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FOREWORD.

THIS first bit is a kind of introduction. I feel bound to shove it down before I start on the real yarn. It's necessary. But I won't make it very long—and that may be a comfort.

To begin with—and I've got to begin somewhere—my esteemed guv'nor, Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous crime investigator, has just finished writing a ripping yarn, which he has called "**The Yellow Shadow**." At least, I think it's ripping. And what I'm going to do now is to briefly re-estate the facts of that extraordinary case.

It's a blessed nuisance, but I've got to! If I didn't, the fellows who are idiotic enough to read the yarn I'm now going to write would say that it was a mix-up, and that they couldn't make head or tail of it. They'd probably call me a silly ass! And I'm not one. I'm ready to dot anybody on the nose who says I am.

Well, here goes.

The guv'nor had gone to the United States after a forger-johnny named Ferroll. In some outlandish place called Snake City, in Colorado, Nelson Lee ran his man down. Ferroll, however, was very much alive, and things got exciting.

The guv'nor's one of the keenest chaps living, and it wasn't through any fault or carelessness of his that he got collared. Some rotten "gunmen," or whatever they're called, got hold of him, and chucked him down the shaft of a deserted mine.

While trying to get out, the guv'nor accidentally stumbled upon the secret meeting-place of the Fu-Chang-Tong. It's a terrible Chinese secret society that's what "Tong" means, I believe, and the yellow brutes tried to kill Nelson Lee.

They didn't, and he made them believe that he was possessed of rummy, uncanny powers. So the Fu-Changs made him a member of the Tong—a "blood brother." It was the only way of escape that was open to the guv'nor: he was forced to join in order to save his little skin.

But, having joined, he found that yards of trouble went with it. The Fu-Chang blighters told him that he had to stay in Snake City, and attend all their meetings, and do any dirty work which was allotted to him.

He didn't see the fun of it, and, having seen Ferroll in gaol, he skipped for New York. He had expected trouble—and he found it! The Fu-Chang-Tong was a grim secret society, with branches in almost every big city in the world.

On the way to New York, and in New York, Nelson Lee was attacked several times. But, owing to his vigilance, he outwitted the Chinese bounders every time. Then he arrived in England, and I met him at Liverpool.

On the quay we were attacked by a crowd of Chinese dock-labourers, and were only just rescued in time by some ripping bluejackets. I don't mean that their jackets were ripping. The chaps themselves were top-holers.

Well, that incident told the guv'nor

that the vengeance of the Fu-Changs had followed him to England. In the train on the way to London, Lee seriously told me that he expected to be dead within a month.

Naturally, I was thunderstruck.

And, later on, I found that there was ample cause for the gov'nor's pessimism. He and I were attacked a second time—on this occasion while walking along the Embankment. I was bowled out, and Nelson Lee was taken in a boat to a filthy opium-den in the neighbourhood of Wapping.

I found this out afterwards, for, having recovered, I at once jogged up the police, and several raids were made on the known haunts of Chinamen in London. By a lucky chance, I was with the raiding-party which discovered the gov'nor. He was in the hands of the Fu-Chang-Tong, and they had been about to torture him to death.

By my action, I had gained the enmity of the Tong, and the pair of us—the gov'nor and I—were faced with the delightful prospect of being knifed or shot as soon as we showed our faces outside the door.

You see, an ordinary criminal, such as a burglar, who owes us a grudge, doesn't make any open attack—he's too fond of his own skin. But these Chinese brutes, having been ordered by the Tong to kill us, didn't care a jot about their own safety.

We were in a fearful predicament.

Death was certain unless we thought of some wheeze which would cause us to completely disappear. It seemed that the Fu-Chang-Tong would drop all activity if we succeeded in avoiding their clutches for the period of six months. After six months, according to the laws of the Tong, we were safe from attack.

So, if we could only vanish for that space of time, we should be as safe as eggs when we resumed our real identities. But how could we vanish? If we hopped off to Venice, or Rome, or Australia, or any other place, we should be followed and "done in." That was certain.

It was little me who thought of a wheeze.

A stout and prosperous old individual named Sir Rupert Manderly, Bart., had called at Gray's Inn Road while the gov'nor was out. He was a governor of St. Francis' College, a big public school in the south of England.

It seemed that a Mr. Thorne, a Housemaster at the school, had mysteriously disappeared. Sir Rupert wanted the gov'nor to find the missing master. Sir Rupert, too, was an old friend of Nelson Lee's—at least, he had been acquainted with the gov'nor for some years.

Lee rang Sir Rupert up, and the old merchant came round to us. Then, in plain language, the gov'nor told Sir Rupert of the whole trouble. He explained that we were "marked down" for immediate death. If, however, we could adopt new identities, and live for six months in a totally different sphere of life, we should be safe from attack.

My idea was simplicity itself. A Housemaster at St. Frank's College (it was called St. Frank's for short) had disappeared. Well, Nelson Lee was to go down to the school—as a master! He was, in short, to become a Housemaster for six months. And I was to join one of the Lower School Forms as a junior schoolboy! Being a junior I should be safer—and there would be more fun. It would be as easy as pie for me to drop into the new life. I revelled in the prospect.

Sir Rupert shook his head, and hummed and hawed. But, in the end, he realised that the scheme was a splendid one. He promised to do his very best. He would let us know the decision of the school governors the next day. Sir Rupert being the chairman of governors, he had the most "say" in the matter.

Well, the decision was satisfactory. We were to take up the new life. The Headmaster had been confidentially informed of the facts—but not the other governors. It was as well to keep the thing as secret as possible.

The die being cast, the gov'nor and I got busy. We took the most extraordinary precautions. Preparations were made for a big-game hunting trip to Central Africa; everything was got ready. Passages were booked in a big liner which was leaving Southampton in a couple of days.

This was a blind, of course. The Fu-Changs would think that we were trying to elude them by fleeing to Africa. The trail being smothered, the gov'nor disguised himself in the most elaborate manner; he took six solid hours over that make-up. It was to be permanent—for

six months—and so extra care was necessary.

I didn't use any make-up at all. I simply got rigged out in schoolboy's clothing, and dyed my hair and eyebrows a light brown. The dye was some ripping stuff of the gov'nor's making—he's a clever chemist—and it had the effect of making my hair curly, too. I was changed into a fair-haired schoolboy of about fifteen. I was taking a supply of the dye with me, so there would be no difficulty in making my hair keep its new colour.

Nelson Lee took his departure first; he left in the early morning. I followed him by an afternoon train. But we didn't leave our rooms in Gray's Inn Road by the usual method. We got out on to the roof, and passed along the leads to a building some little distance down. We were, of course, quite invisible from the road, and from any other house. And we didn't do the roof-journey together. The gov'nor left hours before me.

We got through the skylight of the other building—which was the engraving works of Messrs. Bevison, Norton & Co. Some little time before Nelson Lee had become acquainted with Mr. Bevison, and he readily consented to the idea. He thought that we were off on some detective dodge or other.

Well, we simply left the engraving establishment as ordinary customers. If there were any Fu-Chang men watching, they could not guess anything. As a matter of fact, I don't believe the Tong-men were watching.

I wasn't in schoolboy's clothing then; I changed in the train, on the way down to St. Frank's. It was a bit humiliating sneaking out of our own rooms in that way, but there was no help for it. The gov'nor took all sorts of other precautions; he laid false trails, with the help of trusted assistants, and there was no fear of us being spotted and followed.

Well, to cut it short, our escape was a complete success. We got away safely and easily. And Nelson Lee and Nipper had utterly vanished. For six months we were to be non-existent. We dropped our names, our identities, and our habits.

We became totally different persons—and our sojourn at St. Frank's commenced. I'm now going to write all about it; the queerest episode of our lives, in a way. For, instead of being detective and assistant, we became master and pupil!

CHAPTER I.

I MEET DOB CHRISTINE AND CO., OF STUDY Q.

RICHARD BASIL HERBERT BENNETT stepped out of the train on to the sun-scorched platform of Bellton Station. There was a look of sunny anticipation on his good-natured face, and his curly fair hair escaped in an unruly fashion from beneath his cap.

"Not bad!" he remarked critically, eyeing the picturesque country station, and the green hedges and fields all around. "Not bad at all. In fact, it's distinctly good."

Perhaps it would be as well to state that Richard Basil Herbert Bennett was merely another way of spelling Nipper. I had arrived at Bellton, the station for St. Frank's, and I was feeling uncomfortable, but cheery.

I was uncomfortable because my Eton jacket was preposterously short. I don't mean that it was too small for me. But Eton jackets are absurd things, anyhow. I'd been feeling for my side coat pockets for hours.

It was evening, and the sun was shining from a clear blue sky. I couldn't have arrived in better weather, at all events. And it was glorious to feel that I was free—free to walk about without fearing an attack from behind. The Fu-Changs were diddled, and the gov'nor and I were safe.

I was looking forward to a good time at St. Frank's. Apart from the novelty of the whole situation, I knew that the gov'nor and I would be healthier and fitter for real work when we returned to Gray's Inn Road once more.

Of course, not a word of the truth was to leak out to a soul at the school. Only Dr. Stafford, the Headmaster, knew the actual facts. Nelson Lee was just an ordinary master, and I was a common-or-garden schoolboy.

It had been decided that I should go into the Fourth Form. As regards knowledge, I believe I was learned enough to enter the Fifth or Sixth; but I didn't care to become a senior. Among the juniors I should be lost completely; I should be far less conspicuous in a Junior Form.

I had been studying the geography of the district rather keenly, and St. Frank's, I knew, was situated about three miles from the Sussex coast. The

village of Bellton was just a mile from the school.

Having deposited me upon the gravel-covered platform, the slow branch-line train proceeded upon its weary way. Except for a hot-looking farmer person, I was the only passenger to alight.

I gripped my travelling-bag, and sauntered to the end of the platform to inspect the removal of my trunk, which had been shot out of the guard's van with unnecessary force. Railway employees are rather careless with any property which doesn't happen to be their own.

There was an aged porter eyeing the trunk in a doubtful fashion. It was big, certainly, and the porter was small. But what are railway porters for? It wasn't any good looking at the thing, anyhow. "I reckon you be for the skool, master?" wheezed the old fellow.

"Your reckoning is dead correct!" I replied. "How do the fellows get their trunks up there?"

"If that was the fust day of a new term, which it ain't, there'd be the skool brakes down here, sir," said the porter solemnly. "You'll have to have this here trunk taken up by the carrier. He'll be along by seven o'clock."

"All right," I said. "You attend to that for me. Which is the road to the school? Straight on, I suppose?"

The porter scratched his head.

"You can go by the road, or you can go by the towin'-path, along o' the river," he said. "The towin'-path be a little shorter, I dare say. That ain't far which ever way you go. You'll likely meet some o' the boys, an' they'll tell ye."

I gave the old fellow a shilling, which, in his eyes, probably represented so many extra half-pints at the village inn that evening, and then passed out of the station. Right opposite lay the River Stowe—quite a decent stream.

The village itself was a little further on, over the bridge, nestling in a hollow. The sun was shining on the river gloriously, and I decided to take the towing-path route. The roads were dusty, and I didn't want to arrive at St. Frank's looking like a miller.

Just at that moment, as I gripped my bag more firmly and stepped out, I saw a smart little boat shoot under the bridge, and glide along smoothly, the oarsman resting for a few moments. The boat was occupied by three boys.

They were in white flannels and school

caps. The caps were olive green with yellow circles round them. I could see that the fellows were juniors—Fourth-Formers, most likely. This was a good opportunity to introduce myself. I grinned slightly as I ran to a stile, and leapt over it. I wondered how long it would take me to drop into the new life.

"Ahoy there, ye lubbers!" I shouted cheerily.

The boat drew in to the bank, and I found myself looking at three good-natured faces, which, at the present moment, were somewhat clouded. Two of the fellows were dark, and the other fair.

"Were you calling to us by any chance?" inquired the fair chap.

"Right on the wicket!" I said calmly.

"You're St. Frank's chaps, I suppose?"

"That's right."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I'm a new chap—just arrived. Going into the Fourth. Hope you're in the Fourth! You look decent fellows!"

The three juniors exchanged glances.

"As it happens, we do belong to the Fourth—but it's called the Remove at St. Frank's," said one of the dark fellows. "Awfully good of you to say that we look decent! We're overflowing with conceit. But let me tell you something."

"Go ahead!" I said, stepping nearer.

"We live and learn, you know."

"My hat! You've got a dashed lot to say for a new kid!" exclaimed the oarsman. "The something I was going to tell you is this: We don't allow new kids to call us lubbers—understand? Do I make myself plain?"

"My dear chap, you didn't make yourself plain," I said cheerfully.

"That's nature. You can't help it, and I don't blame you in the least."

The two other juniors chuckled.

"Why not get out and wipe him up, Roddy?" said one of them. "Of course, he's not far wrong—"

"You silly fathead!" roared Roddy, glaring.

"Hope I'm not causing trouble in the family?" I asked anxiously. "Or were you calling me a silly fathead? If so, I forgive you. I thought, perhaps, you were going along to the school. In that case, I'll help to make the rowing a bit harder."

I stepped into the boat, which was quite close to the bank, and sat down. The three juniors glared at me wrathfully.

"Look here! Get out of this boat, you cheeky rotter!" shouted one of them.

"Oh, don't be unkind!" I protested. "I'm Dick Bennett, and I'm going into the Remove. I'm weary and footsore, and the prospect of walking to St. Frank's appals me. Don't be rough on a chap!"

Suddenly one of the dark boys commenced laughing.

"You're a bit of a corker, anyhow," he said. "I'm Bob Christine, and these fellows are Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge. We're all in the Remove--College House, of course. If you're not in the College House, you'll get turned out of this boat on your neck!"

"He'll get turned out on his neck, in any case," said Talmadge, the fair one. "Do you think we're going to stand this chap's rotten nerve, Bob Christine? I'm not, anyhow!"

I was inwardly chuckling, but I looked serious.

"If there's going to be trouble, why not wait until later on?" I suggested. "We can't scrap in this boat, can we? And, if it'll smooth the troubled waters, I'll take the oars and do all the rowing. My arms aren't footsore in the least!"

"Well, by Jove," said Roddy Yorke, "you're hot stuff for a new kid! I dare say you'll improve by keeping. Hand over the oars, Tally, and give the chap a chance to show what he can do. If he's no good, we'll pitch him out."

Talmadge, still glaring, handed over the oars.

I took them without a word. I liked these three chaps, and I knew that they were quite justified in being wrathful. I'd made up my mind, however, to "surprise the natives" at St. Frank's. Going to school again was rather good, and I didn't see why I shouldn't make things hum a bit.

The gov'nor will tell anybody that I'm rather handy with a pair of oars. He'd probably say more, but modesty compels me to remain quiet on the subject. I didn't mean to display my oarsmanship straight off, however.

Watched very critically by Bob Christine & Co., I pushed the boat off, and clumsily fumbled about with the oars, causing a deal of splashing. Then I started rowing erratically and jerkily. Christine and Talmadge and Yorke grinned.

"Do you call that rowing?" demanded Talmadge sarcastically.

"Eh?" I paused. "No, that's not rowing. I was just waiting to see how you were going to pitch me out." Then I bent my back again. "Still, if you're anxious to see my real form, here goes!"

This time I used all the skill I was capable of. The boat sped through the water smoothly, the water hissing against the bows musically. My oars didn't make a sound, and they were as regular as clockwork. It was easy to me, and I was good for two or three miles.

The banks and the trees swept by rapidly, and Christine, who was steering, was beginning to look surprised. His chums, too, were rapidly losing their frowns. I knew that an exhibition of good oarsmanship would dispel all unpleasantness.

"My hat! You can row, kid!" said Christine, with frank admiration.

I grinned, but said nothing. I merely put my back into the work with greater vigour, and the boat simply flew through the water, and by the time the school landing-stage was reached I was going as strongly as ever, and lay back without even being out of breath. Nelson Lee's training had made me strong and hardy, and this exercise was merely enjoyable.

After we'd landed, Bob Christine & Co. were much more genial, and I determined not to rub them the wrong way again. I wanted to learn things, and these fellows could tell me a lot.

Through the trees I caught my first glimpse of St. Frank's. Well, I'd arrived, and I'd made friends with three fellows within the first half-hour, which wasn't so bad.

CHAPTER II.

I LEARN ALL ABOUT THE FOSSILS AND THE MONKS, AND COME TO A DECISION.

BOB CHRISTINE clapped me on the back.

"That was first rate, Bennett," he exclaimed. "You said your name was Bennett, didn't you? If it wasn't for your cheek——"

I grinned.

"I suppose I was a bit fresh," I said frankly. "No real harm done, is there? I don't want to put your backs up, you know. Sorry if I didn't strike you as being meek enough for a new kid."

"Well, that's rather decent of you," said Talmadge. "We're easy enough to get on with if you don't show too much nerve. Nerve in a new kid isn't tolerated

at St. Frank's. Lemme see! Did you say you were a Monk?"

"A which?" I asked, staring.

"Oh, you're ignorant of our little ways, ain't you?" grinned Talmadge. "You see, the College House fellows are known as Monks. In the dim past, the College House used to be a monastery, you know."

"I see! And I suppose there's another House?"

"Well, the chaps who are in it call it the Ancient House. We don't!" put in Roddy Yorke. "We call it a home for slackers and rotters. The Ancient House has gone to seed, my son—clean gone to seed. Fullwood and his gang run the show, and a nice muck they make of it, too!"

"I dare say I shall hear all about Fullwood in due course," I said cheerfully. "Just at present I'm pining for some grub. How do you feed here—at tea-time, I mean? In Hall, or in your own studies?"

"In Hall if we're stony, and in our studies if we can rake up the grub," grinned Bob Christine. "Tell you what, you fellows! We'll have Bennett to tea in Study Q. While we're feeding, we'll tell him the general information of the place."

"That's ripping!" I said gladly. "I'll stand my whack, you know——"

"Rats! You can be our guest, I suppose?" growled Talmadge.

"Thanks!" I said. "I can, and I will. You're decent."

"Hold on!" said Yorke. "You didn't say whether you were a Monk or not—that is, a College House chap. If you're a Fossil——"

"Fossil!" I gasped.

"Exactly! Ancient House fellows are known as Fossils," grinned Yorke. "They are fossils, too. Being ancient, they must be fossils—see? That stands to reason. You see, if you're a Fossil, we can't possibly have you to tea in the College House. Fossils are barred."

I chuckled.

"I'm a neutral at present," I replied. "All I know is that I'm going into the Remove. From what you say, I gather that you'd rather be found dead than belong to the Ancient House. Suppose we delay this discussion until later?"

"Right ho!" said Bob Christine. "This way, kid."

I smiled inwardly. It was rather rich being called a kid in this fashion. Still,

it was all part of the wheeze, and I was enjoying myself hugely. The guv'nor would have a good laugh when I told him all about it in due course.

It seemed certain that Bob Christine was a leading light in the Remove, and I later discovered that he was the Form captain, and recognised leader of the College House juniors. He and Talmadge and Yorke shared Study Q, in the Remove passage.

They were not quite certain about me. New chaps were usually nervous and reticent; but I had plenty of assurance, and I didn't see why I should be sat upon. They all agreed that I possessed too much cheek; but then the guv'nor's told me that many a time. It's just a gift of mine.

From the boathouse we walked along a path which skirted the playing-fields. I regarded them with approval. They were well kept, and the grass was splendid. Over on Big Side a number of seniors, in flannels, were hard at work at the nets. The "click" of bat meeting ball sounded pleasantly in my ears. On Little Side, too, there was considerable activity. Remove fellows were practising, and a noisy crowd of Third Form fags were playing a scratch match. It was a lively scene, and it pleased my eyes. I'm rather good at cricket, I believe. Perhaps I should have a chance of proving my prowess before long.

After the exciting times in London, all this seemed singularly peaceful. The Fu-Chang-Tong and all its works seemed millions of miles away.

We passed through a little gateway, and Bob Christine waved his hand.

"That's the old show," he said, with a smile. "Not bad, eh?"

I nodded approvingly. St. Frank's was a splendid place. There were two main Houses, the College House and the Ancient House. They formed a kind of letter A, the northern ends of both houses being much wider apart than the southern. The wide, open space in front—in most schools called a quadrangle—was known at St. Frank's as the Triangle.

Both houses were ivy-covered, and they looked delightful in the evening sunlight. Bob Christine & Co. had been for a run down the river between afternoon lessons and tea-time. Seniors and juniors were now pouring in from the playing-fields and other quarters for tea.

I noticed that many fellows were wear-

ing caps of the same pattern as Christine's, but coloured blue and gold, instead of green and yellow. These, I found, were Ancient House boys.

I received many glances as I marched across the Triangle, and lots of fellows took a great interest in me; but, for the present, I was concerned with Christine and his chums. Besides, I was hungry.

"That's Fullwood over there," remarked Christine, with a nod of his head. "It's not in my line to preach, Bennett, but I'll advise you to steer clear of that rotter! He's absolutely N.G."

I looked over towards the Ancient House, and saw a dandified fellow lounging on the broad stone steps. He was attired in spotless Etons, and the crease in his trousers was perfect. His fancy waistcoat almost glared at me.

"Fullwood!" I said musingly. "I'll remember him. Is he a—a Monk?"

"A Monk!" snorted Talmadge, who seemed somewhat hot-tempered, and ready to fire up at a moment's notice. "We wouldn't touch the beast with a barge-pole! He's the leader of the Ancient House Remove, and a regular bounder. At one time there used to be a friendly rivalry between the two Houses, but that's practically dead. The Fossils are used up! They haven't got an ounce of sportsmanship among the whole crowd! They're a mouldy lot!" added Talmadge bluntly.

I didn't say anything, but I was thinking hard. Privately, I rather fancied the Ancient House. Nelson Leo was the new Housemaster there, and I was practically bound to become a Fossil. But I didn't say anything to my new friends. I'd been invited to tea, and I didn't want to spoil the harmony.

We entered the College House, and turned from the big lobby into a wide passage, with numerous doors on either side. On each door there was a capital letter, painted in gold.

"The juniors' studies here are lettered, not numbered, as in some schools," remarked Christine. "A to N in the Ancient House and O to Z in this House. Rather a cheek the Fossils having two more studies than we have, but it can't be helped. Here we are!"

We had arrived at Study Q, and Christine kicked the door open. The little apartment was quite comfortable, although plain, both in furniture and decorations. Within ten minutes we were

sitting down to a hearty tea, the kettle having been boiled on a spirit-stove.

Christine & Co. were very genial to me, and I was glad. Whether I remained in the College House or not, I knew that these three fellows were my friends. They were decent chaps, every one.

We'd just got settled down when there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the door opened without ceremony.

"Got any cups to spare, you fellows?" asked a cheerful voice. "We're—Hullo! A visitor! I didn't know you were entertaining a guest."

"It's all right. Clapson, old scout," laughed Bob Christine. "This is Bennett, a new kid. He's in the Remove. Stay to tea! Oh, you've brought the whole family! Never mind! We'll make room, and there's plenty of tommy."

Three juniors crowded into the study, and I was introduced to Len Clapson, Harry Oldfield, and Billy Nation, of Study Z. They were rivals of Christine & Co. in the College House, but staunch pals nevertheless. They accepted me without question as "the right sort." My presence in Study Q proved that.

"I suppose you're in this House?" asked Clapson, after a while. "You'll find room in Study X—next to mine, you know. There's only Page and ~~Turner~~ there—"

"I'm not fixed yet," I said, with my mouth full.

"Oh! We shall have to fix you, then!"

"I rather fancy the Ancient House myself," I went on incautiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The six juniors roared.

"Did I say anything funny?" I asked, looking round in surprise.

"Funny's not the word!" grinned Christine. "Don't you remember what I told you? The Ancient House is a home for rotters and cads. Of course, there are some decent fellows—Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth, and a few others—but Fullwood & Co. are autocrats there. They've killed all decency in the Ancient House."

"Why aren't they hoofed out?" I asked curiously.

"There may be a difference now that there's a new Housemaster," said Christine. "Old Thorne's gone—goodness knows where—and Fullwood's upset. He won't be able to hold his smoking parties so often."

"Smoking parties!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Thorne permitted 'em?"

The juniors grinned.

"Not exactly that. He just winked at them," explained Clapson. "You see, the Ancient House has been on the decline for a long while now—ever since Thorne came. It's been degenerating. Thorne was an outsider—a sneaky, spying bounder! He was down on the decent chaps, and toadied no end to Fullwood & Co. Fullwood's pater is a baronet, I believe, and Thorne would have licked his boots if he'd met him."

"Nothing remarkable in a baronet, is there?" I grinned.

"My dear chap, Thorne lived for nothing else but snobbery," said Christine. "He allowed the Ancient House to run to seed. The Nuts practically run the Fossils, and there's not a chap over there who's got pluck enough to stand up to Fullwood."

"The Nuts?"

"Fullwood & Co.," explained Clapson patiently. "Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Albert Gulliver and George Bell. They occupy Study A. Then, of course, there are the rotters of Study G—Merrell and Marriott and Noys. There all in the same set, you know—smoking and gambling and breaking bounds at night. Pretty goings-on over in the Ancient House, I can tell you."

"They seem to be a rapid lot," I remarked smilingly.

"Fullwood & Co. rule the roost," said Christine. "They're blackguards of the first water, Bennett. I'm just telling you this so that you'll be on your guard. It's not my place to run fellows down; but you'll find out in a day or two. The decent chaps in the Ancient House have been kept squashed by Fullwood's reign of terror. He's been carrying things with a high hand for months."

"What about sports—cricket, and all that?"

"Dead!" declared Talmadge bluntly.

"It seems to me the Ancient House wants to be swept clean," I said slowly. "Are the seniors the same?"

"Pretty nearly. But we've been talking about the junior school," said Christine. "Pass the jam, Roddy, old son. Thanks! Jam, Bennett? Yes, the Ancient House is a dead-letter regarding school games. I'm the Remove skipper, and I've given up hope of making anything out of the Fossils. I've got three

chaps in the Remove cricket Eleven—Tregellis-West and Watson and Hubbard—but they're not up to our form. Tommy Watson had been trying to get up an Ancient House Eleven, but it's like flogging a dead horse. House matches are impossible."

"That's a rotten state of affairs!" I said.

"I dare say it is!" exclaimed Christine drily. "But it's none of our business. We're letting the Fossils go to the dogs in their own way. Fullwood & Co. have impregnated the Ancient House with a general slackness. The Fossils are a back number, and if you take my advice you'll stay on this side of the Triangle."

I lay back in my chair. I'd been thinking during this interesting talk, and my thoughts were rather grim. I knew these chaps had been telling me the straight truth; they were decent fellows, every one of them.

It seemed to me that I wasn't wanted in the College House; my place was on the other side. I don't mean that the fellows didn't want me. As a matter of fact, Bob Christine & Co. rather liked me already. I could see that. New fellows weren't usually treated as I was being treated.

"H'm! It's a problem," I remarked thoughtfully.

"What's a problem?" asked Talmadge in his blunt way.

"Look here! I've digested all you've told me—and the tea as well," I replied. "I reckon there's only one decision I can come to."

"Of course. You'll stay here!" grinned Billy Nation.

"Off side, old man!" I said coolly. "I'm going to the Ancient House!"

"What!"

The six juniors stared at me.

"I'm going into the Ancient House," I repeated.

"What the merry thunder for?" demanded Clapson, with his left cheek bulging.

"Well, it's pretty obvious that the Fossils need a tremendous lot of bucking up," I went on calmly. "Fullwood & Co. need taking down a peg or two. It's up to me to do the bucking."

"Up—up—up to you!" stuttered Talmadge.

"Exactly!"

"You silly ass!" roared Talmadge. "How much bucking do you suppose you're going to do—you, a new kid?"

It strikes me you've got a jolly fat neck on you!"

"Easy does it, Tally," said Bob Christine quietly. "Look here, Bennett, you're a good chap, I believe——"

"Thanks!"

"And you'll be pretty useful at games, judging by your form at rowing," went on the Remove skipper. "But if you start any rot you'll find yourself in Queer Street. Fullwood's not going to be preached to by a new fellow——"

"I don't intend to preach to him," I put in easily. "That's not my idea at all. I'm simply going to knock the Ancient House into shape. If Fullwood gets in my way he'll get knocked into shape, too—or out of shape. I'm going on the warpath——"

"On the warpath—on your first day at St. Frank's!" gasped Christine.

"Why not? Nothing like prompt measures!" I replied coolly. "What's more, I'm going to whip such life into the Ancient House that the Fossils will soon assume premier position at St. Frank's——"

"Prem—premier position!" stuttered Oldfield.

"Exactly!" I grinned, enjoying myself mightily. "And I'm going to whack you fellows to a frazzle! No offence, you know. I like you all right, but you'll have to give way to me once I really get going. I'm not boasting——"

"Not boasting!" yelled Talmadge hotly.

"Not at all. But as I'm going into the Ancient House, and Ancient House has got to become the cock-house at St. Frank's——"

"Collar the cheeky beast!" roared Talmadge.

"Scrag the idiot!"

"Hold on!" shouted Christine, grinning. "He doesn't know any better. Let's frog-march him across to the old barn they call the Ancient House. That's where he belongs, it seems. All hands to the pump!"

I was collared in a second, and then an earthquake seemed to happen. The table went whirling, and there was a clatter of smashing crockery. Then, helpless in the grasp of the six sturdy juniors, I was marched out into the passage.

Out into the Triangle, and then across to the Ancient House. Bob Christine & Co. were determined, and they looked grim. Grinning fellows stood aside, and watched. Finally, I

was bumped down in the Ancient House doorway.

"That's your kennel!" panted Len Clapson warmly.

I sat up, dusted myself, and grinned. Things were getting quite interesting!

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE COMBINE OF STUDY C IS FORMED.

"RUBBISH shot here—what?"

The voice was a languid, drawling one, and its owner stood behind me. I had not the least doubt that I was the rubbish referred to.

I jumped to my feet and chuckled. I didn't blame Christine & Co. in the least for their drastic treatment—I had asked for it in distinctly plain language. And I knew that the College House "Co." were decent fellows through and through.

"Rubbish," I said, "is usually shot upon rubbish-heaps. Is this a rubbish-heap, by any chance?"

"By gad! This fellow is, rather interestin'—he is, really!" went on the languid voice. "Who is he, or what is he? I don't remember havin' seen him crawlin' about the place before."

There were two juniors facing me, and their blue and gold caps told me that they were Ancient House fellows. They were both smiling, and the one with the drawling voice was gazing at me through neat, gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Just for one second I thought that he was the famous Ralph Leslie Fullwood; but then I saw that I was mistaken. This junior was not quite so tall, and his slim figure was elegance itself.

He was dressed perfectly, from the spotless white collar to the toe of his glistening boot. He wore a fancy waistcoat, but it was rich in colour without being in the slightest degree showy. A fine gold watch-chain dangled from the waistcoat, and there was a diamond pin in his tie.

His companion was a sturdy, broad-shouldered junior with an open, sunny face.

"What's the trouble, kid?" asked the sunny one.

"Nothing worth mentioning," I replied. "I fairly asked for it, so I don't grumble. You see, I'm a new chap, and I've decided to come into the Ancient House, in spite of all the disadvantages

it possesses. I told Christine and his crowd that I was going to buck the Fossils up to such an extent that they'd wipe the Monks off the face of the earth, so to speak. Christine & Co. didn't seem to like it—so they told me so. That's all!"

"All!" said the less elegant junior. "A pretty good all, too, I should say! Like your nerve to tell Christine that! All the same, you did the right thing. If you're for the Ancient House you're welcome here. I'm Watson, of the Remove. This walking fashion-plate is Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, also of the Remove!"

"Pleased to meet you!" I said, remembering Christine's references to these two fellows. "I'm Dick Bennett, likewise of the Remove. I'm looking for a home. Having decided to come into the Ancient House, I want somebody to take me in and care for me. You're two of the best chaps in the Ancient House, I understand."

"He knows us!" exclaimed Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, in astonished tones. "Do you hear, Tommy, dear fellow? He actually knows us! Was it Christine who gave you that valuable information, my dusty friend?"

I nodded, eyeing the pair critically.

"Christine is sensible," said Tregellis-West. "I always said so—I did, really. Christine is a fellow with real perspective powers. He told you that Tommy and I were two of the best fellows in the Ancient House. I shall have to shake hands with Christine!"

"Oh, cheese it, Montie!" laughed Watson. "I heard there was a new fellow in the school," he went on, turning to me. "I thought you were going to be a monkey. You had tea with Christine, didn't you?"

"Yes, but we disagreed at the finish," I said cheerfully. "I stated my intention of coming over this side. Look here, Watson and Tregellis-West, I like you both! I'm a chap who believes in speaking out straight. Can't we dig together? I'm looking for a study. What about yours?"

The two juniors stared at me.

"You want to come into our study?" asked Tommy Watson at last.

"That's the idea!"

"By gad! The dear fellow is rather swift!" murmured Sir Montie. "But he's got sense. I can see that, although others may not. He possesses great brain-power. How did he know that Study C was the best in the Ancient

House? How did he know it, Tommy? He must have second sight!"

"Not at all; but I've got eyes," I replied. "I can see that you're both good fellows—and I'm a good fellow. We'll pull well together, I'm certain. Suppose we have a week's trial, anyhow?"

I was smiling, and I knew that my suggestion had rather startled the pair. For a new fellow to act as I was acting was rather astonishing. But that's what I was out for. I meant to make things hum right from the start.

"Is it a go?" I persisted.

Tommy Watson fixed his blue, good-natured eyes upon me.

"I'm willing," he said, after a slight pause.

"As for me, I'm agreeable to anything you like," said Tregellis-West. "Anything for the sake of peace is my motto. Bennett, dear fellow, come to our arms. You will find a haven of refuge in Study C. It is whitewashed, and it is dirty, but we rise above such mundane trifles."

I chuckled. Sir Montie was something of a surprise in himself.

"I'm coming into the Ancient House because I've heard a good deal about Fullwood and his dear friends," I explained. "Fullwood is the leader of the Fossils, I understand?"

Watson frowned.

"Rats to Fullwood!" he growled. "We don't want to talk about the rotter!"

"So my information was correct?"

"If your information was to the effect that Fullwood is every variety of an outsider, then it certainly was correct," said Sir Montie languidly. "Fullwood, my excellent Bennett, is a goer. He is a Nut—the Chief Nut, I might say. He sets the pattern for the Ancient House, and, alas, a great many fellows follow his lead. Why is it so? Why is human nature so depraved? I am sad."

"Don't take any notice of this ass!" grinned Tommy Watson. "He can't help it, you know—he's always like that. Born in him. You'll soon get accustomed to him. Come along to Study C. Hold on, though. Hadn't you better go and ask the Housemaster? He usually decides which study a new fellow has to go into. Tell him you've fixed it up, and he'll be all right, I dare say."

I grinned; I couldn't help it. The Housemaster, Mr. Alvington, was the gov'nor himself. I wanted to see him, to let him know how I'd got on. So I seized this opportunity. It was necessary

for me to have a good reason for going to the Housemaster's study. We were master and pupil now, and I couldn't go to him just whenever I pleased. Any familiarity between us would have been noticeable—and that's what we had to avoid.

Leaving my two friends—whom I really liked—I entered the lobby and turned to the right. Watson had given me directions, and I soon came to a door, with the word "Housemaster" painted upon it. I knocked.

"Come in!" called a strange voice.

I entered the study, and found myself in the presence of Mr. Peter Alvington. He was sitting at his desk busily writing. As I came in he laid his pen down and smiled.

Mr. Alvington was a man of about fifty-five; tall, austere, grey-haired, and grey-whiskered. He wore pince-nez, and his shoulders were more than usually rounded. His grey eyes were twinkling.

"Well, Bennett, what is it?" he asked curtly.

I closed the door tightly and grinned.

"Oh, come off it, guv'nor!" I exclaimed softly. "You look ripping! But when we're alone we're not master and pupil; we're just ourselves. My hat! I'm having a roaring time!"

Nelson Lee lay back in his chair.

"I'm not satisfied that we are wise in recognising one another, young 'un," he said seriously. "Perhaps it will be safe, but you must not stop long. Under no circumstances must our true relations become known to the boys."

"Trust me, guv'nor!" I said, squatting on the corner of his desk.

I chuckled as I did so. I would have given pounds to have seen Tommy Watson's face at that moment—if he could have seen me! Squatting on the Housemaster's desk, and calling him "guv'nor"!

The situation was full of humour.

But Nelson Lee was serious enough.

"You got away all right?" he asked keenly.

"Everything's passed off beautifully, sir," I replied. "Why, those Tong blighters will never find us here. We're as safe as eggs. I've been having a lovely time. Of course, I'm in this House—I've chummed up with a couple of fellows in Study C. I've come here to ask you if I can go into that study."

The guv'nor chuckled.

"Anywhere you like, Nipper," he said. "But I mustn't use that name—even when we're alone. While I think of it,

I have something to tell you. You will sleep in a separate room to-night, and shift into the Remove dormitory to-morrow. At eleven o'clock you must get up and come down to me. There's work to be done."

"What sort, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"I have been examining this apartment thoroughly, and I have discovered several things," replied Lee. "Mr. Thorne, as you know, mysteriously disappeared a few days ago. We have got to find him, young 'un. But I can't say any more now. We will discuss the matter to-night, after the House is asleep. How are you falling into the new life? Do you find it difficult?"

"Easy as winking, sir!" I grinned. "I'm going to make things hum in the Ancient House. I'm going to create the very dickens!"

Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"Go ahead!" he chuckled, in a very unmasterlike way. "Only, mind that you don't fall foul of me, my lad. If I catch you at anything that's against the school rules I shall have to punish you just the same as any other boy!"

"What a cheery prospect!" I smiled. "But I say, sir, this House seems to be in a bad state, by what I can hear."

Lee nodded.

"Mr. Thorne was disgracefully lax," he agreed. "He has left me a legacy of incompetance and slackness which will be difficult to cope with. I shall have much to do in the way of reform. You, among the juniors, will be able to help. But you'd better cut along now."

"Right, sir!" I said. "I'll see you again to-night."

The guv'nor nodded, and I left him. We were both immensely relieved by the way our plans had succeeded, and I, for my part, was enjoying myself tremendously. The prospect of encountering the redoubtable Fullwood was a pleasant one.

When I had arrived at Study C I found that Tommy Watson and Tregellis West had been tidying up in my honour. This was rather a compliment, and I appreciated it. The two fellows hadn't known me ten minutes. But, somehow, I knew that they had "taken" to me, just as I had "taken" to them.

Watson was a good-tempered, cheerful sort of chap. Very possibly my rough treatment at Christine & Co.'s hands had put me into immediate favour with the two Fossils. Since I was at enmity with Bob Christine & Co.—friendly enmity,

of course—it was natural that I should be pally with Study C.

For I found very soon that Study C was the leader of all the decent juniors in the Ancient House. I certainly couldn't have made better friends than Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

Watson was an absolutely straight chap, but I could see that he wasn't very imaginative. He hadn't got any power as a leader. His word didn't go, so to speak. That's where I came in. I rather pride myself that I've got cheek enough for half-a-dozen, and I'd easily make up for Tommy's lack of it.

Tregellis-West was a queer stick in his way, but I grew to like him tremendously. He was a terrific swell always, and as true as steel. His code of honour was of a very high order. I didn't find these characteristics out all in a second, it must be understood; but it's better to make things clear straight away. Sir Montie generally spoke slowly, and when he spoke he said things different from any other chap. And he was always smiling and urbane. Nobody had ever succeeded in making him angry. Nothing could disturb his equanimity. He was serene always.

If he had any occasion to punch a fellow's nose, he would punch with a smile on his face; if he had a real scrap, he was just as nonchalant. He was always lazy, and yet he was certainly the finest cricketer in the Ancient House, and was as keen as mustard when he liked to be.

Upon the whole, I was delighted with my study mates.

"Well?" inquired Tommy Watson, as I strode into Study C.

"All serene!" I said. "I'm going to dig with you two fellows. Do you do prep. here, by any chance?"

"At St. Frank's, do you mean?" asked Tommy. "Of course we do! You won't have any prep. to-night, though, being a new fellow."

There was a tap at the door, and then a big Sixth-Former looked in.

"Hallo! I heard there was a new kid," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Got fixed up with a study yet, nipper?"

I gasped.

"Yes. I--I'm staying in this study, thanks!" I exclaimed.

"We've taken the excellent Bennett under our wing, dear fellow," said Tregellis-West lazily. "He came to us in sore trouble, and we haven't the heart to turn him away. In future Bennett

belongs to Study C. And, by gad, I have an idea that he will prove to be a valuable acquisition."

"It's all right, Morrow," said Watson. "We'll see after the new chap."

The Sixth-Former departed, with a nod. Just for a moment I had been decidedly startled. When he had called me "nipper," I had thought for a second that he knew my name. But I realised in time that there was nothing in it.

"Morrow's a good chap," Watson exclaimed to me. "Head prefect of this House, you know. Fenton's the school skipper—Fenton, of the College House—"

There was a tramp of many feet outside in the passage.

Then the door burst open without ceremony, and five or six juniors crowded in as though they owned the place!

Watson and Tregellis-West frowned, and I grinned.

Fullwood & Co. had arrived!

CHAPTER IV.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD MEANS BUSINESS
—AND SO DO I!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was looking grim.

I had seen him once before, but only at a distance. Now I was enabled to inspect him with greater accuracy. He was a fellow of about Watson's age, but somewhat more barly. At the same time, he was a dandy in every sense of the word, and a monocle was screwed into his left eye.

The fellows with him were Gulliver and Ball, his own especial chums of Study A, and Merrell and Mariott and Noys. These six juniors were the Nuts Bob Christine had told me of.

I was rather surprised to see that Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were looking not only uncomfortable, but just a little startled.

For a moment there was silence.

"Is this usual?" I inquired politely.

"Is what usual?" asked Fullwood, looking at me aggressively.

"I have always understood that a fellow's study is regarded as private," I replied. "It is the usual thing to knock before entering. When you come again, Fullwood, you'll knock, won't you?"

"By gad," murmured Tregellis-West, "things will happen! Things will cer-

tainly happen in a very few seconds! Tommy, dear fellow, observe Fullwood's face. Allow me to point out the sweet curve of his lips, the glint in his eyes, the dilation of his nostrils. Most decidedly things will happen!"

"You shut your head, West!" exclaimed Fullwood savagely. "You keep the door closed, you chaps. I've been told to knock at the door by a new kid! I don't allow that! And the new kid is going to learn some facts."

"Oh, I think I know all about you, my dear Fullwood," I said blandly. "You're a blackguard, I believe? A Nut of the first order—a smoky, gambling bounder? Have I got the facts correct?"

Several of Fullwood's dear pals chuckled audibly.

"He knows you already, Fullwood, dear boy!" murmured Tregellis-West.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood remained quite calm.

"I came here to tell this new beast that he'd got no right to enter any study without asking my permission. I'm the chief of the Ancient House Remove, and I don't allow any cheeky rotters to do as they like. What's your name?"

I appeared to consider.

"Well, it isn't Fullwood!" I replied. "I wouldn't own a name like that!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Fullwood, losing his temper at last.

"Hold on!" I continued. "I've got something else to say. I'm not going to ask you or anybody else what I'm going to do in this House. I came to this study at the express wish of its owners. You're not a prefect by any chance, Fullwood? You don't happen to have any authority?"

Fullwood was quite at a loss. He had evidently expected me to be humble and submissive and frightened. I should never have spoken as I had spoken if he hadn't tried to ride the high horse. I knew that a ragging would probably follow, but I wasn't afraid of that.

Fullwood's chums were looking startled and astounded. One or two of them were grinning. Probably they rather enjoyed seeing their famous leader taken down a peg or two. Watson and Tregellis-West were serious and smiling respectively.

Sir Montie gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"It doesn't appear to be falling!" he remarked, in a puzzled tone. "I half expected the heavens to crash down——"

"You shut up!" snapped Fullwood furiously. "And look here, you!"—turning on me in a flurry of anger. "You're going to pay for what you just said! I'm the boss of this show—understand? I don't suppose you know any better, being a new kid. But you're going to toe the line!"

"What line?" I inquired.

"The line I have set up!" shouted Fullwood savagely. "You're going to lose all this cheek of yours, and you're going to crawl at my feet before I've done with you! You're going to beg my pardon this very minute!"

"Your mistake!" I said politely. "I'm not!"

"Better do it!" muttered Watson, in my ear. "They'll scrag you frightfully if you set your back up against 'em!"

"I can look after myself, thanks," I replied.

The Nuts made a movement towards me.

"Just a minute!" I exclaimed, holding up my hand. "I just want to give you fellows warning. If you lay your dirty paws on me, there's going to be trouble! Is that clear? I'm not going to stand any nonsense!"

"Not—not goin' to stand any nonsense!" stuttered Gulliver. "Oh, my hat!"

"I'm a peaceful chap," I went on calmly—"very peaceful. But you have to treat me with respect. If you get my back up, there's trouble. It may not come immediately, but the natural outcome of butting against me is—trouble! I thought you'd better know that before you do anything rash."

Fullwood adjusted his eyeglass deliberately.

"You're awfully kind an' considerate," he said coolly, but with a steely glitter in his eyes. "Just now I was gettin' wild. That was silly of me! Fellows of your sort are best dealt with calmly. You're goin' to get it in the neck! What's your beastly name?"

"I haven't got one," I replied.

"Haven't got a name?" demanded Marriott, from behind.

"Oh, yes! I'm Dick Bennett," I said. "But Fullwood asked about a 'beastly' name. Bennett isn't beastly that I know of."

Tommy Watson grinned, but he was looking anxious.

"Better stop this rotting, old son!" he muttered. "They'll skin you!"

"Dear fellow, pray don't interrupt," protested Sir Montie, fixing his pince-nez on more securely. "Let the excellent Bennett ramble on. He is entertainin'. This is the best show I've had this term! Fullwood's face is an interestin' study. I am engrossed. I shall have to shake hands with Bennett later on—I shall, really!"

Fullwood grinned sourly.

"He'll need revivin' somehow" he said grimly.

"You're going to rag me?" I inquired, without turning a hair.

"Don't you expect to be ragged, you cheeky rotter?" asked Matthew Noya, of Study G.

"Well, yes, I do expect it——"

"Then you won't be disappointed," grinned Fullwood. "Collar him!"

I was collared. I didn't make any attempt to resist. Now and again, while engaged upon detective work, I have faced desperate criminals. When I'm outnumbered hopelessly, I don't act the goat. I give in. And I gave in now. It saved a lot of trouble and pain. Besides, Fullwood & Co. were disappointed.

They thought that I was going to struggle and hit out; then they'd have an excuse for handling me roughly. But I was as quiet as a lamb, and grinned with apparent enjoyment. Plainly Fullwood & Co. didn't quite know how to take me, and Tommy Watson and Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West were openly astonished. Sir Montie, however, was smiling urbanely the whole while.

"We're outclassed, Tommy, dear fellow," I heard him drawl. "And Fullwood's outclassed, too, by gad! This new fellow is mustard. He is cayenne. He'll astonish the natives before long. He will, really!"

I had an idea that I was astonishing the natives already, but I could see that something really revolutionary would have to be accomplished in the Ancient House. Fullwood & Co. reigned supreme. It was really amazing. The House was "run" by a set of blackguardly fellows who ought to have been barred. But Fullwood & Co. had firmly established themselves, and they'd take a deal of upsetting.

I soon had a taste of their delightful methods.

Surrounded by the Nuts, I was taken down to the common-room. This was at the foot of a few stairs, for the

common-room was like a semi-basement; a huge, bare apartment, with green-washed walls, two fireplaces, and several chairs and tables. The floor was covered with oilcloth of no particular pattern.

There were a good many fellows in the common-room, and they looked on with interest as Fullwood & Co. crowded in. Watson and Tregellis-West lounged in behind. The latter was still smiling.

"A rag, dear fellows," he said, addressing the Removites. "The new fellow has incurred the wrath of the mighty Fullwood. Ructions are about to commence. Earthquakes will now happen. It is sad, but Fullwood must be satisfied."

I looked round calmly.

"Now, here's your chance, you fellows," I said. "Look alive!"

"What do you mean?" demanded one chap, whose name was Church.

"Why, rescue me, of course!" I said. "I can't rescue myself, can I? I'm not a Hercules! I can't fight six. My idea is to wipe up the floor with Fullwood and his dear friends."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"You'll find things out soon, you new fathead!"

"Go it, Fullwood!" grinned another junior—a fat, weak-eyed little bounder.

"I am going it, Lanky!" said Fullwood coolly. "It's a rag. This cheeky new beast has had the nerve to buck against my orders, and he's going to pay for it! If there's any interference——"

"Oh, get it over, you cad!" snapped Tommy Watson.

But even Watson made no attempt to rescue me. Fullwood, it seemed, held complete sway over the Ancient House Remove. There wasn't a single fellow among the whole crowd who had the instinct of leadership in him. They were disunited; they hadn't any notion of opposition. Yet there were plenty of really decent fellows in the Fossils' camp.

Well, I went through it properly.

I was ragged unmercifully by Fullwood & Co. Most of the fellows looked on with disapproval and anger, but they didn't interfere. The tubby, watery-eyed junior, whose name was Teddy Long—usually called Lanky—regarded the whole proceeding as first-class. He wasn't a member of the exclusive Fullwood & Co., but he toadied to them, and was a regular little sneak and rotter.

I won't go into painful details of the

ragging. I'd rather draw a discreet veil over that episode. I'll only say that Fullwood & Co. revealed to me their true, vicious, vindictive, and cruel natures. An ordinary schoolboy ragging isn't much to hurt a fellow, but Fullwood had original ideas in the torture line.

I say torture because the ragging which Fullwood & Co. treated me to came jolly near the border. They didn't satisfy themselves by merely giving me the frog's-march, or something of that sort. They formed up in a line, and made me run the gauntlet. I was forced to stagger between the double line of fellows—for several other juniors had joined in the "fun"—and they whacked me with knotted handkerchiefs as I passed.

This in itself wasn't much, but Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, at least, tied marbles or stones into the knots, and I was three-parts dazed from hard blows by the time the thing was through. Fullwood & Co. were roaring with laughter, and enjoying themselves hugely.

I wasn't. But, all the same, I didn't show the white feather, and it was no good jibbing against this ragging. I should only have labelled myself a funk if I had done so; and, as I'm not a funk, I was anxious to create a decent impression. I think I did so.

After running the gauntlet, Fullwood & Co. put me through some other equally delightful amusements. But, as I said, I'll draw a veil over the precise details. One thing was certain—there'd never be another ragging like that at St. Frank's as long as I was there! I'd see to that.

At last Fullwood & Co. finished with me. They left me lying on the floor, utterly dazed and in considerable agony. Then they crowded out, laughing and joking, in order to celebrate the occasion in Study A.

"Foelin' rotten, dear fellow?"

Tregellis-West was bending over me, and I looked up with a weak sort of grin. I didn't blame Sir Montie or Tommy Watson in the least. Even if they had attempted to help me matters wouldn't have been improved. They would certainly have been ragged themselves.

"That's taught you a lesson, you new-bounder!" grinned Lanky Long, his little weak eyes gleaming with malicious joy. "P'r'aps you won't be so jolly cheeky in futuro—"

"Shut up, you little worm!" snapped Watson angrily.

"Look here, Watson, I ain't going to shut up— Yow!"

Lanky shut up quite suddenly. He had been seized by several of the chaps, and had been bumped. The sympathies of the Removites were with me, and they weren't inclined to stand Long's jibes.

Everybody expected me to crawl away and to become tremendously subdued. But I wasn't subdued, and I didn't crawl away. Without boasting, I think I can say that I was just as cool as ever.

Within me I was boiling with anger, but I didn't show it. I was fully determined to make Fullwood sit up for his treatment of me. A fight would be the finish of it, I knew, and it would be a stiff fight, for Fullwood was strong and burly.

At the moment it didn't suit my book to challenge Fullwood just yet. The Nuts had scored a triumph, and they fondly believed that I had been put in my place—that I was duly humbled, and that in future I should kow-tow to them as most of the other juniors did.

They were destined to receive a bit of a surprise before so very long. But to-night it wouldn't be the thing to engage in a terrific fight. I was thinking of Nelson Lee. The gov'nor had told me to go to him at eleven o'clock that night. There was work to be done. Therefore I didn't want to upset the gov'nor's plans for the night by being crocked. Fullwood was a mighty boxer, in spite of his smoking habits, and he'd be a handful even for me.

"It's a rotten shame!" declared Watson hotly. "My hat! We shall have to do something, you chaps! Fullwood's coming it a bit too thick!"

"In a way our excellent friend asked for trouble," remarked Sir Montie languidly. "Bennett, dear fellow, my heart goes out to you. It bleeds. At the same time, I must be allowed to remark that you are a fathead!"

"Thanks!" I said cheerfully.

"No offence, dear lad!" Tregellis-West hastened to say. "I wouldn't offend you for worlds. I respect you too highly. My esteem is too great to be put into blatant words. You are a marvel. I say that because you seem in no way humbled. Permit me to say, Bennett, that your eye is as steady as ever, your grin as cheerful. Let me shake hands, dear fellow!"

Sir Montie gripped my hand warmly, and the juniors grinned.

"That's Montie's little way," chuckled Watson. "When he shakes hands with you he's pleased. It's a great sign. He's your pal for life."

"True, dear Tommy—quite true," murmured Sir Montie solemnly.

"By Jupiter, I'm still a bit dazed!" I exclaimed. "I'm not going to brag, but Fullwood's going to pay for this! It seems to me that the Ancient House wants a leader—the Remove, I mean."

"And you're going to be that leader?" asked one fellow.

"Perhaps."

"Like your blessed cheek!"

"Oh, dry up, Handforth!" growled Tommy Watson. "We don't want any of your rot now! If you ask me, I reckon Bennett will make things hum before long. I'm ready to follow his lead, anyhow, although he is a new kid!"

"You ass! He's only been at St. Frank's a few hours!" bawled Handforth.

"Never mind!" drawled Sir Montie. "He's the goods, Handy—the real goods!"

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"I'm the leader of the Fossils!" he declared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites were hugely amused. And, later, I discovered the reason. Edward Oswald Handforth had a curious idea that he was a born leader. Coupled with this idea he had a fist with a terrific drive, and nobody was particularly anxious to argue with it.

Handforth was allowed to harbour that delusion. He ruled his study with an iron hand. His chums, Church and McClure, were his faithful followers in everything. Handforth didn't speak—he bawled. His voice resembled a foghorn, and his eye possessed a perpetual glare.

But as a leader Handforth was hopeless. The only advice which was any good was his own. He treated everybody else with contempt, and, as a consequence, nobody took him seriously. This was a constant grievance with Handforth, as I soon discovered.

I also discovered, however, that Edward Oswald was a really decent fellow in the main. He would lend a fellow his last ten bob just as soon as he would punch his head. In fact, he'd often punch a fellow's head, and lend him ten bob during the next five minutes. He had a great idea of his own importance, and

the only drawback was that not another soul shared that idea.

"As a matter of fact," bawled Handforth, amid the laughter, "I think that Bennett ought to have another ragging for being such an ass as to buck against Fullwood. Personally, I think Fullwood's a rotten cad and a fearful blackguard, but he's got power in this House, and we can't suppress him."

"We'll try, anyhow," I said quietly. "My programme is to break Fullwood's power just as soon as ever I can——"

"Dry up!"

"Swanker!"

"Cheek!"

I looked round in surprise.

"Absolute cheek!" declared McClure. "You're only a new kid. This is your first day, and you make a fat-headed suggestion like that! If you do cheek Fullwood again, you'll get it in the neck, my son!"

The common-room door burst open, and the unlanky form of Lanky Long rolled in. I hadn't seen him go out, but he had evidently been spying.

"I say, chaps," he exclaimed, with a grin, "Fullwood & Co. are going strong in Study A. They're celebrating the occasion by holding a smoking party. They're gambling for money, too!"

"You blessed little nosey-parker!" growled Handforth glaringly.

"Oh, so Fullwood & Co. are smoking and gambling!" I said grimly, making up my mind on the spur of the moment. "Now, you fellows, it's up to you! I call for volunteers!"

"Volunteers!" yelled Church. "What for?"

"Why, to raid Fullwood's study as an opening lesson!"

"You frightful ass!"

"Can't be did, old scout," said Watson uneasily.

"And why not?"

"Oh, hang it all! We can't raid Fullwood's study!" said Watson uncomfortably. "It's—it's impossible!"

I didn't say much, but I thought a lot. Tommy was plucky enough, I knew, but the thought of raiding the mighty Fullwood's study appalled him evidently. But it didn't appal me. Before a week was out, I'd have a different spirit in these Remove fellows!

"I believe all you chaps are called Fossils?" I asked deliberately.

"What if we are?" asked Handforth.

"Well, you are Fossils—that's all!"



We saw a little narrow opening running flush with the cliff.—(See p. 27.)

I said, breathing hard. "You want some life put into you! You're named jolly well! Fossils! My hat! You're more like a set of dead mummies!"

There was an angry roar.

"You cheeky new bounder——"

"Calling me names won't do me any harm!" I roared grimly. "Now, listen! Will any fellow come with me to raid Fullwood's study? I give you ten seconds to answer! If nobody steps forward, then I'll go alone!"

Somehow or other the tone of my voice seemed to hush the whole crowd. They just stared at me in wonder and astonishment. I waited with flashing eyes and clenched fists. By Jove, I'd show these chaps some spirit, anyhow!

"Nobody coming?" I asked tartly.

"By gad, I can't let you go alone, my good Bennett," drawled Sir Montie painfully. "I'll come, dear fellow. I'll go to the sacrifice like a martyr. You're an ass, an' I'm an ass. We make a pair. But I can't let you go alone. That would be too utterly rotten!"

I gave Tregellis-West a warm look.

"Good man!" I said briskly. "Anybody else?"

But not another junior moved, and Tregellis-West and I left the common-room. We heard a general gasp as we closed the door behind us.

CHAPTER V.

I DELIVER THE FIRST BLOW WITH SUCCESS.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY-TREGELLIS-WEST looked at me rather queerly through his pince-nez as we mounted the few steps from the common-room to the big lobby. He coughed.

"Dear boy, this is going to be hot!" he said quietly.

"Think so?" I chuckled. "My dear old chap, I'm not going to adopt any bulldog tactics. That's not my line. What we've got to do, as we're so small in number, is to adopt a ruse."

"By gad, a—a ruse?" repeated Sir Montie blankly.

"Exactly!"

"Forgive me, Bennett, old boy," he pleaded. "I'm dull. You may not know it, but I am habitually stupid. I fail to see things, you know. Queer, isn't it? A ruse, you said? I am at a loss."

"You're a blessed fraud, Montie!" I grinned. "You know it, too. You're

just as keen as I am, anyhow. The idea is to give Fullwood & Co. a thorough start, and to confiscate their smokes and cards. Then we'll take 'em down to the common-room and burn 'em. That'll make the fellows stare."

Sir Montie grinned.

"Precisely," he agreed. "I should stare myself, dear fellow. I wish I had your brains. I can't see how it's going to be done. As I haven't, will you be good enough to explain?"

"You wait and see, old son!" was all I said.

We came to the Remove passage, and found it deserted. From Study A, however, came sounds of laughter and jollity.

"Stay here until you're wanted!" I whispered.

"I'm your willin' slave, dear Bennett!"

Sir Montie stood stock still, and I moved on. But my tread was now very different. I walked heavily and deliberately, and at last came to a stop outside Study A. I sniffed the air noisily and then coughed.

From within the study came some hushed whispers.

I rapped on the door sharply, and then turned the handle. As I had strongly suspected, the door was locked. If it hadn't been, my little wheeze would have been ruined on the spot.

"Why is this door locked?" I asked sternly, and I spoke in the guv'nor's exact tones—in his character of Mr. Alvington.

I think I'm a bit of a dab at mimicking voices, as the guv'nor will tell anybody, and this was dead easy.

Not a sound came from the study.

"Open this door at once!" I went on sharply. "Upon my soul, can I smell tobacco smoke? This is outrageous!"

I listened intently, and heard the study window open. I had guessed things exactly. Fullwood & Co. thought that I was the Housemaster, as I had intended. I turned my head and beckoned to Tregellis-West.

"Sharp's the word!" I muttered crisply.

I entered the study with Sir Montie close at my heels. The electric light was switched off, and the room was empty; but the air was thick with tobacco-smoke, and the window was open, although the thick blind was down. I switched the lights on.

"You stand by the window, Montie," I whispered hurriedly.

In a few seconds I had found what I wanted. A box of cigarettes and a pack of cards had been hastily stuffed into one of the drawers of Fullwood's desk. I grabbed them, and then grinned.

"All serene!" I murmured. "We'll clear now!"

"Dear boy, I am bewildered——"

"Rats! Come on!"

"But what the merry dickens——"

"You don't want us to be collared in here, I suppose?" I asked. "Fullwood will smell a rat in two ticks!"

We switched off the light and left the study. The passage was quite deserted, and I grinned at Tregellis-West and glanced at the confiscated property. The cards were expensive ones and the cigarettes a "swell" brand. The box contained about ninety.

"Hallo! What's that you've got?" I asked suddenly.

"I spotted them on the window-ledge, old boy," replied Sir Montie apologetically. "Have I done right? Do you approve? I am anxious."

He was carrying a couple of dark bottles with gold-foil at the top.

"Champagne!" I exclaimed, with a whistle. "Jupiter! Fullwood means going the pace, and no mistake! Do I approve? You ass, of course I do! But let's get back to the common-room. I can hear ominous sounds."

Fullwood & Co. were returning, and Montie and I buzzed along the passage and made for the Remove common-room. Several fellows in the lobby looked at us curiously as we passed, but we didn't stop.

The common-room was still crowded.

"Hallo! Given it up?" asked Tommy Watson, with a chuckle.

"No. We've come back victorious," I replied somewhat tartly. "No thanks to you, though."

"I say, I wanted to come with you," Watson urged, "but you cleared out before I could speak, and then the fellows wouldn't let me go. Said there was no need for me to be slaughtered, too!"

I grinned.

"There's been no slaughtering," I replied. "We just raided the enemy's dug-out, that's all, and we've brought considerable booty away with us. It's just the forerunner of a big offensive, you know."

I held up the cigarettes and the cards, and there was a general gasp.

"Fullwood's habits are really disgusting," said Tregellis-West serenely. "Champagne an' smokes an' cards. Dear boys, Bennett and I have been successful. My respect for him has increased a hundredfold. He is a top-holer."

The Removites crowded round us.

"How—how did you get those things?" roared Handforth amazedly.

"Took them!" I said.

"Great Scott!"

"Surprisin', dear fellows, but it's a fact," drawled Sir Montie.

"Well, I take back what I said," declared Edward Oswald Handforth. "If you can go and bone Fullwood's rotten smokes and cards like that, Bennett, you must be a corker!"

"It's a trick!" shouted Church.

"That's what it is——"

He paused as I walked across to one of the fireplaces. I bent down and set a match to a litter of paper in the grate. There was soon a big blaze, and I piled the cigarettes and the cards on.

"I say, chaps, what a rotten waste!" piped Long indignantly. "All those cigs. being burnt! We could have had them ourselves!"

"Shut up, you fat toad!" snapped McClure. "We don't want the muck!"

"But how the dickens——" began Hubbard, another Remove fellow.

Then the common-room door opened, and Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell came in, followed by Merrell & Co. They were all looking savage. Ralph Leslie Fullwood had a grim glitter in his eyes. His monocle was hanging loose on its cord.

"Anything the matter, dear friend?" asked Sir Montie sweetly.

"There's going to be trouble!" snapped Fullwood. "That interferin' beast of an Alvington has been to my study! Old Thorne had sense enough to keep out of the fellows' studies, but this new rotter had better go easy!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Handforth.

"Alvington's been nosin' round!" said Fullwood savagely. "Came to my study an' forced his way in!"

"We only just slipped through the window in time!" growled Gulliver. "He'll make a row about it, I dare say. The study was a bit smoky. Still, it's

no business of his what we do in our own quarters. The rotten pickpocket!"

"Pickpocket!" shouted McClure.

"Well, he took our cigs. and cards away with him——"

"What!" roared Handforth.

"He took our fags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites roared with merriment.

"Jolly funny, isn't it?" snarled Fullwood, glaring round.

"It is—thundering funny!" grinned Tommy Watson. "Too funny for words! And you thought that Alvington——"

"We didn't think—we knew," snapped Bell savagely. "He came and knocked at the door, and we only skipped into the Triangle in time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows were yelling, and I grinned with appreciation. I had created an impression, at all events. Sir Montie grinned with me, but he was somewhat uneasy. He could see trouble coming along, but he wasn't afraid of that.

"What are you cacklin' at, you idiots?" shouted Fullwood.

"Look in the fireplace, Fullwood!" chortled Lanky Long gleefully.

Fullwood started.

Then he gazed at the blazing mass in the grate. Then his eyes travelled to the two champagne-bottles which Tregellis-West still held in his hands. Fullwood understood in a flash.

"We've been tricked, you fellows!" he exclaimed thickly. "It wasn't Alvington at all!"

"Oh, glory!" gasped Gulliver. "Who—who did it?"

"I did!" I said coolly. "Cigarettes and champagne aren't good for little boys. I thought you'd be healthier without them!"

Fullwood & Co. simply stared in wonder.

"You—you came an' pinched our cigarettes and cards?" he asked dazedly. I nodded.

The common-room was strangely still. The fellows waited with bated breath. Then a hissing gasp came from Fullwood's lips. It was a gasp of absolute fury, and I looked round. This time I expected some backing from the chaps.

Just then another Removite entered.

"Hallo! What's the rumpus?" he asked, staring round.

"You shut up, Owen Major!"

"Rats! The Housemaster's just coming," said Owen Major. "Better look sneek and mild."

"Another trick, I suppose!" snarled Fullwood. "But it's not going to save this precious new bounder. We've put him through the mill once, but this time he'll wish he'd never been born!"

"Alvington's coming, you ass!" said Owen Major.

"Hang Alvington!"

"Ahem!"

Fullwood swung round with a crimson face. Mr. Alvington was standing in the doorway. He wore a grim expression, and I chuckled. The guv'nor looked the part to the life. The other fellows simply gaped with consternation.

The guv'nor stepped into the common-room.

"Your name, my boy!" he said, addressing Fullwood.

"Fullwood, sir!" growled the leader of Study A.

"You will write me a hundred lines, Fullwood, and bring them to me before afternoon lessons to-morrow," said Mr. Alvington gently.

"What for, sir?" demanded Fullwood truculently.

"You were disrespectful."

"You weren't suppose to hear what I said, sir!" exclaimed Fullwood. "Mr. Thorne never took any notice of anything he chanced to overhear."

"It is not necessary for you to quote Mr. Thorne's example to me, Fullwood," said the guv'nor gently. "You are impertinent, boy! You will write three hundred lines!"

"Mr. Thorne never gave me lines at all!" roared Fullwood angrily.

"I am your Housemaster now, Fullwood, and you'll do as I order you," said Mr. Alvington sharply. "I did not wish to give any boy lines during my first day at the college, but I cannot overlook your conduct!"

"What have I done?" demanded Fullwood hotly.

"Unless you can address me respectfully, Fullwood, you will receive, not lines, but a severe caning!"

"Kuk-kuk-caning, sir?" gasped Fullwood, as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Apparently the prospect appals you," said the guv'nor drily. "Take heed of my words, Fullwood, and bring me those lines as I ordered. You appear to imagine that you are a person of some importance. That is quite a mistake on your part. And, in future, you will take that absurd monocle out of your eye while I am addressing you!"

Fullwood didn't say a word. He just looked terrifically ferocious, and when he saw that the other fellows were all grinning he nearly burst a blood vessel. The guv'nor had just come at the right moment, and I was feeling pleased.

And a second ragging did not take place.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUV'NOR AND I EMBARK UPON A NIGHT EXPEDITION AND SEE THINGS.

ELEVEN o'clock boomed out from the old tower which surmounted the College House at St. Frank's.

I was fully dressed, and had been waiting for the hour to chime for some minutes. During my wait I had been pondering over the events of the evening. To say the least, my first few hours at St. Frank's had been somewhat interesting.

Fullwood and his pals had received their first check, and they didn't like it. After the guv'nor's visit to the common-room, Fullwood had slouched off to his study without a word. Gulliver and Bell had politely informed me that I should have to look out for myself on the morrow.

Further trouble was brewing, I knew, but I wasn't worried. Why should I be? My idea was to break Fullwood's power as soon as I could. A big step in that direction would be Fullwood's defeat in a fight. A fight was bound to come; in fact, I was pretty sure that Ralph Leslie himself would challenge me in the morning. Another ragging wouldn't meet the case; I had to be completely squashed.

The Nuts of Studies A and G were beginning to realise, too, that life would not be so easy under the new Housemaster's rule. Mr. Alvington would not wink at their sordid "blagging" as Mr. Thorne had done.

It was rather a good thing that I slept by myself that night. If I'd been placed in the Remove dormitory, I'm jolly certain I should have been mauled about.

But there was important work to be done.

Being no ordinary schoolboy, I was, of course, allowed special privileges on the quiet. As, for instance, this occasion. At a time when all the juniors were asleep I was allowed to go down to the Housemaster's study. For some hours, at least, I should cease being a

schoolboy, and should become Nelson Lee's assistant once more.

While the chimes were still quivering on the air I left my little bedroom and noiselessly descended. The house was all quiet. Juniors and seniors were all in their little cots.

But when I got to the guv'nor's study I found Dr. Stafford there. The Head was a kindly old gentleman with a grave, lined face. He looked up at me and smiled as I softly closed the door behind me.

"Mr.—er—Alvington informed me that you were coming down, my boy," he said gently. "Upon my soul, it is difficult for me to realise that you are not one of my junior pupils!"

"But I am, sir!" I put in smilingly. "I may be Nipper, really, but that's all dead for six months. I'm Dick Bennett now, and I think I shall enjoy life at St. Frank's tremendously."

"I am glad of that—er—Bennett!" exclaimed the Head. "But you must not let me interrupt your labours. Mr. Lee. Dear me! I must not make those mistakes, must I? Mr. Alvington I should have said!"

The guv'nor chuckled.

"The position is somewhat extraordinary, Dr. Stafford!" he smiled. "But we shall soon fall into the way of things, I am sure. Of course, this sort of thing is most unusual. I shall not permit Nipper to leave his bed at night very often. But I have shrewd suspicions that we may be able to get on the track of the unfortunate Mr. Thorne almost at once."

"That's fine, guv'nor!" I exclaimed eagerly.

"You see, young 'un," went on Nelson Lee, "the police have not taken much trouble over this affair. They believe that Mr. Thorne left the school voluntarily for private reasons of his own. There has been no direct proof that the master was kidnapped. He is simply missing. And as there are some thousands of cases of missing people reported to the police yearly, they cannot investigate every individual case very closely. When—as in this affair—a man has obviously vanished from his usual—er—haunts, they merely instruct police-officers to keep their eyes open. But it is not always wise to believe the obvious."

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked curiously.

"You may not have heard the actual

facts. Nipper," said the gov'nor, lighting a cigar and crossing his legs. "One night, a few days ago, Mr. Thorne informed the Headmaster that he would be at work in his study until late. In the morning Mr. Thorne was missing. The electric light in this room was full on, and the window was wide open. From that minute Mr. Thorne had not been seen. There is no actual evidence of violence—hence, the inactivity of the police!"

"But you've been active, I'll bet!" I remarked.

"Dr. Stafford will have you before the school for a flogging if you bet, young 'un!" smiled Nelson Lee. "Yes, I have been active. I won't go into details—there is no time for that. Two pieces of evidence I have discovered lead me to a definite conclusion. Mr. Thorne was forcibly taken from his room and conveyed to the seashore."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Dr. Stafford mildly.

The gov'nor wouldn't explain, and he and I took our departure almost at once. We left the school grounds and started out on the three-mile trudge to the coast—Caistowe Bay."

"A bit thick, leaving the Head unsatisfied, gov'nor!" I remarked, as we walked briskly along. "What are the clues you've found, anyhow?"

"A very slight bloodstain on the window-sill—pointing to violence—and a scrap of dried seaweed which I discovered underneath the desk."

"Dried seaweed!"

"Exactly. Where could that have come from, young 'un?" went on Lee keenly. "Obviously the seashore—possibly a cave. There are numerous caves in Caistowe Bay. I have read the case this way. Some men, for reasons best known to themselves, have thought it necessary to kidnap Mr. Thorne. They decided to hold him a prisoner in one of the caves. They went to the cave, prepared it, and then came up to the school. One of the kidnappers had a piece of seaweed clinging to his boot, and this became detached in Mr. Thorne's study. A slim clue, my boy, but a likely one. My whole theory may be at fault, but it will be better to make sure."

"H'm! It is a bit thin, gov'nor!" I remarked critically. "Still, a slim thread sometimes proves to be the strongest."

The night was very dark and still.

During our three-mile walk we didn't meet a soul. This was just as well, for it would have looked curious to any outsider to see a Housemaster and a junior schoolboy out together at half-past eleven at night.

When we got to the coast we skirted past the fishing-village of Caistowe, and went on to the downs. The Channel stretched away before us in a huge, black expanse, and, down below, the waves were gently breaking on the shingle.

Curiously enough, even as we gazed down, we saw a light among the rocks almost immediately below us. The gov'nor whipped out a pair of night-glasses in a flash and focused them.

"A storm-lantern!" he murmured. "There are two men, Nipper. They seem to be entering—Ah, they have vanished!"

The light had vanished, too.

"Talk about luck!" I exclaimed. "A quid to an old bootlace those blighters were the men we're after! Are we going down, sir?"

"Most certainly!"

The cliffs here were sloping, and we succeeded in scrambling down without much difficulty. But, in the darkness, we could find no trace of an opening. The rocks were jagged and rough, and there were deep pools left by the receding tide on every hand. At last we gave it up.

"This is a daylight job, young 'un!" murmured Lee. "We must come here to-morrow and examine the place more thoroughly. I have hopes—distinct hopes!"

We reached the cliff top after a hard struggle.

"But, look, here, sir," I exclaimed pantingly. "it would look rummy, wouldn't it? We can't come down here by ourselves."

"I don't intend to, Bennett," smiled Nelson Lee. "To-morrow is a half-holiday, and, during the afternoon, you and some other boys will accompany me for a ramble among the caves. If we discover anything of importance we shall do so by accident. Do you understand—by accident?"

"I twig, gov'nor!" I grinned.

It was really the only course to pursue. We couldn't go alone, as I said, for that would attract attention. But a party of juniors, accompanied by a master, was nothing out of the common. The other fellows would think that it

'was just an ordinary jaunt, but the guv'nor and I would know otherwise.

One little incident occurred before we arrived at the school again. As we were going up the lane from the village we passed the White Harp Inn. Here, Tommy Watson had told me, Fullwood & Co. sometimes spent hours at gambling with shady characters. And, by a queer chance, we heard a door open at the back of the inn as we passed.

Through a gap in the hedge I spotted three dim figures cutting across the garden towards a gate which led to the towing-path. I didn't say a word to the guv'nor. But I knew that those three figures belonged to Fullwood and two of his pals.

If I had spoken to Nelson Lee about it he would, of course, have had to take action. And that would have been sneaking on my part. As it was, I made up my mind to deal with Fullwood & Co. personally.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH—FOR FULLWOOD !

"WITH or without gloves?"

"Eh?"

"With or without gloves—just as you like!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood contemptuously.

It was the next day, and morning lessons were over. In the Remove Form-room I had had an easy time. Mr. Crowell, the Remove-master, was a nice little chap, and I had acquitted myself well. As a matter of fact, I could have done much better, but I didn't want to be shoved in the Fifth.

I had just sauntered out into the Triangle with Watson and Tregellis-West. The sun was shining gloriously, and cricket was the general talk—among the College House fellows, at least.

I hadn't had a word with Fullwood that day. He and his fellow Nuts had kept to themselves. But now, on the steps of the Ancient House, the leader of Study A confronted me with his challenge. I had expected it.

"Any old thing," I said calmly. "Without gloves for preference, Fullwood. I can smash your manly beauty a bit more if I don't wear gloves."

Fullwood grinned maliciously.

"You'll do a fat lot of smashing, won't you?" he sneered. "I'm the top boxing man of the Remove—"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed a cheery voice. "Lying as usual, Fullwood?"

Fullwood scowled.

Bob Christine & Co., of the College House, came up.

"Top boxing man of the Remove, did you say?" asked Christine grimly. "I'm ready to take you on whenever you like. Fullwood!"

"I meant in the Ancient House, you rotten Monk!" growled Fullwood. "I wasn't talking to you, anyhow!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Talmadge curiously.

"Dear boy, Fullwood's dignity has been deeply affected," yawned Sir Montie. "He is out for gore, you know. Bennett's gore. Whether he'll get it or not is a question. Bennett is a surprise-packet! He is, really!"

"A fight—on your second day at St. Frank's?" said Christine, looking at me queerly. "You're hot stuff, Bennett. I found that out yesterday. Well, good luck to you! If you smash Fullwood, we'll give you a medal!"

"You silly idiot!" roared Fullwood angrily.

Then he turned to me.

"Behind the gym., after dinner," he said curtly.

"Now, if you like!" I replied.

Fullwood walked away, scowling. I smiled at the fellows round me, and then suggested a stroll to the tuck-shop, presided over by Mrs. Hake, for the purpose of purchasing ginger-beer.

"Ain't you frightened of Fullwood?" asked Roddy Yorke, staring.

"Frightened?" I asked. "My hat! Of course not! If he hadn't challenged me, I should have challenged him, so where's the difference? A fight was bound to come. Fullwood's been cock-of-the-walk too long!"

"You won't whack him, you ass!" yelled Talmadge.

"Sha'n't I? Wait and see, as a worthy gentleman once remarked," I smiled.

With that I took Watson's arm and Sir Montie's arm, and sauntered across the Triangle to the tuck-shop in the corner.

I was thinking of the guv'nor's arrangements for the afternoon, but I couldn't let Fullwood's challenge pass. I should have labelled myself a funk for evermore if I had refused to fight him.

Directly after dinner I made my way to the gymnasium. Behind this building

there was a little, natural amphitheatre. Trees grew all round, and the gym. wall effectually concealed the place from view. The grass was good, and formed a flat patch of about twelve feet square. All round the ground sloped upwards.

It was the recognised place for a "mill" among the St. Frank's juniors of both Houses. I found half the Remove there. College House fellows had been attracted, and Fullwood wasn't on hand yet.

But he arrived in a few moments, looking as though he'd finish the affair in about ten seconds. He swaggered into the ring with a contemptuous expression on his face. He looked me up and down sneeringly.

"Without gloves," he asked.

"No!" interrupted Tommy Watson sharply. "With gloves, you rotter! We're not going to have a prize-fight!"

Watson was my second, and he had brought the gloves along. Fullwood shrugged his elegant shoulders, and strolled across to his corner. His second, Gulliver, helped him to peel off his jacket.

Watson performed a similar office for me. I was quite cool, and just a little amused. The fight had caused an enormous amount of interest. Everybody expected me to be knocked over in no time. Fullwood's reputation was great, and not another fellow in the Ancient House was able to stand up to him. Perhaps his glory was somewhat overrated. We should see, anyhow.

"Who's timekeeper?" asked Bob Christine.

"I am," said Matthew Noys.

Christine frowned.

"This is none of my business," he said, "but I shouldn't advise you to have Noys as timekeeper, Bennett. I should protest. Noys isn't to be trusted."

"What!" roared Noys furiously.

"You're not to be trusted," said Christine deliberately. "I suggest that a Monk should keep time—Clapeon or Oldfield."

"Oh, don't bother!" I said, grinning. "Noys will do. He's making a good deal of noise, but he's got a noisy name, hasn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Noys glared, but said nothing. The other fellows were rather surprised at my coolness. But why should I be otherwise? Fullwood probably thought that I was N.G. with the gloves. But he'd soon

find out his mistake. Nelson Lee had trained me in the noble art of self-defence until I was well-nigh perfect. I certainly knew all the science there was to be known.

Fullwood had a bit longer reach, and his shoulders were heavier than mine; but I was quite confident of victory.

"You seem chirpy, dear fellow," remarked Sir Montie, in my ear.

"Why not? I'm going to win," I replied.

"By gad, I hope so!"

Fullwood stepped into the ring.

"Come on, you cad!" he said sneeringly. "I want to get it over."

"Feeling a bit uncertain, eh?" I smiled.

"No, I'm not! I'm going to smash you!" snarled Fullwood.

"Smash away!"

We faced one another, and the on-lookers stood silent.

"Time!" said Noys sharply.

Fullwood opened with a fierce, savage onslaught. Perhaps he thought that he'd wipe me up in the first round. He didn't.

But I was forced to give ground before the heavy attack, and I was driven almost round the ring. I'll admit that I allowed myself to be driven. I didn't see why Fullwood should learn the uncomfortable truth regarding my form all at once.

"Go it, Fully!" chuckled Bell. "He's no class!"

Fullwood made savage drives at me, and some of them got home. One blow caught me fairly on the mouth, and I staggered. There was a snigger from Fullwood's pals. I still gave ground, and appeared to be crumbling.

"Ain't it time yet, Noys?" asked Watson anxiously.

"No. These rounds are two minutes each!" sneered Noys.

"It's been nearly three!" said Watson savagely. "Fair play, you worm!"

"Rats!"

Noys looked at his watch calmly, and then called time.

I went across to my corner and sank down. Fullwood, grinning with triumph, stood on the other side.

"Next round'll finish it!" I heard him say.

"Dear fellow, he's above your weight!" murmured Sir Montie concernedly.

"Think so?" I smiled. "Don't you

worry, Montie! I was just seeing what he's worth. I'll get busy in the second round."

Watson didn't say anything. He evidently thought that I should get whacked, and so did the rest of the chaps. They were nearly all on my side, for Fullwood wasn't popular except in his own particular set.

"Time!" said Noys.

We stepped up to the line again, Fullwood with a perceptible swagger. He was brimming with confidence, and his face wore a grin.

I didn't wait for him to attack. I started in myself, deliberately and solidly. My left lashed out, and landed upon his cheek. He staggered. Then, before he could lash out, my right shot out. Crash! Fullwood went down in a heap. It was easy.

"My hat!" muttered Gulliver. "That was a fluke!"

Fullwood scrambled to his feet, breathing hard. He simply flew at me, lashing out for all he was worth. He possessed a fierce, savage temper, and it was allowed to run riot now. That was foolish of him.

I stopped every one of his wild lunges without the least difficulty. Then I attacked fiercely, and Fullwood's guard seemed to go to pieces. My gloves whacked upon his face and his chest ceaselessly.

"Time!" gasped out Noys hurriedly.

"You rotter! It hasn't been two minutes!" roared Watson.

"I'm timekeeper!" snarled Noys.

I grinned cheerfully. I wasn't touched. The next round, I determined, would finish the fight. Fullwood wasn't half the terror I had been led to believe he was. Now that he was getting the worst of it, too, he was nervous and touchy. His face was red with fury, and his breath was hard and forced.

The third round started gingerly. Fullwood seemed bent on saving up his strength for a big attack. But I didn't care to prolong the "mill." The sooner it was over, the greater Fullwood's fall from his lofty pedestal.

I took a deep breath and attacked.

My previous attack was nothing to this. I put every atom of skill I knew into that onslaught, and my drives were irresistible. Blow after blow went home. Fullwood attempted to answer, but he was nowhere. To do him justice, he

stood up to me gamely, and showed no sign of giving in.

I drove him right round the ring, receiving a few weak blows, and delivering some heavy ones. Just for a second Fullwood rallied and counter-attacked; but I warded off his wild blows easily.

Then, with a sudden left-handed uppercut, I caught him fairly on the chin. He went back giddily and crashed down. There was a general gasp as Fullwood showed no sign of getting up. He was done!

"One—two—three——" counted Noys reluctantly.

He counted the ten very slowly, but Fullwood lay quite still. I peeled off the gloves, and looked round smilingly. I don't think there was any sign of "swank" in my manner, but I was naturally elated.

"That's the way it's done!" I said lightly.

"Bennett, old boy, you are a public benefactor!" said Sir Montie.

"Good for you, Bennett!" exclaimed Bob Christine heartily. "You've whacked him fairly, and I'm glad. Most of the fellows are glad. Fullwood needed a thrashing badly."

"And he's got it!" grinned Watson. "Benny, old son, you're the goods!"

"Wasn't bad at all!" remarked Handforth critically. "Of course, I could have walloped Fullwood——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared and snorted and walked away.

I looked over at Fullwood. The noble Ralph Leslie was surrounded by his anxious followers, and was already on his feet. He was looking badly battered and wildly furious. He knew that his prestige was sadly damaged. He hadn't expected the fight to end this way.

"You'll pay for this, you rotten cad!" he muttered venomously.

Then he walked away, followed by the wrathful glances of the Removites. At least, the fellows had expected Fullwood to take his beating like a man. But Fullwood was full of hatred and malice.

My own position at St. Frank's was vastly improved.

Fellows who hadn't taken much notice of me before now eyed me with respect. I had whacked Fullwood, therefore I was deserving of respect. The Fossils began to realise that I wasn't a "swanker," after all.

But my campaign against the Nuts had only just commenced.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN CAISTOWR BAY—A MYSTERY—THE END.

NELSON LEE regarded me sternly. "A fight already, Nipper?" he asked. "Upon my soul!"

"Couldn't be helped, guv'nor," I chuckled. "Fullwood's a rotter, and I simply had to take him on. He challenged me, you see."

"It's a good thing I didn't know anything about it," said the guv'nor. "As it is, I have been informed unofficially. Fullwood is the boy who checked me last night, isn't he?"

"That's the chap, sir."

"H'm! He struck me as being a young rascal," said the great detective. "But I know nothing of this fight. You must go your own way, my lad. Only, if I catch you fighting again, I shall have to punish you."

I grinned.

"That's all right, sir," I said lightly. "You won't catch me."

I was in "Mr. Alvington's" study. I'd gone there to borrow a Latin grammar ostensibly. I found him ready for the jaunt down to the seashore.

"About this investigation of ours, Bennett," said the guv'nor, using my new name as a matter of course. "I suppose you'll have a bit of a job to persuade some of your schoolfellows to accompany us?"

"Well, it will be stiff, sir," I said doubtfully. "They wouldn't care for the idea of going out with a master. But it's got to be done. I'll persuade Watson and Tregellis-West to come along. They'll agree. Two'll be enough, I suppose?"

"Quite! Tell them we are going to start now," said Nelson Lee. "And add, by way of inducement, that there is an excellent teashop in the village, where we will call on the way home if we are unsuccessful in our search."

"Right-ho, sir!" I said.

In a few minutes I was back in Study C. I had washed since the fight, and had left Tregellis-West and Watson in the study, talking to some other fellows. They had decided to stroll over to Little Side, to watch the First Eleven cricket.

"Here's a go!" I said, as I entered the study. "Old Alvy wants us to go for a walk with him—three or four of us!"

Handforth, who was there, sniffed.

"A walk with a master!" he

exclaimed. "Not me! This isn't a kid's nursing-school! Let him go out for a walk by himself!"

And Handforth strolled out, followed by Church and McClure. Watson and Sir Montie looked at me doubtfully.

"Did you promise to go?" asked Watson.

"Yes. I had to, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He says he's going to explore the caves or something," I went on, "and he hinted that there's a decent teashop in the village. Is there?"

"Yes, a ripping place," said Watson.

"Well, he's going to stand us a feed."

"That's not so bad, anyhow!" grinned Tommy. "Shall we go, Montie? Might as well please the old boy. He's miles better than that beast, Thorne, anyhow. The fellows will grin——"

"Let 'em!" I interrupted. "Come on, my bucks! Alvy's waiting!"

I swept Watson and Sir Montie out of the study before they knew it. You see, they had to come with us; it would have looked queer for the guv'nor and I to go alone. But with the two other chaps everything would be O.K.

We found "old Alvy" out in the Triangle carefully adjusting a little pocket-camera. He looked at us benevolently.

"Ah, you have succeeded in persuading your schoolfellows, Bennett?" he asked. "That is excellent. I am sure we shall have a lovely walk."

Watson groaned.

"Dear Benny, this is awful!" murmured Sir Montie. "But I am resigned."

We all marched across the Triangle together, followed by the grins of many Removites. I heard Chambers, of the Fifth, asking in a sarcastic voice if St. Frank's had been turned into a kindergarten by any chance.

Of course, it was unusual for a master to go out with boys on a half-holiday. Even on Sundays the fellows didn't care for it. In their own time they liked to be at liberty.

But the guv'nor soon made Sir Montie and Watson at ease. He was genial and jokey and full of life. Both my new chums were rather surprised. They had looked upon Mr. Alvington as a staid, stiff old chap. But they were now finding that, outside of school hours, he was a very cheerful companion.

In fact, he put us all at our ease long before we had trudged the three miles

to Caistowe. It was a fairly long walk, and I was rather surprised that Watson and Tregellis-West had agreed to go.

But at last we stood upon the beach. The tide was nearly out, and the caves were all accessible. We could see their gaping mouths, dark and sinister, in the whitish wall of the cliffs.

Lee had led us to the exact spot where he and I had seen the men with the lantern the previous night. After a while the gov'nor suggested that the three of us should bathe while he searched for shells and pebbles. Watson and Sir Montie grinned, and heartily agreed. They didn't know Mr. Alvington's real object in searching for "shells and pebbles."

So we bathed. We had brought bathing things and towels, and we found a secluded nook amongst the rocks. Within ten minutes we were in the water, splashing about and enjoying ourselves.

Again I surprised my chums of Study Co. They were both decent swimmers, but they couldn't touch me. In my time I've been compelled to swim for my life: I've had to battle with strong river currents. The gov'nor has often praised me for my swimming powers. And I simply walked away from Montie and Watson in a race.

They were enthusiastic and admiring. Their admiration was all the greater because I hadn't mentioned a word about my prowess in the water. Naturally I was pleased; I wanted them to have a good opinion of me.

After we had dressed ourselves we strolled along the beach towards Mr. Alvington. I knew that the gov'nor had got rid of us so that he could have a chance of investigating, and I wondered how he had got on.

He beckoned to us as we approached.

"Boys," he exclaimed, in a tense voice, "I have discovered something!"

"By gad, sir! Have you really?" asked Sir Montie mildly.

"There is a cave here which seems to have a secret entrance!" went on the gov'nor, giving me a quick, keen look which meant worlds to me. "I have a mind to explore it!"

"Good business, sir!" I said. "I'm game!"

I knew by his attitude that he had not been idle while we had bathed. He had, of course, been looking for the place where the two strange men had dis-

appeared. And now, from his words, I knew that he had found it.

A secret entrance! That sounded likely, anyhow!

The gov'nor led the way through a perfect maze of rocks. Most of them were slippery and covered with seaweed. Sir Montie and Tommy Watson were quite eager now. They had started out upon this jaunt in a resigned kind of way, but they found that they were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"I came upon the cave quite by chance," said Mr. Alvington, with perfect truth. "I was on the point of passing the spot, my boys, when I observed a footmark pointing straight towards the cliff. That set me thinking, and I examined the spot. Ah, here we are!"

"Old Alvy's like a giddy detective!" murmured Watson, in my ear.

I didn't tell the Removite how near he was to the mark! And his words told me how necessary it was for us all to be together. The gov'nor and I, just by ourselves, would have set people thinking. And that, above all else, we wished to avoid.

The spot where Nelson Lee had halted seemed to me to be a blank face of the cliff. There wasn't a hole large enough for a rabbit to crawl through.

"Why, there's no cave here, sir!" said Watson.

"I will admit, Watson, that no cave is visible," said the gov'nor mildly.

"But follow me."

He walked right up to the face of the cliff, and then we saw a little narrow opening running flush with the cliff; a portion of the rock formed a shield to the entrance, thus hiding it completely at a distance. The formation was so singular, in fact, that nobody would have seen the entrance unless it had been deliberately looked for.

It was very narrow, and the ground was sandy and dry. But it was all disturbed as though men had been to and fro. Just inside I bent down suddenly and picked up something.

"Why, look at this, sir," I said. "Somebody's been here!"

Lee knew what I was getting at at once.

"Dear me! A cigarette-end!" he exclaimed, in a most benevolent fashion. "Come, my dear boys, we will venture inside. Fortunately, I happen to have an electric torch with me. I find it useful, you know, for finding my way about after dark," he added, with a smile.

We plunged into the little opening, the guv'nor leading the way. His light showed us that we were standing in a long, low cavern. The roof almost touched our heads. The floor was sandy and uneven.

"Nothing here, sir," said Tommy Watson. "Just an ordinary common or garden cave. A fine hiding-place, though!"

Mr. Alvington flashed his light round, and I felt a bit disappointed. The cave was certainly very bare. Yet I felt sure that it was here that we should find the secret of Mr. Thorne's disappearance. I don't know why that conviction took possession of me—but it did.

The guv'nor flashed his light upon the roof. Quite suddenly he uttered a surprised ejaculation. There, close against our heads, was a narrow black opening. The light did not reveal much, however, for the opening seemed to come to a blank end three feet higher.

"Dear me! This seems to be an entrance of some sort!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Suppose we explore it? See! There has been somebody here quite recently, to judge from the marks upon the rock!"

He hauled himself up laboriously, and I nearly grinned. The guv'nor could have swung himself upwards in one jump had he chosen. He disappeared completely, to our surprise. Then his face came into view.

"There is quite a tunnel here," he declared.

"Dear fellows, this is gettin' excitin'!" murmured Sir Montie languidly. "A lag, but no matter. We cannot allow the esteemed Mr. Alvington to lead where we dare not follow. We will venture into the dark depths."

Tregellis-West jumped up first; and, for all his apparent laziness, he displayed astonishing agility. I followed next, and then Watson. The guv'nor was already ahead with the light.

He was passing along a narrow, natural tunnel, so low that we were forced to walk in a doubled position. But, quite suddenly, after about twenty yards, the tunnel widened out into a great black cavern. Nelson Lee's light only illuminated a tiny portion of the place.

"A regular adventure—what?" drawled Sir Montie.

"Good heavens!" gasped the guv'nor suddenly.

He ran forward, and we, startled by his tone, followed. Right at the far end

of the great cavern lay a—human form! It was still and silent. Nelson Lee knelt beside it, and we stood round, excited and eager.

"It's some man or other!" muttered Tommy Watson.

"Good gracious! What can it mean?" asked Mr. Alvington, turning his glasses upon us. "I thought perhaps the fellow was a drunken fisherman, or——"

Tregellis-West suddenly gave a yell. "Great Scott!" he shouted. "It's Mr. Thorne!"

"Mr. Thorne!" gasped Watson. He bent forward, and then looked round at us, his face flushed with intense excitement.

"Montie's right!" he declared. "Is—is he dead, sir?"

"No, Watson," answered the guv'nor gravely. "But he is in a bad way. We must remove him from this place at once! And to think that we should stumble upon him by sheer accident! Wonderful!"

And so it would have been wonderful; but, you see, there wasn't any accident about it. Nelson Lee had found Mr. Thorne because he had deliberately set out to do so. But why was he in this cavern? Why had he been kidnapped?

Somehow or other we got the poor man out of the cave. He may have been a slack, careless Housemaster, but he was undoubtedly a man of honour. And his condition inspired pity and compassion.

For Mr. Thorne was in a very bad way.

It was apparent that he had received no food for days on end; he was thin and pale and unconscious. His captors had treated him cruelly. Near him there was a basket of fresh food and some bottles of mineral water. But they had not been touched.

It was easy enough for me to guess that he had been left in the cavern for days on end—chained to the rock-wall, as we discovered. His captors, for some reason, had not been near him for days. Then, when they had gone to him (as the guv'nor and I had seen the previous night) they had found him insensible.

It seemed obvious that the brutes had tried to force Mr. Thorne to do something, and he had refused. So they had left him to half-starve. But they had overdone the trick, for he was not strong.

It was a mystery, anyhow.

He was conveyed to the doctor in Caistowe, who at once examined him. The doctor's report was not cheerful. He said that Mr. Thorne's brain was affected, and that he would not recover his reason for at least two months. He would require careful nursing and doctoring.

While the unfortunate Housemaster was being attended he became half-delirious. Repeatedly he babbled the name of "Justin Farman—Justin Farman." His abduction was a complete mystery, and it did not seem likely that it would be solved for some time.

But the gov'nor had rescued the poor chap, and that was a great step in the right direction.

At St. Frank's there was tremendous excitement.

Sir Montie and Watson and I were the centres of attraction. We were people of importance for the time being, and the other fellows were rather sorry that they hadn't accompanied us in the little afternoon jaunt. Handforth was particularly disgusted. He badly wanted to share some glory with us. Glory was just in his line, and he couldn't have any.

And that night there was a meeting in the Ancient House—a junior meeting in the Remove common-room. Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West took the chair, and he made a stirring speech. In short, he put it to the Fossils that it was up to them to select a new leader. Ralph Leslie Fullwood had been shaken from his lofty perch, and he was a rotter, anyhow.

Amid great excitement I was declared to be the new leader of the Fossils.

This was a bit rapid, but I was cool enough. On my second day at St. Frank's I had been elected junior leader! Naturally I was elated, and I declared that I would make things buzz with a vengeance.

Fullwood & Co. were furious.

But they couldn't do anything, and they knew it. A feeling was fast growing up against them in the Remove—thanks to my advent in the school! Fullwood's defeat in the memorable fight had worked wonders.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood had fallen from power. He knew it, and he openly declared that he would make me sit up. Well, he was open to try. Perhaps the sitting-up would be for somebody else!

But the surprise of the evening came later on.

I managed to have a few words with Nelson Lee. And the gov'nor told me that he had learned from the Head that there was a new boy coming into the Remove in a few days. And the new boy's name was—Justin B. Farman!

What could it mean?

Farman was coming from Western America—California. How could this complete stranger be connected with the abduction of Mr. Thorne?

It seemed as though events were going to move excitingly in the near future!

As for the Fu-Chang-Tong, they had lost their intended victims completely. And Nelson Lee and I were firmly established at St. Frank's.

Before so very long I shall have to dip into my note-book again, and then I'll set down another episode of our sojourn at St. Frank's College as master and pupil.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

A Magnificent Story of "THE CIRCLE OF TERROR."
Entitled:

"The Abduction of Lady Marjorie."

THE WEEK AFTER!

No. 2 of "Nipper at St. Frank's" Series.

Let Your Friend Read This Number!

GRAND NEW SERIAL—JUST STARTING!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

TOM CRAWLEY, champion light-weight boxer, is a boy stoker on board H.M.S. *Flyer*. Whilst on leave he learns that his father's fishing smack has been impounded. It promises to go hard with Fisherman Crawley, until

DAN SIMMONS, an old friend of the lad, and proprietor of a well-known boxing hall, shows a way out of the difficulty by offering Tom a fight with Jimmy *Soud*, famous bantam-weight. The offer is accepted. Leave for the contest being refused, Tom takes "French leave." He wins the fight, and on leaving the hall is arrested as a deserter. Eventually he is pardoned.

Soon after the event, German battle-ships bombard the coast of England, and the *Flyer* goes into action. After an engagement with the enemy, in which Tom is thrown overboard and believed by everyone to be drowned, he turns up safely to find

BOB RANDLE—a "chicker," as Tom thinks—on the cliffs with

MARY THWAITES, the pretty daughter of Fisherman Thwaites, of whom the lad is very fond. Jealousy gets the better part of him, a fight ensues, and Bob Randle falls over the cliff.

(Now Read This Week's Thrilling Instalment.)

THE VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS.

AS Mary's piercing cries echoed along the cliff, Tom Crawley, the little boxing sailor, stood petrified with horror, standing almost on the brink of the chasm over which he had hurled Bob Randle, staring vacantly in front of him, his heart rising into his throat and almost choking him, it seemed.

What had he done? What had he done?

Mary a time before in his young life—

he was still but a boy had he given rein to his unbridled passion, only to feel utterly ashamed afterwards at his lack of self control.

And as he stood there trembling, he suddenly realised that he had nothing against Bob Randle, save his own unreasonableness. And yet this was what he had done.

Mary tottered towards him, sank on her knees at his feet, and, covering her face with her hands, sobbed aloud.

"Tom, oh, Tom!" she moaned.

The sailor boy passed an unsteady hand across his moist forehead, and looked blankly down at her.

"It was his own fault," he muttered, in a hoarse voice that did not sound like his own. "He should have left me alone. He should have done his duty like a man and joined the Army, instead of skulking about at Weathersea."

Mary raised her white, strained, and tear-stained face.

"Tom," she replied, "he did. He was going into camp for military training in a day or two, and he expected to be sent to France in a month or so. And—and he—he walked up here with me to-night to try and comfort me, because he knew I was broken-hearted about you. We both thought you were dead. He wasn't a bit like what you thought, Tom. Bob was a true and splendid man."

Tom Crawley reeled back a step.

"Don't tell me that," he cried, "or I shall throw myself after him. Oh, Mary, lass, I didn't mean to do it!"

"I won't tell, Tom. I won't tell. They'll think it was an accident."

He seized her wrists and held them in a fierce grip. His burning eyes sought hers, and studied every line of her pale face.

"Do you mean you'd screen me?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom."

A sob broke in his throat.

"Well, I shan't let you do it," he re-

plied. "I shall give myself up and tell the truth. God knows, I didn't mean to send him over the cliff, but I think there was something like murder in my heart when your father told me you were up here along of him. You see, I thought you didn't care a straw for me, Mary, and it seemed so callous that you should let him make love to you when you believed that I'd been drowned."

"Bob Randle didn't speak a word of love to me, Tom. He never has. He wouldn't because, because—of you."

Tom turned away, covering his eyes with his sleeve. His chest heaved under the stress of his great emotion.

"I am all wrong, I am," he moaned. "I don't deserve that anyone should trouble about the likes o' me."

Then down upon his hands and knees he flung himself, and cautiously he crawled to the edge of the cliff, and, leaning over, peered down into the blackness of the chasm beyond, hoping against hope that Bob might have fallen clear of the rocks into the sea, and have escaped with his life.

For Bob was an expert swimmer, and there was no reason why, providing he had not been stunned or killed by the force of the impact, he should not have gained the base of the cliff, and obtained a foothold there.

It was the faintest, the very wildest of wild hopes; and yet it brought a ray of comfort to Tom.

His eyes could not penetrate the darkness, and he heard the waves lapping against the rocks down there.

"Bob!" he shouted presently. "Bob, are you there?"

No answer came save the sighing of the wind and the lapping of the water.

"Bob! Bob, old pal—it's Tom calling. Bob!—Bob——!"

He raised his voice to a despairing wail, and then nearly fell sheer over the cliff, as a voice replied:

"Cheerio, Tom!"

A hoarse cry burst from young Crawley's lips, his head swam, and it was only with an effort that he drew himself back a yard and saved himself.

"That you, Bob——?" he ventured again, as soon as his brain cleared.

"Yes, old sport."

"Where are you?"

"Down here—on the cliff."

Tom closed his eyes and murmured hoarsely:

"Mary!"

"Yes, Tom."

"I'm not dreaming, am I? Can you hear anyone calling?"

"It's Bob's voice, Tom."

"Then he's alive?"

"Yes."

The unspeakable joy of it. Instantly a weight was removed from Tom Crawley's shoulders, and his troubled spirits were at ease.

His strength returned to him. He was able to think and act again. He was once more young Tom Crawley, the boxing sailor, the lad of pluck, the lad of resource.

Again he pulled himself to the verge and peered down, though he could not see beyond a few feet down.

"Where are you standing, Bob?" he cried.

"Down here on a narrow ledge. It's all right. I've found a hollow, and I think I'm safe, unless the chalk breaks away. Caught at a bush as I went down, and that saved me."

"Do you think you can hold on there for a bit?"

"I think so. I sha'n't move. There's only a breeze, thank goodness, so that I sha'n't be blown off my perch. What are you going to do, Tom?"

"I'm off to the lighthouse and coast-guard station. I'm going to bring help, and we'll haul you up to the cliff-top in a jiffy."

THE RESCUE.

TOM swung eagerly round.

"Mary," he said, "stay here and mark the place, will you, like a good sport? I sha'n't be long gone."

Mary nodded, and off he went, running at his best pace, the bell bottoms of his seaman's trousers flapping about as he went, his shoulders braced back, his chin raised.

And as he ran he took every risk, for the narrow footpath wound and turned about dangerously, so that he might well have tumbled over the cliff in the all-pervading darkness.

Yet he kept to the track by instinct, and at last saw the black silhouette of the lighthouse, and the lower range of coastguards' cottages looming away before him.

"Who goes there?" came in a sharp challenge, and he heard the click of a rifle-joint.

"A friend."

"Halt, friend, and give an account of yourself."

A second later there was a flash of light from an electric-torch, and Tom found himself confronted by a military patrol armed to the teeth.

The uniform he wore reassured the guard.

"What's up, Jack, you look scared?" said a grim-looking corporal.

And then, in eager, jerky, panting sentences, Tom Crawley explained that a pal of his had tumbled over the cliff.

"It's along there," he went on, pointing away into the darkness. "My lass is marking the spot. I want the coastguard to help me save him."

"You'll want tackle and ropes, and all that sort of thing, I take it, Jack."

"Yes."

"Right-ho, then. We'll rouse the coastguards and procure a rescue party."

Tom's hopes began to rise, his face to brighten.

If only he could save Bob—if only he could. He was no longer jealous of him. He only hated himself for the unjust attitude he had chosen to adopt towards the man who had always been his friend.

The coastguard tumbled out, and the rescue tackle was secured in less than no time. Yet every second seemed a minute, and every minute like an hour to the anxious and distraught sailor lad.

But at last they made their way along the narrow footpath, the guide using a flashlight with head turned earthward, so that they should keep the way.

How long the journey seemed, and what agony of mind Tom suffered until, at last, he saw a shadowy form standing right in the path ahead of them, and he heard Mary's voice cry out.

"Is that you, Mary, lass?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Is—Bob—still—there?"

"Yes, Tom."

The sailor boy uttered a shout of joy, and leaped forward towards the edge of the cliff.

"Here's the place," he shouted. "He's down below there. Fix up the tackle, and let me go down to him."

The coastguards, old and experienced hands, who knew that undue haste would mean a waste of valuable time, smiled reassuringly.

"Don't get hurried, lad," one of them answered. "We'll get the tackle up as quick as we can. Just you sit down and take it easy."

Tom Crawley brushed the beads of perspiration from his forehead, and threw himself full length.

Then, by a series of hails and questions, the coastguard located the exact spot on the cliff below on which the unfortunate Bob Randle clung.

The tackle was set up, and the rope loosened and paid out. To the end of it a sling seat was attached.

When it was seen that the rope ran easily over an arrangement of blocks, the seat was hauled up, and Tom Crawley sat himself in it.

"I'm light," said he, "and I'm small. I'll get the rope into the ledge all right, so that my chum will grip it. And I want to go."

This they allowed him to do. And so Tom was swung over the side of the cliff and very gently lowered away, fending himself from the jagged surface of the chalk wall with his feet, and calling out encouragingly to Bob as he descended lower and lower:

"Are you all right, Bob?"

"Yes, Tom. I could hold on till day-break, I think."

"Can you see me?"

"No."

"Are you anywhere near now?"

"Yes, I can see you now, Tom."

"Steady, up there," shouted Tom Crawley. "Take it easy." And he looked down, to see Bob Randle clinging close to the chalk wall, his feet firmly set on an uneven ledge of about four feet deep. Above where he stood the cliff slanted back from the ledge, and there some bushes clung tenaciously. It was doubtless these bushes which had enabled Bob to save himself as he slid down, breaking his fall sufficiently to keep his balance upon the ledge when his feet struck upon it.

His escape had been almost miraculous.

Tom swayed and turned gently, swung in towards the ledge, and gripped it with his feet.

"Right!" he shouted, and pulled the rope.

And there he stood, with Bob Randle only a yard or so away from him.

"Bob," said he, "I'll get out of the seat, and you shall take it. After

they've hauled you up, they can send it down again for me."

Bob shook his head.

"No, Tom. We'll either go up together, or else I'll stay where I am."

"You sha'n't, Bob. We've got to change places."

But Randle was obstinate. His coolness amazed Tom Crawley, who was unprepared for such a show of courage and resolution on the part of the rival whose pluck he had always disparaged.

He tried to argue, but it was no good.

"We can go up together, Tom. I'll grip the rope above your head, and swing myself on to your shoulders. Then they can haul us both to the top. The rope won't break. It could take a dozen."

Finding that Bob was bent upon having his own way, Tom Crawley at last consented, and in a trice, after calling to him to "hold tight," Bob had sprung forward, gripped the rope with firm hands, scrambled up a few feet, and got astride Tom's shoulders, the whole action being accomplished in less than no time, and with the skill and dexterity of a trained acrobat.

For, think of it, the slightest slip or miscalculation or carelessness would have caused Randle to miss and go sheer down to the death from which chance had saved him.

"Are you all right, Bob?"

"All right, Tom."

"Haul away, up there."

The coastguardsmen needed no second bidding, and, pulling away at the rope, they hauled the sailor and the embryo Tommy to the safe level of the cliff-top.

Strong and willing arms were outstretched, and firm hands hauled them both from the abyss.

With a sigh of relief, Bob stretched himself.

"By George! That was a narrow shave," said he.

Mary flung herself weeping into his arms.

"Oh, Bob, Bob, I am so glad you are saved!" she cried. "If Tom had—"

But he placed his finger upon her lips, and bade her be silent.

As for Tom, he stood sheepishly by, heartily ashamed of himself, and more debased in spirit than he could ever remember. Now that the man had been saved, the coastguard wanted to know all about the accident. Bruises had been noticed on the sailor boy's face. Now

they observed that Randle's flesh was cut and contused.

And here was a pretty girl. Putting two and two together, they arrived at a fairly definite conclusion.

"Reckon you must have been a bit careless, sir, to have gone over there," said one of the coastguardsmen. "There's no call for a man to go so close to the edge at night."

Tom gazed anxiously at Bob. What would his answer be?

"I know," was the smiling reply, for Bob was as unconcerned as if nothing had happened. "But I was skylarking with my pal, you see, and forgot that we were on the cliff for a moment. I slipped, and he tried to save me. Then I went down."

"Being your own fault like, sir?"

"Oh, entirely. I was a mug, that's all. It served me right. And I'm not likely to make such a mistake again."

Bob Randle gave them his name, and told them that he would reward them; and after the coastguard had returned to their station, and he had heartily thanked them again, Bob, Mary, and Tom pursued their way towards the town together.

When the cliff path had been left behind, and the streets of the town loomed ahead, Tom stopped.

Facing Bob with hanging head, he said:

"Bob, old man, I behaved like a blackguard. If you had shied me over the cliff it would only have been what I deserved. I suppose you—wouldn't—care—to shake hands with a cad like me—?"

Bob laughed, and stretched out his right hand.

"With all my heart," he cried. "Tom, I've always been fond of you. And you've no cause to feel jealous of me where Mary's concerned. You've said a lot of bad things about my not joining the army, but I know exactly how you feel. And I've joined now."

Tom clasped the outstretched hand, and held on to it, looking into Bob Randle's face with a nervous smile.

"My dad will have to carry on as best he can," Bob continued. "I'm bound for military training in France now, Tom. And I'm glad, for I shall

(Continued overleaf.)

do my bit in the war now, like you and the rest of the boys I know.

He disengaged his hand, and drew Mary gently forward.

"And as for Mary, we shall always be the best of friends, I hope, Tom. She's fond of you. And she likes me. Why should there be any difference between us?"

Why? Ah, that was the question. As Tom glanced back into the near past, he marvelled at the stupidity of his jealousy of Bob.

It had arisen, he doubted not, out of the feeling that Bob was trying to evade service, through sheer cowardice.

Yet he ought to have known better. Bob had faced him with rare pluck in the ring, and never on any occasion that he could remember had he shown the white feather.

And his behaviour when face to face with death upon the cliff, in the dead black of the awesome night, had been beyond all praise.

Yes. Tom could feel it in his heart

to admire Bob Randle now. And the three made their way back into the town as if they were the best of friends; and all three were feeling a little tired and jaded by the dramatic experiences of that terrible adventure.

Presently a broad and active figure loomed up in front of them.

"That you, Mary?" came in Fisherman Thwaite's deep bass.

"Yes, dad."

"And have you got Bob and Tom with you?"

"Yes, sir," said Bob cheerily.

The fisherman, with a grunt, joined them, and looked hard into the faces of the two men.

"Glad you're pals," he remarked, and there was a grim note in the ring of his voice. "I thought you might get to fighting."

Bob and Tom glanced at each other, and smiled. But they walked onward side by side, with never a word.

(To be continued.)

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