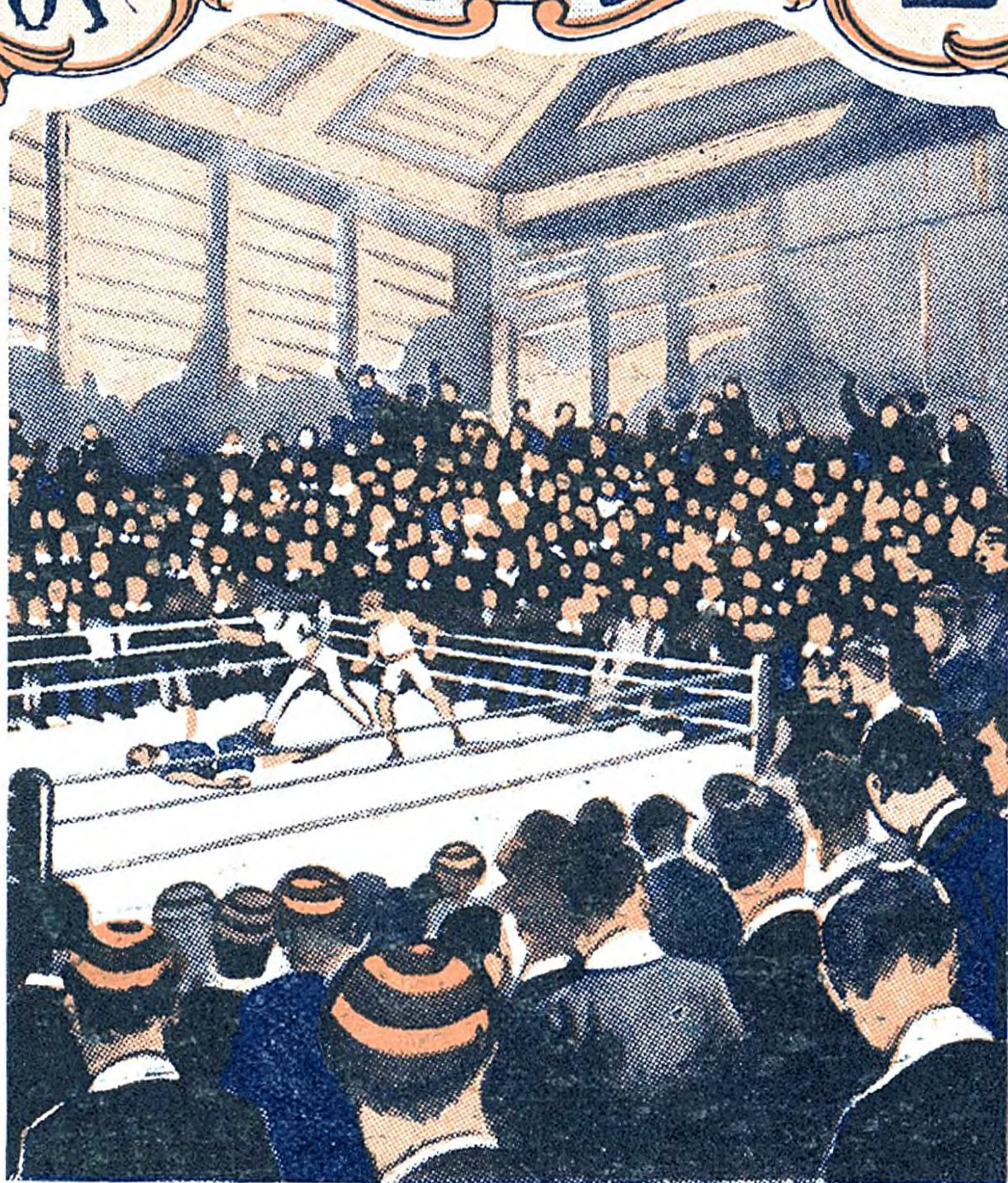


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Nipper versus Buster Boots.

THE BATTLE FOR THE CAPTAINCY !

THIS WEEK'S STORY OF THE GREAT FIGHT.

No. 435.

EVERY WEDNESDAY

October 6, 1923.



Before long they came to a wooden shanty with a painted sign over the door, announcing to all and sundry that the place was Bob Norman's Boxing Booth. The juniors went in.

The Battle For The Captaincy!



The bullying methods of Buster Boots, assisted by the Faithful Five, has made the new boy a powerful leader of the College House, and a power to be reckoned with by the Ancient House fellows. One by one he has broken the rebellious spirits opposed to him among the Monks, who had now found it better to respect his authority, swift retribution invariably following disloyalty to this powerful dictator. Now there was only one

serious obstacle to Buster's ambition to dominate the Remove, and that obstacle was Nipper, whose leadership still enjoyed the full confidence of the Fossils. Everyone knew that before long Nipper's prestige would be challenged by the iron will of Buster. The Ancient House had suffered again and again from the persecutions of Buster and his followers. If Nipper could not cope with this juggernaut, even the Fossils would accept Buster's rule, and the issue could only be decided in one way—namely, a fight. It was to be the battle for the Remove captaincy.

THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I. THE CHALLENGE!

ST. FRANK'S boiled within itself. On the surface there was nothing unusual to be seen. The daily school-work went on just the same as ever; the playing-fields were occupied by seniors and juniors, and any chance observer would have declared that the famous old school was one of the most peaceful spots on earth. But appearances are deceptive.

And here, at St. Frank's the junior school bubbled like some slumbering volcano. At any moment there might be a violent eruption.

Recently, there had been great trouble.

The feud between the Monks and the Fossils had resulted in a terrible riot in the old Triangle—a riot which had caused two or three broken limbs, and all sorts of other superficial injuries which were too numerous to mention.

And nearly two weeks had elapsed since that dreadful day.

The juniors had had very few opportunities to restart the quarrel—but this was mainly because all half-holidays had been stopped, and the entire Remove was confined to gates.

But the period of punishment was nearly over.

Dr. Stafford, the Headmaster, was convinced himself that his punishment had been effective—the Head believed that the juniors were now quiet, and would forget all about their deadly rivalry.

But the Head was deceived—he knew nothing of the undercurrent that was insidiously at work in the two Houses of the old school.

In Study C, in the Ancient House, I was talking to my two chums—Tommy Watson, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. It was tea-time, and we had visitors in the persons of Edward Oswald Handforth and Church and McClure.

Handforth was still showing a few signs of the recent fighting.

There was a scar over his right eye, and a cut lip was only just healing. Church and McClure were showing marks of more recent warfare. But this was not at all unusual. They generally got new marks every day.

"Things have been pretty quiet during this last week," Handforth was saying. "It's about time we started something. I think we ought to get some big affair on foot—just to show the Monks that we're as keen as ever."

"Yes—I agree," I replied. "But we shall have to be very careful. The masters are all on the alert now, and at the first sign of any activity they'll spot it. We've got to go easy."

"As long as you mean to do something, I don't mind," declared Handforth. "But all this talk about peace is ridiculous. It's dotty. We'll have no peace with the Monks as long as they're in existence!"

"Well, I wouldn't say that," I replied. "If they would only adopt a different tone, it wouldn't matter so much. But we're certainly not going to allow the College House to boast that they are the top dogs!"

"Rather not!"

"We won't stand that!"

And that, in a nutshell, was the whole trouble. For years the Ancient House had always been at the top—and this was as it should be. For the Ancient House was larger than the College House, and, as its name implied, was much older. The College House was quite a recent addition.

When I say recent, I mean that it had only been added about fifty years earlier. The Ancient House had been standing for two or three hundred years, and was one of the most picturesque old piles in this part of Sussex.

Not only was the College House smaller, but the boys in it were numerically inferior.

It was a recognised thing that the Ancient House should be the leaders. And until just recently, the Monks had never dreamed of questioning the rightful supremacy of the Fossils.

And then John Busterfield Boots had come along.

He was a new boy—and a natural born leader. He had got the Monks into such a state of discipline that they would willingly obey his every command. And he was a fellow who could enforce his word. For he was a fighter of proved calibre. He had beaten the celebrated Handforth with a knock-out.

This fight, in a way, had been one of the chief reasons of the Monks' new ambitions. They felt they could do anything—and with Buster at the head of affairs, they were determined to knock the Ancient House silly.

The great J.B.B. had brought five faithful supporters with him. These new boys had styled themselves the Supreme Six—and, indeed, it was a good name for them. For in the College House they were absolutely supreme.

At their previous school they had been the cock of the walk—and they coolly declared that they would assume the same position at St. Frank's. And John Busterfield Boots was going all out to gain his end.

The feud between the two Houses had developed like lightning.

There had always been a kind of rivalry—friendly, for the most part. But now there was no friendliness left. The Monks and the Fossils hated one another with a bitter, intense hatred.

No atrocity was too great—no outrage too severe.

Again and again there had been minor tussles between the two factions. And in the end it had led to that never-to-be-forgotten riot, when nobody would have been surprised if two or three deaths had occurred. It seemed almost miraculous that the injuries were mainly trivial.

But the affair, after it was all over, had sobered the Remove.

The gating had helped matters. And so, for the past ten days or more, things had been going on quietly and smoothly. And the masters were telling themselves that all was well.

But it was only on the surface.

Underneath, that hatred was stronger than ever, and very soon it would begin to show itself. Of this there was no question. But it was doubtful if there would be another riot.

In future, the activity would probably confine itself to japes—ill-natured japes, no doubt, but nothing worse. The Remove had learned a lesson it was not likely to forget. Rioting did no good, and it had to be paid for in more ways than one.

Naturally, I was determined to be the first to make a new move. I felt that it was up to the Fossils to show their mettle. And

I knew well enough that Buster Boots was planning things, too.

After tea in Study C, during which no more details were discussed, I sallied out into the Triangle with a few others. It was a rather chilly evening, with a keen wind blowing. On the other side of the Triangle a few Monks were walking about, or indulging in a little by-play.

As soon as I appeared, I noticed that John Busterfield Boots moved forward. He had been standing near the fountain in the middle of the Triangle—just within the Monks' safety zone.

Buster Boots looked quite a decent fellow—and I really believe that he had plenty of good in him. But this feud had antagonised the Monks so much that all that was bad in the fellows came to the surface. And Buster himself was no exception.

He was a well set up junior, with broad shoulders, and freckled face, and a shock of glaring red hair. He calmly strolled right over into the Fossils' section of the Triangle—for in these days there was a kind of invisible line drawn across the big open space.

The Ancient House juniors stared.

"That chap's asking for trouble!" said Reggie Pitt grimly.

This was the first time that any College House boy had ventured alone into the opposite zone. And it seemed that some sort of new activity was about to break out.

I noticed numbers of Fossils bracing themselves—ready to rush to the attack, if necessary. And Monks were doing the same. But they need not have bothered. There was to be no fighting.

For John Busterfield Boots carelessly took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and held it in front of him as he walked.

His meaning was unmistakable.

"Hallo!" I said. "A flag of truce!"

"My only hat!"

J.B.B. continued his stroll with all his usual coolness. He came right among the Fossils, who surrounded him curiously. But they had dropped all their ideas of battle.

"I want a word with Nipper," said Buster languidly.

"I'm not sure that I want a word with you, Boots," I replied, as I walked up to him. "You haven't covered yourself with glory since coming to St. Frank's. What do you want?"

"Just this," replied Buster smoothly.

He leaned forward, and gave my cheek a sharp flick with his fingers. I started back, red with rising anger. And the other fellows near by automatically clenched their fists.

"I suppose you want to fight?" I asked grimly.

"That," said Boots, "is the idea."

"All right—when you like!" I snapped

"I'm not the kind of fellow to turn down a challenge."

"Let me make myself thoroughly clear," said Buster Boots, carelessly. "I mean to fight you, and I am willing to abide by the result."

"What do you mean?"

"I am the leader of the Monks," continued Buster. "I have been considering matters, and I have come to the conclusion that this feud is rather a foolish business. We are the leaders—and we will fight! If you win, all well and good—I will accept your leadership without further question."

"Oh!" I said, with sudden interest. "If we meet in a fair fight, and I beat you, you'll drop all your attempts to attack the Fossils?"

"Absolute," replied Boots. "On the other hand, if I beat you, I shall expect to become captain of the Remove automatically. Is that agreed?"

"Certainly," I said promptly. "The man who wins will naturally be skipper. This fight, I take it, will be a battle for the captaincy?"

"That was my idea of issuing the challenge," said Buster. "But there is one other point that I wish to make perfectly clear. I am hoping to win this fight, as you probably will guess. If I do win, I shall demand complete loyalty from the Ancient House—I shall expect to rule the Fossils just as I am ruling the Monks. I, in fact, shall become supreme leader!"

"Agreed—if you win," I said.

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Fossils. "We all agree to that—it's fair. If Buster wins, he becomes captain and supreme leader!"

The juniors were enthusiastic. For they were supreme in their confidence—they knew well enough that I should beat this ambitious newcomer. And once he was completely whacked in fair fight, his power would fade and wither.

"That's all right, then?" said Buster smoothly. "I should like to arrange the details of this fight at once, if you are willing."

"I'm willing enough," I replied. "But I think we ought to do it in style. This is no place for discussing such a matter. I suggest that we each appoint a committee of three—representing the most important studies in each House—and meet in the gymnasium in fifteen minutes."

Buster Boots nodded.

"Good!" he said briskly. "That's the kind of thing I like. You're a business man, Nipper. In fifteen minutes, then, I'll be in the gym. with two other Monks. I shall expect you to be there."

He turned, and strolled away.

And a buzz of subdued excitement ran through the entire Remove when the facts became known. It seemed that big events were brewing!

CHAPTER II.

ARRANGING FOR THE BIG FIGHT!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE shook his head doubtfully.

"The fact is, dear old lads, I'm not so dashed enthusiastic," he remarked.

"I mean to say, these bally Monks ain't what a chappie would call scrupulous, what? The blighters are quite capable of doing something pretty poisonous. One never knows how to deal with such bounders!"

"You can trust Nipper to be cautious," said De Valerie. "Personally, I don't think there's any trickery about this affair. Buster Boots wouldn't be such a fool as to attempt treachery."

"All the same, we'd better keep our eyes skinned for trouble," said Alfred Brent. "We'll be on the alert all the time, in case we're wanted."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "That, Alf, is the scheme. And if there's any scrapping to be done, I'll do my bally old bit!"

The juniors were talking just inside the lobby of the Ancient House. Groups were dotted about in various quarters, all discussing the prospect of a fight between the two rival leaders.

It struck most of the juniors as being an excellent solution to the problem.

"Something like a big war," remarked Brent. "Two armies fighting against one another, hating one another like poison, and yet they've got no real reason for it. The Monks and Fossils have been keeping up this feud ever since the term started—and yet they don't really need to."

"Of course not, old scream," said Archie. "In fact, absolutely not!"

"So why shouldn't the two leaders fight it out between themselves, and decide the issue?" went on Alf. "That's what they ought to do in a big war—the two Prime Ministers or Presidents ought to scrap, and finish up the war in that way. Look at the trouble it would save."

"Absolutely," said Archie, with approval. "The scheme, dear old onion, appeals to me somewhat fruitily. At the same time, it seems to strike the old bean that it wouldn't work. A priceless ideal, and all that sort of rot, but imprac. What do you say, Clarence, old bird?"

Clarence Fellowe, the tallest junior in the Remove, nodded.

"I must confess, as you can guess, the scheme itself seems fine," he observed. "But all the same, when it comes to fame, a battle royal sublime. A pair of kings, or such like things, fighting to the end, would hardly make, my life I'll stake, a page of history grand!"

Clarence was a most peculiar fellow—he couldn't say a sentence without bringing in a rhyme or two. It was sort of second nature to him. Quite frequently, the juniors

spoke to him on purpose to hear his quaint doggerel.

"Gadzooks!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, that's rather foul! Without wishing to be critical, old darling, it's a rather frightful proposition to make 'grand' rhyme with 'end.' I mean, that kind of thing isn't really done!"

The lanky junior looked penitent.

"The rhyme was bad—it makes me sad!" he replied. "I must admit I'm wrong. But all the same, I'm not to blame, when rhymes won't come along."

"You do pretty well, on the whole," chuckled De Valerie. "Well, here comes Nipper. Don't let those Monks play any tricks with you, old man," he added.

"You needn't worry," I said briskly. "We can look after ourselves."

I had Reggie Pitt and Handforth with me—we were the Ancient House Committee. And we were on our way to the gymnasium. I had strongly advised all the other juniors not to start any demonstrations until the two committees had thoroughly discussed the details.

We hurried over to the gym, and found the College House Committee just arriving. It consisted of John Busterfield Boots, Bob Christine and Harry Oldfield. There was no sign of hostility.

Monks and Fossils stood about, greatly interested.

But they were not admitted. Only the six committee members entered the gymnasium. The door was closed, and we all looked at one another calmly, but without any indication of friendliness. A kind of haphazard truce had been called, but the events of the past week or so had been of such a bitter nature that we were in no mood for amiable overtures.

The two committees eyed one another coldly.

Buster Boots was as calm and collected as ever—nothing seemed to ruffle his collected composure. He had occupied the position of leader in the ranks of the Monks by sheer force of personality—and brute strength.

Any boy who failed to do Buster's bidding was promptly felled. Buster had a tremendous reputation as a fighter—a reputation that was well deserved. For he was, indeed, a fighting man of the first rank.

This had been proved beyond question by the fact that he had smashed Handforth—one of the most deadly boxers in the whole Remove. It was painful to admit the fact, but John Busterfield Boots had actually played with Handforth on that occasion. He had gained the victory with complete ease.

And Buster's confidence in his own powers was so supreme that he had challenged me fearlessly—confident of the ultimate result. He was absolutely certain that he would be able to deliver

the knock-out—the blow that would gain him the captaincy of the whole Remove.

Personally, I was quite elated at the prospect. I was confident, too—for I knew what I could do, and I had no fear as to the result of this fight. I welcomed the plan with enthusiasm.

For it seemed to open out a solution to the whole problem.

"Well, to discuss these details," said Buster Boots languidly. "I suppose we'd better have everything drawn up clearly and concisely. There can't be any mistake afterwards if we do that."

"My idea, exactly," I agreed. "The fight, I understand, is to be to a finish?"

"A knock-out," replied Buster. "We fight until the best man wins—until the loser fails to stand up at the referee's count. No limitation of rounds—we go on until one of us is whacked."

"Good!" said Handforth approvingly. "That's the idea. None of these decisions on points! The knock-out's the thing!"

Buster Boots nodded.

"I suggest that the winner becomes complete dictator——"

"That, of course, is your own affair," I broke in. "If I win, things will go on very much the same as at present—except for the fact that I shall require complete loyalty from the College House. If I win this fight, and retain the captaincy, I shall insist upon this feud being stopped at once and all the Monks will agree to accept my leadership unconditionally."

"Good," said Buster. "And if I win——"

"You won't!" growled Handforth.

"If I win, I shall become dictator!" continued Buster calmly. "I want to get this quite clearly now—before we go any further. When I become captain of the Remove I shall make many new regulations. And I shall demand complete obedience from the Fossils. As captain, I shall expect full and unquestioned support."

"If you win, you can rely upon the Fossils accepting your lead," I replied quietly. "In the Ancient House, Boots, we have a certain code of honour. And if you become captain I'll guarantee that every Fossil will give you unqualified support and strict loyalty."

"Well, that's settled," said Buster smoothly. "The next point is concerning the fight itself. What is your idea? When do you suggest it should take place?"

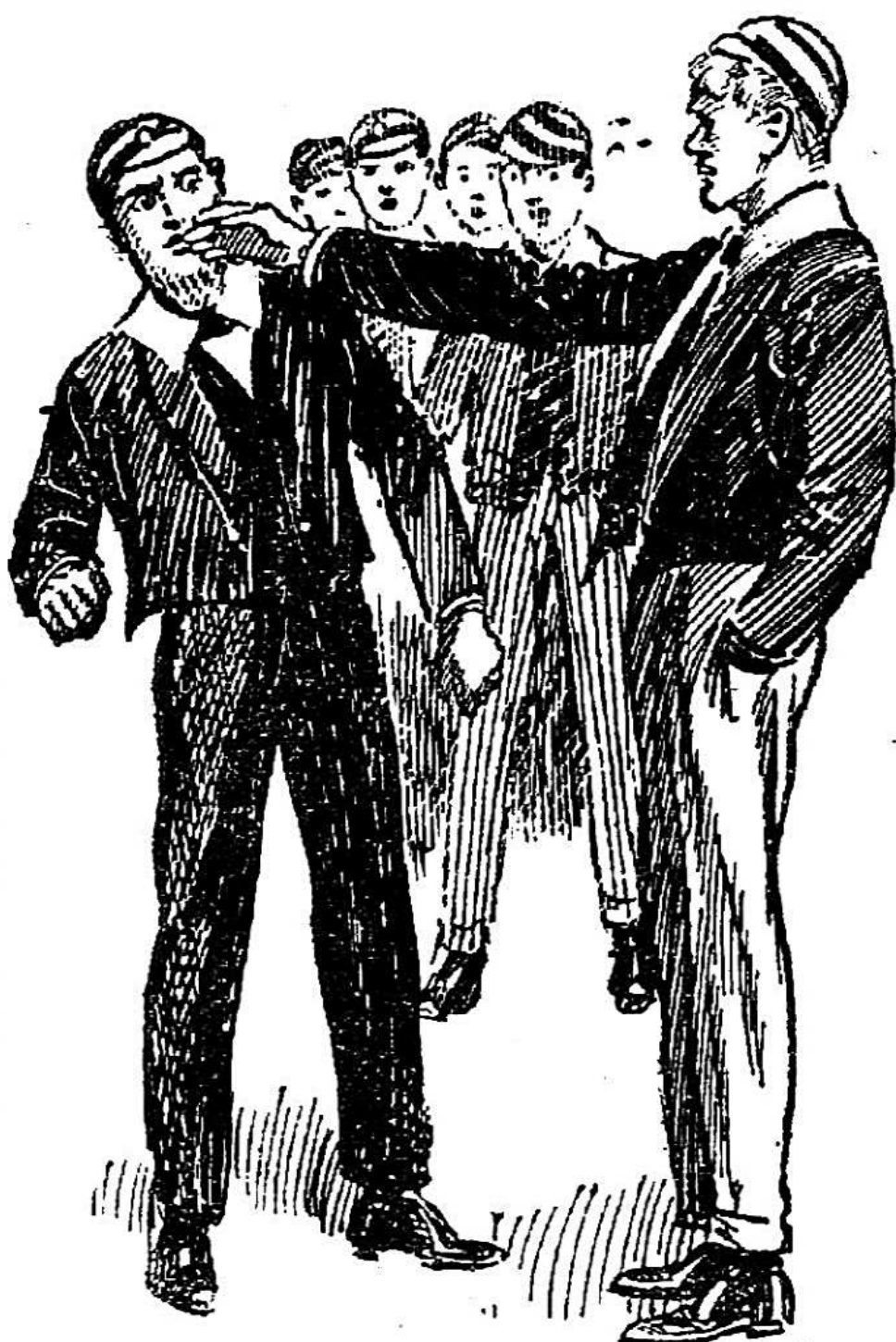
"This evening!" said Handforth promptly. "Straight away!"

Buster Boots looked at me.

"I'm not particular," I replied. "The sooner it's over, the better, perhaps. But I think we ought to wait till to-morrow, anyway. That'll give us a chance to prepare things."

Buster Boots shook his head.

"Of course, I was expecting Handforth to suggest having the fight at once," he



He leaned forward and gave my cheek a sharp flick with his fingers. I started back, red with rising anger. And the other fellows near by automatically clenched their fists.

said. "But I'm rather surprised, Nipper, that you should name to-morrow evening. What about training?"

"I'm quite fit," I replied promptly. "Aren't you?"

"If it comes to that, yes," said the College House leader. "But at the same time, I think we ought to treat this affair a little differently to an ordinary scrap. It's a fight for the captaincy—a big stake. You are the title holder, so to speak, and I am attempting to wrest it from you. I suggest to the committee that we each have a week's training, and hold the actual fight next Wednesday afternoon. This will give the fellows an opportunity to take a big interest, and we shall be certain of a good audience."

"Rot!" said Handforth promptly. "I don't agree to that at all! Fancy leaving it for a week! I vote the fight's held at once."

"No!" said Pitt. "I support Boots. Nipper may be fit, but there's no doubt that a week's training will make all the difference. I think it's a good idea to have the fight next Wednesday afternoon."

"Hear, hear!" said Christine and Oldfield.

"Well, that gives us a majority, doesn't it?" said Buster calmly. "Four against two—"

"No—I'm with you as well," I interrupted. "As the fight is to be so important, a week's training will be beneficial. It's all right, Handy—don't get excited. There are other points to consider, too."

"Other points?" breathed Handforth, glaring.

"Yes," I said. "We can't rush out, and have this fight in the Triangle—"

"What's wrong with the gym., here?" demanded Handforth.

"Nothing—except that it's rather small," I replied. "The fellows, don't forget, will regard this affair as a huge event—and, indeed, it is. We don't have fights for the captaincy every week—or every term, even. And the fellows ought to be provided for."

"My idea, exactly," exclaimed Buster. "While we two are training, we can leave the publicity arrangements, and all the other details, in the hands of our respective committees. And if we have the fight on a half-holiday there'll be no nosing about by masters. I don't know of a place that we can turn into a stadium—"

"Fort Resolute!" said Reggie Pitt crisply.

"Fort which?" asked Buster.

"You don't know about that spot, do you?" grinned Reggie. "Being a new fellow this term, you wouldn't. Fort Resolute is really a barn—that place in the meadow, just beyond the playing fields. We called it Fort Resolute during our barring out—when we had mistresses at St. Frank's, instead of masters."

Buster nodded.

"Yes, I remember now," he said. "Clapson was telling me about it. I've never been there, so I can't judge. Do you think it'll do?"

"Great!" put in Handforth. "That's a brain wave, Pitt! As a matter of fact, I was going to suggest it—myself, only you took the words out of my mouth! There's room enough in that old barn for hundreds."

"Exactly," said Pitt. "We can rig up a proper ring, with ropes and everything—and we can get crowds of fellows on the work of making temporary seats. While the two great men are in training, the Remove can organise, and prepare. So on Wednesday afternoon, when the fight's held, we'll have a first class ring and a stadium for the spectators. In fact, it'll be a miniature edition of the Carpentier-Dempsey fight."

"Good!" said Buster. "Now, we've got to talk about the referee. Somehow, I think we ought to have a senior. We ought to have somebody who's entirely distinguished in our affairs—"

"Leave it to Fenton," I interrupted.

"He's the captain of the school, and as straight as a die. This is going to be a straightforward boxing contest, with gloves, and absolutely above board. I'm pretty sure that Fenton will agree to referee the match. We'll put it to him, anyway."

"Fenton's the man," said Buster. "I shan't grumble if he agrees—I know he'll give perfectly fair decisions. And I suggest that during our training we keep completely apart, and maintain as much secrecy as possible. In other words, we'll conduct this affair in just the same way as a big professional fight. We'll allow no hint of our form to leak out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!"

"That's the idea!"

All the fellows on the committee were unanimous. This battle for the captaincy was beginning to develop into something far more important than the fellows had recently expected. I knew well enough that the whole Remove would be seething with excitement when the details became known. It was rather a good idea to put it off for a week. It would give the Remove something to look forward to.

"But there's one point that's got to be considered," I said. "We've got a week ahead of us—a week in which you and I, Buster, will be fully engaged. During this time I think a truce ought to be declared between the Monks and Fossils in general."

"Absolutely," said Boots. "I endorse that."

"You needn't worry," declared Pitt. "The chaps will all agree."

"Anyway, we'll put it to our respective followers," I went on. "In a matter of this kind the Form ought to be consulted. I suggest that we hold meetings as soon as this discussion is over. We'll put the facts before the Remove, and if the vote is unanimous in favour, we'll go straight ahead."

"Good!" said Buster.

"Providing that all agree, the truce will automatically start from then," I continued. "And any fellow will be severely punished if he starts any trouble."

"I'll look after the Ancient House crowd, anyhow."

"And I'll deal with the Monks," said Buster. "There'll be no trouble."

There were only a few more points to discuss, and then the committee meeting broke up. Outside, in the Triangle, crowds of Removites were waiting, eager to hear the result.

"Here they are!"

"Come on—they're going to fight!"

"Where's it going to be?"

All sorts of shouts went up, but they were soon silenced. Buster addressed the Monks, and I addressed the Fossils. We briefly told our followers that Form meetings were to be held at once—Monks in the College House common-room, and

Fossils in the Ancient House common-room.

Three minutes later the Triangle was as deserted as a moorland scene.

In the Ancient House common-room every Fossil was shouting at once. They surged round as I tried to speak.

"What's the delay for?" yelled Armstrong.

"Why don't you fight?" demanded Hubbard.

"When's it going to be?"

"Speech—speech!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Don't worry, old man—you'll smash that College House bounder!"

I managed to make myself heard at last, and told the excited juniors what the committee had decided. The fight was to take place on the following Wednesday afternoon; in the meantime we were to go into strict training, and Fort Resolute was to be turned into a fully equipped boxing stadium.

"Oh, good egg!"

"Ripping!"

"That's the wheeze!"

"Hurrah!"

"Until the fight, there's to be an armistice," I went on, above the din.

"No actual friendliness, but no scrapping. Any fellow caught quarrelling with a Monk will be punished by the Form!"

"Hear, hear!"

I continued the address, going into the details of the agreement—that if I won, the Monks were to accept me as their leader, and if Buster won, the Fossils were to obey him in all things.

The Fossils agreed heartily, declaring that there was no question as to the result of the fight. The confidence of the Ancient House crowd in me was absolute. A defeat was regarded as impossible.

"You'll win, Nipper!"

"You'll whack that Buster into bits!"

"Rather!"

They cheered me, and I couldn't help feeling proud. It was fine to have the support of all these fellows. In spite of John Busterfield Boots' reputation for fighting, the Ancient House fellows had a blind faith in my own fighting capabilities.

And I was determined not to disappoint them!

CHAPTER III.

THE RIVAL TRAINING CAMPS!



"FIRST class!" said Reginald Pitt approvingly.

"Couldn't be better," declared Hand-

forth. "In fact, dear old screams, the place might accurately be described as the snake's hips!" observed Archie Glenthorne.

We were standing in the roomy, square apartment at the very top of the North

Tower, above the Ancient House. This tower was the only one of importance at St. Frank's, and only a few months ago it had been struck by lightning, and partially destroyed.

That was the occasion when Alf Brent, Archie's special chum, had been seriously injured. But the tower had been repaired so wonderfully that from the exterior there was not the slightest sign that anything untoward had happened. Within, however, it was different.

In the process of rebuilding, the tower-room had been made larger, with an extra window looking out over the cloisters. A good deal of waste space, previously used for no purpose, had been utilised. And this apartment in the tower was airy, bright and cheerful.

We had selected it as my private training camp.

And, indeed, no place better could have been found. Here I could rig up my apparatus easily, and indulge in sparring with various partners to my heart's content. And there would be no fear of interruption from any of the College House fellows. It would be impossible for any of the Monks to spy, no matter how hard they tried.

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, the only possible traitors in the Ancient House, would be kept under strict guard, and would never be allowed near the camp. Besides, I had reason to suspect that they "fancied" me as a winner.

The cads of Study A had been literally expelled from the Ancient House by order of the Remove. They had been hurled forth, and had sought temporary refuge in the Monks' quarters. But Mr. Stockdale, the College House master, would not allow the cads to remain there. Mr. Stockdale was sensible.

So Fullwood and Co. had come back—somewhat subdued, and ready to submit to any orders that were given them. They had had a lesson, and we permitted them to occupy their old study. But they would have to behave—or further trouble would undoubtedly result.

There were a dozen of us in the room at the top of the North Tower, and we all decided that it was just the very spot.

And forthwith it was rigged up as a gymnasium. Punching balls, mats, boxing gloves, dumb-bells, and all manner of things were brought up by the enthusiastic juniors. And before bed-time the actual training had commenced.

The Remove was filled with subdued excitement.

There had never been a fight like this before. As a rule, juniors' scraps were settled on the minute. There would be a dispute, hot words, and in ten minutes the chaps would be at it hammer and tongs. These fights generally took place in the gym, or behind it.

But this was a big fight. It was to be a grand affair, with all the usual pre-

parations that attended a big professional boxing match. Since it was to be a fight for the captaincy of the Remove, it was right that the contestant should go into strict training for a week beforehand. When the fight actually did take place, both Buster Boots and myself would be in great fighting trim.

And all the other Removites entered into the spirit of the thing.

Reginald Pitt had appointed himself my manager, and he was the chief of the Ancient House Fight Committee. Any matters connected with the big boxing match were to be dealt with by Pitt. I was not to be bothered by any details. All I had to do was to get thoroughly fit.

grimly. "I don't believe in this imitation stuff—I'm going to have a proper match with you, and knock you out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do me much good from a training point of view," I chuckled. "Still, I don't mind you having a shot at it, old son. But I think we'll reserve that until to-morrow."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I just want to give you a few tips. Put yourself entirely in my hands, and you'll win the fight easily. I think your footwork is a bit stale, and you're too jolly slow with your right!"

"How do you know?" I asked. "I haven't started training yet!"

"You've got to develop the left upper-

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"You've got to have no business worries," declared Reggie firmly. "Simply confine yourself to training, and you can rely on me to see after the other details. Next Wednesday afternoon when the fight comes off, there won't be a hitch."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Handforth. "It's really my job to be manager, and I'd see that everything went smooth. But some of these fatheads object to the idea—so I'm going to be your chief sparring partner, Nipper."

"Good!" I said heartily. "Just your mark, old man."

Handforth nodded.

"You'll have a job to beat me!" he said

cut!" continued Handforth. "For example, what you've got to do is to practise speed. Look here! This is one of my special uppercuts that never fails!"

Handforth whirled round, striking fiercely at the air. He proceeded to give an example of shadow boxing, punching at nothing, his face grim and tense. Then he darted round the room, still punching out briskly.

Archie was rather late in getting out of the way, and received a fearful slish on the left ear. Church was knocked flying, and Pitt only just dodged in the nick of time.

"Here, steady!" gasped Church, wrathfully.

"I mean to say, what?" murmured Archie.

"Kindly keep the old flippers under control, old darling! Dash it all! What's the idea of whizzing hither and thither, and all this kind of stuff?"

Handforth came to a halt, breathing hard. "There you are—that's the kind of foot-work you ought to practise!" he said, ignoring the various interruptions. "Watch me again——"

"Thanks all the same, but I wouldn't dream of troubling you!" I said gently. "Were you doing some shadow boxing just now—or giving an imitation of a dying elephant? I'd just like to know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared.

"Dying elephant!" he howled. "I'm just showing you how to be light on your feet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth looked at the juniors with withering scorn.

"It's always the same!" he said bitterly. "Rank, rotten jealousy! That's all it is! All you can do is to jeer at me—just when I'm showing Nipper how to win the fight! All right! Go your own way! Blow you!"

Handforth thrust his hands into his pockets, and stalked indignantly out of the room. There came the sound of wild yells and sundry bumps from the staircase—Handy having collided violently with McClure, who was just coming up. The only way into the tower-room was by means of a narrow staircase from the upper landing.

"Handy's all right!" grinned Pitt. "The only trouble is that he has too big an idea of his own capabilities. He'll make a good sparring partner later on."

The following day everything was in full swing.

I had had several hours of keen training in my special quarters. And, already, I was beginning to feel more supple and more fit. It is surprising how training will bring a fellow's muscles into shape.

By mutual agreement, Buster Boots and I had decided that Mr. Clifford, the sports master, was not to be brought into the affair. Mr. Clifford, of course, was fully prepared to help us in our training—but he couldn't very well attend to the two of us, and it wouldn't be fair for one combatant to have the advantage of Mr. Clifford's skill. So his services were not sought.

Long before breakfast I had been out of bed. And in the early morning sunshine I had gone for a five mile trot, accompanied by a crowd of supporters—these latter being mounted upon bicycles. They didn't see any reason why they should run five miles before breakfast.

Buster Boots had done precisely the same thing—but he and his crowd had gone in the opposite direction. Reggie Pitt had arranged this. Percy Bray, of the College House, was Buster's manager. He and Pitt had got together, and had arranged certain rules which were to be strictly kept to.

By this time the news of the coming fight had spread throughout the school. Nobody

could fail to notice the excited condition of the Remove. All the masters were fully acquainted with the coming event. But as it was to be a properly staged boxing contest, with Fenton acting as referee, no opposition was offered. The masters said nothing about it, but they knew all the facts.

And while Handforth and one or two others constituted themselves as my trainers, Reggie Pitt was looking after the business side of the affair. There was a great deal to be done in preparing Fort Resolute for the fight.

At present the old barn was quite empty and bare. And Pitt went over to it with his committee. Percy Bray and the College House committee were already on the spot. And they all got their heads together.

The feud, of course, was dead.

At least, it was slumbering. Monks and Fossils mingled together as of yore—although there was now a lack of the former friendliness. But this would soon right itself. Boys have short memories, and it wouldn't take them long to forget all about the bitter animosity and hatred of the previous week.

"There's a lot to be done," said Pitt, as he looked round the big barn.

"You're right," agreed Percy Bray. "Plenty of space here, but I don't quite see how we can get the audience in——"

"Well, in the first place, we've got to rig up a platform in the middle," said Pitt.

"A platform?"

"Exactly—everything's got to be in order," continued Pitt. "We've got to fix up the ropes, and make the ring just like a professional one. As the fight will be held during the afternoon, there'll be no bother about lights. With the doors open, there'll be plenty of daylight coming in. We've got to get forms, too—and special chairs for the ringside seats. With a little wangling we can borrow all the forms and chairs we need from the lecture hall and the common rooms."

"How about the labour?" asked Bob Christine.

"That's what we've got to arrange," declared Pitt. "The work ought to be divided—say in shifts. A dozen fellows at a time—six Monks and six Fossils. This evening a good lot can be done—and more to-morrow evening, and so on. By Wednesday afternoon it'll all be finished."

The two committees discussed the plans, and made full arrangements for building the ring and providing no less than two hundred seats.

"We shall need all of them," said Reggie. "Over half the school will want to see this fight, including Fifth and Sixth Formers. Fags ought to be excluded—unless they tuck themselves up among the beams."

After careful measurements, it was found that fully two hundred and fifty spectators could be accommodated with seats. There would be standing room for a few others.

The work on the ring would be commenced

at once, and the seating problem would be dealt with afterwards. The Remove entered into the scheme heartily, and all agreed to do their share. There was something exciting in all this preparation. The big fight was to be a kind of show—an entertainment second to none.

Reggie Pitt had his hands full.

He was fairly pestered by eager inquirers. He couldn't move a yard without somebody or other asking about a seat for the coming fight. Chambers of the Fifth calmly demanded six ringside seats.

"Six?" repeated Pitt. "Sure that'll be enough?"

"Well, to begin with, anyhow," replied Chambers. "I'll probably want another dozen before the day. But I want you to reserve the six best seats for me and my special chums. See? You ought to consider it an honour."

Reggie grinned.

"An honour to reserve you the six best seats?" he repeated. "Sorry, Chambers, but the Remove comes first."

"Why, you young sweep—"

"It's our fight," went on Pitt. "It's a battle for the captaincy of the Remove, and it's only by a big concession that we're allowing any Fifth Formers to have seats at all!"

Chambers went red.

"Why, you cheeky young bounder!" he snorted. "I've a good mind not to come at all now! This is all the thanks I get for doing you a good turn! Why, the very fact of us being there will give the whole thing a prestige!"

"Keep your hair on!" grinned Pitt. "I may not be able to give you the six best seats, old son, but I'll see that half a dozen good ones are reserved. If it was an ordinary entertainment, and you were paying for them, I'd book you—"

Pitt paused, and looked keen.

"By Jove!" he said. "That's not a bad idea!"

"What do you mean, you young ass?"

"Whack out thirty bob, and I'll book you the six best ringside seats there are," said Reggie briskly. "There'll be no favours—first come first served, whether they're seniors or juniors. Thirty bob, please!"

Chambers stared.

"You young donkey!" he said gruffly. "What's the idea? If you think I'm going to pay to see a giddy Remove scrap, you've made a mistake! And you'll get into trouble if you start any games of that kind."

Pitt remained quite calm.

"You want the best seats—we have them!" he said genially. "As for getting into trouble, I'll risk that. All ringside seats five bob—that is, the first row. The next four rows half-a-crown, and the rest a shilling! Choose which you like! Only make up your mind quick, because they'll soon go!"

Chambers glared harder than ever. By this time Phillips and Bryant and a few

other Fifth Formers had come up, to say nothing of some Remove fellows.

"You—you hopeless ass!" said De Valerie.

"You can't charge for seats, Pitt!"

"I'm doing it!" retorted Reggie. "Who's the manager of this fight, anyhow? We're doing it all in style, and every seat will be numbered and reserved. If you want six, Chambers, you can have 'em—at five bob each!"

Chambers tried to speak, but couldn't—he nearly choked.

"On second thoughts, it would hardly be fair to give you these seats before the rest of the school knows about it," went on Pitt. "You see, my lad—this is what comes of hesitating. You've lost the chance now. You'll have to apply at the ticket office when it opens. Full announcements later."

And Pitt strolled off, leaving the other fellows staring after him rather dazedly—staggered by the suggestion that seats for the fight would have to be paid for. Such an idea was revolutionary.

"He must be mad," declared Bryant warmly. "The Head'll drop down on the whole thing, and stop it if he finds out that these kids are making money on the game. Disgraceful! I'm not paying any five bob for a ticket!"

"Neither am I!" exclaimed Chambers stoutly.

In the meantime, Reggie Pitt had gone straight to Edgar Fenton, of the Sixth. The captain of the school was to be the referee at the contest—and this fact alone gave the fight the stamp of quality.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Fenton," said Pitt briskly. "Just want your advice."

"Go ahead," said Fenton.

"It seems that practically everybody wants to see this fight next Wednesday," said Pitt. "The chaps are all demanding seats, and it looks as though we shall have a record crowd."

"Nothing surprising in that," said Fenton. "Half the school will be there."

"Well, I've got an idea," said Reggie. "I think we ought to charge for the seats—five shillings, half-a-crown, and a bob. They'll all be numbered and reserved, and there can't be any dispute then. We'll let the fags in for a tanner a time, providing they behave themselves, and sit on the beams."

Fenton looked rather grim.

"Oh, indeed!" he said quietly. "So that's the idea, is it? A pretty complete sort of scheme, young man!"

"Yes, I've worked it all out," said Pitt calmly. "Twenty-five seats at five bob—six pounds five. A hundred and twenty-five seats at half-a-crown—fifteen pounds twelve and sixpence. A hundred and fifty seats at a shilling—seven pounds ten. That's three hundred seats altogether, and I think we can squash them in, with a bit of wangling. Grand total—twenty-nine pounds ten and sixpence. With the fags' tanners we'll get

this up to thirty-two quid, roughly. Not so bad, eh?"

Fenton was looking grim.

"Are you trying to be funny?" he asked. "In another minute I'll kick you out of this study, my lad! You won't be allowed to make any money out of this fight—"

"I'm not expecting to," interrupted Pitt. "But it struck me that it would be a good idea to charge admittance, as this will save all bother, and completely do away with squashing and crowding. And the whole proceeds—every giddy penny—will go to the

will benefit. I'll have a private word with Mr. Lee about this—unofficially, of course—and tip you the wink later."

"Good!" said Pitt. "I knew I could count on you, Fenton."

He went out, feeling well content. And less than an hour later he received "the wink" from Fenton. It was O.K. And Pitt immediately announced to all and sundry that tickets would be available, numbered and reserved, in due course. They would be on sale Saturday afternoon at three o'clock.



Mr. Crowell, entering the Form-room while Handforth's back was turned, beheld the remarkable vision of Edward Oswald punching fiercely at the air, and uttering sundry grunts at the same time.

Relief Fund for the Bannington Unemployed. The poor chaps are having a rough time just now, what with slackness of work and all that—real, genuine cases of hardship. Thirty quid'll feed a good few youngsters, Fenton. Think of the children, you know!" Fenton looked thoughtful.

"Well, of course, that's different," he said. "In fact, it's a good idea. As you say, it'll avoid all disputes and crowding at the fight, and the Bannington unemployed

This was a cute dodge of Pitt's. All the fellows would have their Saturday pocket-money intact.

There was a good deal of discussion on the subject, but everybody agreed that the idea was sound. There couldn't be any jealousy about ringside seats. Those who paid the price would get what they wanted. And there was every indication that the ticket office would be stormed when Saturday afternoon arrived.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAVOURITE!



WORK on the ring proceeded apace that evening

The old barn was a hive of activity. Not merely twelve juniors, but two dozen were busy, and many more would have been willing if there had been something for them to do.

The juniors, in fact, had fully made up their mind that this fight for the captaincy was to be the real big event of the term. And all were working at high pressure to make it a huge success.

Neither Buster Boots nor myself were troubled with any of the details. It was our task to train thoroughly, and to get as fit as possible. And we were both progressing well.

John Busterfield Boots' training quarters were situated in a quiet room at the rear of the College House—an apartment that had previously been a lumber-room. Here the great Buster trained, doing strenuous exercises, punch-ball practice, and sparring with eager partners.

The same kind of thing went on in the Ancient House training camp.

And Pitt was busy with Percy Bray, while they superintended the erection of the ring and all the other details.

By all appearances, even three hundred seats would fall far short of the number that would be required. However, we couldn't provide more than the three hundred, and even then it would be a squash. Pitt and Bray were preparing numbered tickets, and every seat would be numbered, too.

There was no question as to who occupied the position of favourite.

Three parts of the school regarded me as a certain winner. The challenger was doomed to big defeat, and I should retain the title. That was the general impression. And practically every discussion of any importance among the fellows concerned the respective merits of Buster Boots and myself.

"Of course, Nipper's got the name, but that doesn't mean to say he'll win," remarked Armstrong. "The best chaps have to be beaten sooner or later, and I shouldn't be surprised if Buster does the trick!"

"Rubbish!" said Griffith. "You giddy traitor—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" interrupted Armstrong. "I'm just as keen as you are that Nipper should win. We don't want that College House cad for a skipper. I'm just weighing up his chances. Don't forget the way he wiped up Handforth the other day."

"Oh, but Handy isn't in Nipper's class," objected Owen major. "Handy's a good fighter, but he's too impulsive—he hasn't got enough science. He's so jolly clumsy, too."

Armstrong nodded.

"Very likely," he said. "But Buster Boots simply played with Handy, and showed us that he's a boxer of the first quality. He's got a tremendous amount of science, too. He's big, he's got plenty of staying power, and his father was a famous amateur boxer."

"Yes, there's a chance that he'll win, of course," admitted Owen major. "I say, that would be rotten for us. Oh, but I don't believe it! Nipper will never let that rotter whack him—I've got tons of faith in Nipper."

"Same here," said Griffith. "Look at the fights Nipper's had—look at the chaps he's knocked out in his time. And he was trained by one of the finest boxers in the country, too."

"You mean Mr Lee?"

"Of course I do," said Griffith. "I tell you, this is going to be one of the biggest fights that was ever staged at St. Frank's. It's got to be decided by a knock-out, and there's no question at all that Nipper will be the winner."

"Hear, hear!"

"Nipper's our man!"

"He'll pull it off all right!"

"Well, I hope so," said Armstrong. "But I can't help feeling a bit doubtful. They say that Buster is showing some marvellous form."

"Of course—they would say that," sniffed Owen major. "But we can't get any real information—they're too secretive. Even Nipper won't let anybody into his training quarters."

And so it went on—discussions were held all over the school. Even the seniors were talking of nothing else.

They pretended to be just casually interested, and half apologised for bringing up the subject—but this was only their swank. In reality, they were just as interested as any of the juniors.

It was admitted on all sides that Buster Boots was a fine fighter—he had proved that ever since his arrival at the school. But the general opinion was that Buster lacked staying power. And it was widely known that my staying power was good. Trained to the point of perfection, and as fit as I could be, I stood every chance of winning this all important match.

Early on the following morning I was up, feeling better than I had felt for weeks. The excitement of the thing was getting into my bones. And the training was having its due effect.

My limbs were more supple than usual—my muscles harder. I was quicker on my feet, too, and a great confidence surged within me. The idea of being beaten by John Busterfield Boots did not even trouble me.

Pitt and Handforth and Co. and a few others were out of bed as soon as I woke them up. And in less than ten minutes

we were off—out on our daily run towards Bannington Moor.

My companions 'were on bicycles, but I was attired in running shorts, and it was my intention to keep going, and take as much exercise as possible. As I ran along, I indulged in a little shadow boxing, just to pass the time. Handforth attempted the same thing on his bicycle, and nearly ended up in the ditch.

Our route was along the lane, past the lonely house known as the Mount, and then over a footpath skirting Bellton Wood, and round by the old mill, on the edge of the moor. There was hardly any prospect of meeting anybody along this route, for it was quite deserted.

Handforth and Pitt and Watson and the others were fully satisfied with my progress. They were inclined to be enthusiastic. And I must confess that I have never felt more fit in all my life.

"Keep this up, old man, and by Wednesday you'll be an invincible fighting machine," declared Tommy Watson. "Your muscles are as hard as nails, and I've never known your wind to be better. No amount of exertion seems to puff you out."

"I think I shall be all right," I said confidently.

By the time we got back from the morning run I was glowing with health. Just inside the gates our crowd ran into a group of College House fellows. John Busterfield Boots was among them. He, too, had got back from his morning run.

He was looking amazingly fit.

His red hair was all tousled, his face was aglow with health, and his strong, sturdy limbs were hard and firm. His chest was powerful.

"Better look out for yourself, old man," he said calmly. "I'm improving every day. Never felt better!"

"You'll feel different at tea-time next Wednesday!" said Handforth grimly. "You'll probably be in bed, with smelling salts, and plenty of bandages! Poor chap! I'm sorry for you!"

Buster grinned.

"My son, I expect to receive a good amount of punishment," he said calmly. "Nipper's a tough proposition—but I'm afraid he's going under. And when I'm the captain of the Remove—"

"When!" interrupted Pitt. "Better wait, Buster—it doesn't do to be too cocky! If you ever become captain of the Remove it'll be by a fluke! You haven't got an earthly!"

"We'll see!" said Buster. "I'm afraid there'll be a bit of a row after the fight—the chaps will be demanding their money back."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, they won't like paying good cash just to see a couple of rounds," said Buster smoothly. "But I can't afford to take any risks—so I shan't let Nipper last for more than two rounds."

And Buster Boots, grinning, marched away with his chuckling supporters. Handforth gazed after them, and snorted.

"The bragging ass!" he said hotly. "Two rounds! My only hat! Didn't you hear him, Nipper? Why didn't you biff him, or something?"

"The fight doesn't start until next Wednesday, old man," I said gently. "And if he likes to throw his weight about—let him. But I think he'll have a bit of a task to knock me cold in the second round."

We went towards the Ancient House, Handy still indignant.

"You've got to develop that left swing a bit more," declared Edward Oswald. "You are pretty good on the whole, but you're slow with the left. I'll just show you how you ought to practise."

Handforth stopped in his tracks, and proceeded to do a little shadow boxing. He was so engaged in this that he didn't notice the fact that everybody else marched indoors. Handforth was left out there alone. He gave a bellow as he discovered the truth, and dashed into the Ancient House to find me.

But, somehow or the other, he had no opportunity of showing me his famous left swing before lessons started. Again and again Handforth tried to get me alone, but it was useless.

"The rotter!" muttered Handforth, while Mr. Crowell's back was turned. "He knows jolly well that his left swing is slow—and yet he won't let me show him a thing!"

"Shush!" breathed Church. "You'll have Crowell down on you!"

Handforth breathed hard, and went on with his work. Ten minutes later Mr. Crowell had reason to leave the class for a few minutes, and the very instant the door was closed Handforth dashed out of his place, and stood facing the Remove. "I'm jolly well going to show you that left swing!" he declared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get back to your place, you ass—you can't do it now!"

"Besides, Buster's here!" grinned Pitt. "You don't want to give Buster the benefit of your marvellous knowledge, I suppose?"

Handforth started.

"You blessed Monks had better look the other way," he said gruffly. "This isn't for you—it's for Nipper!"

"Go ahead!" I grinned.

Handforth proceeded to prance up and down the Form room, indulging in the most extraordinary antics. In his own opinion, he was shadow boxing—but no disinterested observer would believe this.

Mr. Crowell entering the Form-room while Handforth's back was turned, beheld the remarkable vision of Edward Oswald punching fiercely at the air, and uttering sundry grunts at the same time.

The Remove held its breath.

And Mr. Crowell stood there, quite still, his face very grim. Handforth, in supreme ignorance of the truth, continued his wonderful exhibition. Turning, he pranced down the Form-room again, hitting out with sudden swinging jabs. His final blow came within an inch of Mr. Crowell's nose, and the latter gentleman started back with a gasp.

Handforth gave one gulp, and turned crimson.

"Great pip!" he panted. "I—I didn't know you'd come back, sir!"

"I am quite prepared to believe that, Handforth," snapped Mr. Crowell. "How dare you? What, may I ask, were you supposed to be doing? What is the explanation of these preposterous antics? Have you gone insane, boy? What do you mean by prancing about like a lunatic?"

Handforth stared, stupefied and amazed.

"Couldn't—couldn't you see what I was doing, sir?" he asked blankly. "That was shadow boxing—I was just showing the chaps a few—"

"Oh, indeed!" interrupted Mr. Crowell curtly. "And do you imagine that this is the correct place and the correct time, Handforth, to indulge in these gymnastic displays? Go back to your place at once, and get on with your work. I shall require you to write me two hundred lines for stopping the work of the whole class."

"But—but—"

"Enough!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "Go to your place!"

Handforth went, and the Remove grinned with much enjoyment. And Edward Oswald was not quite so keen about displaying his famous left swing.

CHAPTER V.

BETTING ON A CERT!



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD shook his head.

"My dear chap, you're clean off the rails!" he said calmly. "Boots is never goin' to win this fight. It's Nipper's—right from the start."

Gulliver and Bell stared.

"Do you mean to say that you'd put your money on Nipper?" demanded Gulliver.

"Absolutely!"

"But—but you rotter, you hate Nipper like poison!" protested Bell. "We're all pally with Buster—he's a fine chap. I

reckon it's up to us to support him. I'd love to see Nipper smashed!"

The cads of Study A were chatting in a corner of the Triangle. Lessons were over, and it was nearly tea-time.

"When it comes to a matter of personal likes and dislikes, nothin' would please me more than to see Nipper knocked out," said Fullwood. "But this happens to be a fight in which all possibility of fakery is out of the question. The best man is goin' to win."

"An' you think the best man is Nipper?"

"I don't think it—I know it," replied Ralph Leslie. "Much as I hate him, I've got to admit that he's a marvellous boxer. Buster's pretty good, but he'll never win this fight. It's Nipper's from the very start. I'll bet all my spare cash on it, an' take any odds."

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" said Gulliver. "I've been hopin' all along that Nipper's goin' to be beaten, but it's no good dodgin' the facts, is it? It'll take a better man than Buster Boots to beat Nipper."

"Eh? What's that?" asked Percy Bray, strolling up.

"Oh, nothing!" said Gulliver hastily.

"Didn't I hear you saying that Buster won't be able to win?" asked Percy.

"Well, suppose I did?" asked Gulliver. "It's a fact. Ask Fullwood!"

Percy Bray was not alone. The other members of the Faithful Five were with him. John Busterfield Boots had brought these five fellows to St. Frank's with him, and they were his followers in everything. Crowe and Webb, of Study P, were an average pair of juniors, and Crooks and Denny, of Study R, somewhat different. Crooks was tall and thin, with shifty eyes; and Denny was sturdy and broad and rather coarse in expression.

"Oh, well, it's not surprising that these chaps should favour Nipper—they're Fossils," said Crowe, with a sniff. "But they're going to get a big surprise on Wednesday."

"I thought you hated Nipper?" asked Percy Bray.

"So we do—the self-satisfied rotter!" said Fullwood sourly. "But I don't allow personal dislikes to interfere with my judgment. An' I reckon that your man is in for a whackin'. Nipper's as hot as mustard."

"Seen his form lately?" asked Denny eagerly.

Fullwood laughed.

"Tryin' to get inside information, eh?" he inquired. "As a matter of fact, we haven't been allowed anywhere near Nipper's trainin' quarters. But that's nothin'. I know what Nipper is—an' he'll simply eat poor old Buster."

Percy Bray looked serious.

"Look here, Fullwood, you're not like the rest of these Fossils," he exclaimed

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(Now read on.)

"THE STONE OF SACRIFICE."

AT the far end of the sacred cave as previously mentioned, stood a monstrous wooden idol, representing a gigantic old man, lying asleep with his head pillowed on his arm. In front of this idol stood the "stone of sacrifice," a massive slab of dark-red stone, supported on four short, thick, roughly carved wooden legs. In the east wall of the cave was a long, straight, tube-like tunnel, about four inches in diameter. This tunnel communicated with the open air, and was so arranged that every morning, about the time of sunrise, a beam of golden sunlight passed along the tunnel and fell on the idol's face.

The idol was supposed to represent a sleeping giant named Buddai. Inserted in each of the eyes, however, was a large and almost flawless diamond; and once a day, when the first beams of the rising sun fell on these diamonds and caused them to sparkle, Buddai was said to be awake.

Needless to say, he did not remain "awake" for long. As the sun rose higher above the horizon, his rays no longer passed through the tube-like channel, and the moment the diamonds ceased to sparkle Buddai was said to have fallen asleep again.

On those mornings when the sky was clouded and overcast, Buddai never "woke" at all! On the brightest and sunniest morning, and at the most favourable season of the year, he was never "awake" for more than a couple of minutes. And it was during these two minutes, or less, at certain seasons of the year—that human sacrifices were offered up to him.

After this brief digression we return to Nelson Lee. When his stupor passed away he found that the natives had once more bound him hand and foot and carried him back to the sacred cave, where they had laid him on the stone of sacrifice. Dargo, similarly pinioned, was lying by his side, and had apparently recovered consciousness some time before. Day was evidently breaking, for the cave was filled with an eerie twilight, which was brightening every moment, and which seemed to suggest that the hour of sunrise was very near at hand.

The witch-doctor was kneeling in front of the idol, with a long-bladed knife in one hand, and a silver bowl in the other. Half a dozen natives were standing on each side of him, each man armed with a hollow gourd, which was partly filled with pebbles.

Behind the stone of sacrifice, covering every inch of the floor space of the cave, was a grovelling crowd of men and women, all of them with their hands clasped behind their heads, and their foreheads close pressed to the ground.

"What's going to happen?" asked Nelson Lee, addressing Dargo in a low, tense whisper.

"We going to be offered to Buddai," answered Dargo, without the slightest trace of emotion in his voice. "Buddai sleeping now. By-and-by de witch-doctor gib de signal, and de people dance and shout and sing and make music. Dat wake Buddai. Den de witch-doctor cut out our hearts wid dat knife, and put dem in dat bowl, and offer dem to Buddai."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the witch-doctor rose to his feet and signed to the men with the gourds. These men promptly set to work to rattle the pebbles inside the gourds, and thus produced the "music" to which Dargo had alluded, and which is the only kind of instrumental music known to the Australian native.

When the "music" had lasted two or three minutes the witch-doctor made another sign. Instantly the grovelling natives leaped to their feet, and began to dance the "Corrobaree," or "Dance of Death."

Presently, at another sign from the witch-doctor, they broke into a low chant, which gradually grew louder and louder, until at last every man in the cave, except the

witch-doctor and the two prisoners, was yelling and screaming at the top of his voice in a laudable attempt to wake the sleeping Buddai.

Suddenly the witch-doctor held up his hand, and the uproar ceased as if by magic.

For five—ten—fifteen seconds the natives gazed in spellbound expectation at the idol's hideous face. Then a wild, exultant shout burst from their throats.

The diamond eyes had suddenly flashed into dazzling, coruscating points of light!

"Behold!" cried the witch-doctor, pointing to the glittering eyes with his knife. "Great Buddai wakes! In answer to our supplications the mighty one has returned from the land of dreams to receive his people's offerings! What shall we offer unto him?"

"The hearts of Dargo and the white man!"

The answering shout reverberated through the echoing cave like the roar of a storm-tossed sea.

"It is well!" said the witch-doctor, bowing his head.

With slow and solemn steps he advanced to the stone of sacrifice. He placed the silver bowl on the slab, and laid one hand on the detective's breast. With the other hand he raised the knife in the air, and was just about to plunge it into his victim's heart, when—

The idol spoke!

"Beware!" it cried, in a low-toned, menacing voice. "Your offering is an abomination unto me! Both Dargo and the white man have found favour in my eyes. If a hair of their heads be injured I will blow upon this mountain with my breath, and will cause it to fall upon ye and overwhelm ye!"

It is hopeless to attempt to describe the terrific sensation which was produced amongst the superstitious natives by this startling and apparently supernatural phenomenon.

The reader, of course, will hardly need telling that there was nothing supernatural about it at all.

As a matter of fact, the whole performance was simply a clever trick on the part of Nelson Lee, who was making use—not for the first time in his career—of his skill as a ventriloquist.

The natives, of course, had no suspicion of this, for ventriloquism was an art of which they had never even heard.

The result was that every native present, including both Dargo and the witch-doctor, was firmly convinced that a miracle had taken place, and that the words recorded above had been uttered by their deity.

For one brief instant they stared at the wooden effigy in awestruck stupefaction, their mouths wide open, their eyes protruding from their sockets, and their bare knees knocking together like castanets.

Then, with a shuddering moan of fear,

they flung themselves on their faces in abject, grovelling terror.

After waiting for a moment or two, in order to let the "miracle" sink in, the detective once more threw his voice, as the saying is, and made the idol speak.

"Hear now my commands!" he said, very slowly and deliberately. "Let the white man be released and treated as an honoured guest. Let Dargo also be released and restored to his position as your chief. As for the man who would have slain them, ye shall suffer him to dwell amongst you no more, for his works are evil and his teaching false. Ye shall not molest him if he hasteneth away before the hour of noon, neither shall ye follow him to do violence unto him, but if he tarry in your midst beyond the hour of noon ye shall slay him with your spears."

Not a native stirred. Fear held them spellbound. Nelson Lee glanced at the wooden face of the idol, and saw that the diamond eyes were beginning to grow dim. Buddai would soon be "asleep" again.

"Wherefore do ye tarry to obey my commands?" he thundered. "Thou worker of evil, thou who wouldst have slain my faithful servants, rise and flee, lest I send my lightning to consume thee!"

The witch-doctor leaped to his feet and fled from the cave in panic-stricken terror.

"Now set the prisoners free!" continued the voice. "Quick, ere I breathe upon these solid rocks and cause them to fall down upon ye!"

Almost before the words were uttered a score or more of the natives were slashing at the cords by which Nelson Lee and Dargo were bound. A moment later they were free.

"It is well! My anger is appeased!" said the idol, speaking for the last time. "I now return to the land of dreams. Farewell!"

The rising sun sent a parting gleam of like into the diamond eyes. For the hundredth part of a second they flashed and sparkled with all their former radiance.

Then suddenly the light was quenched, the glittering eyes grew cold and lustreless, and from the watching throng there burst the sob-like cry:

"Great Buddai sleeps!"

ON THE TRAIL AGAIN.

THERE is nothing so fickle as a crowd of human beings, and nothing more uncertain than popularity.

If the natives had been canvassed at the moment when Buddai "woke," and had been asked to vote for the most popular man in the tribe, there is not the slightest doubt that the witch-doctor would have headed the poll.

If a similar vote had been taken after Buddai had "fallen asleep" again, it is equally certain that every man in the cave

would have plumped for Dargo, and never a one for the witch-doctor.

In fact—thanks to the "miracle" which Nelson Lee had performed—the tables were completely turned, and the same men who had been thirsting for the blood of Dargo and the detective now fawned upon them and kissed their feet, and ultimately escorted them from the cave with enthusiastic shouts of acclamation.

"This is a great day for you, my dusky friend," said Nelson Lee, when he and Dargo had at last been permitted to withdraw into the latter's gunyah. "After what has happened this morning, you'll be a hero in the eyes of your people for the rest of your life!"

"Dat's so!" said Dargo, with a self-complacent wag of his head. "Me sacred person now! My people nebber forget that Buddai spoke for me! Me nebber forget it, too! Plenty much most wonderful ting dat ever happened!"

The detective smiled. For one half-second he was tempted to tell Dargo how the "miracle" had been performed, but, on second thoughts, he deemed it wiser to hold his tongue.

"Why should I spoil the illusion?" he muttered to himself. "Why shouldn't I let the little beggar continue to believe that his deity interfered on his behalf?"

"You have changed your mind now, I suppose?" he said aloud.

"What you mean?" demanded Dargo.

"When you came to the sacred cave last night," said Nelson Lee, "I promised that if you would help me to escape I would take you with me as my servant. At the time you expressed your willingness to go, but you would rather stay with your people now, I expect."

"For sure!" said Dargo. "Me sacred person now! Buddai spoke for me! Me heap more powerful dan before! De witch-doctor gone, and him nebber dare to come back. Why me go?"

"No reason at all," said the detective. "At the same time I hope I may still rely upon receiving your assistance."

"For sure!" said Dargo again. "Buddai say me gib you plenty much honour, and me not going to disobey him. We do eberyting you say. If you want to stay with us——"

"But I don't," said Nelson Lee, interrupting him. "On the contrary, I'm anxious to be off at the earliest possible moment."

"Me understand," said Dargo, somewhat sadly. "Black men no good company for white man."

"Don't talk nonsense!" said the detective, laying his hand gently on the native's shoulder. "That isn't the reason at all. If I were free to consult my own wishes, there is nothing I should like better than to stay with you for a week or two. But I have work to do—work that demands my immediate attention. Do you know

where I was going when your people captured me?"

Dargo shook his head.

"Then I'll tell you," said Nelson Lee. "A certain white man, named Mark Rymer, is very anxious to have me killed. Yesterday morning he went to another white man, named Bush Billy, who is the leader of a gang of bushrangers, and he offered Bush Billy and his men a large sum of money to murder me.

"He hadn't the money with him at the time, and the bushrangers refused to kill me until they had the money in their hands, so at last it was arranged that they should capture me, and take me to their mountain stronghold, and keep me there until Mark Rymer and one of the gang rode over to Nymagee and procured the money from the bank.

"I was captured by the bushrangers at Macpherson's station yesterday morning. After they had captured me they lashed me to a barebacked horse and took me to Barnby Coppice. Mark Rymer and one of the gang then rode away to Nymagee, while the rest of us set out for the bushrangers' secret lair, which is known as the Glen."

"Now me understand," said Dargo. "You were going to de Glen when my people attacked the bushrangers and took you prisoner."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "When Bush Billy saw that he could not shake your people off, he turned my horse round, and sent me galloping back into their midst. He and his followers then rode on to the Glen. Do you know where the Glen is situated?"

Again Dargo shook his head.

"Do you think you could find out?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Plenty much easily!" said Dargo. "Me only got to go to de place where my people captured you, and den me can follow de track ob de bushrangers' horses."

"Will you do so?"

"Me will," said Dargo promptly. "Me take my warriors wid me, and when we come to de Glen we fight the bushrangers and kill dem all."

"Thanks, but I'd rather you didn't," said Nelson Lee. "I merely want you to show me where the Glen is situated, and then I want you to guide me to the nearest township."

"Me understand," said Dargo. "You find out where the Glen is, and den you go to de police-troopers and tell them what you know."

"That's the idea," said Nelson Lee. "As I have already told you, Mark Rymer and one of the bushrangers went to Nymagee yesterday afternoon to get the money out of the bank. They know nothing of what has happened here, of course, and consequently they are under the impression that I am now at the Glen. It was arranged that they should bring the money to the

Glen at midnight tonight, and I want to be there, with a handful of troopers to welcome them. Will you help me to do that?"

"Me will," said Dargo.

He was as good as his word; and as soon as he and the detective had satisfied the cravings of hunger, they took their departure, the detective on his horse, Dargo running by his side.

It was nine o'clock when they reached the spot where Nelson Lee had fallen into the hands of the natives. Rain had fallen during the night, and even to the detective's practised eye the tracks of the bushrangers' horses were no longer visible. To Dargo, however, the trail was as plain as the nose on his face, and for upwards of three hours he trotted along, a yard or two in front of the detective's horse.

Shortly after noon they came within sight of a straggling chain of rugged and precipitous hills. As they drew nearer to this rocky barrier Nelson Lee perceived that it was pierced by a number of narrow ravines, and when Dargo came to a halt at the end of one of those ravines the detective knew that the first part of his task was as good as accomplished.

Bidding Dargo take charge of the horse, Lee dismounted and stole up the ravine, which was nowhere more than twenty feet wide, and was bounded on each side by smooth, bare walls of rock, fully two hundred feet in height.

When he reached the other end he found that the ravine suddenly opened out into a sort of natural amphitheatre, surrounded on every side by towering mountain peaks. In appearance it was not unlike an enormous basin, planted in the heart of the hills, and, so far as Nelson Lee could see, the only way of getting into it, or out of it, was by means of the narrow ravine already described.

On one side of this rocky basin was a row of wooden stables, with corrugated iron roofs. On the other side, nestling at the foot of one of the peaks, was a long, low, wooden shanty.

A man was standing at the door of this shanty, smoking a pipe. If there had been any lingering doubt in the mind of Nelson Lee as to whether he had found the "Glen" or not, it would have been banished by the sight of this man. For it was Bush Billy himself!

The detective crept back to where he had left his horse.

"So far so good," he said, as he vaulted into the saddle. "We have found the Glen! Now take me to the nearest town where there's a police depot."

Dargo pondered for a moment, then trotted off in a northerly direction.

Four hours later he pointed to a distant line of roofs, interspersed with factory chimneys.

"Dat Cobar," he said. "Plenty many troopers dere. Me go no farder now. Me

no like while men's towns. Me go back to my people."

The detective accordingly took an affectionate farewell of his dark-skinned ally, and rode on unaccompanied. By half-past five he was closeted with the commissioner of the Cobar police, in the latter's cosy office at the depot. By six o'clock he had put the commissioner in full possession of the main facts of the situation.

By seven o'clock the commissioner had mustered a company of twenty armed and mounted troopers, and had placed them at Nelson Lee's disposal.

By a quarter to twelve the little caval-

Professor Rymer, and the other was his bushranger guide!"

IN THE BUSHRANGER'S LAIR!

"SO this is the Glen, is it?" asked Professor Rymer, as he and his guide rode leisurely down the starlit ravine.

The bushranger, known as Sam, pondered the question for a moment in silence, then answered it with another.

"Supposin'," he said, "as I was to point to the neck of a bottle, and ask yer if that was the bottle—wot would yer say, mister?"

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250 BOOKS AND OTHER CONSOLATION PRIZES.

Particulars of how you may win one of the above handsome prizes will be given in our October 20th issue.

cade, with Nelson Lee at their head, had reached the ravine which led to the Glen, and had hobbled their horses in a neighbouring coppice.

"We will wait here in this coppice until Professor Rymer arrives," said Nelson Lee. "As soon as we've seen him walk into the trap we will—"

He broke off and held up a warning hand. A couple of horsemen, plainly visible in the starlight, were approaching the mouth of the ravine. A moment later they had vanished into the narrow defile.

"Trapped at last!" whispered Nelson Lee exultantly. "That man on the right was

"That it wasn't exactly the bottle, but merely a part of the bottle," answered the professor.

"Jist so! Well then, this ain't exactly the Glen, but only a part of it."

"I see. In other words, this gorge leads into the Glen?"

"Yes. About two hundred yards further on, it widens out into a hollow, summat like a cup in shape, wi' sides as steep as the walls of a house. The hollow is wot we calls the Glen. This bit is only the entrance-hall, so to speak."

"And a capital entrance hall, too!" observed the professor, as he allowed his

eyes to wander up the precipitous sides of the ravine. "Half a dozen determined men, entrenched in this narrow ravine, would have no difficulty in keeping a whole host of troopers at bay.

"On second thoughts," he added quickly, "it seems to me that the very ease with which this gorge could be made impregnable, is a source of weakness to you rather than of strength. For just as it would be impossible for the troopers to force their way into the Glen in face of armed opposition, so it would be equally impossible for you and your comrades to force a way out if the troopers blockaded the exit. You would be caught like rats in a trap."

"Not us!" replied Sam, with a scornful laugh. "Yer don't suppose we're sich fools as to—"

He broke off, as though it had suddenly occurred to him that he might be saying too much.

"You were about to observe——?" prompted Mark Rymer.

"Ne' mind wot I was goin' to say," returned Sam, somewhat sullenly. "'Ere we are at the Glen! See them sheds over there? Them's the stables for our 'osses. That big 'un at the end is where we keeps the plunder till we can find a market for it. That wooden shanty on the other side of the hollow is where we eats and sleeps and generally amuses ourselves. Coo-ee!"

The door of the shanty stood wide open, for the night was close and sultry, with scarcely a breath of wind. The yellow light of a paraffin lamp illumined a couple of windows, and streamed through the open door.

In answer to the bushranger's hail a man appeared in the doorway. It was Bush Billy.

"Is that you, Sam?" he shouted, peering across the intervening twenty yards of darkness.

"Ay, ay!" replied Sam.

"Is that the professor with yer?"

"Yes."

"Then put up your nags, and bring him along."

The two arrivals accordingly stabled their horses, and then walked across to the shanty, which was built of rough-hewn logs, and covered with a corrugated-iron roof. It consisted of a single long, low room, lighted in the daytime by a couple of small, square windows, guarded on the inside by a criss-cross of iron bars. Running down the middle was a long, narrow table, flanked by wooden forms. At one end was an old-fashioned cooking-range, which had been "lifted" from a station fifty miles away. At the other end, suspended from the spars of the roof, were a score or more of untidy-looking hammocks.

At the moment when Sam and Mark Rymer entered the room, Bush Billy was standing with his back to the range, immediately underneath a hanging-lamp.

The rest of the gang were sitting at the table, some playing cards, others dominoes, and others cleaning their rifles and revolvers. The hammocks, with one exception, were empty.

"Glad to see yer!" said Bush Billy, when the two men entered. "Don't shut the door, Sam, for we're well-nigh grilled as it is! Take a seat, professor, and help yerself to the whisky."

He pointed to a brown stone jar which stood on the table with a small tin mug by its side. The professor shook his head, and glanced round the room with an eager, anxious stare.

"Where's Nelson Lee?" he asked.

"Oh, he's all right!" replied Bush Billy, jerking his thumb towards one of the hammocks. "He's gone to by-by!"

The professor glanced at the hammock, but the light was dim, and the room was filled with a haze of vile tobacco-smoke. All he could see was a somewhat bulky form, lying in the hammock, and covered with a horse-rug.

"Now, professor," said Bush Billy, "if you'll just hand over the spondulicks, yer can do wot yer like with that thing in the hammock—just what yer like!"

The professor produced a wad of bank notes from his pocket.

"Seven hundred pounds," he said.

"That was the sum we agreed upon. Count it, and see that it's right."

Bush Billy counted, and announced that it was "O.K." He divided the money in equal shares amongst his confederates and himself, then he pulled out his revolver and his knife and threw them down upon the table in front of the professor.

"Use whichever yer like," he said, with a sly wink at his companions.

The professor picked up the knife, and moved towards the hammock. He stretched out a trembling hand and dragged the horse-rug aside. Then he spun round on his heel, with an imprecation, whilst at the same instant the bushrangers burst into a blatant roar of laughter.

For that which the professor had uncovered was not the pinioned form of Nelson Lee, but the lifeless carcase of a sheep!

For several moments he stared at the jeering crowd in speechless fury. The veins in his high-domed forehead stood out like knotted whipcord. His quivering lips, half parted in a malignant scowl, revealed two gleaming rows of tightly-clenched teeth. His eyes contracted to the merest slits, whilst the long, thin fingers of his unoccupied hand twined and curled like the tentacles of an octopus feeling for its prey.

At last, however, with an effort, he regained his self-control. Having tossed the knife on to the table, he folded his arms across his chest, arched his rounded shoulders, and blinked at his tormentors like some half-awakened owl.

"Finished?" he asked, when the laughter

had ceased. "Very good! And now, having enjoyed your little joke, you will, perhaps, be good enough to explain it!"

"Explain it!" chuckled Bush Billy, whose massive brain had planned the joke. "Bless yer heart, it don't need explaining! It explains itself! We knew as 'ow you'd be disappointed if yer hadn't something to have a go at, so we pervided yer with a sheep!"

"I still fail to see where the joke comes in," said the professor, striving to speak calmly. "Am I to understand that you have played me false—that you have taken my money, and have allowed Nelson Lee to escape?"

"No fear!" said Bush Billy, with a fine air of injured innocence. "We ain't such low-down skunks as that!"

"But you promised——"

"Yes, yes, I know what we promised!" said Bush Billy. "But circumstances was too much for us, and we couldn't keep our promise—leastways, we couldn't keep it in the way we arranged, though we've kept it in another. The fact of the matter is that we were set on by a crowd of blacks on our way to the Glen, and we had to make them a present of Nelson Lee in order to get rid of 'em!"

"You let him go, after promising to keep him until I brought the money?"

"It was 'Obson's choice!" said Bush Billy. "If we hadn't let him go, the blacks would have took him just the same, and would have took us into the bargain!"

A spasm of passion convulsed the professor's face. He tried to speak, but rage and disappointment choked his utterance.

"Now, don't get shirty!" said Bush Billy soothingly. "You've nothing to complain of! So long as Nelson Lee is dead, wot odds do it make whether yer knifed him yerself, or whether he was cooked and eat by the blacks?"

"That's just the point," said the professor huskily. "It would make no odds whatever, of course, if I could only be sure that he was dead. But I can't be sure."

"Why not?" demanded Bush Billy. "Haven't I just told yer that he was captured by the blacks?"

"But that doesn't prove that he is dead."

"Begging yer pardon, but I think it do," said Bush Billy. "I know more about the blacks than you do, Mister Professor. The tribe wot attacked us are cannibals. They don't take prisoners for the fun of the thing. When they capture a white man they treat him the same as I should treat a fat young beast—kill him and eat him!"

"Put Nelson Lee is such a slippery customer," said Mark Rymer. "How do you know that he didn't escape?"

"He did!"

The words rang out with the clearness of a bugle-call. Their effect was electrical. Mark Rymer reeled across the room as though he had been struck. Bush Billy rapped out a startled oath, and snatched up his revolver. His comrades grabbed their

weapons and leaped to their feet; whilst at the same time every eye was turned towards the open door, where Nelson Lee, with arms akimbo, was standing and surveying the scene with a cool and critical stare.

"Good-evening!" he drawled, with a nod and a smile. "Quite a nice little family party, upon my word! Eight, ten, twelve—just a dozen, not including my excellent friend the professor!"

His audacity took their breath away. They thought that he was alone; that he had blundered into the Glen by accident, and so they gazed at him in mingled admiration for his pluck, and amazement at his recklessness in showing himself.

"Look here, my lads," cried Bush Billy, thrusting his revolver into his belt, and smiting his horny hands together, "I like this fellow's grit, and I'd like to give him a chance of saving himself. Wot d'yer say if we make a ring, and let him and the professor fight it out between 'em?"

Before his confederates could reply the detective spoke again.

"Pardon me," he said, in his most winning voice, "you appear to be labouring under a delusion. I haven't come to the Glen to fight with the professor. I've come to bring you all an invitation to the Cobar lock up. See!"

He held up his hand, and in the twinkling of an eye four rifle-barrels crashed through each of the two windows, whilst four more of the troopers, who were standing just behind him, levelled their weapons over his shoulders.

"Every man in the shanty is now covered, except Mark Rymer," continued the detective, as he whipped out his revolver and levelled it at the professor's head. "And he's covered now! Under these circumstances, you will doubtless see the advisability of accepting my invitation without any further fuss."

Bush Billy, who was standing under the hanging-lamp, suddenly flung up his hand. The trooper who was covering him immediately pressed the trigger of his carbine. But the bullet merely grazed Bush Billy's cheek, and the next instant, with a single blow of his ponderous fist, he had smashed the lamp into splinters, and plunged the room in inky darkness.

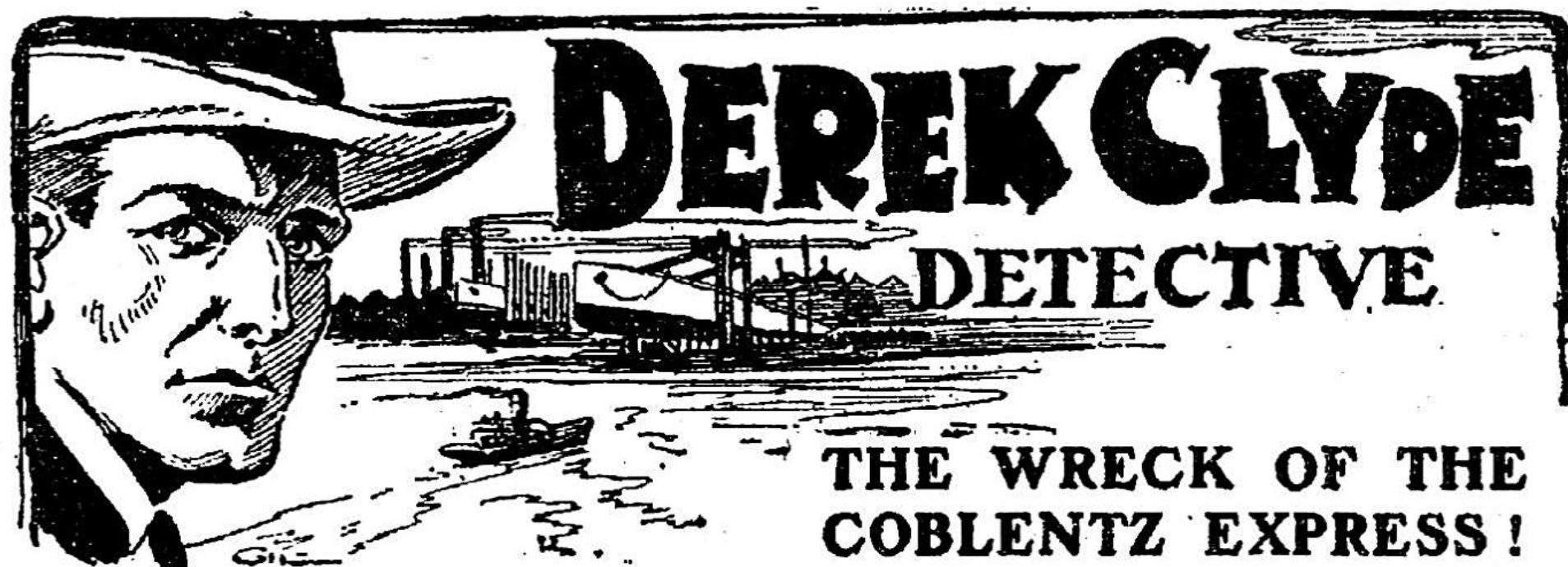
"Look out! They're going to make a rush for it!" yelled Nelson Lee, springing back from the open door. "Stand back a few yards, and give them a volley as they come out!"

The troopers behind him retreated about a dozen yards from the door, and raised their rifles to their shoulders. Instead of the rush predicted, however, the door was instantly slammed to, and barred and bolted on the inside.

"Stand back from those windows!" roared Nelson Lee. "Quick! Down on your faces or else——"

(To be continued)

GRAND NEW COMPLETE TALES OF THE FAMOUS SCOTS DETECTIVE!



THE WRECK OF THE COBLENTZ EXPRESS!

THE UNKNOWN TRAVELLER.

AT a quarter to three o'clock in the afternoon there came out of the Hotel Furstenhof, on the quay at Coblenz, a tall, well-built gentleman of Teutonic appearance.

"One minute to three," he murmured. "I hope the fellow isn't going to disappoint me. It is not likely that he will, though."

He had hardly more than spoken when his expectations were realised. There appeared to his right, from round a corner, a man of medium height and heavy build, with a brown moustache. He came briskly on until he was in front of the hotel, and as he was about to enter it, the three policemen, who had glided across the roadway, suddenly closed around him.

The man had been taken into custody. He flew at once into a rage, and as he was protesting indignantly, declaring that a mistake had been made, the gentleman with the shaggy beard and the spectacles, hastened down from the terrace of the Furstenhof and pushed into the little group.

"What are you doing?" he angrily exclaimed. "I heard what you said. It is an outrage that you should arrest this person. I can vouch for him. He is a respectable citizen. I have seen him more than once in Berlin. Release him, or I will—"

As the gentleman spoke he roughly shoved one of the policemen, who first threatened him with the flat of his sword, and then grasped him by the arm.

"We will arrest you, too, herr!" he declared. "You will see what you will get for interfering with us in our duty! I dare say you also are a suspicious character!"

Argument was of no avail. Still loudly protesting and followed by a noisy crowd, the two prisoners were marched through the town and into the police-station. The door was shut behind them, and the crowd dispersed.

At four o'clock that afternoon, two hours

after his arrest, the bearded gentleman with the spectacles was led out to the street and put into a closed cab. Accompanied by two policemen, he was driven to the headquarters of the French commander in the Wilhelm-platz, and, after a brief parley with an attendant, they were admitted to the building.

A young officer appeared and spoke a few words to the policemen, who took their departure. The gentleman was led along a corridor and ushered into a small room, where a middle-aged French officer in a brilliant uniform was seated at a desk.

The latter rose to his feet and stared in bewilderment at the gentleman, who removed his glasses as he stepped forward. He whipped off his false beard and moustache, and deftly replaced them.

"Well, major, here I am!" he said quietly.

Major Bertrand offered his hand.

"So it is really you, Monsieur Clyde?" he exclaimed. "I could not believe it for a moment. And yet it was your writing in the note I had. What of the police? Are they gone?"

"Yes, thanks to you," Derek Clyde replied. "The telephone message you sent to the station, after you received my letter, gained me my freedom. The charge of obstructing the police was withdrawn, and I was brought here and released."

"And what does it all mean, monsieur?"

"I will tell you presently. I have been playing a little game. I was in need of assistance from some influential person and I hit on you, as you were an old friend of mine, and I knew that you were on the staff of the commander of the French troops in Coblenz."

Clyde sat down and began his explanations. He spoke first of the difficult and dangerous task on which he was engaged, making it clear to the major in a few words that at the request of the Foreign Office in London he had undertaken to exterminate the gang of criminals who, in the guise of Bolsheviks, and under the leadership of the notorious Charles Priest,

were working against the interests of the Allies throughout the Continent. He also mentioned his adventures in Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne.

"It was at Cologne that I got a clue that brought me here," he continued, "and there I obtained a list of the principal members of the gang, most of whom were known to me by name and by sight. I arrived at Coblenz four days ago, knowing that at least several of the gang were in this town, and for some sinister purpose.

"I took a room at the Hanover Hotel in the name of Herr Spitzler, and on the first day, as luck would have it, I saw and recognised one of the miscreants, a man whose right name is Max Vonheim. I ascertained that he was staying at the Furstenhof in the name of Conrad Felmacher, and I promptly shifted my quarters to that hotel.

"Day by day I shadowed my man, but without success. He certainly has accomplices in Coblenz, but he was too shrewd to hold any communication with them. He invariably had luncheon alone at the cafe, and at a quarter to three o'clock each afternoon he left there, and walked back to the hotel. And that knowledge suggested to me a scheme which I carried out.

"I was anxious to gain the man's confidence to some extent, and I foresaw how it might be done. Last night I sent an anonymous letter to the police, informing them that Herr Felmacher was a Bolshevik with forged papers, and telling them where and when it would be advisable to take him into custody. And the trick worked like a charm. I wish you had been there when the fellow was——"

Clyde broke off and laughed. He gave an amusing description of the scene in front of the Furstenhof Hotel, when he had interfered with the police, and been arrested with Herr Felmacher.

"We were searched at the station," he went on. "I did not lose my papers, as I had left them at the hotel. But what documents Felmacher had in his possession were confiscated, and then he and I were locked in the same cell, as I had anticipated would be the case.

"Grateful though the man was to me, and utterly unsuspecting, he was very discreet and close-mouthed. I could get nothing from him at first. He evaded my guarded questions.

"It appeared that he was desperately anxious to gain his freedom at once, however, and when I had told him that I had an influential friend in the town and that I was sure I could have both of us speedily released on bail, he admitted that he wanted to be at the railway-station at nine o'clock to-night to meet a certain person who was coming by express train from Frankfort.

"So much I gleaned from Herr Felmacher, and with that I had to be content. I then hammered on the door of my

cell and had a short conversation with an official of the police, who let me write the note to you, and promised to have it delivered. He kept his word, and here I am. As for Herr Felmacher, he is waiting in hopes of being set at liberty in the course of the afternoon. And he will wait a long time, I imagine."

Clyde paused again. His face was very grave now.

"I have a clue to the plot, at all events," he resumed. "The person who is expected to-night must be of some importance. In other words, his existence is for some reason a menace to the Bolsheviks. They have had orders to assassinate him, and probably because he has secret information obtained in Germany or Russia."

THE WRECKERS AT WORK.

AT twenty minutes past eight o'clock that night the express from Frankfort stopped at the little town of Dortseck, and when it pulled out of the station Derek Clyde was on board, disguised as he had been before. He had travelled to Dortseck by the six o'clock train from Coblenz, and he had been waiting there for more than an hour.

He was doubtful if his quest would succeed, yet he had some hope that it would. Starting at the front of the train, which was a corridor one, he walked slowly through it from carriage to carriage, glancing carelessly yet furtively at the occupants of the compartments.

In the third carriage he noticed, in company with several other gentlemen, a lean man of middle-age, with sinister eyes and clean-shaven features. He hesitated for an instant, scanning the person with vague suspicion, though not because he imagined that he might be the man to whom Conrad Felmacher had referred.

He passed on, and when he had moved a little farther, and had gone half the length of the same carriage, he paused in the aisle and lit a cigarette. The door of a compartment on his left was partly open, and within, sitting alone, was a well-built young man of about thirty, with a ruddy complexion, and a fair moustache. He wore a cap and a suit of grey tweeds. He was smoking a briar pipe, and by his side was a kitbag.

An ordinary observer would not have guessed what his nationality was, but to Clyde he bore the unmistakable stamp of British. There was a rather uneasy expression on the man's face, and from a side-pocket of his jacket bulged something that resembled a pistol.

As he perceived the detective his hand slipped to that pocket, and Clyde, who had previously judged that this was probably the person he was seeking for, was now certain that it was. He at once entered the compartment and sat down opposite to the

young man, who gave a quick start and whipped out a revolver.

"Move a finger and I'll shoot you!" he said in a husky whisper.

"Put that back in your pocket," Clyde calmly replied. "You have nothing to fear from me."

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered the other, lowering the weapon.

"It is quite all right. My name is Derek Clyde. It is familiar to you, perhaps?"

"Yes, it is. But I am certain that you are not the Scottish detective of that name, for I have seen more than one photograph of him."

"I am glad you have. What do you think of me now?"

With that Clyde took off his beard and moustache, and for a moment revealed his clean-shaven features. The young man was staring at him in bewilderment.

"By Jove, you really are Derek Clyde!" he exclaimed.

"Hush, not so loud!" bade the detective. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, of course I am. I beg your pardon. But why are you in disguise?"

"To protect you, for one reason, if you are the person I take you to be."

"I don't know about that, Mr. Clyde. I have no idea what you mean."

"You are travelling to Coblenz, are you not?"

"That's right. I am going to stop there for the night, on my way back to England."

"Are you in any danger?" Clyde continued. "Have you any ground for fearing that your life is in peril?"

"I have, as it happens," the young man answered. "That is why I was suspicious of you at first. I will speak candidly. My name is John Sharlatt, and I am a special correspondent on the staff of the London 'Mercury.' For some months I have been in Germany and in Russia in an assumed name, travelling from city to city. I have always suspected that spies were on my track, and I was warned in Berlin, some days ago, that there might be an attempt on my life at any time. It is fortunate that I have met you, as obviously a trap has been set for me at the railway-station at Coblenz."

"In all likelihood such is the case," Clyde assented. "There will be some French soldiers at the station, however. I have seen to that."

"Have I nothing to fear, then? Or had I not better get off the train before we arrive at the town? We could have it stopped."

"I must consider that question, Mr. Sharlatt. I don't want you to run any risk. One or more members of the gang may be travelling with us. My attention has already been drawn to a suspicious character. I will leave you now and return

later. It is unwise for us to be seen together."

"Can I give you my papers? I shall feel easier if I do."

"Very well. I will take charge of them, if you like."

John Sharlatt produced a bulky envelope that was sealed, and handed it to the detective, who slipped it into his pocket. He left the compartment and passed from one carriage to another. And as he was walking along the aisle, considering the situation, and wondering if the precautions he had taken would be sufficient to protect the enterprising journalist, there was a tremendous crash followed by a shattering concussion.

It was as if the world was in convulsions. The train was rocking and pitching, heaving like a ship in a storm, running on a zig-zag course. Suddenly it careened and turned over. The detective was flung violently against the side of the carriage, and the rest was a blank to him.

THE CAPTURED MAN.

WHEN Clyde came to his senses, after a short interval of unconsciousness, he was lying beneath a litter of splintered wood and broken glass, and above him was a smashed window that was only a ragged-edged gap. Having collected his confused wits, and remembered what had occurred, he discovered to his relief that he was none the worse save for a few bruises. He had had a miraculous escape from death.

"It was no accident," he told himself. "It was the work of Priest and his gang, of course, and I know what their motive was. I must find Sharlatt. I am afraid the poor fellow has been killed."

He could barely reach the window. By strenuous exertions he climbed out of it and looked about him. It was a ghastly scene that met his gaze. The train had rolled down a low embankment, and was sprawled like a monstrous, dismembered serpent at the crest of a wooded slope, beyond which the shimmering surface of the Rhine was visible.

Steam was hissing from the capsized engine. Passengers were swarming, scrambling from the shattered carriages, some of them limping, all shouting wildly. And those within, buried in the debris, pinned fast perhaps, were shrieking in anguish and calling frantically for help.

Where was Sharlatt? He must find him. As he was groping along the line, seeking for the compartment in which he had left the young Englishman, he saw him within a dozen yards. He was standing there as if dazed, his kitbag in his hand. And a moment later, as the detective was approaching, the dusky figures of three men appeared in the murky gloom.

They leapt suddenly upon the journalist, whose startled cry was drowned by the screams of the victims of the disaster. In a trice he was gone, dragged into the black shadow of the trees.

Clyde pressed after him, still suffering from the shock he had sustained. He could not see clearly where he was going. He tripped on a carriage door, pitched over it, and fell heavily.

He lay there for a little time, and then, rising to his feet, he hastened into the woods at the spot where he had seen John Sharlatt disappear. Blindly, shrouded in

Some of the crew wrecked the train, and others are waiting at the station at Coblenz in the event of the attempt failing. What am I to do? How can I save poor Sharlatt? By heavens, how? They want his papers, and they will murder him when they find he hasn't got them. For his sake, I wish he hadn't given them to me!"

He was in dire perplexity. His head was swimming, yet his mind was clear. How was he to rescue the journalist? He must think. He felt for his revolver, and it was not there. It must have slipped from his pocket when the carriage overturned with



And as he staggered across the footway with his burden, and reeled against a tree, the train went thundering and crashing by.

darkness, he made his way down the rugged slope amongst thickets and boulders, and emerged from the cover on a strip of gravel that skirted the river.

Beyond him, out on the shadowy water, a boat could be dimly perceived. It was moving diagonally up and across the Rhine, with a faint splash of oars. And in that boat, of course, were the journalist and his captors. His captors! Fiends of hell who had spilt blood, risked a hundred lives, to accomplish their object. Clyde's fury knew no bounds.

"The miscreants!" he panted. "Charles Priest! Priest and his devils incarnate!

him. Looking beyond him, he saw one of the massive railway bridges by which the line from Frankfort crosses and re-crosses the wide river from side to side.

He knew that the boat had gone in that direction, towards the farther bank, and suddenly an idea occurred to him. He was unarmed, and he would have three desperate men, three blood-thirsty ruffians, but he gave no thought to the risk. There were others to render assistance to the passengers of the wrecked train. He was not needed there.

"I'll do my best," he said to himself.

"There is a chance of saving Sharlatt; just a slim chance."

IN DEADLY PERIL.

AS fast as he could, bruised and shaken though he was, Clyde hurried along the sandy shore of the Rhine. As he went, horrid cries rang to his ears from the scene of the disaster. When he had gone for two or three hundred yards he toiled up the wooded embankment and set off across the railway bridge.

After brief hesitation, he turned away from the Rhine and began to ascend a steep embankment that was clothed with bushes and stunted trees. As he was climbing he heard a low, confused sound of voices, and when he had mounted higher and reached the crest of the slope, he crouched in the thickets and peered through them. He was close to the railway line, and a little to the left of him three men were stooping over a fourth man, who was lying flat. The detective knew at once what they were doing.

"The dastardly fiends!" he said to himself. "If only I can foil them. I believe I can!"

He had not long to wait. The men presently withdrew, and when they had vanished into the cover, at a distance of thirty to forty yards from Clyde, he darted to the spot at which they had been standing. It was the journalist who was lying here. He was stretched across the line, a handkerchief bound over his mouth, and his wrists and ankles tightly tied to the metals.

The young Englishman was conscious, and was gazing at Clyde, who did not delay to take off the bandage. He fumbled in a pocket for his knife, and found that he had lost that also in the wreck. And now to his consternation, there floated to his ears from up the river a rumbling, rattling noise.

"By heavens, a train is coming!" he muttered. "I have precious little time to spare!"

Dropping to his knees, he tugged and strained at the fetters with which John Sharlatt was secured to the rails. He worked in feverish haste, rubbing the skin from his aching fingers; and at length, as the cords had fortunately not been knotted tightly, he accomplished his task.

Meanwhile the train had been drawing rapidly near, and a blazing light was shining on the scene from the lamp on the front of the engine. A deafening noise was ringing in Clyde's ears. The light blinded him, and the earth beneath him was shaking. He was in imminent peril. It seemed that he must inevitably be killed if he delayed for another moment.

But his courage did not falter. He grasped the journalist by the shoulders, and, inch by inch, by desperate exertions, he dragged him clear of the line. And as he staggered across the footway with his burden and reeled against a tree, the train went crashing and thundering by. Three seconds more and the two would have been ground to death.

BAFFLED CONSPIRATORS.

CLYDE was dazed and dizzy for a brief space, and then, pulling himself together, he tore the handkerchief from the young man's mouth. John Sharlatt stared at him in the murky gloom, panting for breath, trembling like a leaf.

"Mr. Clyde!" he gasped. "You—you have saved my life; saved me from a terrible fate! Thank heaven for what you did! How did you get here?"

"I saw you carried off in the boat," the detective hoarsely replied. "I crossed the river by the bridge and searched for you. Those scoundrels were enraged, I suppose, because they could not find your papers."

"Yes, that was it. They were in a mad fury. I can't tell you how I felt when they had left me lying there helpless, and I heard the train coming."

"Well, I am very glad I got here in time, Sharlatt. The miscreants have gone, and we had better be off ourselves."

"We are safe now," he said. "We have nothing more to fear."

An hour later, having floated down the river in the boat, because they were afraid to land anywhere in the vicinity of the disaster, Clyde and the young journalist landed at Coblenz. They went to the Hotel Furstenhof, and the next morning they learned that the wreck of the express had not been as great a catastrophe as they had feared. Two passengers had been killed and a number had been more or less seriously injured.

Meanwhile, the detective having made a report to Major Bertrand, the police had been instructed to search for the Bolshevik agents. But not a trace of them was discovered, as Clyde had anticipated.

The next day John Sharlatt left Coblenz, with an escort of two soldiers, on his way back to London. And on the following day, a slight clue having been obtained from the man Felmacher, who had been arrested, Clyde travelled eastward in a fresh disguise and in another assumed name. He was going now to Berlin, and what his task there would be, what deadly perils would dog his steps, he had no idea of at the moment.

THE END.

(Continued from page 14)

quietly. "In fact, you and your pals were over on our side for a bit, and I rather fancy your sympathies are more with the Monks."

"You bet," said Fullwood. "We'd love to see Buster runnin' the Remove."

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver and Bell.

"And yet you think that Buster's going to lose?" asked Crowe.

"It's a rotten shame, but there's no question about it," said Fullwood. "My dear, pitiful asses. It's rather pathetic to listen to you Monks talkin' about the victory you're goin' to have. It's only makin' the shock all the bigger. Let me tell you somethin'—Buster's goin' to lose!"

"Rot!" growled the Faithful Five.

"Buster's goin' to lose, an' I'll bet on it, too!" said Fullwood calmly. "Five to one—in quids, if you like. There you are—that's fair enough, ain't it? I'll bet you five pounds to a pound that Nipper wins!"

"Done!" said Percy Bray promptly.

"I'll risk a quid like that, too!" said Crooks.

Gulliver and Bell had some bets, also. In fact, they wagered all their spare cash, with the exception of a few shillings. Two disinterested juniors were quickly found, and these fellows agreed to hold the stakes. Fullwood, who was rather flush, handed over as much as fifteen pounds—practically all the money he had recently won on a horse race.

"It's easy money for us," said Percy Bray confidently, as he and the other members of the Faithful Five went off towards the College House. "And even if we lose it's only a quid each."

"Fullwood's dotty—Nipper can't win," declared Crooks. "They don't know the way in which Buster's been improving. Why, he's a holy terror now—he can fight like mad. He'll knock Nipper out in less than three rounds!"

If Fullwood and Co. were confident, so were the Faithful Five. They went to Buster Boots' training quarters, and told him all about it. He listened, and was rather thoughtful.

"Of course, you're going to win that money," he said. "I know what I can do, and I'm pretty sure that I'll beat Nipper. But I've got to admit that this has given me a bit of a knock."

"A knock?" said Percy Bray. "Why?"

"Because Fullwood wants me to win as much as any of you fellows," said Boots. "He wouldn't lay five-to-one on a bet like this unless he was downright certain of Nipper winning. It wouldn't be a bad idea if we could get hold of some definite information of Nipper's form."

"But how?" inquired Crowe. "None of those chaps will say anything."

Buster Boots smiled.

"We can't expect the Fossils to give anything away," he said. "But there are

ways and means, my sons. Leave it to me, and we'll get the info. Just a little brain work is required."

"Of course, we've seen Nipper after his morning runs," said Crooks. "He looks fit enough—but you can't judge by appearances. I'd like to see him sparring. I hear that he's as quick as lightning."

"It isn't necessary for any of us to see him," said Buster calmly. "We can get better knowledge than that. Get ready—we're going out."

"Where to?" asked Percy Bray.

"Never mind where to," said Buster. "You're all with me, I suppose? You'll back me up all along the line?"

"All along the line!" said the Faithful Five loyally.

"Good!"

And John Busterfield Boots was soon ready for a jaunt. He and his followers started out on their bicycles, and took a run into Bannington. On the way, Buster spoke with confidence on the subject of the coming fight. He was perfectly convinced that he would be able to win the day.

But there was something in this very certainty of his that was rather suggestive. It seemed that he was attempting to buoy himself up with false hopes—knowing full well that he was in for a licking. The manner in which he kept reiterating his own superiority was significant.

The Faithful Five had complete confidence in their leader. John Busterfield Boots himself had shared this confidence—until he learned of those bets which Fullwood and Co. had made. He remained perfectly calm, but the news was a bit of a shock to him.

For Fullwood, as Buster well knew, was hoping against hope that Buster would win. The fact that he had wagered five to one on the match was a sure indication that Fullwood was certain of the College House leader's defeat.

And Boots began to have doubts himself. And it was his intention now to set these doubts at rest once and for all. And it was impossible to get any information from the Fossils direct. But there were other methods. And when it came to ingenious trickery, John Busterfield Boots was all there.

Arriving in Bannington, the Supreme Six put their bicycles in a garage, and then strolled away from the High Street in the direction of the lower part of the town. Before long they came to the Bannington Palace—a low-class music-hall. Quite close to this there was a wooden shanty with a painted sign over the door, announcing to all and sundry that the place was Bob Norman's Boxing Booth. It was just the kind of establishment that one would expect to find in such a district.

The juniors went in, and Mr. Bob Norman was present—a big, broad-shouldered individual of about fifty. He was well past the fighting age, but in

former years he had been a well-known pugilist.

Nowadays he confined his attention to training youngsters, and promoting minor bouts in the town. Upon the whole, Mr. Norman made a fair amount of money.

"Always pleased to see young gents such as yourselves," he said genially, as he eyed the juniors. "What's this I hear about the big fight that's coming off at the school? Everybody's talking about it."

Buster Boots grinned.

"I didn't know our fame spread as far as this," he remarked calmly. "Well, the fact is, Mr. Norman, I'm booked to fight Nipper—for the captaincy of the Remove. The bout's coming off next Wednesday."

Mr. Norman looked interested.

"You've got your hands full young man," he said grimly. "I've never had the pleasure of seeing this here Nipper, but they tells me as he's pretty hot. 'Tain't likely that you'll win."

"I want to be certain on that point—I want to find out Nipper's form," said Buster. "Nothing fishy, of course—I wouldn't think of doing any dirty work. But I'd just like to satisfy myself. And you can help me, Mr. Norman."

"I'll be pleased to, young gent," said the ex-pugilist. "But I don't quite see how—"

"I think you've got a professional boxer in training just now, haven't you?" asked Boots keenly. "I saw something about it in the local paper—a chap named Weston—"

"Oh, the Babe!" interrupted Mr. Norman. "You bet I have! The Babe's going to be the champion lightweight of the County—and he's got a big future. One of these days he'll be a man of international fame."

"Well, that's the fellow I want to see," said Boots. "Look here, Mr. Norman, I'll make it worth your while, and worth the Babe's while—"

"Cut that out, young 'un!" growled Mr. Norman. "If I can do anything to help you, and it ain't off the level, I'm only too willing. But, mind ye, no crooked stuff, or out you goes!"

John Busterfield Boots talked with Mr. Norman for several minutes, and, finally, the latter nodded.

"Square enough," he declared. "Just a simple way of finding out Nipper's form, eh? All right, Master Boots—it's a go. I'll go and fetch the Babe straight away. He's game enough for anything."

Exactly ten minutes later John Busterfield Boots was half stripped, and Mr. Norman was adjusting some boxing gloves. Opposite Buster stood Babe Weston, the coming champion. He looked it, too. He had great broad shoulders, he was as lithe as a panther, and a professional boxer to the finger tips.

Mr. Weston was not a gentleman by birth—on the contrary, he had been picked

up from the gutter by the far-seeing Mr. Norman, who had spent quite a lot of trouble and time on the Babe's training. Weston was fair, with a clear skin and twinkling eyes. In his own way, he was a simple soul.

In a very short time the pair were at it. It was, of course, an unequal contest, for Babe Weston was a professional. His footwork was splendid, and he was much heavier than Buster Boots. But Buster himself had been trained by a famous amateur.

"Pretty—pretty!" declared Mr. Norman, as he looked on.

The sparring was of the first quality. Babe Weston found that this schoolboy was trained to a degree that surprised him. And although the Babe was the superior, Boots was not far behind. At the end of fifteen minutes the Babe knew all that he wanted to know.

"You'll win!" he declared confidently. "Why, mate, that right swing o' yours is a rare beauty! This 'ere Nipper cove won't stand no bloomin' chances! I didn't know as a kid of your age could box like this! 'Tain't likely there's another as good."

"Well, you wait and see!" said Buster calmly. "You know my form, don't you? As soon as you've found out Nipper's you'll be able to judge between us—and then you can let me have your report."

"Right!" said Mr. Weston. "But the fight's yours all right!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BAD NEWS!



"READY?" asked Reginald Pitt briskly.

"Ages ago!" I said. "Come on you slackers—we've got to do six miles this morning. I feel fit enough to do twenty!"

It was early on the following morning, and there were several of us in the Triangle—all waiting to start off on the usual morning run. It was dull and cloudy, and rather cold, but this made no difference to our programme.

As usual, I was in running shorts, and the other fellows all had their bicycles. They saw no reason why they should go into strenuous training. While I ran, they escorted me, making all kinds of critical remarks in the meantime.

Handforth and Pitt and De Valerie and Tommy Watson and two or three others were my escort. And before long we were proceeding along the lane towards the moor. The plan was to make a complete detour round Bellton Wood, and then pass through Edgemore, and back to St. Frank's by means of the bye-lanes.

We left the hedged country road behind, and emerged upon the open moor. Just away to our left lay the old broken down

mill—that tumbled structure which had figured in many adventures of the past.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, staring ahead. "Who's this?"

We all paused, and stared ahead. A solitary figure, attired in running shorts, was coming along the moorland road. He was trotting steadily—in just the same manner as I had been trotting.

The stranger came up, and paused. He was quite unknown to us, but he gave us a genial smile of welcome.

"On the same game as me, eh?" he remarked. "I reckon you're some o' them young gents from the school, ain't you?"

"Yes," I replied. "Just doing a little training."

"So I sees," said the other. "Well, I'm Babe Weston—matched against Tom Fields next week. I reckon you must be Nipper, eh? I've heard about that fight that's comin' off between you and another kid."

"Yes, I'm Nipper," I replied. "I've heard about you, too—although I've never met you before. The papers say that you're going to do some big things soon."

"Mebbe," grinned Mr. Weston. "Tain't always safe to believe what the papers say, though. Look 'ere—I'll tell you what! What's wrong with having a little sparring bout, eh? Do me good—and do you good!"

I smiled.

"I've no objection," I replied, "but we haven't got any gloves."

"Don't matter about gloves," said the Babe. "We can—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Handforth eagerly. "It'll only take me five minutes to whizz back on the bike. You chaps go to the old mill, and wait there—I'll bring two pairs of gloves, and be back in no time. You can't miss a chance like this, Nipper—this fellow's a pro, and he'll give you some points."

All the juniors were quite keen upon the idea, and I was rather amused. Never for an instant did I suspect that this was all part of a prearranged scheme. There was nothing sinister or wrong about it—but, at the same time, it was tricky.

John Busterfield Boots had known well enough that my supporters would be only too glad to avail themselves of this opportunity—to see how I should shape against a professional. And by the time we had got to the old mill, Handforth was well on his way back with the gloves.

"Of course, there'll be no necessity to talk about this afterwards," I said. "You see, the fight isn't coming off until Wednesday, and I don't want anybody to know a thing about my form."

Babe Weston winked.

"Lummy! You don't need to be afraid o' me!" he grinned. "Tain't of any interest to me what your form's like. I thought mebbe it would be a bit of a break for us. And I've heard such a lot about you, Master Nipper, that I'm curious. You can trust me to say nothing."

I couldn't trust him—and I didn't. But this did not deter me from the bout. After all, what did it matter? It was all very well to be secretive up to a point, but there was no sense in carrying it to an extreme.

And in a very short while we had our gloves fixed, and a temporary ring was formed within the old mill. The juniors stood round in a circle, watching. And Babe Weston and I started on the job.

I was just feeling fine, and I had badly needed a good sparring partner. And the Babe was far better than any of the juniors who had previously been assisting me in my training.

I found that he was as quick as lightning, nimble, and trained to a point of perfection that was good to see.

And the Babe himself was astonished.

He didn't say much, but I could easily tell by his expression that he was surprised by my form. Again and again he attempted to rush me—to confuse me—but I always anticipated his every move.

Towards the end of the bout he tried his very utmost to deliver some stinging blows—just to prove that he was a far better man. But, somehow or other, he couldn't quite reach me. I always defeated his purpose.

And I detected the fact that the Babe was getting exasperated.

He didn't like being foiled by a mere schoolboy, and some of the friendliness went out of his boxing. He tried, really in earnest, to deliver several telling punches. He wanted to show me that he wasn't going to be played about with.

I received two severe jabs and the juniors stood round, excited and shouting with enthusiasm. And in a moment the friendly sparring bout became something very much like a real fight.

"Go it, Nipper!" roared Handforth. "Great pip! You're better than he is!"

I saw the Babe's eyes glint. He didn't like that remark of Handforth's—and this was not surprising. Weston came forward, slashing out viciously.

Jab! Jab!

Two punches went home, and I staggered back, momentarily getting the worst of things. My own blood was rising now—hitherto I had kept smiling all the time. But if the Babe was going to hit hard, so would I.

Crash! Biff!

Swift as lightning, I brought my left round in a feint. The Babe dodged, and received my right squarely on the point of the jaw. And even as he staggered he got another heavy blow in the chest. The Babe staggered back, caught his heel against an uneven board, and sat down violently.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth.

"Sorry!" I gasped. "I didn't mean—"

"Crikey!" exclaimed Mr. Weston, sitting up. "You ain't 'arf hot!"

He rose to his feet, his momentary viciousness over. And he was smiling all over his face again.

"Go on—you haven't finished yet," said Handforth warmly.

"Strikes me I've 'ad enough!" grinned the Babe. "Lummy, mate, that punch of yours is good enough for the professional ring! You're a lot better than I thought you was. Sorry if I got a bit nasty like. But, blow it, you made me riled when I couldn't git near you!"

"That's all right!" I smiled. "No need to get serious about a friendly affair like this. Thanks for the bout, old man. I wish you every success in your next contest."

"You're the right sort, you are," declared Mr. Weston. "And, what's more, I 'opes as 'ow you wins this 'ere fight. Not as there's much question—there can't be another young bloke as good as you are. Why blow me! You're 'otter than mustard! That's a fact!"

Babe Weston was still in a state of considerable astonishment. And when he took his departure there was a kind of wondering expression in his eyes. I was feeling decidedly pleased.

"I'm glad we had that little bout," I said. "I think I could have knocked him out if I had chosen—and if I can do that to a professional, there's not much question as to what's going to happen to Buster."

"You bet there isn't!" grinned Reggie Pitt delightedly. "You're in great form, old man. This fight's going to be as easy as winking for you. If Buster only knew the truth, he'd go green!"

Later in the day, John Busterfield Boots did know the truth.

It was Saturday, and a half-holiday, of course. As soon as dinner was over the Faithful Five got out their bicycles, and started off for Bannington. The College House fellows were very anxious to hear the result of the early morning affair—which Buster Boots had planned.

Buster's supporters had kept their ears open all the morning, but they had heard absolutely nothing. Not a single word had slipped out from any of the Ancient House fellows. The Faithful Five had no real certainty that Babe Weston had kept his part of the contract.

But as soon as they arrived in Bannington they knew the truth—they heard the bad news.

Percy Bray, and the other Monks had been supreme in their own confidence of Buster Boots. They were fully expecting the Babe to assure them that Boots was dead certain of winning the coming match. But the Babe's first words were extremely discouraging.

Mr. Weston was in the booth, doing a little exercise with a punch ball. He paused, and looked at the juniors as they entered. And a cheerful grin spread itself over his features.

"Crickey!" he said. "Your pal ain't 'arf in for a licking!"

"What!" said Percy Bray. "What do you mean?"

"Ain't he here?"

"No—he's training this afternoon," said Crooks.

"I'm sorry for that there bloke!" said Mr. Watson. "Come Wednesday afternoon he'll be just about ready for the 'ospital. Take it from me, mates—Nipper's goin' to eat him up!"

The Faithful Five looked startled.

"Tell us what happened this morning," said Percy Bray quietly.

"I'd best tell you what didn't 'appen!" grinned the Babe. "That kid nearly outed me! Me, mind yer! I never seed anything like it in my life! Nipper's so bloomin' 'ot you'd burn your 'and if you touched him! Talk about nippy! I never seed such speed! I takes my 'at off to that kid! What kind of flowers would your pal like for his funeral?"

"Oh, come off it!" said Crowe gruffly. "You're trying to spoof us, ain't you? We know jolly well that our man is the best."

The Babe roared.

"Strikes me as you're a bit too confident!" he chuckled. "See here. I've boxed with your pal, and I've boxed with Nipper. I know both of 'em—I've got the 'ang of their form right down to the last punch."

"And what's the verdict?" asked Percy Bray. "Honest, now—what's the absolute verdict, all joking aside?"

Babe Weston looked serious.

"It 'urts me to be frank, but since you want it, I'll let you have it! Kids, your man ain't got a chance! 'E ain't in the same class as Nipper. If that fight lasts more than two rounds, I'll be surprised. Nipper's just about four times as good as your pal."

"Great Scott!" said Percy Bray, startled. "You—you mean this?"

"Never spoke a truer word!" declared Mr. Weston stoutly. "Best resign yourself to a whacking, my lads. Nipper's the real goods—first quality, gilt-edged, and jewelled in every bloomin' 'ole!"

The Faithful Five took their departure after the Babe had given a full and vivid description of the morning's encounter. And the College House fellows were looking almost pale with concern. Buster Boots had schemed to find out the truth—and he had got it!

Babe Weston had given an entirely unprejudiced opinion.

Back at St. Frank's, the J.B.B. was taking an easy spell in Study Q. He was quietly reclining in an easy chair when the Faithful Five entered. The very expressions on their faces was enough for him.

"Bad as all that?" he asked smoothly.

Percy Bray shut the door.

"That boxer chap tells us that Nipper is a terror," said Bray. "He's got you absolutely outclassed, and you don't stand an earthly. Something's got to be done, Buster."

Buster Boots nodded.

"Yes—we've got to go ahead with our training," he said. "By Wednesday I may be able to beat Nipper's form——"

"I tell you it's impossible," interrupted Bray, with great concern. "We heard the full truth, and it's no good trying to spoof yourself. In a fair fight, Nipper will smash you up."

Buster shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm willing to take my chance," he said.

"Look here, if you think I'm going to start any monkey business, you've made a mistake!" declared Boots curtly. "I'm going all out to win this fight. I'm not particularly scrupulous, but I'm hanged if I'll risk any dirty work. It's altogether too much of a chance. Everybody knows how keen I am on winning this fight, and if anything happened to Nipper I should be suspected at once. No, it can't be done—I won't even think of it."

"Then you're in for a licking!" said Percy Bray curtly.



"You'll win!" he declared confidently. "Why, mate, that right swing o' yours is a rare beauty! This 'ere Nipper cove won't stand no bloomin' chance!"

"This is going to be a fight for the captaincy, and——"

"But—but you can't afford to lose!" interrupted Denny tensely. "Look here, now that we know the truth, we might be able to do something. One thing's certain—you've got to be the winner!"

Boots looked at his followers grimly.

"What do you mean—do something?" he asked.

"Well, there are all sorts of things——"

CHAPTER VII.

DIRTY WORK.



JOHN BUSTERFIELD
BOOTS rose to his feet.
"If I'm in for a licking—then I'm in for a licking!" he said quietly.
"It's no good trying to alter the facts. We've found out the truth, and we don't like it. But you

don't think I take this idiot's word, do you?"

"Which idiot's word?"

"Why, Babe Weston's," said Boots. "After all, we've only got his opinion to go on. He's nobody much—and I'm downright certain of my own capabilities. It's a bit rotten that you fellows should lose faith in me."

This was a severe blow to Buster's chums.

"We—we haven't lost faith in you!" stammered Percy Bray. "We know you're jolly good, but the Babe says that—"

"Blow the Babe, interrupted Buster. "You've overlooked one point. When I sparred with him yesterday I didn't allow him to see my best form. I held myself back all the time. And I suppose Nipper went all out. That's just the difference. The Babe judged according to what he saw. But I'm going to whack Nipper, and this news hasn't disturbed me in the least."

The Faithful Five stared.

"Then—then you didn't show the Babe what you could do?" asked Denny.

"Of course I didn't."

"You—you sly bounder!" said Crooks admiringly. "I can see the game now. In case the Babe gets talking, Nipper's pals will believe that the fight is his. And then you'll spring a surprise?"

"Exactly!" said Buster Boots, with a calm nod.

His supreme confidence was a bit of a revelation to his chums. They fully expected that their news would be a blow to him. And soon afterwards, when Percy Bray and George Webb were alone, they got talking.

"Pretty cute of Buster, eh?" grinned Webb. "He didn't show his best form to the Babe—"

"Don't you believe it," said Bray curtly.

"Eh?"

"Just a bit of Buster's spoof," declared Percy Bray. "Do you think I don't know him? Haven't I been his pal for years? I know what he can do—and I know jolly well that the Babe's verdict is true. Unless something's done, Buster's in for the biggest licking of his life."

Webb was rather startled.

"I say, this is a bit too thick," he protested. "First I think that Buster's as good as whacked, then I get my confidence back, and now you're saying that he's going to be licked. I'm blessed if I know what to believe."

"Buster doesn't like to admit that he's the under-dog," said Bray quietly. That's just the long and the short of it. But in his heart he knows it. He's pretty certain that he's going to be licked on Wednesday—but Buster's game—game to the giddy core. He'll try his best to win, and after he's whacked he'll make some excuse or other. I know him."

Webb took a deep breath.

"Then Buster's going to be licked?" he asked.

"Yes—unless we do something."

"But what can we do?" demanded Webb. "Buster wouldn't hear of any trickery—and, after all, it's a bit of a filthy game to try any foul play. Too risky, too. Somebody would get to know—"

"There's only one thing possible," interrupted Percy dreamily. "I heard about it years ago, and it's so jolly simple that it doesn't really amount to foul play at all. It's safe, too. Anyhow, I'm going to try it. Buster's got to win this fight, by hook or by crook."

"Better, go easy!" said Webb uneasily. "If anybody found out that we were trying any dodges, it would mean the sack. It's an awfully serious business to attempt games of that kind. Better drop it, Percy."

"Rats!" said Bray. "Just leave it to me."

Percy was quite a decent fellow in many respects—he had the makings of a really good chap in him. But he was absolutely devoted to his leader. The thought of Boots losing the fight was not even to be considered as a remote possibility. And Percy was prepared to go to great lengths in order to make certain of victory. His sense of right and wrong became temporarily warped. His one thought was for Buster to win. Nothing else mattered.

And so Percy Bray made careful preparations.

He had decided that he wouldn't even tell Webb what the scheme was. It would be better to do it entirely on his own. And, after all, it was so simple that he needed no assistance. Percy had heard about the dodge before, and it had been successful. There was no reason why it shouldn't be successful again.

Later on in the evening Webb broached the subject.

"Look here, Percy, I've just been having a word with Buster, and he's certain of victory," said Webb. "There's no need to do anything crooked—"

"You needn't worry—I'm of that opinion, too," interrupted Bray. "We'll just have to trust to luck. After all, it would be a bit steep if we tried any hanky panky. Forget it old man—we'll let matters take their course."

The subject was not referred to again.

The next day was Sunday, and neither Boots nor myself were supposed to do any actual training on the Sabbath. I confined myself to a long walk—a ten-mile tramp across country. And I had never felt more fit in all my life.

But Boots, I believe, sneaked away to his training quarters, and did some sparring on the quiet. He was using every effort to improve his form. As for myself, I felt ready—and I was only sorry that we still had three days to wait.

I was afraid of becoming stale. Over-training is almost as bad as under-training. If to-day had only been Wednesday, the result of the fight would have been a certainty for me.

But I had trained before, and I knew exactly how to go on. And the confidence in the Ancient House was supreme. The Fossils regarded me as a certain winner.

The work had been going on apace at Fort Resolute. The ring was already erected, and it looked attractive. Seats were being placed in position, and all of them numbered. Every one had been sold.

The previous afternoon Reggie Pitt had had a fearful time. Strictly in accordance with his announcement, tickets had been on sale at the given time. And every inch of seating space had been sold. The full receipts amounted to thirty-three pounds and five shillings—quite a nice little contribution to send to the Fund for the Bannington Unemployed.

This money, by the way, was dispatched at once, for there was no sense in keeping it. The fight was a certainty, anyhow, so nobody could complain of being swindled.

And when Wednesday afternoon came there would be no crushing or crowding or arguing. Every fellow had his ticket, and his seat was numbered. Those who had not paid for admittance would have to remain outside. Under no circumstances could there be any squabbling.

During Sunday evening both Houses were all quiet and peaceful. As usual on a Sunday evening, the juniors confined themselves to reading, or writing letters. None of the customary rowdiness was allowed. And the upper part of the Ancient House was in a state of peaceful darkness.

The Remove dormitory, for example, was deserted. And there was no chance of anybody going into it for another full hour. Outside a moon was visible just behind some filmy clouds. A weak, watery light filtered into the dormitory.

A figure crept in.

It was the figure of Percy Bray, of the College House. Very cautiously he had slipped into the Ancient House by means of a store-room window. Without difficulty he had made his way up the rear stairs, crouching in alcoves and corners so as to avoid all possibility of being spotted.

For him to be found here would be fatal—for his very presence would give rise to acute suspicions. Bray was Buster Boots' own personal chum, and this fact alone would be sufficient to arouse comment.

But Percy Bray was cautious.

He did not allow himself to be seen. And at length he crept into the Remove dormitory and slipped along until he came to a certain bed. He carefully counted from the end of the room, and nodded to himself.

"Yes, this is Nipper's bed," he murmured. "No mistake about it."

Percy Bray was right. The bed was the one he wanted, and in a careful, methodical manner, he proceeded to strip off the quilt, blankets and sheets. At last he arrived at the under-blanket—the one which always rested between the bottom sheet and the mattress.

Bray took this away, and examined it near the window. The pale moonlight was quite sufficient for him to see by.

"Good!" he murmured. "Exactly the same—and not a distinctive mark on it of any kind. I knew it all along!"

From beneath his jacket he pulled a bulky parcel—which proved to be a blanket of precisely the same colour and type as the one he had removed from the bed. It was, in fact, his own under-blanket. They were identical.

Swiftly, Bray put the substitute blanket on the bed, and then got to work. He remade the bed completely. By the time he had finished, after five minutes, there was no indication of any sort that the bed had been touched.

And like a shadow, Percy Bray crept out—taking the other blanket with him. Ten minutes later he was in his own dormitory, remaking his own bed. And soon after that he was in the common-room, and not a soul in the whole school knew of his recent activities. There was no indication of any kind to show what he had done. His scheme had been a success—so far.

Bed-time came, and the Ancient House Remove went up to its dormitory in just the same way as usual. Naturally, practically all the talk among the juniors was concerned with the coming fight.

"Only two days more now," said Handforth. "To-morrow and the day after—and then comes the scrap! I must say that you're looking in the pink, Nipper."

"Never felt better," I declared.

"Good man!" said Handy. "Don't you go and get stale, or you might mess everything up. I'll give you a few tips to-morrow—"

"Thanks all the same, but they're quite unnecessary," I interrupted. "And I wish you chaps would give me a rest. Forget all about the blessed fight. It doesn't come off till Wednesday, anyway."

I was soon in bed, and I dropped off into a healthy sleep at once. But long after all the other fellows in the Remove were soundly off, I woke up.

Somehow or other I wasn't quite so comfortable as usual. It wasn't particularly cold that night, but there was a certain dampness. It seemed to penetrate right into the bed itself. But it was out of the question for the bed to be damp—for the sheets and blankets had been changed two days earlier, and for two nights I had slept soundly and snugly.

I set it down to my imagination, turned over, and went to sleep again. But before dawn I awoke again—with that feeling of dampness still with me. Under no circumstances could I suspect the truth.

And the truth was astonishingly simple.

Percy Bray had merely placed a damp blanket underneath my bottom sheet. The blanket itself felt quite normal to the touch—but was, nevertheless, in that condition which is described as being unaired.

But how was it possible for me to know this—or even suspect it?

I put my restlessness down to myself—and not because of any difference in the bed.

If Bray had realised the grave nature of his act, he might have hesitated. But it seemed to him a simple solution to the problem—and although he was quite a decent fellow in many respects, he had allowed his keen anxiety for Buster to override his sense of judgment.

I fell into a sound sleep at last, and was not awakened until the clanging of the rising bell. And then I opened my eyes, heavy, listless and feeling altogether out of sorts. I couldn't account for it.

I sat up, and, rubbing my heavy-lidded eyes, I became aware of the fact that my throat was irritating. There was no feeling of dampness in the bed—the warmth of my body had, indeed, absorbed it all. There was no evidence of any kind that the blanket had been damp. Even if I had investigated on the spot I should have discovered nothing.

I looked round heavily, feeling inwardly alarmed. I knew the signs all right—I had had them often enough before. Unless I was very much mistaken, I had all the symptoms of a first-class cold! Considering that I had been sleeping for eight hours on a damp blanket, this was not at all surprising. But I didn't know anything about that blanket.

I yawned, stretched myself, and made the startling discovery that all my limbs and muscles were stiff. As a rule, I had just leapt out of bed as lightly as a feather, feeling springy and alert.

But this morning it was exactly the opposite.

"My hat!" I murmured. "I believe I've got a cold!"

And then, in spite of myself, I sneezed violently.

Reggie Pitt, who had been lying in bed studying the ceiling, popped up like a Jack-in-the-box. He simply leapt out of bed, and dashed across to me.

"What are you sneezing for?" he demanded warmly.

"Blessed if I know!" I replied thickly. "I—I don't feel quite so fit this morning, Reggie—"

He grabbed me, and stared into my face.

"Your eyes are bleary!" he said anxiously. "You—you've got an unhealthy-looking flush! Oh, my goodness! I believe you're getting a cold!"

"I've got it!" I said sadly.

I sneezed again, and by this time half the fellows in the dormitory were collecting round my bed. I couldn't help feeling slightly amused, in spite of the seriousness of the situation. Never before had my health been a matter of such concern to the Remove. Never before had the fellows looked so anxious.

"You—you rotter!" exclaimed Tommy

Watson. "Getting a cold like this—just when you need to be so fit!"

"My dear chap, I can't help it!"

"You must have been sitting in a draught last night, or something!" said Watson. "I told you to close that window in the study—"

"There was no draught from that window," I broke in. "I can't explain it at all—I've been so jolly careful, too. Well, there's plenty of time—I shall probably be heaps better by Wednesday. If all you fellows make a fuss like this, the cold will get worse! The best thing I can do is to forget it."

But it is not always an easy matter to forget a cold!

CHAPTER VIII.

BUSTER BOOTS IS FIRM!



PERCY BRAY'S eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"Good!" he murmured. "It worked! No question about that—he's got a cold coming on even now!"

The Remove was in the classroom, and it had not taken Percy Bray very long to see the results of his dirty work. For my cold had developed rapidly, and I was now sniffing and clearing my throat almost constantly. Even Mr. Crowell noticed the fact, and instructed me to go to the matron for treatment. I assured Mr. Crowell that it was only a trifle.

Later on, when lessons were over, Bray grinned delightedly. He was with Boots and the other members of the Faithful Five.

"Looks as though Providence is taking a hand in the giddy game," he remarked casually. "If this cold of Nipper's develops, he'll be in no fit condition for fighting on Wednesday afternoon."

Buster Boots sniffed.

"I'd prefer Nipper to be fit!" he said. "Of course, it'll be easier for me if he isn't, but there won't be much satisfaction. I'm going to whack him all right."

"I believe you are!" declared Bray quietly.

He had noticed the gleam of pleasure in his leader's eyes. For Buster must have known for days past that his chances of success were very slight. Now, however, there was renewed hope for him.

I continued my sparring and my other training in just the same way as usual. But I was alarmed at the exertion. All my muscles seemed to be stiff and painful. Yesterday they had been pliable, elastic, and fit for anything. And as the day wore on, I grew more and more lethargic.

At last Reggie Pitt put his foot down.

"It's no good—you can't go on!" he said anxiously. "It's doing you more harm than good to ignore the thing like this. The only way is to dose you up, and get you well by to-morrow night. Then you'll have

a chance to get fit again by Wednesday afternoon."

"Wednesday's a long way off yet—I shall be all right," I said confidently.

But I was not feeling so certain, by any means. My chums did everything they possibly could to cure me. I was rubbed with embrocation; I swallowed all kinds of doses of cough mixture, and, finally, I was packed off to bed hours before the usual time. It was Monday night, and there was only one clear day before the big event.

The fellows managed to get me a huge bowl of steaming broth, and after swallowing this I was told to get down between the blankets and perspire. I was not allowed any sheets. Extra blankets had been piled on my bed—but the other blanket had not been touched.

Perhaps there still remained a trifle of dampness in it—I don't know. At all events, on Tuesday morning I awoke feeling absolutely rotten. Instead of the cold having disappeared, as many fellows had prophesied, it seemed ten times as bad.

My throat was on fire, and horribly sore. My eyes were red and watery, and the top of my head felt as though it were splitting. Every time I moved a limb, my muscles ached. And I sat up in bed, coughing badly. The other juniors crowded round, very anxious.

"He's worse!" said Handforth tragically.

"Worse!" echoed Pitt. "Why, he looks as if he's got the flu! Buck up, Nipper! Considering the dosing we gave you, you ought to be well!"

"Sorry, old man!" I said huskily. "I feel beastly!"

"Well, this is about the limit!" said Handforth disgustedly. "The biggest fight you ever tackled, and all you can do is to go and get a fatheaded cold like this! Some chaps are brainy, ain't they?"

"Do you think I could help it?" I roared.

"Yes!" thundered Handforth. "If you had placed yourself under my treatment, you'd have been well ages ago! You ought to have eaten all those onions! And instead of taking a teaspoonful of that cough mixture, you ought to have taken the whole bottleful! Those pills, too! I advised you to have a dozen—and you didn't even take one! And what about the mustard-plaster?"

"Oh, my hat!" I moaned. "Spare me, for goodness' sake! Why, you dummy, if I had done everything you advised I should have been dead by now! Don't make such a silly fuss—I'll be all right by to-morrow."

"You've got to take those pills now!" said Handforth curtly.

"I won't!" I roared.

As a matter of fact, I was feeling intensely irritated. I was angry with myself for getting a cold at such a crucial time.

All the other fellows were anxious and worried. But never for a moment did anybody suspect that there had been foul play. Nobody had the slightest idea that

this cold of mine had been deliberately forced upon me.

The very simplicity of the trick was enough to safeguard it. Even the Monks had no inkling of the truth. Percy Bray was the only fellow in the whole school who knew why I had a cold. And he had done this thing for the sake of his leader—so that his chum would win the fight.

That day was like a nightmare.

By a supreme effort I fought the cold. Although my head was splitting, I went through lessons, and when Mr. Crowell asked me if I was better, I assured him that I felt practically myself again. Only by herculean efforts, and surreptitious use of many handkerchiefs did I refrain from coughing and sneezing in the classroom.

By the time the day was over I felt washed out.

All my former fitness had gone; it had left me like a cloak. I felt that I couldn't stand up to even a Third Form fag. I did a little sparring with Pitt after tea, and Reggie was staggered.

"You're no good at all—you're as weak as a baby!" he said in alarm. "That punch of yours is only a ghost of its usual self!"

"I know it!" I said huskily.

"It's no good going on like this—you can't do a thing!" said Pitt. "Come on—you're going to bed!"

"But it's only six o'clock——"

"I don't care about that—you're going to bed!" insisted Reggie. "Why, good heavens, you're as weak as a kitten! And I don't like that feverish gleam in your eye, either! Honest, Nipper, how do you feel?"

"Rotten!" I said, with a sneeze.

"How about your muscles?"

"No elasticity left in 'em at all!" I interrupted. "My head's throbbing, too—it seems to be worse. It's a queer thing, but when nothing depends on it, I can get rid of a cold in a couple of days. I can shake it off without taking a single dose of medicine. And here you've been fairly soaking me with stuff, and I'm worse than ever."

It certainly did seem a cruel trick of Fate. But I didn't realise how bad my cold actually was. It was very serious indeed; and at any ordinary time I should probably have gone into the sanatorium for a few days. But, being afraid that the master would order something of that kind, I had made light of my condition, pretending to be as well as ever. And I must have been fairly successful in my pretence, because I was not bothered.

The same performance was gone through that night.

Hot broth, blankets—and this time a poultice on my chest. But nobody had any real hope that I should be fit by the morning. Indeed, it was farcical to expect that I would recover so rapidly. Even if the

cold left me, my muscles would still be stiff and out of condition.

I was certainly not in any state to enter upon the biggest fight of my life. The idea of meeting Buster Boots was ridiculous. Three days earlier I could have smashed him up; but now I was a mere ghost of my former self.

In the morning Pitt was up before the rising-bell had sounded. He and Tommy Watson came over to my bed and found that I was awake, and they looked down at me with very great concern.

"How goes it?" asked Reggie tensely.

I sat up, shook myself, and slapped my chest.

"Better!" I said briskly. "In fact, heaps better!"

"Really?" gasped Watson.

"You bet!" I declared. "Not quite myself yet; but that sore throat's gone, and my eyes don't water."

They looked at me keenly.

"Yes, I must say you look a lot better," said Pitt, nodding. "But you'll never be able to get into condition by this afternoon. The cold's gone, I can see—completely vanished."

He felt my forehead, and then tested my pulse.

"Practically normal," he announced. "You may not know it, but yesterday you had a terrific temperature. You were absolutely feverish. That's all gone, thank goodness. Within three days you'll be fit."

"Give me until Saturday, and I'll be as well as ever," I declared.

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"That's the idea," he said briskly. "We'll postpone the fight until Saturday afternoon. I'll go straight over to Boots, and put it to him. He's bound to agree—he'll never consent to fight a sick man."

When Pitt made this decision known there was much enthusiasm. And all the juniors were intensely relieved to find that I was so much better. One look at me was enough for all of them.

The old sparkle had returned to my eyes, and that lethargic feeling had gone. I was again my brisk self. But the whole of my body was in a weakened condition. My muscles were flabby, and there was not the same springiness in my actions. I felt all right, but I knew that I wasn't fit enough. The cold had left its mark—had left me a mere shadow when it came to fighting strength.

Reggie Pitt was over in the College House long before breakfast. But he was not up before the Supreme Six. They were collected in the College House lobby, and Buster Boots was looking in the pink of condition.

"Just a word, Boots," said Pitt briskly. "I suppose you know that Nipper's had a pretty rotten cold since Monday morning—"

"Has he?" interrupted Boots. "Why should I know anything about it? I cer-

tainly noticed him sniffing a bit in the classroom, but I didn't think it was much!"

Pitt looked at Buster grimly.

"That sort of thing won't do!" he growled. "You know as well as anything that Nipper's had a rotten cold on him for days. It was only by a supreme effort that he concealed it from old Crowell—and saved himself from getting into the sanny. Nipper's better this morning, but in no condition to fight."

"Oh!" said Buster, with an unpleasant sneer. "So that's the game, is it? You want to call off the fight, eh?"

Pitt's eyes flashed.

"No, I don't!" he snapped. "There's no question about calling off the fight; but, under the circumstances, I think it would be far better to postpone it until Saturday afternoon."

"Rot!" put in Percy Bray. "I'm Buster's manager, and I won't even consider it. The fight's booked for this afternoon, and we're not going to have any of your bunkum. A nice thing! Just because Nipper gets stale, you want to—"

"Stale!" roared Pitt. "He's had a cold, I tell you!"

"Any excuse is better than none!" jeered Bray. "Anyhow, if Nipper doesn't turn up for the fight, there'll be a row! He'll cut a fine figure, won't he? Pretending to be the champion boxer of the Remove, and then finking the scrap at the last moment!"

"You cad!" said Pitt hotly. "You know well enough that Nipper is as game as anybody can be! He'll fight if he has to—but if you're a sportsman, Boots, you'll agree to this postponement."

"I'm not taking any notice of your jibes," said Buster Boots deliberately. "And this fight is going to take place this afternoon—or there'll be some trouble! I'm not agreeable to any postponement."

Pitt turned on his heel, and walked away. He was so angry that he couldn't trust himself to speak for a bit. He met Handforth out in the Triangle, and managed to explain what had happened.

"I was a fool to go over there at all!" he finished up. "I might have known what to expect. Those rotten Monks have got no decency at all."

"The best thing is to have the fight—we can't let those rotters jeer at us!" said Handforth grimly. "My hat! It's not to thought of! Let's hear what Nipper says."

They told me what had happened, and my decision was prompt.

"It'll be an unfair contest, but there's only one thing to do," I said quietly. "If Buster won't agree to a postponement, the only thing is to go ahead. Those cads will only start jeering and crowing if we insist."

"The miserable rotters!" said Tommy Watson hotly.

"Couldn't we report your condition to Mr. Lee, and get him to order you into the

sanny?" asked Handforth. "Those cads couldn't say anything then—"

"I'm an idiot!" interrupted Pitt. "I ought to have done that yesterday. But it's too late now—Nipper's almost himself again. He's thrown the cold off, and he could never get into the sanny. But, although the cold's gone, it doesn't alter the fact that his muscles are as flabby as dead mutton."

The only possibility was to carry on with the fight. The attitude of the Monks was such that there was nothing else to be done. But every one of my supporters felt uneasy and alarmed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT FIGHT!



EXCITEMENT reigned. It was afternoon, and Fort Resolute was absolutely besieged with crowds of animated juniors and seniors.

It was practically time for the big fight to commence. All the seat holders were in their places—and the only surprising thing was that the sides of the old barn did not bulge outwards. The place was packed to suffocation.

Fags were squatting along the beams far above—many of them having slipped in without paying. And outside crowds of other fellows waited—juniors who had not been able to buy tickets on the previous Saturday.

A kind of extra grand-stand had been erected outside the big open doors—a grand-stand composed of boxes, step-ladders, and everything else that could possibly be raked together.

For it was easy enough to see into the big barn, and gaze direct upon the ring. But only a few fellows would be able to occupy that stand at once. However, the troubles of these juniors did not worry those within.

"Come on—start up!"

"Where's the referee?"

"Ancient House—Ancient House!"

"Yah—rotten Fossils! College House!"

The rival factions yelled at one another with all their strength. And then there were storms of cheering. For John Busterfield Boots and myself had just appeared. We were attired in our overcoats, but these we discarded immediately upon entering the ring—revealing ourselves in full fighting array.

Seated in our corners, we were attended to by our respective seconds. And I must admit that I was feeling a great deal better now. Some of my old-form had come back. I had recovered with remarkable rapidity during the morning. My muscles were feeling stronger, and my head was steady.

John Busterfield Boots was the very picture of health and strength. And there was



Bray took the blanket away, and examined it near the window. The pale moonlight was quite sufficient for him to see by.

a smile of complete confidence on his freckled face. He had every reason to feel certain of victory, for all the odds were in his favour.

And then Edgar Fenton appeared. His arrival, of course, was the signal for a fresh burst of cheering. The referee was on the spot, and now it was only a matter of moments before the actual fight commenced.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Fenton—say the word!"

"Buck up, Nipper—you'll win!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yah! Buster's the chap who'll win!"

Fenton frowned.

"Not so much noise!" he shouted. "Everything ready? What's wrong with you, Nipper? You don't look yourself to-day?"

"Oh, nothing much," I said. "I'm all right."

"He's had a bad cold since Sunday—" began Tommy Watson.

"Yah! Trying to excuse him!" yelled the Monks.

"I don't quite like this," said Fenton curtly. "What's the matter here? Are you

fellow ready to begin this fight? If either of you aren't well, you'd better postpone it."

"Here, hear!" shouted a number of Fossils.

"We suggested a postponement this morning, Fenton," said Pitt. "But Boots and his supporters won't agree to it."

"Not likely!" flared up Percy Bray. "Nipper's fit enough—there's nothing wrong with him! If he says he's not well, it's all bluff!"

"Yah! He's afraid!" hooted the Monks.

"Carry on with it, Fenton," I said quietly.

"I'm quite ready to fight now. We don't want to have any unpleasantness."

Fenton could see exactly how things were, and he didn't hesitate. He knew well enough that it would be very difficult to control this crowd if there was any suggestion of postponement now. It was, indeed, essential to go straight ahead with the fight.

"Time!"

The gong sounded, and the first round commenced. As Buster Boots and I stepped from our respective corners there was a tense, expectant silence. The fellows all became hushed, and stood looking on breathlessly.

Boots and I shook hands in the usual formal manner—and the fight was on.

Quick as a flash, Boots whipped his left round, and attempted to hook me on the side of the jaw. But I avoided the blow with ease, and side-stepped. Boots followed me up, and pressed the fighting.

I could see that he was intent upon finishing this battle as soon as ever he possibly could.

He had the idea that he had all the advantage—that he was, indeed, far superior to me. And he thought that if he could only give me the knockout to start with, his victory would be supreme.

But Buster made a mistake.

Just at present I was ready for him—I was a perfect fighting machine. All the suppleness had returned to my muscles, and in the excitement of the battle I felt perfectly fit.

But this, after all, was only a temporary fitness. My weakened condition would not allow me to keep up the pace. After three or four rounds I should begin to lose my speed. I knew this as well as anything. My only chance, indeed, was to press the fighting at the outset.

Boots' policy, on the other hand, ought to have been a waiting game. The finest thing he could do was to let me expend my energy. It would only be a matter of time, then, before he was in a position to deliver the knockout. Once the first few rounds were over, I should be done—I should have shot my bolt.

Ordinarily, my staying power was great. But now I was in just the opposite condition. I was capable of giving just one big burst of speed, and then I should be finished. I knew it, and I worked accordingly.

Buster himself, instead of gaining the im-

mediate advantage, found, to his dismay, that he was compelled to be entirely on the defensive. I fairly drove him round the ring, hitting with whirlwind force.

Crash! Biff! Crash!

Blow after blow crashed upon Boots. He staggered back blindly, and fell against the ropes. I hammered him with all my strength. And his attempts to keep up his guard were futile. Somehow or other, he managed to slip away, and lunged out at me with his left.

Like lightning I ducked, and my famous right swing came round and caught Buster on the point of the jaw. He went completely over, crashing to the floor with a thud. And he lay there, dazed and bewildered.

"He's down—he's down!"

"Hurrah!"

"Buster's whacked!"

"One—two,—three—four——" counted Fenton deliberately.

"Stay down there until he counts eight!" shouted Bray, his voice filled with anxiety. "Don't get up yet, Buster—give yourself time!"

"Five—six—seven——"

Clang!

The round was over, and Buster Boots had been saved by the sound of the gong. Even his own supporters were ready to admit that that blow of mine had been a knock-out. Buster had been saved by the gong alone. He would never have risen at the count of nine, for he was utterly groggy.

I went back to my corner, feeling fine.

"Wonderful!" breathed Pitt enthusiastically. "Keep it up, old man! If you'd only delivered that blow ten seconds before, you'd have finished him off! When it comes to science, you've got him whacked!"

"Absolutely!" said Handforth.

My seconds tended me with every care. In the meantime, the Faithful Five were anxiously attending to their own leader. Boots was feeling much better after treatment, and there was a grim look in his eye.

"Nipper's a terror all right!" he muttered. "He's got a punch like a battering-ram!"

"It's your own fault!" snapped Bray. "Don't give him another opening! Keep on the defensive for the first three or four rounds. He can't stay the course! He'll be all right for a round or two, and then he'll peter out!"

"All right—I'll remember," said Buster.

Clang!

The second round commenced. I continued my policy of aggression, for I knew that it was my only hope. Indeed, I was feeling the effects of the battle already. My arms and legs were aching. Under any ordinary circumstances I should have felt no effects whatever.

I carried the fight into Buster's territory with all the force and strength of which I was capable. At this period of the match I was absolutely in the ascendancy. Buster

Boots had no opportunity to fight back—all his attention was confined to his defence.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

Again I had the College House leader against the ropes. And then he suddenly sprang to the attack with a perfect burst of activity. His own science was of a high order, and his boxing ability was considerable. But he was annoyed by the fact that I should constantly keep him on the defensive. He meant to show the crowd what he could do.

"Go it, Buster!"

"Hurrah!"

"Nipper's the man—go it, Nipper!"

We were going it—for all we were worth. Fenton had very little to do. He kept his eyes constantly open for fouls—but neither Boots nor I were the kind of fellows to indulge in boxing of that kind. Buster, in spite of his questionable ways, was an absolutely fair fighter.

He lunged out at me with all his great strength. One blow caught me on the chest, and another in the neck. Then he brought round a hook which jabbed me viciously on the cheek.

I staggered away, momentarily at a loss. And Buster pressed his advantage. He drove me round the ring, both of us fighting furiously.

Buster's winning!"

"Whack him, Boots!"

"Knock him out, Nipper!"

Crash!

Buster didn't exactly know what happened. But just when he was preparing to finish me off with a fearful swipe, something seemed to come from nowhere—something which caught Buster on the nose, and sent him hurtling backwards into the ropes. He fell half through them, and nearly vanished out of the ring.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"It's the knockout—Nipper's won!"

But Buster Boots was getting to his feet again—and I was ready to deliver a blow that would be vital. But, somehow or other, I was already losing my power. Again and again I punched, but I couldn't seem to get that sting into my blows.

That last terrific punch had taken a great deal of my energy—and now I was feeling the effects far more than I cared to admit. I was, indeed, petering out at a speed which alarmed me enormously. It was only by supreme will-power that I kept going.

And now I should not have the sympathy of the crowd if I collapsed.

For during these two opening rounds I had proved myself to be an efficient fighting machine—there had been no indication that I was stale or suffering from the effects of my recent cold. Even my own supporters had yelled to one another that I had completely recovered.

But, after all, it was a kind of sneer. It was only a flash in the pan, as I had known from the very start.

On the other hand, if I had been groggy from the very outset the crowd would have yelled for a postponement—they would have realised that I was unfit for the battle. In a way, I accused myself of foolishness for not having insisted upon a postponement until the following Saturday. But the thought of Buster's sneers had made me firm. I would go ahead with it.

Clang!

That sound was the most welcome I had ever heard. I almost staggered to my corner, and sank into my seat, while Reggie Pitt and Tommy Watson sponged me down, and vigorously rubbed my limbs.

"You're doing wonders!" said Pitt encouragingly.

"Keep it up, old son!" said Tommy.

"I can't—I'm whacked!" I muttered. "I shan't last another round!"

They looked at me in almost a scared way. I only saw them through a kind of blurry haze. My head was throbbing, and I trembled in every limb. I was shaky all over—with that kind of shakiness which comes with faintness. It was an effort to lift an arm. And I knew, then, that I was doomed to defeat. Just for a moment the thought seemed to send new fire through me.

Defeat!

It was terrible to think of—and how unfair! Given a proper chance, I should have defeated Boots without any trouble at all. Indeed, I was convinced that I could have knocked him out in less than three rounds. The fact that I had stayed two rounds already, in my present condition, was surprising to me. I had not expected it.

Clang!

The third round started—and it proved to be the last.

Boots adopted the aggressive at once. He had probably seen that I was getting groggy, and he decided to seize his advantage. He would have done better if he had waited until the fourth round, for by then, probably, his task would have been easier still. As it was, he had a little difficulty.

As I sprang towards Boots a little of my former fire came back. I forgot about the trembling in my limbs, and the dreadful faintness which assailed me. And I rushed in, determined to make one last, despairing effort. I knew it was hopeless from the very start, but there was just a chance.

I was like a demon.

I fairly hurled myself at Buster, and for a moment he was battered by a hurricane of blows. He went reeling back, more surprised than hurt, for there was no sting to my punches. But the spectators did not know this. It seemed to them that I was winning.

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good man!"

I only heard those voices in a kind of dream. They seemed to be far away and quite detached. John Busterfield Boots

(Continued on cover iii)

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himself was a mere blur. He was there, and I was hitting out at him—but I had no absolute certainty of his position. I felt giddy and faint.

We clinched—and Buster broke away, and then something hit me in the chest. Something else struck me on the jaw.

I staggered back, defending myself feebly. Everything had become black and dim. I didn't care what happened. And the next moment Buster Boots delivered a powerful lunge which caught me on the point.

I crashed over, and knew nothing.

Those who were looking on jumped to their feet, and yelled with alarm and concern.

"Buck up, Nipper—get up, you ass!"

"Four—five—six—seven——" continued Fenton grimly.

He had begun counting as soon as I was down—and now there was no sign whatever of my getting to my feet.

"Come on, Nipper; pull yourself together!"

"Eight—nine—out!" said Fenton relentlessly.

And then pandemonium broke loose.

"Hurrah!"

"College House wins!"

"Nipper's beaten!"

"Hurrah!"

"Beaten?" muttered Pitt tensely. "I knew it—I knew it all along! Oh, my hat! This is a tragedy!"

"And—and he was certain of victory, too!" said Tommy Watson dazedly. "It's all wrong—the fight ought to be held over again——"

"It's no good talking now—too late!" said De Valerie. "It's all over—Nipper's beaten. He's no longer captain of the Remove; Buster Boots becomes captain from this minute onwards!"

Pitt nodded.

"Buster Boots—captain," he muttered. "It seems that the Remove is in for some pretty lively times!"

Crowds of juniors carried me to my corner, and helped to restore me to my senses.

They treated me tenderly, bathed my head and temples, and slowly brought me round.

In the meantime, Fullwood & Co. were glaring at one another fiercely.

"Beaten!" snapped Gulliver. "You—you rotter! Telling me to put my money on Nipper! I've lost over thirty bob!"

"An' I've lost two quid!" snapped Gulliver.

"That's right—snivel!" snarled Fullwood.

"Snivel over your miserable shillin's! What about me? I've lost fifteen quid! But I was sure Nipper would win—an' so he would, but for that cold. It's a rotten shame—he wasn't fit to fight—they ought to have postponed it!"

Most of the Ancient House fellows were talking in that strain—but it was no good! The fight had been a tussle for the captaincy, and John Busterfield Boots had won by a fair knock-out. My condition at the time of the fight was nothing whatever to do with the result. The one concrete fact was there—Buster Boots was now captain of the Remove.

And while I was led back into the Ancient House, surrounded by my supporters, the Monks celebrated.

Gloom prevailed in the Ancient House—and triumph supreme rioted throughout the junior sections of the College House.

The blow had fallen!

And it seemed that the Remove was booked for some very lively times!

With John Busterfield Boots in supreme command there was every prospect of trouble!

THE END.

EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

My Dear Readers,

Outwardly, John Busterfield Boots has fairly and squarely knocked out Nipper in the boxing contest, and is now acclaimed Skipper of the Remove. He is the hero of the hour, but how long will his popularity last? We know, of course, that Nipper would have won the fight had he not contracted a cold through Bray's dastardly trick. Unhappily, this cannot be proved, and although Nipper knew that he could have beaten his opponent had he been fit, the ex-captain of the Remove is not the sort of boy to make any excuses for his defeat.

THE NEW CAPTAIN.

Buster's rapid rise to fame and power is the talk of the school, and the juniors are wondering how he will shape now that he has attained his ambition. It is quite evident that the new leader intends to make some drastic changes in running the

Remove, but whether these changes will be for the good or ill of the Remove remains to be seen. One thing is certain. Buster will rule in the same ruthless manner which brought him into power, and you will read all about it in next week's stirring narrative:

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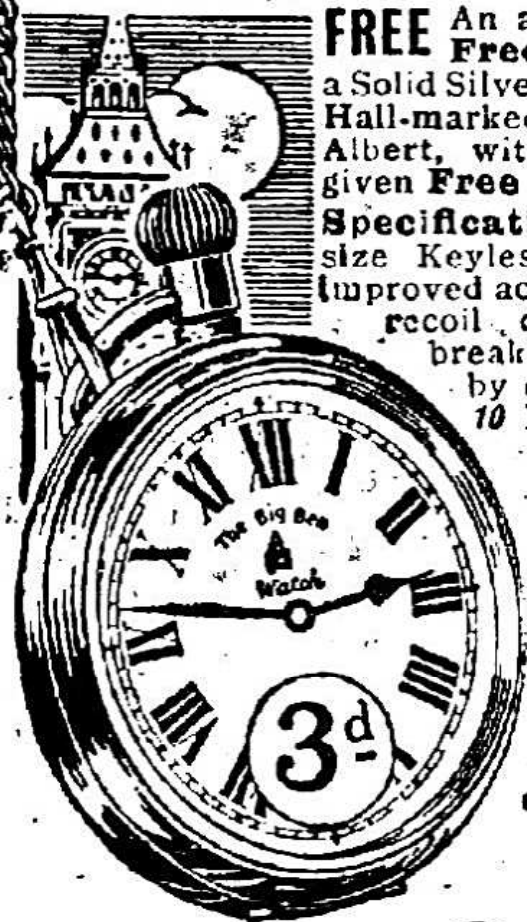
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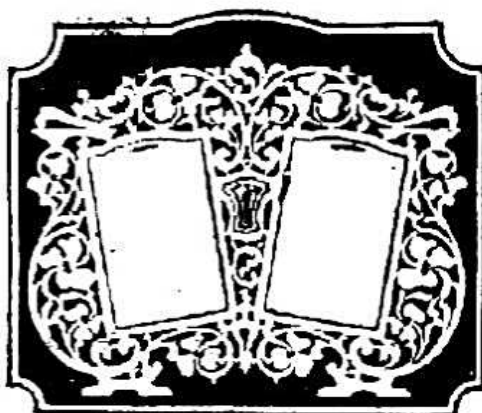
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