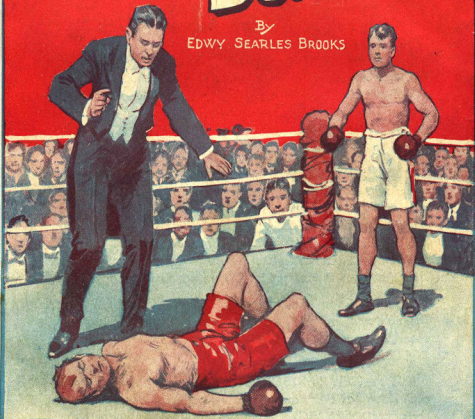


THE SCHOOLBOY BOXER!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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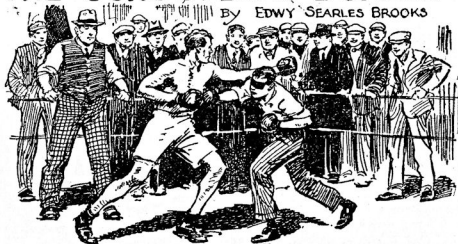
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== MODERN BOY ==

THE 1938 PAPER FOR THE 1938 BOY!

THE SCHOOLBOY BOXER!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



Told by NIPPER of the Remove.

A full-of-punch yarn of mystery, school adventure and boxing—starring
ERNEST LAWRENCE, the lightning light-weight of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

Licking a 'Bully!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST came to a halt, and adjusted his pince-nez. He gazed at Tommy Watson and me with a rather doubtful expression upon his noble countenance.

"Really, dear boys, I think this is frightfully unwise!" he remarked. "It is, really!"

"Rats!" I said. "Don't be an ass, Montie."

"But we're goin' right into the lions' den, begad!" complained Sir Montie. "Christine & Co. will certainly be on the alert."

I chuckled.

"Come along in—the Monks won't hurt us!"

Of late there had been a revival of

the House rivalry between the College House and the Ancient House juniors. One or two japes had been brought off, and, in consequence, the rival sets of Removites were keenly alive for any fresh opportunity. Christine & Co., in particular, were very active of late, and they were determined, if possible, to "put one over" on the Fossils.

Dinner was just over, and it was a half-holiday. The whole afternoon lay in front of us, and we were just about to enter the College House, in search of Bob Christine, to discuss extremely important matters with him regarding football. There was no match arranged for this particular afternoon, but we were on our way to see if we could fix up a scratch match. Anything was better than nothing, and, in these circumstances, I considered that we should be allowed

free entry into the enemy's domain.

We were just about to enter the College House when Clapson, Nation, Oldfield, and one or two other juniors appeared. They glared at us somewhat aggressively.

"Fossils! Come on, you chaps—let's hurl them out on their giddy necks! Like their cheek, coming over this side of the Triangle——"

"Peace, my children—peace!" I interrupted.

"Rats!" said Billy Nation. "We're not going to let you off——"

"Thanks!" I said calmly. "This is a half-holiday, and we're trying to get up a football match. I want to see Bob Christine."

"Oh, that's different!" said Clapson. "If you're getting up a match, all well and good; but don't you try any of your giddy tricks while you're here, that's all!"

They allowed us to pass inside, and Sir Montie breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good!" he murmured. "I really thought that frightful things were goin' to happen."

We were about to pass through the lobby, on our way to the Remove passage, when we caught sight of a junior who was just about to pass us. I knew his name—Ernest Lawrence—and he was a new fellow in the College House Remove; he had only arrived at the beginning of the term.

I had not seen much of him, being, of course, an Ancient House fellow. Lawrence, as a matter of fact, had kept quite to himself, and I knew that he occupied Study T alone. And, as a general rule, he sat in his study "swotting" away at his books. He looked a strong sort of fellow, and had a fresh complexion and an open, pleasant face. His eyes were grey, and rather grave and serious in expression; his hair was curly and quite fair—indeed, almost golden.

There was another point about Ernest Lawrence which I had noticed, and which nearly all the other fellows had noticed. His Eton suit, although

very neat and well kept, was rather too small for him, and it was somewhat shabby.

It indicated that his people were not extremely well endowed with this world's goods.

Up till now, Lawrence had played no part in the affairs of St. Frank's. Yet it was destined that this quiet boy should play quite a big part in the events of the near future.

As it happened, Grayson, of the Fifth, came out of the cloak-room just at that moment. Grayson was a big, hulking sort of fellow, and his reputation in the Collge House was not of the best. He was, to tell the truth, a bully. He also took a keen pleasure in backing horses, gambling, smoking, and choice amusements of that description.

Grayson was not looking where he was going, and he bumped rather heavily into Ernest Lawrence. The Removee staggered, and Grayson almost tripped up. He only saved himself from falling by an effort.

"What the deuce—confound you!" roared Grayson angrily. "Why can't you look where you're going, you confounded young idiot?"

Lawrence looked rather astonished, as well he might.

"I'm sorry, Grayson!" he said quietly. "But I think it was your fault, really—you banged into me——"

"I don't want any of your beastly lip!" shouted Grayson harshly. "You nearly tripped me up, and you're going to apologise now—or have your arm twisted!"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort," Lawrence replied smoothly. "You banged into me, and I don't see why I should apologise for that. Strictly speaking, you ought to apologise, Grayson."

"You cheeky young sweep!" roared Grayson. "If you don't apologise within ten seconds, I will twist your beastly arm until you howl for mercy. One—two—three—four——"

"That sort of talk has no effect upon me," interrupted Lawrence quietly. "You won't twist my arm, Grayson, because you daren't. If you had me alone, you might try something of the kind; but you wouldn't do it here in the lobby, with five or six fellows looking on."

Grayson scowled. He knew well enough that Lawrence was speaking the truth. He would not dare to twist the junior's arm now, and the bully of the Fifth attempted to bluster.

"You'd better be careful what you say to me, you young cad!" he snapped viciously. "I wouldn't soil my fingers by touching you. Who do you think you are, anyway—coming to St. Frank's looking like a tramp? The next time an old rag-and-bone man comes round here, I'll direct him to your study. That suit of yours might fetch twopence half-penny."

Ernest Lawrence turned crimson.

"I—I can't help my suit being a little bit shabby!" he muttered. "There's no disgrace in it, anyway."

"Rather not, dear old boy!" exclaimed Sir Montie warmly. "Don't take any notice of this frightful ass."

Grayson twirled round.

"Who the deuce told you to interfere, you infernal Ancient House brat?" he snapped. "Clear out of here, before I chuck you out!"

Sir Montie started.

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "Did—did you hear that, dear old boys?"

"We're not deaf," said Tommy Watson bluntly. "If Grayson isn't careful, he'll find himself used as a doormat."

Lawrence, still red, attempted to pass, in order to go out, but Grayson barred his path.

"Not yet!" he rapped out. "You're not going just yet, my fine pauper. It's a pity your people couldn't dress you any better—you're a disgrace to the College House—that's what you are. It's a wonder Mr. Foxe hasn't reported you to the Head!"

"Will you let me pass?" asked Law-

rence quietly. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Grayson, but you had better be careful."

"Oh!" shouted Grayson fiercely. "And what the dickens do you think you can do?"

"It seems to me that you are looking for trouble," said Lawrence. "If that's the case, I can let you have some. But, as I told you before, I don't want any unpleasantness."

Grayson grinned.

"Oh, you can let me have some!" he repeated. "And what about the trouble you'll get? If I have any more of your sauce, I'll give you a hiding."

"I don't think you will!" replied Lawrence. "And, what's more, Grayson, I'll fight you if you want me to."

Grayson yelled.

"You'll fight me!" he roared. "Why, you silly little fool, I could smash you. You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I think I do," said the new boy. "Well, will you let me pass, or will you fight me?"

"Fight you!" said Grayson contemptuously. "You might just as well ask me if I'd fight a kid in the Second Form. And I wouldn't soil my fingers by fighting with a low-bred pauper like you—a ragged beggar from some rotten school!"

Smack!

Quick as lightning, Lawrence's hand came forward, and it hit Grayson's cheek with a smack which resounded throughout the lobby. It was a sharp blow, and Grayson's cheek was flaming. He staggered back, with a sharp cry of pain, and his eyes were blazing with fury. Lawrence stood there, hot and flushed, with an expression of defiance in his eyes. Tommy and Montie and I looked on with keen interest.

"You—you little idiot!" snarled Grayson. "Why, I'll—I'll— You—you want me to fight, do you? All right, you young cad, I'll fight you—I'll smash you to bits!"

"All right," said Lawrence. "I'm

ready to fight you now—here, if you want it!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Bob Christine, who had appeared towards the end of the little scene. "You can't scrap in the lobby, you asses. If there's going to be a fight, you'll have to go behind the gymnasium. By Jingo, you're a young ass, Lawrence. You'll be licked!"

The news spread like wildfire, and before long almost every junior in the College House knew that a fight was to take place behind the gymnasium, almost at once—a fight between Grayson of the Fifth, and Lawrence of the Remove. It was an extraordinary bout, for it was regarded as a foregone conclusion that Lawrence would last about one minute only. Grayson was a renowned bully.

Before ten minutes had elapsed, practically all the juniors in the Ancient House, too, were aware that a fight was about to commence, and a great crowd collected behind the gymnasium, which was a kind of natural amphitheatre. There was a hollow, with grassy banks all round, with a splendid view of the proceedings. Handforth, naturally, was very prominent. Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D, generally managed to make himself seen and heard wherever he went.

"It's all rot!" he declared warmly. "We ought to stop this fight, you chaps—it isn't fair."

"Rats!" said Clapson. "We're all waiting to see Lawrence wiped out of existence!"

"Rather!"

"The young ass asked for it, and he'll get it!"

"A fight's a fight, but this won't be a fight!" roared Handforth. "It isn't fair to Lawrence. Grayson is a hulking great beggar—and a bully, too. What hope has Lawrence got against such a chap?"

"No hope at all," put in Reginald Pitt. "But it's no good talking, Handy; if they've arranged this fight,

it will have to go through. Lawrence smacked Grayson's face, and forced him to fight, and so he must take the consequences. In other words, he called the tune, and he'll have to pay the piper!"

At that moment Grayson came into the ring. The bully of the Fifth was looking surly and aggressive. He was evidently determined to finish the fight as quickly as possible, for Grayson considered the whole thing to be *infra dig*.

Ernest Lawrence appeared a moment or two afterwards. He was looking quite calm and collected. His face was slightly pale, but there was no doubt about his pluck.

Bob Christine and Talmadge volunteered to be Lawrence's seconds. Grayson only had one—his study companion, Shaw, of the Fifth.

"Don't waste any time over it, Grayson," said Shaw. "Give him one swipe and lay him out."

"That's what I am going to do," said Grayson viciously. "I'll make him wish he was never born!"

"Right-ho! Go ahead. I'll hold your jacket!"

"No, you won't!" said the bully of the Fifth. "I'm going to keep my jacket on. I can deal with Lawrence in half a minute."

Lawrence was getting ready. His jacket was already off, and his sleeves were rolled up. He looked quite businesslike, although very frail and small compared to Grayson.

Bob Christine was seeing to it that the thing was properly done, and a referee had already been appointed. This was another Fifth Form fellow, named Drake, and the referee now stepped forward with two pairs of boxing-gloves, Grayson glared at him.

"We don't want those things!" he snapped. "We're using our bare fists!"

Drake shook his head.

"I don't think so!" he replied grimly. "That sort of thing won't do, Grayson. You've got a fist like a leg

of mutton, and I'm not going to see you smash into Lawrence without wearing the gloves. I suppose you'll do him quite enough damage in any case."

"Oh, all right!" snapped Grayson.

He pulled his gloves on, and they were secured by Shaw. Meanwhile, Christine and Talmadge were attending to Lawrence, and Bob Christine gave the new boy a few words of fatherly advice.

"Of course, you're a silly young ass to challenge Grayson to fight," said Christine. "But that can't be helped now, and you've got to go through the giddy mill. Take my advice, and don't get in too close—don't let Grayson land one of his rights. He's a terror, and he's got a long reach. Your best policy is to keep on the move."

"Thanks, Christine," said Lawrence quietly. "But I think I can take care of myself, and I shall do my utmost not to disgrace the Remove!"

"Good egg!" said Talmadge. "That's the way to talk, my son. Of course, if you could wipe up Grayson, it would be a terrific victory for us—we all hate the cad."

"I'll do my best," said Lawrence simply.

"Time!" said Drake sharply.

"Now, you little worm!" muttered Grayson.

He stepped forward, his face expressing clearly enough the fury which filled him. He was in an ugly temper, and if Lawrence received one of his heavy blows, it would be hard for the Remove junior. And Grayson lost no time in lashing out.

Swish!

His first shot through the air, directed straight at Lawrence's jaw; but, somehow or other, Lawrence's jaw wasn't there. It was fully a foot away, and the next second Grayson was brought up with a jar, Lawrence having tapped him forcibly upon the chin.

"You—you infernal young cad!" said Grayson thickly.

He simply let himself go then, and

lashed out right and left with all his force and fury. But, curiously enough, not one of Grayson's blows found its mark.

He simply lashed out at the empty air as Lawrence dodged about, using clever footwork. And at intervals the junior got in a blow—one on the chin, one on the nose, and then a heavy thud upon Grayson's chest. Lawrence's arms worked like lightning—they flashed in and out, and he kept clear of Grayson's clumsy thrusts with the greatest of ease. And then—

Lawrence's left came up unexpectedly, and caught Grayson under the chin with a crash which shook every tooth in his head. Grayson staggered back, fell over, and lay on the grass dazedly. And a roar went up from the spectators.

"Oh, well hit!"

"Good old Lawrence!"

"Keep it up, kid! Give him beans!"

Grayson struggled to his feet, his face simply livid with rage.

"Time!" said Drake shortly.

Grayson went to his corner, and Shaw looked at him anxiously.

"I say, old man, you'll have to do better than that!" he exclaimed.

"Confound you!" snarled Grayson. "The kid's like an eel—I can't get at him!"

"That's because you went at it too carelessly," said Shaw. "That sort of thing won't do, you know. The kid's got a bit of science—you'll have to use some, too!"

But this would be difficult, considering that Grayson knew no science. It was his plan to lash out with all his force, and beat his opponent with the fury of his attack.

I was beginning to realise the truth. The new boy in the College House was a wonderful little boxer.

His science was astonishing, and he had all the confidence and composure of a professional. He was looking quite cool as he stood in his corner,

being sponged down by Christine and Talmadge.

"Well done, kid!" said Christine. "Keep it up like that, and you'll make a good display, even if you do get whacked in the end."

Lawrence smiled.

"I don't think I shall get whacked," he said. "Before the end of the third round I imagine that Grayson will have had sufficient."

This rather sounded like boasting, but it was not—as the next round proved.

The crowd of fellows watched, absolutely enthralled. They followed every movement of the fight with excitement and intense interest.

The new boy in the College House treated us to one of the most perfect displays of boxing that we had ever seen. His science was astonishing, and he played with his big opponent. Try as he would, Grayson could do nothing whatever—Lawrence was too good for him every time.

And rapidly Grayson was being worn out. Blow after blow he received, and he could give nothing in exchange. So far, Lawrence was not touched, and Grayson was showing many signs that he was the worse for wear.

The juniors were wild with excitement and joy now. For the opinion of the crowd had been reversed; it was generally acknowledged that Lawrence would be the winner. He had his man absolutely at his mercy.

"Begad! Did you see that?" exclaimed Sir Montie.

I did. Lawrence had suddenly executed a clever feint, drawing Grayson on until the bully stood exactly where he was wanted. Then Lawrence delivered two sharp blows which sent Grayson staggering back, helpless and done.

Only the calling of time saved him from defeat.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Lawrence!"

"Well done!"

Lawrence flushed slightly as he heard these cheering sounds. He had the crowd on his side now, and they were enthusiastic. As for Grayson, all his confidence was gone, and he was looking the worse for wear as Shaw rubbed down his face.

"Take your jacket off, you ass!" muttered Shaw. "The kid's too much for you—"

"Too much for me!" snarled Grayson. "It's not that—I'm not feeling in form to-day! Confound the young cad! I'll get him in the next round!"

But the next round was remarkably short. Lawrence apparently thought that there had been quite enough, and he finished the fight in whirlwind fashion. Instead of playing with his opponent, he went in to work with a will, and Grayson was driven round the ring, blows showering upon him and confusing him.

Then Lawrence finished the fight.

Bang! Crash! Flap! Three—four—five blows rained upon Grayson's face. The bully went down and lay there, blood streaming from his nose, and his lower lip being rather badly cut.

He couldn't rise, and he was counted out amid a terrific cheering and uproar.

Lawrence of the Remove had won! It was almost staggering. My opinion of Lawrence was fixed—he was the finest light-weight boxer I had ever seen.

CHAPTER 2.

Small Foxe is Pleased!

BOB CHRISTINE seized Lawrence's hand in a warm grip.

"Jolly fine, my son!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "How on earth did you manage to do it? You're a marvel!"

"Rather!" put in Handforth. "I'm a good judge of boxing, and I know what's what! Lawrence is a ripper, and no giddy mistake! Why, he knows as much science as I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lawrence has already forgotten all that you know about boxing!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "A good many chaps at St. Frank's can use their fists, but they are mere amateurs compared to Lawrence. The way he played about with Grayson was a sight for sore eyes!"

"Rather!"

"He upheld the honour of the Remove!" said Christine. "Jolly good luck to him! Grayson has been smashed for once, and I'll bet he won't be so jolly ready with his fists in future! He knows that there's somebody in the Remove who can lick him, and that'll make him cautious!"

Grayson had already slunk off, accompanied by Shaw. The Fifth Form bully, as a matter of fact, was still rather dazed and shaky. He could not quite realise that he had been knocked out, cleanly and fairly, by a Removite. It was indeed a humiliation for Master Grayson.

"I'd like to have a little chat with you later on, Lawrence," I said, tapping him on the shoulder. "What you don't know about boxing isn't worth learning, by all appearances!"

"I shall be only too pleased to have a talk," said Lawrence obligingly; "but I don't want you fellows to make a fuss about this affair. It was nothing, after all."

"Nothing!" echoed Handforth, staring. "Nothing—to lick Grayson!"

"Well, Grayson may be much bigger than I am, but he knows nothing about boxing," said Lawrence. "He was just like a baby—all he could do was to hit out blindly and trust to luck. That won't do at all in a proper boxing contest."

"Who taught you how to use your fists?" inquired Christine curiously.

"My father!"

"Then all I can say is, you've got a ripping father!" said Christine. "He must know a good bit about the noble art, I should say!"

"Yes, my father knows quite a lot," he said shortly.

"By the way," I broke in, "I was looking for you, Christine, when Grayson brought on this trouble."

"Well, you've found me now," said Bob. "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. I was wondering if you could get up a scratch eleven for a match this afternoon," I said. "There's nothing doing in particular, and it's a lovely day. Why shouldn't we have a footer match—Fossils against Monks? It'll be a bit of sport, anyway."

Bob Christine nodded.

"Right you are," he said. "I'm game—I'll get up an eleven, if you like."

"Good!" I said. "Be on Little Side in about twenty minutes' time. I'll go along and collect my men."

I went off, taking my chums with me, and a minute or so later Christine & Co. were alone with Lawrence.

"Know anything about football?" inquired Christine, looking at the new boy curiously.

"Well, a bit," admitted Lawrence.

"As much as you do about boxing?"

"Oh, no!" said the new fellow quickly. "I can play a fairly decent game, I think. But that will be for you to decide, Christine—you're the skipper of the eleven. I've been waiting for a chance to play footer, but I've always understood that a new fellow mustn't put himself forward."

"That's quite right," said Bob. "You've got the right spirit, my son. A new fellow mustn't put himself forward—or he gets it in the neck. Where do you usually play?"

"Half-back," replied Lawrence. "I'm not particular which side."

"We'll give you a trial this afternoon, if you like. It's only a scratch game, although, of course, it's a foregone conclusion that we shall wipe up the Fossils. Come along, my sons."

They were just about to move off when a voice interrupted them.

"One moment, boys. Just a word with you, if you don't mind!"

The juniors halted, and turned. And they saw the slim, well-set-up figure of Mr. Smale Foxe, the master of the College House.

Mr. Stockdale, the usual Housemaster, had been given extended leave to visit friends abroad, and while he was away Mr. Foxe was taking his place.

The juniors raised their caps respectfully, and waited for Mr. Foxe to speak. They did not know quite what to make of their new Housemaster. At first, at the very beginning of the term, he had seemed to be a decent sort, but, of late, he had changed—in a subtle, mysterious way. None of the juniors could understand this change.

Grayson, and Shaw of the Fifth, knew more about Mr. Foxe than the juniors did. For an evening or two ago Mr. Foxe had entered Grayson's study, and had found a gambling party in progress. Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, of the Ancient House, were there. And Mr. Foxe, to the boys' amazement, had actually joined in the game—losing money and smoking some of Grayson's cigarettes! This was certainly startling, and beyond ordinary understanding.

This afternoon Mr. Foxe appeared to be very pleasant. He regarded the boys with a smile on his face. His nose looked even bigger when he smiled, and his eyes twinkled—but there was a certain look about them which Bob Christine did not quite like. However, Mr. Foxe was the Housemaster, and he had to be respected.

"Just a moment, boys," he said genially. "It's a half-holiday to-day, and I am just off to Bannington."

"I hope you'll have a pleasant afternoon, sir," said Christine politely.

"Thank you, my lad," said Mr. Foxe. "I was thinking of taking you boys with me—just the four of you. What do you say?"

For some moments the juniors did

not reply. They hardly knew what to say, as a matter of fact. It would be rather difficult to refuse Mr. Foxe.

Christine & Co. were certainly not at all anxious to go out with him. They preferred to play football against the Ancient House fellows. Going out with a Housemaster was always an ordeal for juniors—they were compelled to behave, and they had to keep themselves well in check. There was about as much enjoyment in going out for an afternoon with the Housemaster as there was in the Form-room during lessons.

"It's—it's very kind of you, sir—" began Christine.

"Awfully decent!" said Talmadge. "But—but—"

"You—you see, sir, we're booked for football," said Yorke. "There's a game arranged—"

"Between us and the College House chaps, sir!" put in Christine. "We'd like to come, sir—"

"Then you must come!" said Mr. Foxe briskly. "Surely you can let the football rest for once—you have football two or three times a week—but it is not often that you get the chance of coming out with me. Is this football match a recognised fixture?"

"Not—not exactly, sir," said Christine. "But—but the Ancient House fellows wanted a game, and we said that we'd get a team up—"

"Oh, then, it's quite all right," interrupted the Housemaster. "There will be plenty of other boys to play in this football match. I want you to come with me—I intend to give you a treat. And don't forget—I stand all the expenses."

Bob Christine nearly groaned.

"It's awfully good of you, sir," he managed to say with an effort.

"Frightfully decent!" said Yorke and Talmadge in hollow tones.

They had done their best, but there was nothing else for it. They would be compelled to accompany Mr. Smale Foxe on the afternoon's "enjoyment."

But all the juniors felt as though they had been sentenced to an afternoon of detention.

"Now, hurry indoors and get your overcoats and caps on," said Mr. Foxe briskly. "We shall just be able to catch the early afternoon train if you hurry. We don't want to walk all the way, do we?"

The juniors hurried indoors, and went to the cloak-room. There they gazed at one another.

"Rotten!" grunted Christine. "Why can't the ass go by himself? Absolutely mucked up the afternoon—that's what he's done! Just as if we want to go out on the spree with a giddy Housemaster!"

"Oh, I expect he'll take us up and down the High Street, show us the shops, and then trot us into a giddy restaurant—treat us to a cup of tea and a bun. That's about Foxe's mark!"

"Well, we can't get out of it, can we?" inquired Ernest Lawrence. "I suppose we must make the best of a bad job. I'm disappointed myself, because I wanted to play in that football match."

All four juniors were feeling disgusted, and when they got out into the Triangle again they found Mr. Foxe waiting for them. Christine did not even have an opportunity of seeing me—to explain that he was compelled to abandon the football match. However, he needn't have worried—because when it was found that Christine & Co. had mysteriously disappeared, other juniors were forthcoming. So the match took place, after all.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate quartette were going down the lane with Mr. Foxe, en route for the station. They were just in time to catch the local train to Bannington.

Mr. Foxe produced a silver cigarette case and opened it. He selected a cigarette, lit it, and then passed the case to the juniors. Christine gave a

start as he saw the cigarette-case in front of him. Then he grinned.

"No thanks, sir," he said with a chuckle.

He naturally assumed—as the other juniors also assumed—that Mr. Foxe was attempting to be humorous.

"I'm not joking, my boy!" said Mr. Foxe. "Come along—have a cigarette—have one each. There's nobody to see, except me. And I shall not object."

"But—but—" gasped Christine. "You—you don't mean—"

"Of course I mean it!" said Mr. Foxe. "You've got to understand, my lad, that we are just a little party together. I want you to regard me as one of your own set—not as your Housemaster."

"Great pip!" muttered Yorke, under his breath.

"My only topper!" murmured Talmadge.

Bob Christine shook his head.

"If you don't mind, sir, we'd rather not smoke," he said, with a note of contempt in his voice. "We don't smoke at all. We think it's a rotten habit for boys!"

Mr. Foxe shrugged his shoulders, and put his cigarette-case away.

"Well, I'm not going to press you," he said lightly. "I wasn't aware that I had such good little boys to deal with. I am really afraid that you are self-conscious, and that you don't like to let yourselves go in my presence."

Christine & Co., as a matter of fact, were feeling rather uncomfortable—and so was Lawrence. They did not like this kind of thing. And they were staggered that their Housemaster should even urge them to smoke. It was really astounding.

All the juniors were relieved when Bannington was reached. They passed out of the station, and very soon found themselves in the town.

They wondered what kind of amusement Mr. Foxe would treat them to. There was not much in Bannington on a Wednesday afternoon. There was a

music-hall in the town—a very second-rate place—and the boys never went there. In the afternoon there was not even a performance, in any case. The only other place of amusement was the cinema. And this place was considered to be out of bounds.

Towards the end of the previous term there had been a lot of trouble with this cinema and its proprietor—Mr. Stanley Webb. But Mr. Webb had now left, and he was spending a quiet time in a criminal lunatic asylum.

Meanwhile, a new cinema was being built—a magnificent super-palace—right in the middle of the High Street, on the site of the old Bannington Grange. This was being done by Mr. Isaac Levi—the enterprising father of Solomon Levi, the Jewish boy in the Remove.

As Mr. Foxe went down the High Street, accompanied by the four juniors, they soon came within sight of the new building. Erection had already started, and the place was already more than half up. Before many weeks had elapsed, according to Mr. Levi's plans, the picture theatre would be complete and ready for the public.

A big army of workmen was engaged upon the task, and they simply swarmed over the building, in large numbers, working hard. The enterprise was going forward at full speed.

"It won't be long before we shall have a ripping picture palace in Bannington," remarked Christine, as he watched the activity. "It'll be first-class to come here and enjoy the pictures."

"We don't want to see any pictures!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe. "I rather fancy something more exciting, personally. We'll walk along, boys, until we come to the outskirts of the town. It is quite pleasant now."

They wandered out of Bannington along the road which led towards Helmford. They had not proceeded very far when they came to a neat little

public-house which stood just back from the road, with a wide gravel stretch in front of it. It was a picturesque building, with a swinging sign outside, announcing to all and sundry that the house was known as the "Fox and Hounds." The House-master smiled as he observed that sign.

"Quite appropriate," he observed smoothly. "The Fox and Hounds, boys! I am the Fox, and you—no, I do not wish to insult you!"

He chuckled, and led the way towards the saloon bar of the public-house. Christine & Co. and Lawrence were frankly dismayed. Was it possible that Mr. Foxe was about to enter this public-house? He surely knew that all public-houses were out of bounds for St. Frank's juniors. Not only that, but if any boy happened to be caught in such an establishment, it would certainly mean a flogging, and, possibly, expulsion.

Christine pulled at his arm, just before they arrived at the door.

"Half a minute, sir," said Bob.

"Well, my boy, what is it?" inquired Mr. Foxe, turning.

"We—we mustn't go in there, sir," said Christine. "It's—it's against the rules, you know! All public-houses are out of bounds——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe pleasantly. "We don't take any notice of those rules, my lad! Who is there to see us, anyway? You may consider yourselves quite safe, since you are with me. Have no fear, boys—come along inside."

And before the juniors could say anything further, Mr. Foxe had entered the saloon bar. The juniors followed him in, looking very astonished.

"Well, boys, what are you going to have?" inquired Mr. Foxe genially. "I think I will have a whisky-and-soda. I should advise you boys to have the same—it is a most excellent drink."

"Whisky, sir!" gasped Talmadge. "But—but we mustn't have that!"

"Why not?"

"It—it's intoxicating, sir——"

"What if it is—it does you no harm!" said the Housemaster. "Come along—I will order five whiskies."

"No thanks, sir—we'd rather not!" put in Christine bluntly. "We'll all drink lemonade, or ginger beer. Nothing stronger!"

"Yes, that's it," said Lawrence. "I think I'd prefer lemonade, thank you."

Mr. Foxe did his utmost to persuade the boys to partake of whisky. But they were steadfast—they would not budge. They were more and more amazed. For a Housemaster to invite them to smoke was extraordinary enough—but for him to ask them to have whisky-and-soda was simply staggering.

The juniors were heartily glad when they had got outside, and were once more upon the road.

"Ah, I feel much better now, boys," said Mr. Foxe pleasantly. "A good whisky has a wonderful effect upon a man."

The juniors did not answer. And, presently, the little party came within sight of a tent, which was erected just within a field on the left-hand side. A crowd of rough-looking men and youths stood about the tent, and another man, with a beery-looking countenance, was shouting, evidently inviting people to enter.

Christine & Co. knew what the place was at once.

It was a boxing-booth, and a roughly painted board announced to the general public that the proprietor was named Mr. Jake Gubbin. It was Mr. Jake Gubbin who was shouting, and he looked exactly what he was—an ex-pugilist of a low type.

"Now, gents, roll up!" Mr. Gubbin was shouting. "Only a tanner a time, and I can promise you a jolly good show. You always see good boxing in this 'ere booth of mine. First-class matches, and nothing else. I've got a star man working wiv' me just now—

'Lightning Left Ned.' Come along—a tanner a time!"

Christine & Co. wanted to walk past, but Mr. Foxe halted, and smiled at the boys.

"Come along, youngsters!" he exclaimed. "This promises to be rather entertaining—eh?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Christine. "You—you don't mean to say that we're going in there, sir?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Foxe. "It is a public place of entertainment. Boxing is a manly sport, and it is always interesting to watch."

"But—but not boxing of this kind, sir!" protested Talmadge.

Mr. Foxe smiled more broadly than ever.

"But, my dear boys, why should you object?" he asked. "You seem to forget that I am with you, and that protects you completely. There is no danger while I, your Housemaster——"

"But—but it doesn't seem right, sir!" broke in Lawrence. "I know what these places are. We shall only see a brutal exhibition. It's not real boxing. I don't think we ought to go in, sir."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe. "Come along!"

He led the way towards the entrance, and the rough crowd of men who were standing about looked at him, rather astonished. The boys hung back only for a moment or two. They could not very well offend Mr. Foxe, for they knew that he could make things extremely unpleasant for them in the school.

And so, after that short hesitation, they followed Mr. Foxe to the entrance, and found that he had paid for them. They all entered the boxing-booth, and picked their way down the forms right to the front. Mr. Foxe sat himself down upon a plank, and the juniors sat beside him. They felt most uncomfortable. All round, on every side, there were roughs—men and youths with chokers round their necks, many of them smoking cheap cigarettes.

Certainly if the Head had seen the juniors there, there would have been a terrific row. Caught there alone, it would have meant instant expulsion from St. Frank's; but if they were caught in the company of Mr. Foxe, it would certainly mean that the House-master's duties at the school would terminate with considerable abruptness.

Then why was he leading the juniors into such places, and why was he attempting to get them into bad habits? It was very astonishing, and Christine & Co. could not understand the riddle.

They had not got much time for thought, because the "show" commenced almost at once. Mr. Jake Gubbin appeared in the ring, and he addressed the audience, after introducing his champion boxer—Lightning Left Ned. This individual was a beefy-looking young man, not particularly big, but extremely brutal in appearance.

"Now, gents, I'm going to make you a good hoffer!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I've just interduced to you a young feller wot has got a great future afore him. Mark my words, it won't be many months afore Ned will be in London, and I'll guarantee that within a couple o' years he'll be the champion of England!"

"I don't think!" muttered Lawrence, under his breath.

"You're now goin' to see a wonderful exhibition of boxing," went on Mr. Gubbin. "I'm a sportsman—I reckon everybody knows that—and I'll give the sum of twenty quid to the feller wot can knock out Ned in eight rounds. Mind yer, it's a stipulation that nobody is to come forward to meet Ned unless he's about the same weight. I don't mind a stone or two over, but not more. Now, who's coming forward? Twenty quid, don't forget—twenty quid for the feller who can knock Ned out in eight rounds!"

Nobody took advantage of this magnificent offer. This was not at all sur-

prising for Ned looked a formidable customer to tackle.

"Come along, one of you!" said Mr. Gubbin. "There ain't nothing to be afraid of. Ned won't hurt you if he finds you ain't equal to 'im. It's a bout with the gloves on, don't forget!"

But no one was taking any, so the entertainment commenced. It was a very poor affair from start to finish. It merely consisted of several brutal bouts, and the juniors were heartily glad when they emerged into the open air about an hour later. They felt completely sick of the whole place, and were determined to get away from Mr. Foxe as soon as they could.

As they left the field and once more emerged upon the road, Bob Christine saw that Lawrence was looking very thoughtful. The new junior seemed to have something on his mind.

Bob Christine would have been extremely startled if he could have known what that something was!

CHAPTER 3.

The New Boy's Decision!

MR. SMALE FOXE walked along with the boys for some little way without speaking. Then he called a halt, and faced the juniors.

"Now, look here, boys! I don't want you to say anything about our little adventures of this afternoon!" he exclaimed. "There is no reason why you should talk. If you do talk, it's quite likely that trouble will follow."

"I don't quite see that, sir," said Christine. "We've done nothing wrong of our own accord. You took us into the public-house, and you took us into the boxing-booth. We've got a perfect excuse—"

"Very well, we won't argue about the matter," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You will do as you like, of course. But it will be advisable, I can assure you, if you do not talk."

And very shortly afterwards Mr.

Foxe left the boys and went his own way.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Christine, when they found themselves alone.

"He's the giddy limit! Pubs and boxing-booths! Why, if we'd been spotted in one of those places it would have meant the sack!"

"Not with Mr. Foxe," said Yorke. "I don't see how we can get into any trouble, in any case. But what kind of a Housemaster does he call himself—to take us into pubs, and all that kind of thing? It's absolutely amazing!"

"Well, I think we're safe enough," said Lawrence. "If anything does come to the Head's ears, Mr. Foxe will get into trouble, not us!"

The other juniors were of the same opinion, and so they were not worried. But when they got back to St. Frank's, just before tea-time, they did not consider they had spent a very enjoyable afternoon. The football match on Little Side was not yet over, so Christine & Co. lost no time in making their way there.

Ernest Lawrence, on the other hand, went straight to his study in the College House. He shut himself in, and sank down in the one easy-chair it possessed. And there was that same thoughtful expression upon his open face. It was obvious that Lawrence had something of a rather deep nature in his mind.

And I found Lawrence in this abstracted mood when I entered his study very shortly afterwards. The new boy was laying back in his easy-chair, with a dreamy expression in his eyes. Just for a moment he did not notice me as I stood in the doorway. Then he started, half jumped up, and flushed.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "I—I did not know you were there, Nipper. Come in!"

"Thanks!" I said. "I just want a word with you while things are fairly quiet, Lawrence. The match is over,

and it may interest you to know that your side was whacked by two clear goals."

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, well, it was only a scratch game," he said, "and three of the best men were missing from the team! I expect Christine told you how we were hauled off to Bannington by Mr. Foxe?"

I nodded.

"Yes," I replied. "Mr. Foxe appears to be a genial kind of gentleman, although Christine didn't explain what he did with you all the afternoon. I just looked in, Lawrence, to congratulate you upon the wonderful exhibition of boxing you put up when you knocked Grayson out."

Lawrence shook his head.

"Oh, there was nothing particularly clever in that!" he protested. "Grayson doesn't know how to fight at all. He's got plenty of strength, but he doesn't use it properly. It required very little skill to get the better of Grayson."

"We're all proud of the way you knocked that bully out, Lawrence. How did you learn so well?" I asked. "I pride myself that I am fairly decent at boxing, but I'm sure that you could give me more than a few tips. Didn't you say that your father taught you?"

"Yes," replied Lawrence. "My father is the only trainer I ever had."

"He must know a good bit about boxing, then," I remarked. "I take off my hat to your father!"

Lawrence smiled.

"I'd like you to meet him, Nipper," he said quietly. "It's rather decent of you to come here and have a chat with me. None of the fellows in my own House have done that, and I felt a bit lonely. I hope I'm not keeping you—"

"Of course you're not, you ass!" I interrupted. "I came here for a chat."

I could see that Lawrence was lonely, and he was grateful to me for having come.

It was rather thoughtless of Christine & Co. to have left the new boy to himself for so long, without taking any notice of him. It would probably be different now that Lawrence had distinguished himself so notably. And, somehow or other, he seemed to take to me. There was a very serious expression on his face when he continued.

"You see, my father is Mr. Robert Ernest Lawrence," he said. "It's a good many years since he was in the ring, but I'm not ashamed to tell you, Nipper, that at one time my father was a professional boxer."

"Ah, that explains it!" I smiled.

"I can tell you this, without any fear of it being spread about," went on Lawrence. "I know I can trust you, Nipper. There's nothing dishonourable about it, or anything of that kind, but quite a number of the fellows here would be only too glad to seize upon an opportunity to sneer at me. And they might sneer if they discovered that my father used to be a professional boxer. They don't know him, and you don't know him. He's one of the best dads a boy could possibly have! He's a brick!"

I looked rather thoughtful.

"You're quite right in what you say, Lawrence," I said slowly. "There are certain fellows at St. Frank's who would look down upon you and sneer if they got to know that your father used to be a professional boxer."

"But—but it doesn't make any difference to you, does it?" inquired Lawrence quickly.

"Not the slightest, old son," I replied cheerfully. "I don't think I'm a snob. And your father is just as likely to be a decent, honourable man as anybody else."

"Thanks, Nipper!" said Lawrence. "You see, my father left the boxing-ring for good about twelve years ago, when I was quite a little mite. I think he had saved up a good bit by then, and he bought a business. It was a large ironmongery store in Kensington. My dad sunk all his money in this, and

things prospered with him, and so he decided to send me to a decent school. So all the plans were made, and I was sent to a good preparatory school, and then, at the beginning of this term, I came to St. Frank's."

"But your father didn't neglect to teach you the noble art of self-defence," I smiled.

"Oh, no!" said Lawrence. "Father taught me boxing ever since I was a little kid. We've got a private gymnasium at home, and boxing is father's recreation—his chief pastime, in fact, even now. He took a great pride in me—goodness knows what for—he didn't want me to become a professional boxer."

"I reckon you'd cause a sensation if you really went into it properly!" I smiled. "You're a wonder, Lawrence! The sport has lost a champion in you."

Lawrence shook his head.

"Oh, don't rot!" he said modestly. "I'm nothing particular."

He looked down at his clothing somewhat shamefacedly.

"I—I dare say you've noticed that I'm—I'm shabby?" he went on, in a low voice.

"It's none of my business—" I began.

"I know it isn't," said Lawrence. "But that row with Grayson was because he sneered at my clothing. It's not my fault, Nipper. You see, my father had all his money in Scarbrook's Bank, and, as you know, that went smash just six months ago. It was a terrible blow to dad—he lost everything."

"Hard lines!" I said sympathetically.

"Somehow or other father managed to keep the business going, but he's terribly in debt, and he's struggling along, fighting every inch of his way," said Lawrence. "He wants money all the time—every penny he can obtain. And I don't suppose I should ever have come to St. Frank's, only the first term's fees were paid, and dad said that I might as well come. I don't know whether I shall be here for another term—I hope

I shall be, but if dad isn't in any better position, I shan't let him spend a penny. He—he couldn't afford to get me a new rig-out before I came, and—and I had to make do on what I had."

I smiled.

"My dear chap, nobody takes any notice of that sort of thing here, except the snobs and cads!" I exclaimed. "You mustn't take any notice of Grayson, and fellows of his calibre. They're rotters—every one of them. You can trust me—I shan't say a word to anybody, unless you want me to. And you mustn't worry—your father seems to be the kind of man who will pull round if he's given time. Everything will come out all right in the end!"

Lawrence looked at me with a grateful expression in his eyes.

"It's jolly decent of you to say this, Nipper!" he said quietly. "You've cheered me up wonderfully."

"That's good!" I put in. "Your position at St. Frank's is much better than it was yesterday. Your exhibition of boxing has put you into a fine position in the Remove. You won't find yourself being chipped and bullied and sneered at. A fellow who can fight like you can is generally highly respected."

Ernest Lawrence smiled.

"I—I was going to tell you something, Nipper," he said; "in fact, I wanted to—to ask your advice. I hope you won't think it a cheek on my part —"

Lawrence hesitated, and seemed to be uncertain whether he should continue or not. And just at that moment the matter was decided for him. For there was a clatter of footsteps in the passage, and the door of Study T opened, and Christine, Talmadge and Yorke marched in.

"Hallo! A giddy Fossil!" exclaimed Bob Christine. "What are you doing here, Nipper? Don't you know that you're in the enemy's domain?"

"Oh, draw it mild!" I interrupted. "I came over here to have a word with Lawrence about his boxing."

Christine grinned.

"All right—we'll let you off this time!" he said cheerfully. "I'd like to congratulate Lawrence, too. My son, it was a wonderful exhibition!" he went on, addressing the new boy. "We're proud to have you in the Remove, and —"

"Oh, do dry up!" protested Lawrence. "You've said all this before, Christine. There was nothing much in what I did——"

I thought it just as well that I should retire, so I gracefully took my departure, leaving Christine & Co. with the new boy. I knew that Lawrence had wanted to say something to me—something further regarding his father; but he could not very well talk then, after Christine & Co. had butted in. So I decided to leave it until a more opportune moment.

It was not long before Christine & Co. took their departure from Study T, and once more Lawrence was left to himself. He sat for some little time in his easy-chair, and there was a very thoughtful expression upon his good-looking, open face.

Presently he got up from the chair, and paced up and down the study. There was a thoughtful expression on his brow still, and he seemed to be uncertain. However, at last he came to a decision.

"Yes," he muttered resolutely, "I'll do it! Why shouldn't I? There's no disgrace in it—and every penny counts. And nobody will know—nobody at St. Frank's. Besides, I needn't say who I am."

Lawrence was keener than ever, and presently he left the study and went along to the domestic quarters of the building. It did not take him long to find the House matron, and from her he managed to obtain a needle and some cotton, and an old piece of black silk, an oddment which the matron managed to find. Lawrence did not explain what he wanted it for.

When he got back to Study T he set to work briskly with the needle and

cotton and a pair of scissors, and by the time he had finished he had fashioned for himself a very neat little silk mask. It fitted closely over the upper portion of his face, and it was almost impossible to recognise him.

But why had he done this? What could that mask be for?

Lawrence did not remain indoors for long after tea. The Triangle was quiet and deserted and dark when the new boy stepped out, attired in his overcoat and a tweed cap. And, without allowing himself to be seen, he slipped across the Triangle, went out through the gateway, and made his way down the lane.

Where was he off to in this unobtrusive, surreptitious fashion?

CHAPTER 4.

Accepting the Challenge!

"**T**WENTY quid!" said Mr. Jake Gubbin impressively. "Don't forget the amount, gents. There's twenty quid waitin' for the fust man that comes forward and beats my champion, Lightning Left Ned!"

Mr. Gubbin paused, and looked over the boxing booth. Nobody seemed inclined to accept the challenge. Lightning Left Ned stood in the ring in a careless fashion, somewhat bored. He had listened to this kind of thing for many a night, and he had quite made up his mind that nobody would ever come forward.

"It's an open challenge, don't forget!" went on Mr. Gubbin. "Anybody can come for'ard, and they'll be treated fair. Naturally, there are one or two stipulations——"

"I thought there was a bloomin' catch in it!" came a voice from the audience.

"No, there isn't a catch!" said Mr. Gubbin quickly. "It's a fair challenge, this is. Twenty quid, to beat my champion. Mind you, I ain't acceptin' professional boxers or heavy-weights. Ned

is a light-weight, and anybody can come up and fight him, providing he don't weigh over a stone more than Ned. I'll give you a stone, just as a present, and it'll prove to you, gents, what a confidence I've got in Lightning Left Ned!"

It was the evening "performance" at Mr. Jake Gubbin's booth. The place looked more squalid and disreputable than ever.

The interior of the booth was illuminated by smelly oil lamps. Quite a good crowd had collected—good in the sense of numbers. Otherwise, the audience was perhaps questionable. It mainly consisted of rough characters. But in the front row sat a man who was fairly well dressed, and who looked rather out of place. And on that same front row, but at the very end, sat a slight form—the figure of a boy. He was attired in a shabby sports coat and grey flannel trousers underneath his overcoat, and a tweed cap—the latter being pulled well over his eyes.

He certainly did not look like a St. Frank's junior; but, as a matter of fact, he was none other than Ernest Lawrence, of the Remove.

Lawrence had a specific object in coming once again to Mr. Gubbin's booth.

"Well, there's nobody goin' to accept the challenge for twenty quid?" inquired Mr. Gubbin, from the ring. "We'd better be gettin' on with the show, gents. Lightning Left will show you some of his fancy work with his sparring partners——"

"Hold on!" exclaimed a clear voice—a voice which trembled slightly. "I will accept the challenge!"

Everybody stared, including Mr. Jake Gubbin. The proprietor of the booth moved a rank cigar from between his teeth, and glared at the end of the front row. He saw a youthful figure standing there—a boy of about fifteen. But what was most remarkable, the upper part of his face was completely concealed by a close-fitting black silk mask!

"Darn me!" exclaimed Mr. Gubbin. "Wot's this 'ere? Wot's the game, youngster?"

"You have just made a challenge offering the sum of twenty pounds!" said Lawrence quietly. "I am willing to try my skill against Lightning Left Ned. If I win I shall expect the sum of twenty pounds."

"Oh, you'll get the twenty quid, all right, if you win!" said Mr. Gubbin, with a grin. "But what's the idea, kid? Is this a joke?"

"No; I am quite serious."

"Yah! Sit down!" yelled one of the audience.

"Chuck the kid out!"

"Old on!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I want to find out whether the kid is serious or not. Fust of all, what's the idea of wearin' that there mask?"

Lawrence stepped forward until he was near the ropes.

"I am willing to fight Lightning Left Ned!" he said quietly. "I do not wish to be known, and so I am wearing this mask. It is open to me to be incognito, I suppose?"

"It's open to you to be which?" asked Mr. Gubbin, staring.

"Well, I don't want to be recognised," explained Lawrence. "This challenge of yours is open to everybody, and I want to see what I can do."

Mr. Gubbin laughed.

"Young man, I can see that you ain't a professional—and I don't reckon you're a stone heavier than Ned," he said pleasantly. "I reckon you're about two stone lighter, as a matter of fact. But I shouldn't advise you to be foolish, kid. You'll only get floored in the fust round."

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Lawrence quietly.

"Nobody ain't asked me anythin'!" said Ned, with a sneer. "I ain't sure that I'm goin' to bemean myself by boxing with a kid like this. It won't be no match at all—it'll be a farce! I'll have him flat on his back within

ten seconds. And he'll be so knocked out that he won't know where he is for half an hour!"

Mr. Gubbin turned to his champion.

"There ain't no call for you to object, Ned!" he said gruffly. "If this kid likes to act the fool it's his business. Your job is to show him the horror of his ways. Well, come along, young man, if you're so set on it. it won't do you no harm to have a good lesson!"

"Thank you!" said Lawrence calmly.

He stepped into the ring, and proceeded to shed his overcoat and sports jacket. His collar and tie followed, then he stood in the ring, attired only in his nether garments and his shirt.

The spectators by this time were in quite a good humour. There was much comment and a good deal of laughter. The difference between the two figures in the ring was rather astonishing.

Lawrence looked very frail. His appearance was very boyish, and his skin was fresh and clear, and his limbs clean.

Ned, on the other hand, was big and burly and hairy. He was dark, and it seemed as though he would be able to defeat his frail opponent in less than ten seconds.

There was practically no time wasted on preliminaries. The patrons of Mr. Gubbin's boxing booth were not patient gentlemen. All they wanted to see was the fight—with as much gore as possible.

Lawrence had no difficulty in obtaining two seconds; there were quite a lot of volunteers, in fact. And as he sat in his corner of the ring, waiting for the gong to sound, the boy was quite calm and collected. He knew that he had a very hard task in front of him, and that the odds were against him. But he was game, he was willing to make the attempt, for there was a prize of twenty pounds to be won, and that prize would be useful. For Lawrence intended to send every penny of it to his father. It was a noble

effort on the junior's part. All his natural instincts were against this affair—he detested the booth. But it was for his father's sake, and he did not mind.

The gong sounded, cracked and harsh.

Lightning Left Ned rose out of his chair, and advanced with outstretched glove. But he had scarcely touched Lawrence's before he side-stepped, and then lunged forward with all his strength.

But Lawrence was prepared for this. He had been expecting something of the kind, and he dodged the blow with ease. That swing of Ned's carried him forward, and he almost went off his feet. The junior assisted Ned to regain his balance by giving him a straight punch between the eyes, which brought him up with a sudden, jarring jerk.

"By thunder!" muttered Mr. Gubbin, who was watching closely.

Lightning Left was more surprised than hurt. He could take heavy blows without noticing them much—he was all brawn and muscle. But that blow between the eyes had shaken him up a bit, and it told him that he could not afford to be careless. And the fact which surprised him more than anything else was the power behind his opponent's punch.

Ned made up his mind to finish the fight as quickly as possible—without any fancy work. And so he went charging in like a young elephant. Ned knew, far better than the crowd—that this cool young fellow would not be so easily beaten.

Lawrence was not particularly keen upon getting to close quarters. His game would be to tire his big opponent out.

And so, with this object in view, he used all his knowledge of ring-craft. He ducked and side-stepped, and so gained the disapproval of the crowd. For they did not know much about science, and they were not anxious to

see an exhibition of this sort. They wanted slogging—a furious exchange of blows.

Lawrence knew well enough that he would have to put all he knew into this fight. It was not that Ned knew a great deal. The boxer, in fact, was merely a slogger, and his science was of an elementary type. But it was only necessary for him to get one square blow in, and Lawrence would be knocked flat.

And Lightning Left thought that his chance came just before the end of the round. It seemed to him that Lawrence's guard was too low, and out swung Ned's left. But Lawrence jerked his head aside, and the blow went harmlessly over his shoulder. At the same second, Lawrence lashed out with a glorious left. It struck Ned on the point of the jaw, and he staggered back, surprised and hurt.

And just then the round came to an end. Ned was looking rather surprised and puzzled. He had expected that he would defeat his slim opponent in no time. And yet, as a matter of fact, it had been Ned who had received most of the punishment in the first round. Lawrence, to tell the truth, was not even touched.

"Look here, Ned, this won't do!" muttered Mr. Gubbin darkly. "Why don't you floor the kid? It ain't no good playing about! There's twenty quid at stake——"

"Oh, shut it!" snapped Ned. "Ain't I doing my best? It's luck—that's wot it is, guv'nor—just luck. There won't be no third round—you mark my words! I'll have the kid flat on his back and fast asleep afore the second round is half through! His luck can't last for long!"

Well, don't you make no mistake about it!" said Mr. Gubbin. "I can't afford to lose twenty quid——"

"You won't lose no twenty quid—you won't lose nothin'!" snapped Ned. "Don't you think I can't knock this kid out?"

The next round started, and it was quite obvious to Mr. Gubbin, and to Lawrence as well, that Ned was now going all out to deliver a smashing blow—a blow which would put an end to the contest.

But it was Lawrence who got busy first. Before Ned knew what was happening, Lawrence shuffled about, changing his feet, then he feinted with his right, and sent in a left swing which caught Lightning Left fairly in the ribs.

Thud!

Ned staggered, and then blundered forward blindly. The next moment he received a left hook which sent his head back with a terrific jerk.

He staggered away drunkenly.

"Bust my buttons!" muttered Mr. Gubbins anxiously:

The crowd was beginning to appreciate the position. They were seeing, in fact, that this slim, fair boy was not such a duffer, after all. And that he was giving his burly opponent quite a hot time.

"Go it, Kid!"

"Keep it up—and you'll win the prize!"

"You've got him beat already, youngster—keep it up!"

Lawrence heard these cries only faintly—all his attention was centred upon the work in hand. Never for a minute did Lawrence allow his gaze to wander. His wits were on the alert, and he was alive to every opportunity.

By the time the third round commenced, even Mr. Gubbin was beginning to have doubts as to his champion. Ned was being provided with a hard fight—and he had expected a walk over. For this boy in the silk mask to have lasted so long was astonishing enough. And it really seemed that he was good enough to last for eight or nine rounds. So far he had not been touched. His footwork was so wonderful that it seemed impossible for Ned to get anywhere

near him. His guard was perfection itself.

And now it was noticed that Ned was fighting on the defensive. It was almost pathetic the way he dodged round the ring, attempting to avoid the blows which were showered upon him. Lawrence had seen at once that Ned's body was practically unguarded, and again and again, Lawrence drove hard for the mark.

Lightning Left fought blindly, lashing out at random. And one of these blind blows managed to catch Lawrence on the jaw.

If the boy had received the full force of that blow, he would have gone down with a crash, and taken the count. But Lawrence only received a glancing blow. It jarred him considerably, and his teeth and gums were filled with acute agony for a moment or two.

Lightning Left was quick to seize upon this opportunity. He came forward fiercely, aggressively. But Lawrence swerved, side-stepped, and acted completely on the defensive.

Lightning Left could not get anywhere near his opponent. It was a wonderful exhibition of defensive boxing.

Sitting in the front row, a well-dressed man looked on with great interest. At first he had been bored, but then, as the fight proceeded, he became more and more intent. He was sitting forward on the bench, gazing intently at the combatants. His eyes were gleaming, and most of his attention was devoted to Ernest Lawrence.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" he muttered. "By thunder! This young fellow is a marvel!"

That unexpected blow had put Lawrence on his mettle. He was more careful after that, and he was determined to have his revenge. And abruptly he changed his tactics. He delivered a left punch which caught Ned squarely upon the jaw. The man's head went back with a jerk and he

gasped. And still using his left, Lawrence delivered a perfect hail of blows that enthralled the onlookers.

Ned was quite bewildered. He did not know what to do—he dodged, he ducked—all in vain.

And then Lawrence stepped in close and put all his force into a hooking right which caught Ned upon the chin. The man went down with a crash which shook the very ground.

"Darn my old hide!" said Mr. Gubbin huskily.

The crowd sat there dumb for a moment. They were amazed. This boy—this slim, fair-looking youth—had managed to send Lightning Ned crashing to the floor.

"One—two—three—four——"

Ned was still flat upon his back, and he was being urged by a dozen voices to pull himself together. But at the sound of "eight," he raised himself upon his elbow, sat up, and looked about him rather dazedly.

"Get up, you fool!" snapped Mr. Gubbin fiercely. "Get up, hang you!"

A moment later Lightning Left Ned was upon his feet. And he was only just in time, for the referee was about to say "out."

Ned was very dazed, and Lawrence went in to finish the fight.

The St. Frank's junior sent in an upper-cut which would have caused havoc had it landed upon Ned's jaw. But the fellow saw what was coming, and in sheer desperation, he hurled himself forward and clinched. And then the gong sounded for the end of the round.

"Delightful boxing!" muttered the man in the front row. "The boy would make a world-beater."

The next round started with the crowd in an excited frame of mind. A good many bets were made, and most of these favoured Lawrence, of the Remove.

The boy's footwork was wonderful. He was far superior to Ned in all the finer points of the sport. He kept his

man on the go all the time, without giving him a single breathing space.

Again and again Ned was pressed back on to the ropes. And, at times, Lawrence drove him right round the ring.

The junior brought in an upper-cut that made Lightning Left stagger, and again he tried to clinch. Lawrence, however, was too quick for him, and he dodged away as Ned was hurling himself forward.

But, even as he dodged, he managed to get in a left hook, and Ned went swaying away to the ropes again.

Ned was desperate now, and he simply went at it for all he was worth, taking all the punishment that came to him. He believed that if he could only stand this punishment for a little time, he would be able to deliver a blow which would send Lawrence crashing to the floor.

But in Lawrence he found an opponent ready to mix it with him. The boy stood his ground, and punched away for all he was worth.

It was a thrilling exhibition. The manner in which Lawrence dodged his opponent's blows was a joy to watch. He seemed to know exactly when they were coming, and only a slight movement was necessary in order to evade the thrusts. And all the time he was delivering punches.

At last Ned could stand no more of it. He was almost exhausted, and before long the round would be at an end.

Lawrence stepped away quite unexpectedly. It almost seemed as though he were afraid, and Ned snarled out an exclamation and rushed to the attack. He hurled himself forward—only to meet an upper-cut which was delivered with every atom of Lawrence's strength.

Thud!

Lightning Left Ned was lifted completely off his feet. He floundered over backwards and lay in the centre of the ring groaning. He was done.

And Ernest Lawrence stood away, breathing heavily. He was feeling the effects of the fight—he was feeling weak and limp, and everything seemed faint and far away.

But the timekeeper was already counting, and Lightning Left Ned did not rise when "out" was spoken. He had been beaten—he had been smashed by this unknown youngster in the silk mask.

Lawrence of the Remove had won.

CHAPTER 5.

The Schoolboy Light-weight.

EXACTLY ten minutes later Lawrence was feeling much better. Sponged down, and with his clothing on again, he felt more like himself. Lightning Left Ned, too, had recovered, and he had vanished—probably feeling that it would not be wise to face Mr. Gubbin just then.

The crowd was enthusiastic. Several men had charged forward at the conclusion of the fight. They had seized Lawrence and "chaired" him. And, during that demonstration, the lad's mask had slipped off. But not for long—Lawrence had soon pulled the silk into position again. But during that brief space, a man who was standing at the rear of the booth smiled to himself. And he stepped quietly out, and went away into the darkness.

And now Ernest Lawrence was ready to take his departure. He was standing near the ropes and Mr. Jake Gubbin was there, too—looking very uncomfortable.

"Yes, kid, you did well," said the proprietor of the booth. "I must admit that you're a wonder."

"I would like the twenty pounds, please," said Lawrence quietly.

Mr. Gubbin started.

"The twenty quid!" he repeated. "Oh, yes! Fancy me forgetting that. The fact of the matter is, young gent, I ain't very flush, and I was thinking that perhaps five quid——"

"Yah! None o' that!" roared some of the crowd.

"Pay up, Gubbin!"

"It was a fair challenge, and the kid has beaten Ned!"

"Pay up, and do it smilin'!"

"I am goin' to pay up!" said Mr. Gubbin, who, after all, was something of a sportsman. "The kid has won, and he deserves his money. Nobody don't say that Jake Gubbin don't pay up when he loses—just wait here arf-a-minute, young gent, and you shall have the money."

Mr. Gubbin, with a sigh, left the ring and disappeared. But he returned again very shortly afterwards, and in his hand he held twenty crisp currency notes. He counted them out to Lawrence with some show so that all the crowd could see.

"That's correct, ain't it?" inquired the proprietor.

"Quite correct, thank you," said Lawrence.

"The best thing you can do, young man, is to clear off—and be quick about it," said Mr. Gubbin. "There's men outside as wouldn't hesitate to hold you up—don't give them no chance, kid. Good-night to you, and good luck."

"Good-night!" said Lawrence warmly.

He stepped out and made his way rapidly to the dark road, but he had hardly got there before a figure loomed up out of the gloom and confronted him. Lawrence remembered Mr. Gubbin's words.

"Just a moment, my lad!" said a quiet voice.

"I'm sorry, but I'm in a hurry," said Lawrence, attempting to dodge.

But a hand shot out and seized his sleeve.

"It's all right—I'm not after that money of yours," said the voice, in a slightly amused tone. "My name is Rook—Mr. Norman Rook—and I come from Helmford. I am rather anxious to have a little chat with you."

Lawrence was surprised, and he won-

dered what this man could want. He was smallish, well dressed, and he had a pleasant voice. He was about fifty years of age, as near as Lawrence could judge, and he was clean-shaven.

"What do you wish to speak to me about?" asked Lawrence quietly. "I am really in a hurry—"

"What I wish to say will not take me long," interrupted the other. "I will be brief. I am interested in a big boxing concern in Helmford. At this moment I am promoting a match which is due to come off next week. It is a lightweight contest, and providing quite a lot of interest in Helmford."

"I see," said Lawrence. "But how does this affect me—"

"I will explain," interrupted Mr. Rook. "My own man met with an accident yesterday, and I am now at my wits' end to know what to do. I dropped into Gubbin's place to-night, in the faint hope that I should be able to hear of something—I never dreamed that I should see such an exhibition as I actually witnessed. Let me tell you, my boy, your boxing is marvellous. You have a mastery of the game which surprised me."

"But—but—"

"Wait!" interrupted Mr. Rook again. "What I want you to do is come over to Helmford next week and fight in my man's place. There is a purse of fifty pounds attached to this contest—thirty for the winner and twenty for the loser. And so, in either event, you will be well in pocket."

"I see," said Lawrence, his heart beating fast. "Thirty pounds if I win and twenty—even if I lose?"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Rook quickly. "Furthermore, I may mention that I have a private bet on this match—and I may have a few other wagers, too. If you win for me, I shall not hesitate to make you a very handsome present—a present which will be even bigger than the purse."

"Do—do you really mean it?" inquired Lawrence.

"Yes, I really mean it."

"I—I can't very well discuss the matter with you now," said Lawrence. "I've got to—to— You don't know who I am, or anything?"

"I am hoping that you will reveal your identity to me," said Mr. Rook.

Just for a moment Lawrence hesitated, and then he made up his mind.

"I will come over to Helmford on Saturday afternoon," he said quickly. "If you can tell me some place where we can meet, Mr. Rook, I will be there."

"Good enough!" said the other. "I will meet you at Helmford Station, just outside the booking-office, under the clock. Be there at exactly three-thirty."

"That will do splendidly," said Lawrence. "I'll be there, Mr. Rook, and then I shall be able to explain things better to you. I'm in an awful hurry now, and I cannot stop."

And before Mr. Rook could say anything further, the junior had departed up the road. He was excited and elated. He had never dreamed of such success as this.

Twenty pounds—he actually had twenty pounds in his pocket! And he would be able to send this to his father on the morrow. And the following week he would receive more money—another twenty pounds at the very least, and probably double that amount. It was altogether too wonderful to be true!

The junior had a full realisation of what he had done. He had broken bounds to come to Bannington to take part in a boxing match in a common booth. If any word of this ever got to the ears of a master—particularly to the ears of the Head—the consequences would be serious—indeed, Lawrence was practically certain that he would be expelled on the spot.

But he had done it, nevertheless—he had taken the chance.

He was quite certain that he had not been recognised—and, even so, who was there to report the matter to any

of the St. Frank's masters? Lawrence was a new boy at the school, and he had only been in Bannington once before. It was practically impossible that any member in the crowd at that booth could say who he was, and where he had come from. Lawrence considered that he was quite safe.

Reaching Bannington Station, the junior got into the local train for Bell-ton, and soon arrived at that station. Then he walked briskly up to the school, only to find that the gates were locked. It was not late in the evening, but Mr. Cuttle, the porter, had already locked up. It was, therefore, necessary for Lawrence to climb over the wall.

This was the first time he had done so, and he did not exactly know the ropes, like the older hands in the Remove.

He went to a part of the wall which seemed easy to climb, and he swarmed up. Reaching the top, he remained there for a moment or two, and then dropped lightly into the Triangle. Everything was quiet, and the Triangle seemed to be deserted. The lights gleamed out from many windows in the College House and the Ancient House.

And Lawrence made his way silently and quickly across the open space in the direction of the College House door. But he had not covered half the distance before he was aware of the fact that a figure was coming towards him with rapid strides. Lawrence halted, feeling that it was quite useless to run. He saw that the other was a master.

The master came up, and tapped Lawrence firmly on the arm.

"One moment, my lad," he said grimly. The master was Mr. Smale Foxe—Lawrence's own Housemaster. "You just came over the wall, unless I am mistaken. Is that so, or not?"

"Yes, sir."

"In other words, you are late," said Mr. Foxe. "I suppose you are quite aware of the fact, Lawrence, that

juniors must not be out after locking-up? I must punish you for this breach of rules, and you will follow me to my study at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Lawrence quietly.

And he followed Mr. Foxe into the College House. He could not quite understand why this should be necessary. He had supposed that Mr. Foxe would give him two or three hundred lines, and let him go; but, apparently, Mr. Foxe was not inclined to treat the new boy leniently.

If Ernest Lawrence had only known the truth, he would have received a big shock.

CHAPTER 6.

The Blackmailer!

MR. FOXE suddenly came to a halt.

He and Lawrence were still some little distance from the College House doorway, and it seemed that the Housemaster had changed his mind, for he looked at Lawrence, and then nodded to himself.

"After all, I do not think it necessary for us to enter the House," he said in a low voice. "What I have to say to you, Lawrence, may just as well be said out here. Come—we will seek the shelter of these old chestnut trees. We are quite alone here, I am sure."

Lawrence was rather surprised; but he followed his Housemaster to the old chestnut trees, which grew in a clump in the Triangle. And, once there, Mr. Foxe faced the junior, and looked at him grimly.

"Now, Lawrence, I wish to have the truth from you!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been to this evening?"

"I—I am sorry, sir, but I can't tell you," said Lawrence quietly. "I—I can only say that I went into Bannington—"

"That won't do, my lad!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "You have

been to Bannington—yes. But where did you go in Bannington?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"Very well, Lawrence," said Mr. Foxe. "Perhaps I shall be able to jog your memory. You did not, by any chance, enter Mr. Gubbin's boxing-booth again?"

Lawrence started.

"I—I——" The boy caught his breath in, and then looked at the Housemaster defiantly. "Yes, sir, I did go to that boxing-booth!" he went on. "You took me there this afternoon, with Christine and the others, so I don't see how you can say much now —"

"It doesn't matter to me what you can see, and what you cannot see!" interrupted Mr. Foxe unpleasantly. "The fact remains, Lawrence, that you entered this boxing-booth alone. I suppose you are fully aware of the fact that very severe punishment would follow if the truth reached the headmaster's ears?"

"You introduced me to the booth to begin with," said Lawrence.

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Do not talk such nonsense, my boy. Do you assume for one moment that Dr. Stafford would believe your word against mine—even if it was supported by Christine and the others? I did not go to that booth this afternoon—I did not take you. Do you understand?"

Lawrence did understand—and he felt suddenly disgusted. It was clear that if the truth came out, Mr. Foxe would deny that he had been to the boxing-booth in Bannington. And, of course, the Head would take Mr. Foxe's word—he would be compelled to do so. The Housemaster knew this, and he was taking advantage of the fact.

"However, we do not wish to have any unpleasantness," went on Mr. Foxe. "I do not intend to take you to the headmaster, Lawrence—if you prove reasonable. Let me tell you one other thing. You went to that booth

and actually engaged in a prize fight—a most degrading and disgraceful exhibition!"

Lawrence started violently.

So Mr. Foxe knew the exact truth! He knew that Lawrence had fought with Lightning Left Ned. This was indeed appalling! How had the Housemaster discovered the truth—how did he know?

He had not reckoned upon anything like this. He had worn that silken mask, thinking that he was quite secure. But it was now obvious to him that Mr. Foxe must have been in the booth during the fight—and he had recognised the boy.

Lawrence was numbed by his own thoughts.

Supposing he was expelled from St. Frank's? How would he be able to face his father—how would he be able to go home? For Mr. Lawrence to get his son back from St. Frank's in disgrace would break him up.

Lawrence was appalled by the thought, and he clenched his fists almost desperately.

"Please—please don't say anything to the Head, sir," he pleaded. "I—I——"

"That rests with you, Lawrence," said Foxe in a low voice. "There is one chance for you."

The junior gave a jump.

"A—a chance, sir?" he exclaimed huskily.

"Yes!" said Mr. Foxe.

"How—how do you mean, sir?"

"How much money did you receive from Mr. Gubbin?" the Housemaster inquired abruptly.

"How—how much money, sir?"

"That is what I said."

"Gubbin offered twenty pounds if anybody could beat that man of his," said Lawrence. "I accepted the challenge, sir—and I won!"

"In other words, you came away with twenty pounds in your pocket?"

"Ye—yes, sir."

The Housemaster rubbed his hands together softly.

"Well, my boy, I do not wish to be harsh with you," he exclaimed in a soft voice. "It is not my way to be unkind and unreasonable. To beat Lightning Left Ned is indeed an achievement. I may as well inform you that I witnessed part of the fight, and you impressed me greatly."

Lawrence was astonished—he could not understand the Housemaster's attitude. Only a minute or two before he had been harsh and stern—now he was actually commending the fight! Mr. Smale Foxe was certainly an enigma.

"At the same time, this is all wrong," went on Mr. Foxe. "I may be able to appreciate the position, Lawrence—but I am afraid the Head would not. Taking everything into consideration, I shall not report this matter to the headmaster."

Lawrence gulped.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he panted. "It's ripping of you, sir!"

"It is my habit to be kind-hearted," said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "Providing you agree to what I propose, I will say nothing whatever about the matter."

"You're—you're a brick, sir!" said Lawrence fervently. "But—but what is the proposition?"

"You have twenty pounds in your pocket—prize money received from Mr. Gubbin," said Mr. Foxe. "I will not be so harsh as to confiscate the whole amount—but you must hand me ten pounds."

"I—I must give you—ten—ten pounds?" stammered Lawrence amazedly.

"Yes!"

"But—but—"

"It is your only chance, Lawrence!" said Mr. Foxe curtly. "If you refuse to do this I shall take you before the headmaster at once, and report the occurrence. If, on the other hand, you

agree to my proposal, everything will be well—I will keep your secret."

Lawrence could not find any words—he was so staggered that he could only stand there and stare.

Mr. Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House, was actually demanding hush money! If he received half the prize money he would hold his tongue—but if Lawrence refused to give any money he would go straight to the headmaster and relate all the facts.

The junior hardly believed his own ears—he could not realise that it was the truth.

Blackmail!

And from a Housemaster! Lawrence had known for some days past that Mr. Foxe was a mysterious kind of individual. There were other juniors—some of them in the Ancient House—who had suspicions about Mr. Smale Foxe. But nobody had ever dreamed that he would descend to such villainy as blackmail.

"Well, Lawrence, I am still waiting," said Mr. Foxe curtly. "Unless you comply at once you will be taken straight before the headmaster, and be publicly expelled in the morning."

Ernest Lawrence found his voice again.

"But—but you're—you're joking, sir!" he panted. "You can't be serious—"

"I am not joking!" interrupted the Housemaster. "You are no doubt astonished that I should take this step? Let me assure you, Lawrence, that I am doing this for your sake alone. I do not intend to let you off completely, and, therefore, I think you will be punished quite adequately if you are deprived of half your prize money. I will not confiscate the twenty pounds—because that would be rather too unkind. You must say 'yes' or 'no'—at once."

"Of—of course, sir—I'll pay you the ten pounds," said Lawrence quickly. "It's the only thing I can do. And

you'll—you'll keep quiet, sir, won't you?"

Lawrence pulled out his bundle of currency notes and counted out ten, and handed them across to the Housemaster. Mr. Foxe checked them, and stowed them away in his hip pocket.

"You can be quite certain, Lawrence, that I shall keep your secret," he said. "That is all, I think—you may go in!"

"Thank—thank you, sir!" stammered Lawrence.

The junior was in no way deceived by the Housemaster's bland words. There was no kind-heartedness about this—Mr. Foxe had forced the money out of Lawrence just as any ordinary common blackmailer forces hush-money from his victim. There was no difference whatever.

And Ernest Lawrence went into the College House, and went to Study T in a maze of chaotic thought. When he arrived in his study he closed the door and sat down in his easy-chair. And then he thought over all the facts.

Lawrence was furious—and he was filled with indignation. For Mr. Foxe to have acted in such a way was staggering—startling. And the contemptible nature of the Housemaster's trick was revolting.

Lawrence now only had ten pounds to send to his father, and it filled the junior with righteous indignation to think that the other money should have gone into the pocket of Mr. Smale Foxe. The Housemaster was an intruder—a blackmailer—a scoundrel!

And yet Lawrence felt so helpless.

What could he do? Nothing! He could not say a word to a soul—he would have to keep his secret. He knew it—and he knew also that Mr. Foxe was aware of it.

And Lawrence was shocked at the thought that a Housemaster of St. Frank's could descend to such a low level. He had the boy in his clutches—and, before very long, Lawrence was to know this even better than he knew it now.

CHAPTER 7.

Fixing Things Up!

ERNEST LAWRENCE stepped from the train at Helmford, and noticed that the time was just twenty minutes past three. This suited him perfectly for his appointment with Mr. Rook at half-past. The junior passed out of the station and stood just outside the booking office—under a large clock which hung overhead.

He wore a trim tweed cap, and it was not possible for anybody to know that he belonged to St. Frank's College. There was nothing about his appearance to reveal this fact.

And Lawrence did not notice a mysterious shadower with a brown beard. The man had left the train soon after Lawrence, and he had followed the lad out through the booking office, and then he had waited—for it was quite clear to him that Lawrence was waiting under the clock until somebody else should arrive. But who could this man be? What could be his purpose in shadowing Lawrence?

It was not quite three-thirty when a man came striding briskly up from the town. It was Mr. Rook.

"Ah, so you're here on time, young man!" he said genially. "I like people to be prompt! How are you, Lawrence?"

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Rook," said the junior. "I'm not sure that I'm doing right in coming here—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Norman Rook pleasantly. "It is a Saturday afternoon, and a half-holiday. Everything is quite all right, my boy, and you may rely upon me to keep this thing secret. I wish to discuss full details with you, and to fix things up once and for all. Come on—we'll go this way."

They went into the town, and they were both unaware of the fact that the mysterious bearded stranger was following them.

Helmford was quite a big town—very

much larger than Bannington. It was a market town, too, and Saturday afternoon was always a busy time in Helmford. The town was packed. People from all the surrounding country villages thronged the streets, and the scene was quite a lively one.

Mr. Rook and his young companion went down the High Street until, finally, they came to a halt outside a large, old-fashioned red-brick building. This, at one time, had been the Helmford Town Hall. But a new town hall had been built, and now this old place had been converted into something else. A large ornamental board over the entrance announced to all the townspeople of Helmford that the place was the "Ring Pavilion."

Mr. Norman Rook led the way through the entrance, then he and Lawrence went down a dark passage until they arrived at a doorway. It was standing half open. And Mr. Rook passed in, and switched on the electric light. Then he closed the door, and Lawrence found himself in quite a comfortable little apartment, where a gas fire was burning. There was a desk, and two or three chairs. And the walls were lined with photographs of famous boxers.

"Here we are, my lad!" said Mr. Rook pleasantly. "We can have a private chat here—without any fear of interruption. The conversation I had with you on Wednesday evening was a very brief one, and I now wish to go into fuller details. You're a fine set-up young fellow, and you have marked boxing skill. I shall never forget that exhibition of boxing you gave in Mr. Gubbin's booth."

Lawrence smiled.

"Oh, I don't know about that, sir," he said modestly. "The fellow I fought didn't know much—he was a slogger!"

"Nevertheless, he was a far heavier than you are, and the odds were all in his favour," said Mr. Rook. "It was a magnificent show on your part. Quite apart from that, I was impressed by

your form. I have seldom seen a young man who knows so much as you. Where did you learn it?"

"My father taught me!" replied Lawrence simply.

"Then your father is evidently a very good boxer," said Mr. Rook. "I take off my hat to him—and I take off my hat to you, too. You are the best little light-weight boxer of the century! I am not exaggerating, my lad—I am speaking the simple truth. There is a wonderful future before you. There is no reason why you should not become world's champion in a year or two!"

Ernest Lawrence shook his head.

"It's very nice of you to say that, Mr. Rook, but I don't want to become world's champion," he said. "I don't want to be prominent at all. And I hope you won't ask me any questions about my father, or anything of that sort. I've got nothing to be ashamed of, but my father always told me that he doesn't want me to do anything professionally. And if he got to know that I'd come to see you here he would be very cross."

Mr. Rook smiled.

"Very well, then, my lad, we won't say anything about it—and I won't ask any awkward questions," he said. "What I want you to do is to help me out of a little difficulty—and to help yourself at the same time. That's understood, isn't it? If you'll enter into this contest for me—which comes off next Wednesday—you will pocket twenty pounds, even if you lose the fight. If you win you will have a clear thirty pounds, and possibly a great deal more. It is a good chance for you, my boy, and I hope you will take advantage of it."

"I entered into that contest with Lightning Left Ned, but it didn't matter much there—because I wore a silk mask so that nobody could recognise me," said Lawrence. "But—but I can't enter into any other fights, Mr. Rook. For one thing, how could I

fight here, in Helmford? I couldn't get away from St. Frank's——"

"My dear boy, we can easily arrange such little details as those," interrupted Mr. Rook. "Now, listen, I will put my proposition before you. I cannot compel you to agree—and I do not wish to urge you. I do hope, however, that you will be sensible, and do the right thing. And if you will help me I can give you my word that I will help you."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lawrence.

"It's this way, my lad," said Mr. Rook, bending forward in his chair and chewing at his cigar. "I have agreed to put up a man against Jimmy Rhodes. He's a rather well-known light-weight in this county, and he has several local championships to his credit. He's got a beautiful left, and if you fight him you'll have to be careful."

"I think I've heard of him," said Lawrence.

"That's not at all improbable," went on Mr. Rook. "Rhodes is an excellent boxer—and he can take any amount of punishment. Well, I fixed up an arrangement that I should produce a man to fight Rhodes next Wednesday evening. Unfortunately, the young fellow I had my eye on met with an accident, and broke his arm. That's where you come in, Lawrence—I want you to fight Jimmy Rhodes. You can do it if you like—it will be a bit of a struggle, but you'll win!"

Lawrence shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," he said slowly. "And is it permissible for you to make another arrangement?"

"Oh, I shall arrange that all right—don't you worry your head," said Mr. Rook. "The great point is—will you fight Rhodes or not?"

"I'd do it at once, sir, if I thought that I should help you," said Lawrence earnestly. "But I don't believe I can—if I fight Rhodes, I shall only be beaten. And that won't do you any good, will it?"

"Yes—it will," said Mr. Rook. "Even if you lose it will be to my advantage, because the fight will be abandoned unless I get somebody to meet this Rhodes. And that will mean a big financial loss. I've seen Rhodes fighting, and I've seen you—and without any flattery, Lawrence, you are the better of the two. You're agile, you've got more skill, and you're altogether superior. Jimmy is just a little heavier, I think—but that won't trouble you, I fancy. And there is a purse of twenty pounds for the loser. So, in any case, you will get a prize."

"Yes, I know, sir," said Lawrence. "But——"

"Wait—let me finish!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "If you enter into this fight Lawrence, I intend to wager heavily. I will back you for all I am worth, because I know that you'll win. And, if you do win I will present you with the sum of fifty pounds over and above the purse."

"Fifty pounds!" ejaculated Lawrence, startled.

"Yes—making eighty pounds altogether!" replied Mr. Rook pleasantly. "This is a fair offer, my boy. And I am certain that you will win—and you can be quite certain that I would not wager on you unless I was certain of that. Now I will leave you to think it out, and then give me your decision."

Mr. Rook turned aside, lit a fresh cigar, and pretended to be very busy with some papers.

Lawrence sat by himself looking into the fire. His face was flushed and his eyes were gleaming. He had never dreamed of anything like this. Eighty pounds! His brain almost reeled as he thought of it. How glorious it would be if he could send that money to his father—what a great help such a sum would be! And it did not take him long to come to a decision. And, quite apart from the money, there was something about this whole enterprise which gripped him. It was the lure of the ring.

Lawrence got to his feet and stood before Mr. Rook. The latter looked round and smiled.

"Well, my boy, what is it?" he inquired. "Yes or no?"

"I will agree, sir," said Lawrence quietly.

The boxing promoter slapped his thigh.

"Good!" he exclaimed heartily. "I knew it all along, Lawrence—I knew that you would be sensible—splendid, my lad—splendid! And now we will talk business."

"Will it be necessary for me to come to Helmford before Wednesday?" inquired Lawrence.

"No, I don't think so," said the other. "If you come fairly early on Wednesday evening—or in the afternoon, if possible—that will be quite sufficient. Under the rules of this contest I am allowed to put forward any man I choose providing he is under a certain weight. There will be no trouble with you about that score, Lawrence," added Mr. Rook, with a smile. "Of course, I want you to put in all the practice you can between now and Wednesday. You have a gymnasium at St. Frank's, I believe?"

"Yes, sir—a splendid one."

"Good!" said Mr. Rook. "Get some of your friends to act as sparring partners, and put in all your spare time at practice. There's nothing like it, my lad—only don't overdo it. There is another point I wish to speak about. I'm afraid it will be quite impossible for you to wear that silk mask."

"Yes, I suppose so, sir," said Lawrence slowly. "But that won't matter much, will it? Nobody connected with St. Frank's will be in Helmford—particularly in this place."

"Would it matter if you were seen?" inquired Mr. Rook.

"Matter!" echoed the junior. "Why, if one of the masters happened to see me, it would mean the sack! I should be expelled on the spot!"

"But there is nothing disgraceful in

boxing!" protested the promoter. "Why should you be expelled from the school simply because you engaged in a contest here—"

"You don't seem to understand, sir," interrupted Lawrence. "It is against all the school rules for any boy to do such a thing as this. It's a terrible crime—in the eyes of the headmaster. He would regard it as a prize fight. It would certainly mean the sack for me."

Mr. Rook shook his head.

"Well, I can't quite follow the argument," he said. "But we won't go into that now. In any case, my boy, I think you need have no concern. It is practically certain that nobody connected with St. Frank's will be in the Ring Pavilion on Wednesday evening. As soon as the contract is signed, and we part this afternoon, I shall go to the printers and have the bills got out. And that reminds me that we must get a name for you."

"A name?" repeated Lawrence, with a start.

"Exactly," said Mr. Rook. "We must give you some name, you know, my boy. And we couldn't possibly bill you under your own name—"

"Oh, no, sir—that's out of the question!" said Lawrence quickly.

"Very well, then—how does 'Young Ern,' suit you? That's not at all bad. Lawrence—'Young Ern,' of London. I do not think we need trouble about any other names, eh?"

Lawrence agreed to the suggestion, and then all the other details were discussed. And it was not until an hour later that the St. Frank's junior found himself once more in the High Street of Helmford. He could hardly believe that he had fixed up this fight for the following Wednesday evening.

Lawrence had shaken hands warmly with Mr. Rook in parting, and had promised to be in Helmford on the Wednesday afternoon, in readiness for the evening's contest. The original hour for the fight had been fixed for eight o'clock, but Mr. Rook had consented to

alter this by one hour. The fight would start at seven, and this would give Lawrence plenty of time to get back to St. Frank's before the Remove went up to bed. Lawrence, on his part, would have to get permission, somehow or other, to be out late on that particular evening. The junior thought that he would be able to manage it all right.

As he went back to the station he was still unaware of the fact that the bearded stranger was on the watch—waiting for him.

But this man, too, was unaware that a tall, well-dressed gentleman was watching him—and had been watching him for some considerable time. The shadower, in point of fact, had been shadowed!

And the tall gentleman was no less a person than Nelson Lee himself!

And Nelson Lee, at all events, was under no delusion regarding the mysterious bearded man's identity.

CHAPTER 8. Three Tickets!

MR. MIKE BRADMORE made a wry grimace.

"Yes, you've got me proper this time, young gents!" he exclaimed. "Seven quid between the three of you! Why, it's nearly broke me!"

Fullwood grinned.

"What about the people who backed the losers?" he inquired. "You can't put that kind of spoof over us, Mike! I'll bet you're quids in pocket, if the truth's only known! And you can easily spare these few notes for us."

Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell, the knuts of St. Frank's, had their own opinion about that. They had known Mr. Bradmore for quite a long time, and they knew him so well that they would not trust him with much of their cash. On one occasion Mr. Bradmore had gone to prison, but when he emerged he had carried on the same business as a bookmaker.

Fullwood & Co. had been rather lucky—their fancy had come home. They had backed a winner.

And now, in Bannington, they had just collected their winnings from Mr. Bradmore.

They were all seated in a cosy little nook of the Japanese Cafe, in the High Street. It was not far off tea-time, and Fullwood & Co. were having a little snack to be going on with, before going to the station to catch their train home.

"Well, young gents, you've done well off me to-day," said Mr. Bradmore. "What do you say to having a little flutter on a boxing match—it's coming off next Wednesday evening, in Helmford?"

"No, thanks!" said Fullwood. "We'd rather not."

"Just as you please," said Mike. "I happen to have three tickets here. They ain't expensive—only half a guinea each. They're good seats, my boys, and if I was you I'd buy 'em. It's going to be a fust-class match, I can tell you; at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford—one of the best boxing rings in the county!"

He produced three tickets from his pocket, and gave one to each of the juniors. Fullwood looked at his, and saw that the fight was to be between Jimmy Rhodes, of Helmford, and Bob Hoskin, of London.

"That there second name is wrong," said Mr. Bradmore, leaning over the table. "Bob Hoskin met with an accident the other day, and so another man is being got. But you can take my word for it that Jimmy Rhodes is going to win. It's dead cert, for him."

Fullwood shook his head.

"It's all very well, Mr. Bradmore, but it can't be done," he said. "How do you think we're going to get to Helmford on Wednesday evening?"

"Well, there's a train—"

"I know that!" interrupted Fullwood. "But how are we going to get back in time for bed? It couldn't be done. We'd like to go to this match,

and if it was in Bannington, I'd go like a shot——"

"No you wouldn't!" interrupted Gulliver. "We might be spotted, and that would mean a terrific row with the Head later on."

"There won't be no fear of your being spotted in Helmsford!" interrupted Bradmore. "There won't be none of the St. Frank's masters there—you mark my words. And as for getting home—there won't be no difficulty about that at all. All you've got to do is to fake up some yarn that you're going to meet somebody, and you won't be home till late. It ought to be easy for resourceful young gents like you."

Fullwood looked thoughtful.

"Well, of course, we might be able to fake up some yarn," he admitted; "but I don't think it's worth the candle, Mike. We'd like to go to this fight, and——"

"I can sell you half a dozen tickets, if you like," interrupted the book-maker. "If any of your pals would like to come along with you, I've got about a dozen tickets left. But they'll all be gone by to-morrow—don't you make no mistake. This is about the last chance you'll have. These tickets are going like hot cakes. Come along, you've got 'em now, so you might as well keep 'em. Ten and a tanner each—that's all!"

Fullwood & Co. did not really want the tickets. They would like to see the fight, but they did not care for risking things. However, Mr. Bradmore was a persuasive gentleman, and at last he succeeded in his object. Fullwood & Co. bought the tickets, and put them in their pockets.

And on their way home to St. Frank's, they discussed plans as to how they would be able to get out on Wednesday evening. It was a bit of a problem.

"I don't exactly see how we're going to do it!" remarked Gulliver. "It was a fat-headed idea, buying these tickets.

Fully! I wouldn't mind seeing this fight, but how the dickens can we manage it?"

"Everything can be managed," said Fullwood. "The best thing we can do is to fake up a yarn about your pater, Gully——"

"My pater?" said Gulliver.

"Yes—or Bell's pater—or mine!" said Fullwood. "It doesn't matter which. We'll write a letter, or something, and make out that we've got to meet the old chap in Bannington. We shall get permission to go out like that, and there won't be any questions asked if we don't turn up until bedtime. I tell you it's easy, if we only go to work in the right way."

The knuts continued discussing the plan, and when they finally arrived near the school, they had decided to say nothing until the Monday. By that time they would have a letter, which would be posted on Sunday evening. They would be able to show that letter to one of the prefects, and it would be comparatively easy to get leave.

"Oh, we shall work it all right!" said Fullwood, as he and his chums strolled along the Remove passage. "Don't you worry, my sons—just leave it to me. And it'll be a bit of a change for us to see a fight——"

"Well, don't shout about it!" said Gulliver, in a low voice. "We don't want any of the other fellows to know."

"Why not? What does it matter?" asked Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong in a fight, I suppose? It's a proper boxing contest, and boxing is a recognised thing at St. Frank's——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Bell. "The Head would call it disgraceful if any St. Frank's chaps went to the Ring Pavilion, and it would mean a flogging."

Bell was probably correct in this statement of opinion. The Ring Pavilion was not exactly a high-class place, and the boxing shows which

were given there were generally of a brutal character.

Fullwood & Co. arrived at the corner, before turning towards Study A, when something rather startling happened. There was a rush of feet and one or two yells.

Church was making a break for freedom. There had been a little argument in Study D, and Handforth's wrath had been aroused. Church, who was the culprit, decided that flight was the best thing for him; he dashed out of Study D, helter-skelter. McClure also dashed, because he knew that Handforth, baulked of his prey, would turn upon him. And so the two juniors rushed down the passage, with Handforth in full pursuit; he had almost overtaken them by the time they arrived at the corner.

And then the disaster happened.

Church and McClure ran full tilt into Fullwood & Co. They went over with bumps and yells, and Handforth, bringing up the rear, blundered headlong over the pile.

"Yow! What the deuce— By gad!" gasped Fullwood. "You—you— Yaroooh!"

"Gerroff my neck, you ass!"

"Ow! Yow!"

"You—you rotters!" snorted Handforth. "I've got you now!"

"You—you blithering idiots!" howled Fullwood, getting to his feet. "What's the idea of dashing about like this? Somebody kicked me in the neck—"

"Blow your beastly neck!" said Handforth. "I'm after these chaps here—they insulted me, and I'm going to wipe them up!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Handy!" gasped McClure, sitting up.

And just at that moment McClure's eyes caught sight of something upon the floor, near to him. He could see three pieces of pasteboard, with printing upon them. They were tickets, and McClure picked them up mechanically.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What are these? Tickets for a boxing match, or something—"

"Give them to me!" roared Fullwood, in alarm.

"Boxing?" said Handforth curiously. "Lemme see!"

"They're mine" bellowed Fullwood roughly. "Give those tickets to me, McClure, you fool!"

"Rats!" said McClure.

He was examining them when Handforth pulled them out of his hand, and the leader of Study D gave vent to a bellow as he read the words upon the tickets.

"The Ring Pavilion, Helmford!" he ejaculated. "By George! What do you think of this, my sons? The Ring Pavilion is a rotten hole—a disreputable place! These are tickets for a fight next Wednesday evening!"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snapped Fullwood roughly.

All the juniors were upon their feet now, and Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were looking decidedly disconcerted and alarmed. They had been very anxious to keep this affair secret, and now it was all out. Handforth, above all fellows, had got hold of the tickets!

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Gulliver. "Those tickets are nothing, Handforth. They were given to Fully, and we aren't going to use them. Just as if we should go to a beastly boxing match—"

"You can't spoof me like that, you rotter!" interrupted Handforth sourly. "I know you and your little tricks—and if you think you're going to keep these tickets, you've made a bloomer!"

"There's nothing wrong with boxing. Is there?" demanded Bell savagely.

"Nothing at all!" replied Handforth. "Boxing is one of the finest sports in the world. But everybody knows the Ring Pavilion in Helmford. It's a rotten hole—a place which is only patronised by roughs and bad characters. If the Head got to know

about these tickets, my sons, you'd get it in the neck, pretty hot!"

"The Head's narrow-minded!" snapped Fullwood. "There's nothing wrong in going to the Ring Pavilion, if we like."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "That place is a gambling house as well—it's been raided two or three times by the police. The fights there are only promoted so that people can bet and gamble. And if you think you're going there next Wednesday, you've made a bloomer!"

"Are you going to give me those tickets, or not?" demanded Fullwood. "They're ours, and—By gad! You—you rotter! Hi! Stop it—"

But Handforth was deliberately tearing the tickets into little shreds, and he tossed them all over the floor of the passage, and grinned.

It was certainly impossible for Fullwood & Co. to use them now!

"There you are!" said Handforth lightly. "You can have the tickets if you want them—"

"You—you confounded beast!" roared Fullwood. "Those tickets cost ten-and-six each—"

"Oh, did they?" said Handforth. "I thought Bell said that somebody gave them to you?"

"I don't care what Bell said!" snarled Fullwood. "I'm not going to let you treat our property in that way, you rotter!"

Fullwood was beside himself with rage, or he would never have acted as he did the next second. For he flung himself at Handforth, and delivered a blow which caught the leader of Study D fairly on the chin. But Handforth was made of iron, and the punch hardly affected him. He just staggered back slightly, and then gave a bellow.

"My hat!" he roared. "Of all the nerve! You—you silly ass—"

He didn't wait to say any more, but charged forward. His fists came out like pistons, and the next moment

Fullwood went down with a crash, howling.

"My hat! What's all the noise about?" inquired a cheerful voice.

Solomon Levi, of the Remove, came up, and he looked on at the little scene with considerable interest, too; other juniors had been attracted, too, including Reginald Pitt, De Valerie, Somerton, and Jack Grey. I came out of Study C, followed by Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. And by this time the Remove passage was fairly crowded. I pushed my way forward.

"What's the commotion out here?" I asked. "Oh, it's you, Handforth! Haven't you got more sense than to create a scene in the passage?"

"Nobody asked you to butt in!" said Handforth, glaring. "I've just destroyed something which cost over thirty bob!"

"There's no need to boast about it!" said Pitt. "But what the dickens do you mean?"

"Ever heard of the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford?" asked Handforth.

"Yes," I replied. "It's a pretty rotten hole, by all I understand."

"Well, there's a fight going to take place there next Wednesday evening," said Handforth. "Fullwood had three tickets for it, and they dropped out of his pocket just now. They cost half a guinea each, and I thought the best thing I could do was to destroy them."

"Oh!"

"It's a pity the idiot can't mind his own business!" snarled Fullwood.

"You rotter!"

"It's a good thing Handforth spoilt your little game!"

"Rather!"

"You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Fullwood!"

"You'd get into trouble if the Head got to know about this!" I said grimly. "It's none of my business, I know; but you ought to be kicked, Fullwood. The Ring Pavilion, in Helmford, is absolutely out of bounds for all St.

Frank's chaps—you know that as well as I do. It's not considered to be good class, and, as a matter of fact, the place is a disreputable hole. I'm keen on boxing; but there's a limit. I reckon it's a good thing Handforth tore those tickets up!"

"Oh, rats! Go and eat coke!" snapped Fullwood roughly, and the knuts went along to Study A. As soon as Fullwood & Co. arrived in the study, they switched on the light and closed the door.

"Well, it's no good making a fuss about it now," said Gulliver. "It's all over——"

"Is it?" snarled Fullwood. "It's not all over, my sons. I haven't finished yet!"

Gulliver stared.

"What do you mean—you haven't finished?" he asked curiously.

"I mean that we're going to that fight, after all!" said Fullwood grimly. "I'm not going to be diddled by a cad like Handforth!"

"Oh, but that's rot!" protested Bell. "We can't go now, Fully—the tickets are torn up. Personally, I'm a bit relieved. It was doubtful whether we should be able to get the evening off, and the thing is settled now."

"We're going, I tell you!" snapped Fullwood. "I'm not going to be dished by Handforth, or by anybody else. Bradmore has got other tickets, and I'm going to buy three. And, later on, we'll make Handforth pay for what he did."

And Gulliver and Bell knew that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was in earnest.

CHAPTER 9.

The Great Contest!

THE Ring Pavilion, in Helmford, was packed.

The great night had arrived, for it was now Wednesday evening. It was not a great night for the Pavilion, since contests of this kind were a common occurrence. But it was certainly

a great night for one individual—Ernest Lawrence. Even now he could hardly believe that he would shortly appear in the ring, battling against Jimmy Rhodes, the young man who had won many prizes and belts. Jimmy Rhodes was a champion in his way, and Lawrence knew, better than anybody else, that if he won this contest, it would be by skill alone. Jimmy Rhodes was not going to be easy to conquer; in all probability Lawrence would go under. But the junior was determined to put up a great fight.

It had been easy for him to get leave from St. Frank's. He had gone to Mr. Foxe, and had asked for permission to be out until bed-time, and it had not been necessary for him to give any reason. Mr. Foxe had consented immediately, without asking any questions.

And Lawrence had arrived in Helmford during the afternoon—at about four o'clock. Without any delay, Mr. Rook had introduced his young champion to several gentlemen in white sweaters, who were forgathered in a little gymnasium at the back of the hall. Two of these white-sweatered gentlemen were to be Lawrence's seconds, and, without any delay, the junior showed what he could do.

Stripped, he tested his skill upon two sparring partners, and when he had finished, Mr. Rook was even more convinced that he had not made a mistake. He had discovered a marvellous young boxer in Ernest Lawrence.

"The lad's absolutely a marvel!" declared Mr. Rook enthusiastically. "I've seen a few good boxers in my time, but this boy can beat them all on points. His footwork is simply beautiful, and I've never seen such technique in a boy so young. It's born in him all right—there's no doubt about that."

The time passed quickly enough for Lawrence. Afterwards, he could not exactly remember all that happened, for his brain was in a whirl. And

continuously he kept on telling himself that he must not lose. He wanted that money—the sum of eighty pounds—to send to his father. What a welcome gift it would be. And so the lad forgot everything else in his determination to win.

The Ring Pavilion, half an hour after its doors were open, was packed to suffocation. The fight between Jimmy Rhodes and Young Ern was not the only item on the programme. There were to be other contests; but, at Lawrence's request, his bout with Rhodes was to take place first. He had asked this so that he could get back to St. Frank's in good time, and it really made no difference to the promoters.

In the half-guinea seats there were three youthful figures. They were all attired in long overcoats and tweed caps, and they had mufflers, which concealed their Eton collars. They were, in short, Fullwood, Gulliver and Bell. The knuts of the Ancient House had come to the fight, in spite of all. They had obtained other tickets from Mr. Bradmore easily enough.

By a piece of luck, they had obtained permission from Morrow, of the Sixth, who had been in a hurry.

Fullwood had seized his chance well. He had waited until Morrow appeared, evidently bent upon going out for the afternoon. Then he had asked the prefect if he and his two chums could go to Bannington, to meet Gulliver's father. Fullwood casually mentioned that they probably wouldn't be in to supper, but they would be in before bed-time. And Morrow, who had no time to go into any arguments, scrawled out a pass, and handed it over. And so Fullwood & Co. felt satisfied—they would not get into any trouble afterwards.

There was a good deal of discussion among the spectators regarding "Young Ern." He was an unknown quantity, and the patrons of the Ring Pavilion were curious. Naturally, everybody was certain that Jimmy

Rhodes would win. He was a well-known young boxer, whereas Young Ern was a nobody—he had never been heard of before. It was not to be supposed that he would be able to defeat such a young champion as Rhodes.

It was known that Mr. Rook's original man had met with an accident, and was unable to appear. It was therefore clear that Mr. Rook had been compelled to secure a substitute—a youngster with no reputation.

Never in his life had Lawrence been in a proper roped ring in a boxing-hall. This fight at the Pavilion would be something entirely new, and Lawrence's feelings were mixed when at last the moment came for him to leave the dressing-room to go into the ring. Mr. Rook was there, and he was looking quite confident.

"What you've got to do, my lad, is to be very cautious," he exclaimed. "Put all you know into your fighting, and don't allow Rhodes to use that left of his. If he only gets through your guard and delivers one straight punch, it'll be all over with you. So be careful."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Lawrence quietly.

"That's good—that's all I want you to do," said Mr. Rook, nodding. "If you go under, I shan't grumble; but I've got an idea in my head that you're going to win."

"I've made up my mind to win, Mr. Rook!" said Ernest simply. "I'm not going to think of anything else."

"Eh, that's the style, lad!" put in Bill Hoxley, one of Lawrence's seconds. "That's the style! And don't forget all those points I put you wise about. Keep clear of Rhodes' in fighting, don't let him get too close to you. He's dangerous then. I think you'll find him a bit slow, and, if you're nippy, you'll be able to hold your own. But Jimmy can take a lot of punishment, and you'll need to work thundering hard to get in the knock-out blow."

So much advice was given to Law-

rence, in fact, that his brain was in a whirl, and he was determined to leave everything to his own discretion and his own judgement. As soon as he started fighting Jimmy Rhodes he would know what his man was worth, and he would then fight accordingly. At the same time, he did not altogether ignore the advice which was given to him.

Rhodes was the first to enter the ring, and as he did so a great cheer went up from the crowd—for nearly everybody in the hall supported Jimmy. He was well known to them, and he was backed pretty heavily.

Rhodes was inclined to look upon this fight as a dead certainty for him. He had seen Lawrence, and he had sized him up as a pretty useful sort of youngster, but absolutely hopeless against a real boxer. And Jimmy considered himself to be a real first-class boxer; this was very evident from his attitude.

He lounged into his corner in a languid manner, chatting with his seconds, and showing everybody that he was perfectly confident of winning. As a matter of fact, Jimmy was inclined to swank somewhat, and this was all to Lawrence's advantage. If Rhodes considered that he was in for a certain win, it would be far better for the junior schoolboy. For over-confidence does not pay in the boxing ring—it frequently leads to a sudden and unexpected disaster.

Jimmy Rhodes smiled continuously, and there was just a faint suspicion of a sneer when Ernest Lawrence entered the ring. The junior looked quite small in comparison to his opponent; but, as a matter of fact, there was not such a great deal of difference between them. Rhodes was heavier, certainly, but his muscles were no bigger than Young Ern's.

Rhodes had quite a small army of seconds around him in his corner.

Lawrence was rather dazed at first—everything seemed so brilliant and noisy. Great electric lamps shed down

a glare of light from overhead. The atmosphere was hazy with tobacco fumes, and for a moment or two Lawrence looked about him in a state of bewilderment. It was obvious to almost everybody that this was the lad's first appearance in a proper ring. And many spectators laughed outright—they were anticipating a win for Jimmy Rhodes in the very first round.

Fullwood and Co. watched with great interest. They saw Lawrence enter the ring, but they took no particular notice of him at first. They were up above, in the balcony, and they did not get a full view of Young Ern's face at first. But then Lawrence happened to look up, and suddenly Fullwood gave a gasp, and clutched at the arms of his seat.

"By gad! Do—do you see— Oh, it can't be true!"

"What can't be true?" whispered Gulliver.

Fullwood was still staring down at the ring.

"Don't—don't you see?" he hissed, under his breath. "That chap down in the ring—Young Ern! It's Lawrence of the College House!"

"What rot!" muttered Bell.

But he and Gulliver stared down, and their hearts were beating fast. Again Lawrence happened to glance upwards, and this time both Gulliver and Bell saw his features distinctly. Lawrence, for his part, did not see the knuts of the Ancient House. This was scarcely possible, since he was only aware of a sea of faces. It was not likely that he would be able to pick out three from among that vast crowd.

"Great pip!" gasped Gulliver. "You're right, Fully—it is Lawrence!"

"He's billed as Young Ern, and Lawrence's name is Ernest!" said Fullwood keenly. "It's as clear as daylight, my sons. By gad! What a discovery—a Remove chap fighting here in this beastly hole!"

"Well, it doesn't matter to us, if it comes to that!" said Bell. "We've backed Rhodes pretty heavily, you know, and I think we're as safe as eggs."

Our money's O.K. Lawrence will never be able to beat a professional like Rhodes!"

Fullwood grinned.

"Of course he won't!" he exclaimed. "I can understand now—Lawrence has been shoved in as a substitute, just so that the fight shall take place. I expect they offered him some money to do it, because there'd be a terrific row if the fight didn't come off. It's a dead cert. for Rhodes, and we shall draw in a nice little pile of tin!"

"Rather!" said Gulliver and Bell.

They were excited and astonished. But there was no doubt about it, the young fellow down in the ring, attired in the dressing-gown, was none other than Ernest Lawrence, of the College House Remove! It was just as well for Lawrence that he did not know that the three juniors were here. The knowledge would probably have put him off his form and made his task the more difficult.

It seemed an interminable time to him before the preliminaries were over; but at last they were completed.

The referee—an elderly man in evening-dress—was making himself very prominent. He seemed to imagine that he was of immense importance.

"Seconds out!"

The crowd, which had been talking in a dull murmur, lapsed into silence. Everybody sat in their chairs, tense and expectant, waiting for the tussle to begin. All eyes were directed towards the ring, with the two agile figures standing out in bold relief under the glare of the electric light.

"Time!"

Jimmy Rhodes and Lawrence stepped from their corners at the same moment. They had cast aside their dressing-gowns now, and stood there, stripped ready for fight. The contrast between the pair was very obvious now. Lawrence's skin was white and clear, while Jimmy Rhodes' looked tough and coarse. It seemed to the observer that Jimmy would overwhelm his opponent within the first round.

The boxers circled round the ring, facing one another, sparring for an opening. Lawrence was wary; he wanted his opponent to make the first move.

The St. Frank's junior was nervous. But this was only natural, considering all the circumstances. And Jimmy Rhodes was not slow to recognise this fact. He smiled to himself, and wasted no further time.

He bore in close, and delivered a heavy punch on Lawrence's chest. Then he danced out to distance once more, and was rather surprised that Young Ern did nothing.

Jimmy smiled to himself, and drove right in. He was full of confidence, and he kept shooting out his left in a manner which rather disconcerted Lawrence at first, for the boy was not quite settled yet. His nerves were still on the stretch.

Again and again Jimmy managed to land punches, and it seemed that Lawrence's guard was nowhere. Mr. Rook watched anxiously. He could not understand what had come over Lawrence. The junior was not fighting as he had fought in Mr. Gubbin's boxing-booth. But those blows of Jimmy's were beginning to make the St. Frank's junior think.

And Jimmy Rhodes was more full of confidence now than ever. His chief idea was to make a laughing-stock of his opponent. He delighted to fight to the gallery, and he saw a first-class chance here.

He gave himself up to some very tricky footwork, dancing about his man and delivering a blow occasionally from long range. The spectators chuckled and watched with keen interest, for, without doubt, Jimmy's style was very spectacular.

The first round was nearing its close before Ernest Lawrence found his feet, so to speak. And then, quite suddenly it seemed, his head became clear, and he was oblivious of the crowd, the arc-lamps, and the fact that this was his first real fight in a boxing-ring. All he

saw was Jimmy Rhodes in front of him, dancing about and doing almost as he pleased. And Lawrence set his teeth, and decided that it was time to make a change.

And just at that moment Rhodes made another one of his long-range punches. But Lawrence was ready.

He evaded that straight left with perfect ease, and jumped forward and returned a terrific left hook, which landed with shattering force upon Rhodes' unguarded jaw.

Jimmy staggered back, and uttered a gasping grunt, as much of surprise as of pain. And he was given no rest. Ernest attacked with the ferocity of a tiger, and he delivered three powerful body blows which sounded throughout the hall. Rhodes went back and back, and staggered against the ropes.

"Time!"

A murmur went up from the audience, a murmur of astonishment. They had never expected Young Ern to show such dexterity and form.

"Splendid—splendid!" muttered Mr. Rook during the interval. "That's the style, my lad—keep it up and you'll be all right!"

The gong sounded again, and the second round commenced.

Rhodes attacked at once, swinging in a left hook which Lawrence slipped under without much difficulty. Then, close up, Ernest sent in a whirlwind of blows which landed on his opponent's chest and ribs. Rhodes backed away for a couple of paces.

Lawrence sprang in once more, and his fist went home with great force upon Jimmy's neck. It rather astonished the professional that Lawrence should have such a long reach, and he was taken off his balance for the moment.

He hunched himself up and came right in, "mixing it." The pair danced about the ring in a fierce, swift battle, which warmed them up thoroughly.

Lawrence's guard was perfect, and his footwork was astonishing. Rhodes

found it almost impossible to get in a direct blow, and he was beginning to understand that Young Ern was by no means an easy opponent to beat.

"Time!"

Lawrence went back to his seat in the corner of the ring feeling very confident. He had taken the measure of Jimmy Rhodes, and he was satisfied. He had no reason to feel nervous or alarmed.

When the third round commenced it was clear that Rhodes was getting into a temper, and he meant to finish the fight as quickly as possible.

He sent in a sledge-hammer right which would have knocked Lawrence clean out if it had landed, but Lawrence jerked his head aside with perfect ease, and then he flashed home a left to Jimmy's ribs. The boxer grunted audibly and fell away.

Then Rhodes rushed into a clinch, and he did his utmost to drive home a series of short, powerful punches, which would have sent Lawrence reeling to the floor if the punches had gone home.

But the junior was on the alert. His father had taught him a lot of tricks, and he knew precisely what to do. With his elbows and forearms he bolstered the attack skillfully and cunningly, and Rhodes was unable to land a single blow. Indeed, quite the opposite was the case, for Rhodes received a number of jabs on the ribs which set him gasping.

But Rhodes was still a dangerous opponent.

He skipped round Lawrence and aimed a left swing which, fortunately for Lawrence, missed its mark.

And the force with which that blow was aimed was so great that Jimmy would have staggered forward but for the fact that Lawrence assisted him to regain his balance by delivering a straight punch on the jaw which brought Rhodes up standing.

From one side of the ring to the other the opponents swayed, and the

footwork indulged in by Lawrence evoked exclamations of praise from all the onlookers. The audience was beginning to realise, in fact, that this fair-skinned youngster was a power to be reckoned with.

Jimmy's lips were cut, and he did not present a very pleasing sight when that round came to an end. He was breathing heavily, too, and the brief interval was very welcome to him. However, when he sprang to his feet at the sound of the gong for the next round he was as alert and jaunty as ever. His seconds had done their work well.

There was an ugly look in his eyes as he entered into the fight with renewed vigour. For some moments the pair moved about, waiting for an opening, and now Rhodes was beginning to become wild and savage. He made several rushes, but he found it impossible to break through the impregnable guard. Lawrence was boxing now with great confidence, and with a feeling in his heart that he would win. He had gauged his opponent, and he knew that he was the better man.

Just for a moment Rhodes was careless, and Lawrence seized his opportunity. He landed a jolting hook which sliced through Jimmy's guard without difficulty, and the punch went straight home to his neck. Rhodes swayed back, and Lawrence followed him up.

Thud, thud, thud!

Again and again the schoolboy smashed home blows upon Jimmy's chest, blows that could not be parried. Rhodes was confused, bewildered. He could not understand this. He could not realise that he was being beaten, gradually, but surely, by a youngster who was absolutely unknown.

"Buck up, Jimmy!"

"Put some ginger into it, man!"

"He's all over you, Rhodes—wake up!"

All sorts of shouts came from the crowd. But the words only reached Rhodes in an indistinct blur. He could understand nothing. He was only

aware of the fact that he was faced by a whirlwind, and that he could not see clearly or think clearly, or act with any decision. He waited in a dull kind of way for the sound of the gong. He wanted the round to end, for he was beginning to fear that very shortly a blow would be delivered which would send him down, to remain down until counted out.

"Time!"

It was a welcome sound for Jimmy, and he fairly reeled back into his corner. His face was bruised and battered.

Lawrence, on the other hand, was still looking fresh, but he had several ugly marks upon his cheeks, and his lip was cut. He had received a good deal of punishment, but he was as sturdy and as confident as ever.

"Well done, kid!"

A good many members of the audience were filled with enthusiasm now—enthusiasm for Young Ern, for the lad was putting up a display which surprised everybody. The older hands were beginning to understand that Lawrence was a little wonder—that his boxing was finished and perfect, as well as high perfect as any boxing could be.

"That kid's born to be a champion, you mark my words!" said one man. "He'll beat all comers, and never turn a hair!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Fullwood, up in the balcony. "I—I can't quite believe it, you chaps! Lawrence is doing the trick—he is winning!"

"Looks like it!" muttered Gulliver. "What about our little bet?"

"Lawrence hasn't won yet," said Bell, with a scowl, "the rotter! I thought he'd be nowhere, but he seems to be doing fine, by all I can see."

Fullwood & Co. did not take pride in the fact that Young Ern was a member of their own school. They were only thinking of their bet, and they were worrying because it seemed that Lawrence would win. In that case their money would be gone.

"Time!"

The next round commenced, and this round was not to be so successful for Ernest Lawrence. Rhodes was desperate now, and he put everything he knew into his attack. He went for Lawrence with terrific ferocity, and drew him into a corner of the ring. And then, before Ernest could be aware of the fact, a blow landed upon his jaw which sent his neck back with a jerk, and, quick as lightning, Rhodes brought his other fist round and smashed it heavily upon his opponent's cheek. Lawrence fell into a clinch, and Rhodes pressed his arms down against his opponents.

"Break away, there!"

It was the referee's voice, and Jimmy loosened his grip and stood out to distance.

Lawrence was now racked with pain, and he was feeling rather dazed. Jimmy Rhodes seized that short advantage and came rushing in, sweeping Lawrence's guard completely aside.

Crash! Thud!

One fist went hammering against Lawrence's chest, and the other caught him between the eyes. He swayed back and fell upon his knees, then dropping on to his hands.

"Stand back!" commanded the referee.

Jimmy stood back, breathing hard, his face wearing an ugly leer of triumph.

"One, two, three, four——"

The time-keeper was counting, and the vast crowd held its breath. Was this the end? Had the unknown boxer been beaten? It certainly seemed like it, for Lawrence made no attempt to move. He stayed there, upon his hands and knees, apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

But such was not the case.

Lawrence knew well enough that he had received heavy punishment, and he wanted the breathing space. He listened to the counting, and he knew precisely what was going on. This little respite had already cleared his head,

and he was ready for the fight once more. But every second was of value to him in this extremity.

"Eight, nine——" said the time-keeper.

Lawrence leapt to his feet with an agility which surprised everybody. He was ready again, and he proved this during the very next second.

For Rhodes came forward, ready to close with his supposedly beaten opponent. But this time Lawrence was ready, and his guard was perfect. Jimmy found it absolutely impossible to break through that defence.

The gong sounded, and the round was over.

That interval of one minute did not seem very long, but Lawrence's seconds worked with a will, and when "Time!" was called again the lad felt himself once more.

Rhodes evidently thought that he had the fight in his own hands now, for he began the round by making a swift, savage attack. It was an example of over-confidence.

For Lawrence attacked, too.

His right swept right through, and smashed upon Rhodes' face with a thud which sent a jar right through the professional's frame.

And then, before Jimmy could cover, the junior brought home a left on the point of the jaw which made Jimmy dizzy.

He fell away, and Lawrence was not slow to realise that he had all the advantage. He followed Rhodes up, battling fiercely, and he kept the man on the go without respite. Again and again he smashed into Rhodes, his fists thudding home like clockwork.

Rhodes was bewildered and confused, and he was obviously a beaten man. Lawrence made a feint with his left, and then put all his power into a right punch which went straight for the target.

Lawrence's fist struck Jimmy Rhodes fully upon the point, and the professional simply crumpled up. He crashed

into the ropes, swayed back and rolled over. He lay there, a beaten man.

The count commenced.

"One, two, three——"

Jimmy Rhodes only stirred slightly. He attempted to rise, but found it impossible, and at last the word sounded: "Out!"

"Young Ern wins!" said the referee.

Mr. Norman Rook slapped his thigh.

"By George!" he muttered, his eyes gleaming. "I knew it! That boy is a living wonder!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Informer!

THE events which happened immediately after the fight seemed like a dream to Ernest Lawrence. He knew that he received eighty pounds in currency notes from Mr. Rook, and that gentleman was enthusiastic. He declared that before long he would fix up a fight for Young Ern for a purse of one hundred and fifty pounds!

Lawrence was dazed by that statement, and he could not fully realise what his success meant to him.

He did not fully recover his wits until he found himself in the train, bound for Bellton. And the thrill which went through him was an extremely pleasant one. He had won—he had beaten Jimmy Rhodes! And the evidence of this was in his pocket—for he had the eighty pounds there. It was almost too wonderful to be true.

It pleased him to think that he would be at St. Frank's before bed-time—and that no questions would be asked. Certainly, his face was knocked about—he had several ugly bruises, and his lower lip was cut. But this was nothing particularly alarming. Schoolboys very frequently go about with black eyes, and other ornamentations. Lawrence did not think that there would be many awkward questions.

He decided what he would do with the money. On the morrow he would

send every penny of it to his father by registered post. But, of course, he would not enclose any letter.

Mr. Lawrence would receive the money, and he would not know from whence it came. If he did know, there would be many awkward questions to answer—and Ernest could not face them.

Meanwhile, Fullwood & Co. had left for St. Frank's by an earlier train. They had not been compelled to remain in Helmford after the fight. And they just caught a handy train home. They were furious. For they had lost their bets, and they blamed Lawrence for this. Of course, Lawrence was responsible, since he had won the fight. But it was a blow to the knuts. They had been certain of their money—and they had lost.

"The cad! The beastly rotter!" exclaimed Fullwood savagely. "I'll tell you what, you chaps—I'm going to show him up!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Gulliver. "You can't do that, Fully—we can't let anybody know that we were at that fight——"

"It won't be necessary to tell a soul," said Fullwood. "All we've got to do is to send a typewritten letter to the Head. I can use the typewriter in the prefects'-room. We needn't sign it, of course, and he won't know where it's come from. The Head will only have to make a few inquiries, and then the truth will come out—and Lawrence will get it in the neck—he'll be sacked!"

"And he jolly well ought to be sacked!" said Bell. "I call it disgraceful—a St. Frank's fellow prize-fighting in a place like the Ring Pavilion at Helmford! It's lowering the tone of the school!"

The knuts were very indignant with Lawrence—for winning. And it was in keeping with their characters that they should think of some scheme to bring about the schoolboy boxer's downfall. If ever they could do anybody a bad

turn, they were only too delighted to do so.

The cads of Study A arrived at St. Frank's in good time—we'll before supper, in fact. And they went straight to their study. Fullwood then sneaked away to the prefects' room. It was fortunate for the knuts that the prefects were all engaged at a meeting, which was being held in the Lecture Hall. The prefects' room, therefore, was deserted. And Fullwood lost no time in typing out his precious letter.

It was quite short, and Fullwood typed it all in capitals, without any address or signature. And when he had finished it ran as follows:

"A prize fight has taken place at the Ring Pavilion, Helmford, between Jimmy Rhodes and Young Ern. It took place this evening. Young Ern is another name for Ernest Lawrence, of the Remove. He deserves to be expelled from St. Frank's for taking part in this disgraceful bout. Please do your duty."

It was certainly very brief, but nothing more was necessary. The words were typed upon a plain sheet of paper, enclosed in an envelope, and then Fullwood took it across and dropped it into the Head's letter-box with his own hand.

Just as it happened, the Head had been out that evening—paying a call at the Vicarage—and as he came in—about five minutes after Fullwood had visited the letter-box—he happened to glance in the box, and he saw the envelope. He glanced at it and saw that it was addressed to him. It had evidently been delivered by hand, and the Head took it into his study, rather curious.

A few moments later his brow was as black as thunder, and he was staring at the letter in amazement and anger.

"This certainly cannot be true!" he murmured. "It is some foolish practical joke—and I shall certainly dis-

cover the joker and punish him with the utmost severity. It is out of the question that Lawrence should have been in Helmford this evening—engaged in a prize fight!"

However, the Head meant to get to the bottom of the matter at once—and he lost no time in ringing for Tubbs, the page-boy. Tubbs read the danger signs at once.

"Kindly go over to the College House, Tubbs, and bring Master Lawrence to me!" commanded the Head.

"Yessir!" said the page-boy.

He vanished, and went over to the College House. Lawrence, as it happened, had only just got in, and he was feeling weary and tired—and he ached in almost every limb after his hard fight. He was rather alarmed because his face was bruised and swollen, and he hoped that he would not attract very much attention. And he had hardly sat down in Study T before a tap sounded upon the door, and Tubbs appeared.

"Come in!" said Lawrence wearily.

The page-boy entered.

"Very sorry, Master Lawrence, but you're wanted in the Head's study at once," said Tubbs. "I'm awfully sorry, young gent—but the 'Ead looks terrible black. Askin' your pardon, Master Lawrence, but it looks to me as though you've been fightin', and the 'Ead must have 'eard about it!"

"But—but it's impossible!" panted Lawrence, getting to his feet, his face flushing with alarm.

He accompanied Tubbs to the Head's study, with his brain in a whirl. He was trying to think how Dr. Stafford could have learned the truth. It seemed absolutely out of the question to Lawrence. Why, he had only just got back! How was it possible for the Head to have learned the truth by this time?

"This way, Master Lawrence!"

Tubbs opened the door of the Head's study, and stood aside. Lawrence

walked in and found the headmaster seated at his desk. He was looking very stern, and, looking up at Lawrence, he beckoned.

"Come here, my boy!" said Dr. Stafford. "Read this!"

He passed over that letter, and Lawrence took it, and the words danced before his eyes as though they were alive. He started violently, and the blood ran out of his cheeks. The Head had done this deliberately—for he wished to see what effect the letter would have. He was quite satisfied that those words were true. There was no look of astonishment on Lawrence's face—only amazement and dismay. Furthermore, Dr. Stafford did not fail to notice the signs.

The junior's face was bruised—it was swollen—his lower lip was cut. All these things told their own story. Lawrence certainly had been engaged in this prize fight at Helmford! It was staggering—and the Head was furious.

"I do not think it is necessary for me to question you, Lawrence!" said the Head, in a grim, harsh voice. "Your guilt is absolutely obvious!"

"I—I——"

"It will be better, Lawrence, if you say nothing whatever!" thundered Dr. Stafford, rising to his feet. "I will hear no words of excuse from you. You have disgraced yourself utterly and completely!"

"But—but please let me speak, sir——" gasped Lawrence desperately.

"I will not allow you to speak!" stormed the Head. "The less you can say the better, you wretched boy. You have disgraced yourself beyond all redemption. You have engaged in a low prize fight for money—and your punishment will be drastic and immediate!"

Lawrence was too dazed by this blow to say much. He could only stand there, pale to the lips, staring at the headmaster dumbly. His brain was in a whirl. But there were one or

two things which stood out clearly in his fevered mind. This was the end!

His great success, which had made him feel so happy—his effort to help his father—had ended in this way! It would mean expulsion—disgrace!

Racked with pain as the lad was, he felt that this was almost more than he could bear. He was aching in every limb, and now he was doomed to suffer mental agony as well. Lawrence felt that he would be relieved if the floor opened and allowed him to sink through. He tried to speak, but the words choked in his throat.

"I had intended to question you, and obtain your story, Lawrence," went on the Head, his voice sounding a mere blur to the wretched junior. "But there is no need for me to ask any more questions—your face tells me the absolute truth. You must not imagine that I have any objection to boxing as a sport. It is a fine, manly sport. But you have degraded the art, by going to a common, disreputable place, and fighting for the sake of money. That is what I object to—that is why I am now angry."

"But, sir——"

"Not one word, Lawrence—I will hear no excuses!" thundered the Head. "Your very attitude is sufficient for me. I will not listen to any of your attempts to put yourself right in my eyes. That cannot be done, boy. Nothing that you can say will alter my verdict. You have disgraced yourself, and you have disgraced the school. That is sufficient! The Ring Pavilion, at Helmford, is a low, common, prize-fighting booth, and that you could ever have appeared there is a mystery to me. But perhaps there is a natural explanation. I know that your father, years ago, was a professional boxer himself. He sent you to St. Frank's because he wants you to grow up a gentleman. But you have abused your father's kindness. And, Lawrence, it will be utterly impossible for you to remain at St. Frank's!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Lawrence, horrified. "You—you don't mean——"

"In no circumstances can I allow you to remain at the school," interrupted Dr. Stafford grimly. "Tomorrow morning, Lawrence, you will leave St. Frank's for ever—after being publicly expelled."

The junior almost staggered.

"Oh, but—but—you don't understand——"

"I understand all that is necessary, Lawrence!" exclaimed the Head. "You will say nothing further—for I do not wish to hear you. You will remain silent, boy!"

The Head sat down and touched the bell. A moment or two later Tubbs entered, and he was looking rather scared. Perhaps the page-boy had been listening outside the door, for he cast a sympathetic look towards Lawrence of the Remove."

"Tubbs, you will go immediately to the Sixth Form passage and bring Fenton back with you!" said the headmaster. "And do not lose any time."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubbs.

After he had gone, Lawrence stood there, unable to say a word—almost unable to think. He could see the headmaster sitting at his desk—but he could only see a mere blur—an outline. The whole room seemed to be swimming. His head ached, and his limbs were filled with pain. And then Fenton came—Fenton of the Sixth.

"You will take this boy to the punishment-room, Fenton," said Dr. Stafford grimly.

"Certainly, sir!" said the captain of St. Frank's. "I'm sorry to see Lawrence in trouble——"

"Lawrence is to be expelled in the morning, Fenton," interrupted the headmaster curtly. "You will take him to the punishment-room, and lock him in securely."

"Yes, sir," said Fenton, rather startled.

And Ernest Lawrence was led out, and taken to the punishment-room. It

had all been so sudden—so terribly sudden.

Only a short fifteen minutes earlier he had arrived back at St. Frank's, successful and triumphant. Now everything was lost—and, on the morrow, he would be sent back home—in dire disgrace.

It seemed almost impossible that this disaster could have overtaken him.

But it was true—appallingly true!

CHAPTER 11.

Defying the Blackmailer!

MR. SMALE FOXE was looking very thoughtful as he stood outside the door of the headmaster's study. He had just tapped, and was waiting for the invitation to enter. The Housemaster of the College House had thought deeply before coming on this mission.

He had heard about the disaster which had befallen Lawrence of the Remove. Fenton had returned to the Head's study to report that he had placed the junior in the punishment-room. And the Head had instructed Fenton to go over to Mr. Foxe at once with a message that the Housemaster should attend Dr. Stafford's study without delay. However, the Head had not mentioned to Fenton why Ernest Lawrence was to be expelled.

And Mr. Smale Foxe had been thinking rather deeply.

"Come in!" came the Head's deep voice.

Mr. Foxe entered the study and closed the door behind him.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said, stepping forward into the room.

"Yes, Mr. Foxe—yes!" said the Head, who was looking deeply worried. "I wish to talk to you about Lawrence—of your House. I regret to inform you, Mr. Foxe, that Lawrence is to be expelled in the morning."

"Indeed, sir!" said Mr. Foxe, looking astonished. "You surprise me

greatly! I have always regarded Lawrence as one of my best pupils—he has always been quiet and reserved and extremely well-behaved—”

“No doubt Lawrence has been an excellent boy in school hours,” interrupted Dr. Stafford. “But you will be astounded, Mr. Foxe, when you learn that he actually engaged in a prize fight this evening at Helmford. A prize fight for a large money prize!”

Mr. Smale Foxe smiled.

“I am more astounded than I can say, Dr. Stafford!” he said smoothly. “Did Lawrence admit his guilt—did he admit that he was in Helmford this evening, engaged in a prize fight?”

“Well, not exactly,” said the Head. “I did not give Lawrence any chance to speak—I did not intend him to offer me any excuses. The evidence was quite sufficient, and the wretched boy—”

“Pardon me, sir, for interrupting,” said Mr. Foxe. “Do I understand you to say that you did not allow Lawrence to speak—you did not give him a chance to admit or deny the charge?”

The Head looked up.

“I certainly did not give Lawrence any chance to speak!” he said. “The very appearance of the boy was sufficient proof of his guilt. His face is bruised and battered—ample evidence, Mr. Foxe. Furthermore, he started with real guilt when I showed him this letter—my source of information.”

“May I see the letter, sir?”

“Certainly, Mr. Foxe—it is here.”

The Head passed it over, and Mr. Foxe glanced rapidly at the typewritten words.

“Do you know who sent this letter to you, sir?” he inquired, looking up.

“No; I haven’t the faintest idea,” replied the Head. “It was in my letter-box; but I am extremely glad that somebody unknown realised his sense of duty sufficiently to inform me—”

“I am seriously afraid, Dr. Stafford, that you have made a grave mistake!” interrupted Mr. Foxe smoothly. It is

a pity you did not give Lawrence a chance to speak, or he would have denied this charge.”

“I am quite certain he would have denied it—and I did not wish to hear any lies,” said the Head grimly.

“You would not have heard lies, sir,” went on Mr. Foxe. “It is very unfortunate that you gave Lawrence no chance to speak, because I can prove that he is quite innocent.”

The Head started.

“You—you can prove it?” he inquired sharply. “What do you mean, Mr. Foxe?”

“Precisely what I say, sir,” said the Housemaster. “It is stated in this message that Lawrence is ‘Young Ern.’ That is quite impossible and out of the question.”

The Head rose to his feet.

“Dear me!” he ejaculated. “I shall never forgive myself if I have done the boy an injustice! Please be more explicit, Mr. Foxe. I shall be greatly interested to know how you can prove Lawrence’s innocence. Personally, I have no doubt whatever of his guilt!”

“I do not see how Lawrence could have been engaged in this prize fight, as you imagine,” said the Housemaster. “It is stated in this message that Lawrence was in Helmford this evening, and that he fought a person known as Jimmy Rhodes. That is quite impossible, for the simple reason that Lawrence was with me in Caistowe at the time.”

“Good gracious!” ejaculated the Head, starting. “Lawrence was with you—in Caistowe?”

“Precisely, sir!” said Mr. Foxe. “Lawrence has been with me practically the whole evening—and I think you will admit that it is impossible for the boy to be in two places at one and the same time.”

“But—but, my dear sir!” protested the Head. “I—I hardly know what to say! I was certain of the lad’s guilt—”

“Then all I can say, sir, is that you

have made a grave blunder!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I happened to be going to Caistowe this evening, and I met Lawrence in the lane. I suggested that he should come with me, and we both went together. We were, in fact, in Caistowe at the very time this prize fight took place at Helmford.

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the Headmaster, looking very blank. "This—is is staggering! And I have accused that boy of this thing, and I did not give him any chance to deny the charge! How very distressing!"

Never for one instant did the headmaster suspect Mr. Foxe in this affair. Why, indeed, should he? How was the headmaster to know that Mr. Smale Foxe was lying in an extremely glib manner? And, of course, it was quite impossible for Dr. Stafford to doubt Mr. Foxe's word. Mr. Foxe was the Housemaster of the College House, and there could be no possible reason for shielding the junior in this way. Such a supposition did not enter the headmaster's head.

"I must beg of you, sir, to do your utmost to release Lawrence without delay," went on Mr. Foxe. "If you desire further witnesses I will obtain them. I can produce many people who saw both myself and Lawrence in Caistowe——"

"My dear sir, please stop!" interrupted the Head. "Your word is quite sufficient—I require no further witnesses. Upon my soul! Whoever wrote this message is a base scoundrel! His intention, evidently, was to get Lawrence into disgrace—and he nearly succeeded! It was most unjust of me to refuse the boy permission to speak. I am more glad than I can say, Mr. Foxe, that you have come forward in this way. You have prevented a terrible miscarriage of justice! I will send for Lawrence at once.

"It is really the only thing you can do, sir," said Mr. Foxe smoothly.

"But just one moment!" interrupted Dr. Stafford, looking thoughtful. "Can

you possibly explain, Mr. Foxe, how it is that Lawrence's face is rather badly battered? It was that fact which caused me to be quite certain——"

"The matter really requires little explanation," said Mr. Foxe, smiling. "I admit that it is a coincidence—and it is not surprising that you should jump to one conclusion. We were walking down a quiet side street in Caistowe, when we happened to see a ruffian beating a dog in the most cruel manner. Before I could interfere Lawrence dashed forward and attacked the man. It was very foolish of him to do so, because the fellow turned upon the boy and struck him several severe and brutal blows upon the face. Naturally, I interfered at once, and I succeeded in delivering one or two heavy blows before the man took to his heels. I was rather concerned as to Lawrence's condition at the moment, but he made light of it."

The Head's face cleared.

"I am extremely pleased to hear this, Mr. Foxe," he said. "We will waste no further time."

He touched his bell, and once again Tubbs appeared—this time with great alacrity. It was obvious that the page-boy had been hovering about in the passage.

"Will you please go to Fenton at once, Tubbs, and instruct him to bring Lawrence back to this study?" said the Head. "Make haste, my boy."

"Right, sir!" said Tubbs, with great cheerfulness.

It was not long before Fenton appeared, accompanied by Lawrence, who was looking bewildered and rather dazed. The junior could not imagine why he was being brought back to Dr. Stafford's study.

But he was astonished to see the expression on the Head's face—and he was still more astonished when Dr. Stafford came forward and grasped his hand.

"My boy, I am at a loss for words!" said the Head gently. "I have done

you a grave injustice, and I can only trust that you will forgive me."

"I—I don't understand, sir!" said Lawrence, bewildered.

"Mr. Foxe has come forward, and he has told me the exact truth," smiled the headmaster. "You understand now, Lawrence?"

"The—the exact truth, sir?" stammered Lawrence.

"Yes; and it is very fortunate for you that Mr. Foxe was with you in Caistowe this evening," went on the headmaster. "I know everything, my boy. Mr. Foxe has told me how you went with him to Caistowe, and how you were there when the fight was actually taking place in Helmford. If I had given you a chance to speak all might have been well. I trust that you will forgive me, my lad?"

The junior felt that his brain was reeling—he could not possibly understand all this.

"But—but——"

"There is no necessity for you to say anything, Lawrence," interrupted Mr. Foxe, giving the lad a nudge. "Everything is cleared up, and it is not at all necessary for you to go into any explanations—I have done all that!"

And Lawrence understood — only dimly at first, but he understood. He knew that Mr. Smale Foxe had provided him with an alibi. Perhaps, if Lawrence had not been quite so amazed and bewildered he would have told the truth then and there. He hardly knew what to say. He was dumb—with amazement and relief. But he guessed that Mr. Foxe had some ulterior motive in acting in this way, and it was quite clear that the Housemaster did not want Lawrence to speak. For, of course, the boy would probably put his foot in it if he said anything.

The one fact which filled Mr. Foxe with satisfaction was that Lawrence had not been permitted to say anything during that first interview with the Head. For, if the junior had admitted his guilt, it would have been impossible

to provide him with an alibi. As matters now stood, everything was perfectly satisfactory.

How Lawrence got out of the Head's study he hardly knew. But he faintly remembered that Mr. Foxe led him out, and then the junior found himself across the Triangle, in his own study. Mr. Foxe had come with him, and he was now in the study, with the door closed.

"Well, young man, you ought to be very grateful to me!" said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I got you out of a very tight-corner. I know full well that you were in Helmford, and that you are Young Ern. But I have succeeded in throwing dust into Dr. Stafford's eyes, and, instead of your being publicly expelled on the morrow, you will remain at St. Frank's. And not one word of this story will be allowed to get abroad. You ought to be very grateful to me."

"I—I hardly know what to say, sir," said Lawrence. "It was good of you to help me in that way, but—but perhaps it would have been better to have told the truth. I don't like the idea of anything false being said, just to get me out of a hole——"

"Tut—tut!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "Do not be so foolish! Now we will come to business. I am aware of the fact, Lawrence, that you received thirty pounds for this precious prize fight—to say nothing of an additional sum which was probably given to you by the promoters. Personally, I see no reason why you should not enjoy yourself—why you should not earn a little extra money if you wish. And this boxing scheme of yours has my entire approval."

"If you're going to demand money from me, Mr. Foxe, you won't get any!" interrupted Lawrence grimly. "You had ten pounds last week—simply because I couldn't refuse you. You've no right whatever to demand this money from me. I earned it—I beat Jimmy Rhodes! It was a hard task, and I am aching with pain all over——"

"That makes no difference to me, Lawrence!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Unless you hand me the sum of thirty-five pounds at once—I judge that to be about half of the sum you received—I shall return to the headmaster and inform him of the exact truth. I will give you just one minute to decide. You will give me the money, or I will go to the Head!"

Ernest Lawrence breathed hard, and his eyes glittered. Why should he give up his money to this man—this black-maller? He understood now why Mr. Foxe had got him out of the trouble. It was simply in order to obtain this money! No; he would not give up a penny—not a farthing. For suddenly Lawrence had realised that he was in a safe position."

"Your minute is up, Lawrence!" said Mr. Foxe grimly.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot let you have anything!" said Lawrence firmly. "And I do not think you will go back to the headmaster!"

"What—what do you mean?" demanded the Housemaster, with a start.

"Simply this, sir—I don't very well see how you can go back to Dr. Stafford," said Lawrence. "If you tell him now that I did actually go to Helmsford, you will make yourself out to be a liar!" went on the junior. "You cannot possibly tell another story to Dr. Stafford now without every word of the truth coming out. For you must surely realise, Mr. Foxe, that I shall have no reason to keep silent. And, when the Head finds out that you told a lie to shield me, he will know that I am speaking the truth when I tell him that you have attempted to blackmail me. I defy you, Mr. Foxe—you cannot do anything!"

The Housemaster frowned, and a glint came into his eyes.

And, without another word, Mr. Smale Foxe turned and left the study.

Ernest Lawrence breathed a great sigh of relief.

Mr. Foxe was foiled. His cunning

scheme had come to nothing, and Lawrence of the Remove was still perfectly safe. Everything had turned out in a wonderfully satisfactory manner.

In his own study, Mr. Foxe paced up and down, with pursed lips and glittering eyes. The junior had been one too many for him. But Mr. Foxe was determined to reverse the order of things before so very long. His chance would soon come, and then Lawrence would pay!

CHAPTER 12.

A Split in Study D!

"THREE o'clock!" said Handforth firmly.

"Rats! It's half-past two!" declared McClure.

Handforth glared.

"If you want a thick ear, Arnold McClure, you'd better say so," he roared. "If you contradict me again I'll pulverise you! I say it's three o'clock!"

"And I repeat that it's half-past two——"

"You're both wrong!" interrupted Church, who had just entered Study D. "The exact time now is only just a quarter to two!"

Handforth gazed at Church pityingly.

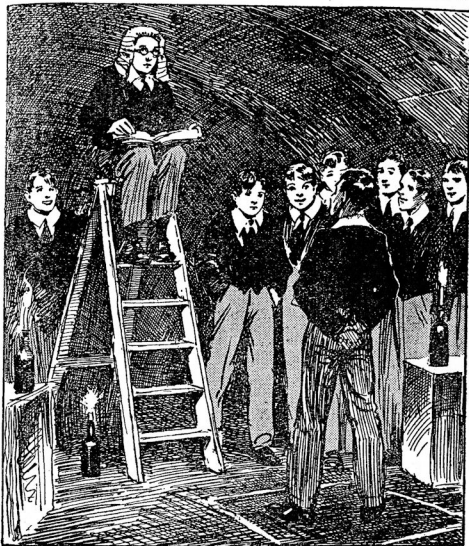
"Who's talking about the exact time?" he demanded. "If you didn't butt in, Walter Church, you wouldn't make an ass of yourself! McClure says that the giddy circus starts at half-past two—and I jolly well know that it doesn't start until three o'clock!"

"Oh, the circus!" said Church. "That's different, of course. As a matter of fact, McClure's right—it does start at half-past two—and we shall have to buck up, or we shall be late for the start."

McClure grinned.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly. "Now what have you got to say, Handy? Here's a witness to prove——"

"Piffle!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got a better witness than this



"Now prisoner at the bar," said Handforth grimly, "did you or did you not engage in a prize fight with one James Rhodes at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford?" "I did," said Lawrence. "You hear that, you chaps?" said Handforth triumphantly. "He admits it!"

fathead! Where's the local paper? There's an advert of the circus in here—and I'll soon prove to you chaps that your memories are in a state of decay!"

The famous trio of Study D were indulging in one of their little arguments. Such scenes as this were of daily—almost hourly—occurrence. If Handforth & Co. ever agreed upon a point without a preliminary argument it was something in the nature of a miracle.

"I'll soon show you!" said Handforth, seizing the "Bannington Gazette" and jerking over the pages. "Now, lemme see—here we are! 'The World's Biggest Circus and Fair. Caistowe, Saturday—Two Performances—One at 2-30—and the other at 7.'"

"Now who's right?" roared Church and McClure in a single voice.

Handforth frowned.

"I'm right!" he said obstinately.

"What!" shrieked Church. "You still say you're right—after seeing the announcement in the paper?"

Handforth nodded calmly.

"Certainly!" he said. "The printer must have made a bloomer in this issue—that's the only possible explanation."

"Well, my only hat!" gasped McClure.

Both he and Church knew well enough that Handforth's obstinacy was startling. But this fairly took the cake. For him to maintain that he was right was sheer and absolute idiocy.

"Anyhow, we're not going to have a row about it!" went on Handforth, realising that it would be better for him to dismiss the subject as soon as possible. "These printers are silly fat-heads at the best of times! I think we'd better be getting off—just to make sure."

"Rather!" said Church. "Come on!"

It was a Saturday half-holiday, and the juniors had made up their minds to run over to Caistowe on their bicycles in order to visit the circus. A number of other juniors were going, too, for this particular circus was reputed to be a

very excellent one, and it was only due to remain in Caistowe for one day. There would be a crowd.

"I say, Handy, do buck up!" said McClure impatiently. "It's nearly two o'clock, and it takes us twenty minutes to get there on our jiggers. We shall find all the giddy seats gone——"

"Eh?" said Handforth absently. "Seats!"

"Yes, ass—at the circus!"

"Circus?" repeated Handforth.

"Ain't we going to Caistowe?" roared Church.

"Caistowe?" said Handforth dreamily.

His chums glared at him.

"You—you giddy parrot!" howled McClure. "Can't you say anything else? What's the matter with you, Handy? You know jolly well we're all going to the circus in Caistowe, and we shall have to hurry up——"

"Oh!" said Handforth, with a start.

He seemed to come to earth, and he smiled.

"As a matter of fact, you chaps," he went on, "we're not going to the circus!"

"Not going!"

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "A circus is a kid's show—and we aren't kids. Just as if we want to go to see a silly, fatheaded circus. Don't stare at me like that, you asses! We aren't going to Caistowe—and there's an end to it!"

At times Handforth would be frightfully exasperating. He would change his mind without warning—and generally without reason. Church and McClure had an awful time with him, and their efforts to stroke him the right way were sometimes quite pathetic. But on this occasion they glared with great indignation.

"You—you blithering ass!" snapped Church. "Only yesterday you were full of enthusiasm for the circus——"

"So he was a few minutes ago!" put in McClure.

Handforth nodded.

"Very likely—but my enthusiasm has vanished," he said calmly. "I've just seen an announcement in the paper, and I've decided that we shall go to Bannington instead. There is something on at the Town Hall which beats the circus into fits. So we're going there, and we shall have to hurry up—"

"The Town Hall!" roared Church. "What is it?"

Handforth passed the paper across, and Church and McClure stared at the announcement. Their feelings can be better imagined than described when they read the following notice:

"TOWN HALL, BANNINGTON. On Saturday afternoon, at two-thirty sharp, Ex-Superintendent Browning, of Scotland Yard will lecture personally on 'Crime Investigation, and Some Celebrated Criminal Cases.' Admission 1s. 3d. and 2s. 4d. (including tax)."

Church looked up in a dazed kind of way.

"Is—is this a joke?" he asked faintly. "Joke!" snorted Handforth. "Of course it isn't a joke, you ass! Fancy me not seeing this advert before. A real Scotland Yard man is to give a lecture on detective work, and all that sort of thing! Why, it beats all your silly old circuses! So we're going straight off to Bannington."

Church and McClure turned red with wrath.

"Do—do you mean to tell me that you'd rather hear this mouldy old lecture than go to a circus?" shouted McClure. "It'll be as dull as ditch-water, Handy—all the chap will do will be to repeat some famous criminal cases—"

"Rats!" said Handforth obstinately. "He'll give a lot of tips about detective work—and you know how interested I am in all that sort of thing. It's a chance in a thousand; and I don't want any of your silly objections! The circus is off—and we're going straight to Bannington."

Handforth said this with an air of

finality—as though there could be no possible argument about the question. As a rule, Church and McClure were submissive. But, at times, they revolted—and this was one of those times. To give up the circus for the sake of a dry old lecture was altogether beyond the limit. But it was just like one of Handforth's usual cranky tricks. There was no telling what he would do next!

"If you want to go to the lecture—you can go!" said Church deliberately. "But if you think you're going to drag us with you—well, you've made a bloomer!"

"A large-sized one!" added McClure. Handforth started.

"Do—do you mean to say that you'll let me go alone?" he asked darkly.

"Yes—if you want to be such a fat-head!" said Church. "We fixed upon going to the circus, and we're going! There's an end of it!"

"Absolutely!" said McClure. Handforth nearly choked.

"You—you rebellious rotters!" he roared. "Mutiny, by George!"

"No!" said Church. "Mutiny by McClure and me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled McClure.

But Handforth did not see the joke.

"I've often threatened to kick you out of this study, and now it's going to happen!" he said sulphurously. "You—you miserable bounders! You—you traitors! You—you blacklegs! You're going to get it in the neck, now—"

Smash!

Handforth's fist shot out, and it caught Church fully upon the nose. Church went over with a crash, howling. This was another of Handforth's fatheaded tricks—to attack his chums without warning. They were so accustomed to his fists that they generally dodged before he could touch them. So Handforth found it necessary to use strategy.

"Yaroooooh!" howled Church. "You rotter! Ow!"

McClure dodged for the door with Handforth in full pursuit. Somehow,

the door stuck, and McClure was a shade too late. And Handforth very considerably assisted his chum through the doorway with the toe of his boot.

McClure rose into the air and fell into the passage with a dull thud.

"Yow—ow—yaroooh!" he bellowed.

Before he could rise to his feet Church came out—upside down. He landed fairly upon McClure.

"Grooooh!" said Church.

"You're out now—you've been kicked out!" exclaimed Handforth. "And if you show your faces in this study again, I won't be answerable for what happens! I've finished with you for good! Understand? For good!"

And Handforth retreated into the study, and slammed the door.

"Hallo—hallo!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, strolling out of Study E. "How many earthquakes have there been? I've counted five, but perhaps I've missed one or two! You chaps seem to be having some fun!"

Church and McClure staggered to their feet.

"We've done with Handy—we've finished with him!" said McClure fiercely.

"Good!" said Pitt.

"Eh?"

"Perhaps we shall have some peace in the passage," went on Pitt. "You don't know what life is in my study. From morning till night all we can hear next door is yells, howls, thuds and crashes! If you chaps go along to some other study it might be better! This is the best news I've heard all the term!"

Handforth jerked out into the passage like a jack-in-the-box.

"And if you try to be funny, Reginald Pitt, I'll give you a dose!" he roared. "I'm just about fed-up—"

"That's one relief!" said Pitt. "If you're fed-up, perhaps you'll be content. I say, you chaps! Handforth has just gone off again—I suggest we take him out and duck his head in the fountain

—to cool him down! If we allow him to go about like this he'll bite somebody—and then there'll be an epidemic of hydrophobia!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of juniors had gathered round, listening.

"Are—are you calling me a dog?" bellowed Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you said it!" said Pitt. "By what I can see, you are displaying all the symptoms of rabies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth didn't take any further time for arguments. He charged forward, with the express intention of knocking Reginald Pitt into the middle of the following week. But Pitt dodged nimbly, chuckling.

And Handforth was seized by many willing hands and dragged to a standstill.

"Lemme go!" howled the leader of Study D. "You—you rotters! Lemme get at him!"

"Not just now, my son!" I grinned. "You mustn't get excited, Handy. This is a sheer waste of time. We're all going off to the circus in Caistowe, and we shall be late for the start, unless we hurry up!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "Blow your silly old circus! Rats to the circus! I'm not going to it—I wouldn't go if you paid me!"

"Oh, good!" said De Valerie. "Then it's pretty certain there won't be a riot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was expecting frightful trouble at the circus," went on De Valerie. "But if Handforth isn't going then we needn't worry."

The excited Edward Oswald was lec-
firmly, forcibly, out into the Triangle. I had a firm grip on him, Pitt had another, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were there, too. Handforth had no chance. He was run out into the centre of the Triangle, and then given a final shove, which sent

him pitching forward. By the time he picked himself up there was nobody on the spot to go for.

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth helplessly.

The next second he had to dodge for his life, for a great body of cyclists came whizzing across from the bicycle shed, straight towards him. He only just succeeded in getting clear in time, and he glared at the cyclists in speechless wrath. They waved their hands, and blew a few kisses towards him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly choked. Then an expression of contempt came over his face, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose they don't know any better—the burbling idiots!" he said witheringly. "Rats to 'em! They can go to their rotten circus! I'm going to spend my time in a better way!"

He strode to the bicycle shed, and his temper was not improved to any great extent when he found that his own cycle had been taken, and the only rideable machine left was an old creak with one mudguard. Handforth didn't know who it belonged to, but he glared at it as though the machine had done him an injury. But it was the only one left, so he was obliged to take it.

"By George!" he muttered. "I'll make somebody pay for this later on."

He wheeled the bicycle out, jumped into the saddle, and rode off. He was accompanied by a series of creaks and rattles, and a group of Third Form fags who had collected near the gate, politely inquired if Handforth had any old iron for sale.

But for the fact that he was late already, Handforth would have got off his machine, and he would have proceeded to chastise the fags in the way they deserved. But Handforth had no time—he would have to pedal for all he was worth in order to get to Bannington by two-thirty. And he did not wish to lose one minute of that important lecture.

Meanwhile, Church and McClure and a crowd of other Remove fellows were speeding towards Caistowe. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were among them, for we were keen upon seeing the circus, too. We went at a good speed, and we arrived at the little seaside town in quite comfortable time; in fact, after we had stored our machines near the circus, we found that the time was just twenty minutes past two. This was quite good.

"Oh, we shall get good seats!" I said. "We're not going in the tanner part, anyhow—and the better seats never fill up so quickly."

We were just crossing the road towards the meadow where the circus was pitched, when Christine, one of the College House, nodded.

"That's old Foxey down there!" he remarked. "I wonder what he's doing in Caistowe? I hope he doesn't come to the circus! There's not much fun in having a Housemaster present!"

I looked down the road, and all the other fellows looked, too. And we saw the figure of Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House. Mr. Foxe saw us looking in his direction, and then he behaved in rather a curious manner.

He was just near a little side turning, and, abruptly, he dodged up this turning, out of view. It certainly seemed as though Mr. Foxe had been extremely anxious to avoid observation. He had only caught sight of us at that moment, and it was quite clear to me that Mr. Foxe did not want us to catch sight of him. But we had already done so—his manoeuvre was too late.

"That's queer!" remarked McClure. "I wonder why he's dodged out of sight like that?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "But Housemasters have their funny little ways, just the same as anybody else. And by all that I can understand, Mr. Foxe is a bit of a mystery—he does things that other Housemasters never do. In any case, if

he wants to dodge, let him—it's his business."

And very shortly afterwards all the juniors, including myself, entered the circus. But for some little time after we had taken our seats, I kept thinking of Mr. Smale Foxe. There had been no mistake—the figure we had seen was the College House master. Why had he attempted to avoid us? Why had he skipped into that little side turning, in the hope that we should not see him?

There was something rather queer about it, and I decided to bear it in mind.

CHAPTER 13.

Nothing Doing!

HANDFORTH arrived in Bannington, accompanied by an awful lot of mud, at exactly twenty-five minutes past two. He was not in the best of tempers, for he had been tearing through mud for a great part of the way, and a considerable portion of that mud had transferred itself on to his clothing, owing to the fact that the bicycle had only one guard.

However, Handforth was in time for the lecture, and that was the main point.

Just as Edward Oswald was dismounting from his machine in front of the town hall, he caught sight of a figure on the other side of the road. And Handforth knew that figure at once.

It was Mr. Smale Foxe!

Yet how could this possibly be? At exactly that same moment, Church and McClure and the other juniors had seen Mr. Smale Foxe in Caistowe—four and a half miles away. But Handforth knew that he had made no mistake. It was not very easy to make a mistake where Mr. Smale Foxe was concerned, for the Housemaster of the College was not an ordinary looking man; he was tall, slim, and he had an exceptionally long nose. His face was clean-

shaven, and—as some of the College House fellows disrespectfully remarked—it was a face which could be recognised a mile off.

And Handforth was rather astonished because Mr. Foxe apparently did not wish to be seen! The Housemaster, upon catching sight of the junior, dodged immediately into the saloon bar of a public-house. Handforth stared, and then sniffed.

"It's a jolly good thing you aren't my Housemaster!" he exclaimed witheringly. "There's a fine example to set—going into pubs! The rotter ought to be reported to the Head!"

And, dismissing the matter from his mind, Handforth went into the town hall for his precious lecture.

Mr. Foxe did not remain long in the public-house; in fact, he was out within a minute, and he kept his eye upon a shop all the time—apparently greatly interested in the ironmonger's shop on the other side of the road.

A figure emerged from the ironmonger's—a junior figure. It was that of Ernest Lawrence. Lawrence had evidently been making a few purchases, for he had a small parcel with him.

The junior went along the pavement, in no particular hurry. He looked into the shop windows idly, and then suddenly he came to a halt, for he found himself confronting Mr. Smale Foxe.

"Good-afternoon, Lawrence!" said the Housemaster.

"Good afternoon, sir!" said Lawrence. "I didn't know you were in the town."

"No?" said Mr. Foxe. "Well, as it happens, my boy, I should like to have a few words with you, in private!"

Lawrence looked at the Housemaster sharply.

"I don't quite understand, sir!" he said.

"I think you do, Lawrence!" replied Mr. Foxe. "In fact, I am quite sure that you understand; and it will be advisable, my lad, if you fall in with my suggestion. I require a few words

in private, and I do not think we can do better than go to the Japanese Cafe, a little farther along."

Lawrence nodded.

"Just as you like, sir," he said quietly.

They walked along, and very soon came to the highly ornamental frontage of the Japanese Cafe. It was quite a nice restaurant, and exceedingly select; in fact, it was the best in Bannington.

They entered, and found the place nearly empty, which was only natural, considering the time. And the cafe was likely to remain partially deserted until about four o'clock, when seekers after tea would be crowding in.

Mr. Foxe led the way to a quiet corner table. The tables were arranged very cunningly in the Japanese Cafe; each one was divided off by curtains and partitions. Thus, it was quite possible to have a very private talk, if one desired to do so.

Mr. Foxe was smiling and pleasant, and he ordered the tea when the waitress came.

"Not much for me, sir!" said Lawrence. "We only had dinner just over an hour ago, you know."

Tea and cakes were brought, and then the pair were left completely to themselves.

When they had finished tea, Mr. Foxe lit a cigarette and then lay back in his seat.

"Now, Lawrence, for our little chat," he said pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," said Lawrence.

"It is natural that you should know what the subject of this chat is to be," went on the Housemaster. "To be quite blunt, I want some money from you, my boy."

"Some—some money?" inquired Lawrence, starting.

"Exactly!"

"But——"

"Please do not put on that surprised tone, Lawrence," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "You know as well as I do why I re-

quire this money—and I intend to have it!"

Lawrence set his jaws firmly.

"I can't let you have any, sir!" he declared. "I haven't got it——"

"What do you mean—you haven't got it?" snapped Mr. Foxe. "You received over sixty pounds for your fight with Jimmy Rhodes. Where would you have spent so much money?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"You infernal young rascal!" said Mr. Foxe harshly. "Those lies will not deceive me! You have the money, practically every penny of it, and I intend to have my share. Do you understand? I will put up with no excuse, and you had better understand, once and for all, that I will not be frustrated."

"I can't let you have——"

"Silence!" said Mr. Foxe. "Let me finish, boy! If you do not supply me with the money I demand, then your life at St. Frank's will be made unbearable. I will make you pay dearly for your obstinacy, and before many days have passed, I will see that you are expelled in disgrace! I can manage that quite easily, Lawrence, make no mistake! Perhaps at the present moment my tongue is tied, for I do not wish to get myself into trouble with the headmaster because of you. But my time will come, and then you will suffer alone. Do you agree to this or not?"

"No, sir, I will not!" said Lawrence quietly.

"You—you——"

Mr. Foxe came to a halt and glared at Lawrence. Then without a word, he rose, pushed the curtain aside and strode out of the restaurant. Again the Housemaster had been defied, but somehow Lawrence felt that sooner or later Mr. Foxe would gain the upper hand.

Lawrence looked at his watch, after a while, and then started.

"My hat!" he muttered. "I shall have to be quick or I shall be too late!"

He paid the bill—Mr. Foxe had

thoughtfully left this for Lawrence's attention—and then took his departure from the restaurant. He went straight along the High Street, and made his way to the railway station, arriving just as a train was pulling up against the platform.

Lawrence waited, and within a minute or two a small, well-dressed figure approached him. It was Mr. Norman Rook.

"Ah, my boy! I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed heartily. "How are you feeling?"

"Splendid, sir!" said the junior.

"That's excellent!" exclaimed Mr. Rook. "I have been anxious to see you ever since your fight with Jimmy Rhodes. I can tell you my lad, you have opened the eyes of the Helmford crowd! They never expected you to win; they were positively certain that Rhodes would wipe you up! It was a great victory for you! I may say that you are the most wonderful little boxer I have ever met in all my experience!"

"It's very good of you to say that, sir——"

"Very good—fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "You have the science; you have the training. By gad! If you weren't tied to St. Frank's, I could do wonders with you, my lad! As it is, I must arrange your fights so that you can easily attend them, without anybody at St. Frank's knowing about it. I can tell you, it's a puzzle, but I think I shall be successful."

"It's very good of you, sir, but——"

"I will not hear any objections, my boy!" interrupted Mr. Rook. "I am fixing up a fight for you now, which, if you win, will finally establish your reputation. And the purse for this next fight will be quite a considerable one—not a farthing under one hundred and fifty pounds."

"My goodness! ejaculated Lawrence, starting.

"Ah, that makes you think, doesn't it?" smiled Mr. Rook. "You see what success brings you, my boy! And things

will get better and better, make no mistake! This next fight I am arranging for you will be a splendid one, and I am quite certain that you will win, although you will have a harder man to deal with than Jimmy Rhodes."

"Who will it be, sir?" inquired Lawrence.

Mr. Rook shook his head.

"I don't quite know yet, my boy," he replied. "I have several irons in the fire, and I shall know definitely by Monday. But, if possible, I want to match you against a well-known man. And it isn't my policy to waste time over these fights. This next bout, if I can manage it, will take place within a fortnight."

"It's awfully good of you to take so much trouble over me, Mr. Rook," said Lawrence; "but I don't think that I shall be able to go in for another fight——"

"Do you mean that you won't be fit?"

"Oh, no, said the junior. "I'm fit enough now, if it comes to that!"

"Then don't let me hear any more of that talk!" interjected Mr. Rook grimly. "Why, boy, you don't seem to realise what this will mean to you! It's rather a pity I can't tell you anything definite to-day—I wanted to, but I am in the hands of other people. Therefore, we must arrange another meeting for Monday evening."

"It might be difficult for me to get a pass, sir."

"That's quite all right, said Mr. Rook. "On Monday I will come to St. Frank's, so that you shall have no trouble."

Lawrence looked alarmed.

"But—but you mustn't do that!" he exclaimed quickly. "You mustn't be seen at St. Frank's, sir. It wouldn't do at all."

"You need have no fear," smiled Mr. Rook. "I shall not appear at St. Frank's; I shall not be seen by anybody except you. I fully realise the position, and I know that your headmaster regards me as a kind of super-criminal.

Therefore, I shall be careful. Now, isn't there some place near the school where we could meet in private—some out-building or other?

Lawrence thought for a moment.

"Well, sir, there's a kind of barn right at the back of the school," he replied. "It's down at the bottom of the paddock, behind the Head's garden. That barn is always deserted after dark, I know, and I could easily slip over there at the given time and meet you. And I think it would be safe enough, too."

"Then that's good enough," said Mr. Rook. "A barn at the bottom of the paddock behind the Head's garden! Right you are, Lawrence; I will remember! And I will be there at seven o'clock to the minute. Will you promise to meet me?"

"Yes, sir—certainly!" said Lawrence. "But I can't promise to—"

"That's enough!" smiled the other. "At seven o'clock on Monday night, in the old barn at the back of the school. Until then, my boy, good-bye!"

And Mr. Rook shook hands with Ernest Lawrence, and a few minutes later they parted. The boxing-promoter would hear no refusal from the junior, and Lawrence felt somehow that he would be compelled to appear in this next match.

And when Lawrence thought of the purse, and when he thought of his father, he decided in his own mind that there could be only one course to take.

CHAPTER 14.

The Mystery of Mr. Foxe!

"JOLLY good!" said McClure cheerfully. "About the best circus I've ever seen in this district! What do you think, Churchy?"

Church nodded.

"Rather!" he said. "A ripping show! What an ass Handy was not to come with us! I'll bet he's sorry now,

because he couldn't help being fed-up with that mouldy old lecture at Bannington!"

The two juniors had just entered Study D in the Remove passage of the Ancient House. They had returned from the circus, and they were in high spirits. It was now just about tea-time, and Church and McClure were already making preparations. They had bought some extra special pastries from Cais-towe with them, and they were intent upon having a swell tea.

The fire was made up, the kettle was put on, and other details received attention. Church and McClure bustled about with a will, totally ignoring the fact that they had been expelled from the study for good. Naturally, they took no notice of this. On the average, they were told to clear out of Study D about three times a week.

"I expect Handy will be coming in before long," said Church, as he cut the bread-and-butter. "And if he isn't in a shocking temper, I shall be surprised. Perhaps this grub will put him in a good humour; he's bound to be hungry, and I must say that the ham looks spiffing and the pastry is first-class. But if Handy starts any of his fat-headed tricks, we'll soon show him a thing or two!"

"Shush! He's coming, I think!"

Crash!

The door burst open and Handforth entered. This was his usual method of coming in. He just delivered one kick, and cared nothing about locks or fastenings. And, to the astonishment of Church and McClure, their leader was looking cheerful and good-humoured.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said genially.

"Getting tea ready? Good! I'm famished! A jolly good spread, too, by the look of it. That's the style! Cycling always gives a fellow a ripping appetite."

Church and McClure exchanged glances. This was better than they had expected. By some extraordinary

chance, Handforth had returned in a good temper. It really seemed that he had enjoyed his afternoon, after all.

Certainly he had quite forgotten the squabble which had taken place just after dinner. But Handforth's memory was always a short one, after he had recovered his good humour. He even forgot his clothing was muddy, and that he was going to slaughter somebody for leaving him an old crock instead of a bicycle.

"By the way," he said, as he sat down at the table, "what about that silly circus of yours? I bet it was rotten!"

"Well, you're wrong," said Church. "It was one of the best circuses I've ever seen, and if you'd had any sense, Handy, you would have come with us. You've missed a treat!"

"Rather!" said the other junior.

"Rats!" exclaimed Handforth. "I should have missed a bigger treat if I had come with you! What about this lecture I went to hear? Ex-Superintendent Browning, of Scotland Yard! By George, what a man! What a marvellous detective! Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake aren't in it with him!"

"Who told you he was a marvellous detective?" inquired Church.

"He did himself, of course!" said Handforth. "He told the audience all about his cases—how he had worked them out, step by step, and hunted the criminals down. It was ripping—absolutely great!"

"This Scotland Yard chap seems to think a lot of himself, anyhow," remarked McClure. "I don't call that very modest."

"If a chap is clever, there's no reason why he shouldn't let everybody know it," said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to boast, but I will say that my detective ability is rather out of the ordinary. But I've never had a chance to display it. All I require is a decent case, and then I shall make things hum!"

"I'll bet you will!" said Church, with conviction.

"Of course, there's a bit of a mystery

about Mr. Foxe," went on Handforth thoughtfully. "There's something queer about the master of the College House. I should like to get at the bottom of it, if I could, but it's not mysterious enough for me. I want something bigger—something more important. Foxey is a queer chap, and I can't quite get to the bottom of him. I saw him this afternoon, just before I went into the town hall, and I'm blest if he didn't dodge into the saloon bar of a public-house! You might have thought that he was afraid of me seeing him!"

Church and McClure both looked up. "You saw Mr. Foxe this afternoon?" inquired Church.

"Yes."

"What time was it—exactly?" inquired McClure.

"Twenty-five minutes past two," said Handforth promptly. "I know that for a fact, because I was just outside the town hall, ready to go in, and I was five minutes before time. Mr. Foxe went into that little pub on the other side of the road."

"At twenty-five past two?" asked Church.

"Yes, you fathead!"

"Absolutely impossible!" repeated McClure. "It wasn't Mr. Foxe you saw!" He was in Caistowe at twenty-five past two."

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you——"

"Piffle!" said Handforth. "Foxey in Caistowe at twenty-five past two? Don't talk out of the back of your neck, you ass! Mr. Foxe was in Bannington at that time——"

"Oh, all right! have your own way!" said Church irritably. "You generally do. But Church and I happened to see Foxey in Caistowe! Not only that, but several other chaps saw him, too—Nipper, and Watson, and Tregellis-West, and Pitt—we all saw him. He dodged out of our way, as though he was afraid of us seeing him!"

Handforth stared.

"Oh, there's something queer about

this!" he exclaimed. "I saw Foxey in Bannington—and he tried to dodge me, just as you say. You didn't see Foxe—that's a cert. The chap you saw was somebody who looks like him!"

"All right; have it that way, if you like," said McClure. "It simply comes to this, then—there are two editions of Mr. Smale Foxe walking about. Because it's absolutely impossible for a man to be in two places at one and the same time. You saw him in Bannington, and we saw him in Caistowe—at the same minute. That's obviously impossible, and so there must be two of 'em!"

"Two Mr. Foxes?"

"Yes," said McClure. "That's the only way to account for it. So we'd better let the argument drop, and say no more about it."

Church, of course, was fully convinced that Handforth had made a mistake, and that the man he had seen was a total stranger. And McClure knew better than to argue, and his chief object now was to bring the discussion to a close. He could see ructions ahead, unless they were careful.

But Handforth took the thing in quite a different way to what McClure had expected. He suddenly jumped to his feet, his face flushing with excitement, and he paced up and down the study with short, restless strides.

"By George!" he ejaculated at last. "A mystery—a regular puzzle! It's just what I was on the look-out for—and here it is, thrown into my hands, ready to be unravelled!"

"Eh?" gasped McClure.

"What?" said Church faintly.

"A mystery—a real, impenetrable mystery!" said Handforth. "I'm going to investigate this, and I'm not going to lose any time about it! There are two Mr. Foxes—two men exactly the same. The Housemaster of the College House has got a double!"

"Oh, my goodness!" said McClure.

"A double!" repeated Handforth

firmly. "That's the only explanation. There are two men who look exactly alike in every detail, and I shouldn't be surprised if there's a conspiracy of some kind."

"You—you burbling idiot!" said McClure. "You must be mad!"

But Handforth was too excited to take any notice of the insult.

"I'm going to watch Mr. Foxe as a cat watches a mouse!" he went on keenly. "I'm going to watch him day and night—I'm going to be his shadow! And, sooner or later, I shall succeed in unravelling the knot!"

And Handforth, grabbing his cap, marched out of Study D, and banged the door after him. Church and McClure gazed at one another rather blankly.

"Well, I'm blest," said Church. "Fancy the ass taking it like that!"

"Oh, there's no accounting for what he'll do!" said McClure. "Let him go. Thank goodness he didn't try to drag us with him! He'll cool off after a bit—after he's met with failure. It's no good trying to knock sense into his head—you might just as well talk to a coconut!"

Meanwhile, Handforth met with an extraordinary piece of luck.

As a general rule, if Handforth started any attempt at detective work, he met with dismal and absolute failure; but, on this occasion, by some trick of fate, he was permitted to find out something of the utmost importance. It was just an example of "fools' luck."

Handforth went straight out into the Triangle. He had no particular plan in mind, except that he was going to hang about the College House, in the hope of catching sight of Mr Smale Foxe. And he certainly did think of approaching the Housemaster's window. But Handforth had not been out in the Triangle for more than three minutes before he gave a start.

A figure had just emerged from the lobby of the College House—a figure which Handforth knew at once. It

was Mr. Foxe himself! The Housemaster was intent upon going out, for he was wearing a thick overcoat and a tweed cap.

"By George!" muttered Handforth. "This is ripping! I shall get on the track straight away!"

He quite overlooked the fact that Mr. Foxe was probably going down to the post office, or on some innocent errand of that kind. But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Foxe was not setting off on such an innocent mission.

He walked across the Triangle, and then made his way down Bellton Lane, in the direction of the village. And Handforth followed behind, at some little distance.

If Mr. Smale Foxe had been suspicious—if he had suspected that somebody was shadowing him—Handforth would have had no chance. But Mr. Foxe did not even once glance backwards.

And, after walking down the lane for some little way, Mr. Foxe came to a halt.

Handforth started, and crouched near the hedge. For he knew that the Housemaster had come to a stop just against the old stile which led into the depth of Bellton Wood. Mr. Foxe was intent upon going along the footpath! This, in itself, looked suspicious to Handforth's mind. Why should a respectable Housemaster want to go into the depth of a wood in the darkness of the evening?

Mr. Foxe stepped over the stile, and then completely vanished from view.

"My hat!" muttered Handforth, in alarm.

For he was afraid that he would lose his quarry. He ran lightly down the lane, slowing down somewhat as he approached the stile. And he did not risk going right up to the stile itself. Instead, he wormed his way through a gap in the hedge, which was situated about ten yards away. Handforth found himself in the wood, and he crouched still for a moment or two, and heard the crackling of twigs.

Inch by inch, Handforth went forward, and still he could hear the sound of twigs being broken under foot. And Handforth came to one conclusion—Mr. Foxe had not taken the footpath through the wood, but had stopped after penetrating a hundred yards. And now he was pacing up and down, killing time; in fact, Mr. Foxe was waiting for somebody! This supposition was proved to be true almost at once, for, when Handforth had got somewhat closer, he came to a halt. Other footsteps were sounding, and they were coming from the direction of the lane. Then a dim figure loomed up, and came along the footpath. It passed on, and then Handforth heard a mutter of voices. He took this opportunity to worm his way nearer, creeping round trees, and avoiding the bushes. And at last he was in a position where he could see the two figures standing talking to one another in low voices. Handforth stood quite still, listening intently.

And he was somewhat disappointed when he found it impossible to distinguish any of the words that were being said. He only knew that the voice was that of Mr. Foxe; in fact, both voices seemed to be the same! This may have been fancy, but Handforth was certain of it.

Then a match was suddenly struck. It flared up, and Handforth fixed his gaze upon the heads and shoulders of the two men.

And what he saw fairly staggered him.

The men were facing one another, and each had a cigarette in his mouth. The match blazed up quite brilliantly in the still air.

As they lit their cigarettes Handforth saw the faces of the two men quite distinctly.

And it was impossible to tell one from the other. They were alike—absolutely alike in every detail!

It was almost beyond belief!

The man on the left was Mr. Smale

Foxe—and the man on the right was Mr. Smale Foxe!

The thin features, the long nose, bushy eyebrows—everything, in fact! Both men possessed the same features in every tiny detail—one was the double of the other!

Handforth was more startled than he could say; his brain refused to work properly, and his mind was in a state of chaos. Was he seeing correctly, or was this some optical illusion? He had suspected something of the kind, after he had heard what Church and McClure had told him; but here was actual proof of it—positive, concrete proof!

And then the match went out, and only the faint glow of the two cigarettes remained. But Handforth had seen enough—he knew the truth. Mr. Smale Foxe, the Housemaster of the College House, had a double. And Handforth now vaguely remembered one or two puzzling things which had occurred during the past week or so. Mr. Foxe had not been the same on all occasions. Sometimes he had been harsh and overbearing—at other times he had been quite decent.

Handforth formed the startling theory that there had been two Mr. Foxes at St. Frank's—not at the same time, but at different periods. One Mr. Foxe had presided over the College House for a certain time, and his place had then been taken by the other Mr. Foxe!

Handforth would have given a term's pocket-money if he could have heard what the pair were saying; but he could not catch even a single word. It was terribly galling. And then Mr. Foxe and his double commenced walking down the footpath. They were chatting together, and were just walking for the sake of something to do.

And Handforth was so full of his discovery that he decided not to wait. He wanted to dash back to St. Frank's, and tell his chums of his wonderful success. And so, as quietly as possible,

he backed away, reached the hedge, and emerged into Bellton Lane. Then he raced away for the school.

He arrived in a breathless condition, and rushed straight up to Study D. As he reached the door he came to a halt, and paused for breath. The sound of laughter came to him from within.

And now he's investigating!" McClure was saying. "He's going to get to the bottom of the mystery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's going to be Mr. Foxe's shadow!" said Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth clenched his fists, grabbed the door handle, and burst into the study. He found it occupied by his own chums, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson and myself, and Pitt, Grey and Levi. We were all grinning hugely.

"Oh, so this is the game, is it?" said Handforth warmly. "You traitors—you rotters! But I'll show you up—I'll prove that my investigations have turned out successfully! I'll show you whether I'm a good detective or not!"

"Keep it up! One of these days you might discover something—there's no telling!"

Handforth sniffed.

"I've discovered something already!" he said.

"Go hon!"

"What is it?" inquired Pitt. "Have you found out that Foxe is a hound?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth frowned.

"If you're going to cackle all the time, I won't say anything!" he threatened. "I've made a discovery of the utmost importance, and I want you chaps to treat it in the right way. I'll tell you what's happened. I followed Mr. Foxe down the lane, not long ago, and he went into the wood!"

"The scoundrel!" said Pitt fiercely.

"Oh, I don't know," grinned

Tommy Watson. "Foxes are often to be found in woods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to be funny, I won't say another word!" shouted Handforth, glaring round. "This is a serious business, and I've got on the track of something tremendously important. And all you can do is to grin, and make remarks that you call jokes!"

I looked round severely.

"Order in court!" I exclaimed. "This is a serious matter—Handforth says so. And it's only right to give him a fair hearing, and to discover what he has done!"

"Go ahead, Handy!" chuckled Reginald Pitt.

"Awfully kind of you to give me permission!" said Handforth sarcastically. "If you fellows would only realise the importance of this affair, you wouldn't be so jolly funny! Mr. Foxe went into the wood, and I followed him. And after a bit he came to a stop, and paced up and down. He hadn't been there long before another man came—evidently from the village. They shook hands, and stood there talking."

"And you listened, I suppose?" asked Watson.

"Yes."

"Eavesdropper!"

"Oh, don't be dotty!" snapped Handforth. "I listened, but I couldn't hear anything—they spoke too low. In any case, a detective is permitted to listen while criminals make their plots—it isn't eavesdropping at all!"

"Are you calling Mr. Foxe a criminal?" asked Pitt.

"Well, I believe he's a wrong 'un," said Handforth grimly. "There's something fishy about him, anyhow. Well, to go on. Mr. Foxe struck a match, and he and the other man lit cigarettes. And while the match flared up, I made an extraordinary discovery—both men were exactly the same!"

"My hat!"

"Draw it mild, Handy!"

"You don't expect us to believe this surely?"

"It's the truth!" snorted Handforth. "Both the men were exactly the same—the same noses, the same eyes, the same features in every way. There were two Mr. Smale Foxes standing there!"

"It's not quite good enough, Handy!" said Pitt. "You only saw the two men just for a moment, while that match flared up, and it's quite easy to make mistakes. It was your imagination, old son. You wanted to see two Mr. Foxes! You made a bloomer this afternoon, and made out that you saw Mr. Foxe in Bannington, while he was really in Caistowe. And now, to suit your own theory, you make two Mr. Foxes! We're not swallowing it, old son!"

"Rather not!"

"Begad! It's a bit too thick, dear old fellow!"

"You'd better try again, Handy!"

Handforth nearly choked as he gazed round at the grinning juniors.

"You—you disbelieving asses!" he roared. "Don't you believe me?"

"We think that you are sincere enough, Handy!" I said gently. "But everybody's liable to make mistakes—even the best detectives. And it's quite clear that you must have made a bloomer this time——"

"I didn't make a bloomer!" howled Handforth. "I saw two editions of Mr. Foxe——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you——"

"You'll be the death of us one of these days, old son!" said Pitt, grinning. "Oh, my sainted aunt, what a yarn—what a wild and woolly one!"

"Too woolly to be swallowed," grinned McClure.

"Rather!" said Church.

"All right, I'm not going to argue," said Handforth curtly. "I'm disgusted with you—I'm fed up! Before long I'll prove the truth of this story

mine—I'll bring complete evidence. All I ask is that you don't talk about it, because that would upset the apple cart. Just keep mum about what I've told you, and within a week I'll bring you the real evidence!"

"Good!" said Pitt. "That's the style, Handy. We won't say anything—will we, you chaps?"

"Not a word!" I promised. "I know the others will be all right."

"That's settled, then!" said Handforth. "You can clear out of my study now—good riddance to you! I'm going to investigate this case, and I'm going to get at the truth! You'll all look pretty small when you're compelled to admit that I've been right all along the line!"

The juniors yelled as they passed out into the Remove passage. But there was something in Handforth's tone which was just a little unusual, and I wondered to myself whether he had really struck an actual mystery this time.

Edward Oswald Handforth was generally supposed to be a duffer of the first water; but Handforth wasn't quite such a duffer as he generally seemed to be!

CHAPTER 15.

Further Discoveries!

SUNDAY was rather a blank day for the amateur detective of the Remove. He watched the College House constantly, but, unfortunately, Mr. Smale Foxe remained indoors all day long. He did not venture out once, and Handforth was disappointed.

On Monday, of course, there were lessons to do. This was a positive nuisance; but lessons were as inevitable as the sunrise, and they had to be attended. Handforth felt it a terrible waste of time, and he chafed all the morning as he sat in the Remove classroom.

Twice he got into trouble with Mr. Frowell, and he came within an inch of

being detained for the evening. After that, Handforth paid more attention to his lessons.

During the dinner-hour, he kept his eyes well open, but there was nothing doing. When afternoon lessons came Handforth was once more plunged into a mood of feverish impatience. While he was wasting his time here, in the class-room, perhaps Mr. Foxe was going about, meeting his double; all sorts of things might be occurring, in fact. Handforth was losing opportunities all the time. It was terribly galling.

But all things come to an end, sooner or later—even lessons; and at last tea-time arrived. Handforth felt like a prisoner coming out of gaol, and his first move was across the Triangle towards the College House. He made one or two careless inquiries, and gained the information that Mr. Foxe was in his study.

"Well, that's one consolation!" Handforth told himself. "I don't expect he'll do anything until after dark now—that's his wheeze. But I'm going to watch him—I'm going to keep my eyes open all the time."

He noticed that Church and McClure were standing against the steps of the Ancient House, and he moved over towards them.

"Coming in to tea, Handy?" inquired Church.

"Yes, I'm coming in now," said Handforth. "But McClure is going to stop out here."

"Eh?" said McClure.

"You're going to stop out here, my son."

"What the dickens for?" demanded McClure. "I want my tea as well as you do—"

"You can have your tea afterwards. At present you're going to remain here!" said Handforth grimly. "I don't want any objections or any insubordination. Don't forget that you chaps are my assistants!"

"Your which?" said Church, staring.

"My assistants!" replied Handforth. "At any time Mr. Foxe might come out, with the intention of going for a walk, or something—or to keep an appointment. If we all go in to tea, we shall probably miss him; therefore, you've got to remain out here on the watch, McClure. I'll have my tea as quickly as I can. If you see Mr. Foxe, buzz up to the study window and tap upon it. It won't take me two minutes to dodge out and to get on the trail."

"Oh, my hat!" muttered McClure. "It's a dotty idea——"

"Are you going to do as I say, or will you take a punch on the nose?" said Handforth aggressively. "I'm not in a mood to stand any nonsense. You've got to obey orders—that's what you are for! If there's any insubordination, I shall put it down with a firm hand!"

McClure felt rather helpless. There was no way out of this difficulty; he would have to stop out there, in the Triangle, until Handforth had had his tea.

"All right—go and get tea as quickly as you can!" he growled. "Don't keep me hanging about here for long."

Handforth went off without another word, and McClure hung about the Triangle, feeling decidedly fed up. Of course, he saw no sign whatever of Mr. Smale Foxe; he would have been very surprised if he had done so, and, a quarter of an hour later, Handforth reappeared chewing the last mouthful of his meal.

"Well?" he asked, in a low voice. "Anything to report about Foxey?"

"No, ass!" said McClure. "I haven't seen a sign of him—I never expected to!"

"All right—get indoors and have some tea!" said Handforth briskly. "I'm afraid you don't appreciate the honour I have bestowed upon you. As one of my assistants, you ought to feel proud!"

McClure couldn't think of a fitting answer, so he went indoors without

saying anything. He went to Study D and partook of tea with Church, and the two juniors discussed Handforth until the meal was over. Then they cleared away, and strolled out into the Triangle. They found Handforth still there, prowling about in the gloom under the old chestnut trees. By this time Handforth himself was beginning to feel somewhat fed up.

"Anything to report?" inquired McClure, as he came up.

Handforth glared.

"I don't want any of your rot!" he said grimly. "No, there's nothing to report! Foxey hasn't come out, confound him!"

"Most inconsiderate!" said Church. "I think something ought to be done about it, Handy! You're out here, waiting in the cold—waiting to follow Mr. Foxe when he comes out, and the chap sticks indoors the whole time. He hasn't got an atom of consideration for you!"

Handforth ignored this attempt at humour.

"What's the time?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, half-past six!" said Church. "A little over, in fact. It must be nearly twenty minutes to seven."

"It's no good hanging about here, Handy!" put in McClure. "The best thing you can do is to come indoors and do your prep——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Handforth. "Look! There he is, now—he's just coming out!"

Church and McClure looked at Mr. Smale Foxe without very much interest. The master of the College House had just appeared, and he came down into the Triangle and walked about for some few moments, evidently taking the air. It was impossible for him to see the three juniors, for they were completely hidden in the darkness under the old chestnut trees. And it probably seemed to Mr. Foxe that the Triangle was quite deserted.

At all events, he proceeded to do something rather curious.

He went over to the school wall, not far from the gate, to a spot where he could find concealment behind some tree trunks. And he stayed there—he placed himself flat against the wall and did not move.

"Well, I'm blest!" muttered Church. "What's the idea of that, I wonder?"

"He's watching—he's waiting for something!" said Handforth. "Didn't I tell you that he's a wrong 'un? No ordinary Housemaster would crouch against the wall like that and try to hide himself! By George, I believe we're going to get on the track!"

The school clock chimed, announcing that the time was now a quarter to seven—and still Mr. Foxe remained there.

At ten minutes to seven a junior came out of the College House. Handforth & Co., recognised him as Ernest Lawrence. The Removite was wearing his overcoat and cap, and, contrary to the expectations of the three Ancient House juniors, he did not walk towards the gate at all. Instead, he went right across the Triangle, and vanished in the direction of the playing fields. Then, to the astonishment of Handforth & Co., Mr. Foxe left his place of concealment and followed Lawrence!

"My hat!" muttered Church. "What's the idea of that?"

"I don't know—but we're going to find out!" said Handforth. "I don't think I ought to let you fellows come, as a matter of fact—you'll only mess things up. I'm going to follow Foxey, and you can follow me, Church, if you like, and McClure can come on behind. But don't get too close. It's no good having amateur detectives on a job like this!"

"Great Scott!" said McClure. "What do you call yourself, then?"

Handforth did not reply, and crept away on the track of Mr. Foxe. Church and McClure, after a short

consultation, followed their leader. They were both curious to see where this little adventure would end.

Handforth was very puzzled when he saw that Lawrence had turned into the big paddock, Mr. Foxe, too, closely following the College House junior. But it was so dark that Lawrence had no indication that he was being shadowed.

Seven o'clock was just chiming out when Lawrence reached the barn which stood at the bottom of the paddock, and entered by means of the old ramshackle door. A figure moved out from the shadows and came towards him.

"Is that you, Lawrence?" inquired the voice of Mr. Norman Rook.

"Yes, sir," said the junior. "You're here, then?"

"I've been here for ten minutes," replied Mr. Rook. "And you are here prompt to the minute. Excellent! It will not be necessary for me to detain you long, my lad—this interview can be over within five minutes."

Outside crouched Mr. Smale Foxe. The master had found it impossible to get to the door without being detected, for Lawrence and Mr. Rook were standing quite close. But the walls of this old building were made of wood, and there were many cracks to be seen. Mr. Foxe was standing against one of these, and it was easily possible for him to overhear every word that was being said.

As for Handforth & Co., they were rather helpless. Handforth crept as near as he could, and Church and McClure came up to him. But it was quite out of the question for them to get near enough to know exactly what was going on within the barn. All they could do was to crouch there, waiting and watching—and decidedly impatient.

In the barn Mr. Rook and Lawrence were talking.

"I have to be extremely careful to keep everything secret," Mr. Rook was

saying. "There is not a soul who knows that Young Ern is really a junior schoolboy of St. Frank's. I don't suppose the public would believe it, even if the statement was made."

"It's most important that it should be kept quiet, sir," said Lawrence.

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Rook. "And it will be kept quiet, my boy. Well, look here, we cannot waste our time by discussing these matters. We must get to business. I have been successful in arranging a fight for Wednesday evening. Do you think you will be fit enough then to enter the ring?"

"Oh, I'm fit enough, sir—even now!" replied Lawrence. "But I don't know whether it will be safe——"

"It must be safe—everything depends upon this bout," said Mr. Rook. "It will take place at the Ring Pavilion, Helmford—where you met Johnny Rhodes. And this fight is being organised well, Lawrence. All the seats are being booked up rapidly—at double prices. You see, great interest in boxing is taken at Helmford, and you have made a name for yourself already. You will fight a fifteen-round contest with Mike Connor."

"Oh!" said Lawrence. "I've heard of him!"

"I'm not at all surprised to hear you say that," said the boxing promotor. "Mike Connor is an Irish-American boxer of some renown—and he will be a hard nut for you to crack, but I am confident, Lawrence, that you will be able to pull the fight off. I have infinite faith in you, and I do not think you will disappoint me. At the same time, you must realise that this contest will be a very severe tax upon your ingenuity and skill. You must use every effort, and you must put in all your spare moments at practice and training."

"I will, sir," said Lawrence. "But I shall have to be careful, or the fellows might get wondering why I'm doing so much boxing."

"I think I can trust you to take every precaution," smiled Mr. Rook. "The purse, as I indicated before, will be a large one—the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds. If you win, you will receive one hundred pounds, and if you lose you will receive fifty pounds."

Lawrence's eyes sparkled.

"It's a big prize, Mr. Rook!" he exclaimed eagerly. "My goodness! It's—it's worth thinking about!"

Lawrence thought even then. He remembered his father, struggling hard in London to keep his business going. If Lawrence could only win this hundred pounds and send it to his father, it would be a wonderful achievement. And the junior did not hesitate a moment in accepting the offer. He decided to fight Mike Connor in the Ring Pavilion on the Wednesday of the following week.

Mr. Rook was very pleased, and he did not waste much time. He continued talking only for a short while longer, and then he shook hands with Lawrence and took his departure. He had fixed things up, and that was sufficient.

Lawrence emerged from the barn and made his way back across the paddock slowly and thoughtfully. And then, quite abruptly, a form appeared before him, a form which he recognised almost at once as that of Mr. Smale Foxe! The junior caught his breath in sharply, and stared at the Housemaster in alarm and anger.

"One moment, Lawrence—one moment!" said Mr. Foxe smoothly. "I would like a little chat with you!"

"A—a chat!" echoed Lawrence. "What for, sir? You've been following me! You've been spying——"

"That is rather a nasty word to use, my lad," interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "I have certainly overheard your conversation with Mr. Rook—if that is what you mean. And I am greatly interested by your little plans. So you intend to go to Helmford on Wednesday."

day, and it is your plan to fight Mike Connor at the Ring Pavilion for a purse of a hundred and fifty pounds?"

"Well, what are you going to do, sir?" asked Lawrence hotly. "You evidently mean mischief, or you wouldn't have taken the trouble to follow me and listen to my conversation with Mr. Rook!"

"Look here, Lawrence, I do not wish to be hard on you," said the Housemaster. "When you fought Lightning-Left Ned, in Mr. Gubbins' boxing booth, I said nothing—I held my tongue—"

"On condition that I gave you ten pounds!" cut in Lawrence bitterly.

"We will not go into details!" said Mr. Foxe. "Then you had a big fight with a person named Jimmy Rhodes at the Ring Pavilion in Helmford—and you pocketed the sum of sixty pounds, being the winner. You managed to get out of that scrape fairly easily my lad. But, in this instance, you will find it a more difficult matter. Personally, I have no objection to make regarding your plans—they have my entire approval. But, if you wish to keep your engagement, you will promise to pay me half the prize-money, after you receive it. That is, if you win, I shall expect fifty pounds. If you lose, I must be content with twenty-five."

Lawrence's eyes blazed.

"Why should I give you anything?" he demanded angrily. "If I fight this man, and beat him, I shall earn the money. It's not fair, Mr. Foxe—you have no right—"

"We are not discussing rights or fairness," interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "It so happens that I have you in the hollow of my hand—and I shall do precisely as I please. And it will please me to reveal the fact that Young Ern, the new light-weight boxer, is none other than Lawrence of the College House at St. Frank's. It will give me great pleasure to reveal the fact—unless you comply with my suggestion.

If you do not give me your promise, Lawrence, I shall see that Dr. Stafford is present at this fight. If you appear, it will be the end of your career at St. Frank's."

"But—but—"

"You had better realise your position now, and without any further delay," went on the Housemaster curtly. "You cannot defy me, Lawrence—"

"I do defy you!" interrupted the junior hotly. "You can do your worst! I know well enough that you won't carry out your threat! And I'm not going to be scared, Mr. Foxe."

The Housemaster gritted his teeth. Again he was finding out that Ernest Lawrence was a match for him. It was a galling discovery, for he had tried to make himself believe that Lawrence would knuckle under. But the junior refused to be frightened.

"Very well," said Mr. Foxe, "you will take the consequences!"

And the Housemaster turned on his heel and walked away—leaving Ernest Lawrence standing there, with clenched fists, and frowning brow.

And neither Mr. Foxe nor Lawrence had the slightest idea that their whole conversation had been overheard. Three juniors had listened to every word—and these three juniors were Handforth and Church and McClure. The heroes of Study D were concealed in the grass, lying flat on the ground.

Handforth, in his efforts to get on the track of the Foxe mystery, had hit upon something quite different—and he was rather startled, and certainly amazed.

As for Church and McClure, they were staggered.

CHAPTER 16.

Called to Account!

"A PRIZE-FIGHTER!" said Handforth huskily.
 "A pugilist!"
 "Oh, my only hat!"
 Church and McClure stared at their

leader in blank amazement. They were all sitting up in the grass now—for Ernest Lawrence had gone. He had walked away in the direction of the Triangle, and had been lost to view. The three chums of Study D were now doing their best to gather their wits together. Handforth rose to his feet, and his chums followed his example. And they stared at one another blankly.

"I—I can't believe it, you know!" exclaimed Church. "Lawrence, of the College House—a Remove chap! And he's a prize-fighter! Oh, it's mad! There must be some——"

"Rubbish!" said Handforth. "It's true enough—it's bound to be true——"

"And Foxe!" put in McClure. "A Housemaster! He knows all about it, and instead of reporting the thing to the Head, he means to drag some money out of Lawrence! The awful rotter—the criminal! Well, we've found something out, Handy!"

Handforth glared.

"We?" he repeated grimly. "I like that! A fat lot you've done! If it hadn't been for me, nothing would have been known!"

"Well, we needn't argue about that," said Church. "You can take all the credit, if you like, Handy—the main thing is, what are we going to do? What action shall we take?"

"Action?" repeated Handforth. "Why, I'm going to smash Lawrence to bits!"

"Eh?"

"Wipe him up!" declared Handforth. "The awful bounder! A prize-fighter—a chap who goes to the Ring Pavilion, and fights with common, low-down bruisers! Why, it's the limit—it's—it's absolutely disgraceful!"

"Rather!" said McClure. "But if you think that you can give Lawrence a hiding, you've made a bloomer."

"Oh, have I?" roared Handforth. "I know what I can do——"

"But, my dear chap, just consider!" protested Church. "Lawrence fought a professional in Helmsford, and whacked him. A professional, mind you! If he

can do that, it stands to reason that he could wipe you up with one hand."

Handforth was thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he admitted. "Lawrence does seem to be a bit of a terror. I don't forget the way he smashed Grayson to bits. Well, we've got to do something, and I suggest that we all three collar him, and shove him through the mill."

Church shook his head.

"It would be a lot better to tell Nipper," he said. "I suggest that we all go along to Study C at once, see Nipper, and tell him all about it. It's too big for us to deal with alone. That's my opinion, Handy."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was going to suggest something of the same sort," said Handforth.

So, without any further discussion, the three juniors went back to the Triangle, entered the Ancient House, and made their way straight to Study C. They came marching in just as Watson and Tregellis-West and I were finishing our prep.

"Sorry—too busy to attend to you now!" I said briskly. "Come again in five minutes, and you shall have our full attention. We're just putting the finishing touches to our prep."

"Blow your prep!" said Handforth. "I've got something important to tell you—something vital. Close that door, Church. And don't forget, we've got to speak in whispers!" he added mysteriously.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Begad! In whispers?" he repeated. "Dear old boy, why is it necessary to be so frightfully cautious? What shockin' secret are you about to disclose?"

"It's about Lawrence!" said Handforth, bending over the table. "I've made a discovery. Lawrence is a prize-fighter! He's been in the habit of going over to Helmsford to fight professionals in the Ring Pavilion——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Montie and Tommy and I yelled. "That's rather a good one, Handy." I said pleasantly. "Got any more like it?"

Handforth glared.

"You—you ass!" he roared. "Don't you believe me?"

"No!" I grinned. "You can't spoof us with that yarn, old son——"

"Yarn!" howled Handforth. "It's the truth! And, what's more, Mr. Foxe, of the College House, has been black-mailing Lawrence, and extracting some of the prize money out of him. And old Foxey demands fifty quid if Lawrence wins the fight next Wednesday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad! exclaimed Montie. "This is frightfully amusing—it is, really! I thought the first one was tall, but Handforth is beating his own record, begad!"

"You've come to the wrong place, Handy," I said sweetly: "It's no good telling those yarns to us."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I should advise you to go to the marines——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth fairly bubbled over. He raved, he roared, and he shouted—in spite of the fact that he had distinctly stated that only whispers were to be exchanged. And we listened patiently until he had exhausted the flow.

"Now then, what is it all about?" I inquired at length, turning to Church. "What's this precious fable that Handforth's been trotting out?"

"Well, I'm blessed if I know what to say!" exclaimed Church. "I can't quite believe the yarn myself; but I believe it's true."

"Begad! That's rather contradictory."

"Well, you know what I mean," said Church. "It seems too dotty to believe, and yet I can't do anything else."

And, with the able assistance of McClure, and with various sulphuric interjections from Handforth, Church proceeded to tell us the whole story. He explained how they had followed

Mr. Foxe, and how they had overheard the conversation between the House-master and Lawrence.

We listened with great interest and full attention. I knew well enough that Church was hard-headed, and not likely to be spoofed. And I was serious when he had come to the end of his story. It was convincing.

"Well, it's a jolly queer kind of affair," I said at last. "You're quite certain that this is all true, Church? You really did overhear Foxey——"

"Oh, yes, it's all true!" said Church. "That's why it's so extraordinary. To think that Lawrence should be a prize-fighter!"

I thought for a minute or two, and then came a decision. In my opinion, there was only one thing to be done.

"Well, strictly speaking, this isn't our affair," I said. "Lawrence may be a Remove chap, but he belongs to the College House. Therefore, it's up to Christine, as skipper on the other side, to decide what course shall be taken. I suggest that we all go over into the College House, and beard Christine in his den."

"Good!" said Church. "That's a ripping idea."

And, a few minutes later, we were all marching into the lobby of the College House—the six of us. We had only got about halfway across, when a crowd of Removites came charging out of the passages.

"Fossils!" yelled somebody. "Collar them——"

"Pax!" I exclaimed. "Can't you see this?"

I was waving a handkerchief, as a kind of flag of truce, and the juniors were unable to interfere with us. They were compelled to respect the white flag.

And so we marched on to Study Q, and arrived just as Christine & Co. were about to come out. They met us, in fact, in the passage just outside the door.

"Hallo!" said Bob Christine.

"What's the idea of this? Why the invasion?"

"We've got something serious to talk about—something concerning one of the chaps on this side. Come into the study, Bob."

Christine & Co. were rather puzzled, but not for long. For it took only a short time for me to acquaint them with the facts. At first Christine and Yorke and Talmadge were sceptical; but at last we convinced them.

"Now I come to think of it, it must be true," said Christine. "We know that Foxey is a rotter. He took us to that boxing booth with Lawrence, and I was there when the proprietor offered twenty quid to anybody who could beat Lightning Left Ned. Lawrence must have gone back in the evening, and accepted the challenge."

"By Jingo!" said Talmadge. "I wish I'd been there—it would have been a sheer delight to see that ugly bouncer knocked out!"

Christine frowned.

"Perhaps so; but we can't look upon this with a lenient eye," he said. "It's a very serious matter, and Lawrence will have to be called to account. We've got to put our private opinions aside, and think of the honour of the school, supposing this came out. How would it look in the papers? A St. Frank's junior, masquerading under a false name, fighting in low-class dens for money! Why, it's awful! You chaps wait here, and I'll fetch Lawrence in."

Christine went at once, but returned within three minutes. And he was accompanied by Ernest Lawrence, who was looking rather mystified.

"Shut the door, Yorke!" said Christine, when they were in the study. "We don't want anybody to overhear this little conversation—we'll keep it as private as possible. Now, Lawrence, I've got a few questions to ask."

"What about?" asked Lawrence, vaguely suspecting that trouble was coming.

Christine made no bones about the matter. In cold, blunt language, he

told Lawrence of what had been discovered, and asked him for his own version. Lawrence turned very pale at first, and his jaws set grimly. I watched him with interest, and was quite convinced that the story was true in every detail.

"Well, out with it!" said Christine, at length. "What have you got to say, Lawrence?"

The new boy looked round calmly.

"Nothing!" he replied.

"Do you deny that you have been prize-fighting?"

"No."

"Do you admit it, then?"

"No," said Lawrence steadily. "I admit nothing, and I deny nothing. I prefer to say as little as possible. Anything else?"

"Yes, you rotter!" roared Handforth. "If you don't admit——"

"Hold on, Handy!" interrupted Christine. "I'm conducting this affair, I believe, and there's only one way to deal with the matter. Personally, I believe that Lawrence is guilty—he's proved it by his very actions and words. But I believe in fairness, and we're going to give him a trial."

"A trial?" repeated Church curiously.

"Exactly," said Christine. "We'll form a select committee of chaps who can be relied upon to keep mum. Then we'll put Lawrence on trial—we'll have a jury and everything. I'll be the judge."

Lawrence looked round, perfectly calm.

"And when is this interesting event to take place?" he inquired.

"Now, as soon as possible," replied Bob Christine. "But we'll give you half an hour for you to prepare your defence, Lawrence—that is, if you have a defence to prepare. Two warders of the court will call for you at eight o'clock precisely. Until then you will please consider yourself a prisoner in your cell—that is, Study T. You can buzz off!"

Lawrence left, and Bob Christine gave some brisk orders. He had com-

plete charge of this affair, and I did not see any reason why I should interfere. This was a Form matter, of course, but mainly connected with the College House.

The jury was arranged for—Talmadge, Yorke, Church, McClure, Page, and De Valerie. A jury of six was considered sufficient. Other juniors who were to be included in the hearing were Reginald Pitt, Grey, Clapson, Oldfield, and two or three others. Only those fellows who could be absolutely relied upon were included.

And the court for this occasion was to be the old vault beneath the monastery ruins. We should be absolutely private down there, and Ernest Lawrence would be given a fair and just trial.

CHAPTER 17.

The Verdict!

THE judge adjusted his wig with an air of great solemnity. "Place the prisoner in the dock!" he said in a deep voice.

The court was sitting.

It was quite an impressive affair. The old vault beneath the monastery ruin was rather brilliantly illuminated by means of about a dozen candles. These were stuck in various places round the walls. Of furniture there was a scarcity. The judge, for example, tried to look extremely dignified—and failed—seated upon a pair of rickety old steps, which had been carried down for his especial benefit. He was in an elevated position, at all events, and that was the main thing. At the same time his lordship felt very insecure and precarious.

The prisoner was quite calm and collected as he stood in the dock. In other words, he stood in a chalked square, which represented the dock. The jury were all safely ensconced in the jury-box—which, of course, was purely imaginary. Actually, they were all standing up in a group, and they were talking in loud voices in a most unjury-like manner. They were dis-

cussing the case quite openly, even before any evidence had been called. This, of course, was against all regulations.

"Silence!" ordered the judge sharply. "Is there to be no order in this court?"

He gave his wig another pull, for it was not exactly comfortable. It had been borrowed for the occasion from the Remove Dramatic Society's props.

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty, or not guilty?" demanded Bob Christine in a deep, hollow voice.

"I don't plead anything!" said Lawrence.

"Rot!" shouted Handforth, who had constituted himself prosecuting counsel. "You've got to plead, you silly ass! A prisoner can't stand in the dock and say nothing. Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

"That's for the jury to decide!" said Lawrence.

"Why, you—you burbling ass——"

"Please remember, Mr. Handforth, that you are in a court of justice," interrupted the judge severely. "It is not fitting for counsel to use such terms, even to the prisoner. Kindly remember where you are."

"But this silly ass of a prisoner refuses to plead," roared Handforth wrathfully.

"All right—let him refuse!" said the judge. "Cut the cackle and get to the horses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in court!" said the usher—who happened to be Tommy Watson.

"Well, gentlemen of the jury, I have a very serious case to put before you," said the prosecuting counsel. "This wretched criminal, who now stands in the dock, trembling like the scoundrel he is, is charged with a very serious offence. To be exact, the rotter has been fighting professional boxers, using an assumed name in order to do so, and he has been getting tin for doing it!"

"Tin?" repeated the judge politely.

"Brass!" explained the prosecuting

counsel. "In other words, money! He has been getting quids and quids for fighting. It's disgraceful, and I call upon you, gentlemen of the jury, to pronounce him guilty. Do your duty!"

The judge grinned—and then remembered himself.

"Ahem!" he said. "This—this is somewhat irregular, I believe. It is customary to submit evidence to the jury before requesting them to give their verdict."

"Evidence?" repeated the prosecuting counsel. "What rot! We all know it."

"That," said the judge, "is an insignificant detail. And, by the way, who's been appointed counsel for the defence?"

Handforth smiled pityingly.

"You burbling ass!" he said. "Who wants a counsel for the defence? This chap is going to be found guilty, and no defence is necessary!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I greatly regret that this unseemly laughter should mar the proceedings of the court," said the judge, frowning, and whisking a curl of wig out of his eye. I am afraid that my learned friend, the prosecuting counsel, is mainly responsible for the hilarity. I must request you, Mr. Handforth, to refrain from making fatheaded remarks. You must realise that a court of justice is a serious place!"

"If you want a thick ear——" began the prosecuting counsel.

"Oh, dry up and get on with the evidence!" roared the judge. "If you aren't jolly quick we'll kick you out, and appoint somebody else. Call your witness."

Handforth swallowed hard, and decided not to reply, for the jury was looking at him in a grim manner, and would not have hesitated long before falling upon him and treating him in a manner most disrespectful and contradictory to all court procedure.

I call upon Arnold McClure!" said Handforth thickly.

McClure stepped forward briskly, and entered the witness-box, a chalked square on the ground. He proceeded to tell his story. He explained what he had overheard. He went into all the details, and the jury listened with considerable boredom—for they had heard it all before.

"There can be no question about the matter," said McClure. "Lawrence went to Helmford last Wednesday, and he fought a fellow named Jimmy Rhodes——"

"One moment!" I interrupted, stepping forward. "How do you know that Lawrence went to Helmford last Wednesday?"

"Why, I—I heard it," said the witness.

"That's no proof—that's not evidence——"

"What the dickens are you butting in for?" demanded Handforth, glaring at me. "Who do you think you are?"

"I'm the counsel for the defence," I explained.

"Eh?"

"I think it's necessary," I went on. "The prosecution is being conducted in such a way that it's only fair that Lawrence should have somebody to defend him. I might just as well do it as stand here, listening to all this piffle."

"You—you ass——"

"What about this visit of the prisoner's to Helmford?" I went on, addressing the witness. "You maintain he went to Helmford. What proof have you to offer that such was actually the case?"

"I heard Mr. Foxe talking to Lawrence——"

"Which is quite sufficient proof!" interrupted the prosecuting counsel. "We can't very well call Mr. Foxe, but we've got Lawrence here—and I intend to put him in the witness-box in a minute or two, and I'm going to cross-examine him."

"Good!" said two or three of the jurymen. "We're fed-up with this!"

"One moment!" I interrupted. "Perhaps Lawrence does not want to go into the witness-box. He must be consulted."

For some little time Lawrence had been thinking hard. He knew that all these fellows could be trusted—he regarded us all as decent chaps, and he knew that we should respect his secret. The truth was out now, so there was nothing to be gained by maintaining silence. And things looked rather bad. It was in Lawrence's power to tell the full, complete truth—and he decided to do so.

"Do you want to go in the witness-box or not?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"I do," said the prisoner.

"Oh, good!" said counsel. "Buzz across, then."

Lawrence took up his stand on the other side of the vault.

"Now, prisoner at the bar—or, I should say, prisoner in the witness-box—I have a few questions to put to you," said Handforth grimly. "Did you or did you not engage in a brutal fight with one James Rhodes on the evening of Wednesday last at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmford?"

"I did!" said the prisoner.

"You admit it?"

"Yes," said Lawrence quietly.

"Oh! That's all right, then!" said the counsel for the prosecution. "You hear that, you chaps. He admits it! Now, Lawrence, did you fight in a boxing booth in Bannington?"

"Yes."

"And you have arranged to fight a chap named Connor—at the Ring Pavilion again—next Wednesday evening?"

"Yes."

"And if you win you'll get a hundred quid?"

"Yes."

"And if you lose you'll get fifty?"

"Yes."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly. "He admits every giddy

thing. I call upon you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to pronounce your verdict."

One of the jurymen stepped forward.

"We find the prisoner——"

"Hold on!" I broke in. "I want to cross-examine the prisoner first."

"Now, Lawrence, just a few questions," I said. "You have admitted that you were engaged in these fights?"

"Yes."

"Tell the jury how you came to start this practice."

"It was quite by accident," said the prisoner. "I was with Christine and Yorke and Talmadge when Mr. Foxe took us to Bannington. Mr. Foxe went into this boxing booth with us, and while we were there the proprietor offered the sum of twenty pounds to anybody who could beat a hulking young rotter who called himself Lightning Left Ned. During the evening I went back to Bannington and entered the ring."

"And you beat this prize-fighter?"

"Yes—I knocked him out."

"Good!" murmured the judge. "He deserved—— Ahem! Disgraceful!"

"You knocked this fellow out, and, I presume, you got into communication with somebody connected with the Ring Pavilion?" I asked.

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

"Quite by chance—again," said the prisoner. "A man came up to me just after the fight and told me that he was Mr. Rook. He suggested that I should help him out of a difficulty by fighting Jimmy Rhodes—because his man had met with an accident. I didn't like it at first, but at last I agreed."

"And so you went to Helmford, and appeared at the Ring Pavilion as Young Ern?"

"Yes—and I won!"

"How much money did you get?"

"Thirty pounds," replied Lawrence.

"Thirty quid!"

"That was my share of the purse," said Lawrence. "But Mr. Rook gave me a further fifty pounds on the top of

that, because he was so pleased that I won."

"Great pip!" said the prosecuting counsel. "Eighty quid! It's—it's unbelievable. And he hasn't been rolling in tin, either. What the dickens could he have done with the money?"

"What did you do with the money?" I asked, turning to Lawrence.

"I sent it to my father."

"You sent this money to your father?" exclaimed Handforth grimly. "So he knows all about it—he's a confederate."

"My father knows nothing," said Lawrence quietly. "Not long ago he met with a financial disaster. All his capital was swallowed up and lost when Scarbrook's Bank went smash. My fees for this term at St. Frank's were paid before then—or I shouldn't be here. I thought if I could go in for these fights on the quiet, and win the money, it would be very helpful to my pater. That's all. I've sent him every penny I've received—although he doesn't know where it came from."

"Do you mean you sent it anonymously?"

"Yes," said Lawrence.

"And you didn't keep a penny of this money for yourself?"

"Not a penny."

"Gentlemen of the Jury, I have concluded my cross-examination," I said. "I don't think it is necessary for any more speeches to be uttered, or for the judge to sum-up. Please pronounce your verdict."

"Not guilty!" said the six jurymen in one voice.

"Good!" declared Handforth, grabbing Lawrence's fist. "If they'd found you guilty, my son, I'd have wiped 'em all up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the court broke up amid much enthusiasm. Ernest Lawrence was not guilty, and he had gained the support of all the best fellows in the Remove. And before very long he was to find that support very useful indeed.

CHAPTER 18.

Dr. Stafford's Plan!

ON the following morning the Head received a rather mysterious letter. It came through the post in the ordinary way, and it had been mailed from Bannington.

Nelson Lee happened to be in Dr. Stafford's study when the letter was opened. The Head glanced at the sheet of paper, and then adjusted his pince-nez, and gazed more intently.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed.

There were not many words on the paper, and they were typewritten. There was no address, and no signature. The paper itself was a sheet of ordinary common notepaper, of no particular brand. And the words which caused Dr. Stafford so much astonishment ran as follows:

"I should advise you, sir, to keep your eye on Master Ernest Lawrence, a junior at your school. He will appear at the Ring Pavilion, in Helmsford, in order to fight a professional boxer named Mike Connor. Lawrence will appear under the name of Young Ern. A week or so ago he was booked to fight Jimmy Rhodes at the Ring Pavilion, but did not turn up, a substitute being provided at the last moment. This substitute was supposed by many people to be Young Ern himself. But on Wednesday next it will be Lawrence, of St. Frank's. Keep your eye on this boy."

The headmaster was rather startled. He did not say anything for a moment or two, but read the letter through again.

"This—this is most distressing!" he said at last. "I really don't know what to do, Mr. Lee. Perhaps you can help me? Perhaps you can suggest some way of dealing with the situation?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"If you will acquaint me with the facts——" he began

"Please read this letter, Mr. Lee," said the Head.

He passed it over, and Nelson Lee rapidly perused the words. When he had finished there was a keen light in his eyes, and he looked up at Dr. Stafford.

"I dislike anonymous communications, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I make it a general rule to ignore them. And, if you are inclined to take my advice, I would suggest that you ignore this completely."

"I am afraid I cannot do that, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "Much as I dislike the idea of it, I feel that I must make some kind of investigation. This is the second time I have received an intimation that Lawrence is participating in prize fighting. There must be something in it—it cannot be purely a fabrication. I share your dislike for anonymous letters, however, but at the same time, I feel it is my duty to inquire further into this matter."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"You may do as you wish, of course," he said. "It is really none of my business, Dr. Stafford. The boy does not belong to my House, and therefore the matter does not come within my province."

"Quite so—quite so," said the Head. "I am not going to ask you to take any action personally, Mr. Lee, I will leave that to Mr. Foxe—"

"Mr. Foxe?" repeated Lee sharply.

"Yes; he is the boy's Housemaster, and it will be Mr. Foxe's duty to investigate," said the Head. "I have a scheme, and I intend to put it into operation. I will settle this question once and for all. I mean to know the truth."

The Head spoke in a firm voice, and he touched his bell.

A moment later Tubbs, the page-boy, appeared.

"Kindly go to Mr. Foxe, in the College House, and inform him that I require his presence in my study," said Dr. Stafford. "You will also take the same message to Mr. Pagett."

"Yes, sir," said Tubbs briskly.

He vanished, and Nelson Lee crossed

the room and sat down. The famous detective had decided that he would not make his exit until after the visit of Mr. Pagett and Mr. Foxe. He, in fact, was rather curious to hear what was about to be done.

"May I look at that letter again?" he asked.

"Certainly, Mr. Lee, certainly," said the Head. "And if you can discover the writer I shall be greatly obliged. But I am afraid that is a hopeless task. There is not the slightest clue. The paper is ordinary, without any watermark, and, of course, it is quite impossible to recognise typewriting."

Nelson Lee made no comment. But, just for a flash, a smile appeared on his features. It seemed that he did not altogether agree with Dr. Stafford's views. But he said nothing.

And he was still examining the mysterious communication when Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett appeared together.

Mr. Pagett was the master of the Fifth Form, and he was one of the most unpopular masters at St. Frank's. He was thin and acid looking, and his temper was notoriously short. Among the boys, Mr. Pagett was generally known as "an old beast."

But, apart from his personal failings, he was a conscientious schoolmaster, and a capable man. Thus he retained his position as master of the Fifth.

"Ah, Mr. Foxe, I am glad you have come!" said the Head briskly. "Will you please glance at this letter, and tell me your opinion of it? I shall then be obliged if you will pass it on to Mr. Pagett."

The Head took the letter from Lee, and handed it over to Mr. Smale Foxe. The Housemaster took it gravely, and gazed upon it as though he had never seen it before. Considering that he had typed it himself, it was barely necessary for him to read it. But, of course, the fact that he was the author of the note was his own secret.

He did not betray himself by any sign or movement, but read the letter with an expression of mild astonish-

ment on his face. Nelson Lee, apparently giving close attention to his nails, was really watching Mr. Foxe with an intentness which would have caused the College Housemaster much discomfiture had he known.

"This appears to be very serious, sir," said Mr. Foxe, at length.

"Pray let me see it!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett, who was filled with curiosity.

The note was handed to him, and he read it.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "A boy of St. Frank's—and a junior at that—taking part in a professional prize fight! Impossible! This—this must be a joke, sir, surely?"

"I wish I could agree with you, Mr. Pagett," said the Head. "But I am afraid it is rather more serious than a joke. What is your opinion, Mr. Foxe?"

"Well, sir, I must confess that I am impressed," said the Housemaster gravely. "There was some little bother concerning Lawrence once before. You were informed that he had been fighting at the Ring Pavilion under the name of Young Ern. But I disproved that by informing you that Lawrence had been with me in Caistowe all the evening. But this letter throws a different light on the matter. It appears that Lawrence was really booked to appear, and found it impossible to do so—probably because he was compelled to accompany me. The promoters of the fight therefore obtained a substitute, without informing the audience of the change."

The Head nodded.

"In that case, Mr. Foxe, the first communication I received was correct," he said. "That is to say, the writer of the note believed that he was performing a good service by giving me the information. But, owing to circumstances which he could not foresee, Lawrence did not appear."

"Precisely," said Mr. Foxe. "It is practically certain, however, that Lawrence will appear at the Ring Pavilion on this occasion—to-morrow evening,

that is. I really think something ought to be done, sir."

"That is precisely my opinion," said the Head. "I think I will send for Lawrence at once——"

"I should strongly advise you not to do that, sir," interrupted Mr. Foxe.

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because the boy will naturally deny all knowledge of the matter, and he will certainly not go to Helmford to keep his appointment," said Mr. Foxe. "It will certainly not go to Helmford to keep anything against him. It would be better, I should think, for you to let this fight take place, exactly as planned. I further suggest that you should go to Helmford personally, and attend the fight, incognito. You will then be able to see, with your own eyes, whether the lad is Lawrence or not."

Dr. Stafford shook his head.

"No, Mr. Foxe, I could not think of doing that," he said. "For one thing, I shall be unable to leave the school, for two gentlemen have made an appointment with me—Sir James Henson, and Mr. Roger Hale. They are two of our directors, and I could not possibly be absent to-morrow evening. Your suggestion, however, is an excellent one, and I will adopt it. I shall take it as a favour, Mr. Foxe, if you will go over to Helmford yourself to-morrow evening—and perhaps it would be a good idea if you took Mr. Pagett with you. You will then be able to find out the exact truth, and report to me afterwards. If this lad is really Lawrence, he will, of course, be expelled without delay. And that will settle the point finally."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett. "A prize fight! My dear sir, I have never attended such a performance in my life! I am appalled! But, for the sake of the school, I will consent to your proposal."

"That is very good of you, Mr. Pagett," said the Head drily.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett left the headmaster's study. The Housemaster was extremely pleased. His plan had

worked well, for now it would be firmly and finally established that Lawrence of the Remove, was the culprit. Mr. Foxe would have his revenge! Having failed to extract money from the boy, he would ruin him. That was Mr. Foxe's genial plan.

In the Head's study, Nelson Lee had risen to his feet, preparatory to departing.

"I am not at all sure that this course is a good one, Dr. Stafford," he said. "But we will leave matters as they stand at present, and wait until to-morrow evening. By the way, may I take that letter with me?"

"By all means, Mr. Lee—by all means!" said the Head. "I only wish it were possible to discover the writer. But that, I am afraid, is quite out of the question."

Again the trace of a smile came into Nelson Lee's eyes, and very shortly afterwards he left the headmaster's study. He went straight along to his own apartment, and lost no time in making a few trifling experiments.

To begin with, he submitted the typewritten letter to a very close scrutiny through a powerful magnifying lens. Each typewritten letter now stood out in bold relief, and many items were now visible which had been invisible before. For example, every letter 't' in the letter bore a slight defect. There was a chip out of the character, practically invisible to the naked eye, but obvious when magnified. The letter 'o' was chipped also, whilst the 's' was not precisely true. It was a shade out of alignment. These defects only became apparent when the lens was used.

"I rather fancy it will not be necessary for me to search far afield," murmured Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I do not think I need stir from this study."

He put the magnifying lens down, and lifted up a pile of examination papers. Some were written, others were typewritten. And one or two of them had been prepared by Mr. Smale Foxe. Nelson Lee picked up one of

these, glanced at it closely, and then brought the lens into play. He smiled.

"Exactly!" he murmured. "Dear me! I really thought Mr. Foxe had more sense—but he apparently believes that a typewritten letter is not open to investigation. But that is a fallacy."

Once more Nelson Lee examined that examination paper—which had been prepared by Mr. Smale Foxe in his own study a day or so earlier. And every 's' was slightly out of alignment—every 't' and 'o' were chipped. In fact, the mysterious anonymous communication, which had been delivered to the headmaster that morning had been written on Mr. Foxe's typewriter! It was therefore quite certain that Mr. Smale Foxe himself was the author.

Nelson Lee had suspected this from the first. And now he had the proof. But he took no action. And he was still sitting in his chair when a footstep sounded out in the passage.

That footstep was mine. I was coming along to the gov'nor's study in order to have a few words with him before lessons.

I found Nelson Lee lying back in his chair, with his finger-tips pressed together, and with a cigarette smouldering between his lips—with about half an inch of ash upon it.

"Penny for your thoughts, gov'nor!" I said cheerfully, as I closed the door.

Nelson Lee turned his head, and the cigarette ash dropped all over his waistcoat.

"Well, Nipper, what is it?" he inquired. "I am rather busy now—"

"Yes, you look it!" I grinned. "Is that what you call being busy, sir?"

"I have been busy with my brains," explained Nelson Lee. "In other words, Nipper, I am thinking. And it is hardly possible to concentrate upon one's thoughts when you are in the apartment. You are a disturbing element, Nipper."

"Thanks!" I said. "You always were good at paying compliments, gov'nor. Well, what's the mystery? What are you thinking about? And what have

you been using that magnifying lens for?"

"Upon my soul! Your inquisitiveness is positively terrible, Nipper!" protested Nelson Lee. "I see no reason why I should satisfy your curiosity. But now that you are here, I would like to have a few words with you regarding Lawrence."

I stared.

"Lawrence?" I repeated. "Do you mean Lawrence of the College House?"

"I am not aware that there is any other Lawrence at St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee. "I have had very little to do with the junior myself, but I believe he is a very straightforward youngster, and quite a decent boy."

"Right every time, sir," I said. "Lawrence is one of the best."

"Do you know if he is going out on Wednesday evening?" asked Nelson Lee casually.

I looked at the gov'nor with some suspicion.

"Is Lawrence going out on Wednesday?" I repeated. "Well, how should I know, and why should you ask me? Surely I'm not supposed to know what Lawrence's movements will be on Wednesday evening?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Still you have not answered my question, Nipper," he said pointedly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, sir, I can't give you any definite answer to the question," I said. "Lawrence may be going out, of course, but I rather fancy that he'll remain at St. Frank's. In fact, I'm willing to make a wager with you that Lawrence will be seen at St. Frank's on Wednesday evening. He'll probably remain at the school the whole evening."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That is just as well," he said. "I do not pretend to know anything, Nipper, and I am not making any inquiries, or giving any information. But I do know this—Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett have been instructed by the headmaster to keep their eyes well open on Wednesday evening."

"What on earth for?" I inquired, with an air of surprise.

"Furthermore," proceeded Nelson Lee, "Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett will take a journey to Helmford on Wednesday evening. They have certain plans in view, Nipper, and I have an idea that there are certain suspicions against Master Lawrence. If the boy has been breaking the school rules it might be bad for him. And I certainly think it will be better for Lawrence if he remains at St. Frank's on Wednesday evening. That's all, Nipper!"

I nodded.

"I quite understand, sir," I said. "I've got you exactly."

And, a few minutes later, I left Nelson Lee's study. He had said nothing definite, and he was apparently not interested in the matter. But I knew differently. I put two and two together. And I knew that Nelson Lee had learned that Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett were going to Helmford on Wednesday evening for the express purpose of catching Lawrence red-handed. The gov'nor had given me a tip—a warning. He knew that I would pass it on to Lawrence.

It was just like Nelson Lee to do a thing like that. He wanted Lawrence to avoid trouble—and so he was doing his best to give the junior an indirect warning.

It was decent of the gov'nor—it was sportsmanlike. And I decided to act upon the information which had been given to me. But one thing was quite certain.

Young Ern would meet Mike Connor at the Helmford Ring Pavilion at seven o'clock precisely on Wednesday evening!

CHAPTER 19.

A Surprise for Two!

"DEAR old boy, you've been looking frightfully serious all day!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Is anything the

matter? I wish you would tell us—I do, really!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked at me keenly through his pince-nez, and I noticed that Watson was paying me a good deal of attention, too.

We were in Study C, and it was nearly tea-time. Tommy Watson, as a matter of fact, was already preparing for the meal. I looked at the table, and then transferred my attention to my two chums.

"We're going to have some visitors after tea," I said. "Five or six, in fact."

"Visitors?" repeated Watson, staring. "What visitors?"

"Begad! You're frightfully mysterious, dear old boy," observed Sir Montie mildly.

I smiled.

"Well, the fact is there's going to be a council meeting," I declared. "I'm going to have Christine & Co. over here, and Pitt, and one or two others. We've got to discuss matters. Something has cropped up which must receive immediate attention."

"About the fight?" asked Watson concernedly.

"Yes."

"Begad! I hope it's nothing serious," said Sir Montie.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is rather serious," I said. "But we've got to set our wits to work—and I'm fairly certain that we shall be able to overcome the difficulty. You'll hear all about it when we hold the council meeting."

And I would not say anything further at the moment, and although Sir Montie and Tommy were very curious, they had to wait until after tea.

Study C was rather crowded by the time all the members of the select council were present. The party numbered twelve altogether—Handforth, Church and McClure, Christine, Yorke and Talmadge, Ernest Lawrence, Reginald Pitt, Jack Grey, and, of

course, the study's original occupants, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, and myself.

"Now, what's the giddy idea?" inquired Handforth. "What's the party for?"

"It's no good asking me," said Watson. "Nipper knows all about it, but he won't say a word."

"It's about Lawrence," I said. "I'm getting to the point straight away."

"About me?" repeated Lawrence. "What do you mean, Nipper?"

"Exactly what I say," I replied. "We've got to discuss ways and means, my son. I've got hold of some information which is of the most terrific importance. It won't be such an easy matter for you to go to Helmford to-morrow evening, to keep that engagement. It may interest you to know that there will be some spies on your track."

"Spies!" echoed Christine. "What do you mean, you ass?"

"Out with it, Nipper!"

"Don't talk in riddles!"

"What's the idea?"

I frowned at the curious juniors.

"Foxe is taking a trip to Helmford to-morrow evening—and Mr. Pagett, the Fifth Form master, will accompany him."

Lawrence started.

"They're going to Helmford!" he exclaimed. "Do—do you mean——"

"Exactly!" I said. "They are going to spy on you, Lawrence. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett are going to the Ring Pavilion to witness that fight. And if they see you there, they are to come back and report to the Head—in fact, the Head has sent them. You can easily guess what the result will be. You might manage old Foxey, but you can't do anything with Mr. Pagett. He'll report, too, and it will be known to Dr. Stafford that you are Young Ern. That'll finally put the lid on it, and you'll get the sack!"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"This—this is awful!" said Lawrence, turning slightly pale. "I—I hadn't reckoned on anything like this, Nipper. But how did the Head know? How could he guess?"

"It doesn't matter much to us how he knew, or how he guessed," I interrupted. "The main thing is that Foxe and Pagett are going to the Ring Pavilion to-morrow evening. If they arrive there and see that fight—well, they'll see you. So we've got to do something. We've got to put our heads together and conspire."

Lawrence looked thoroughly alarmed.

"But—but what can we do?" he asked anxiously. "If Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett are really going, there's an end of it—I shall have to give up the fight! I must send Mr. Rook a wire this evening, saying that I can't turn up to-morrow, and that he must get a substitute—"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "You can't let him down like that. He's arranged this fight, and you've got to keep to it, my son, even if you get sacked from St. Frank's afterwards."

"It's easy enough to say that," put in Christine. "You're not going to get sacked, Handy, and I'm jolly certain that Lawrence won't, either! If there's no other way out of it, he won't go to this fight at all!"

"Let me do the talking, my sons," I said. "I've got an idea, and I want to tell you chaps about it, and hear what you say. You might be able to suggest some improvements. If so, all the better. In any case, this fight is coming off, and Mr. Foxe and Mr. Paget are going to be dished!"

"That sounds frightfully good, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "But how is it goin' to be done?"

"Well, Foxey and Pagett will leave here to-morrow evening," I said. "They'll probably go in the Head's car and start at six, or they might go by rail; we shall have to find out before we make our final arrangements. But,

in any case, Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett will never get to Helmford."

"Eh?"

"They'll meet with an adventure on the way," I went on calmly, "and, unfortunately, they will be delayed for such a time that when they find themselves free again the fight will be over, and Lawrence will be back at St. Frank's."

"You—you ass!" said Handforth. "How do you know this?"

"Something seems to tell me so," I replied, with a chuckle.

"How do you know that Foxe and Pagett will be delayed?"

"Because you chaps will delay them," I replied.

"What!"

"We—we will delay them?"

"Precisely," I said. "You will be jolly busy to-morrow evening."

Everybody was speaking at once. All the juniors were asking questions.

"Hold on!" I exclaimed. "I'll tell you all about it in a minute. There's another thing I want to say. Lawrence, as a matter of fact, needn't worry about getting a pass out, because he'll be at St. Frank's all the evening."

"Eh?" said Christine. "Lawrence will be at St. Frank's all the evening?"

"Yes."

"Then why should we trouble about delaying Mr. Foxe and—"

"You'll understand everything after I've explained," I interrupted. "Now, then, you chaps—silence! Listen to your uncle."

After a while there was silence, and I got busy. I told the fellows, in detail, what my plans were, and gradually their serious expressions changed, and they smiled. Then their smiles changed to grins, and, finally, they yelled.

The meeting broke up half an hour later, and all the plans were cut and dried. We had set ourselves out to help Ernest Lawrence, and we were doing so with a will.

And he needed help, too! Without

our assistance he would never have come through with flying colours. With our assistance, it was quite likely that he would do so. He was feeling fitter than he had felt for weeks, and he was quite confident of being able to put up a good fight against Mike Connor. But if he worried over matters concerning St. Frank's, he would not be able to put his best into that match.

On the following day we learned, through the agency of Mr. Cuttle, the school porter, that Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett were going for a trip in the Head's motor-car during the evening, and they would start at about five-thirty. This was good enough for us. We had got the information we needed.

"It's all serene, my sons," I said, to a group in the Triangle at dinner-time. "They're going by car. Everything in the garden is lovely! We shall be able to work the dodge beautifully, and I don't see how any hitch can occur."

During the afternoon, which was a half-holiday, Pitt and Grey and Handforth & Co. went out on their bicycles. Nobody knew where they went to, and their mission, indeed, was a mysterious one.

They did not return until tea-time, and their bicycles were minus several parcels which had been tied to the machines, and the juniors were all looking content and satisfied.

"O.K.?" I inquired briefly, as I met them in the Triangle.

"Absolutely!" said Pitt, with equal brevity.

They passed on to the bicycle-shed, and not long afterwards they were in their respective studies partaking of tea. They considered that it was a well-earned meal. But it was a rapid one, for, within half an hour the juniors were off again. I remained behind, for I was taking no part in this particular section of the programme.

And I was watching from a convenient position when the Head's two-seater car was brought round into the Triangle, just before five-thirty. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett emerged from the College House together, and crossed over the Triangle. They were both wearing overcoats and gloves.

Mr. Foxe elected to drive himself; he did not wish to be bothered with any chauffeur. Moreover, it was highly necessary that this trip to Helmford should be kept secret. When the two masters sought admission to the Ring Pavilion, they would use means to conceal their features to hide their identity. It was most important that no hint should leak out that two St. Frank's masters had patronised such an establishment.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett left St. Frank's at about twenty minutes to six, and the car went driving away down the lane towards Bellton. Helmford lay nearly twenty miles distant, on the other side of Bannington.

Once in Bannington, Mr. Foxe sent the car buzzing along the main London road, which was also the Helmford road. The first place to be entered was Midshott, a small village about five miles beyond Bannington. Then came a tiny hamlet known as Little Hadlow. Between Midshott and Little Hadlow the road was extremely lonely, quiet and deserted. For three miles there was hardly a house or a cottage to be seen. It was a very deserted stretch of road. For the main part trees overhung the high banks on either side, and there were corners, turns and valleys.

It was practically dark by the time Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett arrived at this stretch of road. The sky was overcast, although there was no promise of rain. Indeed, it seemed that a frost would set in when darkness finally arrived.

The car was just descending into a hollow, where the trees were very thick, and where the hedges were

high, when, glancing down, Mr. Foxe saw a figure standing in the very centre of the road, waving a lantern. A frown came upon Mr. Foxe's brow.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Is the road stopped down here? If so, it will mean that we shall be compelled to make a detour for seven or eight miles. What an infernal nuisance!"

They came nearer, and at last Mr. Foxe brought the car to a standstill. He now saw that the figure with the lantern was that of a country yokel.

The youth was not carrying a lantern, as Mr. Foxe had supposed, but a bicycle-lamp, and the light did not play upon his features. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett could only see a red countenance, surmounted by a dilapidated old hat, and from underneath peeped a bit of untidy red hair.

"Well, boy, what is it?" demanded Mr. Foxe curtly.

"Ah, guv'nor, I'm main glad ye've stopped!" said the rustic, his voice coming in gasps. "There's summat awful happened up at the farm. I want ye to come along, sir."

"Something awful!" repeated Mr. Pagett. "What on earth do you mean?"

"That be only a few hundred yards down this 'ere old lane, sir," went on the boy. "I dunno what to do, an' that's a fact. You must come along, sir—both on ye! What with the mistress bein' fair off her head with worry——"

"We can't stop over your trouble, young man!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "If you're in difficulties of some kind, you'd better go and fetch the police. We're in a hurry!"

"Really, Mr. Foxe, if this lad is in sore straits, we must assist him!" put in Mr. Pagett, who, although bad-tempered, was not bad-hearted. "Now, my boy, tell me what the trouble is. Be brief."

"Well, sir, yer see, it's like this 'ere," he said. "There ain't no doctor here about, and when an old lady

meets with a haccident, it's bad—awful bad. To fall right downstairs is serious enough for anybody, particularly an old woman. If you'd be so kind as to come along, sir, an' have a look—it ain't far, only down this little old lane, a few hundred yards."

The yokel had made no definite statement; he had only vaguely hinted that an accident had occurred somewhere.

"I'm afraid it is hopeless to get much out of this person," said Mr. Pagett impatiently. "But it is quite clear that an accident has occurred to an old lady, and that she is in a bad way. We must go, Mr. Foxe; we must see what we can do."

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Foxe. "Where is this house?"

"That be just down this 'ere old lane, sir," said the rustic. "If so be as you'll come along, I'll direct ye."

"All right; stand on the footboard and give your instructions," said Mr. Foxe. "Down this lane? If there are any turnings, tell me."

"There bain't no turnings, sir," said the rustic. "That be quite straight until the farmhouse is reached. And that ain't fur, neither; you can see they lights from 'ere."

Twinkling through the trees, one or two lights could be seen, evidently the lights of the farmhouse. It was quite dark now, and it was impossible to distinguish anything very clearly. And after the car had been going for some little way along the lane it was brought to a halt in front of a gate, and there loomed before the trio one or two old buildings, evidently a farmhouse. At least, so it appeared to be in the darkness. But Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett would have been surprised had they known that this old house had been deserted for years, and that it was partially a ruin, and generally innocent of all human inhabitants. One or two lights were showing from the windows, giving the old place a warm, inhabited appearance.

The yokel led the way to the front door, opened it, and passed inside. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett followed him. They found themselves in a brick-paved hall. Only a tiny glimmer of light was showing here, and it came from one of the half-opened doors. The country youth went right past this doorway, and led the way to the rear of this passage. He opened a heavy oaken door and stood aside. His bicycle lamp revealed a flight of stone stairs, leading downwards.

"That be the cellar down there, sir," said the youth. "The stairs are treacherous—"

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Mr. Pagett. "The old lady fell down these stairs, no doubt, and is lying there now. Dear me! This is very distressing, Mr. Foxe. We must see what we can do at once."

"Thank ye, sir," said the rustic. He was still standing on the side, and Mr. Pagett led the way down the steps, to be followed at once by Mr. Foxe.

They had hardly got down four or five stairs, when the door closed with a slam. Mr. Foxe gave a start, and turned round. He heard two heavy bolts being shot, and a big key was turned in a huge lock.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe. "What—what is the meaning of this! I say, boy! How dare you?"

He paused, and there was no reply. Not a sound broke the stillness except a movement from Mr. Pagett. And, suddenly, Mr. Foxe knew the truth—he knew that he and his companion had been trapped, and they had walked into the trap open-eyed and like a couple of fools.

"Confound it!" raved Mr. Foxe. "Open that door! Do you hear me? Open that door, hang you!"

Mr. Foxe hammered upon the panels of the door with his hand, but no response came. The country yokel had gone, apparently.

Mr. Pagett, who was lower down the cellar steps, hardly knew what to think. His brain was in a whirl, and he felt

terribly alarmed, for he had often read in the papers how people had been lured into quiet spots, and then robbed with violence! Mr. Pagett suddenly felt his knees wobbling beneath him.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "This—this is extraordinary! What—what can it mean, Mr. Foxe? It—it seems that the lad's story was not true—"

"True!" shouted Mr. Foxe. "Of course it wasn't true—it was pure fabrication, in order to bring us here! We are prisoners, by all appearances."

"Good gracious me!" gasped Mr. Pagett nervously.

They went to the bottom of the cellar steps, and then Mr. Foxe struck a match. As he had suspected, there was no way out. The cellar was only a small one—quite a tiny place, in fact, with no window, and not even a grating. There was merely a ventilator, near the roof, but this was only a few inches in depth. The only possible exit from the cellar was by means of the door at the top of the stairs, and that door was of solid oak, and it was bolted and locked.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had been trapped; there was no escape.

But they were rather surprised, in spite of their alarm. Why had they been left here in this way?

And then suddenly Mr. Foxe jumped to the truth.

"By Heaven!" he snapped. "I've got it!"

"Eh? My dear sir—"

"We have been trapped!" stormed Mr. Smale Foxe. "We have been tricked, probably by some of Lawrence's friends. Don't you realise what it means?"

"I must confess that I fall—"

"We have been brought here so that we cannot go to Helmford—to the Ring Pavilion!" exclaimed Mr. Foxe savagely. "That is the truth. Lawrence will fight there this evening, and, somehow or other, he and his friends got to know that we were coming. But we shall be unable to

witness the fight, and it will be impossible to bring any charge against Lawrence!"

"Dear me!" said the Fifth Form master. "What an astounding suggestion! But, really, Mr. Foxe, I have an idea that you are right. There can be no other solution to this strange problem!"

"I know I am right!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "To think that we should have fallen so easily into the trap! But Lawrence need not imagine that he is safe! The very fact that we have been placed in this cellar and kidnapped is deadly proof against him. The wretched boy shall suffer for this!"

Meanwhile, outside, the country yokel had joined other figures. They came like shadows out of the night, and, curiously enough, they were not country folks at all. On the contrary, they were attired in Etons, and wore ordinary overcoats and tweed caps.

"Did it work all right?" inquired De Valerie softly.

"Work!" said the rustic. "My hat! They walked into it just the same as sheep walk into a pen!"

"I must say you did the trick well, Pitt!" said Tommy Watson. "You acted the part to the life! No wonder Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett didn't smell a rat. And they're safe now until we choose to let them out!"

"Which won't be until nine o'clock at the very earliest," said Reginald Pitt, removing his wig and grinning. "I rather enjoyed it, you know. And neither Pagett nor Foxe can prove anything. They may suspect, but they have no proof. I'll guarantee anything you like they didn't recognise me!"

Pitt had acted his part with extreme cleverness. And he was quite right when he said that neither Mr. Foxe nor Mr. Pagett could recognise him. His own identity had been completely concealed behind his make-up, and he had changed his voice completely, too.

A great thing had been accomplished. It was now impossible for the two masters to reach the Ring Pavilion in Helmford and witness the fight between Young Ern and Mike Connor. So Lawrence was safe.

But other steps had to be taken, too.

For I had made up my mind to convince Dr. Stafford that black was white. In other words, that Young Ern was not Lawrence at all! And I had an idea that I should succeed in this somewhat difficult task.

CHAPTER 20.

A Perfect Alibi!

DR. STAFFORD was very thoughtful as he sat in his study at St. Frank's. He had been quite still for some little time, and now he rose to his feet and paced up and down before the cheerful fire which blazed in the grate.

"I sincerely hope that Mr. Foxe will bring back a good report," he murmured. "I should not like to think that a St. Frank's boy is mixed up with prize fighting."

The Head glanced at the clock, and he saw that the time was just ten minutes past seven. According to his information, the fight had now commenced, and Ernest Lawrence was in Helmford, battling in the ring against Mike Connor.

Dr. Stafford was expecting his visitors—two of the school governors. They had not yet arrived, and the Head went to his door, and then passed out into the Triangle. It was a clear night now, and there was a touch of frost in the air. Two or three juniors were to be seen, moving about the gymnasium and the Ancient House or the College House. And suddenly the Head paused, for he heard a voice.

"I say, Lawrence!" it shouted. "Just come here a minute, will you?"

"What for?" inquired another voice.

"I want you, you ass! That's what for!"

The Head started.

"Lawrence!" he ejaculated, under his breath. "Can it be possible that Lawrence is at the school? If so, then it finally disproves the idea that the lad has gone to Helmford. I understood that Lawrence would be absent this evening. I will see into this at once!"

The Head moved briskly across the Triangle, in the direction of the gymnasium. And when he arrived, he saw two juniors standing just against one of the chestnut trees. The light from the gymnasium windows shone upon the pair and revealed their faces. It was not a strong light, but quite sufficient to see by.

Both the juniors raised their caps as the Head appeared.

"Good-evening, sir," they said.

"Good-evening, my boys," said Dr. Stafford.

One junior was Yorke of the Remove, and the other was Ernest Lawrence! Dr. Stafford did not have very much to do with the juniors, but he knew them all by sight.

"I understood that you were out this evening, Lawrence," said the headmaster. "But I see that you are here."

"Yes," assented Lawrence. "I'm not going out at all this evening, sir. It's rather cold, and I've got my prep to do."

"Yes—yes, of course," said the Head. "I am very pleased to see, Lawrence, that you are here."

Dr. Stafford walked off, and made his way back to his study, feeling very relieved. So Lawrence had not gone to Helmford at all! What could it mean? It was just possible, of course, that the fight had been put off, and that Lawrence had received a warning.

Dr. Stafford meant to make sure of this at once; and there was one way of doing so. He drew his telephone towards him, and lifted the receiver. The 'phone directory was in front of

him, and his finger was upon a certain number.

"Helmford 5301," he said.

It was the telephone number of the Ring Pavilion.

And in a few minutes the Head was through.

"Hallo!" came a somewhat rough voice. "Who's speaking?"

"Are you the Ring Pavilion, Helmford?" inquired Dr. Stafford.

"Yes."

"Can you tell me if a fight is now proceeding between two persons named Young Ern and Mike Connor?" inquired the Head pointedly.

"Yes, of course!" came the voice. "The fight started a quarter of an hour ago. They're in the middle of the third or fourth round now."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "I am sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me for certain whether the fight is really between Mike Connor and Young Ern? Are you sure that the lad is Young Ern—?"

"What's the game?" demanded the voice. "Don't try to be funny with us! Of course it's Young Ern!"

"I want to be quite sure——"

"Oh, I can't waste my time over you!" said the voice. "You can go to blazes!"

And he slammed the receiver down, and the Head was cut off. Dr. Stafford, rather shocked, replaced his own receiver, and then lay back in his chair. And the frown which marred his face soon gave place to a smile.

"Excellent!" he murmured. "I rather regret sending Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett to Helmford now, for I know the truth. Lawrence is here, within the school building, and Young Ern is fighting in Helmford! It is quite obvious, therefore, that Lawrence is not this boxer. I am greatly relieved and pleased."

The Head was convinced—absolutely and thoroughly convinced. No matter what was said to him now, it would make no difference whatever. He knew

for a fact that Young Ern was fighting in the Ring at Helmford, and, with his own eyes, he had seen Ernest Lawrence chatting with Yorke in the Triangle. How was it possible, therefore, for Young Ern and Lawrence to be one and the same person?

Obviously, it was quite impossible.

And while the Head was thinking thus in his own study, Lawrence and Yorke strolled across the Triangle in the direction of the Ancient House. They were near the steps when two figures appeared—the figures of Owen major and Hubbard of the Remove.

"Hallo!" said Owen major. "Monks!"

"Oh, pax!" exclaimed Lawrence easily. "No House rows now!"

"All right!" said Hubbard, who knew what a punch Lawrence had. "But I thought you were going out this evening, Lawrence?"

"Did you?" said the College House junior. "You'd better think again!"

"Well, come on," said Yorke. "We'd better be getting back—it's nearly half-past seven now."

They strolled away, and during the next hour Lawrence was seen by quite a number of fellows—juniors and seniors. He strolled to all parts of the Triangle, and entered the gymnasium. And by half-past eight, there were at least fifty fellows who would be willing to swear that Ernest Lawrence was at the school between seven o'clock and nine o'clock on that particular evening.

Lawrence had shown himself to everybody—but not in the College House itself.

Finally, Yorke and Lawrence crossed the Triangle again, until they arrived at the window of Study Q. This had been left partially open, and the sash was soon raised. He and Lawrence climbed through, closed the window, and pulled the blind, and then switched on the electric light.

Yorke saw that the door was closed, and he turned the key in the lock.

Then he faced his companion and grinned.

"Great!" he exclaimed ecstatically. "Absolutely great! You're a marvel!"

"Oh, come off it!" chuckled Lawrence.

"You're absolutely a double-barrelled wonder!" said Yorke admiringly. "The voice! It's absolutely like Lawrence's. The same intonation, the same everything. And outside in the Triangle, where the light isn't very strong, you looked like Lawrence to the life!"

"What about the hair?" inquired the other junior.

"Well, here there's just a slight difference," said Yorke. "I don't think I'd chance calling in any of the fellows to have a look at you—they might smell a rat! But it's a wonderful make-up, for all that!"

It seemed, according to this little conversation, that Ernest Lawrence was not Ernest Lawrence at all! And this, as a matter of fact, was the absolute truth. The junior who was facing Roddy Yorke at the present moment was a fellow who generally went by the name of Nipper.

Precisely!

Dr. Stafford had been speaking to me in the Triangle—Owen major and Hubbard had been speaking to me! All the other fellows who had seen "Lawrence" had really seen me! To tell the truth, I had disguised myself as Lawrence, and was impersonating him just for an hour or two. My object was to provide an absolutely cast-iron alibi for the schoolboy boxer.

Lawrence himself, of course, was in Helmford, engaged in his great fight with Mike Connor, and, while he was there, I had remained at St. Frank's, and was showing myself to all and sundry as—Lawrence!

"I'm tremendously pleased with the Head!" I chuckled. "He saw me, and spoke to me—and he'll never believe that Lawrence really went to Helmford to-night. The whole game has been a great success, Yorke, and all

we need now is to hear that Lawrence has won his fight. That will put the finishing touch to the evening!"

"Rather!" said Yorke, nodding.

"And I've got an idea that Lawrence will win, too," I said. "He was in fine condition—as hard as nails, and as fit as a fiddle. He'll go into the ring ready for anything. In fact, he's in the ring now—perhaps the fight's over."

"Oh, it's bound to be over by this time," said Yorke. "I tell you, old son, it was a great scheme of yours."

"As a matter of fact, it was the only thing that could be done," I said. "Either that, or Lawrence stayed away from the fight. We couldn't think of that, so we've tricked everybody—including the Head and old Foxey!"

"I wonder how they are getting on?" chuckled Yorke. "I wonder if the wheeze has succeeded. If so, Foxey and Pagett are now confined in that cellar, probably fuming at one another!"

"I don't think Pitt and the others failed," I said. "Pitt was made up all right. I saw to that. And I know he's pretty good at theatricals. I'll guarantee he deceived Foxey and Pagett. And, in any case, he has others on hand if there was any trouble. We can take it as a cert, that the prisoners are still in the cellar."

The scheme, as it will be seen, was rather elaborate. During the afternoon a party of fellows had cycled along the Helmford road until they reached the hollow between Midshott and Little Hadlow.

They had entered the dilapidated, deserted farmhouse, and had made certain preparations.

For example, they had fixed two strong iron bolts to the cellar door, to say nothing of a powerful lock. They had seen that there was no other exit from the cellar. And they had fixed up little imitation curtains to two or three of the windows, and placed candles near by, ready to light, so as to

give the house an inhabited appearance from outside, after dark.

But if Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had failed to fall into the trap, other juniors were ready to take the two masters into the cellar by sheer force. They could easily have done this, for they were provided with cloaks and masks, so that their identity would be concealed. But such an expedient had not been necessary, for Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had fallen into the trap at the very beginning.

In fact, we had carried out our promise to Lawrence. We had done everything in our power to help him in his difficulties. We had made it possible for him to go to Helmford and fight Mike Connor, and his mind was easy. He knew that his escapade would not be discovered, and that he could return to St. Frank's with the full knowledge that his delinquency would not be known to the Head.

CHAPTER 21.

A Giant's Task!

"SECONDS out!"

It was the sign for the audience to remain quite still, and breaths to be held. The big fight was just about to begin. The canvas-covered ring was brilliantly illuminated by several glaring electric lights which hung overhead.

In one corner sat Ernest Lawrence, cool, calm, and perfectly ready. His heart was beating steadily, and he was feeling more fit than he had ever felt before.

In the opposite corner sat Mike Connor, the champion.

There was a deal of difference in the two boxers.

Lawrence was perfectly built and upright. His skin was white and clean, and his features were even—handsome. The same could not be truthfully said regarding Mike Connor. The Irishman was a prize fighter of great ex-

perience. He had toured the United States, and had won most of his fights. He had made a great name for himself, and was regarded by his backers as being well-nigh unbeatable. This particular fight was looked upon as a dead certainty for him—he simply couldn't lose.

His face was rugged, and bore the marks of many severe blows. He was round-shouldered, and his skin was hairy and tough. He formed a great contrast to the boyish figure on the other side of the ring.

Everybody predicted that this would be certain defeat for Young Ern—that the unknown youngster would be knocked out before the fourth round. And, to judge by appearances, these prophets would not be far wrong.

It was quite easy to see that Mike Connor shared the general view. There was almost a contemptuous expression in his eyes, and he seemed to regard it as absurd that he should be called upon to face such a novice as this Young Ern.

This fight—the big one of the evening—was due to commence at seven o'clock. This was rather contrary to custom. But, owing to the fact that Lawrence had to go back to St. Frank's—although the audience knew nothing of this—Mr. Rook had arranged things accordingly.

There were a great many boxing enthusiasts in Helmford and most of them were present. The gathering could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a distinguished one. However, they knew a great deal about boxing—and that was the thing that mattered.

"Seconds out! Time!"

Mike Connor hopped briskly into the centre of the ring, and fell into his guard to face Young Ern, still with that smile of contempt on his rugged countenance.

Lawrence was looking very serious and quiet. He never suffered from over confidence. He let others do

that. His idea was to go cautiously at first, in order to measure his man.

Mike Connor was a problem to him so far. He did not know what this champion was like or what he could do. It was, therefore, better to wait and see what Mike would show him. Until then he would mark time.

The referee was a short, middle-aged man who had been a boxer himself in his younger days. He was a keen man, and, upon the whole, quite fair. He would see that this fight was conducted in a proper manner.

In one of the seats quite near to the ropes sat Mr. Norman Rook. There was an expression of quiet confidence on his face. He knew what Lawrence could do, and he was quietly anticipating the surprise which was awaiting the crowd.

True, a great number of people had seen Young Ern beat Jimmy Rhodes, but Mike Connor was a different proposition, and the greater portion of the crowd had come fully prepared to see Young Ern wiped off the map.

The battle was opened by Mike Connor. He was full of determination to show the crowd what he could do, and it was his present plan to play about with Young Ern as a cat plays with a mouse. He would show everybody how ridiculous it had been to match him against a fresh, raw youngster like this.

Mike was as quick as a panther, and as tough as leather. Lawrence knew well enough that he would have a stiff task to defeat this man.

The first round was rather uneventful. Mike drove Lawrence round the ring, he was, in fact, all over him. Lawrence, according to his usual custom, remained on the defensive. He would not attack until he knew what kind of a boxer he had to deal with.

The round came to a close, and there was no applause. The crowd were not particularly impressed; but it certainly seemed to them that Mike would be

able to finish the fight just when and how he liked.

The second and third rounds were very much the same, Lawrence remaining on the defensive practically the whole time. It seemed rather dull to the crowd, but Lawrence was gauging his man—he was taking his measure. And, more than once, Mike Connor gave evidence of great power and skill. And so far, he had been doing nearly all the attacking, and, on points, he was easily ahead up to now.

By the time the fourth round started Ernest Lawrence had accomplished his desire—he had found out exactly what Mike Connor could do, and what he could not do.

Those three rounds had been rather brisk, but Lawrence was as fresh and cool as ever.

When the fourth round commenced Lawrence entered into the battle with a vim and zest which took everybody by surprise—particularly Connor.

Quick as a flash, the schoolboy boxer's fists shot home, and Mike was not prepared. He received a straight left which woke him up with something like a jar, and immediately following a second blow told him quite plainly that he would not be wise to relax his vigilance.

The pair rushed into a swift exchange of blows, and shifted round the ring in a grim battle. Lawrence's footwork was perfect to behold—and far better than Mike's. The latter was somewhat clumsy, and by no means as rapid and clever as Lawrence.

Connor's principal method of attack was a deadly left hook, and he repeatedly attempted to get this home. But he was not successful—he found it almost impossible to get through his young opponent's guard. And every blow he attempted to drive home was smothered before it became dangerous.

More than once Mike was cautioned by the referee for holding, and in that fourth round the referee found it necessary on several occasions to break

the boxers apart. And, in every case, it was Connor who went into the clinch. He was beginning to take a strong dislike to Lawrence's right.

So far the junior was unmarked, and, when the fifth round commenced, he went into the battle with great keenness. He was enjoying the fight—he was revelling in it. And he opened the round in brisk style.

Almost before Mike knew what was coming he received a punch in the ribs which caused him to stagger a pace or two. Then, quick as a flash, Lawrence came on, landing two terrific punches which literally drove Connor across the ring.

The Irishman was taken by surprise, and, for the moment, his guard was gone. Lawrence was like a tiger, and he could not be denied. The schoolboy boxer waded into Mike with both fists, and punished him severely.

Not that this had much effect. Mike could take a great deal of punishment without showing it. He was as hard as nails, and the most powerful body blows seemed to have very little effect upon him.

But Connor was receiving a shock.

He clenched his teeth, and savagely made two or three powerful swings at Lawrence, being determined to smother this attack. But Lawrence acted with the swiftness of lightning. He dodged thrust after thrust, and with apparently no effort.

Then, changing his tactics with the same rapidity, he swept in, just as Connor made a wild swing. If that blow had got home Lawrence would have measured his length on the floor. But it didn't go home.

Instead, Connor received a straight left on the point of the chin. He was almost lifted from his feet as he staggered backwards to be brought up against the ropes. Then, before he could recover his wits, he was treated to a rain of body blows which fairly made him gasp. And he was immensely relieved when "time" was called.

Lawrence walked back to his corner

calmly and steadily, showing no sign of exhaustion. Mike Connor, on the other hand, was rather puffed, and there was now a leer of savage anger on his mouth. He had received an unpleasant surprise, and he did not like it. He was finding that his opponent was an extremely difficult customer to tackle.

At first Lawrence had not been fighting at all—he had been merely measuring his man. Mike knew this now, and he realised how his youthful opponent had sized him up.

But when the sixth round commenced there was only one thought in Mike's brain. He was going to give this youngster a real taste of fighting.

But Lawrence had quite different ideas.

He was prepared for every one of Mike's moves. He knew exactly what his opponent was worth.

"Time!"

One thing was quite obvious when that round commenced. Mike Connor was in a temper, and he had thrown all defence aside.

It was a fatal policy.

For Lawrence's task was now much easier. The fight was his, indeed, and he knew it. His left swung in like a sledge hammer, and the blow landed upon Connor's jaw. It was a terrific punch, and Mike was practically lifted off his feet, to fall flat on his back with a crash.

He rose, rather dazed, as a buzz of excitement went round the crowd. And Connor came charging in blindly and desperately.

But there had been no change in Lawrence.

He was still fighting calmly and coolly and with an assurance which was apparent to everybody. The on-lookers gazed at him in a kind of awe. He fascinated them—his style was so masterly, so absolutely perfect. He seemed to be impregnable, and his defence was like iron.

To Lawrence's astonishment he was finding this fight even easier than his

tussle against Jimmy Rhodes. And the reason for this was clear. Mike Connor had started off with the firm belief that he had not a very difficult task in front of him. He realised it now—but it was too late. He was groggy, whilst his opponent was still as fresh as paint.

But Mike was game enough—he had no intention of throwing up the sponge. But when the ninth round commenced, he felt, instinctively, that he was beaten, and that Lawrence would be able to put the finishing touch to the fight whenever he liked.

Still Connor fought on, hoping that he might be able to catch this cool youngster napping—and, if he could get home one of his deadly left hooks, he might win, even now.

But Mike did not know his man, or he would not have cherished this idea. Lawrence was not the kind to be caught napping—especially by a groggy opponent.

And, to make matter worse, Young Ern was full of surprises. He was not content to attack in the recognised manner.

Connor fell into a crouching attitude, and waited for Lawrence to close with him. He did not wait in vain, for the schoolboy boxer came in.

He leapt in suddenly, and swept out a powerful left. It was an unexpected attack, and Connor was not prepared for it.

A gloved fist, which appeared to be more like a battering-ram, smashed through the Irishman's guard. And that fist landed squarely upon his mouth—with a thud which sent his head back.

The blows which rained upon him immediately after that cat-like spring of Lawrence's were so rapid and so deadly that Mike hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

His ribs were battered, and the blows fell upon his chest and head, and every one felt like the kick of a mule.

Mike Connor staggered back under

that terrible hail, attempting in vain to guard himself.

There was no time for Mike to make a recovery.

He backed away, working his arms in a futile, helpless manner. And Ernest Lawrence brought the fight to an end at that moment. He sent a punch to the body, which caused Mike Connor to grunt and reel.

Out came Lawrence's right, and it found the point of Mike's chin—it was impossible to miss it, indeed. It was there, unguarded, and inviting attack.

Crash!

All the force of Lawrence's sturdy frame was behind that blow. The impact could be heard all over the hall, and Mike Connor went over and fell in a limp heap. He was knocked out, and everybody knew it. It was futile to wait for the count, for, if the count had gone on to a hundred, Mike would never have found his feet.

"Young Ern wins!"

"The kid's a fair wonder!"

"Splendid—splendid!" muttered Mr. Norman Rook, with intense satisfaction. "I knew that my judgment was not at fault!"

Again Ernest Lawrence had won. It had been a hard, gruelling fight—harder than he allowed the crowd to see.

But a song of triumph was throbbing in his heart, and he had only one thought in his mind as he left the Ring—after being satisfied that Mike would soon be on his feet again. That thought was one of intense satisfaction that he would be able to send his father one hundred pounds—and perhaps more! For Mr. Rook had promised him more if he won—quite a large sum, in fact.

But after the fight it was all one rush for Lawrence—he could not think of other things at the moment.

It was a rush in the dressing-room, it was a rush when he interviewed Mr. Rook and the referee, and one or two of the other officials. Then it was another rush to the railway station. He

would be able to arrive at St. Frank's before bedtime. And nobody in authority at St. Frank's would ever know the real truth. Lawrence's eyes gleamed as he thought of things.

"They're a fine lot—Nipper and the rest!" he muttered to himself. "They've helped me more than they realise! They're bricks—every one of them!"

CHAPTER 22.

A Staggerer for Mr. Foxe!

REGINALD PITT glanced at his watch in the darkness. It was quite easy for him to read the face, for it had luminous hands and numerals.

"Just half-past eight," he murmured. "I didn't think it was quite so late as that. We shall have to be making a move before long, my sons."

Pitt was himself again now—he had

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cast aside his "rustic" disguise. It was no longer needed. It would not be necessary for him to show himself to the prisoners again. And it was quite impossible for either Mr. Foxe or Mr. Pagett to know who their captors actually were. They might guess things—but they had not one atom of proof!

Bob Christine had been looking thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Well, I think we had better be making a move now!" he said. "It's half-past eight, so it's a certainty that the fight is over by this time—and I'm jolly well hoping that Lawrence has won. But we shall find that out later."

"The fight's over!" said Handforth. "What rot! Why, it didn't start until seven—"

"Well, how many rounds do you think there are?" asked Pitt. "I understand that it's a fifteen-round contest, so it's bound to be over by now—it's probably been over for more than half-an-hour. So I think we might as well let the prisoners out. Even if they go to Helmsford, they'll find nothing—Lawrence will be gone!"

Church nodded.

"That's right!" he agreed. "And we've got to think about getting back ourselves—we don't want to be left in the cart, do we? Even if we start almost at once, we shall only arrive just in time for bed. I think we'd better be getting busy, you chaps."

The conspirators agreed. They were all very sorry that they had been unable to go to Helmsford in order to witness the fight. But I had advised them that it would be better not to do so. I had hoped to be there personally, in order to see Lawrence win, but, on the whole, it was far better for us to avoid the Ring Pavilion.

For one thing, the place was absolutely out of bounds. But, more important still, we might have jeopardised Lawrence's safety if we had gone—and if we had been seen by somebody who mattered. As things were, there was nothing whatever to indicate

that we had been mixed up in this affair in any way whatever.

"Well, we've done everything," said Pitt. "All that remains is for us to get off now. You chaps had better take all the bikes out into the road, and have them there ready with the lamps alight. I'll get into the house, and pull those bolts back. Then I'll buzz out, and we can get off as soon as you like. I think the measures we have taken for causing delay will be quite effective."

"They ought to be!" grinned Christine.

The bicycles were soon taken out into the road, and the lamps lit. Pitt, meanwhile, went into the house, and slipped quietly along the passage. For a moment or two he stood outside the cellar door, listening. He could hear the voices of Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett. The two masters were talking together—and Mr. Foxe did not appear to be in a particularly amiable mood. But this was hardly surprising.

Pitt grinned to himself, and then felt cautiously upwards for the top bolt. He found it, and slipped it noiselessly back. Then he turned the key in the lock. The door was now unfastened, except for the lower bolt. This bolt was not secured to the door very tightly—not because of carelessness, but because a definite object had been in view. Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett had to be released—and at the same time, the juniors wanted to allow themselves plenty of time to get away. And the problem had been solved in this manner.

The prisoners would very soon find that the door was as good as open. A little gentle persuasion would soon conquer that lower bolt, and the door would then fly open. The juniors reckoned that it would take the two masters about five minutes to get out.

Pitt slipped down the passage, and a moment or two later he was out in the open. He joined his chums in the road, and they quickly mounted their bicycles and pedalled away.

Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett, down in

the cellar, were in fierce moods by this time. Their captivity had told upon their tempers—particularly upon Mr. Foxe's. The Housemaster fumed up and down in the darkness, finding great difficulty in restraining himself from uttering language which would have greatly shocked the staid Mr. Pagett. But Mr. Foxe knew well enough not to offend the Fifth Form master.

"It is really too bad!" said Mr. Pagett. "Heaven only knows how long we shall be kept here, Mr. Foxe! Probably all night—we do not know. It seems that our captors have gone—we have been deserted. In that case, we might be here for days——"

"You are wrong!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "I am certain that we have only been imprisoned for an hour or two, so that we cannot arrive in Helmford to witness that fight. By now the fight is over, and Lawrence is probably on his way back to St. Frank's. We must do something, Mr. Pagett—it is absurd for us to remain here, idle and helpless!"

Mr. Pagett shrugged his shoulders.

"Really, my dear sir, it is idle to use such words!" he protested. "Have we not tried everything? The door is so fastened that we cannot hope to shift it. There is no other exit—so we must wait until——"

"Hush!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "What is that?"

"Really, I——"

"I am certain I heard a noise just now—a slight sound!" said Mr. Foxe quickly. "Listen!"

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Pagett. "I believe you are right! I heard something myself!"

They both remained still, but no other sound came to their ears. The old place seemed to be quite deserted and uninhabited. Mr. Foxe remained still for a minute or two, and then he moved cautiously forward, striking a match. He found himself at the foot of the stone stairs, and he mounted them.

Reaching the top he touched the door. And he was astonished to find that it seemed loose. It gave as he

pressed against it. And it only took him a few seconds to discover that the lock was undone, and that the top bolt had been drawn. The door was therefore only secured by the lower bolt—which seemed to be none too fast.

"Yes, there was somebody here a moment ago," said Mr. Foxe grimly. "Come up here, Mr. Pagett. The door is unfastened, except for the lower bolt. Our united efforts will enable us to force it open, and then we shall be free."

"I—I sincerely hope so!" said Mr. Pagett. "This is an outrageous affair altogether, and I shall certainly inform the police as soon as I regain my liberty. I have never had such scandalous treatment!"

The two masters used all their strength against the door. It creaked and groaned as they pressed and pushed. But for some little time it resisted their efforts. Then, at length, the lower bolt gave way with a sudden snap.

The door flew open, and precipitated Mr. Foxe and Mr. Pagett headlong upon the stone floor of the passage. Mr. Pagett fell first, with the other master on the top of him.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Mr. Pagett. "Really, sir— You are leaning on my chest! Upon my soul! This—this is terrible!"

"At last we are free!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "And now we will see if our car is still there."

Fortunately it was. As soon as they reached the open they saw Dr. Stafford's car standing there, quite unharmed. Mr. Pagett was greatly relieved.

"I will guarantee that boys are responsible for this outrage!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "Either boys, or Lawrence's associates. We were kidnapped and kept in that cellar merely in order to prevent us going to Helmford. I am positive of that, Mr. Pagett. I intend to hurry back to the school with all speed. If boys are the culprits, we shall

probably overtake them before they arrive at St. Frank's."

"Your suggestion is a wise one, Mr. Foxe," said the Fifth Form master. "It is quite useless for us to go to Helmsford now—that fight will be over. So we might just as well return to the school as quickly as possible."

Mr. Foxe leaned over the dashboard and pressed two or three switches. Instantly the headlamps blazed out, and then Mr. Foxe adjusted the controls and pressed the self-starter; but nothing happened. For two or three minutes the starter whirled, but the engine didn't respond.

"I cannot understand it!" muttered the College House master. "The engine ought to start without any trouble whatever!"

He tore up one of the side flaps and stared at the engine. And then he noticed that the carburettor had been interfered with. It was quite intact, and had not been damaged. But one or two parts were loose and required adjustment.

"The infernal rascals!" rapped out Mr. Foxe furiously. "This has been done to cause us delay—without the slightest doubt."

Mr. Pagett looked alarmed.

"Then—then we are helpless!" he ejaculated. "We need a mechanic——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Foxe. "It will not take me long to make the necessary adjustments!"

He soon found a spanner, and then he got to work. But it took him fully ten minutes before the carburettor was in working order. The engine started all right then, and Mr. Foxe's anger had oozed away somewhat.

"Splendid!" said Mr. Pagett. "I did not know that you were so accomplished, my dear Mr. Foxe!"

The Housemaster sat staring at the car. He had noticed something else—something which fairly made him dance with rage.

"All the tyres are flat!" roared Mr. Foxe savagely. "They have been punctured—they—they——"

The Housemaster choked, for he could not say anything else at the moment. He believed that all the tyres had been slashed with a knife.

But a careful examination showed that this was not the case. The tyres had merely been deflated. This welcome discovery, however, did not improve Mr. Foxe's temper to any great extent.

The misfortunes of the two masters seemed never ending.

"There is only a small foot pump!" rapped out Mr. Foxe. "It will occupy every moment of twenty minutes to pump these tyres sufficiently hard for us to start our journey. We must take it in turns, Mr. Pagett, but the work must be done!"

"How extremely annoying!" said Mr. Pagett crossly.

There was nothing else for it. The masters were compelled to take it in turns at the pump.

At last, however, they were able to get into the car and drive off. And Mr. Foxe let out some of his temper in his driving.

"Really, Mr. Foxe!" protested Mr. Pagett, as they spun round a corner almost on two wheels. "This—this speed is excessive——"

"You need not worry, Mr. Pagett!" snapped the Housemaster. "You are quite safe—I know how to drive!"

And they went roaring along towards Bannington and St. Frank's.

Meanwhile, Pitt and Christine and Handforth & Co. had arrived on the outskirts of Bellton by this time. They had a stiff trip, pedalling for all they were worth.

They were on the last lap of the journey—pedalling up the lane from Bellton to the school—when they saw three dim figures in the distance ahead. They proved to be the figures of three juniors, who stood waiting for the cyclists to come up.

"That you, Pitt?" came a voice.

Pitt jumped from his machine.

"Nipper!" he ejaculated. "I thought

perhaps it was you. Why, hallo! It's Lawrence!"

The three pedestrians were Ernest Lawrence, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and myself.

"Lawrence!" echoed the other fellows. "Good man! How did you get on?"

"Did you win?"

"Did he win?" I grinned. "Yes, my sons—he did! He knocked Mike Connor silly in the ninth round."

All the juniors were enthusiastic—and delighted to hear the good news.

We listened to Reginald Pitt's report with interest.

"Everything is as right as ninepence," I said at length.

"That's because the plans were so jolly good!" said Pitt. "We must give you credit, Nipper, for being a wonderful organiser."

"We haven't got time to talk now," I said lightly.

We succeeded in getting our bicycles over the wall and stowed away in the bicycle shed. Then the College House fellows, including Lawrence, went over to their own quarters, and we strolled into the Ancient House just as the bell was ringing for bed. Nothing could have been better.

I happened to be a little in the rear of the others, and Nelson Lee came striding across the Triangle from the Little Side gate. He had evidently been out. He came quite close to me, and touched my arm as he was passing.

"Very clever, Nipper!" he murmured dryly. "Very clever indeed, my lad!"

"Eh?"

But Nelson Lee had gone—he had passed into the Ancient House.

Ten minutes later we were in our respective dormitories, and no questions were asked.

And, very shortly after the prefects had come in to turn out the lights, we heard the sound of a motor-car out in the Triangle.

The very instant the car had come to a standstill Mr. Foxe dashed out of it

and made his way straight to Dr. Stafford's study. Mr. Pagett came in his rear. The two masters practically burst into the headmaster's study together. They found Dr. Stafford sitting in an easy chair, reading a heavy volume.

"Sir, we have been subjected to a violent outrage!" said Mr. Pagett.

"We have not been to Helmford!" snapped Mr. Smale Foxe. "Before we arrived there our car was stopped, and we were kidnapped."

"Really, Mr. Foxe, I must beg of you to be more explicit!" interrupted the headmaster.

Mr. Foxe glared.

"Yes, sir—kidnapped!" he shouted. "We have been subjected to outrageous treatment! And I am sure that Lawrence is at the bottom of it!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Head curtly. "Please do not talk wildly, Mr. Foxe."

Mr. Smale Foxe glared.

"And I am sure, sir, that Lawrence went to Helmford and appeared in the Ring under the name of Young Ern."

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Head. "Lawrence has been at St. Frank's all the evening."

Mr. Foxe staggered, and gulped.

"When I tell you, Mr. Foxe, that I was in conversation with Lawrence at seven-thirty, you will perhaps believe that Lawrence was in the school all the evening."

Mr. Smale Foxe was completely outwitted. But Lawrence had made a grim, relentless enemy. From this moment onwards Mr. Smale Foxe was determined to devote himself to the task of obtaining revenge.

THE END.

Look out for "**THE HOUSEMASTER'S REVENGE!**"—featuring Ernest Lawrence and Mr. Smale Fox. This gripping yarn appears in No. 330 of the "**SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY**"—out on March 3rd.

DO YOU EAT WOOD?

THE paper on which these words are printed is made of wood. So, probably, is some part of the clothes you are wearing. And then look at the furniture around you—there's a lot of wood there, too, isn't there? And you may even eat wood!

But we've gone a long way from the days when wood was used solely for furniture, tool-handles, fire-kindling, and so on. The other day a German scientist, giving a lecture on the many new uses to which wood can be put, handed round a box of chocolates to his audience—and they were made of wood, too! Nor could those who ate them taste any difference between the synthetic chocolates and the real thing.

Wool from Wood!

All over the world other scientists are also looking for new uses for wood. The resources of the forests that cover the globe are practically inexhaustible, but so far we have only used certain types of trees. Those unsuitable for timber have been allowed to waste, just as, hitherto, the shavings and chippings from saw-mills have been wasted by burning them.

Slowly all that is being changed. To-day there is a factory near Berlin which produces a hundred and forty tons of wool every day from waste wood. In Italy wood is being "roasted" into charcoal, and cars have been designed there which run on charcoal gas. They are not as efficient as petrol cars yet, but they will travel at a mile a minute, and the design is being improved with every new car built.

It is just as easy to obtain a form of petrol from wood. Modern petrol contains a high percentage of alcohol, and

one of the materials from which this can be easily distilled is wood.

Without knowing it, you may be eating wood when you chew sweets! Most sweets are largely composed of sugar, and a factory at Rheineau, Germany, is producing six thousand tons of sugar a year from the twigs, bark and chippings left over when forests are cut down for timber. Sugar, you see, is merely a compound of nitrogen and hydrogen gases united to carbon. The hydrogen for this German factory's sugar is obtained from ordinary water, the nitrogen from the air, and the carbon from wood. Ingenious—and cheap!

Fabrics from Wood Fibres.

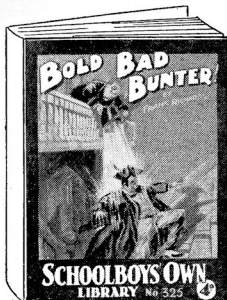
But the biggest new chemical use of wood is in making what is known as acetone. This is the basis of artificial silk, plastics, which wireless cabinets and telephone instruments are made from, explosives, chloroform, and various kinds of fibre.

These fibres can be woven into all sorts of fabrics, from which clothes can be made. If you have a striped pattern in the suit you are wearing, it is quite likely that one or more of the colours in that stripe is produced by weaving in a dyed wood-fibre thread. Whole suits of clothes have been produced experimentally in these fibrous fabrics.

Sawdust, which at one time was almost valueless, is now quite a valuable product, because it can be made into linoleum, instead of using the more expensive ground cork. It also forms part of certain kinds of modern cattle-foods.

But perhaps the most unexpected place to find wood is in glass. The unbreakable safety-glass fitted to motor-cars is made by sandwiching a thin layer of wood, dissolved in chemicals, between two sheets of plain glass. This layer of "plastic," as it is called, not only makes the glass far stronger, but also prevents it splintering if it is struck a heavy blow.

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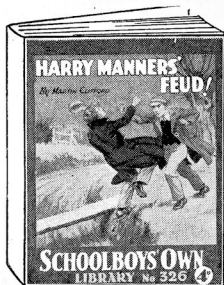


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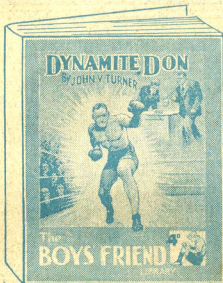
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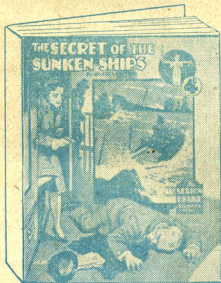
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