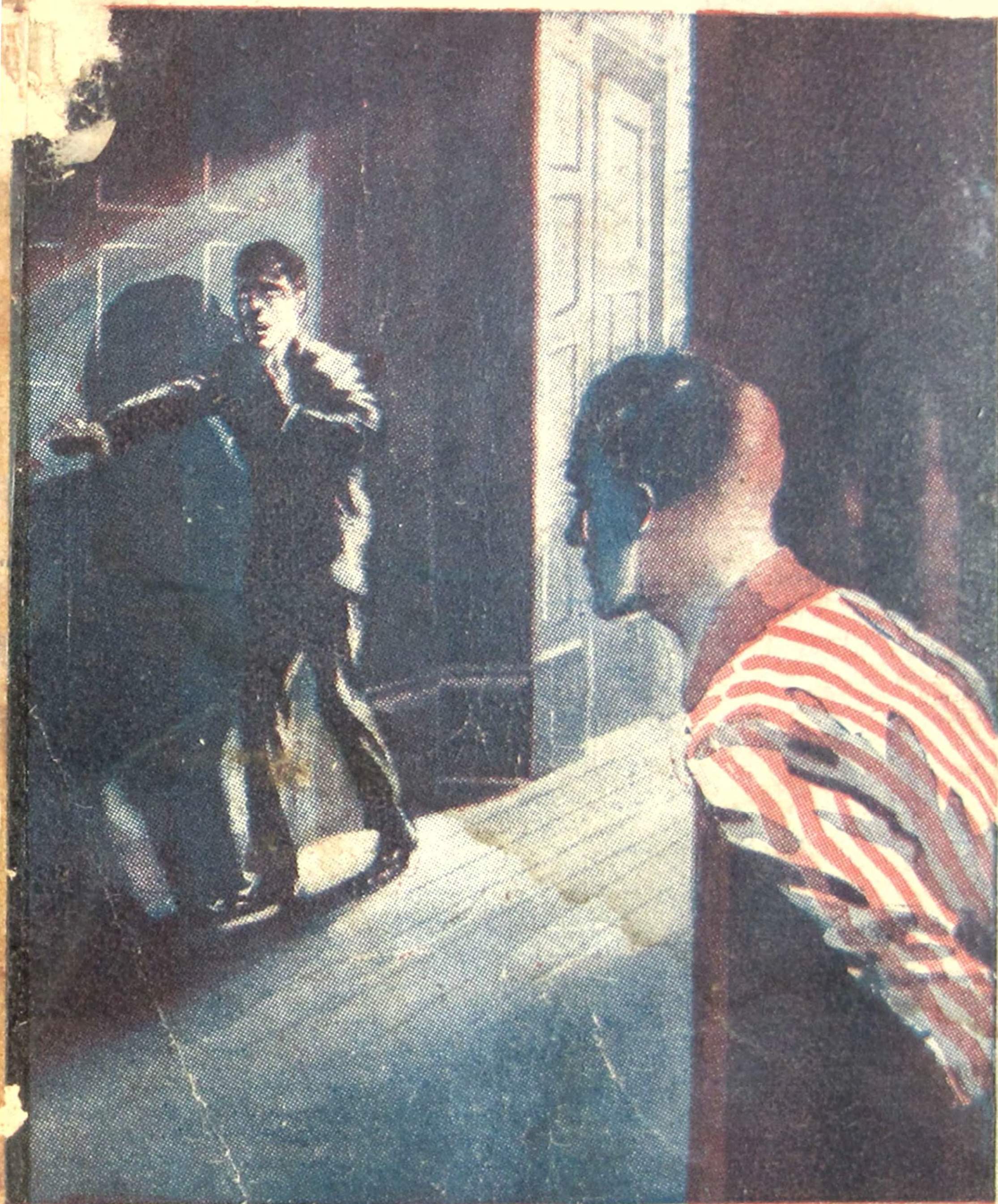


No. 126—LONG, COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORY.

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THE PROBLEM OF THE COPPER FROG!

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by NELSON LEE and NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Bridge House Mystery," "The Mystery of the Blue Volume," and Other Tales.

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Author of "Fullwood's Victory," "The Bridge House Mystery," "The Mystery of the Blue Volume," and Other Tales.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College, to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Secret Society, the Fu Chang Tong, whose hatred they have incurred. Although living in the school in the characters of master and pupil, Nelson Lee and Nipper, nevertheless, find many opportunities to utilise their unique detective ability in various mysterious and adventurous cases.

CHAPTER I.

(Recorded by Nipper.)

IN WHICH THERE IS JUST A LITTLE ARGUMENT WITH FULLWOOD & CO.

THE unlovely head of Edward Oswald Handforth appeared round the door of Study C, in the Remove passage, at St. Frank's. I looked up from my prep. with an impatient frown.

"Go and blow it somewhere else, Handy," I said shortly.

"Eh? Go and blow what?" asked Handforth, entering the study.

"That megaphone voice of yours," I replied. "We don't want to hear it now—we're busy. Who votes for chucking Handforth out?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, my study chums, grinned.

"Carried unanimously, dear boy," yawned Montie. "Handforth, you're a decent chap, but we ain't capable of standin' you just now. What with verbs an'—"

Handforth glared.

"You asses!" he roared. "Can't I come in for a minute? And if anybody says my voice is like a megaphone, it's

only rotten jealousy. I'm jolly proud of my voice, if you want to know——"

"We don't!" said Watson cheerfully. "We only want you to buzz off."

"Well, I'm going to stay until I've said what I came for," declared Handforth, with a sniff. "Rats to your beastly prep."

Edward Oswald spoke firmly, and I laid my pen down with an air of resignation. It was hopeless to argue with Handforth. Once he'd made up his mind, he was like a rock. The only possible means of getting rid of him was to allow him to jaw—or to eject him forcibly. And I didn't feel like exertion just then.

"Go ahead," I said, in a tired voice. "Get it over quickly."

"You fathead! I've come to give you a tip," exclaimed Handforth. "I suppose you know that Farman is getting mixed up with Fullwood and his rotten crowd, don't you? I understood that you'd taken Farman under your wing——"

"My dear chap, you're talking out of your hat!" I grinned. "Farman's not ass enough to play the giddy goat like that. Who's been telling you those silly yarns? I thought you had more

sense, although you are such a cuckoo!"

"Don't you believe me?" bawled Handforth, glaring. "This is what comes of doing a good turn! Fat lot of thanks I get for it!"

"Keep your hair on, old son," I said. "No need to get into a paddy. Who told you this about Farman?"

"Nobody," said Handforth tartly. "If you want to know, I saw Farman go into Study A with Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell—and they were all laughing and talking together. You can guess what that means, I suppose?"

I looked rather serious.

"Is this the straight tip, Handforth?" I asked grimly.

"You ass! Of course it is—Farman only went into Study A a minute ago," answered Handforth, going towards the door. "I happened to see him with the Nuts as I came along the passage. If you want to know anything more, you'd better go along to Study A. But I thought I'd let you know."

And Handforth, still on his dignity, went out and closed the door behind him—a most unusual procedure for Handforth. I looked at Sir Montie and Tommy rather queerly.

"More trouble, Benny boy?" drawled Tregellis-West. "Do we go on the war-path?"

"I don't know," I replied slowly. "Let's think a minute."

I chewed my penholder absently. Handforth's words had made me quite serious. What he had said about Farman wasn't pleasant hearing. Justin B. Farman, the American junior in the Ancient House Remove, was a thoroughly decent fellow in every way.

When he had arrived at St. Frank's, a month or two before, he had been extremely anxious to be on good terms with everybody. He was the son of an American multi-millionaire, and always had a great deal more money than he knew what to do with. Fullwood and Co. the scallywags of the Remove, had done their utmost to get Farman into their toils. The American junior had heaps of cash—and the unscrupulous Nuts had seen no reason why they shouldn't get some of it into their own hands. Fullwood and Co. were in the habit of holding card parties in Study A; and if Farman had become a member of Fullwood's nutty circle, his cash would have found its way into other pockets very rapidly.

Farman was easy-going and weak-willed; he had shown a tendency to accept Fullwood's bait. But I had stepped in, and the cards hadn't succeeded in their blackguardly efforts. Farman had remained thoroughly decent. I hadn't thought it necessary to keep my eye on him any longer. But, as the skipper of the Remove—in the Ancient House—I considered it my duty to keep on the alert.

And now, according to Handforth's information, Justin B. Farman had side-slipped, so to speak. If he had gone into Study A with Fullwood and Co., the inference seemed fairly obvious.

The Ancient House had bucked up tremendously since I had been at St. Frank's, and I took a certain amount of pride in the result of my efforts. I was anxious to keep the tone of the House well up to the mark. Fullwood and Co. were necessary evils—or unnecessary, to speak the honest truth. But I had given them up as hopeless from the start, and only saw to it that their circle wasn't enlarged.

I rose to my feet slowly, and threw the penholder down on to the table. Study C was very cosy. The electric lights gleamed brightly; the fire blazed cheerfully in the grate. Outside, the winter's evening was dark and miserable.

"We'd better go and make sure," I said abruptly.

"Do we take cricket-stumps, dear boy?" asked Montie mildly.

"I don't suppose there'll be a scrap," I said. "In any case, our fists are pretty useful. I don't believe in interfering with other fellows, as a rule, but I'm hanged if I'm going to see those rotters drag Farman into their blackguardly ways."

"We'd better finish prep. first," said Tommy.

"Rats! We'd better get this over." I moved towards the door, and Tregellis-West and Watson rose and followed me.

My two chums and I strode along the Remove passage until we came to Study A—the headquarters of the Nuts. It was nominally occupied by Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell. But Merrell and Co., three kindred spirits, usually congregated in Study A of an evening.

I was just about to grasp the handle of the door, when I heard distinct

sounds of strife. Angry voices were talking on the other side of the door.

"Trouble in the family," murmured Sir Montie, adjusting his pince nez carefully.

"There'll be further trouble in a minute, perhaps," I said grimly. "Let's go in—we don't want to stand listening here."

I opened the door, and strode in, Tommy and Montie following close behind. We were just in time to see a most interesting sight. Justin B. Farman, the American junior, was grinning joyfully; and his fist, at that precise second, was landing upon the elegant nose of Ralph Leslie Fullwood with a forcible thud.

"Yow-ow!" roared Fullwood, staggering back.

"Say, that's just a taster," exclaimed Farman. "You wool-brained galoot! You got fancying that I should join this gambling party, didn't you? Say, I'd sooner make my pals with the first hobo I met on the high road. You're jest about off the rails this trip, Fullwood—you're sure bluffed!"

"You—you rotten cad!" snarled Fullwood, holding his nose tenderly. "By Jove! You'll pay for that, I can tell you! What the dickens are you rotters doing here?" he went on, glaring at me. "Get out! We don't want cads in this study!"

"I thought there might be trouble brewing," I said calmly. "If you're in need of a hand, Farman——"

"Not on your life, pard!" grinned Farman. "You'd sure smile if you'd seen how I bluffed these fool fellers! Say, it was the dandiest racket ever. They figgered that I was keen on gettin' rid of my dollars—an' I figgered differently. Gee! the piles o' hot air which were flyin' around fair made my hair sizzle. But, say, you interrupted; I was just flattening Fullwood's nose——"

"My dear chap," I said hastily, "don't take any notice of us. Get on with it—as soon as you like. We'll form an interested audience."

"You—you cheeky rotters!" shouted Fullwood, red in the face with fury. "If you don't clear out of this study in two seconds, you'll get chucked out on your necks! You'd better look sharp!"

Sir Montie leisurely took out his superb gold watch, and consulted it.

"One—two—time's up, Fullwood," he said blandly. "We're waitin', dear fellow. It would be wonderfully entertainin' to be chucked out—by you! Begad! You seem to be gettin' rather red in the face for some reason——"

"Punch the cad's nose, Fullwood!" growled Gulliver, from the other side of the table.

Fullwood turned round furiously.

"Why the dickens don't you come and do something?" he snarled. "All the lot of you—we're six to four——"

"Oh, rot!" interrupted Merrell uneasily.

"Rather stiff odds—what?" grinned Tregellis-West. "Better not do anything rash, dear boys. If you'd had Farman, alone, you might have hurled him out by sheer weight of numbers. But you don't seem anxious to do anythin' now—except work your jaws. We're still waitin', you know."

"Get out of this study!" said Fullwood sullenly.

"I don't want to spoil the pantomime," I remarked. "If you've got business with Fullwood, get on with it, Farman. We'll stand by and see fair play. That punch of yours was a beauty."

"Say, it's up to Fullwood, I guess," smiled the American junior. "I ain't exactly hankerin' after bloodshed, but I reckon I'm ready to fight any cad in this room. I'll allow——"

"Clear out, you illiterate cowboy!" snapped Fullwood savagely. "I'm going to write to my pater complainin'. St. Frank's is coming to a pretty pass when they let heathens like you into it! This is a school for the sons of gentlemen——"

"I don't want to say anythin' against your pater, Fullwood, but if he's anythin' like you, that remark of yours about 'sons of gentlemen' is rather wide of the mark," I said calmly. "I'm jolly glad to find that Farman was punching your nose. He can go ahead on the rest of your features as soon as he likes. By the look of the table, and by the blue condition of the atmosphere in this study, I can see that you were blagging, as usual. I give you the straight tip to ease down a bit. If you don't, there'll be trouble—big trouble."

"What's it got to do with you, you beast?" roared Gulliver.

"I've got to think of the House," I

replied curtly. "You fellows have been doing your best to disgrace the Ancient House for months past. Just recently you've been breaking bounds at night two or three times a week. That's got to stop——"

"Who's going to stop it?" snarled Fullwood furiously.

"The whole Form," I replied. "We're just about getting fed up with you, Fullwood—with you and your pals. I didn't come here to jaw, but I'm doing it! You'd better understand there's a limit. You've been beyond that limit a lot too much. The fellows are getting sick of it. It's a House affair. You'll bring dishonour on the whole Remove——"

"What the deuce do I care about the Remove?" shouted Fullwood, with blazing eyes. "I'm going to do as I like! I'm not going to be dictated to by you or by anybody else. What do you fellows say?" he added, turning to his companions.

"The same as you!"

"We're going our own road!"

These two last remarks were from Gulliver and Merrell. They were both as furious as Fullwood. All the Nuts, in fact, were looking red with wrath. I'd told them some plain truths, and I was a bit heated myself. I had been intending to talk to Fullwood, straight from the shoulder, for a week or two—and now I'd spoken my mind.

"You're going your own road?" I said grimly. "That's just where you're mistaken, my bucks! What you've got to do is to understand that the Form is fed up with all this blackguardism. Study A is the talk of the whole junior school—and I've been chipped for allowing you to go on. Well, I'm going to put my foot down, but I'll give you a chance first. If I see that you're improving——"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood laughed sneeringly.

"I suppose you think this is going to have effect?" he said roughly. "You preaching cad, you can get out of this study as soon as you like. We shall do exactly what we please—and, if it interests you, I'll just say that we're all going down to the White Harp after lights out to-night. Understand? Be hanged to you!"

All the Nuts were on their feet, and, for a moment, it seemed as though a free

fight would ensue. We were quite ready, in any case.

"That sort of talk is sheer bluff——" I began.

"You can call it what you like," cut in Fullwood. "The six of us are goin' down to the White Harp to-night. There's a special meetin' there. Oh, I know you won't sneak," went on Fullwood, with a sneer. "You're too goody-goody for that. And it's our affair, anyhow. You can go and take your orders to somebody who'll listen to 'em!"

"You'd better not break bounds to-night," I said quietly.

"Thanks. I don't want your advice!"

"I've said all I mean to say," I went on. "I've given you fair warning, Fullwood. If you don't take any notice of it, you'll have to take the consequences instead. That's all."

"Sermon over?" sneered Gulliver.

I didn't reply, but left the study. Tommy and Montie and Farman came out after me, and we went along to Study C. I was looking very grim—for I knew quite well that Ralph Leslie Fullwood had meant what he said.

Well, there was going to be trouble.

CHAPTER II.

(*Nipper Continues.*)

HOW FULLWOOD & CO. DIDN'T GO DOWN TO THE WHITE HARP!

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST was smiling serenely as we entered Study C.

"Dear fellows, it was bluff," he remarked. "Fullwood's rather addicted to bluffin'. That was all rot about goin' out on the razzle——"

"Say, don't you get foolin' yourself that way," interjected Justin B. Farman quickly. "Fullwood sure meant what he said. Why, pards, he was tryin' to get me to join the little party! Say, it was real funny. I made the hull crowd believe that I was hankerin' after joinin' them. They jest swallowed everythin' as it came out of my mouth. I flourished a wad of banknotes before them, and they went green with envy. An' then I told them straight what I thought of 'em."

"So it wasn't simply jaw?" I said seriously. "Look here, you chaps, Fullwood and Co. are getting out of hand.

If we don't put a stop to it, the masters will smell a rat, and then the whole form will have to suffer. It'll end in a month's gatin'—or, perhaps, something worse. It's not going to be stood. But why did you go into Fullwood's study, Farman?

The American boy grinned.

"Waal, say, I was jest feelin' lonesome," he explained cheerfully. "I allowed that a little amusement would be kinder welcome. An' Fullwood got busy askin' me to join the party. So I went along— Say, Bennett, you needn't look at me like that. I guess I've learned hoss-sense since I've ben around this lay-out. Fullwood don't appeal to me none. He and his pals sure thought I was comin' round. Say, I'd smile! He was huggin' himself with delight—an' then I started in."

"Dear boy, proceed," said Sir Montie. "I'm surprisin'ly interested. What a pity you didn't call us in to witness the pullin' of Fullwood's noble leg!"

"I guess I was kinder anxious to see how far them hoboes would go with their all-fired racket," smiled Farman. "I'll allow they outlined a dandy programme—but, say, it don't appeal to me at all. There's a meeting of blamed book-makers and cardsharps at the White Harp to-night, and Fullwood and Co. are sure going to get around. Fullwood fooled himself that I was goin' with him. That's all. I reckoned I wasn't. I jest told him that he and his pals could go to the dickens in their own way. They weren't going to take Justin B. with 'em. I guess you fellows came along good and smart. The Nuts were just about to yank me into the passage. But I guessed that I'd get in one punch first, anyways. Fullwood's nose looked temptin'—now I guess it's tender."

We grinned.

"Handforth told us you'd gone into Fullwood's study, laughing and chatting with them," I explained. "Well, it looked a bit queer, Farman. I'm sorry we nearly misjudged you. I ought to have known that you'd got more sense."

"I ain't worryin' any—so why should you?" said Farman, good-naturedly. "But, say, them coyotes sure mean to bring this House into disgrace. If the hull crowd gets gay to-night, there might be ructions."

"I'll think about it, Farman," I said, frowning. "Something's got to be done—and it wouldn't be a bad idea to start

right at once. If I think of a wheeze, I'll let all the fellows into it."

Farman nodded, and passed out into the passage. I turned and looked into the fire thoughtfully. Sir Montie and Tommy sat down to their prep. once more, and continued work.

"Dear Benny, it ain't worth it," remarked Tregellis-West.

"Eh, what's that?" I asked absently.

"It ain't worth all that terrific brain fag, old fellow," said Sir Montie. "It's surprisin' to me why you worry yourself over those cads. Let 'em rip. Let 'em play their own game. They'll be brought to their senses in the end."

I shook my head.

"Don't be an ass, Montie," I protested.

"Dear boy, I can't help it—it's nature," said Montie blandly.

"Rats! You know as well as I do that we can't let things go on like this. It's all very well to talk about Fullwood and Co. being brought to their senses in the end," I exclaimed. "When's that end going to be? Unless we shove the brake on, those idiots will get themselves the sack."

"Well, don't they deserve it, dear man?"

"Of course they do—but we don't deserve to be disgraced like that. And I'm going to assert my authority as skipper of the Remove—"

"Eight o'clock," said Tommy Watson abruptly.

"Suppose it is eight o'clock—"

"My dear chap, didn't Mr. Alvington give you lines this afternoon?" grinned Tommy.

"I suppose I'd better take 'em along," I said, getting up. "It's a good thing I did them immediately after tea."

I left the study with my impot. and went along to the lobby. During the afternoon I'd been with Handforth and Co.—chatting with them in the Triangle. There had been a little argument, and Handforth, who never considered odds, and who never admitted himself wrong, foolishly attempted to punch my nose.

He didn't succeed, but Nelson Lee had come upon the scene just at that second. He found Handforth and I scrapping on the Ancient House steps, and calmly gave us a hundred lines apiece. He had to do this, of course. He couldn't make any distinctions with me.

The fact that Handforth wanted to punch my nose doesn't mean to say that

Edward Oswald was a rotter. He was just as ready to fight with his best friend as he was to do him a good turn. When Handforth argued, he always tried to drive home his points with his knuckles. That was just his little way.

I arrived at the Housemaster's study, and tapped.

"Come in!" said a deep, pleasant voice.

I entered, and grinned. Nelson Lee—otherwise Mr. Peter Alvington—was lolling in an easy chair before the fire. A book was in his hands, and a cigar burned lazily between his lips.

"Is that the way you work, sir?" I asked cheerfully.

The guv'nor laid his book down.

"You have brought those lines, Bennett?" he said sternly. "Handforth has already been here. I am not sure that you don't deserve a caning. Fighting on the House steps is a serious offence——"

"You do it well, guv'nor!" I grinned. Nelson Lee frowned.

"Just because of our former relations, Nipper, you appear to have an idea that you are granted unlimited licence to be as impertinent as you like. You must remember, however, that you are now a junior schoolboy—and, as such, it is your duty to be respectful to your Housemaster——"

"Oh, lor'!" I groaned. "Don't keep it up, sir!"

The guv'nor's eyes twinkled, and then he smiled.

"You young rascal!" he chuckled. "Well, where are those lines? I shall never teach you to treat me with the respect which is my due. Seriously, young 'un, it was wrong of you to fight Handforth outside the Ancient House."

"I didn't fight him—it was only a bit of an argument," I replied, sitting on the arm of Lee's chair. "Handforth tried to punch my nose—and I wouldn't let him. Handy's a decent chap, but he's hot-headed. Here are your rotten old lines—a hundred of 'em. The next time you see me scrapping, turn your head the other way. Be sporty, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee laughed good-naturedly.

"I should have turned my head on this occasion, but it was too late," he said. "You'd better not be so incautious, Nipper. How are your friends, Tregellis-West, and Watson? I suppose they helped you with these lines?"

I grinned.

"That's telling," I replied. "You needn't look at 'em very closely, guv'nor. They're done—and that's the main thing. Anything doing lately? Have you heard from old Dorrimore, or Miss Eileen?"

"My dear Nipper, I don't receive letters from my friends every day," smiled Nelson Lee. "Lord Dorrimore, I believe, is out in New Guinea, or some such wild spot. When our sojourn at St. Frank's is over, we shall have full liberty again. I must confess, however, that this change is doing us both good. Your education is being improved, and I am enjoying a complete holiday. This evening—very shortly, in fact—I am going down to Dr. Brett's for a quiet game of billiards. I shall return late, so you had better bid me good-night——"

"You'll return late, sir?" I put in quickly. "About what time?"

"I don't know, exactly—in the neighbourhood of midnight, probably," said Nelson Lee. "It might be earlier, or it might be later. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, guv'nor," I replied. "Nothing much, anyhow. I'll be running now. Good-night, sir."

Lee glanced at me rather curiously, but I didn't stop to explain anything. In a couple of minutes I entered Study C. My face was set determinedly, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie saw that something was amiss.

"Begad! Not a canin', surely?" asked Tregellis-West, gazing at me through his pince-nez with pained surprise.

"Caning? No, you ass!" I replied. "I'm thinking of Fullwood and Co.——"

"Oh, crumbs! Give the rotters a rest!" growled Watson.

"Look here, we've got to prevent them leaving the dormitory to-night," I said grimly. "I've just heard a piece of news."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "How interestin'!"

"And we've got to stop them going," I said.

"How?" asked Tommy bluntly.

"Well, I've got a wheeze," I replied. "It'll work beautifully, I believe."

"Dear fellow, your wheezes are always successful," yawned Sir Montie. "They're of the gilt-edged, A1 quality, begad! I'm dyin' to hear——"

"You'll have to wait a few minutes, old scout," I interrupted briskly. "We want some other fellows in this business

—nine others, in fact. Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D; Farman and Owen and Canham, and two or three others. I'll buzz round, and bring them along."

Accordingly, I hastened out of Study C, and rounded up the fellows I wanted. I found them in their respective studies mostly, and in less than five minutes the whole crowd invaded Study C.

They comprised Handforth & Co., Farman and his two chums, and Hubbard, Armstrong, and Griffith. There were twelve of us in the study, and the walls were in danger of being squeezed outwards.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth.

"Some new wheeze or other, I suppose," said Owen major. "What is it, Bennett? A jape on the Monks? Christine & Co. need waking up—"

"Rats to Christine & Co.!" I interrupted crisply. "This is a House affair. Look here, you chaps! Fullwood & Co. are going the right way to work to bring the Ancient House into serious disgrace! We've got to stop it. See? I want you fellows to help me in a little scheme to-night."

I explained about the projected trip to the White Harp. Handforth snorted, and said that we should be asses to interfere. But I didn't take that view, and said so.

"If the Nuts are collared," I explained, "it'll mean the sack for the lot, I reckon. Six fellows being expelled! My dear chaps, we couldn't stand it! We should all share the disgrace indirectly. This night trip has got to be stopped!"

And I explained how it was going to be done. My listeners smiled as I started, grinned as I proceeded, and roared when I'd done.

"It's easy," I said, "and Fullwood and his precious pals will be helpless."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's great, Benny!" grinned Owen major. "I'm with you."

"Rely on all of us," said Handforth, waving his hand. "It's as good as done. Fullwood & Co. need checking, and they'll feel bound to remain in bed to-night—very much bound, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The party broke up, after I had warned them to keep the project quiet. I wanted the Nuts to receive a surprise when the time came. Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove, had ears like a donkey, and if he got hold of the idea Fullwood & Co. would learn of it in next to no time.

The conspirators, however, kept mum, and the rest of the Remove knew nothing. Ralph Leslie Fullwood swaggered about, his monocle in his eye, obviously glorying in the prospect of visiting the disreputable White Harp. Fullwood made no secret of his "dog-gish" ways. He boasted of them.

At bedtime the Nuts were very animated. Gulliver sat on his bed, openly counting a bundle of ten-shilling and pound currency notes. Noy and Marriott were discussing certain bets they had made the previous day. Fullwood and Merrell and Bell were conjecturing as to how much they would win during the visit to the inn.

"Dear fellows," murmured Tregellis-West from his bed, "if you go to the White Harp—which I doubt, somehow—you'll lose all that amazin' wealth. It's very sad. I don't like to see good money thrown away."

"We're not asking your advice, West," said Fullwood sourly. "You'd better come along with us. You've got plenty of tin to chuck about. Come with us, an' double the amount! Be a sport!"

Sir Montie removed his glasses.

"We seem to have different ideas of a 'sport,' Fullwood, dear man," he replied. "I think it's sportin' to sleep in bed, an' be fit in the mornin'. You think it's sportin' to act the blackguard, an' risk gettin' the sack!"

"We're not babies!" sneered Gulliver. "We don't mind takin' a little risk."

"You won't take much risk to-night," grinned Handforth. "Very little, in fact."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Several fellows roared, and the Nuts looked rather uneasy. I believe they guessed that something was on. But no more was said regarding the projected expedition, and very shortly Morrow, the prefect, came and saw lights out.

Most of the Removites settled down to sleep. The doings of Fullwood & Co. didn't interest them.

After about fifteen minutes I heard the regular breathing of the majority of the fellows. I sat up in bed.

"You chaps awake?" I asked softly.

"Dear boy, we're waitin' the word of command," came Montie's voice.

"Hallo! What are you idiots up to?" growled Fullwood, sitting up.

"Just a little jape," I said softly. "Rats to you!"

Gulliver's voice came through the darkness.

"Kid's game!" he sneered. "Raidin' those College House asses, I suppose?"

"You can suppose what you like—nobody'll stop you," I murmured, getting out of bed, and taking something from under my pillow. I bumped against Sir Montie, and he nudged me.

"Right, dear fellow!" he murmured. "Give the signal!"

I waited just a moment or two, and then Tregellis-West and I crept over to Fullwood's bed.

"Right!" I exclaimed sharply.

Montie and I sprang forward, and we heard the other fellows getting equally busy. Fullwood was grasped by Montie and me, and before he could even guess what we were up to, his two hands were gripped. Montie took one, and I took the other. In a second I had a piece of string looped over his wrist. It had been looped in readiness, and it was only necessary for me to slip it over. Then I wrapped the string round several times, and drew Fullwood's hand up until it was near the bedpost. And then I proceeded to bind the rest of the string round the post itself.

"You—you howlin' rotters!" gasped Fullwood savagely.

"Dear boy, you mustn't speak too loudly!" murmured Sir Montie softly. "You wouldn't like a prefect or a master to come an' see you in this state, would you? It would be necessary to explain why it's been done, begad! An' that would be shockin', wouldn't it?"

"You silly idiots!" panted Fullwood hotly. "Unfasten these cords! Let my hands go, you rotters!"

Several echoes came from other beds, in a kind of chorus.

"You silly fathead, Farman! Untie my hands!"

"If you use those cords on me, Handforth——"

"You—you howlin' cads!"

All the Nuts had something to say, but it made no difference. My little plan had succeeded completely. It had been astonishingly simple. The twelve of us had each had a length of cord, looped beforehand. Thus, when the signal was given, every fellow knew exactly what to do. There were two of us for each bed, and we all grabbed at once. The result was very satisfactory.

In less than a minute Fullwood & Co. were all completely helpless. Their

hands were tied to the bedposts, and no amount of struggling would have any effect. They would be compelled to lie in bed until we chose to release them.

Practically every fellow in the dormitory was awake by now, and there was huge amusement.

"What do you think you're foolin' at?" snarled Fullwood furiously.

I grinned.

"We leave fooling to you, my buck," I replied. "This is just a little lesson. You told me that you and your goey pals were off to the White Harp to-night. Well, I've got an idea in my napper that you're going to stay in bed."

There was a gasp from all the Nuts.

"Do—do you think you're goin' to keep us here?" hissed Fullwood chokingly.

"I've got that idea," I replied calmly. "What do you other fellows think? Do you think Fullwood & Co. will visit the White Harp to-night, or not?"

"Not!" said a dozen chuckling voices.

"When naughty boys get up to bad tricks they're locked in cupboards, eh?" murmured Sir Montie. "We haven't got any cupboards, an' so we're bein' extra kind. You're nice and comfy in bed, Fullwood—an' that's where you'll stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites grinned delightedly.

"There's nothin' to laugh at, you cads!" snarled Gulliver.

"Isn't there?" chuckled Tommy Watson. "I'm going to laugh, anyhow!"

But Fullwood & Co., in spite of the humorous situation, didn't see anything funny in it whatever. They lay in bed, fuming.

CHAPTER III.

(Nipper Continues.)

THE STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF LAMBERT, OF THE SIXTH—I SEE A POLICE INSPECTOR, AND THEN THE GUV'NOR GIVES ME A TREMENDOUS SHOCK.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD struggled furiously in his bed.

He lashed his legs about, and wrenched at his hands, but only succeeded in hurting himself. At last he lay still, panting heavily.

"Better take it quietly, old son," I chuckled. "You're going to be kept like that until one o'clock. It'll be too late then to go out on the ran-dan. If

you don't struggle, you won't be hurt a bit."

"Let me go, you—you beast!" panted Fullwood hoarsely.

"Certainly—at one o'clock!"

"By George, you'll pay for this, you interferin' rotter!" snarled Fullwood.

"By George, you will!"

"We'll half kill you for this!" gasped Gulliver.

"We'll have you sacked!" muttered Bell, with suppressed fury.

I grinned.

"Not much good having me sacked after I'm half killed." I chuckled. "My dear asses, what's the good of uttering silly threats? You can't do anything! You've just got to lie there and think over your past sins. If you think of 'em all, you'll get no sleep to-night!"

After a while the Nuts changed their tactics. Knowing that they couldn't release themselves, they tried threats first. Threats being useless, they attempted bribery. Fullwood offered Teddy Long five bob if he'd cut the ropes.

Long didn't think it worth while, and stayed in his bed. Several threatening growls from various beds had caused him to come to this decision. Several other fellows were offered similar inducements, but rescuers were at a premium that night.

Finally, growing hoarse, the Nuts resigned themselves to the inevitable. They were really compelled to do this, for the other Removites were getting rather fed-up. They wanted to sleep, and Fullwood & Co.'s constant growls were not conducive to slumber.

Several pillows had already been thrown, followed up by an occasional boot, and the Nuts decided that it would be less painful to lie quiet.

"We'll make you jolly well sit up for this, Bennett, you beast!" growled Fullwood at last. "Who the thunder's goin' to cut these rotten ropes? You'll all go to sleep, an' leave us like this!"

"That's all right!" I interrupted cheerfully. "Give me a hail when you hear the school clock strike one. I'll cut the ropes myself then. It'll be a bit too late for any trip to the precious White Harp. If you'll hail me before one o'clock, you'll wish you hadn't!"

And I calmly turned over and went to sleep. The other fellows were nearly all in that delightful state. But if the Nuts managed to get free and moved about, I should awaken instantly. That's

just a habit of mine. It doesn't need a jug of cold water to bring me out of the land of dreams.

Fullwood & Co. didn't interrupt, as I had half expected. In all probability, they had fallen asleep themselves. Although their hands were bound, they suffered no discomfort. Their hands were a trifle cold, perhaps, but nothing more; and at one o'clock I awoke with the sound of Ralph Leslie's sweet tones in my ears.

"Rouse up, you interferin' bounder!" came a growl through the darkness. "Do you think we want to stay like this all night?"

I yawned, sat up, and then had a look at my watch. This possessed a luminous dial, and I saw that the time was two minutes past one.

I got out of bed, and fished my pocket-knife from my trousers. Then I went to the end of the dormitory, where the Nuts' beds were situated, and cut through the cords. Except for being a little stiff, not one of them had suffered. Curiously enough, they didn't appear to be at all grateful for my services. Not one of them uttered a word of thanks.

"You can go down to the White Harp now, if you like," I yawned. "If you try these tricks on again, Fullwood, you'll get the same medicine."

"What business is it of yours, you cad?" snapped Gulliver.

"I'm Captain of the Remove, and I choose to make it my business," I replied grimly. "That's good enough for you! You seem to be set upon dragging the name of the Ancient House into the mud—"

"My hat, there's somebody comin'!" exclaimed Bell nervously.

Bell's bed was nearest the door, and he had apparently heard something—or fancied he had. I stopped speaking, and everybody listened. The Ancient House was completely silent.

"Your fat-headed nerves!" I murmured. "That's the worst of being a gay dog, Bell. Still, I'll just have a squint outside, and make sure."

I slipped to the door, turned the handle, and looked out into the corridor. The passage was deserted, but from the lower end of the passage, where a window allowed a shaft of moonlight to enter, I heard a faint sound.

Just as I was about to back into the dormitory—a mere precautionary measure—I saw a dim form rise into view from the staircase. The face of the un-

known came just abreast of the moon-beam, and was, for a moment, illuminated.

"Lambert!" I murmured to myself in surprise.

I didn't back in then, for Lambert, although a Sixth-Former, was not a prefect. He hadn't any right to be out of his bedroom at this time of night. And that one glance at his face had rather shocked me.

He was deathly white—the paleness was, perhaps, accentuated by the moonlight—and a dazed kind of expression glowed dully in his eyes.

I couldn't understand it. What on earth was Lambert doing out in the corridor at one o'clock in the morning? He was fully dressed, and had apparently just come indoors. He wasn't walking in his sleep—I knew that well enough. He seemed to be suffering from the effects of some tremendous shock.

He came along the passage, and I didn't move. I expected him to speak to me, but he passed right by without even noticing that I stood there.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I murmured.

I stared up the passage, and saw him turn the corner. Then I re-entered the dormitory and closed the door. Fulwood and Co. hadn't troubled to get out of bed, and I didn't feel inclined to tell them what I had seen.

"The passage is empty, you ass!" I said, quite truthfully.

Then I went along to my own bed, and slipped between the sheets. I was thinking of Lambert of the Sixth. That face of his had given me a start, and I couldn't quite get it out of my mind. The Nuts made no attempt to dress themselves, but dropped off to sleep after conversing together for a few minutes.

I slept myself, then, and didn't awaken until the rising bell rang. Curiously enough, the first thing I thought of was Lambert's face. I was quite convinced that the Sixth Former had received a huge shock. Perhaps he had been down to the White Harp himself, and had lost all his money. If that was the cause of his paleness it served him right.

Although I had been the last to sleep, I tumbled out of bed first. There were two rising bells at St. Frank's, and most of the fellows, of course, waited until

the second was sounded—which was five minutes later.

But I always made a practice of getting up at once. I was half dressed before anybody else thought of rising, and strolled to the window, fastening my braces, and whistling cheerfully.

It was a fine, crisp morning. The Triangle looked inviting, and I meant to get down there as soon as possible. Just then a motor-car turned in at the gates, and I saw the figure of a police-inspector seated within.

I stopped dressing, and leaned out of the window. The inspector had apparently come from Bannington, the neighbouring town, and the car drew up outside the Head's doorway. I saw the police-officer get out, and enter the House.

"That's queer!" I thought musingly. "Oh, I suppose it's nothing."

I dismissed the matter almost at once, and went along to the bathroom to wash. Just over ten minutes later, I was fully dressed and prepared to go down. The other Removites were now in various stages of dressing.

"Who's car is that?" I heard Handforth saying. "Jolly early for people to be visiting the Head, ain't it?"

I discovered that the car had just taken its departure, and I couldn't help wondering why a police official had visited the school. I don't think the other fellows knew anything about it—except that one or two of them had seen a car leaving.

I said a few stern words to Montie and Tommy, regarding their lazy habits, and then strolled downstairs. I thought it would be a good opportunity of having a word with the gov'nor before the others turned out.

To confess the truth right away, I was curious. I thought that Nelson Lee might know something about the visit of that inspector.

He did.

When I tapped at his door and entered, I found him pacing the study in a way which reminded me of old times. He was absolutely himself, and his brows were knitted anxiously.

"Oh, it's you, Nipper," he exclaimed, after turning his head.

"What's wrong, gov'nor?" I asked quietly. "You seem to be jolly worried over something. Didn't I see a police-inspector—"

"Tut-tut! I thought the inspector's

visit had escaped observation!" interjected Lee impatiently. "Who else saw him, my lad?"

"Nobody else, sir," I replied. "One or two fellows saw the car leaving, but they didn't know who was in it. Why, what's the matter? Has anything happened?"

Nelson Lee nodded gravely.

"Something appalling has happened, young 'un," he replied—"something inexpressibly terrible. The school knows nothing of it at present—and it is to be kept as quiet as possible. I'm not sure that I shall even tell you——"

"Oh, guv'nor!" I protested.

"Well, Nipper, you must breathe no word of what I am going to tell you, to a soul——"

"Not even to Montie and Tommy?"

"No, not even—— Well, perhaps you may tell them," said the guv'nor.

"They are to be trusted, I know. But this ghastly thing mustn't leak out, Nipper. If possible, the Head wishes the school to be kept in ignorance until——"

"What ghastly thing?" I asked, rather startled.

"I will tell you, my lad," said Lee quietly. "This morning, an elderly man—a retired sea-captain—named Roger Garwood, was found murdered at his house, on the outskirts of Bellton—an old-fashioned dwelling known as the Cabin."

"Phew! Murdered, eh?" I said. "By gum! It's a case for you, guv'nor. But why should you be so tremendously shocked? And why did the inspector come here——"

"Because, Nipper, Arthur Lambert of the Sixth Form, has been taken away from the school only a few moments ago," replied the guv'nor gravely. "He has, in blunt language, been arrested—charged with the crime!"

I started abruptly.

"Lambert!" I repeated dazedly. "Why, he's only eighteen—— Lambert of the Sixth arrested! When—when did this happen, sir?"

"Just after midnight, I believe. I have heard no details——"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed suddenly.

I stared at the guv'nor blankly, and I believe I went somewhat pale.

"Don't disturb yourself, Nipper——"

"But—but I saw Lambert at one o'clock," I gasped. "He'd just come in, and I thought he'd been down to

the White Harp—he's one of those silly idiots. He was looking as pale as a ghost——"

"Good gracious! Is this the truth, Nipper?" broke in Lee sharply. "Tell me what you saw!"

I did so, but went into no details regarding my reason for looking out of the dormitory at such an unearthly hour.

Nelson Lee listened intently, softly drumming his fingers upon the desk meanwhile.

"You saw Lambert coming in just after one!" he murmured tensely. His face was pale, and there was a dazed expression in his eyes. Upon my soul, it's terribly convincing evidence, Nipper. It is a good thing you spoke to me about it. This information of yours is of vital importance—and it may even be necessary for you to give evidence in a criminal court——"

"But—but Lambert can't be tried for murder!" I gasped.

"If he committed the crime, he will have to be tried," replied the guv'nor grimly. "But no more for the present, my boy. I am in total ignorance of details, and it would be futile to discuss the affair. Inspector Jameson declared that his own evidence was conclusive—that Lambert had almost been proved guilty. But, of course, time alone will settle that point. It's a horrible business, Nipper—St. Frank's will be the talk of the whole country."

"A Sixth Former arrested for murder!" I muttered. "I—I can hardly believe it, sir. Does anybody else know?"

"Not yet. He went away quietly, after making some statement, I believe—and, of course, he protested his innocence," replied the guv'nor. "That was to be expected. Very few murderers admit their guilt straight away. But you'd better be getting along, my lad. And don't breathe a word to a soul, except your own two chums. And warn them against——"

"That's all right, guv'nor," I put in. "If I tell Montie and Tommy, they'll be as mum as oysters. My hat! What a surprise—what a shock! I hope to goodness Lambert didn't kill the man. We don't want publicity, do we?"

I left the study after another minute or two, and walked slowly down the passage towards the lobby. Again, the

picture of Lambert's white, drawn face appeared before my eyes.

"Could it be possible?"

The whole thing seemed unreal—seemed to be something apart from the life at St. Frank's. It reminded me of old times—and I wondered how it would end. I certainly didn't guess, at that moment, that the gov'nor and I would shortly be plunged into a case as mysterious and dramatic as any we had ever investigated!

CHAPTER IV.

(Related by Nelson Lee.)

I MAKE DR. STAFFORD A PROMISE, AND JOURNEY OVER TO BANNINGTON.

AFTER Nipper had taken his departure from my study, I sat down at my desk and lit a cigarette, and leaned back in my chair, thinking hard.

This startling news, and the startling arrest of a schoolboy, had given me something of a turn. And Nipper's own evidence had added to my perturbation. For, although I showed no sign outwardly, I was very seriously concerned.

Before I could think for long, however, the door of my study opened, and the Headmaster appeared. Dr. Stafford was looking completely haggard. The change which had come over him within the last fifteen minutes was almost startling.

I had only spoken to him for a few minutes—after Lambert had been taken away—and was rather glad that he had come. The Head, of course, knew my real identity. And, when in private with me, he kept up no pretence.

"Mr. Lee, I am almost stunned," he said huskily, as he sat down. "I cannot believe it—I cannot believe such a ghastly thing! Yet the evidence—Oh, it is altogether too preposterous—too unthinkable!"

Dr. Stafford wiped his high forehead nervously, and looked at me appealingly.

"Cannot you see a ray of hope, Mr. Lee?" he asked. "You are experienced in these matters—it is your real profession—"

"I have had no details of the crime, Dr. Stafford," I interrupted gently. "If you can give me any information I might, possibly, be able to form an

opinion. But the police would never have acted as they have done unless they had obtained very positive evidence—"

"The facts are simple—too simple. I am afraid," said the Headmaster, his voice shaking with emotion and anxiety. "Yet, although the facts are all too plain, I cannot bring myself to believe that Lambert—a boy of eighteen—could commit such an appalling crime—"

"I am afraid there are several precedents," I put in gently. "In my own experience, Dr. Stafford, I have met with criminals of the most abandoned type no older than sixteen or seventeen. There are several cases on record of brutal murders being committed by lads in their teens. If Lambert killed this man, he did so, I should judge, under great provocation, or in the excitement of a quarrel. I have reason to know that Lambert is hot-tempered—"

"But to kill a man—no, no!" said the Head, tapping the desk concernedly. "It is impossible, Mr. Lee—impossible. It appears that Lambert broke bounds last night, for the purpose of visiting this man, Garwood—he owed Garwood a sum of money."

"Is this Lambert's own statement?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I am afraid he has done himself a lot of harm," I said thoughtfully. "He should have reserved any statement until later on. He admits visiting Garwood—the police will make the most of that, Dr. Stafford. But please go on."

"Lambert went to this captain for the purpose of gaining time," said the Head. "Of course, the boy has been acting dishonourably. In any case, he will have to be expelled from the school. This debt, amounting to fifty pounds, was incurred, mainly at the inn known as the White Harp, where Lambert was in the habit of gambling with Captain Garwood and others. The boy declares that he went to Garwood's house for the sole purpose of pleading for an extension of time in which to pay the debt. Garwood refused, and Lambert came back to the school."

"That is the lad's own story?"

"Yes—so far as it went," replied the Head. "It was very brief and disjointed. He was too staggered to say much. As for the facts of the crime,

Garwood was found in his sitting-room stabbed to the heart."

"There is no possibility of suicide, I presume?"

"According to Inspector Jameson, none," answered Dr. Stafford. "The knife was thrust into the old man's heart from behind; it is quite evident that he was sitting in his chair at the time, and the blow had been a sudden one."

"How did Lambert take his arrest?"

"He appeared to be dazed, and I must confess that his whole attitude was condemning in itself," said the Headmaster. "Regarding the closer details, I am as much in ignorance of them as you yourself. But, Mr. Lee, I cannot—I will not—believe that Lambert killed this man. It is too horrible."

"I hardly think it is wise to take that view," I said gravely. "It would be better, in my opinion, to weigh the evidence carefully, and form your opinion accordingly. If Lambert committed this deed, he must suffer for it. If he did not, then he will be set at liberty."

"But when—when?" asked the Head nervously. "Mr. Lee, you are exceptionally clever at this work—I am aware of that. I beg of you—I implore you—to look into the whole case—to do your utmost to find out the actual truth before the whole dreadful affair becomes public property."

"But my position here——"

"You will be quite safe—quite safe!" declared the Headmaster. "Is it not natural that one of the schoolmasters should inquire into everything? You are acting under my wishes, of course, and your real identity will never be suspected. I want you to probe the matter to the bottom."

"I'm not sure that the police will allow me to do that," I replied with a smile. "They will not be willing to give Mr. Alvington the facilities which they would unquestionably extend to Nelson Lee. However, I will do my best, Dr. Stafford. I will go over to Bannington immediately after breakfast, and try, if possible, to interview the boy himself."

Dr. Stafford was much relieved, and seemed to rely upon my accomplishing much. I was not sure, however. Nipper's evidence—on which I had not spoken—was rather black. But I must admit that I was intensely eager to commence my inquiries. This astonishing

affair seemed to take me back to my chosen profession all in a moment.

After breakfast was over, and the boys had gone into their various Form-rooms, I set out on my bicycle for Bannington. Upon arrival at the police-station, I at once introduced myself to Inspector Jameson—who appeared to be a capable officer, but somewhat narrow-minded.

"Yes, the prisoner is here," he exclaimed, in answer to a query of mine. "We have made no mistake Mr. Alvington; it was Lambert who committed the crime. I went to the school quite prepared to find that the boy had fled—and was, indeed, astonished and pleased to find that he was there. Of course, he was too stunned by this terrible act to make any move at all. Or, possibly, he imagined that he would not be suspected."

"Dr. Stafford has requested me to inquire into the whole grave affair," I explained. "Naturally, he is extremely anxious. Would it be possible for me to have a few words with Lambert?"

The inspector chewed his moustache thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "I suppose it would be possible—— But why do you wish to see him?"

"I merely want to obtain his own story."

"H'm! I don't suppose he'll say much to you," grunted the inspector. "He made some sort of statement to me, but it was very much against himself. I advised the boy to say nothing until it was absolutely necessary. But, if you wish, you may have five minutes with him, Mr. Alvington."

I thanked Inspector Jameson effusively, in keeping with my character, making him know that I fully realised the great value of his favour. And, a few minutes later, I was ushered into the little room which was occupied by Lambert.

The boy was sitting down with his face in his hands. He looked up at me dully as I entered, but then an eager light entered his eyes.

"Mr. Alvington!" exclaimed Lambert huskily. "Have you—have you brought any news? I can't bear this, sir. It's horrible. Have they found the murderer? Are they going to set me free——"

"Not just yet, Lambert," I interrupted gently. "I came here because I want you to tell me, frankly, exactly what hap-

pened. Tell me the truth, my boy; it will be much better for you in the end. You have admitted, I believe, that you visited Garwood last night?"

"Of course I did, sir," said the young prisoner, without hesitation. "I've been a fool—oh, I can't tell you what an idiot I've been, Mr. Alvington. I—I owed Garwood over fifty pounds, and he kept worrying me for the money. I couldn't pay it, sir—I hadn't got it."

"And you went to see him?"

"Yes—after lights out last night, sir. I suppose I incriminated myself by telling the inspector that, didn't I?" asked Lambert anxiously. "The police will believe that I had a motive for killing— Oh, it sounds awful! I didn't touch Garwood, sir—I didn't harm a hair of his head!"

"But what actually happened, Lambert?"

"Nothing much, sir. I went into his little room, and spoke to him there. It was nearly midnight—or just after. I'm not quite sure. Garwood was terribly harsh. He swore disgracefully when I said that I couldn't pay the money—and told me that he would write to my father to-day. That's all, Mr. Alvington."

"You left the house immediately after that?"

"I was only there a few minutes, sir," said Lambert dully. "When Garwood said that he would write to my father, I begged of him to give me more time. But he wouldn't. He swore that he would write to-day. And I went back to the school nearly mad with misery and fright. I knew what it would mean—the exposure of the whole wretched business, and the sack for me."

"Can't you prove, Lambert, that you left Garwood alive——"

"I've been thinking, sir—thinking till it seems as though my brain's on fire!" muttered the boy brokenly. "I can't prove anything. Garwood and I were by ourselves—his housekeeper had gone to bed—and he let me out of the house himself. He came to the gate with me, sir—and that's all I know. I didn't kill him—I swear that I didn't! Can't you believe me, sir?"

Lambert looked into my face eagerly, and with wild anxiety. But there was not the slightest trace of guilt in his expression.

"I believe—~~and~~ without reason—that I am something of a judge of character.

And, try as I would, I could not bring myself to believe that this boy had brutally stabbed an old man to death. There was not the least sign of a guilty conscience in this foolish boy's appealing and steady gaze.

"Can't you believe me, sir?" he repeated huskily. "When I left Garwood he was alive—as much alive as we are. I swear it, on my oath—on my oath before Heaven! I didn't touch him—I didn't touch him——"

"Steady, Lambert—steady," I said gently. "I do believe you, my boy. You have been foolish and wicked, but I am quite sure that you did not commit the crime with which you are charged."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Lambert, his eyes filling with moisture. "What am I to do, sir?"

"You must remain here for the time being, I am afraid," I replied. "But you may rely upon me doing my utmost to get at the truth. I must go now, Lambert, for I have only been allowed five minutes. Don't fret, and don't get into a panic."

"I—I won't, sir," muttered Lambert hoarsely. "I knew it would all come out, and I'm punished. It's all my own mad fault. But, once I started, I couldn't stop, sir. It'll mean expulsion, in any case—but that's nothing compared to—to——"

"Without a doubt, Lambert, you must leave St. Frank's," I said quietly. "For the time being, however, we are not thinking of your misdeeds—you are in a terrible position, and I am determined to do my utmost to secure your release."

"God bless you, sir!" muttered Lambert, with shining eyes.

I left the boy a minute later, and returned to Inspector Jameson.

"Perhaps you were justified in placing Lambert under arrest, but I am convinced that the boy is innocent," I said quietly. "His story is quite straightforward, and, although the evidence is somewhat black——"

"My dear sir, you do not understand these matters!" interrupted the inspector importantly. "You have had no experience, and, naturally, you cannot judge as I can."

"Perhaps not," I replied drily. "At the same time, inspector, if I may so presume, I should advise you to act with extreme care. Lambert is innocent of this charge——"

"Innocent? Tush!" exclaimed In-

spector Jameson sharply. "You don't understand. He condemns himself—and, before long, he will confess. The case is so plain—so exceedingly obvious—that any investigation is almost needless."

"May I be allowed to hear these simple facts?"

"There is very little to hear," replied the inspector. "Early this morning old Captain Garwood's housekeeper—an aged lady named Mrs. Lennan—descended as usual to attend to her duties. She was shocked and frightened to find her master in his sitting-room, stabbed to the heart. His body was reclining half in a chair and half upon the table. He had been stabbed as he sat—from behind. Naturally, the old lady was nearly mad with fright, and she rushed from the house screaming. She still had presence of mind enough, however, to go to the cottage of a local constable. She told this man what had occurred, and he investigated. After that he wired to me, and I went over."

"But how is Lambert implicated?"

"I am coming to that. When I reached Bellton, Mr. Alvington, I found that Mrs. Lennan had recovered sufficiently to be questioned," went on the inspector. "Her story caused me to go to St. Frank's without a second's delay. Late last night—towards midnight—she was laying in bed, quite awake. Captain Garwood was in his little den alone. Mrs. Lennan heard the bell ring, and then recognised the voice of Arthur Lambert—the boy had been there many times before. The captain's room was just below hers, and she had heard the man and boy talking heatedly and excitedly. It is quite obvious that a quarrel was in progress. The old lady fell asleep, however, and knew nothing more until the morning."

"H'm! It's rather flimsy, isn't it?" I said musingly.

"Flimsy!" The inspector glared. "It is not flimsy, sir—it is decidedly strong! Without the slightest doubt, Lambert killed Garwood in the heat of the quarrel. It is obvious—palpably so. And his very attitude when arrested condemned him. The fact that he admitted visiting Garwood is very conclusive in itself."

"I can't quite see that," I objected. "The boy did visit Garwood—so why should he deny it? Surely, if he had been guilty, he would have told another

story? He would have declared that he hadn't been near Garwood's house——"

"Tut-tut! The boy lost his head," interjected the inspector curtly.

"At the same time, the evidence is quite circumstantial, isn't it?"

"Well, in a way, I suppose it is," admitted Jameson. "But that is of little importance, my dear sir. Before the day is out Lambert will confess—I'm quite sure of that. Who else could have committed the crime? Have you asked yourself that? Garwood hadn't an enemy in the world; he was a peaceful old sea-captain, retired from active life. Lambert must have been stung to fury, and struck the blow on the spur of the moment. The whole thing is as simple as A B C. The boy was so terrified that he even made no attempt to flee. He just went back to the school. And this morning, when I arrested him, his whole attitude was one of guilt."

I nodded slowly.

"I should like, if possible, to interview Mrs. Lennan myself," I said. "I should like to have a look at the body——"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't, Mr. Alvington," said the inspector. "I realise that you and Dr. Stafford are keenly anxious. It may be somewhat out of order for you to mix yourself in the business, but the result is foregone. When Lambert is brought before the magistrate to-morrow, he will almost certainly be sent for trial. Or, possibly, we shall ask for a remand."

Jameson was rather good-natured: I easily obtained from him a written permit which would give me access to Captain Garwood's house. My position was somewhat difficult, for I was a mere schoolmaster. If I had revealed my true identity to the inspector, he would have granted me every possible facility. But, considering how matters stood, I got round him very nicely.

Then I rode back to Bellton, thinking over Lambert's story, and the facts which Jameson had supplied me with. It was a grim business—and puzzling. The police did not think it worth while to probe deeper into the matter. I did. Lambert's story was true—he had left Garwood alive and well. Who, then, had committed the crime?

The inspector's statement had eased my mind, for he had shown me that there was no actual proof against Lambert. The whole case relied upon the somewhat hazy evidence of the old

housekeeper. It was weak—and that is why I had hopes of success. This country inspector had merely looked on the face of the affair. But it was necessary to investigate closely.

I was quite elated as I rode into Bell-ton. There was the prospect of some interesting work ahead of me. In the village street I met Nipper and Sir Montie—and realised that morning lessons were over.

"Hallo, sir!" said Nipper, as I dismounted. "Have you heard anything?"

"I have heard sufficient to make me believe that Lambert is quite innocent," I replied. "I am now going along to the murdered man's house, with the object of making a few inquiries."

Of course, though Sir Montie was unaware of my real identity, it did not seem in the least odd to him that I should be making investigations.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "May we come, sir?"

"Oh, you'll let us go along with you, won't you, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

I smiled.

"Well, I suppose I shall have to be good-natured," I replied. "Perhaps, on the whole, it will be better if we go together. But you must behave yourselves, boys, and refrain from talking. Where is Watson?"

"Oh, he didn't come down!" replied Nipper. "Let's hear the news, guv'nor."

We walked along towards the end of the village, and I briefly told my young companions of my doings in Bannington. And, just as I had finished, we came in sight of a small, neat-looking house, surrounded by a wide garden. All the blinds were drawn, and a police-constable stood at the door.

CHAPTER V.

(Nelson Lee continues.)

IN WHICH I INVESTIGATE, AND MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE COPPER FROG.

ONE or two villagers were standing about the gateway of the Cabin, and they looked at the boys and me curiously as we entered the front garden. I took no notice of them, but approached the constable.

This officer was well known to me; he was the village policeman, and an excellent example of a burly, thick-headed

provincial constable. He touched his cap as I went up to him.

"This 'ere's a bad business, sir," he said heavily. "I reckon you gentlemen up at the school are fair worried over it. Just fancy that good-for-nothing boy a-stabbin' old Cap'n Garwood. It beats me, sir."

"It's a tragic affair altogether, Sparrow," I said gravely. "The body is lying upstairs, I presume? Is Mrs. Lennan here?"

"Indoors, sir," replied P.C. Sparrow, with a jerk of his thumb. "Fair knocked up, she is, poor old gal. Ain't the inspector comin' over again?"

"I don't know—I dare say he will be along later on," I replied. "At present, I am rather curious to question the old housekeeper, and to look at the body——"

"I dunno whether I can let ye go inside, sir," said the constable doubtfully. "I've had orders to admit nobody."

I produced the permit, and Sparrow was quite satisfied and relieved.

He opened the door and preceded us into the house. In the little hall everything was gloomy.

"Mrs. Lennan," called out the constable. "you're wanted!"

A door opened, and in another moment or two we were ushered into a little kitchen-sitting-room. Mrs. Lennan stood before us. It was easy to see that she was terribly upset by the great shock. She had obviously been crying, and I mentally decided that I would not question her too severely. She was an old lady of quite sixty-five, with almost white hair and angular figure.

"The boy didn't do it on purpose—I know he didn't!" she exclaimed tearfully. "But the poor master and he were havin' high words. Oh, it's dreadful—dreadful! What will become of me? I've got nowhere to go—nowhere!"

"Don't give way, Mrs. Lennan," I said gently, leading her to a chair. "The great shock of this tragedy will soon pass. I am Mr. Alvington, from St. Frank's, and I am naturally greatly concerned, regarding the fate of my pupil. If there has been a mistake, as I fear, I want to set matters right."

"It wasn't a mistake, sir—it was the boy who did it!" said the old woman shakily. "The inspector said that the case is quite plain, and he ought to know. Oh, I'll be thankful when I hear from



"A man with a wooden leg has been in this garden," said Nelson Lee keenly!—(See page 19.)

my son! I've asked him to come and take me away——"

"Quite so—quite so," I said softly.

With the constable, I went upstairs into the little front bedroom to have a look at the body, leaving the boys below. A very brief examination was sufficient. Captain Garwood had been a grizzled, bent old man. His death had been caused instantly, I judged. A stiletto, or a narrow-bladed knife, had been plunged into his heart from behind. There had been little external bleeding. But it was clearly a case of murder. No man could have inflicted such a wound himself. Only a strong man could have delivered that deadly thrust. I doubted even if Lambert could have struck such a blow.

"Where is the knife?" I asked, turning to Sparrow.

"The inspector took it, sir," replied the constable, who was looking extremely uncomfortable in the room of death. "It was a long thing, sir; summat like a skewer, to my thinkin'."

"A stiletto, Sparrow—a most deadly instrument!" I explained.

We went downstairs, and found Mrs. Lennan rocking to and fro in her chair, muttering half hysterically to herself. Nipper and Tregellis West were by the window.

"I have seen the body of your late master, Mrs. Lennan," I said quietly. "The wound which killed him was caused by a stiletto, so far as I can see. Have you ever seen such a weapon about the house? I can't quite believe that Lambert owned——"

"It was the master's, sir," said the old lady, looking up. "He's used it for years as a paper knife. It always used to lay on his table. The boy must have picked it up in a fury."

"May I enter the captain's room?"

Mrs. Lennan hesitated a moment, and then rose, muttering that the police were enough bother without anybody else. However, she led the way into the late captain's room, which I saw at a glance, had been tidied up. This was rather a drawback. The apartment was furnished in such a way that it closely resembled a ship's cabin.

The table at which Garwood had sat was fixed to one wall and it would have been an easy matter for anybody to have strangled him in the back as he sat before it. The whole room was provided with a great number of trophies of all descriptions—articles from almost every part of the world.

I could see that a prolonged search was unnecessary. There was very little to be discovered. But one particular curio interested me. Standing upon a corner of the mantelpiece, as though it had been recently placed there, I saw a small ornamental casket. It was made of polished brass, and was quite unique.

"One of the captain's Oriental trophies, I presume?" I asked casually.

"That, sir?" Mrs. Lennan looked at the casket wonderingly. "I've never seen it before," she added.

Inwardly, I felt a thrill run through me.

"You have never seen it before?" I repeated, picking the thing up. "That is rather curious, isn't it? Didn't it belong to Captain Garwood?"

"Not—not that I know of, sir."

Mrs. Lennan stood on the other side of the room, her tears forgotten for a moment. There was nothing remarkable in the fact that she hadn't seen the casket before, and now that she had learned of it for the first time she was naturally astonished.

Something rattled inside the little brass box.

"I don't know what's inside, sir," said the old lady. "Maybe it belonged to the captain. It must have done. Master Lambert wouldn't have brought it here, would he? It looks like one of them Indian things."

I forced the lid back. Nipper and Montie looking on interestedly, and within the casket I found a small image. It was made of metal—polished copper—and shaped into the form of a frog. I picked it up by the head and glanced at it curiously.

Almost the first thing I saw was a clearly defined thumb-print upon the polished under-surface of the frog. Every line of the thumb-mark stood out distinctly and clearly.

"H'm! This may prove of great value," I said thoughtfully. "Do you see, boys? There is a clear mark of a thumb just here. I judge that the image was removed from the box quite recently—within the last few hours. If we can discover whose thumb-print that is, we may accomplish something."

I replaced the curio into the casket and pocketed both—without asking permission.

"I don't think it will be necessary for us to bother you any longer, Mrs. Lennan," I said, turning to her with a

smile. "And it is very improbable that my amateur efforts will bear any fruit."

"It was the boy who killed the master," said the old woman, wringing her hands. "It couldn't have been nobody else. Oh, I'm terribly upset! They'll be thinkin' that I did it!"

"No, no! You mustn't get such absurd ideas into your head, Mrs. Lennan," I protested gently. "The blow which killed your master was delivered by a man—a strong man, too. There's no fear of your being implicated in the least. You mustn't get alarmed."

"I won't, sir," she said shakily. "But it's a shocking affair!"

We passed outside, and found the constable on the doorstep, as before. I didn't leave at once, however.

"Has the garden been examined, Sparrow?" I asked.

"The garden, sir?"

"Yes. Has the inspector been over it?"

"Over it? What for, sir?" asked the policeman, staring at me.

"Why, to look for clues, of course!" put in Nipper impatiently.

"Oh, cloos!" said Sparrow, scratching his whiskers. "Cloos! This ain't one o' them cases, sir. It's all plain. There ain't no cloos, not what I knows of. Inspector Jameson sez that it's all clear an' simple."

I was rapidly becoming convinced that Inspector Jameson was an incapable officer, and P.C. Sparrow had a head like a turnip.

With the boys, I passed round the house until I reached the window of the apartment we had just left. Outside, it was an ordinary lattice, but within it resembled the porthole of a ship.

"Hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Nipper abruptly.

I turned, and found him bending over the soil which stretched out beyond the pathway. There were cauliflowers and cabbages growing there.

"There's a footprint here, guv'nor," muttered Nipper. "But I can't understand it. There's only a left footprint—not a sign of the right!"

"That's queer," said Sir Montie. "Begad!"

I crossed the path and looked carefully. As Nipper had said, there were several distinct left footprints, but no others. It was the impression of a big, clumsy boot. The path itself was quite hard, and therefore revealed nothing. I stepped among the cabbages and bent down.

"Ah, what is this?" I murmured. "By James, I am becoming interested!"

For I had seen several round impressions. They were an inch or two deep, and appeared where the unknown man's right foot should have left a mark. Obviously, the man had lost a leg, and these indentations were caused by a stump.

"A man with a wooden leg has been in this garden," I said keenly. "Don't you see, boys? We had better follow them for a little way."

"My hat," exclaimed Nipper, "this is getting exciting!"

"I'm all agog, begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

But he looked quite calm, and the three of us passed among the cabbages, and found ourselves upon the opposite path. Here we were checked for a moment, but the curious footprints were again discovered on the open soil beyond. There was no difficulty in following them.

But our task was a short one.

After a few minutes we found ourselves right against the low wall which divided the garden from the road. Glancing over, I saw that a wide border of grass lay on the other side, with the hard road just beyond. It would be a hopeless task to attempt to follow the footprints any farther.

"That man, whoever he is, was here only a few hours ago," I exclaimed thoughtfully. "He came, I should judge, during the night."

"Do you think he's connected with this murder, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"I don't know, my boy," I replied slowly. "But it is my opinion that he is very closely connected with it. The whole thing is more intricate than the police seem to imagine. On the face of it, Captain Garwood was killed by the hot-headed action of a senior schoolboy. He met his death at somebody else's hands."

"Whose?" asked Nipper.

"That is what I am going to find out," I replied grimly.

CHAPTER VI.

(Nipper picks up the thread again.)

WE LEARN SOME VALUABLE INFORMATION—AND THEN THE GUV'NOR SURPRISES ME.

NELSON LEE had entered into this case with all his old enthusiasm. Of course, he and I were as much ourselves as ever. Although our positions at St. Frank's were so vastly

different to our usual mode of life, we were not changed in the slightest degree.

And, at the first suggestion of a mystery, the gov'nor was hot on its track. We had only been at the Cabin a very short while, and he had already discovered a fat lot more than the police knew.

"Yes, boys, we have got to find out the truth as quickly as possible," the gov'nor said, as we walked back towards the front garden. "These unusual foot-prints may be totally useless, but it would be foolish to ignore them. Don't mention the matter to the constable, in any case."

We found P.C. Sparrow—who was facetiously called "Dicky Bird" by most of the juniors—staring stolidly before him, and looking rather tired. I couldn't quite understand why he should be on duty there. The one or two gapers had gone, and nobody else was in sight.

The whole village, of course, knew of the tragedy, and was shocked. But I don't think it was general knowledge that Lambert had been arrested. Mrs. Lennan was not a gossip, and had spoken to no one during the morning.

"What about that copper frog, sir?" I asked, as we walked down the road, the detective wheeling his bicycle. "Do you think that will be of any value—that thumb-print, I mean?"

"It might be, Bennett. It all depends," replied Lee vaguely. "I shall, of course, hand it over to the police in due course. I believe that it is connected with the crime."

"But how, sir?"

"It is impossible to form any opinion at this early stage, young 'un. I can't quite see where the copper frog fits in, but I am convinced that it fits somewhere. It is something of a problem."

"It may have been brought by the wooden-legged johnny," remarked Sir Montie brilliantly. "It's a sign. It's somethin' which means somethin' else!"

I grinned.

"I shouldn't tax your mighty brain, Montie," I remarked. "That little frog must mean something or other, or it wouldn't have been there. Mrs. Lennan didn't know anything about it. I wonder if that chap with the wooden leg actually did bring——"

"By Cæsar!" ejaculated Sir Montie suddenly.

He stopped short in the middle of the road, and stood staring across the low hedge. We had passed through the vil-

lage, and were on the quiet stretch of lane which led towards St. Frank's. On the left lay a rough meadow—almost a piece of waste land—with the gaunt trees of Bellton Wood beyond.

"What's the matter, you fathead?" I asked, nudging my chum.

"Dear fellow, look at that!" said Tregellis-West, pointing.

Both Nelson Lee and I were looking, and we saw something which surprised us. For there, on the farther side of the meadow, stood a tiny encampment. It was merely a wretched, patched-up tent, with a small fire burning near it. Over the fire a man was bending, and that man's right leg was missing from the knee! A stump replaced the absent portion.

"Well, I'm blowed!" I gasped.

"I am certainly surprised myself, Bennett," observed Nelson Lee calmly. "Surely this cannot be a coincidence? We are anxious to find a man with a wooden right leg, and here he is before us! This may be merely a ruse! The fellow is possibly playing a part. But we will speak to him."

"Now, sir?" I asked.

"Why not? Delay would be pointless."

The gov'nor laid his bicycle against the hedge, and we all broke through into the meadow. We had walked half-way across before the owner of the wooden stump became aware of our approach, and even then he seemed very little interested. He merely looked up from the fire for a moment, screwed an old clay-pipe more securely into his mouth, and then went on with his task.

A pot was suspended over the fire, and as we drew nearer a savoury odour of boiling vegetables and meat assailed our nostrils. Over by the side of the tent stood a queer looking machine, which I recognised as a tinker's grinding and pot-mending outfit. Roughly painted on the front was the name "Jeremiah Binns."

The wooden-legged man himself was carelessly attired. His hair was grizzled, and an untrimmed beard adorned his chin. He looked at us with his face all wrinkled into smiles as we came up.

"Afternoon, gents!" he said cheerfully. "Mebbe you be wantin' somethin' mended? I'm just a-gettin' my dinner ready, but I sha'n't be long——"

"No, we don't want any repairs done, thank you," said Nelson Lee.

"That's a pity, sir. Old Jerry Binns

don't 'ave none too much work," said the aged tinker, shaking his head. "I ain't done wrong in campin' in this 'ere medder, 'ave I?"

"Not that I know of," smiled the guv'nor. "But I wish to ask you one question—and I want a truthful answer. Did you enter the garden of a small house known as the Cabin——"

"Lor' sakes! I knowed I'd be found out!" ejaculated Jerry Binns, in dismay. "I didn't mean no 'arm, sir. They was fine kebbiges, an' I only took two. I sez to myself, jest afore I went over the 'edge: 'You'll be found out, you old fool,' I sez. 'An' then that'll mean prison for ye,' I sez. I ain't got much money, sir, but I'll pay for them kebbiges if so be as you——"

"One moment Binns," interjected Nelson Lee. "If you took some cabbages which were not your own—well, it is not my place to inform against you. They weren't my cabbages."

"Lor'! I thought ye was goin' to hev' me took up!" said the old man.

The guv'nor and Montie and I couldn't help smiling. The old fellow was quaint, and he certainly bore no resemblance to a murderer. He was smiling again now, and his eyes shone with relief and cheerfulness.

"Tell me what happened, Binns," said Lee.

"Why, I was comin' down the road last evenin', an' I 'appened to see them kebbiges all a-growin'," explained the one-legged tinker. "I stops an' looks at 'em. 'Them's fine wegitables,' I sez to myself. 'A couple o' them'd make a fine dinner,' I sez. An' I no more to do but steal in the garden last night, right late, an' pull up a couple of 'em. One of 'em's a cookin' now."

Nelson Lee smiled, and Montie and I grinned. The footprints were clearly explained. They had merely been made by this cheerful old pilferer, who was quite open about his outrageous crime now that he knew our intentions were not hostile.

"The cabbages will not be missed, Binns," said the guv'nor quietly, "for their owner is now dead. I presume you have heard of the tragedy?"

"I ain't stirred outer this field this mornin'," replied the other. "That there grinder o' mine went wrong, drat it! I bin repairin' the thing. Somebody bin killed, you say? An accident, I des-say."

"No, Binns. The owner of the house was murdered," replied Lee. "Your footprints in the garden were somewhat sinister, but I now know, of course, that you were not connected with the crime."

"Lor' save us! I ain't never killed nothin' bigger'n a mouse!" declared Binns, his smile vanishing. "But now I knows who done it. That ain't right, though—'cos when the young feller left the 'ouse, the old man was alive. That couldn't 'a bin 'im——"

"What's that you're saying?" put in the guv'nor sharply. "It seems to me that you can give us some very valuable information, my man."

The old tinker scratched his whiskers.

"I dunno about that, sir," he replied.

"You see, I caught a rare fright when I was in that there garden. I'd jest got me kabbiges, an' was goin' out, when I 'eard the door open. I crouched down, an' saw a young feller of mebbe eighteen or twenty walk to the gate. There was somebody with 'im—an old man. They seemed to be 'avin' 'igh words, so far as I could 'ear."

"Go on—go on!" exclaimed Lee sharply.

"They didn't stop at the gate long, sir—jest 'arf a minute," said old Binns. "An' then the man went indoors agin, an' locked up the door. I waited a few minutes afore movin'. Then, like the old fool I am, I went an' cracked a great ole dead branch. Lor'! That snapped like a gun, an' give me a rare fright! The winder opened, an' the ole man looked out. But he didn't see nothin', an' closed the winder agin. An' then I come away, feelin' right skeered. Them kebbiges wasn't worth it, sir. But I reckon they look nice now, don't they?"

He stirred the concoction in the pot with a satisfied sigh, and Nelson Lee looked from Sir Montie to me. There was a gleam of triumph in his eye—and I knew the reason.

This information, which had been totally unexpected, was of tremendous value. For Binns's evidence proved positively that Arthur Lambert had not killed Garwood. The Sixth Former had told Nelson Lee the truth—he had parted with the old captain at the gate of his house.

The murder had been committed after Lambert left—that was obvious. But who had committed the deed?

"Did you come away from the garden as soon as Captain Garwood closed the

window—or did you wait?" asked Lee keenly.

"That must ha' bin about three minutes arterwards, sir."

"Did you hear voices from within the house?"

"Not a sound, sir—unless, mebbe, you'd call a kind o' sigh a sound," replied the tinker. "Jest when I was a-gettin' up I heerd somebody sigh real loud like. That must ha' bin this 'ere captin what you spoke on. Like as not, he was a-sighin' for the sea agin."

Lee put several other questions, but the old man was unable to give us any further information. He expressed his entire willingness, however, to tell his story to the police—after the guv'nor assured him that he would come to no harm. He would remain encamped at Bellton for another week, and we should always know where to find him.

"It's gettin' late, Benny boy," murmured Sir Montie, as we started across the meadow again. "Dinner's been served for some time. We shall have nothin' but the leavin's, begad! But it's no good grumblin'."

"You won't get into trouble, Montie," said the guv'nor, with a smile. "You have been with me—and I am your Housemaster. It was extremely fortunate that we saw old Binns. His statement has simplified matters exceedingly."

"It seems to me that it's made the case even more mysterious," I objected. "We know that Lambert didn't do it—but who did? There wasn't a soul in the house except Mrs. Lennan—and we know she couldn't have done it."

"There was one part of Binns's story which needs careful thought," remarked Lee. "He said that Garwood and Lambert stood at the gate for a minute talking. It is possible that somebody crept in by the open door during that period. The old housekeeper was in bed, and it would have been an easy matter for the intruder to enter Garwood's room—the door of which was probably open. He could have concealed himself there, and struck the blow as soon as Garwood sat down. He escaped, of course, by merely walking out in the usual way."

"That's one explanation, isn't it?" I remarked. "I think it's jolly likely, too, sir. But what's the next move?"

"Dinner is the first thing," smiled Nelson Lee. "And then, young 'un, you will have to attend to your after-

noon lessons. I shall make my report to the Headmaster, and take another trip over to Bannington. The chief thing is to effect Lambert's release—and that can be done, I think, this afternoon."

As soon as we got to St. Frank's, Montie and I went in to dinner. We were late, of course, but the guv'nor made that all right. Then he went off to explain what had happened to Dr. Stafford.

Afternoon lessons were a tremendous bore, but we had to go through with them. Scarcely a single junior knew that Lambert had left the school. The seniors thought that he had been called away by his parents, or something of that sort. The real truth, at all events, was unknown.

Some rumours regarding the tragic death of Captain Garwood had penetrated into the school, and these were being circulated rapidly. But nothing definite was known. I told Tommy Watson, of course, and we two and Sir Montie were the only fellows who knew the exact facts.

The very instant lessons were over I dashed to the guv'nor's study, making some excuse for doing so. But the door was locked, and I learned that he had gone out. I went to Study C, therefore, and found Tommy and Montie preparing tea.

It was almost dark by now, and the night promised to be stormy and wet. There were many interruptions during tea—other fellows were constantly putting their heads into the study. And so any private talk was out of the question. There was much amusement concerning the discomfiture of Fullwood and Co. the previous night. The Nuts themselves were going about with fierce, black looks. But this only amused the fellows all the more.

More than once Fullwood darkly hinted that revenge was in store. But that didn't alarm me in the least. I was quite prepared to suffer any revenge Fullwood was capable of plotting.

But, for the time, I'd dismissed all such minor matters as Fullwood's revenge from my mind. I badly wanted to hear what Nelson Lee had been doing all the afternoon.

Tea over, I again went to his study, and this time found it occupied. The Head himself was there, and I prepared to back out hastily.

"You needn't go, my boy," said the guv'nor, looking up.

I closed the door, and walked into the room. The Head, of course, knew everything. He was looking almost cheerful.

"I am indeed thankful that I requested you to look into this affair, Mr. Lee," he was saying. "You have done wonders—wonders!"

"I am afraid you are exaggerating, Dr. Stafford," smiled the guv'nor. "Well, Nipper," he added, turning to me, "I suppose you're anxious to know what has been happening while you were grinding away at your lessons? I took Binns over to Bannington, and his evidence, with my own, convinced Inspector Jameson that a blunder had been made. I think Lambert will be released this evening. I was just about to explain matters to Dr. Stafford. To be brief, I strongly suspect that Mrs. Lennan is deeply concerned in this murder—indeed, it is possible that she struck the blow herself!"

I stared blankly.

"Mrs.—Mrs. Lennan!" I stuttered. "Why, that's impossible! You're dotty, guv'nor!"

Both Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford smiled.

"Is that the way to talk to your Housemaster?" demanded Lee sternly.

"Oh, blow it! I'm not talking to my Housemaster I'm talking to you, sir!" I said impatiently. "You ain't a Housemaster now!"

"I don't suppose you'll ever learn to treat me with proper respect——"

"Oh, crumbs!" I groaned. "A giddy lecture now! If I was an ordinary schoolboy, I should be caned for impertinence, I suppose? But I'm not a schoolboy—and you'll never jolly well make me one, either! What's that you said about Mrs. Lennan, guv'nor?"

"Indeed, Mr. Lee, I am greatly startled myself," put in the Head gently.

"I am afraid Nipper is not so observant as he could be," smiled Nelson Lee. "Otherwise, he would not be so surprised now. He was present during my conversation with Mrs. Lennan."

"Yes, I know I was," I agreed. "But I don't see why you should suspect her!"

"Well, there are two reasons, Nipper," went on the guv'nor. "First of all, the old woman struck me as being totally insincere. I can't explain exactly what I mean, but that was the impression which fixed itself in my mind. Everything she

did, every word she uttered, was false. She acted a part. You didn't notice it, eh? Well, I did, young 'un. And I was at once suspicious. But the most important thing is connected with that copper frog. The old woman positively declared that she had never seen the casket, and that she had no knowledge of its contents."

"Yes, I remember she said that, sir."

"Yet, when I produced the frog, she expressed no surprise whatever, and she gave a very visible start when I remarked that a clear thumb-print was visible," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Why did she start, Nipper? For one of two reasons—because she knew that a thumb-print is one of the most positive clues it is possible to obtain, and the print was either caused by a confederate of hers or by one of her own thumbs. That was why she was so startled."

"But she wasn't startled, sir——"

"We differ there, Nipper. You were not observing Mrs. Lennan as I was—and I don't think I am mistaken," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It was she who gave the information concerning Lambert, don't forget. It was to her interest to throw suspicion upon the boy."

"But a woman couldn't have struck that blow, guv'nor!" I protested.

"Women can do far more than some people imagine," replied the great detective. "I have an idea—but this is a mere suspicion—that the woman is in some way disguised. I don't believe she's so old as she makes herself out to be. And some women are very strong, don't forget. At all events, I am going to make an attempt to secure an impression of her own right thumb. If the two correspond, things will look black against her."

"But that copper frog wasn't used——"

"You don't seem to grasp the situation, my boy. Mrs. Lennan positively denied all knowledge of the thing. She did so, I believe, on the spur of the moment. But, having made that statement, she could not back out from it. And if we can prove that she lied over that, she will probably break down. In any case, I mean to put the matter to the test."

"When are you going, sir?"

"Very shortly—within half an hour."

"Can I come with you?"

"I don't think it's necessary, Nipper," smiled Lee. "I shall only be away a

very short while—not more than an hour, at the most.”

I left the study, feeling rather disappointed. The case seemed to have fizzled out all of a sudden. Now that Lambert's innocence had been proved, and his release from police custody was a certainty, Dr. Stafford ceased to worry. It was bad enough that Lambert should be expelled—but that was a mere trifle in comparison to the other matter. Besides, it wouldn't be an ordinary expulsion. Lambert had simply been taken away from the school by his parents.

But the gov'nor and I looked at the thing in a different way. The mere fact that Lambert was innocent wasn't sufficient. It was only half a case. We wanted to get at the truth. So, although the gov'nor could have left the matter as it stood, he didn't intend to do so.

I went back to Study C and told Sir Montie and Tommy something of what had occurred.

But there was to be other excitement that evening—and I didn't know anything about it—yet.

CHAPTER VII.

(*Nelson Lee Resumes.*)

MY MISSION—AND ITS VERY UNEXPECTED RESULT.

DR. STAFFORD remained in my study only a few minutes after Nipper had gone. His whole aspect had undergone a rapid change since my return from Bannington.

I had certainly never anticipated such a prompt release for Lambert. The thick-headed country police would have kept him in custody for days, probably, if the evidence of Jeremiah Binns had not been forthcoming. I don't think the police cared for the idea of letting Lambert go, even then. In any case, they would certainly keep him under supervision until they had got on the right track.

But the trouble, so far as St. Frank's was concerned, was all over. There would be no scandal, and Lambert's name would not even appear in connection with the affair. If there were any rumours, they would be quickly denied.

But I was not satisfied, by any means.

There is nothing I hate worse than relinquishing my efforts when half-way through a case. I had a very strong suspicion that the murder had been committed by Mrs. Lennan—or, at least, that she had been implicated.

And so I prepared for my visit to the Cabin as soon as ever Dr. Stafford had gone. These preparations were very simple. All I did was to take an ordinary envelope, and write a fanciful name and address upon it. Then I prepared the surface of the paper in such a way that it would take a thumb-print, or finger-print, perfectly—without showing any trace, until carefully looked for. A little fine powder, dusted over the surface, would instantly bring the tell-tale marks into relief.

This envelope I placed between two others, and tucked it into my pocket. I reckoned that I should be in the village only a few minutes. And I was quite eager to learn the result of my test.

When I emerged into the Triangle I found the night to be somewhat wild and blustery. The wind was cold and cruel, with occasional flurries of rain. I was well wrapped up, however, and I set out briskly for the village.

When I arrived outside the little house of the dead captain, the rain was coming down quite briskly. There was no constable at the door now—indeed, it was not necessary. Although the village could talk of nothing else but the murder, it was quite certain that the countryfolk would give the Cabin a very wide berth.

I was somewhat astonished by the fact that Mrs. Lennan had elected to stay in the house during the night—alone. Most of the villagers had been shocked, for that piece of news had very soon got abroad. Sparrow, the constable, had given it to me—and I had no reason to doubt it. Mrs. Lennan would not hear of staying the night in the house of a neighbour.

This, in itself, was suggestive.

I walked up the short garden path, and tapped gently at the door. Rather to my surprise, it was opened within a minute. A small light shone in one of the rear rooms, but the hall was in gloom. The angular figure of Mrs. Lennan was silhouetted against the yellow glow.

“Who is that?” she asked tentatively.

“I am Mr. Alvington—from the

school," I replied. "Can I have a word with you, Mrs. Lennan?"

"What do you want, sir?" she said doubtfully.

"I wish to show you something—and to ask you a question," I answered, shaking the rain-drops from my hat.

"Perhaps you'd better come in, sir."

She stood aside, and I passed into the house. The door being closed, we went into the back sitting-room I had visited on the previous occasion. The room looked nice and cosy, with its cheerful fire and shaded lamp. But I could not help remembering the still, stiff form in one of the rooms above.

"I only wish to stay just a minute," I said, producing the prepared envelope. "Can you tell me if this handwriting is known to you, Mrs. Lennan? Your answer will have some bearing on the case, in all probability."

I handed her the envelope, and she took it exactly as I would have desired. Her right finger and thumb closed upon it in a firm grip, and I knew that the impression would be bold.

"No, Mr. Alvington, I haven't seen this before," she said, looking at me curiously. "I don't know what it is at all. Did you find it here?"

"No," I replied, taking the envelope back. "I just wished to know if you had seen it or not. The result of this little visit, will, you may be sure, have some certain consequence. But I'd rather not explain anything further now, Mrs. Lennan. I sha'n't bother you any longer."

"I'll do anything I can for you, sir—anything to prove that that poor boy is innocent," said the woman sincerely. "But, alas, he's guilty—I know he is! He struck down my poor master. I don't know how I'm bearing it all!"

She opened the door while she was speaking, and I picked up my hat and entered the hall. I was feeling very satisfied. My sole object in coming was to obtain that impression—and I had got it.

It was very dark in the hall, and as I was leading the way. I was necessarily slow, not being quite sure of the obstructions.

And it was then that I received a stunning surprise—in real earnest. It was stunning in more senses than one.

For, as I was feeling my way down the hall, I heard a rustle behind me—a sound as though Mrs. Lennan had

moved suddenly and quickly. Before I could turn, something terribly hard—a poker, I found out afterwards—descended upon my head with brutal force.

Everything went whirling, a thousand fires danced before my eyes, and I pitched forward on my face. And I felt, with a surprise, that my ankles were tightly bound—and that my wrists were in a similar plight.

Opening my eyes, I saw that a candle flickered on the floor—and I was no longer in the hall. From the acute rake of the ceiling I needed no telling that I occupied a small attic.

Obviously, a distinct space of time had elapsed. But yet it seemed to me as though I had only just been struck. During the first moment, I had imagined that my eyes opened immediately after my fall. This, however, was absurd.

I had been carried upstairs—
Carried upstairs!

How in the name of wonder could Mrs. Lennan have dragged my inert body up those stairs? A strong man could have done so, but it would have been an appalling task. But a woman! I couldn't quite understand it.

My head was singing and throbbing painfully, and I knew that my skull was badly bruised. A little more force, and a fracture would have resulted.

There could be only one explanation. For some unknown reason, the woman had struck me down from behind as I moved towards the hall door. And all my suspicions were justified. Mrs. Lennan would never have acted in this drastic fashion if she had been innocent.

I attempted to work my hands a little easier, and succeeded in a slight degree. But then I heard footfalls upon the stairs, and the door opened. Mrs. Lennan, her eyes blazing with anger and malice, stood before me.

"What did you take me for?" she asked, with great scorn. "Did you suppose that I should be tricked so simply? That envelope was prepared—you wished to obtain my thumb-print. You interfering fool, why didn't you attend to your school duties, without mixing yourself in this case?"

"Because, Mrs. Lennan, I had certain suspicions regarding yourself," I replied calmly. "Those suspicions are now justified. I knew that you had made the thumb-print upon the copper frog—and I suspect—"

"What do I care what you suspect?" she cut in harshly. "I did make the thumb-print—what of it? Does that prove anything? As soon as you found out, I felt alarmed, and I made a slip. I let you see that I was alarmed. Well, your trouble has been for nothing. I am going to settle with you at once."

"By using the same weapon as you used before, probably?" I asked steadily.

"You deserve to be killed—but I'm not going to be so drastic," she replied, with a sneer. "You'll call this a confession, won't you? Well, you can. I don't care. You will never be able to trace me—or the public either."

"Ah, you mean to flee——"

"I must—it is my only course," she broke in furiously. "You have caused this, you fool! But I shall have a clear night's start, for you will remain here until to-morrow, at least."

She kicked the candle over, and it extinguished with a splutter. Then, without saying another word, she left the room and closed the door, locking it securely. I heard her walk quickly down the narrow top stairs—and it was not the walk of an old woman.

The attic was one of those with no window, and I knew that shouting would be utterly useless. Mrs. Lennan knew it, too. The house stood quite by itself, and the attic was probably at the rear. Nobody could possibly hear in the road, and meadows stretched out behind. Moreover, the wind was howling noisily.

I was quite relieved.

I had fully expected that the woman would act drastically. If she was capable of killing Captain Garwood—and I was sure she had killed him—she was capable of further violence. Perhaps I had not seen the last of her.

It had been rather unwise of me to walk in front of her in the hall. But, then, one can't always be infallible. I had not imagined that she would act in any way violent during my short visit. The truth of the matter was, I had under-estimated her ability and cunning.

She had jumped to my purpose at once. She had known that I had come for the sole purpose of obtaining her thumb-print. Undoubtedly, that had been very astute on her part, and I found myself wondering. Was it possible that the woman was a professional criminal? The facts rather pointed that

way. She had been absolutely on the alert—and I hadn't been quite prepared for it.

The result was galling, but by no means alarming. The prospect of lying in that icy attic all night was not at all alluring. But I couldn't get free. My hands and feet were bound with really astonishing tightness.

Again, I wondered how she had brought me to the top of the house. Was there an accomplice in the building? If so, I had heard no sign—I had seen nothing to warrant such a suspicion.

The position was merely awkward—nothing more. In the morning—But I smiled in the middle of my thoughts. There was little prospect of my remaining at the Cabin until the morning. Nipper knew where I had gone, and he would soon institute a search after a few hours had elapsed.

Mrs. Lennan had obviously missed this point—which clearly proved that she was in a panic. The instant I was released I should, of course, communicate with the police, and it would be only a matter of hours before the murderess was captured.

Twenty minutes passed—perhaps more. And then I heard movements below. I wondered if my captor was returning—with the object of paying me some unwelcome attention. But the movements ceased, and I heard the front door close.

Mrs. Lennan had escaped—and I could not follow.

CHAPTER VIII.

(Nipper concludes the narrative.)

I BECAME ANXIOUS, AND SET OUT FOR THE VILLAGE WITH MONTIE AND TOMMY—WE MEET A STRANGER—AND AFTER THAT SOME EXCITING THINGS HAPPEN.

I LOOKED at my watch anxiously.

"I don't care what you say, Tommy, something's happened!" I declared.

"Of course something's happened," replied Tommy. "Something always is happening——"

"You ass! I mean something bad," I interjected, staring at my watch again. "Do you know it's nearly nine o'clock? Mr. Alvington's been gone for two

hours and a half—and he was to be back almost at once. It's jolly queer."

I stared into the fire moodily. I was with Sir Montie and Tommy in Study C. Prep was over, and it was nearly supper-time. I'd been to Nelson Lee's study at least six times during the last hour, but he hadn't returned.

Handforth, meeting me in the lobby, wanted to know what new game it was I was playing at, dodging up and down the passages every few minutes. But I didn't stop to answer him, and Handforth snorted.

To tell the truth, I was getting concerned. I knew that Nelson Lee suspected Mrs. Lennan of being complicated in the murder-plot; and the governor doesn't suspect people without being fairly sure of himself.

Why had he been away so long?

I couldn't think of any reason why he should be detained—except one. And that one reason made me tremendously worried. I believed that he had met with some set-back—perhaps foul play.

"I've a good mind to run down to the village," I said abruptly.

"Now?" asked Watson. "It's supper time—"

"Blow supper!"

"And it's raining like the dickens—"

"Rats to the rain!"

"And you'll be breaking bounds—"

"What do I care for bounds, or anything else?" I demanded fiercely. "I'm going, I tell you."

"All right, fathead—don't eat me!"

"Benny is anxious," murmured Tregellis-West. "He's getting worried. Tell you what, old boy, suppose we all three go? Nothin' like stickin' together, you know. I'm game for any old thing you like."

I nodded briskly.

"Right-ho!" I said. "We'll all buzz down. If we meet 'Mr. Alvington' on the way, all the better. If we don't meet him, we'll make inquiries at the Cabin—or break in, or something!"

"Suppose somebody sees us going out?" asked Tommy doubtfully.

"Let 'em see!" I replied, looking round for my muffler. "My hat! You're grumbling like an old woman! If you don't want to come—"

Tommy Watson glared.

"You silly ass—"

"Dry up!" I said. "Let's get off."

"What a rapid chap you are, Benny," said Sir Montie. "You're puttin' me into a fluster, dear fellow—you are, really. You're like a miniature whirlwind when you start thinkin' of ideas. But I'm with you every time, old son. An' I'm just as anxious about Mr. Alvington as you are."

We left Study C, and went along to the junior cloak-room, just off the lobby. Here we selected our thick coats and caps, and emerged into the Triangle. Somebody shouted out after us—it was Owen major, I believe—but we didn't take any notice of him. This wasn't the time for explanations, even if we could have given one.

It was raining fast, and the cold wind lashed the drops into our faces sharply. I've been out in a few miserable nights, but this was one of the worst of any.

The gates were locked, of course, but we simply slipped along to the master's private gate, and went out that way. This gate wasn't locked until ten, but all the masters had a key.

The road was slushy and soaking. The wind howled mournfully in the trees of Bellton Wood. But we went to the village at the double, through dense blackness. By the time we reached the first house, however, the darkness wasn't quite so intense. A slight break had appeared in the clouds, and, besides, our eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom.

The village was dark, except for one or two lights in the upper windows. Although it was only just after nine, the people were in the habit of retiring very early in Bellton. The public-houses, of course, were an exception.

We didn't meet a soul passing through, and very shortly we arrived at the side turning which led to the Cabin. I had been expecting to meet Nelson Lee, but there had been no sign of him.

We were all silent as we neared the house of tragedy. We could see it distinctly ahead, standing back from the road, dark and somewhat sinister. I was just about to make a remark to Montie, when I checked myself. A dim figure—the figure of a man—appeared at the gate of the Cabin, and emerged into the road.

"Mr. Alvington," I murmured. "No, it can't be. By jingo!"

I drew my chums close against the hedge. The man who had just left the house had paused for a moment. "And

I had distinctly seen him shake his fist at the building. Then, with his head down, he came along the road with rapid footsteps. He passed us without knowing of our presence; but I could not distinguish his features.

It seemed to me as though he was moving furtively.

"Who was it?" breathed Tommy.

"Blessed if I know," I replied. "Did you see the way he shook his fist? What the dickens for? I say, I'm beginning to get alarmed. This thing looks fishy. I can tell you."

"Are you sure it wasn't Mr. Alvington?"

"Don't be an ass, Tommy," I said impatiently. "This chap's figure was quite different. It seems to me that he's got into some hole or other. He must have fallen foul of somebody. I'm going to bash at the door, anyhow!"

"But suppose Mrs. Lennan comes——"

"Well, I'll question her, that's all," I replied grimly. "But I don't believe she will come. There's something crooked afoot!"

I pushed open the gate, and strode down the path to the front door. The house was in complete darkness, not a light showing from any window. I lifted the old knocker and hammered it down hard.

"Now we'll see," I muttered between my teeth. "I'm fed-up with waiting!"

But we had to wait again. Two minutes passed by—two minutes, three minutes, and there was no answer to my knock. I hammered again, harder this time, but with the same result.

And then, faintly, I heard a cry; at least, I thought I did. What with the wind and rain, I couldn't be quite sure. It seemed to come from the very interior of the house.

"Look here, I'm going to break in," I said grimly.

"Dear boy, you can't do that——"

"Can't I?" I exclaimed. "You wait, my son!"

I left the little porch, and went to one of the front windows. As I had expected, a shutter covered it. But it was only the work of a minute to wrench it away. And the lower sash of the window went up at the first touch.

"I—I say," said Tommy Watson, in a scared voice. "We—we can't get in, you know. It's burglary! We shall get lagged——"

"Rot! I'm going in!" I declared, throwing my leg over the sill.

In two ticks I was inside, and I stumbled across to the door and felt for the handle. I heard my chains close behind me. I found the handle, and opened the door.

"Anybody at home?" I shouted loudly.

There was a dead silence, and I realised, for the first time, that the dead body of Captain Garwood lay upstairs somewhere. A cold shiver passed down my spine. Somehow, the near presence of death always makes a chap a bit "gawsey."

And then I heard a faint hail from upstairs.

"That you, young 'un? I'm in the attic!"

"Mr. Alvington!" I muttered excitedly. "I jolly well knew that something had happened! Come on, kids!"

We stumbled up the stairs helter-skelter, and in next to no time we stood outside the attic. The door was locked, but it was old as the hills, and when we all three pulled the woodwork gave way.

"Well done, boys!" came Nelson Lee's smooth tones. "Strike a light! You'll find a candle on the floor."

"What have you been having a game at, sir?" I asked breathlessly, as I struck a match. "Great Scott! You're all trussed up—and there's some blood on your collar!"

"A slight mishap, my boy—nothing worse," smiled Nelson Lee. "I half expected that you would turn up, but I wasn't hoping for such a prompt rescue as this. How did you get in?"

"Broke in, sir," I replied, as I lit the candle and took out my pocket-knife. "We met somebody coming out, sir."

"Yes, I suppose you did. Mrs. Lennan only left a minute or two ago——"

"Mrs. Lennan!" ejaculated Sir Montio. "Oh, no, sir! It was a man we saw, an' he shook his fist at the house in quite a nasty way."

"A man!" said the gov'nor thoughtfully. "That's surprising! Ah, of course! Mrs. Lennan disguised herself in order to facilitate her escape. But I wonder—I wonder—— By James!"

Lee was on his feet now, and he stamped about vigorously. Just then we all heard a low rumble above the noise of the wind.

"It's only a train," I said. "The last train to-night, I expect."

"Upon my soul, the fellow means to escape by that train!" exclaimed the gov'nor rapidly. "Come, boys, we'll run! It's only a chance, but we had better make sure."

We pelted downstairs as quickly as we had come up, and rushed at full speed down the road. Nelson Lee, I felt sure, was a bit done up, but he outstripped the three of us.

The station was only just at the end of the road, and as we turned the corner in the rain, we saw the train just entering the station.

It was a brisk race up the slope, and when we dashed through the booking-office and arrived on the platform, I was only a couple of yards behind the gov'nor. One man was in the act of entering an empty compartment towards the rear of the train. He turned his face quickly as we appeared, and then dived into the carriage.

"That's the fellow!" I roared.

Nelson Lee pelted up, and I followed. As we drew opposite the doorway, we caught a glimpse of the man, wrenching furiously at the handle of the opposite door. But it was locked, and before he could quite realise this fact, the gov'nor was upon him. He fought like a demon, but, with the help of Tommy and Montie, he very soon lay flat on his back, exhausted.

It had been a wild scramble, but it was over now. Outside, the two guards and the stationmaster were all asking questions at once. But Nelson Lee bent close over the face of the fallen man, and then whistled softly.

"Well, this is a surprise!" he exclaimed. "Unless I am very much mistaken, I am gazing upon Carter Gibbons, the Clapham murderer!"

Our prisoner drew his breath in with a whistling hiss.

"Hang you!" he snarled chokingly.

"It was quite a near thing, my friend," went on Nelson Lee. "The game's up now, however. It will be necessary for you to stand on trial, to answer two charges, both of murder!"

murderer, who had been missing for years. Finding himself recognised and captured, he raised no objection to telling his story. He knew very well that anything he said would not harm him, for the facts of the Clapham murder alone were enough to send him to the gallows.

Years before, when that foul crime had been committed, Gibbons had fled to Hastings—to the house of Captain Garwood, who had been his best friend. Garwood himself had a most unsavoury record, and his loss would not be felt by anybody. It appeared that Gibbons had arranged with his friend to live with him in concealment. For some years Gibbons had been an actor, and he was undoubtedly a clever impersonator.

In brief, he had dressed himself as a woman, and had posed as Mrs. Lennan, the captain's housekeeper. Never for a moment had I imagined that that white-haired old dame had been a man! Even Nelson Lee himself had not suspected it until the last few minutes.

By this pretence, Gibbons had completely eluded the police, and two or three years before he and his supposed master had settled down in Bellton. Not a soul in the village had ever suspected a thing. Gibbons had kept up his character for so long and with such cleverness that he had practically become the character he portrayed. In that character he had always been gentle and kindly.

But Garwood had treated him harshly. The old captain had abused him because he knew that he was in his power. Gibbons had never been allowed a penny-piece, and he had been afraid to flee, for he was sure that Garwood would "peach." And he had known that the captain was hoarding up a big sum of money.

Gibbons had discovered the hiding-place of that secret wealth, and had become more desperate than ever. He wanted to steal the money, but Garwood had suspected him, and had never given him a chance to act.

For months on end the pair had lived on the very worst possible terms, although nobody suspected it. Then there had been the quarrel with Lambert of the Sixth, and Gibbons had seized his chance on the spur of the moment. He had killed Garwood, meaning the Sixth former to be blamed.

The facts were very surprising.

The gov'nor had been quite right in his surmise. The prisoner was none other than Carter Gibbons, the brutal Clapham

Undoubtedly his vile plot would have succeeded if Nelson Lee hadn't been on the scene. It was the copper frog which had been mainly responsible for the undoing of Gibbons. This, with the brass casket, had been among Garwood's hidden hoards, and the murderer had omitted to conceal it. He had therefore denied all knowledge of it, and, as you know, that's where the trouble started.

A large sum of money—nearly five hundred pounds—was found on Gibbons, in gold and notes. Naturally, he was sent for trial, and his end would be a fitting one. It would mean the scaffold, of course.

But the case was an example of how a

much-wanted criminal could conceal himself from the police, and how greed could prove his undoing.

The scandal at St. Frank's had been averted. The school, instead of having a regular sensation, knew nothing. The gov'nor and I, and my two chums, had played our parts in the drama, and it wasn't necessary for us to give any evidence at Gibbons's trial.

We had been of good service, but we didn't get any laurels.

As a matter of fact, we preferred to be without 'em.

The problem of the Copper Frog had been solved, and life at St. Frank's went on as usual.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Will be entitled:

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BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

The Principal Characters in this Story are:
TOM CRAWLEY, light-weight boxer, and stoker on board H.M.S. *Flyer*, who has been captured by the Germans, as also has his father, though several months before;

BOB RANDLE, who has been sent to France with his regiment; and

MARY THWAITES, daughter of old Fisherman Thwaites, with whom both Tom and Bob are in love. Tom is taken to Zeebrugge at the time of a British aerial bombardment. The next morning he comes face to face with his father. The Guards let them have a short conversation. A day or two afterwards they are surprised to see Bob Randle arrive in a new batch of prisoners. Meanwhile, one of the guards, who is a great bully, is making himself extremely unpleasant, and the prisoners swear they will get their own back.

(Now read on.)

HUN v. BRITON.

THE next day found the German bully there again, and more arrogant and brutal than ever.

Thomas Crawley, Bob, and Tom, in spite of the risk, had gathered together in the middle of the exercise ground, and were talking to one another in a low voice when he caught sight of them, and strode hastily forward.

"Stop that talking, you British dogs!" he cried, making a feint at Tom—Tom being the smallest of the three—with the point of his bayonet.

Tom's eyes blazed, his cheeks crimsoned, his hair stiffened.

"If you touch me with that thing," said the boxing sailor, "I'll knock you down, even if it costs me my life."

The Hun laughed.

"Oh, you Britishers are always boasting about what you can do with your fists," he sneered.

"I can do something more than boast," answered Tom.

The German soldier laughed.

"Bah!" he cried contemptuously. "I spent five years in your hated land before the war. And I tried my luck in your boxing ring. I never found any Englishman who could stand against me."

He shouted in German to a comrade, who hastened to join them.

"Take my rifle, Heinrich," cried the bully. "I'm going to show this British sailor what a German boxer can do."

The other, with a grin, seized the rifle, and its owner, without any more ado, struck out savagely at Tom, and, taking him by surprise, knocked him heavily to the ground.

The sailor boy struck his head in falling, but, in spite of the shock, rose instantly, and, hurling himself upon his enemy, sent several hard blows home on the face.

In a moment the guards rushed forward, surrounded them, dragged the combatants apart.

One of them levelled his loaded rifle at Tom's heart. Another menaced the boy with his bayonet.

Tom gave himself up for lost. Bob Randle and Thomas Crawley were about to interfere.

Before the matter could go any further, however, the Hun bully ordered his comrades to stand back. At the same time he began to remove his belt and tunic.

"I am used to using my fists," he exclaimed. "Keep the British prisoners back, and I'll show you how a German can box."

"But you don't mean to fight him with your fists, Hoffmann?" protested one of the guards.

"Yes. Just for fun. I feel like it. Nobody will know. It's only a lark!" And his lips set in a brutal sneer.

He was ever so much heavier and bigger than young Tom Crawley. Indeed, he had selected Tom as being the smallest of the prisoners confined in the gaol.

It never occurred to him that he might be beaten.

And so he stripped himself to his shirt, and rolled up the sleeves.

His forearms were muscular and thick. His chest was deep, his neck short, his face battered as if from frequent punishment.

Yet, the moment he realised that the German meant to fight, a wave of joy surged through the boxing sailor's veins.

He had been longing for such a chance as this, though he had never dreamt that it would come his way.

So off he stripped his things, and up he rolled his sleeves.

What a midget he looked beside his opponent then, to be sure.

The Hun guards laughed uproariously.

"Kill him, Hoffmann!" they cried.

"I'll try," answered the bully.

"Dad, Bob—stand by me," said Tom, and, as they rallied to his support, the sailor boy gravely begged that they might not be punished for daring to support him in this fight.

Hoffmann laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, no," he cried. "They sha'n't be harmed. But come on, we are wasting time; let us begin the fight."

BEATEN TO A FRAZZLE.

IT was for ever a mystery to Tom, to Bob Randle, and to Tom's father why the German lent himself to such a grave breach of discipline.

The point was never satisfactorily explained. Probably it was an overweening vanity that urged him on, a wish to impress the comrades of his regiment.

Thomas Crawley always declared that the whole thing had been planned beforehand, talked over between them. At any rate, the commandant that day was away, and most of the officers had gone into the town for an afternoon's jollification.

Be that as it may, here was Hoffmann, a Hun soldier, with arms bare, presenting himself in a fighting attitude to the

consideration of a little fire eater like Tom Crawley.

Fight? Tom was even more eager than the German to begin, for he had that cowardly knock down, as well as other insults at this man's hands, to avenge.

And so he met Hoffmann's opening rush with a smashing straight left, went into a clinch, and hammered the brute viciously about the body, while the ring of prisoners roared out their delight.

Hoffmann might have had some experience of boxing in England, but, if so, it was plain that he had never met any really first-class men.

Tom discovered that before they had been at it a minute.

He leant on his man, let Hoffmann push him away, and covered cleverly on the break. Then round the ring he leapt, retreating, advancing, and side-stepping with all his old cleverness, while Thomas Crawley, the fisherman, and Bob Randle called upon the onlookers to give them plenty of room.

The Hun, enraged at the punishment, and stung to desperation, caught hold of Tom, and tried to throw him. Into the air he whirled the boy, and then brought him down with all the strength of his powerful arms.

Tom landed on his feet, kept his balance, broke away, and cut the German's cheek with a stinging punch.

Then they closed, and both went down amidst a scene of uproar that baffles description.

All the prison rules were set at defiance, and the excited Hun guards threatened the prisoners. One of them even struck at Tom with the butt of his rifle.

Thomas Crawley turned the blow aside.

"It's not my son's fault," he cried.

"Give my boy fair play."

So Tom and his opponent took a brief rest, and then stepped forward to renew the fight.

Hoffmann was cautious now, covering up and creeping in craftily.

Tom was wary, and backed away. Hoffmann dashed in, and let fly with the left, only to be neatly countered.

He tried again, only to find his blows turned aside.

Then Tom sent left and right home in the face, drawing blood once more, and then repeated the dose on the body.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Hoffmann, thus early, looked distressed, and his lower jaw dropped.

His eyes were dull with pain, and Tom knew that he had hurt him.

Realising this, the sailor boy redoubled his effort, and, as he felt Hoffmann weaken and falter, he drove blow after blow to the abdomen with such effect that he felt the German reel.

All this work was done at close quarters, and now, pushing his enemy away, Tom stepped back and glanced into his face.

The Hun was beaten—if only he could land a vital punch now.

Every muscle in Tom's body seemed to stiffen. He drew a deep breath, and hurled himself at his opponent.

Crack. His left fist landed nicely on the jaw.

Hoffmann came stumbling forward, his head well within range, and, as he swung himself aside in order to give greater effect to his punch, Tom hooked the right hard home.

His enemy fell with a dull thud, bruised and bleeding, and lay where he had fallen, without attempting to rise.

Tom had beaten him, outclassed him.

Panting, he stood staring down at his prostrate enemy.

"Well done, Tom!" shouted Bob Randle, in an ecstasy of delight.

"Ah, you're a true son of mine, my lad," said Fisherman Crawley. "I used to fight like that in my younger days."

As for Tom, he could hardly believe his eyes. White-faced, and weak from the reaction, he backed among the swarm of prisoners who came to congratulate him.

Then, with angry cries, the guard, with rifles ready, threatened to shoot the prisoners down.

"Shoot the dogs!" they cried. "Use your bayonets!"

And so they might have done had there not been an unlooked-for diversion.

A ringing command echoed through the exercise yard, and, the prisoners parting, stared in the direction of the sound.

The German soldiers ceased to threaten.

They looked scared. And well they might, for it was the commandant who came striding towards them, with a frown on his face, that boded no good to some of them.

A fine, upstanding figure of a man he was, whose uniform seemed to have been moulded on to him. On his breast he

wore the Iron Cross and several other decorations.

In fierce, ringing tones he demanded the cause of the uproar.

"A prisoner has been trying to murder Hoffmann," explained one of the Hun soldiers. "Brave fellow, he agreed to fight the Englishman with his fists! But he was foully treated. Look where he lies!"

The commandant looked at the battered and bleeding Hoffmann, and scowled.

"Who did it?" he asked.

"That is the man!"

Tom Crawley was about to slip into his jumper.

He bore marks of the fight on his face. There could be no question as to his being the culprit.

"Arrest him, and take him to the punishment cells," commanded the commandant. "He will be tried by court-martial to-morrow."

Instantly Tom was seized and dragged away.

"Tom, Tom, my son! My dear boy," cried his father, in deep distress, "they are going to murder you!"

Tom laughed.

"Don't you believe it father!" he cried. "I'm worth a lot of dead men yet. It wasn't my fault. You can all prove that. It'll be all right."

He had no time to say more, for they seized and dragged him forcibly away, while others, helping the battered and beaten Hoffmann along, also disappeared with him into the sombre gaol that loomed so ominously before them.

IN THE HANDS OF FATE!

AFTER the scene in the exercise yard of the prison at Antwerp, in which little Tom Crawley, the boxing sailor, had so ably demonstrated the superiority of the Britisher over the Hun, the utmost anxiety and unrest prevailed among the prisoners.

What would be the outcome of the incident, they wondered? Every man who had the misfortune to find himself shut up there, was aware of the veneration—waning fast perhaps—in which the uniform of the Fatherland, naval or military, but particularly the latter, was held by all the Germans.

(Continued overleaf.)

Incidents in the past in Berlin, in Munich, in Zabern had shown that no man could question the power and might of the military without being punished. And here was a case of a prisoner of war striking down one of his guards.

And so, while Tom Crawley languished in his cell, his ankles shackled, and his wrists handcuffed, the prisoners discussed the question in bated breath next morning in the yard, in spite of the strict order that had been issued that they were not to talk to one another.

Fisherman Crawley, who had not slept a wink overnight, and whose face was white and drawn, spoke hopefully of the situation.

"They'll not harm my brave son," he declared. "They must know that he was not an aggressor. And he is much the smaller of the two men."

"I don't think that will make any difference, sir," returned Bob Randle, who entertained no false ideas on the subject. "He struck a German in uniform. That will be sufficient for those in authority."

"But the German made my son fight."

"What of that? They'll punish him just the same, the more certainly because he is a British sailor. I dare say the Hun will be punished, too; but that doesn't matter one way or the other to us. It's Tom we care about."

"And what do you think they'll do to him—"

Bob's anxious eyes sought those of the grizzled old sea dog. For a moment they were silent. Then Bob spoke.

"I can't say. But I'm afraid that—they'll—"

"Shoot him dead, Bob, lad?"

Another pause, and a solemn nod.

"They'll make what they term an example, and we are all powerless to help him, sir."

The fisherman's lips trembled, and two great tears formed in his eyes and guttered down his furrowed cheeks. He spoke never a word, but from that moment paced up and down, his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes straying every now and then to that part of the prison which contained the executive offices and commandant's quarters.

These Huns stopped at no crime when at war, as the murder of Nurse Cavell and Captain Fryatt proved.

Even at that very moment they might be trying Tom Crawley for his life.

Bob Randle, moody and silent, too, turned up and down the yard by Crawley's side. The rest of the prisoners, glancing ever and anon across at them, were silent, too.

Overhead hung a leaden sky, and the wind sighed mournfully about the angles of the huge and ugly building.

There was a sense of tragedy in the very air.

Even the armed German guards seemed to feel it, for they paced up and down with faces grim and set, and rifles sloped.

Presently the great prison bell tolled, and the prisoners were marshalled, numbered, and marched off into the gloomy building, separated there, and sent to their respective cells.

They were silent, and unusually sad. Where was Tom Crawley, the gallant little boxing sailor who had shown the Huns what a British boxer could do against a cowardly bully of a Hun?

What were they going to do with him, or had they done to him? Was he still in the prison, or had they taken him away, and already shot him as an example?

Before they were taken apart Fisherman Crawley sought Bob Randle's eyes. His glance of inquiry carried an unmistakable meaning.

Impulsively Bob turned to the guard who stood next him.

"We are enemies," he cried, "but on the battlefield I showed and also learned that there was still some chivalry in war. The prisoner, Tom Crawley, is a friend of mine. Tell me, what have they done to him?"

An angry and stern retort sprang to the Hun's lips, but something in the soldier's pleading glance struck home.

This Hun, Bob afterwards learned, had a brother who was a prisoner of war in the hands of the British.

"You have no right to ask," he said, gruffly, "but I will answer you. Your friend is being tried by court-martial now."

(To be continued.)