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**THE
FIENDS
OF
FU-CHOW.**

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"Remember," said Fu Chow, "movement in any direction will cause an instantaneous fuse to light, and that will bring death at once!"

THE FIENDS OF FU-CHOW!



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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER).

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH FLARES UP!

"NOW?" asked Church doubtfully.
Handforth glared.
"Why not?" he demanded.
"Anything to say?"

"All right—keep your giddy hair on!" growled Church. "For goodness sake don't start a row over nothing, Handy. If you want to try the lamp now—try it! Clurey and I mean to buzz out on to Little Side."

"You bet," said McClure. "We'll be off."

Edward Oswald Handforth gazed at his chums ferociously. This, of course, was quite a natural expression of his, and Church and McClure had expected it. Life in Study D was somewhat hard.



St. Frank's was basking in the sunlight of the May evening, and tea was over. Naturally, Church and McClure wanted to get out of the Ancient House and on to the playing fields. As a rule, Handforth was just as eager as they were, but on this particular occasion he was possessed with what Church and McClure privately termed one of his dotty ideas.

As a matter of fact, Handforth had been to the village just before tea; he had gone on his bicycle, and while passing the ironmongery establishment presided over by Mr. Sharpe, he had noticed a new kind of bicycle lamp in the window. Handforth had bought it—not because he wanted a bicycle lamp, but because it took his fancy. He had about three lamps already—although two of them were adorning the machines of other juniors. Handforth was fearfully careless with his property.

"Oh, you'll be off, will you?" said Handforth, after he had finished his glare. "So you think you're going to clear out and leave me to experiment with this giddy lamp on my own?"

"Well, it's your lamp," said Church gruffly.

"What's that got to do with it?" roared Handforth. "If you don't try to be more pally, I'll jolly well slaughter you!"

"Just to make me pally?" asked Church sarcastically.

"And don't try any rotten jokes!" sneered Handforth. "There's only one chap in this study who can make jokes—and that's me! I'm not boasting, or anything like that, but you know jolly well when I make a joke it's enough to make the whole giddy building rock!"

"I don't know about jokes!" said McClure. "But sometimes the study rocks without any jokes being made! But we don't want to argue. If you're going to try this lamp, let's get it over! It looks a mouldy sort of thing to me——"

"Eh?"

"That is, at first sight!" added McClure hastily. "I expect it's a jolly fine lamp, really."

"If it wasn't a jolly fine lamp, I wouldn't have bought it!" said Handforth sourly. "It's a special sort of thing. Burns oil!"

"Most lamps burn water, I suppose?" suggested Church innocently.

"Of course not," said Handforth. "They burn—— You blithering ass!" he roared, suddenly realising what Church had said. "How the dickens can a lamp burn water?"

"I don't know," said Church, grinning. "But you just mentioned that this lamp burns oil—and that implied that all other lamps burnt something else!"

Handforth smiled pityingly.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Months ago I said that you ought to go into the County Asylum—and now I jolly well know it! One

of these days I'll take you there myself!"

"I suppose you know the place?" asked McClure.

"Of course I do—I've been inside it, you ass!"

"That's what I thought!" said McClure significantly.

Church noticed that McClure had edged slightly nearer to the door before making that insulting remark. But, as it happened, Handforth didn't notice anything particularly insulting in what McClure had said. The implication was quite lost upon Handy, who could be very dense when he liked—and sometimes when he didn't like.

"Don't try any more rot!" he said curtly. "This lamp is something special. It's got two glasses—one at the back and one at the front. The idea, of course, is so that you'll be able to see if it's burning properly while you're riding. Never any trouble——"

"But the back glass is red!" said Church. "That lamp looks to me like an obsolete thing out of the Ark! They used those lamps when cyclists were compelled to show a red light—years ago! You're supposed to fit it on to the front fork—not on the head at all."

"The head!" said Handforth. "Oh, you mean near the handlebars? Don't talk rot! Do you think they'd spoof me like that? Huh! I've never met the chap yet who could swindle me! I'll bet he wouldn't swindle me twice—he'd be in hospital for a year after the first attempt!"

Church and McClure sighed, and waited.

"Now, first of all, we want some oil," went on Handforth. "I meant to get some oil in the village, but forgot all about it. We must have some good oil—— Clear out, you fat idiot!"

The last remark was politely addressed to Fatty Little, whose head had just come round the doorway. Fatty, by all appearances, was on the prowl. This was one of his favourite occupations when he was stony. He generally waited until tea was over in the junior studies, and then made a swift round, accepting the leavings with gratitude. Fatty's only grumble was that there were hardly ever any leavings to accept.

"I was just going to ask——"

"Don't!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "There's no grub here—these greedy fat-heads have scooped it all up!"

"Well, I like that!" said Church indignantly. "You polished off half the sardines and nearly all the bread-and-butter, and Clurey and I didn't even get a smell of the cake!"

"Oh, don't quibble!" said Handforth impatiently. "What does it matter? There's nothing here for Fatty. We must have that oil——"

"Oil?" repeated Fatty Little.

"Yes parrot, oil!"

"I've got some!" said Fatty. "Plenty of it!"

"Anybody can see that!" retorted Hand-

forth, gazing at Church and McClure for applause. "Plenty of fat, anyhow."

Both Church and McClure suddenly burst into a roar of laughter. Anybody else but Handforth would have noticed that it was too loud and forced to be spontaneous. But Handy had made a joke—and it was up to Church and McClure to appreciate it. It saved a lot of trouble. Indeed, that laugh restored complete harmony in Study D. Handforth beamed.

"Jolly good that!" he chuckled. "Fatty's got plenty of oil, eh? Did you hear what I said? I told him that anybody can see it!"

"Of course, a chap needs a quick brain to say things like that," remarked Church. "You know, a brain that any ordinary fellow couldn't possess. What about buzzing out to Little Side, Handy——"

"Not until I've tested this lamp!" said Handforth obstinately.

Church groaned inwardly. His flattery had been for nothing, and he was sorry that he had spoken at all. Then Fatty Little appeared again, and this time he was carrying a large open tin which contained a thick, gluey looking mass of the colour of treacle. He put it on the table with a bang.

"There you are," he said. "Take as much as you want."

"What the thunder's this?" said Handforth, staring.

"Oil!"

"Oil!" howled Handforth. "Why, you—you babbling lunatic! What's the good of this stuff to put in a bicycle lamp?"

"A bicycle lamp!" said Fatty Little blankly. "I thought you wanted to fry something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You idiot!" said Handforth. "Take the muck away! Anyhow, do you think we'd ruin any food of ours by frying it in that horrible-looking mass? Phew! What a frightful whiff!"

"It's good enough!" said Fatty. "I've only used it in the frying-pan about ten times!"

"Ten times!" gasped Church faintly.

"Well, perhaps twelve!" admitted the fat boy. "It's jolly rich now! I've fried kippers in it, and steak, and pancakes, and haddock, and sardines. They were a bit squiffy, so I thought it better to fry 'em up. That's what I always do with rocky eggs, too. You can't taste the flavour when they're fried in oil, but they go down just as well. You can borrow this oil if you want to cook something."

Handforth clutched at the table.

"Take—take—it—away!" he panted deliberately. "It looks bad enough, but the smell's too horrible for words! You—you savage! You cannibal! Anybody who can eat anything fried in that poison ain't fit to live in decent society!"

Fatty Little looked injured.

"It shows how much you know about

cooking!" he said contemptuously. "Why, that oil's just prime! It's got a lovely flavour! Even if a bloater isn't particularly good, you wouldn't notice anything after it was fried in that!"

"Clear out!" roared Handforth hoarsely. "I'm feeling sick! I had sardines for tea, and that rotten oil fairly gives me a turn! Oh, my goodness! Chuck him out, you chaps."

Handforth clutched at his throat. Then, suddenly, he became rigid. He stared at the can of oil in a fascinated kind of way, and noticed that a few drops were trickling down the outside of the tin. His face grew redder and redder, and his eyes bulged.

"Look—look what you've done!" he thundered violently. "Right on the top of my exercise book! All that filthy grease has trickled down—— It's ruined! It'll stink the study out for weeks!"

Handforth seized the can of oil and hurled it at Fatty Little. It was only by a miracle that none of the contents fell in the study. But Fatty dodged with astonishing speed, considering his bulk. And the can of oil shot through the open doorway and alighted in the centre of the passage, on the smooth oilcloth. It struck with a thick squelch, and Fatty gazed at it dumbly.

"All my oil wasted!" he gasped wildly.

He rushed out of the study, and gazed at the pool of oil with such sadness that it was rather surprising the tears didn't come into his eyes. A moment's glance assured him that the bulk of the lost treasure could be retrieved—with the aid of a big spoon. He hurried away to his own study, taking the empty can with him.

But Fatty happened to glance through the doorway of Study M, which was open. De Valerie and Somerton had just gone out. And, lo and behold, a large cake reposed in the centre of the table. In a very short time it reposed in quite a different place. And just as Fatty was brushing the crumbs away De Valerie and Somerton returned. Fatty thought it wise to beat a retreat by means of the window. He thoughtlessly dropped the oilcan behind the couch. De Valerie and Somerton were puzzled for at least three days regarding the strange and overpowering odour which unaccountably pervaded their domain. Only an inch by inch search—resorted to in desperation—led to the discovery of the can. The mystery of the missing cake was never really satisfactorily cleared up.

Fatty, being compelled to flee, went out into the Triangle and did not return. Thus the pool of oil lay in the centre of the Remove passage—a horrible trap for any unwary fellow who happened to come along. The Remove passage, however, was practically deserted just now, since nearly all the juniors were outside enjoying the sun.

Within Study D, Handforth was still determined to try that lamp without any delay. As a matter of fact, he didn't really

want to try it at all. He was fed up with it. But having stated his intention of testing the thing, it had to be done. He couldn't let Church and McClure crow over him. The idea wasn't to be thought of.

"There's plenty of oil in the bike shed!" he growled. "You chaps stay here, and I'll go and fetch it. If you dare to bunk while I'm gone, I'll pulverise you! But we might as well get the thing done with at once."

Church and McClure said nothing. But they decided, after short consultation, to remain. They were both rather short of cash, and it would be somewhat unwise to get Handy's rag out over a trifle.

Handforth went to the bicycle shed via the study window. It was much quicker, for he was out in the Triangle in a moment. Using the study windows as though they were doors was quite against school regulations. But Handforth took utterly no notice of that. And it was a regulation, after all, that was winked at generally during the fine weather.

Handforth was soon back, carrying one of those small oval cans of burning oil that one can purchase at any cycle shop.

"Found it on one of the shelves," he announced. "Seems a bit thin, but this oil generally is. I don't know who it belongs to, but he shouldn't be such a careless ass as to leave it lying about. I'll fill the can up later, anyhow."

Church and McClure wanted to get the thing over quickly, and they didn't argue. Handforth unfastened the lamp, took out the container and the wick holder. Then he proceeded to fill the lamp from the can of oil.

"Looks jolly thin!" said Church. "I don't believe it's oil at all. Why, you ass! It's petrol!"

"Petrol!" repeated Handforth. "Don't be a hopeless fathead! Can't you read? Here it is—on the can—'Brightbeam Burning Oil.' It ought to be good stuff—"

"Somebody must have taken the oil out and filled the can up with petrol," said Church. "Lots of fellows do it. They use petrol for cleaning tyres when they've got puncture—"

"Oh, don't be idiotic!" interrupted Handforth. "Do you think I don't know oil when I see it? That's it! Now we'll soon see how she goes!"

He fitted the lamp together, turned the wick up, and then applied a match. At the last moment, Church seized the can of oil and threw it out of the window. He wanted to be on the safe side.

Pop!

The instant Handforth applied his match, the lamp seemed to go off into a flare. Instead of the wick lighting in the usual way, the whole inside of the lamp burst into flame. This was not at all surprising—for, of course, the stuff certainly was petrol.

Handforth probably knew it all the time

—at least, after Church had mentioned it. But he was such an obstinate beggar, that he wouldn't admit it. And he hadn't the faintest idea that the results would be so disastrous. Handforth's knowledge of petrol was not very great.

"Look out!" gasped McClure. "Smother it!"

"Bunk!" roared Church. "The blessed thing'll explode—"

"Oh, don't get into a panic!" snapped Handforth. "It's safe enough—all you've got to do is to keep calm! I'm calm! Why, great pip! Look at it! Get some water—get some water! It's flaring up! It's spreading!"

"Jolly calm, ain't you?" snapped Church.

The lamp, once being alight, flared like a torch. The petrol bubbled out, spurting fire all over the table. Then, suddenly, Church howled out an urgent warning. He dashed across the study, shielding his face with his arm, McClure did the same. Handforth stood looking at the lamp at fairly close quarters.

"Come away, you madman!" gasped Church.

Handforth turned round grimly. "A madman, am I?" he shouted. "Why, you—"

Ba-a-ang!

Handforth's voice was drowned by a tremendous report—and it was lucky for him that he had turned round to look at Church. If this had not been the case the burning spirit would have spurted all over his waistcoat, and the flames would have risen to his face, scorching him badly.

But, as it was, Handforth had his rear to the lamp at the crucial moment. And fully half the petrol out of the lamp came in one jumping spurt on to his back—and it was alight!

At the same time, burning petrol was flung all over the room. The table was alight, two chairs were flaming, the hearthrug was alight, flames licked up the walls, and for one horrifying second it seemed that the whole room was about to burst into a tragic conflagration.

The lamp, of course, was burst to atoms. But Handforth saw none of these things. His whole attention was engaged upon himself. He staggered as the explosion occurred. A blast of hot air shot round his neck, then something scorching seemed to curl up towards the back of his head. He gave one frantic look over his shoulder—and jumped about a yard.

"Help!" he howled. "I'm alight!"

There was no doubt about it. Handforth's rear portion was in flames. He was like a blazing torch. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, and he had visions of flaring up and perishing amid the fire.

The heat was intense, and Handforth leapt about wildly.

"Help—help!" he hooted. "I'm on fire!" He didn't know what to do. Panic seized

him. He dashed to the door, wrenched it open, and dived into the passage, bellowing for assistance.

CHAPTER II.

THERE'S MANY A SLIP!



HANDFORTH arrived in the passage in one bound.

But it was the only bound he took. His intention—if he had any lucid intention—was to fly down the corridor. This would certainly have ended tragically, for the rush of air would have set his clothing alight in real earnest, and the resultant burns would have been not only serious, but intensely grave. Such a thing might have cost Handforth his life.

But Providence took a hand in the matter. Handforth's first step in the passage landed him fairly and squarely in the thick pool of Fatty Little's precious oil. And that pool of oil was as slippery as glass—for it lay upon smooth linoleum. Handforth's foot simply shot away from him, he skated wildly for a foot or two, lost his balance, and sat down in the passage with a fearful thud and a sickening squelch.

And out went the fire!

The thick, cold oil acted immediately as a fire extinguisher. Cold frying oil will not burn at all. At least, it won't burn under these present circumstances. For Handforth sat in the oil and flopped over backwards—thus immediately smothering all trace of the flames. His very weight and bulk squashed all the life out of the freshly started fire.

He lay there, groaning faintly. He had struck the floor with such force that he was rather hurt. Besides, the smell of that oil, mixed with the petrol fumes was calculated to overcome anybody. Handforth was dazed and feeble. He had awful visions of kippers and haddocks and squiffy sardines bubbling and boiling in a pan of burning petrol.

Then he sort of came to himself, and sat up.

"Great pip!" he muttered faintly. "I—I'm dying!"

Just for a moment he believed that he was nearly dead, and he was quite convinced that every inch of skin from his back was burnt off. He didn't even try to get to his feet. He felt that it was too much for him.

"Help!" he moaned. "Help!"

But nobody came to his assistance.

"You—you miserable rotters!" roared Handforth, with surprising vigour for a dying youth. "Can't you hear me? I'm nearly dead! Come and help me before I peg out! Ow! Yow! What a horrible death to die!"

Church and McClure, to tell the truth, were the real heroes of the moment. They had no time to waste on their reckless



"Help!" gasped Archie, "Gadzooks! I mean to say—" He clutched desperately at the air and then—

leader—who was the root cause of all this trouble. But for the extremely creditable presence of mind displayed by Church and McClure, the Ancient House would have been fairly ablaze that evening.

The two juniors could not have been blamed if they had dashed out of the study after Handforth—leaving the flames to do their worst. But they held their ground—and kept their heads clear.

A spurt of petrol had fallen upon Church's arm, and he beat it out hurriedly—for, of course, the petrol was blazing. Another spurt had set light to McClure's trousers. He beat this out, too—quite a simple process, for the spirit had not time to spread, or to gain any hold.

"Good heavens!" gasped Church. "The room's on fire!"

"Quick—the mat!" panted McClure. "Anything—take your jacket off! I'll do the same! If we're quick we'll put it out!"

"Good idea!" said Church huskily.

And there, standing amid the flames, they ripped off their jackets. The table was burning with high, leaping flames. Other flames licked up from the floor and from all parts of the room. But petrol is queer stuff. It is possible to pour petrol on paper and light it. The petrol will burn fiercely, and if smothered at once, it will be found that the paper is not even scorched. It is the spirit that burns first—not the article upon which the spirit is poured.

And, by acting on the instant, Church and McClure saved the situation.

They used their jackets with a will, and

every time they whisked the articles of clothing down the leaping flames were beaten out. Almost before they realised it, the whole fire was extinguished.

The only sign of it that remained was a thick haze in the room, a large number of blacks, and a most overpowering smell of fumes. The tablecloth was still smouldering, and it was utterly ruined.

This, indeed, was the only article that had really caught fire. Several large holes were burnt in it. But the damage was slight, for the tablecloth had only been worth a shilling or two at the most.

"Thank goodness!" said McClure fervently. "I—I thought it was all up! Just imagine what would have happened if the room had really caught! Why, we should all have got the sack—as sure as guns!"

Church nodded shakily.

"Rather!" he agreed. "Oh, what an ass Handy is! I told him it was petrol before he lit it! If we're lucky, nobody will ever know anything about this! Open the window wide, to let the fumes out! We might be able to hush up the whole giddy business!"

McClure flung the window open wider. And he was just pressing out one or two smouldering sparks of the tablecloth, when both he and Church became aware of moans from the other side of the door. They looked at one another blankly.

"Handy!" exclaimed Church, with a catch in his voice. "My—my only hat! I've just remembered! He was all flaring when he went out! Perhaps—perhaps he was burnt up outside the door! He—he might be dying——"

"Don't!" muttered McClure thickly.

They dashed to the door and wrenched it open. In the tense excitement of the moment—for hardly a minute had elapsed since the explosion—they had overlooked Handforth. But there, as they tore the door open, they could see Handy lying on the floor. He gazed at them ferociously.

"You—you traitors!" he shouted. "Can't you see I'm dying?"

Church and McClure stared. Handforth didn't look as though he were dying—and he didn't sound like it, either. They assisted him to his feet impulsively—without waiting to find out why he had fallen. They found it out as soon as they touched him, for their hands became smothered in thick, greasy oil.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Church, in disgust. "It's—it's that rotten oil of Fatty's! I'm smothered all over——"

"What does the oil matter?" demanded Handforth, as he staggered into Study D. "I'm burnt up, you fathead! Rush off and ring up the hospital! Tell them to send an ambulance! I'm done for!"

He sank down into the easy-chair—at least, he was just going to, but Church pulled him back. There was no reason why the easy-chair should be ruined. Handforth's

condition at the rear was too awful for words!

"Hold on!" said Church hastily. "You can't sit down like that——"

"I'm nearly gone!" moaned Handforth feebly. "Can't—can't you understand? I sha'n't last more than half-an-hour— Why, what the dickens— Look—look at that lamp! And it was new this afternoon!"

Handforth's weak voice suddenly became as strong as a tempest. It whirled through the study like a gale. He had just caught sight of the bicycle lamp—or, to be exact, the remains of it. The thing lay on the floor, nothing but a blackened, twisted mass of scrap iron. It was hardly recognisable as a lamp at all.

"You—you rotters!" shouted Handforth unreasonably. "Look what you've done!"

"We've done!" howled Church, with indignation.

"Yes—you've smashed that lamp to bits!"

Church fought for words, but they wouldn't come. He tried to say about a hundred things at once; they all fought for utterance, and every one of those things was of the utmost importance. But Church merely choked. His vocal chords failed, and he stood there gulping.

But McClure was not quite so indignant.

"Hold on, Handy!" he said gruffly. "That's a nice thing—accusing us of busting the lamp up! It's a lucky thing the whole school isn't on fire! As for you, I don't believe you're even scorched!"

"Not scorched!" said Handforth. "I'm burnt up at the back!"

"Well, your clothing is all right—except for that ghastly oil," replied McClure. "Your trucks are sound, and your jacket's in one piece. It must have been imagination, Handy."

And it began to dawn upon Handforth that he had imagined things. He certainly couldn't feel much pain in his rear. And, surely, he would have been in agony if those burns had been real? The petrol had flared up, but Handforth had sat in the oil so promptly that his clothing was not even scorched. It was ruined, all the same. The oil saw to that.

However, it was far better to have a ruined suit of clothes than to have no further use for clothes at all! But Handforth didn't quite look at it in this light. Being a boy, he couldn't realise that he had been very near to tragedy.

But he cooled down somewhat, and soberly came to the conclusion that he had been several kinds of an ass to put a match to the lamp. But to have admitted this to Church and McClure would have been impossible. Handforth didn't even think of doing such a thing.

And, in the meantime, trouble was brewing outside. It hadn't quite come to pass, but it was certainly brewing. It was, as Archie Glenthorne would have remarked, in the offing.

And it was Archie himself, as a matter of fact, who started the ball rolling.

He had been in his study for some little time—elegantly reclining on his soft lounge, glancing through the pages of a weekly pictorial. And then, suddenly, the door of his study had shaken and a booming report had sounded. It wouldn't have been so noticeable, only Archie was very quiet.

"I mean to say, loud thuds, and what not!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle and gazing at the door. "It appears that something has happened. Absolutely! Most dashed disconcerting! Fairly puts a chappie off his stroke!"

Archie decided to investigate. He had certainly heard an explosion. He knew that. He was also aware that most of the fellows were out in the playing fields. The studies were nearly all deserted. What could be the reason for that sudden bang?

Archie sallied forth, and passed down the Remove passage. He was attired with all his usual elegance. And the Remove passage was dim, for the dusk was setting in, and not a great deal of light penetrated into the corridor—which was dull at the best of times.

Archie strode along languidly. Then one of his feet struck the danger zone. His foot continued going, and his balance was completely upset.

Before he could even realise that any danger existed his second foot touched the oil patch. And both his legs whizzed up into the air. They flew from under him as though he had suddenly struck a glassy patch of ice.

"Help!" gasped Archie faintly. "Gadzooks! I mean to say——"

He clutched desperately at the air and then——

Thud! Splosh!

Archie landed in the oil with a horrible, sticky, glugging sound. He wasn't hurt much, but the horror of the moment was so great that he nearly fainted on the spot. He knew that a disaster of paramount importance had occurred. That sticky sound told him that tragedy had befallen his glorious clothing.

And one glance as he sat up—one touch of his hand on the smothered floor—one sniff up his nostrils—and he knew the worst. His breath came and went in great gasps of dismay.

"This," he wailed, "is absolutely poisonous!"

Archie was in a fearful mess—so fearful that he couldn't quite realise the terrible nature of the catastrophe at first. He only knew that everything he touched was oily and sticky. The very thought of getting to his feet without assistance did not occur to him.

So he lay there and shouted.

"Help!" he howled. "I mean to say, kindly rally round and do the old rescuing stunt! Large assortments of S.O.S.! Phipps!

Dash it all! Phipps! Proceed to save the old soul!"

As it happened, Phipps was not very far off, and he heard these frantic appeals. He came hurrying down the corridor, and then caught sight of Archie lying full length on the floor. Phipps hastened onward.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he asked, as he approached.

"Matter!" gasped Archie. "Phipps, old lad, don't be such a bally ass! I'm wallowing—positively and absolutely wallowing! The whole thing is most dashed foul! I've never—gadzooks!"

Phipps had arrived.

And Phipps had not noticed anything peculiar about the floor. He only saw Archie lying there, and vaguely wondered why he couldn't get up. Phipps didn't wonder for long. There was no necessity for it.

The truth was obvious. For Phipps slithered even more violently than Archie had slithered. And it so happened that Archie was making an attempt to rise at the same moment. The unfortunate Phipps met with worse disaster than his young master. He collapsed with a fearful thud, sprawled over Archie, and his face descended into Fatty Little's prized frying oil.

It was perhaps just as well that Phipps found speech impossible at the moment—or Archie might have heard a few extremely strong remarks.

All that Phipps could do was to gurgle and splutter. And Archie sloshed back into the oil with more wallowing than ever.

"Great absolutely heavens!" said Archie faintly. "Dash it all! I mean to say, Phipps! What? What? Kindly remove the old carcase, Phipps! I doubt if I shall survive, don't you know!"

Phipps found his voice.

"How—how did this happen, sir?" he exclaimed thickly.

"Be sensible, Phipps—he bally sensible!" protested Archie. "You don't think I poured the stuff down and then staggered into it, do you? My clothing, and so forth! Ruined, you know! This is an occasion for weeping and wailing, and huge quantities of teeth gnashing!"

"It seems to me more the occasion for a bath, sir!" said Phipps.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Brainy lad!"

Very gingerly, they managed to pick themselves up. Then they trailed away towards the staircase, leaving drips of oil behind here and there. They vanished into a bathroom, and various sounds of splashings came from within.

In the meantime, the Remove passage was deserted once more.

Fenton, of the Sixth, came hurrying through in order to reach the lobby quickly. He reached the floor far more quickly than he reached the lobby. Fenton was hurrying—and the only pity of it was that there

was nobody there to watch. The way he went up into the air was absolutely beautiful. His feet shot from under him, and he practically turned a somersault and came down on the back of his head. Fenton staggered wildly up, slithered again, and sat down.

"Good heavens!" he said faintly.

And it certainly was a startling thing to happen to a fellow who was unsuspecting of such a stark peril being abroad. Fenton managed to get to his feet at last, and he was about to open the door of Study D—having dark suspicions regarding this apartment—when the figure of Mr. Crowell appeared.

Fenton held up his hand urgently.

"Stop, sir!" he exclaimed. "Just a moment, sir——"

"And why should I stop, Fenton?" demanded Mr. Crowell, who appeared to be in a temper.

"You'll slip over, sir——"

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Crowell, curtly. "There is no earthly reason why I should slip over. Pah! Poof! What is this disgusting smell of petrol and oil and burn—— Go—oh! What on earth—— Whooooo——"

Swish—squelch—thud!

Mr. Crowell sat down with terrific force near Fenton's feet, and he uttered several fiendish yells. For a Form-master this was decidedly undignified; but Mr. Crowell was to be excused.

At the same time, he had only himself to blame. Fenton had given him a distinct warning, and if Mr. Crowell had not been in one of his tantrums—as the juniors disrespectfully termed his little periods of touchiness—he would have paused and waited. But it so happened that the Form-master had been compelled to spend his time at scholastic duties when he really wanted to be engaged on literary work—and this always had the effect of shortening his temper.

"Oh! I—I'm sorry, sir!" exclaimed Fenton, with a gulp. "But—but I warned you in plenty of time——"

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Crowell faintly. "What—what does this mean, Fenton? What ghastly substance is this I have fallen into? Oil, by all appearances—sticky, messy, smelly oil——"

"Yes, that's what it seems to me, sir," said Fenton. "I expect some of these young scamps have done it on purpose——"

At that very moment the door of Study D opened—just as Mr. Crowell was staggering to his feet, with Fenton's aid. As Church and McClure said, Handforth fairly asked for it.

They had heard Mr. Crowell's voice, and had suggested an immediate retreat by way of the window. But Handforth was as obstinate as ever.

"Rot!" he said. "Why should we bunk?

We didn't shove that oil down in the passage——"

"You fathead!" snapped Church. "You threw the can at Fatty——"

"A pure accident!" said Handforth gruffly.

He opened the door, and was certainly rather startled when he saw Mr. Crowell's condition. Fenton was not looking particularly clean and tidy, either. That pool of oil had nearly vanished, for the bulk of its original expense was fairly, evenly distributed between Archie Glenthorne, Phipps, Fenton, and Mr. Crowell. And the odour in the passage was not particularly grateful and comforting.

"Why, hallo!" said Handforth. "Anything wrong out here?"

"Anything wrong!" echoed Fenton angrily. "You confounded young sweep! What's all this oil? I suppose you know something—— Ah! You're smothered in the stuff yourself! What's the game?"

"Leave this to me!" said Mr. Crowell thickly. "I will deal with Handforth. Boy, what have you to say?" he barked violently.

Handforth looked aggrieved.

"No need to talk like that, sir——"

"What have you to say?" thundered Mr. Crowell.

"Why, I—I don't know what you mean, sir," stuttered Handforth, robbed of his usual confidence. "You—you see, somebody came in with some oil, and spilt it—— I—I mean, it got upset, somehow——"

"Enough!" roared Mr. Crowell. "Handforth, you will write me a thousand lines!"

"What!" panted Handforth feebly.

"A thousand lines, sir!" stormed the Form-master. "Furthermore, you will clear up this disgraceful mess at once—with your own hands! I shall inquire further into this matter when I am in a more fit state to do so!"

And Mr. Crowell turned on his heel in order to stride away. In his fury he forgot the pool of oil, slithered wildly, and it was only Fenton's presence of mind and swift action that saved Mr. Crowell from turning another somersault.

Once out of the danger zone, however, Mr. Crowell stalked away, and Handforth looked after him with anger and indignation fighting for expression on his countenance. Fenton was grim and cold.

"And you can reckon that you've been let off lightly!" he said curtly. "I was expecting Mr. Crowell to report you for a public flogging. If this mess isn't cleared up by the time I come down—look out for yourself!"

The school captain stalked gingerly away, and Handforth almost choked. Within Study D, Church and McClure silently and fervently embraced each other. At last they had something to be happy over. Handforth had got it in the neck! He had been asking for it for days and weeks—and now it had arrived!

CHAPTER III.
MR. SHARPE IS BLUNT!



HANDFORTH glared at his chums suspiciously at he re-entered the study. Somehow or other, they looked rather too innocent for his liking. Whenever Church and McClure looked innocent, there was generally something behind it. And Handforth guessed that they had been discussing him.

"Well?" he demanded, like the explosion of a bomb. "What the dickens are you staring at? You ought to be jolly pleased with yourselves! Causing all this mess, and ruining my clothes, and—"

"Well, I'm blessed!" interrupted Church indignantly. "We caused it! Why, you ass, it was all your fault for putting petrol in the lamp! If it hadn't been for us, the whole school would have been on fire by this time! You ought to think yourself jolly lucky that Crowell didn't come in here!"

Handforth snorted.

"Well, you can clear up that mess outside!" he said.

"Oh, can we?" said McClure. "Crowell told you to do it—"

"If you don't get busy on the job I'll punch you until you can't see straight," bellowed Handforth. "I'm not going to stand any insubordination! And you'll have to pay for a new lamp, too!"

Church looked at McClure, and McClure looked at Church. They were just about fed up. They were in that condition when they didn't care what happened. And for Handforth to take up this attitude was a bit too much for them.

"If you think you're going to start on us, you'd better think again!" shouted Church aggressively. "You blessed bully! We're not standing any rot from you! You'll have to clear up that mess yourself!"

Handforth gulped twice, and then lurched himself forward.

"All right!" he thundered. "You've asked for it!"

Handforth intended annihilating his chums on the spot. But for once they were ready. They had no scruples. Handforth had gone beyond the limit—and Church and McClure were aroused. It took a tremendous lot to arouse them, but when they did get into that condition it was a poor look-out for Handy.

Crash—biff—bang—thud!

Study D fairly shook with the noise of the engagement. It was a swift battle, but it was deadly. For a few brief moments there was a vision of fists, flying jackets, and reddened faces.

At the conclusion, Handforth lay full length on the floor, his nose purple, one eye half closed, his clothing dusty and disarranged, and he looked just about spent. Church and McClure staggered outside through the window. They were not un-

touched, by any means. Before succumbing, Handforth had dealt out a large assortment of blows. His chums looked decidedly wrecked.

But they had triumphed. They had succeeded in giving Handforth a good hiding. There would be fearful ructions afterwards, of course, and it was quite likely that peace would not be restored until several days had elapsed. But these little episodes were as inevitable as the day and the night. They simply had to come occasionally.

Handforth picked himself up, gasping, grunting, and addressing all sorts of violent remarks to the furniture. He soon realised the futility of this, and he further realised that it was up to him to clear up the oil in the passage.

And a cold glitter came into his eyes as he caught sight of McClure's cricketing blazer. It was hanging on a nail, and Handforth grabbed it. It wasn't his usual custom to be destructive—but just now he felt dangerous.

He seized the blazer, went out into the passage, and proceeded to use the article of clothing as a mop. He swabbed up the oil in a manner that was entirely satisfactory to himself. Mary Jane, the housemaid, would have used a few strong terms regarding Handforth's ability if she had seen the result of his work.

Then Handforth went upstairs and cleaned himself. After a complete change and a wash he felt so much better that he was almost cheerful. But he frowned grimly as he planned all sorts of dire punishments for Church and McClure.

Of course, they were going out of Study D—that was the first thing. He would chuck them out, and never let them enter again. After what had happened it would be quite impossible to have any further amiable relations with them. In fact, Handforth decided that henceforward he would not even exchange a single word. He would cut them dead on all occasions. He would act as though they didn't exist.

He descended to Study D with the cheerful idea of hurling all the property of Church and McClure out into the passage. But as soon as he got inside the door he again caught sight of that smashed-up lamp. And a great rage welled up within him. A moment's consideration would have told him that the fault had been entirely his own, and that it wasn't any good blaming the lamp. But Handforth, impulsive as ever, grabbed up the wreckage and hurried out. There would just be time for him to get to the village before the shops closed. And he set off at full speed.

By the time he arrived at the ironmonger's he had settled on a fixed plan, and he was icily calm. Handforth had various moods, and he would change from one to the other without a moment's warning. In fact, nobody knew exactly how to take him.

He entered the ironmongery establishment of Mr. Sharpe. It was empty, except for the proprietor, who was in the act of pulling

down the blinds. Mr. Sharpe was tall and thin and bony, and it was something of an effort for him to be pleasant. He always regarded the St. Frank's fellows with suspicion. Probably he had reason to!

"Just closing, Mr. Sharpe?" said Handforth briskly. "All right; won't keep you a minute. I'd like a new lamp in exchange for this one."

Handforth banged the battered remains on the counter. Mr. Sharpe adjusted his spectacles, looked at the wreckage, and then looked at Handforth.

"What is this?" he asked bluntly.

"That's the lamp you sold me to-day!" said Handforth. "The blessed thing's no good, and it's busted! You've got to give me a new one; you can't swindle me, you know, Mr. Sharpe!"

The ironmonger's face grew rigid.

"How dare you?" he barked. "The insolence—the impertinence! How dare you come into my shop and accuse me of swindling to my face? And let me tell you this, young man! I will not stand any dictation or——"

"Oh, won't you?" said Handforth icily. "Well, this lamp was no good; as soon as I filled it up and lit it, the thing exploded! You don't call that a good lamp, I suppose? I either want a new lamp or my money back!"

Mr. Sharpe sniffed keenly.

"Good gracious!" he said. "Did you use petrol?"

"Yes, but that's nothing to do with it," replied Handforth. "No decent lamp ought to explode as soon as——"

"Really, my lad, I should advise you to leave as quickly as possible," interrupted Mr. Sharpe curtly. "I cannot conceive of any boy being so utterly brainless as to use petrol in a bicycle lamp. The fact that it exploded is entirely your own fault; you might have expected it. I certainly refuse to have anything to do with the matter. It is already past the closing hour, so I will bid you good-evening."

Mr. Sharpe walked towards the door and invitingly motioned Handforth to depart. He had been very blunt—and Handforth was rather taken aback. The leader of Study D had no intention of leaving yet.

"Hold on!" he said. "We'll see about this, Mr. Sharpe!"

"I have nothing further to say!"

"Then I have!" said Handforth. "Are you going to give me a new lamp?"

"I am not!"

"You refuse to do the right thing?"

"I absolutely refuse to do the wrong thing," retorted Mr. Sharpe. "You have utterly no right to come here and demand a new lamp in exchange for that piece of twisted scrap-iron. How you can have the impertinence to make such a demand is beyond my understanding."

Handforth glared for a moment, and then cooled down.

"All right," he said. "I'm staying here!"

"What?" barked the ironmonger.

Handforth leaned against the counter.

"I'm staying here until I get a new lamp!" he said calmly. "If you think I'm going to be diddled, you've made a bloomer! You've got plenty of lamps in the window; you can easily give me another! You'll never notice it!"

Mr. Sharpe boiled with indignation and anger.

"You insolent young rascal!" he roared.

"You will leave this shop at once, and I shall consider it my duty to report the whole matter to your headmaster! I have never known such effrontery in all my life!"

Handforth didn't move!

"Are you going?" demanded Mr. Sharpe wildly.

"Not until I get a new lamp——"

"You can only have a new lamp if you pay for it," said Mr. Sharpe. "You need not imagine that this establishment is run for philanthropic purposes!"

Handforth smiled pityingly.

"It won't help you to trot out long words like that!" he said. "I know what I'm doing, and I'm just about fed-up——"

"Unless you leave this shop within one minute I will throw you out!" shouted Mr. Sharpe hotly. "Do you hear me, sir? I will throw you out!"

"Good!" said Handforth. "I'd like to see you do it!"

He clenched his fists, squared his shoulders, and waited. He was just feeling ready for another scrap. He was like a bomb, and was ready to explode at the first touch. He felt that something had to happen in order to relieve his feelings. A scrap with Mr. Sharpe would be quite enjoyable. But Handforth, although intensely reckless, had enough sense to avoid starting the conflict himself. He would probably have to stand on the carpet later, and to admit that he had attacked Mr. Sharpe on his own premises would be fatal.

"Well, boy?" demanded the ironmonger.

"Are you going?"

"Certainly," said Handforth, "when I get that new lamp!"

"You—you—— Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Sharpe. "This is insufferable! In my own shop! Now, sir—out you go at once!"

He approached Handforth aggressively, and with blazing eyes. Edward Oswald didn't move a hair.

"Go on—touch me!" he taunted. "Huh! You daren't!"

Mr. Sharpe choked for a moment, and then swore.

"Now!" he panted. "We shall see—we shall see!"

He seized Handforth and whirled him towards the door. At least, this is what Mr. Sharpe intended doing. As a matter of fact, he only shifted Handforth about a couple of inches. Then something which felt like a battering-ram came into contact with his pointed nose.

"Yow—yaroooooh!"

Mr. Sharpe reeled back, howling violently. He staggered right across the shop, tripped over an assortment of buckets and other articles of ironmongery, and then collapsed in a heap.

"You'll chuck me out, will you?" roared Handforth. "All right—do it!"

Mr. Sharpe was not in a position to do anything at the moment. Just behind the spot where he had fallen a large expanse of netting was hung up—probably for display purposes. It was one of those string nets for use on strawberry-beds, or blackcurrant-bushes, to protect the fruit from birds. And, in falling, Mr. Sharpe clutched at it.

The result was disastrous.

He pulled the whole net about his ears. There was a tearing, rending sound, a clatter of falling kettles and saucepans, and the net descended over Mr. Sharpe like a black cloud.

"Good!" said Handforth callously. "Now you've got it!"

Mr. Sharpe struggled desperately and violently. It was the worst thing he could have done. If he had only kept his head all would have been well. He would have been able to extricate himself without difficulty.

But by struggling he only made the position completely hopeless. The net wound itself round him in gripping folds. The more he wriggled the more entangled became the net.

But somehow or other Mr. Sharpe managed to get to his feet. And there, roaring and raving, he staggered about the shop like a comedian in a pantomime. He seemed to have made up his mind that he would do as much damage as possible in the shortest space of time.

Handforth stood looking on with great interest. Two or three village youths, happening to pass by, and hearing sounds of strife, looked in at the door. They admired the performance tremendously—judging by their grins.

"Serves you jolly well right!" said Handforth calmly. "This is what comes of trying to swindle good customers! If you'd given me a new lamp, instead of making a lot of silly fuss, this wouldn't have happened."

"Gug—gug—brrrrrrh!" said Mr. Sharpe incoherently.

His course round the shop was well worth watching. Being wrapped up in the coils of the net, he simply had no control over his movements. And his shop was very much like all other ironmongery shops—half the floor space was occupied by galvanised baths, pails, watering-cans, garden tools, coils of wire netting, sieves, and so forth.

And Mr. Sharpe, staggering round, upset pile after pile. Judging by the noise one might have been excused in believing that the shop was being wrecked. The din was terrific. Mr. Sharpe reeled on like an all destructive cyclone. But gradually he was getting free from his bonds. The netting



There was a tearing, rending sound, a clatter of falling kettles and saucepans, and the net descended over Mr. Sharpe like a black cloud.

was becoming loose, and Mr. Sharpe felt that he could find a way of escape.

And Handforth saw that it would not be safe for him to remain much longer. He was thoroughly satisfied now. He considered that he had had his money's worth, and if he remained the trouble might be very severe. Mr. Sharpe was worked up to such an extent that he was capable of any violence.

"Well, I'd better be going," said Handforth casually. "I hope that this'll be a lesson to you, Mr. Sharpe. The St. Frank's chaps are your best customers, so don't try to diddle 'em!"

And Handforth calmly marched out of the shop—leaving Mr. Sharpe fairly gobbling with impotent rage. By the time the ironmonger got free Handforth had vanished into the gathering dusk.

He went up the road to St. Frank's in the sweetest of tempers. All his hard thoughts had gone. He was even disposed to forgive Church and McClure, and decided that he would allow them to stay on in Study D.

In fact, Handforth was in his most serene mood. All the clouds had rolled away, and everything—as he would have put it—in the garden was lovely. Life was worth living once more.

He was just nearing St. Frank's, and the gloom was fairly thick owing to the clouded sky and the dense trees which lined one side of the road. And then, suddenly, Handforth caught his breath in.

For a brief instant he caught sight of a lurking figure among the bushes near the road. He looked hard, and the figure seemed to fade. It vanished. And when

Handforth hurried up he found that he was absolutely alone. Had that figure been a reality, or really a trick of his fancy?

Handforth was convinced that he had seen something. But why should it lurk there, so silent and stealthy? What could it mean?

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth abruptly. "A Chink!"

The thought came to him like a blow. In a flash all his detective instincts were on the alert. Handforth had plenty of detective instincts, but no detective ability. He was always ready to get on the trail. And he fondly believed that he was smart at the game. He wasn't. He was a hopeless duffer.

"A Chink!" repeated Handforth tensely. "By George, I've got it! Queer things have been happening to Yung Ching just recently, and now his enemies are getting busy again! This is my chance to do things!"

Handforth recalled the thrills and excitements of recent events at St. Frank's. Yung Ching, the Chinese boy in the Remove, apparently had enemies of his own nationality. These enemies, mysterious and always lurking in the background, had made more than one attempt to take Yung Ching's life. But for a week past, owing to the activities of Nelson Lee, the Chinese boy's enemies had been helpless. Their teeth had been drawn—their jaws muzzled. But now, it seemed that fresh adventures were afoot!

And Edward Oswald Handforth was the only one on the alert!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUNG CHING!



"**R**UCTIONS, of course," said Church soberly. "You think he'll be wild?"

"Raving!" said Church. "After what's happened, he'll do all sorts of mad

things. I can't make out where the dickens he's got to—not that I'm worrying. Rats to him! Let him sulk!"

Church and McClure were doing their prep. in Study D. The electric light was burning, for it was fairly late, and the evening had become thick and clouded. And Handforth's chums were trying to make themselves believe that everything was all right, and that there was no need to worry.

As a matter of fact, they were very greatly worried. They had been expecting explosions, but peace prevailed. Handforth was not to be seen. He had completely disappeared.

Church and McClure were certainly fed up with him, and they had shown their hand for once. Experience told them that at least two miserable days would follow. But it couldn't be helped. These things happened in life.

"Of course, it doesn't matter to us what

the ass does, but I wish he'd turn up," said McClure uneasily. "What's he doing? Where the dickens has he got to? You know, he's a hopeless fathead when he gets into one of his moods, and there's no telling what——"

"He's coming!" interrupted Church hurriedly, but with relief.

The footsteps out in the passage were unmistakable. The door of Study D shook slightly, and then it burst open. Church and McClure sprang to their feet and instinctively clenched their fists. They had to be prepared.

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth crisply. "Good! Chuck those books aside! There's work to do—we've got to get on the trail!"

Church and McClure stared. They hadn't expected anything of this kind. Handforth wasn't angry—he wasn't sullen—he wasn't anything that one might have supposed he would be. On the contrary, he was flushed with excitement, in the very best of tempers, and seemed to have no recollection of the recent strife.

"What's the idea, Handy?" asked Church uncertainly.

"Detective work!" said Handforth briskly.

"What?"

"Eh?"

"I've spotted one of those rotten Chinks!" went on Handforth, lowering his voice. "Quite by accident, you know. Lurking in the bushes just near the school. I'll bet he's waiting to stick a knife into Yung Ching, or something of that sort. Anyhow, we're going out to collar him!"

"Oh!" said Church. "But—but what about—— I mean—I—I thought—— Well, you see——"

"Oh, that rot?" said Handforth. "The bust up? That's finished. I had a row with old Sharpe and I'm satisfied. We'll say no more about it. It's up to you fellows to back me up and follow my instructions. We've got to follow this Chinaman."

Church and McClure were only too ready to accept the position.

"Right-ho," said Church. "But where is he? How did you find him?"

"Haven't I just explained?" demanded Handforth. "You're just as dense as ever! This Chinaman's lurking about outside, among the trees. You know that Yung Ching has got a lot of enemies. Well, this rotter is one of them. Think of the glory we shall get by capturing him. Buck up!"

Church and McClure were not filled with any great enthusiasm. But it was an enormous relief to find that Handforth was himself and ready to carry on as usual. His chums were quite willing to humour him.

"Detective work, eh?" said McClure eagerly. "Good! It'll be rather ripping if we collar this Chinaman—and you'll get all the credit, Handy."

Of course, Handforth's chums had no confidence in his story of a Chinaman. At the same time, the finest thing would be to

swallow it, and lend him a hand. So they hurried out of Study D with him and emerged into the gloomy Triangle. Handforth was fairly bubbling with keenness.

The gates, of course, were closed, but a little detail like this did not worry Handforth. He led the way to the school wall, and a minute later the three of them were outside, crouching down against the hedge.

"That's where I saw him—just over there!" breathed Handforth, pointing. "Now what we've got to do is to remain here and watch. The rotter's bound to show himself soon, and then we can spring on him!"

Church and McClure did not argue. Personally, they thought it extremely unlikely that the alleged Chinaman would show himself just to oblige Handforth. The whole thing was a mere waste of time, in their opinion.

The three juniors were crouching in the bed of a ditch. It was quite dry, and there were all sorts of ferns growing in profusion. So it was possible for them to lie there in concealment without giving any hint of their presence to others. And, as it happened, their vigil was not destined to be a long one.

For after about five minutes had elapsed there came the sound of a breaking twig. Handforth gripped Church's arm tightly.

"Yow! What the——" hissed Handforth. "He's coming!"

He stared intently. And, sure enough, a minute later the bushes moved and a dim figure appeared. It was that of a man. It was impossible to see clearly in the gloom, but the juniors could make out that the stranger was staring up and down the lane cautiously.

Then, just as he was about to go back into his place of concealment, Handforth acted.

"Now!" he roared. "On him!" In one leap Handforth was out of the ditch. Church and McClure, although somewhat startled by that bellow, came up to the scratch admirably. They scrambled out in the wake of their leader. Handforth, by this time, was dashing across the road to the thick bushes on the other side.

The lurking figure hesitated for a moment, and then backed away into obscurity. But that moment of hesitation had been fatal for him. Handforth reached the spot, tore through the bushes, and just caught a glimpse of the man as he tried to get away.

"No, you don't!" roared Handforth. "Come on, you chaps!"

He grabbed fiercely, and managed to secure a firm hold of the fellow's coat-tails. He pulled violently, and the man staggered back, tripped, and fell full length into the long grass. They were just free of the bushes, and Handforth was able to jump upon his prisoner.

"Hold his arms—and his legs!" he shouted.

Church and McClure, thoroughly excited, jumped on the captive. And with these three sturdy juniors sprawled over him, the man had utterly no chance. He lay there, helpless.

"What the thunder does this mean?" he panted furiously.

"You're my prisoner!" said Handforth.

"You confounded young idiot!" said the man. "Let me go! What kind of game is this? Let me get up, you young lunatic!"

"My only hat!" said Church. "We've made a bloomer!"

"I knew it!" growled McClure.

"A bloomer?" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean?"

"This chap isn't a Chinaman——"

"Isn't he?" said Handforth knowingly.

"Do you think I'm spoofed by his talk? A Chinaman can speak English as well as I can. This fellow's putting it on! He's a Chinaman disguised!"

"If you don't let me get up within two seconds I'll make things hot for you!" exclaimed the victim harshly. "You made a mistake, you young dolt! Let me get up at once!"

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "You're my prisoner, and you're going to be handed over to the police. Lurking about St. Frank's—trying to murder Yung Ching! I've got you, and you're finished!"

"But—but Handy!" breathed Church. "This chap is English——"

"Rot!"

"He's white!" persisted Church.

"Disguise!" said Handforth. "If an Englishman can disguise himself as a Chinaman, why can't a Chinaman disguise himself as an Englishman? That's logic! If one's possible, so is the other! And this rotten Chink is made up to look like a white man!"

Church felt rather faint. He had nothing to say. Against such an argument it was absolutely hopeless to speak. And the cream of the whole affair was that Handforth really believed that he was correct. The unfortunate prisoner remained on the ground, helpless, breathing hard and using language of a certain strong description which did not sound at all like Chinese.

"And you'd better stop that talk, too!" said Handforth threateningly. "I expect you learned that language around the docks! Down Limehouse or Bayswater!"

"Bayswater?" said Church.

"Well, it's next to Limehouse!" said Handforth, who was very vague in his ideas about the London suburbs. "And I'm jolly certain that——"

"Cave!" exclaimed McClure suddenly.

Handforth glanced round, and then saw two figures coming along the lane. In the first second he didn't recognise them—but then he saw that one belonged to Nelson Lee and the other to me. The gov'nor and I had met in the village, and were coming home together.

"Good gracious!" said Nelson Lee. "What is this?"

"It's all right, sir," said Handforth. "I've got a prisoner here—a Chinaman!"

"Thank goodness you've come, Mr. Lee!" gasped the prisoner. "Please tell these young idiots to release me! They must be mad!"

"Mad, are we?" said Handforth grimly. "All right, my man, you'll see! This gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective! He'll soon snap the bracelets on you and finish your game!"

Nelson Lee and I approached close, and gazed down searchingly.

"Dear me!" said the guv'nor. "What have you been doing, Handforth?"

"I think he's been making a bloomer, sir," said Church. "McClure and I didn't want to interfere, but Handforth was certain——"

"Of course I'm certain, sir," said Handforth. "This chap's a Chinaman!"

Nelson Lee frowned, although his eyes twinkled.

"I'm very much afraid, Handforth, that your usual impetuosity has led you into a further blunder," he said softly. "You will release this prisoner of yours at once. It's all right, Melrose—you mustn't take any notice of this little incident. Just a harmless mistake on the part of these juniors."

"Mistake!" gasped Handforth. "But—but——"

"Let me get up, confound you," said Melrose desperately.

"Stand up at once, Handforth," commanded Lee.

Edward Oswald was staggered, but he could do nothing but obey. Church and McClure sprang to their feet, and Handforth was thrown back, for the prisoner got to his feet by sheer force—a simple task with the weight of Church and McClure removed. He stood there, looking hot and dishevelled and dusty.

"Infernal young idiots!" he said aggressively.

"But—but look here, sir!" gasped Handforth, appealing to Nelson Lee. "I'm right—I know I am! I saw this chap lurking about among the trees, and I know he's a Chinaman disguised as a white man——"

"Do not talk so absurdly, Handforth," interrupted Lee. "I will see you with reference to this matter later on. You will go indoors at once, and in future you had better make certain before committing another such blunder. It will not be safe to walk about the public highways before long."

"But look here, sir——"

"I do not wish to argue, my boy," in-

terrupted Lee. "Go indoors—all three of you. Go at once!"

Handforth would probably have attempted to continue the conversation, but Church and McClure grabbed him and forced him to move. They were both red and self-conscious, and they felt very absurd.

"There you are—I knew it all along!" whispered Church gruffly. "You've simply made us look like a set of fatheads! It's a pity you can't show a bit more sense, Handy. I knew the chap wasn't a Chinaman."

"So did I!" said McClure.

Handforth snorted.

"It just shows how easy it is for anybody to spoof Mr. Lee!" he said bitterly. "He's supposed to be as smart as the dickens, and yet he'll swallow anything! Of course the chap was a Chinaman! I could see it all the time—but he's so jolly clever that he's even hoodwinked Mr. Lee!"

Neither Church nor McClure had any weapons to battle against such an argument as this. It seemed that Handforth really believed that he was right, and that Nelson Lee was wrong! Probably the opposite was the case—but Handforth would never admit himself beaten.

And while the three juniors went indoors, Nelson Lee and I remained out in the lane.

Handforth's late prisoner was standing before us, brushing himself down. He was still looking somewhat indignant, but the guv'nor's presence made all the difference. I had recognised him as an old acquaintance. He was, in fact, Detective-sergeant Melrose, a rising young C.I.D. officer, of Scotland Yard. He was one of Chief-inspector Lennard's best men.

"Well, this is a surprise to me!" I said. "What the dickens are you doing down here, Melrose? I haven't seen you for months."

"I daresay Mr. Lee can tell you all about it," said Melrose. "Anyway, I don't like your school chums, Master Nipper—and that's straight! I never came across such fiery young blighters! Fairly jumped on me and held me down! I'd rather have a scrap with half-a-dozen drunks!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Come, come, Melrose: don't exaggerate!" he said lightly. "I half suspected that the fault was yours for showing yourself. However, no harm is done, so it doesn't matter. Everything is all right, I presume."

"Yes, sir—quiet as usual."

"Let us hope things remain quiet."

"I'm not certain that I hope that, sir," said the detective-sergeant. "I'm about fed up with this business. Stuck here for a week, spending all night in the woods, and never a sight of anything. It's the quietest job I've been on since I joined the force!"

"Which only goes to prove that the enemy has a great respect for the majesty of the law," smiled Nelson Lee. "The very

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

fact that you are on guard is sufficient to keep the Chinamen inactive."

A minute or two later we bade our companion good-night and passed into the Triangle. But I did not part from Nelson Lee at once. I followed him to his study, and closed the door behind me once I was inside.

"Now, look here, sir," I said firmly. "What's it all about? I should like to hear the truth about this. Has Melrose been hanging about St. Frank's for a week?"

"He has."

"And I knew nothing about it!" I said indignantly.

"A dreadful oversight on my part, Nipper," said Lee gravely. "It will probably interest you to know that Melrose has got five other men under him—and those men are at present dotted about round the school—watching from every point."

"Well, I'm jiggered," I said. "And they've been on this work for a week?"

"Exactly."

"So that's why Yung Ching's enemies haven't been in evidence!" I exclaimed. "No wonder it's been a quiet week, sir! But what's the idea exactly? You're not proposing to keep these Yard men on duty always, are you?"

Nelson Lee sat down and lit a cigarette.

"It is the duty of the police to maintain law and order," he said. "There have been some grim attempts at foul play in connection with Yung Ching, and it was absolutely essential that he should have protection. For the past week that protection has been provided. The result, as you know, is entirely satisfactory. There have been no signs whatever of the enemy."

"In fact, things are getting dull," I remarked.

"In comparison to the previous adventures, yes," said Nelson Lee. "Archie Glenthorne was the victim of Ching's enemies on the last occasion—when they took him to Limehouse and used him as a hostage. And events of that nature must not happen again. These Scotland Yard men are well on the alert, and Fu Chow dare not act."

"I suppose they're only on duty at night?" I remarked.

"Melrose and his men do not come to the vicinity of the school until dusk," replied Lee. "They leave their posts at the coming of dawn. It is only during the hours of darkness that these Chinese work their cunning plans. During the past week I have been able to pursue my own investigations."

"And do you think you'll be able to meet with any success, sir?"

"I am confident of success," replied Nelson Lee. "It will not be long before I shall be in a position to round up these Chinamen and render Yung Ching safe from any further persecutions. I have discovered, Nipper, that we are fighting against two separate factions."

"I don't quite follow, guv'nor."

"You may remember that two attempts have been made to kidnap Yung Ching, and at least one attempt to murder him," said Lee. "Now, it stands to reason that if somebody is anxious to take the boy's life, he will not go to the trouble of kidnapping. Those bent upon capturing Ching are members of the Yen Shan Tong—a powerful Chinese Secret Society which has, I believe, a well-established branch in the East End of London."

"But they don't want to kill Yung Ching?"

"No—they are anxious to capture him alive and well," replied the detective. "It was for that purpose that Glenthorne was spirited away—so that we should be compelled to give up Ching. But the whole thing failed—and mainly owing to the efforts of Glenthorne himself."

"Yes, Archie came out strong, sir," I remarked. "I didn't think he had it in him. But what about the attempts to murder Ching?"

"They have been committed by Fu Chow and his associates," replied Nelson Lee. "For I have every reason to believe that Fu Chow himself is in this district and directing the operations of his men."

"You speak as though Fu Chow is somebody important, sir?"

Nelson Lee looked serious.

"Fu Chow is one of the most dangerous men that China has ever produced," he replied. "He is not only a cold-blooded scoundrel, but he is amazingly clever. He is a master of every form of devilry that man ever devised, and he has an absolute hatred for all the white races. These facts are well known, but Fu Chow is so clever and elusive that it has been found impossible to lay him by the heels. Indeed, the police have never been able to obtain direct proof of wrong-doing against him. Yet he has stirred up more trouble in China and elsewhere than a hundred other men. His cleverness is subtle and secretive. One never knows what to expect from this arch-criminal. And, for some reason best known to himself, he has set his mind upon destroying this harmless little Chinese boy."

"Well, I bet he won't get the better of you, sir!" I said confidently.

"I wouldn't be too sure, Nipper," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Fu Chow is one of the most cunning opponents I have ever battled with. I am constantly on my guard, and always on the alert. Yet I have been able to discover practically nothing. The man is almost uncannily cute."

Nelson Lee said very little more, but when I left his study I knew quite well that the only real enemy was Fu Chow. I had never seen the man—I had hardly ever heard of him—but I was convinced that Fu Chow was a power to reckon with. He was a foe worthy of Nelson Lee's own wits.

And before long I was destined to find out the real peril of Fu Chow!

(Continued on page 15.)

Brief Notes about Our "FOOTBALLERS"

Being a short account of the careers of the famous footballers whose photographs we are presenting to readers with this number. Specially written for "The Nelson Lee Library" by "Rover."

F. JEFFERIS.

W. JAKES.

TO Frank Jefferis and Joe McCall must be given the credit for leading Preston North End to the Cup Final this season, for where Joe is the brains of the Deepdale team as a whole, Frank Jefferis is certainly the guiding light in the forward line. Like Joe, he is getting on in years, but there is still plenty of good football left in him, and on recent form he seems good for many more seasons yet.

What Jefferis' real age is I cannot tell you precisely, but I can hazard a pretty shrewd guess. My records tell me that Jefferis, at the time he was playing for Southampton in 1908, was twenty-one years or thereabouts, therefore, if that record speaks truly, he must now be thirty-five. He was born at Fordingbridge, the little village which stands on the River Avon near the New Forest in Hampshire, and in his youthful days played with a junior team called the Fordingbridge Turks, from which he was secured by Southampton.

In 1910, however, he had left Southampton and was playing for Everton, and with them he remained until the 1920 season, when he shifted his quarters to Preston. During the season of 1911-12 he was chosen on two occasions to represent his country, against both Scotland and Ireland, and also had the honour of playing in one international trial match. He is a dashing inside-right who knows all there is to be known about forward play, and is a fine mainstay to Preston's attack. His one weakness, if he has a weakness at all, is in front of goal, though in every other department of the game he is as clever as they make 'em. Height, 5 ft. 9 in. Weight, 11 st. 3 lb.

WILLIAM JAKES, the popular custodian of the famous team which has its headquarters at White Hart Lane, London, was born at Northfleet in Kent, and developed his football with the Kent League team of that town.

In 1911 he was persuaded to adhibit his signature to professional forms for Coventry City, and for the next three seasons he did herculean work between the City's uprights. His prowess as a custodian came under the notice of Peter McWilliam, the 'Spurs' manager in 1914, and he lost no time in arranging Jakes' transfer.

And so William Jakes came South again, this time to play for the auto-rats of London, and with them, though not perhaps always consistent, he has proved himself a goalkeeper of the highest class. In the season of 1919-20, when the Tottenham team won promotion from the Second to the First Division, he was present at every League match, and he played on from then consistently until the middle of season 1920-21 when, for some unfathomable reason, he lost his form. As a result Jakes was relegated to the reserve eleven, and Hunter took his place.

As luck would have it, however, Hunter, in the middle of last season, met with an accident which excluded him from taking active part in football for some time, and as a result Jakes was once more called upon to take the premier position between the sticks. He did; and so finely and consistently has he played since his reinstatement that there has never been any further question of his relegation. Height, 5 ft. 10 ins. Weight, 12 st. 7 lb.

Second Instalment of Handforth's Thrilling New Serial!

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

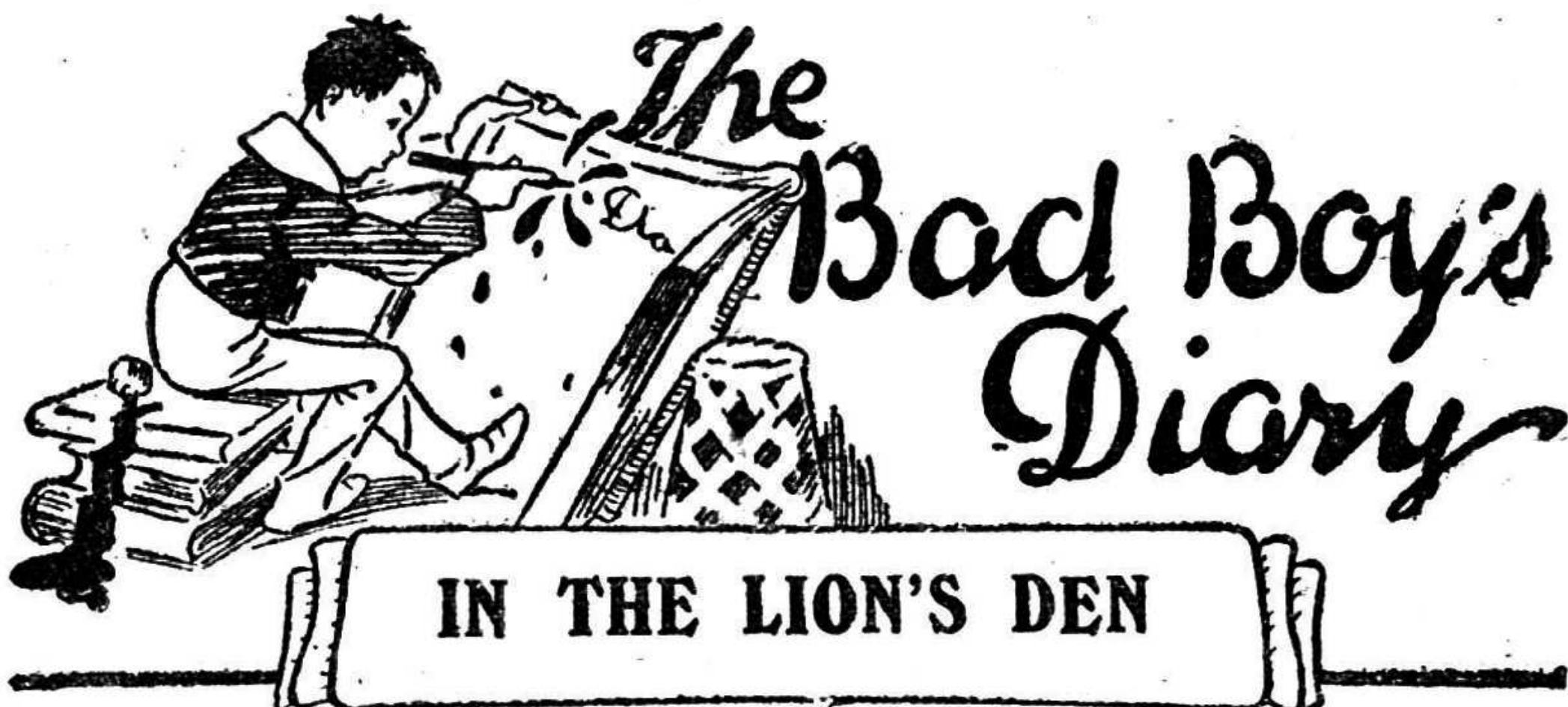
No. 26.

THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

May 20,
1922.



ST. FRANK'S FROM THE RIVER STOWE.



THE doctor says it is urly in the season for the circus crop to come up, but there is one coming next Friday. He has given me half-a-crown to go in on.

The doctor is a bul—golly good brother. Bully is vulgar; it is all rite when you are playing marbles, but not in a diry.

I am learning pretty fast nowadays; I study the circus bills to learn how to spell. Sometimes it makes me late, but they are more interesting than the second reader.

I can spell "akrobat," "summer sault," an sevrul more long words of witch I was igrant last week.

I think if teachers would have circus posters instid of readers, there scollars would learn faster. It is a combination circus and mennajury.



I did not know what was up till I looked at my sum.

As the bills say, children can study nachural history in all its wonderful varieties of animuls, an advises teachers an' parents to give them a holly-day.

To-day I stood up to do a sum in division on the blackboard; the scollars begun to giggle, and the teacher said sturnly:

"George Hackett, 10 marks for misconduct."

I did not know what was up till I looked at my sum. What did you think it was? A great big elefant with his trunk.

I spose I must a been thinking about nacheral history.

Papa says unless I have a good report this friday, I wil not be allowed to go.

I hope he will give me money to go, for I had to spend the half-a-crown docktor gave me buying Charlie's gack-knife—I mislaid mine for Jimmy's ball, witch was the biggest.

The bucher has sold his pony to the juge for his daughter. Papa said it cost him moren the 8 pounds the pony would have cost to repare damages when he got home.

That is alwas my luck. If enny thing gose wrong about the house, it's Georgie did it. If I was fired from a cannon or a bare back rider I would have an eazier time.

I should think grone up folks would be afrade their children would run away an' become tumblers or trappeas purformers when they are made so retched at home.

There is the dearest little love of a pony on the bills you ever saw, with a boy about my size. I lay awake last night ever so long thinking about it.

Offen and offen I have been sent away from table without any pie; offen and offen I have been sent to bed for some harmless aksident.

Every buddy is down on me. I try to kepe out of scrapes, but this town is so full of em I cannot help it.

Ime laffed at an' ridiculed like I was the worst boy on earth. The town counsel threaten to tax my father for l boy. The tax on a dog is seven and six; they say the



I spent my half-crown
on three plates of ice
cream.

cus. I know gust how
about it.

Papa gave me half-a-crown last night for doin errans, but I'm afrade I will have to ask Bess' beau what he would do if he wanted to go an' had not got the money to go, because I spent mine for 3 plates of ice cream, orange, venilly, and lemon.

I was so warm last evening I wanted to see witch kind I liked best, and mamma says I shall not ask for any more.

So I said to that telegraf oprator last evening did he like circusses, an' I was very very fond of them indeed, only I had no money to buy a ticket. I wish I had. He said that was very sad, but he did not offer me any.

I tell you if Bess marries him she will be very sorry; he is a miser. I saw him wink at Bess when I refurd to the circus. No gentleman winks.

I had finally to tell papa I would weed the garden 2 hours for half-a-crown, cause Sam is sick what does our garden; papa agrede.

There was a shower to-day, so as soon as I got home from school I worked like a negro till tea was reddy.

Oh, how tired I was! I thought my back was broke, but Bess said it was not so hard as hop-scotch on a boy's back, witch shows how little girls know.

Papa went out after supper to look how much I had done. Would you believe it, dere diry, I had pulled up all the young unions and left the weeds, after he told me so pertikular witch was witch? It seems as if I never would get half-a-crown to go to the circus.

*** Dere diry, I may as well begin at the beginning. The circus has come and

tax on me ought to be at least £1,000 a month, £12,000 a year.

I am going out of town bout a mile to see the pro-session come in. Charlie an' me are going together.

Poor Johnny, his leg will not be well in time for him to go. I feel real bad about Johnny can't go to the cir-

he must feel

went like a butiful dreme. Charley and I went out to meet it.

I tell you it was xciting almost as if we belonged to it, running rite alongside of the band-wagon, then we would slow up and let the hull thing go by.

There were rinosserosses, hippotmusses, 2 live elfants, a giraft which has such fun swallowing, cause it tastes good all the way down, a friteful tiger, 2 fereful lions, kept for the purpose of the felloe putting his head into see would they bite, all kinds of wild animals, among which were sevrul pretty girls, lots handsomer than Sue and Lil, purched on the elfants' backs, also on those humpy creatures what gro camel's hair sholls, whatever you call them.

It was much finer than the milentary parade last 4 of July. I mist my dinner; I forgot all about it, watching the felloes put up the tents, so when I got home I had gust time to grab a piece of pie Betty saved me; she lent me a penny to buy gingercakes to feed the elfants, and a half-penny to buy a glass of lemunade, and then I was oph like a streak.

I did not think what might happen before I saw my home agane. Bess was going in the evening long with you know who.

I ast mamma was she going, but she said she did not care about it. It was very singler that people can live to be so old as to take no interest in the circus when it comes to town.

So I thought as I past by Peters' groserly I would buy a nounce of red pepper. I mite want it if I ever had to help make catchup.

I got some cakes for the elfant too, and then I went in good time to see the animals before the circus begun.

It was offul, offul funny to see the mon-keys sneeze. I laffed myself most into fits.

The keeper said some noty bad boy had put peper in their cage; if he found out who it was he would put him out an' have him



I went right up against
the top of the tent.

arested. He was mad as he could be, so I moved away, and went over to the elfants. I gave the large one a ginger-cake; he seemed glad to get it, but elfants, like republicks, are ungrateful (see my scool reder) for he only just swallowed it when sumthing happened to me, I didn't no what—my teeth was shook like I was playing bones, an' bang!

I went right up agenst the top of the tent—I expect that little Georgie would have been no more, only he came down in a carefull of tanbark which they were going to put in the ring.

That trechrus elfant had got mad gust because I put a leetle teenty bit of red peper in his cake. His keper had a lot of trubble getting him clammed down agen.

He shoke his fist at me an' said he would not care if I had got my head broke; as it was, there was a swelled place on it, an' I felt kind of queer, so I took my seat and wated for the show to begin. I was sick of being kind to animals.

My headaked some, but I spent a deliteful afternoon. The purformance was first class, no humbug; the clown was rich. I guess I blushed when he pointed me out to the hull crowd and said:

"Why is this little chap like Jonah?"

The ring-master could not tell.

"Coz the elfant throwed him up," was his reply.

Folks luffed, but he must be ignorunt of his Bible—it was not an elfant threw Jonah up. But no matter, I had a good time.

The traned pony was wunderful, and the way those yung ladies went thru those whoops was thrilling in the xtreme.



The lion began to waive his tail and lick his chops.

Oh, how I envid the little fellows that turned those summersets an' stood on their father's head; how I side because my father was not an acrobat.

I believe I can stand on his head gust as well as they did if he would only give up real estate and go into the circus business; but he

has no ambishun. When I am of age I can chose my own profeshun.

My brane was not idol while the play went on. My mind was made up. No more being the laffing-stock of my native town. No more being called a Bad Boy several 100 times a day. No more scool—no more scolding. I would learn the circus trade.

I took my time. My plans were lade. I played with the boys in the street till bout 9 o'clock; then I sliped out to the hotel stable, cut cross lots, come out behind the big tent, where all the wagons stood that were not inside, an' I cralled in one of the wagons an pulled a cloth or sumthing over me, so they would not diskover me, an there I lay and waited.

I must have fell asleep, tho I tride hard to keep awake. When I awoke, the wagon was in moshun.

I stirred a little, my lims were so stiff, and then something growled! My heart stood still, then it went so fast I heard it in my ears like a thousand of brick.

I did not dare to stir agen, but my legs aked dredful. Pritty soon I turned my head bout a ninch, an' I saw a lion. I was in his cage.

He lay there sprolled out, his nose on his paws, his yellow eyes winking at me like he thought it was a good goke.

I thought of mamma, an' Lil, an' Betty, how good every budy was to me, an' how wicked I was to run away, an' the lion he wunk every time, as much as to say, "Too late; you oughter thought of that sooner, little Georgie; wate till my breakfast-time. You will only make two bites when I get hungry." Oh, it was friteful!

Time passed very slo. It got to be brod dalite. The lion began to waive his tail an lick his chops. I guess I fanted.

When I come to my senses I was lying on the grass. There were several men around me; the hull prosession had come to a stop. Some buddy had thrown water in my face. I sat up an' ast:

"Didn't he eat me up, after all?"

"He came within a nace of it," said a driver. "How in the name of wonder did you come in ole Cicero's den?"

I told him how I crolled in the wagon cos I wanted to learn the trade. All them rough fellows luffed an advised me to go home to my mother.

I arrived home late that afternoon footsore an wery. The folks were regoiced to see their bad boy back agane. Still, they welkomed him like he was the prodigul son.

Second Instalment.**Thrilling New Serial.****THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SQUASHED NOSE*****The Amazing and Staggering Adventures of the World's greatest Criminal Detective and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.*****By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.****TRACKETT GRIM versus PROFESSOR FULLER CRIME—MASTER MISCREANT.****SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALMENT.**

Trackett Grim is battling against a terrible secret society, the Brotherhood of the Squashed Nose. The leader of this great criminal organisation is Professor Fuller Crime, the greatest miscreant under the sun. Trackett Grim has been captured by members of the Brotherhood, and bound hand and foot to a gasworks container, at the top. A bomb has been placed, with a short fuse attached. This fuse has been ignited, and the hissing spark is racing towards the explosive. Trackett Grim is in deadly peril. Now read on.

The Nerve of Trackett Grim.

THE famous detective gazed in horrified terror at the spark of the lighted fuse.

Yet he was perfectly and absolutely calm. Something told him that this attempt upon his life was futile. He was equal to the occasion. Professor Crime's minions were no match for him.

The spark grew closer and closer!

Only twelve seconds now, and Trackett Grim would be hurled into eternity. Nearer and nearer to death was the great detective! But there was yet time for him to save himself from this end.

He suddenly realised that others would die if the explosion took place. The surrounding district would be wrecked. In the interests of humanity, it was up to Trackett Grim to save himself.

And the spark grew closer and closer!

Like a flash out of the darkness came a ruse to Trackett Grim. The master mind had triumphed. In a trice, or even less, he bent down and held his bound wrists so that the sparks from the fuse played upon his bonds. The rope caught alight, and burned rapidly.

And the spark grew closer and closer!

But Trackett Grim's hands were now free. Even as the spark was about to ignite the dynamite, the detective seized the charge of explosive and hurled it down.

He knew that a deep ditch of water ran round the huge container. Down—down went the dynamite. And then, just as it was about to explode, it struck the water and went under.

The spark went out! The disaster was averted!

On the Trail of the Brotherhood.

Trackett Grim breathed a sigh of relief, and quickly unbound his feet. Then he leaped down, and plunged into the ditch of water. It was the only way to get down in safety.

Swimming out, he landed, and then saw the figure of a man lurking against a heap of coke. This man moved away, unconscious of Trackett Grim's presence. He had not seen the detective plunge down.

He was a member of the Brotherhood!

Walking off, he presently came to a road, and strode along. Trackett Grim followed, shadowing the rascal with unerring skill. He felt that this man would lead him to the headquarters of the great gang.

The scoundrel believed that Trackett Grim was accounted for, and that he would never trouble the Brotherhood again. How vastly he was mistaken! For Trackett Grim was even then at his heels.

Soon he came to a river. He passed down between the docks, and at length arrived at a little landing stage. All was dark and silent. The man uttered a peculiar whistle.

And instantly two other men appeared, as though from the very ground. They

had evidently been waiting for their leader—for this man that Trackett Grim was following was the chief of the District Gang.

He rapped three times on the woodwork of the landing stage. And then a strange thing happened. The stage sunk into the water, and there, glistening in the moonlight, lay a powerful racing motor-boat.

The engine was throbbing, and a masked man sat at the wheel.

"Get in!" he said curtly. "We are going now!"

The leader of the District Gang jumped into the boat, and it instantly made off into the river. But Trackett Grim was not foiled, as might be imagined. This amazing detective was ever ready.

He had divined what was about to happen, and, quick as a lightning flash, he dived into the river, and swam under the landing stage. Thus, when the motor-boat moved off, Trackett Grim was following.

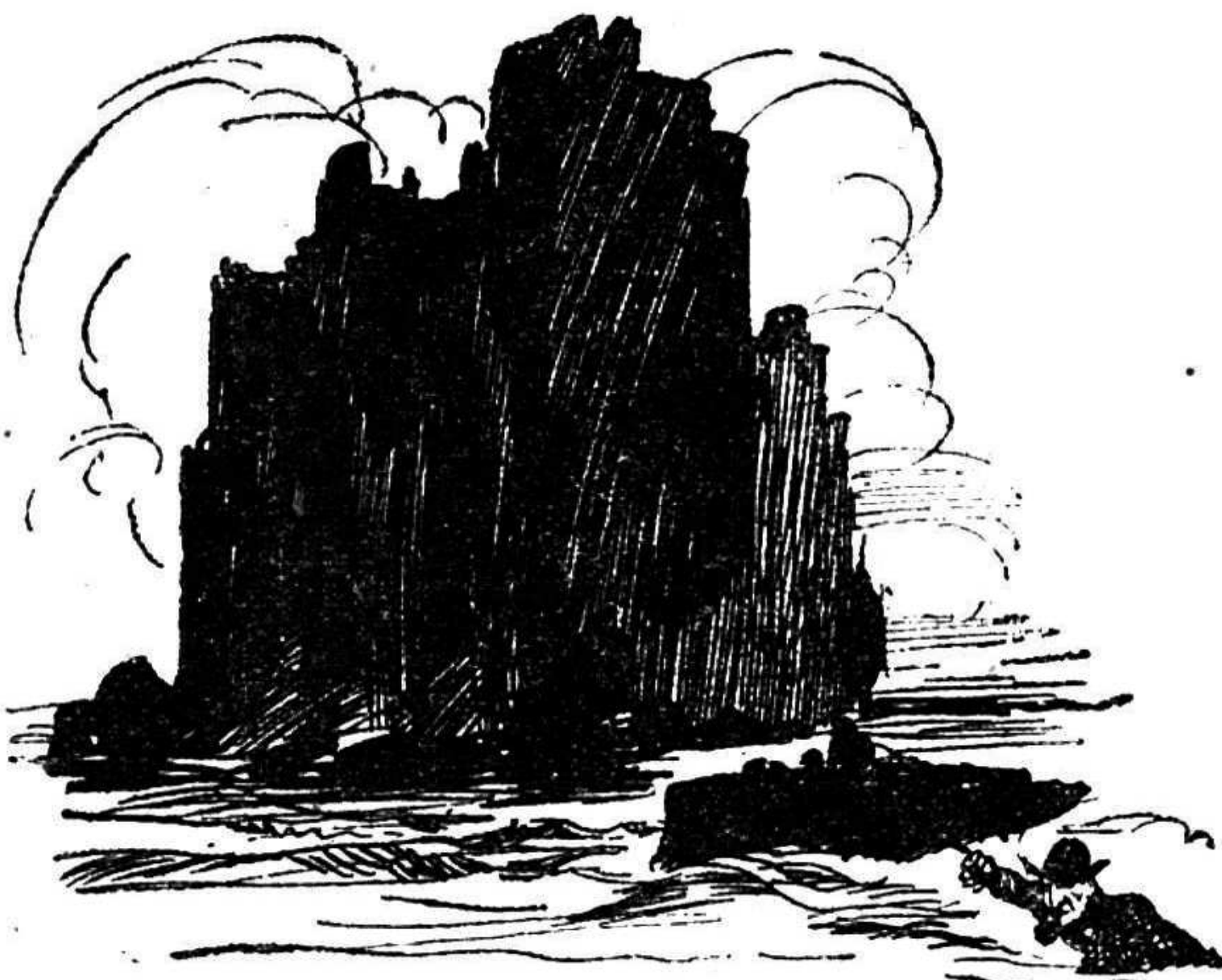
He was a marvellous swimmer, but, even so, he found it impossible to keep pace with the motor-boat for long. It was shooting over the water, silent as a shadow, at the rate of ninety-eight knots an hour. Two great, curling waves, hissing and splashing, rocked over the surface of the river.

Trackett Grim knew that he would soon be exhausted. And he saw that a long rope was trailing behind the motor-boat. He seized this, and he was hauled along without effort on his part.

He was still on the trail.

Hour after hour passed, and the famous detective hung on, always on the track of his quarry. Trackett Grim never left the trail. Once fairly on it, nothing could make him forsake it.

And at last, after the motor-boat had been travelling for some time in the open sea, it turned towards some evil-looking, frowning cliffs. At the rear of these cliffs there were many caves to be seen.



The motor-boat turned towards some evil-looking, frowning cliffs.

Slackening speed somewhat, the boat turned into one of these caves, and proceeded along smoothly. There was plenty of water. The darkness was so intense that Trackett Grim could see nothing—and he had eyes like a lynx.

The Underground River.

And then a strange thing happened.

Without warning, the tunnel became brilliant with numerous electric lights. They were suspended from the rocky roof. The motor-boat proceeded along more cautiously now. The tunnel twisted and turned. The water looked like ink in this strange place.

Trackett Grim was thrilled. He felt that he was learning the secrets of the Brotherhood of the Squashed Nose. He was quite fresh, in spite of his long swim, and ready for any emergency.

And then a strange thing happened.

The tunnel came to an end. But, as the motor-boat approached the solid rock, it parted like massive doors, and the boat passed inside. The doors closed to with a slam in the rear.

The electric lights were even brighter here. It was a huge cavern, but nobody was within sight. The motor-boat sped across the surface of the water, and at last came to rest against a rocky ledge.

But the leader of the District Gang did not get out. For, even at that moment, Trackett Grim acted. With a spring like that of a tiger, he landed upon the man's back, and bore him to the bottom of the boat. One frightful punch on the nose was enough to knock him flat.

Then, in a trice, Trackett Grim changed clothes with the rascal, and disguised himself so perfectly that he looked exactly like the leader of the District Gang. It was impossible to tell the difference. And so perfectly did Trackett Grim work that the pilot of the boat never suspected a thing.

The detective, thrilling with the excitement of this great chase, stepped upon the rocky ledge.

And then a strange thing happened.

The Secret Chamber of the Enemy.

As Trackett Grim landed, the motor-boat snapped into a submarine. Sheets of metal covered it, and it dived under water. Trackett Grim was amazed at the completeness of the Brotherhood's organisation.

He looked round the rocky ledge. He was alone. Not a soul was in sight. Here he was, marooned! Things had gone wrong. But wait! What is this new amazing thing?

For, as Trackett Grim watched, a great door opened in the rock. And there, beyond, lay the Secret Chamber of the Brotherhood! The master detective was about to enter the place where all the big plots were hatched.

(What happened to Trackett Grim in the Headquarters of the great Criminal Brotherhood? How did he escape from the terrible stronghold? Wait until you read next week's hair-raising, awe-inspiring instalment.)

And there beyond lay the Secret Chamber of the Brotherhood.

The Patent Medicine Fiend.

By REGINALD PITT.

A Co'd in the Dose!

THE beginning of it was when I developed a pretty rotten cold in the head.

My napper, to be exact, had been feeling fairly wonky for a day or two, and when my nose started off on its own, so to speak—that is, when it commenced running away—I knew what was the matter.

I had a ghastly cold, and Jack Grey caught it beautifully. We were a beautifully bright pair—sneezing and coughing all over the blessed place. But we didn't want to report to the Housemaster, because he'd jolly soon shove us into the sanny.

Now, the sanny is all very well for slackers, or when you've really got some-

thing the matter with you. But a cold, after all, is just a cold. It seems dotty to go into the sanny for a beastly cold. Besides, it would put us out of the cricket for about a week.

So we decided to say nothing, and trust to luck. We had been pretty bad overnight, but in the morning we were both in a fearful state. Other chaps refused to come anywhere near us. It was the hardest job in the world to make ourselves seem all right in the class-room.

Well, after lessons, the Patent Medicine Fiend appeared.

He looked very much like De Valerio, and he assured us that we were a pair of fatheaded asses to go about with colds when we could cure 'em within a few hours—just by taking a bottle of Lumley's

Luxurious Lung Lotion. I wouldn't have anything to do with it, but Jack fairly jumped at the idea. He buzzed down to the village and bought a bottle of the stuff.

He took several doses that evening, and went to bed feeling better. I was still rotten, and began to think that I'd been a prize duffer not to take the lotion, too.

In the morning, however, Jack seemed to be a bit worse. I was just about the same, and feeling groggy. Then the Patent Medicine Fiend arrived in Study E again. This time he resembled Armstrong. He told us that Lumley's Luxurious Lung Lotion was muck, and that we ought to take Colonel Cote's Consummate Cough Cure. It was absolutely the right stuff.

I was firm, and held off. Jack rushed to the chemist's, and bought some of the mixture. He took nearly the whole bottle that morning, and at dinner time he was complaining of pains beneath his waistcoat. He didn't want any dinner. I fairly revelled in a jolly good lot of grub, and felt heaps better.

It was a half-holiday in the afternoon, and the Patent Medicine Fiend came across us in the Triangle. He had an American accent now, and could be recognised as Justin B. Farman. Jack Grey was looking very seedy indeed. He was causing me some anxiety.

The Patent Medicine Fiend laughed contemptuously when he heard what Jack had been taking, and stated it as his opinion that there was nothing on this earth to beat Potter's Perfect Pellets for Pneumonia. They could cure a cold in two shakes. Gee, weren't they made at Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin, U.S.A.? Wasn't that enough? Potter's Perfect Pellets were positively the only real goods, and then some.

Jack Grey was so struck that he lost no time in trying the new remedy. I went down to the village for him, because I was feeling almost myself, and he languished in the study.

He took the Pellets, and wished he hadn't.

By tea time he had some more queer pains within. They increased. In the

evening he thought he was dying, and pathetically asked me to wire for his people. But he rallied, and then the Patent Medicine Fiend came to the rescue, and said that he would cure Jack's pains in next to no time. I wanted to hoof Singleton out of the study on the spot—Singleton being the P.M.F. in this instance.

But Jack was in dire pain, and listened. The Patent Medicine Fiend gave us a glowing account of Tittle's Topping Tincture for the Tissues, and said that it had cured his grandmother when she had been given up for lost by half a dozen doctors.

The P.M.F. offered to go to the village himself. He went. He came back. He brought the Tincture with him, and Jack took a double dose. He took another dose just before bedtime.

By then he was in mortal agony, but bravely held out, and said that in the morning he would be all right. He could feel the Topping Tincture working. It was the right stuff at last.

But in the morning Jack Grey was looking rather green.

He couldn't get up, and weakly asked for poison to get him out of his misery. I remarked that he had been taking poison for days—that was why he was so bad now.

And in the end Dr. Brett was called from the village, Jack was shoved into the sanny, and there he lay, weak and feeble, for the best part of a week. And the queer thing about it was that I had recovered long before Jack went into the sanatorium at all. And I hadn't taken a dose of anything.

When Jack came out, a shadow of his former self, he saw on the study mantelshelf an array of bottles, some of them half empty. He wasn't particularly strong—but he was strong enough to take those bottles and hurl them miles away into oblivion.

And Jack immediately started training in the gym, so as to be ready for the Patent Medicine Fiend when he appeared next time!

THE END.



But in the morning Jack Grey was looking rather green.

(Continued from page 15.)

CHAPTER V.

FU CHOW'S APPALLING SCHEME!



NELSON LEE walked silently across the Triangle, taking care to remain in the deep shadow of the Ancient House wall. So stealthy were his movements that it was well-

nigh impossible to detect that any human figure was moving.

St. Frank's itself lay asleep.

It was dead of night—long after the hour of twelve. And Nelson Lee was venturing out on his usual nightly jaunt. He had done this kind of thing now for nearly a week—he was playing the Chinaman's own game—prowling about in the hours of darkness.

He had no fear that disaster would befall Yung Ching during his absence, for I was sleeping with the Chinese boy and constantly guarding him.

Lee already knew that Fu Chow's men were located somewhere in one of the old workings of the moor quarry—long since derelict and disused. The detective now made his way to the monastery ruins.

By descending into the ancient vault, it was possible to enter an old tunnel which led direct to the quarry. It was the shortest route and the safest, since there was no fear of being seen by watching enemies.

At one time the other section of Chinamen—the members of the Yen Shan Tong had used the quarry. But they were no longer there. Indeed, Lee believed that they had given up the affair altogether—after the Archie Glenthorne fiasco—and had completely left the district.

This certainly made matters less complicated, but Fu Chow was the real enemy, and Fu Chow was still active.

Nelson Lee descended the crumbling circular stairs to the vault and arrived without mishap. Then, proceeding in utter darkness, he felt his way down the tunnel. He had an electric torch on him, but did not choose to use it. In a tunnel like this the light would betray him in a moment, even at a great distance. And he knew the ground well—he knew every twist and turn of the tunnel. There was no necessity for him to use a light.

To-night, somehow, Nelson Lee had a feeling that everything was not quite the same. Whether it was some slight difference in the atmosphere he could not tell. But he was convinced that others had been using the tunnel.

And then, while he was thinking in this way, he saw a glow in the distance ahead. And, at once, he knew what that glow portended. Somebody was coming along the tunnel with a light.

Lee was glad that he was not using a light of his own—or he might have been betrayed as this other man was betrayed. The next moment the glow changed into a point of yellow light—as the bearer of the light turned a bend.

Lee knew that he was safe for the moment. He was so great a distance off that there was no chance of his being seen just yet. But it was necessary for him to act quickly and to find some place of concealment.

Fortunately, there were plenty of places, for the old tunnel was dotted with crannies and niches at frequent intervals. Here and there a branch tunnel led off, but practically all these were blind and led nowhere.

Nelson Lee came upon one of these little openings within a couple of yards, and quietly slipped into it. He did not see any reason why he should retreat. There was no reason why his presence should be suspected.

At the same time he pulled his revolver out and cocked it. He wanted to be ready for any emergency.

A couple of yards up the little turning there was a projection, and Lee squeezed himself behind this and remained absolutely still. From this position he would be able to see who passed. And he waited, silent and still. The light grew stronger and stronger.

And then, rather to his surprise, he saw three Chinamen walk pass the opening in single file. The first man was carrying a lighted lantern and the others were bearing heavy wooden boxes. Then they had gone from Lee's vision, and the shuffling sound of their footsteps died away.

What could this mean? Why were these men going towards the school carrying boxes? Somehow, Nelson Lee could not help being uneasy. He feared that some fresh devilry was afoot—something he had not yet got wind of. He was thankful that he had come out to-night, for he would probably be able to frustrate any scheme that was set afoot.

For a few minutes he waited, wondering whether he should remain in concealment, whether he should follow the Chinamen, or take the opposite direction. Finally, he decided upon the latter course.

Going out into the main tunnel again, he found that it was once more black and empty. He continued cautiously on his way towards the quarry. Foot by foot he advanced, using every precaution that he knew of, and his movements were as silent as those of a shadow.

He judged that he was fairly close to the quarry by now, and would soon emerge into the wider cavern which gave exit to the open air. He could tell by the freshness of the atmosphere that he was near the end of his journey.

And then, just at this moment, he collided—suddenly and unexpectedly—with something soft, warm, and yielding.

In the darkness, he had run up against a man!

The meeting was as much a surprise to Lee as it was to the other. The detective had not been expecting such an event. But he was on the alert at once and ready for instant action.

A few gabbled words of Chinese came to his ears. Then, to his dismay, he found himself battling, not merely with one man, but with at least three. This was a great deal more than he had bargained for.

But the darkness was an aid to him, and he still reckoned that he might be able to win free. But just then his hopes in that direction were dashed to the ground, for the cold light of an electric torch blazed out.

The detective was dazzled at first, for the light was flashed full upon him. But managed to see that his first surmise was correct. There were three powerful Chinamen fighting him—three yellow ruffians, who were as wiry and as hard as nails. And, skilled as Lee was in the art of boxing, he was not capable of being victorious against such overwhelming odds.

He was half expecting the Chinamen to use weapons—knives, possibly. But this did not happen. The men had no intention of killing their antagonist. And it really seemed that they had orders to capture Nelson Lee alive and unharmed.

Still fighting fiercely, Lee was at last borne to the ground. A sudden hook round one of his legs tripped him, and he went over heavily, two of the Chinamen falling on the top of him.

That, of course, was the end.

Within a minute his ankles were roped round. Then he was roughly turned over on his back, and his wrists were tied behind him. The great detective was bitter and angry.

He had no reason to accuse himself of carelessness. All along he had displayed great caution and care. Such a misfortune as this had been possible during every one of his nightly jaunts. Indeed, he had been rather surprised that he had not encountered the enemy on other occasions.

But now that the meeting had actually taken place—now that he was captured by the Chinamen—he was filled with a great rage. Only a short time before he had congratulated himself upon the fact that he had carried no light. And now, by some trick of Fate, it was the darkness itself which had led to his undoing.

But Nelson Lee had been in many tight corners, and he did not give up hope. Indeed, it was quite possible that this misfortune was a blessing in disguise. For he would probably be taken before Fu Chow. And he might be able to discover the plans and schemes of that master mind.

Nelson Lee had other cards up his sleeve, and, after the first feeling of bitterness had passed, he was calm and cool. And he felt

almost anxious to meet Fu Chow. He had heard a great deal about the man, and it would be interesting to find out if Fu Chow was as great as his reputation.

For this Chinese criminal was not merely an ordinary thief or murderer. For years he had caused endless strife in the interior of China itself. He had been mixed up in rebellions and uprisings. He had come to England, and had been the cause of a great many murders, and yet the police could never lay their hands on him. For it was impossible to find the necessary evidence.

Why this man should be down in this quiet country district, near St. Frank's, was a mystery. Why he should bring his men here and make attempt after attempt to murder Yung Ching was both extraordinary and remarkable.

Lee knew that there was something behind it all—and perhaps he would now be able to discover something of the truth.

He found himself lifted bodily and carried away down the tunnel towards the exit. And very soon he found himself out in the open air, under the starry dome of Heaven. It was now just after one o'clock, and the night was clear and absolutely still. There was no moon, but the stars seemed to provide quite a brilliant light after the intense blackness of the tunnel.

Nelson Lee was not carried very far. After going a short distance, his captors entered one of the disused quarry workings. They continued up this dark place for some few minutes, and then turned a corner.

The instant change was astonishing.

From being in a dismal, smelly tunnel, Lee and his captors turned into a kind of apartment. It was hung with rich Chinese tapestries and curtains. Two curious lamps burned on a little table, and the air was heavy with the smell of some kind of incense.

The whole atmosphere was Eastern.

And there, squatting upon a pile of cushions, was an impressive figure. It was that of a Chinaman. He was attired in a flowing robe—which, no doubt, was worn over ordinary European clothing. But it was not the man's attire which attracted Nelson Lee's attention—it was his face.

The Chinaman himself was comparatively small, and, indeed, wizened. But his face was one which Nelson Lee would never be able to forget. It was yellow, like parchment, a mass of crinkles and furrows. The mouth was a thin, straight line, the eyes, almond-shaped and nearly closed.

But then, as Nelson Lee appeared, the eyes opened, and Lee received a bit of a shock. Whether it was a trick of the light, or whether it actually was a fact, the eyes seemed to be luminous, like those of a cat or a dog. They glowed in a strange, greenish manner, and were filled with sinister, evil fire. And there was something so coldly impassive about the whole bearing of the man that Nelson Lee felt a shiver

pass down his spine. It was the first time he had ever experienced such a sensation on gazing upon a fellow-man.

Lee's captors set him upright upon the floor, so that he could stand. They bowed low before the man with the green eyes, and murmured in Chinese. Fu Chow—for this man was none other—waved his hand, and half closed his eyes again.

"So, Mr. Nelson Lee, we meet!" he said softly.

"Under circumstances entirely favourable to yourself," replied Nelson Lee. "In a way, Mr. Fu Chow, I am pleased that this circumstance has come about."

"Your pleasure is slight in comparison to my own," said Fu Chow silkily.

There was something about his tone which made Nelson Lee feel rather queer. His voice was unlike any he had ever heard. It was smooth and soft, but, at the same time, it contained a kind of menace. And the words were uttered without the slightest trace of emotion.

"Now that you have captured me, I dare say you have every intention of doing something drastic," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I do not pretend to under-estimate the danger, Mr. Chow. At the same time, this meeting is one that I have long desired."

"It is well," said Fu Chow. "I have known for many nights that you have been watching, and your movements have been noted. Consequently, it was simple to effect your capture. You are a valuable man, Mr. Lee. You have done much excellent service for your country. Your country will suffer a great loss."

"In other words, you intend to kill me?"

"Did you expect anything else?" asked Fu Chow impassively. "Yes, Mr. Lee, you will die. Greatly as I regret this circumstance, there is no other course open to me. You will not see the light of the dawn."

"Other men have used similar threats, Mr. Chow," said Nelson Lee. "Yet I still live."

"Other men have blundered," said Fu Chow. "I do not blunder. To-night is the climax of all my plans. Yung Ching, the young lad of my own nationality, will perish during these hours of darkness. You, Mr. Lee, will share his fate. But not quite yet. My plans have still to be completed."

Fu Chow waved his hand again, and uttered some words in Chinese. The other men at once came forward, seized Lee, and led him away. He was taken into an adjoining cave and thrown down. Two of the Chinamen remained on guard in the darkness.

Nelson Lee knew well enough that Fu Chow had been speaking in earnest. The idea was to kill him—and there seemed very little prospect of escaping the fate which Fu Chow had outlined. But why had this Chinese fiend allowed any respite? This delay, indeed, was Nelson Lee's only hope.

It would have been simple for Fu Chow

to order his servants to thrust a knife into Lee's heart. But Nelson Lee knew something of the Chinese mind, and he quite understood that Fu Chow did not want to kill his victim in a manner so direct. He would probably choose something more subtle—something with a hint of torture in it. And it was this knowledge of the Chinese mind which gave Lee a certain feeling of comfort. Delay meant hope.

Lee wondered how long it would be before the time for action came. He remembered those men in the tunnel, carrying boxes towards the school. What did that portend? What cunning scheme was Fu Chow intent upon putting into action?

And after about an hour had elapsed, Nelson Lee was hauled to his feet, and forced out of his prison and into the presence of Fu Chow. The wily Chinaman was sitting in exactly the same way, and it seemed that he had not moved an inch since Lee had first interviewed him.

"I have been in deep thought, my friend," said Fu Chow silkily. "And I have decided to be merciful. If you will obey the orders which are given you, your life shall be spared."

"You are very generous," said Nelson Lee.

"By no means," replied Fu Chow. "It is not my way to waste words. I will be brief. Near your feet, slightly to your left, you will observe the end of a black rope. See! Do you follow me?"

He pointed, and Nelson Lee looked. And there, on the floor, there was the rope as Fu Chow had said. The end of it was raised slightly from the ground.

"What of it?" asked Lee evenly.

"That rope travels from this cave through the tunnel to the very vaults of St. Frank's!" exclaimed Fu Chow softly. "Even further. There is a passage which leads from the vaults to a spot immediately below the cellars of that section of the school known as the Ancient House. This rope leads to that spot—and the end of it is embedded in a gigantic charge of that form of high explosive known as T.N.T."

Nelson Lee felt as though something had gripped his heart.

"This rope is a fuse?" he asked sharply.

Fu Chow nodded.

"You are quick at jumping to the truth, Mr. Lee," he said. "Exactly! This rope is a fuse, and, once lighted at this end, the spark will travel rapidly along the tunnel until, finally, it reaches that charge of explosive. Once ignited, no power in the world can save the whole school from complete and absolute destruction. There is enough high explosive beneath St. Frank's to blow every brick a mile into the air. Not a single soul in the whole building will escape destruction. Instantaneous death is inevitable. You understand?"

Nelson Lee stared straight at Fu Chow.

"You are trying to alarm me," he said steadily. "You are bluffing, Fu Chow—"

"I have spoken the truth," interrupted the Chinaman; "I do not bluff. Yung Ching must die, and he will die. It will be your task to set the match to the fuse—and that action will earn you your liberty."

Nelson Lee said nothing. He was, in fact, sick with horror. It was a side-light on the incredible devilry of Fu Chow that he was willing to kill hundreds of innocent victims in order to be sure of killing Yung Ching! He was prepared to blow the whole of St. Frank's to atoms so that the Chinese boy should be destroyed. And Fu Chow had so planned it that Nelson Lee himself must set fire to the fuse which would bring death to so many.

"Well?" asked the Chinaman softly. "What is your answer?"

"I refuse," said Nelson Lee curtly.

"And yet refusal will mean death—torture," purred Fu Chow. "This explosion shall take place to-night, Mr. Lee. It matters not whether you apply the match, or whether I apply it myself. But it pleases me to arrange things thus. Think carefully. Apply the match, and life and liberty is yours! Refuse, and you die—cruelly!"

Nelson Lee did not hesitate a moment.

"I refuse!" he said quietly.

"That is final?"

"It is final!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASTER FIEND!



FU CHOW smiled.

His parchment-like face went into a mass of yellow crinkles. His green eyes became almost hidden by the nearly closed lids. And he bent slightly forward among his soft cushions.

"So!" he said, in silky tones. "You refuse? I expected as much—I was prepared. However, Mr. Lee, I have a method which will make you agree. You shall light that fuse—and you shall die! You have lost your chance of living now—"

"You hound!" interrupted Nelson Lee harshly. "You inhuman demon! What have those hundreds of innocent boys done to you that you should murder them in cold blood as they sleep? You are anxious to kill Yung Ching—of that I am aware. But what pleasure will it bring you to destroy hundreds of others?"

Fu Chow smiled again.

"Ah!" he murmured. "Not quite so impassive, eh? I have succeeded in breaking down your well-balanced reserve. You wonder why I am willing to kill so many in order to ensure the destruction of one? You do not understand, Mr. Lee—you do not appreciate the position. But I will enlighten

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 28.)

you. Firstly, however, we shall see what can be done about lighting this fuse—

"I shall not consent, torture me as you will," interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "No matter what demoniacal devices you employ I shall not change!"

Fu Chow was silent for a few moments.

"Yes, you are right," he said at length. "I believe you, my friend. You are a man of courage—a man of iron. Torture will not break your will—therefore I shall not attempt torture. It would be a waste of time—and I have a better plan. A much better plan!"

Lee was silent. All this delay was helpful, but there was very little prospect of the detective being able to frustrate Fu Chow's fiendish scheme. The whole of St. Frank's was asleep, and nobody would know what was going on.

Nelson Lee vaguely hoped that he might be able to do something on his own account. He was bound, certainly, but an opportunity might present itself at any minute. Then all hope vanished.

For two Chinamen came forward with steel manacles. These were clasped over Nelson Lee's wrists, and they were so constructed that it was well-nigh impossible for the detective to move his hands. They were not like the regulation "bracelets" of the police force. They were far more efficient.

And not only were his wrists secured, but his ankles as well.

Similar steel manacles were fixed upon his ankles, and they were so tight that walking would have been out of the question. It was even impossible to hop, for the Chinese had constructed these fastenings in such a way that all the edges next to Lee's flesh were sharp. The slightest exertion of any kind meant intense and horrible agony. So long as he remained perfectly still no harm would come to him. Hope died within him. The last chance of helping himself had gone.

Helpless in this way, he was seized, and carried along the tunnel by four men. They went without a word—without a pause. They did not seem to tire, in spite of Lee's weight, but walked on like machines.

And at the head marched Fu Chow, lighting the way. And Nelson Lee could see that black rope trailing along every inch of the tunnel—an unbroken line. There was no bluff about this. The fuse was a reality.

"I was a fool!" Nelson Lee told himself bitterly. "Melrose and his men are on the watch at St. Frank's, and yet I gave them no hint of my intentions. If only I had warned them they might have come down into this tunnel; but they have no suspicions. Even Nipper knows nothing. I simply told him that I should be back by one. I gave him no hint as to my plans."

It really seemed to Nelson Lee that this dreadful night was to be one which the whole of England would remember with horror. For St. Frank's would be blown

to tiny fragments, and every soul would perish! There could be no escape if Fu Chow had spoken the truth.

And he had spoken the truth!

At last the destination was reached. Nelson Lee was carried through the old monastery vaults, and then straight along through a low, narrow tunnel, which ultimately came to a blind end. This spot was only a comparatively short distance from the vault, and the tunnel led in a direct line to it. At the end of that blank wall there was a hidden doorway, which led to the Ancient House cellars.

And, stacked in the tunnel, there were those charges of T.N.T. Nelson Lee knew a great deal about explosives. One glance at this charge caused him to shudder. It was sufficient to wreck the whole countryside—to destroy not only St. Frank's, but to create a local earthquake. Every house within a mile would be razed to the ground by the shock. There was no doubt or question about it. Fu Chow intended making a thorough and complete job of it this time.

Nelson Lee could not help wondering why this fiendish Chinaman had gone to the trouble of laying a fuse. An electric wire and battery would surely have been better—more modern? The switch, placed in the quarry, would have needed but one touch—and St. Frank's would have gone to dust.

By using the fuse, however, a certain amount of delay would be caused. This, no doubt, was Fu Chow's reason for adopting the plan. Once alight, the spark would travel rapidly. But Fu Chow and his devils would have a chance to get a couple of miles away before the actual explosion took place.

And the fuse, after all, was just as certain as any other method. Once the match had been applied, nothing but a miracle could avert the disaster.

And Nelson Lee saw something else.

In the wall there were iron stakes. And without delay Lee was propped against the stonework, and his steel manacles were clasped to these stakes. At the most he could only move a few inches forward or a few inches to either side.

And there, within ten feet, lay the charge of explosive. It was Fu Chow's plan, evidently, to give Nelson Lee the exquisite pleasure of watching the lighted fuse as it came along the tunnel. Lee would be able to see the spark travel to the explosive—and then there would be no more of him. He would be blown into nothingness.

"I fancy that you grasp the idea, Mr. Lee?" said Fu Chow softly. "Pretty, is it not? It will be somewhat exciting to watch the spark travelling towards you—creeping closer and closer! You shall be the first to perish, Mr. Lee. And that is as it should be."

Lee did not answer. It seemed to him that words would be futile.

"There is one other little detail that must be attended to," went on Fu Chow. "Escape for you is impossible, Mr. Lee. But I'm a

man who believes in making sure. I leave nothing to chance. And, should you struggle—as a desperate man will struggle—it is as well you should know that such struggles will bring instant death."

Fu Chow's men were fixing a fine chain to Lee's body, even as their master was speaking. The chain was drawn taut, and the other end of it entered a small box near the charge of explosive.

"Remember," said Fu Chow silkily. "Six inches of movement in any direction will cause an instantaneous fuse to light—and that will bring death at once. Be careful, Mr. Lee—be very careful!"

Lee's eyes gleamed.

"What is to prevent me moving now?" he demanded. "What is to prevent me moving, and blowing you all to the deepest pit?"

Fu Chow smiled.

"It would doubtless give you extreme pleasure to blow us into eternity with yourself, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I know that I am safe in placing such a weapon in your hands. You will never blow St. Frank's up of your own accord. I know that much. Therefore I am safe. And if I die—what matter? A man dies but once. Should it come now, I would not grumble. Indeed, I should have no time for such a thing. But I will leave you, Mr. Lee—to your reflections and to your little period of waiting. Before so very long you will see the spark creeping along toward you."

"Tell me one thing!" said Nelson Lee tensely. "You desire the death of Yung Ching, and it does not surprise me that you should desire my death also. But why should you bring destruction to so many innocent victims?"

"Ah! You have touched the subject I intended referring to," said Fu Chow calmly, his strange eyes glittering with smouldering fires. "I will tell you why I have planned things in this way. Had I so chosen I could have killed the boy with ease. With a little patience and cleverness the task would have been simple. But do you think I love the English?"

"I hardly imagine so," replied Lee.

"I hate them all!" said Fu Chow, the first touch of emotion revealing itself in his voice. "I hate them—I hate all the white races. I shall not live to see it, but in a century or two hence the yellow man will be predominant upon the earth. The yellow man will come into his own—he will be the conqueror of all!"

"A dream, Fu Chow," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"At present—yes," agreed Fu Chow. "Later it will become a reality. And I am one of the instruments ordained by the gods to start this great movement. Shall I ignore

a chance to destroy hundreds of coming white men? These boys will grow into fine men—they are destined to be the fathers of many children. At one blow I can wipe them out. One obstacle the less in the coming struggle!"

"So you have deliberately planned to kill these innocent boys?" asked Nelson Lee grimly. "You have schemed matters in such a way that Yung Ching will die, and every one of his schoolfellows with him. You are no man, Fu Chow. You are a demon from the bottomless pit!"

"It pleases you to indulge in pretty language," smiled Fu Chow. "Well, well! No matter! There is no difference. But time is going, and further delay does not suit me. I must leave you, Mr. Lee. Your last minutes will be interesting, no doubt. Do not fail to watch for the spark!"

Again Fu Chow smiled. He bowed, and moved silently down the tunnel, his men following. Lee could see them clearly as they passed into the vault. Then they were lost to view as they turned the bend, and passed along the tunnel towards the quarry.

Nelson Lee became surrounded by pitchy darkness.

And escape was out of the question for him. The slightest movement on his part would not only bring instant death to himself, but to hundreds of others. Never in all his life had Lee been in such an appalling position!

The horror of it was dreadful.

On many occasions the famous detective had found himself a prisoner in the hands of enemies. But he had nearly always had a chance to help himself. Although bound, he had been able to struggle, and make a fight for liberty. But what could he do now? How could he ever hope to gain his freedom? To move was impossible. And, in any case, he could never have freed himself from those steel manacles.

And so he waited.

The silence was like that of the catacombs. The darkness was something that could almost be felt. And there, within a few yards of Lee, lay that terrible charge of high explosive.

Very soon the spark would come creeping along—it would appear in the distance—it would grow nearer and nearer. And Nelson Lee could do nothing to avert the appalling disaster. He was absolutely helpless.

The mental agony of the situation was ghastly. In vain Nelson Lee attempted to devise some scheme whereby he could warn St. Frank's of its impending doom. But what was the use? Nelson Lee was as helpless as though he were already dead.

But Fate was not going to allow this diabolical crime!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME!



he turns up. Coming home with the giddy milk!"

I made these remarks to myself, for Yung Ching was soundly asleep. I was sitting up in bed in Nelson Lee's own apartment, for

"QUARTER-PAST two!" I murmured, frowning. "And the guv'nor still prowling about outside! This won't do! I shall have to say a few severe words when

real fear. I knew that Nelson Lee could be trusted to look after himself all right.

At the same time, I had a feeling that everything had not gone exactly as he had planned; and it was quite on the cards that Fu Chow's men had scored a temporary victory. At all events, I decided that something had to be done.

"Can't allow this to go on!" I told myself, as I slipped out of bed. "Why, he may not turn up all night, and what should I think of myself in the morning if I turned over and went to sleep again? I've got to look into this—now!"

Having come to that decision, I lost no



The heat was intense, and Handforth leapt about wildly. "Help!—help!" he hooted, "I'm on fire!"—(See page 4.)

both Ching and I were sleeping in the guv'nor's bedroom. The idea of this was that the Chinese boy would be constantly guarded.

Nelson Lee had informed me that he would be absent for a certain amount of time to-night, but that he would certainly return and jump into bed before one. For an hour or two I had been sleeping fitfully—in a kind of state of half-wakefulness. But now, as the school clock chimed out the quarter, I was fully alert.

At first I thought the time was a quarter-past one, but when I glanced at the luminous dial of my watch, I found that the time was two-fifteen. What had kept Nelson Lee out so late?

It was most unlike the guv'nor to say he'd be in before one, and not turn up. I had an uneasy feeling that something untoward had happened. I'm not going to say that I was alarmed, because I had no

time in slipping into my clothing, and then I bent over Yung Ching. The Chinese boy was in a sound, peaceful sleep, and there was not much chance of him being aroused. Yung Ching took everything calmly and collectedly. It was almost impossible to ruffle him. He knew the danger that threatened, but he had such confidence in Nelson Lee that he always went to sleep with the calm, care-free assurance of a baby.

I considered that it would be quite safe to leave him alone for a minute or two. The window was barred, and I could lock the door after me. However, I had no intention of leaving Yung Ching by himself while I ventured outside into the night. I had to find somebody to keep on guard.

Accordingly, I slipped along the corridor to the Remove dormitory, and a minute or two later three juniors were awake and rubbing their eyes. These fellows were Sir

Montie Tregellis-West, Reginald Pitt, and Tommy Watson.

"What's the game?" growled Watson sleepily. "It's past midnight, ain't it?"

"Nearly half-past two," I said.

"My only hat!"

"Dear old boy, I must remark that the hour is a frightful one," observed Sir Montie. "It is, really! Pray explain why you have aroused us at such a time?"

"I want help," I replied. "But we can't talk here—I don't want to disturb the other fellows. Handy might wake up—and then there'd be terrific commotion. Buck up and get into your things."

They didn't argue, but swiftly dressed. Pitt seemed to enjoy the prospect. Sir Montie accepted the idea with his usual sang-froid, and Tommy Watson grumbled continuously as he dressed. But as he always grumbled, we took no notice.

task now was to go to Nelson Lee's bedroom

And at last they were ready, and we passed outside into the corridor. My first again and peep inside. There was no sign of the guv'nor. Yung Ching was still sleeping, and everything was quiet.

"I want you to stay here, Montie, and keep your eyes open," I said briskly. "I don't suppose we shall be long, but whatever happens, remain on guard until we come back. Are you game?"

"Of course, dear old fellow," said Montie.

"But I'm most frightfully bewildered, begad! Why do you want me to stop here?"

"Because Chingy mustn't be left alone, and I'm going out," I replied. "Watson and Pitt are coming with me."

"Oh, are we?" said Pitt. "That's news!"

"Rats!" said Watson. "I'm not going! A nice thing, fetching us out of bed in the middle of the giddy night——"

"Don't growl any more!" I interrupted. "It's quite likely that the whole thing will fizzle out, but there's no telling. I'm a bit anxious about the guv'nor. He said he'd be in bed before one, and now it's getting on towards three. We'll slip outside and see if anything is afoot."

"Good idea!" said Pitt. "I'm on!"

"But how do we know where to find Mr. Lee?" asked Watson obstinately. "What's the good of going out in this darkness? What chance have we got of finding Mr. Lee? He might be down the lane, or he might be over towards the moor, or he might be on the towing-path, or he might be——"

"He might be in the Sahara Desert—but he isn't!" interrupted Pitt. "Dry up, you ass! Nipper's quite right—we can't do better than have a look round. If Mr. Lee

(Continued on next page.)

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wants any help, we're the chaps to supply it. Besides, it's a bit of an adventure—and the quiet life never did suit me!"

"Good, Reggie!" I said quickly. "Let's be off!"

"But I don't see why we should—" began Watson.

"Cease thy chatter, O grumbler!" interrupted Pitt severely. "Avast and belay! In other words, dry up! Lead off, O wise one, and we will follow!"

I nodded, and passed down the passage. Sir Montie went into the bedroom, and remained on guard over Ching. So long as he was there, no harm could come to the Chinese boy.

So I felt quite justified in leaving. Pitt and Watson followed, and, having reached the ground floor, we got outside in a very short time, and paused in the triangle to hold a short consultation.

I had popped into Nelson Lee's study, just to satisfy myself that he was not there. The study was dark. And now, as we paused in the triangle, I gazed across the open space towards the high wall.

"Everything is as still as the dickens!" I whispered. "It's just that time of the night when things seem unreal and a bit ghostly. It won't be very long before the dawn begins to appear—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Watson, glancing over his shoulder. "It's rotten out here—chilly and creepy! Not that I believe in ghosts, or—"

"What was that?" asked Pitt abruptly.

"Eh?" gasped Tommy.

"Thought I'd catch you!" grinned Reggie.

"I didn't hear anything!"

"Look here, my sons—don't rot!" I broke in. "I'm beginning to be more alarmed than ever. And I don't think we could do better than climb over the wall and prow about that shrubbery just across the lane."

"And what's the good of doing that?" asked Watson.

"Well, I happen to know that a Scotland Yard detective is located there," I said. "Detective-Sergeant Melrose. He's got several other men posted round the school, too. We'll have a chat with Melrose, and he might be able to tell us something about the guv'nor."

"Good idea!" said Pitt. "Proceed, sweet one!"

We crept towards the school wall, and in a very short time we were over on the other side. We made just a little noise scrambling over, and I half-expected to be challenged at any moment.

Melrose could not have failed to hear us if he was on the alert. And when no challenge came I thought that this was rather queer. Melrose had distinct orders not to move, except within a certain restricted area. How was it that he had ignored our movements?

It was quite likely, of course, that he was

waiting until he knew something more definite. I was quite certain, in fact, that he was crouching near by, watching our dim figures.

"Sergeant!" I whispered softly. "Ahoy, there!"

Dead silence.

"Are you there, Melrose?" I went on softly. "It's me—Nipper!"

Still there was silence, and I bit my lip.

"Why doesn't he answer?" I muttered. "He must be here! Look here, you chaps, this looks pretty serious. I hope that everything's all right! But the very fact that Melrose has left his post seems significant."

I crossed the lane and went into the trees on the other side. It was just here that Handforth and Co. had captured Detective-sergeant Melrose during the previous evening. I don't know what made me penetrate into the trees and bushes. Perhaps some instinct told me that it was the best thing that could be done. My chums followed close behind, wondering why I should go to this trouble.

But within a minute we found that the move was a wise one.

For, suddenly, I kicked against something soft and yielding. I paused, put my foot forward, and then caught my breath in. I was kicking against a body! In a moment I was on my knees, and I could feel the warm form of a man. He was breathing steadily, and seemed to be in a deep sleep.

"What are you up to there?" asked Watson, from the rear.

"Quick!" I gasped. "There's somebody here—unconscious."

"What?"

"Melrose, I believe!" I went on. "I knew something was wrong!"

Under the circumstances I felt justified in using my electric torch, although it was unwise to show a light of any description. But something had to be done. There, amid the trees, the blackness was pitchy.

I pulled out my torch, pressed the switch, and the light played fully upon the inert figure of Detective-sergeant Melrose. He was not bound, as I had half-suspected, but lay there in the grass, looking for all the world like a dead man. Only his steady breathing told that life was still vigorous, although dormant.

His face was pale, his eyes slightly open. Quickly I pushed up one of the lids, and gazed at the eye. Then I caught my breath in sharply.

"He's been drugged!" I exclaimed tensely. "Heavily drugged, too! There's no chance of him recovering for hours!"

"Great goodness!" said Watson shakily. "What—what does it mean?"

"It means that some devilry is afoot!" I said grimly. "Those Chinese have done this, of course—no doubt about it. But what of the guv'nor? Has he been drugged, too? If so, it's up to us to save the situation."

"If these rotten Chinamen are acting like

this, it means that they're after Yung Ching," said Reggie Pitt shrewdly. "Don't you think we ought to get back—"

"No!" I interrupted. "I'm more concerned about the guv'nor. Chingy's in no danger. Montie will look after him all right, and he'll soon raise a commotion if anything suspicious happens. We've got to look for Mr. Lee."

"But how?" asked Pitt. "We don't know where to start!"

"Well, I happen to know that the guv'nor has been in the habit of using that old tunnel," I said keenly. "You know, the one that leads from the monastery vault to the moor quarry. You see, these Chinamen have made their headquarters out there somewhere, and Mr. Lee has been using that tunnel because it's the most direct route. By Jove! Something's happened to him in the tunnel, perhaps!"

This was quite a chance shot of mine, but, as I have already related, it was a remarkably close one. At the same time, it was natural that I should assume such a thing. I had considered the guv'nor's actions rash for some time, and more than once I had asked him to let me accompany him.

"We'd better buzz down into the tunnel, then!" said Pitt briskly. "Come on!"

"Rather!" agreed Watson.

"Hold on—what about this chap—" began Pitt.

"We can't bother about him now—he won't come to any harm!" I exclaimed. "The grass is quite dry, and he must have been lying here for two hours already. We can attend to him later."

And, without any more delay, we hurried back across the lane, and entered the stark and gaunt ruins of the old monastery. The stone walls, jagged and broken, rose up against the sky-line like grim sentinels. The gloom hid the picturesque covering of ivy, and the ruins looked sinister. In the daytime they were extremely beautiful, but now they seemed eloquent of evil.

I half expected something to happen as we picked our way through the strewn boulders. But, apparently, we had the place utterly to ourselves. And we progressed on until we came to the opening of the circular stairway which led down to the vault, far below.

The steps were of stone, broken and treacherous. But we had negotiated them many times, and knew almost every stair; and, in any case, I had that electric torch, and, with this gleaming and lighting our way, we continued our downward course.

At last we reached the bottom. A sharp turn to the left would now take us straight into the vault itself.

As I made the turning, however, I gave a startled gasp, for I became aware of something which took me absolutely by surprise. Instead of a black opening yawning in front of me, there was nothing but piles of great boulders and stones. I stared, bewildered.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed.

The entrance to the vault was blocked up.

At first I thought that the roof had collapsed, and the thing was a natural phenomenon. A quick glance at the obstruction, however, told me that the entrance had been blocked up deliberately. Each stone had been placed there by hand, and jammed in so tightly that an impassable barrier was formed.

Entrance to the vault was impossible.

"Why, what does this mean?" asked Watson, pushing forward. "Well I'm jiggered! The place is bunged up! We can't get through—"

"There's some rotten business afoot!" I exclaimed, my voice loud with anxiety. "This tunnel was only blocked up over night—it was all right yesterday. Something must have happened to the guv'nor, and these beastly Chinks are responsible!"

"Can't we push this barrier down?" asked Pitt.

"Try it!" I said grimly.

We pushed against the stones and boulders, and they proved to be firm and solid. It would have required a battering ram to break down that obstruction. It probably filled up the whole passage for several yards.

And we stood there silent and anxious.

And then, out of the darkness and the stillness came a voice. It was so totally unexpected that at first I thought my ears were deceiving me. It sounded dim and far away at first.

"Nipper! Nipper!" it said clearly.

"What—what was that?" I asked. "Did you hear anything?"

"Yes, somebody called," replied Pitt tensely. "It sounded like Mr. Lee! It may have been fancy—"

"It wasn't!" I shouted. "Keep quiet, you chaps. Guv'nor—guv'nor!" I yelled loudly. "Are you there?"

We remained still holding our breath.

"Yes, Nipper, and not very far off," came Nelson Lee's voice, clear and distinct. "I heard your voices and lost no time in making my presence known. I have grave news for you, and it is your task to save St. Frank's from destruction!"

"What do you mean, sir?" I shouted, aghast.

"Listen—do not interrupt, and I will tell you the position," replied Lee, from the darkness within the vault. "Take heed of everything I say."

"Wait a minute, sir!" I shouted anxiously.

"Where are you?"

"I am at the end of the little tunnel which leads to the Ancient House cellars," came the guv'nor's voice. "Not a great distance off. I understand that the entrance to the vault is blocked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then Heaven help us!" came Nelson Lee's voice. "These Chinese demons have won, Nipper, we are beaten!"

"But—but I don't understand, sir!" I shouted hoarsely. "Why don't you come here?"

"Because I am secured hand and foot by steel manacles, and I am chained to the wall of the tunnel!" replied Nelson Lee grimly. "That is the reason I cannot come. And now listen to me."

"But—but this is awful!" I shouted desperately. "Did you hear, you chaps?" I added, turning to my chums with a pale face. "The gov'nor's chained to the wall, and can't move! And we can't get near him!"

"Listen to what Mr. Lee says!" exclaimed Pitt quietly.

"Fu Chow has gained the upper hand," said Nelson Lee, from the gloom. "I will be brief, Nipper. Within a short distance of me there is a charge of high explosive which will send St. Frank's sky high, and destroy every living soul within a radius of half a mile! Fu Chow has laid a fuse along the tunnel, and that fuse is probably alight, and travelling rapidly towards us. Fly for your lives, there may be only a minute left!"

I clutched at the wall and feared that I should faint with the horror of it.

"You—you don't mean it, sir!" I shouted chokingly.

"Good heavens, Nipper; you don't think I'd say such a thing unless it was absolutely true!" shouted Nelson Lee. "How many boys are with you?"

"Two, sir."

"One of you give the alarm at once!" ordered Lee, his voice perfectly steady.

"Rouse the school, and get every living soul out and clear away. They must not wait to dress themselves, or take any property. Another of you will hurry to the quarry and take others. If possible, stop the lighting of the fuse. And you must hurry! Every second is of importance! Heaven may be merciful, after all—you have come in the nick of time!"

"This—this is awful, you chaps!" I panted. "Did you hear?"

"Yes, the school's going to be blown up!" said Pitt. "Look here, I'll rush up at once and give the warning—"

"I'll come with you!" gasped Watson.

I looked at them dazedly.

"But—but what about the gov'nor?" I asked thickly. "He's—he's down here—chained to the wall! Don't you realise, you chaps? He'll have no chance—he'll be blown to bits!"

"My hat, yes!" breathed Pitt huskily.

I felt that I was going mad.

"Gov'nor!" I shouted wildly. "What about you?"

"There's no hope for me, Nipper!" came back Nelson Lee's voice. "If the occupants of the school are saved I shall be satisfied. It is utterly impossible to assist me."

"But you'll be killed on the spot, sir!"

"My boy, do you realise that this delay

may mean the death of you all?" called Nelson Lee urgently. "Never mind about me—go! See about saving the others! I tell you this thing is ghastly—even now it may be too late to avert the disaster. Go at once—go!"

"But you'll be killed, sir—"

"Tell your companions to go and give the warning!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "Tell them to hurry! Good-bye, my boys! You can do nothing to help me; but I am thankful that there is a chance—"

Nelson Lee broke off abruptly.

"Well, sir?" I shouted.

We listened, our hearts thumping madly.

"Run—run for your lives!" came Nelson Lee's voice, in a great shout of alarm. "It is too late! You cannot save the school! I can see the spark—the fuse is burning! Within a minute the end will be here! Fly for your lives!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FU CHOW FOILED.



DURING the next five seconds a thousand thoughts seemed to surge through my heated brain. Although the space of time was a mere trifle, my mind worked with such rapidity that it seemed that whole minutes elapsed.

The possibilities of the situation came to me.

Nelson Lee had told us that he had sighted the lighted fuse, it was near by, and travelling rapidly towards him! That meant, in cold truth, that the explosion would take place within a minute.

Of what use was a minute?

The gov'nor himself would be blown to nothing. And we—

What about us? How should we fare? It would take us three minutes, at the very least, to climb those circular stairs to the surface. In other words, the explosion would take place while we were climbing. We should be buried alive. No power on earth could save us from a ghastly death.

Even supposing the explosion was delayed for three minutes—what then? We should reach the surface. But should we be any better off? This explosion would take place before we could run a hundred yards. And the very concussion of it would kill us. Of what use, therefore, was it to run? We might just as well stay down there.

Only death seemed more appalling if we waited for it. To be running for our lives would give us something to do—it would take the ghastly nature of the whole affair away to some extent.

I turned to Pitt and Watson, and saw that they were deathly pale.

"Why don't you run?" I asked tensely.

"What's the good?" asked Pitt. "There's no time!"

In that moment of dire peril he was perfectly calm. Even Tommy Watson showed no sign of panic. He seemed dazed by the shock of it. But the pair were true blue—grit to the backbone.

"We've not going, guv'nor!" I shouted. "There's no time! We'll stay here, and end everything with you!"

"You are mad, Nipper!" shouted Lee, desperately. "The fuse is burning more slowly than I thought! There may be time to escape!"

I don't know how it was, but somehow, and quite suddenly, I seemed to go into a kind of panic. The horrible cruelty of the whole thing filled me with a wild fury. Why should Nelson Lee be killed like this? Why should we suffer the same fate? Why should the whole school be blown into Eternity?

Couldn't something be done?

Anything—anything—so long as we were active!

I turned to my chums with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"I can't stand this!" I shouted thickly. "Heaven will never allow such a terrible thing to happen! There must be a way to avert it, there must be! And the only way is to break down this barrier!"

"But that's impossible!" gasped Watson.

"We'll try—it doesn't matter if we half kill ourselves!" I shouted. "We'll use every ounce of our strength, and we won't care how we're hurt! It's a chance—the only possible chance!"

"By George, you're right," said Pitt.

He placed his shoulder to the barrier and pushed with all his strength. There was no sign of any movement whatever. I simply hurled myself at the obstruction. It felt as though I had rammed a brick wall. The shock of it numbed my shoulder, but I felt the whole structure of stones and boulders quiver. And from somewhere behind came the clatter of a falling piece of rock.

"It moved!" I gasped. "Quick—quick!"

This time we hurled ourselves at the barrier together—the three of us. With all our strength we heaved and pressed and pushed. Again and again we charged. I thought my shoulder was broken, but I didn't care. What did it matter? It was simply a question of life or death.

Again we charged.

Crash—clatter—crash!

From the top of the tunnel a number of boulders became loose and thudded down in a cascade. And there, at the top, was an opening! It was not large enough for me to pass through, but a great hope surged within me. I felt that minutes and minutes must have passed; but, actually, barely thirty seconds had elapsed. In times of peril such as this, seconds are like minutes.

"Come on—the last time!" I panted hoarsely.

Like one machine we hurled ourselves at the obstruction. And, instead of being brought up short, with a jar, as hitherto, we

went clean through the barrier, and landed in a mixed up heap on the other side.

The thing had collapsed!

"Hurrah!" I yelled madly. "We're through—we're through!"

Tommy Watson laughed hysterically.

"But what's the good?" he breathed.

"It's too late!"

"Is it?" snapped Pitt. "Look! Look! There's the spark—there! Can't you see? Travelling along the tunnel! There's still time!"

He dashed forward, but tripped over a boulder, and crashed to the floor. I was on my feet by this time. The darkness was pitchy—for my electric-torch was out of action, owing to the fall. But there was no need for lights. Indeed, we were better without one. For there, in the darkness, the lighted fuse glowed and sparkled and hissed. We could see that spark travelling along the floor—making its way up the short tunnel.

I ran like a lunatic. I didn't care whether I banged myself against the walls, whether I tripped, or whether I half killed myself. My only thought was to reach that spark.

One second now, indeed, meant everything.

As I fell headlong to the floor against the spark, I clutched at the fuse. I grasped it between my fingers, and even as I pinched at the spark I knew the futility of such a proceeding. It is impossible to extinguish a fuse by such methods.

"My boy—my boy!" came a voice out of the darkness.

"It was Nelson Lee's voice, filled with hope and anxiety. And it was so close that I was startled. Then I realised that the gigantic charge of explosive was only a few feet away!

Unless I acted now, the disaster would occur.

Forcing myself to remain calm—for I knew that the slightest panic or undue haste would muddle me and make me slow—I pulled out my pocket-knife. I tore it open. Then, seizing the fuse, I held it firmly, and slashed it through.

One cut was enough.

The thing was severed, and I hurled the burning end of it back along the tunnel. Then, faint and giddy, I lay back, gasping.

My gaze was fixed upon that spark. It continued merrily for a brief space, then gave a final burst, and died out.

And from down the passage came a yell of relief.

"Hurray!" roared Tommy Watson wildly. "It's out!"

There was no doubt about it. The fuse was out, and Fu Chow's diabolical scheme was frustrated.

And now that the immediate peril was over my strength seemed to ebb away. I lay there on the floor of the passage, breathing heavily. It was some moments before I pulled myself together and staggered to my feet.

I knew that the charge of explosive was still near by. The very thought of it being there was enough to alarm me. Any blundering action on my part might set it going even now. And we were in total darkness—inky, pitchy blackness.

"Guv'nor!" I said softly. "You there, sir?"

"Yes, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I hardly know what to say, my boy. Your bravery was wonderful—"

"It wasn't bravery at all, sir. I was thinking of my own life as well as yours," I replied. "I had to do something; I couldn't stand still. But where are you? I wish I could see!"

And just then a gleaming flash of light came from the vault, some distance down the passage. My heart jumped. For a second I thought that another fuse was going, or that Fu Chow's men were at hand. Then came Pitt's voice.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "I've found that torch of yours, Nipper. It's all right; works lovey."

"Oh, thank goodness!" I said. "Bring it along!"

I was standing up now, and my shoulder felt almost dislocated. It was aching terribly. But I didn't care much. The danger was over. We were safe—Nelson Lee was safe—and the school knew nothing.

I hurried along the passage to the spot where Pitt and Tommy Watson were standing. They were both looking rather groggy. They were dusty, towed, and their faces were pale. But they were laughing. They were laughing with relief, with joy, and there was a touch of wildness about them.

"It can't be true!" exclaimed Watson huskily. "You know, we were going to be blown up! And—and is it all right now—really? Is it safe? I—I feel that we're going to get a shock soon—"

"It's all right, my son; don't worry," I exclaimed briskly. "Give me that torch, Reggie! We've got to go along and rescue the guv'nor. He'll know what to do afterwards. Thank Heaven we were in time!"

I took the torch, and we turned back and made our way along the tunnel until we came to the end. And there we halted, and stared blankly at Nelson Lee. Although he had told us that he was chained to the wall, we were amazed at what we saw.

He was fixed in steel bonds, and he was chained to the wall with such security that to get away was obviously hopeless.

"Guv'nor!" I said breathlessly.

"Yes, Nipper, you find me in a pretty pickle indeed!" said Nelson Lee calmly. "How on earth you will release me I don't know. But nothing much matters now. The danger has been averted."

"What's this little chain, sir?" asked Pitt, reaching forward.

"Stop!" exclaimed Lee sharply.

"My goodness!" gasped Pitt. "What—what—"

"That chain will blow us all to atoms if you touch it!" interrupted Lee. "At least, that is what Fu Chow informed me. We shall see. I was afraid to move even a fraction of an inch, for fear of setting off this infernal device."

I stared.

"The awful demons!" I exclaimed furiously. "Not content with chaining you up here, they make it so that you can't even move! What had I better do, sir?"

"I think you carry a pair of wire-clippers on you?"

"By jingo, yes, sir!"

"Then snip that chain through as gently as possible."

I forked out a heavy pocket-knife—one of those useful articles which contain all sorts of other things in addition to knives. There was an arrangement by which wire could be snipped through. The little chain was light, and, very gingerly, I cut it through. The loose end fell to the ground with a little tinkle, and Nelson Lee breathed more freely.

"Now we can see about the rest!" he said. "Don't go anywhere near the explosive, boys. Keep right away from it, for it may be extremely dangerous. See what you can do with these bracelets, Nipper."

I examined the manacles closely, and then I made a discovery which filled us all with delight. Although it was hopeless for Nelson Lee to free his own hands, those bracelets were so constructed that by a twisting turn they could be freed. The wearer himself could not perform this action, and so, to him, they were perfectly secure.

I freed his right hand first, and then saw that the wrist was swollen and red. For that iron band had been tightly round the flesh, leaving the guv'nor no chance to move. And the edge was as sharp as a knife.

"The foul rotters!" I exclaimed indignantly.

It did not take me long to take off the other manacles, and then at last Nelson Lee stood free. His face was rather strained, but there was an expression of heartfelt relief in his eyes.

"Boys, I don't know what to say; words seem futile at such a moment as this," he exclaimed. "But the fact remains that you have saved England from one of the worst disasters in the whole history of the country. If you have not smashed down that barrier and severed the fuse—well, hundreds of lives would have been lost, your own included."

"Don't talk about it, sir," I muttered. "It's too awful! But—but how did it happen? How did you get collared by the Chinks?"

"At the time it seemed to be a piece of the worst possible luck," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "But I now realise that it was an act of Providence. It was the finest possible thing for me to have been captured."

"What!" I exclaimed. "You're glad of it, sir?"

"I am!"

"But why, sir?" asked Pitt curiously.

"Because this vile scheme would have gone forward whether I was captured or not," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you understand, boys? They were proceeding with it when I butted in. Well, my capture caused a delay—the delay of at least an hour. So, you see, but for that loss of time the school would have been blown to atoms at about one-thirty!"

"My hat! That's true enough, sir!" I exclaimed.

"Furthermore, even supposing that the fuse had not been lighted until now, the result would have been the same," went on Lee. "You would have come down to the vault; you would have found the barrier. But I should not have been within call, to warn you of the danger. Thus you would have known nothing. Yes, boys, my capture was providential, for it led to the frustration of the demoniacal plan."

And, now that Nelson Lee had put it in that way, I could see that the thing was right. We were all feeling a lot better now. Our shoulders ached, but what did we care about that. We went a little distance down the passage, and then Nelson Lee paused.

"What caused you to come down here?" he asked.

"I'm blessed if I know, sir," I said. "Fate again, I suppose. I woke up, and found that you had not returned, and I got the wind up. So I left Montie in charge of Ching, and we came out to investigate. Oh, by the way! That Scotland Yard chap is lying in the spinney, drugged! These Chinamen made a thorough job of it while they were about it!"

"No, Nipper, they did not make a thorough job of it!" said Lee. "Boys, not a word of this must be spoken to the others. We must keep it an absolute secret to ourselves. Think of the scandal that would be caused if this story got into the papers; and it surely would. There is no necessity why anybody outside our own circle should know of this plot."

"But what about the explosive, sir?"

"I will deal with that personally," replied Lee. "You need not worry. The charge cannot go off of its own accord, and I will

render it harmless before morning. The best thing you can do is to go back to bed, and try to sleep. My boys, you have done so well that no words of mine can express my real feelings."

We all passed up the stone steps to the upper air, and then we found, rather to our surprise, that the first streaks of daylight had come. And everything was peaceful and quiet. The dawn was at hand, and birds were twittering on every side. It was a scene of peace.

But what a terrible shambles would have resulted if that explosion had taken place? I shuddered when I thought of the possibilities.

And we retired to bed—but not to sleep. Sleep was quite out of the question at such a time. And when the rising bell went, we were only too glad to get up.

The other fellows noticed that we were not quite ourselves, and all sorts of inquiries were made. But we said nothing. Even Sir Montie was in ignorance of the truth until two days later, when Tommy and I took him into our confidence.

And by that time everything was going on as usual.

Detective-sergeant Metrose, I learned, had recovered without taking any harm. And all the other Yard men had been treated in the same way. They told of being suddenly swooped upon by unknown assailants, borne to the ground, and drugged. It seemed that even Scotland Yard was helpless against those yellow fiends.

As for the explosive, Nelson Lee had it cleared away; and he found that Fu Chow's threat had not been exaggerated. The charge was sufficient to wreck the whole neighbourhood. But there had been no danger of Nelson Lee causing any explosion himself. That little affair of the thin chain had been one of Fu Chow's grim jokes. Nelson Lee could have moved freely without any danger of setting the fuse alight. But the thing had been expected, since the gov'nor had been afraid to move a hair.

And he was determined that the end of this grim business should soon come. For the time being Fu Chow was defeated.

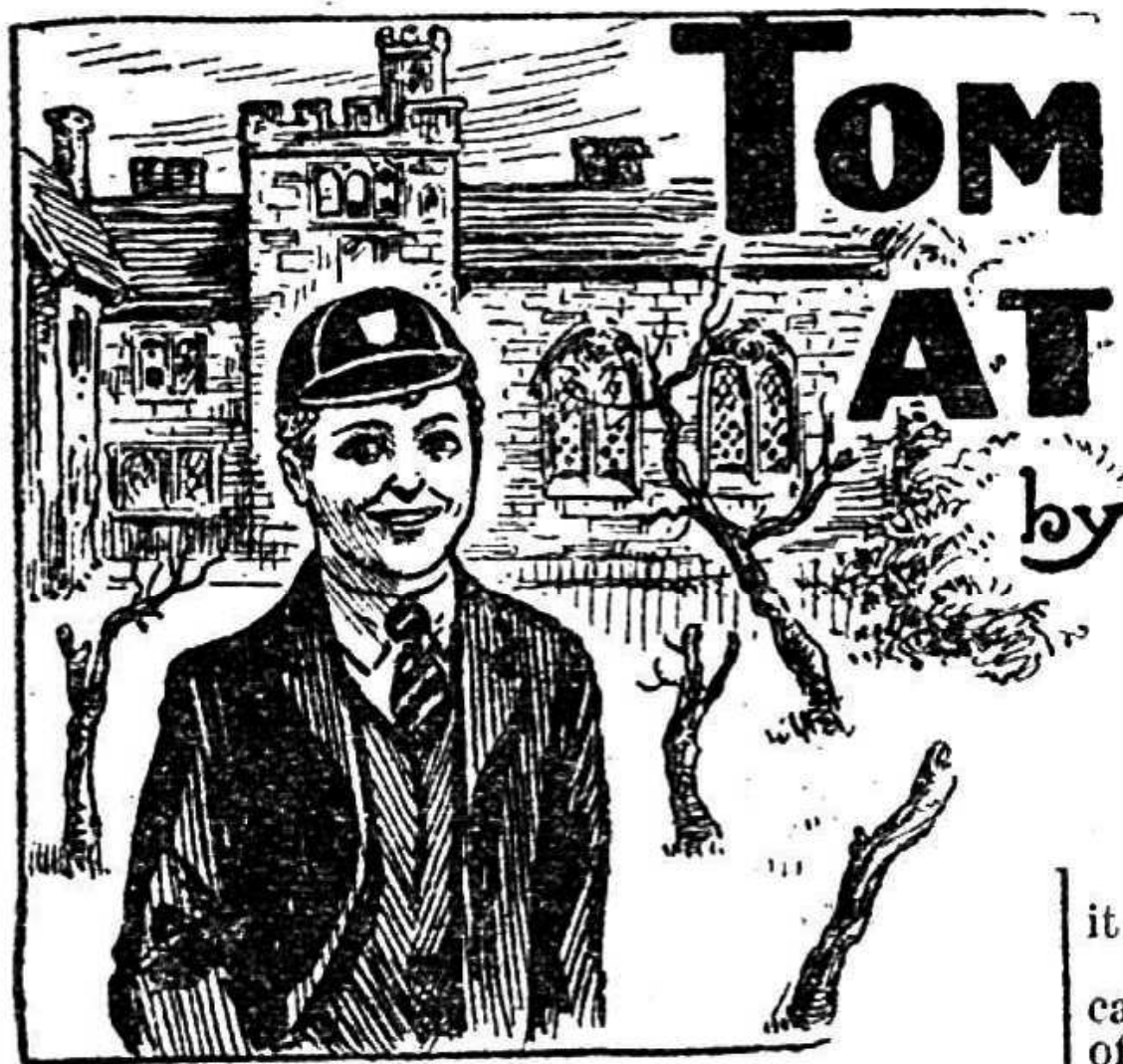
But what was coming next? What terror would descend upon the school in the immediate future?

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Foster Moore, the rascally tutor of Wrasper's School, who has ruined Mr. Wrasper, the Head, in order to step into his shoes, may well rue the day that Tom Tartar came to the school. Tom, who stands for all that's best in a British lad, is the prime mover in the unmasking of Moore, of which you will read in the approaching climax that will bring this splendid yarn to a fitting conclusion.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER LVIII.

Foster Moore's Downfall.

AS the contents were rapidly overhauled it became clearer and clearer that the entire collection of things stolen were in the bundle.

It was a most astonishing discovery.

"I always said the poacher did it," said Sam Smith.

"Don't be in a hurry to jump at that," said the detective. "Now, my lads, can you keep the secret?"

"Of course we can!" they cried.

"Sure you won't go blabbing to the other boys?"

"I will answer for them," returned Tom, "if the reason for keeping it a secret is a good one."

"My lads," said the detective, "I am going to make up a dummy bundle, and put it into the well. Whoever put this bundle there is sure to come for it again."

"That's a splendid notion," said Tom. "What will you do with these things?"

"Take care of them," replied the detective, "first making an inventory in my pocket-book, which I will get you all to sign. Now put them out. How many watches?"

"Five," said Tom.

"Scarf-pins?"

"Seven."

And so they went on through the list until it was completed.

The detective stowed away the things in the capacious pockets he had inside the lappets of his coat.

"Poacher's pockets," he said with a chuckle, "made to hold a hare or two, although I do very little in that line."

The dummy bundle was made up of all sorts of things. Two or three old candlesticks, a lot of old nails from a box, bits of glass and wood, and the dummy was declared by the boys to be perfect.

"And now," said Clarke, "you go on ahead and put a mile between yourselves and this cottage as soon as you can. Mind, mum's the word."

"You can trust us," replied Tom. "It won't be the first time we have kept a secret."

They parted from the detective and went off to the canal, on the banks of which they amused themselves for a couple of hours, and then walked back to school.

A few evenings later Tom, while passing through the hall, was surprised to hear sounds of quarrelling, in the unmistakable voices of Mr. Wrasper and Foster Moore. It was impossible to avoid hearing a little of what was said.

"This is a plot of yours to ruin me," declared Foster Moore.

"No," returned Mr. Wrasper, "it is the unearthing of the plot you laid to ruin me. It succeeded for a time, but I can claim back my own now."

"You may claim, but will you get it?"

Here Tom was passing on when the door of the study opened, and Mr. Wrasper appeared.

He caught sight of Tom going down the passage, and called on him by name.

"Come here, Tartar," he said.

Tom would rather have been out of it, but he could not very well refuse.

"What is he doing here?" asked Foster Moore.

He was standing by the fireplace of the study with his hands clasped behind him.

His face was flushed, and he had the appearance of having received a bit of mental mauling.

"I came in to get a book," replied Tom.

"And to play the spy," said Moore.

"No, sir," said Tom."

"Don't lie to me," said Foster Moore violent. "You were here as a spy and by appointment. You are one of the tools of this man to work my ruin."

Tom did not answer him. He looked at Mr. Wrasper for him to undertake the task of refutation.

"Moore," said Mr. Wrasper, "don't talk nonsense. You know very well that if he had been my spy here that I should not now be admitting him to this room. He is not exactly the sort of witness I should have liked, but he will do. Here, in his presence, I repeat the charges I have made against you."

Moore opened his lips to say something, but he closed them without speaking.

"In the first place," said Mr. Wrasper, "you induced me to invest all my savings in a company that did not exist."

"Can you prove that?" asked Moore.

"Yes, I know now, thanks to the assistance I have received from Tartar's father, and certain men he employed, where you got the false papers printed, showing the report of this said company and the payments of dividends that tempted me."

"And you got your dividends—once," interposed Moore, with a dry laugh.

"Yes, out of my own capital, and then another false paper was printed and sent to me to show that owing to the flooding of the mine, which also did not exist, the company was ruined."

"And that was the end of it."

"As I thought once, Moore. The loss unhinged me, for I had never breathed a word to my wife of what I had done. In my distressed state of mind you proposed a little harmless distraction—draughts, chess, cards, dice—and so we worked our way up, for gambling, to my shame, was my failing before I came here, and weak as I was, I allowed it to return."

"Hadn't you better close the door?" suggested Moore.

"If you wish it," returned Mr. Wrasper, "but as far as I am concerned, what I am about to say may be proclaimed to the world. Close the door, Tartar, please."

"You won all I had," continued Mr. Wrasper. "Taking my note of hand when all money was gone, and, finally, a mortgage on the school. That you seized, and now you will have to give it back again."

"We shall see," said Moore.

"You will see ere many minutes are gone that you must do so," replied Mr. Wrasper. "Foster Moore is not your name to begin with."

"It's a lie!"

"It is true, but what your name is can be of no consequence in the end. Keep that name, live and die under it if you like, but you must go out of this place as you came into it, with only what you stand in, and with not so much as a character wherewith to begin again."

"We shall see," said Foster Moore again.

Tom watched him narrowly, and, as a quick eye can detect the first action of a thaw upon a frozen river, he could see that the hard shell

of Foster Moore's audacity was being broken up."

"You have a wife," said Mr. Wrasper, "whom you deserted. Why?"

No answer.

It was an unexpected blow and shattered a goodly portion of the shell's surface.

"You married that woman seventeen years ago," said Mr. Wrasper, "when you were very young. You were a knave even then, and you got hold of a simple creature with a little money. That you spent, and when it was gone you began a course of brutal treatment that qualified you for a lynching. You see, I do not mince matters."

Again, no answer.

"You left her to return at intervals," resumed Mr. Wrasper, "and wring from her her hard earnings. When away from her what were you doing?"

"Nothing," said Moore.

"You were engaged in a series of crimes for which you did not entirely escape the meshes of the law, forger and convict that you are. Do you deny it?"

"Not here," said Moore.

"No, nor elsewhere," replied Mr. Wrasper. "There was, however, one redeeming point in your character. You loved the only child of your unhappy marriage."

Foster Moore's hard shell was shattered utterly now. He staggered to his chair and sat down.

"Spare my boy!" he gasped.

"It is for his sake," said Mr. Wrasper, "that I now give you a chance of getting away. You introduced him here, after having stolen him away from his sorrow stricken mother, under a false name. He was a worthy son of yours. Ready to learn evil and to play the double part, ungrateful to the loving mother who gave years of her life to him, for never once since he has been here has he sent her one line or word to comfort her misery. Oh, you have played your parts well, the pair of you. Foster Moore and Jonah Worrey, father and son, rascals both."

It was Tom's turn now to be staggered.

He never dreamed of such a revelation as this.

Foster Moore and Jonah Worrey father and son!

"That is all I need say now," said Mr. Wrasper. "Here in the presence of a witness I make these charges. Are you prepared to refute them?"

"Mr. Wrasper," said Foster Moore, "you have the grip on me now."

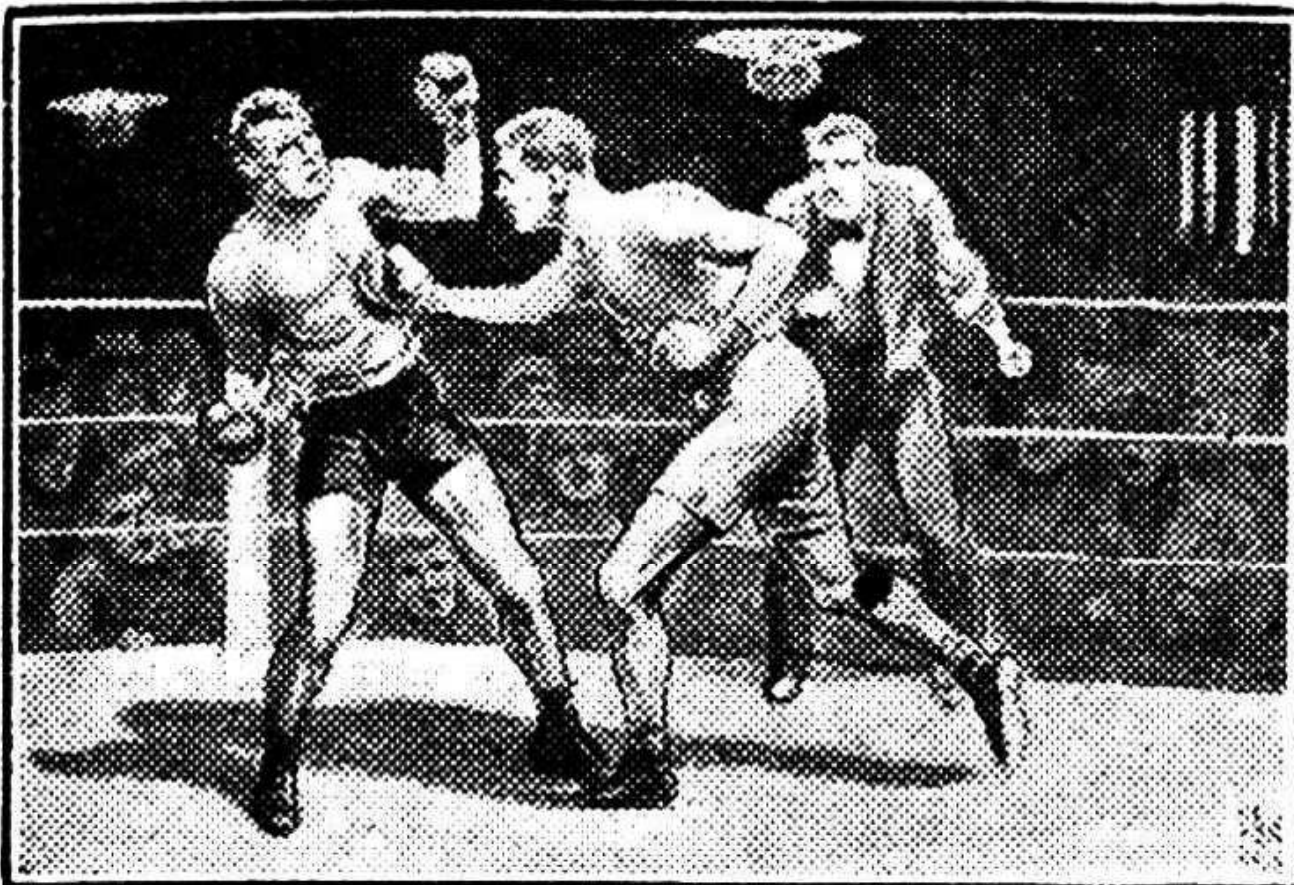
"You do not deny the truth of what I have said?"

"No."

"Then all you have to do is to go away at once," said Wrasper. "I can promise you nothing but immunity from prosecution as far as I am concerned. What other crimes you have committed is a matter for others to deal with."

Foster Moore clasped his hands together, and moaned like a beast in pain.

(To be continued.)



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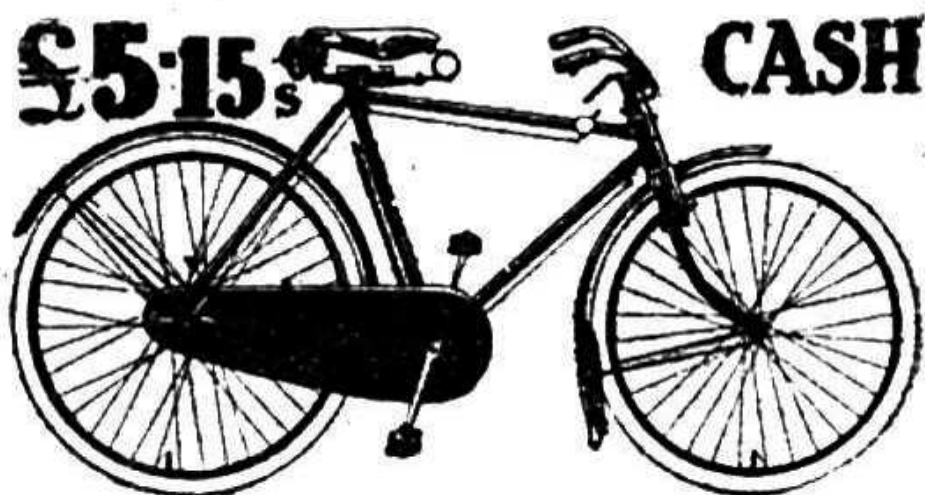
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