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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

CHAOS IN THE COLLEGE HOUSE.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST looked very grave as he removed his pince-nez and commenced wiping them with a silk handkerchief.

"Dear old boys, it's appalling—it is really!" he declared. "It's not only appalling, but frightfully shockin'! Things are in a fearful state, begad!"

I nodded.

"You're right, Montie," I agreed. "The affairs of the College House are in a rotten condition. There's no other way of describing the matter, and, by all appearances, things will get worse instead of better."

"Well, after all, it's nothing to do with us," said Tommy Watson. "We're Ancient House chaps, and everything that takes place over on the other side of the Triangle concerns the Monks only. We don't come in at all. If Mr. Smale Foxo likes to run his House as though it were a lunatic asylum—well, he'll have to face the music!"

"Rot!" said Handforth bluntly.

"Eh?"

"Absolute rot!" declared Handforth. "It's a pity you can't talk sense, Watson!"

Tommy Watson glared.

"Look here——"

"Oh, don't start an argument!" interrupted Handforth. "You know how I hate chaps who argue!"

Watson gasped, and several other juniors grinned. Considering that Edward Oswald Handforth himself was arguing from morning till night, this remark on his part was somewhat uncalled for. The leader of Study D looked round the Common-room impressively, and then nodded in a mysterious kind of way.

"Something's got to be done!" he said. "That something will have to be drastic!"

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"We've got to think of the honour of St. Frank's," went on Handforth. "I'll admit that the affairs of the College House are nothing to do with us; but, at the same time, we've got to think of the school—the school's good name. At the present moment, St. Frank's is being talked of through the district. The local paper has got paragraphs in it concerning the disgraceful escapades of certain chaps belonging to the College House."

"Well, we can't be blamed for that!" put in Watson.

"We oughtn't to be blamed for it, but we shall be blamed for it!" I put in quietly. "It's inevitable!"

Handforth nodded.

"Exactly!" he said. "I am glad to see that there is somebody here who shares my opinion. Nipper's absolutely right. We shall suffer because of what these College House rotters are doing. If the name of St. Frank's is dragged into the mud, there won't be any dis-

crimination. College House or Ancient House, it won't make any difference. We shall all be tarred with the same brush. Therefore it's all rot to say that this affair doesn't concern us. It does! And, what's more, we're going to take a hand in the game—we've got to, in self-defence!"

"Well, I hadn't looked at it in that way before," said Tommy Watson slowly. "And I dare say you're right. I noticed when I went down the village this morning that two or three shopkeepers looked at me in a severe, disapproving kind of way. Just as if I'd done anything! It's a bit rotten for the College House fellows to blacken our name as well as their own!"

"It's all very well to talk about doing something, but what can we do?" asked Cecil de Valerie. "Mr. Foxe himself approves of all this business. Personally, I think he's off his rocker; but that's immaterial. The Head's away, and there's nobody here with the authority to put Mr. Smale Foxe in his right place."

"What about Mr. Lee?" asked Grey.

"I'm afraid the guv'nor can't do anything," I replied. "You see, Mr. Foxe is in sole command of the College House, and he can do exactly as he likes there till the Head comes back. If the guv'nor intervened, there'd probably be a row, and no good would come of it at all."

It was very seldom that the juniors looked as serious as they did just now. It was evening, and a large number of Remove fellows were gathered together in the Common-room of the Ancient House. They were, of course, all Ancient House boys, and the subject under discussion was the extraordinary behaviour of Mr. Smale Foxe and the inhabitants of the College House generally.

Amazing events had recently been happening.

And the man responsible for these amazing events was Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House. There had always been something rather queer about Mr. Foxe, ever since his arrival at St. Frank's at the beginning of the present term.

But, on the whole, he had conducted his House quite well, and he was undoubtedly an excellent scholar, and an accomplished man. But within the last two or three days a great change had come about, and this was solely because

Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the Headmaster of St. Frank's, had gone away.

The Head's absence was an unexpected one. He had, in fact, received a telegram from his brother-in-law, containing very bad news. In short, the Head's sister had met with a grave accident in Switzerland, and was in a serious condition, probably dying.

And, without a moment's delay, Dr. Stafford had hurried off, leaving the Ancient House in the sole charge of Nelson Lee, and the College House in the sole charge of Mr. Smale Foxe. Each Housemaster had full control over his respective House. But Nelson Lee had no power over Mr. Foxe, neither had Mr. Foxe any power over Nelson Lee.

And Mr. Smale Foxe had seized this chance to act in an astounding manner. The day after Dr. Stafford's departure, Mr. Foxe had called his House together, and had addressed the boys. That speech was one of the most extraordinary speeches that had ever been delivered by a Housemaster of St. Frank's, or any other school.

For Mr. Foxe had told his boys that he did not believe in rules and regulations. He was convinced that the boys had always been kept like prisoners—that they had never had any freedom, and, in consequence, they were always inventing excuses for themselves, and resorting to falsehood.

Mr. Foxe declared that he was about to try a great experiment. To put it in a few words, he told his House that, in future, there would be no more rules or regulations. The boys would be able to do exactly as they pleased. They would not be bound down by any school laws. They were their own masters in everything—that is, in their own time. They would be compelled to attend lessons, of course, just the same as usual. If Mr. Foxe had given the fellows an option with regard to this matter, the classrooms would have been nearly empty.

But in their own time they could do exactly as they wished. They could go where they pleased, since there were no bounds for the College House boys. They could have what visitors they liked in their own studies. They could go to any amusements, and remain out just as long as they pleased. If a College House fellow turned up at eleven o'clock at night, or even later than that, he would not get into any trouble. He

would simply walk in, go up to his bed, and no questions would be asked.

Mr. Foxe, in fact, had given his boys a free hand.

And what was the result?

Chaos—absolute chaos! And this had come to pass within two short days. All semblance of law and order had already vanished in the College House. The juniors, in particular, were running wild. The actions of at least thirty boys would have earned them, under ordinary circumstances, a sound flogging. But, under this new regime, instituted by Mr. Foxe, no punishments were administered. The boys had complete freedom, and, as was only natural, they abused this freedom.

Mr. Foxe had declared that he wanted his boys to be truthful, and he trusted them. He was quite certain that they would respect his new order of things, and that they would behave themselves just as well as though all the regulations were in operation. Mr. Foxe placed the fellows on their honour; he relied upon them to live up to the traditions of the old school.

This sort of thing was all very well with some of the boys, but there were a good many fellows in the College House who could not be trusted. They were fellows who took immediate advantage of this new state of affairs, and who brought disgrace upon the whole school.

Some truly shocking incidents had taken place.

And the most appalling event of all had been the disgraceful affair connected with Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth. These two seniors occupied the same study, and they were well known in the College House as being bullies and confirmed young rascals.

Grayson and Shaw considered it manly to smoke and to put bets on horses, and to indulge in a little gamble now and again.

Finding themselves in possession of full freedom, they had conducted themselves in an abominable fashion. Not content with going to Bannington and partaking of intoxicating liquor, they had brought three disreputable men back to the school with them, and then a drunken brawl had taken place within the very walls of the College House. Afterward, Grayson and Shaw had accompanied their guests back to Bannington, and it had resulted in a free fight in the High Street.

Without the slightest doubt, both Grayson and Shaw would have been locked up by the police but for the fact that Christine and Co. and Lawrence happened to be on the spot, and the juniors had rescued the two Fifth-Formers in the very nick of time.

But, even so, a reporter of the local paper had been on the spot, and he had written up a full account of the affair. This appeared in the "Bannington Gazette," and it caused widespread comment throughout the district.

This affair, of course, was only one disastrous result of Mr. Foxe's experiment, and the Ancient House fellows could not possibly understand what it all meant. They could not follow Mr. Foxe's line of reasoning.

This was not very surprising, considering that Mr. Smale Foxe's sole idea in introducing the scheme was to bring disgrace upon St. Frank's! Amazing as it may seem, this is the precise truth. But, of course, we did not know it, and it was very difficult for us to even guess at it, for how could we possibly assume that Mr. Foxe was anxious to get the name of St. Frank's into bad odour?

As a matter of fact, there were two Mr. Foxe's, although we were unaware of this, too, at the time; and it was the wrong Mr. Smale Foxe who was now presiding over the College House at St. Frank's!

Mr. Foxe and his brother were twins, and they were amazingly alike. They were so identical, in fact, that it was practically impossible to tell one from the other. It was Mr. Foxe's twin-brother who had obtained this post as Housemaster at St. Frank's. He was quite a good man, although rather weak-willed, and he had allowed his aggressive brother to fill his shoes, and to seize the reins of the College House.

And Mr. Smale Foxe had one set reason for doing this.

A good many years earlier he had been dismissed from a minor position at the school. In those days Mr. Smale Foxe had been an under-master, but only for a few weeks. He had then been caught red-handed in some disgraceful business, and had been dismissed on the spot. In consequence of this, Mr. Foxe had been unable to obtain any employment for a period of two years, and he had sworn to have his revenge on St. Frank's sooner or later.

Now his time had come!

By means of his weak brother, he had got into St. Frank's, and he now meant to create havoc. If possible, he was going to drag the name of the old school down into the mud. He was going to ruin the fine reputation which St. Frank's had always held. That, in short, was Mr. Smale Foxe's pretty little scheme. Whether it would succeed or not remained to be seen.

And over in the Ancient House feeling was running high. The juniors—and the seniors—could not see any reason why they should be made to suffer for the misdeeds of the Monks, as the College House boys were called. For, of course, outsiders were not to know that the Headmaster was away, and that at the present time St. Frank's was being controlled by two men. As Handforth had remarked, everybody was tarred with the same brush.

"Something's got to be done!" said Handforth grimly. "We can't go on like this. Of course, some of the chaps in the College House are quite decent, and they're behaving themselves. But, at the same time, there are a good few who are doing just the opposite. We've got to deal with that few—we've got to compel them to——"

"It's all very well to speak about compellin', Handy," put in Pitt, "but how is it going to be done? What authority have we got?"

"Authority!" exclaimed Handforth. "Rats to authority! We'll take the matter into our own hands——"

"And make things worse!" interrupted Pitt. "That'll be the end of it, my son. If we butt in, we shall probably do more harm than good. If anybody takes action in this matter, it ought to be fellows belonging to the College House itself. We're not concerned in it at all, and we should only get ourselves into trouble."

"Well, there's something in that," I agreed. "But supposing the Monks won't take any action? In self-defence, Pitt, we shall have to do something. I think the best thing we can do is to go out and find Bob Christine. We'll put it to him straight from the shoulder."

"Good idea!" said Handforth, nodding. "Come on; we'll go now!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

A move was made for the door, and the juniors streamed out of the Common-

room into the passage, and then out into the Triangle. It was quite dark, the time being between seven and eight, and the March evening was dull and overcast and decidedly mild.

The lights of the College House were gleaming out brightly as we crossed the Triangle, and the noise which was proceeding from the building fairly staggered us. Under ordinary circumstances everything was quiet at St. Frank's, except for an occasional shout of laughter, the excited talk of a group of juniors, a squabble perhaps, or something of that kind.

But now it was very different.

Noise was proceeding from every quarter—noise of a truly frightful character. The juniors, in particular, were letting themselves go. They shouted just as they liked, they sang at the top of their voices, and there was hardly one junior study which was not a kind of miniature pandemonium.

Very few blinds were drawn, and we could see right into the studies. In several of them fellows were smoking, and trying to make themselves believe that they were enjoying it, for now they could do as they wished, and no punishments would fall upon their heads.

There were not many Remove fellows in the College House who had previously indulged in smoking. For one thing, it was too risky, and the punishment was too great. The game was not worth the candle. But now it was different.

Any of the fellows could smoke, and Mr. Smale Foxe would say nothing. He even encouraged them to do so; and thus, indirectly, the Housemaster was helping the boys to be bad. Quite a number of fellows who were ordinarily quite decent were now changing their habits. This was only natural. They were not strong-minded, and they were led by the others—by the black sheep. Since they were exempt from all punishment, they did not care.

Other fellows were playing cards. Little parties were made up, and gambling was indulged in. At first the juniors did it just for a bit of fun, but then they were seized by the fever, and they continued it. Some of them lost their money, and they were anxious to regain it, and, consequently, this gambling spirit grew.

As for order being kept in the College House, there was not even a semblance of it. The fellows could do just as they

wished. They could race about the passages, shouting, singing, or doing anything else they liked. Fights were now commonplace in the lobby, or in the studies, and there was nobody to put a stop to it.

At first one or two of the Formmasters had taken a hand. They had reported these irregularities to Mr. Foxe, but had been only snubbed for their pains. Consequently, the Formmasters now kept to their own rooms, and they closed their eyes to the things which were taking place. They all decided to wait until Dr. Stafford returned, and then they would have several nice little reports to make. But until the Head did return, nothing could be done.

"This is what comes of giving the chaps their freedom!" I said grimly, as I stared over at the College House. "My only hat! What a mess they've made of it! It's more like a lunatic asylum than a school!"

"A lunatic asylum is a place of peace and quietness compared to this!" remarked Pitt. "The lunatics are kept in order, but here nobody cares about order. It can't go on—it's absolutely impossible. Just supposing for a minute that some visitors arrived at this moment? What sort of impression would they form of St. Frank's? They'd say it was worse than a reformatory school!"

"And they wouldn't be far wrong!" declared Handforth. "I feel like going in there, and punching every chap until he comes to his senses!"

"You couldn't do it, old son," said De Valerie. "They'd all set on you, and they'd be only too glad of the opportunity. It doesn't matter how much row they make now, and they would rag you unmercifully. The best thing we can do is to keep on our own side. We don't want to get mixed up in any of this rowdyism!"

"Rather not!" said Tommy Watson. "Upon the whole, I think the best thing we can do is to let these chaps stew in their own juice. Rats to 'em! I'm fed up with the whole thing."

"You ain't the only one!" put in Handforth. "We're all fed up with it. And we can't allow it to go on——"

"Hallo!" interrupted Pitt suddenly. "Isn't that Bob Christine?"

We looked at the College House doorway. Bob Christine, the skipper of the

Remove on that side, had just appeared. And with him were Talmadge and Yorke and Ernest Lawrence. The four juniors were looking very serious as they strolled down the steps and came into the Triangle.

"Phew!" put in Christine. "Thank goodness! We might be able to get a little peace out here!"

"It's getting worse than ever!" said Lawrence.

"Well, we're not to blame," put in Talmadge. "We can't help——"

"My hat! What the——hi, steady, you asses!"

Christine and Co. found themselves surrounded, and they were rather taken by surprise. The Ancient House juniors were in force, numbering fifteen or sixteen. Bob Christine looked round in alarm.

"Pax!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "No larks, you chaps! We've got enough trouble in our own House, without starting any giddy bother!"

"Keep your hair on!" I said. "This isn't a raid, Christine. We want to have a little quiet talk with you."

"Well, I'm glad somebody wants to be quiet," remarked Christine. "We don't get much of it on our side these days! Just listen! Did you ever hear such a frightful din in all your natural?"

"It sounds like the parrot house at the Zoo!" said Handforth. "With a few monkeys added!"

"The parrot house would be a place of peace and rest compared to this!" said Christine grimly. "I'm fed up with it—fed up to the neck! I reckon Foxe ought to be taken away, boiled in oil, and then suffocated!"

"Don't you agree with the new order of things?" asked Reginald Pitt.

Christine stared.

"Agree with it?" he repeated. "What do you take me for?"

"A sensible fellow."

"Well, I hope I am," said Christine. "And I loathe this thing just as much as you chaps do. St. Frank's is getting into bad odour, and everybody in the district is talking. Another week of this, and St. Frank's will be spoken of all over the giddy kingdom, and the name of the school will be in the gutter!"

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "And what are you going to do about it?"

"Eh?"

"What steps are you going to take?" demanded Handforth. "It's all very well to say that you don't agree with it, and that things are in a bad state. But that's no good—words are useless. Action is required, my sons. Don't be like the Government!"

"What's the Government to do with it?" asked Yorke, staring.

"Merely a comparison," said Handforth. "The Government is always spouting, and proclaiming from the housetops what it's going to do but it never seems to do it! It's one thing to talk, and it's another thing to act. I'm a fellow of action——"

"Oh, we know that," interrupted Christine. "There's no need for you to start, Handy. I've been thinking hard, and I've come to a decision. As a matter of fact, I've got a jolly ripping idea."

"Where did you get it from?"

"You—you ass!" roared Christine. "I thought of it myself!"

"An idea?" I repeated. "What kind of an idea, Christine?"

"I've thought of something that will put down the present state of disorder," replied Bob Christine. "We can't allow things to go on as they're going on now. Life isn't worth living! And quite a number of chaps—fellows who are usually decent—are turning into smokers and gamblers! Talking to them is useless—what they need is punishment. And Mr. Foxe won't deliver any punishments. Therefore I have decided to perform Mr. Foxe's work for him!"

"Oh!"

"You're going to be Housemaster, I suppose," said Handforth sarcastically.

"Not exactly," replied Christine. "But I've got a wheeze—and I think it's a pretty decent one. As a matter of fact, we came out here to talk it over—not to waste our time on you fellows. So, if you don't mind, we shall be obliged if you will allow us to go ahead."

"You don't want to tell us this scheme?" I asked.

"Well, not just yet," replied Christine. "We want to get it cut and dried. And, afterwards, you'll probably know all about it. We're in a beastly position over our side, and I want you chaps to help us by refraining from butting in. Leave this to me, Nipper, and it won't be long before I have it under control."

"Good!" I said heartily. "I rather thought you'd be equal to the occasion, Christine. We won't interfere, and we'll see what you do. It'll be rather interesting to watch the progress."

"Thanks!" said Christine, nodding.

He walked off with the others—but Handforth strode forward.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I've got an idea—I've got a suggestion. It's bound to be ten times as good as yours, Christine, so you might as well listen to it——"

"No, thanks!" said Christine, over his shoulder. "We'd rather be spared!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you——"

"Let them look after their own affairs, Handy," I broke in. "If they fail—well, we can take a hand then. But, for the present, I think we'd better be spectators. After all, it's not our business, and if Christine can manage it, all the better."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth bitterly. "I don't care, but it's a shame to see my fine ideas going bogging! But, of course, if nobody wants them I don't care a tosh! I'm never appreciated here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth went off indignantly, and everybody else grinned. They could easily guess that Handforth's "fine idea" was one of his usual hare-brained schemes, and was worth precisely nil.

Christine and Co. strolled over towards the gates, intending to have their quiet chat in the lane, where they would not be interfered with. But just as they arrived at the gates a man appeared. He was rather a smallish man, with slightly grey hair, and a clean-shaven face. He was well dressed, and he came to a halt when the four juniors appeared.

Christine and Co. peered forward in the gloom.

"Good-evening, boys!" said the stranger, in a cheery tone. "Do you happen to know where I can find Master Lawrence?"

"Yes, sir—here he is!" replied Christine promptly.

He pushed Lawrence forward, and the latter drew his breath in sharply.

"Mr. Rook!" he muttered under his breath.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCHOOLBOY BOXER'S DECISION.

MR. NORMAN ROOK came forward, with extended hand.

"Splendid—splendid!" he exclaimed. "How are you, Lawrence? I did not recognise you in the semi-darkness. This is quite lucky!"

"I—I didn't know you were coming, sir!" said Lawrence, as he took Mr. Rook's hand. "You didn't send word—"

"No, I thought it better to come upon you by surprise," smiled the visitor.

"Well, Lawrence, how are you feeling?"

"Oh, as fit as a fiddle, sir."

"Excellent!" said Mr. Rook, rubbing his hands together. "That's the style, my lad—that's the style! Well, I should like to—er—speak to you in private——"

"It's all right, Mr. Rook—you needn't worry," interrupted Lawrence. "These fellows know all about it, and they know all about you, too. I told them about that last fight at Helmsford, and——"

"Ah, that makes things much better," interrupted Mr. Rook. "Do I understand, then, that the secret is a secret no longer, and that everybody in the school is aware that Master Lawrence, of the Remove, and Young Ern, the wonderful lightweight boxer, are one and the same person?"

Lawrence smiled and shook his head.

"No, sir; only a few fellows know," he replied. "It's still a secret. I've only told my friends, and they will keep the whole thing quiet. So please don't continue this conversation if anybody else happens to come up. In fact, it's a bit risky, in any case."

"Quite so—quite so," said Mr. Rook. "I fully understand, Lawrence. Well, there is something I wish to tell you—something which I think you will regard as wonderfully good news. And I should like to speak to you in private. Of course, these other boys may remain, if they wish to—since they know the secret. When I say private, I mean in some spot different from this."

Christine turned to Lawrence.

"You'd better take Mr. Rook into the gymnasium," he suggested. "You can get into one of the dressing-rooms, and you will be absolutely on your own, without being disturbed."

"Yes, we shall be all right there," said Lawrence.

"I understand that great changes have recently taken place," smiled Mr. Rook. "That is why I have come so openly. And, by what I can hear, things are not going exceedingly well. Some of the boys have been getting into bad trouble."

Bob Christine grunted.

"It's rotten, sir—absolutely rotten!" he exclaimed. "The College House is going to pot—that's the truth of it. Mr. Foxe, our Housemaster, is trying a wonderful new experiment," added Bob disgustedly. "My hat! An experiment! We're allowed to go out where we like, come in when we like; to have as many visitors as we choose, and, in fact, we can do anything! At one time I used to jib a bit at the rules and regulations, but they were a tremendous lot better than the present state of affairs! A school can't be run without rules. The fellows get wild, and then run away with themselves. Another week of this sort of thing, and St. Frank's will be in disgrace from one end of the country to the other!"

Mr. Rook nodded.

"Yes; I have heard that some very remarkable things have been taking place at St. Frank's," he said. "But, after all, it is none of my business. I have really come here to have a little chat with Lawrence, and I want to catch the train back to Helmsford if I can. That will give me just half an hour with you, Lawrence."

"You'd better buzz to the gymnasium right off, then," said Christine. "We'll wait for you, old son, before we go on with that discussion. You'll find us out here in the Triangle when you've finished with Mr. Rook."

"Thanks," said Lawrence. "This way, Mr. Rook."

He led the visitor across the Triangle to the gymnasium. At the moment the building was quite deserted, and was in darkness. Lawrence led the way in, and switched on the electric light. Then he passed through to the rear of the building, where two or three small dressing-rooms were situated. The pair entered one of these, closed the door, and then sat down.

The junior looked at Mr. Rook curiously, for he could hardly guess why the boxing promoter had come.

Ernest Lawrence had done some remarkable things since he arrived at St. Frank's. On two occasions he had ap-

peared before the public at the Ring Pavilion, at Helmford—under the name of Young Ern. And he had proved himself to be a boxer of astounding ability.

On the last occasion he had received no less than one hundred pounds for the fight, and he had won. He had beaten a professional known as Mike Connor, and had put up a wonderful performance. Mr. Rook had promoted the fight, and it was fairly obvious that Mr. Rook was anxious to fix up another contest for the St. Frank's junior.

For the boxing promoter knew well enough that he had got hold of a boxing wizard. Ernest Lawrence was a marvel, and this is no exaggerated statement. Young as he was Lawrence was a formidable opponent for any man. His boxing was of the highest order, and, combined with this, he had a punch which was related to a sledge hammer.

Mr. Rook knew well enough that Lawrence was a certainty, and that he was capable of beating far better men than Mike Connor. And already the fame of Young Ern was increasing.

Boxing circles all over the kingdom had heard of Young Ern's wonderful performance at Helmford. And there was a good deal of mystery attached to this marvellous boxer. For nobody knew his real name—no outsider, that is. In London there were thousands of boxing enthusiasts who had heard the report concerning Young Ern, and they were eagerly awaiting further news of this new champion.

But Lawrence had not entered the ring with any idea of personal gain. Quite the contrary, in fact. Every penny he had received for his fights had been sent to his father, whose business was in a bad way. Lawrence had sent the money anonymously, for he knew every pound was needed. And he simply dared not tell his father that he had appeared in a professional boxing ring.

For Mr. Lawrence had more than once told his son that he never wished him to enter a professional contest. And so, rather than earn his father's displeasure, Lawrence had kept the thing quiet.

"My boy, be prepared for the news!" exclaimed Mr. Rook, as he sat looking at Lawrence. "It is news that will fill you with delight, and which will be almost too good to be true."

"Is it about another fight, sir?" asked Lawrence.

"Precisely—precisely!" said Mr. Rook, rubbing his hands together. "It is the chance of your life, my boy, and you simply cannot afford to neglect it. But, of course, you will not do that—you will most certainly accept the offer I am now going to make you. Unless you are out of your senses, you can do nothing else."

"What is the offer, sir?" asked Lawrence quickly.

"I have fixed up a match for you with Kiddy Welsh!"

Lawrence jumped to his feet.

"Kiddy Welsh!" he repeated huskily. "Great Scott!"

"It has surprised you, eh?" smiled Mr. Rook. "Well, my boy, it will show you what confidence I have in you. I am certain that you will about beat Kiddy Welsh in a twenty round contest. I have plenty of faith in you, and I know that you will pull the fight off."

"But—he is famous!" protested Lawrence. "I—I'm nobody——"

"Not yet!" smiled Mr. Rook. "You are a very wonderful boxer, my boy. I am not flattering you by saying that, and I knew that you will not get swelled head. But it is a fact. And I am quite certain that you will be able to beat Kiddy Welsh in this contest."

"But—but he is the lightweight champion of London!" exclaimed Lawrence.

"Precisely! The lightweight champion of London," said Mr. Rook. "I want you to meet him, Lawrence, and I am certain that you will relieve him of his title. Then, later on, you will meet the lightweight champion of England. But we need not discuss that now. This fight with Welsh is to be a big one, and I can offer you the most satisfactory terms."

Lawrence was rather staggered by Mr. Rook's words.

"But—but do you think that I've a chance against a man like Kiddy Welsh?" he asked doubtfully.

"Any chance?" repeated Mr. Rook. "My dear boy, I have every confidence in you. I not only think that you have a chance, but, as I have said before, I am almost certain that you will win. You can do so if you like. I have seen Kiddy Welsh, and have seen you—both in the ring, and as a boxer you are greatly his superior."

"But—but he a famous man!" protested Lawrence.

"Precisely!" smiled Mr. Rook. "But

that does not mean to say he's a better man than you. Fame has come to him because he has beaten all comers, and is a very excellent boxer. But you will beat all comers, Lawrence—and you are an excellent boxer. You are, in fact, the finest boxer I have ever had the pleasure to see. And I do not think I am mistaken in believing that you will win this fight."

Lawrence's eyes sparkled.

"It's very good of you, Mr. Rook," he exclaimed. "But—but I didn't think that a man like Welsh would come down to Helmsford—to fight in that place—that Ring Pavilion! It's not much of a show at the best."

Mr. Rook laughed.

"This fight will not take place in the Ring Pavilion, at Helmsford!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "My dear Lawrence, you do not realise what a big chance this is for you. Now let me tell you something else. Win or lose I can guarantee you a certain fixed sum of money. This sum will be paid over before the fight takes place, so you will be on perfectly safe ground."

"I can trust you, sir," said Lawrence simply. "You've been straight with me all along, and I know that you'll be straight in future."

"Thank you, Lawrence—thank you," said Mr. Rook. "I hope that I shall never do anything that will destroy your faith in me. There are many boxing promoters who are not all that they should be, there are many scoundrels—but, at the same time, there are just as many honest men. I pride myself that I am one of the latter. You received something over one hundred pounds for your last fight. This battle with Kiddy Welsh will be a much bigger affair—much more important, and will be held in a far larger hall. Therefore, I can offer you far better terms. To put it bluntly, Lawrence, I will guarantee you five hundred, whether you win or lose, the money to be paid over before the fight commences. Five hundred pounds, my lad!"

Lawrence fairly jumped.

"You—you're joking, sir!" he gasped.

"By no means. I am telling you the simple truth!"

"But—but—" Lawrence paused, breathing hard. "Five hundred pounds!" he repeated. "Why, Mr. Rook, I—I'm not worth it! It—it wouldn't be right!"

The boxing promoter laughed heartily.

"Upon my soul, Lawrence, you are a refreshing youngster!" he chuckled. "I am glad of it, by gad! You are so different from all the others—different in every possible way. Well, what do you say, young man? Five hundred pounds, win or lose. Is it agreed upon?"

Lawrence sat down, looking rather bewildered.

"I—I don't know, Mr. Rook!" he said. "Five hundred pounds. I—I can't accept anything like that—it wouldn't be square. I'm not worth such a big sum—"

"Tut—tut! My dear boy, you don't seem to realise the position!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "Let me assure you of one thing. Whether you win or lose, I shall be well paid for all the trouble I have taken—and I shall make quite a good thing out of it. And so will everybody else concerned. For you must remember that this match will take place in a large building, and the seats will be highly priced. Welsh, I believe, is jibbing at an offer of one thousand pounds, but we shall soon fix things up with him. You will receive five hundred. And I can tell you that I shall make quite a pile of money out of the fight. You see, I am being straightforward—you know well enough that I am not doing this thing because I am a philanthropist. I must earn my living, the same as other people do. And this is my living—to promote boxing matches, and such like. When you become famous you will receive offers of thousands of pounds—perhaps ten thousand—for one night. It makes a great deal of difference when you have made your name. And you are making yours, my lad—you are making it rapidly!"

Lawrence looked worried for a moment.

"That's just it, Mr. Rook," he said. "I can't become famous—I mustn't. As I told you before, my father knows nothing about this—he would be furious if he knew that I had appeared in a professional ring. He doesn't want me to become a professional—he is absolutely against it."

"I'm very sorry that your father should be so very firm on that point," said Mr. Rook. "If he only knew what a wonderful son he had, perhaps he would change his mind. If you never entered the ring again the sport would lose one of the most promising young-

sters it ever had. I am very sorry that your father is so obstinate in that respect. Perhaps, after you have won this fight against Kiddy Welsh, you may be able to tell him your secret—and, quite possibly, he will permit you to continue your career. One never knows, Lawrence. Success makes a good deal of difference. And now, my boy, we must make haste. It is settled, eh?"

"I—I think so, Mr. Rook," said Lawrence. "But—but it seems too wonderful to me! By the way, where is this fight going to be held?"

Mr. Rook chuckled.

"Now for the little surprise!" he smiled. "The contest will be held in—London!"

Lawrence jumped up.

"In—in London!" he repeated quickly.

"Precisely!" said Mr. Rook. "In London, my boy—to be precise, in Kensington. Oh, yes, this is to be a regular swell affair, and no mistake! You are springing up at one bound, Lawrence. This fight is to be held at the West End Sporting Club's Palatial Hall. It is a magnificent building, and will accommodate a huge number of spectators. It will be a tremendously big thing!"

Lawrence was suddenly looking alarmed. His face had flushed, and he was staring at Mr. Rook in a curious kind of way.

"What is the matter, my lad?" asked the boxing promoter.

"I—I'm afraid I can't accept your offer, sir!" said Lawrence slowly.

"What? What nonsense is this you are saying?" demanded Mr. Rook. "You cannot accept? Five hundred pounds! Isn't it sufficient——"

"It's not that, sir—you know it isn't!" said Lawrence. "I think five hundred pounds is altogether too much to offer me, as a matter of fact. But in Kensington—at the West End Sporting Club's Hall! I couldn't do it, sir—I couldn't possibly think of it!"

"In heaven's name, why not?" demanded Mr. Rook.

"Because of my father!"

"But what has your father got to do with it?" asked the boxing promoter.

"What difference does it make whether the fight is held in Helmsford, or in Kensington. You will appear under your ring name of Young Ern. Even if he sees reports in the papers, it will

make no difference. He will never be able to guess your real identity——"

"It's not that, sir," interrupted Lawrence. "But—but you don't seem to realise! I couldn't go to London at all—particularly Kensington."

"Why not—why not?"

"Because my father's business is in Kensington," replied Lawrence. "And I know for an absolute fact that my dad often goes to the West End Sporting Club's Hall."

"By gad!" ejaculated Mr. Rook.

"You—you understand, don't you, sir?" asked Lawrence.

"I think I understand what you are driving at now," replied Mr. Rook.

"You are afraid that your father will come, and that he will see you in the ring."

"Yes, sir, that's it exactly," replied the junior. "My father's got a big ironmongery business in Kensington, and I think it's practically a foregone conclusion that he will attend this fight, when it comes off. So it stands to reason that I can't appear. I'm awfully sorry Mr. Rook, but you'll have to get somebody else to meet Kiddy Welsh!"

"My dear lad, I want you—and nobody but you!" said Mr. Rook anxiously.

"Surely this matter can be overcome? There must be some way out of it. There is no reason why you should be so certain that your father will attend this fight. In all probability he will remain away. I understand that he is very busy just now, and that his affairs are in rather a bad way. You told me all about it. And what of the five hundred pounds? Think of it, my lad—think how useful such a sum would be to your father at this time."

"I dare say it would be invaluable to him, sir," said Lawrence quietly. "But at the same time, I couldn't think of it. I couldn't possibly go into the ring feeling that my father was looking on—watching me all the time. He told me frequently that he never wanted me to enter the ring, and if he saw me there he would be furious. I—I wouldn't have appeared at the Pavilion, only I needed the money."

"Dear me! This is very distressing!" said Mr. Rook. "We must do something, my lad. We must think of some way to overcome the difficulty. Your father is not an ogre, surely."

"My father is one of the best men breathing!" said Lawrence stoutly.

"No boy could wish to have a better father, Mr. Rook. But it's up to me to respect his wishes. I'm not afraid of his anger, if he finds things out—but I'm afraid of his displeasure. He would be disappointed—he would be shocked. And I couldn't risk it—not even for a thousand pounds! I'm terribly sorry, sir, but it wouldn't be possible for me to arrange a fight in Kensington—or anywhere in London, if it comes to that."

Mr. Norman Rook paced up and down, greatly worried.

"This is unexpected—I was not prepared for any such opposition on your part, Lawrence," he said. "What can I do? It is a very difficult position for me. I need you—I know of no other boxer who can take your place. If you fail me it will be a disaster."

"I—I don't want to let you down, Mr. Rook," said Lawrence uncomfortably. "I don't want you to think I am a rotter—"

"My dear lad, I understand perfectly," interrupted Mr. Rook. "I appreciate your point, and I know exactly what you feel. It is a pity—a terrible pity! Everything was favourable—everything! Even your House-master, here, in trying this new experiment has helped. You could come away from St. Frank's, you could attend this fight, and get back to the school by three o'clock in the morning, at the latest. Since there are no questions asked, there would be no trouble. Everything, I say, is favourable to this fight. And yet you cannot agree! I will have a motor-car ready, and you can be rushed down from London in an hour or two—"

"Yes, I realise all that, sir," said Lawrence. "I know you'd do everything, and, in any case, this new idea of Mr. Foxe's doesn't matter much. Even if all the school rules were in operation I should risk it. It would only mean a flogging, anyhow. But it's my father I am thinking of. It would be impossible for me to appear in a boxing ring in London. So it's really a waste of time for you to remain here, Mr. Rook."

"You definitely refuse, then?"

"I—I can't do anything else, sir!" said Lawrence regretfully.

"In spite of the five hundred pounds."

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well. I had better go," said Mr. Rook. "But I do not give up hope entirely, Lawrence. I shall go to the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington, and I shall

put up there for the night. I shall remain there until to-morrow evening. If you change your mind—if you come to any other decision—come to me at once. It will not be too late, even then."

And, after shaking hands with Lawrence, Mr. Norman Rook took his departure. He was upset—more upset than he cared to admit. And Ernest Lawrence was upset, too.

It was the chance of a lifetime and he could not accept it.

CHAPTER III.

BOB CHRISTINE'S GREAT IDEA.

"O H, here you are!" Bob Christine uttered the words impatiently, as Lawrence loomed up out of the shadows of the Triangie. Christine and Co., as a matter of fact, were rather tired of waiting.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Lawrence. "I couldn't get away earlier."

"What's he been jawing about?" demanded Yorke. "Does he want you to fight in the Ring Pavilion again?"

"No."

"Just come for a chat, I suppose?" demanded Talmadge sarcastically. "A chat—while we hang about out here? Of all the giddy nerve! And Christie won't tell us a thing until you arrive—so now—"

"He did want me to fix up a fight, but not at Helmford," interrupted Lawrence. "I refused."

"Terms not good enough?" asked Christine curiously.

"Oh, no," said Lawrence. "The terms are wonderful. Mr. Rook wanted me to meet Kiddy Welsh, the light-weight champion of London!"

"Phew!" whistled Yorke. "That's a pretty tall order!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Christine. "Some of these chaps are boomed up, and they think they're everybody. But Lawrence is a marvel, and I'll guarantee that he could beat Kiddy Welsh any day. And you can bet your boots that Mr. Rook knows what he's doing, he wouldn't ask Lawrence to fight unless he was pretty certain that Lawrence would win!"

"Well, what's the amount of the purse, anyhow?" asked Talmadge.

"I don't know," said Lawrence. "But

if I took on this fight I should get five hundred pounds, win or lose."

Bob Christine fainted on the spot.

He collapsed gracefully into the arms of Yorke and Talmadge, and those two juniors nearly collapsed to the ground, too. They managed to right themselves, and Christine struggled for breath.

"Five—five—five hundred pounds!" he stuttered weakly.

"Yes."

"And you refused?" asked Yorke.

"Yes."

"And you get this money whether you win or lose?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know where you ought to go!" said Talmadge grimly. "There's a place on the other side of Bannington Moor. It's a pretty large building, with a high wall all round it. Its doors are always open to people like you!"

"You mean the lunatic asylum?" asked Christine.

"Of course I do!"

"I know it sounds ridiculous," put in Lawrence. "But I couldn't accept it—I really couldn't. Five hundred pounds is a lot of money for one fight—I never dreamt, in my wildest moments, that I should ever be offered such a figure to appear in the ring. It's—it's fabulous!"

"And—and you refused it!" panted Talmadge. "Five hundred quid! Just for one fight—and it doesn't matter whether you win or lose! Oh, my only Aunt Jane! You must be clean dotty!"

"I'm not," said Lawrence. "I've told you already that my father knows nothing about this prize-fighting of mine. He would be terribly upset and angry if he ever got to know."

"But how can he know?" asked Christine. "In the ring you appear under the name of Young Ern. Your father would never connect Young Ern with you."

"Not if it was in the papers, perhaps," said Lawrence. "But Mr. Rook wants this fight to take place in London—and in Kensington, of all places! That's where my pater lives, you know. And I'm pretty certain that he would attend this fight if it took place. And then where should I be? He would see me in the ring, and——"

"Well, what if he did?" asked Christine. "I don't suppose he'd be very wild—he couldn't be. And if he saw you whack this champion, Kiddy Welsh, he'd be off his head with

delight. In any case, I'd risk it. You must be off your chump, Lawrence, to refuse an offer like that!"

"I'd fight anybody for five hundred shillings!" said Yorke firmly.

Ernest Lawrence shook his head.

"I couldn't do it," he said. "It wouldn't be right. After all my father said to me, and after I know his wishes, I couldn't take a risk of that sort. I know my dad wants the money—he could do with it badly, and I'd take on the fight in a moment if it was billed to take place in Helmford, or some other big town. But not in London. I couldn't think of it!"

"Well, after all, it's your business," said Christine. "If you like to be a dotty ass, you can be one! It's nothing to do with us, anyhow. So we'll drop the subject for the time being, and talk of more immediate matters. I want to tell you chaps about this wheeze of mine. I think it's a pretty decent one, and if we're going to do anything, we must get busy. It's no good waiting until all the damage is done."

"Well, what's the wheeze?" asked Yorke. "We've been waiting for it long enough. So if it isn't a very good one, Christie, you're going to get it in the neck! I don't see why we should wait all this time for nothing!"

Christine looked round.

"Well, I'm not going to tell you about it here," he said. "And we want two more chaps. I suggest Clapson and Oldfield. I think we can rely on them."

"Yes; but what do we want Clapson and Oldfield for?" demanded Yorke.

"Never mind—run and fetch 'em!" said Christine briskly. "You'll find them somewhere about; we shall be in the shrubbery just against the monastery. Be as quick as you can."

"But——"

"No objections, my son!" interrupted Christine. "Buzz off!"

Yorke didn't quite like it, but he buzzed without saying anything further. And Christine and Lawrence and Talmadge made their way to the old monastery ruins, and waited for the three. It was not long before Yorke appeared with Oldfield and Clapson. There were now six of them altogether.

"What's the idea of this?" asked Oldfield. "What dark and mysterious deed are you about to commence?"

"Just a little idea of mine," said Christine. "I'm fed up with Smale Foxe, and all his doings!"

"Hear, hear!" said Clapson.
 "This precious scheme of his is bringing St. Frank's into disrepute," went on Christine. "Over half the fellows are taking advantage of their freedom. They're gambling in their studies, smoking all over the place, and generally behaving like young blackguards. It's got to come to a stop!"

"Good!" said Oldfield. "How are you going to stop it?"

"That's what we've been asking," said Talmadge. "It's one thing to talk about stopping it, and another thing to get busy! The Housemaster won't do anything, so I'm blessed if I can see how we can help!"

"That's just my scheme," said Christine. "We're the Housemaster!"

"Eh?"

"We six—we're going to be the Housemaster!" said Bob calmly.

"What the dickens——"

"What on earth——"

"We're going to be the Housemaster?" repeated Oldfield. "How can we be one?"

"To put it more plainly, we six chaps are going to act in the Housemaster's stead!" explained Christine. "You see, Mr. Foxe won't do his duty—he won't punish the chaps who deserve punishment—so we're going to do it for him! In other words, we're going to exercise those powers!"

The other five juniors looked rather bewildered.

"Oh, he's dotty!" said Yorke. "I've been thinking it for some time—and now I'm jolly well certain! He's clean off his rocker!"

"Think so?" said Christine. "You'll change your opinion before I've finished, my children. Just listen to your uncle, and you'll hear wise words. We six are going to be the tribunal!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"The which?"

"The tribunal!" repeated Christine.

"But just now you said we were going to be the Housemaster!" exclaimed Lawrence. "What on earth are you getting at, Christine? And what's the tribunal, anyway?"

"I'll just explain it to you, if you'll have a little patience," said Christine. "The tribunal is going to restore order in the College House. Mr. Foxe has given the fellows their liberty—their freedom—and they are taking advantage

of the new conditions. Instead of acting in the ordinary way, and going about their business and pleasure as usual, they are misusing their new freedom. This particularly applies to chaps like Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth. Under ordinary circumstances, if they held gambling parties in their study, they would be dropped on by the Housemaster."

"Exactly," said Yorke.

"Well, from now onwards, they're going to be dropped on by the tribunal, instead!" said Christine.

"Oh!"

"That's the whole object of the affair," went on Christine. "Mr. Foxe won't act—so we shall. We're going to be the rod of iron—we're going to rule with a firm hand. We're not going to put up with any nonsense, and we're not going to allow the chaps to do exactly as they please. We're going to put our foot down firmly, and we six are the sole and only members of the secret tribunal!"

The other juniors looked at their leader rather excitedly, and certainly with great surprise. They were beginning to get a glimmering of the great idea, and the very fact that they were excited proved that they were attracted by it.

A secret tribunal!

A collection of fellows who would keep their eyes open and punish juniors who did not act as they should do! That was the idea of it! That was the scheme! It struck the juniors as being a number one sized, gilt-edged idea.

"By jingo!" said Talmadge. "It's not bad, Christie. It's not half bad!"

"It's ripping, in fact!" declared Lawrence. "And it seems to me that it's the only solution to the problem. If we can only make these rotters realise what they're doing—and if we can only punish them for their misdeeds, it will put a stop to the rot. Because that's what's happening now. The College House is simply going to rot!"

"Well, it's not going much further," said Christine grimly. "We've had enough of it during these past days. You know what a terrific row is going on in the house now—fellows are shouting and singing, and behaving like a lot of madmen. We're going to put a stop to that!"

"But how can it be done?" asked Clapson eagerly. "It's a ripping

wheeze; but how can we put it into operation?"

"My idea is to do the thing thoroughly at once," replied Christine. "There's no time to waste, and it's my idea to have a trial this evening."

"My only hat!"

"This evening!"

"There's no time like the present," went on Bob Christine. "The secret tribunal is now formed. We're going to select one of the chaps, and we're going to punish him in just the same way as the Housemaster would punish him. If we see a fellow smoking, we will haul him before the tribunal, sentence him, and carry out the sentence. In other words, we'll swish him with a cane!"

"Ripping!" said Oldfield.

"Rather!" agreed the others.

"Of course, it won't work to begin with," went on Bob Christine. "We mustn't expect that."

"What do you mean, it won't work?"

"Exactly what I say," replied Bob.

"We can't expect it to work. One or two chaps will get swished, and they'll be worse than ever afterwards. They're not going to take any notice of a giddy secret tribunal. That's what they'll say at first. But these rotters will very soon find that the tribunal is just as keen and just as severe as a Housemaster. And after they've been punished a good many times, they'll give up being rotters, and behave themselves. That's my idea. It'll take three or four days to get into proper working order; but then we shall be successful. That's my opinion, anyway. We've got to make the chaps just as much afraid of the tribunal as they usually are of the Head. That's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"It ought to work," said Lawrence. "I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be a complete success, after the first two or three days."

"But why should it be secret?" asked Yorke. "That's what I can't understand. Why shouldn't we set up this tribunal openly, so that everybody knows who we are. It would be a lot less trouble, and I don't see why—"

"If you'd only stop a minute and think, you wouldn't ask such silly questions," said Bob Christine patiently.

"This tribunal can't be open—it must be a secret."

"Why?"

"Because we're juniors, and if we

collar any of the Fifth Form chaps, there'll be ructions—or there would be ructions if the Fifth-formers knew our identity," went on Christine. "Not that I'm afraid of the Fifth, if it comes to that. It really applies in just the same way to the Remove. If we're known to everybody the whole thing will lose its spice—it will lose its value. The chaps will be far more afraid of being pounced on by a secret tribunal than they would be by an open one. That stands to reason. Anything secret or mysterious is always more terrifying than something which is obvious."

"That's quite right," agreed Lawrence. "We can't argue that, Christine."

"Then there's another point," went on Bob. "Mr. Foxe himself will soon get to know of this tribunal. And supposing it were open? Foxe seems to be doing his best to let the College House go to pot. If he found that we were working against him—doing his duty, in fact—he would put his foot down at once. He would put an end to the tribunal. But if it's a secret, he'll be just as much mystified as everybody else. And he won't be able to do a thing. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea to haul old Foxey in front of the tribunal—and swish him!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"You—you ass!"

"I'm not saying that we shall do it," grinned Christine. "But you never know. If the thing turned out to be very successful, we might find it necessary to teach old Foxey a lesson. But that'll do later on. To begin with, we'll start with the Remove chaps—we'll begin at home. Now, we must have some headquarters."

"Yes, they would be fairly necessary," said Talmadge. "What do you suggest?"

"Well, there's no reason why we shouldn't use the old vault, underneath these ruins," said Christine. "But I don't like the idea, it doesn't seem good enough to me. We should have to carry everybody down all those giddy steps, and that would be a fearful fag. Besides, it would give them the clue—they'd know where they were being taken to. We shall have to think of something better than that."

"And, anyhow, how are we going to get hold of the culprits?" asked Oldfield. "We can't hang about in the

Triangle, waiting until they arrive—just for our convenience——”

“My dear chaps, there won’t be any waiting about,” said Christine. “We shall do it boldly. For example, we shall march into one of the studies, collar the chap, and haul him along.”

“Openly?”

“Yes; of course!”

“Then—then we shall be recognised, you prize ass!” said Yorke.

“I don’t very well see how we shall be recognised when we shall be wearing masks, and cloaks, and hoods, and all the rest of it,” said Christine calmly.

“Oh, my hat!”

“What a scheme!”

“It’s a jolly good scheme,” said Christine. “I’m not boasting, but I know when an idea is pretty decent. And I pride myself that this wheezo is going to work out well. But we shall want to go into more details—we shall have to discuss the matter thoroughly.”

And so, for the next half hour, the six conspirators thoroughly discussed the position. They picked all sorts of ideas, but the majority of them were discarded. But, at last, a plan of campaign was mapped out. And all the juniors were thoroughly satisfied, when, at length, the meeting broke.

There was to be no delay.

The first case was to be taken at once—within the hour. The secret tribunal was to get to work!

After due thought and consideration, it had been decided that the plan of campaign should be slightly different to what had been outlined by Bob Christine. But all the difficulties had been overcome, and the juniors felt certain that their plans would work with extreme smoothness when put into practice.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIBUNAL AT WORK.

GRAYSON stretched himself, and yawned.

“Going?” he inquired languidly. “Sorry you can’t stay any longer, you fellows. It’s been a jolly ripping game, though!”

Drake, of the Fifth, grunted.

“From your point of view, perhaps,” he exclaimed. “But, personally, I

think it was a rotten game! I’ve lost twenty-three bob!”

“Well, that’s not much!” said Grayson. “You’ll easily make that up the next time we have a game. Somebody’s got to lose, you know!”

“I’m pretty well skinned out, too!” remarked Parry. “I had sixteen bob in my pocket when I came here, and now I’ve only got about half-a-crown! You fellows have done pretty well!”

Grayson and Shaw chuckled. They certainly had done well. The four seniors had been having a little game of poker in Grayson’s study, and the guests were now preparing to depart. The apartment was full of blue cigarette smoke, and the blind was not drawn. It did not matter about such details now—since the fellows could smoke and do exactly as they liked in their own studies. There was no necessity to hide their actions from observation.

“Why not stay and have another little game?” asked Grayson. “It needn’t be poker, we can play Nap for a change. Your luck might alter at that, and it’s only just about half-past-eight. Plenty of time yet.”

Drake shook his head.

“Nothing doing!” he said. “You fellows are a bit too smart for me. I’m not so accustomed to these games as you are, Grayson. It strikes me you’ve been at it all your giddy life. I shall need a little more practice before I can hope to win anything!”

Drake and Parry, as a matter of fact, were not fellows who were accustomed to gambling. They had very seldom indulged in the doubtful pleasures of poker. And, consequently, Grayson and Shaw had won—for they were old hands at the game.

This was one result of Mr. Smale Foxe’s wonderful experiment. Boys who had never dared to smoke, or gamble hitherto, were now doing it openly. They had permission to do so—and they were fairly easily led into bad habits by the other juniors—by fellows like Grayson and Shaw of the Fifth, or Fullerton, of the Third. It is fairly easy to lead boys into the wrong path when they know that no punishment can fall upon them.

“Sorry you can’t stay,” said Grayson pleasantly. “But remember—I’m always ready for a little game when you like.”

“Thanks!” said Drake, shortly. “But

I'm not particularly struck with poker, anyhow. A quiet read in my own study is far less expensive!"

Drake and Parry took their departure, leaving their hosts chuckling. When they had gone, Grayson lit another cigarette and lay back in his chair. He picked up the playing cards, and toyed with them idly for a moment or two.

"Shall we continue?" he asked.

"Two of us?" said Shaw. "Not much fun, is there?"

"Oh, we can play nap, or something," said Grayson. "Two-handed nap isn't so bad. We shall be able to go nap every deal!"

The two seniors started, and very soon they were right into the game. And, at about a quarter-to-nine, a tap sounded on the door. It was a somewhat timid tap.

"Come in!" said Grayson.

The door opened, and Tripp, of the Third, entered. He did so in rather a scared manner, and he held a note in his hand.

"What's that?" asked Shaw, catching sight of it.

"It's—it's a letter for you and Grayson," said Tripp nervously.

"A letter?" said Grayson. "Who sent it?"

"I—I don't know!"

"What the deuce do you mean you don't know?" said Grayson. "Somebody gave it to you to deliver, I suppose?"

"Ye—es!" said the fag hesitatingly.

"Well, who did give it to you?"

"I don't know!" said Tripp. "I—I didn't see him clearly!"

"What rot!" said Shaw. "You didn't see him clearly!"

"I—I was out in the Triangle," said the Fag. "And—and somebody came up to me and told me to bring this note to you. He—he was all wrapped up in a cloak, and I couldn't see his face at all—and his voice was deep. I—I don't know who it was, Grayson—honest, I don't!"

"All right—give it to me!" said Grayson. "Now you can cut off!"

It had come into the Fifth Former's mind that the sender of the letter was, perhaps, a bookmaker, or somebody of that type. Grayson took the letter, and Tripp hurried out of the study.

"Well, what is it?" asked Shaw.

"It's my call, you know—and I've gone nap! Hurry up!"

Grayson was looking at the sheet of paper which he had extracted from the envelope. And he stared at it in rather a bewildered way for a moment or two. Then he looked up, and stared blankly at his study mate.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed.

"Anything important?" asked Shaw, struck by Grayson's tone.

"I—I don't exactly know," said Grayson. "I think it must be a joke, or something. By thunder! Of all the infernal sauce! I've never seen anything like it in all my life!"

"Well, let me see," said Shaw. "Perhaps I can explain it!"

Grayson passed the note over, and his friend eyed it curiously. Then, as he read, his gaze became fixed. For the sheet of notepaper contained the following extraordinary message:—

"To Harold Grayson and Frederick Shaw.—Take notice! You are hereby commanded to appear before the College House Tribunal at nine o'clock this evening—precisely. The reason for this summons will be explained to you when you present yourselves. You must come alone, and you must be there prompt to the minute. The Tribunal will be held in the old, disused garage at the back of the College House. Do not fail, or the consequences will be serious. Remember—nine o'clock.

"The Chairman, The College House Tribunal."

Shaw looked up with amazement in his expression.

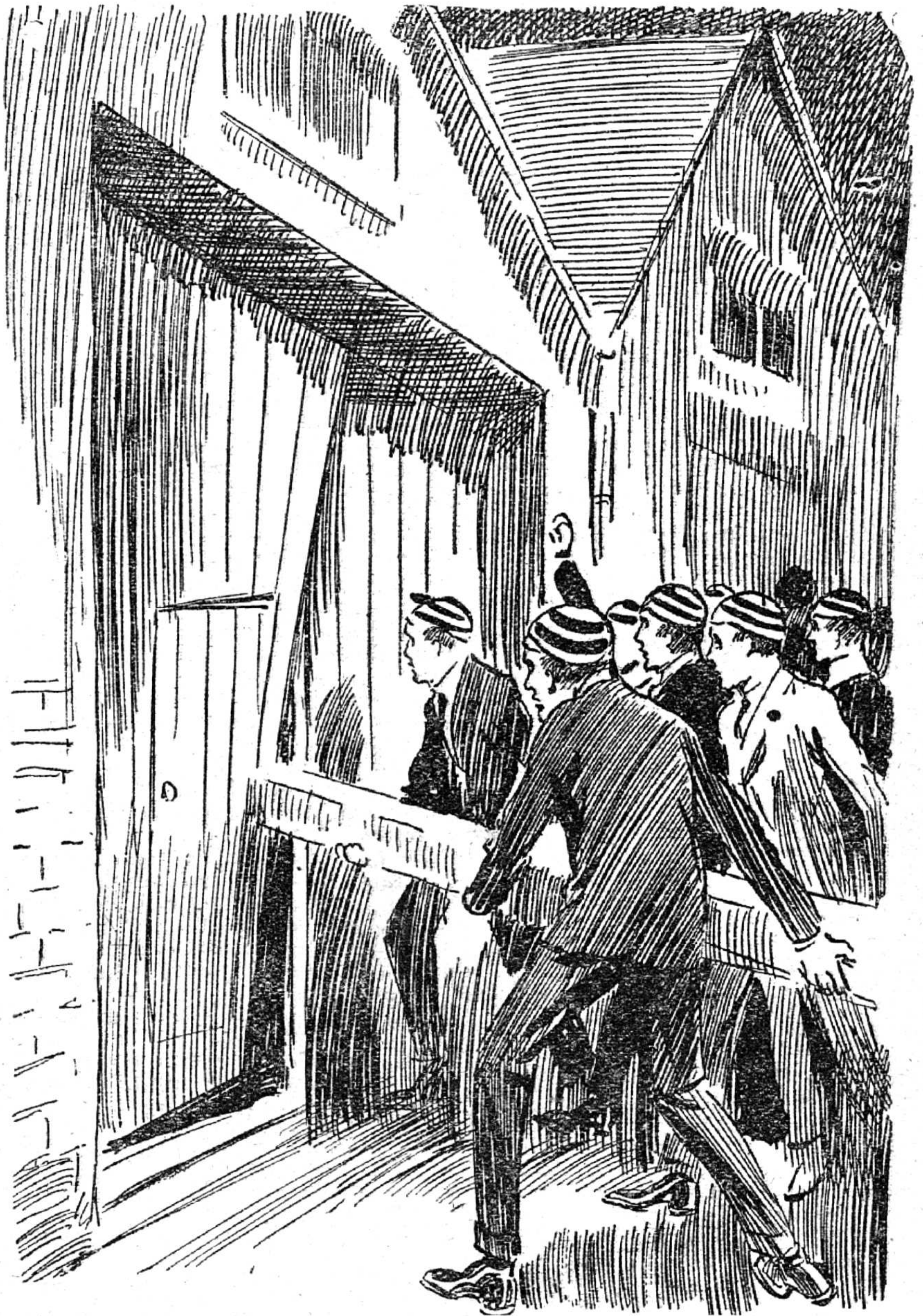
"Well, of all the mysterious letters!" he ejaculated. "Who could have sent this? What does it mean? The College House Tribunal! I've never heard of it—"

"Oh, it must be a joke of some kind," said Grayson. "You don't think we're going to take any notice of it, do you? Some of the juniors, I suppose. They probably fancied that they would be able to get us in that garage, and then rag us. There'll be nothing doing, my son! We're not going to be caught by a trick of this kind!"

Shaw laughed.

"Rather not!" he said. "We're not quite so simple as all that! This is type-written, too!"

"Oh, I suppose the kids went into the Prefects' room—"



At the very first thrust the improvised battering-ram was successful. The lock of the heavy doors gave way, and one of them crashed in. A moment later the Fifth were pouring into the tribunal chamber—a great, yelling crowd!

"No they didn't," said Shaw. "The typewriter in the Prefects' room is an ordinary Remington. This type is a lot smaller, and not so neat. This wasn't typed by any machine in the school that I know of."

"Well, it doesn't matter to us," said Grayson. "We're not going to take any notice. Now, let me see—you went nap, didn't you? Right—ho—go ahead! I've got one or two nice cards for you!"

The seniors continued their game, and very soon afterwards they had forgotten all about that urgent summons. Nine o'clock struck, and they were still engrossed in their game—and they did not remember anything about the College House Tribunal.

At five minutes past nine exactly there came a tap at the door. It was not such a timid tap as the previous one. Grayson looked up rather impatiently.

"Come in, confound you!" he shouted. "It's a pity we can't be left alone for half-an-hour!"

The door opened, and Simms minor, of the Third, entered the study. He was rather a cheeky fag, was Simms minor, and he grinned as he observed the cards, the little piles of money, and the cigarettes.

"Having a good old time, ain't you?" he asked.

"I don't want any of your nerve!" said Grayson, glaring. "What do you want here?"

"I've brought a note for you," said Simms, extending a grubby hand.

Grayson started.

"A note!" he ejaculated. "Another note!"

"I don't know about another one," said Simms minor, "This is the only one I've seen."

"Who gave it to you?"

"I don't know," said the junior.

Grayson and Shaw exchanged glances.

"You don't know?" repeated Grayson.

"Of course I don't," repeated Simms minor. "I was crossing the Triangle a minute ago, when somebody came up to me—somebody in a long cloak, and with his face hidden in a hood. He told me to bring this note to your study, and, incidentally, he gave me a tanner. Well, here's the note. So long!"

Simms minor strolled out of the study, after passing the note on the table. He closed the door behind him, and Gray-

son picked up the note hurriedly. He tore it open, and then uttered an exclamation.

"Well, what is it?" asked Shaw impatiently.

"Look—look at this!" panted Grayson. "It's about the limit in cheek!"

Shaw took the note, and read this:

"To Harold Grayson and Frederick Shaw.—Take notice! You have failed to obey the command of the College House Tribunal. If you imagine that you can defy the Tribunal in this way, you are mistaken. You will be granted five minutes to comply with the original order. Remember—you must be in the old garage not later than fifteen minutes past nine.—The Chairman, the College House Tribunal."

"A quarter-past-nine!" exclaimed Grayson. "That gives us just four minutes to go there. The kids must be dotty, if they think we're going to take any notice of this thing! Just wait until I find out who's responsible. I'll give him the hiding of his life!"

Shaw was rather more serious.

"I—I say, this seems rather queer, you know!" he exclaimed slowly. "Who wrote the notes? I don't quite like it, Grayson. It seems mysterious to me. Hadn't we better go, and see what it means?"

Grayson snorted.

"Go!" he exclaimed. "Not likely! Those kids won't make a fool of me, if I can help it!"

But both the seniors could not help thinking that the circumstances were rather peculiar. Who did these notes come from? Who sent them? And what was this College House Tribunal? They were questions that Grayson and Shaw could not answer.

They went on with their game—and the time slipped by.

But, although the two seniors continued playing, their minds were not upon the game. They were thinking of those mysterious communications, and they were each wondering whether there would be a third note. They had ignored the first two, and they were rather curious to know what the consequences would be. Both Grayson and Shaw were convinced that the juniors were responsible, and that the whole thing was a trick. And they had no intention of being fooled.

And then, at exactly twenty minutes past nine, a development took place.

It was rather a startling one.

Grayson was sitting with his back to the window, and he did not look for any activity in that direction. But suddenly, without the slightest warning, the lower sash was flung up. Then, before the seniors could make a move, six figures swarmed through the open window into the study.

"Don't move," commanded a deep, stern voice. "You will please consider yourselves our prisoners!"

Grayson gasped.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated huskily.

The cards slipped from his fingers, and his cigarette dropped from between his lips, and fell to the floor. He was staring at the six intruders—and Grayson had very excellent cause to be startled.

The figures were extraordinary in appearance.

Each was enveloped in a long black cloak, which descended right to the ground. No human face was visible. Instead, a grotesque mask stared out from the folds of a black cowl. Every one of the intruders wore one of these masks. They were the kind of mask that one sees at a Christmas party—one, for example, was apparently intended to be a representation of Santa Claus, with white beard, and moustache and eyebrows, complete. Others were displaying grinning teeth, and so forth. And all the masks were highly coloured. At first sight it seemed to Grayson and Shaw that their study had been invaded by half-a-dozen smallish men with bizarre faces. The masks were excellent ones, and it was absolutely impossible to detect who the wearers actually were.

Grayson soon recovered from his momentary scare.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded blusteringly. "You confounded young imps! You can clear out of this study at once! Do you hear? If you want to play these darned fool games, go to the Remove! Don't come here!"

"Capture the prisoners!" said one of the masked figures, in a cold, deep voice.

"It shall be done!" said one of the others.

And, before Grayson and Shaw could offer any resistance, they were seized. Three pairs of hands grasped Shaw, and another three pairs grasped Grayson.

They had no chance, although they struggled fiercely at first. But with three to deal with one, it was quite hopeless for the Fifth Formers to expect to defy these intruders.

Grayson was hauled to the window, and forced through. He made a considerable noise in his progress—which was not very surprising.

"Stop!" he howled. "Help—Fifth! Confound it! You young rotters! Let me go—do you hear? Let me go! Rescue, Fifth!"

"Hurry!" said one of the masked figures. "We don't want a crowd round!"

Shaw came tumbling through the window, and he, too, made as much noise as he could, in order to attract attention. But the smart strangers were so quick in their work that when the Fifth Formers' study door burst open, the room was empty. Other members of the Fifth had crowded in, and they ran across to the window, gazing out into the Triangle. But nothing was to be seen now. The big open space was dark and deserted.

Meanwhile, Grayson and Shaw were being rushed along at express speed. They found it impossible to resist the energies of their captors. And, without a pause, they were taken round the College House, until, at length, they came within sight of the old garage.

There were two or three garages at the back of the College House. They were all occupied with the exception of one. This had been deserted for some time, mainly owing to the fact that the roof leaked. And, in any case, there was no need for the shed—nobody wanted to use it.

It was provided with big double doors. And, in one of these doors there was fitted a small extra door, so that people could pass in and out without going to the trouble of swinging open the big, heavy doors. These were securely locked and bolted.

Grayson and Shaw were pushed through the little doorway, and they found themselves in intense darkness. Their captors came through after them, and the door was closed.

"By thunder!" rapped out Grayson. "You kids will pay for this! You needn't think that I don't know you—because I do, and you're going to get it hot——"

"Silence!" commanded a voice. "Let the prisoners be taken into the Tribunal Chamber!"

"It shall be done!" said another voice.

Grayson and Shaw were in total darkness. And they could not imagine what was going to happen. But then, suddenly, they felt themselves up against some thick curtains. These were parted, and the next moment the seniors found themselves in the interior of the garage. They were astonished by what they saw.

The place did not resemble a garage in the least. It was hung all round with heavy curtains, including one extra large one, which was suspended over the top like a huge canopy. And right in the very centre of this gleamed a solitary electric light. It was shaded, and it cast down a subdued glow, making everything look unreal and strange.

A kind of bench was arranged at one end of this enclosure. And, upon this bench, sat six figures. They were all robed and hooded, and from the hoods stared those same grotesque, expressionless faces—masks.

Somehow or other, although Grayson and Shaw knew that these figures were those of juniors, they felt rather nervous and ill at ease. It all seemed so uncanny—so eerie. There was dead silence in the place and nothing to gaze upon except the black curtains, the black-robed figures, and those hideous, staring masks. It was an experience which did not give Grayson and Shaw courage, but Grayson attempted to hide his nervousness by a burst of anger.

"You—you infernal young brats!" he shouted hoarsely. "What's the meaning of this tomfoolery? Let us out of this at once—if you don't, you'll have to pay dearly for it!"

"Silence!" commanded the masked figure which occupied the centre of the bench. "These outbursts will not help you in any way: I am the chairman of the College House Tribunal."

"You confounded young idiot——"

"Number six, who are these prisoners?" asked the Chairman in a deep unrecognisable voice.

"They are Harold Grayson and Frederick Shaw, of the Fifth Form," replied another of the masked figures.

"And what is the charge against them?" asked the Chairman.

"Would it not be better, my lord, to

explain to the prisoners why they are here?" asked Number Six.

The Chairman nodded.

"An excellent idea," he said. "But I have a better one. I imagine. Nos. 3 and 4, go at once and procure a member of the Remove Form. Seize him, and bring him to this chamber. He will not necessarily be punished, but he will listen to the evidence—and he will then spread it abroad. Go!"

"We go, my lord!" said Nos. 3 and 4.

Two of the masked figures vanished through the folds of the curtain. Grayson and Shaw were now left in the presence of ten—for there had been twelve members of the Tribunal altogether. The six figures sat on the bench, and the other four stood about. And they all remained quite motionless, and absolutely silent. The effect upon Grayson and Shaw was by no means comforting. They felt that ten pairs of eyes were upon them, but they could not see them—they could not see these eyes.

"You—you young fools!" rapped out Grayson harshly. "You had better put a stop to this at once—before it goes too far!"

"Silence!" commanded the Chairman coldly.

"Oh, don't play the fool with us——"

"We must insist upon silence!" commanded the Chairman. "You must speak when you're spoken to—you must only answer questions. Wait but a few moments, and an explanation will be made. But that explanation must be made in the hearing of a member of the Remove Form!"

Grayson and Shaw raved and stormed. But it made no difference. They found that no notice was taken of their remarks or their threats. They shouted and they even made an attempt to escape. But it was futile. They were seized, and held. And all the time those ten masks stared in an expressionless way at them.

And, then, after about three minutes, a movement came in the curtains, and Nos. 3 and 4 appeared, hauling between them a junior. He was Dallas, of the Remove. And Dallas was looking extremely scared, and bewildered.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "What—what the dickens—— Oh, my goodness!"

"Now we will proceed!" exclaimed the Chairman solemnly. "Grayson and Shaw, you have been brought into the

presence of the College House Tribunal. Before going further into your case, I will explain why this Tribunal has been formed, and what its duties will consist of."

"You—you young idiot!" rapped out Grayson harshly.

"Take heed of my words!" continued the Chairman. "As you are aware, the College House at the present moment is in chaos. Why is this so? Because Mr. Smale Foxe has chosen to adopt an extraordinary attitude. He has allowed the boys full liberty. And, in consequence, the boys have taken advantage of this liberty, and are abusing it. Henceforth, any departures from strict school discipline and regulations, will be punished. The College House Tribunal has been set up to take the place of the Housemaster. Mr. Smale Foxe is no Housemaster—he does nothing. He administers no punishments when punishments are deserved. Therefore, this Tribunal will act in Mr. Foxe's stead. The rules and regulations must be complied with. If they are disobeyed flagrantly—as you have disobeyed them—swift and severe punishment will follow. Order must be restored in the College House, and order shall be restored. Under no circumstances will the Tribunal allow the College House to go to rot!"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Dallas, of the Remove.

"Oh, so that's the idea?" said Grayson furiously. "You think that you'll be able to restore order, as you call it? If you think that, you little fools, you've made a mistake! All this theatrical business doesn't have any effect upon me!"

"Nor me!" put in Shaw nervously.

"Perhaps not," said the Chairman. "This theatrical business, as you term it, is merely a safeguard. Perhaps the next item on the programme will be more interesting—and it will certainly be more painful. Harold Grayson and Frederick Shaw, you are found guilty of abusing the freedom which Mr. Smale Foxe gave to you. On several occasions you have been found smoking and gambling, and generally behaving like young blackguards. This, as you are well aware, is totally opposed to all the rules of the College. Smoking is not allowed, and is a punishable offence. Gambling is even worse. Such amusements are not

good for schoolboys. Therefore, you will be punished—here and now!"

"Punished!" shouted Grayson. "If—if you dare to lay your hands upon me—"

"Under ordinary circumstances, if you were caught gambling in your study by a Housemaster, you would be severely flogged," interrupted the Chairman of the Tribunal. "The present Housemaster, however, takes no action whatever. Therefore, it is our duty to correct you. You will now be flogged, and it must be a warning to you that you must indulge no further in gambling and smoking. Seize the prisoners!"

Grayson and Shaw were seized, and, before they could know what had happened to them, they were held tight. Grayson was hauled forward, and laid face downwards across a wooden box. He was held there while another masked figure stood by, holding a very business-like cane.

"Proceed with the flogging!" said the Chairman sternly.

"Don't you dare to touch me!" shrieked Grayson wildly. "You—you—Yaroooh! Yow-cw"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The cane descended regularly, and it was wielded with some power, judging by the amount of dust which arose from Grayson's nether garment. The Fifth Former was, in fact, treated to a "swishing" of the most severe character. He howled and raved, but it made no difference. And, at last, he was allowed to get up—tremendously sore, and fairly crying with fury.

Shaw, by this time, was merely a limp mass, and he did not have the strength to resist. He, too, went through the same performance, and he howled even more than Grayson had done.

"Now, you thoroughly understand the position," said the Chairman grimly. "You have been flogged—for the offence of smoking and gambling openly. You will now be released, and you will please remember that if there is any sign of your committing a similar offence, you will be brought before the Tribunal once more—and your punishment, then, will be even more severe than this. There will be no escaping from the clutches of the College House Tribunal!"

Grayson fairly shook with helpless rage.

"You—you confounded young hounds!" he snarled. "Just wait!"

Wait until I find out who you are! You'll be half-slaughtered for this!"

"Let the prisoners be released!" said the Chairman. "As for you, Dallas, you have seen what has occurred. Let it sink. Let it be an object lesson. From henceforth, the College House is to be ruled in exactly the same manner as it was ruled before Mr. Smale Foxe made his alterations. Any infringement of the regulations will be reported to the Tribunal—and the Tribunal will take action. It matters not who is the culprit—whether he belong to the Third, or to the Sixth. He shall be punished according to his deserts."

Grayson and Shaw were allowed to escape, and they were much relieved when they found themselves out in the open air. Dallas came out, too, and the Removee was fairly bewildered. He lost no time in rushing into the College House, full up with his news.

Meanwhile, within the Tribunal chamber, many masks had been removed, and familiar faces were revealed. Christine and Co were there, and Lawrence, and certain members of the Ancient House. These certain members were Handforth, De Valerie, Reginald Pitt, Solomon Levi, and—myself.

"Great!" chuckled Bob Christine. "It couldn't have come off better!"

"A huge success!" I said, nodding. "Keep it up, Christine, and everything will be O K within a week. It's a great idea of yours, and I think it was jolly sporting of you to ask us Ancient House chaps to lend a hand."

"Rather!" said Solomon Levi. "And, believe me, it will be successful. At first, the chaps will jib against it—but when they find themselves punished for every offence, they will begin to take notice. And then order will be restored."

Bob Christine was quite delighted. He had thought it better to bring several Ancient House juniors into the scheme—for it would mystify the College House culprits even more, and would make it far more mysterious than would otherwise have been the case.

My chums and I had only been too glad to lend the College House leaders a hand. For we knew that this scheme of theirs was an excellent one—and that it promised to be extremely effective.

Dallas, of the Removee, did his part well.

He, of course, knew nothing about

the Tribunal—he did not know who the members were, or how it had been originated. But he had been present during the punishment of Grayson and Shaw, and he spread the news broadcast. Before the fellows went to bed that night, the sole topic of conversation in the College House was the secret Tribunal. The fellows had not believed Dallas's story at first—but, after seeing Grayson and Shaw, they were no longer in any doubt. The whole College House was thrilled, and was greatly excited over this mysterious occurrence.

Exactly how the Tribunal would succeed remained to be seen.

CHAPTER V.

THE FATEFUL LETTER.

"COMING out, Lawrence?"

Bob Christine asked that question as he paused in the lobby, before breakfast the following morning. But Lawrence did not seem to hear. He was standing near the letter rack, and he held a letter in his hand. His eyes were gleaming, and he was gazing at the envelope intently.

"Deaf?" inquired Christine. "Coming out into the Triangle, Lawrence?"

The schoolboy-boxer looked up with a start.

"Eh?" he said. "Speaking to me?"

"Yes, I was speaking to you, you gatepost!" said Bob. "Coming out for a stroll?"

"No thanks," said Lawrence. "I've got a letter here—from my dad. I think I'll go to my study, and read it."

"Right-ho—just as you like," said Christine.

He passed outside, and Lawrence, without opening his letter, went along the Remove passage until he came to his own little apartment—Study T. He went in, closed the door, and then sat down at the table.

"The first letter I've had from dad for over a week!" he murmured. "It seems a pretty fat one, too!"

He tore open the flap, with some eagerness—for Lawrence was anxious to know how things were going at home. He felt sure that his father would tell him whether the financial position was better or worse. The junior knew how

hard his father's business had been hit when Scarbrook's Bank had gone smash. Mr. Lawrence had been nearly crippled at that time—and, even now, he was struggling against terrible odds in order to keep things going. Lawrence knew this, and he felt certain that his father would tell him if any fresh developments occurred.

The boy himself had done all he possibly could to help his father. He had fought in two boxing contests so that he could send the money he thus gained to his father. And Lawrence had done so—although he had sent the money anonymously—secretly. His father had no idea as to the identity of the sender.

Lawrence's guess was not exactly a wide one. The letter had felt "fat"—and, when the junior took out the sheets, he found that the letter was quite a long one. It consisted of several pages of notepaper, all filled with his father's neat handwriting.

"I wonder what this is all about?" asked Lawrence, rather curiously. "It's not like the dad to send me a long letter like this!"

Lawrence commenced reading, and his attention became absolutely centred upon the letter. He was oblivious of all else—he did not know that he was sitting in this junior's study at St. Frank's. He read on, and his expression changed as he did so. And when, at last, he looked up, his face betrayed all his emotions. Alarm—bewilderment—pain—mystification—all were expressed upon Lawrence's clean cut face.

"Oh!" he murmured. "Oh, how—how terrible!"

He stared before him, and he did not see the objects which were in his line of vision. His thoughts were far away—with his father. And he knew nothing of his present surroundings. And then, as he sat there, he commenced reading the letter all over again. And it was hardly surprising that Lawrence was affected so much. For the letter ran in this way:

25, March Street,
Kensington,
London. S.W.

"MY DEAR BOY,—

"I am afraid this letter will not be a very cheering one for you, but you are my only son, Ernest, and I think it is my duty to tell you the true position. It would be cruel and hard of me to let

you come home, at the end of this present term—the end will soon be here—and to let you make some very terrible discoveries. It is far better that you should know now. So you must be brave, my boy, and prepare yourself for some very grave news.

"You know already that things have been very serious with me for some time past. Since the bank crashed, my business has suffered enormously. It has been one long struggle, and Heaven only knows how I have managed to pull through up to now. I think it possible that I may be able to save the ship from sinking—but it will be a long fight, my boy—a hard, grinding struggle. And, I am doing my best. But the road will be a long and arduous one, and the fight is telling upon me.

"I do not think it will come as a very serious blow to you when I tell you that it will be impossible for you to remain at St. Frank's after this present term. I rather fancy you are already prepared for some news of the kind. Your fees for this present term were paid before Scarbrook's Bank closed its doors—before I lost my capital. It is only natural, that you should go to the school for this present term. But I find it quite out of the question to renew the fees, and when you come back, at Easter, you will remain at home—or what will then be your home. For, Ernest, I am afraid it will be a sad homecoming for you.

"You must prepare yourself for a shock.

"When you come back, the home you have known all your life will no longer be in existence. It pains me more than I can express that I should be compelled to tell you, in this blunt way, that things are so serious. But it is a fact, my boy, and it is only right that you should know. You are brave, and you are strong, and you can stand this piece of terrible news.

"I do not think it will be necessary for me to go into very many details. You would not understand, even if I did. But, before you return, I want you to know what you will find when you come. You will find your old home gone—gone for ever. And if it will be a blow to you, you may easily imagine what a terrible blow it is for me. I am not sentimental as a rule, but this present affair cuts me to the quick.

"To put it as briefly as I can, one of my creditors has refused to give me

time. He demands two hundred pounds, and I find it absolutely impossible to let him have it. Under the circumstances, I am helpless, and this creditor has decided to go to the extreme limit. I cannot explain all, my boy, but I can tell you this much. It means that our home must go—it must be sold up. The home which we have loved for so many years—the home which we have always known—will be no more when you return at the end of this term. I have told you this now so that you shall not be shocked when you come back. It is better that you should know in advance.

“And, on the whole, things are not so serious with me as I first thought they would be. Five hundred pounds, in solid cash, would put things fairly comfortable. Of course, such a sum would not compensate me for the great loss I have sustained. But it would, at least, enable me to carry on; and to struggle back to prosperity. But as you know, Ernest, it is quite impossible for me to obtain such a sum as five hundred pounds in a week. Even if I wish to borrow, I have not the security, for my liabilities are excessive. So, you see, I am rather in a helpless position. All I can do is to struggle on, and attempt to keep my head above water.

“Five hundred pounds as I have said would enable me to turn the corner—it would blow away the feeling of disaster which at present approaches me. But it is not fair that I should write in this way—that I should place my worries upon your boyish shoulders. I have told you the worst, and that is sufficient, I imagine. I have until Saturday of next week to obtain this money; but I can only let things take their course, and the home will go.

“So do not be shocked and disappointed when you come home to find things very, very different. We must be brave, Ernest, and fight our battles. Fate has been very hard, but perhaps Fortune will smile upon us, after all. I have heard rumours that Scarbrook's Bank may pay five or six shillings in the pound; but I really take no notice of this. I do not expect to get anything. And, certainly, I cannot hope to touch one penny during this present month. I have resigned myself to the fact that Scarbrook's Bank will not meet any of its liabilities.

“And now, we will deal with other and more pleasant matters.”

The rest of the letter consisted of purely personal matters, and Lawrence did not trouble to read them again. It was the other item which filled him with dismay and alarm. He got up from his chair, and paced the study restlessly.

“The home going!” he muttered. “How awful—how terrible! Poor old dad! What an awful blow it must be for him? He'll never get over it!”

Lawrence couldn't quite understand things. Five hundred pounds was certainly a big figure. But his father was in a large way of business. It seemed to strike Lawrence that it was queer that his father should not be able to lay hands upon five hundred pounds. But the junior did not realise the difficulties.

Lawrence senior was struggling against terrible odds. To borrow money in the ordinary way was impossible, since he had no security to offer. His own liabilities were big, and it was only possible for him to pay them if his creditors allowed him time. But creditors are not always so obliging. And if a man decides to take action, he can create havoc. This appeared to be the case with Lawrence's father. Somebody had refused to wait, and the result would be disastrous.

“Oh, if only I could do something!” muttered Lawrence, as he paced up and down. “I'd go back home now—this very minute! But what can I do? How can I help? I should be more trouble than—”

Suddenly, Lawrence came to a halt. His face flushed, and his eyes glittered. A thought had come to him—a thought which burned right into his brain, and which set his blood throbbing fiercely through his veins. His heart beat rapidly as he stood there, rigid, and filled with inward excitement.

“Mr. Rook!”

Back into Lawrence's mind came the memory of that interview which had taken place on the previous evening. Mr. Norman Rook, the boxing promoter, had offered him five hundred pounds—yes, the exact figure—if he would consent to fight Kiddy Welsh, the lightweight champion of London. Five hundred pounds, win or lose!

It was the sum which would save his father!

But Lawrence had refused, he had

cast all thoughts of the fight out of his mind. For it was to take place in Kensington, and his father would certainly know about it. It was out of the question—it could not be.

And yet—

If only Lawrence obtained that money, he would save the home—he would save his father from possible disaster. And it was the only thing to be done, there was no other way out.

Lawrence began pacing the study again, and his thoughts now ran feverishly. Perhaps, after all, his father would not attend that fight. He would be too busy—too worried. He would not trouble about a boxing match, when his business was going to ruin, and when his creditors were swarming round him like a lot of hungry flies. Even though the fight took place in the West End Sporting Club's Hall, in Kensington itself, Mr. Lawrence would not trouble to go. He would have other and bigger things to think about. Perhaps, after all, it would be safe for Lawrence to accept. And he would get five hundred pounds—whatever the result of the contest, he would get five hundred pounds!

Lawrence looked up, his eyes firm and set in their expression.

"By jingo!" he muttered grimly. "I'll do it!"

He did not waste a minute.

Hurrying out of his study, he raced along the Remove passage, out through the lobby, and then straight to the bicycle shed. In less than three minutes he was off, speeding down Bellton Lane, towards the village. He cared nothing for breakfast, or for morning lessons. In any case, he reckoned that he would be back before lessons started. But, even if he was late, he would not care a jot. He was going to Bannington—he was going to the Grapes Hotel, to see Mr. Norman Rook.

Lawrence pedalled hard, and he did the journey in record time. And when, at last, he jumped from his machine in front of the Grapes Hotel, he was perspiring freely, and his face was hot and flushed. He went into the hotel without looking about him. If he had looked he might have seen the figure of Mr. Smale Foxe in the vicinity.

In any case, Mr. Foxe paused and waited.

Lawrence went into the big lounge, and asked the clerk if Mr. Rook was in the hotel, at the moment.

"Why, yes, young man," said the clerk. "Mr. Rook is in his own private room, having breakfast. I don't think you'd better disturb him now—"

"Please send up to him and say that Lawrence would like to see him!" interrupted the junior.

"Just as you wish; but I don't think it will be any good," said the clerk.

A pageboy went up at once, and he returned a few minutes later, saying that Mr. Rook would receive the visitor without delay.

Lawrence went up in the lift, and when he was ushered into Mr. Norman Rook's apartment, he found that gentleman partaking of his breakfast.

"Good morning, Mr. Rook!" said Lawrence, as he came in.

"Good morning, my lad—good morning!" said Mr. Rook, setting his coffee cup down. "Rather an early visit, eh?"

"I've come to accept your offer, sir!" said the junior breathlessly.

The boxing promoter rose to his feet.

"Splendid—splendid!" he exclaimed, with genuine delight in his tones. "Somehow or other, Lawrence, I had an idea that you would change your mind. Excellent! You do not know what relief this has brought me. I may tell you at once that I had decided to call upon you during the dinner hour in the hope of making you change your mind. But it seems that it was unnecessary."

"I—I've been thinking things over, sir, and I should like to have things fixed up," said Lawrence. "I get five hundred pounds, win or lose?"

The boxing promoter nodded.

"Five hundred, win or lose," he repeated. "That's quite right!"

"Oh, splendid!" said Lawrence. "Yes, Mr. Rook, I'll agree!"

Mr. Rook regarded the junior lightly.

"It isn't usual for you to be so keen after the money, my boy," he said. "I've always thought that you were heart and soul in the sport—"

"So I am, sir," interrupted Lawrence. "But—but this is different. I particularly want that money—"

"For your father, perhaps?" asked Mr. Rook. "Oh, yes, Lawrence, I understand—you have explained this

matter to me indirectly, more than once."

"Yes, sir, it's for my dad!" said Lawrence eagerly. "Something terrible is going to happen next week, and if I can only get that money for the fight, I might be able to save a disaster."

Lawrence came to a decision quickly. Mr. Rook had always been straightforward with him—Lawrence knew that the boxing promoter was as straight as a die, and a gentleman to his finger tips. Some men in his position could not be trusted, perhaps, but Mr. Rook was different. He was a white man.

"Please read this, sir," said Lawrence. "You—you'll understand better then. And I know I can take you into my confidence all right. I know that you'll keep it to yourself."

"Thank you, my boy—thank you for the trust you place in me," said Mr. Rook quietly.

He took the letter, and read it through. When he passed it back his eyes were grave; but there was just a little twinkle in them.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed heartily. "My boy, I honour you for having come to this decision. You refused my offer because you thought it unwise for you to partake in this fight. But, in order to save your home and your father, you have changed your mind—and you will fight. And, what is more, you will win—I am certain of it. I am filled with confidence!"

"I hope I shall win, sir, anyway," said Lawrence. "But, Kiddy Welsh is a stiff man to beat, and I shall have to put in a lot of training between now and—and—When does the fight come off, sir?"

"On the Wednesday of next week," replied Mr. Rook. "Yes, you will need to train very severely, my lad. Kiddy Welsh is a good man, but, at the same time, he does not possess your cleverness. He is heavier, and I believe he is stronger. But it is not always strength and weight that wins. You have pluck, endurance, and any amount of clean science. You'll win, Lawrence—you'll win, my boy!"

"By jingo, I'll do my best to win, sir!" said Lawrence. "I know I shall get the money in any case, but if I could only win, I should feel a little bit justified in taking it. But if I lose I shall think I've swindled you!"

Mr. Rook chuckled.

"My dear lad, get all those absurd ideas out of your head," he exclaimed, smiling. "If you win you will get the five hundred pounds—and more. You are certain of the money, even if you lose. But a win will be better for you in more ways than one. For I shall stake on you heavily, Lawrence, and that shows the confidence I have in you. And, what is more, you will benefit. Win this fight, and five hundred pounds won't be the limit of your prize!"

"You're very kind, sir!" said Lawrence. "You're a brick, Mr. Rook! I don't think there are many men like you in the sport!"

And then followed the signing of documents, and so forth. Lawrence settled everything, and when he took his departure half an hour later, he was feeling strangely light-hearted. He felt that he had done something worthy. And he got straight on his bicycle, and rode straight back to St. Frank's—filled with an intense determination to train as he had never trained before. If it were at all possible, he would win this fight against Kiddy Welsh!

But the description of that great encounter cannot be given here.

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD RESULTS.

"GOOD man!" said Bob Christine heartily.

"You'll win, Lawrence—never fear!"

"And you're certain of the five hundred, in any case?"

"Rather!"

It was evening, and Ernest Lawrence had just told a number of juniors of his decision. These fellows, of course, were in the know—such as Bob Christine, Talmadge, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Watson, Pitt, and myself. And we felt that Lawrence had done something really praiseworthy in accepting Mr. Rook's proposal. For we knew that Lawrence wanted the five hundred pounds to save his father from utter ruin.

"We'd love to come up and see you beat this chap Welsh," said Watson. "But I don't suppose we shall be able to manage it, Lawrence. We couldn't go to Helmsford that time, so it's pretty certain we couldn't go all the way to London!"

"He'll have our good wishes with him, anyhow," I said. "And there's no telling, something may turn up, even now. This is going to be a fight worth seeing, my sons. It's going to be the fight of Lawrence's life."

"There's only one thing that I'm afraid of," said Lawrence. "If my father should happen to go to this hall and see me—he'll be awfully angry. I shall never be able to face him."

"Rats!" said Christine. "As soon as your pater finds out why you've done it, he'll be all over you—he'll be only too delighted to grab you by the hand. But if that point is worrying you a great deal, it might be possible for us to lend a hand!"

"How do you mean?" asked Lawrence.

"Why, couldn't we fake up some yarn or other—something to get your father out of London on that particular evening?" asked Christine. "We won't discuss it now; there's plenty of time. We might easily be able to think of something of that nature."

"Yes, we might," said Lawrence slowly. "By Jingo, we might!"

But, as Christine had said, there was no time to discuss the matter then. The affairs of the College House Tribunal had to be attended to. The plan of campaign for the evening had been thought out, and Christine was confident of success.

Another half a dozen fellows had been brought into the secret—Ancient House juniors, for it was realised that quite a large number of tribunal agents would be required, for there would be very many cases to be dealt with that evening. The more cases the better. There were plenty of masks for us, for we had borrowed them from some old props which had been used in a carnival a month or two earlier, and they suited the purpose excellently.

And that evening the tribunal was busy, indeed!

There were quite a number of fellows in the College House who needed correction. Fullerton, of the Third, had been going the pace rather strongly since he had received his liberty. He smoked all over the place; he even gambled in the Third Form classroom, inciting other fags to follow his example. Quite a number of the Third-Formers did so, not because they wanted to, but because they feared ridicule.

And Fullerton was seized, taken before

the tribunal, and swished. He was swished very hard, and he was extremely sore when he was released.

Churchman and Holland, of the Remove, were also dealt with. They, too, had been disobeying the rules. Even minor cases were taken. Holroyd and Munroo and Cobb, for example, were brought before the tribunal because they were making a tremendous din in Study P. They were singing and shouting at the top of their voices, and, under ordinary circumstances, they would have been dropped on at once. They were dropped on now—by the tribunal. They were not punished very severely, merely a couple of swishes each. But it was sufficient to show them that the tribunal was not putting up with any nonsense.

Altogether, seven or eight fellows were dealt with within an hour, and they spread the news to the rest.

And a feeling was rapidly arising in the College House that it would be as well to stick to the ordinary rules and regulations. For the slightest deviation from these brought down the tribunal; and these punishments did not stop at the Fifth. Two seniors in the Sixth Form had been going the pace, and disgracing the Sixth in consequence. The tribunal seized them, hauled them to the tribunal chamber, and treated them just the same way as the juniors were treated. It was soon evident that the tribunal would place everybody alike. The punishments were the same in every case.

The object of the tribunal was to restore law and order in the College House, and it seemed, by the first results, that it would ultimately succeed. Of course, there was a great deal of anger and indignation. A number of fellows declared that they would take no notice whatever of the tribunal. But, on the other hand, a good many juniors decided that it would be better to take heed.

Some fellows had gone down to the village, and they did not turn up until over half an hour past locking-up. They were seized by the tribunal and punished. In fact, everybody who did anything in defiance of the rules was dropped upon. There was no escape. In the Triangle, in the gymnasium, even in the lobby of the College House, the masked, cloaked figures of the tribunal appeared, and hauled off the culprits to the tribunal chamber.

But the evening was not to pass without some excitement.

Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, were extremely indignant and angry. They had not forgotten how they had suffered on the previous evening. They were determined to have their revenge. They were not going to allow the tribunal to continue in this way.

"We'll squash 'em—we'll find out who the young beggars are!" said Grayson grimly. "My idea is to swoop upon that garage, take all the young beggars by surprise, and then unmask them. We'll find out who they really are, and then we shall know what to do."

"Good idea!" said Shaw. "But how is it going to be done?"

"The Fifth will do it," said Grayson.

"Eh?"

"The Fifth," repeated Grayson. "I'm going to call a meeting at once, and I'll guarantee that we shall find plenty of supporters."

"Well, there's no telling," said Shaw. "But we'd better be careful, you know."

"What do you mean—careful?"

"The tribunal doesn't seem very particular," said Shaw. "I hear there have been a lot of cases to-night. All sorts of chaps have been hauled before those masked chaps, and swished. According to one story, there are about two dozen members of this tribunal."

"Rats!" said Grayson. "That's only exaggeration. We know for a fact that there are only twelve. And if we can get up about twenty Fifth Form chaps, we can smash 'em to bits. Do you think we're going to be pounced upon by this rotten tribunal if we want to smoke? We've got permission from the House-master, so what does it matter?"

Grayson was determined, and, without any delay, he called a meeting of the Fifth Form. Quite a good many fellows in the Fifth were in agreement with the tribunal, and they would not listen to Grayson for a moment. They were of the opinion that the tribunal was doing good, and that it would be better if the mysterious masked figures were allowed to carry on their work.

But, on the other hand, Grayson succeeded in getting a good crowd together. He explained that the tribunal was composed of juniors, and he pointed out that it did not seem right that juniors should be able to grab members of the Fifth, have them hauled before the tribunal,

and cuned. It was not dignified; it was not right! Therefore, it was up to the Fifth Form to step in and to squash this tribunal.

"Well, there's sense in that," said Drake. "It's a bit thick when the Remove decides to put the Fifth in its place! The boot ought to be on the other foot. It's up to us to do something!"

"Rather!" said Parry.

"But we'd better be careful," remarked Swinton. "There wouldn't be much sense in our doing this if we were collared and swished! That would be a rotten fiasco!"

"We shall take the place by storm," said Grayson. "That's the only idea that'll work. And if any of the other fellows ask to join—well, we'll let 'em."

It was not long before word got round that the Fifth was preparing to deliver a blow, and the sooner this blow could be delivered the better. The attackers gathered out in the Triangle—dozens of them. Fully half the Fifth were present, to say nothing of a certain number of Remove juniors who had already come under the ban of the tribunal.

And then, under Grayson's lead, the whole crowd of fellows marched towards the garage at the back of the College House. There was no generalship here. Grayson did not adopt any kind of strategy. He simply marched straight to the garage, forced open the door, and entered, all the other fellows piling in after him. They entered just at the moment when the tribunal was dealing with a Remove chap, and without any delay the battle commenced.

Only three fellows succeeded in getting into the garage.

These three were Grayson, Shaw, and Parry, who had been leading the raid. They found themselves held securely, and then the door was closed and bolted. Outside the crowd beat upon the woodwork and shouted in vain. They could not find admittance.

"You—you fools!" yelled Grayson, in alarm. "Why didn't you follow me in? We shall be collared now!"

"Silence!" came a voice from one of the masked figures. "Surely you did not think, Grayson, that you would be able to defeat the College House Tribunal. You have dared to revolt against the mandate of the tribunal, and you shall pay!"

It was not long before the payment was delivered. In other words, Grayson, Shaw and Parry were taken through the curtains, and there, under the subdued electric light, they were subjected to another caning. And this was in progress when a startling interruption occurred.

The Fifth Form crowd outside, enraged by the fact that their leaders had got themselves captured, made a supreme effort to get into the garage.

A heavy beam of wood was obtained, and this was used as a battering-ram.

Crash!

At the very first thrust the improvised battering-ram was successful. The lock of the heavy doors gave way, and one of them crashed in. A moment later the Fifth were pouring into the tribunal chamber—a great, yelling crowd.

"Hurrah!" yelled Grayson. "Rescue, Fifth!"

"We've got the young beggars now!"

"We'll unmask them, too!"

But confusion reigned.

In the gloom the curtains were trampled upon, and quite a number of seniors got so hopelessly mixed up that they were almost suffocated. The electric light had been switched off, and in the interior of the garage all was pitch blackness.

Fellows seized one another, thinking that they got hold of the enemy. But this was not the case. Curiously enough, every member of the tribunal had vanished. When lights were procured the tribunal had mysteriously disappeared. At least, the disappearance seemed to be mysterious until it was discovered that another door existed at the back of the garage.

The Triangle was searched everywhere, but nobody was found, nobody who could possibly be suspected. Bob Christine was in the Triangle, Handforth, Yorke and Talmadge, Tommy Watson and myself. We were all there, wondering and asking what the excitement was about.

Some members of the Fifth may have suspected that we were the tribunal, but

it was impossible to know the truth. We were there, dressed in our ordinary clothes, looking quite innocent. Not a single member of the tribunal was to be found. Not even their masks or cloaks were discovered.

This was not very surprising, for they had all been rushed into the Ancient House by Handforth and Co. and two or three others.

And the Fifth-Formers' attempt to unmask the tribunal was a failure—a dismal failure.

Mr. Smale Foxe, however, knew what was going on, and he was inwardly furious. He did all he could to discover the identity of the secret tribunal. But he, too, failed. He was beginning to realise that it would be necessary for him to take other measures if he was to succeed in his evil designs.

That evening he went to Bannington, and interviewed his twin-brother; for Mr. Foxe had another scheme in his mind, and he intended putting this scheme into operation at once. He had not so long now before the Headmaster would return, and Mr. Foxe meant to take advantage of the few days he had left.

But the rascally Housemaster was unaware of one fact.

After he had left his brother he went straight back to the school, and he did not know that a figure had been lurking outside the lodging-house. That figure, after Mr. Foxe had gone, went up to the house, gained admission, and passed inside. The man was Mr. Nelson Lee!

And before long Nelson Lee was standing face to face with Mr. Foxe's twin-brother, and, then and there, Nelson Lee and Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe had a long, straight talk. What the result of that talk was cannot be recorded.

But one thing was absolutely certain. Nelson Lee was on the alert, and it would not be long before the time came for action! And, certainly, there was destined to be a great deal of action in the very near future!

THE END.

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INTRODUCTION.

Jack Maxwell and Jim Harding are the sole survivors of a shipwreck off the Australian coast. They had come from England to settle in Australia, and were going to Cairns, where lived Jack's uncle, Professor Maxwell, the naturalist and explorer. Hearing that the professor has been away three months in the interior, the two Englishmen decide to go in search of him. Tom Anson, an Australian with whom they become acquainted, makes up the party. After fifteen days' march over burning desert, parched with thirst and exhausted with fatigue, they come to a water-hole. But it is dried up! Under some stones they find a message from the professor, directing them to the Secret Valley.

(Now read on.)

Strange Monsters of the Secret Valley

THERE they ate bully-beef and biscuits and watched a squad of duck some distance away paddling and dipping in a shallow. Suddenly there came terrific booming roar from no very great distance, followed at a short interval by another more distant one. Snaplus bowed his head and whined something about bun-tips, and the three reached for their weapons.

"What in thunder was that, do you suppose?" demanded Anson, slipping a ball cartridge into the left barrel of his gun, which was rifled. "If we were in a zoo now, I'd say it was a lion or a tiger."

"Well, we are in a zoo, aren't we?" replied Maxwell. "I'm no naturalist, but I know enough to see that these tree ferns are different from all I saw round Wurra-Wurra, and that thing over there doesn't exist anywhere else except you count bones in a museum."

He pointed to a strange creature that had appeared around a point of the lake shore, an odd brute with a bloated, flabby-looking body and a long, thin neck waving a reptilian sort of head. It moved slowly, and

the ducks did not appear to fear it. While the three stared, and Snaplus clawed his pate in an agony of superstitious terror, the thing wobbled out of the shallow, and, gathering speed, swam away at a great rate, diving at intervals. As it disappeared there came again that heart-shaking roar followed by the distant answer.

"Yes," continued Maxwell; "I've heard my uncle talk about Australia. He said he should never be surprised if some of the early forms of life that roamed the whole earth before man came on it, should be found somewhere in the interior. He said it would have to be a place cut off from the outer world, so that conditions of life were fixed. Well, here is such a place. Nothing has changed for ages. If we find men here they will probably be a great deal less like us than Snaplus."

"I've heard yarns about Brinjarras—men with tails, you know," said Anson. "Never believed 'em, though. But I don't like that roaring. I thought there were never any wild beasts to hurt in Australia?"

"Not for ages. But there are fossil remains of huge lion-tiger beasts, a sort of brute that was the ancestor of both. Now, if this valley is a kind of collection of relics, we might find one of the brutes. In fact, that roaring sounds as though it might be made by something of the kind."

"Then it's dashed likely to find us," said Anson. "And its me for my clothes before the darling scents me. I'd rather he had me with a bit of something to peel off and stick between his teeth."

He began to dress rapidly, an example which the others followed. Snaplus, who was not bothered by such refinements, contented himself with tying his blanket round his shoulders; then, gripping his axe—his only weapon, though a deadly one in his hands—he turned all his attention towards the direction from which the roaring had come.

For a little while there was silence. Probably, the creature, whatever it was, had been calling to its mate, and by now the pair had joined company.

Had they winded the adventurers? And, if so, would they attack them?

These questions were speedily answered. Snaplus turned. As these were land animals and not water bunyips, he was no longer afraid.

"Two fellow," he announced. "One fellow there." He pointed to a clump of very tall grass about three hundred yards away, then swung towards the other hand. "One fellow there, in heap piece bush." And he indicated the scrub lying close at hand along the base of the cliff and the foot of the sand-slide. "One fellow lie still. One fellow—this fellow, creep close."

He pointed again. A big fern, some ten feet high, swayed as though something had brushed its stem.

They stood alert. The brute that was stalking them must break cover in a moment. The other waited to turn the game when it should bolt. Evidently these were experienced hunters. Their only mistake was in concluding that this particular quarry would run.

"You fire first, Anson, and we'll loose as he cioses. Don't forgot the other one. Snaplus, keep your eyes on that fellow over there, and yell when he moves."

As Maxwell spoke he saw the brushwood nearest them move and part; almost he yelled with astonishment, for though he had seen many lions and tigers in captivity he could not have imagined any of the species quite so huge as this enormous brute.

It seemed to be neither lion nor tiger, but a sort of combination of both—a tawny-hided brute with dark stripes on its flanks and shoulders, a tufted tail, light mane, and two enormous teeth which protruded from its upper jaw.

It seemed as much surprised by the appearance of the men as they were by its tremendous size, and stood and gazed for a moment. Then Anson's rifle spoke and the heavy, bottle-nosed bullet crashed into the brute's exposed shoulder. Huge as it was, it could not withstand the shock of the projectile, but it rolled over on its side with a roar that rang far along the lake shore. However, it was up again in an instant, and charging at a hobbling run on three legs. Anson discharged his second barrel, which was loaded with buck-shot, at the brute's head, and leapt aside to reload. Then the big revolvers bellowed, and, drilled through heart and brain, the animal staggered and fell dead even as Snaplus howled.

"One fellow two, coming!" he cried.

Out of the long grass where she had hidden came the mate of the slain beast. She was not so large as her consort, and had no mane, but, otherwise, she differed from him not at all, except that she did not pause. Head down, tail up, roaring with grief and the lust for vengeance, she came tearing through the grass at a tremendous pace.

Krang-ang! Crash-ash-ash!

The gun and the revolvers spoke together.

The big beast, checked in mid-career, gathered speed again, then, as another blast of lead drove through her lowered head, stumbled, rolled head over heels like a shot

rabbit, and, tumbling almost to the feet of the prancing Snaplus, grunted and died.

The black fellow, wild with excitement, jumped in and bestowed a blow that would have finished the beast had she needed it.

"One fellow, two fellow. We kill um all," he proclaimed to the world at large. "Wow-ow! Make corroborree."

"Not now," put in Anson hastily, for this was neither the time nor the place for a dancing celebration. "Take um, skin, one fellow, two fellow. We might as well have them," he added to his comrades. "And it will keep Snaplus quiet. Besides, we'd better lie low for a bit. Sound carries a long way here, I should say, and if there are any more inhabitants to match these they'll be on the lookout now."

"But if my uncle is here he will have heard also. Wouldn't it be better to look for him?"

"If he has heard he will start looking for us, and since he must know the place better, he can do it better," objected Anson. "My notion is that we should go slowly round the lake looking for any signs of him, or any other inhabitants. At the same time, we can look for a place to camp in where we will be safe for the night. I don't fancy sleeping in the open—at least, not without a good fire."

Maxwell and Harding heartily agreed with this, and when Snaplus had finished skinning the two lions—as they agreed to call the beasts for want of a better name—they hung the hides across the branches of a tree to dry and set out along the lake shore, keeping a sharp lookout on either hand.

They had gone some way when a strong smell of something in decay drew Snaplus into a little fern-shaded glade. He came bounding back.

"One fellow beast dead," he said. "Come look!"

They followed him, and round the remains of a large animal that seemed to have been somewhat like a tapir in life, though apparently it had had a snout so long that it was almost a trunk. Part of it had been devoured, and it was no pretty sight. They were turning away, anxious to get beyond reach of the appalling smell, when Snaplus darted forward, hauled something from one flank, and returned brandishing a spear.

"Blackfellow here, all same as me," he said. "One fellow spear."

"H'm! Yes; but not the sort of spear any other tribe uses that I ever knew of," said Anson, taking the weapon. "Look, Maxwell, it has a stone head."

Maxwell examined the obsidian head. It was truly the same material, but it had not been so skilfully worked as the old-time Maori weapons. Instead of being smoothly polished, the spear-head had merely been roughly chipped to shape, and the point was not very sharp.

"That settles the point whether there are natives here," he said. "And I should say that they are not at all civilised—not as civilised as Snaplus's people, for instance."

But one thing is certain. The fellow that threw this must be uncommonly strong, for that beast's hide was tough and it was driven deep by the look of it—eh, Snaplus?"

"Hard chuck. Heap strong fellow," confirmed Snaplus.

"Therefore we will be wise to go slow and keep a bright look-out. Up there among those rocks there seems to be a cave of sorts. Let's go and have a look."

He pointed to a kind of bastion of the surrounding cliffs, the lower part which appeared to be scalable. In a short while they had ascended to the mouth of the hole Maxwell had indicated. It was a cave, though a shallow one, and since it was close to the upper end of the lake, commanding a wide view, yet only to be approached by a narrow ledge, they decided to camp there for that night, and, indeed, until they had either found Professor Maxwell or decided to seek elsewhere.

A fallen tree furnished wood enough for a fire, and Snaplus, having a boomerang among his belongings, went out to procure fresh meat, accompanied by Maxwell, while Harding and Anson lit a fire.

The hunter had not far to seek for game. A flock of ducks—the same as those they had first seen—rose as they rustled through a bed of reeds by the lake shore. Instantly, Snaplus let fly his weapon. It whizzed among the birds, struck one down, jerked eccentrically aside and hit another, while two more fell before it dropped into the lake.

Almost as it splashed Snaplus was on the birds that had been hit. He wrung their necks to make assurance doubly sure, and, retrieving his boomerang, trotted back to the cave, where the birds were soon ready for cooking.

After they had eaten, the four rested, taking turns to keep watch. They had begun to think about turning in for a really satisfactory snooze, when Harding—who was on guard, seated in the further corner of the ledge with the cliff at his back—uttered an exclamation.

"Something on the lake!" he cried. "Keep well down and be ready! It's coming this way."

(To be continued.)

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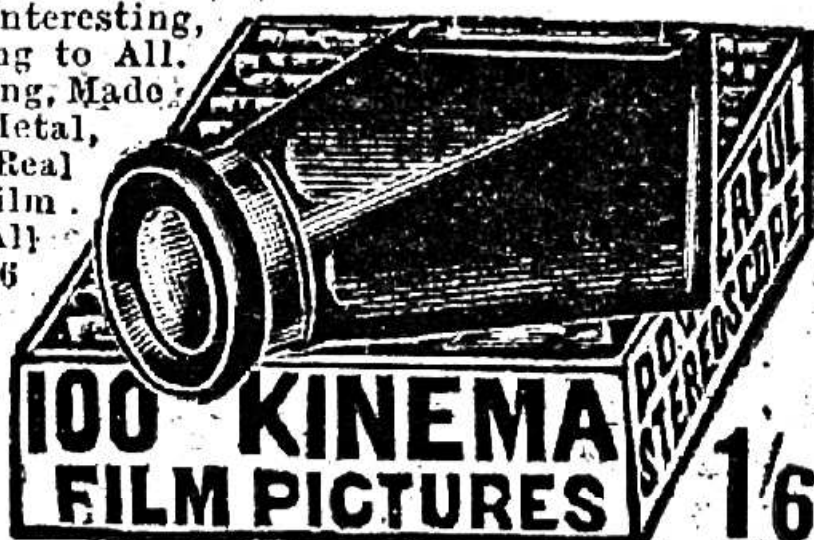
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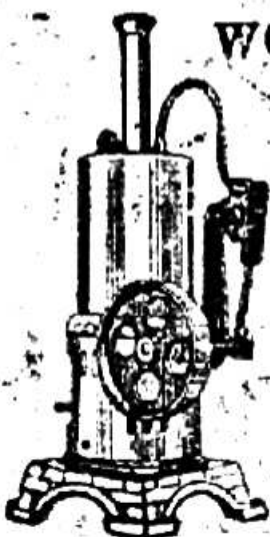
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