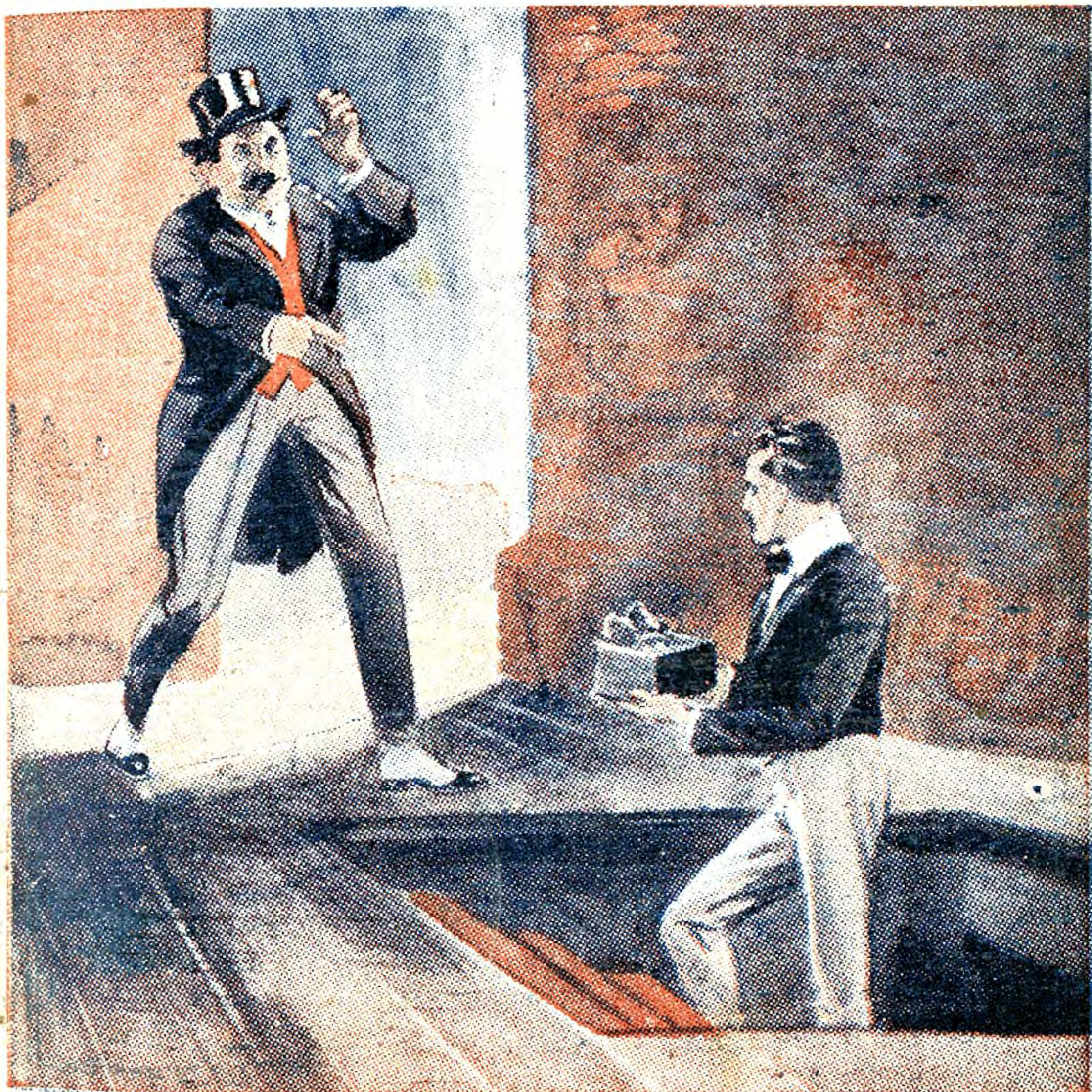


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

HOLDING THE FORT.

BANNINGTON GRANGE was not quite so deserted as usual.

The old haunted house, situated right in the centre of the Bannington High Street, was now in the process of being demolished. Work, as a matter of fact, had only just commenced—and it was destined that the old building should be pulled completely down, and a new, model, super-cinema was to be erected on the site.

Solomon Levi, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, was chiefly responsible for the scheme—his father, Mr. Isaac Levi had taken it up, had formed a company, and was personally superintending the operations. Up to a certain point, everything had gone smoothly.

The property had been purchased, the plans of the new cinema had been approved and passed by the local Council, and a big army of workmen had been engaged to do the job.

But now, less than a week after work had been commenced, trouble had come. And Bannington Grange had been the scene of some exciting and rather thrilling adventures.

It was now night-time—between nine and ten o'clock. And the old house, instead of being dark and still, was quite the opposite. Lights gleamed from many

windows, and the sound of voices floated out to the passers-by in the High Street. They were boyish voices, and the worthy inhabitants of Bannington were considerably startled by the events which had been taking place.

Inside the old house, the scene was not quite so cheerless as one might have imagined. For, in many of the big rooms roaring fires were burning—the chimneys, for the most part, were still intact, and fires were possible. Candles were burning by the score, and there were plenty of blankets, and a great abundance of food and drink.

To be exact, over twenty members of the Remove of St. Frank's were camping out.

I was there, of course—and also Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, my two chums of Study C. The others included Handforth and Co., Pitt, De Valerie, Jack Grey, Christine and Co., Fatty Little, and Solomon Levi. We were rather enjoying the adventure—in fact, we revelled in it.

The new term at St. Frank's had not yet commenced—and our time was our own. But, within two days, we should find it necessary to arrive at the old school—for the new term commenced very soon now. But, for the present, we were rather enjoying this adventure and we were helping Levi.

"Well, it ain't so bad here, after all," remarked Handforth, as he sat in front

of one of the blazing fires. We're teaching these Bannington people a lesson, anyhow. Staying the giddy night in the haunted house—what? If any ghosts appears here, I'll dot him one on the nose!"

"I don't think you'll see any ghost to-night, Handy," I grinned. "The ghost has been laid—as everybody knows."

"Old Webb!" said Reginald Pitt. "I say, that was a show up for him, wasn't it? It was a ripping idea of Mr. Lee's to collar Webb, and expose him publicly."

"Rather!" said Tommy Watson. "But our troubles ain't over yet, my sons. It's very doubtful if we shall get through the night without being attacked."

"That's why we're here," said Handforth. "We're guarding the fort—we're holding the castle against all onslaughts. But I'm blessed if I can properly understand the position. Shall we have to remain in here long—or will the trouble soon blow over?"

"I think I'd better explain the situation," I said, rising to my feet, and addressing the crowd. "You all know the main facts, but it won't do any harm to go over them again. As you fellows know, the workmen who were employed on this job were scared—they believed that evil spirits were at work, and they left their jobs, and cleared out."

"Silly asses!" said Handforth.

"Well, in a way, they were silly asses," I agreed. "But you must admit, Handy, that there was a certain amount of provocation. These workmen are, for the most part, simple sort of chaps, and rather superstitious. And when all sorts of mysterious things happened, they believed that spirits were responsible. As a matter of fact, it was Webb who did all the dirty business—Webb and his paid spies. They did it with the deliberate intention of holding up the work on the job—and Webb succeeded."

"The beastly rotter!" said Pitt. "He deserves to be boiled in oil!"

"Yes, Webb is a rascal," I agreed. "Being the proprietor of the only cinema in Bannington, he is terribly put out because this new cinema is to be erected. It will squash him completely—it will drive him out of business. And he has chosen foul means in order to gain the upper hand. Of course, he hasn't succeeded—and he won't succeed.

Foul methods never brought anybody any good!"

"Rather not!"

"Webb, of course, is being financed by Mr. Hooker J. Ryan," I proceeded. "They're a pair, I think—a pair of scoundrels. And it was Webb's idea to hold up all the work on this job by frightening the men out. Meanwhile, he is enlarging his own cinema, and improving it in every way. But if he hopes to spoil Mr. Levi's chances of success, I'm afraid Mr. Webb will be disappointed. Because this cinema is going to be built—it's going to be the finest picture house in the whole district."

"Hear, hear!" said Solomon Levi.

"We've all got a particular interest in this place," I went on. "We've bought shares in the company, and we feel a kind of personal regard for the new cinema which is to be built. Therefore when Levi telegraphed to us all, asking us to come down, we rushed to his assistance."

"You acted like bricks, believe me!" said Levi, nodding. "It was jolly decent of you!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We're enjoying ourselves!"

"Levi sent his telegrams because all the workmen had walked out," I went on. "So we came down to carry on until a new batch of workmen had been engaged. This new batch will probably arrive to-morrow, and then everything will be in full swing again. But, in the meantime, some rather startling events have been taking place."

"And some more startling ones are coming, by all appearances," remarked Pitt grimly.

I nodded.

"I believe you," I said. "The workmen here, for the most part, are a decent lot. But there are some bad ones, too—a number of young hooligans who haven't got sense enough to see the thing in its true light. And they declared war against us. Because they've lost their jobs—solely owing to their own action—they unjustly vent their wrath upon us because we happen to be working in the building. Our work doesn't amount to much, in any case—we've simply been pottering about, keeping things going, really for the sake of appearances. But every little helps, after all. And these workmen—these hooligans, worked themselves up to a

fine pitch this afternoon, and attacked the building."

"Meaning to get in, and cause a lot of damage," said Levi. "Of course, they couldn't hurt the building much—it's being demolished. But there are plenty of tools here, and all sorts of equipment. And these rotters would have destroyed everything they could lay their hands on. By my life! It was a bit of a fight while it lasted—but we drove them off!"

"Yes, we drove them off all right," I agreed. "Cold water isn't such a bad weapon, after all. We dampened the ardour of these local roughs, and they were driven off, before they could enter the place!"

"But I can't understand why they attacked at all!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "We've never done them any harm—neither has Mr. Levi. They were employed here, and they chucked up the jobs of their own accord—they weren't sacked. They ain't even striking for anything. They simply threw down their tools and walked out!"

"They're mad—that's what it amounts to," I said. "They're mad with themselves for having been such fools. After Webb was exposed as the ghost—after everybody knew the truth—these men all wanted to come back to work. But it was too late then—because other workmen had been engaged. And, because of that, these fellows think that they've got a grievance—they have been making out that they've been badly treated, and all manner of rubbish like that. The majority of the workmen have taken the thing properly—they know jolly well that they are to blame for their own position. But these fellows—these hooligans—are enraged at their own silliness, and they are venting their rage upon us. That's only because we resisted their attacks, and drove them off. It's practically certain that we shan't be left alone for long—and it's up to every one of us to keep a strict watch."

"Hear, hear!"

"Dear old boys, there will be some frightful trouble before long—there will, really!" said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "I don't know why it is, but I've got a feelin' that there will be some excitement."

"We've all got that feeling, old man," I grinned. "But we don't mind—we're ready for 'em!"

"Rather!"

"Let 'em all come—the Remove is waiting!"

"Hurrah!"

Certainly, the fellows were very optimistic and cheerful. As I had said, we were holding the fort. After that attack in the afternoon—the attack that had failed—we had decided to come into the old house in force, and remain there—right throughout the night. It was the only safe way of guarding it. There were police on duty, of course, but a handful of police would not be much good in holding back a hooligan mob. So we were within the building, waiting for the attack.

These ruffianly workmen, enraged by the fact that they had lost their jobs, were determined to vent their wrath upon the building where they had been lately working. They had fondly imagined that they would break in, and they would be able to do as they pleased. But the Remove had said otherwise—and the Remove had driven the attack off.

And, to make things quite certain, we had now come into the old house, with the intention of spending the night there—in warding off any attacks that might be made.

It was quite likely, of course, that our night would be undisturbed. The hooligans, finding that we were there in force, would hesitate before coming to the attack. But it was just as well to be on the safe side.

There was not much fear of any of the fellows feeling lonely or nervous in the old haunted house. For there were lights everywhere, and cheerful fires, too. And there were so many of us that it was quite impossible to feel nervous.

One of our first considerations had been to improve our methods of defence. During that first attack we had used water mainly—and this had been poured down upon the heads of the attackers by the pailful. But this method was clumsy—and decidedly unsatisfactory if it came to a rush.

Now, however, things were different.

Water was still laid on in the old building, and there were a good many taps—two or three upstairs, and others downstairs. And we had obtained several long lengths of thick garden hose. This was fitted up in readiness, and several windows were provided with hoses. Thus, if an attack came suddenly, it was only

necessary to turn the water on, and we should be able to send drenching columns of water over the enemy.

In addition, a dozen juniors had been busy for a couple of hours in manufacturing ammunition of a different kind—bags of soot. A large supply of paper bags were filled with soot, and then tightly closed. These made very excellent missiles to throw—missiles which would confuse the enemy without doing them any harm. A bag of soot, into one's face, is not extremely pleasant—in fact, it is decidedly disconcerting.

Upon the whole, we were feeling well satisfied—and we had decided to sleep in shifts—a third of us would sleep, and the other two-thirds would remain on the watch, and we should take it in turns to slumber. In this way, the old house would be guarded constantly throughout the night, by a large force.

I was not due to have any sleep until the early hours of the morning—to be exact, until five o'clock. I had chosen this way myself, for I preferred to be up and active throughout the night, in case an attack took place. Levi himself would carry out the same plan, for he was rather anxious.

"It's jolly decent of you chaps to help in this way," said the Jewish boy. "Without you we couldn't have done anything in the way of defeating these ruffians—"

"That's all right, my son," I interrupted. "There's no need to thank us. As a matter of fact, we're enjoying the whole adventure."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "But I'd like to punch somebody—I don't much care for this waiting game. My motto is this—if the enemy doesn't come to us, the best thing we can do is to go to the enemy."

"Anything for a scrap, eh?" I chuckled. "But that won't do, Handy. It would be impossible, in any case. How do we know where the enemy are—how do we know who the enemy are, if it comes to that? A certain number of these workmen are hooligans, but we don't know them individually. And if they attack the Grange to-night, they will probably do so later on—when they think we are off our guard. I've got a pretty keen idea in my head that Mr. Webb is behind all this trouble—he's got paid agitators on the job, inciting the men to riot. I don't suppose all these men are ruffians."

Solomon Levi nodded.

"You've just about hit it, Nipper," he remarked. "Some of the men—the leaders—are ruffians, but the others are merely hotheads, who are being misled. After all, these rioters are the minority. The bulk of the workmen have taken the thing quietly and sensibly."

"Yes, but we've got to deal with these disturbers," I said. "And even a small number of men can cause a lot of trouble, Levi. We've got to be strictly on our guard, don't forget."

Some of the fellows were soon fast asleep, and the others remained on the alert. But there was no sign of this from outside. Anybody watching the house would have declared that we had all gone to sleep, leaving the house to take care of itself. For we only spoke in whispers, and we did not show ourselves at the windows. All was quiet and still. And the hours passed slowly and without incident.

But it was not destined that the night should pass uneventfully.

Two o'clock had just boomed out from the old Bannington Church, and the whole town was quiet and sleeping. A good many of the watchers in the Grange were very tired and heavy-eyed, and quite a number of the fellows had declared that this watching business was quite unnecessary, and that it would be sensible if we all went to sleep.

And just then the excitement started.

Only a small percentage of the juniors were actually on watch. These were posted at various parts of the half-demolished old building. For example, two were perched upon a portion of the roof which had not yet been pulled down. This section of the roof was flat, and it was quite easy for the juniors to remain there without being seen—and they were in perfect safety. It was a cold job, of course, but they were well wrapped up.

Other fellows were posted at windows, in such positions that they could not be seen from outside. Meanwhile, the bulk of the defenders were in two of the lower rooms, ready to give battle to the enemy, if necessary.

There were cheerful fires burning in the rooms—but the windows were tightly shuttered, so that no ray of light could escape into the night outside. And so, to all outward appearances, the

old building was deserted and unprotected. At least, it seemed that the defenders were all fast asleep.

I was doing my best to keep the fellows awake and active. I was talking to them about football and other sports—the chances during the next term, and topics of that description. And then, suddenly, the door opened, and Church came in, looking excited.

"Buck up, you chaps," he whispered. "They're coming!"

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

"They're coming!" repeated Church. "Dozens of them—creeping up at the rear, and they'll attack in another two or three minutes."

"Right!" I said briskly. "Well, you fellows, you know what you've got to do—you know your posts. Get to them as quickly as possible, and be ready at the instant."

A buzz of excitement went through the crowd. Those fellows who had been nodding off became fully awake in a moment. And just then, before any of us could make a move for the doorway, there came the sounds of a lively commotion outside, at the rear. Shouts made themselves heard, sharp commands, and then there were the sounds of much scuffling.

"By George!" shouted Handforth, reckless of caution. "They've started! Let's rush out, you chaps——"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" I broke in. "Nobody is rushing out—our task is to stop here—inside—and to defend the house."

The next moment all the fellows were hurrying to their posts—every boy had been given a certain position, and he knew exactly what he had to do. Therefore there was no confusion. I had planned it all out beforehand, and I did not wish any hitch to occur at the crucial moment. Success or failure depended upon briskness of action when the time arrived.

And the time had arrived now!

My own position was at the bath-room window, on the first floor. Tommy Watson was with me, and Reginald Pitt. And we were armed with one of the hose pipes.

Watson and Pitt hurried to the window, and leaned out, staring downwards into the grounds. These, of course, were littered with piles of brick-

work, sand, and all sorts of rubbish of that description. I gave my full attention to the hose pipe. Seeing that it was in order, and that it was ready for immediate action.

At first, Tommy Watson and Pitt could see very little. For, outside, it was gloomy and dark. But, after a moment or two, their eyesight grew accustomed to the night—and they could see what was happening.

At least thirty men were rushing towards the old house. Some of them were battling with the police. And it was the police who had raised the alarm. Truncheons were out and blows were being exchanged. But the police force, after all, was a very small one—not more than a dozen men all told. And only about half of these were in the rear of the building. Consequently, this fight was a very one-sided one—six policemen against nearly three dozen men.

I knew exactly what had happened.

These hooligans had crept up quietly. They had planned everything in advance, and had rushed the old building without warning—hoping to gain an entrance before any defensive methods could be adopted.

The police did their best, and eight or nine men were knocked out and detained. But the others managed to get by, and they came charging at the old house in a grim, determined fashion. They were rioters, and, probably, they had been drinking heavily before embarking upon this adventure. They were reckless and ready for any act of hooliganism.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Pitt. "By Jingo! A good few of them, too—we shall have our work cut out——"

"Let them come right up close," I exclaimed. "They're the orders of the day, remember. Let them come close, and then we'll start the business. Cold water first, and then the soot bags. Get 'em ready, you chaps—I'm seeing after the water supply."

There was no need for any concealment now. The battle had commenced, and it promised to be rather a grim one. For the enemy had come in force—and, what was more, they had armed themselves. They were carrying sticks, stones, and all manner of objects. And it was their intention, evidently, to break into the house, and to gain pos-

session of it. But their task was not such an easy one as they had probably imagined. For, just as the men were making headlong for the rear door, and for the windows, several hissing streams of water came surging downwards from the upper windows.

Swish! swish!

The water hissed down, icily cold, drenching the foremost of the rioters. They gasped, spluttered, and beat a hasty retreat.

"Let 'em have it!" roared Handforth, from one of the other windows. "That's the style you chaps! Are they going to whack us?"

"No!" roared a score of voices.

"Good!" yelled Handforth. "We'll hold the fort——"

"You young brats!" shouted one of the men from below. "We'll have you out of that place before long! We'll teach you to——"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "If you want to pitch us out—come and try to do it! You'll have your dirty hands full!"

"Now let 'em have the soot!"

"Good!"

The water was still hissing down in continuous streams, and this had stopped the advance of the attackers. And now, from various windows, and even from the roof, dozens and dozens of bags, filled with soot, went straggling down. They were thrown in the manner of hand grenades, and they created complete confusion among the rioters. Several of the hooligans received those bags of soot in their faces. The bags were not particularly strong, and, naturally, they burst—smothering the men with black soot from head to foot. Many of the men were wet, and the dry soot breaking upon their faces and bodies created absolute consternation. Some of the men backed away completely, ready to give up the game—for they had not bargained for such resistance; but there were some among them who were more courageous.

"Now then, chaps, let's charge!" shouted one of the leaders. "We ain't going to be beat by this handful of boys—not likely! We've only got to make one charge, and we'll get inside—then we'll show 'em! Now then—all together!"

Two of the other men were shouting the same instructions, and their words

had effect. Once again the crowd charged.

The bags of soot still continued to descend, and the water hissed down pitilessly. It was a defence which the attackers could not break down.

Only for a short time did the hooligans continue their efforts. Then, drenched to the skin, black from head to foot, and wild with fury, they broke ranks and fled. They fled helter-skelter—many of them running into the arms of the police. At rear of the house, at all events, the attack had been a dismal failure.

And the same state of affairs existed in front.

Only a minor attack had been made here—for the front of the house was flush with the High Street, and the hooligans had not cared much for the task of attacking right in the open. However, some, perhaps more drunken than the rest, had done so. They had met with the same failure—they had retired at length soaked through and through and covered with soot.

A great many people in the High Street had been awakened by the noise, and when I glanced out of one of the front windows, I saw that the road was crowded with people—many of them hastily attired in overcoats—and very little else. And the police were busy, too—struggling with black, grimy prisoners.

Without the slightest doubt, the Remove had been victorious.

We had held our own against the rioters.

CHAPTER II.

A DASTARDLY SCHEME.

MR. ISAAC LEVI smiled. "Well, boys, I'm sorry you're going—very sorry indeed!" he exclaimed pleasantly. "You have been of great assistance, and I must thank you heartily for everything that you have done——"

"Oh, that's all right, sir!"

"Only too pleased to have been useful, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Don't mention it. Mr. Levi!"

"We did it for Solly!"

Mr. Levi smiled again.

"Yes, I quite know that," he said.

"You came to Solomon's assistance like the true friends you are. And, having arrived here, you at once set to work to protect the Grange from the rioters. It is not necessary for me to say how well you succeeded—because you know that better than I do."

"We'd like to stop, sir," said Handforth. "Nothing better, in fact."

"Rather!" said Fatty Little. "It's a beastly shame, the new term starting to-day! We sha'n't get half such good grub at St. Frank's as we get at the Grapes Hotel! By chutney! They do treat you well here!"

I chuckled.

"They wouldn't treat you very well unless Mr. Levi had given special orders, Fatty," I said. "As Handforth says, we'd all like to stop—but it can't be done. The new term at St. Frank's commences to-day, and we've got to go—duty calls. Or, in other words, if we don't show up, there'll be the dickens of a bust up with the Head!"

We were all standing outside the Grapes Hotel. And we were all attired in our overcoats, and we carried our bags. In short, we were departing—we were leaving Bannington for St. Frank's. For to-day the new term commenced, and all the fellows would be back at the old school. It was necessary for us to be there, too—or there would be trouble. But, after all, our task had been performed, and it was no longer necessary for us to mount guard over the old Grange.

The new workmen were on the job—men who had been brought from other towns. They were a decent body of men, by the look of them—they worked hard, and with a will. There were hundreds of them—a regular horde.

The contractors, acting upon Mr. Levi's orders, had done the thing thoroughly. Not a moment was to be lost—the new Cinema was to be built within the shortest space of time possible. And, therefore, a perfect swarm of workmen were put on the job. They were being paid good wages, too, and the work was proceeding rapidly. Such activity, in fact, had never before been seen in the sleepy old town of Bannington. Building contracts, here, were as

a rule, fulfilled in a leisurely, sleepy kind of fashion. Mr. Isaac Levi's job was being performed at the rush. It was one constant care, from dawn until darkness. And, within a few days, a night shift would be got to work—and then the building would go on continuously, without a stop. In this way, Mr. Levi hoped to have the new Cinema built within only a very few weeks.

And, of course, it was quite useless for the Remove fellows to remain. They would have been in the way.

But we were all very satisfied with ourselves, for we had performed our set task with full honours. And many of the rioters, who had lately attacked the Grange, were regretting their hasty action behind barred windows.

But it must not be imagined that all trouble was at an end.

For, by what I could see, this was not the case. Many of the men who had been thrown out of work by the arrival of these new toilers were going about the town uttering threats, and making themselves generally noisy. Of course, a great deal of this talk could be ignored. But there were still quite a number of worthless, good for nothing hooligans, who would make trouble if they only received the slightest chance.

Solomon Levi was rather anxious about it, and he did not mind saying so. But his father assured him that every precaution would be taken, and it was not likely that any further attacks would be made upon the Grange. The excitement had died down now, and it was extremely improbable that there would be any more disturbances.

And so we all went to St. Frank's, quite satisfied with ourselves.

When we arrived in a body, we found that a good many other juniors were there. And the old school was beaming with life. It was a fine, clear day, inclined to get frosty, and the old school was looking at its best, with the sunlight glinting on the grey stones, and upon the ivy-covered tower.

Mr. Josh Cuttle, the bow-legged porter, was much in evidence. The first day of the term was always a day of excessive hard work for the school porter, and Mr. Cuttle was bustling about in his green apron, perspiring freely.

He greeted us with a gloomy sigh.

"There was parcels, there was trunks,

and there was bags!" he exclaimed, in melancholy tones. "They was arriving every minute of the day, and they was getting heavier, too. Why was they getting heavier? Ask me! Because my muscles was becoming strained—an' when a man's muscles was strained they wasn't as strong as they was afore!"

"Which was logic!" grinned Tommy Watson.

"Ask me!" said Reginald Pitt, pleasantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter, Cuttle-fish?" enquired Handforth politely. "Carrying bags and trunks will do you good."

"Ask me!" muttered Mr. Cuttle. "It wasn't my way to be pessimistic, young gents—I was always of a cheerful frame of mind—"

"Quite so!" said Reginald Pitt. "About as cheerful as an executioner!"

"There was trouble coming!" said Mr. Cuttle, shaking his head, and looking at us gloomily. "Mark my words, young gents—there was trouble coming. How do I know there was trouble coming? Ask me! Because all you boys was back at the school—and where boys was, there was trouble. But there was going to be extra big trouble this term. Only last night I had a dream. It was a dream which fairly set my blood curdling."

Mr. Cuttle paused and a look of pleasant remembrance came into his eyes.

"Ask me what that dream was!" he exclaimed. "Ask me! It was a dream which few men don't have! There was blood, young gents—there was blood everywhere. And there was fighting. And not only fighting, but there was fire—and water! And my dreams was peculiar, young gents—and I give you a warning. Be careful this term—and that was a good tip. When I was dreaming of blood and fire and water—then it was bad times ahead! Mebbe you won't believe me—mebbe you won't take no notice. But you'll see, and then you'll remember!"

And, still shaking his head in rather a pleased fashion, Mr. Cuttle went on his way—presumably to obtain more parcels and bags and trunks.

"Cheery old bird!" remarked Handforth. "Not that I take any notice of him, you fellows. And if we should care twopence about his fatheaded dreams. As for trouble, that doesn't concern me in

the least. I sha'n't be very sorry if there is trouble—it will help to pass the monotony of the term. This term's always a pretty rotten one—beastly weather, and all the rest of it."

We passed across the Triangle, and mounted the steps of the Ancient House. In the lobby, a group of juniors were standing. Owen major and Hubbard and Armstrong looked at us, and their gaze was a curious one.

"What's all this we've been hearing about you chaps?" demanded Owen major. "You've been up to some giddy old larks in Bannington, haven't you?"

"Fighting, and all that sort of thing!" said Hubbard.

"Oh, we've been having a first class time," said Solomon Levi. "These chaps came to my rescue, you know—it's about the new cinema that's being built in Bannington. At least, it will be built before long—as soon as the old Grange has been pulled down."

"That'll be about six years time!" said Hubbard. "We sha'n't see this giddy picture palace until next year!"

"Don't you think so?" enquired the Jewish boy, smiling. "Well, believe me, you've made a mistake. This new Cinema will be built, and it will be opened to the public before two months have elapsed! Before this term ends, we shall be seeing first class picture shows in our giddy picture theatre."

"Rats!" said Armstrong. "It can't be done!"

"Well, I'm not going to argue," said Levi. "But you'll see everything in good time."

Just then, Chambers, of the Fifth, entered the lobby, and he paused, regarding the Removites severely. Chambers thought a great deal of himself—probably the only person of that opinion—and it was a habit of his to treat the juniors as though they were so many specks of dirt.

"Oh, so here you are?" said Chambers sourly. "What's all this I've been hearing about the disgraceful affair at Bannington?"

"We're not responsible for what you hear, my son," I replied cheerfully.

"Now then—no sauce!" said Chambers curtly. "You know very well what I mean, you young bounder! I'll bet you were one of the principal ring-leaders. Lowering the tone of the school—that's what it's doing!"

"Rats!"

"Mind your own giddy business!"

"Dragging the name of St. Frank's into the dust!" went on Chambers. "A fine thing—I must say! St. Frank's kids going about in corduroys, and acting like workmen! It'll take years for the school to live down a blot of that kind. Every one of you ought to be expelled—then, if I had my way, you'd be birched as well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Chambers!" said Handforth. "Anything more to say, eh—because, if it's anything impertinent, I may be inclined to dot you one on the nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chambers glared.

"I don't know why it is, but you juniors seem to get more cheeky every term!" he exclaimed severely. "You've got to remember that respect is due to a senior—from you kids. Respect—do you understand? Or are you too jolly heathen to know plain English? I'm a senior—and if you don't show me the proper respect, you will——"

"Good!" said Handforth. "Come on, you chaps—let's show him proper respect!"

"Good egg!"

"On the bull, you chaps!"

Chambers backed away rather hastily, for a dozen juniors were advancing upon him. The Fifth Former suddenly realised that he had placed himself in an awkward predicament, for he had no means of escape. And, even if he had had the means of escape, he would not have used them. For it was below his dignity to flee from a pack of Removites. He tried to freeze the juniors with another glare.

"Now then—stand back!" he said sharply. "If you dare to lay your grubby fingers on me—— Hi! Now then—what the deuce——"

Before Chambers could say anything further, he was seized. He was whirled into the air by a dozen willing hands, and he descended to the hard floor of the lobby with a bang.

Bump!

The Fifth Former bumped three times, and he howled in a most undignified manner.

"Yow—yaroooh!" he bellowed "You—you young beggars! Lemme go——"

"We're just showing you proper respect!" said Handforth sweetly. "What's

that bag you've got in your hand? You don't want that, surely?"

Chambers had been carrying a somewhat large paper bag—and this bag contained chocolate-coated cream buns. Chambers had purchased them in the village, in readiness for tea. But it was destined that those cream buns should not be used in the ordinary, orthodox fashion.

According to Handforth, they were put to a better use.

The leader of Study D. whirled the bag aloft, and then brought it down with all his strength upon the top of the luckless Fifth Former's head. The bag burst, the cream buns burst, and Chambers sat in the centre of the lobby looking somewhat peculiar. His head had vanished—also his face. And, in lieu of these useful articles, appeared a conglomerated mass of chocolate, cream, and pastry. And Chambers' clothing was not particularly improved.

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Groooh!" spluttered the Fifth Former. "Gug-gug-gug!"

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "I quite agree with you, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've never seen cream buns put to a better use!" chuckled Reginald Pitt. Fatty Little, who had come up, was nearly crying.

"It's a waste—a wicked, beastly waste!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Look—look at all those buns! Simply chucked away—and they looked beauties, too! Great doughnuts! Just fancy, splashing all those lovely pastries on top of Chambers' head!"

"Well, he'd probably bought them for himself—so he's got them!" said Handforth. "He asked for trouble—and he got that, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but you needn't have used cream buns!" howled Fatty Little. "Chambers asked for it, I admit—but why the dickens couldn't you have used mud—or something of that sort?"

I chuckled.

"I've got an idea that Chambers prefers the cream buns!" I remarked. "It was his own fault—he shouldn't try to make out he's everybody!"

The juniors streamed out of the lobby, leaving Chambers to pick himself up, and to discuss schemes of revenge with himself.

All the fellows were greatly interested when we explained to them what we had been doing in Bannington. And the majority of the juniors were rather envious—they would have enjoyed the experience, too—if they had been asked to come. But Levi had only sent telegrams to the fellows he was particularly friendly with.

And, while we were settling down for the new term at St. Frank's an interesting discussion was taking place in Bannington. The actual scene of this discussion was the private office of Mr. Stanley Webb, at the Bannington Cinema. Mr. Webb was the proprietor, and he was in close conversation with Mr. Hooker J. Ryan. This latter gentleman was an American, and he was financing Webb's scheme for the improvement of his cinema. It was Mr. Webb's hope that he would be able to frustrate the building of the new cinema, so that he would be able to retain the monopoly in Bannington. For this purpose he was greatly enlarging and improving his own cinema, and he had been plotting deeply in order to ruin Mr. Isaac Levi's plans.

In fact, nearly all the trouble in Bannington had been caused by Mr. Webb. He had incited the men to riot. He had caused them to lose their jobs in the first place—and he was using every means within his power to bring the whole operation to a standstill.

But now the rascally cinema proprietor was at a loss—he was furious. Everything was not going so smoothly as it had been—on the contrary, his own plans were quite off the track.

"Something will have to be done—something drastic," he declared fiercely. "It's no good us sitting here, Ryan—it's no good us being idle. Levi has got the better of the battle for the moment."

Mr. Ryan nodded.

"Sure!" he agreed. "The Jew has trumped one of our aces. He's got an army of new men on this building work, and they're going ahead at full speed. Say, Webb, he's put one over on us all right."

"I know that—you needn't tell me!" snapped Webb. "Our own scheme has failed—failed miserably. We succeeded in getting all the men to desert this building job—and now they're out of work. But Levi has obtained fresh labour—and all our efforts to cause a riot, and to cause trouble have been of

no avail. We must do something else—and we must not lose a minute. And this time, Ryan, we must do something desperately drastic."

Ryan shook his head.

"We'd best be careful, old man," he said. "I've got an idea that the police have got an eye on us, already. Say, don't want to get into any trouble—"

"The police have got no idea of the real truth," said Webb impatiently. "Through that confounded busybody, Nelson Lee, I was taken into the High Street, dressed up as the ghost. There was a good deal of trouble over that, because the people of Bannington became aware of the fact that there was no real ghost—only a fake one. But public opinion is beginning to die down now, and it doesn't matter so much. We'll do something to cause a delay—anything—it doesn't particularly matter what. If we can only delay all those building operations, it will be all right. We can go ahead with our own work, and open our new, enlarged cinema in advance. That will spoil Levi's game completely."

Mr. Hooker J. Ryan nodded.

"Sure," he agreed. "But what can we do? What do you suggest?"

"There's only one way!" said Webb, in a low voice. "The Grange must be destroyed—do you understand?"

"I guess I can understand English, if that's what you mean," said Ryan. "But what do you mean—destroy it? How can we destroy a place like that—unless we blow it up?"

"Exactly!" said Webb.

Ryan stared.

"Say, you don't mean—"

"Yes I do!" said Webb firmly. "We'll blow it up—why not? We can do it carefully, and not a soul will know. And that will cause delay—immeasurable delay."

"I guess I'm in this darned thing as deep as you are, Webb," said Mr. Ryan, shaking his head. "But I don't kind of fancy a stunt of that kind. No, sir. Not any! I'm not exactly hankering after being convicted of murder."

"Murder!" interrupted Webb. "Don't be ridiculous! This job can be done without so much as one person being scratched. I'm not as bad as all that, Ryan. And I'm not suggesting that we should put a bomb in the house and wreck half Bannington. All that we need do is to place an explosive down in the cellars of the Grange, and time it to

go off at about two o'clock in the morning. The whole place will be deserted, except for the night watchman—who will be out in the grounds. This explosion will merely cause the destruction of the Grange itself. And think what that will mean to us—think of the confusion—and the delay! Moreover, it can be done without any trouble, in fact."

Ryan shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I guess it's your stunt," he said. "If you like to go ahead with it—get busy! But I'd sure advise you to be careful."

Mr. Stanley Webb, however, was in a desperate mood. He was filled with fury at the way things were going, and he was ready enough for any grim adventure. The fact that Mr. Levi's contractors had obtained new labour—hundreds and hundreds of workmen—made Mr. Webb almost rave. And here was a way of foiling the Jewish financier. And Mr. Webb, in spite of Ryan's advice, proceeded with his plans.

Meanwhile, Mr. Farrow was in his little office at the Grange. Mr. Farrow, was, of course, the manager of the whole job, and he was feeling quite pleased with himself, and the way things were going. The manager was fairly certain that there would be no more rioting, and that the work, from now onwards, would go forward briskly, and without any hitch.

And Mr. Farrow was engaging a night-watchman. The man who had originally occupied this position had thrown up his job—because he had been scared by the "ghost." And Mr. Farrow was engaging a new watchman who would probably look after his job better.

He was a curious looking old fellow, this new night watchman. Attired in cumbersome, rusty-looking clothes, he was well wrapped up. His wrinkled old face was bearded, and a pair of keen eyes looked out from beneath bushy eyebrows. But there was something queer about those eyes—something that made Mr. Farrow almost doubt whether it was a wise plan to engage the man.

"What did you say your name was?" asked the manager.

"Wickers, sir," exclaimed the old fellow. "Joshua Wickers. I'll look after this job well, sir, if you give it to me. Mebbe I'm old, but I'm pretty strong, and I don't go to sleep at nights. Gimme this job, sir, and I'll do the work proper."

"All right, Wickers, I'll give you a trial," said Mr. Farrow. "I had better warn you, however, that it is just possible that there may be some disturbances at night. There is no telling—because there has been rioting lately—"

"I know all about that, sir," interrupted Mr. Wickers. "But that don't worry me at all. I don't reckon there'll be no more rioting—arter what's happened. And things are pretty quiet now, sir. Anyways, I'll take the job, if you don't mind, sir."

Mr. Farrow proceeded to give the old fellow his instructions, and the night watchman went away, satisfied. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Farrow was chatting with Nelson Lee—who happened to be in the town. Mr. Farrow mentioned to Lee that he had engaged a new night-watchman.

"To tell the truth, Mr. Lee, I'm not quite sure about the man," said the manager. "He looks an old chap, and he looks fairly strong. And there's something about his eyes I don't quite like—"

"I don't think you need worry, Mr. Farrow," smiled Nelson Lee. "I saw the old fellow some little time ago. His eyes, as you say, are keen—but that is nothing. You need not be alarmed about the man. I don't think that he is one of Mr. Webb's spies."

"That's what I was worrying about," said Farrow. "I know that Webb is active—and I know that he'll do anything he can to hinder us—but if you say that this old fellow is all right, Mr. Lee, I won't worry any more."

Nelson Lee returned to St. Frank's very soon afterwards, and I happened to meet him in the Triangle. I asked him if everything was going on all right in Bannington, and the gov'nor replied that there was no need for us to worry.

"I rather fancy, Nipper, that the rioters have had quite sufficient," said the school-master detective. "There may be some more trouble—it is quite likely—but it will not be of a very serious character. In any case, there is no necessity for you boys to concern yourselves."

But Solomon Levi was concerned—and he did not mind admitting it. In the end study of the passage, which Levi shared with Dick Goodwin, the Jewish boy was sitting in front of the fire, looking very thoughtful and serious. A tremendous noise was going on in the

Remove passage—but this, of course, was by no means unusual. And on the first evening of a new term the noise was always more noticeable.

"Eh, lad, but what's the matter?" inquired Dick Goodwin, after he had looked at his study chum several times. "I thought everything was going on champion—I did that. But yet you seem worried——"

"It's all right, old man," interrupted Levi. "Don't you put yourself out about me. I'm not exactly worried, but I'm uneasy. The trouble in Bannington isn't over yet, believe me!"

The Lancashire boy looked surprised.

"But I thought it was all over?" he inquired. "I thought everything was settled——"

"So it is—to all intents and purposes," replied Levi. "But I don't trust that man Webb. I'm pretty certain that he'll get up to mischief as soon as ever he possibly can. You can bet your life, Goodwin, that Webb isn't squashed. And I'm uneasy about to-night. I've got an idea that something will happen—something——"

"Of what nature?"

"That's what I don't know," said Levi. "And I've just been wondering if it would be possible for us to slip over there to-night—after everybody else is in bed."

"Eh, but we can't do that, Solly!" said Goodwin quickly. "We can't break bounds on the first night of term. It wouldn't do! We should get into awful trouble——"

"If we were found out," interrupted Levi. "But there's no reason why we should be found out, Dick. My idea is for us to slip out at about mid-night—when the whole school is asleep. It won't take us long to run over to Bannington on our bicycles, and then we can satisfy ourselves that everything is all serene. What do you say?"

Dick Goodwin shook his head.

"I think we can safely leave everything to Mr. Farrow, and to your dad," he said. "There's no need for us to be there, Solly."

"Well, I'm going, anyway," said the Jewish boy firmly. "If you don't like to come, Dick, there's no reason why you should bother. I don't mind going by myself—and I sha'n't worry if you remain——"

"By gum! If you go, I'll go with

you!" interrupted Dick Goodwin swiftly. "If there's anything to be done, two can do it better than one—that's my argument. We'll both go, Solly."

"Good!" said the Jewish boy. "That's settled, then!"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE RISK OF HIS LIFE!

"SHOW a leg, old man!"

Solomon Levi whispered the words as he bent over Dick Goodwin's bed in the Remove dormitory. Midnight had just boomed out, and everybody in the apartment lay asleep—with the exception of Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin. The latter sat up, shivering slightly. He looked up and down the gloomy apartment, and then gazed at the Jewish boy.

"By gum!" he muttered. "There's a rare cold feeling about the air!"

"Never mind the cold," said Levi softly. "Get up, my boy—and slip some clothes on—it's time we were off."

It was not long before Dick Goodwin was dressed. Then he and Levi slipped silently and stealthily out of the dormitory, and made their way down the wide stairs into the lobby. Here they only paused to enter the cloak-room, in order to obtain their thick overcoats and mufflers and caps. Then they slipped away to the end study, and emerged into the Triangle by means of the study window.

Everything outside was dark—pitchy dark. Clouds obscured the sky, and there was no moon. But the air was quite calm, although frosty.

"Couldn't be better!" murmured Levi. "Now all we've got to do is to slip to the bicycle shed, get our jiggers, and then we can be off. Follow me, old man!"

Within three minutes they had obtained their bicycles, and they wheeled these stealthily across the Triangle, until they reached the outer walk. As the gates were closed, and locked, it was necessary to hoist the bicycles over the wall—rather a difficult task, for the wall was a high one. However, the juniors

succeeded at last, and then they were out in the open lane.

They did not trouble to light their bicycle lamps, but mounted the machines straight away, and pedalled along the lane towards the village. But they did not actually go through the village. They turned away to the left, before reaching the bridge, and went along the little lane, past the River House School, on the way to the little hamlet of Edgemoor. But they branched off before reaching the hamlet, and, crossing the river near Willard's Island, they joined up with the Bannington Road further along. In this way they missed going through the village altogether, and hardly passed a single house.

"We shall have to go easy when we're entering Bannington," said Levi. "We don't want to be seen, you know—and I vote that we enter by means of the back streets. We'll leave our bicycles somewhere on the outskirts of the town—behind a hedge, in a ditch. Then we'll go on foot."

"Eh, that's the idea," said Goodwin.

This programme was carried out, and just before one o'clock was about to strike, two dim figures crept along a little lane in Bannington, near the rear of the Grange.

Those figures belonged to Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin. They had succeeded in getting through the town without being seen—for, at that hour, hardly a soul was about. Only in the High Street was there any sign of life—a constable or two. In the other parts of the town all was silent and still.

By approaching Bannington Grange from the rear, the boys had not allowed themselves to be seen, and now, only the dilapidated wall, which surrounded the grounds, separated them from the old house.

"Now we've got to go easy!" murmured Solomon. "There's a night watchman here, I believe, and we mustn't let him spot us."

"What are we going to do, once we get over?" asked Goodwin.

"I don't know—but we'll keep on the alert," said Levi. "We've just come here to have a look round, Dick—just to satisfy ourselves that everything is in order. It's quite likely that we've come for nothing—there's no telling."

They were soon over the wall, and there was plenty of cover for them in

the grounds. For bushes grew in profusion—evergreens. And there were many trees, too. Nearer the house the ground had been cleared, but it was littered with piles of bricks, rubbish and all manner of other building articles. Midway between the boys and the house stood a little watchman's shelter, with a glowing coke fire in front of it. And, pottering about the fire was the bent old figure of Mr. Joshua Wickers, the night watchman.

The two juniors crept as near as they could, then came to a halt beneath some bushes. Other bushes were all around them, and they were completely concealed.

"I think we'd better stop here," muttered Levi. "This is a pretty good position, Dick. We can see everything but nobody can see us."

They waited—but nothing happened. The minutes passed slowly, and the two juniors became quite cold. The air was rather sharp, and it was not exactly a warm job, crouching there, beneath those bushes, perfectly stationary.

It was nearly one thirty before anything happened.

And then Levi suddenly uttered a low exclamation. Wickers was acting rather strangely. The old night watchman had gone some little way away from the coke fire. And he was apparently engaged in the occupation of obtaining more fuel. But, when he reached the pile of coke, he did not stop there. He crept behind it, and vanished. And, a minute afterwards, the two juniors saw Mr. Wickers creeping stealthily and silently towards the house. The man apparently thought that he was unobserved, but this was not the case.

Wickers reached one of the windows, opened it silently, and disappeared inside. And Solomon Levi turned and looked at Dick Goodwin keenly.

"Well, did you see that?" he whispered. "It looks queer, doesn't it?"

"I'm not so sure," said the Lancashire boy. "Perhaps the watchman heard something and has just gone in to have a look round—"

"He wouldn't go in in that way," interrupted Levi. "There's something queer about that old man—believe me. Why didn't he enter by the doorway—it's much easier. Anyhow, I'm going to have a look at this, Dick."

"What do you mean?" asked Goodwin. "What are you going to do?"

Levi considered for a moment.

"Well, I'll wait here for five minutes," he said. "If Wickers doesn't show up by that time, I'm going to investigate."

The five minutes passed, and there was no sign of the night watchman. He had completely vanished.

Solomon Levi kept to his plan.

"You stay here, and keep on the watch," he whispered to Goodwin. "I'm going ahead—I'm going to enter the house, and find out what that fellow is doing."

And the Jewish boy started off without any further talk.

He went forward like a shadow, creeping from bush to bush, without allowing himself to be seen. The night was extremely dark, and it was quite impossible for anybody to see the movements of Levi. In the dense shadow of the trees and bushes he was invisible.

And then, just as he was about to leave this cover, and make his way across a bare space towards the house, Levi came to a halt, he had seen a dim figure approaching, and it was coming right towards him! He remained perfectly still, and crept beneath a laurel bush, near the ground.

And then, to his astonishment, he found that another figure was coming towards him from the opposite direction. It seemed that he had got into a very precarious position quite unconsciously. For him to attempt to escape would be futile, for he would be seen at once. His only course, therefore, was to remain perfectly still, and hope that he would not be seen or heard. And so Solomon Levi remained perfectly motionless, hardly daring to breathe.

The two figures met, about three yards from the bush where Levi was hiding. And the Jewish boy listened intently.

"Well?" whispered a voice. "Have you done it?"

"Yes!" replied another voice, also in a whisper. "We'd better hurry off as fast as we can. It's in the cellar, and it's timed to go off in five minutes from now. Bannington will have a little surprise very shortly."

The two men disappeared, and Levi crouched in his concealment, feeling rather dazed. It would go off in five minutes time. What would go off? What would cause the Bannington people to be surprised?

It was not necessary for Levi to resort to guess-work. He could easily understand what those few whispered words meant.

A bomb!

These men had placed an explosive in the cellar of the Grange—and that explosive would go off in exactly five minutes time! The Jewish boy was thrilled, and he realised that he had been justified in coming to Bannington. By a piece of sheer luck he had discovered the truth, and he did not hesitate. There was only one thing to be done—and he only had five minutes to do it in.

That bomb must be removed from the house, and rendered harmless!

And Levi, without caring a halfpenny about caution now, hastened towards the old house. He made straight for the door and entered. Dick Goodwin, who was watching, wondered what on earth had happened and why Levi was so reckless.

But Goodwin did not move—his policy was to remain concealed, on the watch.

Just as he was in the hall, he ran into the bent figure of Mr. Joshua Wickers. The night watchman was taken by surprise, and he turned swiftly. He was at the door which led down to the cellars—and this fact struck Levi as being very significant. Wickers was one of Webb's paid spies! There was no doubt whatever as to this question.

And Levi was desperate—he did not care what happened now—he barely had a minute or two to get that bomb out of the house.

"You—you scoundrel!" he panted.

And, without giving Mr. Wickers time to say a word, Levi fairly sprung at the man. The night watchman made an attempt to save himself; but Levi had been so prompt, and so unexpected, that he could do nothing.

A fist struck him in the chest, and he staggered back, lost his balance, and then fell headlong down the cellar stairs. It was a heavy fall, and the man brought up with a tremendous jar at the bottom, on the stone floor. He lay there, half dazed, and nearly stunned.

Levi, rather startled at his own success was too excited, and too alarmed to pay any heed to Mr. Wickers. He ran down the stairs, jumped over the night watchman, and looked round him. A gas jet was burning, and a dim light

was cast throughout the cellar. And there, right in the middle of the floor, stood a peculiar looking little box. The top of it was open, and an ordinary alarm clock could be seen. It was evident that this clock was used as a method of timing the fuse.

Levi seized the contrivance, held it firmly, and then rushed up the stairs again, paying no heed to the shouts of Wickers, who was recovering.

Up the stairs Levi went, as hard as he could go. He had a horrible feeling that the thing in his hands would explode at any second—and, if that happened, he would be blown to atoms. He was risking his life in order to save Bannington Grange from being wrecked. But Solomon Levi's difficulties were not over yet.

For, before he could reach the outer door, a figure appeared—the figure of Webb! Webb had returned—because he had seen Levi rushing into the house, and the rascal knew that all his plans would be frustrated unless he took instant action. And so Mr. Webb had hurried back, literally blazing with fury.

He barred the way, and Solomon came to a halt.

"Stand back!" he panted. "This thing will go off in a minute——"

"You young fool!" snarled Webb. "Put it down—you'll be blown to pieces!"

Webb was nearly insane with fright and rage. And he made a dash at Levi, and seized the infernal machine. Before the Jewish boy could resist, the thing was taken from him. And then Webb suddenly seemed to realise that his own peril was even greater than before. Fairly shaking with terror, he bent down, and placed the bomb on the floor. Then he turned to go—in his present state of mind he did not care whether he was recognised or not—although there was little fear of this, since the darkness was intense.

"Clear out of this!" he snapped hoarsely. "That thing will go off in a few seconds—and you'll be blown to atoms."

"We'll both be blown to atoms, then!" said Levi grimly. "You're not going to leave this place until that murderous thing is removed—and you've got to remove it!"

Webb swore furiously.

"Hang you!" he snarled thickly.

The next moment he attacked Levi with the ferocity of a madman. The Jewish boy was a splendid boxer, and he knew how to defend himself. But he was not prepared for Webb's feet.

The man kicked out viciously, and one of his boots struck Levi on the shin. The boy crumpled up, and just as he was falling to the floor, Webb's fist came out. It crashed fully into Levi's face, and the Jewish boy went down with a thud which shook the floor. And he lay there—quite still. He had been knocked out!

Mad with terror, Webb turned to the door, and rushed out—helter-skelter, as though demons were at his heels. He knew that the minutes had been flying, and that only a very few seconds remained before that bomb would explode! His only course to save his life was to flee—and to flee at once, without wasting one second.

And Solomon Levi was left there, lying unconscious on the floor, with the infernal machine only a few inches away from him! When that exploded——

CHAPTER IV.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

MR. JOSHUA WICKERS rose to his feet.

Events had been happening very swiftly in the old house, and only a very few moments had elapsed since Levi had dashed up the stairs, carrying the bomb with him. Wickers looked round him for a moment, and then, he heard sounds of an altercation up above. In fact, he heard Levi and Webb quarrelling. And Wickers, who knew all about that bomb, too, wasted no time in getting up the stairs. If the infernal machine went off, there would be very little hope for the prisoner in the cellar—he would be buried in the debris.

When Wickers arrived at the top of the steps, he was just in time to see Mr. Webb dashing out of the doorway. And there, on the floor, lay Solomon Levi, unconscious. And, at that very second, a splutter came from the little box, accompanied by sparks.

The mechanism had acted, and the fuse was alight!

The situation was now desperate, indeed! If that fuse was a very short one, the bomb would explode within the next three seconds—but, in spite of this, Mr. Wickers did not hesitate. He ran forward, grabbed the bomb, and then, ran like the wind out through the door. He took the steps at one leap, landing on the gravel fairly and squarely—which was rather an astonishing effort, considering the old night-watchman's age.

Mr. Wickers knew that there was a big tank of water only a few yards distant, and to this he dashed at top speed, the bomb spluttering in his hands. He knew well enough that it might go off even then, before he could submerge it under the water. In that case, he would be blown to atoms—and Levi, too, would probably be killed in the wreckage of the old house.

Even before Mr. Wickers arrived at the tank, he swung the bomb from him. Something told him that it was just going off. True as a die, the thing plunged into the water, and just at that moment, it gave one tremendous burst of fire—the preliminary to the big explosion.

But Mr. Wickers had been just in the nick of time.

The thing disappeared under the water, gave one spluttering sigh, and sank harmlessly. Mr. Wickers stood there, trembling perceptibly, and he heaved a long sigh of relief. The crisis was over and everything was all right. Mr. Wickers pulled himself together, walked towards the house, and entered. He found Solomon Levi still lying on the floor, and the Jewish boy was just recovering his senses. He sat up and looked at Wickers dazedly.

"The bomb?" he gasped. "It'll go off—"

"Don't ye worry your head!" said the night-watchman. "That there bomb ain't no more good, young gent. It's under water!"

"Thank heaven!" muttered Levi. "I—I thought—"

"It was a near thing, and no mistake!" went on Mr. Wickers. "You did well, young master, but I don't reckon you treated me right. I fell down them stairs—"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Levi, rather weakly. "I thought you were

one of those cads—one of the men who were trying to blow the place up. What—what did you do with the bomb?"

Mr. Wickers smiled.

"I put that where it won't do no harm," he replied. "Out in the tank of water, Master Levi—you are Mr. Levi, ain't you?"

"Yes," said the Jewish boy. "And it's a good thing I came here, too. I suspected that there was something wrong, and I was jolly well right!"

"I don't reckon as you need have bothered, young gent," said Mr. Wickers, shaking his head. "What am I here for—ain't I a night watchman? I was keeping my eye open, don't you fear! And I see them men steal in, and I guessed what was hup, too. I was just going to fetch that there bomb when you knocked me down the stairs. Like as not we would all have been blown to bits. Even as it was, I thought we was all booked!"

Levi struggled to his feet.

"But how did you manage it?" he enquired. "I am awfully sorry if I butted in, but you see, I didn't understand. I thought you were one of the robbers. Wasn't that bomb sizzling when you picked it up?"

Mr. Wickers nodded.

"It was, Master Levi," he replied. "It was sizzling something awful!"

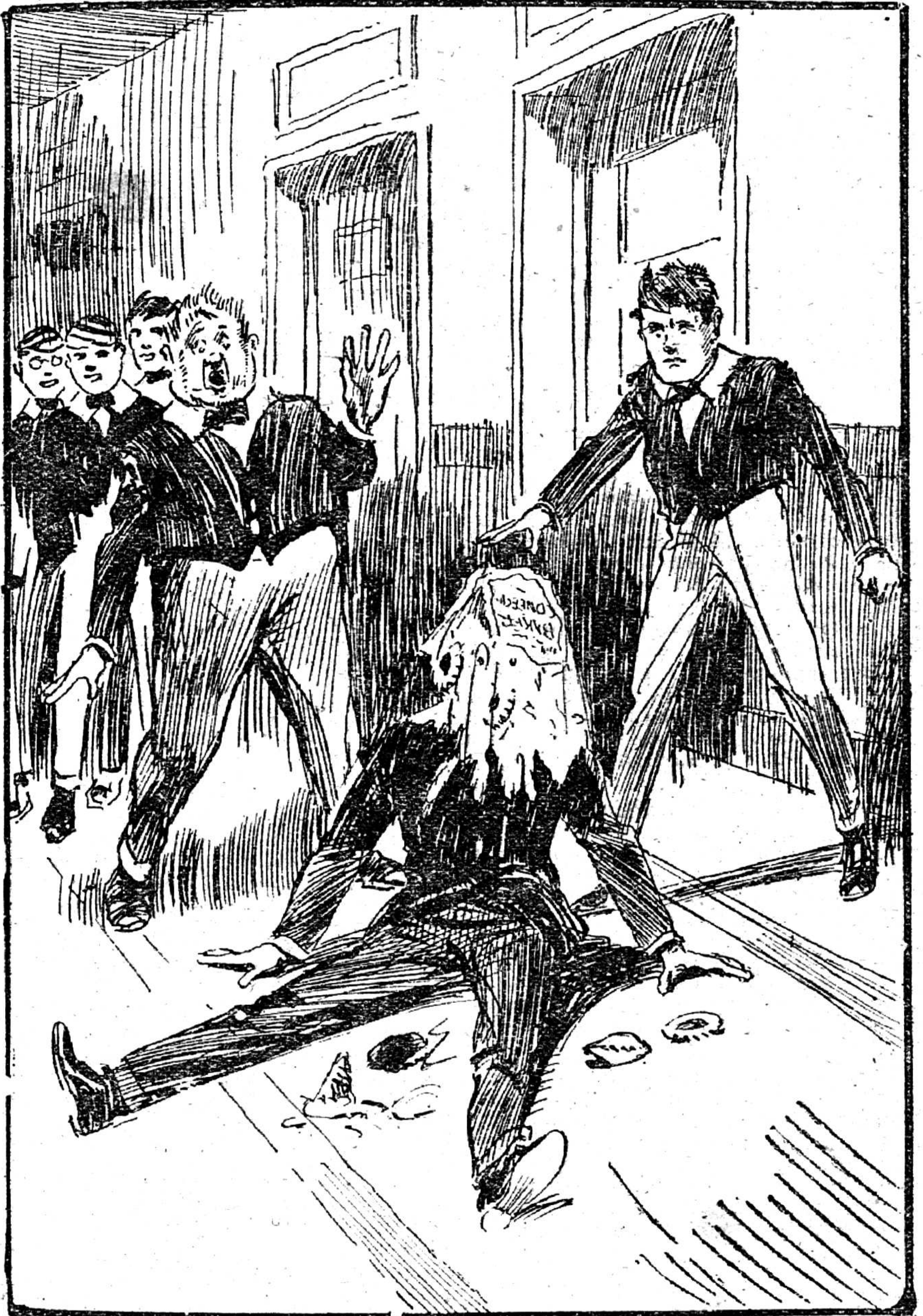
"And weren't you frightened to touch it?"

"There wasn't no time to be frightened, Master Levi," replied the night watchman. "It was either one thing or the other—going sky high, or trying to put the thing out. I carried that there bomb down to the water, and chucked it in—just in time. It was agoing off as it sank."

"Well, it was jolly plucky of you," said Levi. "And thanks awfully for saving my life. If you hadn't come just then, I should have been blown to smithereens."

"Maybe you would," said the night watchman. "Well, young gent, the best thing you can do is to get off—and go back to school. I won't say nothing—you needn't be afeered. I won't let on that you've been out of bounds after dark."

"You're a good sort!" said Levi warmly. "Well, between us, we saved the old house, didn't we? Or, to be more exact, you saved it—I did precious little except blunder."



Chambers sat in the centre of the lobby, his face hidden under a conglomerated mass of chocolate cream and pastry.

Very shortly afterwards Levi had joined Dick Goodwin, and the Lancashire lad was listening attentively to all that Levi had to say. Goodwin was greatly interested and rather alarmed, when he heard all the details. Without any delay, the two juniors strolled back to the place where they had left their bicycles, and were soon pedalling away for St. Frank's. They were quite satisfied that no further excitement would take place that night.

And in the meantime, Mr. Joshua Wickers was not exactly idle. He recovered the bomb from the tank of water, placed it in a secure position, and then went back to his coke fire. He made this up, glanced at his watch, and then, smiled to himself. Then Mr. Wickers deserted his post.

He was satisfied that the remainder of the night would be quiet, and he thought it would be permissible for him to leave the old building for a short space of time. And Mr. Wickers made his way out, went down the High Street, and until he arrived in a quiet side road. He passed down this, glancing at the houses as he went. And at length he came to a small, rather modern villa which stood in its own garden. A light was gleaming behind the blind in the front room, and Mr. Wickers noticed, to his satisfaction, that one of the windows was slightly open at the top.

The curious old night watchman entered the house in a most unconventional manner. Instead of going to the front door, and knocking, he went to the window, seized the sash, and pushed it open—briskly and with one swift movement. The next second he was inside the room, and the blind had fallen back into place. Mr. Wickers found himself staring straight into the eyes of Mr. Stanley Webb. The latter was on his feet, looking startled.

"What—what does this mean?" panted Webb harshly. "How—how dare you come into this room?"

He sank back into his chair, looking rather relieved, for if the truth must be told, Mr. Webb had expected the intruder to be a policeman. The cinema proprietor had been sitting at the table, and a glass was just handy—to say nothing of a bottle of whisky, considerably emptied. Mr. Webb's nerves were on edge, and he had been stimulating them to the best of his ability,

but he was still looking pale and scared and he was trembling visibly.

"I thought I would just like a word with you, Mr. Webb," said the night watchman, striding forward and sitting down in a chair opposite to his host. "I hope you don't mind me entering in this way?"

Mr. Webb stared—and he started.

"Who—who are you?" he rasped out sharply. "By thunder! I'll throw you off these premises—I'll pitch you out into the street! Of all the infernal impudence, coming into my house through the window!"

"Please do not get excited, Mr. Webb," interrupted the night watchman. "It will be far better if you remain quite calm."

Strangely enough, Mr. Wickers had completely lost his common talk, and he was now speaking in a refined voice, totally unlike his ordinary one. Mr. Webb found himself extremely nervous all of a sudden.

"Who—who are you?" he repeated hoarsely.

Mr. Wickers smiled.

"I think we have met before," he said. "My name is Nelson Lee!"

Mr. Webb fairly leapt to his feet.

"Nelson—Nelson Lee!" he gasped. "Good heavens! You fool—you mad fool! What nonsense are you talking? You are the night watchman from the Grange——"

"Exactly," interrupted the other. "But it may interest you to know, Mr. Webb, that there is no such person as Joshua Wickers. I am Nelson Lee, and I have come in because I am rather keen upon having a little quiet conversation with you. In fact, I am determined that we shall come to a thorough understanding—here and now!"

Mr. Webb was now as pale as a sheet, and he sank back into his chair, his face expressing many emotions—rage, fear, consternation and alarm.

"You're lying to me!" he rapped out. "You are not Lee. I have met Lee several times, and—— Good heavens!"

For even while he had been speaking, "Mr. Joshua Wickers" had been removing his beard and moustache. A wig followed, and Nelson Lee was revealed—the famous detective, without the slightest doubt.

"You will know, by this time, Mr. Webb, that your scheme has failed—

that Bannington Grange is still intact," said Lee grimly. "I was successful in spoiling the plan. that bomb is now quite harmless. I presume you are aware of the fact that you are liable to be arrested for attempted murder?"

Mr. Webb gulped hard.

"It's a lie!" he panted. "I only meant to blow down the house, nobody would have come to any harm. It's no good trying to bluff the thing out now, you know too much, Lee! Confound you, you're interfering the whole time, and it is no concern of yours. This quarrel is between Levi and myself, you're an outsider——"

"Quite so, but I am looking after Mr. Levi's interests," said Nelson Lee. "Only a very short time ago, you deliberately stunned young Solomon Levi and left him in the Grange lying beside that bomb. If the thing had exploded, you would have been guilty of murder."

"Rubbish!" said Webb sharply, recovering his composure somewhat. "And look here, Lee, you can say what you like, you can't prove a thing—you can't prove anything whatever against me. I've admitted nothing, and I don't intend to. The man who was at the Grange was not recognised, and even if you take your story to the police, they can't move. They can't arrest me without evidence!"

"You need not be alarmed, Mr. Webb," interrupted Nelson Lee coldly. "I am not here to bargain with you, or to come to any arrangement. I am here to dictate!"

"Oh, indeed!" snapped Webb.

"Precisely," said Nelson Lee. "You will please listen carefully to what I have to say, and heed my words. If you had not resorted to foul means, Mr. Webb, this would merely have been a professional rivalry between yourself and Mr. Levi; but you have descended to methods which render you liable to arrest. I am now going to warn you, and I should strongly advise you to heed this warning."

"You can go——"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Webb," interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "My warning is this. You must not interfere in Mr. Levi's business in any way whatsoever—you must not attempt to try any more of your foul methods. If you do—if you disregard this warning—I can tell you quite plainly that you will

land yourself in the hands of the police, and a long term of penal servitude will follow. My eyes will be open, and I shall know what is taking place, so be very careful, Mr. Webb, and keep your interest centred round your own business. Otherwise I shall be compelled to take action."

Mr. Webb glared at his visitor.

"Well, have you finished?" he demanded harshly.

"Yes, and——"

"Then get out of my house before I throw you out!" shouted Webb fiercely. "Do you understand that?"

As a matter of fact, Webb was nearly off his head with fright. He was trembling with fear, but he strove to make Nelson Lee believe that this agitation on his part was anger. The man was beginning to realise that he would be helpless from this moment onwards, that he would be watched, and that it would be impossible for him to attempt any more plotting.

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I shall be on the alert, Mr. Webb," he said quietly. "To-night you attempted to perform a criminal action, and it is very lucky for you that there were no actual witnesses who would be ready to prove your guilt in a Court of Justice. You may not be so lucky next time, so you must be very careful. It is not necessary for me to say anything further. You will kindly lead the way to the front door, and show me out."

Webb felt too weak to say anything, and he led the way to the front door and allowed Nelson Lee to pass out. Then he slammed the door and staggered back into the front room. He sat down, poured himself out some whisky, and gulped it down. Then he stared straight before him, his hands twitching.

"The busybody, the infernal, interfering hound!" he snarled. "He knows everything, and, if I'm not careful, I shall find myself in the hands of the police. It's true, I know it's true! I've been afraid of Lee all the time, but I hadn't the faintest idea that he knew so much. I didn't guess that he was on the alert all the time. But I'm not beaten. No, by thunder, I'm not beaten yet!"

After a short time Mr. Webb left the room and passed upstairs.

He entered one of the rear bedrooms of the house, and switched on the

electric light. There, in a bed, lay a man, fast asleep. This man was Williams, the fellow who had been doing a great deal recently to aid Mr. Webb's schemes. The cinema proprietor had thought it just as well to have the man in his own house, under his own eye. Webb crossed to the bed, seized the man's shoulder, and roughly shook him.

"Wake up, Williams; I want to speak to you!" he exclaimed harshly.

The man opened his eyes, sat up, and blinked at his employer.

"Why, what's the matter, sir?" he asked. "It's not morning yet—"

"I know it's not morning!" snapped Mr. Webb. "But I want you, Williams. I want to speak to you; it's most important."

"Very well, sir; I'll come down in a minute."

"Mind that you are quick!"

Mr. Webb went down, helped himself to some more whisky, and then sat waiting. In a few minutes Williams appeared, only half dressed, and looking rather bewildered. He had never seen his employer in this condition before, and he wondered what could have happened.

"Things are going wrong!" snapped Webb, as soon as Williams appeared. "There's only one course for us to pursue, Williams, and I want you to help me. There must be a strike at the Grange."

"A strike, sir?" repeated Williams.

"Yes, man—a strike! Can't you understand plain English?" demanded Webb angrily. "You know two or three men who are good at agitating, don't you? Men who can go among these workmen and make them dissatisfied with their pay or with their conditions. Preach anything you like—Bolshevism, if you want to—in order to get these men to go on strike. Once they are out they will stop out for two or three weeks, very likely, and that will cause delay. What you've got to do is to stir up some trouble."

"I don't know whether we can do it, sir," said Williams doubtfully.

"What do you mean—you don't know?" demanded the other. "What do I pay you for?"

"That's not the point, sir," interrupted Williams. "But these men are strangers to us; they're all from different towns—some from Helmsford, for

example—and they're all getting good pay, and the conditions of work are excellent. It will need a bit of doing to convince these men that they are not getting paid enough, or that they ought to go on strike. And it's too late to try that ghost business; they would not believe it, even if strange things did happen. They'd say it was all faked up."

"Yes, of course—that's done with," said Webb. "We can't work that dodge again, Williams. But if a good few agitators get among these men in the evening—while they are in the public-houses, drinking—it is more than likely trouble may be stirred up. In any case, you've got to do your best."

Williams looked very doubtful.

"I don't know that it can be done, sir, and that's plain," he said bluntly. "It'll be worth something—"

"Oh, you needn't worry about the money I shall pay you!" snapped Webb. "Look here, my man; if you can engineer a strike within three days—if you can cause all the workmen on the Grange to come out—I will give you the sum of fifty pounds for yourself, in addition to your usual money."

Williams looked quite alert.

"Is that straight, sir—true?" he asked.

"Absolutely!" said Mr. Webb. "Fifty pounds will go into your pocket, Williams, if you bring this strike off within three days. And, just to give you encouragement, and to use for current expenses, I'll give you ten pounds now."

"Right you are, sir; I'll do my best," said Williams.

Mr. Webb had come to the conclusion that it would be quite useless for him to pursue his criminal tactics. No good would come of that, particularly as Nelson Lee was on the alert. However, this was his one card left. If he could stir up trouble among these new workmen, his object would be achieved in a much better way. For, once a strike took place, there was no telling what would happen. And Mr. Webb did not see any reason why a strike could not be engineered. These workmen were a scratch lot. They had been obtained at a moment's notice, and they were not hard-headed, sensible fellows. The majority of them were youngsters, who had eagerly accepted

the employment when it was offered to them.

And the next day Mr. Webb's paid agitators got to work, led by Williams. They proceeded with their task insidiously and secretly.

In public-houses, at street corners, and wherever a group of the workmen congregated, one of these agitators would talk—talk about the work at the Grange. They declared that the men were being underpaid, considering that it was a rush job. They were not getting their full rates, and they were not working under the best conditions.

"Why, you must be fools to work for such a small wage!" exclaimed Williams, talking to a group of men at a street corner that evening. "Personally, I wouldn't stand it."

"It's all very well to talk like that, mate," said one of the men. "The wages ain't so bad——"

"Oh, if you're satisfied, there's no need for me to talk!" said Williams, shrugging his shoulders. "But just think of it. The man who's behind this enterprise is a Jew, and you know as well as I do that Jews are sweaters. That's what's happening to you men—you're being sweated! You seem to forget that you're working double pressure—that you've been urged to work as hard as ever you possibly can because this new cinema wants to be put up quickly. My argument is that if a man works at double the pressure, he ought to receive double the wage. That's only sensible."

"Well, of course, there's something in that," said one of the listeners, taking the bait. "We do work hard, mates, when you come to think of it."

"Then again," went on Williams, "you're not inhabitants of this town—you don't live here. That means that you've got to take lodgings, and lodgings cost a lot of money."

"That's a fact," said one of the men. "After I've paid my week's bill and sent the money home to the missus, I haven't got enough left to pay for drinks and baccy; and I reckon I'm getting pretty good money, too."

Williams seized his chance.

"Well, there you are!" he exclaimed.

"There's just the case in point. You're a man who has to take lodgings in Bannington and send money home to your wife. You ought to get double the money you are getting, and then

things ought to be comfortable for you. What's the good of a job like this when you have to screw all the time? And, not only that, you're working at double your usual speed; you're working yourself ill. That'll be the end of it. By the time you've finished this job you won't be fit for anything. Then you'll have to be idle for weeks, perhaps months, starving all the time!"

Many of the men listened to this kind of talk and allowed the seed of discontent to take root. Up till now they had been quite pleased with themselves; they had reckoned that they had good work and good wages.

But these agitators, led by Williams, were doing their work well. They were making contented workmen believe that they had every reason to be discontented.

"Of course, it's got nothing to do with me, strictly speaking," went on Williams carelessly. "It's no concern of mine, but I like to see men getting good wages and fair treatment. I wouldn't work on this job——"

"Yes, but you was working on it at one time, wasn't you?" inquired one of his listeners.

"Yes," said Williams nodding. "I chucked it up; it wasn't good enough for me, mates. Building this cinema won't last for ever. It's going to be a quick job; it'll be over in four or five weeks, I believe. And then where will you be? Nowhere. You won't have saved a penny, and you'll be half starving soon after you've left this job."

"There'll be plenty of other work——"

"That may be, but you won't be fit to take on no other work," said Williams. "This job will take it out of you, old man, don't make no mistake about that. That's why I reckon you ought to have more money, every man of you. You ought to have at least fifty per cent. more than you're getting."

"Very likely you're right, mate, but we ain't likely to get fifty per cent. more," said one of the workmen. "I reckon the best thing we can do is to be content with what we've got. Grumbling wasn't no good to anybody. A job's a job, and it's better than being out of work when you've got kids to look arter."

"That ain't the point," said Williams quickly. "A man what's got kids ought to have more money than you

men are getting. Anyhow, you won't get nothing more unless you ask for it."

"What shall we do, then?" inquired one of the crowd. "Go up to Mr. Farrow and ask him for more money?"

"Of course—a whole delegation of you," said Williams. "I suggest that you ought to meet him to-morrow evening—all the workmen on the job. Hold a big meeting in the town hall or on the green. Then pass resolutions, and a delegation of you can go to Mr. Farrow and put the thing before him."

"And supposing they won't raise our wages?"

"Well, there's only one thing to do—go on strike!"

"Not for me, mate!" said one of the men. "Striking wasn't no good for anybody. I'd rather go on—"

"Look here, you dry up!" shouted one of the others. "If we can get more money, we're going to get it, and don't you forget that!"

"That's the kind of talk!" said Williams approving. "I like to see some spirit. And you men seem to forget that this is a special position. If you go on strike you can't be dismissed—they can't get no other workmen to fill your places. You've absolutely got this Jew in your hands. All you need do is to demand more money, and he's bound to give it to you, simply because this cinema must be built as quickly as possible, and he can't afford to have any big delays. Take my advice, mates, and go on strike, and ask for double the money!"

"Hear, hear!" said one of the younger men. "That's the kind of talk!"

Williams was feeling very pleased; he had secured quite a crowd of sympathetic listeners by this time. And the other agitators were meeting with similar success, in most cases. They secured audiences, and commenced preaching discontent to them. This had only one effect, the effect which could be imagined. The workmen themselves got talking and discussing the whole point. Many of the workmen got up and addressed their fellows, and the whole trend of the talk was that they were working too hard and not getting sufficient money.

And before the evening was over it was definitely decided that a meeting should be held early on the following morning, before work commenced, and

this meeting was to be held in the grounds of the Grange. One of the workmen, a big, burly labourer, with decidedly Bolshevik views, was to address the meeting, and to put the whole question before the other men.

Mr. Webb was delighted with the success of the scheme when he heard of it later. He had hardly thought that Williams would get so much done in such a short space of time.

Mr. Farrow, the manager of the job, did not fail to observe the signs. As he passed down the High Street he could see groups of men talking, and he caught words as he went by. It was the same at the public-houses—crowds of men were collected together talking, and discontent was rife. Mr. Farrow was surprised and worried, for he had believed that these new workmen were content, and that they would not be foolish. Mr. Farrow went straight to the Grapes Hotel and had an interview with Mr. Isaac Levi. The latter was rather disturbed, too, when he heard the news.

"Well, Farrow, we must hope for the best," he said at length. "It is no good anticipating trouble before it comes. Possibly it will blow over—by the morning the men will be quite sober, and they will refrain from doing anything silly. Many of them have been drinking and are not responsible for what they say. If I were you, I should not worry too much."

"But what if the men ask for more money, sir?"

"They won't get it," said Mr. Levi promptly. "Every one of these workmen is obtaining a higher rate of pay than he would get on any other work. This is a rush job, and it is being paid for at special rates. We certainly shall not dream of paying these workmen any more if they ask for it."

"I don't think the men are so bad, sir," said Mr. Farrow. "Plenty of them are as right as rain; I know for a fact. But there are some agitators getting to work—some of these Bannington workmen, I think. It's these fellows who are poisoning the minds of our men."

"Well, there's only one thing that we can do," said Mr. Levi. "We must wait and see how events progress. Personally, I believe that the whole thing will blow over."

But Mr. Isaac Levi was wrong.

The affair did not blow over. On the contrary, the storm clouds were darker than ever in the morning!

CHAPTER V.

ON STRIKE!

WHY the worried look, my merry son of Israel?" Reginald Pitt asked that question as he met Solomon Levi in the Remove passage just before breakfast-time on the following morning. Levi was certainly looking very worried. There was a concerned expression in his keen, dark eyes, and his forehead was lined into a frown. He started slightly, and looked at Pitt.

"Yes, I am a bit worried," he admitted. "And, believe me, I've got cause!"

"Hard up?" inquired Pitt sympathetically.

"No, not that," replied the Jewish boy, with a slight smile.

"Oh, I thought that was the trouble; when a Remove fellow is worried, it's generally over financial matters," said Pitt. "What's the trouble, then—"

"Come into Study C, and I'll tell you," replied Levi shortly.

They were standing just opposite the door of Study C, and the pair entered, and found that the study was occupied by its rightful owners—Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself. We had had one or two letters that morning, and we had just been reading them.

I looked at Solomon Levi, and then glanced at the window.

"Better pull the blind down, Montie," I said gravely.

"Begad! What on earth for, dear old boy?" inquired Tregellis-West.

"I think somebody must be dead," I said. "According to Levi's expression—"

"Oh, don't rot!" said the Jewish boy, with a wan smile. "The fact is, Nipper, I've just been talking to my father over the telephone. Things don't seem to be going very well at the Grange."

"Oh, I thought everything was smooth now," I said. "Now that all these new men are on the job, I imagined that there would be no more trouble."

"That's what my father thought,

too," said Levi; "but, according to what he tells me this morning, there's every prospect of another stoppage before long. The men are discontented; they've been holding street-corner meetings, and agitations, and all that kind of thing. My father thinks it quite possible that the whole crowd will go on strike."

"Begad!"

"My only hat!"

"But what for?" demanded Pitt. "What are they going on strike for?"

"Goodness only knows!" replied Levi. "They're getting well paid, and it's good work: there's no reason why they should be discontented. But there seems to be some fate with this new cinema we're building. Everything has been going wrong from the very start, and it's my belief that that rotter, Webb, is responsible. His agents have probably been going about, sowing discontent."

I nodded.

"That's quite likely," I said. "But surely your father and Mr. Farrow will be able to put a stop to any trouble? It seems preposterous that the men should go on strike when they've got nothing to strike about. Although, strictly speaking, there's nothing much in that. There have been plenty of strikes recently, all over the country, over matters which hardly concern the men at all. I think a lot of these fellows go on strike just for the sake of doing so. It seems to be in the fashion."

"Well, it's pretty rotten," said Levi. "We can't seem to get ahead at the Grange at all, it doesn't matter what we do. It seems to me that place is causing us some trouble! I suppose you fellows will be ready to help, if any emergency arises?"

"Count on us!" I replied promptly.

"All through!" added Reginald Pitt, with a nod. "You can rely on us, old son, to the very last. We'll stick by you, and we'll do anything we can if trouble arrives. Even if it's in the middle of the giddy night, we'll turn out in full force—the whole blessed Remove!"

"That's the kind of talk I like!" said Levi, his face lighting up. "It's awfully decent of you chaps."

"Rats!" said Pitt. "I don't suppose for a minute that we shall have to do anything; but, of course, there's no knowing."

Meanwhile, in Bannington, rapid developments were taking place.

The men employed on the Grange

affair had all arrived at work over half an hour before the usual time. Then a meeting was held at the back of the old house—a meeting which was addressed by the burly rascal with Bolshevik views, who had promised to speak, and he waxed very indignant as he addressed the men.

He pointed out that they all deserved more money, because they were compelled to work at high pressure. He made the men believe that they were not being treated right, and that their only course was to demand more money—and if that demand was not complied with, to go on strike at once.

Of course, a great many of the workmen were against it; they were perfectly satisfied with their lot, and were content to continue the job until it finished. But a decision of this kind went by the majority, and when it was put to the meeting, the "Ayes" were far more numerous than the "Nays." The meeting decided, in brief, that a delegation should be appointed, and that this delegation should interview Mr. Farrow, the manager. And this interview was to take place before work commenced. The men were demanding a fifty per cent. increase all round.

Mr. Farrow was in his office when the delegation arrived, and he looked at the men rather grimly as they piled into his room. Mr. Farrow knew well enough what was coming.

"Well, my man, what do you want?" he asked briskly. "I'm afraid I can't give you much time; work commences in about five minutes from now. If you've any grievance I will hear it, and give you my decision. Now then, who's the spokesman?"

"Me, sir!" replied the man who had been addressing the crowd—the burly labourer, who went by the artistic name of Peter Humm. "We'd just like to say a few words, sir."

"All right," said Mr. Farrow.

He sat back in his chair, and looked at the workmen quite calmly. Mr. Humm cleared his throat, and was just on the point of soiling the carpet with a plug of tobacco, when he remembered himself.

"It's this way, sir," he said. "Seeing as how this job is being done quick like—seeing as how we men have got to work at more than usual speed, it only seems fair and proper that we should get more money——"

"I don't follow that argument at all," interrupted Mr. Farrow. "For one thing, there is not a single man here who is being overworked—who is being worked at speed, as you call it. This job must be completed in as short a space of time as possible, and, with that purpose in view, a very large number of men have been engaged. Each man, individually, has to do no more work on this job than he would on any other job. So that sort of talk is absolutely preposterous!"

"You can call it what you like—use all the big words you like, sir," said Mr. Humm nastily, "but we say that we're working hard, and we want more money. That's only right. If you can see your way to put the matter to the gov'nor for us——"

"What is the increase you require?" asked the manager.

"Ten bob in the pound, sir," replied the spokesman. "That ain't over much, when you come to consider it. We're working a lot more than double as hard as we ought to, and we're only asking for half as much agin in money."

Mr. Farrow rose to his feet.

"I'm sorry, men, but I cannot possibly entertain this proposal," he said coldly. "You must be satisfied with the money you are getting, or you can leave the work. It is either one or the other. My employers will not budge one inch; they consider that you are getting a fair wage, and they do not see their way clear to increase the rate in the slightest degree."

"Does that mean to say that we don't get no extra money, sir?" asked Mr. Humm.

"It does," replied the manager. "You may as well go now, because it is merely a waste of time to remain here. The best thing you can do is to get to work, and forget all about this sort of nonsense. I believe that local agitators have been inciting you to this, because you were all quite keen upon taking the work, and you made no grumbles about the pay at first. I may as well tell you now, for the first and last time, that the wages cannot be increased. That is all—you may go."

Mr. Farrow sat down again, and busied himself with some writing. The men looked at one another, and then filed slowly out of the office. Their mission had not been very successful, and they were looking sullen and rather

morose. Many of them, indeed, were openly rebellious, and urged the others that a second meeting should be called, and that a strike should be commenced at once, without delay.

But this suggestion was not carried out, and, ten minutes later, all the men were at work. But Mr. Farrow noticed that they did not work with their usual speed. They did not precisely go "ca'canny," but they did not put the vim into the work which had characterised them hitherto. The manager looked on rather grimly, and he decided that he would not stand very much of this sort of thing. But he was a wise man, and did not say anything at present. The time to speak would be later on—upon the following day. The men were in rather a peculiar mood just now.

Mr. Levi came down during the morning, and had an interview with the manager. Then they went out, and had a look at the work going on. Certainly a great deal had been done. The work of demolishing the old house would be completely finished, according to Mr. Farrow's arrangements, within ten days' time. One wing had already vanished completely, and only the central portion of the building remained intact. And this was now being attacked by the workmen—but they were not getting along as swiftly as they ought to have been.

The dinner-hour arrived, and all the men left their work and went away to their lodgings, or to the cook-shops, or to some quiet corner, where they consumed the food they had brought with them.

But on this day they ate much faster than usual, and the reason for this was that a meeting was being held at exactly one-thirty; work was due to commence again at two o'clock.

That meeting was a decisive one.

Mr. Humm addressed the crowd, and he waxed indignant and excited. Other men supported him, and the excitement spread; and a final decision was arrived at by ten minutes to two. At two o'clock, Mr. Farrow went to his office, and stood there, rather puzzled. There was no sign of the men coming; not a single one had turned up. At five-past two, the building was in the same deserted condition, and very shortly afterwards Mr. Farrow learned the truth. All the men had gone on strike!

Mr. Farrow would have had no doubt left, even if he had not known the truth, for, a few minutes later, a big procession came up the High Street—a procession of workmen. Shopkeepers came to their doors to watch, and there was a general feeling of subdued excitement throughout the town.

This affair was not like the other one, when the workmen at the Grango had placed aside their tools because they were afraid to work any longer in the old house. There was nothing of that kind in this affair.

These men were not scared; they had not been frightened by faked ghosts and manifestations. They had deliberately come out on strike for more wages, although the majority of the people in Bunnington considered that they had absolutely no case. It did not seem that the strikers would gain much sympathy from the townspeople.

A meeting was held in the market square, and considerable crowds were attracted. Many of the strikers talked, and fully justified themselves in having taken this drastic action. They convinced themselves, in fact, that they ought never to have started work at all; and they were certainly not going to resume until their wages were increased.

And while this was going on, Mr. Farrow was having an interview with Mr. Isaac Levi. Both the men were looking grave and troubled.

"I'm not blaming you, Farrow," said Mr. Levi. "I am quite convinced that you did your utmost to avert this disaster—for it is a disaster. There is no necessity for us to disguise the facts. If this strike lasts very long, the delay will have very serious consequences. I hope the men will regain their common sense—"

"I'm afraid there's only one way of ending the strike quickly, sir," said Mr. Farrow. "And that's a way I don't agree with at all—"

"You mean to meet the men's demands?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall certainly not do that!" said Mr. Levi firmly. "If I thought these workmen had even the faintest form of a case, I should consider it, and I should not hesitate to raise the wages. But they have no case; it is the height of impudence to demand more money. And I'm not putting up with it, Farrow. I'm going to show these men that they have met their master; there will be no

knuckling under on my part, I assure you."

The manager nodded.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, sir," he said. "I feel like dismissing every man Jack of them, and sending them about their business—it's no more than they deserve. Some of those men nowadays don't know when they're well off—and that's a fact! But we can't very well do that, Mr. Levi. I'm afraid we should experience great difficulties in obtaining fresh labour."

Mr. Levi pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Well, it is early to come to any decision yet," he said. "We must wait, Farrow, until to-morrow, at least. By that time, probably, the fever will have cooled down in these men, and they will be ready enough to resume work if we only give them the opportunity. I cannot help being suspicious, however."

"Suspicious of what, sir?"

"Well, I don't believe that our men would have thrown down their tools of their own accord," said Mr. Levi. "They were influenced in some way, and I am convinced that Mr. Webb is chiefly responsible for the discontent."

Mr. Farrow grunted.

"It seems that Webb is a thorn in our side all the time, sir," he exclaimed. "It's a pity we can't deal with him drastically. But, so far as I can see, he's done nothing criminal, so we can't touch him."

Meanwhile, at St. Frank's, the news had arrived, and there were many excited discussions among the juniors. Levi's uneasiness of the morning had not been without justification. He was now very worried.

"By my life," he exclaimed, "there's some fatality about that old house—although, of course, I don't believe in that old fable about bad luck. Ever since work was commenced on the Grange, things have been going wrong."

"I don't suppose anything would have gone wrong at all but for one fact," I said; "a rather solid fact, too."

"What's that?"

"Mr. Stanley Webb," I replied grimly. "He's the fact! It's all because of him that these disasters have taken place. But troubles were only sent to us, old chap, for us to overcome them—and your dad and Mr. Farrow will overcome this one, I expect."

Solomon shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that," he

replied. "Those men seem to be determined, and we mustn't forget what happened two or three days ago. That trouble was caused by a mere handful of men; but these strikers are in double and treble the numbers. If they get rioting, there'll be awful doings, believe me!"

"I do believe you," I said grimly. "But it's no good anticipating things, Levi. We'll sit tight, and see how events go. But you can be sure of one thing—if the Remove is required, the Remove will be there."

"Good!" said Solomon Levi.

And, as it turned out, the Remove was required—very much required!

CHAPTER VI.

THE REMOVE TO THE RESCUE!

TOWARDS the evening, other items of news came through to St. Frank's from Bannington. The postman had something to say; one or two tradesmen came to the domestic quarters of the school, and they were full up with information.

Most of this filtered its way through to the juniors before very many minutes had elapsed, and there was a feeling of subdued excitement and unrest in the lower school.

The knowledge that some stirring events were happening in Bannington made the fellows anxious to be there, on the spot.

It was known that a big meeting had been held—a meeting of strikers. Local agitators had addressed the men, and these agitators had been doing their utmost to incite the strikers to acts of violence.

Indeed, one or two scraps had already occurred. A few of the men had got into the building, and had attempted to demolish some of the tools. But the police had arrived on the scene, and two had been arrested.

This only inflamed the others all the more.

Other meetings were being held, and the police were having their hands quite full. For these meetings were not quiet and orderly. In nearly every case minor rioting took place—and it was still only early in the evening.

Williams and his men were doing their work well.

Williams had spent a great deal of that ten pounds—which Mr. Webb had given him to commence with—on spirits. And this he passed round among the strikers, pretending to be very pally. Williams had received his fifty pounds from Mr. Webb—for he had easily won it.

But the rascally cinema owner had not been content.

He had proposed to Williams that further trouble might be caused by inciting the men to riot. And Williams had found that men with liquor in them were far more likely to riot than those without. The men were capable of many acts of violence which they would not dream of in their sober moments.

Thus, insidiously and grimly, the game went on.

Some little time after locking up at St. Frank's, Solomon Levi slipped out into the Triangle. He was determined to go to Bannington at once. It didn't matter to him whether he got into trouble or not. He didn't care.

For Solomon took this matter very much to heart.

It had been his original idea to turn the old Bannington Grange into a cinema, and his father had been quite enthusiastic in the beginning. And Levi felt that it was decidedly rotten that all this trouble should be caused. It was not his—Solomon's—fault, but he felt it keenly. And he wanted to know what was going on.

But in the dim Triangle, Levi ran across a shadowy figure.

"Hold on, old son," said the figure. "Going out?"

Levi halted.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Nipper. I am," he replied. "I'm just off to Bannington."

I glanced up at the school clock.

"Why, you'll hardly have time to get back before bedtime," I said. "And if you don't show up in time for dormitory there'll be ructions—on a large size. You'll have to buzz both ways."

"I don't particularly care whether I miss bed or not," said Levi grimly. "I want to find out exactly what's happening over in Bannington. We can't very well rely on the stories that have come through. I want first-hand information.

Would you care to come with me, Nipper?"

"Well, I'm game," I said promptly. "If there's a row—there'll be a row, that's all. We'll look at the matter philosophically. Now then—let's get our bikes out— By Jove! Old Cuttle's at the gate. He's a good old bird, and he'll let us slip out while he deliberately turns his head the other way."

Mr. Cuttle did not disappoint us.

The old porter was very convenient in that way. Always gloomy, and always full of trouble—to outward appearances—he was, actually, a kindly-hearted, cheerful old fellow. And many were the good turns he did for the juniors. He only reported late-comers when he was absolutely obliged to.

We pedalled rapidly once we were out in the lane. We did not go through the village—for the simple reason that we might have run into a master. So we turned off, and went past the River House School, and so along the Edgemore Road, until we came to the fork which led us straight on to the Bannington Road.

And when we arrived in the town we knew that something big was afoot.

In the market square an extraordinary scene was being enacted.

Hundreds of men were there—and they were nearly out of hand already. A great many of them had been drinking heavily, and were as good as drunk. Others, hovering between drunkenness and sober common sense, were easily led by the hotheads.

Great torches had been lit, and these were being waved about madly. Men were shouting, others were singing, and a truly tremendous commotion was going on. Williams and his assistants were busy—not openly, but from behind. They had but one object in view—to incite the men to real violence.

The police could really do nothing.

There were only twenty or thirty, all told—and some of these really belonged to out-lying districts. They kept order as much as possible, but it was a difficult task.

Solomon Levi and I looked on rather grimly.

"This isn't going to end here, my son," I said. "If I know anything about strikers and rioting, I'll guarantee this little sing-song will end up in a tre-

mendous bust-up. There's trouble brewing."

"That's what I fancy," said Levi. "Let's get a bit closer."

We pushed our way through the crowds, until we could hear a great deal of what was being said. Several men were talking at once, some of them shouting wildly, and nearly all the speakers were under the influence of strong drink.

In their present mood, the men were quite likely to follow these hotheads anywhere.

Many of the men were, no doubt, quite honest, hardworking fellows—in fact, this might almost be said of the majority. But they were excited now—excited with drink, and with the desire for revenge—for they all considered that they had a grievance against the Grange and Mr. Isaac Levi.

Mr. Peter Humm was one of the most prominent speakers. He was standing on some upturned boxes, shouting at the top of his voice. And his words were highly interesting. At least, they seemed to be, for a great many of the men were listening.

"Are we going to stand it, mates?—that's the question," shouted Mr. Humm. "We've been treated bad—we asked for a fair wage, and these 'ere bloomin' sharks won't give it to us!"

"Shame!"

"Are we going to stand it—are we going to take it tamely?"

"No!"

"Not likely, mate!"

"Of course we ain't goin' to stand it!" went on Mr. Humm. "We did the best we could—we went to Mr. Farrow, calm and polite, and told him what we wanted. And what did he tell us? Why, that we wouldn't get no increase, and that it wasn't no good his putting the matter before his employers—because they wouldn't entertain any such thing. So there was only one thing left for us, mates—and that was to strike!"

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"We've done the right thing!"

And so it went on in this fashion. Really nothing of importance was said at all, and I became rather tired of listening. But I noted that many of the men were becoming more and more violent as the minutes passed.

And some were openly suggesting that

they should smash their way into the Grange, and set the whole place on fire.

"It's the only thing to be done, mates!" growled one half-drunken man. "We'll teach these bloated employers that they can't do as they like with us. We're as good as they are—and don't you forgit it! And we're goin' to 'ave our rights—or there'll be trouble. The best thing we can do is to take a lot of these torches, and set fire to things. That'll teach this blamed Jew a lesson!"

Solomon bit his lip.

"Do you hear that?" he muttered.

"Yes," I replied. "A bit steep eh? They seem to be running down your pater pretty thoroughly, Solly—but that's always the case when a man is firm and unbending. And I'm pretty sure that there's going to be some first-class rioting before long."

"Do you think the men will try to burn down the Grange?" asked Levi. "There's not much of it left, I know, but there's Mr. Farrow's office, and there's a tremendous amount of valuable property there—which would all be destroyed by fire. Do you think these men will attempt anything of that sort, Nipper?"

"Yes, I do," I replied grimly.

"Then—then what can we do?" demanded the Jewish boy in alarm. "We hurled off the other attacks without difficulty—but we can't do anything here—just the two of us. It's awful, Nipper!"

"Look here, Solly," I interrupted crisply. "You know as well as I do that we had a lot of hoses, bags of soot, and all that kind of thing? Well, unless they've been cleared out, those hoses are still there, connected up. And I know we left a good stock of soot bags."

"But—but what do you propose?"

"Well, I'm not suggesting that we should tackle the mob on our own," I replied. "In a case of this sort, Levi, we've got to take a sporting chance."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I'm practically certain that these men will soon be rioting in full swing," I replied. "And it's a dead certainty that they will make the Grange the centre of their attentions. If the Remove is going to do anything to frustrate this riot, the Remove must be on the spot."

"But all the fellows aren't here."

"Exactly," I agreed—"but they can come!"

"By my life! That's a good idea!" said Levi, his eyes sparkling. "But will they come, Nipper—that's the question? And, in any case, will they be allowed to come? We can't very well take the whole Remove away without the masters getting to know about it."

"Hardly," I said. "Well, we'll see—and we'll hurry back as fast as we can go."

We had spent more time in Bannington than we had realised, and we soon found that it would be impossible for us to reach St. Frank's before bedtime.

When we finally arrived we left our bicycles outside in the road, climbed a wall, and sped across the Triangle. Just as we were going into the Ancient House I paused, and turned to Levi.

"Look here, we want the College House fellows as well," I said. "Christine and his lot, you know. You'd better go over there while I attend to our fellows. The more the merrier."

Levi went off, and I rushed in, and was soon up in the Remove Dormitory, having managed to get there without being observed.

"Oh, here he is!"

"You're in for a warm time, Nipper!" said Tommy Watson. "Morrow's after your blood, and he'll——"

"Never mind Morrow, and never mind any trouble I might get into!" I shouted. "I'm glad to see that hardly any of you are undressed. You're all wanted!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"We're which?"

"You're wanted—at Bannington!" I went on grimly. "In a case like this we can't bother about rules and regulations. We are required to maintain law and order, and when it's all over, the Head won't be able to punish us much. I call upon all you fellows to rally round."

Then, just as we were about to surge

out of the dormitory, the door opened, and Morrow of the Sixth appeared. His brow was black, and he swished a cane in his hand.

"What's the meaning of all this confounded noise in here?" he demanded warmly. "Good gracious! You're not even undressed! Silence! I won't stand——"

As it turned out, Morrow didn't stand—he found it impossible to do so. For the juniors, quite reckless, rushed the prefect, bowled him over, and sent him sprawling. Before he could rise to his feet, the juniors were streaming down the stairs like a miniature flood. Mr. Crowell came out of his rooms and started shouting. But the Remove fellows were deaf, and they surged out into the Triangle in a noisy, shouting crowd. For one horrible moment Mr. Crowell imagined that the juniors were on strike—that a barring-out was commencing. But such a thing could not be—the fellows had absolutely no grievance. And before Mr. Crowell could ask anybody the truth, the juniors had gone.

I was delighted with the success of the scheme—I had been quite certain that something of this sort would occur. An appeal such as I had made was popular, and the juniors were always ready for some excitement.

And from the College House came another excited crowd of Removites. Levi had been successful, too, and he was now bringing over the College House battalion. Our force was now quite a considerable one, and there was no doubt that we should be able to perform wonders in the way of defensive work.

The Remove was going to the rescue—and it was an absolute certainty that the Remove was in for some excitement.

The events of that night were dramatic, indeed—but they cannot be set down here. They form quite another episode in this remarkable history, and all the facts will be set down—by yours truly—in the immediate future.

THE END.

READ NEXT WEEK

"THE JEWISH BOY'S TRIUMPH!"

The grand, concluding Story of the Olnema Series.

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KIT & CORA

Mysterious Detectives

A TALE OF DETECTIVE
ADVENTURE IN LONDON.

INTRODUCTION.

LIN FLEET, a lad of fifteen, wrongfully accused of stealing, loses his job at a motor garage. His parents being dead, he lives with an unscrupulous pair known as Uncle and Aunt Pawley, the former being better acquainted with the thefts at the garage than he would care to admit. Lin meets a stranger in a grey suit, who takes an interest in him, and the boy nicknames him "Mr. Mysterious." The stranger employs Lin on some dangerous missions in order to give the lad an opportunity of displaying his detective abilities. One night Lin accompanies his employer to a lonely house inhabited by a dangerous gang of foreign secret service agents. Having obtained valuable information concerning the gang the daring detective and Lin are caught, and only succeed in getting away by pretending to be common burglars.

(Now read on.)

Lin Gets Another Surprise!

THE supposed burglar was curiously ordered to the door, and shambled out, under escort of the two men. Never once had the brother and sister made any sign one to the other, or even exchanged a glance that the keenest watcher could have detected as having meaning, or suggesting a secret understanding.

But just as he reached the doorway Twyford dropped one of the tools he was putting away in the pockets of his coat. It fell with a noisy clatter on the bare boards, and, in the most natural manner, the woman at the bureau turned her head.

Then, in one swift, lightning-glance, their eyes met for the first time. The brother's eyes conveyed a message; the sister's responded that she read it and understood. All in the single moment, as Twyford stooped to pick up the fallen tool, that subtle bit of "wireless" was flashed across the room. None saw it—not even Lin Fleet, alert and watchful though he was.

But he was quick to see and understand the slight sign that Cora gave him—a mere motion of her hand—when Twyford and his guards had passed out of the room. It meant "stay," and he eagerly hoped that the brave girl needed his help—perhaps

even such protection as he could give her, if that great blind brute with the beard came back, and attacked her in his baffled spite.

But he was disappointed there. Cora Twyford did not detain him a bare half-minute.

Swiftly she crossed to the window, thrust her arm between the curtains, then turned to him and passed her brother's notebook into his hands, moist with the night-dew it had already gathered in the few minutes it had lain upon the outer sill.

"Secure it under your jacket," she said, in a rapid whisper; "then overtake my brother—or, if you miss him, make for where the grey car is waiting. Be quick yet cautious. Beware of that blind man with the great beard. Now go, Lin—go!"

Lin would rather have stayed. He hated to go and leave her to face unknown perils alone. Cora seemed to understand that, for, smiling, she shook her head and pointed towards the door.

In spite of the smile it was a command, and he had to obey.

It was quite dark in the outer hall; but a vertical streak of wan, grey light showed him that the door opening into the portico stood ajar. Lin made towards it cautiously and slipped out; pausing behind one of the stone pillars of the portico before he ventured to cross the wide garden to the gate, in case the two men who had formed Twyford's escort had not yet returned to the house. If he encountered them they might detain and question him—perhaps even search him. And he had that notebook upon him!

But there was no sign of the men, and, waiting only until a dense bank of drifting cloud covered the moon, he left the portico and stole across the lawn to avoid the sound of his footsteps on the hard path.

At the gateway he paused again, in the shadow of a bush at one side—for one leaf of the great iron gates stood open a little way, and it seemed not unlikely that Rideau and Wetzler had conducted the supposed burglar beyond the grounds, and that he might yet run foul of them as they returned.

But in the avenue beyond the gates, as far as he could see along it in the murky gloom, was bare of any moving figure. Nor could he hear any sound like a footfall; only the dropping of moisture from the trees, as they stirred in the sluggish wind that was rising with the dawn.

"Better risk it now than wait here," Lin decided. "They may have gone back another way."

He opened the gate—just wide enough to slip through; keeping in the shadow of a group of bushes that grew against the stone pillar at that side. A slight sound—the grind of a step upon the wet gravel—made him turn with a start.

But he was too late to spring away! A huge, dark figure towered over him; a great hand seized his shoulder and swung him round. Steel gleamed before his eyes. The fierce voice of Sapt, the Bulgarian, hissed in his ear:

"Who is that man you came with? Tell me, boy—and instantly—or I will plunge this into your heart!"

The terror of his threat was not enough for the Bulgarian. To give a horrible reality to his words he actually pierced the boy's clothing with the knife's keen point, touching the flesh.

"That is a foretaste," he grimly said; "answer my question instantly, or I will give you the whole length of the blade. Who is that man? Speak at once, or you will never speak again in this world!"

Lin's brain whirled with the suddenness of the attack at a moment when he had almost thought himself safe from the interception, with a fair chance of getting clear away with that dangerous book.

He could hardly believe that the man would actually kill him in cold blood. Yet there seemed something terribly real in his threat, backed as it was by the sharp sting of the steel point in his flesh.

Not for a moment was he tempted to betray Twyford; even the thought of it did not enter his mind. And if a clever lie might have served him then, he could think of none. He was never ready at inventing lies. He remained silent, and tried to shake off the grip of that mighty hand.

It was useless. And a second touch of the knife's point came to remind him that it was deadly dangerous, too!

"You will not speak?" growled his burly captor. "One bare moment more I give you, then——"

A slight sound of movement; then a voice, the voice of Rideau; Lin thought, said:

"Release that boy, Herr Sapt! I am to shoot you if you refuse. It is madame's command, and I am under oath to obey her as a member of the League at the peril of my own life!"

"Curse you for coming a moment too soon, Rideau!" growled Sapt. "Take your pistol from my forehead, and your grip from my arm!"

"Not till you release that boy and return to the house," the other voice responded sternly. "Refuse, and I shall pull this trigger! I am under orders; I will not break my word and lose my own life for yours, Sapt!"

The Bulgarian cursed him again. But he released his hold; and flinging Lin violently from him, so that the boy almost fell upon his face, turned and strode through the

gates towards the house. Lin, who had fallen on his knees, felt himself helped up by a strong but not rough hand. With a dry laugh, a familiar voice said:

"Has that great ruffian hurt you, Lin? No; that's good! Then we'll get along to the car. I expected that the fellow would dog you as you came out, and so came back after those two men had seen me, as they thought, bolt off down the lane here, as if delighted to get away alive."

And the speaker laughed again. There was no mistaking that quiet laugh of Mr. Mysterious.

"But it was that man Rideau's voice, sir, ordering him to let me go!" exclaimed Lin. "Rideau's voice—I heard it!"

"Something like it, Lin," chuckled Twyford, as they walked quickly down the dark avenue. "Not a bad copy, I think, as I had never heard the fellow speak until to-night. But it went very well with that big brute; and the socket of a screw-jemmy, pressed against his forehead, was quite as effective as the muzzle of a six-shooter. Mere bluff; but it went, didn't it?"

"I think it saved my life, sir!" said Lin, with more than a touch of feeling in his tone.

"And that's worth saving, lad!" said Twyford heartily. "But here's the nook where we left the car. Ah! How goes it, Crabb?"

The gruff voice of the wooden-faced driver responded, out of the gloom of the little dell where the grey car had been drawn up:

"All's well, guv'nor! An' how's things gone—up there?"

"Well enough, so far," answered Twyford. "But my sister is there yet, and I shall wait here until I know that she is safely out of the place."

"Ay, ay, guv'nor!" grunted Crabb. "Glad o' that; 'cos I couldn't 'ave druv away easy in me mind, knowin' that missie was among that lot there—an' alone!" Then he added, more cheerfully: "Not but what her cool pluck an' bright brains will bring her through safe enough, guv'nor!"

"I trust so!" muttered Twyford fervently.

He stepped to the gap in the hedgerow which formed the only entrance to the little dell, and there stood waiting—with Lin at his side, and the wooden-faced driver close behind—all three silent and alert with suspense.

They had not long to wait. Then the purr of a light motor was heard. Twyford seemed certain of the sound, for he breathed a sigh of relief, and raised a peculiar, soft whistle—the call he had taught Lin, who forgot it at the critical moment.

But it was answered now, at a little distance, then nearer. The small, dark car, which Lin had seen waiting in the grounds of the house, now approached, and slowed down without quite stopping as it came abreast of where they stood. Twyford took a step forward.

A hand waved from the car, and a soft voice said: "All's well!" Then the car drove on, and rapidly gathering speed was

soon out of sight and hearing, as it bowled down the avenue towards the high-road.

"All's well!" repeated Twyford gaily. "Thank Heaven for that! Now it's home, sweet home, Crabb, at top speed and some! I'm just spoiling to shed this gaol-bird plumage, and have a bath and a big, big feed! Hop in, Lin! Whip her up, Crabb! Hang the speed-limit for once and only!"

To Lin that swift ride through the grey of dawn back to London was more like a dream-journey than a reality. Tired out, the swaying of the flying car, with the hum of the wind past the open windows for a lullaby, made him drowsy, and he soon fell asleep.

He was but half awake, and it was still like a dream, sitting at table and eating and drinking, in that queer double room at Hampstead, with Mr. Mysterious—his own self again—at one end, and Miss Twyford—fresh as a rosebud on a summer morning—smiling at him across the shining china and silver.

She laughed gaily, as he nodded over his plate, or actually fell asleep with his cup halfway to his lips. He heard their voices like voices in a dream, and was just awake enough to notice with wonder that they never made the slightest mention of the grim and exciting adventures of that thrilling night. Their chat ranged lightly over art, music, books, travel, and a hundred topics; but not one word of the thrilling drama they had passed through so recently!

It might never have happened to them, or they had forgotten all about it. And Lin began to wonder if it had really happened, or whether it wasn't all a dream? He couldn't decide. And, anyway, it wasn't worth troubling about; he was too jolly sleepy to think it out.

Then he had a hazy notion that he stumbled upstairs after someone with a candle; undressed, and tumbled into the snuggest, softest bed he had ever known in his life.

After that all was a blank until, about ten minutes later—as it seemed to him—he awakened to find the sunlight streaming through the open window of a room that he knew couldn't be his bare garret at Cowl Street, or even his dingy "top-floor-back" at Sam Wade's! It was so vastly different!

Someone was standing beside his bed. He cleared the mists of sleep from his eyes, and discovered that it was the wooden-faced Mr. Crabb—not in his chauffeur's leathers, but in a plain livery, and with a big bath-towel over his arm. This he dropped on to the bed, saying:

"Bathroom in there," pointing to a white-enamelled door. "When you're through an' dressed, it's all ready an' waitin' downstairs."

"What is waiting—breakfast?" asked Lin, who found himself astonishingly hungry after that late supper such a little while ago. Crabb turned at the door, and with a wooden grin said:

"Well, you might call it that, or you

might say as it was luncheon—only, mindin' the time o' day, most 'ud reckon it tea."

"Tea!" exclaimed Lin, sitting upright quickly. "Why, what's the time, then? I haven't slept long!"

"Jest the round o' the clock an' a bit over, that's all," grinned Crabb from the doorway. "Goin' on four in the afternoon."

"Afternoon! I can't have slept all that awful time!" cried Lin, in amazement.

"Why didn't you rouse me out before?"

"Guv'nor's orders," grunted Crabb. "Said, let him sleep up all he can while he's got the chance, because—"

"Because what?" demanded Lin eagerly, as he slid out of bed.

"You'll find out in time, if you lives long enough," said Crabb darkly. "Downstairs in twenty minutes, if you don't want yer tea overdrawed, an' yer rashers cold!"

With that he withdrew. It hardly took Lin half the specified time to have his bath, and dress as neatly as his somewhat limited outfit allowed. Then he made his way downstairs, and guided by the—to him, with a sharp appetite upon him—delightful odours of grilled ham and freshly-made tea, found himself once again in that queer double room.

On a small table by the open window, in that daintily bright and charming portion of the long apartment, which he had come to call "Miss Cora's half," was a silver tray with all the materials for a rather mixed but glorious feast upon it!

Lin sat down, and began rather timidly; but, made bolder by the first few mouthfuls, soon got into his stride and went the pace until he could eat no more.

In fact, when he surveyed the havoc he had made among the things on that tray he actually blushed, and muttered half-aloud:

"Great land! I've been eating like a starved kid off the streets! What would Miss Cora have said if she had seen me at it!"

"'Cheers!' and 'go it again!' most likely," said a musical voice, with a ringing, silvery laugh.

Lin sprang to his feet, blushing quite fiercely now. Outside the window stood Miss Twyford! She wore a very business-like outfit of overalls and cap, and there was sawdust upon her, and here and there a shaving clung to her; but she looked as dainty and charming as ever, as she smiled at him, and said:

"Finished? Then come along, Lin! We've got something to show you—and I rather think you will open your eyes, when you see what a clever carpenter I am, for I helped to make it!" And she laughed again gaily. "Come on! Push the window up and jump out. It's a short cut, and I often take it."

Lin laughed himself, catching the spirit of fun that danced in her bright eyes. And he thought with wonder and admiration,

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

now this same laughing, light-hearted girl, in that grim scene of the night before, had stood between her brother and death—and by sheer power of will and splendid daring saved him!

He dropped lightly from the window and followed her, as she beckoned, into a wilderness of trees and shrubs, intersected by a bewildering maze of narrow, rough pathways that seemed to wind in all directions and lead nowhere.

"Shocking scrub of a garden, isn't it?" laughed Cora. "But my brother likes it so. 'Kit's Jungle,' I call it. Here, take my hand, Lin, or you'll go astray and wander for ever and ever!"

Seizing Lin's hand she led him, with speed that soon increased to a run, through the bewildering tangle of paths, until his head fairly whirled with the constant twisting and turning, and he had hardly breath enough to laugh. Then she stopped suddenly, and said, with a flourish of her arm:

"Scene—a ruined hut in the woods."

Lin wondered what she meant. For at first he could see no hut; it was dark there, what with the coming of evening and the massed shadows of the surrounding trees. But presently he saw what looked like an old, tumble-down shed, or log-cabin, more than half-hidden by a wild overgrowth of bushes. It was rather picturesque with its mournful air of abandonment and decay, so Lin thought that Miss Twyford must have brought him there to see it, as one of the sights of the place. He was disappointed rather, having hoped for something more exciting than a twilight view of an old, ruined shanty. But he thought it would only be polite to express a little admiration, so he murmured, "Very—very pretty!"

Cora broke into a ringing peal of laughter. "Oh, good!" she exclaimed. "Did you think I had brought you here just to admire that old shack! Oh, won't Kit enjoy that! But it's a shame to laugh at you, Lin—though you'll laugh yourself when you discover your mistake. Come on!"

The Big Packing Case.

CORA lifted aside the wild curtain of foliage that covered the front of the shed and disclosed a door of rough, weatherbeaten planks. She pushed this open and signed Lin to enter.

An exclamation of surprise burst from the boy's lips, and her eyes twinkled with enjoyment, as she followed him in and closed the door.

"Not quite what you expected, eh, Lin?" she slyly asked.

It was not, by any means! For he had naturally expected the interior to match the outside—a gloomy place with a rough floor of earth, heaped with dead leaves and other rubbish, and long given over to rats below, and big, fat spiders among the rotten rafters of the roof above.

Instead, he found himself in a roomy workshop, well-built of brick and concrete, and fitted out with every appliance of the

most up-to-date description for work in wood or metal. Although Lin had seen not a gleam of light outside, it was bright within with the glow of many electric lamps.

"This is our workshop; now you shall see what sort of work Kit and I can turn our hand to! Come! There's Kit—hard at it up at the other end!"

They waded ankle-deep through the sawdust and shavings that covered the floor, and rounding a stack of boards, found Mr. Mysterious, in shirtsleeves and apron, busy with stencil-plate and brush upon a large box, or packing-case.

Lin stared at the case in fresh astonishment. Twyford laughed, and said:

"Rather reminds you of those cases we saw in that cellar last night—eh, my lad? Think it's like?"

"Like!" exclaimed Lin. "Why, it's exactly the same as that biggest one!"

"As to the outside. Yes, I think that is a pretty close copy," said Twyford. "But there is a bit of difference in the interior, Lin, as you shall see. Show him, Cora—for that part is chiefly your work."

There were iron clamps at the corners of the big case. Cora touched one of these, which, though it seemed as firmly screwed on as the other, shifted under her hand. The front of the case dropped outwards on invisible hinges, showing that the interior was empty, save for a ballast of bars of lead at the bottom, and a curious contrivance like a cradle or hammock, slung lengthwise from end to end, and so arranged that it could swing with any movement of the case, in lifting or carrying, without bumping against the sides.

"Looks comfy, doesn't it, Lin?" smiled Cora. "Now get in and try it."

Wondering, and inclined to laugh, Lin climbed into the queer swing-hammock, and found that he could lie in it at full-length with perfect ease.

"Pretty comfortable—eh?" said Twyford. "Now, do you think you could stand an hour, or a couple of hours in there?"

"Longer than that, sir," declared Lin. "It wouldn't make bad quarters for a night."

"Ah, but I mean like this, my lad," said Twyford.

The front of the case rose into its place and closed with a slight click. Lin was in darkness, with the unpleasant feeling of being like a rat when the trap shuts on it! But he could still hear Twyford's voice distinctly:

"You won't want for air, Lin—that's all provided for. And you can hear me pretty well, can't you?"

"Quite distinctly," answered Lin from within the case. "And I can see you, too, sir, and Miss Cora, and a good bit of the workshop as well—through these little holes here, just about level with my eyes."

He wondered, as he spoke, that he had not seen those holes when he stood outside the case; but he discovered afterwards that they

(Continued overleaf.)

were so cunningly "camouflaged" by the heavy black lettering stencilled there, as to be practically invisible, save to the closest scrutiny.

"Good!" said Twyford. "And you are not a prisoner in there, my lad. You can hop out any moment at your own sweet will. You have only to touch that little lever you will find at your left hand."

Lin reached out, and with his fingers found a small metal lever in the angle of the case, beside him. He pulled it over, and, with a very slight purring sound of well-oiled mechanism, the front of the case dropped outwards until it touched the floor. At a sign from Twyford he vaulted lightly out of the swing-cradle, raised the front of the case and closed it as before.

"Well, what do you think of our work,

Lin?" said Cora, with a smile. "But, of course, it is a box of mystery to you."

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Lin. "So clever—the idea of that swinging cradle-like thing, and the way that the whole side of the case is made to open and shut with hardly a bit of noise! It is quite a marvel, I think! But, of course, I don't understand —"

"What is its meaning and its intended purpose?" said Cora. "No, I don't suppose you do, Lin," she added, with more of seriousness in her look and tone. "But you have to know and understand; for this queer packing-case belongs to your part in the work we have still before us, and would be useless without you. But I will leave my brother to explain."

(To be continued.)



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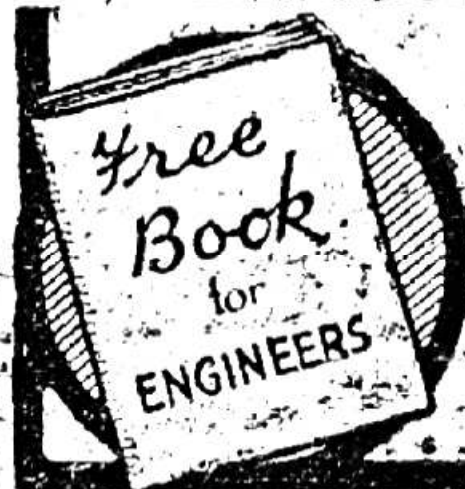
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