have to wait for about three hours. So it's up to you to put your best foot foremost! And we shall all be able to arrive at Stowmarket together, where Dorrie will meet us.

"By the way, have a go at spelling 'Reppin' backwards. Don't you think you've been dense?"

"Don't forget to walk fast!

"NIPPER."

Bob Christine looked at his chums sheepishly, and they looked at him with expressions which were too deep for words. Their own plan had failed, and they had fallen into a trap of the simplest variety!

Bob Christine drew in a deep breath. "April fools!" he said bitterly. "I reckon we're April idiots!"

CHAPTER 18.

Fooled Again!

WHEN the four-thirty train left Liverpool Street it carried all the Ancient House members of the St. Frank's party—with the single exception of myself. Tregellis-West and Watson were there, Handforth & Co., Pitt, Farman, Fatty Little, and all the others. And they were in high spirits. At the same time, they wondered whether I had succeeded in my scheme.

Clearly it had started well, for there was no sign of Christine & Co. at Liverpool Street. But, in any case, the juniors were not left in doubt for long. For when the train pulled up at Chelmsford—the first stop—I strolled along the platform, smiling cheerfully. I found a number of heads projecting from the carriage windows, and a dozen waving arms greeted me.

"There he is!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Begad! How did it go, dear old fellow?"

"Did you fool them?"

"It was as easy as rolling off a form," I grinned, as the juniors tumbled out and crowded round me. "They've been dished to a turn—done brown, in fact. And now I expect they're trudging wearily along, trying to get to Mark's Tey in time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you manage it?" asked Watson.

"Only just," I replied. "I had time to get back to Chelmsford, and slipped

the coach into a garage. I raced up here at full speed, and got my ticket as the train came in. Cutting it pretty fine, eh?"

"Rather!" said Reginald Pitt. "But still, you did it."

"And, although it cost a few quid, it was jolly well worth it," I grinned. "They knew me at that motor-coach company in London, or I couldn't have wangled the thing at all. They're sending a man down to take the coach back."

I climbed into the train with a crowd of other fellows, and very soon we were speeding along our way. And we were not separated, even now, for the coach was a corridor one, and our party occupied two adjoining compartments. Everybody was grinning at the way in which Christine & Co. had been caught in their own trap—for this is what it practically amounted to.

And, before so very long, the train steamed into Mark's Tey Station—a small but important junction near Colchester. Many heads were projecting from the carriage windows, and a series of yells went up when nine weary-looking figures were seen upon the platform. Christine & Co. had managed it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"April fools!"

"How are your poor feet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Christine! Poor old Monkeys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train came to a stop, and the faces of the Fossils all registered a wide grin. But there were no answering grins from Christine & Co. They glared at the train ferociously. All the nine of them were dusty and untidy. Their shoulders were drooping, and it was clear that they were tired. Burdened with luggage, their long walk had told upon them.

"You awful bounders!" said Christine fiercely. "You—you rotters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to fight you for this,

Nipper!" went on Christine grimly. "I may get whacked, but I'll give you something to be going on with before I am! By Jingo! You horrible rotter —"

"Rats!" I grinned, grabbing Christine's hand. "Don't take it like that, old son. You tried to fool us, and it failed. But we returned the compliment, that's all. Laugh, you ass! Don't you think it was funny?"

"Oh, it was a scream!" said Christine bitterly.

But, in spite of himself, he could not help realising the truth, and a faint grin spread over his face.

"Well, I suppose there's no sense in making a fuss about it," he said reluctantly. "You fooled us, and you fooled us well! We might as well admit it. Have your giddy laugh, and get it over!"

Christine's spirit was echoed by the other fellows, and soon after the journey had recommenced we were all joking together. There was no ill-feeling. The Monks realised that it was up to them to sing small and grin.

And so, by the time the train finally arrived at Stowmarket, Christine & Co. had forgiven, but not forgotten. But they took it all in good part. However, I felt quite certain that Christine himself would seize the first opportunity to get his own back—with interest. Not that we should mind that.

Unfortunately, the brilliant afternoon had changed into a dull evening, with threatening clouds sweeping over the skies. And now, as we stepped out on to the platform at Stowmarket, rain was falling. It was quite dusk, and the lights of the station were not particularly bright.

"Just our luck!" grunted Christine, as he turned his coat collar up. "Still, I expect Dorrie has got a whole fleet of cars outside to carry us up to the Hall. And then for a jolly good time."

Fatty Little smacked his lips.

"Great doughnuts!" he exclaimed. "It's the feed I'm thinking about. I'll

"bet we'll have a gorgeous tea. I've half a mind to dash into the refreshment-room for a snack——"

"Nothing doing!" said Nicodemus Trotwood grimly. "My only hat! I've been looking after you ever since we left London, and you've eaten enough for a dozen already. If you have any appetite when we arrive at Dorrie's place it'll be a wonder."

"Appetite!" snorted Fatty. "Why, I'm half starved!"

We all moved down the platform, towards the exit. The rain was falling steadily, but it would probably only be a shower. The clouds would soon roll over, and then the stars would shine.

We passed out through the booking-office, much to the interest of the few local inhabitants who were gathered round. So many boys at once seemed to be a bit of a novelty in Stowmarket.

And, just as we got outside, we heard a hail in a cheery voice, and Lord Dorrimore came marching up attired in thick boots and macintosh, and carrying a stout walking-stick. He nodded to us genially.

"So here you are!" he exclaimed. "Anybody missing?"

"No; we're all here, Dorrie," I replied. "We've had a few diversions on the way, but they're all settled now. You'll hear the yarn later."

"Right you are," said Dorrie briskly. "Got your luggage? Good! It's only about a three-mile walk. Pity it's raining."

"A three-mile walk!" said Christine blankly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Aren't—aren't we going to ride?" muttered Pitt.

"It doesn't seem like it," said De Valerie softly. "But we mustn't say anything—we can't grumble. We're Dorrie's guests, you know."

But there was a general feeling of dismay among the juniors. Lord Dor-

rimore, the millionaire, was making us all walk! I was considerably astonished on my own account, for I had expected something very different.

We were all carrying heavy bags, and the prospect of a three-mile walk in the rain was not at all alluring. The College House fellows, indeed, were positively thunderstruck. Weary as they were, they didn't relish the trudge.

But they knew better than to grumble—aloud, at all events. What they muttered among themselves was a totally different matter.

And so we set off from Stowmarket in the gathering dusk and the falling rain. Before we were fairly out of the town our bags and suitcases felt as though they were filled with lead. And Dorrie strode cheerfully on in advance, puffing at his pipe and chatting genially.

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Fortunately, the rain was not heavy—a thin sprinkling which was not sufficient to wet us through. At the same time it was very uncomfortable, and we soon found ourselves out in the country lanes, struggling hard to keep to the pace which our host was setting.

"Come along, young 'uns—come along!" said Dorrie, glancing over his shoulder. "Only about another two miles now!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Two more miles!"

The groans were general—a particularly loud one coming from Fatty Little.

"I shall drop before we get there—I know I shall!" he said hoarsely. "My strength will give out! I'm no good unless I have something to eat—"

"Never mind, boys! Once you get to the Hall you'll have some hot tea and plenty of good food," said Lord Dorrimore. "That'll set you up, and after that you'll go up to bed, and sleep like tops until the morning. I'm giving you something particularly good to-night, as it's a special occasion."

"Oh, ripping!"

"By the way," went on Dorrie, "I might as well tell you now. I thought perhaps you'd rather all sleep together, so I've had twenty-five beds put in one huge room. You'll be as cosy and comfortable as birds in a nest!"

The juniors all thought this to be a first-class idea, but just then they were not in a mood to enthuse over anything. They walked on, growing more tired every minute—and hungrier, too.

The journey had given them appetites, and now the chill evening air was making them enormously sharp-set. They all felt that they would be able to eat a truly record meal—a Fatty Little meal, as De Valerie put it.

But all things come to an end in time—even wearisome trudges on a wet evening. It was quite dark now, and a chill wind blew over the countryside. At the top of a little rise Lord Dorrie-

more came to a halt, and lifted his stick, pointing.

"Home, sweet home!" he announced lightly.

"Thank goodness!"

"We're nearly there now!"

Dorrie's stick was pointing to a collection of warm lights which glowed through the trees some distance ahead. Those lights looked particularly attractive, for they gave promise of comfort, luxury, and a ripping feed.

"We shall be all right soon!" said Tommy Watson. "Warm fires, hot tea, sandwiches, beef pies, cakes and pastries—"

"Great coconuts—don't!" said Fatty Little. "I can't bear to think of it. It makes me weak all over. I'm nearly dead with exhaustion!"

"And, after a terrible tuck-in, we'll go up to bed and sleep like tops!" went on Watson. "The beds are bound to be comfortable and warm, and I expect we'll have a huge fire burning in the room. Dorrie always does things on the grand scale."

At last we arrived at a pair of big gates. Dorrie pushed one of them open, and we all trooped in upon a wide gravel drive, and Dorrimore Hall lay before us, some way back from the road. It seemed to be a huge, rambling old building, with many warmly lighted windows.

"By the way, Nipper," said Dorrie, taking my arm. "You won't see your guv'nor to-night. Lee isn't here."

"Why—how's that?" I asked, in surprise. "I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," interrupted his lordship. "Your guv'nor couldn't manage to be here this evening; but I'll explain all that later."

Those last few steps up the drive seemed easy, for we were within sight of warmth, rest and food. Dorrie arrived at the big door first. He mounted the steps and flung the door open wide, revealing a dimly lighted interior.

"Enter, boys!" he said genially. "Welcome to Dorrimore Hall!"

"Thanks, sir!"

The juniors all spoke at once, and they trooped in. And their first feeling was one of surprise and keen disappointment. It was not at all as they had anticipated. They looked about them wonderingly.

For they found themselves in a big lounge hall with a low ceiling. Great oaken beams were above, but the only light was supplied by two dismally burning oil-lamps. There was no fire, and the air struck chill as the juniors stood, divesting themselves of their overcoats.

And of comfort there was no trace. The floor was covered with cold linoleum, and the only chairs were hard, uninviting-looking objects of dark oak. There were no lounges—no soft chairs.

And after the youthful guests had taken off their overcoats, a butler appeared—a grim, gaunt-looking man with a face which revealed neither good humour nor welcome. He was a forbidding person altogether.

"Now, I dare say you all want a wash, just to make you feel comfortable," said Lord Dorrmore. "James will show you the way upstairs, and you can have a comfortable wash and brush-up. Then you'll come down to a good spread."

The fellows felt much better now. The journey was over, and they were within sight of the welcome feed. Many of them thought it most unnecessary to wash, but they could not object. Fatty Little considered the idea to be mad in the extreme, and it nearly broke his heart to go upstairs.

All the juniors followed James, the butler. The staircase was dark and cold. True, it was richly carpeted, but the light was dim, and there was not the warmth and comfort which the juniors had expected.

And when they got to the bath-room they found it to be a long, cheerless apartment with a number of wash-basins lining the walls. Two candles were burning, casting a flickering light upon the dismal scene. And the water

in the basins was icily cold. Many of the fellows looked at one another queerly.

"Dash it all, I expected something different from this!" muttered Pitt. "Who said that Dorrie was a millionaire? All this looks awfully poor and mean."

"We're all tired," I said. "It'll seem different to-morrow."

The wash was not a great success, but it was soon finished with, and then we trooped downstairs, and were ushered into the dining-room. Dorrie stood by the doorway, smiling and chatting genially with the fellows as they went in.

And now the guests were not only surprised, but they received an unpleasant shock. The room was a huge one, but it was only dimly lit by a number of candles. In the centre stood a great table, covered with snowy white linen, and surrounded by hard oaken chairs. But it was not the table or the chairs that the juniors gazed at. It was the contents of the table that attracted their attention.

Great plates were piled with thick bread-and-butter—even thicker than was usually served at St. Frank's. And the butter was meagrely spread. There were no dainties, no pastries, no hot dishes. The juniors had been expecting to see the board covered with every manner of delicacy—with huge hams, roast joints, fruits and sweet dishes.

And there was nothing—except piles of thick bread-and-butter!

Fatty Little's eyes nearly started out of his head.

"Great jumping lobsters!" he gasped. "Is—is this what we're going to have —?"

"Shush, you ass!" muttered Pitt, nudging him.

Grumbles were impossible. It would have been bad form to make any remarks concerning the fare which Lord Dorrmore provided. But to say that the juniors were surprised would be putting it mildly. They were staggered.

"Now then, boys, sit down and pile

in!" said Dorrie, rubbing his hands together with much enjoyment. "I knew you would be hungry, and so I had the table well filled. The tea will be along in a minute."

The juniors sat down, feeling rather dazed. Words failed them. But they were so hungry that even the bread-and-butter—shockingly stale as it proved to be—was welcome. They piled in with gusto.

And presently the tea arrived—at least, Dorrie had called it tea. It was a weak concoction with very little flavour, half cold, and with scarcely any sugar in. As one of the fellows remarked, coffee-shop tea was glorious by comparison.

And Dorrie walked about, smoking and talking animatedly all the time. The pile of bread-and-butter vanished in record time—which was not surprising, considering that there were twenty-five fellows to be fed.

The table was completely cleared, and the guests were still very hungry. Fatty Little hoarsely declared that he was on the verge of starvation; but, apparently, there was no food to follow.

"Now, the best thing you boys can do is to go straight to bed!" said Dorrie. "You've had a good meal, and what you need is a good sleep. Off you go. James will show you to your bedroom. Good-night, youngsters—good-night!"

Only a few juniors replied—the others felt that words were impossible. They rose, listlessly and followed the forbidding-looking butler upstairs once more. Several of the juniors were inclined to be rebellious. They wanted to ask for more food; but they had no opportunity.

They were hustled upstairs and they soon found themselves in their bedroom. They received a further shock. It was a chill, barren apartment with cold oilcloth on the floor, and with a single candle to illuminate it, and round the walls there were twenty-five beds of the most uninviting-looking description.

"Oh, great pip!" said Handforth, looking round.

The door closed with a slam, and the juniors were alone. Somebody felt one of the beds, and it proved to be as hard as a board. They were all the same. The blankets were coarse, and few in number. The beds in the Remove dormitory at St. Frank's were havens of luxury compared to these prison-like articles.

"I've never been so surprised in all my giddy life!" said Reginald Pitt in a low voice. "What does it mean? Did you ever see anything like it? Fancy giving us beds like this—"

"Blow the beds!" moaned Fatty Little. "What about the supper? I shan't live until the morning—I shall simply expire from starvation—"

"Oh, you'll be all right, Fatty," said Christine irritably. "But I can tell you one thing—I'm off home to-morrow!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We won't stand this!" went on Christine warmly. "Dorrie invited us to spend a week with him, and we thought we should have a good time. But this—this! I've never been treated so rottenly in all my blessed existence!"

"We'll all make excuses, and go!" said Handforth. "So this is your marvellous millionaire!" he went on bitterly, addressing me. "This is your wonderful Dorrie! A jolly fine host—I don't think!"

"Oh, don't grumble!" I said. "I suppose that Dorrie thinks that plain food and absence of comfort are good for us. The best thing you chaps can do is to get into bed and go to sleep. You'll feel different in the morning!"

In the morning two or three fellows awakened at about the same time, and the rest were soon sitting up. They were refreshed, but they ached in almost every limb. And they were ravenously hungry.

"No beastly doorstep breakfast for me!" said Bob Christine.

"Nor for me!" said De Valerie.

"Look here, you chaps, let's come to a decision. It's early yet—only just seven. I vote we get dressed as quickly as possible, slip out quietly, and go to Stowmarket. We'll have a good feed there, and then catch the next train back to London.

"Hear, hear!"

The voices of approval were unanimous. They went quietly along to the stairs and descended into the hall. And the first thing that the foremost junior saw was a huge white-painted board, with two black words upon it. And these were the words:

"APRIL FOOLS!"

The juniors simply pelted downstairs, excited and wondering. In less than five minutes they discovered that they had the place completely to themselves. Dorrie wasn't there—the butler wasn't there—and no servants were visible at all.

And, happening to go outside, one fellow made the astounding discovery that the building was a big industrial

school, which had been shut up for the holidays! It wasn't Dorrimore Hall at all!

And then, in the midst of it, Dorrie himself appeared in a big motor-car. He was grinning with huge enjoyment, and finally yelled with laughter. And then we realised that it was all a practical joke—we had been fooled by Dorrie himself!

It had been easy for Dorrie to make his arrangements and to occupy the industrial school for a single night.

Dorrimore Hall was close by, and there the St. Frank's guests found warmth, comfort and luxury. They enjoyed a hearty breakfast, and even Fatty Little had enough. And then the juniors were able to appreciate the point of the joke, and they roared with laughter at the recollection of their discomforts.

And so the stay at Dorrimore Hall commenced, with everybody feeling happy and gay and cheerful. They little realised what further startling adventures were to befall them in the very near future!



WORLD'S LONELIEST ISLAND

IF you get out a map of South America, and look right down by the southernmost tip, Cape Horn, you will see far out in the South Atlantic Ocean a tiny island called Tristan da Cunha. This is the world's loneliest inhabited island—a tiny spot of land midway between Montevideo and Cape-town, where for a hundred years hardy white men have tried to eke out a living.

It's a strange story how the island ever came to be inhabited at all, for it is nearly all barren rock, with very few places where food can be grown. But at the end of the eighteenth century, when the British Government was looking round for parts of the world not already taken over by other nations, two settlers were sent out to take possession of the island.

Driven Mad!

There is no landing place for ships at Tristan. The two men were landed by rowboat from a whaler, together with a supply of stores. But the experiment was a failure. Driven mad by the loneliness, one of the settlers called himself the Emperor of Tristan, and took possession of it for his empire!

After the mad settler and his companion had been taken off the island by a passing ship, nobody lived there till Napoleon's time. Then, to prevent French warships watering there, a garrison of fifty white men and fifty Hottentots was sent to the island.

After Napoleon's death this garrison was recalled, but one of the white men asked to be allowed to return and settle there with his wife and family.

This man, William Glass, together with a companion named Peter Green, were the ancestors of the present population of the island. They were joined by two shipwrecked sailors, who also settled there.

Gifts From Well-Wishers.

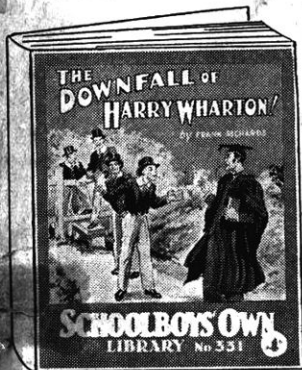
The island is a strange place to-day. They have no form of money—all goods are bartered between the inhabitants. The only form of transport is by ox-team, and the ox-carts are primitive affairs with wheels made from segments of a big tree-trunk which the sea washed on to the shore!

Every year the 187 inhabitants receive a visit from a passing ship, which brings them stores and gifts presented by well-wishers all over the world. In stormy weather no boats can land with these stores, so they are attached to buoys and dropped into the sea, so that the currents drift them ashore.

In some ways the island is the happiest spot on earth. There are never any crimes there, and disease is unknown. A radio set which has just been installed is regarded as "magic" by the islanders; the current it uses is supplied by a windmill-driven dynamo.

A sidelight on the queer life of Tristan is shown by the action of the islanders' chaplain, who visited England for the Coronation. He went round the decorations and stands, picking up odd nails lying about, and explained that on Tristan nails are precious and scarce, so he wanted to take some back!

TREAT YOURSELF TO THESE GREAT SCHOOL YARNS, TOO!

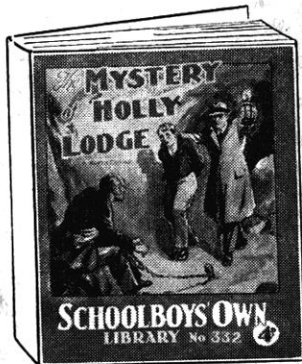


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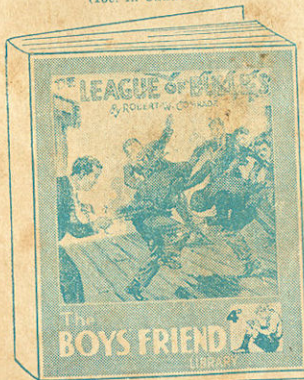
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