

No. 125—LONG, COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORY.

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**THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE VOLUME.**

Another Tale of NELSON LEE & NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Verdict of the School," "The City of Burnished Bronze," etc.

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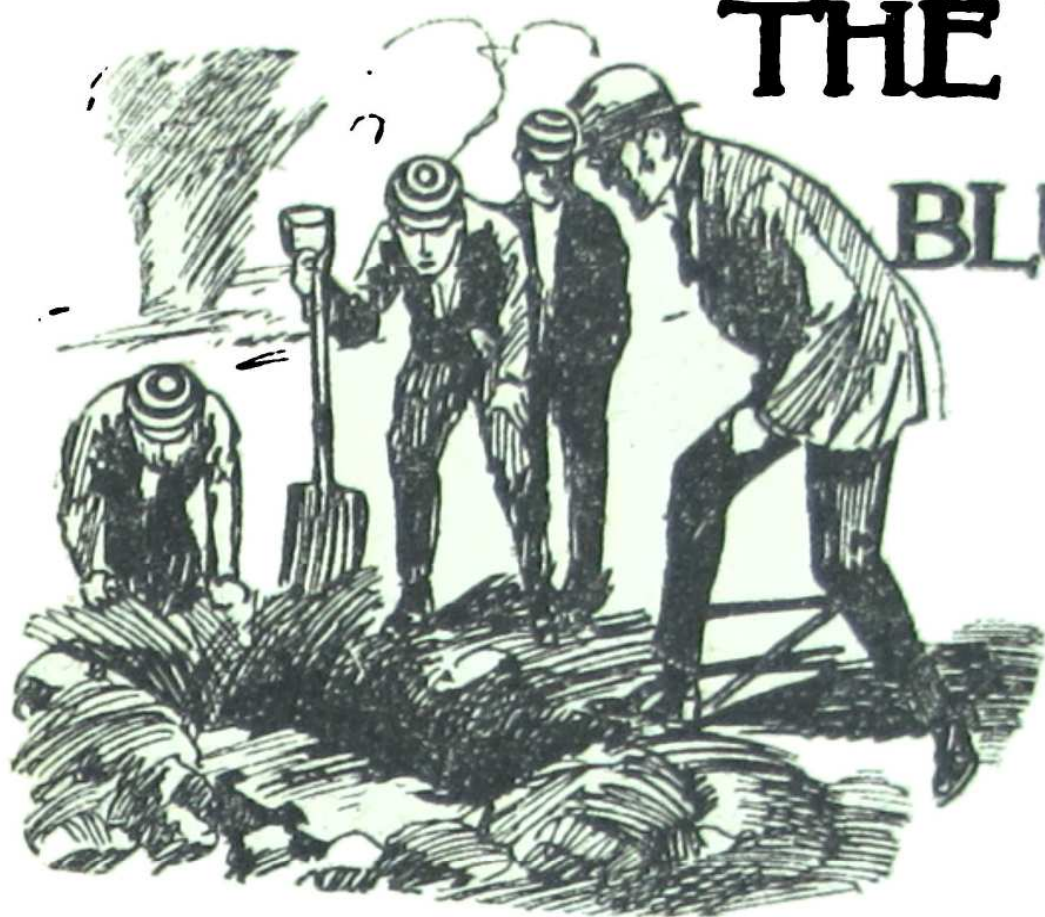


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# THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE VOLUME



Another Tale of **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE**. Set down by **NIPPER**, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "**Fullwood's Victory**," "**The Bridge House Mystery**," "**The Messages of Mystery**," etc.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE.

*Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College for a period of several months. Having incurred the hatred of the Fu Chang Tong, a murderous Chinese Secret Society, Nelson Lee and Nipper have been forced to adopt new identities until the time of peril has passed. Nelson Lee is a Housemaster, and Nipper a junior schoolboy. Nipper himself writes of the events which took place during his life as a member of the Remove Form in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.*

## CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH BOB CHRISTINE IS HUMOROUS ENOUGH TO MAKE A SARCASTIC CHALLENGE—AND HE IS VERY SURPRISED WHEN I ACCEPT IT.

**D**ICK BENNETT—that's me—snorted. I don't usually snort, but I did so on this occasion. I had good reason to. I was squatting in the easy chair in Study C, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and I had been thinking deeply.

My two study chums, Tommy Watson and Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, were seated at the table, busy with their prep. I ought to have been doing mine, as a matter of fact, but I was thinking instead.

It was evening, and the cheery fire blazed in the grate. Outside, everything was black, and a blustery wind moaned round the angles of the great public school.

I snorted indignantly—this is the same snort, of course—and rose to my feet. Then I brought my fist down upon the

table with a bang. I had to relieve my feelings somehow.

"It's rotten!" I declared. "That's what it is, you chaps. I'm not saying that Christine is intentionally nasty, but he's an ass. The difficulty's got to be overcome one way or another, and I'm going to put my foot down!"

Sir Montie looked up from his work.

"Dear boy, you're interruptin'," he complained mildly. "And you jerked the table frightfully just now. I'm not altogether sure that Mr. Crowell will like these ink-blots all over my exercise-book—"

"That's all right, Montie," I said. "Accidents will happen. Shove your prep. aside for a minute, my sons. I'm going to talk."

"Rats! Wait until we've done," said Tommy Watson shortly.

"Can't—it's too important."

"We wouldn't dream of hinderin' you, dear Benny," drawled Tregellis-West, with a sigh. "What's the trouble? Didn't you mention Christine? An' when you put your foot down you'll be careful, won't you?"

I grinned.

"The fact is, I want to jaw about football," I explained.

"My dear chap, leave it until later on," said Watson, dipping his pen in the ink. "Football ain't important—"

"That's just where you're mistaken, my buck," I interrupted grimly. "Football is important—jolly important. You don't seem to realise the position. Who's the skipper of the St. Frank's Junior Eleven? Bob Christine! And Christine insists on making up his team of Monks only. It's absolutely off-side!"

Tommy Watson nodded.

"That's right enough," he agreed. "I don't see why the Ancient House should be left out in the cold. Christine seems to think that we're just as slack as we used to be over on this side. But if the College House ain't careful, it'll find itself left behind. The Fossil's mean business!"

"That's my argument exactly," I said promptly. "I'm not going to boast, but I am going to state a few facts. Before I came to St. Frank's, Fullwood and Co. had this House in the hollow of their hands—I mean the juniors, of course. Well, cricket and footer and all sports were simply allowed to go to pot. You know as well as I do that there's been a big alteration."

"It was your doin', dear fellow," said Sir Montie, looking at me through his pince-nez benevolently. "You're the leader of the juniors on this side. Before you came we were frightfully stale. Nothin' doin' at all. Fact is, we didn't have enough energy. Dear boy, you were like a live wire—you simply made everybody jump in a most shockin' way!"

I grinned again.

"Live wires usually do give you a shock," I replied. "But we were talking about the football. Since the season started I've been working like the very dickens. The Ancient House Eleven is jolly strong—as strong as Christine's lot, I believe. But will he admit it?"

"Is that a riddle, old man?" asked Sir Montie languidly.

"No, it isn't," I said. "You know the answer just as well as I do. Christine simply ignores us. He calmly says that the St. Frank's Junior Eleven has always been made up of College House

chaps, and there's no need for an alteration. He actually tries to make out that we haven't got any players in this House who can hold a candle to the Monks. That's sheer rot!"

"Oh, absolute piffle!" agreed Tommy. "You're a ripping forward, Benny, and so is Montie. I'm not so dusty at half, and old Handforth is one of the finest goalies that ever stood between a pair of posts. He's an ass, really, but he can play footer all right."

"And Christine won't admit any of us into the Junior Eleven," I said indignantly. "It's not to be stood! Christine's a good chap, but he's pig-headed. He doesn't realise the full worth of my men. Well, he's got to! I'd be quite satisfied if we had five chaps in the Junior Eleven—to play in all big matches."

"I dare say you would," grinned Sir Montie. "But I'm afraid Christine won't be at home when you call. But you're right, dear boy—you are, really. Why shouldn't the St. Frank's Second Eleven be made up equally, from both Houses! Begad, it's only right!"

"I'm a bit proud of my work," I went on warmly. "That's not boasting—it's just what I feel. I've been slogging away during every spare minute, and the chaps have backed me up in a ripping manner. Well, all that work's not going to be for nothing. I'm going to have the Ancient House represented in all the big matches. I don't see why we should be spectators."

"You're right on the mark every time, old boy," said Tregellis-West, leaning back in his chair. "But may I ask a simple question?"

"A dozen if you like."

"One's enough, Benny. How are you going to make Christine change all this?" said Sir Montie mildly. "He's junior skipper, and his word goes. If he says he won't have us, he won't. Arguin' is just a waste of breath."

"Not if you argue in the right way," I replied. "Christine doesn't understand the position—and I'm going to make him. In fact, I'm going straight over to the College House now, and I'm going to put it to Christine plainly. See?"

"We shall get chucked out on our necks!" remarked Watson dubiously.

"We'll risk that."

"Just as you like, Bennett, old fellow," murmured Sir Montie. "It's a

fearful bore, bein' chucked out on our necks, but I'm willin' to go to the slaughter! I'll be a martyr, begad! Anythin' to please you!"

"Well, let's finish our prep. first—" began Tommy.

"Blow the prep.," I interrupted crisply. "Let's get along!"

To stop all further argument I opened the door and switched off the electric-lights. Tommy and Montie followed me out—the latter with a resigned sigh. We strode along the passage to the lobby, and found it deserted. But just as we were going out Mr. Alvington came in and smiled at us as he passed.

We were great friends, of course. For "old Alvy" was really Nelson Lee, my esteemed gov'nor. We weren't detective and assistant during our sojourn at St. Frank's—we were master and pupil. The only person in the whole school who knew the truth was Dr. Stafford, the Head.

At the present moment I wasn't concerned with the gov'nor, or with anybody else. Footer was to the fore, and I was keen on it. I'd always revelled in the great game; but, of course, I'd got pretty slack at it. Just lately, however, I'd been slogging at practice for all I was worth. All my old form returned—in fact, I believe I was better than I'd ever been.

As Tommy and Sir Montie and I crossed the dark Triangle, I wondered how Christine would take my proposition. He would probably refuse to listen to me. But I meant to peg away until I got some sort of satisfaction. To tell the truth, I'd never fairly tackled him. My eleven had only just polished up their form to the high mark I required. And now I was ready for business.

We marched straight into the College House, and went along to Study Q—where Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge resided. They were three decent fellows—the leaders of the Monks, in fact.

But Study Q was dark and empty, and I closed the door again.

"Common-room," I observed shortly. "This way, my sons."

We proceeded to the common-room, and found that apartment pretty well crowded with Removites. There was a general look round as we strode in.

"Hallo—Fossils!" called Talmadge. "No admittance!"

"Rats!" I said cheerfully. "I've come here to talk business with Christine."

"With me?" asked Bob Christine, a sunny-faced junior. "Can't be bothered now, Bennett. I'm just starting a game of chess—"

"Blow the chess!" I interrupted. "I want to come to a proper understanding about the footer."

"My dear old scout, there's a proper understanding already," said Christine calmly. "We all understand that there aren't any Fossils worth putting into the Junior Eleven—not even as reserves. Good-night!"

"Shut the door after you!" said Yorke casually.

I grinned.

"Now, look here, we didn't come here to make any unreasonable requests, or anything of that sort," I said. "We came because we want to put things straight. St. Frank's is a school with two Houses of equal size. It's only right that both Houses should be represented in the Junior footer team. Isn't the First Eleven composed of Seniors of both Houses?"

"What are you getting at, anyhow?" asked Christine curiously.

"Patience, dear fellow, patience!" murmured Sir Montie. "Benny will explain it all in good time, you know. He's a fellow with sound ideas, but he will do things in his own way. There's no stoppin' him. I've tried it, an' it's no good. Perhaps you won't agree to what he wants. But you will in the end, begad! When Benny's fairly on the warpath he's a whirlwind—he is, really!"

"That's more than you are, West, anyhow!" grinned Talmadge. "I wish to goodness you asses would clear off. We don't want to hear anything about your silly footer. I dare say the Third Form will give you a match—"

I snorted.

"That's just it!" I cut in. "You think we're only fit to play a fag's Form, don't you? That's just where you are off the track. The Ancient House Remove Eleven is as good as your lot—perhaps better!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You think that's funny, don't you?" I went on grimly. "Well, I'm not

going to beat about the bush; I'm just going to tell you what we want. I'm skipper of the Remove on the other side, and it's up to me to put things in order. On Saturday afternoon St. Frank's Juniors are playing Bannington Grammar School, aren't they?"

"So I've heard," grinned Christine. "It may be a rumour, of course—"

"Well, I reckon that the team we send against Bannington ought to be picked out of the fellows of both Houses," I went on, warming to my work. "That's only fair. And I suggest that in the Bannington match—in all big matches, in fact—there ought to be at least five Fossils in the team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Monks simply yelled.

"Only five?" asked Talmadge sarcastically. "Why not say twenty, and done with it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle all you jolly well like!" I roared. "I've only got five men—not including myself—who are just as good as any of you fellows here. I'm not asking a favour, mind you—I'm just sticking up for the rights of the Ancient House. I want five men in the junior school team. Every player ought to be picked on his merits."

"My dear kid, that's my system always," said Bob Christine genially. "I bar favouritism. Every man in the Junior Eleven has got to be a first-class player—and your chaps aren't up to our form."

"Have you seen us at practice?" I asked warmly.

"I've seen you amusing yourselves," replied Christine. "Never taken any particular notice, of course. Whoever takes any notice of the Ancient House? It's painful, but it's a fact—the College House is the only place at St. Frank's where there's any merit."

"Begad! What modesty!" drawled Sir Montie. "Do you know, Benny boy, I had an idea that we should cause general amusement. Don't you think we'd better beat a retreat before the slaughter begins—"

"Rats! We didn't come here to kick up a fuss, Montie," I interrupted. "But, before I go, I want to have a straight answer. I want to know whether the Ancient House is going to be given a chance or not—especially in the Bannington match."

"Not!" yelled a dozen voices in unison.

"Chuck the cheeky cads out!"

"Hold on!" said Christine, grinning. "Bennett's had his say, now I'll have mine. When the Fossils prove that they can play football decently, I might offer them a House match—just for the sake of appearances, you know. As for making any alterations to the team for Saturday, that's out of the question. But I'll tell you what," added the junior skipper with a chuckle. "I'll make you a challenge, Bennett."

"Fire ahead," I said grimly.

"To-morrow's Wednesday," said Christine. "I was going to keep my men at practice during the afternoon, but if you like I'll play your Eleven. It'll be a bit of fun anyhow. And if you win the match—well, you can have the Bannington fixture as a present."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean that if we beat you to-morrow afternoon, you'll stand out altogether?" I asked quickly.

"Exactly! You can take your team over to the Grammar School," grinned Christine. "We'll come along and look on!"

"I accept that challenge," I said promptly.

"You ass!" yelled Oldfield. "Do you think you'll stand a chance?"

"Quite a good one," I replied calmly.

"You'll be whacked hands down!" yelled Talmadge. "Christine, my son, you must be potty! We can't play these fatheaded Fossils—we shall be the laughing stock of the whole school!"

"We sha'n't!" chuckled Christine. "They will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I beamed delightedly.

"I couldn't ask for anything better," I said, making for the door. "That's fixed, Christine? My Eleven plays yours to-morrow—and if we win we go over to Bannington on Saturday?"

"That's it," grinned Christine. "You stand about one chance in a million, but, if you're satisfied, I am. And, in any case, it'll be a bit of practice for us. I like to be obliging, you know."

Sir Montie and Tommy and I passed out, and as soon as we got into the gloomy Triangle I took a deep breath.

"Ripping!" I exclaimed. "It's just what I wanted!"

"We can't possibly whack 'em!" said Tommy doubtfully.

"Can't we? We'll jolly well try!" I declared grimly. "Just think what it means, my bonny boy! If we can only pull off that match, we go to Bannington on Saturday—not five of us, but the whole lot! By Jingo, it's ripping!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HOUSE MATCH—AND HOW IT ENDED.

**I** MADE no attempt to conceal my intense satisfaction.

To tell the truth, I had been hugely surprised at Christine's challenge. I had never dreamed that he would make such an offer. Of course, he had no idea of the form which the Fossils had attained. And, although the odds were really against us, I had a distinct hope that we should pull off the match.

Christine's Eleven was hot stuff, and the Monks, as a whole body, were tremendously amused. They expected to win by about ten goals to nil. But I was optimistic enough to hope that the Fossils could, at least, finish up with a draw. I resolved to ask Christine what would happen in that event.

Tommy and Sir Montie wanted to go back to Study C to finish their prep. But I wouldn't hear of it. I carried them off to the common-room, and found the bulk of the fellows there.

"News, dear fellows," said Sir Montie languidly. "Benny's been goin' it again. Before long the Ancient House will come into its own."

"That's about true," I remarked. "The fact is, you chaps, Christine has challenged my Eleven to play the St. Frank's Junior Team to-morrow afternoon. I've accepted, of course."

"What!"

"A House match!"

"My only hat!"

There hadn't been a Junior House match at St. Frank's for years, and the Removites were simply staggered. But their surprise changed to excitement and amusement when they learned that Christine's challenge had been of a humorous character.

"But that doesn't make any difference," I declared. "It's just the chance we wanted. If we only set our backs to it, we'll surprise the whole school. It's up to us—and we mustn't fail."

"Silly rot!" sneered Ralph Leslie Full-

wood, gazing round him through his affected monocle. "You'll get it in the neck—and serve you right! Do you think your team can stand up against Christine's? With Bennett as a skipper and Handforth as goalkeeper, and a lot of muffs to make up the rest of the team, you'll be licked to the wide!"

"I don't suppose you'll care if we are," I said curtly. "A fat lot you care about your House, Fullwood. It's owing to your miserable slackness, when you were leader, that the Ancient House Remove got into such a mouldy state!"

The great Fullwood scowled.

"Go and eat coke!" he exclaimed sullenly.

My remark had gone home, and Fullwood didn't exactly know what to say. He lounged over to the corner of the common-room with his nose in the air, and stood chatting with his precious pals. The Nuts of St. Frank's were by no means so powerful as they had been at one time; they no longer bossed the show.

"I don't suppose we'll win," said Handforth, of Study D. "Of course, so far as I am concerned, the match is safe enough. But I'm thinking of the forwards. It's no good me protecting the goal if I'm not supported, is it? I'm not sure that I oughtn't to be skipper——"

"I am!" I interjected. "I'm quite sure, Handy, old man. You're a good custodian, but you're not a bit of use in the field. You stick to your job, and play the game of your life to-morrow. For every ball you let through the posts, we'll bump you!"

Edward Oswald Handforth sniffed.

"My goal's safe enough," he declared. "If it only rested with me, the game is a foregone conclusion!"

Handforth was a good goalkeeper, as I have remarked, but he had the peculiar fault of imagining that he was the only decent player in the team. But that was Handforth's character all over. He wasn't exactly conceited—he fully believed that he was the only chap in the Remove who was capable of being an efficient leader. As a matter of fact, a fag in the second could have led better than Handforth.

Nobody really took the match seriously—except the members of my Eleven. They, of course, knew that their chance had come, and they meant to take advantage of it. When I suggested that we should all get up early the following

morning and do an hour's practice before breakfast, there wasn't a single objector. Every man in the team was as keen as mustard to be at the top of his form. We'd worked hard for this match—and we didn't mean to make it a farce.

The news spread, of course, but everybody seemed to take it humorously. The Ancient House had been the home of slackers for so long that nobody quite believed that a passable team had been mustered up. Our continual practice had passed almost unnoticed by the majority of the fellows; they hadn't thought that we were worth noticing.

Well, the next morning the whole team turned out eagerly, and when the rest of the fellows came down to breakfast, I had been keeping my men on the go for over an hour. And I was keenly satisfied with the result. I was just a bit weak in the half-back line, but my forwards were all good. I was playing centre, and I had plenty of confidence in my own ability.

I am afraid I was not very attentive in the class-room that morning. But, as I was practically the top boy of the whole Remove, Mr. Crowell didn't particularly mind a little inattention on my part.

For weeks I had been fuming over the one-sidedness of all the junior matches. There had been three big fixtures so far, and in each of them the Ancient House had been left in the cold. I meant to go to superhuman lengths to bring about a change.

Now, I don't intend to fill half this yarn with a description of that eventful match. It's the result of the match that really matters. For that result led up to certain events, which I shall relate in due course.

Those events were both remarkable and mysterious—as you'll probably say when you hear all about them.

Well, after dinner I had my men on Little Side almost before they could swallow the last mouthful. And when Christine and Co. arrived, I was feeling highly optimistic. The fellows had entered into the spirit of the thing, and meant to move heaven and earth to pull off a victory. It wasn't such a herculean task as the rest of the school believed, for we ourselves—the team—fully understood our own capabilities. Everybody else wasn't quite "wise" to our form, as Justin B. Farman put it.

The Ancient House Eleven was made

up as follows: Handforth; Hubbard, Church; Armstrong McClure, Tommy Watson; Tregellis-West, Owen major, myself, Griffith, and Justin B. Farman.

Christine's men—the St. Frank's Junior Eleven proper—were extremely strong. They were composed of: Billy Nation; Turner, Page; Freeman, Steele, Roddy Yorke; Oldfield, Talmadge, Christine, Clapson, and Harron. Christine was playing all his best men, and that made me just a little dubious as to the result.

I had been hoping that he would give one or two of his reserves a chance, but he apparently meant to make mincemeat of us, as a lesson not to be cheeky. The more goals he could score against us, the greater would be our humiliation.

"It's going to be a tough fight!" I declared to the fellows, as we were about to leave the pavilion. "There's one thing I want to warn you against. Don't assume that we're whacked before the game starts. We're not whacked. The odds are heavy, but if we all pull together we'll surprise the natives. Don't forget that we're out to win."

We took the field cheerfully, and with plenty of confidence. This match had aroused general interest, and the ropes were crowded. Fullwood and Co. were there in force—ready to jeer when the ball went into our net. Fullwood, I believe, had a few bets on the match, and he thought that he was on a cert.

In the event of a draw—Christine had grinned when I suggested it to him—it was arranged that five of my men should go to Bannington on Saturday. So, even if we couldn't win, we stood a chance of gaining my real object.

Bryant, of the Fifth, had consented to referee the match, and he stalked on to the field and blew his whistle sharply. The teams lined up, and Christine and I tossed. He won—which meant that we should have the wind with us during the second half.

Christine had evidently given his men instructions to score a goal within the first minute—just to set the crowd laughing. Consequently, the Monks followed up the kick-off with a rush.

To everybody's surprise, this rush was stopped almost at once. The Fossils worked together with clockwork-like precision. This, in itself, was a revelation to the spectators. They had expected us to be nothing better than a ragged, straggly mob.



But they soon found out their mistake. The Monks' rush was stopped, and Owen major and I got off in fine style. We attempted to get through the Monks' defence, but we found it was a difficult task. Our attack was stopped, and the game swayed into midfield.

Here, for some time, it remained, neither side getting a decent chance. But the play was good all round. It had been believed that the game would be fought on our side of the field practically all the time. But both the teams were well-matched. The fact that the Monks hadn't scored straight away caused general surprise.

And then I saw a chance.

Farman, at outside-right, neatly trapped the ball from Clapson, and streaked up the field like lightning. The whole forward line moved with him in unison, and there was a buzz of excitement from the ropes. Farman slipped through the opposing halves with amazing agility, but then Turner and Page bore down on him at the same moment. The backs meant business, and I could see our advantage slipping away.

But the American junior passed in the nick of time. He sent the ball neatly on to Griffith's foot. Steele charged at Griffith desperately, but the forward dodged cleverly, sending the ball to me at the same second.

I didn't hesitate. I sent the ball in with all my strength, risking everything on one kick. It was just a slim chance. The leather soared from my foot, and shot straight for the goal. Nation, between the posts, was taken completely off his guard.

To tell the truth, he had been lounging idly, never believing that he would be called upon to stop anything. And then, before he could rush to the centre, the ball shot into the net.

"Goal!"

"Great Scott! Goal!"

There was a gasping roar from the ropes, and I caught a vision of scores of caps soaring skywards. The Ancient House fellows simply went off their heads with excitement for the moment. Their Eleven had scored during the first five minutes, and this match was being played for the especial purpose of taking us down a peg!

"Goal!"

The shout rang out continuously for over a minute. Fullwood and Co. were

silent, and so were the College House chaps. They gazed at one another in alarm and consternation. They couldn't quite believe the evidence of their own eyes.

And then Sir Montie and Tommy and three or four other Removites rushed upon me and nearly wrung my arm off.

"Amazin', dear fellow!" gasped Tregellis-West. "First blood to us, begad! Benny, boy, you're a livin' marvel!"

"It was a fluke!" declared Talmadge gruffly. "That fathead, Nation, was lounging about instead of looking after his goal. We simply gave it to you."

The Monks were very sore, but Christine grinned cheerfully.

"You won't catch me napping like that again!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you one thing, though; I'd formed a wrong idea of your team, Bennett. My hat, you're hot stuff, and no mistake! We shall have all our work cut out to pull the game out of the fire!"

This early success had filled every Fossil with wild enthusiasm, and when the game restarted my men played with terrific zeal.

But the Monks played with terrific zeal, too. They didn't give us any other chance of attacking. We were compelled to be on the defensive the whole time. On three occasions within ten minutes the opposing forwards got through. But Hubbard and Church were first-class backs, and they worked like Trojans.

If ever there had been a test match this was one. The brand-new Ancient House Eleven was being put through its "baptism of fire," so to speak. It was proving its mettle.

Only once did the backs stop the Monks' rushes. On the other two occasions, Handford, in goal, was compelled to act alone. He was all hands and feet, and he kept the ball out of the net with amazing skill.

Again and again the Monks tried to score, and we were pressed severely. But then, after a corner kick, there was a fierce attack in front of the Ancient House citadel. Handforth desperately fisted out the ball as Christine sent it in. But Harron's head got in the way, and it went back with a thud. The leather struck the goal-post, rebounded, and fell right against Talmadge's foot.

Bang!

Talmadge slammed the ball in instantly, and another yell went up.

"Goal!"

The Monks had equalised—but only after a period of gruelling hard work. And it was nearly half-time. Until the whistle blew, in fact, both sides merely kicked the ball about in a humdrum fashion. Practically every player was in need of a rest.

At half-time the score remained the same. And Bob Christine and Co. had confidently boasted that half-time would see them about five goals up.

The Monks were beginning to look very serious. And when the second half started, Bob Christine's team lined up with grim faces.

My own team was grim, too. We had the advantage of the wind now, and if we could only bring off one more goal, and keep the ball out of our own net, we should win.

It sounded easy—but it wasn't.

The Monks were desperate, and they attacked fiercely and determinedly. Once it looked as though they were going to score, but Church just managed to clear the ball into mid-field. And then Sir Montie's chance came.

He trapped the ball, and dribbled it away down the field swiftly. The Monks were after him in a pack, but Sir Montie was as swift as a deer when he liked, in spite of his affected languor.

The opposing backs flung themselves in, and he lost the ball. It shot away, and Freeman kicked in an attempt to clear. But Farman "headed" the ball, and drove it back. Just for a moment there was a wild scramble. And out of it all rushed Sir Montie, with the leather again at his feet.

He had scarcely a second to deal with it. The halves were upon him like a swarm of wasps, but a clear goal lay in front of him—with Nation dancing about between the posts with arms outstretched.

Sir Montie kicked, and the ball shot forward like lightning. Nation made a frantic leap upwards and sideways. His fingers scraped the ball as it sped in, but he was a fraction of a second too late.

"Hoorah! Goal! Hoorah!"

"Bravo, West!"

"Well kicked! Oh, well kicked!"

"Goal!"

Everybody simply went mad—the Monks with chagrin, and the Fossils with joy. Bob Christine was almost pale with

alarm, and he was tremendously subdued. This match was proving to him that the Ancient House Eleven was equal to the recognised Junior Team. I suppose, really, it was a personal triumph for me.

The match was won—by the Ancient House!

For there were only ten minutes more to run, and during that time we centred all our efforts upon defence. At all costs the ball had to be kept out of the net. We weren't after any more goals! We only wanted to prevent our opponents scoring.

The Monks tried desperately to equalise, but their efforts were useless.

And the whistle blew at last, leaving both teams thoroughly exhausted after one of the hardest matches ever played upon the St. Frank's junior field. But what did we care? The game was ours!

And while consternation reigned supreme in the Monks' camp, the wildest enthusiasm filled the heart of every decent Fossil. My team had won—and we were to play Bannington Grammar School on the Saturday!

### CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH WE ADD FURTHER GLORY TO OUR NAMES!

SATURDAY morning dawned fine and clear.

There was general satisfaction when the weather conditions were observed. The Bannington match promised to be the most interesting of the season, and it would have considerably dampened our spirits if the weather had been bad.

As it was, the majority of the Fossils were simply bubbling with delight and eagerness. Since Wednesday afternoon the whole Junior School had been in a state of tumult.

The College House fellows came in for a tremendous amount of chipping—and they had nothing to say. After all their boasts as to what they were going to do, they could do nothing but hide their diminished heads. For them the fateful match turned out to be a fiasco.

Bob Christine's challenge, issued in a fit of sarcasm, had resulted in sheer disaster—for the Monks. Instead of teaching me a lesson, they had simply given me one of the most important fixtures of the whole term.

Some of the fellows demanded that the conditions should be ignored; but Bob Christine was a chap of his word. He had said that I should take my own men to play the match, and he made no attempt to back out.

But it was a bitter pill for him to swallow, and he did so with as good a grace as possible. He had the consolation of knowing, however, that the Fossils would keep their end up for St. Frank's as well as the School Eleven could have done. And that was comforting.

On the Wednesday evening Christine had written to the Grammar School skipper, explaining that a new St. Frank's Eleven would go over to Bannington, and added that he would explain later on.

For Christine meant to accompany my Eleven to Bannington. A whole crowd of fellows had the same intentions. The distance was only just over four miles, and so every available bicycle was got ready.

Fullwood and Co. hadn't much to say. The Nuts, generally, didn't take any interest in football—except in the matter of bets. But Fullwood himself hated me like poison, and any success of mine was gall and wormwood to him. He had attempted to drag my name into the dust on more than one occasion, but had failed. Just now, however, he affected to be studiously indifferent.

Morning lessons were a bore to everybody, but they were over at last. And just before dinner, Morrow, the head prefect of the Ancient House, sent word out to me that I was being called up on the telephone.

I went into the House with a puzzled frown on my brow. I couldn't imagine who could want me on the 'phone. But I soon found out. The instrument was installed in the prefect's common-room—it was an extension 'phone—and I found Morrow and two or three other prefects there when I entered.

"There's somebody wants you, Bennett," said Morrow, jerking his head towards the instrument. "While you're about it, you'd better tell your friend that it's not usual for juniors to be rung up."

I grinned, and went over to the 'phone. "Hallo!" I called. "I'm Bennett. Who wants me?"

"Oh, that's Bennett, is it?" came the

reply. "Just a word with you, old man. I'm Gray, of Bannington Grammar School. You were going to bring a team over here this afternoon, weren't you?"

"Yes," I replied calmly. "I am going to bring it!"

"I'm sorry, but it can't be did!" called Gray. "The fixture is off."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Well, several of our chaps are down with influenza, and the Head's barred all matches for to-day," replied the Bannington skipper. "We're in quarantine, so to speak. It's simply rotten, of course, an' I'm frightfully sorry. I dare say we'll be able to fix up another date later on."

"Let's hope so," I replied. "Good-bye!"

I hung up the receiver and turned away. I had received the news quite calmly, and proceeded to tell the fellows of what had taken place over the wires. Everyone was simply thunderstruck—except Fullwood and Co. For some reason or other they cackled hugely, and were highly amused.

"This means that the match is off altogether!" exclaimed Handforth warmly. "I call it rot! Who the dickens cares for influenza? It strikes me, Bennett, that Bannington's called off for some reason. That was only a rotten excuse!"

Merrell and Noys—two of the Nuts—were standing near, and they grinned broadly.

"Spoilt your little game, what?" chuckled Noys.

"Perhaps," I replied sweetly—"and perhaps not!"

And immediately after that I got all my men together and quietly told them to get ready to start exactly as though nothing had happened. In fact, I told them to get ready a little before the originally arranged time.

During dinner there was considerable talk, which the masters couldn't subdue, for all the juniors were keenly disappointed. Only the Monks, on the other side, felt relieved. And their relief was mixed with the regret that one of the best fixtures had been wiped off.

Most of the Removites were in the Triangle after dinner—as I knew they would be. Everybody was ready for setting off to Bannington; bikes had been got ready, and the fellows who didn't possess bikes had decided to run over

by the afternoon train from Belton. The match had excited general interest among the juniors.

And now it was off!

The Triangle was simply crowded with indignant Removites. I had simply repeated the words which had been given to me over the telephone. But they were quite enough. Gray, the Bannington skipper, had said that St. Frank's match was cancelled. And "that's all there was to it," as Farman put it.

There were groups all over the Triangle when Tommy and Sir Montie and I left Study 6 and went into the lobby. We found the rest of the Eleven there, talking in a clump. Their bags were all ready, but they were looking a bit mystified.

"Look here, Bennett, what's the idea of this?" asked Handforth grimly. "Didn't Gray ring you up and say that the match was postponed? What's the good of us getting all prepared like this? A fat lot of good it'll be—"

"Cheer up!" I interrupted lightly. "The fixture's all right."

"What?"

Handforth and Hubbard and Church simply yelled at me; but I only grinned and passed outside. The team followed, and upon the steps we found the noble Nuts, chatting in a group, and indulging in frequent chuckles.

I went straight up to Fullwood and smiled at him.

"It was a bit too thin, old scout," I said sweetly.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood glared at me.

"What are you gettin' at, you cad?" he demanded.

"You're a smart chap, Fullwood. I leave it to your mighty brain," I said. "But telephones don't disguise a fellow's voice when you're only speaking across a short extension line—say, for example, from the College House to the Ancient House!"

Fullwood started.

"What—what—"

"Besides," I went on, "when you've played a mean trick of that sort, it isn't exactly advisable to cackle like a Cheshire cat—it gives the game away, you know. That's just a tip."

"I don't know what you're babbling about!" blustered Fullwood.

"Oh, yes you do!" I smiled pleasantly. "And so do your precious pals. Quite a nice little plot, eh? Tried to muck up

the match—out of sheer spite! It was you who rang me up, Fullwood, not the Grammar School skipper. I recognised your dulcet tones in a jiffy. Pity, wasn't it?"

Fullwood was red in the face, and the other Nuts looked very sick. Of course, I had been aware of the game from the very start. But I hadn't exposed it until now because Fullwood was a tricky young bounder. He would have tried some other dodge, perhaps—and that would have meant unnecessary trouble, and possibly delay.

"You're dotty, you—you rotter!" roared Fullwood. "I haven't used the telephone for days—"

"That's a lie, anyhow!" put in Charlie Talmadge, of the College House. "You were in the prefect's common-room, over on my side, only an hour ago—"

"You—the awful scoundrel!" gasped Handforth, rolling up his sleeves, and glaring at Fullwood. "Tried to muck up the match, did you? Our match! My only hat! There's going to be frightful bloodshed in half a second!"

I pushed Handforth back, and grinned.

"No time for pig-slaughtering now, Handy, old son," I said cheerfully. "If you feel like punching Fullwood's nose, leave it until this evening. It'll be something to look forward to—especially for Fullwood!"

Ralph Leslie sneered.

"You can't prove it was me—" he began.

"I don't want to," I interrupted curtly. "But I know it, all the same—and you don't look like an injured innocent, Fullwood. The fellows will know what to believe all right. You'd better think of some other whoeze!"

I walked away with Sir Montie and Tommy.

"Dear fellow, you're surprisain'," murmured the schoolboy baronet. "You are, really! You do these things so calmly, y'know. Regad! Fullwood's face was worth quids, dear man—I wouldn't have missed it for worlds! It's awfully refreshin' to see the cad taken down a few pegs!"

Of course, the news spread like wild-fire, and the fellows were mightily indignant. The Nuts, with Fullwood at their head, decided—quite suddenly—that the immediate vicinity of the Triangle was somewhat unhealthy. They

melted away, and the Removites didn't trouble to find them.

All the fellows grinned with delight—all the Fossils, at least. But the Monks were rather glad, I believe. Although it was galling that the Ancient House Eleven should play the match, Bob Christine and Co. were anxious to be on-lookers.

I'd never met the Grammar School fellows, but I was given to understand that they were a very decent crowd. The Junior Eleven was known to be hot stuff—in their own words, they were "mustard." But Christine confidently asserted that St. Frank's could lick them hollow—provided, of course, that the Monks were playing. I assured Christine that the result was even more certain under the present conditions. In reply to this remark I only received a snort.

Bannington was looking quite sunny as we passed through on our jiggers; and the Grammar School proved to be an imposing establishment. But it was modern compared to St. Frank's; and not half so good really.

Arthur Gray and his men were on Little Side waiting for us. A senior match was just beginning on the First Eleven ground, but we weren't interested in it. Gray was the Fourth Form skipper, and quite a decent chap.

"A new team, eh?" he inquired genially, after we were introduced. "Well, if you're as good as the old one, you'll give us a good game. I'm rather sorry you're not playing, Christine."

"Not so sorry as I am!" said Bob ruefully.

He briefly explained the circumstances, and Gray grinned hugely. I believe he thought that the change was very much for the better—from his point of view. But as soon as the match started he knew different.

My team was in fine fettle. Our first success had put great heart into us, and every fellow was simply bubbling with enthusiasm, and with the desire to attain new honours.

The Eleven played together superbly, and Handforth did wonders in goal. Farman and Tregellis-West were particularly good in the forward line, and before the game had been going ten minutes, we scored first blood.

Christine and Co. cheered as loudly as anybody, and Farman, who had taken

the goal, asserted that "we had made a plump dandy start, anyways!"

But the Grammarians were good footballers, and the game was first class. Before half-time the home-team had equalised, and just as the whistle blew they scored again.

So when the second half started we were one down—that meant that we had to get another goal to equalise and two to win. As a matter of fact, the Saints equalised within the first minute. I kicked the goal myself, seizing upon an unexpected chance almost as soon as the ball had been kicked off.

The teams were well-matched, but I think we were just a little more scientific in our method of play; and the Grammarians were certainly weak in their half-back line.

Having equalised, we maintained the offensive. The game was played, for the most part, in the enemy's territory. And Owen major headed the ball into the net beautifully when everybody least expected it. Soon after that Farman scored again, and the game was as good as over.

We were two up now, and the Grammarians made frantic efforts to lessen their defeat. The past five minutes was rather hot, and I must admit that the Bannington fellows had a bit of bad luck. For, just as the whistle blew, Gray sent in a ripping shot. But it entered the net too late, and so the goal didn't count. It was really hard lines.

"Four—two!" exclaimed Bob Christine joyfully, as he wrung my hand. "Top-hole, Bennett! By Jove! You've kept our end up fine!"

"What about the Ancient House?" I grinned. "Do we get a show in all big matches in future?"

Bob Christine nodded emphatically. "You bet!" he exclaimed. "Fact is, Bennett, I've been a bit of an ass."

"Glad you admit it——"

"I'm only too willing to admit it," he interrupted frankly. "If there's one thing I detest, it's being unfair. And, in future, the St. Frank's Junior Eleven will always be made up equally of Monks and Fossils. By Jingo, with your best men, and mine, we'll be practically un-touchable!"

I was tremendously pleased—and so was every other member of the Ancient House team. We had fought for our rights—and we had got them.

## CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH A CERTAIN BLUE VOLUME CREATES QUITE A LARGE AMOUNT OF INTEREST.

THE Grammarians took their defeat in quite a nice spirit, but assured us that when they paid a return visit to St. Frank's, they would do their best to whack us on our own ground. And we were quite agreeable that they should—do their best.

"It's a piece of fearful cheek, really, these mouldy old Fossils having so much nerve," remarked Charlie Talmadge, as we prepared to set off home. "I suppose the asses will be kidding themselves that they are as good as the Monks!"

"My dear chap, it's not kid—it's a fact!" I said blandly. "To tell the truth, the College House will be left miles behind before so very long. The Fossils are going to forge ahead in everything!"

"Why, you—you ass——"

"No squabbles now!" grinned Christine. "But I'll tell you one thing; the old rivalry between the two Houses at St. Frank's looks like being revived. That'll mean House rows—friendly ones, of course. And you'd better look out for squalls, Bennett. We're jolly pleased that you whacked the Grammar School, but the Fossils will be bound to crow no end. In that case it will be my duty to point out—forcibly—that the College House still rules the roost. This is just a hint—see?"

"Dear boy, who couldn't see?" drawled Sir Montie. "But squalls are queer things, you know. They're so frightfully changeable, begad! The squalls might turn round in the wrong direction—what?"

This little exchange of views made me really cheerful. Already I had aroused that keen sense of rivalry which had once characterised the Juniors of both Houses at St. Frank's—but had been long since dead. St. Frank's would be altogether more healthy if that friendly rivalry was renewed in earnest.

Handforth simply couldn't be suppressed. The worthy inhabitants of Bannington, I verily believe, had an idea that Handforth was making public announcements of some kind. At all events, he rode a little in advance, and his fog-horn voice awoke the echoes. It was a kind of song of triumph. The

mighty Edward Oswald seemed to have a fixed idea that if it hadn't been for him the whole match would have gone to pot. But as nobody else had this idea, there was no harm in allowing Handforth to stick to his little delusion. In any case, argument was useless. Arguing with Handforth was like asking a mule to be reasonable.

And just as we were in the middle of the old High Street, Handforth's sweet voice was interrupted. As nobody had been listening to him, this didn't matter much. A loud report sounded, followed by ominous wobblings of Edward Oswald's front wheel. In short, his tyre had sprung a leak—as Tommy Watson put it, it had been torpedoed. At all events, repairs were necessary, and so repairs were done. They were accomplished on the spot, several fellows electing to lend a hand.

A good few juniors went on ahead, but the eleven stuck together. And so we were compelled to wait until Handforth's tyre was capable of holding wind again. Sir Montie and Tommy and I strolled off down the High Street with the intention of purchasing some liquid refreshment. There was no reason why we shouldn't improve the shining hour.

"Hold on!" said Tommy, coming to a halt. "I want to pop in here for a tick. Old Spragg might have a copy of that book I was talking to you about yesterday."

I didn't remember what book it was, but we halted. "Old Spragg" was the name of an ancient gentleman who presided over a grubby little book-shop set in a back-water of the High Street. Outside the shop stood a long bench, with a miscellaneous assortment of musty volumes on view.

These books were in separate piles, with different prices marked on each pile. Sir Montie and I stood looking at the old volumes idly while Tommy was within the shop. They seemed a pretty dilapidated lot, in any case.

One book, however, attracted my attention, and I picked it up with a slight amount of interest. It had been wedged in between four or five others on the sixpenny pile. It was bound in a blue kind of leather, and was decidedly ancient by the look of it. The title was nearly worn off, but the book was in a pretty good condition considering that it had been published in the year 1798.

"'Crimes of Fifty Years Ago'—that

sounds interesting," I remarked. "Those crimes must have been committed somewhere about 1748. Is it worth a tanner, Montie?"

"My dear boy, don't ask me!" said Montie. "Personally, I wouldn't handle such a beastly looking book. The cover's nearly off, an' I'm quite sure it's full of those horrid little insects——"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "I suppose you mean book worms? There's generally a selection in most old books, but they don't hurt you, Montie. I'm going to sport sixpence on this, anyhow."

"In war-time, too!" sighed Tregollis-West.

I don't suppose he understood my interest in the volume—I'm sure he didn't. As a matter of fact, I thought that "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago" might interest the gov'nor. It's often possible to pick up an old book at a second-hand shop for a few pence which is really worth pounds.

I took the blue-covered volume inside, paid my sixpence, and found that Tommy was ready to depart. We marched out together, Tommy remarking that it wasn't his business if I liked to throw good sixpences away.

Just in the doorway we almost ran into a well-dressed man who was entering. I could see his eyes fixed upon the book in my hand, and his expression suddenly became very intense for some reason or other.

As I passed he grabbed my arm and jerked me round.

"Tell me, boy, what is that book?" he asked abruptly.

I didn't like the man's curt, authoritative tone, and I jerked my arm free from his grip.

"I don't mind telling you," I replied. "But there's such a thing as politeness, sir. This book is called 'Crimes of Fifty Years Ago'——"

"Ah! Give it to me!" the man exclaimed eagerly, thrusting out his hand, and grabbing for the volume. But I jerked it back, my temper rising slightly.

"Excuse me," I said quietly. "I've just bought this book—I've paid the enormous sum of sixpence for it. It's mine, and I haven't the slightest intention of giving it to you. If you'll please let me pass——"

The stranger's eyes gleamed.

"You young fool!" he snapped. "Give me that book—do you hear me?"

It's mine—mine! I——" He paused abruptly, and laughed. "But I am going to work the wrong way. You have bought the book, you say? For sixpence? I will give you a shilling for it, young man."

"Thanks," I said curtly. "I'll keep the book."

And I pushed past him. Tommy and Sir Montie were just on the pavement, grinning. But before I could take a couple of strides the stranger seized my arm again. He spun me round fiercely.

"You young jackanapes!" he snarled angrily. "I want that book——"

"Well, you won't get it now, however much you want it!" I broke in, with equal heat. "If you had asked me politely I might have obliged you by re-selling it. I don't want it particularly, anyhow. But I'm not going to be called a fool and a jackanapes——"

"Tush!" he snapped. "You shall have two shillings, boy!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Sell it, Benny boy. You'll become a profiteer then! It's a rippin' deal, y'know. I don't believe in profiteerin', really, but——"

"That's all right, Montie," I interrupted. "I'm not going to sell."

"You are going to sell!" declared the man with glittering eyes. "I came to this shop for the especial purpose of purchasing this book—and I am not going away without it! Do you understand? I am not going away without it!"

I smiled.

"That's funny," I said calmly. "I've got an idea that you are going away without it—because I'm going to take it myself. I wouldn't sell it for any price after the way you've behaved. Don't you think we'd better finish this little argument?"

Perhaps my tone cooled him down. At all events, he changed his tactics almost at once, and smiled. But his eyes still shone with excitement and anger. I couldn't understand why—and I didn't particularly want to understand.

"I have insulted you, my boy," he said quietly. "Forgive me. That book is of no value to you—you have admitted as much. But it is priceless to me. It—it was the property of an—an old friend of mine, and I want it as a keepsake. I will give you five shillings for it. There—how is that? Five shillings. Your profit will be considerable."

"I don't want to make any profit," I said impatiently. "I'm not going to sell the book, thanks."

Again I pushed past him. I was fed up with the silly argument, and several small urchins were standing round, keenly interested in the proceedings. The stranger's yarn about wanting the book as a keepsake was all bunkum, of course.

He did not attempt to detain me again—he realised that there would have been trouble if he'd attempted any violence. But he glared after me, and uttered a harsh exclamation of fury.

"I will give you ten shillings!" he shouted desperately.

I didn't take any notice, but walked away with Sir Montie and Tommy. Old Spragg, I knew, had come out of his shop. He was probably thinking that he had allowed a valuable book to go for a mere song. But the volume was mine—I'd paid the marked price for it—and I meant to stick to it.

"You ass!" said Tommy Watson warmly.

"What's the matter?"

"The matter!" he echoed. "Why, you—you chump, you've chucked nine and sixpence away! That chap was willing to give you half a quid for that mouldy old book! And you refused it! My only Aunt Jane!"

I laughed, and glanced back. Old Spragg was having a heated argument with the infuriated stranger.

"My dear chap," I said, "if that fellow was willing to give me ten bob for the book, it proves that the book's worth more. Don't you see? Why should he offer me such a price? Because he knows it's valuable, probably. Anyhow, I'm going to take it to old Alvy when we get to the school. He'll know. And, in any case, I'm not hard up for half a quid. The book's mine."

"Let him have his own way, Tommy boy," said Sir Montie. "Benny's a good fellow, but he's obstinate. Frightfully obstinate. When we get to St. Frank's he'll bore us to tears with that beastly old book. But we mustn't grumble—life is full of worries."

We found that Handforth's tyre was repaired, and the journey to St. Frank's was continued. And when we arrived at the school we were greeted enthusiastically. The news of our victory had reached St. Frank's well ahead of us, and the Ancient House fellows were simply bubbling with joy.

I invited the whole team to tea in Study C, and several other fellows managed to be present, too. Teddy Long, of course, was to the fore—although he had been sneering for days at the absurdity of allowing the Ancient House Eleven to go over to Bannington. Long was the sneak of the Remove, but whenever there was a feed on he managed to squeeze in somehow or other.

Just before tea was over Tommy Watson mentioned the blue-covered book, and there was a little discussion concerning it. One of the guests suggested that the book was, perhaps, the last of an ancient edition, and worth a lot from a collector's point of view. Anyhow, I decided to speak to the gov'nor about it.

So, after tea, I took it along to the Housemaster's study. Mr. Alvington, of course, was really none other than Nelson Lee, the famous crime investigator. But, as I'd often told him, if the detective business ever failed, he'd do fine as a schoolmaster.

He looked up with a smile as I entered his study.

"Can you spare a minute, sir?" I asked, closing the door.

"Two, if you like, my boy," replied Lee cheerfully.

"That's generous of you, gov'nor," I grinned. "Lemme see, I haven't had a private word with you since yesterday morning, have I?"

"I don't think you have, Nipper," smiled Nelson Lee, laying down his pen. "But I wasn't aware that such a word as 'lemme' existed in the English language. Our stay at St. Frank's seems to be having a detrimental effect upon your vocabulary, Nipper."

I groaned.

"Chuck it, gov'nor!" I replied. "Don't sling all those long words at me at once, for goodness' sake! The fact is, I want you to have a squint at this book. I bought it at Bannington this afternoon—for sixpence."

"Oh, yes. I was going to congratulate you upon your visit to Bannington, young 'un," said Lee. "I'm very glad to hear that the Ancient House team has won such honours under your leadership. You're doing well, my boy. But what's this?"

He picked up the disreputable-looking volume, and examined it, the cover nearly falling off as he did so. He dipped



into several different portions of the book, and then looked up.

"It may prove to be interesting, Nipper," he remarked, "but I don't think you have made a very useful purchase."

"I'm not thinking of reading it, sir," I grinned. "The fact is, I had an idea you might like to look at it. Do you think I've swindled the bookseller by getting it for so small a sum?"

The gov'nor chuckled.

"You gave sixpence for it, eh?" he replied. "I am inclined to believe that the bookseller has swindled you, Nipper. This dilapidated volume would be rather dear at threepence."

"Well, that's queer," I said. "Some man offered me ten bob for it."

And I told the gov'nor of the affair outside old Spragg's, in Bannington. He listened carefully, examined the book again, and then passed it back to me.

"I can't quite understand it," he said. "This man offered you ten shillings? I should say he was a crank of some kind, with more money than he knew what to do with. At all events, the book is worthless."

I left Nelson Lee's study after another minute or two, and there was a general grin among the fellows when they learned that the blue volume wasn't actually worth what I had given for it. Everybody reckoned that I had been an ass not to accept the ten shillings which the stranger had offered me.

But the Removites didn't know the real value of that musty old book—and, for that matter, neither did I!

## CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH I DESCRIBE THE STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF MASTER TEDDY LONG.

**A**FTER prep. in Study C, Sir Montie and Tommy and I went down to the common-room. At least, my two chums went; I followed after about ten minutes. For I completed a little task I had been engaged upon.

It was nothing much—but it was to mean a lot later on. While looking at the old book I managed to drop it, and the cover came right off. As it happened, I had an old dictionary without a cover at all. And as the blue cover fitted the dictionary exactly, I thought it rather a good idea to use this cover for a good purpose.

So I fished out some glue, and proceeded to stick things together. After about ten minutes the blue cover of "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago" adorned the dictionary. As it was for my own use, it didn't matter a scrap—and I hate books without covers.

I felt that my sixpence hadn't been wasted after all, and I shoved the dictionary on the shelf with a feeling of satisfaction—stowing the aged volume beneath a pile of old magazines, out of sight.

Then I went down to the common-room.

I found that apartment simply crowded, and everybody was talking at once. And they certainly had something to talk about that was worth while. The Ancient House victory had stirred the whole school, and seniors and juniors alike were discussing it. The Fifth and Sixth, naturally, regarded all junior affairs from a somewhat lofty altitude, but the Ancient House seniors were undoubtedly pleased.

Fullwood and Co. said nothing. They preferred the Ancient House in its old slack state, and my success as leader of the Fossils was a direct blow at Fullwood. While he had been leader the Remove had gone to pot; and it was galling for him to stand by while I repaired the damage. His power was broken for good and all. At the same time, he and the Nuts still clung together.

In the dormitory that night there was a considerable amount of talk, and everybody was late in going to sleep. As a natural consequence, most of the juniors felt a bit seedy in the morning. But the knowledge that we had won the Bannington match—and thus proved our eligibility for the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, was a great source of satisfaction.

After breakfast Sir Montie and Tommy and I strolled about in the Triangle. As you'll probably guess, we were deeply engrossed in "footer" jaw. As a matter of fact, I was engaged in the difficult proposition of choosing five or six fellows who were most suitable for the school team. There was certain to be a small amount of jealousy, and I wished to avoid as much of it as possible.

About twenty minutes before morning lessons were due to start I noticed the plump figure of Teddy Long on the other side of the Triangle. Under ordinary

circumstances, I took no notice whatever of the fat little bounder. But his tactics at the present moment were a bit interesting.

My chums and I were near the gates, and Teddy Long had dodged out of the Ancient House doorway with the apparent intention of scudding out into the road—for he came straight towards us.

But then he abruptly stopped, looked at us rather uncertainly for the moment, and then edged over towards the chestnuts and elms which grew on the other side of the fountain. It was quite clear that he wished to avoid us.

"Now, what's up with that young rotter?" I asked curiously. "He's up to some mischief, I'll bet! Did you notice the way he dodged?"

"Leave him alone, dear fellow," said Sir Montie languidly. "Long is rather an expert at dodgin'—"

"Yes, but he looks guilty, somehow," I said keenly. "I believe he's been up to some game connected with us. Otherwise, why should he wish to avoid us? I'm going to collar him, anyhow."

I walked over towards the elms, where the squat Removite was seeking to obtain cover. The very fact that he wished to hide from us looked suspicious. And when he broke into a run at the first sign of approach, I was positively convinced that there was something in the wind.

I pelted after him, and he gave a little squeak. His fat legs moved like clockwork as he vainly attempted to reach the gates before me. It was an easy matter to cut him off, and I grabbed his shoulder, and spun him round.

"You—you rotter!" gasped Teddy Long. "I—I'm not going out—"

"Not just yet, anyhow," I said grimly. "What's the game, you young fathcad? Why are you looking so guilty? Up to something a bit more sneaky than usual?"

"I—I—I—"

"Begad, that's not English!" said Sir Montie, who had leisurely strolled up. "Use lucid language, Long, dear boy."

"I—I haven't done anything!" panted Teddy indignantly. "I didn't go into your rotten study— I— mean—"

"Oh, so you've been in Study C, have you?" I said grimly. "Out with it, you little idiot. What's the game?"

"It's like your cheek, keeping me here!" roared Long. "Lemme go, you cad! I've got an important appoint-

ment with—with— I mean, I've got to meet somebody down the lane before lessons— Leave my waistcoat alone, West, you beast!"

"Dear fellow, you're gettin' too fat," drawled Sir Montie. "Isn't there some-thin' bulgin' here? Begad, it's not superfluous tissue, is it?"

Teddy Long wriggled wildly.

"You—you rotters— Yow!"

Sir Montie, quite calmly, had ripped open the fat Removite's waistcoat while I held him. Something fell to the ground with a thud, and I glanced down. I saw a faded blue-coloured book—and I uttered an exclamation.

"That old volume!" I ejaculated, in surprise.

I picked it up. The book was the dictionary—in its new cover. Why on earth had Long been concealing such an article under his waistcoat? I looked at the young bounder angrily.

"What's the idea of this?" I demanded.

"I—I— That rotten book ain't worth anything!" gasped Teddy. "I—I was only going to read it, Bennett!"

"You ass! Do you think I believe that rot?" I said sharply. "Now then—out with it! And if you don't tell the truth, I'll take your head and shove it in the fountain pool!"

Long shuddered—he loathed water.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Bennett!" he panted. "It—it was this way, you know. I—I went for a stroll jn-just before brekker, and I—I met a man out in the lane. It's the truth—honest injun!"

"Your injun's generally a fearful liar, Teddy boy," murmured Tregellis-West.

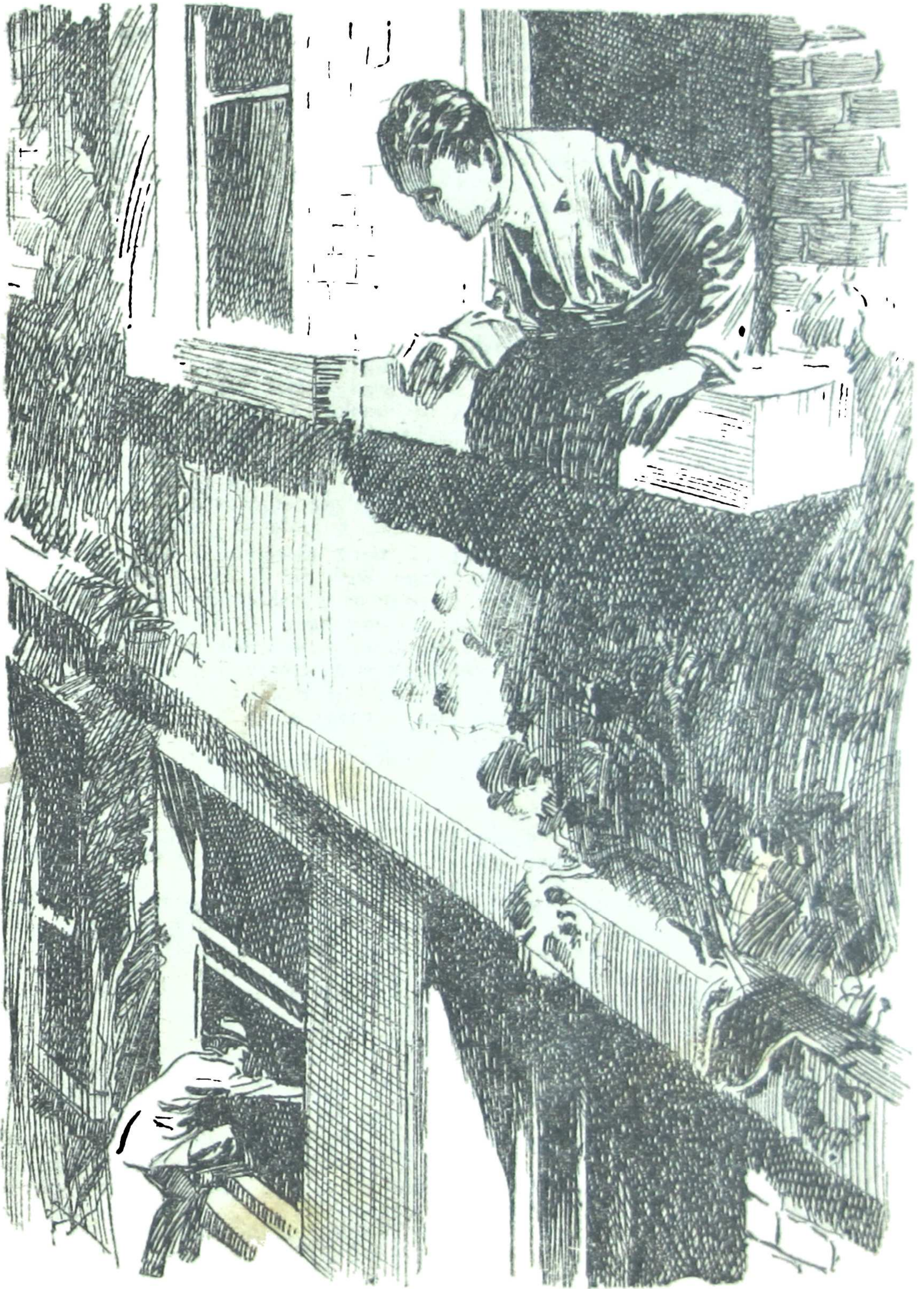
"I did meet a man!" roared Long. "A ripping chap, too. He—he gave me half a crown, and—and promised me another seven and six— I—I mean—"

"That is to say," I interrupted grimly, "this stranger offered you half a quid to pinch this blue-covered volume?"

"Not—not pinch it!" stammered Teddy. "Besides, it's only a rotten old thing—you said so yourself! The man asked me if I knew anything about an old blue-covered book which one of the fellows had bought at Bannington. I—I knew you'd got it, Bennett, and I told the chap so."

"Well?" I asked, rather surprised.

"He said that if I fetched it for him



**NIPPER ON THE WATCH!**—(See page 24.)

he'd—he'd give me half a quid!" said Teddy defiantly. "Of course, I—I was only going to give you a surprise, Bennett. I—I thought you'd be pleased, you know. As soon as I'd got the money, I should have handed it over to you——"

"Well, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt," I said. "But you're a young rascal, anyhow. Where is this man you speak about?"

"Just down the lane, at the first bend," said Teddy Long. "I—I say, don't you think I'd better take him the book——"

"I think you'd better clear off!" I interrupted curtly. "And consider yourself lucky that you haven't been bumped. Cut, you young bounder!"

The sneak of the Remove scuttled off—and made straight for the tuck-shop. He still had the half-crown, and he evidently meant to get rid of it before it could be taken from him by force. I'd forgotten it for the moment.

"What the dickens was the young ass talking about?" asked Tommy Watson wonderingly. "Do you think that chap has come to St. Frank's for the book?"

"There's no question about it," I replied. "It's queer. Why on earth is he making such efforts to get hold of that ragged old volume? I'm afraid he would have got a bit of a shock if Teddy had taken him this," I added with a grin. "There's nothing but the cover here—but Long didn't know that."

"What's to be done, dear boy?" asked Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez. "It's gettin' near school time, you know——"

"I vote we run down the lane," I interrupted. "We'll interview this merchant, and point out that he'll get himself into trouble if he incites fellows to take other people's property."

As Sir Montie has said, it was nearly time for morning lessons, and so we hurried as we strode down the lane. But when we got to the corner there was not a soul in sight—although I fancied that I saw a movement among the trees of Bellton Wood.

"Bunked!" I said, nodding my head. "I half expected it. The fellow must have slipped into the wood as soon as he saw the three of us coming down instead of Long. He guessed that trouble was brewing. Well, it's no good waiting here."

We walked back briskly, and were

just in time to scrape into the Remove Form room before Mr. Crowell—the Remove master—arrived on the scene.

But what could be the meaning of the incident?

Why had the stranger adopted such a device in order to get hold of that musty old record of forgotten crimes?

The affair was queer—but it was to be even more mysterious before long.

## CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH BOB CHRISTINE AND CO. GET VERY BUSY.

**I**MMEDIATELY after morning lessons I went along to Study C and raked out the coverless old book. I hadn't examined it properly so far, and I thought it would be worth while to do so. It certainly wasn't as worthless as it seemed—or the genial stranger would never have gone to such trouble to possess himself of it.

I went through it almost page by page, with Sir Montie and Tommy looking over my shoulder. But we couldn't find anything that gave us any enlightenment—except, perhaps, an assortment of figures which were scribbled on the fly-leaf at the back. The whole page was covered with hastily pencilled figures.

"Well, these aren't worth ten bob, are they?" I asked. "They're only a jumble, anyhow. Looks like a kid's exercise, more than anything else. By Jupiter! I don't suppose it's a cipher, is it?"

"What, one of those queer things which mean something else?" asked Montie, rather vaguely. "Don't ask me to help you with it, dear fellow. I loathe figures; in fact, I loathe anythin' which means brain exercise. That's the worst of havin' such a little brain, you know. I've got to use it sparin'ly."

"A cipher!" I said thoughtfully. "Now, let me see——"

The study door opened with a crash.

"The—the awful rotters!" bawled a powerful voice, which couldn't possibly be mistaken.

"Begad! You do shock a fellow, Handforth!" protested Tregellis-West. "Dear boy, what's the matter? You're lookin' frightfully excited, and your tie's all crooked. It's bad form to go about with a crooked tie——"

"Blow my tie!" roared Handforth. "You're captain of the Fossils, Bennett—or supposed to be. It's my job, really, but there's too much fat-headed jealousy in this House for fair play to be thought of. Christine and Co. have been playing a rotten trick!"

I and my chums had been poring over my strange purchase for nearly half-an-hour, and evidently something startling had occurred during that time. Handforth, at least, was very excited—and when Handforth was in that state he awoke the echoes.

"What's the matter, Handy?" I asked calmly.

"Come and look for yourself," bawled Edward Oswald furiously. "It's up to you to put your foot down, Bennett. House rivalry's all very well, but there is such a thing as a limit. And those caddish Monks have overstepped the mark the first go off!"

Handforth stamped out of the study again, and we followed him—more out of curiosity than anything else. I certainly believed that he had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Bob Christine wasn't the fellow to do anything caddish.

In the lobby we found several other fellows talking heatedly, and with black brows. And Handforth led the way straight over to the bicycle shed. There were five or six Fossils crowding round the doorway—Church and McClure and Farman, and Owen major, and one or two others.

"What's all the giddy fuss about?" I asked curiously.

"No more fuss than is warranted, anyhow!" said Owen major, warmly. "Just have a look in here, Bennett. I reckon it's a bit too thick!"

I stepped into the bicycle shed with Tommy and Montie close behind me. And the first thing we saw was a piece of old cardboard pinned on to the wall, facing the door. Upon it were the words: "College House for ever! Down with the Fossils!"

The writing was hurried, but it looked like Bob Christine's.

"Well, I can't see anything much in that——" I began.

"Look at all these tyres!" roared Handforth, into my ear.

I looked, and then my expression changed. For five or six bicycles were seriously put out of action. In short,

all the tyres were flat, and from each protruded the heads of dozens of large pins. The tyres, in fact, had been deliberately punctured in innumerable places, the pins being stuck right in almost to the head.

"Begad! What a horridly mean trick!" murmured Montie, in a shocked voice. "Old scouts, this is a bit too steep—it is, really!"

"Steep!" I echoed angrily. "This isn't a jape—it's a rottenly caddish outrage. I didn't think Bob Christine could be such a bounder. But he'll have to answer for it, I can tell you!"

"I saw a crowd of Monks over by the College House, cackling like old hens five minutes ago," said Owen major hotly, "There's no doubt about it, Bennett—Christine has opened the ball by doing this piece of caddishness."

"It smacks more of Fullwood than Christine," I said. "It would be just like Fullwood, too, to stick that card up. I shouldn't be surprised if the Nuts did this, expecting us to believe the worst of the College House fellows. Fullwood enjoys causing trouble."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "That's Christine's handwriting all right——"

"Why the dickens can't you juniors keep quiet!" exclaimed a sharp voice. "Clear away, you young sweeps!"

I recognised the voice of Starke—Walter Starke of the Sixth. He was an Ancient House prefect, and a pretty considerable bully as well. He and his inseparable pal, Kenmore, were just about a pair. The Ancient House was rather unlucky in the matter of prefects. Morrow and Conroy major were all right, but Starke and Kenmore were fellows of Fullwood's type. I strongly suspected that Fullwood and Co. sometimes played banker in Starke's study.

"What's the matter here?" demanded Starke impatiently. "Fetch out my bike, Watson, and don't stand there gaping. Fetch Kenmore's, too."

Tommy Watson grinned.

"Your bike's crooked, Starke," he said with real satisfaction. "At least, I think your jigger's among the victims. If you've got time to repair about a dozen punctures——"

"What do you mean, you young idiot?" snapped Starke.

He soon found out what Tommy meant, for a moment later he spotted the pins sticking out of the tyres of his

own machine. I think most of the juniors really enjoyed the situation for a moment. It was rather rich to know that Starke was one of the sufferers.

"Who did this?" roared the prefect furiously.

"Better find out, hadn't you?" I asked. "We don't know ourselves——"

"That's a whopper!" interrupted Teddy Long, from the background. "You know jolly well that cad Christine did it——"

"Christine, eh?" rapped out Starke. "This is a bit too much of a good thing, Kenmore. Those rascals in the College House want licking. If Christine's responsible for this, I'll take him before his Housemaster. Mr. Stockdale will deal with him pretty severely."

Starke and Kenmore marched off across the Triangle. If Starke's bike hadn't been touched he would probably have grinned; but the fact that his own property was damaged brought forth all his bullying propensities. He hadn't the slightest right to touch the Monks, for he had no authority in the College House. But he could make a severe report to the Monks' Housemaster.

As it happened, Christine and Co. were lounging on the steps of their House, chatting amiably. They looked quite innocent, although I saw a grin lurking about Yorke's mouth. But Christine and Talmadge and Oldfield were as serious as judges.

"Look here, Christine," I said, getting my word in first. "I believe some cads have been playing a double trick—a trick on us and a trick on you. Five or six bicycles have been punctured——"

Bob Christine nodded.

"That's right," he said—"the tyres are as flat as pancakes, aren't they? Just a little joke, you know. I told you to look out for squalls, Bennett."

I simply glared.

"You admit it, then?" I exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, Christine, tremendously sorry. I didn't think you could be such a beastly cad——"

"Nothing caddish in what I did," said Christine amiably.

"I'm going to march you off to your Housemaster, you young blackguard!" rapped out Starke. "I heard you confess! I suppose you punctured the tyres of my bicycle deliberately?"

"Oh, my hat! Did we treat your jig-

ger the same way?" yelled Talmadge.

"I say, that's rich!"

"You'll think it's rich when you get a licking!" snapped Starke angrily.

"I'm going to report this to Mr. Stockdale——"

"Hold on," grinned Christine.

"Don't make any report yet, Starke, old son. You're not one of our prefects, and you're not anxious to make an ass of yourself, I suppose? If you like, we'll go across and mend your tyres for you."

"You'd better be quiet about it, then," put in Kenmore. "We might overlook it if you do the job properly. But if Starke's tyres are injured you'll have to pay the damage——"

"We'll pay it—if there is any damage," said Christine cheerfully. "A few pins don't amount to much, anyhow. Come on, you chaps. Let's go and get it over. Must satisfy these lordly prefects, I reckon."

I couldn't quite understand the Remove skipper. He treated the whole thing as a joke. And yet the trick was detestable in every way. He was the last fellow I should have suspected of playing so low down a jape.

All the other Monks were equally as unconcerned. I should have expected this sort of thing from the Nuts—but not from fellows I always regarded as decent. But Christine and Co. were highly amused.

As we entered the bicycle shed again the Ancient House Removites were looking very black, and I suspected that the Monks would have been summarily colared if it hadn't been for the prefects' presence.

The Fossils were just ripe for a genuine row—and I felt quite incensed enough to take the lead myself. Starke, I felt positive, meant to make his report to Mr. Stockdale in any case—but he didn't see any reason why his tyres shouldn't be mended beforehand. If he made his report straight away, he would be compelled to mend the punctures himself.

"Now, what's all the fuss?" asked Bob Christine, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Not much harm in a few pins, that I can see. I suppose you want 'em all taken out, Starke? Nothing simpler!"

Christine walked across to the prefect's bicycle, watched by many pairs of eyes. And he calmly plucked one of the

pins out, and held it up. It came out with singular ease, and a loud roar of laughter sounded from the other Monks at the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ever been diddled?" cackled Talmadge.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't make out why you bothered us at all," said Christine blandly. "Did I mention that these pins had been treated before we used them? You said you didn't think I was a cad, Bennett—well, I'm not. But this is jolly funny, and I'm going to laugh."

Christine laughed uproariously, and I simply gasped.

"The tyres aren't punctured at all!" I yelled. "Don't you understand, Starke? These funny asses have been dishing us! They must have let the air out by means of the valves——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, with a sickly smile. "It's one against us, dear fellows. We were had superbly. Christine's a fearfully deep chap, you know. Just listen to the merriment!"

I couldn't help grinning, although the joke was against the Ancient House. Christine's jape was not at all caddish; on the contrary, it was quite funny—from his point of view.

A brief examination showed that all the pins were merely stumps: they had been clipped off quite near the head. Thus, when they were lightly stuck upon the soft rubber of the tread—without injuring the tyres in the least—they looked exactly as though they had been rammed right in. And the wind had simply been released by means of the valves. Not a single tyre was injured in the slightest degree!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Is that a pun, dear fellow?" groaned Montie. "Puns are frightful after this shock! Just as we are talkin' about jiggers you say that you're jiggered! It's too bad of you, Handforth—you shouldn't do these things."

Bob Christine and Co. retired across the Triangle yelling with laughter. Starke and Kenmore stalked off without another word, and the Removites looked at one another sheepishly. I felt just as sickly as the rest. Without a doubt the Monks had brought off a very successful jape

But just as we were beginning to talk Starke and Kenmore turned back.

"This rot's your doing!" snapped Starke sourly. "You can't make a fool of me without paying for it! Every junior here will take a hundred lines!"

The two prefects went off feeling somewhat more satisfied. But we weren't! We felt like kicking one another!

## CHAPTER VII.

I RETURN THE COMPLIMENT—AND THEN SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

SIR MONTIE looked mildly interested.

"It sounds all right, Benny boy," he observed, "but can it be done? It's a bit risky, you know——"

"There's risk in everything," I interrupted lightly. "Nothing would be done if we didn't take risks now and again, old son. We've simply got to pay Christine and Co. back for that jape. We can't let the insult go unavenged."

It was evening, and Study C looked very cosy and cheerful with a bright fire flickering in the grate. Prep. was over, and Tommy and Montie and I had been plotting a plot. It was my wheeze, and my chums were just a bit doubtful.

"It's as simple as A B C," I went on. "This length of rope will do the trick nicely. There's no need for you chaps to be in it at all—it's a one-man job. But those cackling Monks will sing small in the morning, I'll bet."

"What about the other fellows?" asked Tommy. "Don't you mean to take them into it?"

"My dear chap, that would take the cream off the joke," I grinned. "Let 'em all be mystified for a time. Then we'll spring the cat out of the bag. By Jingo, Christine and his lot will be the laughing stock of St. Frank's for days. It's simply a stunning wheeze!"

"You ought to know—you thought of it, dear man," murmured Tregellis-West. "We'll back you up. That's our job—backin' you up. If you're collared, though, it'll be serious. A gatin', at least. Perhaps a floggin'——"

"There's nothing like being cheerful," I interrupted, with a chuckle. "Don't you worry your head, Montie—I sha'n't be collared. Now, where's that rope?"

I picked up a length of stout rope which lay at my feet, and proceeded to

make knots at intervals of about two feet. I'd smuggled the rope into the study earlier in the evening—having borrowed it from Warren's toolshed.

Having knotted the rope to my satisfaction, I slipped upstairs with it and concealed it under the mattress of my bed. Then I came down and found that the supper bell was just ringing.

As leader of the Fossils, I felt that it was up to me to play a return jape upon Christine and Co without delay. The College House fellows were still laughing hugely over the success of their little joke.

In the dormitory some of the Removites were rather indignant. They declared that I hadn't shown up well as a leader. Nothing had been done to wipe out the stain and, apparently, I didn't mean to do anything.

I just grinned, and held my tongue. You see, I was "wide," as Farinan would have expressed it. The humour of the wheeze I intended perpetrating would be all the richer if the Fossils didn't learn of it till afterwards. I could have explained my plans at once—but that wasn't so good as keeping mum.

So the Remove went to sleep grumbling. Only Tommy and Sir Montie were in the know. And they and I kept awake after all the others had gone right off. At least, they had agreed to keep awake. Actually, they didn't.

The old clock had boomed out the quarter to twelve when I quietly sat up in bed. The night was a bit chilly, but quite still. A weak ray of moonlight was penetrating the windows.

"You fellows ready?" I whispered.

Deep silence.

I grinned, and tumbled out of bed. I had half suspected that Fullwood and Co. would be off on one of their nocturnal expeditions to the White Harp—the disreputable little inn on the border of Bellton, where the Nuts gathered for the purpose of losing money at billiards. But to night there was nothing doing—and I was glad.

"Rouse up, you lubbers!" I murmured softly.

Both Tommy and Sir Montie slept next to me, and I shook them in turn.

"Begad! mumbled the schoolboy baronet. "Have I been to sleep, Benny, ole feller? Quite an accident—"

"Yes, I know all about that," I chuckled. "You're a nice sentry, aren't you? Now, then, Tommy, out you get!"

They were both rather reluctant to leave their beds, but they did so when they found that I was determined. Very quietly, we all slipped our clothes on. At least, I did. Tommy and Montie merely pulled their trousers over their night attire.

"I say, I'd give it up if I were you —" began Tommy.

"If you were me you'd go on with it!" I interrupted. "That's what I'm going to do, anyhow. My dear old son, it's the simplest thing in the world. I sha'n't be gone more than ten minutes, at the most. And think of the morning!"

My chums chuckled, and we all moved across to the window nearest us. I raised the sash very softly, and then went and fetched the rope from under my mattress. One end of this I tied to the foot of the bedstead which was nearest the window—one occupied by Handforth. The other end of the rope I flung out of the window. As the bed was close against the window, it wouldn't move when my weight rested on the rope. Besides, Tommy and Sir Montie would steady it. And Handforth would have slept through a dozen air raids.

I stood by the window for a moment.

"All you have to do is to wait here until I come back," I whispered. "You can get into bed again if you like—but be at the window in about ten minutes' time. Savvy? I shall want you to chuck the rope down to me when I whistle. We can't leave it dangling all the time. A hawk-eyed master might spot it."

"Trust us, dear boy," yawned Sir Montie. "We won't desert you."

I slipped a leg over the window-sill, and gradually lowered myself until I was gripping the knotted rope with one hand.

"Hold tight!" I muttered.

I allowed my full weight to rest on the rope, and I felt it give slightly. But Handforth's bed didn't shift an inch; it couldn't, as a matter of fact, for it was wedged against the wall.

Within twenty seconds I was standing on the ground. The Triangle stretched out before me, dark and shadowy. The half-moon had gone indoors, and had closed the door behind it—at least, it was completely obscured by a heavy cloud.

I wasted no time, but hurried across the open space towards the College House. Only one or two windows were illuminated—those of masters who had been rather late in retiring. As a rule,



everybody at St. Frank's was in bed by midnight.

I expect you're wondering what my game was. Well, I simply meant to get up into the Remove dormitory in the College House. The wall beneath that particular window was covered with thick ivy, and I knew that it would be child's play to mount it.

The wall beneath the window of my own dormitory was ivy-covered, too, but the roots were comparatively young, and would not have carried my weight. That's why I had provided the rope. On this side a rope wasn't necessary.

On many occasions I had risked all sorts of dangers while engaged on some piece of detective work with the gov'nor. But the mounting of this ivy couldn't be called risky. For one thing, the roots were thick, and provided a splendid foothold; and, for another thing, I shouldn't have hurt myself much even if I had fallen from the very top.

For the dormitory window was comparatively low, and fellows had dropped from it to the ground on more than one occasion. Still, it wasn't a nice drop, and I didn't mean to test it. I just want to make it clear that I wasn't getting up to any foolhardiness for the sake of a mere jape.

As it turned out, I shinned up the ivy without the least difficulty, and pushed up the lower sash of the window without making a sound. Then I stepped into the dormitory, and stood quite still. Deep, regular breathing, varied by a musical snore now and again, met my ears. Bob Christine and Co., and their faithful followers, were sound asleep, as all good little boys should be.

I grinned.

"Now for the collection!" I murmured with a chuckle.

Without making a sound, and with no particular hurry, I went from one end of the dormitory to the other, collecting up all the fellows' clothing. I didn't even leave a pair of socks.

Having taken a full load aboard, so to speak, I gently opened the door, and passed out into the corridor. If I was spotted now, I should get into exceedingly hot water. It was a tremendous offence to leave my own House in the middle of the night.

But I wasn't afraid of being spotted.

I crept along the corridor until I came to a narrow door. I opened it, and entered stealthily. The room was

merely a little box-room, in which was stowed the Removites' trunks, etc. I simply bundled down the clothes in a heap, and then returned to the dormitory for a fresh supply.

After about five minutes every article of apparel which belonged to Bob Christine and Co. lay in a great pile upon the floor of the box-room. I chuckled as I left the little apartment, and locked the door behind me.

The key had been in the lock, but I took it out and tucked it just on top of the door frame, where it could just be reached. Nobody would think of looking for it there.

The jape was now completed—the opening stages of it, at least.

I didn't believe in anything very drastic, but it was highly necessary to show the Monks that they couldn't do as they liked with the Ancient House. And this little wheeze promised to be one of the jokes of the term.

It doesn't sound much, I know—but just consider it. When the Remove turned out in the morning they would naturally look round for their clothing. They couldn't very well go down to breakfast in their night attire.

And they would look round in vain.

Their clobber would be conspicuous by its absence. I could just imagine their astonishment and consternation. They would search for it everywhere, of course, but the chances were that they wouldn't find it for some little time.

Naturally the whole crowd of Removites would be late for breakfast, and when they finally came down there would be general amusement. The whole school would cackle over the joke. And Bob Christine and Co. couldn't very well be punished, for it wasn't likely that they would hide up their own clothes. In fact, there wouldn't be a clue as to the culprit. But the Monks would know whom they had to thank—we'd see to that!

The joke would be all the richer because the Ancient House fellows themselves didn't know anything about it. I would let the cat out of the bag afterwards.

Feeling quite satisfied, I tiptoed across to the window and leaned out for a moment. The moon had come out again, and was smiling rather weakly upon the Triangle.

I wasn't quite pleased, for I should be conspicuous as I crossed over to the

Ancient House. A glance at the sky, however, told me that if I waited a minute I should be in a better fix, for a heavy cloud was moving along towards the moon slowly and sedately.

And then I got a bit of a shock.

As I looked down idly, I saw the figure of a man appear just round the angle of the Ancient House; he had apparently come from the direction of the hedge which separated the playing fields from the Triangle.

He crept round cautiously, close to the wall, and halted outside one of the windows of the Remove common room. Then, as I watched, he proceeded to force an entry!

Now, nobody would do such a thing like that unless he was up to mischief, and I felt my heart beating rapidly.

"Burglars!" I muttered. "At least, one burglar!"

There could be no doubt about the matter. The thing had been so deliberate that there could be no mistake. The man, of course, fondly imagined that the whole school was asleep. It was extremely lucky that I happened to be at the dormitory window at that moment.

But why on earth should the burglar break into the common-room? There was nothing of value in that apartment—or in any portion of the school section of the house. The private portion of the Ancient House was quite cut off from the rest of the building at night—cut off by a fire-proof door.

As I was wondering what to do, the man pushed the window open, and disappeared within.

I determined to investigate without delay.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THERE IS SOME EXCITEMENT—  
FOLLOWED BY AN INTERESTING CHAT WITH  
THE GUV'NOR IN HIS STUDY—CERTAIN  
PLANS ARE MADE.

NELSON LEE was the man to look into this affair, I decided; and I scrambled down the ivy as quickly as possible—and perhaps with a certain amount of recklessness. At least, I slipped the last six feet, and fell with a thud.

But a fall like that doesn't do any harm, and I was soon sousing across the Triangle. The moon had obligingly snuffed out, and I felt safer. I found

the rope dangling down all ready for me. Sir Montie and Tommy must have been on the look-out.

The guv'nor has often told me that I can climb like a monkey, and I certainly did so on this occasion. I simply shifted up that rope in leaps, and tumbled into the dormitory.

"Begad! Are there demons after you, dear fellow?" asked Sir Montie, in mild astonishment.

"I've done the trick!" I panted. "But there's a burglar just got into the Ancient House——"

"A burglar!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Gammon!"

"You ass, I saw him open the common-room window!" I replied. "He's in the House now, and, if we're slippy, we'll be able to collar him. Come on—there's not a second to waste!"

"Hadn't we better wake the other chaps——"

"Rather not!" I said. "Do you think we want everybody jawing? The burglar would be warned in no time—and we can capture him easy enough if we go to work in the right way. This way!"

I crossed the dormitory, and emerged into the passage, Sir Montie murmuring that I had really gone off my rocker, begad!

But I knew that I had made no mistake; the man who had entered the Ancient House had no right there, and it was up to me to put a spoke in his wheel.

But just as we were passing along the corridor on the way to the staircase, I noticed that a little glimmer of light streamed from beneath the door of Nelson Lee's bedroom. The guv'nor, evidently, hadn't retired, and I made up my mind quickly.

"We'll tell old Alvy!" I muttered.

Without waiting for the others to make any remark, I tapped at Nelson Lee's door, and waited. In about five seconds a footstep sounded, and the guv'nor appeared before us. He was over half-dressed, and he uttered a little exclamation as the light from his room streamed upon me.

"Nip——"

The guv'nor paused abruptly as he caught sight of Tommy and Sir Montie.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" he asked sharply.

"Awfully sorry to trouble you, sir!"

I panted. "But I've just spotted a man getting into one of the lower windows. We—we were just going down to collar him, but I saw a light under your door—"

"You are quite right in coming to me, Bennett," interrupted Nelson Lee briskly. "Is the whole dormitory awake?"

"No, sir—only we three!"

"That's just as well," said the gov'nor. "I won't inquire why you were out of your beds at this hour—and how it is that you happened to see a man entering a lower window. Do you know which window it was?"

"The common-room, I think, sir," I replied.

"Very well, let me lead the way."

Nelson Lee didn't waste time by asking needless questions. He just strode down the passage with Watson and Fregellis-West and I in the rear. The gov'nor had made a bit of a slip—which wasn't usual for him—by commencing to address me as Nipper. But I don't suppose my chums noticed it.

When we got to the top of the staircase, we came to a halt and listened. But everything was silent down below. So we noiselessly descended, and turned out of the lobby towards the common-room, which was situated at the foot of five or six shallow stairs.

Faint beams of moonlight entered the windows, and we could just see dimly. But as we were about to descend the steps, I clutched at the gov'nor's arm.

"Up the passage—look!" I hissed.

From where we stood it was possible to see up the Remove Study passage, which led out of the lobby. And, for a moment, we all saw a dim shadow pass in front of one of the side windows.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Benny was right!"

The gov'nor didn't wait for any further evidence, but ran swiftly down the passage. At that very second, however, the marauder became alarmed, and dashed off without any further attempt at concealment. He rushed right into the end study, which was usually occupied by Lincoln and Young, and slammed the door. We heard the key turn in the lock, and then the study window was shoved up noisily.

"Let's get through one of the other studies!" I gasped.

But Nelson Lee was already putting

this plan into execution. He dashed into the next study, and had the window open in a moment. And we all three saw a figure pelting across the Triangle at full speed. Even as we watched he plunged through the hedge into the playing fields.

"After him!" panted Tommy excitedly.

"No, my boy, we'd better not pursue the chase," put in "Mr. Alvington" quietly. "The man secured a good start, and by this time he is on the edge of the wood. We should merely waste our energy. Our feet, moreover, are not shod in a suitable fashion for cross-country running!"

We were all in slippers, of course, and I realised that the gov'nor's decision was a wise one. It would be hopeless to continue the pursuit.

"Well, it's queer, sir," I remarked. "What the dickens was the fellow doing in this quarter? I believe he came out of Study C—anyhow, the door was open as we passed. We don't keep diamonds and banknotes in our study—do we, you chaps?"

"A fiver now and again, dear boy—but nothing more," drawled Sir Montie.

"We will go to your study, boys," said the gov'nor.

As we emerged into the passage we listened for a moment. But the whole school was quiet, and it was evident there had been no alarm. The little episode had not awakened anybody else.

It was rather galling to know that the marauder had slipped off, but it had been unavoidable.

In Study C Nelson Lee switched the light on as we entered.

The first glance showed nothing out of the usual; but when I looked over at the book-case I started. Nearly all the books were shifted about, and there was a blank space between two of them.

"That blue-covered volume!" I gasped amazedly.

"My only topper!" exclaimed Tommy. "Do you mean to say that the chap broke into the school just to pinch that rotten old book?"

"It looks like it," I replied, striding across the study. "The book's not here, anyway—Great Scott! It's the dictionary that's gone—not that old record of crimes at all! The chap's made a bloomer."

"Will you kindly explain what you

mean, Bennett?" asked the gov'nor calmly.

Just for a moment I collected my thoughts. I had been intending to tell Nelson Lee of those pencilled figures on the fly-leaf, but I hadn't had a chance. I should do so now, of course.

The burglar had fallen into the same error as Teddy Long. Seeing the blue cover, with the title still faintly visible, the pilferer had naturally assumed that the book was the one he was after. But he had only got the shell, so to speak. If he had had more time, he would probably have discovered his mistake.

I told Nelson Lee that this was the third attempt to gain possession of the old volume, and Lee was rather impressed—especially when he heard of the figures upon the fly-leaf.

"I meant to puzzle over them myself, sir," I ended up. "But I didn't find time. I dare say those figures have some significance."

"It seems the most plausible explanation, at all events," replied the gov'nor. "You say that the unknown man has merely taken the cover, and not the book itself?"

"That's right, sir—here's the book."

And I unearthed the coverless volume from beneath the pile of magazines which had obscured it. Nelson Lee turned to the back of it, and studied the figures for some few moments. Then he tucked the book under his arm.

"Come along to my study, boys," he said. "We will look into this."

"All of us, sir?" asked Tommy in surprise.

Lee smiled.

"Well, it is rather a concession on my part," he said, "but you may as well come. Another half-hour won't make much difference, now that you are out of your beds. The other occupants of the House are undisturbed."

Both Tommy and Sir Montie were pleasantly surprised. But I knew why the gov'nor had given us permission to go with him to his study. He wanted me to be there—and I couldn't be there without the others.

We closed all the windows, and then went along to the Housemaster's study. A weak fire was still glowing in the grate—for the hour was only just after midnight, after all. Quite early for the gov'nor and I!

Nelson Lee threw on a few pieces of coal, and the fire blazed cheerfully. Then he lit a cigarette, and dropped into his chair before the desk.

"Squat down, boys," he said, in the free-and-easy manner which had endeared him to all the decent fellows in the Ancient House. "Don't feel uncomfortable—although you do look somewhat untidy."

Sir Montie blushed.

"It's shockin', sir!" he murmured. "Do you think I could go an' dress properly—"

"I don't, West," said Lee. "You are quite presentable—and I sha'n't look at you too carefully. Now, let's examine these figures."

"Do you think they are important, sir?" I asked.

"I don't know what I think—yet," replied the gov'nor. "It is obvious, however, that the stranger hasn't been making these frantic efforts for the sake of the old volume itself. He has some other motive—and the figures suggest a cipher."

"That's what I thought," I said eagerly.

I stood just against Nelson Lee's chair, looking over his shoulder. Tregellis-West and Watson sat down near by. They couldn't quite get over their surprise. They had expected to be sent hustling back to the dormitory—and they were here, in Mr. Alvington's study, taking things easy!

After about two minutes the gov'nor nodded.

"Yes, the thing is absurdly simple," he said. "These figures are the key to a message which is probably contained in the pages of the book itself. We shall see. Have I your permission to tear this fly-leaf out, Bennett?"

I grinned.

"Tear the giddy book to pieces if you like, sir," I replied cheerfully.

"That is not necessary Bennett," said Lee, carefully detaching the sheet with the figures upon it. "Now, we shall see, within a minute, if these figures are valuable. I have an idea that they are."

"I am terrifically interested, dear fellow—I—I mean, sir!" gasped Sir Montie.

I looked at the roughly pencilled figures curiously. They were all

sprawly, but this is how they were placed:

8—25—47  
 17—6  
 23—14—87—156  
 89—2  
 181—203—234  
 233—5—15  
 345—79—125—217

"If I have judged correctly," remarked Nelson Lee, "the first figures in the line—for example, the '8' at the top—stands for the number of the page. The other figures are words. Thus, '25' means the twenty-fifth word down the page, and so on. Just turn to page eight, Bennett."

I did so, and then counted down until I came to the twenty-fifth word.

"Arch," I read out.

"H'm! That doesn't sound very promising," smiled Lee. "However, we cannot judge yet. Now find the forty-seventh word, my boy."

"Stow," I said, after counting.

The gov'nor frowned slightly.

"'Arch—stow,'" he repeated.

"Are you sure you counted correctly, Bennett?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Very well. Turn to page seventeen and tell me what the sixth word is," said Lee. "I'm half afraid we're on the wrong track, but we must persist."

The sixth word on the seventeenth page proved to be "face."

"That makes it 'Arch—stow—face!'" I remarked with a grin. "There's no rhyme or reason in that, is there, sir? I think we'd better try something else, don't you? This is just a waste of time—"

"Patience, Bennett—patience!" interrupted Lee mildly. "I'm not at all sure that we're on the wrong track. Turn to page twenty-three: there are three words on that particular page."

It was some little time before I could count down, for the last of the three words was near the bottom. And the message now ran: "Arch stow face north twenty yards," and I was flushed with excitement. Tommy and Montie were also as keen as mustard.

"You were right, sir," I exclaimed eagerly. "There's sense in it now, although I can't fully understand it. Shall I go on?"

"By all means—by all means!"

After about five minutes counting, the message was complete, and this is how it ran in his deciphered form:

"Arch stow face north twenty yards ahead five-and-half further left ditch dig."

Nelson stroked his chin with satisfaction.

"Excellent, Bennett—excellent!" he exclaimed. "We now understand why our unknown house-breaker was so anxious to obtain this volume. The message reads like some directions concerning a hidden treasure!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "It's beyond me—I can't make any sense of it!"

"Neither can I, for that matter," I remarked. "Some parts of it are a meaningless jumble. Let me have another look—"

"It is really unnecessary, Bennett," interrupted the gov'nor smoothly. "You must understand that the man who pieced this message together had a limited choice of words, and he leaves a great deal to the imagination. For example, 'arch stow' surely means an archway, or bridge, which spans the river Stowe."

"By jingo! That sounds likely," I exclaimed.

"The supposition is all the more probable because we know that the river Stowe flows through this neighbourhood," went on the gov'nor. "The book was for sale in Bannington and therefore we are localised. And there is an arch over the Stowe midway between here and the town—the only arch, in fact."

"What about the rest of the message, sir?" asked Tommy Watson eagerly.

"Well, I judge that the intended meaning is this: The reader of the cipher is to proceed to the arch, and face north," explained Nelson Lee. "He will then measure twenty yards straight ahead, and turn abruptly to the left, when he will measure a further five and a half yards. There, presumably, a ditch is to be found. After that there is nothing to do but dig."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed admiringly.

The gov'nor had elucidated the cipher in the correct way—there was no doubt about that. But what was buried in the ditch?

I put the question to Nelson Lee, and he shook his head.

"Really, Bennett, you mustn't expect me to tell you that," he smiled. "But I am certainly determined to have a look into this matter. You had better get off to bed now, and we will investigate in the morning."

"Not now?" asked Tommy blankly.

"Certainly not, Watson. We need daylight, and it will be necessary to take certain tools," replied Lee, rising to his feet. "Now, off to bed with you. I will give you an early call, and we will set off on the expedition before breakfast."

And so it was arranged.

## CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH WE MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. GINTER—AND EVERYTHING ENDS UP ALL SERENE.

NELSON LEE kept his promise, and called me and my chums long before the rising bell was due to clang out.

We dressed ourselves quickly, and then went downstairs. The housemaids were busy, and were exceedingly surprised to see us down so early. In spite of the fact that we had gone to bed very late, we were fresh enough. Being healthy, the lack of an hour or two's sleep didn't make much difference.

The morning was fine, although chilly, and when we emerged into the Triangle we found the sun streaming down with a slight amount of warmth. Nelson Lee was waiting for us with spades and forks.

"You've been quick, boys," he smiled, by way of greeting. "I fetched you out early because the walk is rather a long one. However, we have two clear hours before breakfast. Try some of these."

He handed each of us a neat packet of sandwiches; obviously he had been interviewing the housekeeper. It was jolly decent of the gov'nor to think of our appetites in that way, and we appreciated it fully.

We set off briskly, and took the foot-path across the meadows to the Bannington road. Just before crossing the stile I fancied I saw the bushes move near the wood. I looked hard, but there was no sign of any human form.

Well, the arch was reached after a sharp walk of about twenty minutes.

We could have gone on bicycles, of course, but we shouldn't have saved much time, and the digging implements would have been cumbersome.

The arch spanned the river, and allowed the road to run over it. It was a very quiet spot, and at that early hour there was no sign of any traffic. We should have the place to ourselves for an hour, probably.

"Oh, what about a compass?" asked Sir Montie suddenly. "We can't do anything without one, can we?"

"I have not missed such an important point, West," said Lee, producing a pocket compass. "North is over in that direction, I fancy."

We got out exact bearings, and then descended to the marshy ground just below the arch, on the bank of the stream. The gov'nor produced a measure, and we carefully ruled off twenty yards due north. Then we carried out the other directions—and found ourselves right in the bed of a shallow ditch.

"We seem to have come to the right spot, at all events," remarked Nelson Lee. "It is fortunate that the ditch is dry, or we should have met with a big set-back here. Now, boys, put your backs into it."

So far we had spent about half an hour on the spot—for Nelson Lee had taken very great pains with the measuring. It was most important that we should reach the precise spot in the ditch, otherwise our digging would be futile.

We all set to work with a will—except Lee. He stood by, watching us. And, after about five minutes' brisk work, my fork struck something, which yielded reluctantly. We redoubled our efforts.

"There's something!" I panted, after a bit. "By Jupiter! It's a leather trunk by the look of it—just about in the last stages of decay—"

"Let me see, boys," said the gov'nor, bending over the hole we had made.

And then, all in a second, the earthquake happened.

At least, that's what it felt like for a second. Without the slightest warning, something hit me on the side of the head, and I just saw Nelson Lee twirl round. After that things were rather confused.

But I know that the man who had questioned me at Bannington was lashing out with both his fists, and there

were four rough-looking men with him—gipsies, by all appearance. One of them was armed with a stout cudgel, but he didn't keep it long. One direct blow from the gov'nor's fist sent the fellow spinning.

It was a great fight.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I were greatly outmatched, of course, and we had been taken at a disadvantage. But the brutes had expected us to knuckle under at the first blow. When they found that we were ready to fight them, they did not seem so enthusiastic.

I really believe that the tussle would have ended badly but for one fact. Nelson Lee took on the man we already knew—the man who had broken into the school—and he dealt with him severely.

After one or two light blows, the gov'nor delivered a clean knock-out, and the man crashed over on to his back, and lay still. Without the slightest pause, Lee turned, and got home a lovely punch on one of the other ruffian's nose.

That did it.

With their leader knocked out of time, all the stuffing seemed to be knocked out of them also. The four gipsies simply turned on their heel, and fled. They had been paid to attack us, I guessed, and they didn't see the fun of continuing the fight after their employer had been bowled out.

At all events, they streaked off, and vanished.

"Upon my soul!" panted Nelson Lee, rubbing his knuckles. "I didn't expect an interruption of this kind, my boys. Are you hurt at all?"

"Just a few knocks, sir—nothing much," I gasped.

Tommy had a black eye, but he was rather proud of it, and didn't grumble in the least. Sir Montie's casualties merely amounted to a bruised nose and a swollen ear. And, before we could have any further conversation, the knocked-out man sat up dazedly.

"I don't know who you are, but I should advise you to remain quiet," said Nelson Lee sternly. "It is my intention to keep you here until the police are informed, and you will then be charged with deliberate assault and burglary."

"I only took that blamed dictionary!" whined the man.

"You admit, then, that you broke into the school?" asked Lee sharply.

"I don't see that it's any good deny-

ing it!" growled the fellow sullenly. "It's hard lines, sir—rotten hard lines. I've done nothing to be sent to prison for, anyway."

"You had better make your statement to the police——"

"My name's Ginter, sir," interrupted the man. "Give me a chance, anyhow! I'll tell you the whole truth—honour bright I will!"

"Hoping that I shall let you off?" said Lee grimly.

"I leave that to you, sir," muttered Ginter. "But I'm done—I'm clean done. And I know when I'm beaten."

And after that the man told his story.

It was a rather interesting yarn.

Ginter, it appeared, had served time for burglary; he was, in fact, known as "Gentleman Ginter" to the police, and had quite a choice record.

He told us that he had only come out of prison a month before, and was now on ticket-of-leave. Three months previous to his release a convict had died in the prison infirmary—a man named Deane, who had been sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for burglary with violence. He only served five years of his stretch when he pegged out.

He was in for the theft of the famous Massington gold plate. I was rather surprised to hear that, for I'd often heard our old friend, Detective-Inspector Morley, refer to that particular case. Sir James Massington, who lived just beyond Bannington, had suffered the loss of his priceless gold ornaments and plate.

The stuff had been stolen by Deane, but had never been recovered. Deane had been interrupted just after he had cracked the crib, and had violently assaulted an under-footman, smashing the poor chap's skull severely.

Well, Deane had been put on trial, but had refused to reveal the hiding-place of the gold. He had, therefore, received ten years. He and Ginter had been great friends in the prison—as far as it is possible for men to be friends in a convict settlement.

And just before Deane died he made a request that Ginter should be allowed to come to him. Ginter was only serving three years, and his time had nearly expired. With his last few breaths, Deane had whispered to his fellow convict a few words which meant a tremendous lot.

In short, he told Ginter that if he would go to Bannington he would find a book called "Crimes of Fifty Years Ago" in his uncle's house. He would then learn the whereabouts of the missing gold.

Ginter had gone to Bannington as soon after his release as possible, but had found that Deane's uncle had sold a lot of old books to Spragg only a month before, for a mere trifle.

Well, Ginter at once hurried to the bookshop, and, by a curious stroke of chance, he arrived just in time to see me going off with the very volume he wanted! Deane's uncle had evidently given him a description of it.

I couldn't help feeling slightly sympathetic when Ginter told that part of his story. It must have been awfully galling for him to see that book going away in my hands. No wonder he had offered me ten shillings for it! No wonder he had made such frantic efforts to gain possession of it! Ginter had been positively alarmed and furious—with real cause. A fortune lay before him, and he couldn't touch it!

But the fellow was a rascal, and he was handed over to the police. He had been intent upon securing stolen property—and that was enough to earn him imprisonment. His attack upon us, and the burglary of the school were further examples of his guilt. We found out afterwards that a caravan of shady gipsies had been encamping on the edge of Bannington Moor, near Bellton Wood. Ginter must have seen us leave the school with spades and forks—and had

guessed things. In sheer desperation he had tried to defeat us.

Of course, other facts came out. Doane, after stealing the Massington gold, had fled, with the pursuers hot on his track. He realised that capture was certain, and had hidden the gold close to the Stowe arch.

And Deane had been cunning; he had taken the exact measurements, and had placed them down immediately upon arrival at his uncle's house in Bannington. But he had recorded the whereabouts of the gold so cryptically that no one could ever discover it. And he had set it down, of course, because he had realised that his memory might fail him during his years of imprisonment. He was on bad terms with his uncle, and did not mean the latter to get the gold.

I don't know how the case went against Ginter, but I fancy he received another term of imprisonment. Sir James Massington, of course, was overwhelmed with delight to recover his famous treasures.

And a short time afterwards Sir Montio and Tommy and I were presented with a superb gold watch—by way of recognition for our part in the affair. Nelson Lee had discreetly remained in the background, for he did not wish to figure in the papers—even as Mr. Alvington.

The little jape with regard to Bob Christine and Co.'s clothing was hugely successful, but it faded into insignificance beside the news which we brought to the school. All St. Frank's acknowledged that on this occasion, at least, the Fossils had scored a big triumph.

THE END.

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**TOM CRAWLEY**, light-weight boxer, and stoker on board H.M.S. *Flyer*, who has been captured by the Germans, as also has his father, though several months before;

**BOB RANDLE**, who has been sent to France with his regiment; and

**MARY THWAITES**, daughter of old Fisherman Thwaites, with whom both Tom and Bob are in love. Tom is taken to Zeebrugge at the time of a British aerial bombardment. The next morning, as he exercises in the yard, he comes face to face with his father, and they are allowed to exchange a few words. Meanwhile, Bob Randle is waiting in a front line trench, ready to go over the top. He goes over with the rest and sees a dome-shaped structure spitting out flame and smoke. He crawls towards the spot, carrying his bombs.

(Now read on).

## BOB RANDLE IN CAPTIVITY.

**W**ITH set lips Bob Randle seized the bombs, and one by one released the mechanism, and pushed them through a slit in the concrete dome.

With a fiendish joy he heard the bombs exploding beneath the ground, in the hidden chamber. One after the other he got rid of them, and then saw grey-clad figures leaping panic-stricken into the open, many of them streaming with blood, and all holding aloft their hands and shrieking "Kamerad!"

The machine gun was silent. Single-handed, Bob had taken the position, and an officer, striding up, congratulated him with a nod and a smile.

"Well done, my lad," said he. "Your name?"

"Bob Randle, sir."

The officer instantly made a note of the name, though the bullets and shells were dropping everywhere. Then he calmly ordered some of the lads to pass the broken prisoners to the rear.

Bob Randle went on with the rest, and entering a German trench, sped along it, striding over the fallen forms that littered the shell-torn ground, his rifle and bayonet ready.

Grim-faced comrades accompanied him. At an angle of the trench a murderous fire held them up. Some of them fell. Bob, who seemed to bear a charmed life, led the rush forward. The angle was turned, and the Huns there were shot down or bayoneted, all save an officer, out of whose hand Bob struck a sword, calling upon him to surrender.

The officer wore an Iron Cross, and was a splendid figure of a man.

"I will never surrender," he exclaimed. "Kill me first."

"Take that then," roared a stalwart Tommy, but Bob, with an upswing of his rifle turned the bayonet's point aside, and took his place by the Hun officer's side.

"You are safe with me. I'll protect you," said he, and the German gave a curious glance from a pair of surprised eyes, then accepted his fate with a shrug of indifference.

He, like thousands of others taking part in the desperate carnage, did not mind whether he lived or not.

They kept him there, while they prepared to consolidate the position, and dig a slant the reverse side of the trench.

For some hours they remained, and then the trench was subjected to a terrific shelling by the Huns. The Tommies dived into the holes and shelters of the trenches, taking the officer prisoner with them, and there remained while the violent bombardment continued for upwards of three hours.

Tired, hungry, begrimed with smoke, in want of clear, cold water, and wondering whether the ground they had taken would be held or not, stayed in their hiding place until the shell fire ceased.

Twenty minutes later they could hear the rattle of machine guns, the pop, pop,

pop of rifle and revolver, the cries of men raised in hideous clamour, and the clash of steel.

Some men were coming along the trench.

The Tommies rushed out to see, Bob Randle among them, and the German officer prisoner, eagerly curious like the rest.

To Bob's horror they were not khaki uniforms that loomed up along the deep dug trench, but German uniforms of field grey.

A counter attack, launched under cover of the terrific bombardment and barrage, had enabled the enemy to recapture his lost trenches. The isolated regiment of British heroes, who had penetrated the enemy positions to a greater depth than any of their other forces, had been left in the air.

They did their best with rifle, bomb, and bayonet, but as fast as they shot down or bayoneted the enemy, others came, until only a remnant of heroes, with Bob Randle among them, remained.

On to them, round them, the enemy swarmed.

Some finding that the game was up, that they had no chance, throw down their arms. Defenceless they faced their enemies.

Death was upon them, round them, very near. In their helplessness one or two put up their hands. The cowardly Huns thrust their bayonets at them.

"No quarter!" they yelled.

One of the poor fellows was struck down. Then a Hun thrust at a broad-shouldered and stalwart corporal, who faced his enemies with folded arms, a mocking smile upon his lips.

Bob Randle was quick to see the stroke, and springing forward, intercepted it, turning the blade of the bayonet aside.

Then with a left and right he hit the savage Hun clean off his feet, showing the enemy what a cool and determined Britisher could do with his fists, even at such a time as that.

His brave act brought the Huns to a stand. They faltered, glaring at him.

Then with exultant cries of triumph, they hurled themselves upon him, one of them knocking the brave fellow down with the butt end of a rifle.

Then a dozen gleaming bayonets were pointed at him, the enemy hesitating be-

fore driving the steel home because of the stripes the gallant fellow wore.

Half stunned, too badly hurt for a moment to move, Bob lay there.

He thought the end had come, and his lips framed a prayer.

Scarcely were the first words shaped, however, than someone leapt between him and his would be murderers, someone shouted to them to stand back.

"The British have surrendered," he cried. "Back, you dogs. I will answer for them. They spared my life. I'll answer for theirs."

It was the German officer with the Iron Cross who had interceded for Bob.

Bob rose a bit dazed. A guttural command was uttered, and he and his fellow prisoners were marched along the trench, with an armed escort under command of the rescued Prussian officer, who now went bail for them all.

"So, I'm a prisoner of war, am I?" growled Bob, with a shrug.

"Yes," said the German officer with a smile. "It is hard luck."

"So early in the game, too. I've only just come out," muttered Bob, wondering what Mary Thwaites would think when she heard.

"Never mind," said the Prussian officer, "you are well out of it. And I am glad I saved you. It is tid for tad."

And he smiled again in the most friendly way, as they proceeded onward, passing through the British curtain of fire to the safer ground beyond.

## TOM AND HIS FATHER.

AT the prison at Antwerp unfortunate captives came and went at regular intervals, so that Tom Crawley and his father hardly ever ventured out into the high-walled exercise yard without finding new faces there, and missing others they had got quite used to.

Kept apart by themselves under a special armed guard, these unfortunates would look wistfully out of their big eyes at the British prisoners, soldiers and sailors who had helped in the work of liberation and suffered in the great cause.

A day or two they remained, and then—vanished.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Some of the military prisoners, too, did not remain there long. They came and went at regular intervals, too.

Thomas Crawley had been there almost longer than anybody. Periodically, so he told his son Tom, he was taken before the commandant of the prison, a stiff-necked, but not an impossible, German, and severely cross-questioned as regards the military and naval position of Great Britain.

Sometimes German naval officers were present at these examinations.

Once he was shown a map of Weathersea, and asked to state whether it were accurate or not.

He defied them all, without any show of heat, but with shoulders set back and head erect.

"Commandant," he would say, "you can put me against a wall and shoot me down if you like, but I'll never give you any information which may injure my country."

Some of the German officers became very angry with him. The commandant never. And after every ordeal he was sent back to his cell and treated as before.

"Tom," said the gallant fisherman one day, "I don't know how much longer we shall be here, but I hope, when they do remove us, that we will go together. Maybe we will, as we are both sailors."

So the days came and went, and still they remained in their prison, wearied by the monotony of their lives, dreaming of escape, but with never a chance presenting itself.

Then there came a morning on which, when they entered the exercise yard, they found many fresh prisoners there, including a batch of khaki-clad heroes.

There must have been some thirty or forty of these at least, and the guard of German soldiers had been doubled.

What did it mean? Had the British met with a severe defeat in Flanders that these gallant fellows had been brought here?

No news, at least no reassuring news, ever reached the unfortunate captives, who were always told by their guard that Germany was winning the war hands down.

As the Tommies and non-commissioned officers strolled about, some of them seeming contented enough, while others were downhearted and sad, the older prisoners mixed with them, and eager questions were asked and answered.

Things were going on all right, but the

Hun was putting up a good show. It was a question of time.

Feeling greatly reassured, Tom's father put his arm round the young sailor's neck, and, smiling, said: "It's all right, boy. They haven't sunk the old island yet, and mother's still safe at Weathersea. Maybe she's got the letter you sent her, saying that you're alive, by this time. And the cottage will still be there when we go back to Weathersea."

At that moment father and son became aware of a shadow which had come between them and the solitary shaft of sunlight which penetrated the dreary yard. Then a well-known voice addressed them: "By George! Yes, it is! Mr. Crawley, how are you? Whoever would have expected to meet you here? And Tom, too. Tom, old man, it's almost like a miracle!"

"Bob Randle!" ejaculated the startled fisherman.

"Bob!"

Yes, it was Bob Randle, the Weathersea grocer's son, but little changed by the ordeal through which he had passed, save that he looked older and had filled out a bit.

Bob's khaki uniform showed signs of service. The discolourations upon it had been made by Belgian mud. The cloth was worn and weather stained. Yet Bob looked a hero in it.

Tom seized his old enemy's hand, and gripped it firmly.

His boyish eyes filled with tears, and his lips trembled as he spoke.

"So, Bob," he muttered, "you're out of it as well as me. Tell me how you got taken."

This Bob did in simple language, passing lightly over the part he had played in the attack on the enemy's positions during the progress of which he had been captured.

"I can't say how it went after I got taken," he said. "The Huns say we were heavily defeated. But they always make that claim. I should say we hit them very hard. I'm sorry they got hold of me, though I'm glad to see you and Tom again, Mr. Crawley. What a long time it seems since we were last at Weathersea. I wonder what they're doing there?"

"Carrying on as usual, Bob," said the stout-hearted fisherman. "You can stake your life on that. Only I dare say some of our friends are feeling down in

*(Continued overleaf.)*

the mouth. Poor Mary Thwaites, I wonder how she is bearing up. She'll have heard of Tom's loss long ago, of course, and now there's you."

Tom and Bob exchanged glances at the mention of Mary's name. Bob made no reply, and during the rest of their time out in the yard they spoke of other things.

"I say, Bob," whispered Tom Crawley, before they parted, "there are three of us here now, and we can trust one another. If only we could escape!"

Bob glanced round at the high walls capped by iron spikes, and at the armed German guard.

"It's impossible," he muttered. "We could never get away from here."

"P'raps not," returned Tom, with a meaning glance. "But if ever we get the chance, suppose we try?"

### HUN v. BRITON.

**A** FEW days before the arrival of Bob Randle at the prison in Antwerp a notice had been posted up in the exercise yard to the effect that the prisoners were not to talk to one another under pain of condign punishment.

Yet, in spite of this notice, they continued to form groups and to chat as usual.

Some of the guards winked at this defiance of the order, while others chose to take notice of it and to bully the unfortunates.

Among the worst of the bullies was a thick-set German of moderate height, a clean-shaven, rather brutal-looking fellow, who spoke English remarkably well.

Finding that his threats had little effect upon the chattering, he struck one of them with the butt of his rifle, and, when remonstrated with, felled the poor fellow to the ground.

His victim was carried away bleeding profusely, and badly stunned.

From that moment the bully got completely out of hand, whilst the attitude of the prisoners towards him became at times almost threatening.

Bob Randle's hands itched to get at the fellow.

Tom Crawley was equally as indignant. So was his father, though he realised the hopelessness of interference other than by making an appeal to the commandant, who would not be bothered as a rule with the complaints of the prisoners.

The bully in the hated German uniform had matters completely his own way, and rejoiced in his power.

But something was going to happen which would teach him a lesson.

*(To be continued.)*

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