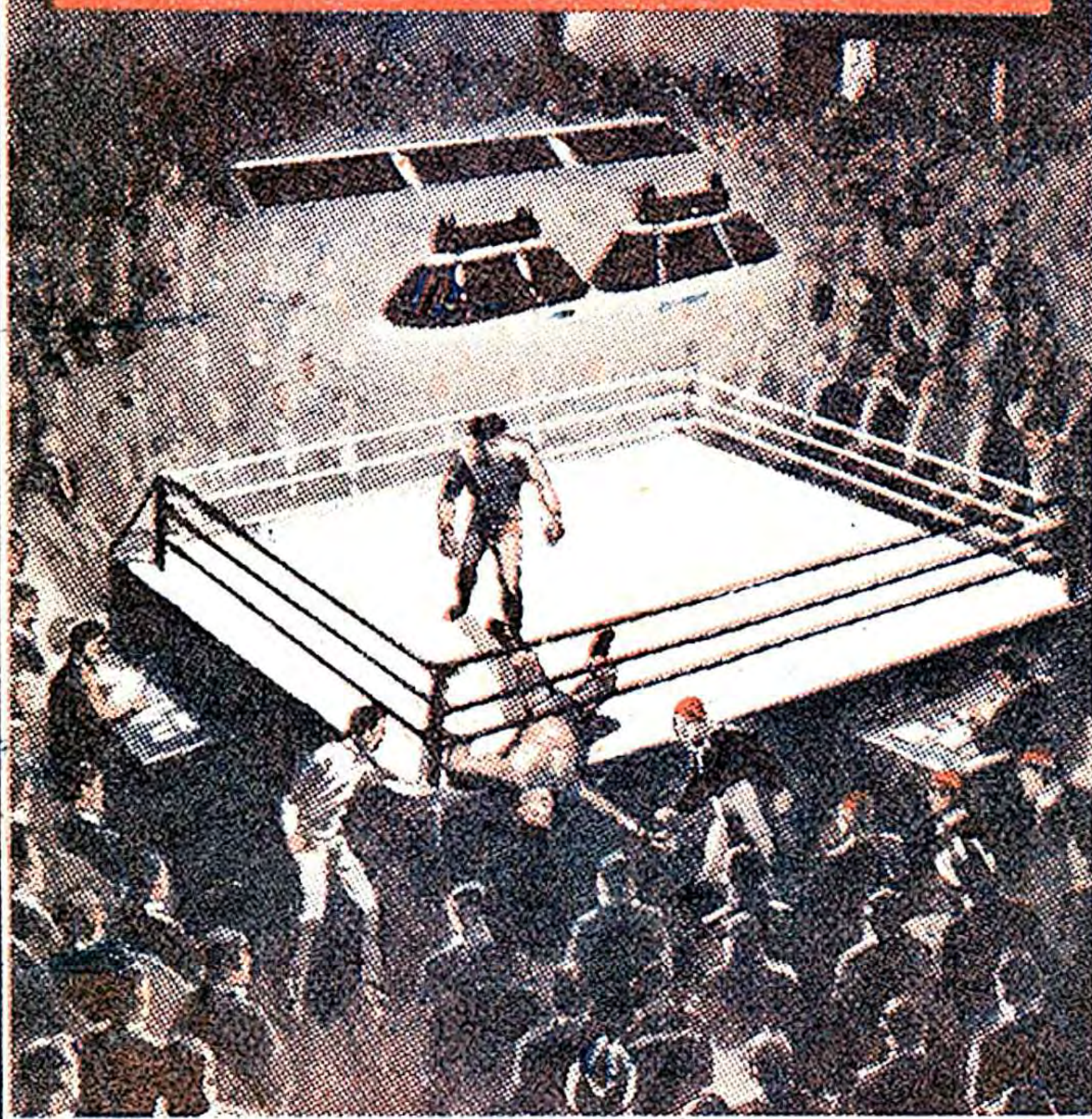


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THE BOXING UNKNOWN!

This Week's Rousing Story of the Ring and St. Frank's.



The Nuts of Study A could see that the second man was the referee at the Stadium.



The Boxing Unknown!

Every boy likes a good boxing yarn, but when it is a St. Frank's boxing yarn it is sure to be a Ring story much above the average. "The Boxing Unknown" has all the mystery and excitement which readers have learned to expect from the author of our inimitable St. Frank's stories.

THE EDITOR.

he said. "Two quid of mine, and ten bob each of yours."

"Lucky beggar!" said Gulliver. "You always get the best of it."

The cads of the Remove were in Study A—their own apartment. And tea was just about to be poured out. Bell was busy on the job already. Outside, the evening was clear and fine—with a touch of frost, and with every sign of a clear sky with a bright moon.

"Well, anyway, we've got three quid on," said Fullwood. "And all the bets are five to one. That means to say that we stand to win fifteen quid. We shall be rolling in cash to-morrow."

"Yes—if the chaps pay up," remarked Bell.

"Oh, they'll pay all right," said Fullwood. "Kenmore and Parkin, and Grayson and those fellows have got plenty of cash, and they always settle on the spot. I wouldn't have made the bets otherwise."

It must not be imagined that junior school-boys of St. Frank's generally indulged in topics of this kind. But Fullwood and Co. were an exception. They considered themselves to be sporting youths, and they took

CHAPTER I.

BETTING ON A CERT!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, scanned his pocket-book thoughtfully.

"Exactly three quid altogether,"

a great delight in betting, and having a flutter on horse racing and similar enterprises.

The majority of the fellows in the Remove viewed such things with scorn and contempt. But Fullwood and Co. were the exception. And just at the present moment all their thoughts were centred upon a big boxing contest.

This contest was quite above board—a sporting event which would attract all the best people in the county. But Fullwood and Co. were far more interested in the betting possibilities.

It so happened that the famous Tony Lennox—heavy-weight champion of the South—was to defend his title against Battling Jem Crake, another well-known fighting man. The contest was to take place in the Helmsford Stadium this very evening at eight o'clock sharp.

And it was regarded as an absolute certainty that Tony Lennox would win. Battling Jem's chances were looked upon as being very slight.

But Fullwood and Co. were "in the know."

They had obtained a tip from a bookmaker in Bannington—somebody who knew all about it. And they gloated in the exclusive information that Battling Jem Crake was to be the winner.

There was no question regarding this point. According to the information which the nuts had received, it was absolutely impossible for Tony Lennox to win the fight. He was as good as beaten already.

Fullwood and Co., profiting by their knowledge, had made quite a number of bets—both in the College House, and in the Ancient House. These bets were all to their advantage.

As Fullwood remarked, what was the good of having secret information unless they made some capital out of it? There was only one regret now—and that was that they would have to wait until the morning to hear the result.

"I don't suppose there's any way we can find out to-night," said Fullwood, as he sat down, and helped himself to bread and butter. "Of course, we might telephone somebody up—but that would be a bit too risky. Even in the morning it may be a long time before we get to know."

"Everything's asleep down here!" grumbled Bell.

"Yes, rather," said Fullwood. "But it's no good grumbling. Of course, the best way of all would be to be at the fight, and see for ourselves."

"Oh, yes!" said Gulliver tartly. "That's likely, ain't it?"

"Well, I don't know," said Fullwood, looking thoughtful. "It might be done."

"What?"

"There's no tellin'," said Ralph Leslie coolly. "Simply a matter of nerve—that's all. If we can gather enough cheek together, we shall be all right. We've got to think of something."

Gulliver grunted.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" he growled. "You know it's impossible."

"My dear ass, I'm serious," said Fullwood. "In fact, I was never more serious in my life. Are you chaps willing to risk somethin'? Don't you think it would be worth a couple of hundred lines each to go?"

"Yes—but we're more likely to get the sack."

"Rot!" said Fullwood. "Even if it came out we were there, the Head wouldn't sack us. But there's no reason why it should come out—not the slightest. I'll tell you what—I'll go along to Kenmore, and get a permit for us to stay out until bedtime. Kenmore will wangle it all right—he's pally, and would like to know the result of the fight himself. He'd probably be off, but he's a prefect, and he can't leave."

Gulliver and Bell began to get really interested. And they were quite excited. Soon after tea, when Fullwood returned after a short absence, they were intensely interested. For their leader brought back with him a permit signed by Kenmore of the Sixth.

"There was nothing in it," said Fullwood. "Kenny whacked it out in no time. Now, look here. I've got it all fixed. We're going to slip off practically at once. It's twenty miles to Helmsford, but we ought to do it in an hour and a half. That'll give us plenty of time!"

"But what about getting back?"

"Of course, we'll come back the same way—on our bikes," said Fullwood. "We can't go by train, because we shouldn't get home. With luck we ought to be here by about half-past-ten."

His chums stared.

"You hopeless duffer!" said Gulliver. "Do you think we can stay out till half-past ten?"

"Why not?"

"Why not!" shouted Bell. "Because it would mean the sack for all of us! And even if we escaped that, we should be publicly flogged."

Fullwood smiled patiently.

"My dear chap, bikes are always liable to go wrong," he said. "That's what's going to happen to-night. We'll get home as soon as we can. Then, just outside the gates, we'll buckle up one of the front wheels. Then we'll say that we had an accident about twelve miles away, and had to walk home. Even if we're not believed, nobody can prove the actual truth. So we shall get the benefit of the doubt. There's nothing like cheek."

"But—but it's too thick!" protested Gulliver, getting excited in spite of himself. "And what do you mean—buckle one of the front wheels?"

"I was thinking of doing that to your bike," said Fullwood calmly.

"My bike!" roared Gulliver.

"Exactly."

"You idiot!"

"Of course, if you're going to kick up

objections, I won't suggest any more first-class ideas—"

"If you call it a first-class idea to smash my jigger up, I don't!" said Gulliver sourly. "Why can't you buckle your own confounded wheel? It's like your nerve to—"

"Be reasonable!" put in Fullwood. "My bike's a new one, and your front wheel has been rocky for months past. Two or three spokes are missing, and the rim's a bit kinked, anyhow. If we buckle it deliberately it won't make much difference. We can get it repaired in the village for ten bob. It'll be as good as new, then. Understand?"

"Do we share the cost of repairs?" asked Gulliver.

"Of course we do," snapped Fullwood. "I never knew such a chap for quibbling over trifles. I merely suggested your bike because it's the oldest. And now, we shall have to look pretty sharp, because we want to get to Helmford in good time. Even as it is, we shall probably have a bit of a job in getting into the place."

Gulliver and Bell were very excited.

Although the project had seemed so utterly impossible, Fullwood had smoothed out the difficulties in his usual unscrupulous manner. He didn't mind what lies he told, providing he gained his object.

He knew quite well that there would be inquiries when he and his chums turned up well after bedtime. But Fullwood was an expert at "wangling," and he had no lack of confidence. He did not worry himself in the slightest degree over the prospects.

And so, within ten minutes, the three juniors were off.

Very few fellows saw them depart—for, as a matter of fact, a good number of the Remove were absent—having gone a fairly long journey to Hazlehurst College, in order to play football.

The nuts were not particularly fond of hard work. But everything depended upon speed now, and they pedalled until they were quite breathless. And they made excellent progress.

By the time they had got well through Bannington they had found their second wind, and were going steadily. It was now clear, cold and ideal for cycling. The roads were hard, and the moon was shining with a clear brilliance which illuminated every rut and ridge.

"Oh, we shall do it comfortably," said Fullwood, as they coasted down a long decline. "We ought to get there by half-past seven at the latest. Thank goodness it's not London—there won't be such a rush for seats. I expect they'll be pretty full, but we'll have a chance to get in all right."

And when they arrived at their destination, Fullwood's words proved to be prophetic. Having stored their bicycles away, they had no difficulty in finding the large new building which was known as the Stadium. And they just managed to secure standing room in the balcony—all the seats had gone. But as long as they got inside, they didn't care.

The place was a blaze of light, and humming with activity. Downstairs, in the other circles, and on the ground floor, every seat was full up. It was really a record house for Helmford—particularly as all the prices were trebled for such a big occasion.

This light had been boomed for weeks in advance, and outside the building, limousines and other cars were parked, row after row. All the best people from two or three counties had turned up.

For one thing, Tony Lennox was a very hot favourite. He was a clean boxer—a straight man, and one who had never been known to use a foul swing, or take unfair advantage of an opponent. His record was perfect.

Battling Jem Crake did not bear such an exemplary character. He was, in fact, well known as being a savage kind of fighter, and it was quite certain that he would use every ounce of his brutal skill in order to wrest the title from Tony.

Indeed, the fight promised to be one of extraordinary interest.

"We're all right here—better than I expected, in fact," said Fullwood. "Not much sense in getting too close, anyhow. You never know who might be here. It was a good thing we put plain caps on. We don't want to advertise the school colours too much."

"Rather not," said Gulliver.

Attired in overcoats and tweed caps, it was really impossible to distinguish Fullwood and Co, from any of the various other youths who had entered the place. They were certainly not recognisable as schoolboys.

They watched the proceedings with keen interest.

There already had been one or two minor contests. But these were now disposed of, and the huge place was filled with a hush of expectancy. The big tussle of the evening was almost due to commence.

Taen, down below, came a stir.

"One of them coming out, I expect," whispered Bell.

He was right. For a moment later many members of the audience on the ground floor, at the ring side, rose to their feet, and waved.

"Tony—Tony!"

"Good old Lennox!"

"Put up a good fight, Tony!"

Fullwood and Co. watched eagerly. They had seen Tony Lennox's photograph many times, but they had never seen the famous boxer in the flesh. Tony Lennox appeared in the ring almost at once.

He was attired in a somewhat shabby dressing-gown, and he bowed once or twice as a storm of applause greeted him. He was a well set up, broad-shouldered fellow, and he would have been quite handsome but for a peculiar twist in his features.

Even so, there was nothing brutal about his face. He was not the kind of man one would take for a professional boxer. And he was quite devoid of swank.

He went over to his corner, sat down, and soon became deeply engrossed with his seconds.

And then Battling Jem Crake entered.

His reception was much less. Only his own supporters greeted him. They were few, but they made a considerable din. Battling Jem proved to be a burly, brutal looking pugilist. He had coarse lips, a big, ugly nose, and a bullet-shaped head, with close cropped hair. He was a typical example of a prize fighter.

"Now we sha'n't be long!" said Fullwood. "An' we can be dead certain that money of ours is safe. Battling Jem will knock this other fellow into a cocked hat!"

"Let's hope so, anyway," said Gulliver. "I'm thinking of our bets."

CHAPTER II.

THE BREAK-DOWN.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE beamed genially.

"A rather priceless game, what?" he observed. "Of course, I'm frightfully ig. on the old sub, but it struck me that

the game was somewhat good. I mean to say, three goals, and so forth."

"Rather!" said Reginald Pitt. "Three goals—and we got two of 'em. We're going strong, Archie."

"Oh, absolutely!"

"And having whacked Hazlehurst on their own ground, we're now wending our way homewards in style," went on Pitt. "I've got to say, Archie, that you do have flashes of reason now and again. It was a jolly good idea of yours to get this giddy charabanc for us."

Archie nodded.

"It just happens, don't you know," he remarked. "Ideas don't come very often, but they're pretty priceless when they do. I mean to say, when I thought of this scheme, I was lounging in the old study at St. Frank's. There I was, you know, gazing into the jolly old embers of the fire, and thinking of this and that. Then—zing! The good old scheme! Absolutely! It sort of buzzed along, and smote me one."

"And so you got up and 'phoned to the garage?" grinned De Valerie.

"Absolutely not," said Archie. "Dash it all, what about Phipps? I mean to say, what's the chappie for? I simply tickled the old bell, and Phipps oozed in, and the young master proceeded to instruct him."

Everybody chuckled. There were sixteen of us in the charabanc—the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, one or two reserves, and a few others. We had been to Hazlehurst College, and we had beaten the home team by the odd goal out of three. And so we were coming home feeling very pleased with ourselves.

In the ordinary course of circumstances we should have gone by train. But Archie Glenthorpe, who was simply rolling in

money, had hit on the idea of chartering a charabanc for the occasion. The expense was a mere detail to Archie. And it really gave him great pleasure to foot the bill.

The motor coach was not one of those heavy, lumbering affairs, but a modern fourteen-seater, with pneumatic tyres, and capable of developing a nice turn of speed. Our little party was very comfortable inside.

Well wrapped up, we were now speeding along the moonlit road—for it was evening, and we were due to be back at St. Frank's by about eight o'clock. We had stayed at Hazlehurst for tea.

"Upon the whole, we've done well," I said. "I didn't expect to win. With Jack Grey out of the team, I was half afraid that we should come a cropper. But all you others fellows played up like champions."

Handforth nodded.

"I don't want to boast, but I rather think that I saved the game," he observed. "Our backs were none too reliable——"

"What's that?" said the backs promptly.

"Anyhow, you let the Hazlehurst forwards get through at least a dozen times!" declared Handforth. "And there they were, bombarding the goal with hot shots by the ton! If I hadn't been smart, the ball would have been through time after time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you asses——"

"Sorry to disillusion you, Handy, but you seem to have got it wrong," I grinned. "As a matter of fact, I was particularly delighted with the defence. You did your part very well, but you were only called upon twice—once in the first half, and once in the second half. Our half-backs messed up the Hazlehurst movements so thoroughly that they never really got going."

"So that's that, what?" said Archie beamingly.

"You—you rotters!" snorted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I didn't expect anything else!" said Handforth bitterly. "That's all the thanks I get! I save the game—I hold the fort when everything else is lost—and then I don't get any credit!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"It's a hard case!" said Pitt solemnly.

"If I were you, Handy, I should do something about it. Why not punch a few noses, for example?"

"By George, I will!" roared Handforth.

Biff!

"Yaroooooh!" howled Pitt wildly.

Handforth had taken him at his word, and had started without any preliminaries. But that's about as far as he got, for Church and McClure and all the other fellows near by fell upon Edward Oswald, and held him down. And after that we were allowed to proceed in peace.

"I'm surprised at you, Handy!" I said severely. "Kicking up a fuss like this just when——"

Zzzzzuunurrrr!

There was a most extraordinary grating, grinding noise from beneath the body of the motor coach, just as though a gigantic thread was being stripped, or something of that sort. The coach itself quivered. Then the engine ceased its beat as the driver throttled down, and jammed the brakes on. We came to a halt on the side of the road.

"I mean to say, this is somewhat foul!" exclaimed Archie. "A break down, what? Various gears out of order, and all that kind of rot! Dash it all, what about it?"

"I don't think it's much, young gents," said the driver, as he climbed out of his seat. "Sounded like the back axle, but it won't take me long to make certain."

"If it's the back axle, we're in a bit of a pickle," I remarked. "It seems to me that something's gone wrong with the shaft drive."

The driver jumped out, and then he proceeded to make investigations. In the meantime, we all piled out on the hard road, too. And many of the fellows raced up and down in order to get thoroughly warm. They all believed that we should be moving again within a few minutes.

But I wasn't so confident.

I knew a decent bit about cars, and that sudden grind had not sounded at all healthy to my ears. I was anticipating that the driver would instruct us to walk.

Fortunately, we were not far away from civilisation. Frequently, mishaps of this kind occur miles from anywhere. But we were only just outside the town of Helmsford.

Indeed, we could see the lights gleaming in the valley just ahead.

"Well?" demanded Handforth, as he gazed under the coach. "You're taking your time! Being a driver, you ought to locate the trouble in about five seconds! How much longer are you going to keep us here?"

The driver climbed out, greasy and concerned.

"I'm sorry, young gents, but it's real serious," he said. "I'm afraid we can't get any further!"

"What!"

"Can't get any further!"

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "That is, gadzooks and all that kind of stuff! I mean to say, this is about the absolute limit. Here we are, as it were, positively stranded on the old turnpike. Alone and forsaken, and the old coach refuses to buzz! The mind absolutely reels under the picture. Pray have another look, old dear."

The driver shook his head.

"It wouldn't be a bit of use, sir," he said. "The young gent, was right at first—there's something wrong with the shaft drive—I believe she's snapped, or something like that. Anyhow, we're stranded. The only way to get the old 'bus home will be to take her in tow!"

"What!" said Archie faintly. "Do you

absolutely mean to say that we've got to pull the bally thing along?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, Archie. He means that another car will come and do that," I grinned.

"Oh, that's priceless!" said Archie, with relief. "A few loads of thanks, old tulip! Well, there you are! I mean to say, nothing to grumble about, what? We've simply got to pile in, and wait for the other car to come dashing along."

"I'm afraid we can't do that, sir," said the driver. "It's very doubtful if I shall be able to get a car to-night. About the only thing will be to push the coach on to the grass, and leave her there. We shall have to walk it to Helmsford."

"That's cheerful!" said Pitt.

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "That is, absolutely the reverse. Dash it all, a chappie isn't cheered when he hears pretty ghastly news of that kind! So we've got to walk into Helmsford! How poisonous!"

"Well, it's not far—that's one thing," I said. "And accidents will happen, old man. We must think ourselves lucky that we weren't left stranded three or four miles back."

"Rather!" said Pitt. "It's only about a couple of miles into Helmsford. And we're bound to get a train from there."

In the end, we all helped the worried driver to push his coach on to the wide stretch of grass which bordered the road. Then, leaving him there, we shouldered our various packages—bags containing football togs, etc.—and set off towards Helmsford.

Upon the whole, we quite enjoyed that walk.

We sang songs, and whistled, and we were in Helmsford almost before we realised it. And the time was just after seven o'clock. After all, there was nothing whatever to worry about, and we were very cheerful.

The station was situated near the edge of the town, and we came upon it first of all. This was most satisfactory, as it lessened our walk. But we were not particularly delighted when we made inquiries.

For we were informed that there was no train to Bannington or Bellton until nine-forty.

"Great Scott!" said De Valerie. "What a service! Nine-forty! Why, that means getting home long after ten!"

"We shall be lucky if we roll in by eleven!" I exclaimed. "But you needn't worry. The best thing we can do is to ring up St. Frank's. I'll explain to the guv'nor, over the 'phone, and they won't expect us until late."

"A sound scheme, laddie," said Archie.

It did not take me very long to get through, for the night was quiet.

By a piece of luck, I was able to get hold of Nelson Lee at once. I told him just what had happened, and he was full of sympathy, and told us not to worry in the slightest degree.

He promised that he would give in-

structions for Cuttle, the porter, to keep the gates open until we arrived. But he advised us to come home by any other means if we could possibly get there earlier.

We found no other means.

Archie was full of the idea of hiring a couple of cars. He had plenty of cash, and he was quite ready to whack it out. But to our astonishment, every car in the town seemed to be hired already.

We went to two or three garages, and heard the same story at each. There would be cars available on the morrow, but not to-day. Everything with a motor inside it was commandeered for the fight.

We heard nothing else but the fight everywhere we went. And then, as we got further into the town, we understood. At the big Helmford stadium, a particularly great attraction was provided.

"Why, it's Tony Lennox, the famous heavyweight!" I said enthusiastically. "He's one of the best sportsmen in the country—a clean boxer, and a good man. I say, I'd love to see him, you know."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "What about it?"

"Do you think we can risk it?" asked Tommy Watson dubiously.

"Risk it?" I repeated. "Where's the risk?"

"But the Head might get to know——"

"Well, supposing he did?" I asked. "There's nothing particularly sinful in seeing a boxing match, I suppose? Don't we have boxing at St. Frank's? It might do us all good to see a really first-class exhibition. Anyhow, we'll go along and see if there are any seats left."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "And I'll pay the exes."

"It's jolly good of you old man, but we can't allow that," I said. "We'll all pay our own——"

"Will we?" said Church. "I'm stony!"

"That looks rather bad for you!" I chuckled. "Still, we'll adjust all those little details later on. Buck up!"

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Handforth. "I'm as keen as anybody else on this thing. But what about the train? We can't lose it, you know, and the big fight might not come on until half-past nine——"

"Cheer up; it comes on at eight o'clock," I interrupted. "We shall only just get in in the nick of time. Put some speed on!"

And so, in a bunch, we made our way to the big building. And we were lucky enough to obtain seats in the first circle. They were a bit expensive, but Archie paid up handsomely. He insisted, in spite of all our protests. And thus, purely by chance, we found ourselves inside the Helmford Stadium. And when the two famous boxers came into the ring we had no idea that only a short distance above us, Fullwood and Co. were watching, too.

And we waited eagerly for the big fight to begin.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHALLENGE!



WE watched the preliminaries with very great interest.

Possibly, to anybody who is unfamiliar with boxing, these very preliminaries are rather tedious to behold. But to one who takes an active part in such sport it was quite the reverse.

"He's a fine-looking chap—Tony Lennox," said Tommy Watson. "About the body, anyway. Big, straight, and full of spring. I can't say that I care much for the appearance of his face."

I smiled.

"A professional boxer's face is generally a bit spoilt when it comes to beauty," I remarked. "I'm not interested in Tony's handsome points. I want to see how he shapes in the fight."

"Of course, he'll knock that bruiser flying," said Church.

"You never know, but he's got a fine record, and he's fighting to defend his title," I said. "Just one chance blow might spoil everything. Many of these contests are decided by a piece of luck."

It was not long before the audience sat forward with expectant eagerness. For the referee appeared, and then a few more interesting preliminaries were gone through. The two boxers were formally introduced, and the referee had one or two announcements to make.

The most interesting of all fairly thrilled the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," exclaimed the referee, in a clear voice, "a somewhat unusual challenge has come to hand. It arrived only half an hour ago, shortly before the two contestants left their dressing-rooms."

He paused, and unfolded a sheet of paper.

"This is the challenge in my hand now," he called out. "It is from a group of influential boxing promoters whose names are famous throughout the country. There can therefore be no question as to its bonafides. The challenge is from a man who prefers to be called 'The Boxing Unknown.'"

There was a stir.

"That sounds mysterious, you know," whispered Pitt. "I wonder who he can be, this Boxing Unknown."

"Goodness knows," said McClure.

"Shush!" breathed De Valerie. "Listen!" The referee was talking again.

"This challenge is for a purse of five hundred pounds, and it is the desire of the Boxing Unknown to meet the winner of to-night's fight."

"Good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I have departed slightly from the usual procedure, and both Mr. Lennox and Mr. Crake have agreed to the proposal," went on the referee. "The winner of to-night's fight will meet this Boxing Unknown."

"Hurrah!"

"Furthermore," said the referee, "you'll be all greatly interested to hear that this other contest will take place very shortly in this same hall. I cannot give the exact date, but that will be announced later."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Helmford!"

"It'll be a cert for Tony!"

"Hear, hear!"

The audience was buzzing with talk. The very mysterious nature of the whole affair made the matter most interesting.

Who was this fighter who preferred to be called the Boxing Unknown? Obviously, he was somebody of skill and standing, or the promoters would never have agreed to the thing.

It was quite possible, in fact, that all those connected with the fight knew the actual name.

"I expect it's merely a stunt," said Handforth. "That's about the size of it. Something to interest the public, so that they'll roll up in their thousands. I'll bet this unknown boxer is one of the usual crowd."

"There's no telling," I said. "Anyhow, we don't want to talk about it now. They're just getting busy."

"Good!"

"No we shall see something."

The last arrangements were being made, and, very soon afterwards, the gong sounded, and the two boxers sprang out from their corners.

The first round had commenced.

There was a great hush in the huge building, and all eyes were strained towards that glaringly illuminated square in the centre. Great arc lamps overhead cast their pitiless light down upon the two men. And, in the semi-stillness came the sound of clicking cinema cameras.

Hardly anybody spoke, and all watched.

Tony Lennox was a fine figure of a man, now that we could see him without his dressing-gown. We could easily understand why he was so famous. He had not lost a fight during the last year, and he was renowned throughout the world as being the most gentlemanly boxer in the ring.

There was a great contrast between him and Battling Jem.

The latter was coarse, ugly, and by the way he crouched, he looked almost deformed. In many ways Battling Jem was repulsive. The whole sympathy of the crowd was with Tony. It would be a terrible shame if this brute of a fellow defeated him.

Up in the balcony, Fullwood and Co. watched intently.

"I reckon our money is as good as made!" breathed Fullwood. "Just look at Jem's muscles! That bookie was right, you know! Jem's the winner of this fight—and he'll be



And passing beneath the lamp were three youthful figures, attired in tweed caps and overcoats. "Our cheery friends from Study A!" I chuckled.

quick about it, too. I don't give Lennox two rounds."

"He's been puffed up, but he's not much good," said Gulliver.

"That's about it," agreed Bell.

Nevertheless, they were rather anxious as they watched the opening exchanges. Tony Lennox appeared to be in no hurry. He was cool and calm, and his footwork was really delightful to watch. Battling Jem, on the other hand, moved with nervous, jumpy, strides.

It was clear to everybody that he was uncertain of himself.

Then Tony started.

Quick as a flash, he delivered a body blow which took Crake off his guard. Then, following it up, he drove his opponent across the ring, right to the further ropes.

Swish! Crash! Swish!

Quick as lightning, Tony's fists flashed out. But, although the blows he delivered were hard, Battling Jem did not seem to feel them. He staggered slightly, and then came on with a bulldog determination. Again and again he struck out, vainly attempting to smash his way through Tony's guard.

It was like attacking a brick wall.

The champion hardly budged. Every thrust he swept aside with supreme ease. Then, with a catlike movement to the left, he dodged round, and delivered a swinging uppercut which caused Battling Jem to sway badly. But here Jem displayed a touch of real cleverness.

While he still appeared to stagger, he recovered himself—a wonderful effort. And in one swift lunge he was forward. His fists swept out, and Tony received two heavy body blows, and a drive to the jaw which sent him to the boards.

"Oh!"

"He's down!"

Battling Jem went to take advantage of his opening. But Tony was on his feet now, and he seemed just as cool and calm as ever. But that blow had shaken him up considerably, and it was obviously a relief to both the boxers when the gong sounded.

The first round was over.

"Jolly good!" said Handforth approvingly.

"Of course, they don't know much about the game, strictly speaking. I could give 'em a few points——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Instead of going to it with a will, they simply mess about," went on Handforth, glaring. "Why, in that time I could have got in about twenty terrific sashes! I'm blessed if I can understand these professionals!"

And Handforth proceeded to enter into a long discourse on boxing—a discourse which nearly ended in a demonstration. For Church and McClure, becoming rather fed-up, attempted to restrain their leader.

Church, in fact, did actually receive a somewhat severe punch on the nose. But before Handforth could give any further exhibition, he was seized, and held down like a vice.

"You—you disturbing ass!" I hissed. "Keep still!"

"By George!" panted Handy. "I'll—I'll——"

"You'll be kicked out, unless you dry up!" I exclaimed. "They don't allow this kind of thing——"

"There goes the gong!" said Pitt.

I was immensely relieved, for Handforth became interested so abruptly that he completely forgot to carry out his threats. He sat there, gazing down upon the boxers, thrilled through and through.

There was much more life in this second round.

Both Tony and Jem awoke with a vengeance. Many blows were exchanged, but none of them were vital. It could be detected, however, that Tony was the master all the time. He was playing with Battling Jem—just waiting until the right opportunity came for him to deliver the knockout.

Upstairs, Fullwood and Co. were getting rather anxious.

"That bookie was a fool!" growled Fullwood savagely. "As far as I can see, Jem is just about as much good as Handforth would be! He's all brawn and no brains! He's had about twenty openings, and hasn't taken advantage of one! His wits must work like mud!"

"Give him a chance!" whispered Bell. "It's all very well to criticise, but—— By gad! Did you see that?"

They watched, entranced.

The round was nearly over. And Battling Jem suddenly lunged in when nobody seemed to expect it. His ugly left came round, and it seemed as though Tony Lennox was to be sent to the floor once again. But the champion gave one slight movement of his head. It was so slight that only a few people saw it.

Jem's fist missed by a fraction of an inch. He lurched forward, and Tony Lennox seized his opportunity.

Crash!

He delivered a right uppercut, which fairly lifted Battling Jem off his feet. The way in which the man crumpled up was almost comical. He sagged at the knees, staggered back, and collapsed.

"He's down!"

"Tony wins—Tony wins!"

"One—two—three—four——" counted the referee.

But it was unnecessary. The gong came to the fallen man's aid. The round was over, and Jem was carried back into his corner, and his seconds proceeded to sponge him and massage him like men possessed.

And their services were of such good use that when the third round commenced Jem was practically recovered.

"It was a near shave, though!" I said. "I thought he was out all right. He was tremendously lucky to escape like that. Another five seconds and the fight would have been over."

It was quite clear now, that Battling Jem Crake was getting desperate. He began to fight wildly. And I honestly believe that Tony could have settled matters at any moment he liked. But he was just giving the audience something for their money.

And his boxing was delightful to watch. Certainly, Fullwood and Co. were not particularly delighted. They had wagered three pounds that Battling Jem would win—and they stood to gain fifteen. But it was a foregone conclusion that their money was lost.

Their wonderful information was not reliable.

And the Nuts of the Ancient House were furious.

"Wait till I see that bookie next time!" snapped Fullwood savagely. "I'll tell him off as he's never been told before! Givin' us a tip like that, and tellin' us to make bets!"

"We've simply chucked our money away!" growled Bell.

"It was your fault, Fully!" declared Gulliver. "I didn't want to touch the thing at all. But you're always keen on——"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Fullwood sourly. "It's no good blamin' me!"

"Not much!" growled Gulliver. "We're not likely to see any of our money, anyway. I'm beginnin' to think, Fully, that you ain't so jolly smart as you used to be. This business is a proper frost!"

"Will you shut up?" hissed Fullwood.

They continued watching the contest.

But they had practically lost interest now. After all, it was not very alluring to see their own man being driven round the ring, hopelessly defeated. For there was now no question as to Battling Jem's position.

He stood no chance whatever.

The fight continued until the fifth round. And, during this time, there was certainly some very excellent boxing to watch—most of this being provided by Tony Lennox. The champion had a delightful style, and all his movements were interesting to those who understood the real art of boxing.

But the end was inevitable.

Nearly at the end of the fifth round, Battling Jem made one tremendous effort to smash down his opponent's defence. Crake attempted to win by sheer force—by an exhibition of deliberate brutality. It was a fatal mistake. Not one of his blows found their mark.

And the cool Tony Lennox, seizing his opening, delivered one swift blow, with the force of a steam-hammer behind it, and it landed upon Battling Jem's mark. The way in which Jem went over was astonishing.

He only moved twice during the count—a feeble kind of attempt to get up. There was no question about the complete nature of the knock-out. Tony Lennox had won—he had defended his title, and he was still the champion.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Tony!"

"The best man wins!"

"Rather!"

Practically all the members of the audience decided that the fight was a good one, and that they had had their full money's worth.

"Well, we've spent the time all right, anyhow," said Handforth, as soon as the referee had given his decision. "There's still plenty of time to catch the train, and——"

"There won't be plenty of time if you start arguing," said Church. "That's one of your failings, old man. It wouldn't surprise me if you suddenly went off into a long discussion about Tony Lennox and Battling Jem. Personally, I think that Crake was a washout!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed McClure. "It was Tony's fight all the time."

"Of course it was; everybody knows that," said Handforth. "But what I want

to know is, who's this mysterious Unknown?"

"Ah!" put in Pitt. "Who is he?"

"Do you know?" demanded Handforth.

"My dear chap, I haven't the faintest idea," smiled Pitt. "If everybody knew a thing like that, the Unknown wouldn't be an Unknown at all. But it's a good stunt, you know."

"That's about the right word," remarked De Valerie. "I believe the whole thing is a stunt—just for the sake of attracting the public."

"Well, it looks like it," I put in. "There's no telling what these promoters will get up to. Anyhow, the thing's worked. Because I'd love to be here to see this other fight."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Tony Lennox versus the Boxing Unknown, what? I mean to say, it sounds dashed alluring, and all that kind of rot. Absolutely! But what about it, laddies? Don't you think we'd better trickle forth?"

"I do!" I replied. "If we lose that train we shall have to walk home!"

And we all left the large building in a body, fully satisfied. We were feeling rather glad, in fact, that the charabanc had broken down. For, owing to that little accident, we had been enabled to see this contest.

Little did we imagine what was to come later!

CHAPTER IV.

VERY SIGNIFICANT!



"TWENTY past nine!" said Handforth, as he looked up at the town hall clock.

"Oh, we've got tons of time. Twenty minutes to get to the station, and it's only seven minutes' walk, at the most."

"We shall do it comfortably," said Church. "Well, I must say that I enjoyed the affair pretty well. It only shows that it won't do to grumble when accidents happen. You never know what they might lead to."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, those priceless chappies within the jolly old ropes were dashed good. That is to say, they provided a few hundred thrills, and what not! Of course, boxing is a ripping sport, but it seems to be fearfully rough."

"Why, these men were gentle—at least, Tony Lennox was," said Pitt. "And he didn't show a mark at the end, either. My hat! He's one of the cleverest boxers I've ever seen!"

"I rather pity this Unknown!" grinned De Valerie.

"He won't stand much of a chance; but it'll draw the crowd," I said. "As for Archie saying that——"

"What-ho! What-ho!" interrupted Glen-thorne.

"Anything the matter?"

"It may be a delusion, old lads, and it's

quite possible that the optic nerves are out of condish!" replied Archie. "But, dash it all, it seems to me that those chappies over there are somewhat familiar." "Eh?"

Several of us turned, and looked across the road. We ourselves were just in a dark patch, where we were almost hidden. But there was a big electric standard on the other side of the street.

And passing beneath it were three figures—three youthful figures, attired in tweed caps and overcoats. One glance was quite sufficient for me. I couldn't help grinning.

"Our cheery friends from Study A!" I chuckled.

"What, Fullwood and Co.?"

"Yes; and they look as though they've got to walk home," I said. "Did you ever see such a gloomy looking set? They've got faces a mile long; and I'll bet they're squabbling. There you are! Can't you hear?"

Across the street came the faint sounds of heated argument.

"Serves them jolly well right!" said Handforth warmly. "They've been betting, I expect—gambling their money—and they've lost! I've a good mind to go over, and slosh them!"

"Better not, Handy; we mustn't lose that train," I said. "Come on; we'll let Fullwood and Co. look after themselves. We might see something of them at the station—unless they came on their bikes."

It rather amused us to see Fullwood and Co. in such a plight. Somehow or other, the cads of the Ancient House were always going wrong in their speculations. They thought themselves to be so extremely clever—and yet all the time they were precisely the opposite.

And experience never seemed to teach them.

The Nuts did not see us. They were so engrossed in their own affairs that they had no knowledge of our presence in the town. And they made their way towards the place where they had left their bicycles, and got them out. The prospect of a twenty mile ride home did not appeal to them. A chill wind had sprung up, and it promised to be dead in their faces.

"This is what comes of adoptin' your lovely ideas!" exclaimed Gulliver bitterly. "Twenty miles home, an' then we shall probably be flogged! The rotten fight wasn't worth it!"

"I should think it wasn't!" said Bell.

"Nobody asked you to come!" snapped Fullwood. "All you fellows can do is to turn on me if things don't go exactly right. Fine sportsmen, ain't you? Why, you're just about as—"

"Oh, don't argue!" put in Gulliver. "That won't do any good. But the next time I put any money on a boxing match I'll get some good advice!"

Fullwood glared.

"You needn't grumble!" he snapped.

"You only lost ten bob, but I'm two quid down. You don't hear me snarlin' about over nothin'! What's the good of cryin' over spilt milk?"

"Oh, let's get goin'!" said Bell gruffly.

"That's the first sensible remark you've made this evenin'!" said Fullwood. "The sooner we can get back the better. By gad! What's the idea of us snappin' our heads off? We're all in the same cart, ain't we? Just because we're wild with that bookie, for givin' us a dud tip, it doesn't mean that we should snap one another's heads off."

Gulliver couldn't help grinning.

"That's just about right," he agreed.

"It's simply dotty of us to squabble among ourselves. All right, old son. Let's try and be cheerful, and we shall do the ride all the better."

"That's the idea," agreed Fullwood, as he buttoned up his jacket. "I wonder who this mysterious Unknown can be? I've been thinkin', you know. If we can possibly get over for that next fight—"

"Not likely!" interrupted Bell. "Once is enough for me."

"Same here!"

"Oh, we won't have any bets next time," said Fullwood. "But it'll be worth comin' over, to see the fight, an' also to find out who this unknown boxer is. I don't mind admittin' I'm pretty curious."

"Oh, well, we needn't discuss that now," said Bell. "The main thing is to be off. It'll take us an hour and a half—"

"Hallo!" put in Gulliver, staring along the street. "Who the deuce—Why, that man looks familiar—Great Scott!"

He ended up in a gasp, and clutched at his chums.

"What's the matter, you ass?" demanded Fullwood.

"Quick—dodge back!" hissed Gulliver.

"It's Clifford!"

"Clifford!"

"Yes; comin' right over this way!"

The three juniors suddenly burst into remarkable activity. They yanked their bicycles back, and in less than a dozen seconds they were hidden in a kind of alley, where there were no lights.

But, from this point of vantage, they could see clearly into the electrically lit High Street. And they watched the two figures who were now coming along in fairly close proximity.

And one of them was certainly familiar.

He was, in short, no less a person than Mr. Harold Clifford—the sports master at St. Frank's. Mr. Clifford was, comparatively speaking, a newcomer to the old school.

But he was already popular among all the decent fellows. For he was a sportsman, a genial man to talk to, and he understood boys in a really remarkable way. He had a certain knack of dealing with the chaps which was always successful.

And here he was—in Helmsford.

This, after all, was not so very remark-

able. Being a sports master, and an expert in boxing, it was only natural that Mr. Clifford should have come here in order to witness the contest. But it would not be very pleasant for Fullwood and Co. if he saw them.

And so they remained quite still, hoping that they would not be seen.

And then Fullwood caught his breath in.

For the two men had paused under one of the big electric light standards. They shook hands. And the Nuts of the Ancient House could see that the second man was the referee who had presided at the stadium.

This seemed rather significant. At least, Fullwood thought so. Gulliver and Bell were too anxious to use their wits much. They only wanted Mr. Clifford to clear out of the way.

"Very well, Mr. Clifford; it's fixed," the referee was saying. "I'll see the gentleman for you, and let you know later. But you can be quite certain that everything will be all right."

"Thanks, Mr. Wrench," said the sports master. "I'll leave the whole thing in your hands. Good-night— Oh, yes, of course. Yes, that's right! Good-night!"

They parted company, and Mr. Clifford went striding along with his swinging, easy gait.

Fullwood and Co. breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness!" said Gulliver.

"He's gone—an' he didn't spot us!" muttered Bell. "Fancy him bein' here to-night!"

"Under the cires.. it's not at all surprisin'," remarked Fullwood.

"You mean he came to see the match?"

"More than that."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear chap, haven't you got any brains?" asked Fullwood. "Can't you put two-an'-two together? By gad! This is the biggest thing that ever happened—if we only deal with it properly."

"I don't know what you're gassin' about," said Bell.

"Look here. Clifford's a great boxin' chap, isn't he?" asked Fullwood.

"Of course he is."

"He makes a speciality of that sort of thing?"

"You know he does?"

"An' he's big—a burly chap——"

"Oh, my hat!" interrupted Gulliver. "What on earth are you tryin' to get at? Of course he's big. If he was to go into the ring he'd be classed as a heavyweight. He's about the same size as Tony Lennox or Battling Jem."

"That's right," said Fullwood. "An' he was just havin' a confidential chat with the man who refereed the fight. The referee said he'd fix things up, and then let Mr. Clifford know. It's as plain as daylight."

"What is, you exasperating ass?" demanded Bell tartly.

"Look here, my sons," whispered Full-

wood. "We're in the know here—absolutely right in! What about this unknown boxer? A challenge comes, an' no name is mentioned. An' we find Mr. Clifford havin' a quiet chat with——"

"But—but——"

Gulliver broke off, his jaw gaping.

"Exactly!" grinned Fullwood.

"You mean that Clifford is the Boxin' Unknown?" gasped Bell.

"Of course!"

Fullwood's chums looked utterly bewildered.

"My only hat!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

"I don't usually jump to conclusions, but there's no jumpin' about this," said Fullwood. "It's as clear as crystal. Of course, Clifford can't possibly give his real name, or appear as himself, because he's a master at a public school. It would be a terrific disgrace for St. Frank's if he let it out. But he must be hard up, an' wants a share of the purse."

"He'll never beat Tony Lennox," said Bell.

"What does that matter?" grinned Fullwood. "The main thing is to get the public interested. An' it's not only the winner who benefits in these fights. Sometimes the loser gets the bigger share. Of course, Lennox will collar three parts of it this time, but a thousand or two will come in jolly handy for a miserable sports master!"

"By George!" exclaimed Gulliver. "We might be able to work somethin'!"

"Might!" echoed Fullwood. "My sons, we're goin' to work somethin'!"

"How do you mean?"

"We came to this place to see Lennox and Battlin' Jem," replied Fullwood. "We dropped a bit of money on the fight, but that doesn't matter a toss now. Because we shall collect together a nice round sum from this other business. If Clifford thinks he can choke us off, he'll make a mistake."

"But—but we can't tell him that we know——"

"Leave it to me," interrupted Fullwood. "I know what I shall do. Clifford is gettin' a big prize out of this fight, an' you can be quite sure that he won't drop it in a hurry. If we go to work in the right way, we'll get our share. He's absolutely in our hands. We've only got to tell the Head, an' it'll be the sack for him."

"My hat, yes!" said Bell. "It's a chance!"

And the three rascals of the Ancient House mounted their bicycles, and sped through the streets of Helmsford. They had more heart for the ride now, and they put all their strength into their pedalling.

And, in the meantime, Mr. Clifford strode briskly into the station.

And, incidentally, he strode briskly into a crowd of juniors who were talking together in the booking-office.

Mr. Clifford had no time to back away, even if he had wanted to do so. For we recognised him at the same moment. The

sports master came to a halt. Just for a flash there was an expression of surprise in his eyes—or it might have been consternation.

Then he smiled in his usual genial way, and came forward.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING FOR THE NUTS!



MR. CLIFFORD regarded us all as he came to a halt.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed.

"What's the meaning of this, boys? Fifteen or sixteen of you in Helmford—twenty miles from St. Frank's at this time of night! What on earth have you been doing?"

"We played Hazlehurst College this afternoon, sir," I explained.

"And does it generally take you all this time to get home?"

"Absolutely not, old darling!" put in Archie. "I mean to say, the fact is, we came along in one of those dashed coach things, don't you know. But this went wrong and that went wrong, and we were fairly stranded."

"Oh, your car broke down, eh?" said the sports master. "If you have a good excuse of that kind, I daresay everything will be all right."

"You needn't worry, sir," I smiled. "We telephoned to Mr. Lee as soon as the accident happened. He told us to go home by train—and this is the first one we could get."

"Have you been waiting here long?"

"No, sir."

"And what time did the mishap occur?"

"Oh, soon after seven, sir," I said. "This was the first available train. We passed the time away by having a look at the boxing match, sir, at the stadium."

"Oh, indeed," ejaculated Mr. Clifford sharply.

"No harm in that, sir, was there?"

The sports master smiled in a quick, forced kind of way.

"Not at all—not at all!" he said hastily. "In fact, I quite approve. You couldn't have done better, my lads. You probably saw some excellent boxing. In fact, I'm sure you did."

I grinned.

"I suppose you were at the fight, sir?" I asked.

"Well—between ourselves, yes," admitted the sports master. "I didn't anticipate that any of you youngsters would be on the spot. Still, there's no harm done."

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"What did you think of Tony Lennox, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Oh, he was pretty fair," said Mr. Clifford.

"Pretty fair!" echoed De Valerie. "Oh, I say, sir. I thought he was great—one of the finest boxers I've ever seen! He was master of the situation all the time, and had his man measured up right from the very start."

"It certainly seemed to be that way," said Mr. Clifford. "But, of course, Tony is a well-known boxer. He has his reputation to think of, and—well, I hardly think Crake was a match for him."

"Of course he wasn't a match, sir," declared Pitt. "Why, Tony is absolutely a gentleman in comparison. I've never seen lovelier footwork. By the way, sir, were you there when they made that announcement about the challenge?"

"I was."

"What do you think about it, sir?"

"Well, to be quite candid, I was interested," said Mr. Clifford.

"I wonder who this Unknown Boxer can be, sir?" said De Valerie.

Mr. Clifford smiled in a curious way.

"Who knows?" he said vaguely.

I couldn't quite understand him, and I was about to ask if he had any special information, when the ticket-collector advised us to get on the platform, as the train was just coming in.

Mr. Clifford did not travel with us. He got into a smoking compartment by himself, and this was a clear indication that he was inclined to travel alone. And so I had no opportunity of putting a few more questions.

The train was a fast one to Bannington, and the journey was only comparatively short. But by the time we arrived at St. Frank's the hour was getting late. All the fellows had gone to bed, and the school was looking dark and quiet.

However, Nelson Lee knew what time we should arrive, and he was waiting to let us in. The gov'nor was quite reasonable. He heard our explanation, and then smilingly bade us good-night, and we hurried up to the dormitory.

Nelson Lee had asked us a few questions concerning Fullwood and Co. We explained that the chums of Study A had not been with us—but we omitted to mention that we had seen the Nuts in Helmford.

They would probably get into trouble without our assistance. And it was not our habit to sneak.

"I expect the silly asses are coming on their bikes," said Pitt. "They won't be in for over half-an-hour yet. They're bound to catch it pretty warm, because they'll have no proper excuse. Still, that's their lookout. If they ask for trouble, they can't grumble for getting it."

And, in a very short time, we were all in bed.

Even while we were snuggling down between the sheets and blankets, three weary

figures arrived at the school gateway. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell had turned up.

And they certainly looked as though they had been passing through a rather bad time. The front wheel of one of the bicycles was buckled up to such an extent that the machine had to be carried.

"Everything seems to be quiet!" muttered Fullwood. "The best thing we can do is to hoist the jiggers over the wall, and then slip them into the shed. There's no tellin'—we may get in without anybody knowing."

"That's very likely—I don't think!" said Bell. "You can bet that Mr. Lee's on the watch, or somebody else."

"Still, we're not goin' to ask for trouble," said Fullwood.

Very laboriously, and without making much sound, they hoisted the machines over the school wall at a point where it was comparatively low. Then, breathing hard from their exertions, they were just about to move across to the bicycle shed when a dim figure loomed up out of the shadows of the Triangle.

"Oh my hat!" murmured Gulliver. "Now for it!"

"Yes, there's no sense in bunkin'," breathed Ralph Leslie. "Don't forget the yarn—if we all stick to the same story, we're safe."

They waited, feeling quite certain that the figure was that of Nelson Lee. But Fullwood felt a kind of relief when he saw that the newcomer was Mr. Clifford, the sports master.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Clifford smoothly. "And what's the meaning of this, my lads? What's the idea of turning in at this time of night?"

"We had a break-down, sir," said Fullwood.

"Miles away, sir," said Bell.

"My front wheel busted up, sir," put in Gulliver.

"And is it usual for you to lift your machines over the wall?" inquired Mr. Clifford. "Personally, I thought the work to be rather unnecessary—particularly as the gate happens to be unlocked."

Fullwood grunted.

"We thought it was all secured, sir," he said. "If possible, we wanted to get in without disturbin' anybody."

"That was very thoughtful of you, but I hardly imagine that you will be successful," said Mr. Clifford. "Indeed, I have an idea that Mr. Lee is waiting for you indoors. But before you go in, I would like to have a few words."

"What about, sir?"

"Where have you been?" asked the sports master.

"We went out for a ride in the evenin', sir, an' on the way-home Gulliver's front wheel buckled up," explained Fullwood.

"We couldn't leave him stranded, sir, so we walked home with him—nearly ten miles."



Very laboriously, and without making much sound, they hoisted the machines over the school wall at a point where it was comparatively low.

"From which direction?"

"Oh—er—from Caistowe, sir," said Fullwood hastily.

"That's right, sir," agreed Gulliver and Bell.

"Caistowe is not ten miles away."

"We—we came round by Midshott, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Clifford drily. "I had an idea that Midshott was in a totally different direction. However, we will let that pass for the moment. Do you realise boys, that the hour is very late?"

"We didn't exactly know the time, sir," said Fullwood.

"And yet you are all wearing watches," said the sportsmaster. "And how is it that the extremely sensible idea of sending one ahead did not occur to you. Surely one of your number could have come on in advance, explaining the mishap, so that there would be no misunderstanding?"

Fullwood thought that it was time to be indignant.

"Look here, sir," he said truculently. "Are you tryin' to make out that we're not tellin' the truth?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Clifford.

"But—but—"

"To be exact, Fullwood, this story of yours concerning a bicycle accident is a pure fabrication," declared Mr. Clifford.

Fullwood flushed.

"Do you call me a liar, sir?" he shouted.

"Yes!" snapped the master. "And I detest boys who lie!"

There was something so different in his tone that the Nuts of Study A stood still staring at him rather blankly. But Fullwood was not beaten yet. He had maintained that the only thing was to bluff the story out.

"I think it's a bit thick, sir, to accuse us like this!" he said hotly. "Surely we ought to know where we've been to—"

"One moment," interrupted the master. "Were you, by any chance, in the town of Helmford this evening?"

"Oh!" said Gulliver and Bell.

"No, sir," declared Fullwood firmly.

"You positively state that you were not?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I shall take care that you are very severely punished for telling a deliberate falsehood," rapped out Mr. Clifford. "It so happens, Fullwood, that I saw you in Helmford with my own eyes."

Ralph Leslie was rather taken aback—but only for a moment.

"It's always possible to make a mistake, sir," he said. "We haven't been near Helmford—"

"Enough!" broke in the master. "You were not only in Helmford, but you were actually in the balcony of the stadium—witnessing a boxing exhibition. Do you dare to deny the truth of this?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fullwood promptly.

"Upon my soul!" said Mr. Clifford. "Your audacity is remarkable."

"In any case, sir, what were you doing in the stadium?" sneered Fullwood.

"That is no business of yours!" retorted Mr. Clifford, biting his lip. "And since it is impossible to get any truth out of you, I will question your companions. I must warn you, Fullwood, that it is quite useless for you to nudge Gulliver in that suggestive manner."

Gulliver gulped, and gazed at Mr. Clifford nervously.

"We—we didn't go near Helmford, sir—" he began.

"I think it will be better for you to wait until I question you," said Mr. Clifford.

"Were you in the Helmford Stadium this evening, Gulliver?"

"Nunno, sir," said Gulliver hastily. "We—we went for a bike ride, and went to Mid-Shott and Little Hadlow—I—I mean we didn't go near Little Hadlow at all, sir, an' we only passed through Helmford by chance—Yaroooh!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Clifford. "What is the meaning of that extraordinary noise?"

Gulliver hopped about on one foot.

"Just—just a twinge, sir," he panted.

"Caused, no doubt, by Fullwood treading on your toe?" suggested Mr. Clifford. "I think we have wasted quite sufficient time, boys. I am satisfied that you have told me an utterly false story, and I shall punish you accordingly. You visited the Helmford Stadium this evening for the purpose of witnessing the fight between Lennox and Crake. That, in itself, was no crime—but, knowing your propensity for gambling, I have not the slightest doubt that you were there for the purpose of betting. I intend to cane you all."

"Oh!" snapped Fullwood. "An' why?"

"For telling a string of well calculated lies," replied Mr. Clifford curtly. "I will say nothing about your visit to the boxing match—that, in itself, was no offence. You will all follow me to the gymnasium."

"Look here, sir—"

"Follow!" rapped out Mr. Clifford.

And his tone was so ominous that the Nuts could do nothing but obey. Fullwood was feeling desperate. He knew for an absolute fact that Mr. Clifford was the mysterious Boxing Unknown—the man who had challenged the winner of the Helmford fight.

And it was on the tip of Fullwood's tongue to broach the subject now—hoping that it would serve to stay the forthcoming flogging. But, after a moment's consideration Fullwood decided to wait.

His time would come later.

Mr. Clifford entered the gymnasium, and the Nuts followed. It is not absolutely necessary to go into close details of the ensuing episode. It is quite sufficient to say that when Fullwood and Co. emerged they held their hands under their arms, and they walked in a peculiar crab-like fashion. And they were all red with fury and pain. Mr. Clifford had done his work well.

Further, he had made three vindictive young enemies—not that he cared a jot about this. His opinion of Fullwood and Co. was of a very low order.

The three juniors crawled into the Ancient House, and met Nelson Lee in the lobby. To their horror, he was carrying a cane, too.

Fullwood gave him no chance to start questioning.

"We've got a complaint to make, sir!" he burst out.

"Oh, indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "What do you mean, Fullwood?"

"Against Mr. Clifford, sir!" shouted Fullwood furiously. "We were out cyclin' this evenin', an' we met with an accident. As soon as we got in Mr. Clifford jumped on us, and flogged us!"

Nelson Lee frowned.

"It is not my usual habit to listen to complaints against masters!" he said curtly.

"If you have been flogged by Mr. Clifford, I

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HOLDRON tapped his desk peremptorily with a lean forefinger. He was a hard-eyed man with prominent cheek-bones, and his voice rasped.

"That's nothing to do with you," he said brusquely. "I only want you to recover the papers or to indicate the man who stole them, and I will do the rest. That's why I'm paying you a big fee instead of calling in the official police."

Weir Menzies shrugged his shoulders.

"It's asking me to work in the dark," he grumbled. "If you were ill you'd expect to tell your doctor all your symptoms. You'd confide in your lawyer if you had any legal business."

"I'm not going to argue about it," said Holdron sharply. "I hire you on my terms or not at all."

There was an atmosphere of ponderous placidity about Weir Menzies which was apt to deceive those who were not familiar with him. Portly, prosperous looking, with a heavy black moustache and a ruddy, genial face, he was obviously of the middle classes. One might have considered him a tradesman of moderate business astuteness—certainly not a man of specially subtle brain or resource. Yet Menzies, senior partner in the private inquiry firm of Menzies and Spink, had a reputation as well earned as the pension he enjoyed as chief inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department. A hard man and a tenacious man, in spite of the fact that he was a churchwarden at Tooting and spoken of in municipal circles as a coming borough councillor.

"I'd take it easy if I were you," he warned icily. "I'm not that kind of private inquiry agent. If you want to rush me

into something blindfold, I've got to be careful. I'm not dirtying my fingers. And remember, Mr. Man, I'm not a junior clerk in your city offices."

The other abruptly twisted round his padded chair, and his harsh, astonished gaze met the level eyes of the detective.

Suddenly he gave a short laugh.

"You're right, Mr. Menzies. I apologise. I forgot you were in a way my guest. I am rather worried over this business, and it's got on my nerves."

The detective nodded imperturbably.

"I only want to be treated right," he went on mildly. "You've dragged me fifty miles down here by motor-car leaving me to name my own fee, so that whatever you've got on is pretty urgent. I know now that your safe"—he jerked his head to a big steel vault built into the wall—"was opened between ten and midnight by someone who had evidently got the combination. I know that some papers have been taken, and you say it's not necessary that I should know what they are. Now you suppose burglary, because there are footprints leading from beneath this window to and from the stables, where there was a ladder. I don't say you're not right, but if you don't give me a hint of what was taken, how can I guess at any motive?"

Holdron stroked one eyebrow with a pen-holder.

"There's the footprints," he suggested. "There's a start."

A flicker of irritability passed across the detective's face.

"I don't keep a pocket-register of footprints," he retorted. "You've a dozen guests in your house-party and a score of servants in the house beside outsiders. Do

you want me to collect all their boots? Give me a reason why someone should want those papers, and I'll be that much nearer to saying who it was."

He was getting annoyed at the way the point was continually parried. He knew nothing about Alfred Holdron save that he had some kind of financial and export business in the City, and was apparently a wealthy man, to judge by the style in which he was entertaining at his country house. But even wealthy City men have skeletons in cupboards, and Menzies was wary. Private inquiry agents have more than once been engaged to find out exactly what their employers have arranged they should find out.

"How do you know that I suspect someone in the house?" demanded Holdron.

"Since the combination was used you could hardly avoid it," said Menzies dryly. "Perhaps it would be as well if we went into the question of these papers."

His client let his gaze wander thoughtfully through the broad windows on to the trim grounds. He had completely dropped his arrogant, curt air.

"No outsider knew I had those documents," he said at last, "and to the ordinary person they would be a meaningless string of letters and figures. They were in cipher, and I had intended to decode them this morning." His eyes narrowed. "They were of supreme importance in certain business negotiations in which I am concerned."

He rose and paced the room uneasily, his feet making no sound on the thick carpet.

"There was a number of banknotes in that safe lying with the papers. That must have been the real object of the theft. As you say, there was obvious collusion."

"Let's be clear about this, then," said Menzies, speaking with precision. "I can't act in leading-strings. You must give me a free hand."

"Certainly. So long as you point out the thief to me and keep your mouth shut I don't care how you do it."

Weir Menzies wore a frown when he emerged from the library. Somehow he distrusted Holdron, and yet beyond his first lack of candour about the contents of the missing ciphers there was no tangible reason why he should do so. The suspicion that he was being used as a tool for a crooked purpose would persist at the back of his mind. Yet, after all, if he were to refuse lucrative commissions on instinctive prejudice he might as well give up his profession.

For the time being Holdron was his employer, and he had to earn his pay. He resolutely bent his thoughts on the definite problem. All that Holdron could tell, or would tell, about his guests or servants had been reduced to a few Greek notes on the back of an envelope. It was a long-standing habit with Menzies to make his notes in Greek. In case of loss, the odds were against the finder being able to understand them.

He had refused Holdron's company while he inspected the footprints, and he stood for a while looking thoughtfully down on the flower border in which the first two or three were embedded—heavy, obviously men's, tracks showing as distinctly in the soft earth as though picked out in plaster of Paris. Slowly he followed their course round to the stables—a matter of twenty yards—and then again he came to a halt, tilting his bowler hat and scratching his head with the brim.

Then a slow grim overspread his face. He knelt and took some measurements, and was entering them on his inevitable envelope when he became conscious of an on-looker.

A woman—she might fairly have been described as a girl—was watching him with frank curiosity. He saw a slim, grey figure with smiling, ingenuous eyes and a glory of fair hair. He raised his hat, and he caught a flash of white teeth.

"You are the detective from London, are you not?" she said. "Mr. Holdron told me you had arrived. I am Lady Malchester. Have I caught you in the act of detecting something? Have you?"—she breathed the words with an expression of mock awe—"got a clue?"

Now, Weir Menzies was a business man, and he liked his business taken seriously. Not that he had no sense of humour. He could stand ridicule as a part of the game, but he was thin skinned with outsiders. He bowed stiffly.

"I am pleased if my antics afford you any entertainment, madam," he said with frigidity.

Her big, grey eyes opened widely in hurt astonishment, like those of a child who has been sternly checked in an innocent amusement. Then the sunshine flashed into her face again.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "It was silly of me to question you, wasn't it?—only, you see, I'm so frightfully fascinated. I've read a lot about detectives, but I've never seen one at work before. Mr. Holdron was telling us at breakfast that he had sent for a man with a most tremendous reputation, and I guessed it was you directly I saw you looking at those footprints. You are Mr. Weir Menzies, aren't you?"

He had stood moodily with downcast gaze while she spoke, as though constrained only by politeness to listen to irrelevant chatter. Now he looked up and laughed.

"That's me," he agreed. "It's rather a disillusionment—eh? I'm not in disguise, and afraid I don't carry either a microscope or a revolver. In fact, Lady Malchester, practically the only tool I carry around with me is plain horse sense."

An idea had come to him that this ingenuous young lady was not quite so verdant as she seemed. He knew that Holdron had told his guests that the safe had been robbed—there had been no particular reason for keeping the disappearance of the bank-

notes secret—and that he had sent for Menzies. He had mentioned Lady Malchester's name to the detective in describing his guests—a society beauty, a young widow of a baronet with plenty of money, who spent a good deal of her time looking for new amusements.

"Not even handcuffs?" she said wistfully.

He shook his head.

"Not even handcuffs. They'd be a frightful nuisance."

"But the footprints," she persisted. "Don't tell me the footprints aren't a clue. You'll destroy my faith in fiction for ever and ever if you say that."

His face was solemn.

"I'll let you into a secret," he said portentously. "They are a clue. Men's boots, size 9, according to the tracks. You'll observe that the quality of the earth round this side of the house is different to anywhere else in the grounds. I have taken a sample of it, and I bribed the man who cleans the boots to scrape the mud of all the size 9's and put each sample in separate envelopes. Later, I shall send them all to an analyst to find the thief. I have already decided that he weighs 190 lb., and has black hair which he parts on the left. He has six buttons to his vest, and he is fond of lager."

"I believe you're making fun of me," she said doubtfully.

"I wouldn't dare," he declared. "Now, if you really would like to do me a favour, Lady Malchester, I want to measure how far it is from this ladder to that flower bed. Thank you so much."

He tied a knot in the string at a point which indicated the distance, and, coiling it, placed it in his pocket. "I have to go into the village now," he added. "I shall no doubt have the privilege of seeing you at lunch—if I can manage to get back in time."

She murmured an assent, and he strode away. Lady Malchester remained for a little while watching his retreating figure, and her grey eyes were more hard and less child-like.

"He's not altogether a fool," she murmured. Then, with a philosophic shake of the head: "A fool would be less easy to manipulate than a fairly clever man—and less fun."

There is a newspaper motto, much more closely observed in detective circles than in journalistic life—always verify your facts. Truth is a necessity for the detective, a handicap for the journalist. The foundations of a successful inquiry need more than a brilliant flash of inspiration or deduction. Though Weir Menzies believed he had got a glimmering of the truth, he was too old a hand to expect it to immediately unravel itself. It was probable that a good deal of heavy inquiry work would have to be done before he became clear about the case.

Certain crimes, as all criminologists know, fall into grooves. It is comparatively easy to eliminate those who, either through lack of

motive or lack of opportunity, could not have committed them. One can usually ignore a millionaire when investigating a case of pocket picking. An East End loafer would not be capable of a skilled forgery. Most classes of crime show in themselves a particular group among whom to look for the perpetrator.

Here, however, Weir Menzies, on the facts as he knew them, had no very definite arena of search. Holdron's theory, that the robber had only accidentally taken the cipher documents, might be perfectly sound. In that case most members of the house-party were probably above suspicion. On the other hand—and Menzies felt that it was strongly possible—the banknotes might have been taken merely as a blind. There are varying standards of honesty, and if the papers dealt with some big projected financial coup, the thief might just as likely be a peer of impeccable reputation as a professional burglar.

At a tiny village post-office, Menzies wrote a comprehensive wire to his partner in London. There was plenty of material in it to test the singularly complete organisation of their office, for it included a list of every one of Holdron's guests, with a request that as much detailed information as possible might be gathered about each one. It might have seemed superfluous that the detective laid some stress upon the name of his own employer.

As he emerged from the post-office a bronzed little man with a tooth-brush moustache and square shoulders met him in the doorway. He came to an abrupt halt.

"What the blazes are you doing in a hole like this, Mr. Menzies?"

Menzies grinned as he shook hands.

"I'm a freelance now, Captain Lockett. Able to pick and choose my jobs a little. If it comes to that, you are about the last man I should have expected to find here."

"Meaning I'm to mind my own business," grinned Lockett. "I'm doing a bit of fishing—got a bit run down, you know, so I thought I'd take a holiday."

"Queer time to take a holiday, isn't it? War and all that, you know."

It was Lockett's turn to grin.

"Oh, I don't know. Look me up if you're staying in the neighbourhood. I'm at the Dolphin."

"I certainly will if I get a chance. So long for now."

The detective strode out in the roadway with new food for thought. The presence of one of the keenest brains in the Intelligence Service in an obscure Hampshire village, while the greatest war in history was being waged, might be accounted for by a passion for fishing, but on the whole Menzies thought not. He wondered if it had anything to do with Holdron's case, whether the deal this client had mentioned had anything to do with the war. It was a possibility not to be lost sight of.

He reached the house half an hour before lunch, and the butler found in him a congenial spirit. Menzies had a faculty for friendliness when he cared to exert it, and he pressed into service an utterly fictitious relative who was bailiff to an earl. Many pumps work on the reciprocal principle. You must pour water down them first. Menzies made no attempt to conceal his identity, and poured a number of reminiscences confidentially into appreciative ears. In return he received a tolerable amount of gossip and scandal concerning Holdron and his friends—for an upper servant knows many things gathered from valets, maids, and keepers. The butler had no conception that he was being made a victim of Menzies' painless method of extracting information.

"There's the first lunch bell, Mr. Menzies." The butler felt himself justified in the subtle avoidance of "sir." Hadn't the detective practically admitted that they were on the same social level! "I suppose you'll be lunching upstairs?"

"I suppose so," agreed Menzies. "Just one moment, though, Mr. Wringley. I don't want to worry Mr. Holdron about this. I want to know exactly where everyone slept last night. Can you draw a rough plan for me, marking each room with the name of the occupant?"

Wringley agreed, and five minutes later Menzies, with the plan in his waistcoat pocket, was walking sedately upstairs. He met Holdron on the landing.

"Any luck?" demanded his client.

He shook his head.

"I can't tell yet. I may be closer up to-night. By the way, I may be a little late for lunch or I may not come down at all. I hope you won't mind?"

"Not at all," snapped Holdron, and with a curt nod resumed his descent.

Lady Malchester gave a gasp that resolved itself into a stifled cry, and her hand went to her heart. Menzies gave her credit for being genuinely startled—almost as startled as he was. He had just taken a pipe from one of the drawers of her dressing-table—a common, straight-stemmed silver-mounted briar pipe, and so quiet had been her entry that her cry was the first indication he had received of her presence.

He looked up quietly. So far from being disconcerted was he, that one might have imagined him engaged in a most commonplace act instead of being caught red-handed ransacking a lady's room.

"You—you blackguard!" she said tensely.

"Quite so," he agreed mildly. "I should come in and close the door if I were you. One cannot tell who may pass."

She pulled the door savagely open and stood defiantly with fists clenched, a dainty figure of wrath.

"I hope they will," she flamed. "You will perhaps be able to explain what you are doing here."

Impulsively she crossed the room, sweeping

disdainfully by him, and laid one hand on the bell. He wheeled to continue to face her, and smiled benevolently.

"You will find that bell act ever so much better if you press the push instead of the moulding," he commented dryly.

For an instant he thought she was going to strike him. Then she dropped her hand, and her face lost its passion. Her whole attitude changed.

Recrossing the room she slowly closed the door and answered his smile.

"Really, Mr. Menzies, it is difficult to lose one's temper with you. I ought really to call the servants and have you thrown out, and I can't tell why I don't, except that I'm curious. I may do it yet. Meanwhile, you might gratify my curiosity a little. I suppose I am what you would call a suspected person?"

He liked this attitude of hers somewhat less than that of lofty indignation. He prepared himself for more subtle tactics on her part than a crude bluff of anger. He toyed mechanically with the pipe.

"Undoubtedly," he said bluntly.

There was an open bureau to which he had already directed his attention. She stood with her back to it, placed both hands upon its surface and swung lightly to a seat, her satin-shod feet dangling. Laughing lightly she picked a scented cigarette from a box at her side, applied a light, and tried unsuccessfully to blow a smoke ring.

"So I'm a burglar, Mr. Menzies—a sort of Lady Raffles." Her gay eyes met his austere, ruddy face in mocking challenge. "Do you know I'm frightfully interested. What is the right thing to do? You must have had such a lot of experience in these cases. Do I go on my knees and beg you to spare me, or do you snap the handcuffs swiftly upon my wrists and hale me forthwith to the deepest dungeon of the village police-station? Or does the village police-station keep a dungeon? Perhaps the constable there uses a woodshed. I hope it isn't damp."

Her badinage embarrassed him more palpably than her unexpected entrance had done. She was something beyond his experience, and she was giving proof of a consummate nerve whether she was innocent or guilty. He had few doubts in his own mind upon that question. She must have suspected a possible search of her room, or she would not have returned so unexpectedly ten minutes after lunch had commenced. Nor would she have so calmly acquiesced in his presence there had she no sense of guilt.

"I shall put the facts before Mr. Holdron," he said stiffly. "It will be for him to decide what steps to take."

She laughed again.

"It will be a horrible scandal in high life, won't it? Only, of course"—she perched her head on one side like a bird—"you are quite certain about me. Do you know, in every detective novel I have ever read the hero—that's you—explains the steps by which he exposed the villain—that's me. I'd love to

hear how you penetrated my subtle machinations."

He frowned at her. After all, she was not a professional criminal. As a churchwarden and one of the pillars of a suburban constitutional club, Weir Menzies was a staunch believer that the upper classes were the salt of the nation. It pained him, it revolted his sense of womanliness, that she should meet the situation with flippancy. That was almost worse than being a thief. The scent of her cigarette irritated him.

"If you want to know," he said grudgingly, "it can't do any harm, as the rest of the facts are bound to come out. I know that you laid that trail of footsteps—you probably wore men's boots over your own."

She gurgled delightedly.

"How clever of you! How on earth did you get to know that?"

"It was plain enough for a child to see. The size of the tracks did not correspond to the length of the paces. That is where you made a mistake, Lady Malchester. You should have taken longer strides. It was quite clear that the trail had been faked for the purpose of a false scent. Then, again, you were altogether too interested when I was examining them. I had an idea then, and I got you to walk alongside the trail. The length of your stride corresponded exactly to that of the burglar."

"Wonderful!" she ejaculated. "I didn't expect to be run to earth so quickly and cleverly. But after all, Mr. Menzies, though I don't mind admitting to you that you're right—because I shall deny this conversation later on, and you've got no corroboration—it will be difficult to bring anything against me merely because my stride happens to be the same length as that of a supposed burglar." She shook a white forefinger at him. "If you say a word against me there's such a thing as an action for slander, you know."

"That is silly," he observed. "You must give me credit for a little common sense. For instance, this pipe." He held it up and tapped the stem lightly.

He thought he had scored a point. For a moment the mocking light deserted the grey eyes.

"I—I picked it up on the stairs this morning, and pushed it in the drawer, intending to give it to one of the servants to find the owner."

"I can save you that trouble. It bears the initials, W. C. The owner is Mr. Walden Concord, a young gentleman whose official salary as a Government clerk by no means covers his expenditure. He is a guest of Mr. Holdron's, I believe, and a friend of yours. He arrived about ten o'clock last night, and was supposed to have retired shortly afterwards. As a matter of fact, he never went to bed at all."

The woman's self-confidence was rapidly vanishing.

"How do you know that?" she demanded.

He stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat and beamed complacently.

"There's no Sherlock Holmes about that, Lady Malchester. I have been talking to the servants. One of them, the butler, tells me he happened to see a figure prowling about the grounds, and investigated. He got near enough to recognise Mr. Concord, and concluding that if any of his master's guests chose to walk about late on a damp night it was no business of his, he was withdrawing when he saw a woman steal out of the house. He recognised her."

Her cheeks were scarlet.

"Well?" she said.

"Well," he drawled. "This morning Mr. Concord sent his man out for his pipe, which he had, he said, left overnight in the summer-house where he had gone for a solitary breath of air."

There were great gaps in the structure Menzies had so elaborately reared on the facts he had gained, and no one was better aware of its weakness than himself. But he judged that Lady Malchester's logical strength was breaking down, and he was determined to press his advantage.

She slid down from the bureau and passed a hand in a weary gesture across her brow. Very pretty and very helpless she looked, and if Menzies had not held very rigid ideas of duty he might have felt compunctious.

"That proves nothing," she declared faintly.

"Mr. Holdron will form his own opinion," he retorted. "It will probably be the same as mine by the time I have searched your room."

A flash of spirit seemed to return to her.

"You wouldn't dare!" she exclaimed.

"I'm going to," he returned doggedly, "with your permission or without it."

Something glinted in her hand, and with a swiftness of which his bulk gave no promise, he sprang forward and wrenched away a small pistol. He stepped back and dropped it in his pocket.

"This is mere foolishness," he said severely.

Her slender form was shaking, and her hands were in front of her face.

"You—you forced me to do it!" she exclaimed brokenly. "I can't stand exposure." Suddenly she was on the floor at his feet. "You can't understand what it means. If I give him back everything—everything—that's all you want—all Mr. Holdron wants. You needn't tell him—"

He raised her gently to her feet and pulled a chair under her. Her emotion seemed genuine enough, and although he was inclined to believe in it he was too wary to be deceived by a new feint.

"I'm afraid I can make no promises. I am acting for Mr. Holdron, and he is entitled to know everything I learn. I have no discretion in that way."

"But if I give up everything—"

He shook his head.

"You must do that in any event."

But he had pushed his advantage too far. The scarlet lips became doggedly pursed, and her bent figure straightened. "You can either ruin me by exposure to Mr. Holdron or you can recover the papers. You will never find them unless I choose to tell you."

"We will see," he said grimly.

He resumed his methodical search of the room as calmly as though she were not present. Yet he felt that it was hopeless. Even under the best conditions no man, however skilled, can hope to thoroughly search the smallest room when time is limited. It is largely a matter of luck if he finds an article, even if it has not been hidden. And Lady Malchester seemed very confident. Once, while he was rummaging the papers in the bureau, out of the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of her in the mirror. He could have sworn she was smiling. Yet when he wheeled swiftly she was still sitting meekly, hands folded in her lap, with downcast eyes and despondent face. He closed the bureau with a snap that showed he was a little irritated, and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets.

"Mr. Menzies," she said tremulously.

"Yes."

"If I return the money and the papers, will you give me one day's grace before you tell Mr. Holdron?" Her voice was very low. "That can't hurt you much. I could not stand—the—the disgrace if I were here. Give me a day to get away and I shall not mind so much. Surely a single day can't be very important?"

There were tears in her voice and in her big, childlike, grey eyes. He gnawed his moustache while he considered her appeal. It was not so unreasonable. He had scarcely hoped to clear up the affair so completely even in two days. If he refused he might get the documents before the next day, or he might not get them at all. The compromise seemed the wisest policy.

"That is outside my instructions," he said, "But I will do it."

The criss-cross of lines that marred her white forehead disappeared.

"Thank you!" she murmured. "Will you turn your head for a moment?"

He obeyed. There was a rustle of garments and then a crackle of papers. It was obvious that the things had been concealed in her stocking. The hiding-place had all the merit of simplicity and accessibility. She held out the papers.

"I am very much obliged, Lady Malchester," he said formally.

Holdron paced impatiently to and fro across the library, and Menzies noticed that his fingers were twitching. He was quite clearly in a high state of nervous tension. His eyes dwelt malevolently on the detective as though he meditated wresting the secret from him by force.

"When you're satisfied with this melodramatic nonsense perhaps you will conde-

scend to tell me what you mean," he snarled. "If this is a trick to enhance your fee it will not go down with me."

"It is unusual," admitted Menzies. "But you're a reasonable man, Mr. Holdron, and you'll see the difficulty of my position. I have got the papers and have solved the mystery, but I could have done neither if I had not passed my word that you should not receive my report till to-morrow."

The other came to an abrupt halt.

"The papers, man! You have the papers? Give them to me." His hand fell on a bronzed elephant used as a paper-weight.

"To-morrow," said Menzies, with determination. "I will post them from town to-night."

So unexpected was Holdron's next movement that the detective was almost taken unawares. He saw the hand with the bronzed elephant flicker upwards, and divined the other's intention as the missile left his hand. He sprawled sideways, chair and all, and so saved his face. But a numbing shock in the right shoulder told him that his assailant had not entirely missed. The next moment Holdron was upon him, fighting with a dynamic energy that more than made up for the difference in weight and muscle.

In any ordinary encounter the City man would not have lasted a second against the burly detective, but Menzies was on the ground and still entangled with his chair. Moreover, his right arm was for the moment useless.

It was all over in five seconds. Strong, lean hands twined about his throat. He jerked his elbow up into the other man's stomach and heard a groan. Then his head was thrown violently backwards against one of the legs of the chair, and a red mist swam before his eyes. Thereafter he lost consciousness.

He awoke with a sharp tang of spirit in his throat, and at once all his senses were keenly alert. A bronzed face with a toothbrush moustache was near his own, and Captain Lockett's arm was supporting his head. He sat up abruptly and met the composed, smiling face of Lady Malchester. She was comfortably tucked up in a big arm-chair, her knees crossed and one foot rhythmically swaying.

"You come to life like a Jack-in-the-box," observed Lockett, straightening himself. "How d'you feel? Here, let me give you a hand up."

"I'll be all right in half a minute," said Menzies. His eyes lighted with inquiry on Lady Malchester. She was smiling whimsically at him, as she had done when she had come across him, examining the footprints. He tried to resolve the problem, but his brain was clear enough to show him the impossibility. "Where is Holdron?" he asked.

"Sitting in a cell by now wondering whether he is going to be tried by court-martial or by the civil power," said Lockett.

Menzies rubbed his eyebrows and took a long breath. A swift and appalling fore-

hoding that he—sometime chief inspector of the C.I.D.—had been used as a tool by the unscrupulous in elligence officer flashed across his mind. The details were hazy, but he had no doubts of the main facts. There was evidence in the vibrant grey eyes of Lady Malchester, in the lurking smile under Lackett's tooth-brush moustache.

"That so?" he remarked blandly. "Well, you had better luck than I."

Lady Malchester giggled.

"Stung!" said Lackett. "The old war-horse smells the battle and won't admit that he's lame in the off-foreleg. Now, Menzies be a sport. Admit that you've been done down for once and we'll admit you into the secret. You earned that, anyhow."

"I seem to have broken in on you somehow," said the detective. "I'll own that I'm guessing. The Secret Service is on top this time. Now then. And I must apologise to you, Lady Malchester. You strung me neatly. You're a credit to the Service, if you don't mind me saying so. Still, if I'd been given a hint——"

"Lady Malchester is not in the Service," said Lackett. "She assisted me for——"

"Love," interjected Menzies, and had his reward. A crim on tinge-crept under the tan of Lackett's countenance. Lady Malchester was unmoved.

"If I had known what Captain Lackett has since told me," she said, "I might have taken you into my confidence. But I didn't know you, and it was simpler to take no risks—the more especially as I took good care to see you did all you were wanted to."

"I seem to remember you on your knees begging me not to expose you."

"That was the transpontine touch," she smiled. "Do you know, I wouldn't have had you go away without those paper for anything. I wanted you to think you forced them from me."

Menzies pushed his hands widely, palms outward.

"Am I drunk or is the room only standing on its head. Things seem to be spinning round. All I know is that Holdron is a spy, and that you are the lady who was so naively interested in detective work. I never associated you with Captain Lackett."

"These are the facts," said Lackett. "Holdron, of course, was a spy, or as good as a spy. His financial interests have been largely bound up in Germany, and it's only lately that I ran on to his tracks. During the last few years he's been making many friends in official circles—not the very biggest men, but people with access to confidential information—this man Concord, for instance."

"There had been leakages which could only have come from someone inside, and once I was on the case it was easy to suspect Concord, who was spending a deal more than his small private income and smaller salary. I wanted to get at the man behind, so I waited before jumping on Concord. I had had him closely watched, and naturally there wasn't a letter he mailed or received that

didn't come under my eye. The only correspondent he had who was at all doubtful was Holdron—but there was nothing to take hold of, you understand. Holdron was too clever for that. That was where Lady Malchester came in. She found mutual friends and got an introduction. She even managed—she has her own methods—to secure an invitation to this house-party, which, though we didn't know it then, had been arranged for a definite purpose.

"Mark the cunning of the man. Yesterday Concord was to take copies of certain cipher documents which showed a strategic plan to be put in execution next week. It was essential that they should be passed over to Holdron as quickly as possible, yet suspicion might have been aroused should it be observed that a Government clerk had been in definite communication with him, and they, of course, daren't trust them to the post. But a house-party to which Concord had been invited long before—you get me?"

"Anyway, there we were. Lady Malchester watching our friend Holdron, I keeping an eye on Concord. When Concord caught a train down here last night, I was behind him. You see, I didn't want any accident to happen to him while he had those papers."

"You knew he had them, and yet——"

Lackett leaned forward and emphasised his point with a forefinger.

"Yes, it wasn't quite so simple as merely getting them back. You see, it had been arranged that information—of a kind—should reach the enemy—I had duplicate documents which I wished to transfer for the genuine ones unbeknown to our young friend."

Menzies smacked his thigh.

"That's the point that's been worrying me. Of course, you want the scheme to be carried out so that you would know its workings. By gum, why didn't I think of it!" He was seriously annoyed with himself.

"Because it was no more likely to occur to you than a million other hypotheses, I suppose. Anyway, I failed. Mr. Man had a motor waiting for him at the station, and I hoofed it into the village. I knew that Lady Malchester would pick up the end without any help from me, and I didn't want to risk being seen fussing about the house."

Lady Malchester took up the story.

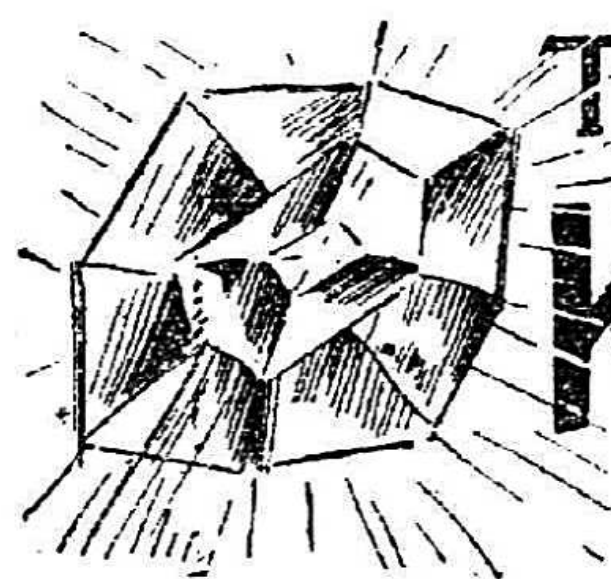
"That was where I took the stage. My maid—you're not the only one who knows the value of servants as agents for collecting information—had become rather friendly with the chauffeur here, and consequently I knew the exact time of Concord's arrival, but in case of accidents I had the combination of the safe—Holdron keeps it on a slip of paper at the back of his watch, and I arranged that he should sleep soundly the night before last."

"You drugged him and entered his bedroom? Well, you've sure got a nerve!"

There was a gleam of mischief in the childish face.

"Something had to be done," she said, as

(Continued on page xii.)



The CASE of the KRYLOFF DIAMOND

The Strange and REMARKABLE EXPLOITS of CARFAX BAINES

ABOUT six o'clock on a wet and foggy November evening the detective was sitting in an easy-chair by his window, looking down at the endless crowds who tramped through mud and rain along Villiers Street. He was wondering what would fall his way next, when, as if in answer to his thoughts, there came a rush of feet up the stairs and a loud rap at the door. The visitor was an elderly, well-dressed man, and it was evident at a glance that he was labouring under some tremendous trouble and excitement.

"Take a seat, Mr. Rink, and compose yourself," said Carfax Baines. "The recovery of the Kryloff diamond is by no means hopeless."

The man gasped and stared.

"How—how did you know?" he began.

"The head of the firm of Rink and Rafsom, the leading jewellers of London, is naturally familiar to me by sight," Baines interrupted. "Beyond that my remark was conjecture, but it is reasonable to suppose that nothing but the loss of the famous gem could cause you such great agitation."

The jeweller dropped into a chair, pale and trembling; he mopped the perspiration from his forehead, and made an effort to control his perturbation. "You are right!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "The Kryloff diamond, which was put into my hands to sell, and was valued at forty thousand pounds, is gone! And other jewels worth half as much again have vanished with it. I am ruined—ruined!"

"Let me have the particulars."

"There is not much to tell, Mr. Baines. It was a most astounding robbery, daringly planned and executed. My old and trusted assistant, Wilkes, went this afternoon to visit a customer at the Imperial Hotel, Gloucester Road. He took the diamond and the other stones with him in an oblong oak box, brass-bound and securely locked. He was returning to Bond Street in a cab between four and five o'clock, and, in the Brompton Road, close to Harrod's Stores, the vehicle was delayed by a block. Suddenly the box was snatched from his grasp, and at the same instant a quantity of pepper was dashed into his eyes. The thick yellow fog favoured the crime, and the thief easily escaped, doubtless by means of a confederate and a four-wheeler that were in waiting. No person saw him—not

even Wilkes—though an immediate alarm was given."

"Wilkes is beyond suspicion?"

"Yes, absolutely."

"Was it not imprudent to trust him in the streets of London with such valuable property?"

"I admit that it was, Mr. Baines."

"And is it usual to send sixty thousand pounds' worth of jewels away from the shop?"

"That depends on the customer. In this case"—The jeweller paused and hesitated.

"I want to know everything if I am to help you," said Baines.

"Then I suppose I must tell you," replied Mr. Rink, "though the name of my customer can have no possible bearing on the matter. A month or two ago—this is in strict confidence, remember—I received a letter from his Highness the Hereditary Prince of Waldesheim, who has frequently favoured me with commissions in the past. As you are probably aware, Prince Kars is shortly to contract a marriage with a Princess of the Royal House of Saxony. Well, he wrote to say that he wished to present his bride with a couple of necklaces, and that his representative, Count Regendorf, would be in London in a few weeks' time for the purpose of buying the stones from me, and with a view to purchasing the Kryloff diamond. Four days ago the count arrived, and presented to me a letter of credentials from his Royal master. He was suffering from incipient influenza when he came to the shop, and the next morning he was much worse. So I sent Wilkes to his hotel with the assortment of stones—diamonds and rubies—on three consecutive afternoons: yesterday, the day before, and to-day."

"Had the count decided?"

"Yes, this afternoon. I was to make a necklace of rubies, and another of diamonds, including the Kryloff gem, and have them ready in a week."

"Am I to understand that Count Regendorf desired his mission to London to be kept a secret?"

"Yes, and most naturally. Do you suppose he wanted it to be known that he was taking back with him, on the long journey to the German Principality of Waldesheim, jewels worth nearly sixty thousand pounds?"

I shall probably sell him other stones, and for that reason his name must be kept out of this affair."

"It won't get into the papers through me, I assure you," replied Baines. "About the letter presented to you by the count—of course it was genuine?"

"It was written and given to him by his master, and bore the latter's crest," Mr. Rink answered curtly. "I have received dozens of similar communications from Prince Kars, and am familiar with his handwriting. You surely don't suggest anything against Count Regendorf?"

"No; that would be folly."

"Of course it would. But you must find the thief for me, Mr. Baines. The scoundrel undoubtedly knew that I was sending the jewels to the Imperial Hotel every afternoon, and he laid his plans accordingly."

"No other theory suggests itself, I admit," said Baines.

The jeweller was limp and nerveless, almost overcome by his great loss, and a glass of brandy was needed to pull him together. He stated that he had gone first to Scotland Yard and laid information of the robbery, and in reply to other questions he gave the hour at which the jewels had been sent to the Imperial Hotel each day. Finally, after various little details had been arranged between himself and the detective, he went down to his cab in rather better spirits.

His visitor gone, Carfax Baines drew the window-curtains and pulled his chair to the fire. But the time for reflection and tobacco had not yet arrived. The case of the stolen jewels was so far one-sided, and likely to remain so. He had already fixed on the one man who could have committed the theft, and had thereby shown his peculiar handiwork; this was a daring criminal known for many years to the police, who had very recently been liberated from Dartmoor prison. But where to find him now, if he was indeed the guilty party, was a problem to which Baines had no clue. He went out and dined in the Strand; then he went to Scotland Yard, and was closeted for half an hour with Inspector Flint. The latter, with professional jealousy, was disposed to resent the detective's partnership in the case.

"You go your way, Mr. Baines, and I'll go mine," he said, at the conclusion of the interview. "I doubt if it's the same chap you have in mind."

"Ah, then it's not Larry Brett, alias the Manchester Pigeon?"

The inspector's crestfallen countenance betrayed his discomfiture.

"Can you put your hands on him?" he asked.

"No; can you?" Baines replied.

"Never mind about that. But whoever finds the man will find Rink and Ransom's diamonds. Brett stole them."

"There is every reason to think so, Flint.

Good-night, and good luck to you. I'll probably see you to-morrow."

Baines left Scotland Yard with the conviction that the case was a very ordinary one, and that it might safely be relegated to the police, though he had no intention of dropping it himself at present. In Villiers Street he heard the shrill cries of the news-boys, and saw the robbery proclaimed in glaring headlines on every placard. He bought three or four evening papers, and in the privacy of his room he read the various accounts of the affair. Nothing new was to be gleaned. The customer at the Imperial Hotel was referred to, but there was no mention of Count Regendorf's name.

At nine o'clock, after a change of clothes and a clever alteration of his features, Baines travelled by the District line to Gloucester Road. He went to the Imperial Hotel to make general inquiries, to ascertain if any suspicious characters had been seen lurking about the place during the last few days, and while he was thus engaged a cab stopped outside, and two men came into the office. One was clearly a servant or a valet, while the other was tall and distinguished-looking, with a flaxen beard and moustache cut German fashion. The latter, whose great-coat was buttoned about his throat, slightly acknowledged the clerk's obsequious bow, and passed on with his companion to the lift.

"Was that gentleman Count Regendorf?" Baines asked; and on getting an affirmative answer, he added, "I understood that he was suffering from influenza?"

"So he was," replied the clerk, "but he seems to have made a rapid recovery to-day."

A few minutes later, after acquiring certain information from the hotel commissionaire by a judicious tip of half a sovereign, Baines was on his way back to Charing Cross by the Underground, well satisfied with his evening's work. When he reached his rooms he jotted down a few lines in a note-book:

"Have seen Count Regendorf before, but can't recall the circumstances. Until noon to-day he was confined to his room by illness. At twenty minutes past four this afternoon he went out with his valet, Muller, and they were gone until nearly ten o'clock."

The detective's observations, trivial as they seemed, afforded him considerable food for thought. He sat by the fire for three hours, smoking hard, staring at the coals with a tense, strained expression. Then his countenance cleared, as if he had arrived at a definite conclusion, and he went to bed and slept soundly.

Nine o'clock the next morning found Baines at the Imperial Hotel again, where he had a long and private interview with the manager. An hour later he visited the German Embassy, and came away less sanguine than he had entered, for what he had learned was not exactly favourable to his theory. But after a lengthy cross-

examination of the man Wilkes, who came by appointment to his rooms at twelve o'clock, his confidence was restored. He lunched at two, paid a brief call at the Imperial Hotel, a longer one at Scotland Yard, and was at Rink and Ransom's shop in Bond Street at five o'clock. He saw the letter presented by Count Regendorf, and had another interview with Wilkes in the private office. When he came out, the jeweller whispered to him:

"The count has just been here, Mr. Baines. He was very sympathetic about my loss, but he has found other stones to suit him."

"Ah! Did he select any?"

He chose a number of stones to be made into a necklet, and he bought and took with him a diamond tiara worth five thousand pounds."

"He paid for it, I suppose?"

"Yes, with his own cheque on the Bank of Berlin."

"And when is the necklet to be ready?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

Baines made no further comments, but a peculiar smile hovered about his lips as he left the shop. As he walked back to Villiers Street he purchased the evening papers and looked over them. His first thought when he got to his rooms was to see if there was a telegram for him, but none had arrived. He smoked a couple of pipes, then put on immaculate evening-dress and Inverness cloak, and took a cab to the Imperial Hotel, where he dined.

He strolled from the dining-room into the office a little after eight o'clock, and just as a well-dressed man, with a heavy black moustache and a purplish complexion, stepped up to the desk and informed the clerk that he had an appointment with Count Regendorf. A page-boy was promptly ordered to take the gentleman upstairs to the count's apartment. Baines, who had scanned the visitor closely, but who had been careful to keep out of the latter's range of vision, shot a meaning glance at the clerk, and then slipped into the street. A Scotland Yard man, who had been hanging about the hotel most of the day, at once came up to him.

"All right?" he whispered.

"Yes," Baines replied, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

A short conversation took place, and then the Scotland Yard man hurried off to the nearest police-station, with instructions to fetch a couple of constables. Baines remained on guard, and when he had walked up and down the pavement for a few moments a sudden thought struck him. He looked round the corner just in time to see two men glide from a side entrance to the hotel in the next street. They sprang into a cab that happened to be passing, and were driven rapidly away.

Baines had recognised the men by the light of a street lamp, but he was unable to prevent their escape, so quickly had they

acted. For an instant the utter failure of his plans confronted him, for no other cab was in sight.

"That was fast work," he muttered. "I didn't expect them out so soon. But luckily they couldn't have seen me, and I may get them yet. Ten to one they will strike for the Continent, and they have barely time to catch the night-express from Charing Cross. I can't stop now to see after the Pigeon, though it is likely a case of murder."

Baines looked at his watch, and ran swiftly into Gloucester Road, buttoning his cloak about his throat. He found a hansom without delay, and as he jumped into it he shouted brief instructions to the driver. The ride was a trying one, but he reached Charing Cross with a minute to spare. He bought a ticket to Dover, and as he passed out of the booking-office and through the gate he saw the persons he wanted hurrying along in front of him. He lost sight of them for an instant, and then, springing into a first-class smoking-carriage just as the train started, he found himself alone in the compartment with Count Regendorf and his valet. They sat together on the right-hand side, with their overcoats buttoned up to their chins. Baines settled himself in the farthest corner of the opposite seat, and began to read a newspaper.

The train rolled out of the station and across the stately river, and dashed on through the grimy suburbs of South London. Behind his paper the detective planned what he would do when he reached Dover, or puzzled his brains to recall when and where he had met Count Regendorf in the past. His fellow-passengers occasionally darted furtive glances at him, or looked at each other significantly; but Baines did not dream that he had been recognised until, hearing a slight noise, he lowered the paper and saw Count Regendorf about to leap upon him with a drawn knife.

"I'll settle you this time Baines!" the impostor snarled.

In a flash the detective knew the man—realised his deadly peril. He had no time to reach the pistol that he always carried, but with one hand he grabbed the would-be assassin's uplifted wrist, and with the other he gave the communicating cord a hard jerk. The next instant he was engaged in a desperate struggle with his assailant. They swayed from one side of the carriage to the other, each trying to bear the other down. The hold on the count's wrist prevented him from using the knife, so Muller snatched it from him, and dodged about, waiting for an opportunity to stab Baines.

He would have succeeded in doing so, had not the train suddenly begun to slacken speed: the flashing of lights indicated the approach to a populous suburb. Muller lost courage, threw open the door, and sprang into the night. A moment later the other two reeled and pitched after him, landing unhurt at the side of the line, and still locked together. The train came to a full

stop a few yards ahead, and within fifty feet of Chiselhurst Station.

The guard, reinforced by several railway porters, promptly responded to the detective's shouts, and seized his assailant. Muller, who had sprained an ankle, was as easily caught. The prisoners were taken to the station-master's room, where Baines identified the bogus Count Regendorf as George Ryland, one of the most notorious criminals known to the authorities of Europe and America; in a belt round his waist were found the Kryloff diamond and the other stolen jewels. His companion proved to be a German named Pankop, who had been working with him for years. Both

men—who were splendidly disguised by the way—had measured cunning with the detective on a previous occasion. The police were sent for, and meanwhile Baines wrote off the following wire to Inspector Flint, at Scotland Yard:

"Your man Brett is at Imperial Hotel, probably dead, in Room 247."

The detective's prognostication was mainly correct, as he learned when he went back to town that night, after seeing the prisoners locked up in Chiselhurst. The hotel manager and several police-constables had broken into the count's apartments and found Larry Brett lying gagged and bound on the bed; he had been stunned by a blow on the head, and then overpowered. Rink and Ransom's original jewel-box was also discovered hidden in the room.

As for the genuine Count Regendorf, he arrived in London the day after the arrest. It turned out that Ryland and Pankop had known of his plans and of his intention to go down to the Riviera for a week before coming to England. While stopping at the same hotel with the count in Paris, one of the pair had entered his room while he was absent, gained access to his trunk with a skeleton key, and found Prince Karr's letter to the jeweller; they neatly opened this without injuring the seal, abstracting the contents, and inserted instead a blank sheet of paper.

The Kryloff diamond and the rest of the gems were restored to Mr. Rink by Carfax Baines, who was handsomely rewarded for his services. He good-naturedly explained



Suddenly the box was snatched from his grasp and, at the same instant, a quantity of pepper was dashed in his eyes.

to the jeweller the deductions by which he had discovered the real criminals.

"I believed at first that Brett had the stuff," he said, "and what put me on the right tack was the return of the supposed count and his valet to the hotel that night, the former's sudden recovery from his illness, and the fact that they had gone out immediately after your man Wilkes left them. I reasoned this way. Their object in having you send the jewels to the hotel three days in succession was to gain time enough to have a box made similar to yours, which they must have studied very closely. On the third afternoon they succeeded in exchanging the boxes, and at once left the hotel with their plunder. But before they could get out of London they learned from the evening papers what had happened to Wilkes. Then they boldly decided to return to the hotel, play their part a little longer, and rob you to a further extent. They knew that they had not been away long enough to be suspected, and that nobody could have entered their rooms and found the rifled box."

"The next thing was the box stolen from Wilkes in the cab. I was certain that Brett was the thief, and the question was, what would he do when he found the box contained nothing but rubbish, and learned by the papers what had been in it? Knowing the man, I was satisfied that he would spot the thieves, go to them at the Imperial Hotel, and demand a share of the plunder under threat of informing the police. So far so good. I set a watch on the hotel the next day, and arranged with the manager

to inform me if any person called upon the count. My theory was rather shaken when I learned at the German Embassy that Count Regendorf was quite likely to be stopping privately in London; but after seeing Wilkes, and ascertaining that his back had been turned for a moment in the hotel that afternoon, and that the jewel-box was lying on a table near the curtained entrance to an adjoining room, I was reassured again. And when I saw Brett go up to the count's apartments in the evening I was sure that the game was in my hands. I judged what

would happen, though I did not expect that the scoundrels would act so quickly."

"All is well that ends well," remarked the jeweller. "But this will be a lasting lesson to me."

The subsequent confession of the prisoners proved the detective's theories up to the hilt. The three rogues, who had only themselves to blame for the result of their misdeeds, were sentenced to long terms of penal servitude. It was believed that Brett had a confederate, but if so, the police were unable to find the man.

THE END.

A Meeting of Greeks.

(Continued from page vii.)

though that settled the matter. "It was only just the tiniest little drop in his wine. So you see I was all ready for emergencies. I and my maid between us kept a close eye on Concord after he arrived, and when he went out into the grounds I followed. You rather jumped to conclusions about that, Mr. Menzies."

"You didn't disillusion me."

"That would scarcely have been policy," she smiled. "Anyway, I shadowed him—that's the technical term—isn't it?—to the summer-house, where Holdron was already waiting. I suppose the rendezvous had been arranged beforehand. I heard all I wanted to, and the papers passed over. Concord left his pipe, and I was silly enough to pick it up. I got back to the house, unseen as far as I know, and found Holdron with his guests. Then I made an excuse, slipped into the library and opened the safe, collared all the papers I could see, and walked out quite openly. At the worst the papers wouldn't reach the enemy."

"She had no duplicates to replace them," explained Lackett. "I had not seen her then."

"No," said Lady Malchester. "Well, it was some time after midnight that the car started out, and I heard from my maid there had been a robbery, and that Holdron had sent a car to London to fetch a well-known private detective. I didn't learn your name till next day. It seemed a pity that you shouldn't have a clue to work on, so at four this morning I borrowed a pair of boots—there were plenty outside the bedroom doors—and laid a trail. I must say you used it rather cleverly."

"Naturally I surmised that Captain Lackett would not be far away from Concord. They had been accustomed to my taking a solitary walk before breakfast during the few days I have been here, and to-day was no exception. He, as a matter of fact, was looking for me, and we had a chat."

"I was rather chagrined," said Lackett. "Luck seemed to have been against us, for, though it was important to recover the

documents, we seemed to have lost all chance of following up the means that were used to get them away. Then it was that Lady Malchester thought of you—of allowing you to recover the false papers."

"I do think," grumbled Menzies, "that it would have been more simple to have taken me into your confidence."

"Now, don't be peevish, Mr. Menzies," said Lady Malchester, with a little grimace. "You were a stranger to me. It was so much more convincing for you to run the criminal to earth yourself. If you been at fault I was prepared to make the clues plainer—but you seemed to have picked up the right scent at once. It would have been harder to stage-manage with a duller man. You will remember that I never pledged you not to return the papers to Holdron at once, but only not to disclose the identity of the thief. I didn't want him to have any suspicion that I was helping the Secret Service till he'd passed the bogus information on. He'd have known at once, of course, that I was in no need of money."

"That's where you jumped the rails," observed Menzies. "I misunderstood my pledge, and refused to give him the papers. That's how he came to lay me out."

"All to the good," grinned Lackett. "He couldn't have had any suspicion of the papers when you were so anxious to delay his re-possession of them. Well, the result has been this. He'd got a regular pigeon-loft in a derelict lodge among some shooting covers he rents at Stoner, ten miles away. We followed him there. He made six copies of the cipher on tracing papers and turned loose half a dozen pigeons before we collared him. Concord, by the way, was captured on his way back to town."

"And the result?" said Menzies.

Lackett rubbed a finger along his stubby moustache.

"Germany," he observed, "will mass troops to meet our reinforcements some ninety miles from where the real attack will take place. By the way, I hope you got your fee from Holdron?"

"Oh, confound the fee!" said Menzies. "I really beg your pardon, Lady Malchester."

THE END.

(Continued from page 14.)

have not the slightest doubt that you thoroughly deserved the punishment. Under the circumstances, I will let the matter stand. I have no question that Mr. Clifford will report the matter fully to me to-morrow. Go to your dormitory at once."

"But, sir—"

"At once!" snapped the Housemaster.

And Fullwood and Co., still sore, and with absolutely no satisfaction, crept away upstairs to bed.

Their feelings were too deep for words—but they were determined to make it hot for Mr. Clifford later on.

Fullwood meant to bide his time—and then he would strike!

CHAPTER VI.

FULLWOOD'S LITTLE SCHEME!



DURING the few days which followed, Mr. Clifford's behaviour was in no way significant to the majority of the fellows.

But Fullwood and Co. saw much to interest them.

Being sportsmaster, it was only natural that Mr. Clifford should spend a great deal of his time in the gymnasium. And, because he was there, nobody thought much about it.

But the Nuts of Study A took particular notice that Mr. Clifford spent an hour or two every day in hard, strenuous training. He would go through dumb-bell exercises, and all manner of other things, and was exceptionally keen upon manipulating the punchball. Mr. Clifford would also indulge in shadow-boxing.

What could this mean—but one thing?

"Oh, there's not a doubt about it!" said Fullwood, on the fourth day. "The man's in strict trainin' for this match. We're on his game, and before long we shall have him on toast. Just leave it to me, my sons, an' you'll see things."

"What's the game?" asked Bell.

"I'll tell you later on."

"I don't believe you've got any wheeze at all," growled Gulliver. "It always sounds jolly clever to be mysterious, and to tell people to wait and see! In any case, I should like to know what we can do to Clifford?"

Fullwood smiled.

"My dear asses, do you think for a moment that I'm going to be content with things as they stand?" he asked. "Here's this beastly sports-master, posin' as such a model of honour—an' all the time he's nothin' better than a giddy, prize-fighter! Ain't I right?"

"Well, I don't know," said Bell doubtfully.

"What do you mean?"

"He's not exactly a prize-fighter," said Bell. "This boxin' contest in Helmford is to be a pretty classy sort of a show. All the

best people will be there, and a boxin' match, after all, is nothin' to be ashamed of. We have boxin' at St. Frank's—"

"Don't be an idiot," broke in Fullwood. "This match at Helmford is to be a prize fight. The two boxers will fight for a knock-out—an' a purse. Do you think the governors of St. Frank's are goin' to stand for that sort of thing? If the truth comes out, Clifford will be kicked out neck an' crop."

"Then why not tell the Head?" asked Gulliver.

Fullwood sighed.

"I don't expect you chaps to have much brain, but you might show a little common sense!" he grunted. "What's the good of tellin' the Head?"

"He'd give Clifford the push—"

"Exactly—but that's just what we don't want," said Fullwood. "There's a good chance here to click. And, what's more, we're goin' to click. Leave it to me, an' you'll see things."

His chums could not quite understand what he meant, but he would give them no further satisfaction. Fullwood was not a fool, and he was always ready with schemes. In most cases these schemes were entirely unscrupulous, for the leader of Study A did not seem to know what honour was.

And there were other fellows in the Remove who began to wonder.

In Study D, for example, discussions were rife.

"Blessed if I can make Clifford out lately," remarked Handforth, at tea one evening. "Haven't you noticed him? Always in training, and practically living in the gym. from morning till night."

"That's not very extraordinary," said Church.

"But he didn't do it last week," said Handforth. "Why should he have this sudden burst of activity? It almost looks as though he's in training for something. I wonder what his game is?"

McClure grinned.

"I suppose he was fired to do something after watching Tony Lennox," he remarked. "You know, Clifford saw that fight, and it seems to me that he was impressed. He's a good boxer, too—"

"Rather!" declared Handforth. "One of the best. And do you know, I've got half an idea that he's in the swim about this Boxing Unknown."

"What do you mean—in the swim?"

"Well, he knows who the man is."

"Oh, rats," said Church. "We've got no evidence of that—"

"Haven't we?" interrupted Handforth. "Don't you remember on the platform at Helmford? Clifford was jolly evasive when he was questioned about the Unknown. I thought it a bit queer at the time—"

"Great Scott!" gasped McClure.

He sat back in his chair, with flushed face, and he stared straight before him. In fact, he was so startled that he absent-mindedly

poured a spoonful of sugar into his half-eaten egg.

"That egg ought to taste nice now!" said Handforth tartly.

"I wonder!" breathed McClure. "I wonder!"

"If you're dotty?" said Handforth. "I don't wonder at all—I jolly well know it! What's the matter with you, fathead? Don't stare at me in that soppy way! My hat! You look soft!"

McClure took no notice.

"Clifford was there on the night of the fight!" he exclaimed. "Clifford didn't answer direct when we asked him about the Boxing Unknown! And now he's training like the dickens—and he's a magnificent boxer himself! I wonder if—I wonder if—"

"Haven't you stopped wondering yet?" snapped Handforth.

"But think!" gasped McClure excitedly. "I mean, putting all these things together! Don't you think it's likely that Clifford himself is the Boxing Unknown?"

Handforth dropped his cup into its saucer with a clatter.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated.

He stared at his two chums rather blankly.

"I believe McClure's right!" said Church breathlessly. "Of course, Clifford daren't give the challenge openly, because he's a master at St. Frank's. Anyhow, it would account for his training so hard just now. And he was certainly there on the evening of the big fight—and that's significant in itself. I say, how gorgeous! One of the masters fighting Tony Lennox for the championship! What a ripping thing if Clifford won!"

Handforth thumped the table, and set the crockery jumping.

"There's not a doubt of it!" he declared firmly. "The Boxing Unknown is Clifford, and when that fight comes off, we'll jolly well see it! Of course I was certain of this days ago! I knew it all along!"

"What?" gasped McClure.

"It was obvious!" went on Handforth.

"Any chap with an ounce of brains couldn't help seeing it. I suppose you chaps will give me a bit of credit now? I'm always the first to find things out!"

McClure breathed hard.

"You—you ass!" he exclaimed warmly. "I guessed it! You hadn't the faintest idea until I spoke just now——"

"Oh, of course, I knew you'd claim the credit!" sneered Handforth bitterly. "Just because you happened to take the words out of my mouth, you go and boast! You pitiful

fathead! As a matter of fact, I guessed Clifford's secret long ago, but I didn't mean to take you chaps into my confidence!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said McClure blankly.

He was quite accustomed to this sort of thing, but Handforth was certainly rather more barefaced than usual. To coolly declare that it was his idea was slightly beyond the limit. But McClure knew better than to argue. An argument would only end in a squabble, and then trouble would come.

"Anyhow, we'd better not say anything about it to the others," growled McClure. "I don't suppose they'd believe it, anyhow. We'll keep it dark, and then watch for the fight to be announced. And we'll arrange things so that we can go and see it."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "But it's all rot about keeping it dark. I'm going to ask the other fellows——"

"Better not!" advised Church. "You know what it is if the chaps get talking. Why, it might even come to the Head's ears, and then Clifford would be in hot water!"

"Why would he?"

"Because the Head wouldn't agree to it——"

Before Church could say anything else the door opened, and Reggie Pitt looked in.

"Seen the paper this evening?" he asked.

"That fight between Tony Lennox and the Boxing Unknown is announced for next Wednesday."

"Great Scott!" said McClure. "I thought it wouldn't come off for weeks!"

"They don't usually rush things like this, but there must be a special reason," said Reggie. "Anyhow I'm going to wangle things so that I can see the fight. I reckon it will be particularly interesting to us."

Handforth nodded.

"Rather!" he agreed. "Look here, Pitt, I'm going to tell you something. It's an absolute secret, but I know I can rely on you to keep it mum. I know who this Boxing Unknown is."

"Go hon!" said Pitt, grinning.

"He's—he's Mr. Clifford!" breathed Handforth impressively.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pitt.

"You—you cackling ass——"

"My dear dummy, why don't you teach your grandmother to suck eggs?" inquired Pitt blandly. "I knew it days ago! I don't happen to be dense, and it was as clear as daylight that Clifford was in training for something big. Of course Clifford is the Boxing Unknown!"

"You—you knew?" said Handforth weakly.

"Of course I did," replied Pitt. "And the next time you get a brain wave like that, Handy, you'd better bottle it. I was hoping that you wouldn't guess——"

"He didn't!" growled McClure. "I guessed!"

"Well, it's the same thing!" said Pitt. "Handy's bound to spout it all over the school, and that's the last thing we want. Look here, Handy. If you think anything

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of Clifford, you'll keep mum. He's a brick, and we don't want to get him into any trouble."

And Pitt left, with Handforth and Co. feeling rather flabbergasted. And before they could really get into conversation, the door opened again, and I looked in. I closed the door behind me.

"Pitt's just given me the wheeze," I said. "For goodness' sake, you chaps, keep quiet about Clifford—"

"Did—did you know it, too?" asked Church wonderingly.

I smiled.

"Of course I did," I replied. "But there was no need to talk about it. If Clifford beats Tony Lennox it'll be a terrific honour for St. Frank's; but we don't want to get gassing beforehand."

In the end, I made Handforth definitely promise that he would keep quiet. And, although Handy was an ass in many ways, his word was his bond. I knew that he would preserve the secret.

It was rather curious, taking everything into consideration. Half the Remove had guessed Mr. Clifford's secret, and yet not a single word was spoken of it openly. There were mere whisperings behind the closed doors of various studies. It was thus quite impossible that the sports master should know anything.

But he would not remain in ignorance for long.

In Study A, Fullwood and Co. were looking at the evening edition of the "Bannington Gazette." They were studying the big displayed advertisement on the central page—an advertisement which announced to all and sundry that the match between Tony Lennox and the Boxing Unknown would take place at eight o'clock in the evening, on the following Wednesday. Plenty of seats were available if application was made at once.

Fullwood closed the paper with a jerk.

"Now's the time," he declared grimly.

"The time?" said Bell. "What for?"

"It's the moment to strike!" said Fullwood. "The thing is now publicly announced—an' that's all I was waitin' for. I'm goin' to act boldly. It's the only way. An' Clifford's goin' to squirm!"

Ralph Leslie walked towards the door.

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Gulliver, in surprise.

"I'll tell you afterwards," replied Fullwood calmly.

CHAPTER VII.

NOT EXACTLY SUCCESSFUL!



"COME in!" said Mr. Clifford invitingly.

He was in his study in the Ancient House, and a tap had just sounded upon the door. It was rather significant that Mr.

Clifford pushed an opened copy of the evening paper under his blotting-pad.

The door opened, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood walked in.

"Sorry to disturb you now, sir, but there's somethin' I'd like to say," said the leader of the Nuts. "Is it convenient, sir?"

Mr. Clifford smiled.

"That depends upon what you want to say, and how long you will take to say it," he replied smoothly. "I am not very busy just now, my boy, so I will condescend to spare a moment or two. Go ahead."

Fullwood came in, and closed the door.

"It's very private, sir," he said.

"So it appears," replied Mr. Clifford. "I must confess that I am at a loss, for I cannot imagine what private business you can have with me. But you will no doubt put an end to my curiosity."

Fullwood came right up to the desk, and looked at Mr. Clifford steadily. He was feeling just a trifle nervous, although he would not admit this even to himself. But the main thing was to put on a bold front.

"It's about boxing, sir," he began.

"A subject which does not interest you much—eh?" said the sports master. "At all events, I have had considerable difficulty in persuading you to take instruction in the noble art."

"I don't mean that, sir," said Fullwood.

"To be absolutely exact, sir, I happen to know who this Boxing Unknown is—the man who challenged Tony Lennox to a contest for a purse of five thousand pounds."

Mr. Clifford started.

"You—you know?" he asked quickly.

Fullwood felt that he was on firmer ground.

"Yes, I do, sir," he said. "I know who the Boxing Unknown is, and—well, I thought perhaps we could come to an arrangement."

Mr. Clifford steadied himself with an effort.

"Indeed!" he said quietly. "And what possible arrangement could we come to? Why have you come to me at all, Fullwood? How do you suppose this affair interests me?"

Fullwood smiled.

"Well, I imagine it must interest you more than anybody else, sir," he said coolly. "There's no sense in beatin' about the bush, is there? I might as well tell you at once, sir, that I happen to know."

"You know what?"

"That you are the Boxing Unknown, sir," said Fullwood boldly.

Mr. Clifford rose abruptly to his feet, and he paced up and down the study for a moment or two, gripping his fists. Then, at length, he came to a halt in front of the junior.

"Well?" he demanded, in a suppressed voice.

"There's no need to get excited, sir," said Fullwood calmly. "Of course, it's not my business, strictly speakin'—"

"I am glad you admit that," snapped the master.

"At the same time, sir, I think we ought

to come to a little understanding," went on Fullwood. "You don't need telling that the Head would cut up pretty rusty if he knew the truth. From a point of view of duty, I suppose I ought to go to the Head and tell him everythin' I know——"

"And why don't you?" demanded Mr. Clifford angrily.

"Because—well, I don't see why I should spoil your little game," said Fullwood smoothly. "After all, you'll get a nice fat share of the purse, and there's no reason why I should do you a bad turn."

"Your generosity is overwhelming!" said Mr. Clifford, with bitter sarcasm.

"Not at all, sir," said the junior. "As a matter of fact, we can both benefit. Providin' you make things all right, I won't breathe a word. But, under the cires., I think you ought to fall in with my idea."

"Are you suggesting that I should pay you money?"

"That's puttin' it rather bluntly, sir," growled Fullwood. "But there's no harm in bein' straightforward, perhaps. You see, I can stop this fight if I choose, an' then you won't get a penny. I thought a little matter of twenty pounds might be fixed up."

Mr. Clifford looked at Fullwood steadily for a few moments, and then went back to his chair and sat down. By this time he had recovered his composure, but there was a glint in his eye which Fullwood failed to observe.

"Twenty pounds?" said the sports master.

"So you would be satisfied with that?"

"Yes, sir," said Fullwood.

He bitterly scolded himself for not opening his mouth wider.

"According to what I understand, Fullwood, you require this sum of twenty pounds as hush money?" asked Mr. Clifford slowly. "In other words, if I pay you the sum, you will keep your own counsel?"

"That's the idea, sir."

"You unmitigated young blackguard!" said Mr. Clifford.

Fullwood caught his breath in.

"But—but——"

"You unscrupulous little scoundrel!" thundered the sports master, rising to his feet, and advancing upon the junior. "Good gracious me! I never believed that one so young could develop such villainy! You have the utter audacity to come to me on a mission of blackmail! You are out of your element, Fullwood—you should be in a reformatory!"

Fullwood started back, flushed and astounded. Only a minute before he had been telling himself that he had got Mr. Clifford in the hollow of his hand. This sudden outburst upon the part of the master was not only disconcerting, but startling.

"Better go steady, sir!" said Fullwood thickly. "I've reconsidered, too! I sha'n't be satisfied with anythin' less than fifty pounds——"

"Stop!" rapped out the master.

"It's all very well to bluster——"

"It is not my intention to say what I think of you!" broke in Mr. Clifford. "Neither shall I report this matter to the Headmaster. I will deal with it personally—at once."

To Fullwood's consternation, Mr. Clifford went to a corner, and picked up a wicked-looking cane.

"Hold out your hand!" said Mr. Clifford curtly.

Fullwood backed away.

"If you think I'm goin' to stand this, you're wrong!" he gasped. "I know your secret, an' I'm goin' to tell the Head, unless you dub up! If you touch me with that cane, I'll—— Wow! Yarrooh!"

Swish! Swish!

The cane descended twice across Fullwood's shoulders.

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the sports master.

"I won't!" roared Fullwood.

By this time he was thoroughly alarmed—and, indeed, in a state of panic. Just as Mr. Clifford was on the point of eating out of his hand, so to speak, he turned on him like this! It was outrageous.

Fullwood thought it was even more outrageous a few moments later. For Mr. Clifford was not to be denied. He seized Fullwood in a grip which was like that of a vice. The junior writhed and struggled in vain.

Swish! Swish Swish!

Again and again the cane whizzed down, striking Fullwood on a portion of his anatomy which was generally used for sitting down purposes. And the leader of the Nuts howled with agony and rage.

The thrashing was one of the most severe he had ever received at the hands of an undermaster. Mr. Clifford finished, flung the cane into the corner, and stood back, panting.

"And now—get out!" he exclaimed, between his teeth.

Fullwood reeled away, his features twisted with pain. There was a light of evil in his unpleasant eyes.

"You—you brute!" he hissed. "All right—I will get out! And you'll be sorry, too! I'm goin' straight to the Head."

"Very well—do so!"

"And I'm goin' to tell him the whole thing——"

"You are perfectly at liberty to do as you please!" exclaimed Mr. Clifford. "But let me remind you, Fullwood. So far as I am concerned, I am satisfied—I have punished you as I deem fit. If you are particularly anxious to be expelled from this school, you can go to Dr. Stafford!"

Fullwood pulled up short.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "The Head won't do anythin' to me! But you'll get kicked out——"

"I am quite capable of dealing with my own affairs!" broke in Mr. Clifford curtly.

"But never mind—you may do as you please. It will be rather interesting to hear what

the Head has to say when he learns that you came to me in the capacity of a black-mailer! I hardly think that Dr. Stafford will view the situation with approval."

Fullwood gulped.

Until that moment he had not considered the possibilities. But he knew, at once, that Mr. Clifford was right. If the master was in Fullwood's hands, Fullwood was also in the master's.

It was quite likely that Ralph Leslie would be able to put the stopper on Mr. Clifford's career, but there was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Clifford would also put the stopper on Fullwood's. As soon as the Head got to know these details, he would expel the junior on the spot.

Fullwood opened his mouth to say something, but the words refused to come. He was so enraged that he could not articulate. And he tore at the door, wrenched it open, and fled.

His mission had not been an absolute triumph!

CHAPTER VIII.

FULLWOOD TAKES ACTION.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE paused half-way down the Remove passage, and adjusted his monocle.

"Dash it all!" he murmured. "It appears that the priceless lad is somewhat sold out. I mean to say, judging by the express on the old dial, he's in a state of considerable ag.!"

And Archie felt sympathetic. He did not like to see suffering in any way—even in a fellow he cordially detested as much as Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

The latter was coming along the passage in a kind of crawl, and it was patent to the most inexperienced eye that he was in great pain. The leader of Study A, in fact, felt very much used up.

"Kindly allow me to extend the old fist!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean, it seems to me that this is where we ought to rally round. The tissues, laddie, are apparently at the lowest ebb."

Fullwood looked up, scowling.

"Mind your own infernal business!" he snarled.

"Gadzooks!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, scarcely polite, what? In fact, absolutely not! I was just about to assist—"

"Clear out of the way, you babbling fool!" hissed Fullwood. "I don't want any sympathy from you! Go and choke yourself!"

And Ralph Leslie passed on, leaving Archie gazing after him in a state of considerable bewilderment.

"Well, that, I mean to say, was somewhat dashed!" observed Archie sadly. "The bally poisonous blighter! Obviously a case of misplaced sympathy, and all that kind of rot! Dash it all, we live and learn!"



Archie Glenthorne paused half way down the passage, and adjusted his monocle. "Dash it all!" he murmured. "It appears that the priceless lad is somewhat sold out. I mean to say, judging by the express on his old dial, he's in a state of considerable ag.!"

And he walked on, shaking his head dolefully.

Fullwood, in the meantime, entered Study A, slammed the door, and went over to the fireplace. He flung himself into the easy-chair—and then leaped up again, with a howl. Even easy-chairs do not seem to be particularly comfortable after one, has just received a sound flogging.

Gulliver and Bell were looking at Fullwood rather blankly.

"What on earth's the matter with you, Fully?" asked Gulliver. "My hat! Don't glare at me in that way! You seem to be in pain—"

"That—that beast of a Clifford half-murdered me just now!" snarled Fullwood. "By gad! I'll make him pay—I'll show him!"

"You don't seem to have been very successful," remarked Bell.

Crash!

Fullwood's fist dashed into Bell's face, and the latter reeled back, howling.

"If you start crowing over me, I'll

slaughter you!" panted Fullwood fiercely. "I'm not feelin' in the mood for any rot! Understand?"

Bell recovered himself, and he gingerly held his nose.

"You—you dangerous idiot!" he stuttered. "What's the idea of lettin' fly like that? I wasn't crowin'—"

"Oh, don't make a song about it!" snapped Fullwood. "I couldn't help it—I had to hit somethin'! I'll tell you what happened, and then you'll be able to understand!"

Gulliver and Bell—the latter still aggrieved—listened while Fullwood related his experience in Mr. Clifford's study. The two Nuts were rather startled after they had heard all.

"Why, you reckless ass!" exclaimed Gulliver. "No wonder Clifford went for you! You absolutely asked for it! Fancy goin' to him an' demandin' money! I wonder you had the nerve!"

"I thought he'd pay up!" growled Fullwood. "Anyhow, it was a chance—an' it's had one good result. We know for an absolute fact that Clifford is the Boxin' Unknown."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, don't be a dense maniac!" said Fullwood. "If he wasn't the Boxin' Unknown, do you think he'd let me go without reportin' to the Head? Not likely! But he thinks he's safe—he thinks I daren't breathe a word for fear of what might happen to me."

"Well, if you do tell the Head, you'll get the sack!" said Bell pointedly.

Fullwood's eyes glittered.

"If I went to the Head personally I should get the sack all right," he agreed. "But there are more ways than one! I've decided what I shall do. I'm goin' to write a letter to the Head now—an' then I'll get one of the village kids to deliver it—"

"That'll be rather risky," said Gulliver. "The kid might let on. An' what's the good of a letter, anyhow?"

"I shall disguise my handwritin', an' leave out the signature," said Fullwood. "Anyhow, the Head won't know where the information comes from. As long as he hears about Clifford, that's the main thing. I'm goin' to stop that fight! Clifford's not goin' to have the laugh over me."

"The best thing you can do is to send the letter through the post," advised Bell. "There can't be any inquiries then. There's no hurry—the fight doesn't come off till next Wednesday."

Fullwood agreed that it was the best course. And, then and there, he set to work. For a full hour he laboured, and when he had finished the result was certainly satisfactory.

The anonymous letter was brief, but to the point. And after a large number of experiments, Fullwood had succeeded in adopting a "fist" which was utterly unlike his own.

The letter ran thus:

"To the Headmaster of St. Frank's College.

"You will be interested to learn that one of your undermasters—Mr. Harold Clifford—is arranging to take part in a prize-fight next Wednesday evening at the Helmford Stadium. Mr. Clifford has adopted the alias of 'The Boxing Unknown,' probably hoping to conceal his identity by this means. I consider it my duty to inform you of this fact, as it seems against the interests of St. Frank's College for a master to participate in prize-fighting.

"FAIR PLAY."

If the chums of Study A could only have realised it, the adoption of "Fair Play" as a pseudonym was decidedly humorous. For of all the fellows in St. Frank's, these three were probably the very last to adopt any tactics of a fair nature.

"Yes, that'll do all right," said Fullwood, as he folded the letter up. "I'll simply slip it in an envelope, and run down to the village and post it. The Head'll get it in the mornin'—an' then Clifford'll be on the carpet."

"Supposin' he tells the Head about you?"

"I shall deny it," said Fullwood. "He's bound to know that this letter is mine, but he can't prove it. An' after this exposure the Head won't be likely to accept his word. Anyhow, he can't possibly bring any evidence that I tried to get money out of him. I'm safe enough."

And, five minutes later, Fullwood was on his way to the village. He posted the letter, and went back to St. Frank's feeling that Mr. Clifford's fate was sealed. He was impatient to see what would develop on the morrow.

He little realised what was coming!

CHAPTER IX.

NELSON LEE'S ADVICE.



DR. STAFFORD adjusted his glasses, and coughed.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Dear me! Extraordinary!"

For the third time he read through the remarkable letter which was in his hands. It had come by the morning post, and the Head was not only surprised, but rather startled.

"Of course, the thing is quite impossible!" he told himself. "I cannot believe that Mr. Clifford would be so foolish as to enter upon any such ridiculous undertaking."

At the same time, Dr. Stafford was uneasy. And he felt that it would do no harm to obtain a little advice. He had learned that he could turn to no one better than Nelson Lee. The famous schoolmaster detective had helped the Head in many a difficulty.

Dr. Stafford rang the bell, and Tubbs came. He instructed the pageboy to go to Nelson Lee's study, with a message to the effect that the Head would be glad of Lee's presence at the first convenient moment.

Lee arrived seven minutes later.

"That you, Mr. Lee," said the Head, after they had bade one another good morning. "I should just like you to glance at this letter, if you will. It is an anonymous communication—and, as such, I place very little reliance upon it. But I should be glad of your opinion."

Nelson Lee read the letter, and smiled.

"I do not think it is quite so anonymous as you appear to imagine, doctor," he said. "With regard to the alleged information, I hardly know what to say. Certainly, we have no reason to suspect Mr. Clifford of such tactics. Not that there is anything disgraceful in a boxing contest."

The Head pursed his lips.

"Then you think the statement might be true?" he asked.

"I did not say that," replied Lee. "My mind is quite open. I do not believe any unsigned communications. During the whole course of my experience I have invariably found that such letters are untrustworthy."

"Quite so—quite so," agreed the Head. "At the same time, I should be exceedingly annoyed if one of my masters so far forgot himself as to appear in a public fight. It would be quite contrary to all the traditions of St. Frank's. Do you think it possible that Mr. Clifford has really challenged this man, Lennox?"

"It is certainly possible, but I hardly think it can be true," replied Lee. "In any case, sir, I should strongly advise you to ignore the matter altogether. It is really not worth worrying about."

The Head hesitated.

"You would not advise me to speak to Mr. Clifford?" he suggested.

"Considering the character of the letter, I think it would be most unfair to Mr. Clifford to question him," replied Lee. "We have absolutely no evidence—and I always destroy anonymous letters on principle."

"I quite agree," said the Head. "You are right, Mr. Lee. It would be unjust to suspect Mr. Clifford—and decidedly bad form to ask him for any explanation. At the same time, I must confess that I am curious."

"Regarding this Boxing Unknown?"

"Exactly."

"Well, if it will be any satisfaction to you, doctor, I will make a point of running over to Helmford next Wednesday, and I will see this man for myself," smiled Nelson Lee. "In the meantime, may I keep this letter?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

Nelson Lee thanked the Head, and soon departed. It appeared, therefore, that Ralph Leslie Fullwood's little vindictive scheme would not have the desired effect. Mr. Clifford was not even questioned.

Lee arrived in his own study, and sat down at the desk. He examined the letter carefully, and then compared it with one or two papers which he took out of a drawer. He smiled rather grimly as he touched the bell. Tubbs appeared a minute or two later.

"Tubbs, I want you to find Fullwood, of the Remove," said Nelson Lee. "When you have done so, inform him that I desire his presence in my study at once. That is all."

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs.

He hurried away, and found Fullwood lounging in the Ancient House lobby, chatting with Gulliver and Bell. As a matter of fact, the Nuts were keeping their eyes wide open, hoping that they would see some indication that the anonymous letter was bearing fruit.

Tubbs came up, grinning. The page boy was feeling pleased. He had an idea that Fullwood was hooked for a bit of trouble—and the thought of this was a pleasant one. Tubbs was not partial to Fullwood.

"Sorry to trouble you, Master Fullwood, but Mr. Lee says as how he wants to see you," said Tubbs. "Mr. Lee also says that you've got to go at once. Them was his very words, Master Fullwood."

Ralph Leslie started.

"Mr. Lee wants me?" he repeated sharply.

"Yes, sir!"

"If you're trying to fool me——"

"I've give you the message, an' if you don't go it ain't my fault," interrupted Tubbs. "If you take my advice, Master Fullwood, you won't lose no time. 'Ouse-masters don't like to be kept waiting."

And Tubbs went off, whistling.

"Well, this looks pretty cheerful!" remarked Bell. "I wonder what Lee wants you for? I suppose it can't be in connection with that letter? It would be pretty rotten if he found out——"

"Oh, don't be an idiot," growled Fullwood. "He gave me some lines yesterday, and I suppose he wants them. Only fifty—but I've forgotten the rotten things. I bet he doubles the impot.!"

And Fullwood went off, looking far more confident than he felt. He arrived at Nelson Lee's study, and entered boldly enough.

"Close the door, Fullwood," said Lee. "That's right. Now come over here. Why did you write this letter?"

He held Ralph Leslie's precious effort out. And the junior looked at it with a sudden start. He controlled himself with difficulty.

"I don't know what you mean, sir!" he said. "That—that isn't my letter at all!"

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I've never seen it before. You know my handwriting, sir—"

"Exactly," interrupted Lee. "This is your handwriting, Fullwood. It is somewhat disguised, but it is yours, nevertheless. What caused you to have the audacity to write to the Headmaster in such a manner?"

Fullwood felt awful, but he maintained a bold front.

"You've made a mistake, sir," he said firmly.

"Take this letter, Fullwood, and read it!" snapped Nelson Lee.

Fullwood did so.

"Well, sir?" he asked, looking up.

"Do you still deny that you penned this abomination?"

"I do, sir."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet, and reached for a cane.

"You foolish boy!" he said curtly. "Did you imagine for one moment that your paltry attempts at disguising your handwriting would deceive me? It may interest you to know, Fullwood, that I am considered to be something of an expert in these matters. I will give you just ten seconds to admit your guilt. If you still persist in lying to me, I shall flog you."

Fullwood knew that Nelson Lee was in earnest. He had a certain amount of sense—and the prospect of another flogging did not appeal to him. He adopted an aggrieved expression.

"Well, sir, what about it?" he growled.

"Yes, I did write it!"

"Thank you!" said Nelson Lee. "You stand before me, Fullwood, not only a self-accused liar, but a person worthy of the utmost contempt. How dare you make this accusation against Mr. Clifford?"

"It's true, sir—he is the Boxing Unknown."

"Can you give me any proof—any positive evidence?"

"Of course I can, sir," replied the junior sullenly. "Mr. Clifford's a fine boxer, and for the last few days he's been practising for all he's worth. He's been in strict trainin'. Besides that, I happened to see him talkin' to somebody who's connected with the Helmford Stadium."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough, sir?"

"No, it is not enough!" replied Lee grimly. "You may be quite sure in your own mind that Mr. Clifford is the man who has challenged Lennox to a contest—but you had utterly no justification for writing to the Headmaster. You must realise, Fullwood, that there is a vast difference between surmise and fact. No statement should be made without absolute proof. You may go."

Fullwood looked astonished.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he said, with relief.

"But you need not imagine that you will escape punishment," went on Nelson Lee. "I am merely deferring the matter until later. At the right time I shall deal with you as you deserve. That is all."

Fullwood left the study with a feeling of harrowing doubt within him. The whole thing had gone wrong, and there was an uncertainty about Nelson Lee's attitude which was distinctly uncomfortable.

The leader of the Nuts felt savage and despondent as he went back to his own quarters. Nothing seemed to go right. But he had a flash of hope as he thought of the coming fight.

He would see it with his own eyes—and then he would be able to justify his anonymous letter. It would be rather good to crow over Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER X.

PUTTING HIM TO THE TEST.



"WHAT on earth—"

I broke off abruptly, and stared at the door

of Study C. It was just tea-time, and Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and I were sitting round the table. And into the apartment came an invading force.

There were about eight fellows altogether, including Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, De Valerie, Singleton, and Archie Glenthorne.

"Sorry—we're rather short of supplies to-day," I said briskly. "We'd have you all to tea with pleasure, but—"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "Please don't think, laddie, that we are on the look out for a cup of the good old brew. I mean to say, such a thing would be dashed bad form—"

"Dry up, Archie, and let your uncle talk!" said Pitt cheerfully. "The fact is, Nipper, we've just come here to discuss things. We've got a proposition to make, and we want to hear your opinion. You're Remove skipper, and it's up to you to shove the seal of approval on the scheme."

"Absolutely," said Archie.

"Go ahead," I exclaimed. "What's the stunt?"

The visitors spread themselves over the little room.

"It's about Clifford," said Reggie, who had obviously appointed himself spokesman of the party. "We're all certain of the fact that he's the Boxing Unknown, aren't we?"

"Carried unanimously," I agreed.

"Well, it would be a pretty good idea to put Clifford to the test," went on Pitt. "He's our sports master, and he ought to be very encouraged if we show a healthy interest in boxing."

"I don't follow."

"Give me a chance, and you'll follow all right," said Reggie. "The wheeze is to go to Clifford in a body, and ask him to

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

take us to this contest in Helmford. Now, this is where the test comes in. If he isn't the Boxing Unknown, he'll agree like a shot. He can't do anything else, because he'll be delighted at us for showing such a big interest in the noble art. Do you catch on?"

I grinned.

"It's rather a good stunt," I said approvingly. "There's no doubt that Clifford would take us all if he was a disinterested party. He would be flattered because we took such a keen interest in boxing."

"Exactly," put in De Valerie. "But this is where the test comes in. If he is the Boxing Unknown he'll get the wind up, and refuse. He'll make some excuse. It's so simple that it can't go wrong. We've just got to put this question to him, and we shall know the absolute truth."

"What do you think of it?" asked Pitt.

"We'll go to Clifford at once," I said. "It's a first-class idea. Come on! No sense in wasting time. Let's get it over. Of course, the result is obvious, but there's nothing like making doubly sure."

And, without wasting any time on further discussion, we streamed out of Study C, and went down the passage in a body. But Mr. Clifford was not in his own apartment.

"Don't worry," I said. "We'll find him in the gym. I'll bet he's there, putting in some training."

And, sure enough, we found the sportsmaster indulging on some vigorous exercise with a punchball. He was half-stripped, and he looked flushed and warm and in the pink of condition.

"We've come to ask you a favour, sir," I began. "At least, not exactly a favour; but we're all very keen on boxing, and we can see a good opportunity of picking up some jolly fine pointers. There's nothing like watching experts at work—is there, sir?"

Mr. Clifford nodded.

"One may certainly pick up some good tips in that way," he said. "But what is this idea of yours, young men? It seems to be fairly important, or you wouldn't be missing your tea in this way."

"It's about the match at Helmford, sir."

"Next Wednesday evening, sir—"

"Between Tony Lennox and the Boxing Unknown—"

"And we want you to take us—"

"Stop!" interrupted Mr. Clifford. "Good gracious! Don't all speak at once! So you want me to take you over to this match, so that you may profit by the exhibition?"

"That's the idea, sir," I replied. "Of course, we'll pay our own exes. But we thought it would be rather nice if you came with us, so that you could point out the various drives and upper-cuts, and all that kind of thing. We'd be awfully pleased if you could arrange it, sir."

Mr. Clifford looked thoughtful.

And the juniors waited, far more anxious

than they seemed. For, within the next few moments we should know the **absolute** truth. And we all wanted Mr. Clifford to refuse—there was no question about that. Every fellow was gloating in the idea that this unknown challenger of the great Tony Lennox was a St. Frank's master. There was something fascinating about it.

Mr. Clifford pursed his lips, and then slowly shook his head.

"You don't know how sorry I am to disappoint you, boys, but I'm afraid it can't be done!" he exclaimed. "In the first place, I very much doubt if the Headmaster would approve—"

"No need to tell him, sir," I put in. "We only need to ask our Housemaster, and I'm downright certain that Mr. Lee would allow it, providing you came with us to keep us in order."

Mr. Clifford nodded.

"I can see that you have everything mapped out," he said drily. "But, boys, you have reckoned without your host. Unfortunately, I shall not be available on Wednesday evening. I have a most important engagement—elsewhere."

"Can't you put it off, sir?" asked Pitt innocently.

The sportsmaster gave us a curious little smile.

"I am afraid not," he replied. "No, boys, I must reluctantly disapprove of this scheme of yours."

All the fellows were feeling rather bucked. Mr. Clifford had acted exactly as we had anticipated. For he had almost said, in plain words, that he was the Boxing Unknown.

"Disapprove, sir?" I asked, in surprise. "You can't mean to say that you wouldn't care for us to go?"

"We're awfully keen on boxing, sir!" put in Pitt.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "Absolutely, in fact, with large knobs!"

Mr. Clifford frowned.

"It's all very well, boys, but it won't do," he said, with an attempt to appear stern. "No, it won't do at all! Were I free, I would have no hesitation in taking you to Helmford, and I am flattered by your anxiety for me to go. As such a thing is impossible, I think you had better give up the idea altogether."

"Oh, sir!"

"You may meet some rough characters in the town," went on the sportsmaster. "And you must remember that we do not want to get people talking about St. Frank's in a disparaging way. Certainly, it would be advisable for you to stay at the school. In fact, I forbid you to even consider this scheme any further."

"Very well, sir," I said meekly. "We're awfully sorry, but it's a big disappointment. Thank you, sir."

I turned, looking crestfallen and sad. And all the other fellows streamed silently out of the gymnasium after me.

"Well, that," observed Archie, "is absolutely that, what?"

"In other words, we've obtained all the evidence we need," I declared. "You see, Clifford not only declined to come, but he put the ban on us going alone. He's afraid of the truth coming out."

"But we're going, all the same!" said De Valerie firmly.

"You bet!" declared Pitt. "Going? I should jolly well think we are! We'd better club together, and book our seats as soon as possible——"

"Pray allow me to shove in the old interruption," put in Archie. "The fact is, dear old tulips, I've been having a dashed serious chat with Phipps. He's a brainy cove. I mean to say, one of the chappies who grab hold of real ideas. And I've got something to say."

"Well, say it—and don't take two hours," said Pitt.

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "The fact is, it would be a rather priceless scheme if just a few of us got busy—Tregellis-West and Singleton, and myself. You see, we are fairly rolling in the old dollars. That is, our notecases bulge with doubloons, and all that sort of rot! What about it? Ring seats for the multitude, as it were?"

We soon gathered the trend of Archie's remarks. And his idea was certainly a most generous one. It was quite simple, too. All the fellows with pots of money would splash for once, and buy the most expensive seats for all of us. As Archie said, it was worth it.

Fellows like Pitt or Grey or De Valerie could not afford the luxury of ring seats. But the expense meant nothing to Archie, Singleton, and Co. Needless to say, all the others accepted with great promptitude.

And thus it was fixed up.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIG FIGHT.



WEDNESDAY evening found us ready.

We had decided to leave nothing to chance. If we asked for permission to attend the big fight, there was just a possi-

bility that permission would not be granted. So we would risk it.

We should all get back late, but it would only mean a couple of hundred lines each. There would be no severe punishment awaiting us after we had explained our exact reasons.

And so we went off in twos and threes soon after tea, and gathered together at Bellon Station for the evening train.

Handforth had expressed great indignation because he had not been consulted. Many of the other juniors had been hoping that Handy would be left out; but such a pleasant state of affairs was impossible. Handy was in everything, and he always let everybody know it.

"Well, we're off!" said Reginald Pitt, as we sat in the train. "Did you notice Clifford? He buzzed off during the afternoon, and hasn't been seen since. He'll get a bit of a shock when he sees us sitting right next to the ring!"

"It might put him off his stroke," said Jack Grey.

"Rats!" declared Handforth. "It's far more likely to give him encouragement. It won't take us long to show him that we're absolutely on his side. We'll cheer like the dickens!"

"Rather!"

And the fellows continued talking animatedly during the journey. This was a very special occasion, and we did not allow ourselves to worry over the consequences. There would be plenty of time for worrying later—when the reckoning came.

When we arrived in Helmford we found the town in an unusual state of bustle.

It was quite obvious that something very special was afoot. One boxing contest had been exciting enough; but a second one so soon afterwards caused no end of a stir. There were some people, of course, who had a great deal to say about the brutality of such encounters; but nobody took any particular notice of these grumblers.

We felt rather important as we marched in with our ringside tickets, and we took our places in the best seats. They had cost Archie and his companions a good deal of money—not that they cared about that.

"Well, here we all are!" said Archie, as he made himself comfortable. "I mean to say, bally good! Right on the jolly old arena, as it were. Absolutely the stuff! I mean we sha'n't have much difficulty in spotting Mr. Clifford, what?"

"We ought to see him here all right," agreed Pitt.

The lights were brilliant. And, although the big event of the evening was not yet due to commence, another match was in progress. It was a ten round contest between lightweights.

We watched with interest—but it could not be denied that we were impatient for the big event to come on. All the juniors took particular pleasure in anticipating Mr. Clifford's consternation when he saw us all there, on the very outskirts of the ring.

"At last!" murmured Tommy Watson.

The lightweights had retired, and a large gentleman in evening-dress was announcing that the big event of the evening would now take place—the famous Tony Lennox against the Boxing Unknown.

And there was a stir in the audience, and a murmur of expectancy. The very fact that Tony's opponent was some mysterious stranger, caused everybody to have added interest.

"Hurrah!"

"Here he comes—here's Tony!"

The popularity of Tony was very apparent. He was cheered to the echo as he came into

the ring, attired in the same dressing-gown he had worn when we saw him on the first occasion.

We all gave him a rousing cheer—just as a compliment to his prowess. For, later, we should reserve all our cheering for Mr. Clifford. Much as we admired Tony, we should naturally support our own man. For we had come here to see Tony knocked out. It would really be glorious if Mr. Clifford could whack such a famous opponent.

Lennox gave us an amused glance as we cheered so heartily. His peculiar face lit up, and I felt rather guilty. We had led him to believe that we had come to support him.

"Gentlemen—I will now introduce the Boxing Unknown!" shouted the man in evening-dress.

This time there was a much greater stir. All the St. Frank's fellows, in particular, stood up in their seats, gazing eagerly towards the doorway which led from the dressing-rooms. The door opened.

"Here he comes!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "Now then—one, two, three! Let's give him a regular rouser!"

"Rather!" said Pitt. "Well—Great Scott!"

Pitt broke off, and his jaw dropped. And now all the others were staring in open-eyed amazement.

The Boxing Unknown had entered.

He was big, broad-shouldered, and ugly. He possessed a rugged face, with large, protruding ears, and a nose which was pushed over to one side. Not by the wildest stretch of imagination could we mistake him for Mr. Harold Clifford, the sports-master of St. Frank's.

The Boxing Unknown entered the ring, bowed, and grinned. He revealed two rows of irregular teeth. And there was no doubt that he was an extremely common man by birth and upbringing. He looked a hard case, however, and Tony Lennox would not have such an easy task.

The St. Frank's fellows were almost dumb with utter amazement and disappointment. But they soon found their voices. And when they did they all talked at once.

"Kindly rally round with large supplies of smelling salts, old dears!" murmured Archie. "I mean to say, I'm feeling dashed faint! We were wrong—absolutely! Something, it seems, has caused the whole universe to buzz off the rails!"

"But—but I can't understand it!" gasped Handforth. "We—we were certain, you know! Where's Clifford? Why isn't he here?"

"For the simple reason that Clifford isn't the Boxing Unknown—and never has been," I replied. "It only shows, my sons, that it's never safe to be too certain. We've been kidding ourselves all along. It was foolish, too—because we've never had any real proof."

And upstairs, in the circle, Fullwood and Co. were nearly on the point of fainting. "They had come to the match—nothing would



"This is your handwriting, Fullwood. It is somewhat disguised, but it is yours, nevertheless. What caused you to have the audacity to write to the Headmaster in such a manner?"

have kept them away. And now they saw their dream shattered.

"By gad!" muttered Fullwood huskily. "It's not Clifford! An' I wrote that letter to the Head—and Lee knows about it! Goodness knows what'll happen now!"

"I've got it!" muttered Bell. "I'll bet anything you like that Lee gave Clifford the wheeze. Don't you understand? Clifford stepped down, and they got somebody else. As there was no name mentioned, it didn't matter—anybody could be the Boxing Unknown."

"By gad, you're right!" breathed Fullwood. "We're dished!"

Further conversation was impossible, for the fight was already commencing. And the Unknown was forcing the pace from the very beginning. His idea, apparently, was to smash through Tony's defence, and deliver a knock-out in the first round.

We displayed very little interest. For, as far as we were concerned, the fight did not matter any more. We had come to see Mr. Clifford—and Mr. Clifford wasn't here.

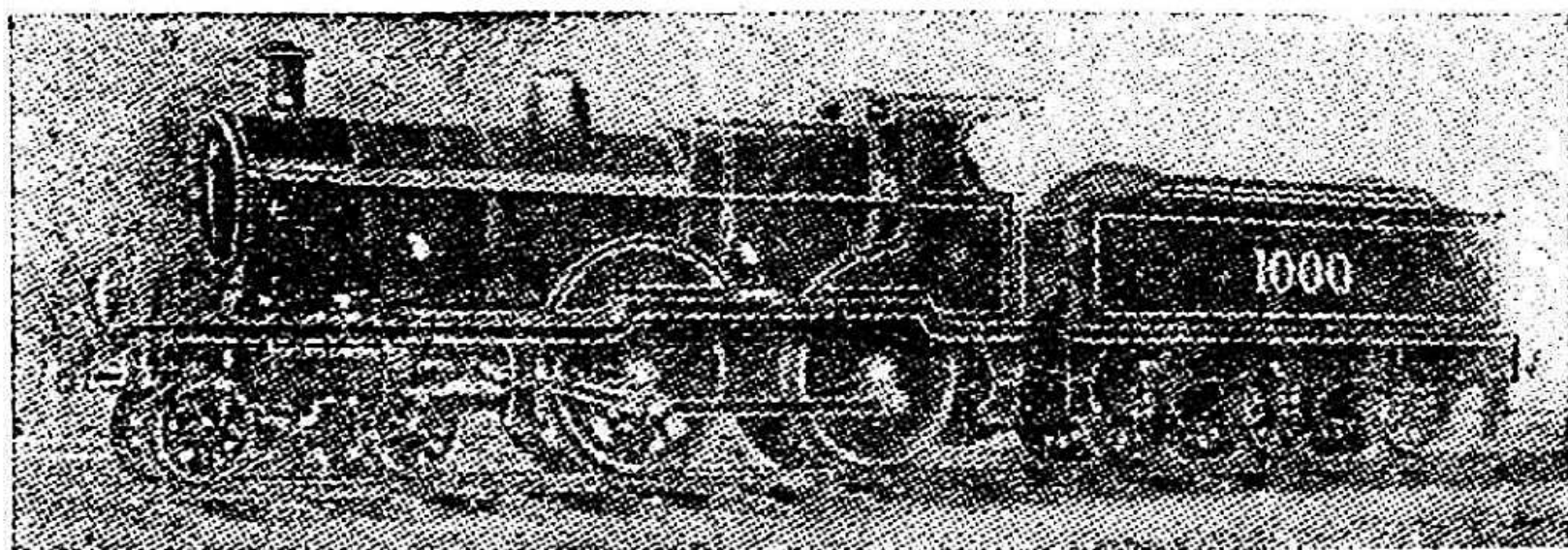
But just then we were forced to pay attention. For the Unknown, fighting like a whirlwind, was forcing Tony round the ring. It nearly seemed that the champion was taken off his guard. For a flash he lost his coolness—and the Unknown took advantage of his chance.

Crash!

He delivered a smashing drive which Jack

(Continued on page 27.)

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began in the December 16 issue, and ends with issue dated January 27, when a list of the seven St. Frank's stories to be voted for will appear on a coupon.

All you have to do is to place the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 in the blanks provided on the coupon against the titles of the stories according to how you consider they rank in order of merit, putting the figure 1 against the story you like best, the figure 2 against the story you like second best, and so on. Where you like two or more stories equally, place the same numbers against them according to their position with the other stories.

All the lists will be totalled, and from this a comparative list will be drawn up, representing the general voting of all competitors. The competitor whose individual voting most nearly corresponds to the general voting will be declared the winner.

IMPORTANT!—A small coupon, bearing title of story and date of issue, will appear every week during the competition, usually on the back of the "Answers" tag. This week it will be found at the foot of page 21 of the book. These small coupons must be cut out and enclosed with the final voting coupon.

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(Continued from page 25.)

Dempsey himself would have staggered under. Tony reeled back, struck the ropes, and fell. And this happened just a few feet from where we were sitting.

One—two—three—counted the referee deliberately.

I don't know why I did it, but I felt genuinely sorry for Tony. I jumped out of my seat, and rushed forward to help him. Of course, such a thing as this would not have been allowed. And I pulled up short just as I reached Tony's side. He was lying half out of the ring, dazed and bewildered.

It all happened in a flash.

I caught a clear look at his face. Then, in a confused kind of way, I heard the gong. The champion's seconds dashed up to Tony, flung a towel over his face, and dragged him into his corner. They gathered round him, ministering to his injuries. And I went back to my seat as though in a dream.

The truth was too staggering for words!

For Tony Lennox was—Mr. Clifford!

If I had been told this earlier, I should have laughed at the idea. But I had seen with my own eyes—and I was probably the only fellow who had seen, for it had all happened so quickly. During that one clear glimpse of Tony's face I had seen that the twisted expression had gone. He was not ugly, as he always appeared in the ring and in his photographs. I looked upon the face of Mr. Clifford.

But not a word did I breathe to the others. I wanted to pull myself together first. Clifford—a professional champion. It was too astounding for anything. Then I found myself gazing eagerly at the fight.

"And what a change now!"

Tony Lennox was fighting with all his mettle. He had no intention of being caught napping a second time. By the end of the third round he was making rings round his opponent. He was the absolute master of the situation. There's no need to go into any details.

In the sixth round Tony delivered the blow which put an end to all the Boxing Unknown's hopes.

The latter lay stretched on the floor, taking the count.

Half an hour later we were all walking through the Helmford streets on the way to the station. And Reggie Pitt suddenly called our attention to the fact that Nelson Lee was walking a short distance behind, accompanied by Mr. Clifford. Reggie reckoned that large supplies of trouble were coming. Obviously, Mr. Clifford had been in the audience all the time. But I knew better!

"Just a minute, you chaps," I said briskly. "I'll catch you up!"

Before they could protest, I ran back, and came face to face with the gey' nor and Clifford.

"You boys will get into trouble later on," said Nelson Lee severely. "How dare you break bounds without—"

"All right, gey' nor—we know what's coming," I grinned. "And we're prepared for it, too."

I turned to Mr. Clifford, still smiling.

"Hallo, Tony!" I said. "Allow me to congratulate you! You put up a wonderful fight, sir."

Mr. Clifford grabbed my shoulder.

"You young rascal!" he exclaimed. "Have you told the others?"

"Not likely, sir," I grinned. "Silence is golden!"

"Thank goodness," said the sportsmaster. "But how in the name of wonder did you find out? It took me years to twist my face up in that way! I got it to such a state of perfection that my own mother wouldn't have known me! And I always used that face for my professional engagements."

I explained how I had learned his secret.

"Well, Nipper, I think you had better keep it quite to yourself," said Nelson Lee. "There is no reason why any of the other boys should know. From to-night onwards Tony Lennox is no more—he has finished his boxing career. And Mr. Clifford remains at St. Frank's as himself."

"Good business!" I said heartily.

"It would be quite impossible for the thing to go on," continued Nelson Lee. "And Mr. Clifford has chosen the better course. He has been leading this innocent kind of double life for years, and I cannot but admire him. But I think it is time it finished. There is no reason why the whole of St. Frank's should know the secret."

"You can trust me to keep quiet, sir," I promised. "But there is just one little thing I'd like to know. Who the dickens is the Boxing Unknown?"

Mr. Clifford smiled.

"His real name is Mike Dooley, from Chicago. Three years ago he was famous. But there were certain scandals about him in the States, and his backers were afraid that I should refuse to meet him if they brought him forward openly. In addition, the fight promoters believed that better business would result if the absurd catch-penny notion was adopted."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter now," I said. "You whacked Mike beautifully, and he can retire into the obscurity he came from."

Mr. Clifford smiled again.

"And I shall retire into the obscurity of St. Frank's," he said cheerfully. "After all, I've had my run—and now for a quiet life, if such a thing is possible among a lot of youngsters!"

And at St. Frank's the mystery of Mr. Clifford and the Boxing Unknown was never solved!

THE END.

BEGINNING NEXT WEEK:—

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