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THE INTERRUPTED MATCH

OR ARRESTED ON THE FIELD

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THE TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN, Ltd.,

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THE INTERRUPTED MATCH;

OR, ARRESTED ON THE FIELD.

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 "Playing for the League," "Missing from the Match," "The Mystery Outside-Right," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

A VISITOR IN THE NIGHT!

TAP! Tap!

Nelson Lee turned sharply, and gazed at the window.

The taps had come abruptly, breaking in upon the stillness of the night with startling distinctness. The great detective was seated in his study in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and the time was a few minutes after midnight. Nelson Lee was doing some late work.

The blind was down and he could see nothing. He wondered who could be outside the window but he was not in the least perturbed or concerned. He thought of any possible enemies but dismissed the idea.

Tap!

It came again; this time a trifle louder.

Nelson Lee rose quietly to his feet. He had never thought of being disturbed in this way and he was still puzzled as to the cause of the mysterious sounds. It struck him—and he smiled at the idea—that possibly an innocent cat was the cause of the taps. He had known cats to do that kind of thing on many an occasion. He crossed over to the window, and pulled the blind up.

But, merely as a matter of precaution—a kind of instinct with Nelson Lee—he

stood aside, quite clear. In case an old enemy happened to be on the spot, with uncomfortable intentions upon his life, he was prepared.

But nothing of this kind happened, and Nelson Lee, suddenly striding forward, flung open the window.

"Well, who's there?" he asked sharply.

A dim form loomed up, and Lee received something of a start. The form was a youthful one, and the face which looked at him was that of a junior. Nelson Lee at once recognised him as Reginald Pitt of the Remove.

"Why, Pitt, what is the meaning of this?" asked Lee, half sternly.

"I—I want to speak to you, sir."

"You have chosen rather an extraordinary time to have a chat," said Nelson Lee drily. "And do you realise, Pitt, that it is my duty to punish you severely for being absent at this time of the night?"

"I haven't come to you like that, sir," said Pitt. "I want to see you on business—not as a schoolmaster. It's about Simon Raspe, and all that affair, sir; and although I knew it was a bit reckless, I thought I couldn't do better than to come straight to you."

"Well, Pitt, I cannot possibly understand the position until you have told it to me," said Nelson Lee. "Therefore,

the best thing you can do is to come in and explain yourself."

"Thank you, sir."

The junior climbed in through the open window, and then Nelson Lee closed it, and once more pulled the blind into position. Nelson Lee sat down in his easy-chair, and motioned to Pitt to sit in another.

There was something rather quaint about this midnight call of Pitt's.

For, earlier that same night Pitt had run away from St. Frank's. Bedtime had come, and he had not shown up; and it had become certain that the junior had run away from the school for good.

He had been driven out by the attitude of a number of thoughtless fellows in the Remove. They had believed Pitt to be engaged in shady pursuits; they thought that he had taken to gambling and betting, and consorting with questionable characters. And they had come to this conclusion with no proof.

Things had reached a climax, and Pitt had cleared out; and now, only two or three hours later, he had turned up in this extraordinary way. Nelson Lee was quite surprised, although he did not allow Pitt to see it.

"Well, my boy, I'm waiting!" said Lee.

"I—I hardly know how to begin, sir," said Pitt.

Lee smiled.

"The usual way, Pitt, is to begin at the beginning," he suggested. "It is far simpler, and avoids all confusion. And you need not be nervous, Pitt. I realise that you have come to me confidentially, and—shall we put it?—unofficially. I will not regard myself as your Housemaster for the period of this interview."

Pitt leaned forward eagerly.

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir," he said. "That's what I was worried about. I came, in spite of what might happen, but I was afraid you might keep me here; and I don't want to stop, sir."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Pitt; but we can leave that until later," said the detective. "Go ahead with your story."

"You know most of it, sir," said Pitt quietly. "You know that Simon Raspe, the millionaire financier, swindled my father out of every penny he had—even

to the extent of taking his house and home."

"Yes, Pitt, I know that."

"At the same time he brought false evidence against Mr. Lockwood, my father's private secretary," went on Pitt, "and Lockwood was sent to prison for things he didn't do. It was terrible, sir."

"I think you are aware, Pitt, that I am applying my attention and my efforts to this particular case at the present moment," said Nelson Lee. "If it is humanly possible, I shall recover all the money that your father was swindled out of, all the property, and I shall secure Mr. Lockwood's pardon. That is what I am working for now."

"You're a brick, sir," declared Pitt gratefully. "I knew all this, as you say, and that's why I've come, because I've brought some information that might give great assistance to you—that might make all the difference in the world."

"Very well—go ahead!" said Nelson Lee. "But just one moment. There is something I shall tell you. If you are scheming in your mind how you shall broach the subject of your present occupation, I can save you the trouble. I know that you are playing football for the Bannington club—as a professional."

Pitt stared.

"You—you know?" he asked blankly.

"I do."

"But—but how—"

"Never mind how I got to know, Pitt—I do know," smiled Nelson Lee.

"But does anybody else know, sir—at St. Frank's, I mean?"

"Yes, Nipper knows; but Nipper and I are keeping it quite to ourselves, I can assure you," said Lee. "You need have no fear, Pitt; your secret will be well kept. But I shall have a word to say about that later."

"I—I'm awfully glad you know, sir, because it makes it easier," said Pitt. "I hope you won't be wild, but I did it all for the best. I played in a reserve match at first, just for fun. I never thought anything would come of it; but they liked me so much that I was offered six pounds a week to play in the regular matches."

"And you were tempted by the money?"

"I shouldn't have been under ordinary

circumstances, sir," said Pitt firmly. "If things had been all right at home, I wouldn't have dreamed of it. But it was different. My father and mother were in an awful hole because of Raspe's villainy—living in lodgings, and they didn't have hardly a penny. You—you don't know how it hurt me, sir!" he added, in a low voice.

"I think I do, Pitt, and I realise how it hurts you to even speak of your parents' position," said Nelson Lee softly. "But there is nothing disgraceful in it, my boy. Your father is the victim of a dastardly conspiracy, and the only blame in the whole affair attaches to Simon Raspe. So you need not be so tentative in referring to your parents' urgent need."

"You make it easy, sir," said Pitt gratefully. "I had the chance of getting this money, and I seized it at once—I grabbed it with both hands. I promised to play for the club, and I've been doing so. It didn't interfere with lessons, or any school work; but I've been compelled to run off sometimes when I was badly needed in the school eleven. That's the only point that upsets me."

"Well, Pitt, you couldn't be in two places at once—you couldn't play in two games at the same time," said Nelson Lee. "And I admire your spirit in forfeiting the school game for the sake of the one which would bring you in the money to help your people. That was the right spirit, and I approve of it."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Pitt huskily. "I—I thought you'd be so different—but that was unjust of me. I always knew you were as good as gold. This afternoon I went to London, and played against Brompton."

"And did your team win?" smiled Lee.

"Yes, rather, sir!" replied the junior. "It was a lovely game, too! I managed it all right by slipping off without dinner, and I got back in good time, too. But I had to miss playing in the game against Helmford College."

"Obviously."

"When I got back, sir, I—I—well, I ran away!"

"Because a number of the boys made false accusations against you, and treated you badly in every way?" asked Nelson

Lee. "Yes, I know; and, speaking confidentially, I can't altogether condemn you for deciding to get out. I judge that you did so in a weak moment."

"I don't know that I was weak, sir," said Pitt. "I could see everything coming. If I didn't go then, I should have had to go later on. Things couldn't go on properly; because I should have had to miss other matches, and then all the trouble would have been the same. So I thought it best to clear."

"Accordingly, you went to one of your footballer friends in Bannington?"

"How did you know, sir?"

"I didn't know; but it is the only logical explanation," smiled Nelson Lee. "Who else could you go to?"

"Yes, I suppose that's right," said Pitt. "I went to a young chap named Howard—a regular nice fellow, sir. And my idea is to put that dye stuff on, and keep it on all the time; then nobody will be able to find me. I can come back to St. Frank's after everything's cleared up."

"And this is what you have come to tell me?"

"No, sir, not this at all!" said Pitt. "But you told me to start at the beginning, didn't you? I told Tom Howard all about it, and he has promised to let me live at his place. Well, we went for a walk, sir, and we suddenly saw a dark form in front of us, and we chased it."

"This is getting quite thrilling," said Nelson Lee drily.

"I'm really serious, sir," went on Pitt. "Howard struck a match, and we saw that the man was dressed as a convict—"

"A convict?" repeated Lee sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Not—not—"

"Lockwood, sir—Lockwood himself!" said Pitt tensely. "I recognised him at once, and he recognised me. That's what I've come to you about; because I don't know what to do, and I thought it only right you should know."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"It was very sensible of you, Pitt," he said slowly. "So Lockwood has escaped, eh? In one way I am glad, and in another way I am rather sorry. In any case, he would have been released before so very long. He ought not to have taken this chance. Do you know how he escaped?"

"He said something about a wall collapsing, sir," replied Pitt. "There was a lot of confusion, I believe, and Mr. Lockwood managed to slip out. I expect it was the prison wall round the courtyard, and I suppose Mr. Lockwood got out before the gap could be guarded."

"That is probably the case," said Nelson Lee. "Being an innocent man, you cannot quite blame him for taking the opportunity when it came. Where is he now?"

"We've got him, sir—Tom Howard and I."

"Phew!" whistled Lee softly. "Aiding and abetting a convict to evade the law! A pretty serious business, Pitt. If you're not careful you'll find yourself in bad trouble. It's just as well you came to me."

Pitt leaned forward.

"But I don't think there's any danger, sir," he said. "You see, we've given Mr. Lockwood some proper clothes, and he's gone to a little bathing shed of Howard's, just near the river. Even if he's found there—which isn't likely—we can't be connected with it."

"H'm! I see you have thought of all precautions," said Nelson Lee. "Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to come and see Lockwood, sir," said Pitt. "I believe he can give you a lot of valuable information about Simon Raspe; and as you are engaged upon this case, it's better that you should know it."

Nelson Lee nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"You must allow me to compliment you, Pitt, upon your shrewdness. You have acted with admirable presence of mind and common sense," he said; "and I appreciate the delicate nature of your position, and your natural unwillingness to come to me. You put all such thoughts aside, and you came, simply because you thought it would help towards securing your father's lost fortune."

"Yes, sir," said Pitt quietly.

Nelson Lee sat silently in his chair for some little time. He hardly moved an inch, and almost appeared to be half asleep. When Pitt was beginning to get impatient, Nelson Lee stirred.

"Yes, I will go to Lockwood at once," he said. "I will have a chat with the man, and hear what he has to say. If

there was the slightest possibility that Lockwood was guilty, I would hand him over to the police. It may even be necessary to do so now—it may be better for the man himself. We will see. But I know he is innocent, and that makes a great difference."

Nelson Lee rose, and placed a hand on Pitt's shoulder.

"As for yourself, my boy," he went on, "you have been going through a troublesome time—you have had severe trials. Upon the whole, you have borne up bravely. I do not command you to come back to St. Frank's—I could only do that in my capacity as Housemaster, and I have given you my word that I will not assume that capacity just now. But, Pitt, let me urge you to come back."

"But—but I don't want to, sir," said Pitt uneasily.

"Why not?"

"Oh, you don't know—you don't see what goes on, sir," said Pitt miserably. "The fellows don't understand, and they think rotten things about me, and—and— Oh, it's uncomfortable and terribly awkward. I'd rather carry out this plan, sir, and come back when everything's properly cleared up."

"H'm!" said Lee thoughtfully. "There is that aspect of the case, of course, and we will not continue the subject now, Pitt. We will hurry straight to this little bathing hut you refer to, and interview the unfortunate Mr. Lockwood. How did you come here?"

"On my bicycle, sir."

"Good. I will return with you by cycle, too," said Nelson Lee.

They were soon off, and they went riding along down the quiet country roads towards Bannington. It was close upon one o'clock now, and everything was still and dark. Not much wind was blowing, and the sky was very cloudy. The dark was very intense.

Pitt himself was in a whirl of excitement. So many things had happened just lately that he could hardly keep count of them; and it gave him great courage to know that Nelson Lee was fully in the secret, and conversant with all the details.

They reached a tiny lane at last, and turned off. Proceeding along this, they went round many winding turns until the River Stowe lay just ahead. There

was a tiny bridge here, and to the left, in a meadow, and reached by a foot-path, stood the little bathing hut which Pitt had referred to.

They left their bicycles near the bridge, and walked to the hut. It was perfectly dark and still, and looked quite deserted.

"I expect he's asleep, sir," whispered Pitt. "Anyhow, he's locked in, and I expect we shall give him a bit of a start. I'd better whisper straight off, because he knows my voice."

They arrived at the door of the hut, and Pitt tapped upon it.

"It's me—Pitt!" he said softly. "Please open the door."

There was a dead silence.

Again Pitt tapped, but still there was no reply. Nelson Lee grasped the handle of the door, and turned it. The door opened at once.

Nelson Lee threw it open wide, and flashed his light into the bathing hut.

It was quite empty!

CHAPTER II.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE!

THORNTON HOUSE was quiet and still.

It was shortly after midnight, and the master of the big residence was seated in his library in a lounge chair, reading by the light of a softly shaded electric standard lamp, which stood upon a carved table near him. A fire crackled and glowed in the grate, for this October night was somewhat chilly.

Mr. Simon Raspe was finishing a big cigar before going to bed, and he was just glancing through the London evening paper. He was a biggish man, with fat, heavy features, and a most unpleasant hagginess about the eyes.

Simon Raspe was the only person in the whole house who was still up. Everybody else had gone to bed, and the rest of the house was in darkness. Even Stretton had retired—and Stretton was Mr. Raspe's confidential secretary.

At least, this was the capacity he was supposed to fill in the household, and in Simon Raspe's business affairs. Actually, Stretton was more or less of an accomplice in criminal dealings; for Simon Raspe was by no means the innocent gentleman he purported to be.

He was a man of great wealth—a financial magnate in the City; and it was generally supposed that he had gained his fortune through clever speculation and shrewd manipulation of the stock market. Actually, Simon Raspe's money belonged to other people. The victims of this man were numerous, and one of them was Mr. Reginald Pitt. Indeed, Raspe had ruined Mr. Pitt utterly and completely.

But Raspe worked carefully, and he generally managed to keep within the law. It was certainly true that he had gone very near the mark in the Pitt case; and, indeed, if certain information came out, he would find himself in Queer Street. But Simon Raspe was confident that this information would remain locked up.

The rascally financier was not aware that Nelson Lee was busily working on the case; and he certainly would have been staggered if he had known that the famous detective had already made big headway. Fortunately for Raspe's peace of mind, he did not know these things.

Crash!

Simon Raspe started violently. The sound had come from the window—a splintering crack of glass, not particularly loud, but seeming to be extraordinarily noisy in that quiet atmosphere. It was probably unheard in every other part of the house.

"Good heavens!" muttered Raspe, starting up.

He stared towards the French windows; they were curtained, but the curtains were not tightly drawn, and as Raspe looked he saw a hand come through a hole in the glass, and the hand lifted back the patent catch.

The financier rushed across to his desk, and pulled open a drawer. He felt feverishly for the revolver which ought to have been there; then he cursed violently, remembering that he had left the weapon in his bedroom.

Facing about again, he saw a man entering the room, leaving the French windows wide open. A cold draught blew into the apartment from behind him. It was impossible to see much, for the room was in deep shadow, except for that one patch of light under the reading-lamp.

"Who the deuce are you?" snarled

Raspe shakily. "What's the meaning of this?"

The stranger advanced into the room. "I think you know me, Mr. Simon Raspe!" he said coldly.

The financier stepped forward a pace.

"Confound you!" he snapped. "How should I know you? A burglar, I suppose? Well, you've come to the wrong house——"

"I am no burglar, and I would not touch a penny which belonged to you!" interrupted the stranger. "Switch the lights on, and you will recognise me, I dare say. I have come to have a talk with you, Simon Raspe—and I have come for something else!"

Raspe caught his breath in, and turned towards the door.

"Don't make a mistake and go out!" said the stranger quietly. "You will stay here. At the first sign of attempted flight, I shall act drastically. And remember—make no outcry."

Raspe gritted his teeth, and savagely switched the central lights on. He turned, and was somewhat astounded to find that his visitor was within a foot of him, having crept up quietly while Raspe's back was turned.

"What the——"

"This will be safer!" said the stranger.

He turned the key in the lock, and then flung the key into a corner.

"Why, what—what—— Good heavens!" gasped Simon Raspe hoarsely. "You—you are Stanley Lockwood!"

"Yes, I am Stanley Lockwood," agreed the visitor calmly.

"How—how—what——"

Raspe's voice forsook him, and he stood there breathing hard, staring at the man as though he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes. Lockwood was attired in a somewhat shabby tweed suit, and a tweed cap of a different pattern was pulled tightly over his head.

He looked very respectable, in spite of his shabbiness, and his face was set grimly and determinedly. Yet there was not much reason for Simon Raspe to fear, for Lockwood was quite frail-looking in comparison to the burly financier.

Simon Raspe began to recover his composure.

"Have you been fooling me?" he snapped. "You come here threatening, and I don't believe you've even got a weapon on you——"

"I have my bare hands!" said Stanley Lockwood curtly.

"Tcha! What harm could you do?" said Raspe contemptuously. "I can see that I was needlessly alarmed. There is only one course that I can take, and that is to hold you here until I communicate with the police."

"It sounds quite easy, doesn't it?" asked Lockwood. "I shall not allow you to do anything of that kind, Simon Raspe. Probably the idea sounds ridiculous, but it is my intention to give you the biggest hiding you've ever had. No, I have no murderous plans—you needn't be afraid. I am neither a criminal nor an assassin. My revenge will take quite a simple form, but it will give me great satisfaction. Simon Raspe, you brought false evidence against me, and sent me to prison on a trumped-up charge——"

"Cut out this insane talk——"

"The talk is true—true in every detail!" interrupted Lockwood tensely. "I have been in prison—my name is ruined—I am a convict. And you shall pay, Raspe—in only a very slight way, it is true; but I intend to thrash you until you can't stand on your two legs. Are you ready?"

Raspe stopped back a pace, and laughed harshly.

"You infernal fool!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you could touch me? Do you think you could even attempt to carry out this threat? You haven't got the strength of a mouse!"

"It is not always strength that counts," said Lockwood.

"How have you come here? How did you obtain those clothes?" demanded Raspe. "I heard that a convict had escaped from prison, and now I know that you are the man. Well, my friend, it won't be very long before you are handed back to the warders. This escapade of yours will do you no good."

"It will certainly do you no good!" said the other grimly.

"You idiot!" jeered Raspe. "You brainless dolt! I don't know you—I don't recognise you! You understand? I've never seen you before; and neither

the police nor the prison authorities will believe a word you have to say. We will soon see who is the master of the situation."

Raspe was quite calm now, and he strode across the room to the bell-push, his intention being to awaken the household; but before he could reach the bell, Lockwood sprang forward and grasped his arm.

"Not yet!" he snapped.

"Confound you——"

Crash!

Lockwood's fist went into Simon Raspe's face with considerable force, and the financier staggered back with a yelp of pain. Then he flew into a furious rage, and went blindly for Lockwood, fully believing that he could put this fellow out of action within a few brief seconds.

Simon Raspe made a mistake.

He was in a fearful temper, and Lockwood remained calm.

And that made all the difference, for Lockwood, although the inferior in a matter of strength, was far superior in science. He knew boxing, and he knew how to guard himself, and how to bring his right round. Simon Raspe, on the other hand, was like a blundering elephant, with no defence and no attack.

The fight was quite interesting.

Raspe, blundering about, was punched heavily—on his face, on his chest; and these punches were continuous.

Crash! Slam! Biff!

Raspe roared and cursed—all to no purpose. His nose was swelling, one eye was blackened, and blood was flowing from a corner of his mouth. But Lockwood was untouched as yet; not one of Raspe's wild blows had found its mark. And Lockwood was carrying out his stated intention—he was giving Raspe the hiding of his life. The financier was receiving a thrashing of the most thorough description.

"Now you will believe me, perhaps!" said Lockwood, between his teeth. "I may not be strong, but I am determined. No, that won't do! You cowardly cur! Trying to kick, eh?"

Crash!

His fist smashed into Raspe's face, for the latter was attempting to hack at Lockwood's shins. Raspe staggered back, his face now a terrible sight, for he had received heavy punishment. But,

after all, Lockwood was only administering a thrashing which was thoroughly deserved. There was nothing brutal or murderous in his attack; he was gentlemanly in every way. He was giving a rasool what he deserved in a thoroughly British way.

"Help!" screamed Raspe wildly. "You — you—— Gug-gug-grrh! Help!"

He was now absolutely maddened with pain and helpless rage, and he knew that he could do nothing against Lockwood's superior skill; and at last he was forced to admit that he was beaten.

And so he screamed for help.

His cries were loud, and were heard by others in the house, for almost at once excited voices were heard out in the corridor, and loud thumps came upon the door; but no admittance could be gained.

"What's wrong, Raspe?" came Stretton's voice.

"Help! Police!" gasped Simon Raspe faintly. "I—I——"

"Now I am satisfied!" muttered Lockwood curtly. "I have done what I came for—I have thrashed you until you moaned for help! You will remember this night as long as you live, Simon Raspe!"

In a frenzy of rage, Raspe seized a heavy paper-weight from the desk—it was just within his reach. He staggered back, and flung the weight into Lockwood's face. Only in the nick of time did the latter dodge, and the weight shot through the air, and crashed with terrific force into a magnificent pier glass, shattering it to fragments, with appalling noise.

"You cur!" whispered Lockwood fiercely.

Up came his right, and it caught Simon Raspe fully upon the jaw. The financier gave a gurgling cry, and staggered back. He went to the floor with a heavy crash, and lay perfectly still.

"A knock-out!" muttered Lockwood. "Just what I wanted!"

He thrilled at the thought of what he had done. He had come to Simon Raspe's house, and he had fought the man until he could no longer stand. In a measure, he had been made to pay for his sins.

Lockwood was a quiet man by nature,

but he had suffered so much at Raspe's hands that he had been driven to this action; and he fairly thrilled with joy as he looked down at his beaten enemy's still form. It was the joy of seeing a foul rascal receive what he deserved.

But there was no time to waste.

Lockwood quickly went towards the French windows, and sped out into the night. The hammering upon the door was increasing, and the door was showing signs of giving way. It was high time for Lockwood to go.

He went, and vanished into the darkness.

Exactly thirty seconds later, a panel of the door was smashed through, and Stretton completed the destruction; the door swung back, smashed in. Stretton rushed into the room, followed by Raspe's butler. In the rear, several startled and frightened maidservants were standing in a group, pale and agitated.

Stretton caught his breath in hoarsely.

"Great heavens!" he panted. "What has happened? Look—look at Raspe! Why, I—I believe he's dead—murdered!"

"Im-impossible, sir!" gasped the butler.

But there was every reason for Stretton's alarm.

Simon Raspe lay there, looking a dreadful sight. His face was bruised and battered, and blood was flowing from his mouth; and, at the same time, a steady trickle of blood was coming from the back of his head. He certainly looked dead as he lay there. Stretton hesitated for a second, and ran forward.

He bent down over Raspe.

Then he breathed a sigh of relief as he looked up.

"He's still alive!" he muttered. "Quick, Hawkins! Ring up for a doctor, and get through to the police immediately afterwards!"

"Yes, sir!" said the butler feverishly.

He rushed over to the telephone, and Stretton lifted Raspe's head from the floor; then he saw the reason for the financier's stillness. It was quite clear that Raspe had received a heavy blow, which had sent him crashing over, and, in falling, he had caught the back of his head upon a sharp corner of the heavy brass fender. But Stretton did not look at it in this light.

He gazed about the room, and his eyes saw the smashed pier glass, and then he noticed the heavy paper-weight lying upon the floor. Stretton at once came to the conclusion that Raspe's wound had been caused by this paper-weight. It had struck Raspe's head, and had glanced off into the glass.

In Stretton's excited state of mind it was, perhaps, excusable that he should come to such a wrong conclusion. It was clear to him that somebody had attacked Raspe—and, apparently, it had been a murderous attack.

Everything pointed to it.

It certainly did not seem that a highly indignant man had merely come and had administered a sound thrashing. And yet this was the simple truth. Lockwood had had no intention of causing any real injury to Raspe. The fact that the latter had fallen upon the fender was a pure accident.

And it was to lead to somewhat startling developments.

Stretton had acted on the spur of the moment in telling Hawkins to ring up for the police; but it was just as well, perhaps, that the police should be fetched. After all, there was no reason why this matter should not be investigated. Raspe had nothing to fear; he was well respected in this district, and it would look very strange indeed if the thing was hushed up. It would be far better to have the whole thing open.

Stretton was agitated and anxious. He could not imagine who had done this, and he came to the conclusion that an ordinary burglar—or a tramp, perhaps—had broken in, and had made the attack upon the master of the house.

It was not long before the doctor arrived. By this time Raspe had been lifted on to the couch, and Stretton and the butler had washed his face with wet sponges, and had tied a bandage round the wound.

The doctor's examination was a careful one.

"Fairly serious; but you need not be alarmed, Stretton," he said. "The blow on the back of the head was a heavy one, and slight concussion has resulted. Mr. Raspe will probably remain unconscious for several hours."

"But he will recover?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" smiled the doctor. "Within a week he will pro-

bably be himself; but for the next two or three days he must be kept in bed, and must know nothing of any business. He must not be worried by anything—you understand?"

"Quite!" said Stretton. "Ah! I think the police have arrived—I can hear voices. Please excuse me, doctor."

They had been talking in the bedroom, for Simon Raspe had been carried upstairs by the doctor's orders, and was now lying in bed. Stretton went downstairs, and in the hall he found Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, with two constables to support him.

"We came as quickly as possible, sir," said the inspector. "Rather a bad business, by what Hawkins tells me. How is Mr. Raspe now?"

"Unconscious; but the doctor says he is in no danger," replied Stretton. "I think it is just as well that you should look into the matter, inspector."

"Of course—of course," said Jameson. "I understand that Mr. Raspe was murderously attacked?"

"Yes."

"H'm! We shall have to look into it at once," said the inspector. "Do you mind showing me the scene of the crime?"

Stretton led the way into the library. Inspector Jameson was quite an excellent officer, but he was not blessed with a large amount of brain-power. He was somewhat pompous in manner, and his opinion of Inspector Jameson was a high one.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, as he surveyed the library. "I should say that Mr. Raspe was attacked by a gang!"

"One might think so, but I hardly think that that is the case," said Stretton. "I was under the impression that one person broke in and attacked Mr. Raspe. It appears that Mr. Raspe fought desperately for some time."

The inspector nodded, and walked round. He was shown the paper-weight and the smashed glass; then he nosed about the room inquisitively, searching for clues, and, by good luck, he found one almost at once.

It was a cap—a tweed cap, which Stretton declared did not belong to Simon Raspe. It was, in fact, Lockwood's, the latter having flung it from

his head in the excitement of the fight. He had forgotten all about it.

Inspector Jameson examined the cap closely.

"Yes, no doubt this was left by the miscreant," he said grimly. "H'm! What is this? There is a name written upon the lining, in ink. This may be a most valuable clue, Mr. Stretton."

"Yes, by Jove!" said Stretton.

They took the cap over to the middle of the room, and examined it closely under the electric light; and they had now no difficulty in deciphering the faint name which had been written on the lining.

It was "R. Pitt."

"Pitt?" said Inspector Jameson thoughtfully.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Stretton, starting back.

For a moment they stared at one another. This cap had belonged to R. Pitt; and Stretton immediately came to the conclusion that it was the property of Pitt senior. But, after a moment's thought, he realised that this was impossible. The cap was altogether too small; and, moreover, Mr. Pitt would not wear a cap—certainly not one of this kind, for it was more like a boy's headgear. And the scrawled name inside was also boyish.

"Pitt!" said the inspector. "Why, there's a boy at St. Frank's named that—his name is Reginald, too, I believe. Just a coincidence, I suppose."

"I hardly think so!" said Stretton, with gleaming eyes. "You may not be aware, inspector, that this boy's father made a very bad speculation in the City not long ago. He lost his entire fortune, and his business rival in that matter was Mr. Raspe. I know for a fact that the Pitts are very bitter against my employer. Doesn't it strike you that this boy might have come here?"

"Oh, that's impossible!" said the inspector. "The boy couldn't have done this, Mr. Stretton—I don't know, though," he added slowly. "Was Mr. Raspe any good at boxing?"

"I don't think he knew anything about it," said Stretton.

"Well, this boy might be the culprit," said the inspector. "It's quite likely, in fact, for this schoolboy is certain to be"

fully acquainted with the art of self-defence. A strong, sturdy youngster could smash Mr. Raspo about with ease; and in the end, no doubt, he flung that paper-weight, causing the serious wound you have told me about. H'm! It looks like being a serious business for Master Pitt."

"What do you intend doing?" inquired Stretton.

"I shall make it my business to go to St. Frank's early to-morrow morning," replied the inspector. "I will make inquiries. If I discover that Pitt was away during the night, there will be no doubt about the matter."

"Hadn't you better go at once?"

"No, I fancy not," replied the inspector. "There is no need to disturb the school at dead of night, and make the whole thing public. The boy is certain to be there in the morning, and, if he isn't, it will not take the police long to find him. And, in any case, I must wait until Mr. Raspo recovers consciousness, for he may not wish to prosecute."

"Yes, I suppose you are right," said Stretton. "We shall see you in the morning?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Jameson. "I think, however, I shall go to St. Frank's first, and make a few preliminary inquiries. Since Mr. Raspo is not badly injured, there is no necessity to do anything in a hurry; and please let me request you, Mr. Stretton, to keep this thing quiet. Do not let any of the servants know that this schoolboy is suspected. I should not like to get St. Frank's into bad odour. We must keep the whole matter quiet."

And a few minutes later, Inspector Jameson took his departure. He was satisfied that the assault had not been a very serious one; but Mr. Raspo had been battered about, and it was highly necessary to bring the culprit to book; and the inspector was determined to carry out his investigations in the morning.

It seemed that Reginald Pitt would shortly be in a bad way!

And yet how strangely this misunderstanding had arisen. Lockwood had been supplied with clothing by Tom Howard and by Pitt. Lockwood had been wearing Pitt's cap, and purely by mischance this cap had been left behind. Owing to that one little fact, the junior was to find himself involved in a perfect maze of startling adventure!

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET OUT!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST shook his head sadly.

"It's a frightful pity, dear old boys," he said. "Pitt was one of the best chaps in the Remove, an' it's quite startlin' to think of him runnin' away—it is, really!"

"Well, he's gone," said Tommy Watson bluntly.

"Yes, there's no doubt about that," I agreed. "He hasn't been seen since last night; and he was driven out by Owen major and Armstrong, and all those other rotters. They ought to have had more sense!"

I was feeling highly indignant about the whole matter. Reginald Pitt was not guilty of the things which the fellows had believed—I was sure of it. But, finding himself scorned by the whole Remove, he had fled, and he had not been seen since.

Most of the fellows who had ragged him were intensely sorry now, and they would have been only too pleased to see Pitt back; but Pitt had gone—Pitt had run away from school.

"Beastly shame—that's what I call it!" said Handforth, coming up. "If I'd have been here, Pitt would never have gone; but these blithering idiots go and accuse him of gambling and betting, and don't give him a single chance to defend himself. I'm going to punch a dozen noses this morning."

"That won't do any good, Handy," I said. "I don't blame Pitt for clearing out; he's had a pretty miserable time lately. First of all he quarrelled with Jack Grey, and then the best part of the Remove set on him. And he's innocent of all these rotten things."

But many of the juniors were still sceptical. There was no evidence that Pitt was innocent; he had acted very strangely, and he had given no explanation of his conduct. Even when he had been given the chance he had refused to say anything—that fact in itself had been significant.

"It's all rot!" said Teddy Long. "Pitt's guilty all right, and I'm jolly glad he's cleared out. We don't want his sort in the Remove."

Handforth turned, glaring.

"And we don't want your sort, either," he snapped. "You rotten little

sneak! You're always glad when you find people in trouble. One of these days you'll find a heap of trouble of your own!"

"Yah! Rats!" said Teddy Long. "Didn't Pitt miss the football matches? Didn't he go off on his own—and wasn't he seen with a blessed bookie? It's as clear as daylight! He's a rotter!"

Handforth charged forward, and Teddy Long prepared to flee; but at that very moment Nelson Lee appeared, and Handforth checked himself. Teddy Long grinned, and stuck his hands in his pockets; he knew he was safe.

Nelson Lee was looking very thoughtful as he came through the lobby; he nodded to me, and paused.

"Morning, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"Good-morning, boys!" said Nelson Lee. "Nipper, I want you for a few minutes."

"Now, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, at once," said the guv'nor. "Come straight to my study—it is rather important. You'd better come with me."

"Right you are, sir," I said.

I went with the guv'nor to his study, and when we were inside he looked at me keenly.

"I want to talk to you about Pitt," he said. "As you know, Nipper, he has not returned, and our surmise has turned out to be correct. Pitt has run away, and is now staying with a young fellow named Tom Howard."

"He's one of the Bannington footballers, sir," I said. "He belongs to the professional club——"

"Quite so, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Pitt has decided to remain with the team, and I failed to persuade him to return. He intends adopting his simple disguise, and he will become Abdullah for some little time."

"You mean to say that he's decided to live with the club?" I asked. "Of course, he's been playing for them under the name of Abdullah for two or three weeks, in secret, and nobody knows anything about it. What's his idea now?"

"He wants to wait a bit until everything is cleared up—until he can return to St. Frank's and explain everything," said Nelson Lee. "At present he cannot do so without unfortunate complications."

"Well, I don't blame him," I said. "Things have been pretty beastly for him in the Remove of late, sir. The fellows have misunderstood; they've been thinking that he's been up to shady games, and all the rest of it. We know where he is, and——"

"Wait!" interrupted Lee sharply. "I thought I heard something!"

He nodded towards the door.

I had heard something, too—as though somebody crouched in the passage, and had suddenly slipped. I tiptoed quietly across to the door, and suddenly flung it open. As I did so there was a scuffle of feet up the passage. I just caught a glimpse of a form vanishing round the corner.

"My hat!" I said angrily.

I guessed the truth. Somebody had been listening at the keyhole; and that somebody had caught fright just before I'd opened the door, and had fled. I rushed up the passage, but could see no sign.

The eavesdropper had had time to get round the further corner. Just for a second I thought of chasing after him, then I realised that this would be futile. There were other fellows round there, and by now the culprit would be safely mixed up amongst the others.

I turned back and went into the guv'nor's study.

"A nuisance, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "However, I don't think he could have heard much, for we were not speaking in loud voices; and, in any case, it is no use getting angry or alarmed. Fortunately, I had not referred to the most important matter."

"But we talked about Pitt, sir," I said. "I wonder who the dickens it could have been? Let's hope he didn't hear anything—that's all. Well, what were you going to say, sir?"

"I was merely going to tell you of a little adventure I had last night," said Nelson Lee.

He proceeded to explain what had happened.

He told me how Pitt had arrived just after midnight, and how the latter had explained his intentions, and all the rest of it. I learned about Lockwood, and the fact that the escaped convict had been clothed by Pitt and his footballer friend, and given the use of the old bathing hut.

"Well, Nipper, I went to see this man," said Nelson Lee. "I know for a fact that he is quite innocent. It was my intention to persuade him to give himself up, for that would be far the better course. I have certain information in my possession which will secure his liberty within a very short time, and it would be much better for Lockwood to surrender himself."

"And did you tell him this, sir?"

"Unfortunately, I was unable to do so," said Nelson Lee. "When Pitt and I arrived we found the hut empty."

"Lockwood had fled?" I said.

"Apparently," said Lee. "I do not know why he went, but I could only imagine that he felt himself unsafe; or, more probably, he did not want to get his new friends into trouble, in case the police appeared. If he was found in that hut it might have been bad for Tom Howard, and so Lockwood went on his way. That is how I put the thing together."

"And how are you getting on, sir, with your case?" I asked.

"It is progressing very well indeed," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think that Simon Raspe will enjoy his liberty much longer. As you know, I got possession of certain papers; but Raspe doesn't know of this yet. And he is living in a fool's paradise; while he thinks himself perfectly secure, the machinery of the law is getting into motion, and it won't be long before Mr. Simon Raspe finds the net tightly drawn around him."

"Good!" I said. "I shall be glad when it's over, sir. Pitt will come back then; and we're fearfully handicapped without him. By the way, where does Tom Howard live?"

Nelson Lee gave me the address, but advised me not to visit Pitt.

"I don't think it would do much good, Nipper, and Pitt would hardly welcome a visit," he said. "However, I will leave it to you. I thought I'd better tell you all this, because you knew all the facts so far."

"Thanks, gov'nor," I said. "I'm greatly relieved to know that Pitt is all right, and it's splendid to hear that he's told you everything."

Very shortly afterwards I took my departure from the study, and I made my way into the Ancient House lobby.

It was still quite early morning, and the breakfast-bell was not due to ring for another half-hour.

I found Handforth and Co. talking excitedly.

"I can't believe it!" Church was saying. "It's impossible."

"We saw him!" said McClure. "We actually saw the chap playing—and he didn't look a bit like Pitt!"

"Well, I mean to make it my business to find out for certain," said Handforth grimly. "The yarn's going about, and there must be something in it."

I went over to the three juniors.

"What yarn?" I asked. "What's this about Pitt?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"Why, everybody's talking about it," said Handforth. "They're saying that Pitt's run away because he's joined the Bannington Football Club as a professional."

"What?" I shouted.

"That's it," said Church. "They say that Pitt's wearing a disguise, and he's using the name of Abdullah!"

"Great Scott!" I gasped, fairly staggered.

"We've seen Abdullah," went on Church. "We went to one of those giddy matches, and Abdullah played a ripping game. Everybody's talking about him—you must have heard, Nipper. And, now I come to think of it, Abdullah's style was just like Pitt's; and he's about the same size, too!"

I didn't reply.

The truth was out! I could easily understand how it had got out, too. The eavesdropper had heard the gov'nor and me talking. He had heard us say that Pitt had run away and was staying in Bannington. The listener had heard us say that Pitt had joined the professional club, and was playing for Bannington under the name of Abdullah. The whole secret was out!

"Do you believe this?" asked Handforth.

"Who told you?" I demanded, without answering his question.

"We heard it from Armstrong."

"Where is he?" I demanded grimly.

"Out in the Triangle."

I dashed out into the Triangle, and saw that the fellows were standing in

groups, excitedly talking. I knew the subject of their conversation; the whole school, in fact, was discussing this piece of news.

I walked up to Armstrong, who was talking with Owen major and Hubbard and Griffith, and one or two others.

"Just a minute, Armstrong," I said. "About this story concerning Pitt. Who told you that he's playing for Bannington, under the name of Abdullah?"

"Oh, I heard it," said Armstrong.

"Who from?"

"I forget now—one of the fellows," replied Armstrong. "What do you think of it, Nipper? It's true, of course. Everything's explained now, and we know why Pitt sneaked off and missed our matches. What do you think of it—playing in a giddy professional club? What a nerve!"

"We misjudged him, too," went on Owen major. "We were all wrong about his going on the razzle, and mixing with bookies. We saw him coming out of the football grounds, you know, with Siggins, the bookie, and another man. It's as clear as daylight now! We actually saw him leaving the football grounds!"

I realised that it would be impossible to repair the damage. The truth was out—and it was obviously the truth. No matter what yarn was put into circulation, it would have no effect. Reginald Pitt's secret was a secret no longer.

But I wanted to find out who had set the tale going.

"Look here, Armstrong, I want you to remember who told you this," I said. "You must know——"

"I was in the passage," said Armstrong. "One of the chaps came running up to me and blurted the thing out. Yes, I remember now—it was Long. He told three or four of us——"

"Teddy Long?" I exclaimed. "Of course! The blessed little sneak!"

I walked off, boiling. I might have guessed it from the first. I remembered that Teddy Long had been in the lobby when the gov'nor told me to go to his study. And the inquisitive little beggar had followed us at once. Long was the spy of the Remove. Somehow or other, he always managed to nose out every secret that was going. And he had spread the tale throughout the Remove.

I felt like giving him the hiding of his life. But this would have done no good. The mischief was done now, and it wouldn't be repaired by giving Teddy Long a thrashing, as he deserved.

And within ten minutes the whole school was talking about this astonishing piece of news. Pitt had run away from school! Pitt had become a professional footballer! It was startling.

Jack Grey came up to me in the Triangle, his face fairly glowing with anxiety and excitement.

"I say, Nipper, is this true about Pitt?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," I replied.

"Do you know for certain?"

"Yes," I said again. "There's no question about it, Grey. Everybody's talking about it now, so there's no sense in keeping it back. Pitt's been playing for Bannington for several Saturdays, and I expect he would have remained at St. Frank's, only the chaps ragged him and drove him out."

Jack Grey looked miserable.

"And I was just as bad as all the others," he said gloomily. "Reggie told me time after time that he wasn't doing anything shady, and I wouldn't believe him."

"That was a pity," I said.

"I ought to be kicked!" said Jack. "I deserve to be jolly well thrashed! I suspected Reggie of all sorts of rotten things—that's what we had the row about. Why on earth didn't he tell me?"

"I suppose he had his reasons for not doing so," I replied.

"Yes, but what reasons?" persisted Jack. "After all, why shouldn't he explain that he was playing for Bannington? There's nothing disgraceful in it even though he does disguise himself. I got terribly wild with him because he wouldn't come out with me one afternoon. And he wouldn't explain where he went. I say, there's something else! When I came back I found that he had a lot of notes on the table—he must have been getting money from playing!"

"Perhaps so," I said. "It's a confounded nuisance, all this being known by the whole school! I'm not revealing any secret, Grey, when I tell you that Pitt's people have been in a bit of trouble lately; and, between you and

me, I think it's fairly obvious why Pitt took on this footballing job."

Jack Grey caught his breath in.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "You're right! I've got it now. He wanted the money—he must have sent it to his people! And that's why he wouldn't tell me anything about it—that's why he kept me in the dark!"

"You've hit it," I said shortly.

"He didn't like to tell me his people were hard up!" exclaimed Grey softly. "And I can quite understand it, too. He asked me to trust him, and I didn't. Oh, what a rotter I've been! I—I want to go to Reggie and beg his pardon."

"But you can't," I said. "He's in Bannington—"

"That doesn't make any difference," interrupted Jack. "I'm going! I mean to make it up with him. To think that we quarrelled! He's one of the best chaps living, and he went through all this for the sake of his people! And he kept mum about it, too! By Jove, it's up to me to make things right!"

"I don't think you'll be able to see him to-day," I said.

"Why not?"

"Well, you won't have a chance to go before this afternoon, and I think Bannington are playing an away match," I replied. "At the earliest, you won't be able to see him before this evening—after the team gets back."

Jack Grey nodded.

"Well, I'll see him then," he said firmly.

Jack Grey was probably the only fellow who had an inkling of the truth concerning Pitt's real reason for playing professional football. For Jack Grey knew that Pitt's people were in financial trouble.

The rest of the school regarded the whole thing as a freakish whim on Pitt's part. They concluded that he had decided to play for Bannington because he loved football and wanted to do big things.

And, certainly, he had been doing big things.

Not a single fellow at St. Frank's condemned him. They were staggered that a junior should be considered good enough to play for a League club. The doings of Abdullah had created quite a lot of comment, and it was quite obvious

that Pitt was displaying extraordinary form.

The Remove, to a fellow, admired him intensely. They were tremendously proud of the fact that Pitt belonged to the Remove. Sixth Formers were sceptical. They couldn't believe that a junior could be playing for a big League club.

And not only the Remove, but a large number of seniors, decided to visit the Bannington club's ground when the next home match was played. They would be there to cheer the champion junior. They would be there to show him that they approved, and that they were proud of him.

CHAPTER IV.

INSPECTOR JAMESON ON THE TRAIL!

INSPECTOR JAMESON, of the Bannington police, rode sedately and laboriously up the rise from Bellton village to St. Frank's.

It was quite early in the morning, and the worthy inspector was carrying out his programme, just as he had arranged. He was on his way to the school to make inquiries concerning Pitt. Of course, not a word was known as yet about the attack upon Simon Raspe.

Just near the gateway several juniors were standing out in the lane talking together. They were waiting for the breakfast bell to ring. It was due to do so within a few minutes.

The inspector thought this was a good opportunity to make a few preliminary inquiries. He would probably be able to get some information from these boys. They would be in possession of all the facts—they would certainly know if Pitt had been away from the school during the night. But it would need a little diplomacy, perhaps, in putting the questions. The inspector did not want the juniors to guess that he was seeking any particular information.

He dismounted from his machine and nodded genially to the juniors.

"Good morning, boys," he said. "Looks like being a fine day."

"Rather, sir!" said De Valerie. "Anything particular brought you this way to-day?"

"Nothing much—nothing much," said the inspector carelessly. "Just come up have a few words with Mr. Lee—not

officially, of course. Quite a friendly visit. You boys seem to be rather excited."

"Well, we're a bit bowled over, sir," said Bob Christine. "You haven't heard the news, I suppose?"

"What news?"

"Why, about Pitt, of the Remove."

The inspector tried hard not to start.

"Pitt!" he repeated quickly. "What about him?"

"Why, he's run away from school, sir!"

"By George! Run away?" said Inspector Jameson. "Do—do you mean to say that he isn't here?"

"Of course he isn't here," said De Valerie.

"I take it that he's been away since yesterday?" asked the inspector. "He was absent from the school during the night, eh?"

"That's right, sir," said Christine. "He bunked yesterday—just before supper. And he hasn't been seen since. But we know where he is."

"Oh, you do!" said the inspector.

He was doing some quick thinking. Here was corroboration, indeed. Pitt had been absent from school during the night. Then there was not the slightest doubt that it was the junior who had broken into Simon Raspe's library, and who had attacked the man in such a brutal way.

"You know where he is?" asked the inspector. "How's that?"

"Why, he's playing professional football for the Bannington Club, sir," said Christine. "He's that new winger they've got—but when he plays for Bannington he stains himself brown and calls himself Abdullah."

"Bloss my soul!" said Jameson.

In a way he was very pleased to obtain this information. His investigations would not be difficult now. Pitt was, without doubt, the culprit: Jameson put several questions to the juniors, and the answers all fitted in with the facts. There was not the slightest doubt that Reginald Pitt had been away from the school during the night, and it was quite certain that it was he who had assaulted Raspe. For he had left his cap as a certain clue. And there was plenty of motive for Pitt's action.

The inspector decided to see Nelson Lee at once, and within a few minutes

he was ushered into the schoolmaster-detective's study. He got straight to the point, and explained.

"I am afraid I have some serious news for you concerning Master Pitt," said the inspector. "I have already learned that Pitt was away during the night, Mr. Lee. It will come as a surprise to you to learn that he broke into the residence of Mr. Simon Raspe, and committed a grave assault upon Mr. Raspe."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"It is certainly a great surprise," he agreed calmly. "I can assure you, Jameson, that nothing of the sort took place. Pitt did not do as you say—"

"Wait until you hear the facts, Mr. Lee—wait until you hear the facts," said the inspector pompously. "I was called to the house immediately, and every atom of evidence points to the one certain fact that this boy is the culprit. Indeed, there is no other way to look at it."

"At what hour did this assault take place?"

"Between midnight and one o'clock."

"Then it is impossible that Pitt could have committed it—"

"You are wrong, Mr. Lee—quite wrong!" interrupted the inspector. "Pitt was away from the school, as you know as well as I do, and it was his cap I found in Mr. Raspe's library."

"Indeed! You found Pitt's cap?"

"Yes."

"How do you know it belongs to Pitt?"

"The boy's name is written inside it."

"H'm! That certainly seems conclusive," said Nelson Lee. "But your evidence, after all, is purely circumstantial. And I can vouch for Pitt's innocence. By the way, what does Mr. Raspe say about all this?"

"Mr. Raspe was unconscious," replied the inspector.

"So bad as all that, eh?"

"You don't seem to realise, Mr. Lee, that this matter is really serious," said the inspector. "Mr. Raspe was brutally assaulted. His face was in a shocking condition, and it is my firm belief that the boy used something more powerful than his fists. He certainly flung a heavy paper weight at Mr. Raspe, and caused a nasty injury at the back of

the head. Mr. Raspe was unconscious last night."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"No, I came straight here."

"Well, Jameson, I should advise you to go to Mr. Raspe without delay," said Nelson Lee. "You will find that your conclusion is a wrong one. Mr. Raspe will tell you that Master Pitt was not the person who assaulted him. In any case, you cannot proceed further until you have received instructions from Mr. Raspe."

The inspector nodded.

"That's quite right," he said. "But I wanted to make certain of my facts first, Mr. Lee. I am certain of them. My visit to this school has convinced me that the boy Pitt is guilty."

Nelson Lee was silent for a few moments.

He was thinking hard. This was most unexpected and most unfortunate. He could not explain the matter fully to Inspector Jameson without revealing his own plans. And he was certainly not going to do that.

He considered it better, on the whole, to appear ignorant of the entire circumstances. He easily guessed that Lockwood had been wearing Pitt's cap, and he must have carelessly left it behind—he would never have done so deliberately.

And this was where Lockwood had been at the time of Nelson Lee's visits to the little bathing hut. Perhaps the convict had returned to his retreat. Lee meant to make certain of these things before long.

"Take my advice, Jameson, and drop this thing entirely," said Nelson Lee. "No good will come of it, I can assure you. And I am convinced that Pitt is not guilty. Go straight to Raspe's and he will satisfy you."

The inspector rose to his feet.

"You may rely upon me, Mr. Lee, to be discreet," he said. "If I am obliged to go forward with this affair, I will do so carefully. You need not be afraid of any publicity. Indeed, it is to be hoped that Mr. Raspe will not want to proceed with the prosecution."

Lee said no more, and Jameson took his departure.

Reginald Pitt was quite innocent—Lee knew this. And, if necessary, Nelson Lee could prove that Pitt was with him

at the very time the assault had taken place.

Lee had a perfect alibi for the junior, but, at the moment, he did not want to explain anything to the police. If he did, Raspe might get to know things, and Raspe would smell a rat.

Under no circumstances would Nelson Lee jeopardise his own carefully laid schemes. This development was a nuisance, but it could not be helped.

And, indeed, Simon Raspe had recovered consciousness. In the early hours of the morning, in fact, he had come to his senses. And now he was propped up in bed with his face completely bandaged. Strelton was sitting by his side—this was the first opportunity Strelton had had of speaking with Raspe.

"Feeling better now?" he inquired.

"Better!" muttered Raspe painfully. "Do I look better? Don't ask such infernally silly questions! Are we alone here?"

"Yes."

"Give me something to drink—brandy!"

Strelton went over to a side table and poured out a stiff dose of brandy from a decanter. He gave this to Raspe, who drank it with some difficulty, for his mouth was painfully sore, and the bandages hindered free use of his mouth.

"I want to hear all about it," said Strelton. "I'm still in the dark, Raspe—I don't know anything. What took place in the library?"

"Don't any of the servants know?"

"My dear man, we're absolutely mystified about it all."

"That's one good thing," growled Raspe. "I don't want this talked about. They haven't caught the hound, then?"

"Pitt, you mean?" asked Strelton.

"Pitt?"

"Yes, young Pitt," said Strelton. "It was he who broke in and knocked you about, wasn't it? The inspector reckoned so, anyway, and he's pursuing that line of inquiry. But he can't do much until you tell him all the facts."

Raspe clenched his teeth.

"Pitt—Pitt!" he exclaimed harshly. "What foolery is this? Of course it wasn't Pitt! The man who broke in was Lockwood!"



The goods train began to move. Pitt took the risk and leapt at one of the trucks as it passed!

"What?" gasped Stretton. "Lockwood's in prison——"

"He escaped, you fool!" interrupted the other. "He escaped and came to me. Said he was going to thrash me. By Heavens! I thought I could wring his confounded neck! But he was like a bunch of live wires, and I couldn't do anything with him."

"Lockwood!" said Stretton. "Then——then he did this? How did you manage to get that crack on the head?"

"There's no reason why you should ask all these fool questions," muttered Raspe irritably. "Haven't you got any sense? Lockwood punched me on the jaw, and I fell over backwards. My head caught the fender, I believe——"

"Oh, then he didn't fling that paper weight at you?"

"Paper weight? No—no, of course not!" said Raspe. "I flung it at him and missed, confound it!"

"Then our conclusions were all wrong," said Stretton. "You see, we found the cap, and it had Pitt's name inside it. Both the inspector and I believed that the boy had broken in, and we thought that the wound on the back of your head was caused by that paper-weight."

"A bright pair!" said Raspe harshly. "In heaven's name, what did you bring the police into it at all for?"

"Hang it all, Raspe, I had to do something!" persisted Stretton. "I thought you were dead—you don't know how awful you looked. And the first thing I did was to ring up for a doctor and the police. After all, it's better, isn't it? It would look infernally queer if you let a thing like this pass without taking any action at all. The police had to know."

Raspe was silent for a moment or two.

"Yes, I dare say you're right," he said slowly. "Curse those bandages! My face feels absolutely raw! Lockwood shall pay for this—hang him! Huh! And so the brilliant inspector has arrived at the wonderful conclusion that young Pitt assaulted me?"

"Yes. The inspector is coming here this morning, too—I'm expecting him any minute now. He wants to have a talk with you."

"Oh, does he?" said Raspe. "By gad, I've got an idea, Stretton! Yes,

and I'll do it, too—it'll be the best thing!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, look here, I don't want this thing to be made public," said Raspe. "It wouldn't suit me to accuse Lockwood of breaking into my house and assaulting me. That would look queer in the papers, wouldn't it? And you say nobody knows that Lockwood was the man?"

"Both the inspector and I thought that Pitt did it; and everybody else in the house is completely in the dark," said Stretton.

"Well, understand—we don't know anything about Lockwood!" exclaimed Raspe, his voice taking on a peculiar gloating tone. "Pitt did this—young Pitt! Who's to prove otherwise?"

"You—you mean to let Jameson think that he's right?" asked the other quickly. "You mean to accuse Pitt?"

"Yes, I do!" replied Raspe. "It's the best way. Somebody must be accused, and I don't want Lockwood's part in the affair to be known. The inspector suspects Pitt—well, let him. Nothing would please me better than to see the young puppy in the hands of the police. His father would be rather upset, eh?"

"It would be a terrible blow to old Pitt," said Stretton. "But you may not be able to carry this through, Raspe. It's quite likely that Pitt was at the school all night—and that provides a complete alibi. You'll have to be careful. You can't go and make this accusation until you're pretty sure."

"Leave it to me," said Raspe grimly. "It's better that the police should be on a false trail. And how can anybody prove that Pitt was in bed? Couldn't he have snaked out after the school was asleep? He'll have a job to establish his innocence, I can tell you! His cap was found in my study, and I shall make a statement to the police which will leave no further doubt. By thunder, this is lucky—nothing could be better! I don't want Lockwood to be brought in, and——"

"Hush!" interrupted Stretton.

A second later there came a tap upon the door. Stretton opened it, and found the butler out there with Inspector Jameson.

"I don't want to intrude," whispered the inspector. "If Mr. Raspe is not well enough——"

"Yes, Mr. Raspe will see you," said Stretton. "Please come in, inspector."

Jameson entered the bedroom.

"Sorry to see you like this, sir," he said. "Rather a bad business. I hope you'll soon be on your feet again, sir."

"Don't bother about me. What have you discovered?" demanded Raspe. "What about the young scoundrel who assaulted me? Have you got him?"

Raspe had not committed himself by those words, but Jameson took it for granted that Reginald Pitt was the culprit.

"I made a few investigations last night, Mr. Raspe," he said. "I was quite satisfied that the boy Pitt was responsible, and this morning I made inquiries. The result is significant, sir."

"How?"

"Young Pitt ran away from school last night, sir, and nobody can vouch for his movements," said Inspector Jameson importantly. "He was not at the school, and it stands to reason that he couldn't have been."

"Of course it does—of course it does!" snapped Raspe. "The infernal young brat was here!"

"My conclusions were right then, sir?"

"Of course they were right!" replied Raspe. "It was young Pitt who broke in and assaulted me. I was reading at the time, and the attack came with such abruptness that I was not prepared."

"Do you mind explaining what took place, sir?"

"I am doing that now," replied Simon, Raspe smoothly. "The boy flung a stone through the window, and it broke the glass and hit me on the forehead. I was half stunned for a moment, and when I staggered to my feet young Pitt was in front of me. He had a heavy piece of wood in his hand, and he smashed this into my face several times before I could even attempt to defend myself."

"Good gracious!" said the inspector. "And the other injury, sir?"

"I was getting the better of the boy, sir, when he picked up the heavy paper-weight," said Raspe. "The young brat was in a frenzy of mad rage—why, I

don't know. Perhaps he considers he has some grievance against me because his father was foolish enough to lose all his money. But that's beside the point. Young Pitt flung the paper-weight at me, and I remember crashing over, but nothing more."

The inspector made many notes in his pocket-book.

"Thank you, Mr. Raspe," he said. "I am glad to find that my theory was the correct one. Now, do you want this matter dropped, or is it your intention to prosecute? If you wish the former, we shall make no search for the boy."

Simon Raspe snorted.

"I do not want the matter to be dropped!" he exclaimed grimly. "You must find this boy Pitt, and you must place him under arrest. I mean to charge him fully with this crime. It is quite possible that he has committed robbery as well—I have not looked through my bureau yet. There was a good deal of money there. Arrest Pitt, and charge him at once. If he is too young to be sent to prison, I'll see to it that he goes to a reformatory—which is the same thing."

The inspector rose to his feet.

"Very well, sir, I'll lose no time," he said briskly. "I rather fancy I can put my hands on the boy at once. I can come to you again with regard to the charge. For the moment, sir, I needn't bother you any longer."

And Jameson went off, highly pleased with himself.

He had the whole case well in hand, and he chuckled as he thought of Nelson Lee's words and advice. He would prove to Nelson Lee that he had been right all along! And the inspector again chuckled as he remembered what Lee had said about Raspe. The latter, instead of wanting the whole thing dropped, was most anxious for Reginald Pitt to be placed under arrest.

The inspector, profiting by what he had learned from the juniors, went straight away and obtained a warrant for Reginald Pitt's arrest. He had no difficulty in getting this, for Raspe's accusation was clear.

But it caused some delay, and it was getting on for noon when the inspector arrived at the Bannington Football Club's ground. He was fairly certain of finding Pitt here—or, at least, he would get to know where Pitt was.

To his chagrin, however, he learned that Bannington had a match on this afternoon. And, what was more to the point, the team had already started off for Porthampton by charabanc.

And Reginald Pitt was included in the team!

CHAPTER V.

ARRESTED!

PORTHAMPTON was a big city, and the football ground was a large one. The Bannington team arrived there, very hopeful of bringing off a win. They were at the top of the League table, owing to their splendid victory over Brompton, and Porthampton occupied the fifth place down the list.

It was certainly comparatively early in the season, and no team had had much time to reveal its true form. Porthampton was supposed to be a strong team, and many football experts were prophesying that the South Coast club would win the championship at the end of the season.

A large crowd had passed through the turnstiles to see this mid-week match, and, shortly before the game was due to commence, the stands and the enclosures were practically filled right up.

Only a very few Bannington supporters had come along, but a noisy little knot of them occupied a portion of the grand-stand. The home supporters were fully confident of a victory; they were expecting their champions to wipe Bannington up.

There had been no change in the Bannington team, and Pitt was determined to do the best he could for his side. He was hopeful that Bannington would at least come away from Porthampton with one point.

He was quite ignorant of the fact that his secret was revealed to everybody at St. Frank's—and, as a matter of fact, to everybody in the district, for the story had not been confined to the school.

And Pitt was wearing his simple disguise. He had browned his skin by means of a harmless dye, and he had become Abdullah. In this character he had created a sensation in football circles. In Bannington he was a popular hero, for he had been doing great things for the club.

He and his fellow players took the field briskly, and they looked a clean, well-set-up body of fellows. Tom Howard—Pitt's partner on the right wing—was in fine form, and he and Pitt were determined to do their utmost. There was a closer bond of friendship between the two now.

Hearne, the captain, was well satisfied with his men. They had been working so well together that the side was in fine winning form. There had been no friction, no jealousy, and a team that always pulls one way is a team that does things.

But the Porthampton eleven was a businesslike looking crowd, too, and they were playing at home, which gave them an advantage. The ground was a somewhat difficult one for the visiting team.

It was not particularly large, and the stands and enclosures rose up steeply on all sides. As Pitt looked about him, the place reminded him of a kind of well, so deep was it; and on all sides crowds of expectant humanity waited. But they didn't have to wait long now, for the referee had already appeared, and Hearne and the Porthampton captain had tossed.

Bannington won—not that this was much advantage, for there was no sun, and the wind was only a gentle breeze.

The game started, and away went the players. From the very first it was an exciting tussle—two splendid teams, one against the other; and so excellent was the half-back play, neither side found it possible to break through. For ten minutes most of the play was in mid-field, and the goalkeepers merely lounged about, idle.

Porthampton were the first to break away. Their forwards got off with the ball, and swung down the field in fine style, passing neatly and accurately. The Bannington backs were both passed, one of them making rather a bad mistake, and allowing the opposing inside left to get right up close.

From this position he shot for goal.

It was a hot shot, and would probably have materialised with any average goalkeeper. But Carden, the Bannington custodian, was a wonderful keeper, and he flung himself at the ball and turned it round the post.

"Corner!" roared the crowd.

The referee pointed to the corner flag on that side. Carden couldn't possibly help it—he had done well to keep his goal intact.

Bannington met with misfortune immediately afterwards. The corner kick was taken, and very badly centred. Everybody expected to see it cleared at once; but, somehow, in a scramble between three or four players, it got pushed back towards the Bannington goal.

Carden rushed out to clear—and he could have cleared easily if he had been left alone; but his left back attempted to clear at the same time, and they collided. Before they could properly recover, a Porthampton man dashed in and gave the ball a running kick, which carried it into a far corner of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well-kicked!"

"Goal!"

"Beastly hard lines!" grunted Tom Howard. "That never ought to have been a goal. If Carden had been left alone, he'd have cleared."

"Well, it's no good grumbling," said Pitt. "That won't mend matters."

Porthampton were one up, and their supporters were full of enthusiasm. The game restarted with a rush, and it rather took the wind out of Bannington to find themselves another goal down within five minutes.

There was no fluke about this one. The home centre-forward made a magnificent dash through. Nobody could stop him, and he sent in a cannon-ball shot which Carden didn't even see.

"Goal!"

"That's the way, the sailors!"

"One more!"

The Porthampton players were confident now—they were all over Bannington. Among the supporters they were affectionately known as "the sailors"—presumably because the town was a seaport.

And, as only too frequently happens, Porthampton slackened down somewhat. With such a fine lead they felt that it was not necessary for them to exert all their efforts. And they took things rather easily.

Too easily, for within five minutes the Bannington right wing got on the move.

From a goal kick, Tom Howard got possession of the ball. Pitt was already

racing up the field, taking care to remain on side. Then, just as a home back was bearing down upon Howard, he passed.

Pitt was on the ball in a moment. A roar came from the little knot of Bannington supporters.

"Go it, Blackie!"

"Now, my bonny boys!"

"Let's have one!"

Pitt sent over a perfect centre. At the last minute, within a foot of the goal-line, he touched the ball, and dropped it at Fred Hearne's foot. Slam! The centre-forward drove it hard and true at the goal.

The custodian made a wild attempt to save, but was just too late. Hearne's shot went in, and the referee pointed to the centre of the field.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Abdullah!"

There was a different complexion on the game now, and when it restarted the Bannington team went forward with tremendous vim and vigour. Pitt received the ball quickly, and again he rushed up the field.

This time he was alone, and the inside men were not ready to receive a pass. The Porthampton backs were rushing upon Pitt, and he hadn't a moment to lose. He took a chance, and sent in a low, curving shot from the wing.

It was most deceptive, the goalie thinking that it was going very wide. And almost before he knew it, the leather curled round and slipped past the post. The custodian touched it with his foot, but failed to stop it.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, the boys!"

The Porthampton crowd were rather quiet now. In a most unexpected way, Bannington had equalised. Nobody had been looking for such a disaster as this. And, by the way the visitors were going, it seemed that they would not be content with merely equalising.

It was only five minutes to half-time, but even in this short spell the Porthampton goal had two very narrow escapes. Pitt was playing with all his usual vigour, and he sent in some beautiful centres—only to see most of them wasted. It is not always easy for the

inside forwards to get in first-time shots which are capable of beating the goalie.

And then the whistle blew for half-time, with honours even.

"We ought to do it all right," said Hearn, as he and his colleagues trooped into the dressing-room. "Just one more, and then we can concentrate our efforts on keeping the beggars out."

"We'll do our best, anyway, Fred," said Tom Howard. "Why, hallo! Who's this?"

He looked in surprise at the doorway. A police inspector had appeared accompanied by Mr. Page, the manager. Pitt was looking at the inspector in some alarm, for he recognised him as Inspector Jameson, of Bannington. But he was confident that his disguise would not be penetrated.

"Just a moment," said Mr. Page, beckoning to Pitt.

Pitt crossed over, wondering.

"Oh, so I've found you, have I?" said Inspector Jameson. "Abdullah, eh? I must admit I don't see much resemblance to Master Reginald Pitt, of St. Frank's, but you're him right enough. I'd like a word with you, young man."

Pitt started back.

"How—how did you know?" he asked blankly.

"How did I know? Why, everybody knows it!" said the inspector. "The whole school is talking about this escapade of yours, my lad. By this time everybody in Bannington knows that Abdullah is a St. Frank's schoolboy!"

"Well I'm blessed!" said Pitt dazedly.

"But that's not the point, Pitt," put in Mr. Page. "The inspector has come on a far more serious matter. I am convinced he has made a mistake, and I am anxious to hear what you have to say."

"It is my duty to warn you, Pitt," said Jameson grimly. "I have here a warrant for your arrest, and I must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you when you are brought before the Magistrate—"

"Arrest me?" shouted Pitt.

"Yes, my lad—"

"You're joking!" said Pitt, in amazement. "What can you arrest me for? I've done nothing! You must be off your rocker—"

"This won't do you any good, Pitt," interrupted the inspector. "You needn't be afraid that I shall handcuff you, or make an exhibition of you. Give me your word that you won't try to escape, and we can go without attracting any notice."

"But—but what am I arrested for?" gasped Pitt.

"For committing a brutal assault upon Mr. Simon Raspo between the hours of twelve and two last night," said the inspector. "Now, come along—"

"But—but it's all wrong!" shouted Pitt. "I didn't do anything of the sort! I haven't touched Raspo!"

"You deny the charge?" asked Mr. Page.

"Of course I do!" said Pitt quickly. "It's ridiculous—it's absolutely mad! There's some mistake here—"

"Let me advise you to drop all this kind of business," said the inspector curtly. "The evidence against you, Pitt, is of the most deadly character. Further, Mr. Raspo himself has made a statement which renders circumstantial evidence a matter of minor importance. He has charged you with this crime—"

"But—but it's all wrong!" shouted Pitt desperately. "Raspo has been lying! I haven't touched him—"

"That's enough!" broke in Jameson sharply. "You'll have plenty of chance of denying the charge later on. At present you are my prisoner, and you've got to come back to Bannington with me."

Pitt stood there, absolutely flabbergasted.

His mind was in a state of chaos. He did not know what to think, and this blow had fallen upon him with overwhelming force. He had a dim suspicion in his mind that Lockwood was really the culprit. But he couldn't explain anything. He couldn't say a word without revealing the fact that he and Tom Howard had aided and abetted the escape of a convict. Pitt's very alibi, in fact, depended upon this. He knew that he could only clear himself of this charge by getting mixed up in a more serious one, and, further, it would incriminate Tom Howard as well.

Just in this one minute the skies had fallen. All Pitt's glorious plans were wrecked, and he felt desperate.

It did not come as a great shock to

him to learn that Raspo had made such statement. It was in keeping with Raspe's character. And the thought of being taken back to Bannington by Inspector Jameson appalled Pitt.

Arrested! He would be taken to the police court, brought before the Magistrate, and charged— It was too awful to think about. What would his father and mother say? They would hear, and—

"But look here, inspector," Mr. Page was saying. "You can't take this lad off in such a way. We're right in the middle of this game, and we can't play a substitute. At least, you will wait until the game is over?"

The inspector shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Page," he said. "My time is more valuable than this football match. This boy is playing for you, I know, and the fact that he is arrested is your misfortune. I shall have to take him at once. I cannot consent to wait until the match is over."

"If he gives his word that he will surrender at the finish—"

"It makes no difference," interrupted Jameson. "Let me tell you, sir, I cannot waste my time here. The boy must come back with me to Bannington now—at once. That's the last word I've got to say about it."

Pitt turned to Mr. Page and the other players.

"You—you don't believe this, do you?" he asked frantically. "It's a lie! I've done nothing of the kind! The whole thing is faked up! You don't believe it, do you?"

"Of course we don't!" said Mr. Page promptly.

"Not likely!" exclaimed Fred Hearne. "Cheer up, young 'un—we'll have something to say about this when we get back to Bannington."

"Rather!"

"But—but Pitt was with me last night," shouted Tom Howard. "I can prove—"

"Don't say anything now, Tom," put in Pitt quickly. "It won't do any good. Keep quiet and it's bound to come right. The whole thing's a ridiculous blunder, and I'm not getting into a panic. It's a rotten shame I can't play in the second-half, but that can't be helped."

Just then the players had to go on the

field, and Pitt was left alone with the inspector and Mr. Page.

"Hurry up and get into some proper clothes," said the inspector sharply. "I can't take you away like this. And be as quick as you can."

"All right!" muttered Pitt.

He went into one of the small dressing-rooms, and closed the door.

"Can he escape by any way?" asked the inspector, turning to Mr. Page.

"Escape—what nonsense!" said the manager curtly. "Do you think the boy wants to escape? What good will that do him? In any case, there's only a tiny window, too small for anybody to pass through."

The inspector nodded and waited.

Meanwhile, Pitt was quickly removing his brown stain. His mind was still in a whirl. Arrested! He couldn't believe it. And arrested upon a charge that was absolutely false. Curiously enough, he did think of escape. It was the first thing that came into his mind as he closed the dressing-room door.

Perhaps it would be better if he could get away. He hadn't promised to surrender himself after he had dressed—he hadn't promised anything. And as the different thoughts passed through his mind his panic increased.

The whole thing would come out in the papers, and he would be locked away in a prison cell. He wouldn't be able to say anything to clear himself. He thought of his father and mother, and his heart beat rapidly.

Then, in desperation, he looked about the little dressing-room. The window was tiny—too small for anybody to pass through. And just outside stood a fence, and beyond that a steep railway track.

Pitt dressed rapidly, and within a minute or two he was ready. He felt money in his pocket—for Mr. Page had paid him already. And, just then, something happened which finally decided Pitt's mind.

A goods train came lumbering along very slowly. It came to a stop practically opposite the football club buildings. And a tremendous roar from the ground indicated that Porthampton had scored again. The attention of everybody would be attracted to the field.

Pitt came to a swift decision.

Without really knowing why he was

doing it he went to the window and forced it open. It was altogether too small, but he thought he would try it. And, by sheer force, he squeezed his way through.

For one terrible moment he thought he was going to be stuck half-way, but at length he dropped outside, breathless and dishevelled.

And now his determination was firm.

He wouldn't be arrested! He wouldn't suffer the indignity of being hauled off by the police, and thrown into prison for something he didn't do. He wanted advice—he wanted to talk with somebody who would understand. And, by fleeing, he would obtain a few hours' grace.

Perhaps he would even be able to get to St. Frank's after dark, and see Nelson Lee. Nelson Lee would be able to tell him what to do. Never in his life before had Pitt felt more the need of somebody to advise him.

But he was sure he was doing the right thing in running away—in escaping from Inspector Jameson. He hadn't done it yet, but he was very hopeful of getting clean off, before the inspector could suspect his plan.

Then the goods train began to move.

Pitt gave a jump, and leapt forward. In a second he was over the fence, and then he raced up the steep embankment. The goods train was moving slowly; but it is a difficult task to climb on board even a slowly moving train, for there are no handy footboards to assist one.

However, Pitt took the risk, and leapt at one of the trucks as it passed. He clung to it, and swung himself on board, dropping over into a mass of mixed merchandise. He popped his head over the edge, and gazed back at the club buildings.

The football match was continuing, and nobody had seemed to witness his escape. Then Pitt caught a glimpse of a face at one of the tiny dressing-room windows. It was the face of Inspector Jameson.

Well, Pitt had done it, and now it was too late to change his mind. He couldn't possibly go back and surrender himself to the inspector. The only thing was to carry on—to hide himself until he could seek the advice of somebody who could tell him the best thing to do.

Pitt remained on the goods train for quite a long time. He had expected to be hauled out, but this did not happen. Apparently the members of the train crew had not seen him climb on board. There was a small piece of tarpaulin in the truck, and Pitt thought it wiser to creep under this.

For there were many signal-boxes to pass, and signal-boxes are generally high, so that everything in an open truck can be seen.

There were many stops—jolting and banging and hammering. Sometimes Pitt thought that these stops were for good; but the train moved on again, and it must have covered twenty or thirty miles.

He had no idea where he was, or what direction he was taking. The dusk of the evening grew into night, and rain commenced to fall. This did not add greatly to Pitt's comfort, for the tarpaulin was leaking.

And then at last the train came to a final stop. There was no doubt about this, because the trucks were all shunted on to a siding. Pitt wasn't quite sure whether the whole train stopped, or whether only a part of it; but he knew that his own truck was at the end of its journey.

And it was just outside a big station, too, for many lights were gleaming. He was feeling miserable and sick at heart. He had had time to think matters over, and it was dawning upon him that he had made a mistake in running away.

If he had stayed he would have been taken to Bannington, and perhaps Nelson Lee would have been told. And Nelson Lee would have come to him. But what could he do now? Where could he go?

Fortunately he had money on him, and after a while he crept out of his truck, and made off across the sidings to a fence. He scrambled over, to find himself on a public footpath.

Within five minutes he was in the station, and he found that it was a big junction, and he further learned that a fast train for London was almost due. London! He would take a ticket and go.

Yes, he would go straight to his parents. He would tell them everything. It was far better that they should know of this impending disaster

from his own lips—far better than them learning it from the newspapers.

He got his ticket, and walked on to the platform. He felt uneasy and full of nerves. A policeman appeared from the booking-office, and Pitt's heart gave a leap. He wanted to run, but he stood his ground, and waited. The policeman took no notice of him, and walked the other way.

It was the first time Reginald Pitt had ever experienced a hunted feeling, and it was far from pleasant. But, as he got his wits to work, he felt sure that there would be no hue and cry after him. It was not as though he had committed a murder, or was suspected of committing one.

And so the train came in, and Pitt got into it.

He fancied everybody was looking at him, but, as a matter of fact, he attracted practically no attention. And, while in the train, an idea came to him—the best idea of all, he considered.

He wanted to go to a friend—somebody who would understand—somebody who would advise him. And he thought of—Lord Dorrimore! The sporting peer was in London, as Pitt knew; and Pitt liked Dorrie very much. Dorrie was a real good sport, and he was just as fond of the juniors as the juniors were of him.

Yes, before going to his parents, Pitt would see Lord Dorrimore!

CHAPTER VI.

LORD DORRIMORE'S WAGER!

"GALLIVANTIN' up in London on your own, eh?" said Lord Dorrimore easily. "Well, Pitt, my lad, I'm pleased to see you; in fact, you've just come in time to save me from expirin' of boredom. Squat down, young 'un, and make yourself at home."

Reginald Pitt had just arrived.

And he had been ushered straight into Lord Dorrimore's magnificently appointed library—a library, by the way, in which Dorrie took about as much interest as a naturalist takes in mechanics.

The electric light was full on, a cheerful fire was burning, and Lord Dorrimore himself sprawled in a huge easy-chair which filled about two square

yards of floor space, and almost enveloped Dorrie in its folds.

Pitt stood on the hearthrug, nervously fingering his cap. And Dorrie, seeing that something was wrong, eased himself out of the chair, stood upright, stretched himself and yawned.

"Now we're better!" he said, lighting a cigarette. "The fact is, young 'un, I'm off to Africa in about a fortnight. How on earth I shall fill in the time until then, goodness only knows, by gad!"

"I—I hope I'm not disturbing you," said Pitt hesitatingly. "It's rather late in the evening, and—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Dorrie. "Late? Why it's only just after nine! What's the matter, Pitt? There's somethin' wrong—I can see it. A young chap like you oughtn't to have a worried expression of that sort. What's the trouble? Pour out the yarn, an' it'll fall upon attentive ears. Go ahead!"

There was something about Dorrie which gave Pitt courage and confidence. Lord Dorrimore was a real good 'un, and Pitt decided then and there to tell him the whole story—not merely a part of it, but everything from the beginning.

He did so, telling Dorrie how, several weeks before, he had returned home after the summer holidays, to find his parents driven out of house and home, and in dire poverty. Then he went into all the details that had occurred since.

"Pretty long yarn," said Dorrie, at length. "An' the finish of it is that you've been arrested? How frightfully rippin', by gad! There ain't many of us who have somethin' like that to talk about!"

"You—you don't seem to take it seriously, sir!" said Pitt.

Dorrie chuckled.

"Seriously?" he repeated. "Good gracious! Of course I don't take it seriously."

"But it's true, sir——"

"I accept your word, an' I've no doubt it's true," interrupted Dorrie. "But you don't need to take things like this seriously. You didn't go to Simon Raspe an' beautify his face, did you?"

"No."

"An' you didn't enter his place even?"

"No."

"Then why on earth should you worry?" asked Dorrie. "You're inno-

cent, an' it'll be as easy as pie for you to prove that. Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, appears to be several kinds of a muddle-headed idiot. An' what we've got to do is to put him about his business. You ought to have gone straight to Mr. Lee, you know. I'm no good at this sort of thing. I'm just about as much use as a coal-heaver!"

"But I came to you, sir, because I know you'd understand—and I knew I could tell you my secret without any fear," exclaimed Pitt. "I'm in an awful position. I daren't go back to Bannington without being arrested. I might even be arrested when I go out of this house. And I don't see how I can prove my innocence, either. Everything's gone wrong, Dorrie! Even my secret about playing for Bannington is being talked about."

"Well, it's no good comin' to me," said Dorrie. "I'm a terrific chap when it's a matter of action—when something needs to be done. But this is a thinkin' matter—an' that's where I'm stumped. But I've got a suggestion to make, anyway."

"What is it, sir?"

"I'm goin' to ring Lee up at once," replied Dorrie. "It's fairly late, an' I reckon we can get a trunk call through to St. Frank's within ten minutes. I'll have a chat with Lee, an' he'll soon know what's best."

Pitt was very eager, and this idea seemed to him to be a splendid one. Everything had seemed terribly dark, and now Lord Dorrimore's very cheerfulness had made the whole position seem easier.

Of course, inwardly, Dorrie was gravely concerned; but he put on this careless, free-and-easy manner for the especial purpose of cheering up his visitor. He certainly succeeded, for Pitt was now feeling far more confident and content.

As Dorrie had surmised, it only took a comparatively short time to get a trunk call through. And, when the ring came, Dorrie lifted off the receiver and found himself speaking to Nelson Lee.

"Why, it's Dorrie!" came Lee's voice over the wire. "I hardly expected you to ring up, old man. Is it anything important?"

"Well, fairly," said Dorrie. "I've got Pitt here with me—"

"Pitt?"

"Yes—he's arrested," said Dorrie. "At least, he was, an' escaped. Fellow named Jameson copped him, an' Pitt gave him the slip. He's with me now, wonderin' what to do. It's beyond me, so I'm pushin' the whole thing on to your shoulders."

"I couldn't quite catch all you said, Dorrie," came Nelson Lee's voice. "Do you mind repeating all that carefully? I gathered that Pitt is in danger of arrest, and he has come to you for advice."

"That's about the truth of it," said Dorrie. "But I'll put it more fully, if you like. Or, better still, you'd better have a jaw with Pitt himself. It's a frightful fag, yollin' into this mouthpiece!"

Dorrie put the instrument down, and beckoned to Pitt.

"Go ahead, young 'un," he said. "Spin the yarn."

Pitt carefully told Nelson Lee what had happened, and the detective listened with great attention.

"You need not be alarmed, Pitt," said Lee, at length. "You ought to have communicated with me earlier. However, no harm has been done. I'll get you out of this mess at once."

"Oh, it's ripping of you, sir," said Pitt gratefully. "But—but how can you?"

"I don't think I need explain that, but I shall convince Inspector Jameson that you cannot be in two places at one and the same time," said Nelson Lee grimly. "At the very moment of this assault on Simon Raspe you were with me, Pitt, and I shall establish your alibi, and have the whole thing quashed. I will run over to Bannington immediately, and see about it."

"You're a brick, sir!" exclaimed Pitt. "But—but what about Raspe, sir? The inspector told me that Raspe made a statement to the effect that I committed the assault."

"You needn't worry about that, Pitt," came Lee's voice. "Jameson is a blundering fool, and he has made a complete hash of this whole business. If he had only communicated with me before getting out that warrant for your arrest, the whole trouble would have been avoided. I never thought anything of this kind would develop."

"And what shall I do, sir?"

"Stay just where you are, with Dorrie, until you hear from me," re-

plied Nelson Lee. "I'm going to Bannington at once, and you'll probably get a 'phone call from me by about eleven. Wait until it comes."

"Yes, sir," said Pitt.

He hung up the receiver a moment afterwards, and his heart felt wonderfully lighter. Lee had spoken with such confidence that it was impossible for Pitt to be worried any longer. He knew that everything was coming right.

"There you are, young 'un! What did I tell you?" said Dorrie cheerfully. "You got into a panic, and all the rest of it, and you needn't have come to me at all."

"But I'm glad I did come to you, sir," said Pitt. "You've given me new hope and courage."

"That's the idea," said Dorrie. "Throw yourself in that chair, an' make yourself easy. We've got close upon two hours to wait, I expect. Tell me about your exploits on the football field. I'm frightfully interested."

Pitt was only too glad to oblige, and he told Dorrie how he had first become a member of the Bannington Club, and how he had played regularly ever since.

"Bravo! Reggie!" said Dorrie, at length. "And you've been doin' all this for the sake of your father an' mother? You haven't said so, but I know it's a fact. Good lad! You've got the right spirit in you, an' I'm proud to have you as one of my friends."

"You're very kind, sir," said Pitt, in a low voice. "It's not as though my people have become poor through extravagance, or speculation, or anything of that kind. They were swindled out of everything by this brute of a Raspe. But I'm sure that Mr. Lee will see that things come right soon."

"Of course he will," said Dorrie. "Keep your pecker up, my son."

"But will they come right in time, sir—that's the thing I'm worrying about," said Pitt slowly. "I don't want to go back to St. Frank's until everything is cleared up—until Raspe has been exposed, and the whole truth is brought to light."

"Well, I don't suppose that'll be very long," said Dorrie. "Just you trust in Mr. Lee, and he won't let you down. By the way, you were tellin' me somethin' about an auction sale, weren't you?"

Pitt looked unutterably miserable.

"Yee," he replied glumly. "Raspe

has put everything up for auction—our old home and all the furniture and everything. If the truth doesn't come out in time, that sale will take place, and everything will be sold. Think how awful that would be! The home will be lost for ever."

"Yes, it's infernally awkward," said Dorrie. "We must think of somethin', my lad. When does this sale take place?"

"Next Monday morning."

"Phew!" said Dorrie. "So soon as that, eh? H'm! That doesn't allow much time. An' you're playin' the return match with Porthampton on Saturday?"

"Yes, sir," replied Pitt. "But what has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," replied Dorrie hastily. "This sale comes off on Monday mornin'. I'm afraid Leo can't fix things up in such a short space of time, Reggie. If he can, all the better."

"And if he can't, everything will be lost!" said Pitt-hopelessly. "To tell you the truth, sir, that's been worrying me more than anything else. I can't bear to think of the mater losing everything. It's—it's horrible to think about, and I know it's worrying her fearfully."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

He dismissed the subject after that, and once more talked about football, and cricket, and all sorts of subjects. He tried to get Pitt's mind off the matter which was worrying him. So the time passed fairly quickly.

Soon after half-past-ten the twin bells of the telephone rang noisily. Dorrie answered at once, and found that Nelson Lee was at the other end of the wire.

"You're a bit sooner than you expected," said Dorrie.

"Yes" replied Nelson Lee. "I have interviewed Inspector Jameson, the chief constable, and a Justice of the Peace. There's no need for me to go into details, but you can tell Pitt that it will be perfectly safe for him to return to Bannington just whenever he likes."

"Oh, good man!" said Dorrie, turning. "It's O K., Pitt," he added. "Mr. Lee's fixed it up, an' there's nothin' to fear. You won't be arrested when you play in your next match."

"You—you mean it, sir?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"Of course I do," exclaimed Dorrie.

"You there, Lee? How did you manage it?"

"I had some little difficulty but I have finally convinced the police authorities that Pitt was not the guilty party," came Lee's reply. "Raspe is not being informed of this, and he probably thinks that the police are still on Pitt's trail. But what Raspe thinks does not interest me. I cannot say more over the wire."

"But the whole case is dropped?"

"Yes," said Lee. "In fact, the matter is completely hushed up. No-body knows of this assault, or of Pitt's escape except the Bannington players—and I am sure they will keep quiet. Everything is quite all right now."

Pitt went to the telephone, and thanked Nelson Lee for what he had done. And Lee urged him to return as soon as possible. And when the junior rang off, he was almost feeling happy.

"Well, you'll stay here until to-morrow, anyhow," said Lord Dorrimore. "Then you can buzz back to Bannington, an' put in a bit of practice for Saturday's match. By the way, what are your plans?"

"I shall keep with the Club until everything is cleared up, sir," replied Pitt. "And we've got to beat Porthampton on Saturday—we must. They whacked us to-day, four goals to two. That's what it says in the paper anyhow."

"That's because you weren't there for the second half," said Dorrie. "They were a man short, an' I expect they were worried about you, too. Get your revenge on Saturday. How many goals do you reckon to score?"

"Well, I hope I shall get one, sir," said Pitt modestly.

"Nonsense! Why can't you go ahead, an' do somethin' special?" asked Dorrie. "I'll wager you couldn't score five goals on your own in Saturday's match."

"Five goals!" exclaimed Pitt. "But that would be impossible, sir."

Dorrie slapped his knee.

"I'm a sportsman!" he exclaimed calmly. "Look here, I'll make a wager with you that you can't score five goals—on your own—against Porthampton on Saturday. Will you take me?"

"At what odds?"

"Oh, anythin'—a shillin' to ten thousand pounds, say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't yell like that!" said Dorrie. "I mean it. I'm a millionaire—ten thousand is nothing to me—and a shillin' ain't much to you. Now there's a chance for you, my son! A fair an' square wager, an' we'll have it witnessed, if you like Ten thousand pounds to a shilling that you don't score five goals. If you fail, you give me a shillin', an' if you win, I give you ten thousand quid. Does it go?"

Pitt suddenly realised that Lord Dorrimore was serious. And his heart gave a great jump. Ten thousand pounds—on Saturday! The sale would take place on Monday! With ten thousand pounds he could buy everything—house, home—

Pitt's brain reeled at the thought. Here was Dorrie, suggesting this wager—with these ridiculously absurd figures. Pitt felt a tremendous impulse seize him to accept this wager. If he won he wouldn't take the money, of course but there was something else in his mind. He had an idea.

And Lord Dorrimore had an idea, too,

"Well?" he asked, leaning forward.

"I accept, sir!" said Pitt tensely.

"Good man!" exclaimed Dorrimore.

"Ten thousand pounds to a shilling! Now, go ahead, and score five goals in Saturday's match! If you do it, you'll be the most wonderful footballer that ever got into shorts!"

Five goals—on his own! The very idea of it staggered Pitt. But it was possible—and he told himself that he would work with might and main to accomplish this seemingly impossible feat.

Everything depended upon his success. If he won the wager it would mean the restoration of his whole home—of everything! If he lost—but Reginald Pitt didn't think of losing. He couldn't lose! He musn't lose!

And Lord Dorrimore, watching the junior's flushed face, smiled quietly to himself. He had made that wager for a purpose—and it seemed that the purpose was likely to be achieved.

Some dramatic events were near at hand—particularly the return match against Porthampton!

THE END.

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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, who, learning of the famous detective's presence at the school, plots to murder him. This fails and Vilotte, the assailant, is put under lock and key. When the ghost next appears Lee fires a shot, and the apparition leaves a very human finger behind—a clue which leads to the arrest of Adolphe Malines.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued).

The Secrets of the Vault.

THE man's face was pale as ashes and drawn with pain, but the moment he recognised the newcomer he lifted his hands with an action of terror and entreaty.

"Hush, hush, Master Barton!" he whispered. "Don't make a sound! There's one of them over yonder! Listen!—can't you hear him?"

Nipper's eyes were almost starting from his head as he saw that the butler was a prisoner, chained to the pillar by his waist, and that his right limb had been roughly bound in a splint made from a piece of an old packing-case.

"Who's here, and where is he, Boyle?" he whispered.

"In the room through that doorway," was the startling reply. "He's a big man and speaks like an American."

"That's Sol Clitters!" thought Nipper, wishing devoutly indeed that Nelson Lee had been with him.

"Hark! There's machinery in there, and every now and then he does something that makes a dull bang. Don't you hear it now?"

He did hear it—a curious metallic thud above the throbbing of a dynamo.

"Never mind me," said Nipper, going down on one knee. "I'll have you loose in a moment," and he groped in his pocket.

"If you value your life and mine, leave me alone!" said Boyle, in a tone of great agitation. "My leg's broken. The monk who brought me here did it at the top of the steps when he dropped me. But where are the others? You've never come alone?"

"If by 'the others,' you mean the Belgians," whispered Nipper, "they're spending the evening at the Manor House, and I have come alone to discover how these scoundrels get in."

The helpless man made a gesture expressive of utter dismay and, seizing Nipper by the sleeve, drew his head closer to his own lips and pointed in another direction.

"They've got another prisoner somewhere at the end of this cellar," he whispered. "I've heard sobbing many times, and the Belgian woman, when she brings my food, has a covered tray which she carries over there. Sometimes she speaks in a scolding voice, and sometimes she laughs like a fiend. What does it all mean, Master Barton?"

"You'll know before you're very much older, Boyle," said Nipper, with a triumphant smile. "This alters all our plans. We thought Clitters had gone back to Peterborough with Charteris. Ah, you don't know who I'm speaking about. Clitters, the American, is a desperate villain, a forger of treasury notes, and no doubt at this very minute he's working at them, for he's hoping to return to America at the end of next week. I must go back at once and tell Nelson Lee."

"The saints protect you! You're a brave young gentleman!" said Boyle. "Yes, yes,

that's the best thing. You'll never find the way into the Manor House without the key, and I don't know where they keep that."

Nipper pressed his hand, and walking without noise until he had recrossed that vast outer vault, ran as hard as his legs would carry him along the stone passage and up the steps at the other end.

It was not often that he allowed difficulties to daunt him, but the thing he encountered as he thought to gain the laboratory by the way he had come, had surely brought dismay to the stoutest heart, for the trap-door he had all unconsciously closed barred the way!

In vain he groped and fumbled until his fingers were torn and bleeding. To no purpose did he stab the darkness on every side with the bright beam of the electric-torch. The switch that controlled the mechanism, which he had accidentally touched in his descent without knowing it, was a couple of yards from the foot of the steps, where no one would have thought of looking for it, and stifling a groan of despair he ran back to take counsel with the man with the broken leg.

Boyle knew that something was amiss, and gave them both up for lost in his own mind.

"Nonsense!" whispered Nipper. "It's jolly serious, of course, because the time's getting on—half-past eight already, which gives me only a couple of hours or thereabouts. Tell me how they brought you here?"

"It was the big Belgian they call Trochong," whispered Boyle, the pair of them keeping their eyes on the door of that inner vault, and Nipper crouching against the pillar ready to slip out of sight in case Sol Clitters should make his appearance. "He had me off my feet like a child and ran along into the north-west wing, which is never used, and is right away from the rest of the house, and when he had shut the door of the big attic where the old furniture is stored he hissed, 'I'll kill you if you make a sound. You won't be hurt if you come quietly.' He might have saved his breath, for I was half-choked as it was, but as he turned on an electric-torch like that one in your hand I recognised the room, and that's about all I did see then. I never felt so bad in my life, Master Barton."

"Yes, yes; but never mind your feelings—the minutes are slipping away," interrupted Nipper. "How did you come down here?"

"Why, I'll tell you," continued the butler.

"At one end of the room stands a very, very old chest. I reckon it's too heavy for

six men to lift, and the lid of it was open. And what's more, the bottom of it was open, too, and there was no floor underneath that. It had all been cut away, and hung on hinges, showing the end of a ladder which he pointed out. 'You've got to go down there,' says he, 'and the quicker you start, the better for you.'

"While I was struggling to get my breath, and feeling more dead than alive, he picked me up again as easy as a child with a kitten, and dropped me through the hole before I had time to find the ladder with my feet.

I tried to save myself, but I slipped and fell, and when I felt something snap under me I knew my leg was broken. Of course, he understood what he was about, and when he had climbed inside I heard him shut the lid of the chest and lock it, and his language was frightful when he came to me lying there and found that I couldn't move."

"And then?" prompted Nipper.

"Why then he picked me up again and banged my head against the wall when I screamed with pain, but those foreigners have no hearts, and he carried me down a flight of stone steps, same as you see in a church tower, round and round, and down and down, until I thought we should never come to the end, but we did, my broken leg knocking against the stones all the way.

"'Twas lucky the electric light was burning same as it is now," continued Boyle, "else I couldn't tell you any more, but after we reached the flat again we came out in that next vault at the end of a very long passage through a little doorway behind a printing-press, or something of that kind, and the old gentleman was there, and the American, and they were very angry with Trochong for bringing me at all."

"That'll do," said Nipper, laying his hand on the speaker's arm, for, like most elderly people with a tale to tell, Boyle was getting garrulous. "It's twenty minutes to nine, and I must find that staircase."

"Don't do it," implored the butler. "You can't get there without being seen, and he'll kill you same as he said Trochong ought to have killed me."

"I've got as many lives as a cat, or I should have been dead long ago," said the boy.

"Yes, but you haven't got the key! What's the good if you can't open the door in the attic?"

"I can make them hear me," whispered Nipper. "Don't you worry about that. The American's my only trouble."

Boyle heaved a deep sigh. It was no good arguing, but he knew too well that one might fire a gun in that attic room in the isolated wing without rousing the rest of the Manor House.

Nipper was already gliding from pillar to pillar, until he reached the archway that led to the inner vault, and lying face down, he peeped inside, without at all liking what he saw.

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

It was a smaller chamber than the other two, and was evidently the coiners' den. The light there was dazzling in its brightness, and showed Nipper the little pointed arch that was the goal of all his hopes, and the utter impossibility of reaching it, as Boyle had warned him.

At a hand-press, with his back towards him, stood the powerful figure of Sol Clitters, the American counterfeit king. He had nothing on but his trousers and a sleeveless vest, which displayed his enormous muscles to advantage.

Every time he pulled the press over it gave out that dull thud which the boy had heard, and the man was working with an energy worthy of a better cause.

On a table beside him were several piles of treasury note-paper, cut to the exact size, and the watcher's heart began to pound painfully, for the process promised to be interminable. Each blank had to be taken from the pile, placed in position, and the press brought down upon it; then the forged note was picked up, scrutinised, and laid upon a drying board, which consisted of a metal tray under which a row of oil lamps was burning.

Every now and then he gathered up the notes when the ink was sufficiently dry, and deposited them in a basket with thousands of others, ready to be circulated among an unsuspecting public when the time came.

"Will he never tire?" thought Nipper, turning his eyes round the vault.

On one side was a sloping desk with magnifying glasses and engravers' tools scattered upon it, and at one end what appeared to be a smaller room with a heavy door standing open, a door like that of a safe, very thick and apparently constructed of iron and concrete, no doubt fire-proof.

Within that little room an electric bulb was burning over a porcelain sink, and the boy saw that the compo pipe which he had traced across the vaults ended there, and brought the water supply to a brass tap.

Nipper was at his wit's end, and it was now ten minutes to nine! He was only half a dozen strides from the pointed arch on which all his hopes were concentrated, but in that brilliant glare a mouse could not have crossed the floor unseen.

Then all at once Sol Clitters began to hum a tune, the burden of which was "There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night!" Nipper had always liked that tune, but now he hated it, as the American crooned the refrain over and over again, while he pulled and adjusted and scrutinised the results with an unfailing regularity that was almost mechanical in itself.

He stopped suddenly and said: "Cuss it!" scratching the back of his head as he tore the note he had just printed across the middle and dropped the two halves into a waste-paper basket.

Then he reached for a screw-driver from the desk and began in a quick, businesslike way to remove the die, laying the four

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screws in a row and examining the copper plate through a watchmaker's glass, which he screwed into his right eye.

"I thought so," he said aloud. "That comes of Master Adolfe's escapade. This little joker's got to go into the acid again. The King's head's coming out a bit blind," and walking along the vault he entered the little room, switched on another light, took a bottle from a row on a shelf over the sink, and unstopped it with his teeth.

Nipper watched him for a moment, and then riveted his keen eyes on that iron-bound, fire-proof door. It had a sliding bolt on the outside, and raising himself on to his hands, he waited until the forger, after warming a stick of composition by the aid of a match, began to rub the plate with it, leaving only the head of King George exposed.

The boy knew what he was doing, and that it would take some minutes, and drawing a deep breath, crept across to the other side of the vault, and stole on tip-toe along the wall towards his enemy!

The man was still humming his tune as Nipper reached the open door, and bracing himself for a desperate effort, with a fervent prayer that it might not be too heavy, exerted all his strength, flung the whole weight of his body against it, and as it closed shot the steel bolt into the socket!

The daring of the thing he had done almost frightened him, and as he recoiled a step and stood there with clenched fists quivering, there came from the inside of the little room a quick succession of raps, so faint that at first he did not realise what they meant.

It was Sol Clitters beating wildly on the door of his prison, and then Nipper knew that the door was almost sound-proof.

"Oh, joy!" he cried. "I must tell the gov'nor this news! That's another of 'em,

anyhow, and the most dangerous of the lot. You're quite right, Mr. Clitters, there will be a hot time in the old town to-night!"

CHAPTER XVII.

The Prisoner in the Monks' Punishment Cell.

As he passed the printing-press a brilliant idea occurred to him, and gathering up all the printed notes and half the pile of blank paper, he thrust them into his pockets and blew out the lamps under the sheet of metal.

"They knew Clitters was here," he said to himself, "and if they return before I find the way out they'll think he's finished his job and gone back to Peterborough."

Boyle gasped with astonishment when he heard what the boy had done, but Nipper had no time to waste, and darting through the pointed arch, turned his light on to the uneven flooring.

Quite a quantity of half smoked cigarettes lay at the far end where the stairs began, and he knew there was no mistake about it now.

He did not trouble to count the steps, and went winding round and round the stone newel, but young as he was, he had to pause twice before he reached the top, and found himself on a little landing at the foot of the wooden ladder.

It was just as Boyle had described it—the hinged flap like the drop of a gallows and above that the ancient chest.

He could have shouted as his torch showed him a key hanging on a nail, and when he had placed it in the back of the lock he lifted the heavy lid with both hands and looked about him.

(To be continued.)

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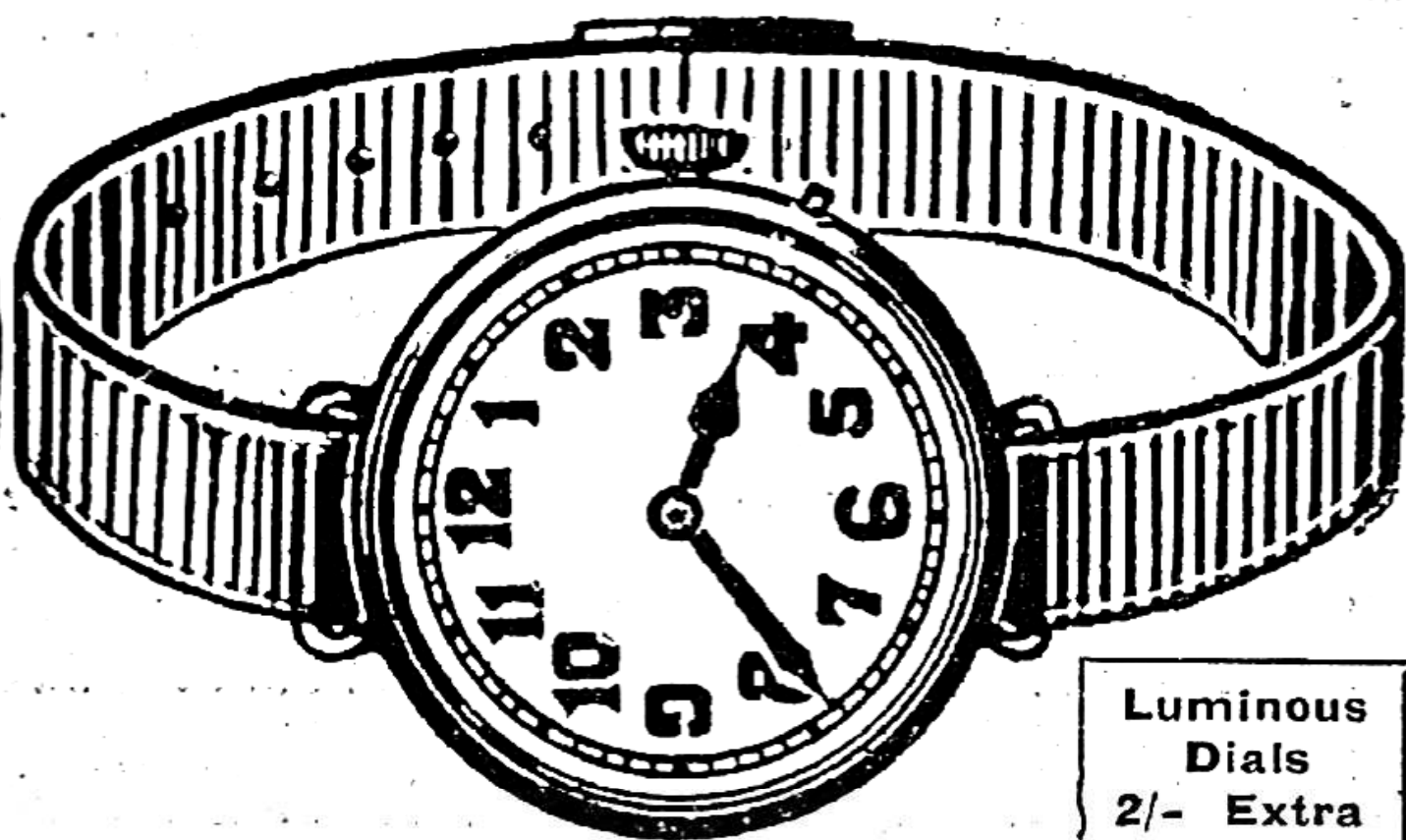
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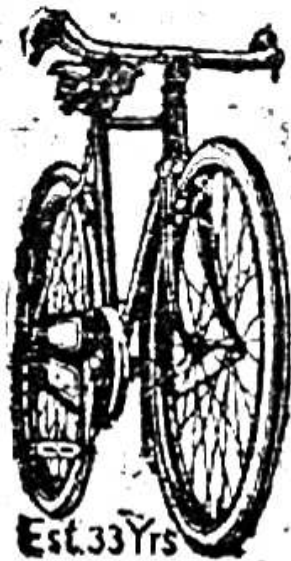
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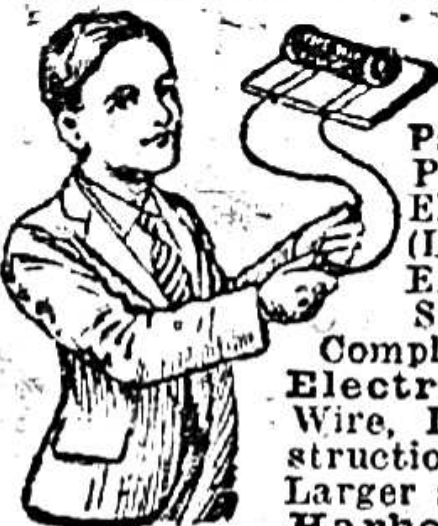
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