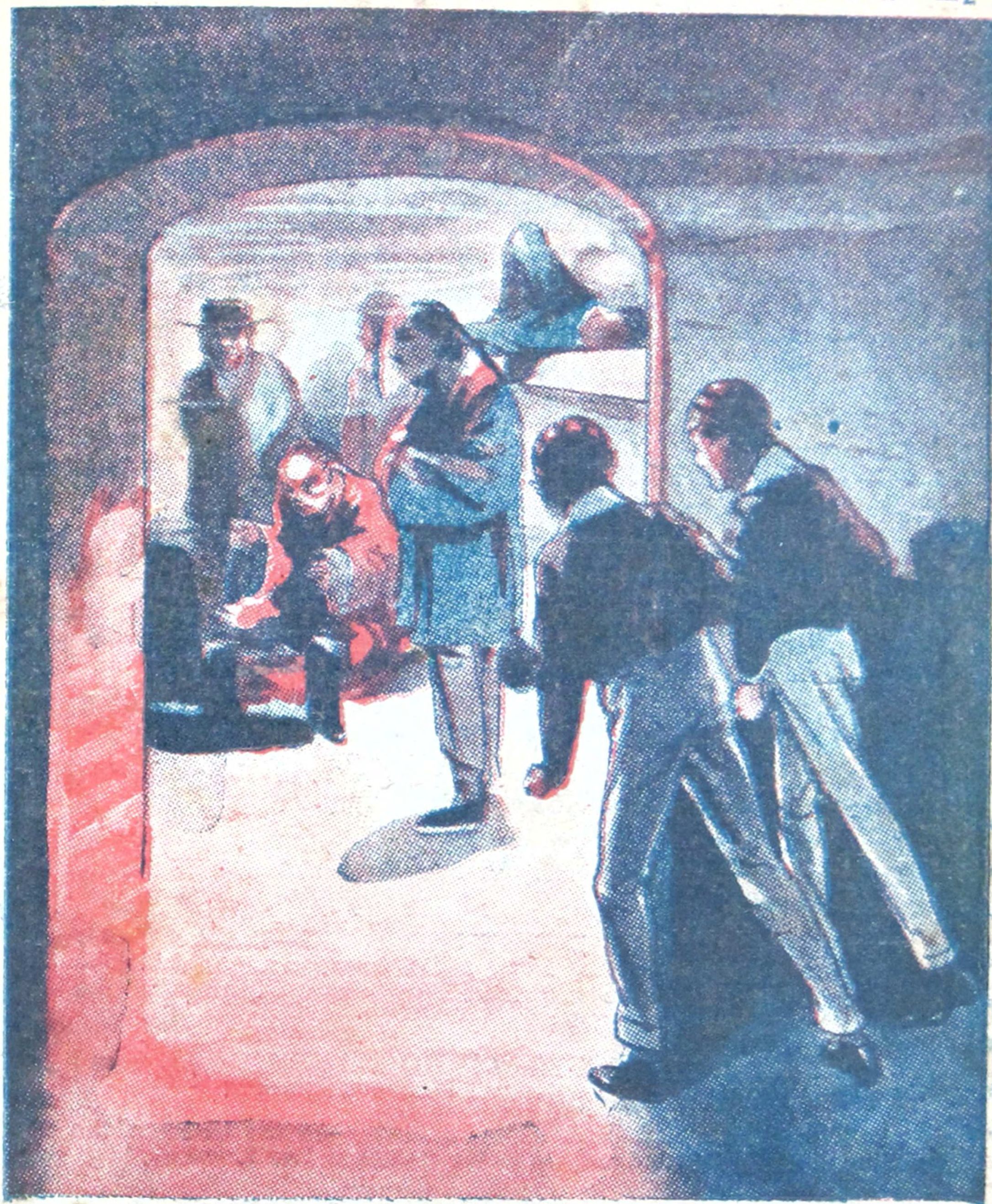


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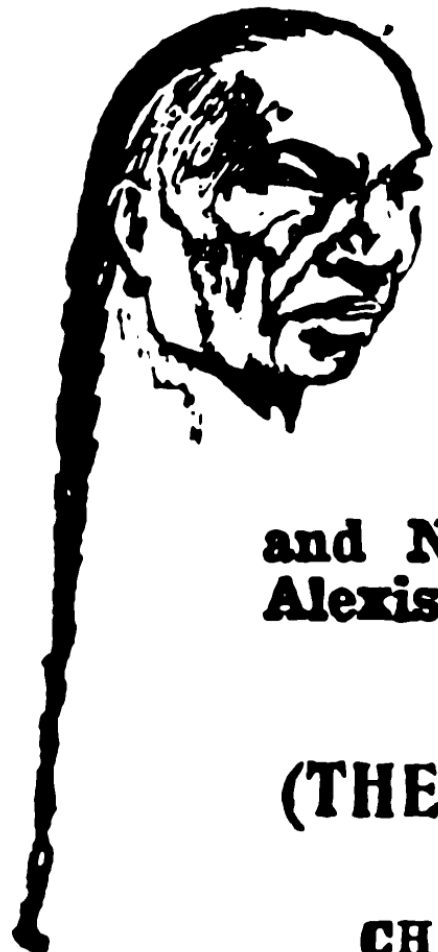
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE IN HOLBORN!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST beamed. "Dear fellows, this is what I call rippin'," he declared. "Nothin' could be more to my likin'. It gives a chap a chance to spend his money well, begad! Just look at those neckties! They're frightfully decent—they are, really!"

Tommy Watson and I grinned.

"Drag him away," I chuckled. "He'll want to buy the whole stock!"

"Really, old boy——"

"It's unsafe to let you go about London by yourself, Montie," I went on. "You'd spend all your money on articles of personal attire. What the dickens do you want with these neckties?"

"They're simply gorgeous, dear old fellow," explained Montie.

"And a gorgeous price, too!" grunted Watson.

"But you've got plenty of neckties," I said. "There must be about three dozen in your box, Montie!"

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"But they ain't like these," he said, gazing through his pince-nez into the shop window. "I must really go in an' purchase at least a dozen—— Begad! Pray leave my arm alone, Tommy boy——"

"Come on!" said Watson grimly. "Neckties are off!"

"But, listen——"

"We'll listen when we've dragged you a mile from this shop," I grinned. "We don't like to see you waste your filthy lucre, old son. Don't you know that spending money on unnecessary neckwear is an extravagance, and an act of treachery to the State?"

"Begad!" gasped Montie. "I wasn't aware—— Good gracious!"

We hauled him away from the shop, grinning hugely. It was quite easy to pull the noble Montie's leg, although in most matters he was as sharp as a needle. We succeeded in getting him clear of the danger zone.

We were strolling down High Holborn, and

the hour was a few minutes before six o'clock. The streets were filled with noisy traffic, and the whole experience was somewhat novel to us.

For, as a rule, we did our shopping in the tiny High Street of Belton village, near to St. Frank's. But we had left Belton—we had left St. Frank's. And we were in London City.

The reason for this radical change was a simple one, but serious enough for all that. The College House at St. Frank's had been burned to the ground, and it had been necessary to find temporary quarters for the Monks during the period of rebuilding.

There was no accommodation locally, so the whole school had been shifted to London. This had only been done because there was a great building, right in the heart of London, available for use.

It had been standing for many, many years, and it had been converted into a school on a somewhat grand scale. But the man who had been prepared to open it as such had, unfortunately, met his death before his plans could materialise.

And so, as the place was all ready for occupation, the school governors had agreed to Nelson Lee's proposal that it should be rented for a brief period—while St. Frank's was undergoing a spring clean, as it were.

For there were many things being done at the old school now that it was highly necessary for the builders to be in occupation. The Ancient House would benefit, for it was to be completely redecorated and repainted.

Meanwhile, the school was not disbanded because of the disaster. Just off Holborn, St. Frank's had settled down comfortably. There were two main buildings, and the College House fellows had taken possession of one side, and we were in the other. In fact, we were extremely comfortable.

It was a novelty for most of the juniors to be able to walk about Holborn and Fleet Street and Cheapside. After tea it was the general rule for quite a number of fellows to go out on a fine afternoon.

Locking up time was at seven-thirty, so the

hours of liberty were not many. And it was a strict order that all boys should be within the gates at the correct time. Late comers were punished.

For a change Sir Montie and Tommy and I had partaken of tea in a restaurant, and we had thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. And now we were leisurely strolling back towards the little side turning just off Holborn, where the "St. Frank's the Second" was situated.

Having successfully withdrawn Tregellis-West from the neighbourhood of the tie-shop, we continued our way from High Holborn into Holborn. It was just like old times to me, for I knew every single inch of the ground in that district—for, of course, Nelson Lee's house was only a short distance off, in Gray's Inn Road.

"There seems to be a bit of a bother just down there against the other pavement," remarked Tommy Watson, nodding his head. "I can see two or three of our chaps moving across in that direction, too. That chap just crossing the road, he's Pitt, I believe. And there's De Valerie just behind, and Jack Grey—I say, shall we see what the trouble is?"

"Only somebody in a faint, I expect," I remarked, "or a minor street accident. You often come across that sort of thing up here, you know."

"Then we won't go, dear boy," said Sir Montie. "There's nothin' which distresses me more than to see somebody in a faintin' fit. It's really a shockin' state of affairs."

"I'm going, anyhow," said Watson.

He marched off across the road, and I turned to Montie.

"We'd better go," I remarked.

Tregellis-West did not object, and he followed Tommy Watson across to the other side of Holborn. The road is considerably wide just there, and the small crowd of people collected near the edge of the pavement did not interfere much with the continuous flow of traffic.

We dodged one or two motor-buses, and arrived on the outskirts of the crowd. Reginald Pitt, of the Remove, saw us at once. He was grinning, but I noticed that his eyes were looking rather concerned.

"The silly ass!" he exclaimed.

"Somebody drunk?" I asked.

"Drunk!" ejaculated Pitt. "Why, didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

"It's Handforth," put in Grey.

"Handforth!" I ejaculated, aghast. "Do you mean to tell me that Handforth is causing all this commotion?"

"He's having a scrap with an errand boy," chuckled De Valerie.

"Great Scott!"

I was really concerned, and I pushed my way through the crowd without waiting for any more information. I would have a look at the scene with my own eyes, and then I should know the exact truth.

It didn't actually amaze me to learn that Edward Oswald Handforth was scrapping.

The famous Leader of Study D was never really happy unless he was punching somebody's nose, or giving somebody a black eye.

It was not an easy task to push through the crowd, but I succeeded after a little amount of trouble.

And then, to my absolute astonishment, I beheld Handforth, of the Remove. His coat-sleeves were turned up, and it was quite evident that he meant business.

"I'll show you, my son!" he shouted. "Why, you cad! I'll teach you to call me a clumsy bargee!"

"If you're lookin' for a bloomin' 'iding, I'll give you one—an' quick!" shouted a youth who was facing Handforth. "It was your fault, anyhow. Didn't you come blunderin' across the road jest as if you was drunk?"

"Drunk?" roared Handforth. "By George!"

He rushed forward, and the next moment he and the other boy were fighting with all their strength.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

Handforth was a champion fighter, and his fists landed squarely every time. His opponent was bigger than he was, but Handy was making the fellow back away in circles.

I looked round, alarmed.

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" I exclaimed. "We can't allow this to go on, you know! There'll be a policeman here soon, and that'll mean a terrific row. We'd better drag the idiot away while he's safe."

"Begad! Rather!" declared Sir Montie.

He and Pitt and Tommy Watson came pushing through the crowd to my side. I didn't pretend to know what caused the scrap; but Handforth was a prize idiot to engage in any tussle in Holborn. But it was just like him. He was capable of any madness.

"Go it, long 'um!"

"Don't let the swell kid beat you!"

"That's the way—slosh at him!"

The spectators were all keenly interested, and many of them gave advice which was quite unwanted. Both Handforth and his opponent were too busy to take any notice of what was going on outside.

I was feeling rather alarmed, because I knew that if a policeman came on the scene there might be some trouble. If a constable interfered, Handforth was quite capable of telling the arm of the law to go and eat coke! And an insult of that nature would not tend to mend matters.

So it was necessary to act quickly.

I noticed Church and McClure, Handforth's bosom chums, were standing near by. McClure's left eye was closing, and Church possessed a thick ear. Apparently, they had attempted to stop the fight, with disastrous consequences. When Handforth really got going he was a terror.

"Now then—together!" I shouted.

"Let's get through, please!"

Montie and Tommy and Pitt and one or two others came pushing through after me. A policeman was just visible in the distance,

and I could see that he was coming along to make inquiries into the scene. So there was not a moment to be lost.

"Chuck it, Handy!" I shouted. "You can't fight——"

Handforth glared at me.

"You clear off!" he roared. "I'm giving this chap a licking, and—— Yarrooh! Why, you—you mean rotter——"

The errand boy had seized his momentary advantage, and had got in a blow which sent Handforth staggering.

It was just as well, for Handforth was easier to deal with. In spite of his struggles, he was securely grasped by five or six of us. We tore him away from his opponent, and the crowd grinned as we forced an exit from the squash.

"Lemme go!" bellowed Handforth violently. "You—you silly asses! I was just giving that chap the licking of his life. Lemme go! I mean to squash the cad until he's as flat as——"

"Dry up, Handy!" I broke in sternly. "What the dickens are you thinking about? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Eh?"

"Don't you realise that you are blackening the fair name of St. Frank's?"

"Oh, rot!"

"It isn't rot," I said calmly. "We're not in London on a visit, Handy; we're living here. And it wouldn't look nice in the papers if they reported wild scenes in Holborn, caused by St. Frank's fellows. You ought to be more careful, you thoughtless ass!"

Handforth did not look at all repentant.

"When I get the chance I'm going to biff that rotter again!" he declared. "You don't understand what happened, you prize duffers! I was just crossing the street when that juggins hit me in the back with his tricycle. I wouldn't have minded that so much, but he started swearing at me, and you don't suppose I was going to stand that? I dragged him off his rotten tricycle and biffed him on the nose. I haven't half finished yet! Lemme go!"

"Impossible, Handy!" I interrupted, as we hurried him off. "There's a policeman coming, and it wouldn't take him half a minute to arrest you!"

"Arrest me?" gasped Handforth.

"Of course!" said Pitt solemnly. "If you create a disturbance in a public thoroughfare like this the police don't take two minutes to run you in. You'd better make yourself scarce, old son."

"We're not in Bellton now," I went on. "We're in the heart of London, Handy, and if you start any of your rot here you'll find yourself pounced upon in next to no time."

"Besides," said McClure, "if the Head hears anythings about fighting in the streets he'll gate the lot of us. I told you before——"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Handforth.

He probably realised that we were speaking words of wisdom, for he made no further attempt to break away. The little knots of

people drifted away, and Holborn took on its usual aspect once more.

There were three juniors standing near who had been rather interested in the scene, although they had made no attempt to interfere. These juniors were Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, of the Remove.

The Nuts of the Ancient House were far too elegant to take part in any rough horse play; moreover, they would have been quite delighted if Handforth had been left to his fate.

"Just like the bounders to interfere," exclaimed Fullwood, with a sniff. "It would have been rather sportin' if we had seen Handforth taken away to the lock-up in charge of a bally policeman!"

Gulliver chuckled.

"It won't be long before the idiot gets into trouble again," he said. "There won't always be so many near by, ready to interfere. I say, these cigarettes look jolly decent, don't they?"

The Nuts came to a halt outside a showy window of a big tobacconist's shop. Fullwood and Bell looked at the cigarettes which Gulliver indicated, and they announced that the smokes looked decent.

"You chaps wait here, an' I'll go in an' buy some," said Fullwood, taking out his notecase. "As it happens, I want some loose change; I've got nothin' except one or two fivers an' a handful of Treasury notes."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was flush—his notecase was well filled. And Fullwood did not attempt to conceal the fact as he opened it. He always liked to make his chums feel envious.

But it was rather an unwise thing to display such a large amount of cash in public. A man who was passing at the moment seemed to be suddenly interested in the shop window, and he gazed through the plate-glass searchingly.

As a matter of fact, the man was really looking into a mirror—the tobacconist's window was filled with mirrors, just for the sake of effect. Their main object, perhaps, was to make it appear that there was double the amount of stock in the window than actually existed.

The stranger's eye gleamed somewhat as he observed Fullwood's "flush" condition. And the man seemed more interested in the window than ever.

He was faultlessly attired in a light coloured suit. His white spats were spotless, his velour hat was a perfect dream; his waistcoat and necktie were in perfect harmony with the rest of his attire.

The man certainly looked a gentleman.

Fullwood emerged from the shop and joined his chums.

"All serene!" said Bell. "We haven't spotted any St. Frank's fellows, and nobody else takes any notice of us here."

But Bell was mistaken.

"Excuse me, boys, but do you happen to know if a gentleman with a red rose in his coat has been waiting about here?" asked

a smooth, refined voice at Fullwood's elbow. "I'm afraid I've lost my friend, and we arranged to meet at six."

The Nuts turned, and found themselves looking at the well-dressed stranger.

"We haven't seen anybody—not to notice," remarked Fullwood. "I'm sorry, sir—I'd like to give you a hand, if possible. I suppose you're a stranger in these parts of London?"

The man smiled.

"Well, hardly," he replied. "I think I know every hole and corner for quite a long way around. It is my friend who is the stranger, and I am becoming convinced that he has missed me in some manner. Well, never mind, the appointment was of no real importance. I gather that you belong to some big school, although I don't seem to remember your colours, particularly?"

Fullwood and Co. grinned.

"We belong to St. Frank's, sir," said Bell.

"Why, yes, of course!" exclaimed the other. "I'm dull this evening. I saw a few words in the newspaper about your arrival in London. Well, boys, how do you like it? Getting on all right?"

"Oh, we're gettin' on fairly decently," said Fullwood. "We're rather strange to the district, that's all. We've been lookin' out for a bit of sport, but there seems to be nothin' doin' in that line."

"Sport?" repeated the stranger.

"Yes; somethin' out of the ordinary," said Fullwood. "We three fellows don't pretend to be goody-goody, an' we like a bit of a flutter now and again. We're always ready for a little gamble, you know."

The stranger smiled and winked.

"I think I understand," he said. "As it happens, you couldn't have spoken to a better man than to me. My name's Joseph Palmer, and if you care for a flutter, I can give you a few."

"I don't understand," said Fullwood staring.

"I suppose you like billiards—with a little interest on the game?"

"Yes, rather," said the Nuts.

"And poker?"

"You bet," said Fullwood.

"That's just a hint of the sport I can give you," said Mr. Joseph Palmer, lighting a cigar. "If you'd care to come with me now I'll give you an evening of entertainment that'll make you feel happy—and the chances are that you'll go to bed with your pockets full up with winnings."

Fullwood and Co. exchanged glances.

"By gad! We're on!" declared Gulliver heartily.

"Not just yet," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "We'd like to come, Mr. Palmer, but we must be in by seven-thirty—an' there's not much good in goin' with you for an hour."

"Couldn't you be late for once?" asked the stranger.

"We could, but it wouldn't be advisable

just now," replied Fullwood. "When things have got more settled down we can take more chances. An' it's quite possible that we shall be able to slip away after lights out, too."

"We could do that to-night!" said Bell eagerly.

"Now you're talking," exclaimed Mr. Palmer. "If you could meet me, say, at half-past ten to-night, I could give you two or three hours of solid amusement—and you'd get back to bed without a soul knowing. But, of course, it doesn't matter a toss to me. Come if you like, or stay away if you like—I don't care. But I was a boy myself once, and there's nothing better than a little flutter now and again."

Fullwood and Co. were impressed.

"It's jolly decent of you, Mr. Palmer," said Fullwood. "Yes, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't meet you after lights out. It's a bargain."

And when, ten minutes later, the rascals of the Remove wended their way back to the school, they were in high good-humour, and fondly imagined that they were to have an opportunity of making a pile of money.

Curiously enough, Mr. Joseph Palmer had the same conviction—with a difference. Fullwood and Co. had about one chance in a thousand of reaping any profit. Mr. Palmer was on a certainty.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER LIGHTS OUT.

STUDY C, in the Remove passage, was cosy and comfortable.

This sounds as though I am referring to St. Frank's. In our new quarters, we had selected our studies in approximately the same positions as our old ones. And as the doors were not numbered or lettered, we had done this ourselves.

Thus, Watson and Tregellis-West and I occupied Study C; Handforth and Co. were next door, in Study B, and Study A was still the abode of Fullwood and Co. There was no lack of accommodation in our temporary premises. Many of the fellows, to tell the truth, would willingly have remained in London for good.

Prep. was over in Study C, and I was sitting with my chums in the glow of the electric light, enjoying the lazy hour of freedom before supper.

"Well, we're jolly comfortable here—that's one thing," remarked Tommy Watson languidly. "But I shouldn't be surprised if we find life duller in London than it was at St. Frank's."

Sir Montie shook his head.

"Not if Handforth goes on as he was goin' on this evenin'," he exclaimed. "Begad, if we hadn't interfered, the frightful duller would have been arrested for causing an obstruction."

"I don't think he would have been nabbed, Montie," I grinned. "At the same time, the Head would have been told, and that might have caused him to place Holborn out of bounds. Just fancy the ass—Handforth, I mean—just fancy him scrapping with a giddy errand boy!"

"Handforth, my dear fellow, is capable of anythin'—absolutely anythin'," declared Sir Montie firmly. "There is no tellin' what he will be up to next. What amazes me more than anythin' is how Churen and McClure continue to live. If I were in Study D, I should perish of exhaustion within a week—I should, really!"

"Well, we needn't discuss Handforth," I remarked. "Just now you said something about being dull, Tommy. Don't you believe it. It's my opinion we shall have some pretty exciting times."

"I don't see how," said Watson.

"You remember what I told you about that Chinaman——"

"Rats!" interrupted Tommy. "That was your fancy!"

I glared.

"I'm not in the habit of fancying things," I said grimly. "On the first night of our arrival here I broke bounds after lights-out—as I have already told you. I slipped along to Gray's Inn Road, to the guv'nor's place. I met Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard——"

"This is stale news, you ass!"

"Perhaps it is, but I'm going over it again," I said. "Lennard went with me to Nelson Lee's place, and we had a long chat. The most interesting part of it was concerning a mystery which the police can't fathom. It seems that a large quantity of drugs are being smuggled by an unknown gang. And this gang, so far as Scotland Yard knows, has its headquarters in this very district. Opium and cocaine are the principal drugs used in the traffic, and it's rather a serious business. The police can't get at the source of the supply."

Tregellis-West nodded.

"It is certainly a frightful state of affairs," he admitted. "In fact, it's an appallin' situation. In my opinion, opium and cocaine ought to be positively forbidden an' barred."

"But they're used in medicine, you duffer," said Watson.

"That's why I'm so frightfully puzzled," said Montie, removing his pince-nez, and polishing them. "These drugs are deadly—they are shockin'ly poisonous—an' yet they're used as medicine. It doesn't seem right!"

"My dear chap, hundreds of poisons are used in medicines," I remarked. "Taken in small quantities, they are beneficial. But we needn't go into a discussion concerning drugs. I was telling you about that night. When I was on my way back—after I had got inside the school grounds, in fact—I spotted a dim figure near the high wall. It vanished before I could get near, but I'm

willing to bet all I possess on one thing—the fellow was a Chinaman!"

Tommy Watson was openly sceptical.

"You've been thinking about opium," he said. "You've got Chinamen on the brain, and when you saw a harmless tramp prowling about, you mistook him for a giddy Chink! That's the long and short of it."

"I don't usually let my imagination get the better of me in that way, my son," I said patiently. "That man was a Chinaman, and he may have had no connection whatever with the drug case of Lennard's. I only say that it struck me as being significant. That's all. And if that rotten gang is operating somewhere close by, we stand a chance of getting some excitement. Because, on the quiet, I can tell you that the guv'nor is as keen as mustard to get on the track."

"Talking about mustard," said Watson, "reminds me that we've got some cold beef in the cupboard—and cold beef ain't worth eating without mustard. Who can we borrow some from?"

Watson had effectually changed the subject, and shortly afterwards we were discussing cold beef sandwiches—regardless of the fact that supper would soon be ready.

When we went up to the Remove dormitory I could not fail to notice a decided change in the attitude of Fullwood and Co.

They were all looking rather excited, and they all did their utmost to conceal it. Either something had happened, or something was about to happen. At all events, the Nuts were different.

I noticed a rather significant fact. They placed their clothing in neat piles, and all in readiness to don, even in the darkness. Their boots were handy, too. There was some reason for this unusual neatness.

"Surely the bounders aren't beginning their old games?" I murmured. "They can't be thinking of breaking bounds after lights-out?"

But I was pretty sure that they were—and I realised that here, in London, the Nuts would have many more opportunities of satisfying their desire for gambling than they received in Bellton.

It wasn't my habit to interfere with Fullwood and his set; and it wasn't my business to interfere, either. If they liked to get themselves into trouble, it was their own look-out.

At the same time, I resolved to butt in just once—in order to give the reckless asses a word of warning. It wouldn't be regarded, perhaps, but I should feel more comfortable.

Long before ten o'clock the dormitory was asleep, and in darkness. The subdued roar of London was strange to most of the fellows, but it didn't keep them awake. It takes more than the distant rumble of traffic to disturb healthy boys.

I went to sleep myself, knowing that I should awaken if Fullwood and Co. attempted to break bounds. And, sure

enough, just as the clock was chiming half-past ten, I was aroused by whispering voices.

"We shall have to buck up," I heard Fullwood mutter. "It's half-past already! We ought to be out by now! Ain't you ready, Gully?"

A grunt from Gulliver.

"Lemme get my boots on!" he growled. I slipped out of bed, and approached the Nuts.

"Who—who's that?" hissed Fullwood.

"Only me," I said quietly. "What's the game, you duffers?"

"Mind your own business!" replied Fullwood.

"Go to sleep, you interferin' cad!" muttered Bell.

"I don't want to interfere," I said. "But I can see that you chaps are thinking of breaking bounds. Don't do it, Fully. You'll only get yourselves into shocking trouble. The game isn't worth the candle."

Fullwood scowled.

"We don't want your advice," he said sourly.

"I know you don't," I said, "and I'm rather surprised to find myself wasting breath on you. But you'd better go easy. Breaking bounds in London isn't quite such an easy game as it was at St. Frank's."

"You ass!" said Gulliver. "We can nip out, and it doesn't matter a toss who sees us in the streets. Nobody will ask questions, an' it'll be as safe as houses. In Belton we had to hide from everybody who passed—because everybody knows everybody else in a pokey hole like that. In London we're all serene."

I smiled grimly.

"Think so?" I asked. "Well, you can go your own way—it's not my concern. But I thought I'd warn you beforehand—"

"You can warn the bedpost!" snapped Fullwood.

"Yes, I expect it would be as profitable as warning you," I retorted. "But you seem to forget that there are a good many policemen about London at night—"

"Bobbies!" said Gulliver, looking startled.

"Exactly!"

"But—but they won't touch us—"

"I don't suppose they will," I went on. "But the Head has given them all the tip, and they'll spot you in a second—they'll know who you are. What will the result be? A report, and an inquiry. Then you'll be in the soup."

"By gad!" muttered Bell. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"You've also got to remember that there are plenty of snares in London," I said, painting the picture as black as possible. "You'll be caught up in the whirl of it all, and carried away. Gambling is a curse to men and women—and it's not a game for schoolboys to play. Don't think I'm lecturing—I'm not. But before you take this step, consider the full position."

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Fullwood. "We can look after ourselves!"

"That's what you think—that's what all the greenhorns think—"

"Are you calling us greenhorns?" exclaimed Gulliver warmly.

"Yes, I am—and it's true," I said. "You're strange to London. I'm not. I was born and bred here. I know how easy it is to get on the wrong track. A man will get into conversation with you—a well-dressed, polished gentleman. He says nice things, and all the rest of it. He invites you to go somewhere with him—quite innocent and harmless, of course. But when you get there you find that the place is a rotten gambling-den, or something of that sort. And you come away with your pockets empty—and the polished gentleman is grinning. He's got your money, and he has reason to grin. You can't do anything at all. You can't complain to the Head, or to the police, or to your people—because you'd expose yourselves. My sons, I advise you to go easy. That's all."

"Really?" sneered Fullwood. "Haven't you got somethin' else to say? You were just gettin' into your stride. Go ahead! Don't mind us!"

"Oh, he means well," grinned Gulliver. "Let him go back to bed, an' we'll have our little flutter. We don't happen to be such asses as he seems to think we are. We can take care of ourselves."

I didn't feel inclined to waste any more breath. In fact, I had said far more than I had intended saying. I had gone dangerously near to lecturing—and that's a thing I hate. But I just wanted to let the reckless Nuts see what they were heading for.

I went back to bed, and Fullwood and Co. crept from the dormitory. My advice had left them unmoved, but they would probably remember my words later on. In any case, I hadn't done any harm.

The Nuts escaped from the school by the same method that I had employed on my first night in the place. They got out of a first-floor window at the end of the corridor.

All the lower windows were barred, and the doors were locked and bolted. The window at the end of the corridor was a fairly large one, and Fullwood gently pushed up the lower sash.

Just below the window was the roof of the gymnasium—a fairly recent addition to the general building. The slope was not at all steep, and the three juniors had no difficulty in negotiating it.

There was an ornamental tree-stump just against the wall of the gym, so it was a simple matter to reach the ground. Fullwood and Co. were standing on the solid earth within four minutes.

"Good!" murmured Gulliver. "Now where do we go?"

"Follow me," said Fullwood softly.

They were in the courtyard, and Fullwood led the way to the gates which led into the playing-field, or paddock, as it was called.

The grounds were not extensive, but large considering the position of the school. We were lucky to have a playing-field at all.

Fullwood scrambled over the gates, and his chums followed. Over the grass they went, until they arrived at the bottom. The high wall which ran here was an easy one to scale—and it led into a little public footway—an ailey. This, in turn, led into a side street.

"It's easy!" murmured Fullwood, grinning.

They dropped over, and stood for a moment or two, regaining their breath. Fullwood glanced at his watch.

"Quarter to eleven!" he muttered. "Mr. Palmer will be waitin'."

"I say," exclaimed Bell slowly. "Nipper wasn't far wrong, you know—"

"Wasn't far wrong?" snapped Fullwood.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, about a well-dressed stranger," said Bell. "This chap Palmer is a stranger to us, an' we don't know where he's goin' to take us, do we? I've got thirty bob, an' I don't want to lose it—"

"I've got fourteen quid," said Fullwood. "I'm not goin' to lose mine, you ass! Before I come back I'm goin' to double my cash!"

"Same here!" said Gulliver.

"Yes, but it's queer how Nipper should guess—"

"Oh, come on!" snapped Fully.

They walked down the passage, and nothing further was said. But it seemed that Bell was rather uneasy; the advice had not been entirely ignored. Fullwood and Gulliver were too conceited, and too "doggish" to heed a word of warning. Their own judgment was, of course, perfect.

"Ah! So here you are!"

Fullwood and Co. arrived at the end of the alley. And there, lounging against the wall, was Mr. Joseph Palmer. He regarded the juniors with a frown upon his clean-shaven, smooth face.

"This won't do, boys," he said. "You're late."

"Sorry, Mr. Palmer," yawned Fullwood. "We couldn't get away just when we liked, you know. These things have to be wangled."

Mr. Palmer chuckled.

"Ah, yes, of course," he said. "Well, come along."

"There's no particular hurry," exclaimed Fullwood, taking out a box of cigarettes. "Where are we goin' to?"

"You will see—when you get there," said Palmer. "I may as well inform you that I am doing you a very great favour, and you will show your appreciation, I hope, by comporting yourselves like young gentlemen. I observe that you are not wearing your school colours. That is good."

"I know you're doin' us a favour," said Fullwood. "You needn't rub that in, Mr. Palmer. But where are we goin'?"

Mr. Palmer smiled.

"I do not intend to tell you and then you will be unable to chatter," he said frankly. "Not that there is much fear of that. For your own sakes, you will keep quiet about this little jaunt. But it is better to be on the safe side. Trust yourselves to me, and you will come home with full pockets. I presume that you have some money—for speculation purposes?"

"I've got thirty shillings," said Bell.

Mr. Palmer frowned.

"Only thirty shillings!" he said. "But I understood—"

"Fully's got over twelve quid!" put in Bell. "An' Gulliver is flush, too—he's got four-pounds-ten, at least."

"Well, we shall get on all right," said Mr. Palmer, smiling. "With such an amount to play with—why, you can easily double your capital. If the luck is at all genial, you will return with your pockets bulging with winnings."

"Good!" said Fullwood and Co.

They went down the little street, and in Holborn a taxi was secured. Then they sped away into the gleaming lights of the West End. Mr. Joseph Palmer was reckoning that the game was well worth the candle. Between the three of them the boys had close upon twenty pounds. And they would probably prove very easy pigeons to pluck!

CHAPTER III.

A GAY TIME.

"HERE we are!"

Mr. Palmer alighted from the taxi, and Fullwood, Gulliver, and Bell stepped to the pavement in his rear.

The journey had been short, and the three St. Frank's juniors found themselves in a narrow, almost deserted street, in the neighbourhood of Soho. Shaftesbury Avenue was not so very far distant. But Fullwood and Co. were not aware of their location. And they had no time to use their eyes.

Without a pause, they were hurried into a dark lobby between two closed shops. They went up two flights of stairs, and finally came to a halt on a landing, where a single electric light jutted out from the wall.

"This is a queer sort of show," said Fullwood, looking round. "I thought you were goin' to take us to a pub, Mr. Palmer—where we could play billiards, an' all that sort of thing."

"This is better than a public-house, my boy," smiled Mr. Palmer. "Wait until you get inside. We cannot afford to take chances—and you must not judge the flavour of a cake by its exterior appearance."

Bell hung back.

"I think we'd better give it up, you fellows," he muttered. "We've got to get back, you know—"

"Rot!" said Fullwood. "We've come here for a gay time—an' we're goin' to have it! Lead the way, Mr. Palmer!"

"That's the kind of talk I like to hear," said Palmer genially. "Good gracious! You don't think I'm dangerous, do you?" he laughed. "You are as safe in this place as you would be in your own school!"

"Well, I can't understand why you're takin' so much trouble over us," remarked Bell bluntly. "We're strangers to you—"

"Ah, but you are boys—and I was a boy once," interrupted the man. "It gives me great pleasure to give you pleasure. Do you see? That is all the reward I require. Come along!"

He opened the door with a latch-key, and entered a dark passage. From within the flat came the sound of laughing, chattering voices. Mr. Palmer switched on an electric light.

"Hang your coats up here," he said smoothly.

He removed his own overcoat, and the boys saw that he was attired in evening-dress. He spoke like a gentleman, he looked like a gentleman, and he was dressed like a gentleman. Where, then, was the danger?

But it was all so strange that Fullwood and Co. were rather uncertain. They hadn't the faintest idea of what was to be revealed to them. The interior of the flat was a mystery.

"Now, boys, we'll have some fun," said Mr. Palmer genially. "Follow me!"

They went along the passage, and passed through a doorway into a neatly furnished room which resembled a library. Books were lying on little tables, and there was no sign of anything shady or "crooked."

Through this room Mr. Palmer led the way, and across to another door—a door which was hidden by a plush curtain. He pulled the curtain aside and opened the door. Fullwood and Co. entered the mysterious apartment which lay revealed.

"By gad!" muttered Fullwood, staring.

The place was a blaze of electric lights, and filled with laughing, excited people. They were mostly men—young men—but there were several women. The latter were well dressed, and obviously belonging to the upper class. The men for the most part were in evening-dress, but some were attired in ordinary lounge suits.

Fullwood and Co. gazed through the haze of blue smoke upon the "gay" scene. The occupants of the large room were gambling—all of them. At one table poker was being played; large piles of money lay on the green cloth. At another table chemin de fer was in full swing.

"Better than billiards—eh?" smiled Mr. Palmer.

Fullwood turned a flushed face.

"Rather!" he said, taking a deep breath. "By gad! Rather!"

"Look over there!" muttered Gulliver. "They're playin' roulette! That's a roulette-wheel!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bell, staring.

They moved forward, and Mr. Palmer joined another man who had approached,

and was speaking to him in a low voice. Nobody took much notice of the three school-boys; just a glance or two, and nothing more. They did not interest this flushed, fevered throng of gamblers. The fever was upon them, and they cared little for anything or anybody.

"This is a rippin' place, my sons!" murmured Fullwood.

"Roulette, an' poker, an' goodness knows what else!" said Bell. "I say, is this sort of thing allowed in London?"

"Of course not, you ass!" said Fullwood. "If the police knew about this place they'd jump on it—an' arrest the whole crowd here—"

"Then we might be arrested, if we're copped?" asked Gulliver, startled.

Fullwood laughed.

"You ass!" he said. "There's no danger here! You don't think the police will trouble to raid this show? There must be dozens an' dozens of places like this in the West End. The owners are too jolly 'cute' to be copped, you duffers! We're as safe as houses—an' we're goin' to have a good time!"

"Rather!" said Gulliver. "Most of these people are greenhorns—an' we're rather experienced at the game. We shall be able to skin them like one o'clock. We'll go home with our capital doubled, just as Palmer said."

Bell was not looking so dubious.

"It seems all right, anyhow," he remarked.

"Ain't you glad you came?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes! now that I know what the show is," said Bell. "Let's have a look at the punters round the roulette-wheel. It's jolly interestin'. We'll splash a bit after we've got the hang of things."

They edged their way nearer to the roulette-table. There were rows of chairs round the table, and all were occupied. Other punters stood behind, playing over the shoulders of the sitters.

"Make your game, gentlemen!" said the croupier droningly.

Roulette is a fascinating game—if you are mad enough to let it get hold of you. A fellow loses his head very soon, and he plunges recklessly and insanely. The game is a sheer gamble, and a player stands to win huge sums of money—with luck. But it is far easier to lose than to win—although, strangely enough, the punters seldom realise this.

The chances are all in favour of the bank. Even when the game is played fairly, the punters stand to lose all along the line. But a fair game of roulette is almost unknown; and those who are being cheated never realise that they are being cheated. The game is so fascinating that one always reckons to beat the croupier at his own game.

Fullwood and Co. were not entirely unacquainted with roulette. There had been a famous occasion when they had visited a gambling-den in Bannington, three miles from St. Frank's. Roulette had been played there; and Fullwood and his chums had lost all

their cash. But they had not gained any wisdom.

They were as eager now to try their luck as they had been then. It looked so easy—and the chances of "going down" seemed remote. There were so many chances of victory.

"Watch!" muttered Bell.

The croupier had just picked up the ivory ball. At the same time he gently turned the roulette-wheel. This wheel was divided into thirty-seven compartments; one compartment for "zero," and one for each of thirty-six numbers.

The game was not at all difficult to understand—quite simple, in point of fact. Fullwood and Co. knew all about it. The wheel was turned in one direction, and the ivory ball spun within the wheel in the opposite direction. And as they spun they gradually slowed down—until the little ball clicked into one of the compartments. The number of that division was the winner.

If any punter had staked on that number of the green cloth he would receive thirty-five times the amount of his stake. If, for example, he had placed a pound on sixteen, and sixteen turned up, he would rake in the comfortable little sum of thirty-five pounds—over and above his original stake.

But there were thirty-seven spaces on the roulette-wheel, including "zero," which meant that the punter had only one chance in thirty-five. In the case of the banker it was different; for he had thirty-seven chances to one against him. Which made a deal of difference.

Fullwood and Co. were greatly interested.

As the croupier requested the players to "make their game," money was placed on the table.

"Of course, we needn't splash much, to begin with," murmured Fullwood. "We can go a bit cautiously—until we get into the hang of it. Not that I need any teachin'. I know all about it."

"Well that's more than I do," said Gulliver. "I remember playin' in that Bannington place, but I've forgotten most of the details."

Fullwood decided to air his knowledge.

"It's easy," he declared. "A winnin' number, if it comes up, brings in thirty-five times the amount of the stake—but that's risky play; it's takin' a chance. You can shove your money on the line between two numbers—coverin' both. Then if either number turns up you receive seventeen times the amount of the stake. That's called a 'cheval.' See?"

"But that's a bit risky, ain't it?" asked Bell.

"Well, you can shove some cash on a row of three numbers, an' that's called a 'transversal.' If it wins you get eleven times as much as you bet—or, rather, if one of the numbers comes up. Or you can back columns of numbers—or dozens. In that case the winnin' number brings you in double your stake money. I think we'd better play cautiously, though, to begin with, an' simply

back red or black. That's merely an even chance. Then there's 'pair an' impair,' an' all sorts of things."

"Blessed if I can remember it like that," said Gulliver.

They noticed that the minimum stake was a shilling—but most of the punters backed more heavily than this. At the Monte Carlo tables the lowest stake allowed is five francs.

"There he goes again!" muttered Bell.

The wheel spun, and the croupier tossed the ball in. Fullwood and his chums watched intently. The ball went clicking round the shallow basin of the wheel, in the sides of which were fitted little metal studs. At length the wheel came to a stop, and the croupier droned out the result.

"Eighteen, black, impair and manque."

There was a hush for a moment, then a buzz of voices.

"See that fat chap?" whispered Fullwood. "He had a bob on number eighteen—that means to say that he's got thirty-five bob to come. Silly ass! Why the deuce didn't he put a quid on?"

"He didn't know the number was comin' up!" grinned Gulliver.

"I don't see the fun of standin' here an' watching," remarked Bell. "We haven't got much time, and we want to make a bit. I'm goin' to shove some money on the table next time."

His chums decided to follow suit. They were feeling unusually free and easy. They were unknown—strangers among strangers. There was no possibility of their little "butter" reaching the ears of the head.

And they were inclined to let themselves go for once. Fullwood intended showing off, and he pulled out a bundle of notes ostentatiously. Some of the punters stared when Fullwood commenced operations by laying a pound-note on the table. He only took an even chance, but it was a big risk.

Gulliver and Bell were content with a modest half-crown each. By extraordinary luck, they all won. But was it luck? The croupier knew that they were newcomers, and perhaps he wished to encourage them. There was little doubt that he was able to control the wheel almost exactly as he desired.

"Great!" muttered Fullwood, his eyes glittering. "Watch me!"

He proceeded to lay further sums upon the table. After ten minutes of play he had lost his winnings, but was by no means discouraged. Gulliver and Bell were both "in" to the extent of several shillings, and they were of the opinion that roulette was a great game.

Fullwood plunged, in order to make his total higher, and his chums plunged in a minor degree to keep him company. The result was not exactly as they anticipated. They lost heavily.

"I say, this won't do," muttered Bell. "I've only got eighteen bob left! I'm twelve bob down!"

"What about me?" snapped Fullwood. "I've lost three quid!"

"Oh, we shall make it up," said Gulliver. "Some of these people here have won twenty or thirty pounds to-night!"

He failed to mention—perhaps he failed to notice—that several of the punters had lost a far greater amount than he had named. The banker was considerably in pocket over the evening's play. If such wasn't the rule, there would be no table and no roulette. A roulette-banker does not run a table for pleasure, or for his health. He runs it in order to fleece fools!

Mr. Palmer strolled across to the table, and smiled at the juniors.

"Enjoying yourselves?" he asked genially.

"Oh, rather!" said Fullwood, with a sneer. "I enjoy losin'!"

"Losing?" exclaimed Palmer, elevating his eyebrows. "Dear me! That's bad, young man! You mustn't lose your money so soon! Perhaps you have been playing recklessly. Let me advise you what to do."

For five minutes Mr. Palmer remained near at hand, and he whispered advice to the excited Nuts. Fullwood won thirty shillings back, and Gulliver and Bell were actually in pocket over and above their capital.

"This is fine!" said Gulliver enthusiastically.

"Keep on this way, and you will win all along," said Mr. Palmer. "I've shown you what to do, boys. Keep it up—and you will go back to the school with your pockets bulging."

He strolled off again, leaving Fullwood and Co. to their own devices. He had encouraged them a great deal, and they entered into the play with greater vim and determination.

But the Nuts had bad luck.

The minutes passed, and their money went all in one direction. Now and then a break would occur—they would win. But for every shilling they won, they lost ten.

The result was inevitable.

Bell was the first to go "broke." His money had gone, and he borrowed a pound from Fullwood to help him to win back his losses. As a logical result he lost Fullwood's pound as well.

Fullwood himself was in a bad way. His notes had been disappearing with startling swiftness. The more he lost the more desperate he became. Gulliver lost his money, and watched—miserable and sullen. He hoped that Fullwood would win hand over fist. There would be a fund to borrow from then.

"Dash it all, I'm goin' to plunge this time!" muttered Fullwood. "It's the only way of gettin' back what I've lost. Roulette is a rippin' game, but the luck's all against us to-night!"

The "luck" continued to be against them—or, rather, against Fullwood. His plunge resulted in failure, and he was left with three pounds. And he had started with something like fourteen!

He decided to place his money on a number. A pound staked in that way would bring him in thirty-five pounds, if he was successful

—and that would more than make up for his losses.

The first note went, and the second was in the balance. The wheel came to a stop, Fullwood and Co. watching it feverishly.

"Lost!" said Gulliver huskily.

"Hang it!" grated Fullwood. "It's rotten—absolutely rotten! I'm fed-up with the game, an' everythin' else. Let's clear!"

"You've got a quid left, ain't you?"

"Yes, an' I'm goin' to stick to it!" snapped Fullwood.

"You ass! You might win back everythin'—"

"Oh, all right!" said Fully. "I'd better try, I suppose."

He tried—and lost! He and his chums had entered the flat with nearly twenty pounds between them. They had been there a bare hour. And now they were penniless! Roulette was certainly a ripping game—for the banker!

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

"**B**ROKE!" said Fullwood savagely—
"broke to the wide!"

"All three of us!" groaned Bell.

They had drifted away from the roulette-table, and were standing together in a miserable group. It was impossible for them to take part in any other game, for they had no money.

"We were fools to come at all!" said Gulliver, with real wisdom.

"How the thunder did we know the luck would be against us?" asked Fullwood. "Any other night we might have won ten quid each!"

"Oh, rot!" said Bell.

"It's always the case," went on Fullwood. "Everybody can't win, and everybody can't loose. It's just a matter of luck, an' the luck was against us. An' now we're stony!"

"It was your idea," growled Gulliver. "If it hadn't been for you, Fully, we should have stayed in bed—"

"That's right—round on me!" snarled Fullwood. "I didn't drag you here, did I? You needn't shout, either. I've lost six times as much as you have. I shall be hard up for weeks because of this!"

The Nuts were short-tempered. There are few gamblers who can lose without displaying irritability and impatience. It was only natural that Fullwood and Co. should be snappy with one another.

"We shall all be hard-up for weeks," said Bell.

"Yes, an' you owe me a quid," remarked Fullwood. "I'll trouble you to pay that when you get your next remittance—"

"You silly ass!" snorted Bell. "I lost that quid at roulette!"

"You'll have to pay me—"

"Rot!" said Bell.

"Look here—"

"If I hadn't lost it, you'd only have shoved it on the table yourself," went on Bell

warmly. "I'm not payin' that quid back. Fully! I think it's a bit rotten of you to mention it!"

Fullwood glared.

"You rotten swindler!" he said fiercely. "If I'd only had that quid I might have made tons of money——"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Bell.

"Dear me! Not quarrelling, surely?"

Mr. Palmer strolled up, a big cigar in his mouth. He regarded the Nuts with surprise and interest.

"No, we're not quarrellin'," said Fullwood. "But we ain't in the best of tempers, Mr. Palmer. You wouldn't be in a good temper if you'd lost nearly fourteen quid! The luck has been dead against us."

"We're all broke!" said Gulliver miserably.

Mr. Palmer moved the cigar from his mouth.

"But you were getting on well when I left you," he said in surprise.

"We did our best!" growled Bell.

"I'm sorry, boys—very sorry," exclaimed Palmer concernedly. "So you've lost all your money? Dear, dear! That's very bad! It is the essence of bad luck for you to lose on your first night here."

"I reckon it'll be the last night, too!" said Fullwood.

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Palmer. "You mustn't get discouraged, boys. Why, another time you will make up for all this leeway. Have another try now, and perhaps you will be able to mend your fortunes to a slight extent."

Fullwood shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't bet on nothin'," he said, "an' I don't suppose the croupier will accept our IO U's."

"Perhaps not—but I may," said Mr. Palmer smoothly.

Fullwood and Co. stared.

"You'll accept our IO U's?" asked Ralph Leslie.

"I have no objection to lending you a pound each," said Palmer. "Then I will help you to double it at the roulette-table. Pay me back when you like; you needn't worry in the least. Your IO U's will be sufficient for me."

The Nuts brightened up; they were willing to snatch at any chance.

"It's jolly decent of you, sir," said Gulliver eagerly.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Palmer. "Now, let me see. These cards will do——"

He produced three plain slips of pasteboard from his pocket. Apparently, he kept them there for this particular purpose. Fullwood and Co. soon signed their names to the miniature documents, and three pound-notes were handed over.

They considered that Mr. Palmer was true-blue, and did not even trouble to ponder over the actual facts. Their "generous" friend had merely returned a portion of their own money—and he had them in his power. With those IO U's in his possession Mr. Palmer could dictate to them as he chose.

The Nuts did not realise that Palmer was probably the man who ran the gambling-flat. The croupier was a partner, perhaps, or an

employee. In any case, Palmer was very closely connected with the disgraceful place. Yet he pretended to be a mere, ordinary habitue.

"That's all right, boys," he said cheerfully, as he pocketed the IO U's. "Now, we'll see if we can't increase that little capital of yours. It ought to be quite easy."

"Hadn't we better try poker?" suggested Fullwood. "We're rather good at poker, or nap, you know."

Mr. Palmer shook his head.

"You lost at roulette, so you must win at roulette," he said. "And you will be able to get your money quickly, too."

The roulette-table was still being heavily patronised, and it was some little time before the Nuts could get a look in. Then, upon the whispered advice of Mr. Palmer, they staked their money—in shillings.

Sometimes they won, sometimes they lost, but, in the main, they continued to win. Mr. Palmer was responsible for this. He wanted them to win; he wanted to give them encouragement.

At last Fullwood and Co. had doubled their opening money; they possessed two pounds each. And they were feeling cheerful and lighthearted. Even Fullwood, who was still twelve pounds "out," was smiling.

"It proves that we can win, anyhow," he remarked. "It only needs system—an' a little more knowledge of the table."

"That's right," smiled Mr. Palmer. "Why, before long you will be able to break the bank! It would be rather interesting to see the croupier done out of his job, for want of cash!"

He glanced at his watch.

"Nearly one o'clock," he said. "Time you were going, boys."

"One o'clock!" ejaculated Gulliver. "Great Scott! We sha'n't have any sleep at all if we don't nip back!"

"I'm stayin'," said Fullwood calmly. "I want to win some tin——"

"Let me advise you to go now," put in Palmer. "You will only lose your money if you stay. You are excited. Moreover, I can take you back by taxi if you come now. Otherwise you will have to walk, and that will be a nuisance."

The Nuts looked at one another.

"We'd better go," said Bell.

"Yes, I suppose we had," admitted Fullwood. "But we can come again another night, an' have some sport."

"Of course you can," smiled Mr. Palmer.

He piloted them to the door, and a few minutes later they were out in the open street. The taxi was waiting, and Fullwood and Co. bundled in. This time the vehicle did not travel very far.

It came to a halt at the top of Kingsway, with High Holborn just in front. Mr. Palmer jumped out.

"You can walk from here, boys," he said smoothly. "It isn't far."

He had succeeded in getting Fullwood and Co. away from the flat without their learning its exact locality—and that was all he

wanted. They were only boys, but he had profited to the extent of about seventeen pounds, and had lent his victims three of it. So he was fourteen pounds clear in pocket. The game was certainly worth the candle. Furthermore, he had a hold on the young rascals now—he held their I O U's. And they might be useful—later.

"Good-night, boys," said Mr. Palmer.

"Hold on, sir," exclaimed Bell. "What about that money we owe you—a quid each? I think we'd better pay that off, and get those cards back. We've got the money now, and—"

"My dear lads, say no more," laughed Palmer. "I trust you."

"That's decent of you," remarked Fullwood. "Still, we'd like to pay our debts."

"Yes, of course," said Gulliver.

Palmer shook his head.

"No, no!" he said emphatically. "I will not accept the money to-night. You have had rather bad luck, and you are short. Don't think of paying me back. I can wait until you are in funds again. That will be soon, I suppose?"

"I'm expectin' a fiver at the end of the week," said Fullwood.

"I shall be in funds on Saturday, too," put in Gulliver.

"Then leave it until Saturday, by all means," said Palmer, who had been pumping for that information. "I can meet you again on Saturday night, if you wish. Then we can have some more sport."

Fullwood nodded eagerly.

"That's a fine idea, sir," he exclaimed. "We shall be able to get our money back, and we can pay you, too. Eleven o'clock on Saturday night, at the back of the school. Is that all serene?"

"Splendid," said Mr. Palmer. "Don't be late, that's all. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

He jumped into the taxi, and it moved off. He still held those I O U's, and there was no question about the Nuts turning up at the appointed place on the Saturday night. They would have fresh supplies of money then, and Mr. Palmer chuckled as he anticipated the fate of their cash.

Meanwhile, Fullwood and Co. were walking briskly along High Holborn. It was late, and the street was nearly deserted.

"Of course, we've gone down frightfully—at least, I have," said Fullwood. "I'm quids out. But the luck doesn't always go in a chap's favour. I'm not a rotten loser, anyway. On Saturday I'll make up for to-night, by gad! I'll rake in a cool twenty quid!"

"Jolly decent of Palmer to lend us that money," remarked Gulliver. "We should have been stony without it. It was decent of him, too, to refuse to take it back to-night. He's a real sport."

"Rather!" agreed Bell.

The Nuts, in spite of their "smartness," were thoroughly duped. They were unable to see through Mr. Palmer's very obvious game. One lesson was not sufficient for them. They were determined to visit the gambling-den on the Saturday night. No doubt they would

learn then the folly of placing faith in plausible strangers. Fullwood and Co. were decidedly green.

They reached the little alley at the back of the school without any untowards incident. A policeman had eyed them rather searchingly, but he had not spoken. And the cads of the Remove were rather glad to get into the alley.

"We'd better go cautiously," murmured Fullwood. "If we're spotted it'll mean a floggin' an' a gatin'. Follow me."

They scrambled over the wall, and dropped into the paddock. All was still and dark. Not a light showed in any window from the school buildings. The place looked grim and gloomy to the returning revellers.

"Makes me feel creepy, by gad!" muttered Bell. "Even St. Frank's, in the heart of the country, doesn't look so beastly sinister as this place does. I shall be glad to get indoors!"

"You blessed funk!" grinned Fullwood. "There's nothin' to be afraid of!"

They crossed the playing-field, and reached the gate which led into the paved courtyard. Climbing over the gate, they entered the yard, and were about to move forward towards the gymnasium, when Fullwood paused.

"Hold on!" he breathed. "I thought I saw— Yes, by gad!"

The others halted abruptly.

"Eh?" said Bell, in a nervous whisper. "What—what did you see?"

"Somethin' moved—"

Fullwood paused, and caught his breath in. Something certainly had moved. The courtyard was dark, save in one small strip. Here a ray of light penetrated from a neighbouring arc standard. The light was a good distance away, but the beam in the yard seemed quite brilliant.

And an object had moved in the gloom; it moved, but it made no sound. The three startled juniors could not see whether it was man or animal; it crouched as it walked, and there was something queer about it.

Then, abruptly, the object passed into the beam of light. It was only a momentary glimpse that the Nuts received, but that glimpse unnerved them. For the thing they saw was horrible.

The figure seemed to be that of a man, attired in a long, flowing robe. Only the face was visible out of the clothing. And it was this face which gave Fullwood and Co. such a shock.

It was yellow, and it was like nothing human. Gaunt and ghastly, it resembled a death's head, and in the hollows of the eyes two shining orbs appeared. Just that one flash, and then the thing vanished into the darkness. Not a sound had been made, and the Nuts shook as they stood.

"What—what was it?" gasped Gulliver faintly.

"I—I—o-o-oooh!"

Bell whispered something huskily, his knees knocked together, and the next moment he fell in a heap on the ground. He lay perfectly still, and Gulliver and Fullwood stared at him in horror.



2

1. For one brief second the ghastly apparition hovered in view, then, as suddenly, disappeared.

2. "Montie," I breathed, "this cover has been moved recently!"

"He's fainted!" panted Fullwood.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Gulliver. "What—what shall we do? That thing wasn't human, Fully! It—it looked like a skull—"

Gulliver's nerve forsook him, and he made a dash for the gymnasium. Fullwood, after one second, followed. They forgot all about Bell; their only thought was to get into the house—into the Remove dormitory.

Panic had seized them, and they scrambled up to the roof of the gymnasium like monkeys climbing a tree. Up the roof they ran, and into the window. They made a considerable noise as they sped down the passage, but they didn't care. It is doubtful if they knew what they were doing.

Reaching the dormitory, they burst in, and closed the door.

"Is—is it comin'?" gasped Gulliver.

Fullwood's nerve began to return.

"Shut up, you ass!" he snapped. "You'll wake everybody! We were asses to rush in like that! There's Bell—"

"He's dead!" muttered Gulliver feverishly.

"You fool! He only fainted!" said Fullwood, in a fierce voice. "That—that thing we saw—"

"It was a ghost!" gasped Gulliver shakily. "A ghost!"

"Hallo! Who's talking about ghosts at this time of night?"

I sat up in bed, the voices of the frightened pair having awakened me. I could dimly see them sitting on their beds down the dormitory. They were breathing heavily, and were plainly scared.

"What's wrong over there?" I asked softly.

"We—we'd better tell him!" muttered Gulliver.

He came over to my bed, and I could then see that he was fully dressed. Fullwood followed.

"Tell me what!" I inquired. "What's the matter with you two? I suppose you've just come back from your little outing? You prize asses! I'll bet anything that you've lost all your money!"

Gulliver clutched at my arm.

"Bell isn't here!" he said huskily. "He's down in the courtyard—unconscious!"

"What the dickens—"

"It's true—it's true!" panted Gulliver. "We—we saw somethin'—somethin' horrible! An' Bell fainted away, an' fell down. He's there now, Nipper, lyin' in the yard. Perhaps he's dead! Oh, it's awful—awful!"

I slipped out of bed.

"Pull yourself together, Gulliver," I said sharply. "You don't know what you're talking about—"

"Yes, he does," interrupted Fullwood. "But he's scared out of his wits. We were crossin' the courtyard—Bell an' Gully an' I—when we saw somethin' move. There was an awful yellow face—"

"Like a death's-head!" shivered Gulliver.

"Well, it did look pretty ghastly," said Fullwood. "Bell was so frightened that he fainted, or somethin'. We left him down

there, the ass. I expect he'll get all right soon, an' then he'll come up."

I looked hard at the quivering pair.

"Have you been drinking spirits, Fullwood?" I asked suspiciously.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Fullwood. "We're not drunk—if that's what you mean. We haven't been seein' things. As a matter of fact, we haven't touched anythin' at all. There was somethin' down in the courtyard, I tell you. Bell an' Gully were scared—"

"An' so were you!" growled Gulliver. "You ran as fast as I did!"

"You say that Bell fainted?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And you left him down there—alone?"

"Of course we did!"

"A fine pair of beauties, aren't you?" I said contemptuously. "You'd better buck up and fetch Bell in, before a master awakens. This is what comes of breaking bounds in the dead of night—"

"Oh, don't preach!" snarled Fullwood. "I'm not goin' to fetch Bell in! If he likes to stay outside it's his look-out. Rats to him!"

"I'm not goin', either," muttered Gulliver. "After seein' that—that ghost—"

"You fellows had better get into bed," I interrupted curtly. "You've got about as much pluck as a pair of three-day-old kittens! Where did you leave Bell? I'm going to fetch him in. Where did you leave him?"

"He's down in the courtyard; you'll see him," said Fullwood. "But I advise you to stay here, Nipper. Why the thunder can't you mind your own rotten business? Bell will be comin' in soon; he was a fool to faint away like that—"

"That's enough," I snapped. "If Bell has come to any harm, Fullwood, I shall report the whole matter to the Head—and you'll be required to give a full explanation. I don't believe you saw anything, and I don't believe that Bell fainted. He fell down over something, and you're trying to fake up a yarn—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Fullwood. "He fainted, I tell you. Don't you believe me?"

"No!"

"All right—do the other thing!" went on Fullwood. "It's true, though. We saw something—"

"A man like a skeleton, in a flowing robe," said Gulliver. "It appeared all of a sudden, Nipper, an' we were rooted to the spot with horror. You'd have been scared, too, if you had seen it. It's a wonder we didn't all faint!"

"Where did this apparition vanish to?" I asked, as I dressed.

"It—it simply faded into the darkness!"

"Yes, but whereabouts?"

"Over to the left side of the courtyard, against the wall of the College House," said Gulliver. "There's no window there, and not even a door. The—the thing couldn't have passed through the solid wall. It—it just vanished, you know! I tell you straight, it was a ghost!"

"We'll see about that," I said grimly.

And I hastened my dressing.

CHAPTER V.

INVESTIGATIONS.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST yawned. "Begad!" he murmured, blinking round him into the gloom of the dormitory. "Who is that? What are you doin' out of your bed in the middle of the night? Dear me! You're dressin', dear fellow!"

I turned, rather impatient.

"Who told you to wake up, Montie?" I demanded.

"Dear boy, I'm frightfully sorry if I've offended you," he said calmly. "But, really, I have no control over myself when I'm asleep. Sometimes I slumber on peacefully an' quietly until the risin'-bell rings. At other times I wake up in the still, dark hours. It ain't my fault, Nipper boy—it ain't, really. These things just happen, begad! I thought I heard voices."

"If you don't talk more softly you'll hear other voices—you'll have the whole dormitory awake," I said. "Listen to me for a minute, and if you want to take a hand in the little game you'd better shove some clobber on—quick! I can't stop for any fancy dressing. mind."

"Really, old fellow——"

"Listen!" I interrupted.

And I briefly told Sir Montie the facts. He listened with growing surprise and concern, and by the time I had finished he was out of bed, dressing himself. Fullwood and Gulliver were between the sheets by this time, awake, but nervous still.

"This is shockin', dear fellow," observed Montie at length. "Those frightful bounders ought to be punished. Fancy leavin' Bell in the courtyard in a faint! Bell's an awful cad, but even a cad deserves attention when he's bowled over——"

"We didn't bowl him over," growled Fullwood. "He fainted."

"You misunderstand me, dear boy—I mean, you rotter," said Tregellis-West stiffly. "A fellow is bowled over when he is in a faintin' fit. As for the ghost, I don't believe a word of it—not a bally word, begad!"

"Nobody asked you to believe anything!" snapped Fullwood.

"Don't argue," I said. "We'll go and see for ourselves. Ready?"

"One moment, dear old boy—just one moment!"

"I've been waiting three minutes——"

"But I must find my collar an' tie," said Montie. "Just give me a second!"

"Rats!" I exclaimed. "You don't want a collar, and you don't need a tie. You'll do as you are. Come on!"

"Really, Nipper, I——"

"If you don't come now I shall go without you!" I declared grimly.

I walked down the dormitory, and Montie, with a sigh, followed on my heels. We didn't think it advisable to awaken Tommy Watson. There was no reason for three of us to be prowling about in the dead of night.

Outside, in the corridor, I faced my noble chum.

"This affair seems to be a bit mysterious, Montie," I whispered.

"Dear fellow, it does," he agreed.

"Fullwood and Co. saw something—that's certain," I went on. "And it was something which scared them out of their wits. They're not particularly plucky, and I suppose it was easy enough for them to be scared. It was dark and gloomy, too, and that added to the effect."

"Do you really think that Bell fainted?"

"Bother Bell," I said—"although, to answer that question at once, I do believe he fainted. He's the biggest funk in the Remove, except for Long. But I'm thinking of something else. You remember what I told you last week?"

Sir Montie scratched his head.

"You told me a frightful amount of things, old boy," he said slowly. "I can't——"

"About seeing a Chinaman on the premises, I mean—a Chinaman in the courtyard," I broke in. "Tommy wouldn't believe it at first, and you were a bit sceptical. But I know I saw him."

"Yes, I remember that."

"Well, doesn't it strike you that Fullwood and Co. might have seen the Chinaman, too?" I asked keenly. "The face was yellow, and deathly—that's how it would look to a set of scared funks. I can't help thinking of those drug merchants, Montie. In this district there is a gang of Chinese rotters who are trafficking in cocaine and opium, for unlawful purposes. They're smugglers, and it seems to me that we might be able to find things out. It would be rather rich if that gang has its headquarters right near the school."

"But, dear old boy, it's rather far-fetched——"

"Rot!" I interrupted. "You don't know London as I do."

"Perhaps not, old man."

"Well, then," I went on, "it seems to me that we're on the track of something—and I mean to investigate thoroughly. We'll go down now, see where Bell is, and then nose about for a bit."

"Begad! That'll be frightfully interestin'," said Montie languidly.

We wasted no further time, but hurried to the corridor window. It was open, just as the Nuts had left it. The night was dark, and at first we could scarcely see the roof of the gymnasium, immediately below us.

I lowered myself first, and reached the ground without any difficulty. Then Montie came down—nearly head first—and I only just managed to save him.

"You ass!" I grinned. "Don't make all that noise!"

"I slipped, dear boy!" gasped Montie.

A sound, like a long sigh, came from the darkness.

I looked round, and then saw a dim form lying on the ground. It raised itself up as I stepped across the yard—and I needed no

telling that the form belonged to George Bell, of the Remove.

"Who—who's that?" he asked faintly.

"All right, my son," I said. "You needn't be startled—"

"Nipper!" muttered Bell. "Thank goodness! I—I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," I went on, bending over him. "What's the trouble? What the dickens made you swoon?"

"It's gone now!" murmured Bell huskily. "I saw it plainly, Nipper! An awful yellow face— Fullwood an' Gulliver saw it, too! Where are they? I—I don't seem to remember—"

"You fainted," I said. "Gulliver and Fullwood are in the dormitory—and you'd better follow as quickly as possible. What you need is sleep. And you'd better look lively in the morning, too—unless you want the Head to know of your rotten gambling jaunt!"

Bell seemed to recover rapidly.

"I—I'll go in," he said, staggering to his feet. "Oh, my head feels awful! I can't see properly! An' that terrible face—"

"Where was it?" I asked. "There was a figure, I understand, and it vanished into thin air?"

Bell pointed a quivering finger.

"It disappeared over there," he said unsteadily. "There's nothing but a blank wall, Nipper! Yet it vanished! Oh, it was a ghost—I know it was! I want to get away from this horrible place!"

He was quite unnerved, and Montie and I found it necessary to assist him up the gymnasium roof and into the building. When we reached the Remove dormitory we left him to himself. He was quite capable of undressing and getting into bed.

"I don't want to make objections, dear fellow," said Sir Montie, as we crept down the corridor again; "but wouldn't it be better if we went to bed, too? We can examine the yard much better in the mornin'—"

"Can we?" I broke in. "With dozens of curious chaps dodging about? Don't you believe it, Montie! The best time for us to get busy is—now. I want to have a look at the spot where the apparition disappeared."

"Just as you like, Nipper boy," said Montie. "I'm agreeable, begad!"

"If you don't want to come—"

"Pray be sensible," said Tregellis-West severely. "I wouldn't dream of backin' out. Your decision is final, dear fellow—as they say in the competition rules!"

We slipped out of the window, and descended to the ground once more. Everything was dark and quiet, and it seemed rather strange that any Chinamen should intrude in that quiet spot.

But I had seen them with my own eyes several days earlier, and now Fullwood and Co. had been scared by some apparition which they could not understand. It was only natural that I should draw the most obvious inference.

Furthermore, it provided me with an open-

ing for an investigation, and I was quite eager to get to work.

"I thought about waking up the guv'nor," I whispered, "but I don't think that would be advisable, Montie."

"Why not? Mr. Lee could do a lot—"

"He could do better than us," I said. "But we should have to explain about Fullwood and the others—and I don't want to sneak. For to-night we'd better look into this affair ourselves. If we are successful—well, I can tell the guv'nor then. But it's quite possible that we shall find nothing."

"Most probable, in fact," murmured Sir Montie.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothin', dear boy."

I grinned, but said no more. Tregellis-West was plainly sceptical; he was under the impression that my efforts would be useless. But, somehow, I felt that I should be able to discover something—even if it didn't amount to a lot.

I had an electric torch on me, and as I walked over to the wall of the College House I switched the light on. The school was divided into two big buildings, and the fellows always referred to them as the College House and the Ancient House—they were trying to kid themselves that they were still at St. Frank's.

I took care to keep the light very low on the ground, and we had no difficulty in seeing that there was no outlet in the corner which Bell had indicated. The wall of the building rose straight from the ground, and there was no window just there. There was not even a grating.

"I can't quite understand it," I remarked. "If the yellow chap disappeared in this corner, he must have vanished into thin air—or dropped into the solid ground. He couldn't have got out of this dark corner without going back. I expect that's what he did do, but the Nuts were too scared to notice it."

"Yes, I suppose so, old boy."

I altered the direction of the light a trifle, and then moved forward with a little exclamation.

"My hat!" I murmured. "What's this?"

"It looks like a drain cover, dear boy," said Montie.

"That's what it is, too."

The ground was quite clear and solid, and set into it near the wall was one of those square iron coverings which one often sees. Beneath it, no doubt, were some drain-pipes—and this place was merely provided for the purpose of clearing the pipes if they got blocked.

"Well, I wouldn't trouble to examine this under ordinary circumstances, because it's a bit tall to suppose that the mysterious figure vanished into a drain-pipe," I said. "But, in the absence of any other outlet, we must pay attention to this one—even though it seems out of the question."

I went down upon my knees, and examined the edge of the grating with minute care. And as I did so Montie watched languidly.

And my heart began to beat somewhat faster. For I had already made a discovery.

"Montie!" I breathed. "This cover has been moved recently!"

"I suppose the plumbers——"

"Confound the plumbers!" I snapped. "It's been moved since yesterday, you ass! The dust has been disturbed, and there is every indication that the cover was lifted less than an hour ago. It can't be a drain cover, after all! That Chinaman must have gone down this way."

Sir Montie began to get interested.

"Do you really think so, old son?" he asked.

"I do," I replied. "Lend a hand!"

We tugged at the cover, but it was some little time before we could shift it. There was no handle, and we found it necessary to lever the thing off. But at last we were successful in our efforts.

"Good!" I breathed. "Now we'll see!"

"Pray listen to me for one moment," said Montie. "If the Chinaman disappeared this way, Fullwood and Co. would have heard him opening the cover—they would have seen him doin' it, begad!"

"There's no certainty about it," I replied. "If this is an entrance to an underground den, the Chinks have probably got a special way of opening the cover, which we don't know anything about. That's not an important point, anyhow. Those cads bunked before they had time to see anything."

We raised the cover, and propped it against the wall. Then I switched my torch on once more, expecting to see a deep, dark cavity. But I received something of a shock. For the cavity was only a foot deep, and was simply a break in two small drain-pipes. A fox terrier couldn't have squeezed in.

"Hard lines, dear fellow!" murmured Montie.

"Yes, I'm afraid I was rather too hasty," I admitted. "Nothing human could have got into this place. But it's queer, all the same. I can swear the cover has been moved recently."

"Exactly," said Montie calmly. "By the plumbers."

I nodded.

"Afraid you're right," I murmured. "But, all the same, this drain doesn't strike me as being in proper repair—as it would be if the plumbers had attended to it. We had some rain yesterday—a good deal, in fact. And yet these two drains are as dry as a bone. They must have been dry for weeks."

"Perhaps they're different kind of drains, old boy. There's no tellin', you know. They might lead from a part of the house where——"

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

Montie paused abruptly, for I had spoken in a startled tone.

"I knew there was something fishy about it!" I exclaimed tensely. "I was just feeling the pipe, Montie, when it moved—the whole base of the cavity moved, in fact. Yet it looks solid."

"Begad! You're not suggestin'——"

"I'm not suggesting anything," I interrupted. "We'll wait and see."

I commenced pressing on the drain-pipes, in different places. For a minute nothing occurred; then, abruptly, the whole basin swung back, dropping at the same time into a cavity at the side.

A deep shaft was revealed—a shaft leading straight down into the solid ground. At short intervals iron footrests were fixed in the wall. Montie and I stared down with growing excitement.

"What have you got to say now?" I asked tensely. "I was right! I had a feeling that there was something out of the ordinary about this place. Look, Montie! This is a shaft—leading into a sewer, probably."

"I am quite 'bewildered, dear boy,' confessed Montie. "What about the drains? How does the water flow——"

"You duffer! It's only a fake," I explained. "Don't you see? This exit is made to look like an ordinary drain cover. Any casual examination would reveal nothing. This gang must be a pretty smart lot."

"Begad, rather!" agreed Tregellis-West. "And what shall we do now?"

"Go down!"

"But what about tellin' Mr. Lee?"

"Before I tell the guv'nor anything I want to have a look round myself," I said. "Perhaps you'd better stop up here, Montie—on guard."

Sir Montie smiled.

"That's a rippin' idea—I don't think!" he said calmly. "Good gracious! Do you suppose that I would allow you to go down into this place alone? I'm comin' with you. We can leave the cover slightly opened, so that our exit will be all serene. I'm comin' with you, Nipper."

"All right," I said. "We won't go far, anyhow. I just want to see where this shaft leads to—that's all. Follow your uncle!"

I descended into the shaft, and Montie followed. He made no attempt to close the hidden door, but merely pulled the iron cover down—leaving it slightly out of position.

"We don't want to be trapped, you know," he murmured.

I cast my light downwards, and saw that the descent was clear. So I switched off again, and we descended in darkness.

The shaft was not quite so long as I had anticipated, for, just as I was thinking of getting some light on the subject again, my feet touched solid ground—instead of another footrest.

"Hold on, Montie," I whispered. "Go easy!"

The beam of light shot out, and revealed the fact that I was standing in a fairly narrow circular brick tunnel. It was quite dry, and I had no difficulty in recognising it as one of the old type sewers.

In all probability it had been in a state of disuse for a good many years, and its presence was forgotten. In any case, the place was neglected by the authorities, and was now in the possession of the band of

drug traffickers. That, at all events, was my firm impression.

"Come on down, Montie!" I whispered, looking up.

Tregellis-West descended the last few footrests, and stood by my side.

"Begad! We've got into a queer place now, dear fellow," he observed, peering round through his pince-nez. "I was under the impression that you had come to the end of the shaft, and that we couldn't go any further."

"We've come to the end of the shaft, all right," I agreed. "But there's a tunnel here, my son—an old sewer, by the look of it. This is where we've got to go cautiously. We might have to bunk in a hurry."

In order that no mistake should be made, I made a mark just near the shaft. It was possible that we should pass other shafts along the tunnel, and we didn't want to get mixed up.

By this time both Montie and I were excited; the thought of turning back never occurred to us. Our chief aim was to press on—and discover everything. Who was the man who had descended into this place?

I was determined to get at the truth.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YELLOW BAND.

THE sewer led straight in one direction, but we could see the end of it in the other. Switching my torch on again, I closely examined the dry floor, and had no difficulty in seeing how the land lay.

For, in one direction the ground was undisturbed; whilst in the other the dusty brickwork was covered with marks.

"That must be a cul-de-sac up that way," I whispered, pointing down the short portion of the tunnel. "It's no good going in that direction. We'll creep along this way, and see where we get to."

"I'm with you, Nipper, old boy."

"Good!"

We walked on, and I took the precaution to place my handkerchief over the bulb of the torch. It then only gave a subdued light—less visible at a distance, but quite sufficient for our needs.

We had not proceeded far in this way before I became aware of a turn in the sewer. It was not an abrupt turn, but a curve. And I was just about to remove the handkerchief from my torch when I changed my mind.

I switched the torch off altogether.

"Begad!" breathed Montie. "What's the meanin' of—"

"Hush!" I whispered. "Not a sound!"

For, now that the curve had been rounded, I became aware of a dim glow in the distance ahead. It seemed to fill the

whole tunnel about two hundred yards away from us.

And, as we crept forward again, I felt a decided change in the atmosphere. It was warmer and more stuffy—and there was a horrible, sickly odour in the air. I recognised the scent in a moment.

"Opium!" I hissed triumphantly.

"Really, dear boy?"

"We'd better be thinking of going back," I said, coming to a halt. "We don't want to run any unnecessary risks, Montie. There might be a dozen Chinks further along this tunnel. There must be a whole band of them."

"A yellow band, begad!"

"That's it," I agreed. "A band of yellow crooks! I'll tell you what, old son. We'll just go along for another hundred yards, and listen. If we can't hear anything, we'll venture further. Then we'll buzz back."

"An' what then?"

"The guv'nor!" I said briefly.

There was no need for our light now. We could see quite distinctly, owing to the reflected light in the distance. The source of the illumination was not exactly in view; it was probably in a side tunnel, or cavity.

We crept on very carefully now, and after a while we came to a halt and listened. But everything was absolutely silent. And I suppose the adventure seemed all the more mysterious because of that.

At last I decided to turn back while we were still safe. If I had been alone I might have ventured on further, but I didn't want to drag Sir Montie into any unnecessary peril.

But just as I had come to this decision I saw a dim doorway just in front. A very weak light was emanating from it; we had not seen it earlier because of the brighter light ahead.

"We'll just take a peep through that doorway," I breathed.

We reached the opening, and peered cautiously round. At first we could see very little. There was no actual light in the place; but it opened into another cavity, as we could see by an outlined doorway. The place was not very large, and at first I thought that it was merely filled with a few bundles of rubbish. Then one of the bundles moved.

The truth came to me in a flash. The bundles were men—lying upon mattresses! Probably they were opium-soaked Chinamen who had come to sleep off the effects of the drug.

In any case, I concluded that our investigation had proceeded far enough. We could do very little by remaining, for it was quite impossible to venture further without the certainty of being captured. And, once in the hands of these yellow scoundrels, our fate would probably be swift and unpleasant.

"We'll go back now, Montie," I whispered. "Let me lead—"

"Good gracious!" gasped Sir Montie.

He had taken no care to lower his voice, and I turned abruptly. His startled tone assured me that something was decidedly wrong. And something was! Standing in the tunnel, and barring our retreat, were two Chinamen!

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed huskily.

The yellow men had come up unseen and unheard. Stealthily, they had cut us off, and I realised—too late—that I had been foolish to venture so far. Perhaps I had been too confident—too cocksure. Everybody is liable to make mistakes. And I had reckoned that we should be able to get back in safety.

My reckoning, it seemed, was at fault.

The Chinamen stared at us, and we stared at the Chinamen. For a few seconds there was a tense silence. Then my wits returned.

"Charge!" I whispered quickly.

Montie took his cue at once, and we both prepared to dash forward. A swift attack might possibly bowl the yellow brutes over, and leave the way clear for us to escape. But there was a sudden flash of steel—and we found ourselves facing two wicked-looking knives!

"Old boy," gasped Montie, "it can't be done!"

We held ourselves in check, our hearts beating rapidly. And at that moment I caught a glimpse of another figure behind—a third Chinaman. He, unlike the two in front of us, who were dressed in European clothes, was attired in flowing robes. And his face was positively hideous—disfigured, deathlike, and horrible to gaze upon.

"So!" exclaimed one of the Chinamen. "You velly blave British boys—eh? What you doee here? Allee samee plisoners. You savee?"

"Prisoners!" I said warmly. "You've got no right to make us prisoners, you rotter! This sewer isn't your private property, I suppose?"

The Chinaman didn't move.

"Allee samee plisoners," repeated the man who had spoken. "You comee here to spy. Is it? You vellee good boys. You speakee the tluth? You tellee me how you camee in this place?"

"Oh, we just dropped in," I said carelessly. "Having a look round, you know. No harm in that, is there? If we're not wanted here, we'll clear out. We're always ready to oblige!"

A hand grasped my shoulder.

"Where you come from?" demanded the Chinaman.

"It looks like being fine, I think," I replied.

"No playee tlicks!" exclaimed the yellow man sharply. "You! I speakee to you! Who sentee you here? Where you comee from?"

Sir Montie, whose shoulder had been shaken, just rescued his pince-nez in time.

"Speakin' to me?" he asked. "We're goin' now, dear boy. Good-night!"

"So! You vellee clever white boys!" said the Chinaman softly. "You no speakee? Allee samee plisoners. No escape. Savee?"

He turned as he finished speaking, and uttered a long string of words in his own language. A second afterwards Montie and I were seized, and the point of a knife was placed against our backs. Any refusal to move forward would have had disastrous consequences.

"You walkee!" ordered the Chinaman.

We walked. There was nothing else to be done, in fact. After being taken along the tunnel for a short distance we passed the opening from which the light was streaming.

I glanced in as we went by, and saw that several paraffin lamps were burning in the heavy atmosphere. Several repulsive-looking Chinamen were moving about, and the place was littered with cases and stools. I was absolutely positive, by this time, that we had discovered the secret of the drug smuggling.

After a short walk Sir Montie and I were pushed through a narrow doorway, and then something slammed. We heard a key grating in a lock, and then a dead silence followed. It was almost uncanny.

Without delay I fished out my electric torch, and switched it on. The light revealed the fact that Montie and I were in a tiny stone chamber. It was empty, save for ourselves, and the only exit was by means of the door. This was solid, and there was a tiny slit at the top for purposes of ventilation.

Tregellis-West and I gazed at one another rather blankly.

"Dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "We seem to be in a frightful hole—we do, really. What are we goin' to do?"

"Well, that's a question I can't answer," I said. "I suppose it's my fault, really, for being such a reckless ass. I'm awfully sorry I've got you into this fix——"

"Pray refrain from being so utterly absurd," interrupted my noble chum. "We didn't expect to be collared, did we? It's just our misfortune, begad! I don't suppose these yellow gentlemen can keep us here for long."

"No, I suppose not," I said slowly.

But at the same time, I was decidedly uncertain. Tregellis-West didn't understand the position as I did. I had had some experience of Chinamen before; and I realised that we should be exceedingly lucky if we succeeded in getting out of our perilous predicament.

We could do nothing to help ourselves. We were trapped—hopelessly. Even if it were possible to get out of the chamber, we should be no better off. For recapture would follow as a matter of course.

I judged that the time was already later than two a.m. The school, of course, was fast asleep, and we could not hope for any

help from that quarter. But in this supposition I was wrong.

Certain events were occurring at the school which were destined to make a great deal of difference to our position.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood, for once in his life, acted sensibly. But he only did so because he began to get somewhat scared.

He knew that Sir Montie and I had ventured out of the dormitory to fetch Bell; and he knew that we had gone off again—after putting Bell safely to bed—to investigate the apparition. And Fullwood could not get to sleep. Perhaps he was kept awake by the knowledge of his losses at roulette; perhaps he was wondering what had occurred to Sir Montie and I.

At all events, after an hour had passed, Fullwood was still awake. Everybody else in the dormitory, including Bell, was sound asleep. But Fullwood was rather worried—for once in a while.

"Two o'clock!" he muttered, as he heard a clock striking. "Why don't the fools come back? Perhaps they've been injured by something—an' if they're found in the mornin', there'll be a frightful bust-up."

Fullwood was certainly thinking about the safety of his own skin. He didn't want to get into any trouble. And, after a while, he decided to slip out of the dormitory and make investigations on his own account.

These investigations proved to be very elementary. He merely went to the corridor window, and gazed out into the courtyard. Naturally, he saw no sign whatever of Montie or myself.

"They've gone—they've vanished!" muttered Fullwood. "What the dickens shall I do? The idiots! Why didn't they come back? What did they want to go out again for? I don't see why I should interfere! Hang them!"

He walked back towards the dormitory, but paused half-way up the corridor. He was still gravely uneasy, for he really thought that something bad had happened. Not that he really cared for Montie and I.

He knew that he had sent us out, and he feared that he would suffer if any misfortunes had befallen us.

So, after a moment's hesitation, he hurried away to Nelson Lee's bedroom. He wanted to shift the responsibility on to somebody else—and it was better for him to go to the Housemaster.

Arriving outside Nelson Lee's bedroom, he tapped upon the door, and then waited—very nervously. He had half expected that he would be compelled to knock two or three times; but almost at once the door opened.

A blaze of light flooded out past Nelson Lee into the passage. The schoolmaster-detective was standing in the doorway in his dressing-gown, and he regarded Fullwood with uplifted eyebrows.

"Is anything wrong, Fullwood?" he asked.

"No, sir—that is to say, yes, sir!" ex-

claimed Fullwood nervously. "Nipper and Tregellis-West are missing, sir."

"Missing? What do you mean?"

"Bell an' I felt rather stuffy after we got to bed, sir, and we went out into the courtyard for a little while——"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lee. "And how did you get there—with all the doors locked?"

"We got out of the window, sir," said Fullwood hurriedly. "While we were standin' in the courtyard a horrible figure appeared, an' Bell fainted. I went back to the dormitory, an' Nipper an' Tregellis-West fetched Bell in. Then they went out again to have a look round. But they've been away a frightful time, sir, an' I'm beginnin' to think that somethin' must have happened."

Nelson Lee regarded Fullwood rather grimly.

"I will not press you to give me your full story to-night, my boy," he said. "But you must tell me what this figure was you saw, and where it disappeared. If Nipper an' Tregellis-West are still out, they must be fetched in."

Fullwood was not at all anxious to give the full story. He wanted to get out of any punishment, and was relieved when Nelson Lee allowed him to go—after the detective had gained all the knowledge he required.

For ten minutes after Fullwood's departure Lee remained sitting in his chair absolutely motionless. Then, with a rather curious glint in his eyes, he rose to his feet and hustled about.

— —

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE!

"DEAR fellow, I am beginnin' to despair—I am, really."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West's tone was not at all in keeping with the words he expressed. For he spoke quite cheerfully, and even lightly. But he seldom spoke in any other way. Montie was always urbane and calm.

"There's no need to despair, old chap," I said. "We've been here for two hours——"

"Begad!"

"What's wrong?"

"Two hours!" echoed Montie. "I was thinkin' it was twelve!"

"It has seemed a long two hours. I'll admit," I said. "But it's only just about twenty-past three. A nice time for two respectable schoolboys to be up, isn't it, Montie?"

"Up!" said Tregellis-West. "It seems to me that we're down!"

"We're down in more than one sense," I agreed. "I don't know whether there's any escape from these old sewers, but I'd like to have a try. That door's too jolly thick, though. We couldn't shift it with a crowbar."

Sir Montie nodded.

"It's amazin', dear fellow," he said. "Amazin' that these frightful Chinamen should be down here, right in the heart of London. I don't suppose the police know anythin' about it. We've hit upon the secret of this yellow band of smugglers—an' yet we can't do anythin'."

"That's just the trouble," I said. "If only the Chinks would make a move it would be better. But we're stuck in here, and we don't know what's going to happen. That's the aggravating part of it. What a born idiot I was to venture so near."

"Yes, rather!" said Montie absently.

"Eh?"

"Oh! I was thinkin'!" said Montie with a start. "Frightful sorry, old boy. I really didn't mean to agree that you're a born idiot. We were both in it together, an' I dare say the fault was mine. I might have made a noise, or somethin'. I'm a shockin'ly careless chap, you know."

We continued talking together—mainly for the sake of keeping one another company. We were both feeling very depressed and anxious, but we pretended to be cheerful. We made ourselves believe that an opportunity of escape would soon come. But I, for my part, had many doubts.

I knew that we had stumbled upon the secret retreat of the Chinese gang, and it was scarcely probable that they would allow us to go into the open air once more—to tell our story to the police. It was far more likely that we should be kept prisoners for an indefinite period.

I didn't hope to see anybody again that night; although I said nothing to Montie about it. I was afraid that we should receive no food, even in the morning. Chinese criminals are not very particular with regard to any prisoners they happen to have on their hands. And down in that cellar we were completely at their mercy—with no hope of rescue from the outside world.

But, as it generally happens when one comes to a conclusion, I was wrong. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed before the key turned in the lock of the door. We had heard no sound of any approach, and we both turned expectantly and curiously. The door opened, and the figure of a tall Chinaman was revealed.

He had a lantern in one hand, and a long knife in the other.

"You follow me—savce?" he said, in a low voice. "You vellee clever boys—but you been allee samee too clever this time. So! No keepee you here, my young friends. No safe. You go."

"You're goin' to set us free?" asked Montie, in mild surprise.

"Oh, yes—you see allee light—vellee flee soon," said the Chinaman. "Plenty much killee—the liver."

"Begad!" said Montie. "How frightful! They're goin' to kill us, old boy! What was that he was sayin' about our livers?"

"He wasn't referring to our livers," I

replied. "He meant the river, Montie. We're going to be killed, and then thrown into the Thames. I expect we shall be shoved into a sewer, and the water will carry us down to the river."

"That's frightfully interestin'," said Montie steadily.

"You blave boys—vellee blave," said the Chinaman. "Allee samee, solly to kill you. But you know too muchee. You die. It quicker and more certain. You tellee nothing when you downed."

"I don't suppose we shall tell much," I said calmly. "Well, get busy if you mean to carry out that threat. We can't do anything to stop you—you yellow scoundrel!"

"You comee—savce?"

The Chinaman waved his hand, and we walked out of the stone chamber into the tunnel. There was nobody in sight save our captor. But there was little prospect of getting the better of him, for he kept his knife constantly ready. And a Chinaman, when he strikes, seldom misses.

I expected that we should be taken into another place, where others of the yellow gang were congregated. But this did not happen. We went straight past the openings along the tunnel, until we were seemingly lost.

But, in spite of my meek obedience, I was feeling desperate and reckless. It seemed that we were to be killed in cold blood. Well, I wasn't inclined to peg out without making a fight for it.

To be knifed and then thrown into the river was not a pleasing prospect. It would be far better to make a struggle for life now. One of us, perhaps would succeed in getting away. And that would be a distinct advantage.

So, without the slightest warning, I acted.

Montie and I were being forced along ahead of our captor. His open knife was held point outwards; at the least sign of treachery on our part, that wicked blade would play its deadly part.

There was only one possible chance—and that was a slim one. It is no easy task to trick a Chinaman—and I would never have attempted such a feat if the position had been less desperate.

As I said before, I acted. While walking I abruptly fell headlong to the ground, as though my foot had caught upon a projection. The next second I wriggled over like an eel, grabbed at one of the Chinaman's legs, and pulled with every ounce of my strength—a tremendous, violent jerk.

Crash!

The man fell headlong on to his face. The lantern went one way, and the knife clattered down. My trick had been successful, and I was almost dazed with astonishment. For I had never really hoped that the ruse would work.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

The lantern had not gone out. I snatched it up, and the flickering glare revealed the Chinaman on the floor. He had caught his

head upon the hard stone floor—and he was stunned.

"Dear boy, how did it happen?" panted Montie.

"I don't know—I didn't expect it to happen at all," I replied swiftly. "But that's always the way. The unexpected generally occurs, you know. We've got to bunk—and bunk like mad, too. Come on!"

Montie needed no second bidding. Leaving the lantern behind—after extinguishing it—we dashed away down the tunnel, our way illuminated by my electric torch. We didn't know if we were in the right sewer, and we didn't much care. Our main point was to get away—to get free!

And then, it seemed, our luck deserted us. For, as we turned a bend in the tunnel we almost ran headlong into a yellow-faced figure in a flowing robe. Before we could dodge, or even show fight, the Chinaman seized us.

His grip was like iron, and we were helpless. Breathless as we were, we simply hadn't the physical strength to struggle. All hope left us, and we resigned ourselves to our fate.

"You tly to escape—so?" exclaimed the Chinaman softly. "Vellee foolish, my young friends. You comee with me."

We were forced along the tunnel, prisoners once again. A short minute before our hopes had been raised to the highest pitch. Now they were cast down again. I hardly remember what happened after that.

Everything seemed like a nightmare, and the first really certain thing I knew was that we had arrived at the shaft—the shaft which led up into the courtyard of the school!

I blinked up, amazed; realisation dawning upon me.

"You are taking us up here?" I asked blankly.

"You goee first, English boy," said the Chinaman. "Hullee—no time to waste. And no tlicks. Me friend. Me no harmee you."

"A friend!" I exclaimed huskily. "But—but—"

"No wastee time," said the Chinaman curtly. "Climbee up!"

More bewildered than ever, Montie and I scrambled up the shaft, and at last we stood in the open air, under the stars. I took in a great breath, and wondered if I were still awake.

The Chinaman closed the metal cover of the false drain, and Montie and I looked on in a dull kind of way. Montie was still unable to realise what had occurred. We had been expecting such dreadful things—and we had got our liberty!

"You vellee foolish boys," said the Chinaman severely. "Allee samee, no sense to go along the sewer. In fact, you young rascals, you thoroughly deserve a sound thrashing. You might have been killed!"

Montie and I staggered.

"Begad!" panted my noble chum.

"The guv'nor!" I gasped.

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee, in his natural voice. "I was just coming along to see what I could do—but it seems that you were well on the way to freedom when I found you. You must tell me what happened."

It was some few moments before we could get over our amazement. The "Chinaman" we had run up against was none other than Nelson Lee himself! He had just been coming along to give us a hand—and he had thought that we were doomed!

The guv'nor, we found out, had easily discovered the false drain-cover—for we had left it partially open. Guessing that we had met with misfortune, he had taken the precaution to adopt a disguise before commencing our rescue.

"Yes, Nipper, it was foolish of you to venture so far," he exclaimed, after we had told him all. "But I cannot very well punish you for this escapade, for you have discovered a great deal of valuable information."

"Do you think this yellow band is the gang responsible for the drug smuggling, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"There can be little doubt about that point," replied the guv'nor. "But the case is still far from complete, and you must be very careful in future. Say nothing about this to a soul—I intend to let it drop."

"And you're not going to investigate further?" I asked, staring.

"I was referring to your escapade," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I shall certainly make very close investigations—but I shall do so alone. Now, boys, you must get off to bed at once. And let me advise you to leave this matter quite alone in the future."

A minute later we were hurrying towards the Remove dormitory.

"Leave it alone, eh?" I whispered. "That's likely, isn't it, Montie? I can see a good deal of excitement coming along!"

"It certainly looks like it, dear fellow," said Tregellis-West, yawning. "But at present I want to get to bed. I expect I shall dream of Chinamen an' sewers and frightful looking knives!"

Ten minutes later we were in bed. But before going to sleep I came to the conclusion that our adventures with the drug smuggler were by no means at an end!

THE END.

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INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM an inventor is rescued from cannibals in Central Africa by an exploration party consisting of

FRANK HILLSWORTH, his chum, **MACDONALD GUTHRIE**, both sons of millionaires, their old college friend, **PROFESSOR MONTAGUE PALGRAVE**, a renowned scientist, and **ABBIE**, a burly negro. Gresham tells his benefactors of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space, and in recognition of their services, invites them one and all to accompany him on a voyage to the solar planets. Since none of the party have any home ties and are ready for any adventures, they willingly accept the invitation. They all return to England, where for some months the flying machine, christened the "Solar Monarch," is secretly constructed. At last everything is in readiness for starting. All being aboard, Gresham pulls a lever and the Solar Monarch shoots up into space, heading for their first destination, the moon. Gradually the machine attains the tremendous speed of 2,000 miles an hour, and in a week the moon is reached.

(Now read on.)

In the Hands of Lunar Monsters!

FRANK broke off abruptly, and pointed below. Standing on the moon's surface, and gazing up at them, was the canny Scot himself, apparently uninjured.

Frank stared at him in amazement; but both the professor and Gresham, now that they recollected where they were, knew the cause of the phenomenon.

The latter picked his way to the front.

"There was not the slightest need of this ladder," he remarked; and to Frank's surprise coolly jumped to Mac's side, thirty feet below. But instead of dropping swiftly, he appeared to float downwards, and alighted with scarcely a jar.

"Come on down," he called to the professor and Frank, and in a minute they were

at his side, the latter puzzled and bewildered.

"The cause of this," the inventor explained, "is that on the moon the force of gravity differs greatly from that of the earth. At home a person would fall sixteen feet in a second, whilst here he would only fall a fraction over two. Therefore, a drop such as this takes nearly fifteen seconds to accomplish. Look here."

Gresham gathered himself up, and sprang into the air. Up he went, right to the conning-tower door. Then he turned and smiled down upon them.

"You see, travelling would be a very easy matter here," he said, once more joining them. "What would seem a very heavy load in England would be a mere featherweight on the moon. Now, to come to more important matters, I think it is time we commenced work."

"Not before we explore the country round about here," protested Frank. "I want to see what this deserted-looking place is like first."

"All in good time," smiled Gresham at his eagerness. "However, since I see you so impatient to have a look round, suppose we just walk over to that dark fissure yonder?"

"Good idea!" cried Mac, and without further discussion he led the way to the spot indicated. The ground over which they trod was unlike any they had ever seen. It was entirely composed of rock and lava, and here and there little patches of vegetation grew. The leaves of these plants were almost black, and very peculiar in shape. It was a mystery to them how the stuff thrived at all, for there was no soil in which it could gain moisture or nutriment. The object to which they were making their way was a very steep hill—almost a precipice—which rose sheer from the surrounding country. This mountain—probably an extinct volcano—was split in twain, and a huge fissure, some forty feet in width, was thus formed.

When they reached it, Frank and Mac in advance, the two young men peered before them curiously. The place certainly looked far from inviting. Inside, the two cliffs rose up perpendicular, and the explorers found, for the first time, some signs of soil. This

proved to be very similar to the soil on earth, the only difference being that it was a trifle darker in hue.

As they progressed hardly a word was spoken. One and all were so intent on their surroundings that conversation seemed unnecessary. When they had traversed the first twenty yards the fissure commenced to get narrower, and presently they found it difficult to see for more than ten yards ahead.

"Don't you think it would be advisable to retreat from this place," said Gresham suddenly, his voice echoing eerily around them. "It is quite evident we cannot go further without the aid of lights."

"We'll just have a look round this corner," said Frank, who was foremost, "and then we'll go back to the Solar Monarch. Ugh, it the moon's like this all over, I reckon we'd better be mighty sharp in getting off. I've no desire to make a lengthy stay here. Eh, Mac?"

"Weel," returned the Scot, "if, as ye say, this is a specimen of the whole, I'm for agreein' with ye. We havena sae much as sighted a body yet, an' it's my belief we winna. The mune's dead as a doornail."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you're right, Mac," remarked Professor Palgrave. "What little we have seen of the place, so far, certainly tends to make your supposition correct. It is very strange. I was almost positive, in my own mind, that we should discover various kinds of living beings."

"Then, by the general look of things at present," laughed Frank, "it appears that you were wrong. Hallo!" he added, suddenly coming to a halt. "What the deuce is this?"

There was every reason for his sudden stoppage. The fissure at this point came to an abrupt stop. So far, high above them, the blue sky had been visible. Now, however, this changed, for in front of them the opening of a cavern yawned. It did not look inviting in the least, and it is scarcely surprising that Frank momentarily hung back.

"I dinna think we'll venture inside of that place until we've got mair licht," muttered Mac. "It's no' a pleasant place at any time, but in the dark it's worse. I vote for gettin' awa'."

"Not a bad suggestion," put in Gresham, "for, seriously, it would be difficult to find a more desolate and dismal——"

His utterance was cut short by a weird noise, practically indescribable, which apparently emanated from the interior of the cavern. Faint it was at first, then it rose higher and higher. For a moment the explorers tried to make themselves believe that it was the wind. This idea was soon dispelled, however, and they glanced at one another in suspense and awe.

Suddenly the sound ceased, and everything remained quiet again. It seemed to be too quiet—menacingly quiet, in fact.

Gresham was the first to break the silence, and when he spoke his voice seemed to be huskier than usual.

"I can offer no explanation to the strange sounds which we have all just heard, but I

think you will agree with me that it is high time we quitted this forsaken spot."

"Yes, by Jove, it's getting on my nerves," exclaimed Frank, glancing over his shoulder. "I wonder what on earth that could have been, though? I should like to find out——"

Even while he was speaking the hair-raising noises repeated themselves. This time, however, they were much louder, and rose occasionally to a weird shriek. It was quite evident that some kind of animal had taken up its quarters in that cavern, and was voicing its objection to being disturbed. The four adventurers were not at all anxious to make its acquaintance. In the darkness of the fissure it was distinctly disconcerting. It would take them quite five minutes to reach the open daylight again, and anything might happen in that short space.

Being in total ignorance of what the cave held gave the situation many added horrors. There is nothing quite so nerve-shattering and terrifying as the unknown. And yet, for all they knew, the creature which was proclaiming its presence so lustily might be harmless and small. On the other hand, there was every likelihood of its being large and distinctly harmful, and there was no sense whatever in leaving the matter to chance. So, taking the best course, they all made haste to reach the exit.

Before they had taken a couple of steps, however, something—in the half-light they could not see what—emerged from the cavern with a strange, shuffling motion. They all wheeled round, knowing not what to expect, and faced the thing. It appeared to be of immense size—the shape was quite indistinguishable—and out of one portion something round glowed luminously—evidently an eye. The crew of the Solar Monarch were undecided how to act—fly for their lives, or face the thing and endeavour to overcome it.

The question was decided for them a second later, for the weird Lunar creature, again uttering its terrifying cry, bore down upon the little band.

As the Lunar being came towards the explorers Gresham saw in a moment that it would be the height of folly to retreat. The only alternative was to face it and overcome it.

"Draw your revolvers," cried the inventor, "and fire at the brute. Don't stop to think—shoot! It's the safest and best way."

Now that Frank and Mac had something tangible before them to tackle, all their nervousness left them. True, it was impossible to distinguish what it was they were attacking, but it was something alive and solid. They all drew their pistols, and, just as the Lunarian was upon them, fired.

In that confined space the reports sounded deafening and the object of their attack staggered back. Not that it seemed hurt, however, for it still stood there, its shape indefinable, and its one eye gleaming balefully. As the echo of the shots died away

(Continued on p. III of cover.)

that weird cry again rang out. This time, however, it had a different note in it, and it was of much longer duration. It sounded almost as if the creature was speaking. And, indeed, this evidently was the case, for almost immediately the call was answered by several others of a like nature. Before the inventor and his companions could wholly realise it, a trio of monsters, like unto the one in front of them, had appeared in their rear.

"We're trapped!" cried the professor, in a wild voice—a voice utterly unlike his own. "I thought what it would be! This fool's journey from the earth will mean our death. Good-bye boys! There is no hope of escaping the clutches of these fierce creatures!"

Frank gave Professor Palgrave a swift, curious glance. Surely this cowardly speech had not come from the lips of his old science-master? It seemed incredible. But Frank realised that the professor was in one of his moody fits, that his nerves were undoubtedly unstrung; and when in that state he could be a different person to his usual self.

The young explorer had no time to think more, for just then a stifled shriek came from Mac's lips, to be followed by an audible exclamation from Gresham. Frank looked at them in consternation. He could just manage to see his two companions in the grasp of what seemed to be long, octopus-like tentacles. Before he could see more, something grasped him round the body—something which seemed to be made of steel, and which he could not even move. When he struggled the band tightened until his ribs felt like cracking. Suddenly he felt limp, and the grip relaxed its hold to such an extent that he could breathe in comfort once more.

All at once his legs were swept from under him. He closed his eyes, expecting every moment to be his last. But still nothing of the sort happened, and still he lay tightly clutched, until he realised that he was being borne bodily along. He opened his eyes. All was pitch darkness, but he could hear the strange shuffle of their captors as they progressed.

"Mac," called Frank, in the hope that his chum was still alive—"I say, Mac, old man, where the deuce have you got to?"

"Hoots," came a low voice through the blackness, "is it alive ye are then, Frank."

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?"

"Weel, I'm no' sae fond o' being carried aboot like a babby," Mac complained. "It's mair than I can make oot. How is it that we're not all kilt?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you. You ought to be thankful that you've escaped unhurt. I wonder where the professor and Gresham are?"

After a moment's calling in a louder voice, Frank ascertained that their two companions were following at some little distance in the rear—also unharmed. What sort of creatures were these, who simply took them prisoners

and did not even try to injure them?—notwithstanding the fact that one of their number had been apparently riddled with revolver-bullets? There was no doubt at all that all four shots had entered the Lunarian's body, and yet it appeared to take not the slightest notice, and also seemed to bear no malice.

Frank fell to wondering what Abbie would do when they failed to put in an appearance. He could imagine the negro's consternation. He also wondered how their captors could find their way so easily in the darkness. No doubt they were underground creatures, who could not see in the light of day. Frank remembered now, when coming up the fissure, a dark hole in one of the cliff-faces. It was doubtless out of this that the Lunar being's companions had emerged, on hearing its call.

The whole affair was weird and uncanny in the extreme. Once or twice Frank pinched himself to ascertain whether he was dreaming it all or not. The dead silence of the journey was getting on his nerves; nothing could be heard but the strange shuffling sound which accompanied their unwelcome companions' progress. They did not even converse with one another—for it was evident that the monsters could talk in a certain kind of way—otherwise how was the call answered so swiftly?

It seemed to the helpless prisoners that they were never going to stop. Were they being taken to a lair, where they would be killed and devoured? That seemed the most probable explanation. All four of the travellers had given up hope of ever seeing Abbie or the Solar Monarch again. While Frank was wondering what sort of a death was in store for him, he became aware of a change in the blackness.

For a moment he could not decide what it was. For one thing, it did not appear so completely oppressing. For another, he thought he could distinguish signs of the tunnel walls as he was carried onwards. This conviction was strengthened as time went on, for Mac, too, called out and inquired if anyone knew where the "licht" was issuing from. It was more than Frank could do to answer him, for he was equally puzzled. And as they went on so the weird light grew in intensity—stronger and brighter, until at last Frank could make out a shadowy form walking along beside him—the form of Mac's bearer. The light was not strong enough yet to allow him to clearly see the shape of the thing. Suddenly Mac's voice reached his strained ears.

"Can ye make oot what the heggars are like?" he inquired, in a husky voice. "Mon, we're in the devil's own hands, I'm thinkin'."

"Not quite so bad as that, Mac," replied Frank, with a show of cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "There is no telling; we may get away with whole skins, after all."

"Ay; but I'm a-doubtin' it—Gum! What d'ye call that?"

(To be continued.)

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