

No. 329.—Grand "Footer" Story of St. Frank's Wonderful Right-Winger!

THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY
1½D



THE MYSTERY FOOTBALLER.

September 24, 1921. New Nelson Lee Detective Serial Just Started!



A Long, Complete Story of St. Frank's, dealing with the further adventures of NIPPER & CO., is now on sale in

THE NUGGET LIBRARY

No. 57.

Price 3d.

It is one of the best yarns of St. Frank's ever written, and deals with a rousing rebellion at the old school, wherein Nipper & Co. are the principal actors. The title of story is

"REBELS OF ST. FRANK'S!"

If you are at all interested in stories of Nipper & Co. you cannot afford to miss it.

New Long-Complete-Story Books Now on Sale!

THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY.

Fourpence
Per Volume.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY.

Fourpence
Per Volume.

THE NUGGET LIBRARY. 3d. Per Vol.

NO. 570. THE MILLIONAIRE WINGER.

Superb story of the footer field. By J. O. Standish.

NO. 571. BAYNE OF THE BACK-BLOCKS.

A thrilling yarn of the Boxing Ring. By Eric W. Townsend.

NO. 572. REDSKIN AND RUSTLER.

A stirring story of adventure in the Wild West.

By Gordon Wallace.

NO. 573. THE THREE MACS.

Grand tale of schoolboy life. By Jack North.

NO. 574. THE CINEMA-ATHLETE.

A splendid story of adventure in film-land. By Walter Edwards.

NO. 188. THE LEOPARD MAN.

A story of thrilling African adventure. By the author of "The Man Who Forgot."

NO. 189. THE MYSTERY OF THE 100 CHESTS.

A tale of Chinese mystery and London adventure, introducing Sexton Blake, Tinker, and the Hon. John Lawless.

NO. 190. THE VALLEY OF FEAR.

A fine detective story, introducing Mlle. Claire Delisle, Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake, and Tinker.

NO. 191. THE KING OF THE STABLE;

OR, THE NEW TRAINER.

A rousing racing story.

NO. 192. THE SIGN OF THE SERPENT.

A tale of mystery in London and adventure in India.

NO. 55. THE PET OF ST. FRANK'S.

A rollicking story of school-life, introducing Nipper, Hardforth, Fullwood & Co., and other St. Frank's Juniors.

NO. 56. MESHES OF MYSTERY.

An amazing story of detective work and adventure in London and Dover, introducing Nelson Lee and Nipper.



THE MYSTERY FOOTBALLER.

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Traitors of Caribou Pass," "The Fury of Thunder Rapids," "His House in Disorder," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SAINTS VERSUS GRAMMARIANS.

"GOAL!"

A perfect roar went up round the ropes of Little Side—a roar from scores of junior throats.

"Hurrah!"

"Well, played, Pitt!"

Reginald Pitt, of the Remove, glowed with pleasure. The first match of the season was being played at St. Frank's. It was a junior match, of course, and the Remove eleven was playing Bannington Grammar School.

The game had not been going for more than three minutes. It had, in fact, only just started, and not even the most optimistic St. Frank's supporters had hoped for a goal so soon.

But Reginald Pitt, the outside-right, had brought off a wonderful individual effort. Seizing the ball when the Grammarian left-back was a trifle careless, Pitt rushed it right into the goal mouth, and kicked the leather well and truly into the corner of the net. It was the most unexpected thing that could have happened.

"Ripping, old man!" I exclaimed, slapping Pitt upon the back as we went to line up for the re-start. "I knew you'd do some wonderful things in this game. Keep it up, and we'll wipe the Grammar School hollow."

The game re-started, and the Grammarians were evidently determined to

equalise as soon as possible. This early reverse had taken them by surprise, and they were now on their mettle.

The Grammar School had sent a strong team to St. Frank's. The captain was a fellow named Gordon. The previous season Arthur Grey had been skipper, but I understood that he was now among the seniors, and we shouldn't see anything more of him. The Bannington team was composed as follows: Bales; Hayford, Gregg; Collins, Howell, Freeman; Brown, Davis, Gordon, Benson, Greene. We knew most of these fellows, for they had nearly all been in the cricket team. They are a very decent collection of juniors, and they had promised to give us a good game.

I was captain of the St. Frank's side, and this was made up in the following manner: Handforth; Yorke, Burton; Church, Talmadge, Somerton; Christine, Grey, myself, Tregellis-West, Pitt.

If the Grammarian team was strong, so was ours, and I was very optimistic of bringing off a victory. We had heard a great deal of the Grammarians, and we had been informed that they could lick us hollow. It was our intention to show them that we could do something in the licking line, too.

Thanks to Pitt, we had opened splendidly. And, once having gained this advantage, we were anxious to maintain the lead. It certainly seemed as though we should do so, for every fellow was playing with all his skill and energy.

Sir Montie and Pitt, on the right wing,

were a splendid pair: They worked together beautifully.

Watching the game, one was reminded of the tactics of professionals. There was nothing slipshod or careless about Tregellis-West and Pitt. Their passing was well-nigh perfect, and it was very seldom indeed that they made a miss-kick.

Soon after the game had re-started the ball swung away to the left wing, and Christine had a good chance. He ran the ball up the touch line well. But he was unfortunate. For, just as he was about to centre, Hayford, one of the Grammarian backs, charged him, and sent him flying. And the leather was sent back into mid-field with all the strength of Hayford's kick.

By good luck, the ball fell practically at Gordon's foot. Gordon was the centre-forward, and he was supposed to be very hot stuff. And now he proved that his reputation was well earned.

Without a second's hesitation he kicked the ball as it came to him, and sent in a "first-timer" with such force and precision that Handforth scarcely had a chance. He was not looking for a shot then. He was, in fact, caught napping—and Handforth was a splendid goalie.

Slam!

The leather shot past Handforth, and rammed its way into the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well kicked, Gordon!"

"Well played, sir!"

Gordon received applause from friends and enemies alike. It had certainly been a well-placed shot.

"This is going to be a jolly hot game," remarked McClure at the ropes. "One each, and they're going all out! My hat! I'd like to see Pitt get busy again. He's the best man we've got—even better than Nipper!"

The teams lined up, and Morrow, who was acting as referee, blew his whistle. The game started off with a rush. The Grammarians had the ball, and, working well together, they swept down the field. But Yorke and Burton put up a strong defence. The leather did not get past them, but was sent straight down to Talmadge, at centre-half.

Talmadge looked about him quickly. He was beset by two Grammarians, and with commendable coolness he lifted the ball and dropped it at the feet of Sir

Montie. Without hesitation, Tregellis-West dribbled the leather up the field. A half-back came bearing down upon him. And then, at the last moment, Montie made a neat ground pass to Pitt.

There was a roar from the onlookers.

"Go it, Pitt!"

"Centre, centre!"

But Pitt was not centring yet. Near the touch line, he raced up towards goal. One of the Grammarian backs charged upon him. The way in which Pitt tricked the back brought forth a delightful roar of applause.

He suddenly stopped dead, and Gregg blundered past. When he looked round, Pitt was ten yards away, and just upon the goal line. From there he sent in a calm, perfectly placed centre. I was there, waiting. The ball dropped at my foot, and without hesitation I kicked with all my power.

Bates, the goalie fisted the leather desperately. It bounced out, and I jumped, heading it just beyond Bates' reach, and just under the cross bar.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well played!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"It was Pitt's goal!" roared somebody.

"That's the way, Pitt!"

Certainly, I did not claim very much credit for myself. If Pitt had not centred so beautifully I could never have headed that goal. Again Pitt had proved himself to be of incalculable value to the side.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, St. Frank's!"

And we certainly went it—with all our speed and strength. We were now one up, and we were determined to make this lead even bigger before half-time, if possible. Whether we should do so remained to be seen.

As a matter of fact, it was the opposite way about. For twenty minutes no goals were scored, but the football was of the highest order. Time after time, both Bates and Handforth were called upon to save. And they did so magnificently.

Pitt had sent in some good centres, but, unfortunately, none of these had been converted into goals, not because of any failure on the part of the inside men, but because Bates was an exceptionally smart goalie.

And then, just before half-time, the Grammarians made a great spurt. They compelled Yorke to concede a corner.

Browne, the visiting outside-left, took a kick, and he sent in a dropping centre, which fell practically in front of the goal mouth. There was a wild scramble. Handforth sisted out, but his fist didn't reach the ball. It dropped to the ground, and for a moment there was a melee.

And then one of the Grammarians pushed the ball out of the general turmoil, and it rolled into the net. Handforth didn't even see it, and he was hardly to be blamed, considering the confusion.

But Morrow pointed to the centre.

"Goal!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" snorted Hubbard. "What a rotten piece of luck! That oughtn't to have been a goal!"

"Oh, it was fair enough," said Armstrong. "It was one of those lucky ones. Perhaps we shall have our turn soon."

The whistle for half-time went shortly afterwards, with the score two-all. The Grammarians were highly pleased with themselves, for they had not hoped to equalise by half-time.

Indeed, they had begun to fear that they would never equalise at all. They were mortally afraid of the right wing, and both Pitt and Montie were well marked. But these two forwards of ours were well capable of dealing with any defensive tactics that the visitors might like to adopt.

"Keep it up in the second half, and we'll have them beaten to a cinder!" I said, in the pavilion. "And don't forget to be ready for Pitt's centres. I've never known him to play so splendidly as he's playing now—there's not a man in the first eleven who can compare with him."

"Oh, draw it mild!" Pitt said modestly.

He knew himself that he was playing well, but he had no inflated ideas about his own powers. He was just doing the best he could for the Remove—for St. Frank's. And he was very delighted that his efforts were proving of great service to the side.

The whistle blew for the second half.

The teams started off, fresh and active. But, this time, it was we who assumed the aggressive. We bore down upon the visitors' goal with grim determination. Both the backs were beaten within the first minute. But Bates was as unconquerable as ever. We couldn't get past him.

The play swung down into our half for

a time, but both Yorke and Burton were playing well. They kept a sound defence, and not once did the Grammarian forwards get through.

From a throw-in, Church passed the ball to Talmadge. And Talmadge, without hesitating, fed the right wing.

Pitt had the leather, and he tipped it neatly to Tregellis-West. Montie passed it on to me. But I was not in a position to shoot, for I was beset by two of the enemy.

Without hesitation, I swung the ball back to Pitt, who was in a favourable position. He trapped it neatly, made circles round an opposing back, and rushed for the goal. He didn't centre, for I was off side, and couldn't touch the ball. So Pitt tried a shot on chance.

It was a low shot which skimmed about a foot over the ground. And it went in at an angle which was extremely difficult to judge. So swiftly did it come that Bates gave one leap, and was even then too late.

The ball struck the inside of the upright, and bounced into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Pitt!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

"Another one, and we'll have 'em wiped out of existence," I said briefly. "They'll never be able to equalise if we get two up. Pitt you're better than ever!"

"Good man!" chuckled Grey.

Pitt only smiled, and went back to his position in field. The game commenced once more, and Pitt did not relax his efforts for a moment. Whenever he got the ball he worked as though his very life depended upon success in this match. It was just the enthusiasm of a good footballer. Pitt was making no special effort. He was just playing his own game.

And now, as the minutes passed, the match became more and more exciting, and exhilarating. The crowds round the ropes yelled themselves hoarse whenever there seemed a possibility of scoring.

Desperately, our visitors attempted to equalise. And their great efforts culminated in success only five minutes before time. Davis, the inside-left, was responsible, and it had to be admitted that his shot was a real beauty. Nobody blamed Handforth for letting it through.

But the disappointment was keen.

"Oh, that's done it!" groaned Jack Grey, as we lined up. "We can't possibly score again in these two or three minutes! Still, it'll be a draw, and that's better than a defeat."

The crowd was silent, as play recommenced. They had been confidently expecting a victory, and now, just at the last moment, the visitors had scored this equalising goal. It was terribly galling.

"Go it, St. Frank's!"

"Let's have another!"

"Just one more!"

"Pitt—Pitt!"

And it was Pitt who made a tremendous effort after three further minutes had passed. The referee, indeed, had the whistle in his hand, and he glanced at his watch two or three times.

It seemed hopeless for us to score. We tried again and again, but our combinations were broken up every time.

And then, at the last moment, when every hope seemed dead, Yorke was fouled. A free kick was awarded, and our best back took a long kick and dropped the ball right at my feet. Without hesitation, I slammed the leather towards the net. Bates could only do one thing—he kicked. The ball went spinning away, twisting trickily. It seemed certain that it would go over the touch line, and Grey didn't even attempt to stop it.

But Reginald Pitt was racing up like an express train. In the very nick of time he saved the ball from going outside. Then, quite unmarked, he rushed forward and sent in a curving shot which completely bewildered Bates. The ball went in between the goal posts high up, just at the corner.

Bates leapt desperately. His fingers touched the ball, but could not save it. It dropped behind him, into the net.

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, good old Pitt!"

"Goal!"

"Well played, outside-right!"

The whistle blew shrilly.

"St. Frank's win!"

"Where's Pitt—grab him!"

The crowd streamed on to the field, and before Pitt could escape he was yanked up, and raised shoulder high.

He had saved the match, and had given St. Frank's the victory. That last goal of his had been a glorious effort, and I

marvelled at the cleverness he had displayed. He was certainly too good to be playing in a junior match—but we were only too glad of his services.

"Give him three cheers!"

"Hurrah!"

Everybody was enormously delighted, and with every reason. For this was the first match of the season, and we had won it. It promised to be a happy augury for the future.

The excitement ran high, and it was some little time before Pitt escaped the attentions of the excited Removites. But, at last, he was permitted to go, and he escaped to the Pavilion, and rubbed himself down. Soon afterwards he was attired in Etons, and he went into the Ancient House.

In Study E, in the Remove passage, Jack Grey, his study mate, congratulated him heartily upon his success.

"I didn't expect it of you, Reggie," said Grey. "You've been so miserable lately that I hardly expected you to put up such a fine show. It was great, old man—absolutely stunning."

"Oh, I don't know," said Pitt. "I did the best I could, of course. But some of my centres weren't as true as they might have been. Twice Nipper could have scored if I had only been a bit more accurate."

"Rats!" said Grey. "You played a great game."

Pitt was soon left to himself, and, curiously enough, the sparkle left his eyes, and he sat down looking straight before him thoughtfully and with a kind of dull depression.

His cheeriness, which had been so marked during the game, left him completely. And practically all the fellows in the Remove had grown accustomed to this new attitude of Pitt's.

Nobody could understand why he was so worried—why he always went about looking sad and sorely troubled.

But, as a matter of fact, Pitt had much on his mind.

There had been great trouble in his family of late. He had known nothing of it until his arrival back from the summer holiday trip. Then he had returned home to find that his father had been ruined.

It was a terrible blow.

For Mr. Pitt's downfall had been complete. The home which Pitt had known since childhood was gone, and in the

hands of an oily rascal named Simon Raspe. It was this man who had ruined Mr. Pitt.

From the very first Reginald was quite sure that the man had deliberately swindled his father.

But, unfortunately, there was no proof of his guilt. There was no possible way of proving that this man had wrongfully appropriated Mr. Pitt's fortune. And Reginald was sick at heart as he thought of his parents' predicament.

Nothing had been left to them.

Their home had been taken, and practically all their personal belongings. And now, while Pitt was at St. Frank's—his fees for his term having been paid before the crash—his father and mother were living in poverty in a little boarding-house in Fulham.

Pitt had almost wept with mortification when he found out his parents' plight. They were in the last stage of despair. For all their funds had gone, and they would never descend to borrowing money from friends or others. Things were even so bad that Mr. Pitt himself was obliged to seek employment. He did not mind what, so long as he got some money in.

But Pitt knew that his father had found nothing so far, and the thought appalled him.

How were his parents living?

How would they be able to pay for their lodging and their food?

These were questions which worried the junior more than he could say. He had done everything he possibly could, and he was anxious to do some work of his own, if such a thing was possible. His one idea was to get money in—so that he could send it to his parents.

He did not feel that it was right for him to be at St. Frank's, living in comparative luxury, while his father and mother were in want. But, Mr. Pitt had pointed out, the fees were paid, and there was no reason why the junior should not remain at the school.

Another point which gave Reginald much food for thought was the fact that Simon Raspe had a big house near Bannington, some little distance from the outskirts of the town. Pitt had found this out almost by accident. And the knowledge had thrilled him at first.

For he thought it quite possible that he would be able to do something—that he

might even be able to discover some secret which might unmask Simon Raspe for the scoundrel he was.

He thought over these matters deeply, and it was hardly surprising that he went about, absent-minded, and with never a trace of a smile upon his face. Football, indeed, was the only recreation which made him forget.

Pitt remembered a meeting he had had with a cheerful young man named Tom Howard. He was a member of the Bannington Football Club, and he had been greatly impressed by Pitt's excellent play. Howard, in fact, had invited Pitt to look in at the club grounds whenever he liked.

The junior had not taken advantage of this offer so far, for no opportunity had occurred.

However, he meant to avail himself of it soon. The Bannington Football Club were ambitious, and this year, for the first time, it was included in the English League. It was now, to tell the truth, a first-class team—although, of course, it was not in the first division.

But they played League football at Bannington, and the town supporters of the Club were proud of their eleven. This year they had been doing well in their opening matches, and they are going all out for promotion.

Pitt was naturally quite interested. It filled him with pleasant anticipation to think that he might become acquainted with all the members of the professional eleven. They were good fellows, all of them, in the Bannington Club. Tom Howard was a fair example of the others.

Pitt never realised what his first visit to the Club grounds was to lead to.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET OF THORNTON HOUSE.

MONDAY evening found Pitt with very little to do. There was no football practice on hand, and the evening was a fine one, clear and bright.

Directly afternoon lessons were over Pitt got out his bicycle, and started out. He did not wait for tea. To-day he was feeling rather more depressed than usual, and he felt that he wanted to be alone—at first, anyway.

He decided to cycle to Bannington, and call upon Tom Howard. This was a good

opportunity. The reason for Pitt's depression was not far to seek.

For that morning he had received a letter from his mother—a letter full of cheerfulness and hope. But it contained one item of news which filled Pitt with misgiving.

His father had not obtained any employment—and this meant, of course, that money was extremely tight. If only he could find something to do—if only he could get some money from some source!

"My hat! It would be glorious!" Pitt told himself as he cycled along. "But what can I do? How can I earn money? There's no way—I couldn't get a job if I tried. Nobody would give me one."

His depression increased, and he rode slowly along towards Bannington. The evening sun was quite bright, and the countryside was looking fresh and green, in spite of the fact that Autumn was at hand.

Somewhere near Bannington, Pitt was on the point of passing a side road. He remembered this well, for one evening during the previous week he had met with a slight mishap there. It was on this occasion that he had first discovered that Simon Raspe lived in the district.

And now, by a curious chance, a big motor-car came gliding out into the main road. Pitt recognised the car in an instant. He quickly bent his head, so that he should not be recognised by the occupants.

In that one brief glance he recognised the occupants—the two men who occupied the front seats. One was Simon Raspe, and the other a man named Stretton, whom Pitt had met before.

They passed on towards Bannington without having recognised the junior. Indeed, they took very little notice of him, and possibly did not see him at all. To get out of sight quickly, Pitt turned up the side road.

And, having done so, he came to a decision. Why shouldn't he go on, and have a look at Thornton House—Raspe's residence? He knew for a fact that Raspe himself was away. And so it would be quite safe to have a look at the place closely. Pitt took great interest in it, for he badly wanted to do something which would bring about the man's undoing.

He rode more quickly now, and, within five minutes, he arrived at a white gateway. Beyond lay the drive, and

Thornton House itself stood back from the road, surrounded, for the most part, by high trees.

Pitt dismounted from his machine, and placed his bicycle in a shallow ditch, where it was nearly concealed.

Then he walked along the high bank which skirted the still higher wall of the grounds. He was hoping to be able to peer over, so that he could see what was going on beyond.

And he soon came to a spot where a large oak tree grew near to the wall. It was a simple matter for him to scramble up, and look over. This was the first time he had paid a visit to the place in daylight.

He found himself gazing across a well kept series of lawns and pleasure gardens. The hedges were well clipped and beautifully laid out. The flower-beds were perfect, and the house itself, beyond, was a magnificent building. Pitt clenched his fist, and shook it.

"And all this belongs to that rogue!" he muttered fiercely. "By Jove! One day, before long, he'll find himself in Queer Street! He ruined my pater, but the truth of that has got to come out yet!"

Pitt continued to look over. He could see one or two people moving about near some outhouses, just near the main building. He could also see the windows of Simon Raspe's library. They were French windows, and one stood half-open. Probably Raspe had only just gone into Bannington, and would soon be back.

And then, almost before Pitt realised it, something of a startling nature was taking place. At first, he heard a loud scream in the distance.

It startled him a bit, and he wondered what the cause of it could be.

Then he saw that large volumes of smoke were pouring through the doorway of the little outhouse. The figure of a woman came rushing out. She was screaming frantically.

"Hallo!" muttered Pitt. "Looks like a fire."

And a fire it undoubtedly was. Not dangerous, perhaps; but certainly alarming. Dense clouds of smoke were rolling out of the doorway, and out of the window of the outbuilding. And now, as Pitt watched, he saw lurid tongues of flame appearing.

He guessed that the woman had been at work in there—lighting a fire, perhaps.

"I'll bet I know how it happened!" Pitt told himself. "I expect the silly ass of a woman was using paraffin to start the fire with. And before she knew where she was the can caught fire, or something. Anyhow, that building's burning pretty brightly."

Indeed, unless it was quickly put-out the flames would spread. There were other outbuildings near by, some of them adjoining the house. A small fire of this kind might easily lead to a devastating conflagration.

Those screams of the woman had brought the servants of the house rushing out. Two or three men appeared, and other women. And Pitt could see them running about like so many rabbits.

Pails of water were brought, and they were thrown upon the fire. Two gardeners who had been at work left their flower-beds and hastened to the scene.

And it struck Pitt, quite suddenly, that the house itself was now quite empty. Undoubtedly, everybody was out there, at the back. Then Pitt caught sight of the French windows of the library.

His heart seemed to give a leap.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, his eyes gleaming.

A startling thought had come to him. And, without waiting to give it full consideration, he put it into instant operation. He acted on the impulse—and it is a well-known fact that many big discoveries have been made through an impulsive action of this kind.

Pitt dropped over the wall, and landed on the other side. Then, running hard, he raced across the lawns, and made straight for those French windows. He was not seen by a soul.

For all the servants were bestowing their full attention upon that burning outbuilding, exactly as Pitt had reckoned. He reached the windows, and slipped into the room. And there he stood, looking round him, with his heart beating a sharp tattoo against his ribs.

"Well, I'm in!" he muttered. "And now for it!"

He had one idea in mind—and that was to search for any papers that might serve as a clue to Simon Raspe's guilt. Even as Pitt stood there he realised how improbable it was that he would be successful. For it was almost certain that Raspe would never leave papers of any importance about.

However, he had started upon the adventure now, and he had to go through with it. He saw that the room was a large one, well-appointed, and supplied with every article of comfort.

Against one wall, there stood a mahogany bureau, beautifully inlaid. In another corner there stood a big desk, with any amount of drawers. He tried them first, and found that they were locked.

It never struck him that the consequences might be serious if he were found. And he was always ready to run like a deer if he was surprised. But not a sound came from beyond the heavy oaken door of the library.

He gave his attention to the bureau.

He found that the doors were unlocked, and, with trembling fingers, he opened them, one after the other. He had examined three, without result, and then he tried the fourth. It seemed to be sticking, somehow, and would only open three or four inches. But he was enabled to see in, and he could catch sight of several bulky packages.

And one of these, to his great excitement, had one word scrawled upon the face of it in blue pencil.

That word was "Pitt."

What could it mean? Surely that package contained documents and papers concerning Mr. Simon Raspe's business relations with Mr. Reginald Pitt! At all events, the junior decided to examine that package without delay.

But he couldn't get the package out, and the drawer continued to stick. Then, just as he was beginning to get rather impatient, he heard a quick sound of running footsteps out in the passage. They came nearer and nearer, and Pitt knew at once that somebody was coming into the library.

He looked round desperately.

Just for a second he thought of bolting out into the garden, but he realised that there was hardly time for him to get out of sight. The sun was shining brilliantly outside.

He pushed the drawer in, and then leapt behind an oriental screen which stood across the corner just near him. And he was only in the nick of time. For, even as he dodged, the door opened.

A man entered—a short, stumpy fellow, dressed in the uniform of a butler. He was greatly excited, and breathing hard. He didn't look round the library, but

just went across to a pedestal near the fire-place. And then Pitt saw why he had come in such a hurry.

Upon that pedestal stood a patent fire extinguisher—one of those affairs which merely require the end to be knocked to release the compressed charge. The man seized it, and hurried out.

Pitt breathed a sigh of relief.

"Phew! That was a near thing!" he murmured.

He didn't move for a second or two, thinking that it would be wiser to remain in concealment until all was perfectly still. He felt fully justified in being where he was.

He had no nefarious intentions. His object was an honourable one, for his sole desire was to obtain evidence of Simon Raspe's villainy. Pitt, in fact, was playing the part of amateur detective, and playing it quite well.

After a brief minute had elapsed he decided that it would be safe for him to emerge, and he was quite grim in his determination to get that package.

He heard a faint shout in the distance, and once more he paused. He leaned back against the wall. The next moment he uttered a gasp. The solid wall itself seemed to be collapsing in his rear!

Pitt made one big effort to recover his balance, but failed.

He toppled over, and vanished through a big gap in the wall. He fell upon his back down a short flight of stone steps, and he landed with considerable force, bruised and dazed.

A dull thud sounded.

He was in complete darkness, and there was a damp, earthy smell in the air. For the life of him he couldn't understand what had happened at first. Then he sat up, and finally scrambled to his feet. His back was aching a bit, and his right elbow was grazed.

"My goodness!" he muttered.

The truth was coming to him. There could be only one explanation of this extraordinary occurrence.

He had come through a secret doorway.

In some way he must have touched a spring or catch, when he leaned against the wall. Thus, he was precipitated backwards into this black cavity. And now the door had closed automatically. Pitt was so surprised that he could hardly think clearly to begin with.

He fumbled in his pockets and found a

box of matches. He struck one, and the dim yellow light flickered out. He held it aloft, and saw that he was standing in a stone passage with an arched roof. The floor was of stone, too. And, before him, was a door of some hard wood. Some mechanism could be seen.

"Well, this is the queerest thing I've ever struck!" muttered Pitt, in amazement. "My only hat! I wonder if I shall be able to get out!"

He struck another match, and commenced fingering the mechanism on the doorway. But he couldn't tell how it worked, and he was greatly handicapped by the fact that he could only use one hand.

And the matches kept going out.

He tried hard for five minutes, and made no impression on the door. He pulled at it, and shook it. But it seemed as solid as the wall itself. It was very galling, and annoying.

Just when he could have got that package, this happens. And here he was, within a few yards of it, and he couldn't reach it.

He gave up trying to open the door, for it was evidently useless, and he only had seven or eight matches left in the box. If he struck all these, and still couldn't open the door, what would his position be?

He would be trapped in this place, in pitchy darkness. And for him to explore the tunnel would be difficult and possibly dangerous.

And so, very wisely, he kept those matches in reserve.

For some little time he persevered at the door in darkness, thinking that he might hit upon the secret catch by chance. But there was nothing doing. And, with sore fingers, Pitt gave up hope.

He turned, and struck one of his matches.

Then, holding the light ahead of him, he walked quickly down the tunnel. By what he could see, it had not been used for years. Perhaps Simon Raspe himself didn't know of its existence—or it was likely that Raspe had built this exit himself, to provide a means of escape in case of emergency.

Pitt's match soon went out, and he struck another. The passage went downwards at quite a steep angle. Then, after a while, it bore away round to the

left. The floor here was muddy, and the walls dripping with moisture. Pitt shivered in spite of himself.

The tunnel was ghostly and eerie. Two more matches were struck, and he was rather alarmed to see that he only had three left. The tunnel did not seem to be coming to an end.

He went on more quickly, shielding the lighted match with his hand. It burnt out, and he paused to ignite the next. Finally, he had one left, and he stood for a moment or two in the darkness, rather scared.

What he would do after this match had gone he couldn't imagine. But he would have to grope his way forward as best he could. And, for all he knew, there might be pitfalls.

He felt in his pockets, and to his great satisfaction he found an old catalogue of school books which he had been examining the previous day. It was only a small thing. But, torn up, and converted into a long torch it would burn for a minute or two.

He made it into three torches, and then wondered fearfully if this last match would strike. He drew it across the box, and it spluttered, and burst into flame. From it he lit the first of his little torches, and then hurried on as quickly as he could go.

As it happened, he needn't have been so alarmed.

For he had hardly traversed another twelve feet before he came to a right-angle turn. Going along this new course he was immensely relieved to see a drab kind of light ahead. It was the light of day.

"Oh, that's good!" he muttered. "But where the dickens have I come out? Goodness only knows what I've let myself in for!"

He arrived at the end of the passage, and found that a flight of stone steps led upwards. Above him he could see a mass of green. Mounting cautiously, he finally discovered himself in the very heart of a little shrubbery. And this exit to the tunnel was in the very centre of a brick well, the sides of which were by no means deep. He hauled himself up without any trouble.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he murmured. "I never thought I should get out so easily. And now where am I?"

He went cautiously through the trees,

and he trod on the soft bed of dead leaves—leaves which had fallen for many a year. He was convinced that this tunnel had not been used for a very long time.

Then, as he parted the foliage, he looked out. To his tremendous surprise, he found that he was within twenty yards of the outer wall, and it would be the easiest thing in the world for him to scramble over and reach the road.

He lost no time in covering the remaining distance. He got to the wall, gave one leap, and reached the top. Then he pulled himself over, glanced up and down, and dropped into the road.

CHAPTER III.

A WELCOME OPPORTUNITY.

REGINALD PITT found his bicycle without any trouble. A glance over the grounds of Thornton House had told him that the fire had been extinguished, and all the excitement had died down.

It was just as well, perhaps, that he had got away when he did.

And he was inwardly excited.

For his discovery had set him thinking. It was all for the best, he believed that he had not taken that package. And he had discovered a secret way right into the library, which could be used at dead of night after the household had gone to sleep.

"Why, it's amazingly lucky," he uttered. "I can't come here in the middle of the night myself, but there's somebody else who can. I'll tell Mr. Lee all about this, and I wouldn't mind betting that he takes advantage of the knowledge."

And so, thrilled by the thought of what he had to tell, he rode swiftly away. At first he thought of abandoning his original idea of going to the Football Club's ground. But, on second thoughts, he saw no reason why he should not do so.

It was still early in the evening, and he would have plenty of time to tell Nelson Lee about his discovery. And so, when he reached the main road he went straight into the town, through the High Street to the further outskirts where the football ground was situated.

The big doors were all closed, and Pitt stood looking at them rather disappointedly. Then he saw that there was a small door just near by. He went to

this, and pushed it open. A short, stumpy man came up, and eyed him without any particular favour.

"Sorry, young gent, but you can't come in here," he said.

"Why not?"

"Agin the rules."

"But I want to see Mr. Howard," said Pitt. "He asked me to come. He told me I could call whenever I liked."

"What'll your name be?"

"Pitt."

"You can walk in," said the man. "Mr. Howard did mention that you might be calling, and I'd forgot it for the minute. You'll find Mr. Howard on the field, and if you hurry up you'll be able to have a word with him before the match starts."

"Match!" echoed Pitt. "At this time?"

The man nodded.

"Quite private, of course," he said.

"It's a practice match, you see. The boys are getting ready for Wednesday's match."

Pitt was very pleased. He had hardly expected this. It would be quite enjoyable to witness this professional match, even though it was only a practice game. He hurried past the turnstiles, climbed up the embankment, and saw the excellent field in front of him.

He was just behind one of the goals, and two groups of players, wearing different coloured shirts, were punting footballs about.

Pitt searched for Tom Howard, and soon found him. He walked down to the railings, and gave a hail.

Several men looked round, and Howard at once answered.

He came running up and took Pitt's hand.

"Good!" he said. "Glad to see you, young 'un. You're just in time to see us start. Can you stop for a while?"

"I'll see the game out," replied Pitt.

"That's the style," said Tom Howard.

"Just wait a minute, I'll introduce you to our skipper—Fred Hearne—one of the best. Hi, Fred!"

One of the other men came up—a cleanly built man of about twenty-seven, with fair hair, and frank open face.

"This is Pitt, one of the St. Frank's juniors," said Howard. "I'm sure he'll be pleased to meet you. He's jolly hot stuff at football, and I wish you could have seen him play."

"Perhaps I haven't lost the chance," said Hearne pleasantly.

He was somewhat condescending in his manner, and this was hardly to be wondered at. Pitt was a schoolboy, and certainly did not look much of a footballer in his Eton suit, although he was sturdily built.

Fred Hearne was the captain of the Bannington first eleven, and was considered to be one of the best centre-forwards in the country. The Bannington Club had secured him at considerable expense from a First Division Midland team.

And before they could say much further another man appeared, but not one of the players this time. He was a big stout individual, attired in a tweed suit and a bowler hat stuck at the back of his head. He looked a bluff, hearty man, and his clean-shaven fat face was full of good humour.

"Who's this young gentleman?" he asked as he came up.

"Our manager, Mr. Page," murmured Tom Howard.

Pitt was introduced, and Mr. Page regarded him with slight interest. Then he reminded the players that the daylight wouldn't last for ever, and they would be well advised to start the play at once.

"We're a man short," said the captain. "But that can't be helped. One side will have to be without an inside-right."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Mr. Page. "You'll be able to have a decent game, and I can see how you're shaping."

Tom Howard hesitated, and grinned.

"It's only a practice match," he remarked. "What about asking this youngster to take the absent place? He might be able to help a bit."

Hearne chuckled, and Mr. Page burst into a broad smile.

"He might spoil the game," he objected.

"Not on your life, sir," said Howard. "I've seen him play, and I can tell you he's as hot as pepper. I'd like to try him in a game like this, too. After all, it doesn't matter, does it?"

"I've got no objection," said the manager. "And I suppose it's better to play with two full sides—even if one man does happen to be a dud."

"Do you hear, Pitt?" asked Tom

Howard. "You can play in this match, if you like. Would you care to?"

Pitt flushed with pleasure.

"I'd love it," he replied eagerly. "But I'm afraid my form won't show up very well among——"

"That doesn't matter," interrupted Howard. "Rush off to the Pavilion, and our trainer will give you some togs. But you mustn't be more than three minutes. You'll find Hogan a bit blunt, but he's all right."

Pitt rushed off, and Hogan, the trainer, proved to be a grizzled individual with a short way of speaking which was somewhat disconcerting. However, Pitt got what he wanted, and soon turned out in knickers and jersey.

The change in his appearance was remarkable. He looked business-like now, and the instant he went on the field, Mr. Page blew his whistle, for he was acting as referee. He wanted to watch every movement of his men.

Pitt took his place as inside-right. But, before the game started, Tom Howard suggested that he should change to outside—his own position. It made very little difference to the other man, who was just as much at home inside.

"Right you are. Off you go!" said the manager.

He blew his whistle and the game started. It was a proper game, too, every man doing his utmost to play at the top of his form.

The two Bannington teams were here—the first and the reserve. But it was not a game of the first against the reserve. The different players were intermingled, and both sides were almost equal strength.

For ten or fifteen minutes Pitt had very little chance. The outside wing, probably because he was there received no attention. Pitt hardly saw the ball. But then a kick from mid-field happened to come his way. In all probability it was not intended for him at all. But he pounced upon it as a cat pounces upon a mouse.

The next second he was rushing up field with the ball under perfect control. Two of the opposing backs barred his way. He wound round them without any trouble, got well up, and then delivered a beautiful centre.

The ball was seized upon at once, and slammed into the net.

"Fine!" said Tom Howard. "That was great, Pitt!"

The other players were looking at Pitt rather curiously, for that effort of his had taken them by surprise.

And when the game was resumed Pitt found that he was fed fairly frequently by the half-backs. They had seen what he could do, and now they were giving him further opportunities.

Pitt took advantage of them at once.

He was even more keen in this game than he had been in the match against Bannington Grammar School. For here he was playing with professionals against professionals. He felt that it was up to him to do even better than usual.

He did!

Again and again he had the opposing defence guessing. Again and again he beat all their tactics, and left them stranded. They could do nothing with him. He was faster, he was trickier, and every time he "got there."

His centres were accurate and perfectly placed. He didn't miss a kick once, and he had his opponents pulled and winded while he was still as fresh as paint. Every time the ball came to him he surprised the whole field.

By the end of the match there wasn't a professional there who didn't regard him with unqualified admiration. For a boy to play in this way was astounding. They hadn't believed it possible.

For he was playing against men now—not boys.

And the net result of Pitt's inclusion in the game was that his side won the match by eight goals to two! Five of Pitt's centres had been converted into goals, and this was very certain proof of his cleverness. True, the goalkeeper was quite poor, but that made very little difference to Pitt's own brilliance.

If he hadn't centred the ball so well, the inside men could never have scored. Pitt seemed to know exactly where to place the leather, and his judgment was really astonishing.

"You're absolutely a wonder, my lad!" exclaimed Tom Howard, when the game was over. "I didn't think you had it in you! I knew you were pretty good, but this just about takes the biscuit!"

"I'm glad you think I did all right," said Pitt.

"All right!" put in Mr. Page, coming

up. "Good gracious me! You took the shine out of some of my men, I can tell you! It's a pity we can't get you to play in some of our big matches!"

"Oh, you can't mean that, sir," smiled Pitt.

"Gad, I do mean it!" retorted the manager.

"But it's not possible, sir," said one of the other players. "We couldn't have a schoolboy in the team—we should be laughed at."

"Yes, I suppose we should," admitted Mr. Page. "But I don't care what a player is—a boy or a man. If he can deliver the goods, he's the fellow I want. And this young gentleman has been delivering the goods all the time!"

"He has!" agreed Hearne, the skipper. "I'll give him credit for that! Couldn't we play him on Wednesday?"

The manager looked doubtful.

"It's only a reserve match, I know, but I'm afraid there's no chance," he said. "I'd like to, by gad! I'd give anything to be able to put him in the eleven."

"Why not risk it, sir?" asked Howard eagerly.

Reginald Pitt shook his head.

"It's awfully decent of you to suggest this, but it's impossible," he said. "I daren't risk it. The Head wouldn't allow it."

"How would he know?"

"Why, I should be spotted at once," said Pitt.

"Somebody who knows you would report you, you mean?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "And I couldn't risk it."

"Why not black yourself?" grinned one of the players facetiously.

Fred Hearne gave a jump.

"By jimminy!" he roared. "That's the idea!"

The manager looked at him.

"You don't mean it, do you?" he asked.

"Of course I do!" replied the skipper. "I know the very stuff that would do the trick; not black, but brown. It would disguise him perfectly. Nobody would recognise him with that stuff on him—and he's got black hair, so it would be just right. What a joke!"

"But how about getting the stuff off?" asked Pitt, smiling.

"That's easy," replied Hearne. "I'll

get some of this dye and show you. It goes on fast, and you can perspire as much as you like, and it won't run. All you've got to do is to just wipe yourself over with a sponge dampened with petrol, or methylated spirit. It comes off like magic, and only takes a minute."

Pitt thought that the footballers were joking at his expense. It hardly seemed possible that they were really in earnest.

As a matter of fact, they were joking. Even Hearne himself hadn't really meant it at first. All the others were roaring, and the captain continued the joke until it became a real suggestion.

"After all, why not?" he asked. "You're game, aren't you, young 'un?"

"I shouldn't mind if it was safe," said Pitt.

"Safe!" echoed Hearne. "My dear chap, it's as safe as houses! And just think what a glorious laugh we shall have over the crowd! They'll all mistake you for a blessed Hindoo, or an Arab, or something of that kind. You'll attract attention, but nobody will know you! In any case, it'll only be for once. And it would give you a chance of showing what you could do."

"It would help us to win, you mean?" put in the manager. "I don't want to make you fellows uncomfortable, but there's not an outside man in the reserves who can equal the form of this youngster. We're playing a hot side on Wednesday, and it's quite likely that Pitt may be able to win the game for us."

The junior could hardly realise that these words were being spoken in earnest. That he, a St. Frank's fellow, could win a match for a professional side! It seemed perfectly ridiculous.

But to anybody who has watched professional football, it would not seem ridiculous at all.

Even the best clubs, in the first and second division of the League, sometimes play reserve teams which make a wholesale hash of the game. Wing forwards are difficult men to get hold of, and they are of extreme value. Pitt was a wing forward of really remarkable ability.

"We'll try it—just for this once," said the manager. "Nobody will know anything about it, and it'll be a bit of sport. Gad! I'll tell you what—we'll call him 'Abdullah' on the programme! I'll fix his forms with the Football Association by then."

All the rest of the players roared. All the time it was treated as a joke. But it was fixed up. Pitt promised that he would turn out with the reserves if Fred Hearne's dye proved to be all that he claimed for it. And Pitt said that he would come along to make the test on the following evening.

He took his departure from the Bannington Club feeling almost light-hearted. The idea of playing with these professionals appealed to him enormously. He would be disguised, too, and that added to the spice of it.

But, even now, as Pitt rode homewards, he doubted if the suggestion would ever come to anything.

What it actually came to was astounding!

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE INVESTIGATES!

NELSON LEE stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Quite a remarkable story, Pitt," he said. "I do not approve of what you did, but it would be futile for me to say much about that now—particularly as you have discovered such a lot. It was remarkable that you should find that secret passage in such a way. And I will admit that it might come in useful."

"Will you take any action, sir?" asked Reginald Pitt eagerly.

"It is quite possible that I might," said Nelson Lee. "I have already promised you, Pitt, that I will do my very utmost to expose Simon Raspe, and help your father. Perhaps this fresh knowledge will help us."

"I hope so, sir."

Pitt had told Lee all about his adventure at Thornton House. It was late evening now, and would soon be bedtime for the juniors. Nelson Lee was greatly impressed by what Pitt had told him, and he could not help admiring the boy for his pluck and determination.

I knew all about it, too, for I was present in the guv'nor's study. And I was filled with inward excitement. That Pitt could have done this all off his own bat took the wind out of my sails, so to speak. And, without any doubt, he had certainly revealed quick perception and ability for taking advantage of opportunity. Pitt, in fact, had acted on

the spur of the moment, and he had not made any blunder.

"What are you going to do, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Nothing, just now, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "But, as I have already told Pitt, I shall probably take advantage of the information he has given me. The knowledge of this secret tunnel, for example, is very useful. I shall certainly have to go along and examine it for myself."

"I hope something comes of it, sir," said Pitt eagerly. "I never dreamed that I should make any real discoveries when I went into that library. But that's just the way of things, isn't it? When you expect things they don't happen. And when you don't expect 'em, they do!"

"Yes, life is full of those contradictions," agreed Nelson Lee. "In some ways, Pitt, I feel inclined to commend you. In other ways it is my duty as your Housemaster to be quite severe."

"But you're not his housemaster, guv'nor," I said. "He's come to you now as a client, and you're agreeing to look into his case!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Perhaps we had better put it like that," he chuckled. "In any case, Pitt, I cannot find it in my heart to scold you for doing your utmost to help your father. I know full well that your intentions are honourable and straightforward. And, taking all things into consideration, I can justify you for burglariously entering Mr. Simon Raspe's library."

Pitt took his departure from the study shortly afterwards. As soon as he had closed the door I turned to the guv'nor and looked at him.

"Well, what about it?" I asked.

"What about what?"

"This tunnel—this secret entrance into Raspe's library?" I said. "When are we going to explore?"

"I was not aware that we should explore at all, my boy."

"But you said—"

"I said that I should probably make an investigation," interrupted Lee. "And when I say 'I,' that doesn't mean 'we.' I'm afraid you can't come, Nipper."

"Well, I'm afraid I can!" I retorted.

"You cheeky young rascal!"

"Oh, lor!" I groaned. "Don't get on the high horse now, guv'nor!"

"The high horse!" snapped Lee. "Upon my soul!"

"Well, guv'nor, you know what I mean," I went on. "It's all rot to say that I can't come with you. We might be able to do a lot of things here, and it would be simply preposterous for you to go alone."

"You imagine, therefore, that your presence will lead to many further discoveries?" inquired Lee. "In other words, Nipper, you evidently take me for a somewhat hopeless jackass?"

"Well, not exactly, sir——"

"Not exactly!" glared Nelson Lee.

"I'm blessed if you're not jumping down my throat all the time!" I complained. "The fact is, sir, I'd like to come with you on this expedition, and I shall take it as a great favour if you'll give me permission."

"H'm! That's better!" said the guv'nor. "At the same time, I am not sure that I shall allow your soft tongue to overcome my decision. Strictly speaking, Nipper, it wouldn't do for the pair of us——"

"Oh, there you go again!" I broke in. "All right! Go yourself, and if something happens to you, don't blame me! I'm not suggesting that I should come with you all the way. But oughtn't I to be on guard at the garden end of the tunnel? That would only be a measure of precaution, sir."

"Well, perhaps you are right in that respect," said Nelson Lee. "We'll see. If I want you, I'll come and rouse you out of bed about midnight. But if I don't come you mustn't get up."

This was highly unsatisfactory, but I couldn't get the guv'nor to alter his decision. And, when I went to bed, I was in an uncertain state of mind. I didn't know whether he'd call me or not.

I had an uncomfortable feeling that he wouldn't.

However, I was wrong.

For, just after midnight, I was awakened by a soft tap upon my shoulder. I opened my eyes and beheld Nelson Lee bending over my bed. He was attired in a dressing-gown.

"Be ready in ten minutes, Nipper," he whispered.

"I'm coming with you?" I asked.

"Well, I shouldn't tell you to be ready unless you were," he replied. "I am afraid my better judgment has deserted me for once."

I grinned in the darkness, and Nelson Lee silently left the dormitory. Before he had closed the door I was out of bed and dressing. It didn't take me more than four minutes. Then I silently slipped out and went to the guv'nor's bedroom. I found him just finishing his dressing.

"You're a long time, guv'nor!" I said severely. "You were half-dressed before you came to me!"

"You see, Nipper, I dress properly. I don't simply hurl my clothes on in bundles!" retorted the guv'nor. "There is no hurry, and if you are so very impatient, you had better go by yourself! I am very much afraid, Nipper, that you are becoming extremely disrespectful of late."

"Well, you're enough to make anybody short-tempered, guv'nor!" I protested. "I make a most reasonable suggestion, and all you can do is to hum and haw and make all sorts of objections. It's a bit off-side for me, you know. I'm beginning to think you look upon me as a giddy schoolboy, just because I'm in the Remove."

"We won't go into any arguments on that subject," said Nelson Lee. "And when you've quite done pulling my neck-tie about I shall be obliged."

"Well, tie it up, and don't waste so much giddy time!" I said. "It'll be daylight before we get back. My hat! You seem to be getting as slow as a funeral in your old age!"

It was only by an adroit movement that I escaped the lunge which Nelson Lee made at me. After that I thought it just as well to wait for him in the passage. He came out very soon, and I preceded him downstairs, and two minutes later we were outside.

The night was rather overcast and somewhat chilly. There had been a few drops of rain earlier, but none since. And now it seemed that we were going to have a fair journey.

We had decided to use our bicycles, for the distance to Thornton Lodge was rather too far to make a walk comfortable. We didn't use our lamps, however, and trusted to Providence that no policeman would see us.

And, finally, we arrived at our destination, and found the whole house in darkness, and wrapped in silence. Evidently the household was asleep—which was not

very remarkable, considering that it was getting on for half-past one.

We concealed our bicycles in the ditch, climbed over the wall, and then followed Pitt's directions.

It was not difficult for us to find the well which Pitt had described. Just against it Nelson Lee came to a halt. I was half afraid of what was coming, so I anticipated him.

"Shall I go first, sir?" I asked casually.

"You remain here, my lad!"

"Look here, guv'nor, you didn't mean all that rot about stopping here?" I demanded warmly.

"Why, you suggested it yourself——"

"Well, I didn't mean it."

"You shouldn't say things you don't mean," exclaimed the guv'nor. "But, seriously, Nipper, it would be far better for you to remain on guard at this end. There's no earthly reason why you should come."

I saw plenty of reasons, but it was no good pointing them out to him. And so I let him have his own way—there was no alternative. He disappeared from sight, and the earth simply swallowed him up.

And then, I waited, impatiently, and feeling more and more inclined to disobey orders and follow him.

Nelson Lee was progressing quickly along the tunnel to the secret door which led into Simon Raspe's library. Lee went up to it very cautiously, and, as he drew near, he distinctly heard the sound of voices.

At first he had an idea that he would not be able to hear the words that were being spoken. For the door was a thick one, and the voices sounded muffled and far away.

But, when Lee placed his ear to the woodwork, he had no difficulty in distinguishing every word that was said. The door acted as a sounding-board, and intensified the voices rather than muffled them.

"There's no need for you to worry yourself, Raspe," one of the voices was saying. "I can assure you the whole business will go through without a hitch."

"Well, Stretton, I'm leaving it to you this time," said the other voice. "If you bring it off, it'll mean a half share, and you'll be rich. But if you fail—well, I shall probably lose your delightful company for about ten years."

"There's no question of failing," said Stretton. "Why, it's a much more simple affair than the Pitt business, and you came through that all right."

"Exactly," said Simon Raspe. "But Pitt was unsuspecting, and he had no idea of my true intentions. When he did suspect anything it was too late."

Stretton chuckled.

"About the neatest thing you've ever done," he declared. "Why, you must have raked in something like two hundred thousand over that game, Raspe."

"Just a little under," said the other.

"And can't the law touch you?"

"If the law got hold of certain papers my position would not be worth a ha'penny," said Raspe grimly. "I should be sentenced to fifteen years, I expect. But we understand one another, Stretton. I fooled Pitt very neatly, and you ought to be able to fool this man in just the same way."

"It'll be dead easy," declared Stretton.

"By the way, about that boy," went on Simon Raspe. "I don't quite like him being so near. I really had no idea that he was at the school. You are quite sure he doesn't know that I live in this house?"

"I don't see how he can know," replied Stretton. "And what would it matter if he did? You say you're safe enough."

"Well, I think I am," said Raspe. "Naturally, I shouldn't like anyone to come prying about. This afternoon, for instance, I had that package of papers relating to the Pitt case in my bureau. It was foolish of me to leave it there. But it's quite safe now."

"Have you locked it up?"

"No—but it's safe."

"And in this room?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know your own business best—but, personally, if ever I have any dangerous papers, I burn them," said Stretton.

"I can't very well burn these," said Simon Raspe. "I am constantly referring to them, and it would be very unwise of me to destroy them just now. Pitt can do nothing—he is a ruined man and penniless."

The voices grew more distant, and then Nelson Lee heard the distinct sound of a closing door.

He thought it quite likely that only Stretton had left the library, and, for a good many minutes he remained there with his ear still pressed to the door. But no sounds came through to him.

And then, very cautiously, he got to work.

For a long time he examined the mechanism of the secret lock without touching it. He was trying to see how it worked, so that one touch would release the catch. And, so accurate were his calculations that he only fingered a portion of the mechanism for a few seconds and the door came open.

It moved inwards a few inches.

All was blackness beyond.

Lee was quite sure that the library was empty. But he was not taking any chances. He switched the light of his torch into the apartment. Then, he crept through, making sure that the secret door did not close with a snap behind him.

He thought he heard a slight sound, and paused.

He swept his light round, and then felt reassured. There was certainly nobody in the room. It was quite empty save for himself. Lee came from behind the screen into the full open.

He saw the bureau at once, but he doubted if the bundle of documents reposed in that drawer now.

And then, again, came a peculiar sound.

It seemed to him that it proceeded from behind the big curtain of the window. And he looked in that direction intently. And then Nelson Lee received quite a considerable shock.

Without the slightest warning, a huge dull coloured object bounded out from behind the curtain. It charged at him with a snarling sound, and with wide-open mouth, revealing its yellow fangs.

The thing was a dog—a savage mastiff. Why it had not made an outcry before Nelson Lee did not know. Perhaps it had been trained to keep quiet, so that it could spring upon its intended victim by surprise.

Lee had had no idea that this awful creature was in the room. He could have killed it on the spot with his revolver—but he didn't want to do this. For Simon Raspe would have known instantly that an intruder had been in the room.

Lee acted with great promptitude.

Just to his right there was a lounge, and upon it rested a number of big cushions.

Lee seized one of these cushions in a flash, and he flung it fully into the face of the charging dog.

Only for a few seconds was the animal's onrush defeated. But those few seconds were quite enough to enable Nelson Lee to beat a retreat. He did so at once, leaping behind the screen, and dodging through into the secret tunnel. He closed the door softly behind him.

He breathed hard.

It had been a narrow escape, he knew. If that animal had seized him, there would have been very little hope. For it was a savage brute, and Lee would never have been able to withstand its onslaught.

The detective remained there, listening.

The dog was now making a big outcry, baying furiously, and intermingling this noise by loud whines. And, in the middle of it, Simon Raspe appeared, revolver in hand. He entered the library and switched on the light.

"Down, you infernal hound, down!" he said sharply. "What have you been making all this noise about?"

Lee heard the man cross the room, and take a look at the French windows. Then he went back to the centre of the room.

"Nothing's happened here!" Lee heard him say. "This is the second time you've made a noise for nothing, confound you!"

The dog whimpered back, and his master looked round the apartment carefully. He evidently came to the conclusion that the dog had been making a disturbance for nothing.

He thought nothing of the fact that one of the cushions was lying on the floor, for this strange guardian of the library had pulled a cushion down on more than one occasion.

And Simon Raspe took his departure, leaving the dog in sole possession once more. Lee crept away.

For it was, of course, quite impossible for him to enter the room again. If he had done so, the uproar would have continued. So it was pointless to open the secret door again.

In one way, Lee was disappointed, but he was greatly relieved to have got out without Raspe knowing that he had been there. For the man was not on his guard—he did not know that anybody



Lee seized a cushion, and, in a flash, he dashed it into the face of the charging dog.

had been prowling round. Lee even began to wonder if Raspe was aware of the fact that the secret tunnel existed.

This night visit had made him certain of one thing.

Raspe had deliberately defrauded Mr. Pitt out of a fortune. He had admitted so much to Stretton. Lee knew, therefore, that he was fully justified in going right ahead with his investigations until Simon Raspe was shown up in his true colours.

When Nelson Lee reached the outlet he found me waiting there—impatient and rather anxious.

"You all right, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Yes, Nipper, although I must admit that I had a somewhat unpleasant experience," said Nelson Lee.

And he told me what had occurred.

"My hat! That was pretty rotten!" I exclaimed. "A savage mastiff, eh? It's a good thing you weren't caught by the brute, sir."

"It is, indeed."

"And so you haven't been able to do anything?"

"No."

"We've had a wasted journey——"

"On the contrary, Nipper, the journey has had most valuable results," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Until now I have only suspected Simon Raspe of villainy in this particular case. I have known him to be several kinds of a scoundrel for quite a number of years, and I took it for granted that his activity on this Pitt case was of an unscrupulous description."

"And you know for certain now, sir?"

"I know for certain."

"How did you find out?"

"I was fortunate enough to overhear Raspe speaking to an accomplice of his, a man named Stretton!" said Nelson Lee. "They were discussing the subject—not at all improbably, because I believe Stretton himself is now engaged upon a similar enterprise."

"The awful rotter!" I exclaimed. "Ruining somebody else, eh?"

"So it appears, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Raspe said quite bluntly that if the police got hold of certain information he would be liable to fifteen years' penal servitude."

"Phew!" I whistled.

"However, this information is of no value," went on Lee. "It satisfies me

that I am pursuing a correct course. But the fact that I have overheard these words does not produce any real evidence. Before we can get Simon Raspe under lock and key we must obtain concrete proof of his guilt."

"Yes, and that's what'll need a lot of getting," I said. "It looks to me, guv'nor as if we've taken on a pretty large sized job."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That makes it all the more attractive, Nipper," he said. "This man, Raspe, is a very pretty scoundrel, and it will give me keen pleasure to hunt him down until I have secured his arrest. For the moment we can do nothing."

"That's rotten!" I grunted.

"But, fortunately, he does not know that we are on his track," said Lee. "Consequently he is not on his guard, and it is more than likely that if we only have patience we shall be duly rewarded."

"It's no good waiting for the evidence to drop into our hands, sir," I objected. "What we've got to do is to go out and find it."

"Exactly—but on a more favourable occasion."

And so Nelson Lee and I returned to St. Frank's, somewhat disappointed with the result of our night expedition, but satisfied in some ways. From this moment, at all events, it was war to the knife with Simon Raspe.

CHAPTER V.

ABDULHAH, THE MYSTERY FOOTBALLER.

HANDFORTH nodded to himself.

"Yes, rather!" he said absently.

"Eh?"

"What?"

Church and McClure looked at their leader curiously.

"We'll go," said Handforth.

"Go?" said Church. "Go where?"

"Why, in the bob seats, of course," replied Handforth, as he rose from the table. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't. We might as well spend the afternoon that way as any other."

He walked across Study D, and glanced out of the window.

"It's going to be fine, too," he said. "That's all the better."

"What the dickens are you talking about?" demanded Church tartly.

"You know what I'm talking about," replied Handforth. "We've arranged to go. I think we ought to go in the bob seats, and as I'm rather flush I'll treat you two fellows. Besides, the bob seats will be under cover. So we shall be all right, even if it does rain."

"Under cover!" said McClure. "Rain!"

"Have you gone dotty?" roared Handforth. "What's the idea of repeating things, like a giddy parrot? We've decided to go——"

"Go where?" yelled Church.

"To Bannington, of course!"

"Bannington!"

"Oh, my only giddy aunt!" snorted Handforth. "I always knew you chaps were three parts off your rockers, but it seems to me I've got a couple of blessed sheep for study-mates! Haven't you got any brains?"

"You'd better look for your own, before you start questioning ours!" snapped Church. "If anybody's dotty, it's you. You suddenly start up and say that we'll go. We ask you where, and you say in the bob seats! How the dickens do you think we can understand what you mean by that rot?"

"But you know where we're going!" retorted Handforth.

"Yes, to Bannington. You said so."

"We're going to the football match!"

"The football match!"

"Didn't we arrange it?" asked Handforth wearily.

"No, we didn't!"

"I read the announcement of it in the paper just now, and I decided that we'd all go," said Handforth. "That's enough, I suppose?"

"And because you decided in your own blithering mind, you take it for granted that we know all about it?" asked Church sarcastically. "Are we supposed to read what runs through your marvellous brain?"

"I've never known such chaps for arguing in all my life," said Handforth. "Here, I've told you in plain English that we're going to the football match, and all you can do is to stand there and jabber! We didn't know what to do with ourselves this afternoon, so we all agreed about the footer match."

"Agreed!" said Church. "Who agreed?"

"Oh, he did!" exclaimed McClure. "He always agrees for us, Churchy. If he suddenly made up his mind to go and sit in a puddle of water, he'd expect us to do the same!"

Handforth looked at his watch again. "We'll be late if you're not careful," he said. "This match starts at half-past two."

"Which match?"

"Haven't I just told you?" howled Handforth.

"Oh, give it up!" said Church. "Let's go with him, and it'll save all further trouble. It must be a match at the Grammar School, although I don't remember that they charged a bob each to see——"

"It's at the Bannington Football Club," snorted Handforth. "It's a League match. Don't you understand?"

Neither Church nor McClure had the slightest inclination to go and see a League football match. Nevertheless, they went with Handforth without objecting. They knew from past experience that objecting would be absolutely useless. Their only chance of escaping it would be for them to press Handforth to take them.

However, by the time they arrived on the football ground, they were feeling rather better. Handy was flush, and he had paid all the exes; and, furthermore, he had provided quite a large assortment of fruit and sweets. So Church and McClure felt that the match was worth it.

They were somewhat disgusted when they learnt that they would only see the reserves. Handforth himself was highly indignant at this, and loudly declared that it was a fraud. He was even suggesting that he should go to the manager's office and kick up a row.

"But you saw the advert., didn't you?" asked Church.

"It doesn't say anything about reserves in that," said Handforth. "It simply says that the Bannington Second Eleven will play Caistowe Athletic this afternoon."

"That's the same thing, you ass!" said Church.

Another argument commenced on the spot, and it was only brought to a close by the appearance of the players on the field. They looked quite a sturdy lot of young fellows, with a single exception.

"I wonder who that chap is?" said Handforth. "He looks like a giddy Red Indian!"

Church consulted the programme.

"Outside right—Abdullah!" he said. "Well, I'm blessed! Fancy having a giddy Arab in the team. That's what he is, Handy—an Arab."

"And we've paid our money to come and see this!" snorted Handforth disgustedly. "I knew what it would be! If ever I take your advice about going anywhere it always turns out like this!"

"Our advice!" gasped McClure.

"Well, didn't you suggest coming here?"

Handforth's chums had no strength to reply. The barefaced way in which he put the blame on to them for every unfortunate action of his own was beyond all understanding.

However, as soon as the match started they forgot all else.

They weren't particularly interested in the game. But the form displayed by Abdullah, the Egyptian footballer, was so remarkable that Handforth and Co. were lost in admiration.

This unusual member of the team was very dark-skinned. He was well-built and sturdy. His age might have been anything between eighteen and twenty-five, as it was impossible to guess with any degree of accuracy. His hair was quite black, and his features regular. But he was undoubtedly a native of Northern Africa. And what he didn't know about football was hardly worth knowing.

Handforth and Co. watched him closely. They saw him when he came quite near to the stand. But neither Handforth, Church, nor McClure had the faintest suspicion that this coloured footballer was anything but what he purported to be. Gazing at Abdullah full in the face, Handforth and Co. showed no sign of recognition.

As for Abdullah himself, he was somewhat perturbed by the presence of the three Remove juniors. He had never expected that any St. Frank's fellows would be on the spot. But, of course, it was just like Handforth and Co. to butt in when they weren't wanted.

"I know I shall be spotted!" Reginald Pitt told himself. "This brown stuff may make me look a bit different, but they'll see through it."

But they didn't.

And Pitt himself realised this long before half-time. He passed them so often, and looked up at them so frequently, that he could tell with perfect ease that they had no idea of the truth.

And it pleased Pitt enormously. For, if Handforth and Co. couldn't recognise him, it was a moral certainty that nobody else would. He was quite safe in playing. And as it was for only one occasion, it wouldn't matter.

Pitt had promised that he would do his best—and he was doing it.

The Reserve team was, on the whole, a weak side. The Caistowe players, although only amateurs, were a very different set. They took football seriously. Their combination was excellent, and their passing of the highest order. Before the game had been in progress ten minutes Caistowe scored. Within another five Caistowe scored again.

Two—nil.

This was not particularly enlivening for the Bannington supporters, for it seemed almost hopeless to suppose that the home team could win. They would be lucky, indeed, if they obtained two goals and draw.

The futile attempts of the inside forwards, of the home team, in front of goal, brought forth yells of derision.

But Abdullah's display drew unbounded applause. Time after time he ran right down the field, beating everybody who attempted to bar his progress. And if he couldn't send in his centre, he nearly always managed to make the defender concede a corner-kick.

But it made Pitt rather miserable to see his centres being wasted and frittered away. Time after time he knocked the ball right at the centre-forward's feet. But this man was evidently off colour, for he either ballooned the ball, or shot yards wide of the goal. He certainly tried hard enough, but he couldn't find the net. His shooting was shocking.

It was the same with the other inside men. Now and again they woke up and tested the goalie with a good shot, but these shots lacked sting—that was the chief trouble.

And, just before half-time, Reginald Pitt decided that he had had enough of it. He was tired of seeing his centres wasted. And when he got the ball the next time, he kept it. He rushed right

up the touchline, with the leather in perfect control at his feet. He tricked two men in quick succession, leaving them standing. Then he made a bee line for the goal. The custodian came out, probably hoping that it would confuse this dark-skinned winger. The goalkeeper flung himself at the ball. Pitt tapped it gently, dodged round the goalie, and drove the ball into the empty net. As an individual effort it was a singularly cool, well-worked-out piece of strategy.

"Goal!"

"Good old Inky!"

"That's right—show 'em how to do it!"

It was nearly half-time. When the whistle blew the score remained the same—two—one.

There was just a possible chance now that Bannington might win. The interval was entirely occupied by the crowd discussing this new footballer. They had never seen him before—never heard of him.

But it was clear that Mr. Page, the manager, had made a find.

In the dressing-room the manager was bubbling with delight and enthusiasm. He had been watching Pitt's play very keenly during the game. And, for that matter, so had most of the members of the first eleven. And, professionals though they were, they were vastly impressed by Pitt's remarkable performance. If they hadn't known that he was a schoolboy, they would have not been quite so surprised. But, considering his age, he was doing wonders.

"I don't know what to say to you, my lad!" exclaimed Mr. Page. "You're too good altogether for school football, and I've got an idea that you'll win this game for us to-day. The inside-men are shocking—disgraceful. The chances they threw away made me weep. Positively made me weep!"

"Keep it up, young 'un!" said Tom Howard. "Don't forget that I introduced you here, and I want you to prove that I was justified. They laughed at me at first—but they're not laughing now."

Pitt was feeling fresh and keen as he took the field for the second half. It was his ambition to score two goals this half—to win the match for Bannington, and prove to these professionals that he was capable of doing something on his own.

And he succeeded.

The second half had not been started for more than ten minutes when Pitt ran clean through. He had left his outside-right position for the time being, and took the leather down the centre of the field. It was a pretty piece of work.

He left the two half-backs staring blankly after him, and then he tricked the left full-back, and kicked for goal. The Caistowe custodian pushed the leather out, but Pitt's head was ready.

He sprang up high, put his head to the ball, and it entered the corner of the net.

"Well played!"

"Goal!"

"Good for you, Abdullah!"

"You're the man for us!"

"We want one more now!"

The crowd was beginning to have enormous faith in Abdullah. Handforth and Co. were greatly impressed, and they decided that this coloured footballer was the most remarkable outside-right they'd ever seen.

"The chap's a marvel," said Church. "Do you know, his play reminds me of Pitt's—the way he streaks down the touchline——"

"You—you silly ass!" said Handforth. "This chap's twice as good as Pitt! Pitt's not in the same street with him!"

"Well, he's got the same kind of style," persisted Church.

"I'm not denying that Pitt's a jolly fine winger," said Handforth. "But he can't hope to be as good as a professional. My hat! Just look at that! Oh, beautiful! Glorious!"

Handforth went into ecstasies. For, at that moment, Abdullah was racing along like a hare. He outstripped two of his opponents, and reached the ball well before them. Then he sent in a dropping centre which one of the inside men promptly put his head to.

"Goal!"

The ball was in the net again.

"It was Abdullah's goal!" said Handforth. "He's doing everything!"

And all the other spectators came to the same conclusion. It was generally agreed that Abdullah was the man of the match, and that without him the game wouldn't have been worth looking at.

This, no doubt, was an exaggeration. But it went to show how greatly superior Pitt was to all the others.

The score remained the same until the end of the match. But Bannington had won. The new player, Abdullah, had given them victory. And Mr. Page, the manager, hardly knew what to say.

"My lad, I'm not going to think about losing you," he said firmly. "It simply can't be done—and you won't play in the reserves again. I shall give you a place in the first eleven! By gad, you're worth it!"

Pitt thought he was joking—for, of course, this affair had been in the nature of a joke itself. Pitt was more concerned about his colour. He was wondering if it would come off as easily as Fred Hearne had declared.

He really needn't have worried, for an application of the sponge, prepared as the captain had instructed, removed the dye in a remarkably small space of time. No trace of it was left upon Pitt's skin.

When he had dressed, he was instructed by Tom Howard that the manager wanted to see him in his office. Pitt went there, feeling quite satisfied with his afternoon's play. He knew well enough that he had acquitted himself admirably. Mr. Page was waiting for him.

"Ah, that's better, young 'un," he said. "We told you the stuff would come off, didn't we? I want to thank you for the help you gave us this afternoon. But for you, we should have lost this match."

"Oh, I don't know, sir," said Pitt.

"We should have lost it!" repeated the manager. "It's not much, son, but I hope you'll accept it without taking offence. Just a little acknowledgment of your services."

He handed Pitt two pounds in Treasury notes, and the junior stared.

"For me?" he asked blankly.

"Yes."

"But—but I haven't earned two pounds."

"You've earned more than two pounds," said Mr. Page. "Put it in your pocket, lad, and say no more about it. How are you fixed for Saturday afternoons?"

"They're always holidays," said Pitt.

"And you can get away without trouble?"

"Well, yes, mostly."

"Look here, Pitt, I've got a proposition to make to you," said the manager,

bending forward. "I meant what I said twenty minutes ago. I want you to play regularly for the first eleven—at all the home matches and as many of the away fixtures as you can manage."

Pitt could hardly believe his ears.

"But—but are you really serious, Mr. Page?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm really serious."

"But—but—"

"Hold on a minute before you refuse," interrupted the manager. "I don't expect you to do this for nothing. And, on my own responsibility, I'm offering you six pounds a week regular money to turn out for us on Saturday afternoons whenever it is possible. You'll get your money whether you play or not—that is, when we go too far off for you to come with us. But it'll be worth the money to have you for the home matches."

Reginald Pitt was silent for a moment or two. He could hardly realise what this offer meant to him. Six pounds a week—just for playing a match on Saturday afternoons! It was almost too good to be believed.

And Pitt thought of his father and mother. Six pounds! What a tremendous help such a sum would be to them. And he could send it all—regularly—throughout the term!

"Well?" asked Mr. Page.

"I—I hardly know what to say," said Pitt. "Do you mean that I shall continue to use that dye?"

"Of course," said the manager. "Having started as Abdullah you'll have to keep it up. That's the only way. And don't forget that you'll have this money regularly. Are you willing to sign an agreement with me?"

Pitt thrust out his hand.

"Yes," he said tensely.

"Good lad!" shouted Mr. Page. "That's what I like to hear—a quick decision. Good enough! You'll start on Saturday, and you'll draw your money. We play at home, and you'll turn out with the first eleven."

Pitt hardly knew what to make of it. He was certainly delighted, and when he left the Bannington Football Club ground he returned to St. Frank's feeling happier and more cheerful than he had been since this awful disaster had come into his life.

And it was because he was making money himself—with his own ability. And this money he could send to his parents in their sore hour of need.

CHAPTER VI.

REGINALD PITT'S SECRET.

"**A**BDULLAH!" said Tommy Watson. Pitt was just entering the Ancient House lobby, and he stood stock still as Tommy Watson uttered his name. Just for a moment, Pitt thought that his secret was already out. He looked at the juniors half fearfully.

"Abdullah!" repeated Watson.

"Yes, that was the merchant's name," said Handforth. "An Arab, or an Egyptian, or something like that. He played a glorious game—you ought to have seen him. I've never seen a winger play so rippingly before."

"He certainly was good," agreed Church. "I wish you'd been there, Watson. That chap's passing was superb, and it would have done you good to see him."

Pitt entered the lobby.

"Hallo, what's the jaw about?" he asked.

"Oh, it seems that these chaps went to a professional football match in Bannington," said Tommy Watson. "They've gone dotty over some Arab chap who was in the team—a regular flier, by all I can hear."

Handforth nodded.

"Pity you weren't there, Pitt," he said. "You could have learnt one or two points from this dusky merchant."

"Could I?" said Pitt, inwardly chuckling.

"Rather!" said Handforth. "Of course, he played miles better than you can—although I will admit that you're decent. My hat! You should have seen him going up the field like greased lightning!"

"Faster than I can go, I suppose?" asked Pitt innocently.

"Faster!" said Handforth. "This chap's got double your speed."

It was as much as Pitt could do to

keep himself from laughing. And it certainly was an amusing situation. To be told that he couldn't play half so well as himself was certainly comical.

He wondered what Handforth and Co. would have said if they could have known at that moment that the mysterious Abdullah was standing before them. Pitt felt almost sorry that he could not reveal the truth. Their expressions would have been worth pounds.

"I wish we had some footballers like that in our team," said Church. "The next time that chap's playing for the Bannington team, I'm going to see him. It's as good as a tonic to watch him."

"Rather!" said McClure.

Nothing could have made Pitt feel safer than this. He was told to his face that this Egyptian footballer was remarkably clever. Handforth and Co. had seen him within five or six yards. But even at such close quarters they had not recognised him. Pitt felt perfectly safe, and he decided that he would tell nobody of his secret. He would keep it absolutely to himself.

It was imperative that he should do so, for if the truth got about in the Remove it would soon reach the Head's ears, and then a swift stop would be put to Pitt's little game.

And he had a double motive for keeping it up.

For one thing, he exalted in the idea of playing football for the League. It was a chance such as a schoolboy had never had before. And secondly, he wanted the money so that he could send it to his parents. They were in sore need of it.

He chuckled over his plans.

He wouldn't tell them anything, either.

He would just send the six pounds every week and let them wonder how he obtained it. But this little scheme of Pitt's was not destined to come to anything. For that very evening he received a visitor.

He was in Study E with Jack Grey when a tap sounded upon the door, and Tubbs, the boy, looked in.

"A gent to see you, Master Pitt," he said cheerfully.

Pitt looked round sharply.

"Pater!" he exclaimed, jumping up.

Mr. Pitt entered the study and greeted his son warmly. And when this was over he sat down and looked about him with interest.

"You didn't wire, or anything," said Pitt. "It's a tremendous surprise, dad. What made you come down so unexpectedly?"

"Oh, I thought I'd like to have a look at you," smiled Mr. Pitt. "I don't suppose I'm the only father who drops in suddenly, am I? I want to hear how you're getting on, and what you're doing?"

Jack Grey only remained in the study a few minutes longer, for he instinctively felt that father and son wanted to have a little chat together. So Jack, making an excuse, withdrew.

"I thought he'd go out," said Pitt, after the door had closed. "Awfully decent fellow, dad. I say," he went on eagerly, "have you brought any news?"

"If you mean good news, I'm afraid not."

"About—about money. I mean?" asked Pitt.

"As a matter of fact, I've come down here concerning money," said Mr. Pitt, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "A day or two ago I received a letter from you containing three pound notes. I want to know where you got them, Reggie?"

Reggie stared.

"And have you come down especially for that?" he asked.

"I have!"

"But it'll cost you over a pound——"

"Never mind what it costs me—I have come to find out the truth," said his father. "I know for a fact that you did not possess such a sum. And it is necessary that you should tell me the whole truth. To be quite frank, Reggie, I am deeply concerned. The money is useful—urgently needed, in fact——"

"Perhaps this'll come in handy, too?" asked Pitt.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out the two pound notes which had been given to him by Mr. Page. His father started as he saw the currency notes. He looked from them to Pitt.

"Five pounds altogether!" he ex-

claimed. "What does it mean, Reggie? You must be truthful, and you must keep nothing back. Both your mother and I have been very worried."

"But why, pater?" asked Pitt, in surprise. "I thought it would make you feel a bit happier—I thought the money would be welcome. And now you say that it worried you."

"It worried us because we could think of no explanation," said Mr. Pitt. "We could think of no source from whence you could obtain such a sum. My dear boy, have you been getting this money together by some method?"

"Getting it together?"

"I mean, have you been raising a subscription?"

"Subscription?" gasped Pitt.

"We thought it just possible that you might have lost your head," said his father. "We considered every point, and we came to the conclusion that the only way you could raise money would be by obtaining loans, or subscriptions. The fact that you gave no explanation in your letter was most significant."

"But—but I don't understand, dad," went on Pitt. "How could I raise subscriptions? Great Scott! You surely don't think for a minute that I should have told the chaps about your position, and that you needed money?"

"No, I didn't exactly think that," said the other. "But both your mother and I feared that you might possibly have invented a story of your own, and obtained money from your schoolfellows. And I felt compelled to come down here and see into it without delay."

"But—but you needn't have come, pater," said Pitt. "I'm awfully pleased to see you, but you've been worrying over nothing. I'm not raising any subscriptions, or any rot of that kind!"

"Then how did you come by the three pounds—and this other money here?"

"Oh, this is just a little present," said Pitt.

"From whom?"

"The manager of the Bannington Football Club."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Pitt. "What are you talking about, Reggie?" Pitt grinned.

"On Saturday, dad, I shall send you six quid," he said calmly.

"What!"

"And six quid every Saturday afterwards," added Pitt.

His father frowned.

"I don't like you to joke with me——" he began.

"I'm not joking," said Pitt, with a chuckle. "First of all, I'll tell you about that original three quid. Did you know that Simon Raspe lives near Bannington?"

"No, I didn't know that!" said Mr. Pitt quickly. "I always understood that Raspe had a house somewhere in the South of England, but I've never known the exact locality. In Bannington, you say?"

"Yes, dad. I was riding home on my bike one evening when Raspe came along in his car, and I was knocked down——"

"Good heavens!"

Pitt hastened to reassure his father, and he proceeded to explain exactly what had occurred. And Mr. Pitt was greatly relieved when he heard how his son had come into possession of the three pounds.

"So I thought I'd send it straight to you, dad," said Pitt quietly. "I didn't need it, and I knew that you and mother were hard pressed. In any case, it's your money, isn't it? Raspe stole it from you in the first place."

Mr. Pitt was pleased with his son's explanation, and they talked on the subject for some little time.

"And what about this other money?" asked the visitor. "What about the two pounds on the table?"

"I was presented with that for playing in a professional football match," explained Pitt calmly.

"Bless me!" ejaculated his father. "What on earth will the boy be up to next! Getting himself knocked down by motor-cars, playing in professional football matches! Upon my soul, Reggie, you are a most extraordinary boy!"

"I've been doing everything I could, pater, to get money."

"I can quite believe you," said Mr. Pitt drily. "And now you make some preposterous statement to the effect that you will send me six pounds on Saturday—and a further six pounds on every succeeding Saturday. What nonsense is that?"

"It's not nonsense, dad—it's the truth."

"And where will you obtain this money from, pray?"

"From the manager of the Bannington Football Club."

"Good gracious me!" said Mr. Pitt. "Is this man a philanthropist—a public benefactor who goes round distributing pound notes to schoolboys? Come, Reggie, you are joking with me."

"I keep on telling you I'm not, Pater," said Pitt. "I'm going to get this money for playing in professional football matches—I didn't want to tell you anything about it, but you forced it out of me. There's nothing disgraceful in it," he added quickly. "Nobody will ever know in the school, and I can earn this money and send it to you and mother."

Mr. Pitt was quite overcome for the moment.

"But—but it is incredible!" he exclaimed. "Six pounds a week! Why, that's more than a man is capable of earning! Do you seriously tell me, Reggie, that this football club is willing to pay you that money for playing one game of football in a week?"

"Yes, dad."

"How extraordinary!"

Mr. Pitt thought it was still more extraordinary when he learned how the matter had been arranged—when it was disclosed to him that his son was to appear publicly as Abdullah, the marvellous Egyptian footballer. In spite of himself, Mr. Pitt could not refrain from laughter.

"Why, it must be some joke!" he said. "These people have been playing a trick upon you, Reggie," he protested.

"It's as straight as a die," declared Pitt. "Don't you see how cute it is? Nobody can know who I am—so there can't be any disgrace or anything. They'll all take me for Abdullah, even the chaps at the school won't know me. And I get six quid a week—to send to you and mother!"

Mr. Pitt was convinced at last.

"I hardly know what to say, Reggie!" he exclaimed. "The one fact which stands out above all others is that you have been working and scheming to do anything so that you can send us some money. You cannot imagine how I appreciate that spirit, my boy. You are a true son, and I admire you greatly."

"Oh, it's nothing, dad!" muttered Pitt. "I can't earn money in any other way. This is easy for me—it's like getting money for nothing. You will agree,

won't you? You won't peach to the Head?"

"I won't what?"

"You won't tell the Head about it?"

"As far as I can see the Headmaster would not be at all delighted to hear this piece of news," said Mr. Pitt drily. "Certainly, I should not care to upset him—and so I shall keep my own counsel."

Pitt hugged his father.

"You're a brick, dad!" he said. "Just leave this to me, and everything will be all serene! All I've got to do is to work like the dickens, and make everybody at St. Frank's think I don't care much about footer. Then I can sneak off on Saturday afternoons and play for Bannington."

"H'm! A very pretty little conspiracy," said Mr. Pitt. "Since I shall

benefit more than anybody, I suppose it would be somewhat out of place if I criticised your plan. At all events, it is quite honest and straightforward—except for the little deception of the brown dye, which I can overlook."

Pitt was overjoyed at his father's attitude.

He didn't care for anybody else. His father knew the secret, and he had given his sanction to the scheme. And Reginald Pitt knew that he would be able to go straight on—that he would be able to play in the First Eleven of the Bannington Football Club on the Saturday afternoon.

He would be playing for the League!

But even Reginald Pitt, in his great enthusiasm, little realised what this precious scheme was to lead to.

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Old readers will remember that Pitt is not altogether a novice in the art of disguise. Having been a leading spirit in amateur theatricals at St. Frank's, he is quite able to play the part of Abdullah, the Egyptian Wonder Footballer, as skillfully as he plays the game itself. Even so, it is by no means plain sailing for him to keep his secret, especially from his study companions. When Jack Grey begins to ask awkward questions, Pitt, who would rather remain silent than concoct falsehoods, finds himself losing one of his best pals. Misunderstandings and suspicions arise, which, added to Pitt's already overflowing bowl of troubles, are not likely to improve his temper. But though he is becoming less popular with his fellows at St. Frank's, as Abdullah he is winning fame among the numerous followers of professional football. The Bannington F.C. are justly proud of their new recruit, and have decided to play him in a league match. The story of this big event in Pitt's "footer" career will be told next week under the title of **"PLAYING FOR THE LEAGUE!"**

THE EDITOR.

GRAND FREE PLATES!

NO boy should miss the unique opportunity of securing the fine free plate which appears in this week's issue of **THE BOYS' REALM**, entitled

"Well Played, Goalkeeper!"

It is a beautiful production, printed on art paper by a special process, and is well worth framing. This is only the first of a series of these plates. For further particulars see the current number of

THE
BOYS' REALM, 1½d.

The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

Nelson Lee

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

INTRODUCTION.

NELSON LEE, the great detective, as Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A., secures a post as games master at Marsh Manor School in order to investigate strange visits of ghosts at the school. His young assistant, NIPPER, comes to the school as Barton, a backward boy. Unless the ghost can be laid, the Head, the REV. OCTAVIOUS CHARD, will be obliged to close down the school. Lee suspects Monsieur VILOTTE, the French master as being implicated in the ghostly manifestations. ADOLPHE MALINES, JULES TROCHON, and MADAME TROCHON, Belgian refugees and friendly neighbours of the Head, are found to be living on the hospitality of INGLEBY-CHARTERIS, known by Lee to be a financier of ill-repute. The mystery deepens, and Lee finds that he is up against some very desperate and clever criminals, including SOL CLITTERS, the notorious forger. Nipper obtains a job as messenger to Mr. Charteris and overhears an important conversation with Sol Clitters.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER X.

The Opened Letter.

THE beady eyes of the young person at Marsh Manor Post Office pored over the long code telegram that had arrived for "Mr. Herbert Drake," her mean, inquisitive soul exasperated to a degree at her failure to successfully pry into other people's business.

She had just despatched it to the Manor House when the mid-day mail came in, bringing several other letters for the games-master, which she turned over longingly, not daring to break the seals.

It was just then that Monsieur Vilotte blew in to make a purchase, raising his hat politely and smiling his best smile.

The young person liked Mr. Vilotte as much as she hated Mr. Drake, for that artful foreigner went out of his way to flatter her vanity, and whispered soft nothings over the little counter which sounded very

romantic to her, being mostly in French, one of the many things she did not understand.

"Ah! And why does my angel look sad?" said Vilotte. "Are there any communications for the Manor House?"

And he looked at the pile of letters, which, in country fashion, were laid out on the counter for any owner to claim at will after the first delivery.

"There are three for the new master," she replied rather tartly. "He's a mystery to me. He's always getting telegrams which sound like gibberish. I don't think they ought to be allowed."

"Gibberish? Ah, yes," said Vilotte, his own eyes, which were also black and beady, flaring down to a sharp glitter. "What sort of gibberish, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, I don't know! Whole lot of words that make nonsense—code telegrams."

The French-master smiled.

"We all have our own affairs, mademoiselle. Ah, if I could only look into your heart now I should find some charming secrets there without a doubt—is it not so?"

"Get along with you!" said the young person, her pasty face colouring. "But would you like to take these up to the house?"

"I am enchanted to do your smallest bidding!" said Vilotte, with a bow.

And he went out, leaving behind him the lingering impression of a false smile that showed a set of faultless false teeth.

Once in the street the smile disappeared, and he turned the three letters over and over, closely scrutinising the heavy wax seals.

"Now what does a games-master want with code telegrams?" he was thinking. "There is something about my new colleague that creates an indefinable suspicion in my mind. He shall have two of these letters, the third we will examine before it is delivered."

And, selecting one which felt bulkier than the rest, he slipped it into his own pocket, and, returning to the school, sought out "Mr. Herbert Drake," and presented him with the other ones.

"Thanks!" said the recipient. "It's very good of you to have troubled!"

"Enchanted, I assure you!" grinned Monsieur Vilotte, and he locked himself in his own room.

There he produced a watchmaker's glass, and submitted the stolen letter to a minute scrutiny.

"Perfectly simple," he thought, and, with a little instrument he sharpened before using, he made a semi-circular incision round the edge of the sealing-wax, which done, he laid the letter, seal downwards, in his wash-hand basin, and left it soaking there until he came up again after dinner.

He knew exactly what he would find on his return, and he was not disappointed, for the flap had curled open, with the seal intact, and the French-master extracted another envelope that had been sent under cover.

As he read the address he raised both hands above his head with a sharp cry, and his face became livid.

In his search after information Monsieur Vilotte had made a discovery that was destined to change the course of a good many lives!

The billiard-room at Mr. Ingleby-Charteris's was a handsome apartment. On a raised platform round the big table were luxurious lounges upholstered in scarlet morocco, and, in addition to the frosted dome in the roof, large windows gave alluring peeps of the garden on every side.

In one corner was a little serving-hatch closed by a sliding mahogany panel, through which refreshments could be passed at will, at the table itself the stockbroker and his guest were playing snooker in their shirt-sleeves.

"Good shot, Sol!" said Ingleby-Charteris, as the American made a clever cannon off the brown, and went into the top pocket.

While he was still chalking his cue, the new page entered with a letter, and Nipper, who had discreetly left the room again and was now behind the mahogany sliding hatch, heard him give a tremendous oath.

"What's wrong now?" said the American, pausing in the middle of his stroke.

"Everything's wrong. We're all skating on very thin ice," was the startling reply. "Great Scott! Look at this letter, sent, under cover, to the new games-master at Marsh Manor! This'll tell you what's wrong!"

And the watcher saw the consternation in the faces of the two men as Sol Clitters read aloud: "To Nelson Lee, Esq., Gray's Inn Road, London."

"There you are!" said Clitters, between his set teeth. "After you've been monkeying about and playing the fool with your infernal ghosts, here's the enemy at our very gates."

"Tell me something I don't know!" snapped Ingleby-Charteris. "We've got to

act now with a vengeance, and promptly. What's our next move?"

"To kill him this time—out and out—and within the next forty-eight hours, too. Vilotte's our man for the job, and we'll burn the body in the vaults."

The stockbroker's face was white as his immaculate shirt-sleeves, and his hands were trembling violently.

"Do you see who the letter's from?" he said. "Major Rogerson, that besotted fool who was in love with my niece. By heavens, Clitters, it's neck or nothing now! But if we kill him at the school, we're done!"

"We're done if we don't. And there's another three millions trembling in the balance—don't forget it!"

Ingleby-Charteris groaned, and grabbed at the decanter.

"Cut that stuff!" said the American sternly. "I've seen dozens of good men go to the electrocuting-chair through gingering themselves up. I'm glad I came. I'm not saying you haven't done well, old man, in the past; but it wants a stronger nerve than yours to face the present crisis."

Through the crevice in the door of the serving-hatch, Nipper saw the pompous stockbroker sink down on one of the leather lounges, limp as a rag, and as the American coolly lit another cigar the contrast between the two men was remarkable.

"Now listen to me, sonny," said Mr. Clitters. "We've got the whole thing under our hat if we make no mistakes. Your position here is above suspicion, our Belgian friends at the hostel have got a clean sheet; it's the Manor House that's all wrong. A boy disappears, a master disappears—"

"And my niece disappeared—don't forget that!" interrupted Charteris.

Instead of his words producing the impression he had expected, the American's smile only increased.

"There's only one man alive who would link up that chain of coincidences, and as his own death is the next move on the board, why waste breath in talking foolishly?" he said. "If Nelson Lee were anywhere else, I'd be with you; but he's where we can get him, and we're going to get him to-morrow night. I must have a word with Vilotte, and if there's any doubt about his carrying the thing through cleanly and without noise, I'll durned well do it myself. Cuss you, Chart, weakening like this! I'd got that game easy all, and you've lost me the chance of winning twenty dollars."

The stockbroker's eyes had become blood-shot, and he looked round the sumptuous billiard-room with a sudden fear in them, the fear of a man who is about to lose everything.

The American understood the look, and took up the decanter with a perfectly steady hand.

"I'm going to prescribe for you. I've got a tabloid which we'll dissolve in a two-finger peg, just to steady your nerves. Then we'll

go out into the garden, and talk things over. I'm in charge of this outfit now. You've got to do as you're told."

By the time dinner was served Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, though some of his florid colour was missing, had apparently recovered his usual demeanour. Nipper, soft-footed, attentive, and self-effacing, poured out the Rudesheimer, which was the wine Sol Clitters had selected, and afterwards filled the liqueur-glasses without spilling a drop, under the watchful eye of the butler.

"How do you like Johnson, Friday?" said the master of the house, when Nipper had gone to bring the cigars.

"He promises very well, sir. I think we shall make something of him," was the reply, and Ingleby-Charteris nodded.

"I suppose you're keeping your eye on the clock, old man?" said the American. "What time do we meet—the lady?"

"Oh, another hour yet!" said his friend. "I've given my chauffeur a night off, and we'll get the little Hurler out ourselves. The train's due in just before ten. You can go now, Johnson, we sha'n't want you again."

And, depositing the cigar-box on the table, Nipper closed the dining-room door.

That last sentence had determined his course of action. Within a quarter of an hour of the arrival of the down train there was one, he knew, which would deposit him at Huntingdon, thus giving his plenty of time to witness the departure of the two confederates with the mysterious lady they were going to meet, and Nipper, convinced that he had already heard enough and would serve no useful end by remaining there, had resolved to warn Lee in person of the enemy's discovery of his identity and the peril that threatened him in consequence.

"There will be supper in half an hour," said Mr. Friday, the butler, to the new boy. "You can wash some of that silver up now if you like, or leave it till afterwards; but it's all got to be packed up by bedtime. If you want me for anything, you'll find me in my own room."

"Thank you, sir!" said Nipper, and he went into the pantry, where he listened to Mr. Friday's footfalls dying away in the distance.

"If I do a guy without any apparent cause," thought the boy, "those two scoundrels are cute enough to tumble to who I am, and that won't do at any price. I must turn amateur thief for the occasion, to provide a reason for my disappearance."

The stockbroker's silver was solid, and every article stamped with his crest and monogram, and, wrapping up a dozen forks and a dozen spoons, the fish carvers, and three or four gravy-ladles in a towel, he carried them to his own little room, which was immediately above the pantry.

It did not take him five minutes to shin out of his livery and into his own clothes again, and, when he had placed the silver in the secondhand attaché-case he had

bought that morning in the town, he opened the window, which he had previously reconnoitred, and lowered the case into the middle of a flower-bed, by the simple means of two sheets knotted together.

Then he climbed out on to the sill, grasped the rain-water pipe, and, after waiting a breathless moment or two, picked up the swag, and stole away through the shrubs, skirting the tennis-courts and the little pagoda, where he had played eavesdropper with such important results, and, when he had made quite sure that there was nobody on the road, scaled the wall and struck briskly out for the town, which was about a mile off.

On the way he took the precaution to lock the case, and, reaching the station without adventure of any sort, walked coolly into the parcels-office on the down platform.

"I want to leave this here," he said.

"Threepence," responded the attendant, handing him a duplicate slip. "Shall I keep it forward?"

"No, thanks! I sha'n't want it until to-morrow," replied Nipper, tendering half-a-crown, which was the smallest coin he had.

Already there were passengers waiting for the arrival of the train from London, and the man was slow in producing the change.

"I say, do you mind hurrying up?" said Nipper.

And a figure in a big motor-coat who was passing the door at the moment heard his voice, fell back a step, to gain a clearer view of the speaker, and, with a surprised cry, pounced in and seized him by the collar.

"You infernal young scoundrel! By the living jingo, Johnson, you shall smart for this!" thundered Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, snatching the slip from Nipper's fingers. "Here, bring me the article this refers to!"

And he held out the slip to the attendant.

"Certainly, sir," said the man to whom the stockbroker, being a season-ticket holder, was well known.

And he returned with the attaché-case.

"Open it for me; I want to see the contents," demanded Ingleby-Charteris.

"It's locked, sir."

"Then give me the key!"

And he shook Nipper like a terrier shakes a rat.

There was nothing for it, and he unlocked the case, staggered at the turn things had taken, and very sick at heart.

"I thought so!" cried his captor triumphantly. "We discovered half an hour ago that this young villain had rifled the pantry and decamped, and here I've caught him red-handed. Is that train signalled yet?"

"Yes, sir. She'll be running in in a minute," said the man. "Shall I fetch one of our constables?"

"No. My friend outside will take charge of him, and we'll drop him at the police-station on our way. Come along, you!"

And, with the attaché-case, which the attendant had relocked, in one hand, and

the other firmly grasping "Peter Johnson," the stockbroker, swelling with righteous indignation, hustled his late page outside to a grey-painted Hurlu, in which sat Sol Clitters.

"Got him! Piece of amazing luck!" said Ingleby-Charteris. "You'd better change into the back, and take charge of the prisoner. Don't let him go at any price."

The American climbed over, with surprising agility for a man of his bulk, and as he laid his heavy hand on Nipper's wrist, Charteris ran back on to the platform.

"Guess you're seventeen assorted kinds of a considerable idiot, Johnson!" was the crook's amused comment. "Been long at the game?"

Nipper hung his head and made no reply, and they heard the stertorous breathing of the great locomotive and the hiss of escaping steam above the soft purr of the Hurlu's engines, which Charteris had left running.

The immediate prospect was very black, but Nipper's chief concern was whether they would fathom his real identity.

"You're suffering from the impetuosity of youth," said the American good-humouredly, after a pause. "You're a bad little boy, and they'll probably give you a couple of years in a reformatory, according to your record; but if you do it again, after you've come out, don't be in such a hurry. It's the waiting game that pays in this hard, unsympathetic world. Just think now—instead of a pitiful little grip-sack of forks and spoons, you might have cleared with——"

But the coming of Mr. Ingleby-Charteris interrupted the wisdom of experience, and the stockbroker ushered a tall, slim lady, whose face was hidden by a set of cheap furs, to the door of the car.

"I'll introduce you two when we've got rid of this other little business," he said, motioning her to the front seat, and they started.

Nipper tried to catch a glimpse of the lady's profile, but the black bear-skin fur foiled him, and it caused him no surprise when they reached the police-station that the American should remain in his seat in the car, leaving Ingleby-Charteris to take him inside.

The proceedings were brief, and the prisoner made no attempt at defence, but gave his false name and answered the stereotyped questions of the station-sergeant in monosyllables.

"Very well, sir; we'll look after him, and to-morrow you'll charge him?"

"I shall be here at eleven o'clock," said the stockbroker, drawing on his driving-glove. "Good-night, sergeant!"

"Good-night, sir!"

And he went out through the swing-doors.

"Sergeant," said Nipper, resting his handcuffed wrists on the iron bar. "I took that silver, but it would have been faithfully restored to Mr. Charteris in a day or two. I assure you this is not an ordinary case of

thieving, and I want you to do something for me."

The station-sergeant, an intelligent man, was struck, not only by the boy's tone and the perfect self-possession with which he spoke, but the smile that was almost one of merriment that accompanied the words.

"What do you mean? What do you want me to do?" he said sternly.

"To send a telegram to Mr. Herbert Drake, at the Manor House, Marsh Manor. I'll pay for it. That money you found in my pockets is my own. Say: 'Barton in custody at Peterborough. Come at once.'"

The sergeant looked puzzled.

"Anyway, it's too late to wire now," he said. "If you've been playing practical jokes, you'll find you've got yourself in a bit of a mess, young man. And it's no laughing matter. But I'll send the telegram for you first thing in the morning. Tell me again, and I'll put it down."

Twice during the course of the night the sergeant opened the little window and turned his light into the cell, and, finding the prisoner sleeping peacefully, with a happy smile upon his face, went away more mystified than ever, and sent the telegram, as he had promised.

CHAPTER XI.

The Return of the Truant.

"I SAY, Withers," said Nelson Lee, as the innkeeper of The Red Lion pulled up in front of Peterborough police-station with his motor-cycle and side-car shortly after nine next morning. "I'll make it worth your while to keep a very silent tongue about anything you may see or hear. I've always found you a man of quite superior intelligence, and, apart from all that, I'll ask you, as a personal favour, to be absolutely mum. Do you follow me?"

Withers was the local sportsman of Marsh Manor and captain of the village eleven, and Withers smiled.

"I know what the young gentlemen think of you, sir, and I know exactly what you mean," he replied. "Marsh Manor's a funny place, as you'll find when you've lived a little longer among us, if you haven't found it out already. Have you got the runaway boy, sir?"

Lee nodded.

"Well, there's no reason why Marsh Manor should know where you've found him, and they'll never learn it from Bill Withers," said the good sportsman.

It was a long and exceedingly interesting conversation that passed between the station-sergeant and the famous detective; but at the end of half an hour Nelson Lee handed him a cheque for a hundred pounds, for which he received an official receipt.

"That's my bail for Master Barton's, alias 'Peter Johnson's,' appearance, in case Mr. Ingleby-Charteris proceeds with the charge, which I'm pretty certain you'll find

he won't when I've explained the whole matter to him. There are very great issues hanging on this business, and you must forgive me if I have not entirely opened my heart to you; but I think my name is sufficient to clear any doubts you may have in your mind."

"The name is world famous, sir, and it's been a real pleasure to meet you," said the police-officer heartily. "Of course, you're really in the Huntingdon district; but if there's anything we can do, you've only got to 'phone us up."

"I'm very much obliged to you, and thanks for the loan of the handcuffs!" said Nelson Lee. "Now, Nipper, I'll escort you back and hand you over to the tender mercies of Mr. Chard; but we mustn't forget to restore your hair to its natural colour before the boys see you."

"I've got a budget of news that'll make your own hair curl, guv'nor," said Nipper, in a low voice, when they were outside.

And he rapidly told him all he had heard.

For a moment Lee's face became more than usually grave and thoughtful.

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" he said at last. "Well, our best chance now is to be perfectly open. And I'm rather sorry you pinched that silver, but no matter. Sol Clitters carried the war into our camp, and we'll do the same thing with the enemy. Withers!" And he walked over to the side-car. "Run us round by the post-office on the way back. Now, Barton, climb up behind, and away we go!"

At the post-office, into which he beckoned the captured truant, as Withers believed him to be, the great detective wrote these words, which he showed to Nipper, before he enclosed them in an envelope:

"Dear Mr. Ingleby-Charteris,—I shall esteem it a personal favour if for the present you will take no further proceedings against Peter Johnson, whom I have bailed out this morning. I am engaged at the present moment in some delicate investigations into the mysterious apparitions at Marsh Manor, and Johnson, otherwise Nipper, of whom you may possibly have heard, is indispensable to me.

"Yours very faithfully,

"NELSON LEE."

"That will give them furiously to think!" he laughed, as he licked the envelope down. "You'll find the ghosts will cease from this moment, and we must be prepared for far more serious visitors. Has it occurred to you, Nipper, that we're only on the extreme fringe of the business, and the moment we discover how our Belgian friends get into the house we shall strike?"

"Unless Vilotte strikes first!" said Nipper.

"Pooh, youngster! That fool doesn't trouble me in the least, and I sha'n't even take the precaution of locking the communicating door between the study and my bedroom, for I mean to catch him on the hop. Now I must get you a shampoo."

It was a very humble, contrite "Barton" who followed the games-master into Mr. Chard's study, and Nelson Lee revealed more of the condition of affairs to that gentleman than he had previously deemed advisable.

"There is no doubt, Mr. Chard," he said, "we are on the eve of a great capture. A desperate gang of forgers, under the guise of Belgian refugees, has been living unsuspected in your midst, and I have made some surprising discoveries, thanks to Nipper here. I am very much afraid that however the cat jumps your school is bound to suffer a temporary eclipse, although, on the other hand, it may prove the very best advertisement you could have desired. Have I your permission to pursue the object in view?"

"You have not only my permission, Mr. Lee," said the Rev. Octavius stoutly, "but I will render you every assistance in my power. Good heavens! I never heard of such a state of things in my life! And you seriously implicate Mr. Ingleby-Charteris?"

"I have no doubt about it," said Nelson Lee. "His association with the man Clitters, who is wanted by half the world's police for half the crimes it is possible to commit, tells me much, and I shall find out more. The one thing I would impress upon you, sir, is on no account to let the Belgians see any change in your manner. If it is possible to be more friendly, be so. A very great deal hangs on that. And now I would suggest that you put Barton through his facings, for the sooner he takes his place in the school again the better."

The Sixth Form were taking French, and Seymour was in the very depths of despair. He had entirely forgotten to do his exercise over-night, and knew instinctively that Monsieur Vilotte knew it instinctively too, and was playing him like an angler plays a fish.

He hated the French master, who seemed to take a delight in showing him up, and that morning there was something almost vindictive in the glitter of Monsieur Vilotte's eye, and he did not smile at all.

"I have no chalk. Will you have the goodness to procure for me a piece, Seymour?" he said.

And Seymour went to the cupboard.

"A thousand thanks! Your manners are better than your reflexive verbs."

There was silence in the class-room, but the French master seemed in no hurry to begin. Instead, he walked to the window, and looked out in a grim, abstracted way, quite different to his usual manner, which was brisk and rapid.

"Froggie's got the pip over something," whispered Tulk.

"Who was that talking?" demanded Monsieur Vilotte.

"I spoke, sir," said Tulk.

"Then stay behind after school for your impertinence. Mr. Chard, he pay me—oh, large sums of money—to do all the talking here. I see someone has left the door open."

Seymour, have the goodness to oblige me by closing it."

And poor Seymour obeyed.

"He's got me!" groaned that unhappy young gentleman to himself, feeling his face growing more scarlet every moment.

And then Monsieur Vilotte fell to studying his nails with great attention for a few moments, until, suddenly looking up, with a slight shadow of that saturnine smile they knew so well, he said:

"Open your copybooks. Exercise thirty-seven—English into French. Seymour, begin!"

At that moment the door opened, and one of the junior boys, looking very important, with wide-open eyes and a perceptible tremor in his voice, cried:

"Please, sir, Mr. Chard wants you to bring your class into the hall at once!"

And, without waiting for any comment, he ran off to the next class-room.

They wondered what had happened, and even the French master bit his lips as he pointed to the door.

"Saved!" whispered Seymour, and they filed out, the master following.

In the passage they found other forms also filing out, and the air was thick with speculation as they took their places in the grand old Tudor room with the black panelling, the morning sun flinging the colours of the painted windows on to the tiled floor.

The trio looked at the games-master, and thought his face wore an added gravity.

"I hope it's measles, and we've all got to go home!" whispered Gurling.

But before Tulk could reply the Head sailed in, in his cap and gown, and behind him was their missing schoolmate.

There was a little gasp, which died away on the instant as Mr. Chard, in a solemn, sorrowful voice, said:

"Barton, stand forward, where the whole school can see you!"

I don't know which of them played his part the best—Nipper, with head bent and eyes cast down, looking the very picture of misery, or the Rev. Octavius Chard, as he took off his cap and passed a hand across his brow.

"Boys," he said, "the wanderer has returned, and I am glad of it."

He said the words in a tone which meant very clearly that the gladness was not going to be shared by the culprit, and the trio, who had taken Barton to their hearts almost at first sight, trembled, expecting the most serious punishment of all for their chum.

"Barton," said Mr. Chard, "you have merited expulsion, but, having regard for the previous excellence of your conduct, and realising that a boy expelled from school bears a lasting badge of shame upon his brow through the whole of his after-life, I have decided not to take that course."

"Your plea of homesickness is a very foolish one, and quite unworthy of a manly lad of your inches, and you have done a thing calculated to bring my school into very bad odour. When a boy runs away the outside world draws its own conclusions, and those are generally against the school. Your punishment must be a severe one, but I give you a choice. You will either be publicly flogged, or you will write out ten thousand lines of Latin. Which is it to be?"

"Oh, the lines, sir!" stammered Barton, with such alacrity that symptoms of a little titter were audible among some of the bigger fellows.

And then the Rev. Octavius delivered an address that sank into the hearts of his hearers, as he intended it should. A very eloquent, pithy, and pointed address, in which he alluded to the nonsensical rumours that had been floating about of "white abbots" and such-like absurdities, and, the proceedings having occupied very nearly half an hour, Seymour felt his own heart beating joyfully at, not only having Barton back once more, but there being no time now for Monsieur Vilotte to take that French exercise.

Mr. Chard had closed his oration by forbidding the boys to question the truant, who, he said, had made a clean breast of it all to himself, and there must be no re-opening of the subject.

"We'll get it all out of him," whispered Gurling to Tulk, as they returned to the class-room, to gather up their books and transfer themselves to Mr. Jackson for arithmetic.

But for all that, though they pleaded and threatened and cajoled, and brought all the batteries of schoolboy ingenuity to bear on the culprit, not a word could they get out of the "backward boy," who said he had promised Mr. Chard not to open his lips.

"You're no end of a pig, Barton, and if you weren't such a jolly good chap, I'd blooming well lick you!" said Tulk, of the red hair, angrily.

"Perhaps you would, and perhaps you wouldn't," smiled Barton, with a lurch of his broad shoulders. "But one of these days I'll tell you the whole thing. Now, what's been happening here whilst I've been away?"

"Nothing much," said Seymour, "except — Oh, yes! One night old Drake came tumbling out of his room like a madman, and tore down the corridor."

"Must have seen the ghost, you know, and missed it," interjected Gurling.

"And when he came back," said Tulk, "he was like a bear with a sore ear, and

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2!

threatened to report us to the Head if we didn't close our doors at once."

"Didn't think Drake would ever let out," said Barton.

"Oh, wouldn't he?" laughed Gurling. "Only, it would be all over in a minute. Not like that black-bearded beast of a Frenchman, who snarls and yaps like a pom, and keeps it up for days. You were jolly lucky this morning, Seymour; but you'd better write that exercise out from mine. He's certain to nail you on Thursday. He never forgets anything."

After school Mr. Chard marked off a formidable quantity of Latin lines, saying, as he handed the book back:

"Mr. Drake says you can write your imposition in his study. There will be less distraction there. But, remember, I shall expect no mistakes."

And Barton went away, with the book in his hand and the sympathy of the whole school, for it was the heaviest imposition any of them could remember.

CHAPTER XII.

The Murder of Nelson Lee.

NELSON LEE and Nipper sat in the former's study, the Virgil unopened on the table. There were things more important in their particular world than the siege of Troy, and as a glance through the window showed them the French master pacing backwards and forwards at the other side of the playing-field, where he was on duty, the coast was clear for a final consultation.

"What are you going to do, gov'nor?" said Nipper.

"I'm going to let Vilotte kill me in my sleep—on this occasion only. I have the whole thing planned out to a nicety, and Mr. Chard is one of the best fellows I have met."

"I agree," said Nipper. "No one could possibly be kinder. But go on."

"Well," said Lee, "it's a bold step, but I don't think it can fail. As I said just now, Vilotte will murder me to-night, and another mystery will be added to the rest, for when I disappear Vilotte will disappear also, and will be no more seen until the psychological moment. That old Japanese screen in the next room, which is intended to keep off the draught, will serve a double purpose, and, unless the scoundrel is as strong as Samson, Chard and I will make short work of him."

"But what will his confederates think?"

"Exactly what I wish them to think, and when they get his letter announcing that the deed has been done all their fears will be at an end."

"But suppose he won't write?"

"It makes no difference," said Nelson Lee.

"I shall write for him. Mr. Chard has pro-

vided me with several specimens of his screech, and I think my French will pass muster."

"Oh, great!" murmured Nipper. "But what do I do?"

"You'll listen outside Vilotte's door, and if you hear anyone with him you'll come to mine, with a raging toothache for your excuse. I wish we knew who that lady was they met at Peterborough station, but I'm not going to complicate matters by any attempt to find out at present. She's probably some friend of Madame Trochon's, who helps to pass the forged notes. For the moment we have quite enough on our hands, and the future must take care of itself."

To Nipper the rest of that day seemed to crawl on leaden feet, and when tea-time came he was conscious that the French master's eyes were riveted upon him more than once. He knew that the forgers must be aware of his identity, and that sooner or later, possibly sooner, they would attempt to make away with him also.

The afternoon had been grey and lowering, and when the sun sank the rain came. Mr. Jackson was taking prep. that night, and Nipper had a glimpse of the French master, his mackintosh turned up his ears, leaving the house.

"He's gone to hold a last council of war at the hostel," he thought, and his heart thumped curiously against the edge of his desk as he turned over his lesson-books with well-inked fingers.

He thought the supper would never come, but at last the welcome sound of the maids bringing in the usual trays of milk and thick bread-and-butter marked another milestone on the highway of those strange happenings. Mr. Jackson closed his book, and there was a glad hum of relief in the big class-room, with much banging of desks, and yawnings and stretchings.

"You look beastly white," said Tulk, with a chuckle.

"So would you," retorted Nipper, "if you'd gone through what I have to-day."

"I wish we could help you, old chap," said Seymour sympathetically.

"But we can't," laughed Gurling. "Your writing is like a spider that's crawled through an inkpot, and mine isn't much better. Old Chard would spot it at once. Perhaps when Barton's done a few thousand he'll let him off the rest. You were a silly young ass to belt! Poor little baby Barton! Didums want his mummie, then?"

"Shut up, you beast!" said Tulk angrily. "You know he hasn't got one!"

And Nipper, glad of the opportunity, swung round on his heel and left the room, meeting Sutcliffe, who had wished to see Mr. Chard, and was coming back from that gentleman's study, looking very angry.

"Can't find the old ass anywhere," he growled. "When you don't want him he pops round the corner, but when you do he's out."

(To be continued.)

The Best Love Stories and Mystery Tales by the
Most Popular writers Always appear in :

GRAND
BOXING AND
LOVE SERIAL
NOW
RUNNING!

ANSWERS' 2 LIBRARY

EVERY TUESDAY.



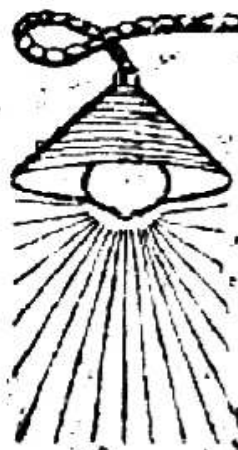
FACTORY TO RIDER

Carriage Paid. Fifteen Days' Free Trial.

LOWEST CASH PRICES. EASY PAYMENT TERMS.

Prompt Delivery. Second-hand Cycles
CHEAP. Accessories at popular
Prices. Write for **Free Lists** and
Special Offer of Sample Bicycle.

MEAD CYCLE CO. Inc.
Dept. B. 607.
BALSALL - HEATH, BIRMINGHAM.



EVERY BOY CAN MAKE ELECTRIC LIGHT!

Battery, Switch, Wire, Lamp, Holder, Re-
flector, Instructions, etc.,
4/6; postage 6d. Larger
Size, 8/6; post 9d. Shock-
ing Coil! Set of parts
for making. 1/9. BATTERY
PARTS. 1/6; post 3d. ELEC-
TRO MAGNET, 9d.; post
3d. Box ELECTRICAL EX-
PERIMENTS, 3/-; post 6d. SPECIAL CHEAP
TELEPHONE SET, complete, 1/9; post 4d. ELEC-
TRIC MOTOR, 3/9; (Catalogue 6d.)



The **HARBORNE SMALL POWER CO.**,
38 (A.P.), Queen's Rd., Aston, Birmingham.

BECOME BIG NOW You can easily increase
your height from 2 to 5
inches, and improve your health, figure and car-
riage, by the Girvan Scientific Treatment. 9 years
of unblemished record. £100 guarantee of genui-
ness. Particulars for postcard. Enquiry Dept.
A.M.P. 17, Stroud Green Road, London, N.4.

MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parcels 2/6, 5/6. Ven-
triloquist's Instrument, Invisible, Imitate Birds.
Price 6d. each. 4 for 1/-.—T. W. HARRISON, 239,
Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

CUT THIS OUT.

The Nelson Lee Library. Pen Coupon. Value 2d.

Send 15 of these Coupons with only 2/9 direct to
the Fleet Pen Co., 119, Fleet Street, E.C.4.
You will receive by return a splendid British-
Made 14ct. Gold Nibbed Fleet Fountain Pen, value
10/6 (Fine, Medium or Broad nib). If only 1
coupon is sent the price is 4/9. 2d. being allowed
for each extra coupon up to 12 (Pocket Clip 4d.
extra). This great offer is made to introduce the
famous Fleet Pen to NELSON LEE readers. Satis-
faction guaranteed or cash returned. Foreign
post extra.

Lever self-filling Safety Model, 2/- extra.

STEREOSCOPE



AMUSING BARGAIN
NOVELTY.

Powerful Lens
Stereoscope and
Picture Holder,
2 1/4 ins. long, and
100 Real Kinema
Film Pictures,
All Different, 1/6
Post Free. De-

light or Money Back, Creates a sensation
wherever shown. Thousands Selling. FREE
Catalogue. **PAIN'S PRESENTS**
HOUSE, Dept. 478, HASTINGS.

FREE FUN!

Our funny Novelty,
causing Roars of
Laughter, FREE to all
sending 1/- for 100 Cute Conjuring Tricks, 250
Riddles, 18 Games, 5 Funny Recitations, 10 Funny
Readings, 73 Toasts, 21 Monologues, Ventriloquism,
Etc. Thousands delighted! Great Fun! C. HUGHES,
15, Wood Street, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Strengthen Your Nerves

Nervousness deprives you of employment,
pleasures, and many advantages in life. If you
wish to prosper and enjoy life, strengthen your
nerves, and regain confidence in yourself by
using the **Mento-Nerve Strengthening**
Treatment. Guaranteed Cure in 12 days. Used
by Vice-Admiral, to Seaman, Colonel to Private,
D.S.O.'s, M.C.'s, M.M.'s, and D.C.M.'s. Merely
send three penny stamps for particulars.—Godfrey
Elliott-Smith, Ltd., 527, Imperial Build-
ings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C. 4.

PHOTO POSTCARDS OF YOURSELF, 1/3
doz., 12 by 10 **ENLARGEMENTS** 8d. ALSO CHEAP
PHOTO MATERIAL. CATALOGUE AND SAMPLES
FREE—HACKETTS, JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.

FILMS FOR SALE, cheap. Machines, etc.
Stamp for list. 50 ft. Sample film, 1/3. **Tyson**
& Marshall, 89, Castle Boulevard, Nottingham.

"CURLY HAIR!" "It's wonderful," writes
E. 10,000 Testimonials. Proof sent. Ross'
"Waveit" curls straightest hair. 1/3, 2/5. ROSS,
(Dept. N.L.), 173, New North Rd., London, N.1.

FUN FOR ALL! Ventriloquist's Voice Instru-
ment. Invisible, Astonishes, Mystifies. Imitate
Birds, Beasts, etc. 1/- P.O. (Ventriloquism Treatise
included).—Ideal Co., Clevedon, Somerset.

Be sure and mention **"THE
NELSON LEE LIBRARY"** when
communicating with advertisers.

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Limited: The
Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, 11s. per annum,
5s. 6d. for six months. Abroad, 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 5d. for six months. Sole Agents for South
Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs.
Gordon & Gatch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company, Limited.