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FULLWOOD'S VICTORY!

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER at St. Frank's College. Set down by Nipper, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Boy From California," etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College for a period of several months. Having incurred the hatred of the F'u Chang Tong, a murderous Chinese Secret Society, Nelson Lee and Nipper have been forced to adopt new identities until the time of peril has passed. Nelson Lee is a Housemaster, and Nipper a junior schoolboy. Nipper himself writes of the events which took place during his life as a member of the Remove in the Ancient House of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I DESCRIBE HOW ALL THE TROUBLE STARTED.

"SOMEBODY is speaking!"

Mr. Crowell uttered that sharp remark in an irritable, angry tone. I looked up from my work for a moment. I wasn't the culprit, and I fancied that the murmur of voices had come from the corner of the Remove Form-room occupied by Fullwood & Co., the Nuts of St. Frank's.

"If there is any more talking, I shall punish the offenders severely," said Mr. Crowell tartly. "I will have silence in my class. Fullwood, sit up straight! I have told you more than once that I detest lounging!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood sat up, with a grunt, and the Remove settled to work again.

Mr. Crowell, our esteemed Form-master, was in a bad temper that afternoon. Perhaps the heat affected him. The blinds were down, but the windows were open. The blazing sunshine was streaming down upon the old Triangle outside, and the Form-room was hot and stuffy.

I—that is Dick Bennett, otherwise known as Nipper—was quite contented,

however. The work of the Remove was easy enough for me. Since the arrival of Nelson Lee and myself at the great school, we had led a lazy, easy life. After the strenuous strain of detective work, our days at St. Frank's were just one continuous holiday.

Not a soul at St. Frank's excepting the headmaster himself knew that "Mr. Alvington" was Nelson Lee or that "Dick Bennett" was Nipper. Our identities were completely hidden, and for the time we were master and pupil.

I had been getting on famously in the Remove. I was captain of the Ancient House Remove already, having licked Fullwood in a memorable fight behind the gym. Fullwood's power had ebbed considerably, and the Nuts of St. Frank's no longer swayed junior opinion in the Ancient House.

Naturally Fullwood and his pals were sore, and they hated me like poison; but I much preferred their hatred to their friendship, for they were young blackguards, every one of them. The Nuts consisted of Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, of Study A, and Merrell and Marriott and Noys, of Study G. Merrell & Co. were just a shade less disreputable than Fullwood & Co., but only a shade. They were all tarred with the same

brush. They were all smoky, gambling rotters.

When I had come to St. Frank's, I had found the Ancient House in a disgraceful state. The College House was clean and decent, but the Ancient House had been rapidly going "to seed." The Junior School especially was in a bad condition. This was because Mr. Thorne, the Housemaster, had favoured Fullwood & Co., and had winked at their many shady doings. Fullwood had been the self-constituted leader of the Fossils, as the Ancient House juniors were called. In the College House the juniors, known as Monks, were under the leadership of a first-class fellow named Bob Christine. And consequently the College House led the way in all things.

I had lost no time in making an alteration, and now, only a week or two after my arrival, the Fossils were forging into line with the Monks. Bob Christine & Co. were beginning to realise that the Ancient House would soon be a formidable rival.

The St. Frank's Junior Cricket Eleven was composed entirely of College House Removites, except when an extra man was wanted. Then, perhaps, Tregellis-West, or Watson, or Hubbard would be included in the team. Tregellis-West and Watson were my own study mates, and they were good chaps, both.

For some little time now I had been getting an Eleven together of my own—an Ancient House Eleven, and the fellows were shaping splendidly. A new boy, named Justin B. Farman, an American, was a miracle at bowling, and he would be a tower of strength to the new Eleven.

Farman was an easy-going, good-tempered junior, and he had come from California. He spoke in a rough-and-ready manner as a rule, and he was popular; but his weak, easy nature had landed him into several holes already. Farman was the son of a millionaire, and he always had piles of money.

Fullwood & Co. had attempted to "take up" Farman, to make him a member of the select order of Nuts, and at first Farman had almost succumbed. He had even broken bounds on his first night at St. Frank's, persuaded by the rascally Fullwood. But I had taken a hand, and Farman was now on his guard. He would have nothing to do with the Nuts. And the Nuts, in consequence, were very bitter against him. They hated him

nearly as much as they hated me, and that worried Farman more than a little, for he was painfully anxious to be on good terms with everybody.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was still hopeful of gathering Farman into the fold. He still affected friendship for the new boy. But on that first night the American junior had learned a lesson.

He had been kidnapped by two strange men—an American and a Chinaman. Nelson Lee and I and some other fellows had rescued Farman, but the two strangers had escaped; and Farman had refused to say a word, although he obviously knew a lot. His queer reticence was mysterious. It was all the more mysterious because of an incident which had occurred at the school just previous to the arrival of Nelson Lee and myself.

Mr. Thorne, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, had been forced down to a cave in Caistowe Bay, three miles away, and had been left there by two men. Lee had discovered him in a bad state, and Mr. Thorne was still in a nursing-home, and he was still unable to give any details of the strange affair.

The unfortunate Housemaster had only muttered the name "Justin Farman"; nothing more could be got out of him. And then the American boy had arrived, only to be attacked by night by two unknown men.

But the incident was over and done with now, and most of the fellows had forgotten it. But the guv'nor and I had not forgotten. We were both anxious to get to the bottom of the business. It was no good questioning Farman, for he wouldn't say anything.

I glanced over at him as we sat in the hot Form-room. He was working industriously, and his sunny, rugged face was earnest. And just then a tiny, trivial incident occurred which was to lead to the most astounding consequences.

Teddy Long sat next to Farman, and Long was the sneak of the Remove. He wasn't long by any means, although his nickname was "Lanky." Teddy Long was a squat, snub-nosed junior, with a water-mark round his neck and an inky collar. He was always untidy, and he was undoubtedly the laziest fellow in the Remove.

As I looked across the Form-room, I saw Long bend over towards Farman. They weren't far from me, and I heard Long's whisper.

"I say, Farman, how do you spell 'adequate'?" he asked anxiously.

"Guess you'd best be quiet now," whispered Farman.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" protested Long. "I must know how to spell."

Mr. Crowell looked up sharply.

"Talking again!" he rapped out. "Who was speaking?"

Silence.

"The boy who was speaking will stand up!" said Mr. Crowell angrily.

Justin B. Farman looked a little uncomfortable. He had been talking, it was true, but the few words he had uttered had been merely a warning to Long to keep quiet. Teddy Long was shivering in his shoes.

Mr. Crowell's eyes shifted, and his gaze rested upon Long.

"Were you talking, Long?" asked the master sharply.

"Pup-pup-please, sir, it—it was Farman!" gasped Teddy Long.

There was a murmur from the Form.

"Silence!" rapped out Mr. Crowell. "Were you talking, Farman?"

The American junior stood up, looking flushed.

"I guess I said a few words, sir," he replied quietly. "I——"

"That is enough, Farman," interjected the master. "You must understand that talking in class is forbidden. You will write me a hundred lines. Had the offence been committed by any other boy I should have caned him. You may sit down."

But Farman remained standing.

"If that's the case, sir, I guess I'd like to be caned," he said. "I ain't hankering to be favoured any."

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"Your speech is not only lacking in refinement, Farman, it is positively coarse," he said. "Writing lines will be of more service to you than a caning. Sit down! And if there is any more talking the whole Form will be detained!"

Farman sat down, and he bestowed an angry glare upon the grinning Long, for the sneak of the Remove was hugely pleased with himself. He considered that he had escaped punishment very neatly.

There were a lot of other fellows glaring, too. Handforth, of Study D, looked as though he could eat somebody. Sneaking in the Form-room was regarded as a

crime, and Long had sneaked in the most bare-faced manner. More, he had been the culprit himself.

Farman resented the young bounder's action, I could see; but he showed no sign except for that one eloquent glare.

The Remove was very silent during the remainder of afternoon lessons.

When dismissal-time came, most of the fellows had forgotten the little incident, and Teddy Long scuttled off hurriedly. Apparently he hadn't forgotten, and he feared Farman's wrath.

But the good-natured American junior was smiling now. He came out into the lobby with Canham and Owen major, his study-mates. Fullwood bore down upon him. Fullwood was looking as sweet as honey, and his eyeglass was in his eye.

"Comin' to tea, Farman, old chap?" he asked cordially.

I was just going off with Tregellis-West, but I paused.

"At it again!" I muttered. "Fullwood seems determined to drag Farman into his rotten circle. Hold on, Montie!"

Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West held on.

"Anythin' you like, old boy," he yawned. "Dear Fullwood is persistent. He's a sticker, begad. Surprisin' what lurin' properties money has—what? Farman's seethin' with money, you know. He fairly wallows in it. An' the genial Fullwood wants some of it. Ain't it disgustin'?"

I was quite prepared to chip in if necessary, but, as it happened, my chipping-in wasn't necessary at all. Justin B. Farman had a pretty clear idea by this time that the Nut-leader's overtures were not sincere. And Farman was a thoroughly decent fellow at heart.

"Am I coming to tea, Fullwood?" he asked. "Why, sure!"

"Good man!" said Fullwood heartily. "We've got ham and——"

"Say, I guess you're off-tracked," smiled Farman. "You're guessin' that I'm toting along to your shack? I'd smile, Fullwood. I'm going right along with my own pards to Study H."

"Rot! I want you to come to tea with me."

"With cigarettes and cards afterwards, mebbe?"

Fullwood laughed.

"Just a little sport, perhaps," he said.

"Come on, Farman."

"I'd be really sorry to offend you,"

said Farman deliberately. "Guess I'm a feller who just loves to please everybody. Say, if it ain't too much trouble, I'd like you to shift. You're kinder filling the passage, and I want to go."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled.

"That means you don't accept my invitation--eh?"

"Guess you're sure as keen as a razor," said Farman calmly. "You've been trying to fix me for days, Fullwood—fix me good 'n proper. Say, I ain't such an all-fired guy. There's sense—hoss-sense—running around in my head, and that hoss-sense sorter tells me that Study A ain't the place for a decent feller."

And Justin B. Farman calmly pushed past with Canham and Owen. Fullwood was left biting his lip furiously. In very polite language, Fullwood had been "told off." And the Removites, who had overheard the little exchange of words, grinned and chuckled.

"You asked for it, Fully, and you got it," grinned Hubbard.

"Perhaps he won't pester Farman any more," I said. "I was going to put my spoke in, if necessary. But Farman's learning things."

Fullwood just glared at us and strode off. He had been rebuffed badly, and Fullwood didn't forget such slights. His dislike for Farman was even greater now, and I could see trouble brewing.

I went out with Sir Montie into the Triangle. We crossed to Mrs. Hake's little tuck-shop and laid in supplies for tea, incidentally regaling ourselves on lemonade and ginger-beer in the meantime. On such a hot afternoon the worthy dame's stock was exhausting itself rapidly—or, rather, the juniors were exhausting it.

Tommy Watson had gone straight to Study C to prepare. As Montie and I crossed the Triangle back to the entrance of the Ancient House, I saw Fullwood at the window of his study. He was talking to Teddy Long, who was outside.

The junior studies at St. Frank's were on the ground floor, directly overlooking the Triangle. In fine weather the fellows as a rule used the windows more than they did the doors as a means of egress and ingress. This was, of course, against the school rules, but that particular rule was rather lax.

"Some merry little plot bein' hatched," murmured Tregellis-West.

"Long's telling Fullwood the latest scandals, I expect," I grinned. "The great Nut-leader doesn't have anything to do with Long unless he wants the little sneak to do something for him. Rats to 'em!"

"Carried unanimously, dear fellow!" drawled Sir Montie.

We went inside, and tea was soon on the go in Study C. Tea was always a merry meal in my study. Tregellis-West and Watson were good chaps, and we often had visitors. Sir Montie, being a baronet, always had plenty of money, and I was never short. And if cash did run low, I had only to pop into the Housemaster's study, and "go down" Nelson Lee for a fresh supply. The fellows would have stared if they could have seen me demanding cash from "Mr. Alvington."

After tea, Sir Montie and Tommy and I strolled out. We lounged on the steps of the Ancient House, discussing cricket and other things. Before long I was going down to Little Side with several fellows, and we were going to practise.

We hadn't been talking two minutes before the chums of Study H appeared.

"Whither away?" asked Watson cheerily.

"Just a walk, my son," said Owen major. "We're going to show Farman the beauties of Bellton Wood."

"Don't be long, then," I said. "I want you on the cricket-ground at six."

"Guess we'll be right there," smiled Farman. "Oh, say, just a minute, pard!" he added. "I'll be needing something from the dormitory."

He went indoors again, and we chatted with Owen major and Canham until he came back. When he reappeared, he was closing a splendid pocket-knife. He slipped it into his pocket and smiled.

"I'd surely have been a first-class guy if I'd forgotten my knife," he said. "I'm going to show you a few tricks in wood-cutting, Owen, pard. Guess you'll be a heap interested."

"What about those lines for old Crowell?" grinned Tommy Watson.

"Oh, say, give it a rest!" protested Farman, frowning a little. "I'll need to do those lines later on. Say, that was surely a mean trick of Long's. Guess I'll need to kick that hoboe!"

He and his two chums went off, and they disappeared through the big gateway. Handforth came out, chewing the

last mouthful of his tea. Church and McClure were with him; Church and McClure were always with him. They were his faithful echoes in all things. Edward Oswald Handforth ruled Study D with an iron hand, but his chums knew how to manage him. Nobody else did.

"Swank, I call it," Handforth was saying—"rotten swank!"

"What displeases the mighty Handforth now?" murmured Sir Montie lazily.

"Dear boy, what is wrong?"

"Fullwood!" said Handforth bluntly.

"Fullwood's wrong!"

"You don't say so?" drawled Tregellis-West. "I thought Fullwood was always right. He says he is—an' he ought to know! My mean intelligence——"

"Oh, don't rot!" growled Handforth. "Although you do say a sensible thing now and again, Montie. About your intelligence, for example. Ain't you heard the latest? Fullwood and Co. have hired a motor-car—a giddy motor-car, mind you! Ordered it by 'phone from Bannington, and they're going out for a spin!"

"Shockin'!" said Montie, horror-struck.

"I'm not surprised," I said. "It's only swank, as you say, Handforth. But it's no concern of ours. If the Nuts like to throw their money about—let 'em. It pleases them, and it doesn't hurt us. And they'd better spend their money that way than gambling in their beastly study."

Fullwood and Co. lounged out with beaming faces.

"I s'pose you think it's clever—going for motor rides?" sneered Handforth.

"You'd like to come, I dare say," said Fullwood coolly.

"Rats!"

"He's jealous!" grinned Gulliver. "Wait until the car arrives—it'll be here in ten minutes. Handforth'll go green when he sees it!"

"Some chaps are green—without seeing a fathheaded motor-car!" retorted Handforth meaningly. "Let's hope you turn over in a ditch!"

Sir Montie chuckled.

"An' let's hope that the ditch is full of mud, dear boy!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood and Co. snorted, and were about to walk away towards the gates when there was a commotion within the House. Fullwood paused, and looked back. Then Long, of the Remove, came

pelting out, his face red with indignation.

"Look at this!" he roared. "Just look at it!"

The sneak of the Remove was panting heavily, and he waved before our eyes an Eton jacket which looked as though it had been through a chaff machine. It was ripped to rags and shreds.

"Look at it, you chaps!" he shouted, almost tearfully.

"Is that the latest fashion in jackets?" asked Fullwood, jamming his monocle into his eye.

"Begad! It's a ragtime coat!" smiled Sir Montie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at!" howled Long. "This jacket's ruined—absolutely ruined! You can see that, can't you?"

"Well, it seems to be the worse for wear," grinned Handforth. "What made you do that, Lanky?"

"I didn't do it!" bellowed Long. "That cad, Farman, did it!"

I suddenly became serious.

"What's that?" I said sharply. "You'd better be careful of what you say, Long. Farman didn't cut that jacket up——"

"He did, I tell you!" shrieked Long, nearly beside himself. "Just now, up in the dormitory! I—I saw him! I was up there just a minute after he'd gone out! He did this out of revenge."

"Revenge!" echoed Tommy Watson.

"Yes. Because I sneaked in the Form-room this afternoon!" gasped Long.

"What a filthy trick! Pretended to take no notice of me after lessons, and then goes and does this caddish thing!"

I looked very grim.

Deliberately ripping up a fellow's jacket was, indeed, a mean action—a rascally trick—and if Justin B. Farman had got his own back on Teddy Long by such a stratagem, he would reckon with me!

CHAPTER II.

I SALLY FORTH ON A WAR-LIKE ERRAND—
AND STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH snorted wrathfully.

"Farman ripped up that coat!" he said. "What a beastly bounder! I believe in punching a fellow's nose, but to maliciously ruin a

good Eton jacket behind his back is the limit! A Hun wouldn't do that!"

"Farman couldn't have done it," said Watson.

Teddy Long nearly choked with excitement.

"I tell you Farman did do it!" he panted. "Wasn't he left in the dormitory five minutes ago? Did he say what he was going up for when he left you?"

"No," I replied. "He didn't —"

Then I paused suddenly, and started. "I say," I added, "this looks straight enough, you know. Farman didn't say why he was going to the dormitory, but when he came down he was closing his jacket knife!"

"By Gosh! So he was!" said Watson, with a whistle.

"We don't know much about him," I went on. "He seems good-tempered and decent, but we haven't had time to get to know his real character. By Jove! If he did actually slit up——"

"If!" howled Long furiously. "There's no if about it, you silly ass! Farman did do it! If he didn't, who did? You don't think I ruined my own clothes, do you? It's my best jacket, too!"

"Awfully hard lines!" grinned Fullwood unfeelingly.

"The beast'll have to pay for it. I know that!" went on Long. "I've a good mind to go to the Housemaster straight away——"

I turned to Teddy Long fiercely.

"You won't do anything of the sort!" I snapped. "You're not going to sneak, you little worm! Farman has got plenty of money, and I'll make him pay the damage. I'll make him sit up, too!"

"A thrashin' is too good, Benny, dear fellow," said Sir Montie. "Even Fullwood would draw the line at rippin' up a fellow's jacket. Fullwood's capable of all sorts of rascality——"

"You silly idiot!" roared Fullwood angrily.

"Don't start rowing now," I cut in. "This thing is serious, and it's up to me to punish the offender without delay. I'm going to find Farman, and I'm going to give him the hitting of his life."

"That's right—smash him!" chortled Gulliver.

For once Gulliver's advice was good. I certainly meant to smash Justin B. Farman. I was furious. I had never thought Farman capable of such utter

rascaldishness. There couldn't be any doubt about the matter; Teddy Long would never have cut up his own jacket, and the fact that Farman had been in the dormitory only a few minutes before was strikingly significant.

On the surface Farman was genial and easy going. It appeared, however, that, instead of punching a fellow's nose in a straightforward manner, he preferred to adopt a mean, underhand subterfuge. To perform such an act as this, out of sheer spite, was a real eye-opener.

I didn't like to believe it of him. But how could I doubt it? I should give Farman a chance to explain, of course; and, if he had nothing to say, well, he'd have something to feel!

Without a word, I turned on my heel and strode across the Triangle.

"Hallo! Where are you off to?" shouted Tommy Watson.

"I'm going to find Farman," I called back, without pausing. "I'll be back again before six. You chaps had better get down to Little Side. I'll deal with Farman. And keep that little rotter's tongue still!"

I heard a snort from Teddy Long, but then I passed out through the gateway and struck off through Bellton Wood. I wasn't exactly sure which part of the wood the chums of Study II had made for.

So, after a bit, I jumped up on to one of the high banks of the lane and looked across the meadows. The wood was dense and thick, and for a certain distance it bordered the road. But it could be reached also by crossing the meadows.

I saw the three Removites almost at once. They emerged from behind a clump of bushes near the wood, and quite close to the roadway—not the roadway which led to the village. Just at that point there was a side lane which joined the main Bannington Road half a mile further on. That lane saved the fellows going through the village when they wanted to get to Bannington.

I stood for a moment watching. My brow was contracted, and my eyes gleamed. As a matter of fact, I was thundering wild; I was far angrier with Farman than I had ever been with Fullwood and Co. For I expected rascality from the Nuts of St. Frank's, but I didn't expect it from the new American junior.

Owen major and Canham were dodging about in a most erratic fashion, while

Farman stood looking on. Presently the former two dived straight into the wood, and disappeared. Then I realised that they had been chasing a particularly elusive butterfly.

I hurried forward. This was a good opportunity of speaking to Farman alone. Apparently he took no interest in butterflies, for he sat down on the bank and idly whittled a piece of stick.

But I had hardly moved forward a couple of yards before a most extraordinary thing happened. The whole extent of the meadow separated me from Farman. I had a vague notion that a motor-car was buzzing somewhere behind me, and I subconsciously realised that Fullwood and Co. had started off on their jaunt. Their hired car must have arrived immediately after my departure.

But there was nothing extraordinary in that. The amazing thing happened to Farman himself. Quite suddenly two men burst through the hedge behind him, and dragged him backwards!

I stood stock still.

Instantly a flood of thoughts crowded through my mind. Justin B. Farman was being attacked by two strangers! Obviously, they were the same two men who had attempted to kidnap him only a week previously! But, on that occasion, they had done their work by night. Now, apparently in desperation, they had seized a sudden opportunity, and had acted again.

I rushed to the rescue; but, as usually happens in such cases, disaster overtook me. My foot caught in a hole, and I fell headlong, knocking every ounce of wind out of myself. For quite a minute I lay on the ground in dire agony.

Then, when I looked up, I heard the sound of a motor-car down the lane; it seemed to me as though the automobile was taking the short cut to the Bannington Road. Farman's attacker apparently heard the sound, too.

For, as I rose to my feet, I saw them both turn scared faces in the direction of the road. Then, with one accord they dashed away and plunged into the depths of the wood. I knew, in a moment, that they had been frightened by the unexpected approach of the car—which, passing along that lane, would be upon the scoundrels in next to no time. They had not reckoned on such an interruption, and did not think it worth while to remain on the spot, and court capture.

Accordingly, they had abandoned their victim, leaving him lying upon the grass beside the road. I reached the spot very quickly, and with my heart beating fast. Justin B. Farman was huddled on the grass, still and silent.

I knew that he had struggled—that he had attempted to break away from his would-be captors. And they, resenting his attitude, had dealt drastically with him. It had been their intention to drag Farman into the wood, where they would have been lost. But this idea had been rendered incapable of fulfilment because of the rapid approach of the motor-car.

And it was not the unknown scoundrels who were caught with Farman—it was me! At the moment I was altogether too concerned to realise the significance of the fact. I just rushed forward impulsively, and bent over Farman.

He was lying quite still, and his face was in a shocking condition. It was only too plain that some heavy instrument had crashed right upon his forehead. An ominous bruise showed there, and the skin was cut.

"Farman!" I exclaimed huskily.

He didn't answer, but his eyes opened for a second.

"The scoundrels!" I panted hotly. "They—they might have killed him!"

My gaze rested upon a stout piece of stick which lay close beside the nearly unconscious junior. It was a cudgel made from a thick chunk of heavy beechwood, and there were a couple of ugly knots on the fat end of it.

I picked it up mechanically.

I suppose, just at that second, my attitude must have been very sinister. Justin B. Farman was lying on the grass, face upwards; and I was bending over him with a weapon in my hand. And I had left St. Frank's with the avowed intention of smashing Farman!

Such a piece of circumstantial evidence is by no means uncommon; the gov'nor and I had come across such cases many a time. But this was the very first occasion on which I had been the victim of a terrible misunderstanding.

For, even as I bent over the injured boy, a big motor-car glided round the bend and came into full view. For a moment I didn't turn, for I had again seen a sign of life in Farman. But he just shifted a trifle, and groaned.

Then I heard a sudden cry—in Gulliver's voice.

"Great Scott! Look there! Bennett's knocked that kid down with a stick!" roared Gulliver. "The frightful young scoundrel!"

I started.

The Nuts thought that I had knocked Farman down!

I turned swiftly, and dropped the cudgel to the grass. The motor-car came to a halt, and I saw that it contained Fullwood and Co. and their followers of Study G—Merrell and Marriot and Noys.

"You've just come in time!" I shouted. "Help me to get the poor chap into the car, and then drive back to the school——"

"What have you done to him?" panted Fullwood, horrified.

I gritted my teeth.

"Don't ask silly questions!" I rapped out. "You don't think I did this, do you? Two scoundrels sprang upon Farman, and cudgelled him. I couldn't get here in time to stop them, and Owen major and Canham are fooling about after a butterfly. Oh, here they are!" I added, as Fullwood's chums emerged from the wood, hot, ruffled, and triumphant.

"We collared the blighter!" shouted Owen cheerily. "A real beauty, too——Hallo! What's up! What are you cads doing here?"

"Bennett's nearly killed Farman—that's all!" panted George Bell fearfully.

"Nearly killed——What rot!"

Canham and Owen looked very startled. And the latter suddenly gave a wild cry, and dropped down into the grass. He had just seen Farman, and the American junior was a terrible sight. The blood had streamed down his face now, and the rich red of it stood out in striking contrast to the deathly pallor of his skin.

"He's dead!" gasped Owen major.

"No he's not—only stunned," I said sharply. "It's nothing much, anyhow. Let's get him to the school!"

But, although Farman's injuries did not seem terrible to me, the other juniors were dumb with horror for a moment. In many of Nelson Lee's detective cases I had seen men battered about far worse than this—and perhaps I was case-hardened. I had, indeed, been several times smashed up myself. And so Farman's injury did not appal me as it appalled the others.

My attitude, however, was misunderstood. The fellows thought that I had struck Farman down, and I was therefore callous.

"You fearful scoundrel!" panted Owen savagely.

"Don't be a fool!" I snapped. "I didn't touch Farman! He was attacked by two men while you and Canham were chasing that butterfly. I tried to get here in time, but I couldn't manage it."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood sneered.

"We didn't see any men!" he said nastily.

"There weren't any men, either!" added Merrell. "It's as clear as daylight. Why, you beast, you went out on purpose to smash Farman! You told the fellows you were going to find him——"

"I was going to lick him—that's all!" I interjected angrily. "I don't knock chaps down with a cudgel. Don't jaw so much, for goodness sake! Help me to get the poor kid into the car!"

Fullwood grinned maliciously.

"Lucky thing we came along when we did!" he sneered. "You might have killed Farman outright! We're not such idiots to accept your cock-and-bull story of two men. You didn't see any men, did you, Owen?"

"Of course not," said Owen huskily. "Look here, Bennett, why don't you confess? I suppose you did it by accident——"

"I didn't do it at all!"

"Liar!" said Gulliver hotly.

I clenched my fists, but didn't punch Gulliver's nose. After all, these fellows weren't so much to blame. The facts looked terribly significant to them. Nobody but myself had seen the strangers; and Fullwood & Co. had burst into view just at the moment when I had been bending over Farman.

They had heard me say that I had intended punishing Farman, and the obvious conclusion was that I had come across the American junior, and that I had attacked him with the stick. Owen and Canham believed the worst of me, too. The rotten part of the whole business was the fact that the real attackers hadn't been seen by a soul—except me! And how could I expect these juniors to take my word?

Fullwood & Co. were by no means sorry. They hated Farman and they hated me. In one stroke their bitter enemies were punished. Farman was in-

jured, and I—they thought—would undoubtedly be sacked from St. Frank's.

The position was a terrible one.

And the after-consequences of misunderstanding were to prove overwhelming.

CHAPTER III.

THE FINGER OF SCORN.

ST. FRANK'S was horrified.

Juniors and seniors alike were thunderstruck by the startling news which ran through the school like a gust of choking wind. Fellows stood in groups, talking in low tones. Fags of the Second and Third chattered excitedly, and with bated breath. Owen minor and Heath and Lemon, of the Third, openly jeered at me when I appeared in the lobby.

Seniors like Morrow and Starke and Phillips were very stern. Even the College House fellows could think, or talk, of nothing else but the shocking attack which had been made on Farman by—Dick Bennett, of the Remove!

For St. Frank's, as a whole, took it for granted that I was guilty.

The boys were hasty and excitable; they didn't pause to consider. The facts all pointed to me as the culprit—and I was condemned.

It was a blow to me—a terrible blow.

My only consolation was the certain knowledge that, in a very short time, I should be vindicated. For, of course, Farman would make it known, as soon as he was able to speak, that I hadn't touched him.

At the same time, it was rotten for me. I had been popular in the Ancient House; it was galling to realise that the boys believed so badly of me. But boys are hasty; they do not stop to consider.

Farman had been taken to the school in Fullwood's hired car, and he had been packed straight off to the school hospital—a little building standing by itself in the rear of the College House.

Nelson Lee himself (Mr. Aivington), had taken Farman in, but the gov'nor had not questioned me much. I simply told him that Farman had been attacked by two strangers, and that I had found him. Fullwood had attempted to accuse me, but the gov'nor had curtly shut him up.

Then Farman had vanished into the

school hospital; and Fullwood & Co. set about their task of making St. Frank's ring with the story of the assault. Needless to say, Fullwood & Co. stated positively that I was the culprit.

And the finger of scorn was pointed at me from all sides.

This was something new for me—and the sensation was not pleasant. But I remained calm and cheerful. The juniors would take on a different tune when they knew the actual truth! My popularity, now dropped to zero in less than ten minutes, would soar higher than ever—later on.

That was a consoling thought, at all events.

But Fullwood was making hay while the sun shone. He and his fellow-Nuts soon spread the yarn about my brutality. The fellows were amazed and disgusted. How could I blame them? The story was terribly convincing—and my own defence was terribly weak.

As soon as ever Nelson Lee had taken the injured boy off, I walked indoors, and went straight to Study C. Tregellis-West and Watson were not there. I glanced out of the window. Fullwood & Co. had divided, and they were busily imparting their news to little groups of Fossils. The Monks, too, soon heard the story. St. Frank's was already humming.

I smiled bitterly, and sat on the edge of the table.

"This is a fine thing, anyhow!" I muttered. "Accused of bashing Farman with a cudgel! Thank goodness the asses will know the truth before bed-time. Farman wasn't badly hurt—he'll be on his feet within an hour."

I reviewed the situation.

First of all, how did I stand—exactly?

I had stated in the hearing of several Fossils, my intention of finding Justin B. Farman and walloping him. The affair of the ripped jacket of Long's was forgotten now; it was completely overshadowed by this new sensation.

Well, I had sallied forth—alone. What an ass I had been not to take Sir Montie and Watson with me! But there it was—I hadn't. I had gone alone. Then I had spotted the Study H trio.

Canham and Owen major had gone off into the wood—and the two lurking scoundrels had seized the chance that Fate had placed before them. I had dashed to the rescue, but couldn't save Farman in time.

Then Fullwood's car had been heard by the attackers, and they had both fled. When the Nuts arrived on the scene I was alone with Farman. And Farman was lying on the grass, his head battered, and I held a cudgel in my fist!

And I had left St. Frank's on purpose to smash the American junior!

The affair was as clear as daylight—on the face of it.

The juniors didn't trouble to get beyond the face; they accepted the story as it was told to them. And I could only say that I hadn't done the deed. I couldn't produce a shred of proof which would convince the juniors of my innocence.

"Phew! It's warm — thundering warm!" I muttered anxiously.

I wasn't referring to the temperature; I meant the situation. I could see myself going through a pile of trouble within the next hour. After that, the truth would come out, and the fellows would be sorry.

And I decided that my best plan was to go down and mix with the others. If I remained skulking in the study, it would be assumed that I was ashamed to face my schoolfellows.

I slipped off the edge of the table, and at the moment the study door opened, and Tommy Watson and Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West entered. They were both looking serious. I hadn't seen a frown on Sir Montie's brow before; and even now there was a lurking suggestion of lazy urbanity about his eyes. His pince-nez were fixed on tightly.

"Oh, here you are, dear fellow," he said languidly. "We've been lookin' for you."

"Well, you've found me," I smiled. "Heard anything about Farman?"

Watson regarded me queerly.

"We've heard that Dr. Banham has been sent for," he replied, in a grim tone.

"Phew! I didn't think the poor chap was so badly knocked about!"

"You ought to know, anyhow," said Watson.

My eyes flashed.

"Oh! So you think I did that rotten thing, do you?" I asked bitterly.

"Do you deny it?"

"I suppose it's no use denying it," I replied. "You seem to take it for granted that I'm a blackguardly ruffian——"

"Oh, come off it!" interrupted Tommy uneasily. "Hang it all, Bennett, we must believe our own senses, I suppose? Didn't you leave us at the House steps, saying that you were going to find Farman—to pitch into him?"

"I did," I said quietly.

"And weren't you found by Fullwood & Co. bending over Farman, with a chunk of wood in your hand?"

"That's true enough."

"Well then," said Watson angrily, "what's the good of denying the thing?"

"I don't deny it!"

"You ass! You just said——"

"I don't deny going out to find Farman, and I don't deny that I was found by the Nuts, bending over him!" I said smoothly. "But I do deny striking the poor chap. He was attacked by two men—the two men who tried to kidnap him a week ago. You helped to rescue him on that occasion, so you ought to have more sense than to believe this rotten yarn."

Tommy Watson shifted his feet uneasily.

"Well?" I asked.

"Dear fellow, we're with you," said Sir Montie quietly. "Tommy's an ass, you know—he is really. He doesn't believe you struck poor Farman. We're sure that everything is all serene. Don't worry, Benny boy. We're your pals!"

"Thanks, Montie," I said softly.

"And you, Tommy?"

"I was a bit knocked over at first," said Watson slowly. "But, of course, it must be as you say, Bennett. I'd forgotten about those two rotters. Farman was attacked by somebody else—not you. All the same it—it looks——"

"It looks jolly serious," I interrupted.

"I know that as well as you do, old scout. But don't worry. Farman'll be himself again, by to-morrow, at the latest. Then the other kids will look small. Farman'll say who went for him."

Watson looked relieved.

"What an ass I am!" he grinned.

"Why, of course! Farman will say in a tick that you didn't hit him. Come on downstairs, Dicky. The fellows are in the common-room—most of 'em—and they are saying that you are afraid to show your dial."

"I was just going down when you came in," I replied.

"Fullwood's in his element," said Sir

Montie. "Fullwood's in his glory, dear boy. He's so pleased that he can't pull his face straight, begad! He's wearing a fixed smile of happiness. Fullwood's always happy when somebody's in trouble."

We went down to the common-room.

I say "down," although the studies were on the ground floor. But the common-room was situated in a kind of semi-basement, and we had to go down several steps to get into it.

Half the Remove was there; practically every Ancient House Removite to a man. They had gathered together to discuss the exciting affair, and Fullwood was holding forth loudly and cheerfully.

He was being listened to, and that made him feel "good." The Nut-leader had been quick to see that his star was on the ascendancy again, and he was grasping this opportunity to regain power in the Remove—and, incidentally, to knock me off my perch. Fullwood's intentions were quite sweet.

"I tell you Bennett did it!" declared Ralph Leslie emphatically. "Isn't it as clear as daylight? Bennett's a ruffianly hooligan——"

"Thanks!" I said, strolling into the common-room.

"Oh, here he is," sneered Gulliver. "It's a wonder he ain't afraid to show his murderous face!"

"Rotter!"

"Yah! Hooligan!"

"Who nearly killed Farman?"

These, and many other similar cries were flung at me. I bit my lip, but kept the smile on my face. I remembered that the juniors were sincere in their beliefs; they really thought me guilty, and they had good cause.

"I suppose Fullwood's been jawing?" I asked quietly.

"He told us what happened, anyhow," replied Handforth. "Fullwood's every kind of a rotter—we all know that. And so is Gulliver, and so is Bell, and so is Merrell, and so——"

"Oh, cut it out, you idiot!" howled Watson. "You don't believe what those rotters say, do you? You admit they're worms——"

"If you want a thick ear, Watson——" began Fullwood furiously.

"I'll take all the thick ears you can give me!" said Watson disdainfully. "I say that Bennett ain't guilty. You've only got Fullwood's word——"

"What about mine?" roared Owen major.

"Do you think Bennett did it?"

"Why, you ass, it's as plain as day!" declared Owen major. "Canham and I went into the wood after a butterfly. When we came back we found Farman lying on the ground, unconscious, and Bennett standing over him——"

"That's no proof," interjected Watson tartly.

"Proof enough for me!"

"Of course there's proof!" shouted Fullwood. "Any chap who believes Bennett innocent is a lunatic!"

Sir Montie beamed.

"I believe Bennett's innocent!" he said urbanely.

"Then you're a lunatic—a babblin' idiot!" said Fullwood.

"You're awfully polite," said Tregellis-West, without being ruffled in the least. "I believe in Bennett's innocence, because I've got cause. If it wasn't such a jolly fag, I'd make a speech—I would, really!"

"Go it, Montie!" roared Watson. "Speech—speech!"

Tregellis-West sighed, and got on to a chair. Then he surveyed the excited Removites through his pince-nez.

"Dear fellows, you're all wrong," he said lazily. "Bennett's as harmless as a kitten. He wouldn't knock a fellow about. Have you forgotten that affair eight or nine days ago? Wasn't Farman collared by two unknown bounders, an' carried through Bellton Wood? An' didn't Mr. Alvington lead the way through the wood, and didn't we rescue Farman?"

"That's got nothing to do with this business!" said Fullwood angrily.

"Dear Fullwood, you're off the rails—you are, really!" drawled Sir Montie. "Benny went out to give Farman a talkin' to. Suppose I'd gone instead? Suppose I'd seen a couple of ruffians attackin' Farman——"

"Bennett attacked him!" shouted Hubbard impatiently.

"Did he? That's the question—the burnin' question," said Montie. "Supposin' I saw two awful bounders goin' for Farman? What should I do? I should rush to his rescue. And supposin' those same two awful bounders heard a motor-car comin' along? What would they do? They'd slither away, dear fellows. What

would be the result? I should be found with Farman—alone! And, as likely as not, I should be ass enough to pick up the cudgel which had been used. Bennett did that. He was an ass. But I don't blame him."

Tregellis-West beamed round amiably. And the Removites were certainly impressed.

"Well, I'm blessed if I know what to think," said Handforth. "Bennett's a good sort—at least, I always thought he was. And it doesn't seem to fit, you know. Bennett ain't the chap to use a cudgel!"

Fullwood glared round angrily.

"Oh, so you're takin' notice of this fashion-plate—what?" he asked.

"No; we're not taking any notice of you, Fullwood!" said Watson sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was talking about Tregellis-West!" roared Fullwood.

"Oh, I see!" grinned Watson. "You should be more explicit. You're a fashion-plate, you know—a freak one. That waistcoat of yours is good enough to do duty for a megaphone—it's so giddy loud!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a time for rotting!" snarled Fullwood. "I say that Bennett's guilty! He's a crawling, loathsome hooligan! He ought to be kicked out of St. Frank's! If he ain't sacked, I'm going to write to my pater to complain to the governors! We're not goin' to have murderers and ruffians——"

"Fullwood!"

Everybody stood stock still. Unnoticed, Mr. Alvington had entered the common-room, and he had heard most of Fullwood's remark. And Nelson Lee, in his grey-whiskered disguise, was looking very stern.

"Fullwood!" he repeated sharply.

"I didn't know you were here, sir!" said Fullwood boldly. "Masters don't usually come into the junior common-rooms without lettin' the fellows know——"

"Silence, you insolent boy!" rapped out the guv'nor curtly. "The words you were giving utterance to were wild and disgraceful. You were referring, I presume, to Bennett, when you mentioned murderers and ruffians?"

"Bennett tried to kill Farman, anyhow, sir!" said Fullwood impudently.

Nelson Lee's eyes flashed.

"I will not deal with you now, Fullwood," he said quietly. "But if you make any such remarks in my hearing again I shall take you straight before the Headmaster. As a punishment for what you have already said, you will write me five hundred lines. And you will come to my study before lessons in the morning."

"What for?" shouted Fullwood.

"To receive a caning," replied Mr. Alvington tartly. "And remember, Fullwood, that I will not allow you to shout when you address me. You appear to think that you are a person of some importance—while, as a matter of fact, you are merely a particularly ignorant and impertinent upstart!"

Fullwood glared, but he didn't say anything further.

"I had decided that two cuts with the cane would be sufficient, Fullwood," went on the guv'nor. "Under the circumstances, you will receive four. And you will bring those lines to me to-morrow evening. If they are badly written, I shall order you to write them again."

"Serve him jolly well right!" whispered Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled, and turned his back. Nelson Lee looked at me, and smiled.

"Bennett, you are wanted in Dr. Stafford's study," he said. "Follow me."

"Yes, sir," I said quietly.

And we left the common-room together. We left it in a buzz.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ATTITUDE OF JUSTIN B. FARMAN.

NELSON LEE did not say a word until we were in the Head's study, and the door was tightly closed. There were two doors—an ordinary door, and one covered with green baize a little distance from it. Thus the Head was completely shut off from all school sounds. And his study was absolutely private.

The only occupants of the book-lined, sombre apartment, were Nelson Lee, Dr. Stafford, and me. Dr. Stafford knew the actual truth about the identities of the guv'nor and me, but nobody else at St. Frank's did. In fact, the only other individual in the world who knew the

truth was Sir Rupert Manderley, one of the school governors. But I'm wrong. I've just remembered that the guv'nor let old Detective-Inspector Morley, of Scotland Yard, into the secret.

"How's Farman, sir?" I asked anxiously.

Nelson Lee sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Farman is not seriously hurt, Nipper," he replied easily, using my own name with freedom in this private sanctum. "Dr. Banham is with him now, and it seems that the only damage is a bad bruise, and very slight concussion."

"That's good, anyhow," I said, with relief.

Dr. Stafford coughed.

"I am very worried—er—Bennett," he said. "I—I suppose I had better call you Bennett, since that is your name in the school." The Head smiled. "I haven't quite accustomed myself to the fact that you are not one of my pupils at all—"

"But I am, sir!" I put in. "While I'm at St. Frank's, I'm just a junior schoolboy. I'm enjoying myself, too! But this affair seems to have jarred everything badly. I'm rather awkwardly placed, sir."

The Head nodded.

"I was speaking to Morrow a few minutes ago," he said. "Morrow tells me that the boys—particularly the juniors—are openly accusing you of attacking Farman. That is ridiculous. How can the boys think such a thing?"

"Well, the facts look a bit black on the face, sir," I replied. "You see, I was found with Farman just after the attack—and I had the cudgel in my hand. I'd picked it up mechanically. You don't think I—"

Dr. Stafford laughed.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "My dear lad, as if I should suspect you of committing such a deed! Upon my soul, what a thought! You are Mr. Nelson Lee's assistant—you are quite above suspicion!"

"You mustn't look so serious, young 'un," smiled Nelson Lee. "Farman isn't much hurt—you have been knocked about far more severely on more than one occasion. At the same time, the whole affair is disagreeable. Tell us exactly what happened."

"Right you are, sir," I said, sitting on

the edge of the Head's desk without thinking. Then I saw him smiling.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir—"

"That's all right, my boy, you are privileged!" said Dr. Stafford genially.

I could tell by his tone, and by the guv'nor's tone, that there was very little the matter with Justin B. Farman. As the guv'nor had said, just a bad bruise.

Just for a moment I hesitated. I couldn't tell the Head about my suspicions regarding Farman and the slashed Eton jacket; so I slurred over that bit.

"I went to look for Farman, sir," I said. "I was a bit wild with him over something, and I told the other fellows that I was going to knock him into the middle of next week—or words to that effect. He had just gone out with Canham and Owen, his study mates."

As briefly as possible, but without any omissions, I related the events that had taken place. Nelson Lee and the Head listened with interest, and they both looked somewhat grave when I had finished.

"H'm! The facts, as you have told them, seem rather awkward," said Nelson Lee musingly. "I can quite understand the boys assuming that you inflicted Farman's injury, Nipper. Dr. Stafford and I, of course, accept your story without question; we know only too well that there is some mystery connected with Farman which, at the moment, I confess, I cannot fathom. But we cannot allow you to be under such a terrible cloud."

"Most of the fellows are against me," I said slowly.

"Boys are hot-headed—they do not take into consideration an alternative," said the Head. "The circumstantial evidence against you is strong, Bennett, and the boys have not paused to probe deeply into the matter. We shall have to put that right. I shall, if necessary, publicly exonerate you from all blame—"

"But you'll have to prove my innocence, sir," I put in quickly. "The fellows will want proof, you know. If you don't provide any proof, they'll think that you're just hushing the matter up, and favouring me."

Nelson Lee threw his cigarette end into the fireplace.

"Farman will provide the proof, Nipper," he said easily. "Farman will, of course, clear you in a moment. We will visit him in a few minutes, and hear

his own story. Now, tell me, did you see the two strangers clearly?"

I shook my head.

"They were right on the other side of the meadow, sir," I replied. "I couldn't say who they were, but it's obvious that they're the same two rotters who tried to spirit Farman away on that other occasion."

"And Farman wouldn't speak," murmured Nelson Lee. "Dear me! Supposing he refuses to speak now? That will be awkward—very awkward, Nipper."

"I was thinking of that, guv'nor," I said.

"But what is this mystery concerning the boy?" went on the detective. "Why is he attacked? Why won't he speak? It's an infernal bother, Dr. Stafford. If Farman is still obstinate, I shall certainly take measures of my own—measures which will bring the truth to light."

"It seems to me that the unknown attackers are desperate, sir," I remarked. "Just fancy them trying to kidnap Farman in the open daylight. That's because they knew they'll never have another chance at night, of course. They realised, of course, that the game was impossible; when they heard Fullwood's motor-car coming along they abandoned their victim. If they'd had the spot to themselves they would have carried Farman through the wood—or they would have waited in the wood, I dare say, until darkness came on."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"We will go to Farman," he said. "We will hear his version of the story."

Dr. Stafford came with us, and we reached the school hospital by a rear route. The local medico, Dr. Banham, a cheery little fat man, met us at the door. He was smiling.

"The boy is all right," he said. "Getting along famously. But I shall have to keep him in bed for a week, at least. We don't want complications, eh? The cut on his forehead wasn't much—a mere graze."

"Is he conscious?" asked the Head.

"Conscious? Bless my soul, of course he is!" declared the doctor. "He has been conscious all the time. He was knocked over a bit—that's all. Dazed, you know. Can you go up to him? Why, certainly—certainly! I'll look in again to-morrow, although it's not really necessary."

And Dr. Banham bustled off to his trap, which was waiting in the Triangle.

We went into the neat little hospital, and found Justin B. Farman in one of the wards, all to himself. The school nurse was preparing a meal for him. The American junior smiled cheerfully as we all went in.

"I'm really sorry, sir," he said, addressing Dr. Stafford. "I guess this'll cause you a heap of trouble, and I just hate to cause people trouble. Say, I'm all right. Guess I'll be able to take lessons to-morrow."

The Head smilingly shook his grey locks.

"Oh, no. You'll have to remain in bed for several days, Farman," he replied. "Are you comfortable? How is your head?"

"Why, I guess it's aching a heap," smiled Farman. "There's a kind of brass band playing ragtime tunes inside my skull, sir. They're all playing out of tune, and I'm real fuddled. Say, it's queer."

Nelson Lee stepped to Farman's bedside.

"Tell me, Farman," he said quietly. "Who attacked you?"

The American boy became very grave.

"I guess I was hit so quick that I couldn't properly see——"

"Come, come, Farman!" interjected Lee sharply. "That won't do!"

"It don't matter a darn who hit me, does it, sir?" asked Farman. "Say, I'm not hurt; they didn't do any real damage. I'm a whole lot worried, and I guess I'll be more worried still if I let loose all that's in my mind."

"Look here, Farman, these men have attacked you on two separate and distinct occasions," said Nelson Lee. "They will attack you again, in all probability. Don't you see that the position is an impossible one? The men must be traced and arrested."

"Arrested?" said Farman quickly. "Guess that'll mean—penitentiary!"

"It will mean prison, Farman," said the guv'nor. "You are not safe while these enemies of yours are at liberty."

"Say, they're not—enemies, sir!"

"Friends do not commit a brutal assault——"

"That was a mistake, sure," said Farman. "I kinder wriggled, and my head got round where it shouldn't. Say, I'm real anxious to let the whole matter drop."

If I don't choose to speak, you can't force me, sir—can you?"

"Of course not, Farman," put in the Head. "But why are you not straight-forward? I warn you that if another affair of this sort happens, you will have to leave the school. I really cannot have St. Frank's dragged into disrepute. Good gracious me! Parents will be nervous of entrusting me with their sons!"

Farman looked very pained.

"Snakes! I hadn't thought of that, sir!" he said frankly. "Why, say, there'll be no more of it. But I just can't say anything more."

"You will not tell us who attacked you?" asked Lee.

"No, sir."

The guv'nor bit his lip.

"Then, perhaps, you will tell us who did not attack you?" he asked.

"I don't quite get you, sir."

"The fellows are saying that I bowled you over, Farman," I put in. "They think that I hit you with that cudgel—and I'm in a bit of a fix."

Justin B. Farman stared at me in astonishment.

"Waal, you surprise me!" he ejaculated. "The fellers think that you knocked me over? Say, the fellers are sure—loony. You, Bennett? You didn't touch me with your little finger!"

"Bennett is exonerated, then," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Why, sure!" said Farman. "Bennett's a friend of mine!"

I was, of course, vindicated—I had reckoned on this, and the chaps would feel rather sorry for themselves when the Head stated the facts.

But Farman would not say any more.

As to who his attackers were, or why they were persecuting him, we were left to imagine for ourselves. Upon the whole, the matter was not so serious as I had supposed. The assault upon Farman had been brutal, but not grave.

We left the hospital, Nelson Lee very thoughtful, and went back to the Head's study. Then the guv'nor and I were left alone while Dr. Stafford went out and called a general assembly of the school in Big Hall.

When the head came back he smiled at me.

"You had better go now, my boy," he said. "Take your usual place in the Remove. I shall soon remove all stigma from your name. It is a pity Farman

was so obstinate; but he said sufficient, at all events, to clear your name completely."

Two minutes later I was in the wide passage leading to Big Hall. It was thronged with fellows—seniors and juniors.

"Hallo! Here's the little bouncer!" said Grayson, of the Fifth. "Going to be sacked—eh? You deserve it, you bloodthirsty young rascal!"

"Rats!" I said cheerfully.

"Of course he's going to be sacked," said Gulliver. "That's what the school's called together for. Nothing else, I suppose?"

"A flogging as well, I should say," grinned Fullwood. "Look at the way he's brazening it out! You might think he was innocent!"

Handforth grabbed my arm.

"Now then, own up!" he commanded magisterially. "Might as well, now that you're going to get the sack!"

"Who's going to get the sack?" I asked.

"You are, ain't you?"

"First I've heard of it!"

"Oh, you'll hear all about it in a minute or two," chuckled Fullwood. "By Jove! You don't mean to say that the Head's goin' to let you off with a public flogging?"

"I don't mean to say anything—to you!" I retorted.

Tregellis-West and Watson hurried along the passage and grabbed me. They were both looking a little anxious.

"What's the verdict, dear Benny?" asked Sir Montie.

"All serene!" I replied. "I'm exonerated!"

"Oh, rippin'—really rippin'," beamed Montie. "Dear boy, I knew it. I could tell by your face that you were innocent. I'm a wonder at readin' faces. Now, I can read all sorts of guilt on Fullwood's face!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood didn't hear that, or there might have been trouble in the passage; not that Sir Montie would have minded.

I went to my place with the rest of the Remove. The Head, I saw, was standing on the raised platform at the end of the great hall, talking with Mr. Aivington and Mr. Crowell.

And as the Head stepped forward, facing the great throng of boys, there was an expectant hush.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MUCH TROUBLE STARTS
BREWING.

DR. STAFFORD cleared his throat. "I have called the school together," he began, in grave tones, "because it is necessary for me to make a public statement concerning a certain boy in the Fourth Form. As you all know, Farman, of the Fourth Form, has been brutally attacked, and injured. Happily, his injury is not at all serious."

There was a murmur of relief.

"That fact, however, does not lessen the guilt of the ruffians who assaulted him," went on the Head. "Word has come to my ears of a preposterous rumour which, I believe, has been circulating throughout the whole school. I am referring to the rumour concerning Bennett, of the Fourth Form."

Fullwood and Co. looked astonished.

"Rumour—what?" whispered Fullwood. "It's a dead cert—not a rumour!"

"Certain boys have maliciously declared that Bennett committed the attack upon Farman," continued Dr. Stafford. "That statement is not only untrue, but grossly unfair to the lad in question. Bennett did his utmost to rescue Farman from the clutches of the men who assailed him, but, unfortunately, Bennett was unable to reach the spot in time. I now wish to state—I do state, emphatically—that Bennett is entirely and absolutely innocent of the suspicion which has been circulated throughout the school."

The Head paused, and I saw scores of fellows looking at me, most of them with surprised expressions. Fullwood and Co. were frankly disappointed.

"Rot!" muttered Fullwood. "It's a hush-up—that's what it is!"

"You rotter!" hissed Handforth. "Bennett's cleared!"

The Head cleared his throat again.

"Unfortunately, Farman does not know—or declines to state—who attacked him," he went on. "He has positively declared, however, that Bennett had no hand in the affair. Farman has assured me that Bennett is innocent, and that assurance from the victim himself is, I imagine, sufficient evidence of Bennett's innocence."

"Bennett's story is that he saw two men fall upon Farman, and knock him to

the ground," said Dr. Stafford. "By an unlucky chance, Farman's own companions had gone into the wood for some reason of their own, and so they are quite unable to bear out any portion of Bennett's statement. However, the lad is quite exonerated, and I have felt it my duty to make that statement publicly. Needless to say, every effort will be made to trace the ruffians who were actually responsible. That is all, my boys. You may dismiss."

And the school dismissed.

Grayson, of the Fifth, passed me, grinning.

"I called you a bloodthirsty young scoundrel, didn't I?" he said. "I was wrong, kid—and I'm glad. As a matter of fact, I didn't believe the yarn from the first!"

"Oh, no!" I said sarcastically. "We all know that!"

Grayson went off, and I was surrounded by a crowd of Removites.

"Sorry I doubted you, old son," said Handforth genially. "But the thing was a bit thick, wasn't it? But, if you didn't whack Farman, who did?"

"No good asking me," I replied. "Farman knows, but he won't speak."

"Why won't he speak?" sneered Fullwood.

"Because he chooses to keep silent, I suppose," I replied. "Old Alvy tried to make him tell us everything, but he wouldn't."

"Of course not!" grinned Fullwood.

"What are you getting at, you cad?" demanded Hubbard.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Fullwood. "But it's queer—that's all I say. If Farman had told the Head who the men were, or what they were like, it would have been a different thing. But he didn't describe the men, because there weren't any men to describe!"

"That means you still think Bennett guilty?" bawled Handforth.

"It means—what it does mean!" said Fullwood enigmatically.

And he went off with his chums.

I went to Study C with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. It was still daylight, but too late for cricket. So we went to our study for prep.

"Well, I'm glad that's over," I said, with a laugh. "It was rather rotten, being suspected of such a beastly act. And, now I'm calm, I can't believe Farman slit up Long's coat at all."



Nipper is tried by his Form mates.—(See p. 20.)

"Who did, then?" asked Tommy.

"Fullwood, I expect—or else Long himself," I replied. "Don't you remember the rebuff Farman gave Fullwood just after lessons? Farman declined to go to tea with the Nuts, and said a few home truths at the same time."

"Begad! You're right, dear fellow," said Sir Montie lazily. "You are always right, if we come to that. Fullwood's a vindictive merchant, you know. He remembers things. He lets 'em stew. Then he opens a safety valve, and something mean and caddish is the result."

I nodded.

"He wanted to get his own back on Farman, and so arranged things with Long. He knew that I should be down on Farman like a hundred of bricks," I said. "He was cunning enough to realise that he's caused a rupture between Farman and me. And that's just what he wanted. I dare say it was all done on the spur of the moment, when he saw Farman going up to the dormitory. Fullwood wouldn't mind handing Long a quid for the damage to his coat."

"Anyhow, we'll ask Farman about it when he comes out of the hospital," said Watson. "If he says he didn't do it, I'll take his word."

We settled down to our prep. I was quite elated now, for I knew that my position in the Remove hadn't been shaken. But I was soon—very soon—to receive a rude shock.

I didn't get on with my prep. very well. I was thinking. And I determined to have a few words with the guv'nor before going to bed. I wanted to discuss the affair with him. Why hadn't Farman spoken? It was very strange, to say the least. And I was just a little annoyed. It was silly of the fellow to make a mystery over nothing.

"Dreamin'—what?" drawled Tregellis-West.

I looked up, and grinned. I'd been chewing my penholder.

"No, I wasn't dreaming, Montie," I replied. "Just thinking, that's all. But I suppose I shall have to get on with prep.—"

There was a thump at the door, and then a head came in. The head belonged to Timothy Griffith, of the Remove—a denizen of Study J.

"You fellows are wanted in the common-room," he said, with a curious look at me.

"We can be wanted, then," said Watson. "Clear off, Griff—we're busy."

"It's a House meeting of the Remove," said Griffith. "Every fellow's got to be there. I'm just rounding up the stragglers."

"A House meeting!" said Tommy. "What the dickens for?"

"Something on," replied Griffith. "You'd better go."

And the head disappeared, and we heard its owner rounding up some more stragglers from Study B, next door. I looked at my two chums curiously. Somehow, I guessed that I was the chief figure of that form meeting.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

"I s'pose we'd better," said Tommy Watson. "If it's a House meeting, we may be wanted to vote for something. Every chap's supposed to turn up at a House meeting. Of course, it's only the Remove."

Sir Montie sighed.

"More exertion," he yawned. "It's gettin' wearisome, dear fellows. I shall go on strike—I shail, really. Form meetin's ain't the thing after all the excitement we've had. But there's no rest for the wicked; that's why Fullwood's always busy, I s'pose!"

We left our prep. and went along to the common-room. It was really the time of the evening when every fellow ought to have been busy at prep., but work was put completely aside for the time being.

The common-room was crowded with Ancient House Removites. They were there to a man. And Ralph Leslie Fullwood was standing on the table, holding forth loudly and excitedly.

Fullwood was eloquent, and he was receiving a great amount of attention. True, Handforth was bawling out a speech on his own account in one corner, but his audience seemed to consist solely of Church and McClure.

"Here he is!" said Fullwood, as I came in. "Here's the hooligan!"

I flushed angrily.

"You'd better not say that again, Fullwood," I said quietly. "I've licked you once, and I'll lick you again for two pins. You know jolly well that the Head cleared me of that rotten charge—"

"Did he clear you?" sneered Fullwood.

"Yes, he did!"

"I'm not so sure of that," went on Fullwood calmly. "This is a Form

meetin' to discuss the subject. It looks to me as if you deceived the Head. Anyhow, we're goin' to thrash the subject out—now!"

"Begad! He's goin' as strong as ever!" murmured Tregellis-West. "And we fondly imagined that it was all over! Have you got some fresh evidence, Fullwood, dear bounder? Have you found the bloodstained knife, or the dented revolver bullet? I'll wire to Scotland Yard——"

"Make that ass quiet, for goodness sake!" growled Fullwood. "We don't want any fresh evidence—we've got all the evidence we need. Bennett knocked Farman down, and I'm going to prove it! I'm goin' to prove that Bennett's a lyin' cad, and a beastly hooligan!"

Tommy Watson strode forward.

"Look here, I protest against this!" he shouted. "I suppose you're not going to let that cad Fullwood influence you? You know he hates Bennett, and he's doing this out of sheer spite. Don't listen to him!"

"Rag him, I say," drawled Montie. "Give him the giddy frog's march. I'll stand an' laugh. I'm willin' to do my share!"

The Removites were uncertain for a moment.

"Give him a fair hearing—give 'em both a fair hearing," said Armstrong. "Let's have Fullwood first, and then Bennett. Bennett'll have to answer the charge. If he can't do it satisfactorily, we'll have a trial!"

"That's it—a trial!" yelled Teddy Long. "I'll be judge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be silly asses!" said Long. "I'll make a fine judge—— Yow—ow! Oh, you beast, Handforth!"

"Shut up, then!" said Handforth, glaring. "You're the cause of the whole trouble, anyhow—you with your ragtime jacket!"

"Who votes for a trial?" shouted Gulliver.

A great number of hands went up, and I looked on grimly.

"It's all tommy rot!" declared Watson hotly. "What's the good of a trial? Hasn't the Head publicly stated that Bennett's innocent? You're not going to doubt the Head's word, are you, you fat-heads? Ain't Dr. Stafford's decision good enough for you?"

"A trial! A trial!" yelled a score of voices.

"It's rottenly unfair, giving a fellow a trial after he's proved innocent!" roared Watson furiously. "The whole thing's thin, anyhow. Bennett only meant to give Farman a jawing. Do you think he'd smash him with a cudgel just because he ruined one of Long's measly jackets?"

"Bennett lost his temper," said Fullwood. "He an' Farman had a fight, I expect, and then Bennett, in a savage mood, picked up that stick——"

"Rot!"

"Utter rot, dear lads!" said Sir Montie.

"Well, a trial won't do any harm if Bennett's innocent," remarked Handforth.

"If!" bellowed Watson. "There's no 'if'! We all know——"

I stepped forward calmly.

"I'm not afraid of a trial," I said. "Why should I be? If the fellows want a trial, let 'em have it. But Fullwood's not going to be the judge! I'll be firm on that point. The judge has got to be a disinterested party."

"That's me!" said Edward Oswald Handforth promptly.

"No, it isn't!" cut in Watson, who had stood by me nobly, and was now hot with anger at the injustice of the whole proceeding. "If there's going to be a trial—and the whole idea is rotten—we'll have a College House chap as judge. That's only fair. And we're not going to have any of the Nuts in the jury!"

"That's reasonable enough," said Hubbard.

There was considerable excitement for a few moments. The majority of the fellows believed in my innocence. I knew that. But the idea of a Form trial appealed to them, and they were anxious to have it, just for the novelty and the excitement. The jury, too, would be all in my favour from the start. So what did it matter?

"Oh, get on with it!" I said impatiently. "I'm willing!"

Fullwood gave me a malicious glance. Even Fullwood knew that I was innocent, but he meant to blacken me if he could. He meant to convince the Removites that I was guilty. The fact that I was innocent didn't worry Fullwood in the least. If he had seen the whole affair, if he had witnessed the actual attack by the two men, he would have done just

the same as he was doing now. He saw a chance of regaining his old power in the Remove, and he had seized that chance. Fullwood wanted a victory.

"I don't see why we should go outside of our own House for a judge," he exclaimed warmly. "That's rot! Merrell can be judge, or Bell——"

"One of your own pals!" snapped Hubbard. "No fear! We're going to have a proper trial if we have one at all. I suggest Christine or Oldfield. Christine'll be best, as he's the junior skipper in the College House."

"He'll do!" said Watson. "Canham, cut across and fetch Bob Christine over here, and bring half a dozen other fellows for the jury. It's only fair that the jury should be disinterested, too."

There was a buzz of approval, and Fullwood didn't utter the protest which was on his lips. But he'd got his way about the trial, and he meant to bring in a verdict of "guilty" if he could possibly manage it.

Events promised to be interesting!

CHAPTER VI.

TRIED BY THE FORM.

BOB CHRISTINE & Co., of Study Q, in the College House, strolled into the Remove common-room in the Ancient House. Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge were looking amused.

There were several other Monks, too—Harry Oldfield, and Len Clapson, and Billy Nation, of Study Z. Then came Turner and Page and Harron, the Study X trio. The common-room was pretty well packed.

"What's the trouble over here?" asked Bob Christine genially. "Can't you manage your own little affairs?"

"Easily enough," replied Tommy Watson promptly. "But you chaps are disinterested. Dick Bennett's going to be tried for assaulting Farman——"

"Why the Head cleared him of that charge!" said Talmadge.

"Of course he did! But these asses have been listening to Fullwood, and they want a Form trial," said Watson bitterly. "Bennett's agreeable, and so we're going to have it. The whole thing's rotten!"

"Sure to be, if Fullwood suggested it," observed Oldfield.

Fullwood scowled.

"I knew what it would be if we had these beastly Monkeys here!" he said savagely. "Clear 'em all out! We can manage a trial on our own, I suppose?"

"Rats!"

"Stay here, you Monks! You're the jury."

"Oh, we're the jury!" grinned Clapson. "Who's the judge? Not Fullwood? He'll pass sentence before there's any evidence given! Can't expect any sort of justice from Fullwood, you know."

"If any of the masters came here and found this going on," I exclaimed, "he'd punish the whole Form. So you'd better get it over as quickly as possible. I've been publicly cleared by the Head himself, and I've got nothing to be afraid of. Pile in as soon as you like!"

"We want you to be judge, Christine," said Watson.

"Any old thing!" grinned Bob Christine. "Where do I sit?"

There were lots of tables and chairs in the common-room, and one of the tables was dragged against the wall and a chair placed upon it. Bob Christine mounted this and sat down.

Other chairs were placed for the jury. The jury was composed of the eight Monks and four Fossils—Hubbard, McClure, Church, and Handforth. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West preferred to stand out.

"Hold on!" said Handforth. "What about counsel?"

"Who's going to prosecute?" grinned Oldfield from the jury-box.

"I am," said Fullwood. "I'm counsel for the prosecution."

"Who's going to defend the prisoner?" asked Christine.

Nobody answered for a moment; then Tregellis-West lounged forward.

"I'll be counsel for the defence," he yawned. "It's a fag and a bore, but I don't mind. Better than lookin' on. Lookin' on makes me tired. I'll make the openin' speech, if you like——"

"Ass! Counsel for the defence doesn't jaw first!" said Handforth.

"That's a pity," sighed Sir Montie. "I wanted to get it over, you know."

"Where's the bar?" inquired Hubbard, grinning. "Must have a bar for the prisoner, you know, and a witness-box, too. If you're going to have a trial, let's do it properly."

I was placed between a couple of chairs, and the witness-box was composed

of a square made out of chairs, placed back to back. One side was left empty for the witness to enter.

"Now we're ready!" said Fullwood, with relish. "Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Oughtn't I to ask that?" grinned Christine, from his elevated seat.

"This ain't a proper court," said Fullwood. "The main thing is to prove the prisoner's guilt——"

"That's what the prosecuting counsel's for," said Watson. "He tries to get a conviction even if he knows the prisoner's innocent. That's justice. Anyhow, it's supposed to be justice. Pay counsel a big enough fee, and he'll get you off all right. That's the other side."

"Shut up, Watson!" said Fullwood, jamming his eyeglass into his eye. "Prisoner at the bar——"

"Oh, get on with it!" I interrupted. "I plead not guilty."

"What is your name?" asked Fullwood.

"I suppose you've never heard it?" I asked sarcastically.

"You must refrain from making irrelevant remarks," said the prosecuting counsel. "Answer the question!"

"Winston Churchill," I said calmly.

"Oh, this is rot!" said Fullwood, looking round. "What's the good of trying to hold a trial if the prisoner acts the goat? We'll pass over that point. The prisoner's name is Richard Bennett, and he stands in the dock accused of causing serious bodily injury to Justin B. Farman. I call Thomas Watson as my first witness."

"Rats! I'm a witness for the defence," said Watson tartly.

"All right! I'll cross-examine you later," said counsel. "Owen major!"

"Hallo!" said Owen major. "I'm not going to give evidence——"

"Yes, you are. Get into the witness-box."

Owen major did so.

"Now, Owen major, you were with Farman just before the assault," said Fullwood. "How long were you away from him?"

"Only about five minutes."

"You plunged into the wood with Canham?"

"Yes, we were after a butterfly."

"Never mind that!" said counsel. "Did you hear any suspicious sounds while you were in the wood? Did you hear anybody in the wood with you?"

"Yes."

"Eh?" Fullwood started. "You did hear somebody?"

"Of course I did!"

"Ah! You must have fancied——"

"I heard Canham," said Owen major calmly. "He was with me."

The court grinned, and Fullwood snorted and looked relieved. He had begun to fear that Owen's evidence would upset things, for, if Owen had heard sounds of somebody else, it would have shown that strangers were in the wood. Fullwood didn't want evidence of that kind.

"Witnesses are supposed to answer questions—not play the fool!" said Fullwood acidly. "You didn't hear anybody except Canham?"

"No."

"What did you see when you emerged from the wood?"

Owen major reflected.

"I saw a horrible sight," he said—"a frightful sight, in fact!"

"Ah! You mean Farman's face——"

"No, I don't," said Owen. "I mean your face. That's a horrible sight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The judge and jury and everybody else roared.

"I suppose you think that's funny?" snarled Fullwood savagely. "What's the good of this rot? Get on with the business! You saw Farman lyin' on the ground, didn't you? And you saw Bennett standing over him?"

"Bennett wasn't standing over him. He was close by."

"And you hadn't heard a sound, or seen a sign, of a stranger?"

"No."

"That points to the fact that there were no strangers—what?"

"No, it doesn't," said Owen major. "It points to the fact that the wood is jolly dense, and I shouldn't have heard any strangers if they'd numbered a dozen. It's quite possible that there were a couple of men there."

"That's enough! You can stand down."

Owen major looked across at Sir Montie.

"Don't you want to cross-examine me?" he asked.

"Too much fag, dear fellow," yawned Tregellis-West. "I shouldn't get any more out of you. Your evidence is in favour of the defence, anyhow."

There was a momentary lull, and I suppressed a yawn. I was getting fed up with the trial already. It was a silly business, anyhow. Yet somehow I had an idea that Fullwood was going to triumph. I wasn't afraid, but I was inwardly angry.

"Albert Gulliver!" said Fullwood.

"Hallo!" said Albert Gulliver.

"You're wanted in the witness-box, ass!"

"Oh, right-ho! I'm ready."

Gulliver stepped into the witness-box and looked round smilingly.

"Where were you just after five o'clock this evening?" asked counsel.

"Where was I? Lemme see!" said Gulliver. "Just finishing tea, wasn't I?"

"No, you weren't!" snapped Fullwood. "You were just outside the House, and Bennett and Tregellis-West and Watson were there, too."

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

"That won't do!" put in the judge severely. "Counsel mustn't tell the witness what to say. If the witness doesn't know things, he can't answer questions. It's no good your putting things to the witness just so he'll agree with them, Fullwood."

"Well, Gulliver shouldn't be such an ass!" snorted Fullwood.

"Look here——"

"Oh, dry up! We want to get on," said counsel. "You were outside the Ancient House? Very well! Tell the jury what happened there."

"Why, that little cad, Long, came down, and showed us a jacket—an Eton jacket—all ripped to shreds! Farman had ripped it up like that——"

"How do you know that?" asked Christine.

"Long said that Farman did it, anyhow," said Gulliver. "And Bennett flew into a fury, and swore that he'd smash Farman. Bennett went off ravin', his face as black as thunder. He knew that Farman and Owen and Canham had gone to Bellton Wood, and he went after 'em to get hold of Farman."

"To give him the hiding of his life?" asked the prosecuting counsel.

"That's what Bennett said."

"Did you say that, Bennett?" asked the judge, looking at me.

"Yes. I was thundering wild at the time," I answered.

"The judge ain't supposed to ask the prisoner questions!" roared Fullwood.

"Keep to the rules, Christine! Well, and what happened after that, Gulliver? What happened after Bennett had gone off—with the avowed intention, mind you, of knocking Farman into mince-meat?"

Gulliver thought for a moment.

"Why, the car arrived," he said.

"Which car?" asked one of the jurymen.

"A car Fullwood had hired from Bannington by 'phone," said Gulliver. "It came, and we started off for a spin. We took the short cut on to the Bannington Road. We turned a corner, and saw——"

"That's it!" said Fullwood eagerly. "What did you see?"

"You ought to know! You were there!"

"Ass! You've got to tell the jury!" snapped counsel.

"Oh, I see! We turned the corner, and saw Bennett standing on the grass beside the road," went on Gulliver, warning to his work. "Bennett was bending over somebody—Farman—and he held a thick cudgel in his hand. Farman's face was bruised and bleeding."

"Do you consider that his injuries were caused by the cudgel?"

"Of course they were!"

"And the cudgel was in Bennett's hand?"

"Yes."

"Bennett was standing right over the stricken fellow?"

"Yes, right over him."

"Was there anybody else in sight?"

"Not a soul," said Gulliver. "Bennett was there alone, except for Farman, and Farman was lying in the grass, badly injured."

"Remembering Bennett's words just before he left the school, you assumed that he had inflicted the injuries upon Farman?"

"I didn't assume it. I knew it," said Gulliver. "Who else would have done it? There wasn't a soul anywhere. Bennett and Farman had the spot to themselves, and Bennett was looking scared and pale."

Fullwood looked round triumphantly. Gulliver's evidence was certainly convincing, and I felt a little uneasy. I could see that the jury was impressed. This was the first time the details of the affair had been stated before the whole Remove. The College House fellows hadn't

heard the details at all, as a matter of fact, and the jury was impressed.

Sir Montie stood up.

"I'm goin' to ask the witness a few questions," he said. "It's necessary. He's given the jury a false impression——"

"I've told the truth," said Gulliver.

"Dear boy, I don't doubt it—although you are rather a liar, as a rule," said Tregellis-West lazily. "Bennett himself admits all you've said. There's nothing in it, after all. Now for the questions. Did you see the prisoner actually strike the blow—any blow?"

"No," admitted Gulliver.

"Was he in a threatenin' attitude?"

"Yes, he was."

"Because he was standin' over Farman?"

"Of course."

"I submit to the jury that Bennett's attitude wasn't threatenin' at all," said Sir Montie. "He naturally stood over Farman, because he was finding out how serious his hurts were. Do you suppose he would have stood ten yards off? Any fellow in the same circumstances would have stood over Farman—it was the most natural thing for him to do."

I looked at the judge and jury. They were serious, and, I believe, Montie's shot had told. But the schoolboy baronet had another card up his sleeve—which, I'll admit, I hadn't thought of. Montie was cute.

"Bennett had a cudgel in his hand at the time," said Gulliver seriously. "Was that natural?"

"Yes. He picked it up mechanically."

There was a mocking laugh from Fullwood and Co., and the jury smiled. Even the jury couldn't quite believe that.

"About the cudgel," went on Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez. "What sort of a cudgel was it, Gulliver?"

"A whacking lump of sitck, thick at one end, and thin at the other."

"It wasn't merely a broken piece of a tree-branch?"

"No; it was a manufactured thing—a proper bludgeon," said Gulliver, with relish. "That's it—a bludgeon. A hooligan's bludgeon, in fact."

Gulliver found great satisfaction in pronouncing the word.

"We're getting on fine," said Sir Montie languidly. "A manufactured bludgeon—what? An' Bennett used it to smash Farman? Now, tell me, Gulliver,

how long would it take you to make a cudgel like that?"

Gulliver looked at Sir Montie suspiciously.

"How do I know?" he asked. "I should have to find the right piece of wood first, an' then fashion the thing properly, an' trim up the handle an' all that. It couldn't have been made in less than twenty minutes."

"Dear boy, you're quite right," smiled Montie urbanely. "Twenty minutes to make the bludgeon. That's rippin'. Did Bennett have the thing when he was outside the Ancient House—when Long came out with his jacket?"

"Of course he didn't."

"Then he must have made it afterwards?"

"I—I suppose so," said the witness uncertainly.

"An' you an' Fullwood an' the others left the school, I understand, about a couple of minutes after Bennett had left?" went on Montie. "Therefore, the time that elapsed between the departure of Bennett and when you found him bendin' over Farman couldn't have been more than seven or eight minutes?"

"Look here!" shouted Fullwood, "this ain't right——"

"Let the witness answer!" said the judge sharply.

"Yes, about eight minutes, I suppose," said Gulliver. "Not more than ten, anyhow."

"An' the bludgeon took at least twenty minutes to make?" asked Tregellis-West pleasantly. "It couldn't have been done, old boy. I submit to the jury that Bennett couldn't have committed the deed, because he couldn't have made the cudgel. An' the jury will have sense enough to realise that the prisoner didn't carry the thing about with him, up his sleeve, or in his waistcoat pocket."

The fellows were grinning now; Montie's argument was sound, and the jury, at least, nodded among themselves with great solemnity.

Gulliver looked furious.

"Bennett must have made the bludgeon beforehand——" he began.

"You're a witness," put in Bob Christine curtly. "Witnesses ain't allowed to pass any remarks—they're in the box to answer questions."

"I've done, dear fellow," drawled Sir Montie. "Gully can stand down."

Gulliver stood down, and Ralph Leslie

Fullwood jumped up again. He was looking angry, and almost alarmed. He shot a fierce, venomous glance at me. But I just smiled.

"I'm not going to have the jury bluffed by Tregollis-West," he shouted. "He's twisted——"

"Hold on," said Oldfield, the foreman of the jury, "West ain't twisted anything. He conducted his cross-examination in the right way."

"There's nothing in the argument he put forward—nothing whatever," declared Fullwood hotly. "It's childish to suggest that Bennett didn't do it because he couldn't have made the bludgeon. Of course he didn't make it—then. He either made it beforehand, as Gulliver said, or he found it. Nothing very remarkable in finding a chunk of heavy stick, is there? I submit that Bennett picked it up in the heat of a sudden fury, and used it against Farman before he realised what he was doing."

"Then you don't blame him?" asked the judge.

"Yes, I do! I should think so!" went on Fullwood. "Bennett committed a dastardly assault, and he'll have to pay for it. My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I could call other witnesses to corroborate Gulliver's statements—but it isn't necessary. Everybody knows the facts. And I am now going to place my arguments before you, clearly and briefly——"

"As briefly as possible, for goodness sake!" murmured Talmadge.

"You have heard how the attack was committed; you have heard the facts as they stand at present," went on Fullwood, warming to his work. "Well, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury——"

"Get on with it!" bawled Handforth.

"I submit that the Head has been wilfully deceived," said Fullwood boldly. "Dr. Stafford is a bit of a muff, in his way, you know—it's easy enough to stuff him up with a pack of lies——"

"You ought to know," said Christine. "You've practised, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this a trial or not?" shouted Fullwood, turning red. "I say that the Head has been hoodwinked! In Big Hall, a little while ago, he told the whole school that Bennett was innocent, didn't he?"

"And he is innocent!" shouted Tommy Watson.

"That remains to be seen," sneered

Fullwood. "The jury's got to give its verdict. The Head, of course, believed that Bennett was innocent. Why? Because Farman told him that Bennett did not touch him. Farman has stated that Bennett is innocent."

"Well, that clinches the matter, I should say," remarked the judge. "Farman was the chap who got walloped. He wouldn't say Bennett was innocent if he was really guilty, I suppose?"

Fullwood slapped the table hard.

"That's just it!" he exclaimed. "My argument is this: Farman didn't say that Bennett had assaulted him, because he was afraid to! He feared Bennett's wrath afterwards. Farman didn't realise that the rotter would be sacked from the school, and he thought that Bennett would revenge himself upon him for having sneaked. Farman stated that Bennett didn't touch him, simply because he daren't say anything else! That's what I submit to the jury!"

The jury looked thoughtful, and there was a hush in the common-room.

"And has the jury considered another point?" went on the prosecuting counsel, following up his advantage rapidly. "Why didn't Farman say who had attacked him? Isn't that significant? We've got to look at the facts. Farman simply said that Bennett didn't do it—but Farman didn't say who did! The Head told us that—as you all know. Don't you think it queer that Farman kept secret an important thing like that? Yet it isn't queer at all."

"Why isn't it queer?" asked the judge curiously.

"I will tell you." Fullwood adjusted his eyeglass, and surveyed the judge and the jury with great composure. Fullwood was feeling that he had turned the tide in his favour. "Farman didn't tell the Head who had brutally attacked him, because he couldn't do so without giving Bennett away. He was afraid to give Bennett away, because Bennett had probably threatened him. And so, as a kind of compromise, he said that Bennett didn't do it—and refused to say anything else. He couldn't say anything else without lying, and he probably jibbed at that."

"That's more than you'd do!" grunted Watson.

"I submit my arguments for what they are worth," concluded Fullwood. "The jury can only come to one decision.

Bennett attacked Farman! Bennett is guilty, but he forced Farman, by threats, to tell the Head the opposite. The very fact that Farman was so secretive proves my case up to the hilt. That's all."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood sat down.

The case for the prosecution was at an end.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VERDICT OF THE JURY—TOMMY AND MONTIE STICK TO ME—FINIS.

I LOOKED round the common-room rather bitterly. I could see, at a glance, that Fullwood's concluding speech had done much to influence the Removites. The Nut-leader's argument had gone home.

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked George Bell.

"Rats! We've got to have the other side before the jury give any verdict," said Watson warmly. "Now, Montie, you're counsel for the defence. You've got to prove your case, and put an end to this rot."

Tregellis-West lounged forward.

"It's a bore," he complained. "Still, for Benny's sake, I'm game. I'm game for anything. I want Teddy Long as first witness."

"Me?" said Long nervously. "I ain't going to give evidence——"

"You're called," put in the judge. "Get into the box, ass!"

The sneak of the Remove thumped across the floor, and entered the witness-box. He was looking alarmed and uneasy. His little eyes were restless, and he didn't look at Tregellis-West.

"How much did Fullwood pay you for rippin' up your jacket, Long?" asked Sir Montie calmly.

"A quid—— I—I mean——" Teddy Long gasped. "Farman ripped it up, you ass!"

The sneak of the Remove turned pale as he saw Fullwood glaring at him. Long hadn't realised the significance of Sir Montie's calmly voiced inquiry until too late. I almost grinned.

"You little liar!" hissed Fullwood. "I didn't give you——"

"You shut up, Fullwood!" rapped out Christine sharply.

"Go to the dickens, you rotten Monkey——"

"You've made me judge, and I'm

going to see order kept!" snapped Christine. "This is a court—for the time being—and the prosecuting counsel ain't supposed to interrupt. If you don't be quiet, you'll be chucked out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Chuck him out, anyhow!"

The Removites were enthusiastic for a moment. But Fullwood scowled and sat down again. He didn't want to be chucked out. Tregellis-West was quite cool and composed. He had taken Long off his guard, and had succeeded in making the witness admit something which he would never have admitted otherwise.

"Fullwood paid you a quid for rippin' up the jacket—what?" asked Sir Montie.

"Yes—— That is, no!" panted Long desperately. "Fullwood didn't give me anything. Farman did it——"

"Did you see Farman do it?"

"Yes, of course," replied Teddy eagerly. "He took his knife and simply tore it to shreds. I—I was hiding under one of the beds."

"Begad! Why were you hidin'?" asked counsel mildly. "Why didn't you jump out and put a stop to it?"

"I—I——" Long floundered. "You see, I was afraid to come out, because I heard somebody coming along the passage. I didn't want to be seen in the dormitory at that time, just after Farman had gone out——"

"Oh, Farman had gone out, had he?"

"No!" said Long. "Of course he hadn't! I never said he had, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the good of puttin' Long into the witness-box?" snarled Fullwood.

"You know what a little liar he is——"

"Fullwood, dear fellow, I am conductin' this defence," interrupted Sir Montie quietly. "Long has admitted that you paid him a pound for rippin' up Long's jacket. I am glad the truth of that has come to light. Bennett thought Farman had done that mean trick——"

"So he did!" exclaimed Fullwood hotly. "Long's a confounded little liar!"

"What about you?" roared Teddy Long angrily. "Didn't you promise to give me a quid, you rotter? I haven't seen it yet——"

"Oh, so the dear boy hasn't paid up?" drawled Montie.

"And I bet he won't, now!" roared Long angrily. "If you don't gimme that

quid, Fullwood, I'll give you away—see if I don't! You ain't going to play about with me——"

"The witness can stand down," interrupted Tregellis-West. "My lord and gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the witness's unsatisfactory replies. He's been lyin'. It's a speciality of Bong's. Caught it from Fullwood, I suppose. These things are catchin', you know. I submit to you that Fullwood worked up a beastly trick on Farman—out of revenge. Fullwood rather enjoys revenge. Farman told him to go an' eat coke, or words to that effect, an' Fullwood's dignity was upset. He did his best to get Farman into a row. And if Fullwood will tell lies over one thing, he'll tell 'em over another. Long ripped up that jacket himself—after Fullwood had promised to pay him for it. Begad, that was a mean trick—what?"

"Rotten!"

"Scrag him!"

There were many angry faces turned towards Fullwood, and it looked for a moment as though he were about to be collared. I was decidedly pleased, for I had always had a kind of idea that Farman had committed that mean trick. His innocence was proved now.

"Look here!" roared Fullwood.

"That affair's got nothin' to do with this! Bennett thought that Farman was guilty, didn't he? And he went off with the intention of smashin' Farman."

"That's right enough," said the foreman of the jury. "You Fossils will have to settle with your pet blackguard yourselves. We're here to give a verdict on Bennett's case. Have you got any more witnesses to call?"

Sir Montie looked at me doubtfully.

"I'll put Bennett himself in the box," he exclaimed after a moment. "Benny, dear boy, kindly step over here."

I entered the witness-box.

"Did you assault Justin B. Farman?" asked Sir Montie calmly.

"No, I didn't."

"But you saw who did?"

"Yes, two strange men," I replied. "I was at the other end of the meadow, and I saw Owen and Canham disappear into the wood. Then the men sprang out upon Farman and knocked him down. I tried to rescue him, but I couldn't get there in time. That's all."

"When you got to the spot the men had gone?"

"Yes."

"An' you heard the merry Fullwood & Co. approachin'?"

"I heard a car coming—yes, and I was pleased," I replied. "I could see that Farman was rather badly hit, and he wanted attention."

"You picked up the cudgel, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Why did you pick it up?" asked Sir Montie. "You were rather an ass, you know, Bennett, to pick it up. Fullwood saw it in your hand, and he jumped to a silly conclusion. But perhaps you can throw some light on the matter?"

"I don't think I can," I replied. "I just picked the thing up mechanically, and if the jury doesn't like to believe that it can do the other thing! Farman told the Head in my presence that I didn't touch him. Mr. Alvington was there, too. They both know that I am innocent, and the Head has vindicated my character before the whole school. That ought to be enough."

"Quite right, dear boy. You can stand down."

I left the witness-box, and Tregellis-West turned.

"I think this farce has gone far enough," he said quietly. "You've heard all that's been said, and now you'd better bring your verdict in: Bennett's innocent. An' you'd better show some sense, and bring in a verdict of 'Not guilty!'"

Sir Montie sat down, but Fullwood at once jumped up.

"Yes, we've heard all that's been said for the defence," he exclaimed quickly. "It amounts to nothing—nothing at all. Bennett's practically admitted the whole thing, an' if you're not idiots you'll realise it."

"Look here! This ain't fair!" bawled Handforth. "Personally, I believe Bennett's not guilty, but it ain't right for Fullwood to start jawing again, just to influence the jury——"

"The jury's got more sense than you have, Handforth!" roared Fullwood. "The jury knows jolly well that the prisoner is guilty. He can't describe the attackers, an' he's admitted that he had the cudgel in his hand. He's admitted everything. You all know that he left the school with the intention of smashin' Farman, but he smashed him more than he meant to do. Now he's tryin' to get out of it, and somehow or other he forced Farman to hoodwink the Head."

"That's all. Bennett's guilty, and he ought to be sacked!"

It was absolutely unfair, of course, for Fullwood to make that final speech, but in the excitement no objections were raised, and Fullwood's last word in the matter had due effect.

Looking at it the way he had put it, the case was black against me. The whole trouble arose from the fact that Farman had refused to give the description of the real culprits. I couldn't give that description, either, and there wasn't a single witness to appear in my favour.

The absence of Farman, too, was much against me. If he could have been put in the witness-box, he would soon have convinced the jury of my complete innocence, and the fact that the ripping of Long's Eton jacket had been a put-up job didn't weigh a mite with the jury.

Sir Montie had done his best, but I was afraid he had failed. The Removites had been greatly struck by Fullwood's eloquent condemnation. He had conducted his case cunningly, and had played a trump card by getting in the last word.

The jury consulted together for some moments. They consulted in loud voices, and as the rest of the fellows were holding a similar consultation, the common-room was filled with a perfect babel of voices.

Harry Oldfield stood up.

"Can't you kids keep quiet?" he bel-
lowed. "We've decided on our ver-
dict."

There was an immediate hush.

"Not guilty, of course?" drawled Sir Montie lazily.

"The jury has come to the conclusion that Bennett committed the deed, and therefore the verdict is—Guilty!" said Oldfield firmly.

"Guilty!"

"But the jury recommends the prisoner to mercy," continued Oldfield rapidly. "We believe that he did it in a fit of anger, and without realising the seriousness of the blow. It's up to the judge, now, to pass the sentence."

I didn't say anything. I stood quite still, and looked on with a grim face. Guilty! Altogether, I didn't blame the jury for bringing in that verdict. Some of the fellows, I believe, were still rather doubtful—Church and Handforth and Hubbard, and one or two others, were looking uneasy. But the verdict had been given now, and they couldn't do anything.

"The sentence," said Bob Christine thoughtfully—"now, what's it to be?"

Fullwood grinned triumphantly.

"We'll frog's-march him, and make him run the gauntlet!" he exclaimed viciously. "We'll bump him until he confesses, and then send him to Coventry for the rest of the term, and bar him from all studies. We'll make his life a misery——"

"You ain't the judge!" roared Hubbard furiously.

"Shut up, Fullwood!"

"Let Christine pass the sentence!"

"You've said enough already!"

Fullwood was howled down, and there was a momentary hush as Bob Christine rose from his elevated position and assumed a stern expression.

"Prisoner at the bar," he exclaimed solemnly, "you have been found guilty of committing a rotten attack upon some other ass belonging to this House. Personally, I think you're innocent, but I'm not supposed to say that. It's my job to pass sentence. And if you're sent to Coventry by the Ancient House for one month, I reckon that'll fit the case."

"Hear, hear!"

"Is that the sentence?" howled Fullwood & Co., in chorus.

"Yes. Coventry for one month!"

"You burbling ass!" shouted Fullwood hotly. "What's the good of a sentence like that? You can clear out, you rotten Monkey! We're goin' to rag Bennett until he's skinned——"

"No, we're not!" put in Handforth. "We agreed that the judge's decision should be final, and we're not going back on it. Bennett's in Coventry for a month, and there's going to be no ragging. Let's put it to the vote, anyhow. Hands up for a ragging!"

The hands of Fullwood & Co. and their chums of Study G—Merrell and Marriott and Noys—went up like clockwork. There were three others as well. Then the other side was taken, and it was decided, by an overwhelming majority, that there should be no ragging.

The court broke up, and the affair was finished. Bob Christine & Co. went off to their own house.

I was sent to Coventry!

Somehow or other, I simply couldn't help grinning. The whole thing was so utterly preposterous. Sent to Coventry, just when I'd been getting on so famously.

It was certainly a victory for Fullwood.

and he was making the most of it. He was airing his views loudly, and I couldn't intervene. I was barred by the whole Remove! Some fellows, I was sure, were in my favour, but they could not show their real feelings. The sentence had been passed, and they had to abide by it.

I was utterly ignored—left standing quite to myself. Fullwood & Co. were disappointed at the sentence, but there was no doubt that they had triumphed.

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were standing to themselves, talking in low tones. With set lips, I marched up to them.

"Are you fellows in this, too?" I asked quietly.

My two study-mates looked at me queerly, but didn't answer.

"You shut up, you rotter!" exclaimed Gulliver.

"Shut up yourself, Gully!" said Fullwood fiercely. "You're not supposed to speak to him. If anybody does speak to the cad, he'll be sent to Coventry, too!"

Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"That's rather interestin'," he drawled easily. "Benny, my dear boy, we're sent to Coventry. I'm rather pleased—I am, really! Saves a fearful amount of talkin', you know. Count on me, dear fellow! I'm with you!"

"And so am I!" declared Tommy Watson promptly.

They both gripped my hand, and I felt rather choky for a moment. It was good of these two fellows to stand by me, for they knew what the consequences would be.

"Good for you, my sons!" I said smilingly. "We'll soon set matters straight, won't we?"

We were surrounded by an angry crowd.

"Ain't you going to take any notice of the sentence?" shouted Merrell.

"No notice at all, old scout," grinned Watson.

"Then you're all three sent to Coventry together!"

"How amusin'!" murmured Tregellis-West lazily. "We're all sent to Coventry together—what? Nobody to speak to but ourselves! What a thrillin' prospect! We had better go an' finish our prep., dear boys."

And, arm-in-arm with Tommy and Montie, I left the common-room.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was victorious.

There was no doubt about that. True, his victory had not been so complete as he had desired, but it was certainly a triumph. The fact that Tregellis-West and Watson were standing by me was merely a detail.

I attempted to keep up a brave front, but in reality I was very dejected. My sudden fall was a great shock to me. For one thing, I had condemned my two study chums to a miserable existence for a whole month, and I urged them to abide by the Form's sentence.

But they positively refused to desert me. It was ripping of them, and their attitude really made my downfall all the keener. But, whereas they were merely avoided, I was positively shunned. The fellows would not come near me, and Fullwood & Co. openly jeered whenever I was within hearing.

I was barred by the whole Form—and yet I had done nothing to deserve it!

It was all the more galling, because I was just establishing myself firmly at St. Frank's. I had practically paved the way for the formation of an Ancient House Junior Cricket Eleven.

That idea, of course, would now all fall to the ground.

Even after the month was over, I should never be able to regain my old position. The Removites would scorn me, more or less, just as long as I remained at St. Frank's. And I had determined to make such alterations, too!

Before I had really got started on the job of "cleaning up" the Ancient House, Fullwood & Co. were back in power. And the Nuts were glorying in their reborn strength. Automatically, Ralph Leslie Fullwood had become leader of the Fossils again, and I literally realised that I should very soon witness the slipping back of the Ancient House into its old slack ways.

I was nobody now; the fellows would take no notice of me at all. Fullwood's cunning had gained the day, and I felt utterly miserable. Back in Study C. I did not attempt to do any prep., but just lounged in the easy-chair while Tommy and Sir Montie made a pretence of working.

But there came a revulsion of feeling.

The misery left me, and I jumped to my feet, with a fierce exclamation.

"By Jingo," I shouted, "I'm not going to stand this!"

Tregellis-West looked round mildly.

"Dear fellow, you startle me!" he exclaimed. "I'm nervous, you know. But what won't you stand? Coventry?"

"I'm not going to put up with this rot!" I declared grimly. "Somehow or other, the scoundrels who attacked Farman have got to be captured! When that happens, perhaps the Remove will feel sorry for itself."

"How are you going to capture the rotters?" asked Watson curiously. "You don't happen to be a detective, I suppose?"

I grinned cheerfully. Tommy didn't know how near the mark he had got.

"I'll tell you one thing," I replied. "Before a week's out I'll have the whole Remove signing a general apology; and then Fullwood & Co. will have to look out for themselves. Fullwood's victorious now, but it won't last!"

And, before going up to bed, to suffer further humiliation, I managed to go to Mr. Alvington's study with some excuse or other. Once alone with the House-master, I told him the main facts of the case.

It was lovely to be talking to the guv'nor again, in our usual free-and-easy manner. And Nelson Lee at first was inclined to be angry.

"The boys have sent you to Coventry, Nipper?" he asked, sitting back in his chair and lighting a cigarette. "Good gracious, the thing is absurd! How can the boys be so ridiculous? The Headmaster publicly——"

"Yes, I know, guv'nor," I interrupted. "But the fellows have got queer ideas into their heads. Of course, this is strictly on the Q.T., you know. I'm not complaining, and you mustn't take any action."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I shall let matters take their own course, young 'un," he answered. "You are quite capable of looking after yourself. And I think I have a piece of news for you which you will welcome."

"News, guv'nor?"

"Exactly! We are to take up our old profession for a little while," smiled Nelson Lee genially. "I have decided to get to the bottom of this mystery without any further delay. When the truth is revealed, you will, of course, resume your old position in the Remove."

I grinned.

"What's the programme, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"I am not exactly sure at the moment," was the guv'nor's reply. "But it seems that our old friend, Detective-Inspector Morley, of Scotland Yard, is at present staying in Bannington."

"Bannington! That's only three miles away!"

"Precisely! Morley is investigating a robbery there. The local police didn't feel up to conducting the investigation on their own hook," said Nelson Lee, "and I am going to consult Morley with regard to this Farman mystery."

"What can old Morley do, sir?"

"It's not what Morley can do; it is what we can do!" replied the guv'nor easily. "I mean to lay a trap for these enemies of Farman, for I am convinced they are still hanging about the place. And then the truth will come out."

"What sort of trap, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

"Ah, I don't know that just now," smiled Lee. "But within a day or two your term of 'Coventry' will come to a sudden end. So don't worry, young 'un! Farman refuses to say who the attackers were. Very well! We shall proceed to find out for ourselves."

.

And we did find out, too!

Nelson Lee, with my help, and the help of Detective-Inspector Morley, laid his trap carefully, and Farman's enemies were caught. The truth came out, and I was restored to my old position in the Remove Form at St. Frank's.

But I can't go into the full details of that affair here. I'm going to dive into my note-book again, get all the facts fresh in my memory, and then I'm going to set down the adventure at full length.

That's all—for the present!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

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, light-weight boxer and stoker aboard *H.M.S. Flyer*, makes his first public appearance in a contest with Jimmy Yowl, lightning feather-weight. He wins the fight, and with the prize-money is able to replace his father's torpedoed fishing smack. Tom is jealous of

BOB RANDLE who, the lad considers, is a "slacker"—on the grounds that Bob seems to find favour in the eyes of

MARY THWAITES, the pretty daughter of Fisherman Thwaites, of whom Tom is very fond.

FISHERMAN CRAWLEY'S smack is chartered as a mine-sweeper, and one day is torpedoed by a German submarine in sight of land. Old Thomas Crawley is taken prisoner and carried on board the U-boat. But the others are put afloat on a raft. They are soon picked up by a British destroyer and landed near Weathersea. Tom and Bob go to meet them, and Mary is very anxious about the fate of old Tom Crawley.

(Now read this week's thrilling instalment.)

The fact that Mary, Riley, Sam, and Morgan had been saved was in no way to the credit of the Huns. If the destroyer had not come upon the scene as she did, might they not have drifted on the raft in the ever increasing swell until the frail battens had parted and they had been engulfed?

What did it matter if Germany possessed one sea officer whose heart was big enough to hold some slight feeling of humanity? Ships were being sunk without warning every day. Germany continued her policy of murder and rapine, and the junkers in Berlin still howled for annexations and indemnities.

As Tom and Bob strolled back through the sunlit streets of Weathersea, with Mary between them and their arms

linked in hers, the brave girl told her story.

"Tom—Tom," she sighed, as they stopped outside the gate of the little cottage in which she lived, "would we had twice as many fighting men as Britain possesses to carry on the war and beat the Germans to their knees!"

"Here's one more going to France, at any rate, Mary," said Bob Randle cheerfully. "And there are hundreds more will go out with my draft. And America will soon be sending her legions."

"And the *Flyer's* nigh ready for sea again, Mary," said Tom, with brightening eyes. "If we've a bit of luck, we shall run foul of some of Fritz's skulking destroyers; and if we do, you'll see that I can do some fighting outside a boxing-ring!"

Mary thought of Tom's mother. What a wrench and trial it would be for her every time Tom went to sea now. There she would be, left alone at home to brood and grieve and wonder whether her boy would follow her father to captivity, or worse, or be drowned or slain in the dreadful fighting.

"Oh, Tom, your mother!" she faltered.

Tom winced.

"We've got to fight for her, and you, too, lass—me and Bob," growled Tom, with a far-away look in his eyes. "And I can't forget the *Dora Grey*. I fought for her, and won her in the ring, for the sake of the old dad. And now she's sunk! What's the use of trying to do anything while these German murderers are at large?"

"It's some use, Tom, boy," said Bob Randle quietly. "Look here! There's no saying when your call or mine will come! Your father hadn't much put by, had he?"

"No. He was only just beginning to earn money," answered Bob.

"Then, Tom," said Bob Randle, "go to Dan Simmons, and get him to give you another show at his boxing-hall."

before the *Flyer* puts out to sea again. The money you'll earn will go to help your mother if anything should happen to you. You see what I mean?"

Tom stared.

"Eh? You mean get up a benefit show for my old dad?" he breathed, and his eyes brightened at the idea.

"Why not? Dan's one of the best. And he likes you. All the fisher folk will rally when they know it's for Thomas Crawley's sake."

"Ay, I'll do it, Bob," said Tom.

And so he left Mary, who rushed into the cottage, to be received into her mother's yearning arms, and went home to comfort his mother, and have a further talk with Bob over that proposed benefit.

ARRANGING A BENEFIT.

TOM did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

Now that he had made it up with Bob, and was fast friends with him instead of hating and despising him as he used to do, Tom could not see enough of the khaki-clad Tommy.

And so, when both had comforted Mrs. Crawley as much as possible, they left her to sigh and moan over her absent husband, and hied them to Dan Simmons's boxing-hall.

They found Dan in his office, which was full of choking smoke, and when they had got used to the cloud of tobacco, which hung like a veil between floor and ceiling, they espied several men in khaki and a few in Navy blue, puffing away at Dan's cut navy plug and Gold Flake cigarettes, which were always there for the use of the lads who were serving their King and country on land or sea.

"Come right in, there, you Tom! Come in. Bob!" said the friendly boxing promoter. "What can I do for you?"

In a few direct sentences, Tom and Bob alternately explained the position of affairs, and stated what had brought them there.

In a moment Dan was on his feet. His face was good-natured no longer. With fists clenched, cheeks red, and eyes glistening, he stood before them, trembling with passion.

"And so they've sunk the *Dora Grey*, have they? The cowards!" he cried. "And they've taken poor Thomas Crawley away to Germany, a captive in a German submarine! Tom—Bob, I've a

mind to quit this promoting game of mine, though it would ruin me to give up this hall and the long lease I hold and the money I've sunk in it, and join the Army."

"Don't! You're years over age, Dan," said Bob Randle. "Stay at home and do your bit! You carry on! Grow vegetables, and help to guard the town as a special constable, if you feel you're not doing enough. But stand fast. Leave the fighting to Tom and me. And now, what do you say about letting Tom box at a benefit for Mrs. Crawley? It would keep her going, you see, if anything should happen to Tom."

Dan Simmons considered.

"I've been running benefits reg'lar," he returned, "and I don't know that I ought to individualise. And yet why shouldn't I? I knew Tom's father well, and Tom 'll be at sea with the *Flyer* again before you can say 'Knife!' Yes, I'll do it! Will you fight Jerry Nelson here, Tom, or is he too good for you?"

The promoter's eyes twinkled merrily.

Jerry Nelson! Tom's face flamed, his eyes glinted. Jerry Nelson! Why, he'd heard of Jerry Nelson, the Hull flyer for the last year or two, and Jerry's name had always been associated with bantam-weight victories.

Jerry had a big following. There were people up North who proclaimed him the toughest bit of goods living at his weight.

Tom's eyes roamed the smoke-laden room, and he saw Jerry standing on his feet, encased in khaki, a square-shouldered, wonderfully tough-looking little nut, with short neck and deep chest, with a grin on his face that might have been chiselled there.

"Yes, I'll fight him," said Tom, snapping his teeth, "if he'll agree to fight me!"

"Put it there, Jack!" said the Tommy. "It's blue against khaki, the Navy versus the Army. And if you want a side bet, I'm your man."

"I'll back myself for twenty-five pounds, if it's any use to you," said Tom. "I've that much by me."

"Right-ho! I want to add a bit to my bank balance. Now, Dan, what 'll you pay me for the fight? Twenty rounds, of course!"

"Fifteen 'll be long enough," observed the promoter, "and it's for charity. You've got to sing small, Jerry."

"H'm! I'll take twenty-five pounds

for the job. I'm worth four times that, as you know. And I want to insure myself against loss, in case Tom here beats me."

Dan did a bit of rapid ready reckoning. He figured out in a flash the composition of the other contests and cost of the hall, lighting, printing, attendants, etc.

"All right. I'll give you five-and-twenty, Jerry. You won't want anything, Tom, for it'll all go to the profits I'll have to hand out on behalf of your mother."

"Right you are!" said Tom.

And there and then the bargain was sealed and the benefit finally arranged. It was ordered to take place on the Monday week. Dan could not allot a Saturday, as he had to pay his way, and it took him all his time to win through with his regular programmes.

And so within three days special posters, printed despite the regulations and restrictions imposed upon such war-time luxuries, were set up on the hoardings, and the word went round that Thomas Crawley's widow (people would insist on believing the fisherman dead and that U-boat sunk) was going to have a benefit at Dan Simmons's, and that Tom was going to box Jerry Nelson a fifteen-rounds contest in order to attract the crowd.

THE SHELL.

TOM had anticipated that the Wlyer would be ready for sea again before that benefit day came round; but, although rapid progress was made with her, she had not recovered that far, and Tom was at liberty to meet the famous Army bantam weight.

And what a crowd filled the hall when they met, to be sure!

As it happened, a fierce gale was blowing, the mine-sweepers had come into harbour, and most of the fisher-folk were free.

They were not the sort to hang back when there was a chance of doing Thomas Crawley's widow a good turn. And so they, and such sailors as were in port, flocked to the hall in their hundreds.

Soldiers from the neighbouring barracks, and flying men from the local aerodrome, poured into the town, and

most of them made their way to Dan Simmons's hall.

Near the ring-side sat Mary Thwaites, next her father, with Mrs. Crawley on her right hand.

Bob Randle was with them, but left to go to the dressing-room a half an hour before Tom was due in the ring.

He was going to help second Tom.

A little before the time fixed for the star event of the evening, Dan Simmons entered the ring.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, after having made his appeal to the men to stop smoking, "we are all gathered here to-night to do honour to the memory of a good man. I refer to fisherman Thomas Crawley, one of the best. He's said to be a prisoner of war; but, prisoner of war or not, the fact remains that he has left Mrs. Crawley behind in Weathersea to carry on, without any means of doing it. Her son Tom has to do his bit, and isn't free to fight in the ring for big purses as he would be in normal times. So we conceived this idea of a benefit, and he's here to-night to earn the brass to keep his mother.

"I can't put things eloquently, for I'm not a polished speaker. But you know what I mean. He's a boxer, and a plucky young boxer. So is Jerry Nelson, who agreed to box him so that the show may be a great draw, at only a fourth of his usual fee.

"I'm a boxing promoter, and I've given my hall for the benefit, charging only bare expenses. And you're all lovers of the game, and keen sportsmen. I am able already to tell you what I shall have to hand over to Mrs. Crawley to-morrow. It amounts, with subscriptions, to no less a sum than one hundred and ninety-seven pounds, and, with the tenner I'm going to add to it myself, we push it well over two hundred quid, with a few outstanding items to add to it in the final reckoning. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you."

So saying, he made his bow, and scrambled down to the floor amid a deafening roar of applause, and shouts of "Good old Dan!"

The echo of the cheering had hardly died away ere Tom Crawley and Jerry Nelson approached the ring, accompanied by their seconds, the one treading close upon the other's heels.

They were stripped and ready for the

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contest, and their white flesh gleamed in the bright lights suspended above the ring as they mounted the steps and entered it from opposite sides.

Both lads were smiling, and in build and height and reach there was nothing to choose between them.

They bowed to the cheering, met in the middle of the ring, and shook hands there. Then the gloves were produced and tied on, and the din died away, all eyes being turned towards the boxers.

The contest ought to be very little inferior to a championship bout.

"If I win, Tom," said Jerry before the clash, "I'll give you your twenty-five pounds back again. That'll be my donation to the fund."

And Tom respected him for the words.

If there were any present who imagined that Jerry or young Tom would hold their hands just because there was not a lot of money hanging upon the result of the fight, they were quickly undeceived.

From the word "Go!" the pace was a cracker, and as soon as Tom discovered that he could not do as he liked with the Tommy from Hull, he settled down to a clever and well-calculated style of boxing which left few openings for the "Flyer," as Jerry was called.

And Jerry was a flyer. His leading with the left was perfect. It was the weapon with which he generally won his fights.

Tom resigned the leading in the first few rounds to Jerry, seeing that the Hull boxer was keen, and contented himself with countering.

And so six rounds were fought—six rounds so even as regard points that no referee could have found anything between them.

Then, encouraged by his success, Tom began to do a bit of leading in his turn, and Jerry was forced to mill on the retreat, which he did in grand style, holding up Tom again and again.

Finding these tactics of no avail, Tom abandoned them, and fell to clinching and in-fighting. But here he also found that he could teach Jerry nothing. Jack was as good as his master, and, with all his cleverness, in spite of all his wiles, Tom did not invariably gain the inner position.

If Jerry's ribs were red and sore from the pounding, so also were Tom's.

And so they reached the twelfth round,

with not a point's advantage either way.

In the thirteenth round, Jerry showed what dangerous stuff he was made of by sending Tom down.

Tom, white with anger at his fall, leaped to his feet and rushed crazily in.

Bob Randle thought that he must lose it then, but he fought with such determination that Jerry, too, went down before the three minutes were up, and both were bleeding, bruised, and much marked when they tottered, panting, to their respective corners after the bell had rung.

It proved to be the most exciting round of a thrilling fight.

When next they met, both were tired and cautious, and, neither being in a mood to surrender any advantage to the other or take any risk, the contest petered out with considerable holding.

Then Dan Simmons stood up without entering the ring, and held up his hand for silence.

The cheers were stifled for a moment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, spreading his arms so as to take in both lads as they stood breathless in their corners, "I declare the contest a draw!"

And then the Tommies and the sailors let them both have it at the full stretch of their lungs.

There was hardly a man present who did not thoroughly endorse the verdict. The fight had thrilled them. They'd never seen a better.

"Three cheers for Tom Crawley!" roared a lusty sailor.

"And three more for Jerry Nelson!" bawled a Tommy of Jerry's regiment when the first lot of cheering had died away.

"And what about another three for Dan?" suggested Bob Randle when at last he was able to get a look in.

"Thank you, ladies and gents," said Dan. "And now, supposing we have another for Mrs. Crawley?"

The one for Mrs. Crawley was the best of all, and as it died away Dan lifted her bodily and deposited her on the steps of the ring, and told her that she'd got to make a speech.

In a moment one could have heard a pin drop.

Mrs. Crawley, looking around her with tears in her eyes, felt for her first words; but as she opened her lips to

(Continued overleaf.)

utter them, a curious whirring sound made itself heard.

Jerry's face blanched as he heard it. Looking down, he caught Dan Simmons's eye.

"Heavens, what's that?" muttered Dan.

"It's a shell, or I've never heard one!" whispered Jerry hoarsely as he bent down to reach Dan's ear.

A moment later, something struck the boxing-hall, there was a flash, a deafen-

ing report, and the electric lights were instantly put out.

Then came the crash of falling slates and rending brickwork, of tearing wood, of splintering glass, and shrieks and cries of terror rang out in the sudden darkness.

"The Germans are shelling Weather-sca!" screamed a voice from nowhere. "Bolt for your lives!"

(To be continued.)

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