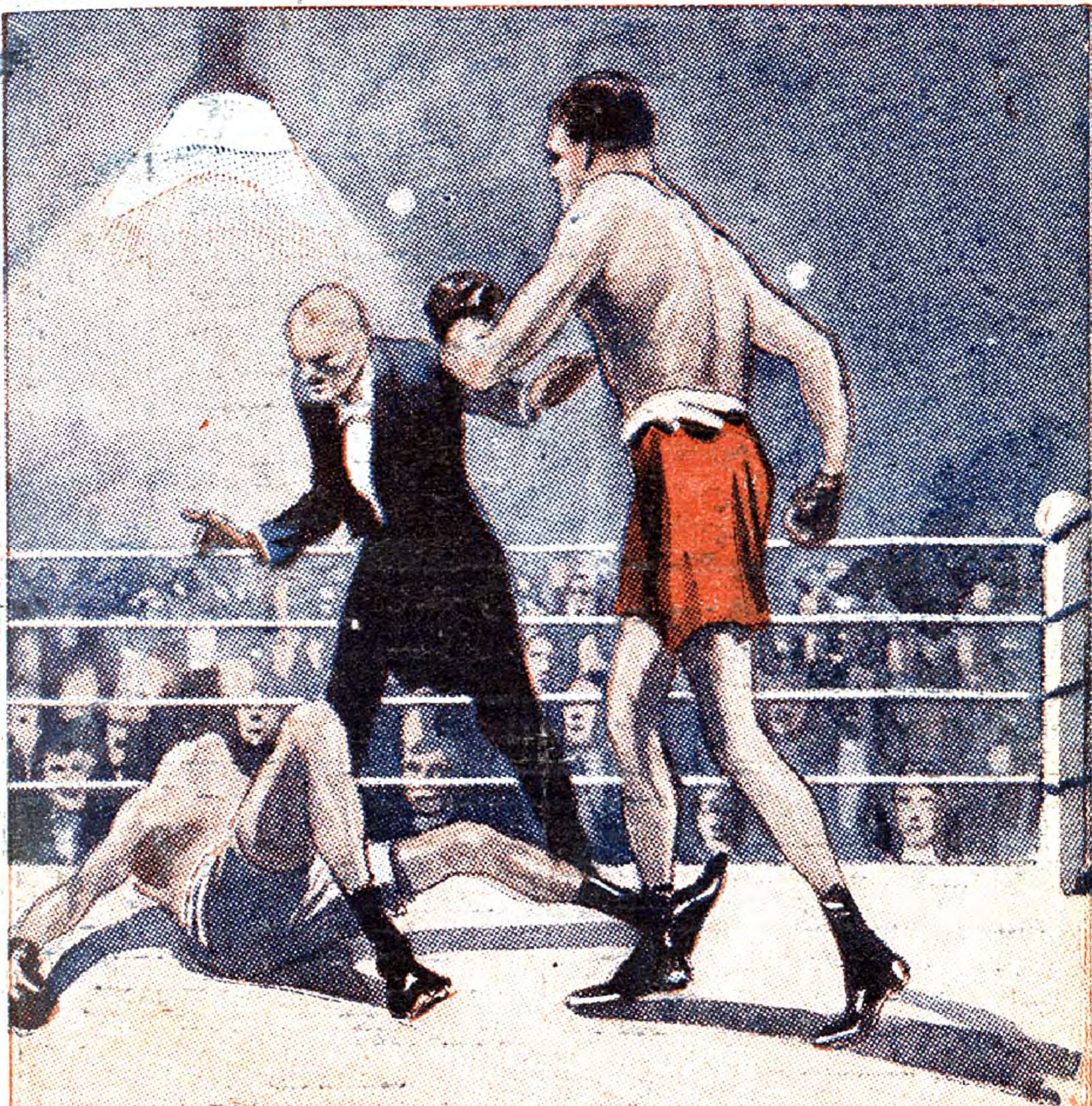


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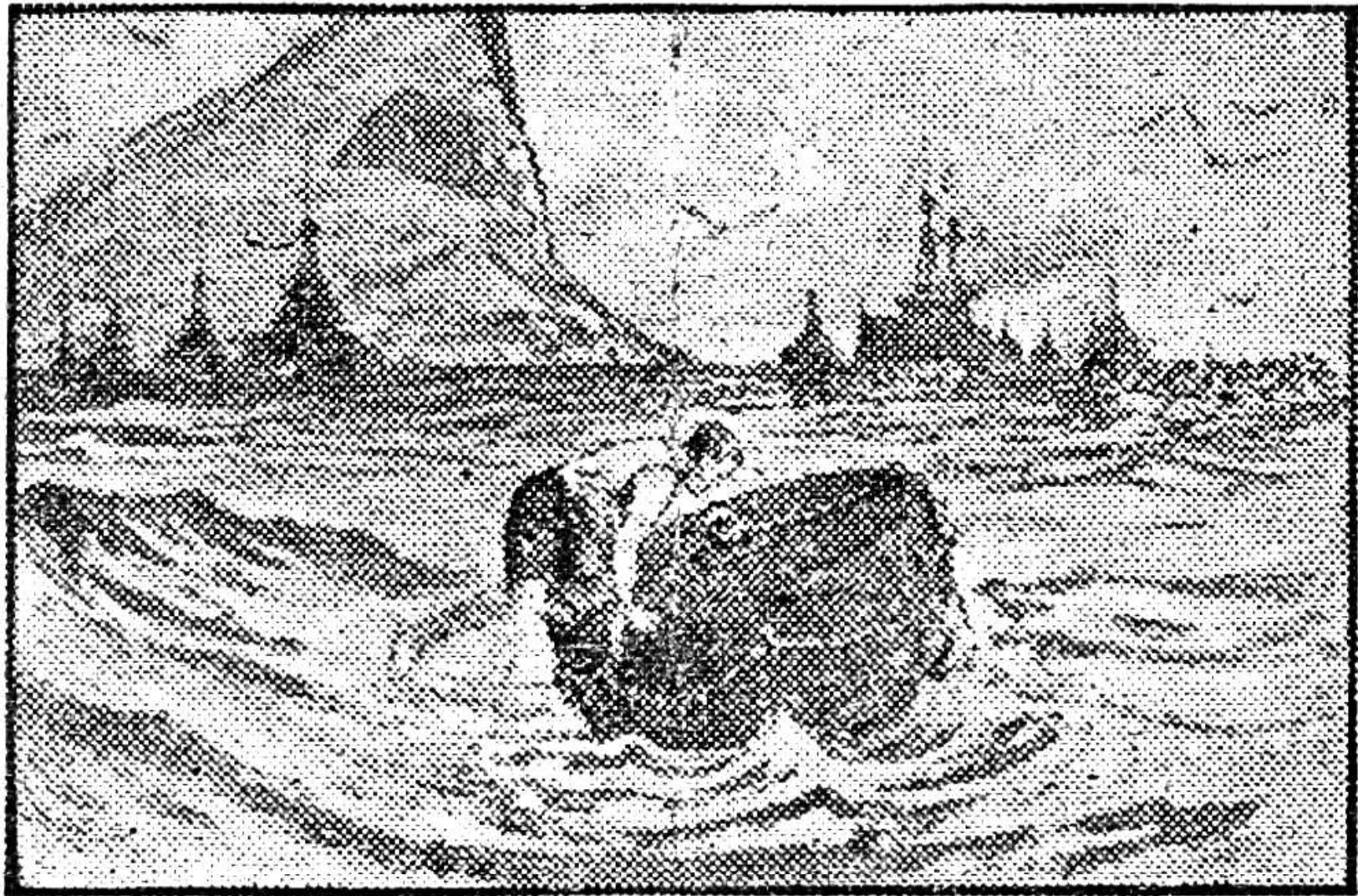
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A SHOCK FOR FULLWOOD AND CO.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked disgusted.

"Rain, rain, and nothing but rain!" he snorted. "What can we do on an afternoon like this?"

"Well, it's nice and cosy in the study," remarked McClure. "We can go there, and sit reading in front of the fire, or play a game of chess. There are plenty of things that we can do, Handy, if we want to."

"But we can't do anything out of doors, you ass!" snapped Handforth. "I know we can go to the study—but who wants to stick in the study on a Saturday afternoon? Did you ever know such beastly weather? Why can't we have snow, and frost? Why can't we have skating?"

"It's no good asking me!" said Church, shrugging his shoulders. "I'd like frost and snow as much as you would, Handy—but don't accuse me of causing this rotten drizzle! Anybody might think I was responsible, by the way you're glaring at me!"

The juniors were standing just inside the lobby of the Ancient House. And they were gazing out upon the rain-soaked Triangle. A continuous drizzle had been falling since early morning—and now the Triangle and the whole countryside was saturated. It was one

of those days calculated to cause anybody to have a fit of the "blues." The atmosphere was hazy, chilly and miserable. A fine drizzle soaked down, drenching everything. All out-of-doors sports and pastimes were practically out of the question.

"Well, somebody seems to be braving the elements," remarked McClure, nodding his head across the Triangle. "Who's that chap that's just come out of the College House?"

His companions stared across, and they saw a well-built figure just coming down the steps of the College House. He was a junior, and he was attired in a tweed overcoat, and the ordinary school cap. His collar was turned up, and he walked with a brisk stride towards the gates.

"Look like Lawrence!" remarked Church. "Lawrence, of the Remove."

"Silly ass!" said Handforth grumpily. "Where the dickens is he off to?"

"Better go and ask him!" suggested McClure.

"But why should he go out on an afternoon like this?" went on Handforth. "What's the idea of it?"

"My dear chap, Lawrence can go out if he wants to, I suppose?" said Church. "It's a half-holiday, and he can go where he pleases—so long as he gets in before calling-over. Why should we worry our heads about a fat-headed College House chap? I vote we go back to the study, and sit down in front of the fire. We might be able to think

of some game or other—to work on the other chaps.”

This seemed to brighten Handforth up somewhat, and he agreed to go into Study D. Meanwhile, Ernest Lawrence was walking briskly down Bellton Lane, and he soon arrived in the village. He went straight through, until he arrived at the railway station. He bought a return ticket to Helmford, and then strolled on to the platform. The train was due to come in within two or three minutes.

Handforth would have wondered still more if he had seen Lawrence buy that ticket. Why was the College House junior going to Helmford—a town fully twenty miles away from St. Frank's? What could the junior's object be in taking such a journey?

Lawrence was practically a new fellow in the Remove. He had arrived at St. Frank's at the beginning of the present term, and he had been placed in the College House. He was a fair-haired, clear-skinned youngster of about fifteen years of age, and he had a fine physique. He had distinguished himself in one way since his arrival at the old school—he had, in short, given Grayson of the Fifth—the bully of the College House—a sound and well-deserved thrashing. For the junior to perform a feat such as this was quite remarkable—for Grayson was a hulking big fellow, and his age was nearly seventeen.

The train soon steamed into the station, and Lawrence got into a third-class compartment to himself, and closed the door. He failed to observe a man enter the train—a man who was rather roughly attired, and who wore a coarse, brown beard. This man, strange to tell, had also followed Lawrence practically all the way from St. Frank's. But the junior was quite unaware of this, too. He had no suspicions—he had no idea that this brown bearded stranger was on his track.

But such was the case. This man—who had certainly never been seen in Bellton before—was shadowing Lawrence. Why? Who was the man?

What could his reason be for following a junior schoolboy?

It was certainly a very strange procedure on the man's part. But he apparently had a very good reason, or he would never have taken the trouble on such a miserable afternoon as this.

And while Lawrence was journeying to Helmford—while his movements were being watched by this stranger in the brown beard—Fullwood and Co., of the Remove at St. Frank's, received something of a shock.

They were in their study in the Remove Passage, and they were all feeling rather glum. Gulliver was staring out of the window, into the rain-sodden Triangle.

“It's always rotten weather on a half-holiday!” he grunted. “Just when we'd arranged to go to Bannington, too! We can't go out in this beastly weather—”

“We are going out in about two hours time,” put in Fullwood. “But there's no need to start off now, Gully. We've got to meet Mike Bradmore in Bannington just at about tea-time—to collect our cash. But there's a good deal of time to waste before then, and the best thing we can do is to enjoy ourselves here—in the study.”

“We shall enjoy ourselves all right!” said Bell. “There's a fat lot of enjoyment sitting here—I don't think!”

Ralph Leslie Fullwood looked rather thoughtful.

“I don't know,” he said slowly. “We might be able to get some fun. Mr. Lee's out—I know that for a fact. I saw him go at about a quarter past two. And there's not any prefect who will come disturbing us during this afternoon. Therefore we can consider ourselves free and easy.”

“What the deuce are you getting at?” demanded Gulliver.

“Nothing much—but I don't see why we shouldn't enjoy a little game of cards,” said Fullwood. “We can smoke, too. It'll be as safe as houses if we keep the door shut all the time. I vote for a nice little game of poker.”

Gulliver and Bell were not impressed by this suggestion. As a matter of fact, they never enjoyed playing cards just between themselves. Perhaps they knew one another too well—and, most certainly, they suspected one another. It was always better if they had somebody else there—somebody they could “skin.” The knuts of the Remove were well experienced in the art of card sharpening.

Fullwood went over to the cupboard, and he presently returned with a pack of cards, and a box of cigarettes. He

and his companions lit up, and Gulliver shuffled the cards. He was not looking very satisfied.

"I suppose we might as well have a round or two," he said. "Personally, I'd rather read a book. but——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Fullwood. "I've got a suggestion. Why shouldn't we fetch Mr. Foxe, and ask him to join in?"

Gulliver and Bell stared.

"Mr. Foxe?" repeated Bell.

"Exactly!—Mr. Smale Foxe, the respected Master of the College House," said Fullwood, nodding. "He's bound to have plenty of cash, and I rather fancy that we can squeeze some of it out of him. In any case, it's better than playing alone. And it'll be a bit of a novelty to have a Housemaster in our study—smoking and playing cards with us!"

Gulliver and Bell were rather uncertain about it. It was quite true that Mr. Smale Foxe had played cards with them on a previous occasion—he had smoked, too. This had thoroughly amazed the juniors, but there was no getting away from the fact that Mr. Foxe was a sport.

This happened over in the College House—in Grayson's study. Grayson and Shaw had been entertaining Fullwood and Co. when Mr. Foxe had walked in. But, instead of inflicting severe punishment upon the culprits, he had joined in their game! Not only this, but he had smoked, and he had lost some money. And he had told the boys to carry on, and to thoroughly enjoy themselves. It had staggered all of them, and they had given up trying to find an explanation. But they regarded Mr. Smale Foxe as a good sort. He was a novel kind of Housemaster—he was a man who understood things.

"Why shouldn't we fetch Foxy in here now?" suggested Fullwood. "Personally, I think it's a good idea, and we shall certainly be able to get some tin out of him."

"How can we get him here?" inquired Bell.

"One of us will have to go over and fetch him," said Fullwood. "I expect when he hears that we're going to have a little flutter, he'll be only too jolly glad to come. It must be rotten for him over there, with nothing to do, on a wet afternoon."

"All right—you'd better go and fetch him!" said Gulliver smoothly. "I wouldn't risk it!"

"Neither would I!" said Bell.

Fullwood sniffed.

"Oh, I know you've got about enough pluck——" he began.

"It's not a question of pluck," said Gulliver. "It's nerves that's required in a case like this. For all we know, he might kick us out of his study. He might not be in a decent mood to-day. Anyhow, I wouldn't like chancing it!"

"You're not going to be asked to—because I shall go over myself," said Fullwood. "Get the cards ready and wait here. I'll soon be back with him."

Fullwood lost no time in getting off, and he hurried across the Triangle, and made his way to the College House. Fortunately he did not encounter any Monks, or it is quite likely that he would have been ragged. Any stray Ancient House fellow found in the College House was generally subjected to a ragging. It was just the same if a College House fellow risked his skin amongst the Fossils.

Fullwood arrived at the Housemaster's study, and he rapped briskly upon the panel.

"Come in!" said a voice from within.

Fullwood entered, and found Mr. Smale Foxe sitting at his desk examining some papers. Now that the moment had arrived Fullwood was not feeling quite so confident. It was a terrible thing to come here—to a Housemaster—to ask him to come into a junior study to smoke and gamble! It was about the limit in cool cheek.

But Fullwood remembered that former occasion—and he knew well enough that Mr. Foxe liked gambling and smoking—and he did not object to it among the boys. Therefore, why should he object now?

Fullwood tried to really feel easy, but he couldn't manage it. Mr. Foxe was looking at him in an expectant kind of way. And, somehow, it seemed to Fullwood that the Housemaster was more refined than usual. And his voice was quieter.

"Well, my boy, what do you want?" he exclaimed, laying down his pen.

"Ahem! I just—I—I just looked in to see if you were busy, sir?" said Fullwood. "I—I want you to come over to my study in the Ancient House, sir."

"We're giving a little party—well, it's not exactly a party, sir. Gulliver and Bell and I will be there, and we'd like you to come over, too."

Mr. Foxe looked rather surprised.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "It is rather curious that you should require my presence, Fullwood—although I appreciate your kind invitation. But may I inquire the nature of this little party?"

"Oh, we're going to have a flutter, sir!" said Fullwood boldly.

"A—a flutter?"

"That's the idea, sir!" grinned Fullwood, with a wink. "You understand, sir!"

Mr. Foxe looked rather bewildered for a moment, then he smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I understand, Fullwood," he said. "All right, my boy. I will certainly come over to your study—but not just at the moment. You may expect me in about ten minutes time—and I thank you for your thoughtfulness. I just want to finish a few notes, and then I will come."

"Oh, good!" said Fullwood. "We can promise you a good game, sir!"

Fullwood left the study, and returned to the Ancient House. When he burst in upon Gulliver and Bell, that precious pair were lounging near the fireplace, smoking. They started up as Fullwood entered.

"You—you ass!" gasped Bell. "I—I thought you were a prefect——"

"Never mind what you thought!" interrupted Fullwood. "Foxy is coming across in about ten minutes from now. So we'll be having a game until he arrives. When he walks in he'll find us in the middle of it. That'll make him feel nice and comfortable for a start off."

"He agreed all right, then?" asked Bell.

"Rather!" said Fullwood. "His eyes sparkled, and he grinned all over his face. It's just what he wanted to liven him up. You wait until he arrives, my sons—he'll enter into the game like a good 'un."

Fullwood and Co. were soon seated round the table. They were smoking and playing poker—a game which is really nothing but a gamble. Each junior had a little pile of silver and copper beside him, and they were feel-

ing quite secure, for the door was closed and locked on the inside. It was impossible for anybody to gain admittance without disturbing the gamblers.

A footstep sounded out in the passage, and then a tap came upon the panels of the door.

"Hullo!" shouted Fullwood. "Who's that?"

"It is I—Mr. Foxe!" came the reply.

"Oh! Half a jiffy, sir!"

Gulliver jumped up and turned the key in the lock. Then he threw the door wide, and Mr. Smale Foxe walked in. He was smiling, and he entered the study in a mood which was evidently a genial one. Gulliver closed the door rapidly, and relocked it. And then a change came over Mr. Foxe's face. The smile vanished, and it was replaced by an expression of astonishment. He was gazing at Fullwood and Co. as though he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were all smoking cigarettes—the atmosphere, indeed, was hazy with blue smoke. And, Mr. Foxe took a very searching glance at the table—where the piles of money and the playing cards told their own story. The Housemaster uttered an exclamation.

"Upon my soul!" he gasped. "What—what is the meaning of this?"

Fullwood looked up, and grinned.

"Oh, come off it, sir!" he chuckled. "Anybody might think you hadn't expected to see this! We're just having a little gamble, sir—a little flutter. We want you to join in. Try one of these, sir—they're quite decent!"

Fullwood offered the cigarette box to Mr. Foxe, and the Housemaster seemed at a loss for a moment. Then his brow became black, and he bestowed a look upon the knuts of the Ancient House which caused them to become suddenly uncomfortable.

"How—How dare you?" thundered Mr. Foxe. "Good gracious—you—you impudent young scoundrels! Smoking—gambling! I have never seen such depravity in all my career! And—and you had the audacity to bring me here and to offer these cigarettes, and to suggest that I should join you in a—a gamble for money? It is the most outrageous piece of—of——"

Mr. Foxe came to a halt, unable to find words to express himself. And Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell looked

at the Housemaster in alarm. They had not expected an outburst of this nature.

"But—but there's nothing in it, sir!" panted Fullwood. "We—we thought you'd like to have a little flutter——"

"A flutter!" thundered Mr. Foxe. "Boy! Do you realise what this means? Do you realise what you have asked me to do? Have you no sense of what is right or wrong?"

"Oh, come off it, sir!" said Fullwood impatiently. "I don't see why you should go on like this—after what happened the other day!"

As a matter of fact, Fullwood and his companions were completely staggered. They were at a loss. They did not know what to say, or what to think. They had fully expected that Mr. Foxe would join heartily in the game, and that he would appreciate their thoughtfulness in requesting him to come.

But, now that Mr. Foxe had got here, he was going off like a rocket—he was acting, in fact, as Fullwood and Co. would have expected Mr. Crowell to act. And what could it mean? What could be the meaning of this unexpected change? Why had Mr. Foxe altered his attitude so drastically?

Gulliver and Bell sat dumb—and they had already thrown their cigarettes into the fire. They knew the signs all right—and they mentally anathematised Fullwood for being such a fool in this matter. He never ought to have brought Mr. Foxe into the study at all.

Mr. Foxe looked round the study, and his brow was still as black as thunder. He picked up the box of cigarettes, and thrust it into the fire.

Fullwood uttered a gasp, and flushed with anger. It was nearly a full box of a hundred, and they were expensive cigarettes, too.

"I—I say, sir!" protested Fullwood. "There's no need to destroy——"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Pass those cards over to me at once!"

"If you're going to put them in the fire——"

"Pass those cards to me!"

The cards were passed, for Mr. Foxe's tone was commanding. And, a moment later, they followed the cigarettes into the blazing fire—a brand new pack of cards which had cost Fullwood the sum of three and sixpence.

"And now, you young rascals, I expect you know what my next move will be," said Mr. Foxe, grimly. "Unfortunately, Mr. Nelson Lee is out this afternoon. But the very instant he returns I shall report this whole occurrence to him. Unfortunately, I can do nothing, since I am not your Housemaster, and I have no control on this side of the Triangle. But I shall consider it my duty to report this matter in full to Mr. Lee. He, no doubt, will attend to you as you deserve."

"But—but——"

"Silence!" said Mr. Foxe firmly. "I may as well inform you boys that I shall recommend Mr. Lee to soundly flog you, and to give you one thousand lines each."

"By gad!" muttered Fullwood faintly.

"Oh, my only hat!" murmured Gulliver.

"A flogging—and a thousand lines!" panted Bell. "My goodness!"

"You will be extremely lucky if you are let off with such a punishment as that," said Mr. Foxe. "It is possible that Mr. Lee will consider it his duty to report you to the Headmaster—and, quite possibly, you will be expelled from the school in disgrace. Your crime would not be so serious if I had caught you unawares. But you have absolutely defied all rules and regulations by inviting me here—and expecting that I should join in this game——"

"Well, it was only natural that we should expect you to join in, sir!" put in Fullwood boldly.

"Natural?" shouted Mr. Foxe.

"Quite natural!" roared Fullwood, whose anger was at fever heat. "You gambled with us the other day—smoked, too! If you did it then, why shouldn't you do it now? How are we to know that you would change your attitude like this? It ain't fair to us, sir—it's not right to be down on us in this way—after what happened at the beginning of the week!"

Mr. Foxe started—he started violently.

"At—at the beginning of the week!" he stammered.

"Oh, I suppose you don't remember it, sir?" sneered Fullwood. "You can't very well remember it, considering what you've just said. But we shall remember it—when Mr. Lee comes to us with that punishment! And we sha'n't forget

to tell Mr. Lee all about it—how you came into Grayson's study in the College House, how you smoked with us, and how you played poker for money—"

"Stop!" gasped Mr. Foxe. "I—I do not seem to remember this affair, boys—there—there is something wrong with my memory to-day! Tell me—tell me what you mean—tell me what I did at the beginning of the week."

Fullwood was quick to notice the change in Mr. Foxe's attitude, and he seized his advantage.

"It won't take me a minute to jog your memory, sir," he said unpleasantly. "One evening at the beginning of the week—I think it was Tuesday—Gulliver and Bell and I were over in the College House—we were in Grayson's study, in the Fifth Form Passage. We were all smoking, and we were playing cards. You came in, and we were a bit startled at first."

"So I should imagine!" said Mr. Foxe curtly.

"But, instead of punishing us, sir, you joined in the game, and you accepted some cigarettes from us, and smoked them," went on Fullwood. "And what's more to the point, you lost some money, and said it was a pity you couldn't stop longer, but you had something to do. And you told us to carry on, and to enjoy ourselves."

"Good gracious!" muttered Mr. Foxe.

"If you don't believe it, sir, you can go to Grayson and Shaw—they'll corroborate everything we've said!" exclaimed Fullwood. "There's another thing, too. Reynolds, of the Sixth—he was a prefect then—came along and found us smoking. He went straight to your study, and reported the matter—and you deprived him of his prefectship and sent him away."

Mr. Foxe passed a hand over his brow.

"I—I do not seem to remember!" he muttered. "I must have been—very absent-minded at that time, boys. Good gracious! To—to think that I should have acted in such a way! However, what you have told me makes a great difference."

"I should think it would do, sir," said Fullwood boldly.

"Under the circumstances I will refrain from reporting this matter to your own House Master—"

"Oh, good!" muttered Bell.

"I will leave you, boys, and will forget all about this little incident," went on Mr. Foxe. "I—I do not think it is necessary for me to say anything further—or to stay any longer."

And, without even looking at the Knuts, Mr. Foxe turned towards the door, unlocked it, and passed out. Fullwood and Co. stared at one another in blank astonishment.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Fullwood deliberately.

What had come over Mr. Foxe? Why had he changed so much? It was a puzzle which Fullwood and Co. could not fathom. But there was something about Mr. Smale Foxe which was very mysterious, and very strange.

CHAPTER II.

MIXING THINGS UP.

ERNEST LAWRENCE stepped from the train at Helmford, and he noticed that the time was just twenty minutes past three. This suited him perfectly, for he had an appointment at half-past. He had, therefore, only ten minutes to wait. The junior passed out of the station and stood just outside the booking office—under a large clock which hung overhead. This was the meeting spot, and Lawrence waited patiently.

His coloured school cap, with its conspicuous badge, was no longer upon his head. Instead, he wore a trim tweed cap, and it was not possible for anybody to know that he belonged to St. Frank's College. There was nothing about his appearance to reveal this fact.

And Lawrence did not notice the mysterious shadower in the brown beard. This man was still hanging about. He had left the train soon after Lawrence, and he had followed the lad out through the booking office, and then he had waited—for it was quite clear to him that Lawrence was waiting under the clock until somebody else should arrive. But who could this man be? Who was he that he should follow a schoolboy about? What could his purpose be in so doing?

It was not quite three-thirty when a man came striding briskly up from the

town. He was a smallish man, rather elderly, with a cleanshaven face. He was immaculately attired, although his clothing was somewhat loud and sporting in appearance.

"Ah, so you're here on time, young man!" said the stranger genially. "I like that—I like people to be prompt! How are you, Lawrence?"

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Rook," said the junior. "I'm not sure that I'm doing right in coming here——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Norman Rook pleasantly. "It is a Saturday afternoon, and a half-holiday. Everything is quite all right, my boy, and you may rely upon me to keep this thing secret. I wish to discuss full details with you, and to fix things up once and for all. Come on—we'll go this way."

They went into the town, and they were both unaware of the fact that the mysterious bearded stranger was following them. The drizzle had stopped now, and the sky was clearing somewhat. But the roads were filthy and muddy, and the going was bad.

Helmford was quite a big town—very much larger than Bannington. It was a market town, too, and Saturday afternoon was always a busy time in Helmford. The town was packed, in spite of the weather. People from all the surrounding country villages thronged the streets, and the scene was quite a lively one.

Mr. Rook and his young companion went down the High Street until, finally, they came to a halt outside a large, old-fashioned red-brick building. This at one time, had been the Helmford Town Hall. But a new Town Hall had been built, and now this old place had been converted into something else. At first it had been a kind of theatre, then it had changed into a cinema for a time—and now a large ornamental board over the entrance announced to all the townspeople of Helmford that the place was the "Ring Pavilion." Photographs were hung outside the entrance—and these photographs were mainly those of extremely muscular looking gentlemen with very little wearing apparel. The fact that these gentlemen wore gloves hinted quite strongly that the Ring Pavilion was a stronghold of boxing.

Mr. Norman Rook led the way

through the entrance, then he and Lawrence went down a dark passage until they arrived at a doorway. It was standing half open. And Mr. Rook passed in, and switched on the electric light. Then he closed the door, and Lawrence found himself in quite a comfortable little apartment, where a gas fire was burning. There was a desk, and two or three chairs. And the walls were lined with further photographs of muscular gentlemen with boxing gloves.

"Here we are, my lad!" said Mr. Rook pleasantly. "We can have a private chat here—without any fear of interruption. This is my little office, and I am pleased to have you here. The conversation I had with you the other day—that is to say, on Wednesday evening—was a very brief one, and I now wish to go into fuller details. You're a fine set up young fellow, and your capabilities are wonderful. I shall never forget that exhibition of boxing you gave in Mr. Gubbin's booth, just outside Bannington. My dear lad, it was wonderful!"

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, I don't know about that, sir," he said modestly. "That fellow I boxed with didn't know much—he was a slogger."

"Nevertheless, he was far heavier than you are, and the odds were all in his favour," said Mr. Rook. "It was magnificent on your part, and you deserve great credit. Quite apart from that, I was impressed by your form. I have seldom seen a young man who knows so much as you. Where did you learn it?"

"My father taught me!" replied Lawrence simply.

"Then your father is evidently a very clever gentleman," said Mr. Rook. "I take off my hat to him—and I take off my hat to you, too. You are the most amazing little lightweight boxer of the century! I am not exaggerating, my lad—I am speaking the simple truth. There is a wonderful future before you—why, by George! There is no reason why you should not become World's champion in a year or two! You have it in you—you will be able to beat all comers after a little practice, and when your muscle has become harder!"

Ernest Lawrence shook his head.

"It's very nice of you to say that, Mr. Rook, but I don't want to become

World's champion," he said. "I don't want to be prominent at all. And I hope you won't ask me any questions about my father, or anything of that sort. I've got nothing to be ashamed of, but my father always told me that he doesn't want me to do anything professionally. And if he got to know that I'd come to see you here he would be terribly cross."

Mr. Rook smiled.

"Very well, then, my lad, we won't say anything about it—and I won't ask any awkward questions," he said. "What I want you to do is to help me out of a little difficulty—and to help yourself at the same time. That's understood, isn't it? If you'll enter into this contest for me—which comes off next Wednesday—you will pocket twenty pounds, even if you lose the fight. If you win, you will have a clear thirty pounds, and possibly a great deal more. It is a good chance for you, my boy, and I hope you will be good enough to take advantage of it."

Ernest Lawrence said nothing for a moment or two. He was thinking of the incidents which had taken place on the Wednesday evening.

A very low class boxing booth was pitched just outside Bannington. This place was the property of Mr. Gubbin, and the principal entertainer at the booth was "Lightning Left Ned"—an extremely beefy young man who was considered to be unbeatable. He was a slogger—and it was his usual custom to knock out his opponents in the first round.

Mr. Gubbin had offered to give any member of the audience the sum of twenty pounds if he could knock "Lightning Left Ned" out. And Lawrence, on the impulse of the moment, had accepted the challenge.

But perhaps it was not on the spur of the moment, after all. For Lawrence had remembered his father—and he knew that Lawrence senior could do with that sum of money.

Fairly recently Lawrence's father had met with a great disaster financially—for all his money had been tied up in Scarbrook's Bank. This concern had failed, and Mr. Lawrence had lost every penny of his money. His business, consequently, was in a precarious position, and every penny that came in was of

use. The boy's fees at St. Frank's had been paid in advance, or Lawrence would never have come to the old school.

In his early days Lawrence senior had been a famous boxer, and he had prospered. Then, later in life, he had gone into business, and he had determined to bring his only son up as a gentleman. He did not wish Ernest to become a boxer, or to have any intimate connection with the ring. True, Mr. Lawrence had taught his son the noble art of self-defence from A to Z; but he did not want the lad to enter into any professional contracts—he was anxious that Lawrence junior should be a gentleman when he grew up. Ernest knew this, and he was very careful—he did not want his father to know a word about his movements now. He had had a chance of winning twenty pounds—and he had seized it. It had been his intention to send that twenty pounds intact to his father. For Lawrence had beaten "Lightning Left Ned," after a hard fight. And Mr. Gubbin—not without reluctance—had parted with the twenty currency notes.

Lawrence felt rather bitter as he thought of the incident which had occurred when he arrived at St. Frank's, triumphant, with that money in his pocket. For he had been met by Mr. Smale Foxe, his own Housemaster. And Mr. Foxe had extracted ten pounds from Lawrence—as the price of his silence. In cold, blunt language, Mr. Foxe had descended to blackmailing. He had blackmailed the schoolboy, and he had obtained half the prize money. Lawrence had been helpless—he had been unable to protest even. For only one word to the Head would have been sufficient to get him expelled from the school in utter disgrace. It seemed that Mr. Smale Foxe had no particular scruples—and he had a tight hold on his victim.

Lawrence remembered meeting Mr. Norman Rook after the fight. Mr. Rook had been there, and he had witnessed the whole performance, much to his satisfaction. And he had arranged with Lawrence to meet him to-day—in Helmford, so that further matters could be discussed. For Mr. Rook had been greatly impressed by Lawrence's form, and he knew that this junior schoolboy—was a champion.

"Day dreaming, eh?" said Mr. Rook smiling.

Ernest Lawrence started, and looked across at his companion.

"Why, yes, sir, I was just thinking!" he said. "And—and I'm quite sure that I ought not to be here. I entered into that contest with 'Lightning Left Ned,' but it didn't matter much there—because I wore a silk mask so that nobody could recognise me. But—but I can't enter into any other fights, Mr. Rook. It wouldn't be possible. For one thing, how could I fight here, in Helmsford? I couldn't get away from St. Frank's——"

"My dear boy, we can easily arrange such little details as those," interrupted Mr. Rook. "Now listen, I will put my proposition before you neatly and concisely. I cannot compel you to agree—and I do not wish to urge you. I do hope, however, that you will be sensible, and that you will do the right thing. It is up to you—your decision will be final. I am not a scoundrel, Lawrence—I am a straightforward man. And if you will help me, I can give you my word that I will help you."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lawrence. "I'm quite certain that you're straight."

And Lawrence was speaking the truth—he was certain that Mr. Norman Rook was on the square. He was a boxing professor of great experience.

He was a straight speaker, and he did not believe in beating about the bush. He was always blunt and to the point. And it was so in this case. He wasted no time in letting Lawrence know exactly what was required.

"It's this way, my lad," he said, bending forward in his chair and chowing at his cigar. "I have agreed to put up a man who will be able to beat Jimmy Rhodes. He's a rather well-known light-weight in this county, and he has several local championships to his credit. He's a good young man, too—he's got a beautiful left, and if you fight him you'll have to be careful."

"I think I've heard of him," said Lawrence.

"That's not at all improbable," went on Mr. Rook. "Rhodes is an excellent boxer—and he can take any amount of punishment. Well, I fixed up an arrangement that I should produce a man to fight Rhodes next-Wednesday evening. Unfortunately, the young fel-

low I had my eye on met with an accident, and broke his ankle. That's where you come in, Lawrence—I want you to fight Jimmy Rhodes, and I want you to beat him. You can do it if you like—it will be a bit of a struggle, but you'll win?"

Lawrence shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," he said slowly. "And, in any case, will it be allowable for you to make another arrangement?"

"Oh, I shall arrange that all right—don't you worry your head," said Mr. Rook. "The great point is—will you fight Rhodes or not? If you won't enter into this arrangement, it's not a bit of use my talking to you. And we might just as well shake hands and part. It's a sheer waste of time for me to discuss this matter with you unless there is some prospect of your complying with my suggestion. Now then, Lawrence—what is your idea—do you think you will accept this offer or not? Yes or no—that's what I want!"

"I'd do it at once, sir, if I thought that I should help you," said Lawrence earnestly. "But I don't believe I can—if I fight Rhodes, I shall only be beaten. And that won't do you any good, will it?"

"Yes—it will," said Mr. Rook. "Even if you lose it will be to my advantage, because the fight will be abandoned unless I get somebody to meet this Rhodes. And that will mean a big financial loss in another direction. Think this matter over carefully, my boy—now, within the next three minutes. I will keep quiet. But there is one other thing I wish to say before I leave you to your own thoughts."

"What's that, sir?"

"I know well enough that this fight against Jimmy Rhodes is a tough order," said Mr. Rook impressively. "But if you only put all you know into it, you will win. I've seen Rhodes fighting, and I've seen you—and, without any flattery, Lawrence, you are the better of the two. You're agile, you've got more skill, and you're altogether superior. Jimmy is just a little heavier. I think—but that won't trouble you, I fancy. And there is a purse of fifty pounds for the loser. So, in any case, you will get a prize."

"Yes, I know, sir," said Lawrence.

"But——"

"Wait—let me finish!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "If you enter into this fight, Lawrence, I intend to wager heavily. I will back you for all I am worth, because I know that you'll win. And, if you do win, I will present you with the sum of fifty pounds over and above the purse."

"Fifty pounds!" ejaculated Lawrence, startled.

"Yes—making eighty pounds altogether!" replied Mr. Rook pleasantly. "This is a fair offer, my boy. If you enter into this fight, and lose, you will receive twenty pounds. If you win the fight you will receive eighty pounds. And I am certain that you will win—and you can be quite certain that I would not wager on you unless I was certain of that. Now I will leave you to your own thoughts. Think it out, and then give me your decision."

Mr. Rook turned aside, lit a fresh cigar, and pretended to be very busy with some papers.

Lawrence sat by himself looking into the fire. His face was flushed and his eyes were gleaming. He had never dreamed of anything like this. Eighty pounds! His brain almost reeled as he thought of it. How glorious it would be if he could send that money to his father—what a great help such a sum would be! It would be a Godsend to Mr. Lawrence, and Ernest was nearly mad with joy at the very thought of sending such a sum. And it did not take him long to come to a decision. And, quite apart from the money, there was something about this whole enterprise which gripped him—which held him—which compelled him to agree. He had the blood of his father in his veins—and it would not be denied!

Lawrence got to his feet and stood before Mr. Rook. The latter looked round and smiled.

"Well, my boy, what is it?" he inquired. "Yes or no?"

"I will agree, sir," said Lawrence quietly.

The boxing promoter slapped his thigh.

"Good!" he exclaimed heartily. "I knew it all along, Lawrence—I knew that you would be sensible—splendid, my lad—splendid! And now we will talk business—now we will go into full details!"

"Will it be necessary for me to come

to Helmford before Wednesday?" inquired Lawrence.

"No, I don't think so," said the other. "If you come fairly early on Wednesday evening—or in the afternoon, if possible—that will be quite sufficient. Under the rules of this contest I am allowed to put forward any man I choose providing he is under a certain given weight. There will be no trouble with you about that score, Lawrence," added Mr. Rook, with a smile. "Of course, I want you to put in all the practice you can between now and Wednesday. You have a gymnasium at St. Frank's, I believe?"

"Yes, sir—a splendid one,"

"Good!" said Mr. Rook. "Get some of your friends to act as sparring partners, and put in all your spare time at practice. There's nothing like it, my lad—only don't over do it. There is moderation in all things. There is another point I wish to speak about. I'm afraid it will be quite impossible for you to wear that silk mask."

"Yes, I suppose so, sir," said Lawrence slowly. "But that won't matter much, will it? Nobody connected with St. Frank's will be in Helmford—particularly in this place."

"Would it matter if you were seen?" inquired Mr. Rook.

"Matter!" echoed the junior. "Why, if one of the masters happened to see me, it would mean the sack! I should be expelled on the spot!"

"But there is nothing disgraceful in boxing!" protested the promoter. "Why should you be expelled from the school simply because you engaged in a contest here—"

"You don't seem to understand, sir," interrupted Lawrence. "It is against all the school rules and regulations for any boy to do such a thing as this. It's a terrible crime—in the eyes of the Head Master. He would regard it as a prize fight, and I should be in shocking disgrace. It would certainly mean the sack for me."

Mr. Rook shook his head.

"Well, I can't quite follow the argument," he said. "But we won't go into that now. In any case, my boy, I think you need have no concern. It is practically impossible that anybody connected with St. Frank's should be in the 'Ring Pavilion' on Wednesday

evening. Even if somebody did happen to be there it would be very difficult to recognise you—for you do not look like a schoolboy when you are stripped ready for the ring. I'm quite certain of that. As soon as the contract is signed, and we part this afternoon, I shall go to the printers and have the bills got out. And that reminds me that we must get a name for you."

"A name?" repeated Lawrence, with a start.

"Exactly," said Mr. Rook. "We must give you some name, you know, my boy. And we couldn't possibly bill you under your own name——"

"Oh, no, sir—that's out of the question!" said Lawrence quickly.

"Very well, then—how does 'Young Ern,' suit you? That's not at all bad, Lawrence—'Young Ern.' of London. I do not think we need to trouble about any other names, eh?"

Lawrence agreed to the suggestion, and then all the other details were entered into. And it was not until an hour later that the St. Frank's junior found himself once more in the High Street of Helmford. He was still rather in a maze. He could hardly believe that he had fixed up this fight—for the following Wednesday evening.

It did not strike him that he was doing anything disgraceful, or dishonourable. And, as a matter of fact, he would be doing precisely the opposite. For his sole object in entering into this fight was to help his father. He would receive that eighty pounds—providing he won—he would be able to send it all to the one he loved most dear in the world. He would be doing it for his father—to help his dad!

Lawrence had shaken hands warmly with Mr. Rook in parting, and had promised to be in Helmford on the Wednesday afternoon, in readiness for the evening's contest. The original hour for the fight had been fixed for eight o'clock, but Mr. Rook had consented to alter this by one hour. The fight would start at seven, and this would give Lawrence plenty of time to get back to St. Frank's before the Remove went up to bed. Lawrence, on his part, would have to get permission, somehow or other, to be out late on that particular evening. The junior thought that he would be able to manage it all right.

And as he went back to the station

he was still unaware of the fact that the bearded stranger was on the watch—waiting for him. The man had seen everything, and his shadowing had been successful.

But perhaps this man, too, was unaware of one certain fact.

And that fact was that a tall, well-dressed gentleman was watching him—and had been watching him for some considerable time. The shadower, in point of fact, had been shadowed!

And the tall gentleman who had gone to so much trouble was no less a person than Nelson Lee himself!

And Nelson Lee, at all events, was under no delusion regarding the mysterious bearded man's identity.

CHAPTER III.

THREE TICKETS!

MR. MIKE BRADMORE made a wry grimace.

"Yes, you've got me proper this time, young gent!" he exclaimed. "Seven quid between the three of you! Why, it's nearly broke me!"

Fullwood grinned.

"What about the people who backed the losers?" he inquired. "You can't put that kind of spoof over us, Mike! I'll bet you're quids and quids in pocket, if the truth's only known! And you can easily spare these few notes for us."

"Well, you won your bets, young gents, and it's only right that I should pay," said Mr. Bradmore. "I'm a square man, I am—I never swindles nobody. It ain't my way!"

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell had their own opinion about that. They had known Mr. Bradmore for quite a long time, and they knew him so well that they would not trust him with much of their cash. On one occasion Mr. Bradmore had gone to prison, but when he emerged he was as confident as ever, and he now carried on the same business as a bookmaker.

Fullwood and Co. had been rather lucky—their fancy had gone home. They had backed winners.

And now, in Bannington, they had just collected their winnings from Mr. Bradmore.

They were all seated in a cosy little nook of the Japanese Cafe, in the High Street. It was not far off tea-time, and Fullwood and Co. were having a little snack to be going on with, before going to the station to catch their train home.

"Well, young gents, you've done well off me to-day," said Mr. Bradmore. "What do you say to having a little flutter on a boxing match—it's coming off next Wednesday evening, in Helmford?"

"No thanks!" said Fullwood. "We'd rather not."

"Just as you please," said Mike. "But I just happened to have three tickets here. They ain't expensive—only half a guinea each. They're good seats, my boys, and if I was you I'd buy 'em. It's going to be a first-class match, I can tell you; at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford—one of the best boxing rings in the county!"

He produced three tickets from his pocket, and gave one to each of the juniors. Fullwood looked at his, and saw that the fight was to be between Jimmy Rhodes, of Helmford, and Bob Hoskin, of London.

"That there second name is wrong," said Mr. Bradmore, leaning over the table. "Bob Hoskin met with an accident the other day, and so another man is being got. But you can take my word for it that Jimmy Rhodes is going to win. It's a dead cert. for him, and it'll be a good match. Mark my words, young gents, it'll be one of the best boxing matches that we've seen for many a day!"

Fullwood shook his head.

"It's all very well, Mr. Bradmore, but it can't be done," he said. "How do you think we're going to get to Helmford on Wednesday evening?"

"Well, there's a train——"

"I know that!" interrupted Fullwood. "But how are we going to get back in time for bed? It couldn't be done. We'd like to go to this match, I dare say; in fact, I'm sure we would. There's nothing I like better than seeing a jolly good prize fight. If it was in Bannington, I'd go like a shot——"

"No, you wouldn't!" interrupted Gulliver. "We might be spotted, and that would mean a terrific row with the Head later on."

"There won't be no fear of your being spotted in Helmford!" interrupted Bradmore. "There won't be none of the St. Frank's masters there—you mark my words. And as for getting home—there won't be no difficulty about that at all. It's simply a matter of arrangement. All you've got to do is to fake up some yarn that you're going to meet somebody, and you won't be home till late. It ought to be easy for resourceful young gents like you; if you get permission to be out late on Wednesday evening, it won't matter a tish, even if you don't turn up till bedtime."

Fullwood looked thoughtful.

"Well, of course, we might be able to fake up some yarn," he admitted; "but I don't think it's worth the candle, Mike. We'd like to go to this fight, and——"

"I can sell you half a dozen tickets, if you like," interrupted the bookmaker. "If any of your pals would like to come along with you, I can sell tickets. I've got about a dozen left, I suppose. But they'll all be gone by to-morrow—don't you make no mistake. This is about the last chance you'll have. These tickets are going like hot cakes, I might as well tell you, an' I'm doin' you a favour by givin' you a chance to buy some. It'll be as good as a tonic for you young gents to see this fight. Come along—you've got 'em now, so you might as well keep 'em. Ten and a tanner each—that's all!"

Fullwood and Co. did not really want the tickets. They would like to see the fight, but they did not care for risking things. However, Mr. Bradmore was a persuasive gentleman, and at last he succeeded in his object. Fullwood and Co. bought the tickets, and placed them in their pockets.

And on their way home to St. Frank's, they discussed plans as to how they would be able to "work" a fake for Wednesday evening. It was a bit of a problem, and the knuts of the Ancient House were attempting to puzzle it out.

"I don't exactly see how we're going to do it!" remarked Gulliver. "It was a fat-headed idea, getting these tickets, Fully! I wouldn't mind seeing this fight, but how the dickens can we manage it?"

"Everything can be managed," said Fullwood. "The best thing we can do in this instance is to fake up a yarn about your pater, Gully——"

"My pater?" said Gulliver.

"Yes—or Bell's pater—or mine!" said Fullwood. "It doesn't matter which. We'll write a letter, or something, and make out that we've got to meet the old chap in Bannington. We shall get permission to go out like that, and there won't be any questions asked if we don't turn up until bedtime. I tell you it's easy, if we only go to work in the right way."

The knuts continued discussing the situation, and when they finally arrived near the school, they had decided to say nothing until the Monday. By that time they would have a letter, which would be posted on Sunday evening, and it would arrive on Monday. They would be able to show that letter to one of the prefects, and it would be comparatively easy to get the permission they required. Fullwood and Co. were experts in the art of faking things up.

"Oh, we shall work it all right!" said Fullwood, as he and his chums strolled along the Remove passage. "Don't you worry, my sons—just leave it to me. And it'll be a bit of a change for us to go over there, and to see that fight —"

"Well, don't shout about it!" said Gulliver, in a low voice. "We don't want any of the other fellows to know."

"Why not? What does it matter?" asked Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong in a fight, I suppose? It's a proper boxing contest, and boxing is a recognised thing at St. Frank's——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Bell. "This ain't proper boxing. The Ring Pavilion at Helmsford is a rotten place—everybody knows it. The Head wouldn't mind us going to the National Sporting Club, or something of that sort, perhaps; but the Ring Pavilion in Helmsford is a different proposition. The Head would call it disgraceful if any St. Frank's chaps went there, and it would mean a flogging."

Bell was probably correct in this statement of opinion. The Ring Pavilion was not exactly a high-class place, and the boxing shows which were given there were generally of a brutal character—they were prize fights of the worst type, and the spectators at those contests were not satisfied unless blood flowed freely. It was a low-class place altogether—and Ernest Lawrence knew this as much as anybody.

But he did not feel that he was dis-

gracing himself by consenting to appear for Mr. Rook. There was a chance of making some money to send his father, and all else mattered little. And, so far as Lawrence was concerned, the whole thing would be honourable. There was no reason why he should be ashamed of his decision.

Fullwood and Co., of course, knew nothing of the real truth—they had not the slightest idea that they would go to Helmsford to see a Romovite in the ring. Such an idea as that never occurred to them.

They arrived at the corner, before turning towards Study A, and at that moment something rather startling happened. There was a rush of feet, one or two yells, and then the thud-thud of bodies striking against one another. Complete confusion followed.

And yet the explanation was simple.

Church was making a break for freedom. There had been a little argument in Study D, and Handforth's wrath had been aroused. Church, who was the culprit, decided that flight was the best thing for him; he dashed out of Study D, helter-skelter. McClure also dashed, because he knew that Handforth, baulked of his prey, would turn upon him. And so the two juniors rushed down the passage, with Handforth in full pursuit; he had almost overtaken them by the time they arrived at the corner.

And then the disaster happened.

Church and McClure ran full tilt into Fullwood and Co. They went over in hopeless confusion and disorder, and Handforth, bringing up the rear, blundered headlong over the pile.

"Yow! What the deuce—— By gad!" gasped Fullwood. "You—you—— Yaroooh!"

"Gerroff my neck, you ass!"

"Ow! Yow!"

"You—you rotters!" snorted Handforth. "I've got you now!"

"You—you blithering idiots!" howled Fullwood, getting to his feet. "What's the idea of dashing about like this? Somebody kicked me in the neck——"

"Blow your beastly neck!" said Handforth. "I'm after these chaps here—they insulted me, and I'm going to wipe them up!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Handy!" gasped McClure, sitting up.

And just at that moment McClure's eyes caught sight of something upon the

floor, near to him. He could see three pieces of pasteboard, with printing upon them. They were tickets, and McClure picked them up mechanically.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "What are these? Tickets for a boxing match, or something——"

"Give them to me!" roared Fullwood, in alarm.

"Boxing?" said Handforth curiously. "Lemme see!"

"They're mine!" bellowed Fullwood roughly. "Give those tickets to me, McClure, you fool!"

"Rats!" said McClure.

He was examining them when Handforth pulled them out of his hand, and the leader of Study D gave vent to a bellow as he read the words upon the tickets.

"The Ring Pavilion, Helmford!" he ejaculated. "By George! What do you think of this, my sons? The Ring Pavilion is a rotten hole—a disreputable place! These are tickets for a fight next Wednesday evening!"

"Those tickets are mine!" snarled Fullwood. "They fell out of my pocket when I was bowled over just now——"

"That's your misfortune!" interrupted Handforth. "It's a good thing they did fall out, because we know what a cad you are now! We knew it all along, as a matter of fact; but this is simply awful! Fancy buying tickets for a beastly prizefight——"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snapped Fullwood roughly.

All the juniors were upon their feet now, and Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were looking decidedly disconcerted and alarmed. They had been very anxious to keep this affair secret, and now it was all out. Handforth, above all fellows, had got hold of the tickets!

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Gulliver. "Those tickets are nothing, Handforth. They were given to Fully, and we ain't going to use them. Just as if we should go to a beastly boxing match——"

"You can't spoof me like that, you rotter!" interrupted Handforth sourly. "I know you and your little tricks—and if you think you're going to keep these tickets, you've made a bloomer!"

"There's nothing wrong with boxing, is there?" demanded Bell savagely.

"Nothing at all!" replied Handforth. "Boxing is one of the finest sports in the world—the art of self-defence is a

magnificent one. But this ain't boxing—this ain't the real thing at all. Everybody knows the Ring Pavilion in Helmford. It's a rotten hole—a place which is only patronised by roughs and bad characters. If the Head got to know about these tickets, my sons, you'd get it in the neck, pretty hot!"

"The Head's narrow-minded!" snapped Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong in going to the Ring Pavilion, if we like."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "That place is notoriously bad. It's a gambling house as well—it's been raided two or three times by the police. The fights there are only promoted so that people can bet and gamble. And if you think you're going there next Wednesday, you've made a bloomer!"

"Are you going to give me those tickets, or not?" demanded Fullwood. "They're ours, and—— By gad! You—you rotter! Hi! Stop it——"

But Handforth was deliberately tearing the tickets into little shreds, and he tossed them all over the floor of the passage, and grinned.

It was certainly impossible for Fullwood and Co. to use them now!

"There you are!" said Handforth lightly. "You can have the tickets if you want them——"

"You—you confounded beast!" roared Fullwood. "Those tickets cost ten and six each——"

"Oh, did they?" said Handforth. "I thought Bell said that somebody gave them to you?"

"I don't care what Bell said!" snarled Fullwood. "I'm not going to see you treat our property in that way, you rotter!"

Fullwood was beside himself with rage, or he would never have acted as he did during the next second. For he flung himself at Handforth, and delivered a blow, which caught the leader of Study D fairly on the chin. But Handforth was made of iron, and the punch hardly affected him. He just staggered back slightly, and then gave a bellow.

"My hat!" he roared. "Of all the nerve! You—you silly ass——"

He didn't wait to say any more, but charged forward. His fists came out like pistons, and the next moment Fullwood went down with a crash, howling.

"By my life! What's all the noise about?" inquired a cheerful voice.

Solomon Levi, of the Remove, came up, and he looked on at the little scene with considerable interest. Other juniors had been attracted, too, including Reginald Pitt, De Valerie, Somerton, and Jack Grey. I came out of Study C, followed by Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. And by this time the Remove passage was fairly crowded. I pushed my way forward.

"What's the commotion out here?" I asked. "Oh, it's you, Handforth! Haven't you got more sense than to create a scene in the passage?"

"Nobody asked you to butt in!" said Handforth, glaring. "I've just destroyed something which cost over thirty bob!"

"There's no need to boast about it!" said Pitt. "But what the dickens do you mean?"

"Ever heard of the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford?" asked Handforth.

"Yes," I replied. "It's a pretty rotten hole, by all I understand."

"Well, there's a fight going to take place there next Wednesday evening," said Handforth. "Fullwood had three tickets for it, and they dropped out of his pocket just now. They cost half a guinea each, and I thought the best thing I could do was to destroy them."

"Oh!"

"It's a pity the idiot can't mind his own business!" snarled Fullwood. "Those tickets belonged to me, and —"

"You rotter!"

"It's a good thing Handforth spoilt your little game!"

"Rather!"

"You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Fullwood!"

"You'd get into terrific trouble if the Head got to know about this!" I said grimly. "It's none of my business, I know; but you ought to be kicked, Fullwood. The Ring Pavilion, in Helmford, is absolutely out of bounds for all St. Frank's chaps—you know that as well as I do. It's not considered to be good class, and, as a matter of fact, the place is a disreputable hole. I'm a keen believer in boxing; but there's a limit. I reckon it's a good thing Handforth tore those tickets up!"

"And, what's more, we ought to do something to show these rotters that we don't approve of their ways!" said Reginald Pitt. "What's wrong with the

idea of grabbing them, and giving them the frog's-march round the Triangle?"

"Hear, hear!"

"A jolly good idea!"

"Collar 'em!"

"Good egg!"

Fullwood and Co. backed away, in great alarm; but the other juniors were thoroughly excited now, and they felt that they needed something to liven them up. It had been a very dull afternoon, and there had been nothing doing whatever. To frog's-march the knuts of the Remove round the muddy Triangle would indeed be a welcome diversion.

"Don't you touch me!" snarled Fullwood, as he backed away.

"You—you cads!" panted Gulliver.

"We—we haven't done anything——"

"Grab 'em!"

Fullwood and Co. had no chance whatever. They were seized and held firmly. There had been no escape for them, for the crowd surged round on both sides of the passage, making flight absolutely impossible.

And so the knuts were seized and dragged along to the lobby, and then out into the Triangle. The rain was not falling now, but the state of the Triangle was not exactly a pleasant one. The mud was thick, and there were many puddles. It was comparatively dark, for the evening was gloomy, and night had set in early.

Fullwood was spread-eagled with a junior at each corner, and then he was carried round the Triangle and bobbed down occasionally—generally where there happened to be a puddle. Gulliver and Bell met with the same fate—and the Removites did the thing properly. They meant it to be a lesson to the cads of Study A that would be remembered for quite a long time.

Being frog's-marched round the Triangle on a dry day is quite an unpleasant ordeal; but if the ground is wet, and when there are many puddles about, the ordeal is ten times more severe. And Fullwood and Co. were not treated lightly; by the time the punishment was over, the knuts were hardly recognisable. They had vanished beneath a coating of mud. Their elegant attire was smothered, and they looked fearful sights.

At last they were brought round to the Ancient House steps, and dropped.

They picked themselves up, black with mud, and black with fury.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's hope it'll be a lesson to 'em!" said Pitt.

"If it isn't, we'll give 'em another dose!" remarked Handforth. "In fact, I think it would be a pretty good idea to give it to 'em now, in advance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No; they've had enough!" I grinned. "And enough is as good as a feast, Handy. We'll let 'em go now!"

Fullwood and Co. crawled into the Ancient House, and made a bee line for the bath-room.

It took them quite a long time to remove the dirt, and a complete change was necessary.

Almost an hour had elapsed before they came down into the lobby again. They looked themselves once more, but their brows were black, and they were in a sullen mood.

"Hallo!" said Pitt, who happened to be passing through the lobby. "That's better, Fully! What do you say to another go round the Triangle?"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Fullwood roughly.

Pitt grinned, and he watched the knuts as they went along to Study A. As soon as Fullwood and Co. arrived in the study, they switched on the light, and closed the door.

"Well, it's no good making a fuss about it now," said Gulliver. "We don't need to look black at one another, Fully—there's no need for you to glare in that way. It's all over—"

"Is it?" snarled Fullwood. "It's not all over, my sons! I haven't finished yet!"

Gulliver stared.

"What do you mean—you haven't finished?" he asked curiously.

"I mean that we're going to that fight, after all!" said Fullwood grimly. "I'm not going to be diddled by a cad like Handforth!"

"Oh, but that's rot!" protested Bell. "We can't go now, Fully—the tickets are torn up. Personally, I'm a bit relieved. It was always doubtful whether we should be able to get the evening off, and the thing is settled now. It would be ridiculous for us to get other tickets—"

"We're going, I tell you!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm not going to be dished

by Handforth, or by anybody else. Bradmore has got other tickets, and I'm going to buy three. And, later on, we'll make these cads pay for what they did—at least, we'll make Handforth pay!"

And Gulliver and Bell knew that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT CONTEST.

THE Ring Pavilion, in Helmford, was packed.

The great night had arrived, for it was now Wednesday evening. It was not a great night for the Pavilion, since contests of this kind were a common occurrence. But it was certainly a great night for one individual—Ernest Lawrence. Even now he could hardly believe that he would shortly appear in the ring, battling against Jimmy Rhodes, the young man who had won many prizes and belts. Jimmy Rhodes was a champion in his way, and Lawrence knew, better than anybody else, that if he won this contest, it would be by hard work alone. Jimmy Rhodes was not going to be easy to conquer; in all probability Lawrence would go under. But the junior was determined to put up a great fight.

It had been easy for him to get leave from St. Frank's. He had gone to Mr. Foxe, and had asked for permission to be out until bed-time, and it had not been necessary for him to give any reason. For, curiously enough, Mr. Foxe had consented immediately, without asking any questions.

And Lawrence had arrived in Bannington during the afternoon—at about four o'clock. Without any delay, Mr. Rook had introduced his young champion to several gentlemen in white sweaters, who were foregathered in a little gymnasium at the back of the hall. Two of these white sweated gentlemen were to be Lawrence's seconds, and, without any delay, the junior showed what he could do.

Stripped, he tested his skill upon two sparring partners, and, when he had finished, Mr. Rook was even more convinced that he had not made a mistake. He had discovered a marvellous young boxer in Ernest Lawrence.



"You cannot tell Dr. Stafford another story without the truth coming out," said Lawrence. "I defy you, Mr. Foxe—you cannot do anything!"

"The lad's a wonder—absolutely a marvel!" declared Mr. Rook enthusiastically. "I've seen a few good boxers in my time, but this boy can beat them all on points. His foot work is simply beautiful, and I've never seen such technics in a boy so young. It's born in him all right—there's no doubt about that. He doesn't want any training—it's there already!"

The time passed quickly enough for Lawrence. Afterwards, he could not exactly remember all that happened, for his brain was in a whirl. And continuously he kept on telling himself that he must not lose. He wanted that money—the sum of eighty pounds—to send to his father. What a welcome gift it would be! And so the lad forgot everything else in his determination to win.

He forgot the reputation which the Ring Pavilion held—he forgot everything.

Mr. Norman Rook did not make any quibbles about his object. He was out for money, and nothing else, and he got hold of Lawrence because he was convinced that the lad would beat Jimmy Rhodes. And, if that event took place, Mr. Rook would rake in a very large sum of money. It is quite possible that Mr. Rook was not a man who possessed a perfectly clean reputation; but, in this particular case, he was acting on the square—he was treating Lawrence in a perfectly fair manner.

And the Ring Pavilion, half an hour after its doors were open, was packed to suffocation. The fight between Jimmy Rhodes and Young Ern was not the only item on the programme. There were to be other contests; but, at Lawrence's request, his bout with Rhodes was to take place first. He had asked this so that he could get back to St. Frank's in good time, and it really made no difference to the promoters.

In the half-guinea seats there were three youthful figures. They were all attired in long overcoats and tweed caps, and they had mufflers, which concealed their Eton collars. They were, in short, Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell. The knuts of the Ancient House had come to the fight, in spite of all. They had obtained other tickets from Mr. Bradmore, and had come along.

By a piece of luck, they had obtained permission from Morrow, of the Sixth, who had been in a hurry.

Fullwood had seized his chance well. He had waited until Morrow appeared, evidently bent upon going out for the afternoon. He had asked the prefect if he and his two chums could go to Bannington, to meet Gulliver's father. Fullwood casually mentioned that they probably wouldn't be in to supper, but they would be in before bed-time. And Morrow, who had no time to go into any arguments, scrawled out a pass, and handed it over. And so Fullwood and Co. felt satisfied—they would not get into any trouble afterwards.

There was a good deal of discussion among the members of the audience regarding "Young Ern." He was an unknown quantity, and the patrons of the Ring Pavilion were curious. Naturally, everybody was certain that Jimmy Rhodes would win. He was a well-known young boxer, whereas Young Ern was a nobody—he had never been heard of before. It was not to be supposed that he would be able to defeat such a young champion as Rhodes.

It was known that Mr. Rook's original man had met with an accident, and was unable to appear. It was therefore quite clear that Mr. Rook had been compelled to secure a substitute—and it was quite clear also that this substitute was a youngster of no importance.

Never in his life had Lawrence been in a proper roped ring. He did not count that scuffle in Mr. Gubbin's boxing booth of much account. This affair at the Pavilion would be something entirely fresh and new, and Lawrence's feelings were mixed when at last the moment came for him to leave the dressing-room to go into the ring. Mr. Rook was there, and he was looking quite confident.

"What you've got to do, my lad, is to be very careful," he exclaimed. "Put all you know into your fighting, and don't allow Rhodes to use that left of his. If he only gets through your guard, and delivers one straight punch, it'll be all over with you. So be careful."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Lawrence quietly.

"That's good—that's all I want you to do," said Mr. Rook, nodding. "If you go under, I sha'n't grumble; but I've got an idea in my head that you're going to win. You've got to have that idea, too, because, if you start with the

conviction that you'll lose, then it's a ten-to-one chance that you will lose!"

"I've made up my mind to win, Mr. Rook!" said Ernest simply. "I'm not going to think of anything else."

"Oh, that's the style, lad!" put in Bill Hoxley, one of Lawrence's seconds. "That's the style! And don't forget all those points I put you wise about. Keep clear of Rhodes in fighting—don't let him get too close to you. He's dangerous then. I think you'll find him a bit slow, and, if you're a bit nippy, you'll be able to finish the fight within five or six rounds. But Jimmy can take a lot of punishment, and you'll need to work thundering hard to get in the knock-out blow."

So much advice was given to Lawrence, in fact, that his brain was in a whirl, and he was determined to leave everything to his own discretion and his own judgment. As soon as he started fighting Jimmy Rhodes he would know what his man was worth, and he would then fight accordingly. At the same time, he did not altogether ignore the advice which was given to him.

Rhodes was the first to enter the ring, and as he did so a great cheer went up from the crowd—for nearly everybody in the hall supported Jimmy. He was well known to them, and he was backed pretty heavily.

Rhodes was inclined to look upon this fight as a dead certainty for him. He had seen Lawrence, and he had sized him up as a pretty youthful sort of youngster, but absolutely hopeless against a real boxer. And Jimmy considered himself to be a really first-class boxer; this was very evident from his attitude.

He lounged into his corner in a languid manner, chatting with his seconds, and showing everybody that he was perfectly confident of winning. As a matter of fact, Jimmy was inclined to swank somewhat, and this was all to Lawrence's advantage. If Rhodes considered that he was in for a certain win, it would be far better for the junior schoolboy. For over-confidence does not pay in the boxing ring—it frequently leads to a sudden and unexpected disaster.

Jimmy Rhodes smiled continuously, and there was just a faint suspicion of a sneer when Ernest Lawrence entered the ring. The junior looked quite small in comparison to his opponent; but, as

a matter of fact, there was not such a great deal of difference between them. Rhodes was heavier, certainly, but his muscles were no bigger than "Young Ern's."

Rhodes had quite a small army of seconds around him in his corner.

Lawrence was rather dazed at first—everything seemed so brilliant and noisy. A great spluttering arc lamp shed down a glare of light from overhead. The atmosphere was hazy with tobacco fumes, and for a moment or two Lawrence looked about him in a state of bewilderment. It was obvious to almost everybody that this was the lad's first appearance in a proper ring. And many members of the audience laughed outright—they were anticipating a win for Jimmy Rhodes in the very first round.

"Why, this ain't fair!" grinned one of the audience. "How can we expect a mere novice like this to stand up against Rhodes? Why, Jimmy will smash him up in less than twenty seconds—you mark my words!"

Fullwood and Co. watched with great interest. They saw Lawrence enter the ring, but they took no particular notice of him at first. They were up above, in the balcony, and they did not get a full view of "Young Ern's" face at first. But then Lawrence happened to look up, and suddenly Fullwood gave a gasp, and clutched at the arms of his seat.

"By gad! Do—do you see— Oh, it can't be true!"

"What can't be true?" whispered Gulliver. "Don't be an ass, Fully—everybody's looking at us!"

Fullwood was still staring down at the ring.

"Don't—don't you see?" he hissed, under his breath. "That chap down in the ring—Young Ern! It's Lawrence—Lawrence of the College House!"

"What rot!" muttered Bell.

But he and Gulliver stared down, and their hearts were beating fast. Again Lawrence happened to glance upwards, and this time both Gulliver and Bell saw his features distinctly. Lawrence, for his part, did not see the knuts of the Ancient House. This was scarcely possible, since he was only aware of a sea of faces. It was not likely that he would be able to pick out three from among that vast crowd.

"Great pip!" gasped Gulliver. "You're right, Fully—it is Lawrence!"

"But—but it can't be true! It's impossible!" said Bell. "Lawrence, of the Remove, fighting here, in the Ring Pavilion! We—we must be mistaken, Fully—this chap must look like Lawrence——"

"He's billed as 'Young Ern,' and Lawrence's name is Ernest!" said Fullwood keenly. "It's as clear as daylight, my sons. By gad! What a discovery—a Remove chap fighting here, in this beastly hole!"

"Well, it doesn't matter to us, if it comes to that!" said Bell. "We've backed Rhodes pretty heavily, you know, and I think we're as safe as eggs. Our money's O. K. Lawrence will never be able to beat a professional like Rhodes!"

Fullwood grinned.

"Of course he won't!" he exclaimed. "I can understand now—Lawrence has been shoved in as a substitute, just so that the fight shall take place. I expect they offered him some money to do it, because there'd be a terrific row if the fight didn't come off. It's a dead cert. for Rhodes, and we shall draw in a nice little pile of tin!"

"Rather!" said Gulliver and Bell.

They were excited and astonished. But there was no doubt about it, the young fellow down in the ring, attired in the dressing-gown, was none other than Ernest Lawrence, of the College House Remove! It was just as well for Lawrence that he did not know that the three juniors were here. The knowledge would probably have put him off his form and made his task the more difficult.

It seemed an interminable time to him before the preliminaries were over; but at last they were completed.

The referee—an elderly, under-sized man in evening-dress—was making himself very prominent. Imitation diamonds blazed on his shirt-front, and he seemed to imagine that he was of immense importance.

"Seconds out!"

The audience, which had been talking in a dull murmur, lapsed into silence. For a second or two only the spluttering of the arc lamps made a sound. Everybody sat in their chairs, tense and expectant, waiting for the tussle to begin. All eyes were directed towards

the ring, with the two agile figures standing out in bold relief under the glare of the electric light.

"Time!"

Jimmy Rhodes and Lawrence stepped from their corners at the same moment. They had cast aside their dressing-gowns now, and stood there, stripped ready for fight, expect for their short knickers. The contrast between the pair was very obvious now. Lawrence's skin was white and clear, while Jimmy Rhodes' looked tough and coarse. It seemed to the observer that Jimmy would overwhelm his opponent within the first round.

But Lawrence's frame was wiry, and his muscles stood out in a very obvious fashion. He would not be so easy to beat—this was the opinion which Mr. Rook arrived at. He was half afraid that his man would fail, but he was hoping for the best.

The boxers circled round the ring, facing one another, sparring for an opening. Lawrence was wary; he wanted his opponent to make the first move.

It might as well be admitted at once that the St. Frank's junior was nervous. But this was only natural, considering all the circumstances. And Jimmy Rhodes was not slow to recognise this fact. He smiled to himself, and wasted no further time. Rhodes was a young fellow who entered the ring with the grim determination to win, by hook or by crook. Of honour or pity he knew nothing. He was there to beat his opponent, and for nothing else.

Suddenly Jimmy bore in close, and delivered a heavy punch on Lawrence's chest. Then he danced out to distance once more, and was rather surprised that "Young Ern" did nothing.

Jimmy smiled to himself, and drove right in. He was full of confidence, and he kept shooting out his left in a manner which rather disconcerted Lawrence at first, for the boy was not quite settled yet. His nerves were still on the stretch, and his brain was in a whirl.

Again and again Jimmy managed to land punches, and it seemed that Lawrence's guard was nowhere. Mr. Rook watched anxiously. He could not understand what had come over Lawrence. The junior was not fighting as he had fought in Mr. Gubbin's boxing-booth. But those blows of Jimmy's

were beginning to make the St. Frank's junior think.

And Jimmy Rhodes was more full of confidence now than ever. His chief idea was to make a laughing stock of his opponent. He delighted to play to the audience, and he saw a first-class chance here.

He gave himself up to some very tricky footwork, dancing about his man, and delivering a blow occasionally from long range. The spectators chuckled with glee, and watched with delighted interest, for, without doubt, this style of Jimmy's was very spectacular.

The first round was nearing its close before Ernest Lawrence found his feet, so to speak. And then, quite suddenly it seemed, his head became clear, and he was oblivious of the audience, the spluttering arc lamps, and the fact that this was his first real fight in a boxing-ring. All he saw was Jimmy Rhodes in front of him, dancing about, and doing almost as he pleased. And Lawrence set his teeth, and decided that it was time to make a change.

And just at that moment Rhodes made another one of his punches, and this time he intended to deliver quite a severe blow.

But Lawrence was ready.

He evaded that straight left with perfect ease, and jumped forward and returned a terrific left hook, which landed with shattering force upon Rhodes' unguarded jaw.

Jimmy staggered back, and uttered a gasping grunt, as much of surprise as of pain. And he was given no rest. Ernest attacked with the ferocity of a tiger, and he delivered three powerful body blows which sounded throughout the hall. Rhodes went back and back, and staggered against the ropes.

"Time!"

A sign went up from the audience, a sign of astonishment. They had never expected "Young 'Ern" to show such dexterity and form.

"Splendid—splendid!" muttered Mr. Rook. "That's the style, my lad—keep it up, and you'll be all right!"

Lawrence was glad of the rest, for it gave him time to collect his wits, and to realise that he would not have everything his own way, by any means. Rhodes would not indulge in any more of that fancy work. He had been taught his lesson.

The gong sounded again, and the second round commenced.

Rhodes attacked at once, swinging in a left hook which Lawrence slipped under without much difficulty. Then, close up, Ernest sent in a whirlwind of blows which landed on his opponent's chest and ribs. Rhodes backed away for a couple of paces.

And then he broke away and lashed out a right which crashed upon Lawrence's jaw. The lad was brought up with a jerk, and the pain in his teeth and gums was agonising.

There was no pause.

Lawrence sprang in once more, and his fist went home with great force upon Jimmy's neck. It rather astonished the professional that Lawrence should have such a long reach, and he was taken off his balance for the moment.

He hunched himself up and came right in, "mixing it." The pair danced about the ring in a fierce, swift battle, which warmed them up thoroughly.

Lawrence's guard was perfect, and his footwork was astonishing. Rhodes found it almost impossible to get in a direct blow, and he was beginning to understand that "Young Ern" was by no means an easy opponent to beat.

"Time!"

Lawrence went back to his seat in the corner of the ring feeling very confident. He had taken the measure of Jimmy Rhodes, and he was satisfied. He had no reason to feel nervous or alarmed.

When the third round commenced it was clear that Rhodes was getting into a temper, and he meant to finish the fight as quickly as possible. He considered it a disgrace that this unknown young fighter should last out so long. And Jimmy was impatient.

He sent in a sledge-hammer right which would have knocked Lawrence clean out if it had landed, but Lawrence jerked his head aside with perfect ease, and then he flashed home a left to Jimmy's ribs. The boxer grunted audibly and fell away.

Then Rhodes rushed into a clinch, and he did his utmost to drive home a series of short, powerful punches, which would have sent Lawrence reeling to the floor if the punches had gone home.

But the junior was on the alert. His father had taught him a lot of tricks, and he knew precisely what to do. With his elbows and forearms he bolstered the

attack skilfully and cunningly, and Rhodes was unable to land a single blow. Indeed, quite the opposite was the case, for Rhodes received a number of jabs on the ribs which set him gasping.

But Rhodes was still a dangerous opponent.

He skipped round Lawrence and aimed a left swing which, fortunately for Lawrence, missed its mark.

And the force with which that blow was aimed was so great that Jimmy would have staggered forward but for the fact that Lawrence very considerably assisted him to regain his balance by delivering a straight punch on the jaw which brought Rhodes up standing.

From one side of the ring to the other the opponents swayed, and the footwork indulged in by Lawrence evoked exclamations of praise from all the onlookers. The audience was beginning to realise, in fact, that this fair-skinned youngster was a power to be reckoned with.

Jimmy's lips were cut, and he did not present a very pleasing sight when that round came to an end. He was breathing heavily, too, and the brief interval was very welcome to him. However, when he sprang on to his feet at the sound of the gong for the next round, he was as alert and jaunty as ever. His seconds had done their work well.

There was an ugly look in his eyes as he entered into the fight with renewed vigour. For some moments the pair moved about, waiting for an opening; and now Rhodes was beginning to become wild and savage. He made several steady rushes, but he found it impossible to break through that impregnable guard. Lawrence was boxing now with great confidence, and with a feeling in his heart that he would win. He had gauged his opponent, and he knew that he himself was the better man. There was no doubt whatever now—he knew, positively knew!—that he would win this fight.

Just for a moment Rhodes was careless, and Lawrence seized his opportunity. He landed a jolting hook which sliced through Jimmy's guard without difficulty, and the punch went straight home to his neck. Rhodes swayed back, and Lawrence followed him up.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Again and again the schoolboy smashed home blows upon Jimmy's chest, blows that could not be parried.

Rhodes was confused, bewildered. He could not understand this. He could not realise that he was being beaten, gradually but surely, by a youngster who was absolutely unknown.

"Buck up, Jimmy!"

"Put some ginger into it, man!"

"He's all over you, Rhodes--wake up!"

All sorts of shouts came from the audience. But the words only reached Rhodes in an indistinct blurr. He could understand nothing. He was only aware of the fact that he was faced by a whirlwind, and that he could not see clearly or think clearly, or act with any decision. He waited in a dull kind of way for the sound of the gong. He wanted the round to end, for he was beginning to understand that very shortly a blow would be delivered which would send him down, to remain down until counted out.

"Time!"

It was a welcome sound for Jimmy, and he fairly reeled back into his corner. His face was bruised and battered.

Lawrence, on the other hand, was still looking fresh, but he had several ugly marks upon his cheeks, and his lip was cut. He had received a good deal of punishment, but he was as sturdy and as confident as ever.

"Well done, kid!"

A good many members of the audience were filled with enthusiasm now—enthusiasm for "Young 'Ern," for the lad was putting up a display which surprised everybody. The older hands were beginning to understand that Lawrence was a little wonder—that his boxing was finished and perfect, as well nigh perfect as any boxing could be.

"That kid's born to be a champion, you mark my words!" said one man. "He'll beat all comers, and never turn a hair!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Fullwood, up in the balcony. "I—I can't quite believe it, you chaps! Lawrence is doing the trick—he's winning!"

"Looks like it!" muttered Gulliver. "What about our little bet?"

"Lawrence hasn't won yet," said Bell, with a scowl, "the rotter! I thought he'd be nowhere, but he seems to be doing fine, by all I can see."

Fulliwood and Co. did not take pride in the fact that "Young 'Ern" was a member of their own school. They were

only thinking of their bet, and they were worrying because it seemed that Lawrence would win. In that case their money would be gone.

"Time!"

The next round commenced, and this round was not to be so successful for Ernest Lawrence. Rhodes was desperate now, and he put everything he knew into his attack. He went for Lawrence with terrific ferocity, and drew him into a corner of the ring. And then, before Ernest could be aware of the fact, a blow landed upon his jaw which sent his neck back with a jerk, and, quick as lightning, Rhodes brought his other fist round and smashed it heavily upon his opponent's cheek. Lawrence fell into a clinch, and Rhodes pressed his arms down against his opponents.

"Break away, there!"

It was the referee's voice, and Jimmy loosened his grip and stood out to distance.

Lawrence was now racked with pain, and he was feeling rather dazed. Jimmy Rhodes seized that short advantage and came rushing in, sweeping Lawrence's guard completely aside.

Crash! Thud!

One fist went hammering against Lawrence's chest, and the other caught him between the eyes. He swayed back, and fell upon his knees, then dropping on to his hands.

"Stand back!" commanded the referee.

Jimmy stood back, breathing hard, his face wearing an ugly leer of triumph.

"One, two, three, four——"

The time-keeper was counting, and the vast audience held it's breath. Was this the end? Had the unknown boxer been beaten? It certainly seemed like it, for Lawrence made no attempt to move. He lay there, upon his hands and knees, apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

But such was not the case.

Lawrence knew well enough that he had received heavy punishment, and he wanted the breathing space. He listened to the counting, and he knew precisely what was going on. This little respite had already cleared his head, and he was ready for the fight once more. But every second was of value to him in this extremity.

"Eight, nine——" said the time-keeper.

Lawrence leapt to his feet with an agility which surprised everybody. He was ready again, and he proved this during the very next second.

For Rhodes came forward, ready to close with his supposedly beaten opponent. But this time Lawrence was ready, and his guard was perfect. Jimmy found it absolutely impossible to break through that defence.

The gong sounded, and the round was over.

That interval of one minute did not seem very long, but Lawrence's seconds worked with a will, and when "Time!" was called again the lad felt himself once more.

Rhodes evidently thought that he had the fight in his own hands now, for he began the round by making a swift, savage attack. It was an example of over-confidence.

For Lawrence attacked, too.

His right swept right through, and smashed upon Rhodes' face with a thud which sent a jar right through the professional's frame.

And then, before Jimmy could cover, the junior brought home a left on the point of the jaw which made Jimmy dizzy.

He fell away, and Lawrence was not slow to realise that he had all the advantage. He followed Rhodes up, battling fiercely, and he kept the man on the go without respite. Again and again he smashed into Rhodes, his fists thudding home like clockwork.

And the fight came to an end with an abruptness which was really astonishing.

Rhodes was still bewildered and confused, and he was obviously a beaten man. Lawrence made a feint with his left, and he put all his power into a right punch which went straight for the target.

Lawrence's fist struck Jimmy Rhodes fully upon the point, and the professional simply crumbled up. He crashed into the ropes, swayed back, and rolled over. He lay there, a beaten man.

The count commenced.

"One, two, three——"

Jimmy Rhodes only stirred slightly. He attempted to rise, but found it impossible, and at last the word sounded--

"Out!"

"Young 'Ern' wins!" said the referee.

Mr. Norman Rook slapped his thigh. "By George!" he muttered, his eyes gleaming. "I knew it! That boy is a living wonder!"

CHAPTER V.

THE INFORMER.

THE events which happened immediately after the fight seemed like a dream to Ernest Lawrence. He knew that he received eighty pounds in currency notes from Mr. Rook, and that gentleman was enthusiastic. He declared that, before long, he would fix up a fight for "Young Ern" for a purse of one hundred and fifty pounds!

Lawrence was dazed by that statement, and he could not fully realise what his success meant to him.

He did not fully recover his wits until he found himself in the train, bound for Bellton. And the thrill which went through him was an extremely pleasant one. He had won—he had beaten Jimmy Rhodes! And the evidence of this was in his pocket—for he had the eighty pounds there. It was almost too wonderful to be true.

It pleased him to think that he would be at St. Frank's before bedtime—and that no questions would be asked. Certainly, his face was knocked about—he had several ugly bruises, and his lower lip was cut. But this was nothing particularly alarming. Schoolboys very frequently go about with black eyes, and other ornamentations. Lawrence did not think that there would be many awkward questions.

He decided what he would do with the money. On the morrow he would send every penny of it to his father, by registered post. But, of course, he would not enclose any letter.

Mr. Lawrence would receive the money, and he would not know from whence it came. If he did know, there would be many awkward questions to answer—and Ernest could not face them.

Meanwhile, Fullwood and Co. had left for St. Frank's by an earlier train. They had not been compelled to remain in Helmford after the fight. And they

just caught a handy train home. They were furious. For they had lost their bets, and they blamed Lawrence for this. Of course, Lawrence was responsible, since he had won the fight. But it was a blow to the knuts. They had been certain of their money—and they had lost.

"The cad!—the beastly rotter!" exclaimed Fullwood savagely. "I'll tell you what, you chaps—I'm going to show him up!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Gulliver. "You can't do that, Fully—we can't let anybody know that we were at that fight——"

"It won't be necessary to tell a soul," said Fullwood. "All we've got to do is to send a typewritten letter to the Head. We needn't sign it, of course, and he won't know where it's come from. The Head will only have to make a few inquiries, and then the truth will come out—and Lawrence will get it in the neck—he'll be sacked!"

"And he jolly well ought to be sacked!" said Bell. "I call it disgraceful—a St. Frank's fellow boxing and prize-fighting in a place like the Ring Pavilion at Helmford! It's lowering the tone of the school!"

The knuts were very indignant with Lawrence—for winning. And it was in keeping with their characters that they should think of some scheme to bring about the schoolboy boxer's downfall. If ever they could do anybody a bad turn, they were only too delighted to do so.

"There's one thing we've got to remember," said Fullwood. "We shall send this anonymous letter to the Head—we'll type it as soon as we get in, and slip it in the Head's box. He won't know where it's come from, or anything. And we shall have to keep our mouths shut—tightly shut. We mustn't breathe a word to a soul—or the whole school will get to know that we were in Helmford this evening. That won't do at all—or the whole thing will recoil on our own heads, and we shall get a flogging, or something pleasant like that!"

And so it was decided. The knuts would say nothing—but they would concoct that letter, and deliver it into the Headmaster's box. Then they would await developments—keeping their mouths tightly closed. No matter what

happened, they would not be able to say a word. For they had their own safety to think about.

The cads of Study A arrived at St. Frank's in good time—well before supper, in fact. And they went straight to their study without being noticed. It was Fullwood who sneaked away into the prefects' room. It was fortunate for the knuts that the prefects were all engaged at a meeting, which was being held in the Lecture Hall. The prefects' room, therefore, was deserted. And Fullwood lost no time in typing out his precious letter.

It was quite short, and Fullwood typed it all in capitals, without any address or signature. And when he had finished, it ran as follows:

"A prize fight has taken place at the Ring Pavilion, Helmford, between Jimmy Rhodes and Young Ern. It took place this evening. Young Ern is another name for Ernest Lawrence, of the Remove. He deserves to be expelled from St. Frank's for taking part in this disgraceful bout. Please do your duty."

It was certainly very brief, but nothing more was necessary. The words were typed upon a plain sheet of paper, enclosed in an envelope, and then Fullwood took it across and dropped it into the Head's letter box with his own hand.

Just as it happened, the Head had been out that evening—paying a call at the Vicarage—and as he came in—about five minutes after Fullwood had visited the letter-box—he happened to glance in the box, and he saw the envelope. He glanced at it, and saw that it was addressed to him. It had evidently been delivered by hand, and the Head took it into his study, rather curious.

A few moments later his brow was as black as thunder, and he was staring at the letter in amazement and anger.

"This certainly cannot be true!" he murmured. "It is some foolish practical joke—and I shall certainly discover the joker and punish him with the utmost severity. It is out of the question that Lawrence should have been in Helmford this evening—engaged in a prize fight!"

However, the Head meant to get to the bottom of the matter at once—and he lost no time in ringing for Tubbs, the pageboy. Tubbs read the danger signs at once.

"Kindly go over to the College House, Tubbs, and bring Master Lawrence to me!" commanded the Head.

"Yessir!" said the page-boy.

He vanished, and went over to the College House. Lawrence, as it happened, had only just got in, and he was feeling weary and tired—and he ached in almost every limb after his hard fight. He was rather alarmed because his face was bruised and swollen, and he hoped that he would not attract very much attention. And he had hardly sat down in Study T before a tap sounded upon the door, and Tubbs appeared.

"Come in!" said Lawrence wearily. The page-boy entered.

"Very sorry, Master Lawrence, but you're wanted in the Head's study at once" said Tubbs. "I'm awful sorry, young gent—but the 'Ead looks terrible black. Askin' your pardon, Master Lawrence, but it looks to me as though you've been fightin', and the 'Ead must have 'eard about it!"

"But—but it's impossible!" panted Lawrence, getting to his feet, his face flushing with alarm.

He accompanied Tubbs to the Head's study, with his brain in a whirl. He was trying to think how Dr. Stafford could have learned the truth. It seemed absolutely out of the question to Lawrence. Why, he had only just got back! How was it possible for the Head to have learned the truth by this time?

"This way, Master Lawrence!"

Tubbs opened the door of the Head's study, and stood aside. Lawrence walked in and found the Head Master seated at his desk. He was looking very stern, and, looking up at Lawrence, he beckoned.

"Come here, my boy!" said Dr. Stafford. "Read this!"

He passed over that letter, and Lawrence took it, and the words danced before his eyes as though they were alive. He started violently, and the blood ran out of his cheeks. The Head had done this deliberately—for he wished to see what effect the letter would have. He was quite satisfied that those words were true. There was no look of astonishment on Lawrence's face—only amazement and dismay. Furthermore, Dr. Stafford did not fail to notice the signs.

The junior's face was bruised—it was swollen—his lower lip was cut. All

these things told their own story. Lawrence certainly had been engaged in this prize fight at Helmford! It was staggering—and the Head was furious.

"I do not think it is necessary for me to question you, Lawrence!" said the Head, in a grim, harsh voice. "Your guilt is absolutely obvious!"

"I—I—"

"It will be better, Lawrence, if you say nothing whatever!" thundered Dr. Stafford, rising to his feet. "I will hear no words of excuse from you. You have disgraced yourself utterly and completely!"

"But—but, please let me speak, sir——" gasped Lawrence desperately.

"I will not allow you to speak!" stormed the Head. "The less you can say the better, you wretched boy. You have disgraced yourself beyond all redemption. You have engaged in a low prize fight for money—and your punishment will be drastic and immediate!"

Lawrence was too dazed by this blow to say much. He could only stand there, pale to the lips, staring at the Headmaster dumbly. His brain was in a terrible whirl. But there were one or two things which stood out clearly in his fevered mind. This was the end!

His great success, which had made him feel so happy—his effort to help his father—had ended in this way! It would mean expulsion—disgrace!

Racked with pain as the lad was, he felt that this was almost more than he could bear. He was aching in every limb, and now he was doomed to suffer mental agony as well. Lawrence felt that he would be relieved if the floor opened and allowed him to sink through. He tried to speak, but the words choked in his throat.

"I had intended to question you, and to obtain your story, Lawrence," went on the Head, his voice sounding a mere blur to the wretched junior. "But there is no need for me to ask any more questions—your face tells me the absolute truth. You must not imagine that I have any objection to boxing as a sport. It is a fine, manly sport. But you have degraded the art, by going to a common, disreputable place, and fighting for the sake of money. That is what I object to—that is why I am now furious."

"But, sir——"

"Not one word, Lawrence—I will

hear no excuses!" thundered the Head. "Your very attitude is sufficient for me. I will not listen to any of your attempts to put yourself right in my eyes. That cannot be done, boy. Nothing that you can say will alter my verdict. You have disgraced yourself, and you have disgraced the school. That is sufficient! The Ring Pavilion, at Helmford, is a low, common prize fighting booth, and that you could ever have appeared there is a mystery to me. But perhaps there is a natural explanation. I know that your father, years ago, was a professional boxer himself. He sent you to St. Frank's because he wants you to grow up a gentleman. But you have abused your father's kindness. And, Lawrence, it will be utterly impossible for you to remain at St. Frank's!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Lawrence, horrified. "You—you don't mean——"

"Under no circumstances can I allow you to remain in the school," interrupted Dr. Stafford grimly. "Tomorrow morning, Lawrence, you will leave St. Frank's for ever—after being publicly expelled."

The junior almost staggered.

"Oh, but—but—you don't understand——"

"I understand all that is necessary, Lawrence," exclaimed the Head. "You will say nothing further—for I do not wish to hear you. You will remain silent, boy!"

The Head sat down, and touched the bell. A moment or two later Tubbs entered, and he was looking rather scared. Perhaps the pageboy had been listening outside the door, for he cast a sympathetic look towards Lawrence, of the Remove.

"Tubbs, you will go immediately to the Sixth Form passage, and you will bring Fenton back with you!" said the Headmaster. "And do not lose any time."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubbs, bolting.

After he had gone, Lawrence stood there, unable to say a word—almost unable to think. He could see the Headmaster sitting at his desk—but he could only see a mere blur—an outline. The whole room seemed to be swimming. His head ached, and his limbs were filled with pain. And then Fenton came—Fenton, of the Sixth.

"You will take this boy to the punish-

ment room, Fenton," said Dr. Stafford grimly.

"Certainly, sir!" said the captain of St. Frank's. "I am sorry to see Lawrence in trouble——"

"Lawrence is to be expelled in the morning, Fenton," interrupted the Headmaster curtly. "You will take him to the punishment room, and lock him in securely."

"Yes, sir," said Fenton, rather startled.

And Ernest Lawrence was led out; and taken to the punishment room. It had all been so sudden—so terribly, sudden.

Only a short fifteen minutes earlier he had arrived back at St. Frank's, successful and triumphant. Now everything was lost—and, on the morrow, he would be sent back home—in dire disgrace.

It seemed almost impossible that this disaster could have overtaken him.

But it was true—appallingly true!

CHAPTER VI.

DEFYING THE BLACKMAILER.

MR. SMALE FOXE was looking very thoughtful as he stood outside the door of the Headmaster's study. He had just tapped, and was waiting for the invitation to enter. The Housemaster of the College House had thought deeply before coming on this mission.

He had heard about the disaster which had befallen Lawrence, of the Remove. Fenton had returned to the Head's study to report that he had placed the junior in the punishment-room. And the Head had instructed Fenton to go over to Mr. Foxe at once with a message that the Housemaster should attend Dr. Stafford's study without delay. However, the Head had mentioned to Fenton why Ernest Lawrence was to be dismissed.

And Mr. Smale Foxe had been thinking rather deeply.

"Come in!" came the Head's deep voice.

Mr. Foxe entered the study and closed the door behind him.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said, stepping forward into the room.

"Yes, Mr. Foxe—yes!" said the Head, who was looking deeply worried. "I wish to talk to you about Lawrence—of your House. I regret to inform you, Mr. Foxe, that Lawrence is to be expelled in the morning."

"Indeed, sir!" said Mr. Foxe, looking astonished. "You surprise me greatly! I have always regarded Lawrence as one of my best pupils—he has always been quiet and reserved and extremely well behaved——"

"No doubt Lawrence has been an excellent boy in school hours," interrupted Dr. Stafford. "But you will be astounded, Mr. Foxe, when you learn that he actually engaged in a prize fight this evening at Helmford. A prize fight—for a large money prize!"

Mr. Smale Foxe smiled.

"I am more astounded than I can say, Dr. Stafford!" he said smoothly. "Did Lawrence admit his guilt—did he admit that he was in Helmford this evening, engaged in a prize fight?"

"Well, not exactly," said the Head. "I did not give Lawrence any chance to speak—I did not intend him to offer me any excuses. The evidence was quite sufficient, and the wretched boy——"

"Pardon me, sir, for interrupting," said Mr. Foxe. "Do I understand you to say that you did not allow Lawrence to speak—you did not give him a chance to admit or deny his charge?"

The Head looked up.

"I certainly did not give Lawrence any chance to speak!" he said. "The very appearance of the boy's guilt was sufficient for me. His face is bruised and battered—ample evidence, Mr. Foxe. Furthermore, he started with real guilt when I showed him this letter—my source of information."

"May I see the letter, sir?"

"Certainly, Mr. Foxe—it is here."

The Head passed it over, and Mr. Foxe glanced rapidly at the typewritten words.

"Do you know who sent this letter to you, sir?" he inquired, looking up.

"No; I haven't the faintest idea," replied the Head. "It was in my letter-box; but I am extremely glad that somebody unknown realised his sense of duty sufficiently to inform me——"

"I am seriously afraid, Dr. Stafford, that you have made a grave mistake!" interrupted Mr. Foxe smoothly. "It is a pity you did not give Lawrence a

chance to speak, or he would have denied this charge."

"I am quite certain he would have denied it—and I did not wish to hear any lies," said the Head grimly.

"You would not have heard lies, sir," went on Mr. Foxe. "It is very unfortunate that you gave Lawrence no chance to speak, because I can prove that he is quite innocent."

The Head started.

"You—you can prove it?" he inquired sharply. "What do you mean, Mr. Foxe?"

"Precisely what I say, sir," said the Housemaster. "It is stated in this message that Lawrence is 'Young Ern.' That is quite impossible, and out of the question."

The Head rose to his feet.

"Dear me!" he ejaculated. "I shall never forgive myself if I have done the boy an injustice! Please be more explicit, Mr. Foxe. I shall be greatly interested to know how you can prove Lawrence's innocence. Personally, I have no doubt whatever of his guilt!"

"I do not see how Lawrence could have been engaged in this prize fight, as you imagine," said the Housemaster. "It is stated in this message that Lawrence was in Holmford this evening, and that he fought a person known as Jimmy Rhodes. That is quite impossible, for the simple reason that Lawrence was with me in Caistowe at the time."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the Head, starting. "Lawrence was with you—in Caistowe?"

"Precisely, sir!" said Mr. Foxe. "Lawrence has been with me practically the whole evening—and I think you will admit that it is impossible for the boy to be in two places at one and the same time."

"But—but, my dear sir!" protested the Head. "I—I hardly know what to say! I was certain of the lad's guilt—"

"Then all I can say, sir, is that you have made a grave blunder!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I happened to be going to Caistowe this evening, and I met Lawrence in the lane. I suggested that he should come with me, and we both went together. We were, in fact, in Caistowe at the very time this prize fight took place at Holmford."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the Headmaster, looking very blank. "This

—this is staggering! And I have accused that boy of this thing, and I did not give him any chance to deny the charge! How truly distressing!"

Never for one instant did the Headmaster suspect Mr. Foxe in this affair. Why, indeed, should he? How was the Headmaster to know that Mr. Smale Foxe was lying in an extremely glib manner? And, of course, it was quite impossible for Dr. Stafford to doubt Mr. Foxe's word. Mr. Foxe was the Housemaster of the College House, and there could be no possible reason for shielding the junior in this way. Such a supposition did not enter the Headmaster's head.

"I must beg of you, sir, to do your utmost to release Lawrence without delay," went on Mr. Foxe. "If you desire further witnesses, I will obtain them. I can produce many people who saw both myself and Lawrence in Caistowe—"

"My dear sir, please stop!" interrupted the Head. "Your word is quite sufficient—I require no further witnesses. Upon my soul! Whoever wrote this message is a base scoundrel! His intention, evidently, was to get Lawrence into disgrace—and he nearly succeeded! It was most unjust of me to refuse the boy permission to speak. I am more glad than I can say, Mr. Foxe, that you have come forward in this way. You have prevented a terrible miscarriage of justice! I will send for Lawrence at once!"

"It is really the only thing you can do, sir," said Mr. Foxe smoothly.

"But just one moment!" interrupted Dr. Stafford, looking thoughtful. "Can you possibly explain, Mr. Foxe, how it is that Lawrence's face is rather badly battered? It was that fact which caused me to be quite certain—"

"The matter really requires little explanation," said Mr. Foxe, smiling. "I admit that it is a coincidence—and it is not surprising that you should jump to one conclusion. We were walking down a quiet side street in Caistowe, when we happened to see a ruffian beating a dog in the most cruel manner. Before I could interfere, Lawrence dashed forward, and attacked the man. It was very foolish of him to do so, because the fellow turned upon the boy, and struck him several severe and brutal blows upon the face. Naturally, I interfered at once, and I succeeded in

delivering one or two heavy blows before the man took to his heels. I was rather concerned as to Lawrence's condition at the moment, but he made light of it."

The Head's face cleared.

"I am extremely pleased to hear this, Mr. Foxe," he said. "We will waste no further time."

He touched his bell, and once again Tubbs appeared—this time with great alacrity. It was obvious that the page-boy had been hovering about in the passage.

"Will you please go to Fenton at once, Tubbs, and instruct him to bring Lawrence back to this study?" said the Head. "Make haste, my boy."

"Right, sir!" said Tubbs, with great cheerfulness.

It was not long before Fenton appeared, accompanied by Lawrence, who was looking bewildered and rather dazed. The junior could not imagine why he was being brought back to Dr. Stafford's study. Probably it was to receive a flogging, he reflected. He had heard that when fellows were expelled, they frequently received a flogging beforehand. And Lawrence was feeling too miserable and too unhappy to care what happened to him.

But he was astonished to see the expression on the Head's face—and he was still more astonished when Dr. Stafford came forward and grasped his hand.

"My boy, I am at a loss for words!" said the Head gently. "I have done you a grave injustice, and I can only trust that you will forgive me."

"I—I don't understand, sir!" said Lawrence, bewildered.

"Mr. Foxe has come forward, and he has told me the exact truth," smiled the Headmaster. "You understand now, Lawrence?"

"The—the exact truth, sir?" stammered Lawrence.

"Yes; and it is very fortunate for you that Mr. Foxe was with you in Caistowe this evening," went on the Headmaster. "I know everything, my boy. Mr. Foxe has told me how you went with him to Caistowe, and how you were there when the fight was actually taking place in Helmsford. If I had given you a chance to speak, all might have been well. I trust that you will forgive me, my lad?"

The junior felt that his brain was reeling—he could not possibly understand all this.

"But—but——"

"There is no necessity for you to say anything, Lawrence," interrupted Mr. Foxe, giving the lad a decided kick. "Everything is cleared up, and it is not at all necessary for you to go into any explanations—I have done all that!"

And Lawrence understood—only dimly at first, but he understood. He knew that Mr. Smale Foxe had provided him with an alibi. Perhaps, if Lawrence had been not quite so amazed and bewildered, he would have told the truth then and there. He hardly knew what to say. He was dumb—with amazement and relief. But he guessed that Mr. Foxe had some ulterior motive in acting in this way, and it was quite clear that the Housemaster did not want Lawrence to speak. For, of course, the boy would probably put his foot in it if he said anything.

The one fact which filled Mr. Foxe with satisfaction was that Lawrence had not been permitted to say anything during that first interview with the Head. For, if the junior had admitted his guilt, it would have been impossible to provide him with an alibi. As matters now stood, everything was perfectly satisfactory.

How Lawrence got out of the Head's study, he hardly knew. But he faintly remembered that Mr. Foxe led him out, and then the junior found himself across the Triangle, in his own study. Mr. Foxe had come with him, and he was now in the study, with the door closed.

"Well, young man, you ought to be very grateful to me!" said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I got you out of a very tight corner. I know full well that you were in Helmsford, and that you are 'Young Ern.' But I have succeeded in throwing dust into Dr. Stafford's eyes, and, instead of your being publicly expelled on the morrow, you will remain at St. Frank's. And not one word of this story will be allowed to get abroad. You ought to be very grateful to me."

"I—I hardly know what to say, sir," said Lawrence. "It was good of you to help me in that way, but—but perhaps it would have been better to have told the truth. I don't like the idea of anything false being said, just to get me out of a hole——"

"Tut—tut!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "Do not be so foolish! Now we will come to business. I am aware of

the fact, Lawrence, that you received thirty pounds for this precious prize fight—to say nothing of an additional sum which was probably given to you by the promoters. Personally, I see no reason why you should not enjoy yourself—why you should not take a little extra money if you wish. And this boxing scheme of yours has my entire approval.”

“If you’re going to demand money from me, Mr. Foxe, you won’t get any!” interrupted Lawrence grimly. “You had ten pounds last week—simply because I couldn’t refuse you. You’ve no right whatever to demand this money from me. I can’t it—I beat Jimmy Rhodes! It was a terrible task, and I am aching with pain all over—”

“That makes no difference to me, Lawrence!” interrupted Mr. Foxe. “Unless you hand me the sum of thirty-five pounds at once—I judge that to be about half of the sum you received—I shall return to the Headmaster, and inform him of the exact truth. I will give you just one minute to decide. You will give me the money, or I will go to the Head!”

Ernest Lawrence breathed hard, and his eyes glittered. Why should he give up his money to this man—this black-mailer? He understood now why Mr. Foxe had got him out of the trouble. It was simply in order to obtain this money! And Lawrence had only done it—he had only engaged in the fight—so that he could help his father! No; he would not give up a penny—not a farthing. For suddenly Lawrence had realised that he was in a safe position.

“Your minute is up, Lawrence!” said Mr. Foxe grimly.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I cannot let you have anything!” said Lawrence firmly. “And I do not think you will go back to the Headmaster!”

“What—what do you mean?” demanded the Housemaster, with a start.

“Simply this, sir—I don’t very well

see how you can go back to Dr. Stafford!” said Lawrence. “If you tell him now that I did actually go to Helmsford, you will make yourself out to be a liar!” went on the junior. “You cannot possibly tell another story to Dr. Stafford now, without every word of the truth coming out. For you must surely realise, Mr. Foxe, that I shall have no reason to keep silent. And, when the Head finds out that you told a lie to shield me, he will know that I am speaking the truth when I tell him that you have attempted to blackmail me! I defy you, Mr. Foxe—you cannot do anything!”

The Housemaster frowned, and a glint came into his eyes.

And, without another word, Mr. Smale Foxe turned and left the study.

Ernest Lawrence breathed a great sigh of relief.

Mr. Foxe was foiled. His cunning scheme had come to nothing, and Lawrence, of the Remove, was still perfectly safe. Everything had turned out in a wonderfully satisfactory manner.

In his own study, Mr. Foxe paced up and down, with pursed lips and glittering eyes. The junior had been one too many for him—Lawrence had been very clever. But Mr. Foxe was determined to reverse the order of things before so very long. His chance would soon come, and then Lawrence would pay!

But what was the mystery concerning the master of the College House?

And who was the mysterious individual in the brown beard who had followed Lawrence to Helmsford on the Saturday afternoon? Not Nelson Lee, because Nelson Lee had been shadowing the bearded man. Not Mr. Foxe, because Mr. Foxe had been at St. Frank’s. Then who was it? And what connection had he with the mystery which surrounded the Housemaster?

Before so very long, another episode was destined to occur, and there would be many exciting and dramatic events!

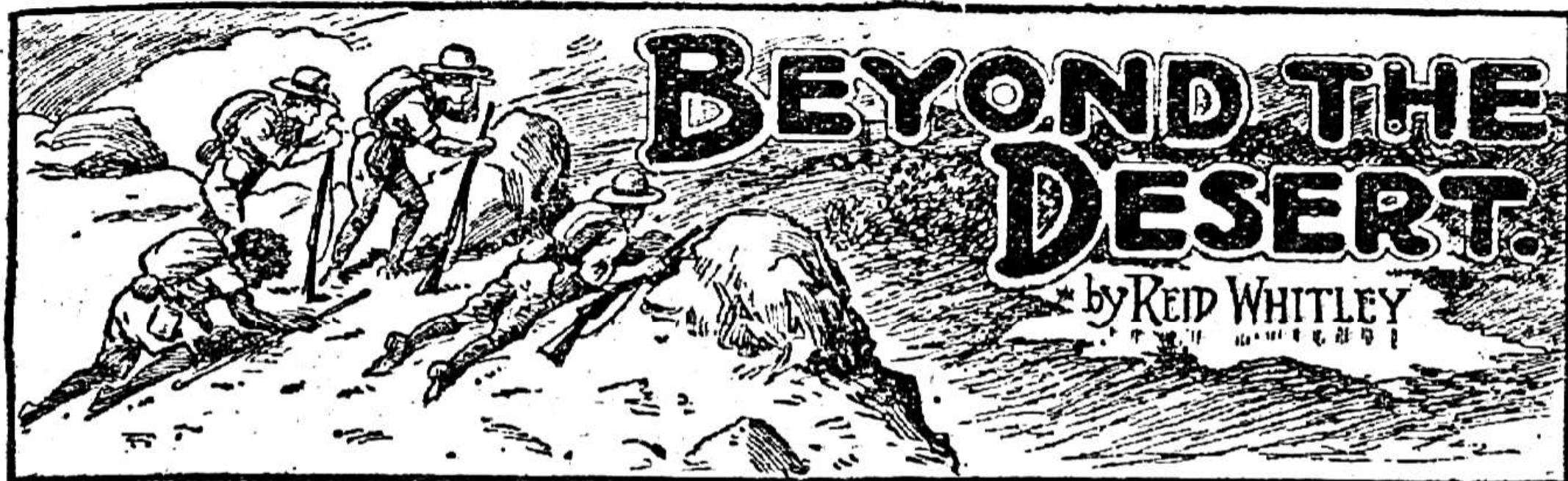
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INTRODUCTION.

The *Barracuda*, an old sea tub, is battling against a nasty bit of weather in the Arafura Sea and Torres Straits. Jim Harding and Jack Maxwell, the only two passengers aboard the tramp, are told by the captain that there is little chance of the ship getting through the storm. The engines break down, and the ship crashes on to a reef, cutting her in two.

(Now read on.)

Left On the Wreck.

THE table and the chairs on either side of the cabin still remained in place, for they were fastened to the deck, but everything else that was movable had slid down and piled itself against the remains of the bulkhead or the companion stairs, which, twisted and awry, were none the less still intact.

The water washed to and fro about the pile, wedging it closer together. A tin of biscuits floated up and down with an incessant clang-clang, like some cracked bell sounding a knell of doom.

"Good heavens! What's become of the skipper and the rest?" exclaimed Maxwell. "Let's get out and look—though I fear—"

He did not finish the sentence. If Jennings had left them below when the catastrophe occurred, it was only because he had been unable to come to them, for he was not the man to leave his passengers in the lurch. A few blows from the pistol-butt and a little hacking from the knife and the hole in the door was enlarged sufficiently to allow them to get out.

Maxwell climbed through, waited till Harding joined him, and, walking cautiously down the sloping floor, reached the stairs and tried the first steps. They held. Very carefully he ascended, drew back the hatch door, and, hanging on to it, drew himself out on what was left of the *Barracuda's* deck.

Only a few feet of it remained forward of the hatch, though the twenty feet or so aft was all intact. The ship had broken in two

just forward of the bulkhead. Part of this latter had gone, but sufficient remained to sustain the stern against the battering it was still receiving. By some freak of the waves the after part of the ship had been tossed on a reef, and in settling down had caught between two teeth of rock which held her firmly, while the rest of her had been broken away and had apparently sunk in the deep water to windward.

"They've gone!" said Jack, in a low voice, turning to Harding who had joined him. "Poor old Jennings! A first-class chap! And all the rest of them. I suppose they were all either swept overboard when she struck or drowned below."

"Lucky if they were drowned," replied Harding gravely. "Look there! The water's swarming with sharks!"

A long, triangular fin cut the surface of the calmer water in the lee of the reef. Another and another followed it. Looking down they could see the huge fish darting to and fro, chasing each other—for fragments of their ghastly feast, perhaps!

Maxwell heaved a long sigh.

"Well, they've gone, and we're left. That looks like land over there. Perhaps if the sea goes down we can reach it. We might make a raft, you know. We'd better begin. It may be no use, but, anyway, it will keep us from thinking too much of other things."

Harding stared long at the blur on the horizon. The wind was falling and the air clearing.

"Yes, it's land right enough," he said, and followed his companion below.

At once they started stocktaking, and at the end of an hour had discovered exactly how they stood. They had about two gallons of water, a bottle and a half of whisky, one tin of fancy biscuits, unopened, one ditto, the tin which had been washing about, nearly empty, two tins of preserved pineapple, and a tin of tongue, together with the cabin cruet of salt, vinegar, and mustard. These things had been in the captain's locker.

This was a very small stock of provisions on which to depend, especially as the coast—if they ever reached it—would probably

prove to be barren. The rest of the ship's provisions had been stowed forward in the steward's pantry and were gone. But beneath the cabin was a small lazarette or hold where possibly something eatable might have been stowed.

Therefore they hauled up the hatch and descended. The place was awash. A number of cases proved to contain trade gin, that fiery abomination which is still a trade medium among the islands, though it is apt to slay off its devotees at an alarming rate.

"Jennings's little private venture," said Harding. "I remember he said something about it when I asked what he had stowed here. It's no good to us."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Maxwell slowly. "We'll see later. Now, how about that raft? We have a saw, a hammer, a brace and bits, and a hatchet. I think the best thing will be to try and get up a section of the deck. Anyhow, we'll try."

The trial consumed another hour, at the end of which, they reluctantly gave up the task. The deck planking, though old, was still tough, and it had been well laid. At the rate of work, they calculated it would take them nearly a week to get enough of it raised to suit their purpose, and they could not possibly wait so long.

"Hang it all! What about the cabin table?" cried Harding suddenly. "It's big enough to carry us if only"—he paused, and his face fell—"if only we had something to buoy it up. There's the wood of the stairs, of course, but that wouldn't be buoyant enough, would it?"

Maxwell's face split with a sudden grin.

"I know. It's never been done before, but how about those bottles? Empty them, re-cork 'em, and stick their necks through holes bored in the table top! We could turn it over and build a sort of deck across the lower side, using the legs to support a kind of bulwark. How's that?"

"Sounds as though it would be mighty brittle," muttered Harding. "Still, our chances are more than brittle if we stay here more than a day or two. We'll die of thirst if we do. Let's get at it."

With a good deal of hard work they got the table loose from its fastenings, turned it over, and Maxwell began to bore holes large enough to take the bottle necks at regular intervals in the top. Meanwhile, Harding found the skipper's corkscrew, and having opened a case or two of the gin, proceeded to uncork, empty, and re-cork the bottles.

Only when the light began to fail did the couple desist, by which time the table-top was perforated all over and double-decked with portions of the cabin panelling, while a pile of empty bottles reposed at the upper-end of the cabin. An almost overpowering odour of raw spirits filled the cabin.

"We haven't noticed it, I suppose, till now, but the wind has dropped," said Maxwell. "Let's get aloft for a breath of fresh air. Fetch along some biscuits and let's feed. Then we'll turn in and start again

with the morning. To-morrow's going to be the most eventful day in our young lives."

They found that the sea was now a great deal calmer, though a heavy swell still ran about the reef. The tide was low, but a pool of shallow water lay on the reef at the lower end of the wreck directly below the hole in the bulkhead.

"We'll get our raft launched there, old bean," said Maxwell. "There's depth enough to try if she will float all right. This time to-morrow should see us ashore, or else—"

He pointed at the sharks who were now cruising to and fro as though they hoped for further rations, then turned to look at the shore which was now plainly visible some half dozen miles away.

"If the sea goes down, if our gimcrack raft floats, if we can get a bit of a breeze to help us along—then we should do all right," said Harding. "There goes the sun. Let's turn in."

The Terror in the Night.

PERHAPS it was to cheer their loneliness that Maxwell insisted on leaving the cabin lamp alight when they presently turned in. Besides, it was possible that the gleam of it might be seen from the shore, though this was improbable. So far as they could guess, they must be far down the Gulf, perhaps near the bottom, and there were but few settlements thereabouts. But, anyhow, the light was comforting, so they left it burning when they dropped into their bunks.

They were speedily asleep. The tide had turned, and the sea began once again to invade the lower part of the shattered hull; but the swell was fallen, and the wash of the waters did not disturb the sleepers. It was a noise of quite another sort that disturbed Harding somewhere in the small hours. He awoke as something clinked in the cabin.

He sat up listening. The lamp was burning low now, the oil being nearly exhausted, and from his position he could not see through the broken door into the main cabin. Suddenly he felt his hair prickle on his scalp. He had distinctly heard a faint tinkle, exactly the noise made by a bottle as it touches a glass. The last time he had noticed it was when Captain Jennings, filling himself what had proved to be his final drink, had let the bottle rattle on the lip of the tumbler.

He wasn't superstitious, but what could be moving in the cabin of a wreck miles from the shore, surrounded by a shark-infested sea? Nothing human, surely? And yet—

"Maxwell!" he whispered. "Jack, old man! Wake! There's something stirring out there. I'm going to look."

As he spoke he swung his legs over the edge of his bunk. There was a rattle from

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the cabin, several bottles slid from the pile, and crashed on the deck. Maxwell awoke with a grunt, something dark and sinuous waved for a moment before the opening in the door, then darted towards him.

In an instant, his legs were seized in a terrible embrace, a fearful, crushing grip, like the strangle-hold of a boa-constrictor. He was jerked from the bunk, and hauled against the opening in the door. Only in time to prevent himself being dragged through, he flung out his arms and caught the bunk edge, at the same time shouting an alarm.

"Something has me by the legs! Something strong! Quick, old chap! My pistol! Under my pillow! Ow!"

He howled with pain, for the grip was frightful, and his legs seemed to be near dislocation. Maxwell sprang across the cabin, fumbled and found the revolver, and wheeled to the door, across which Harding was spreadeagled. He saw another cable-like arm darting in to assist the first, saw a dark object which glistened as though it were made of black tarpaulin, slowly heaving itself backwards across the sloping floor.

Two large, horrible eyes glared fixedly from the midst of the thing. He levelled the heavy pistol, just as two more arms came flickering across his field of vision; then four roaring reports crashed out in quick succession.

Something which looked exactly like an inky fountain splashed against the further side of the cabin, the cables waved wildly. One of them, flailing out, hit the lamp and extinguished it. Harding fell, sprawling across his friend's feet. A horrid acrid stench filled the air, there was the sound of a heavy body slithering down the sloping floor, then a loud splash—and silence, save for the low wash of the swell.

"Oh, Jupiter! What in thunder was it? Matches!—A light! Oh, Jehosaphat—my legs!" grunted Harding.

Maxwell struck a match, and lit the candle beside his berth, put down the pistol, and, as Harding staggered, helped him to sit down. Then he dived for his trunk, found a packet of cartridges, and swiftly reloaded.

"There! We're ready for him, if he does come back, though I reckon he won't. Four bulls, old son! If he can live after that, I'm a Dutchman! Are you hurt?"

"Bruised, and my legs feel as chaps who were racked must have felt, but nothing more. What in thunder was it?"

"Some sort of octopus, I think—the same sort of thing that attacks divers. You remember what poor old Jennings told us about them, how they lie up under reefs and grab anything that comes their way? It was a thundering great beast, anyhow. I'm going up on deck, to see if I can see anything of

it. Here, take your gun. I'll carry my own. Sha'n't be a tick. Keep still and rest."

And, heedless of his companion's remonstrances, he heaved himself through the door, relit the lamp, which, luckily, was not broken, and climbed the rickety stairway to the deck.

He came only in time to guess something of the visitor's end. Far down in the deep water beside the reef was a confusion of flashing forms, streaks and whorls of phosphorescent light, coming and going around something that writhed vaguely. The octopus, stricken to death, had tried to regain its submarine den. But the sharks were not to be caught napping. They had scented the creature, knew that it was nearly helpless, and dashed at it ere it could regain its fastnesses.

"One the less," muttered Jack Maxwell. "I hope there is not another hanging round when we move out."

He returned to the cabin, which smelt most vilely of the creature, and examined it. A few bottles had been broken, but nothing else had been disturbed, though the black, evil-smelling fluid was everywhere. He found Jim Harding rubbing his legs, which were discoloured and swollen.

"I'll be a precious creak to-morrow!" he growled.

"Then rest for all you're worth now. It's nearly day, so I'm not going to sleep again," said Maxwell.

He sat till daylight streamed in; then, leaving Harding dozing, crept out and up to see what the weather promised. The sky was clear, the day promised to be hot, but the sea had gone down to as near a calm as could be expected. Only a long, slow swell broke on the outer side of the reef, and a faint breeze blew almost directly towards the long line of coast, shimmering in the morning haze. In fact, the conditions seemed to be as good as could be. Only a dark belt of cloud, lying low on the windward horizon, gave Maxwell a twinge of uneasiness.

(To be continued.)

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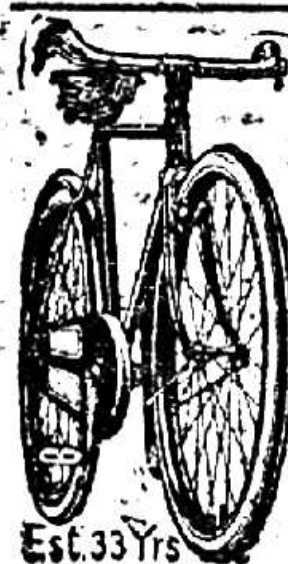
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