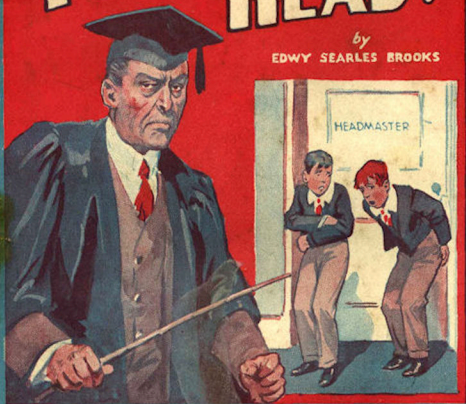


# THE TYRANT HEAD!

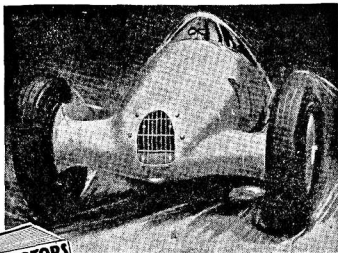
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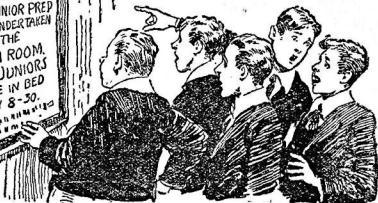
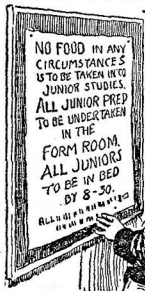
## The Modern Boy's New Book of **MOTORS, SHIPS and ENGINES**

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# THE TYRANT HEAD!

by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



Mr. MARTIN, the new headmaster of St. Frank's, thought it a simple matter to bully the school into submission. But NIPPER & Co. soon show the tyrant the error of his ways—as is proved in this exciting yarn.

*Narrated by NIPPER himself.*

## CHAPTER 1.

Back to St. Frank's!

**B**USTLE reigned supreme.

Every St. Frank's fellow, senior and junior, was busy with something or other. There were no lessons for the day. The whole school, as a matter of fact, was upside-down.

For the sojourn in London had come to an end.

During the last six or seven weeks the school had carried on in temporary premises in London, just off Holborn. We had shifted from St. Frank's, originally, because of a fire which had partially demolished the College House.

The place was re-built now, and the Ancient House had benefited by the

presence of the builders and the decorators and the painters, too. The whole school had been given a spring clean, so to speak.

As it was all ready for occupation, there was no reason why we should remain a day longer in London. So we were going back—and the majority of the fellows were pleased with the prospect.

London had been all very well for a change, but we should be glad to get back to dear old St. Frank's.

The Remove was travelling by itself, accompanied, however, by a couple of prefects—to keep order. They were not likely to do much in that line, I imagined. The day was regarded as a

holiday, and the juniors would probably let themselves go.

Nelson Lee, my esteemed guv'nor, would travel down some hours later than the Remove. We juniors, in fact, were to be the first to leave. And so everything was bustle and noise in the London premises.

"Back to the dear old place," said Watson cheerfully. "Good! I shall be as pleased as Punch when we get there."

"Yes, it'll be a relief," I agreed. "We've been awfully hampered up here with regard to the footer. Once we settle down at St. Prank's we can get ahead with the fixture-list, and proceed to whack every eleven we play against."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West smiled.

"I have been wonderin' if the place will reek of paint an' all that sort of thing," he said. "I loathe the smell of paint, dear fellows. It will be frightful if Study C——"

"Don't you worry your head about Study C," I interrupted. "The College House fellows will have to suffer the most from smells. Their place has been practically re-built, and it's bound to be unpleasantly new."

"I expect the paint——" began Watson.

A head appeared in the doorway.

"You chaps ready?" asked Reginald Pitt. "The buses to take us to London Bridge are waiting in the courtyard, you know. They won't wait for ever."

"We're ready," I said. "Just coming, Reggie."

"Good for you."

Pitt went off, and a few minutes later I strolled out with my chums. There were several buses waiting in the courtyard, and they were practically filled with shouting Removites already.

Morrow and Reynolds of the Sixth were standing by.

"Hurry up, kids," said Morrow briskly. "We're starting in two minutes. Can't wait for laggards. If some of you get left behind you'll have

to come on by a later train—and that'll mean punishment."

I ran my eye over the crowd before mounting a bus.

"Everybody seems to be here," I said. "It's all right—hold hard, though. Where's Study L?"

"In the building, I expect," grinned De Valerie. "Nobody's pinched it."

I looked round.

"Anybody seen Trotwood?" I asked. "Or Little?"

"They're indoors, I believe," said Owen major. "Both the Trotwoods are trying to get Little away. But there's some grub in the study, and it would break Fatty's heart to leave it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They'd better be called out," I said, grinning.

Jimmy Little, the new boy in the Remove, was the fattest fellow on record. He was of truly terrific size and his appetite was large in proportion. He could eat enough for four ordinary fellows.

Eating, in fact, was his one weak point. He would get himself into trouble because of his appetite. In all other respects he was one of the best.

Just as I was about to hurry indoors, one of the Trotwood twins appeared. It was impossible to tell which one it was—by sight. For Nicodemus and Cornelius were alike as two peas.

"Where's Fatty?" roared a dozen voices.

"Indoors—gorging!" shouted Nicodemus—for it was the elder twin. "We can't shift the ass!"

"A crane couldn't shift him!" grinned Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I want a dozen fellows to come in and yank him out by force," said Nicodemus. "It's the only way——"

"Rats! We're not having any!"

"But, my good friends——"

"I should leave the fat ass alone," said Bob Christine. "If he likes to miss the train, that's his look-out. In any



case, it's a question if we could get him on one of these buses. He'll want a whole one to himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time's up," said Morrow. "We can't wait any longer, Trotwood."

"My goodness! Gimme just one minute!" gasped Nicodemus.

He rushed into the school again, and charged into Study L. The juniors' studies here had been lettered the same as at St. Frank's, so that no confusion should be caused.

Fatty Little was seated at the table, and before him were a number of cakes and pastries, and a pile of sandwiches. He grinned cheerfully as Nicodemus rushed in. Jimmy was a very amiable fellow.

"Come on!" yelled Nicodemus. "The buses are starting!"

"Really, my dear Nicodemus, I am waiting for Little," said Cornelius mildly.

"Just give me three minutes to finish—" began Little.

"You duffer! There's not a second!"

"But I can't leave this grub—"

"You must!" roared Nicodemus. "You fat gorger! The buses are starting now! Can't you hear 'em? Leave that stuff on the table and come along!"

Jimmy Little shook his head firmly.

"I couldn't do it!" he declared.

"You—you—"

"It would be a waste of good food," said the fat boy. "I don't mind taking it with me, if you'll wait a couple of minutes while I wrap it up—"

"We can't wait for anything!" howled Nicodemus. "Help me to force the silly idiot out of this study, Corny! Lend a hand!"

"Really?" said Cornelius mildly. "I can't hear it."

"What?" gasped his brother. "Can't hear what?"

"You said there was a band—"

"I didn't!" yelled Nicodemus. "I asked you to lend me a hand, you ass!"

We've got to get Little out of this study."

"Yes, I believe it is muddy," said Cornelius. "I hope my best trousers do not get splashed. Really, my good Nicodemus! Why did you push me?"

"You deaf fathead!" roared Nicodemus. "Help me to shift Little!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the other Trotwood. "Why didn't you say so at first?"

Nicodemus didn't trust himself to speak. He turned his attention to Fatty Little.

That hungry junior was eating away unconcernedly and calmly. And he didn't move a hair when his study chums collared him.

They pulled and they wrenched—but they couldn't shift him. His weight seemed to hold him down to the chair as if he was stuck there.

"You—you greedy, gormandising, guzzling bounder!" gasped Nicodemus. "Aren't you coming? Can't you leave those few sandwiches—"

"But think of the waste—"

"Blow the waste!" hooted Trotwood.

"Are you coming—"

"My dear Nicodemus, you are exciting yourself over nothing," said Cornelius softly. "The buses are no longer in the courtyard. They have gone!"

"Gone!" panted Nicodemus. "Then—then we've lost that train! All because of this—this walking whale! We shall be caned now, or given detention, as soon as we get to St. Frank's. That's a fine way to begin, isn't it?"

Jimmy Little gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

"I've finished," he said calmly. "I don't suppose I shall want anything else until—"

"This time next week, I should think!" snapped Nicodemus.

"Until we get to the station," explained Little. "And you needn't be in such a hurry, Nick. There are plenty of taxi-cabs, and we can get one in Holborn—and reach London Bridge first, perhaps."

Nicodemus cooled down.

"Well, that's not a bad idea," he admitted.

"We shall have time to visit the refreshment-room for some grub," said Little, with satisfaction. "We shall need something to sustain us on the journey!"

"You're the limit!" said Nicodemus blankly. "After eating enough for a dozen, you talk about raiding the refreshment-room! It's a wonder to me you don't have your grub in a pail, and shovel it into your tummy!"

The fat boy was not at all offended. He was constantly chipped about his appetite, and he was used to ridicule.

They seized their bags and hurried out. The buses had certainly gone, and the courtyard was strangely quiet in consequence. In Holborn the juniors were fortunate enough to secure a taxi within a minute.

"London Bridge Station," said Little briskly.

"Yes, sir," said the cabby.

The twins bundled in, and then Fatty squeezed himself through the doorway. And the trio were soon bowling along towards London Bridge.

They arrived in plenty of time for the train.

The Remove, in fact, had only just got there, and two of the buses were still disgorging their passengers. There was a yell when the occupants of the taxi were recognised.

"Here's Fatty!"

"Mind how you get out, Little!" yelled Pitt.

The Trotwoods were already out, and Jimmy Little proceeded to squeeze himself out of the taxi. But unfortunately for Fatty, he became jammed, half in and half out!

"Great doughnuts!" gasped Fatty. "Gimme a hand, Nicky!"

Nicodemus pulled with all his strength—but Little remained jammed.

"Rescue, Remove!" roared Pitt. "Fatty's wedged!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All hands to the pump!"

"Here, steady, young gents!" protested the taxi-driver. "If you ain't careful you'll do some damage."

Fatty Little was still struggling. A crowd of yelling juniors swarmed into the taxi from the other side. And while some juniors pushed, others pulled. And at last Fatty was successfully released.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I shall have to be more careful with the giddy things in future!"

"I think we'd better go and tell the station master here to put on a special carriage for you, Fatty," said Handforth. "There's no telling what you'll do once you're let loose in an ordinary compartment. Hold on! I was talking to you, Little!"

The fat boy looked anxious.

"But the train goes in ten minutes!" he exclaimed.

"What of it?"

"I've only just got time to have a snack—"

"And he had enough for a dozen before he left the school!" sighed Nicodemus Trotwood. "I really think the poor fellow ought to be examined by a specialist. I think he must be suffering from some awful complaint."

"Exactly — a healthy appetite," grinned Pitt.

Fatty Little very nearly lost the train, for he left it until the last moment before he could be dragged away from the refreshment-room. He succeeded in piling into a crowded compartment at the last second.

The train was an express, and didn't stop until it reached Bannington. There we changed into the local train, and Bellton was reached in due course. The little station was looking just as forlorn as ever when we trooped out upon the platform. But the day was fine, and we had come back to St. Frank's.

Everybody was in high spirits.

"Seems like the first day of term!" remarked De Valerie, as we made our way out of the booking office.

"Not likely!" said Hart. "On the first day of term the fellows are generally looking a bit glum—it's a natural effect after having been at home for some time. But this is different."

"Yes, I suppose it is," agreed De Valerie. "And now to see the new St. Frank's. I wonder if they've made a complete mess of the College House? Not that it interests me at all!"

"But it interests me!" put in Bob Christine. "Who's going to be the first to set eyes on the new show?"

Several juniors were tempted into a race. But Sir Montie and Tommy Watson and I went more sedately, for we were in no particular hurry to get there.

"Well, we've had a good deal of excitement in London," I remarked, as we strolled through the village. "And now we'll have some peace and quietness until the end of the term."

"Yes, begad!" agreed Sir Montie. "That's the idea, old boy."

But I was far from guessing the little peace and quietness we were likely to get at St. Frank's in the near future. For ructions—with a capital R—were destined to break out almost at once!

## CHAPTER 2.

### Startling News!

"RIPPING!"

"Oh, fine!"

"Couldn't be better!"

All the fellows were satisfied with the outward appearance of St. Frank's as the old school came into view. The building contractors had cleared their materials away to the last chip, and there was nothing to show that a whole army of workmen had lately been busy on the premises.

The College House, which had been burnt out, had been rebuilt, and both Houses and all the other buildings had been painted.

We were glad to get back in the old

Triangle. It was much more grassy than usual, for disuse had had its effect. I led the way across to the Ancient House, and entered the lobby.

"My word," said Watson, "what a change!"

The change, indeed, was remarkable. The walls were bright and fresh, and all the paintwork was new, and in excellent taste. Going along to the Remove passage, we found that the juniors' studies had also been dealt with. The doors were receiving much attention from the juniors.

For the letters were painted in gold on a dark background, and looked extremely neat. It was a problem how long the neatness would remain. The interior of Study C was on a par with everything else. It had been repapered, whitewashed and painted. Everything was spick and span.

"I'm not sure that I like it so well," I said, after a moment. "There's something cosy about a place where the paint's dirty and the wallpaper's a bit worn. This looks rather stiff and formal——"

"Don't you worry," said Watson. "It'll soon get soiled!"

We decided to go down into the Common-room, and we were striding along the passage when we were astonished to see a strange man in a cap and gown walking towards us. He was a big, powerful man, with a face which resembled that of a prizefighter—a bulldog face, with a protruding chin and heavy eyebrows.

"Who's this merchant?" breathed Watson. "I didn't know there were any new masters coming——"

"I expect he's a visitor," I said.

The man was about to brush past us, but he paused, and seized Tregellis West's arm fiercely.

"One moment, boy," he said. "If you appear in public wearing that fancy tie again I will punish you severely."

Sir Montie simply gasped.

"Begad! I—I don't know what you mean, sir!" he protested. "Nobody

has raised any objection to my ties before——"

"I don't want to argue with you," snapped the other. "Understand, once and for all, that I will have no fancy ties worn in this school."

"But——"

"Enough! Go and remove that tie."

Sir Montie's eyes flashed.

"You will pardon me, sir, but I won't do anything of the sort," he said firmly.

"You—you won't obey my orders?" thundered the man.

"Why should I? I don't know you, an' you've got no right to order me about," said Sir Montie. "This tie is in perfect taste. There is no rule here that a fellow can't wear a fancy tie if he wants to. I shall be obliged, my dear sir, if you will be good enough to mind your own business!"

"Hear, hear!" I murmured.

The stranger was red in the face with fury.

"You—you insolent young jackanapes!" he bellowed harshly.

"Eh?"

"You impudent puppy!"

"Begad!"

"I intend to have obedience——"

"Pardon me, sir, but we've never been told that it is our duty to be obedient to you," I put in.

"Boy!" roared the man. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir. I haven't had the—er—pleasure of meeting you before——"

"I am your new headmaster!"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Begad, I——"

"I am Mr. Howard Martin, the headmaster of this school!" shouted the man. "And I will have you know that I will put up with no nonsense from any junior boys—or, for that matter, from any senior boys, either. I intend to have absolute discipline and obedience in this establishment!"

We stared at the stranger blankly.

"You—you are the new headmaster?" I asked, still staring. "But what of Dr. Stafford——"

"Dr. Stafford remained in London,

and where he is now doesn't interest me in the slightest," snapped Mr. Martin. "From this moment onwards you are to recognise me as your headmaster. It is my intention to rule St. Frank's fairly but firmly, and in no circumstances will I permit any boy to wear ridiculous things."

"But, my dear sir——" began Montie.

"That is sufficient!" snapped Mr. Martin.

He stalked away down the passage, leaving us staring after him as though in a dream. A few of the juniors had collected in the background, and they stared, too. It was absolutely amazing.

"There must be something wrong!" said Watson. "It's dotty to suppose that an awful bounder like him can be our headmaster! What about Dr. Stafford?"

I looked grim.

"It seems to me, my sons, that we've been double-crossed, as they say in the States," I said. "Without saying a word, the Governors have pushed the dear old Head out, and appointed this—this bully in his place."

"Great pip!" exclaimed Handforth fiercely. "It can't be true—it simply can't be! Don't you remember the fuss we made before we went to London? Don't you remember how the whole school demanded that Dr. Stafford should be retained?"

Reginald Pitt nodded.

"Yes, we do remember it," he said. "And we also remember that the Chairman of the Governors, General Ord-Clayton, was the prime mover in the attempt to get Dr. Stafford dismissed. This simply means that the general has succeeded—but he's done it in an underhand way."

"Rather!" I agreed. "The school wasn't allowed to know, and we've come down here to find the new chap in power. By jingo! Unless I'm very much mistaken, there will be ructions before long!"

"There'll be ructions right now!" roared Handforth. "Do you think

we're going to put up with rotten trickery of this kind? Not likely! What do you chaps say?"

"No!"

"We won't stand it!"

"We'll go on strike first!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a good deal of excitement, and the manner in which the news spread was really astonishing. Before twenty minutes had elapsed practically everybody in the school knew that Dr. Stafford had not come down from London, and that Mr. Howard Martin was installed in his place.

The indignation was general. Mr. Martin had not shown himself much, but it could be seen that he was a tough customer. Sir Montie made no attempt to change his tie. He decided to wait until Nelson Lee arrived. He was our Housemaster, and we were under his control. My chum was determined to take no heed of the outsider's order.

"In any case, it isn't a matter for the Head to interfere in," declared Montie. "I refuse to recognise the frightful bounder—I do really! I have got an idea that somethin' is wrong, begad! Perhaps it is a joke, you know."

"Oh, yes—a very humorous joke!" sniffed Watson.

"Well, we needn't argue about it," I remarked. "The guv'nor will be down within an hour, and we can ask him. It wouldn't be a bad idea to meet him at the station, and hear the latest."

"Good!" said Tommy, nodding. "We'll go."

"Dear fellow, it is a first-class suggestion," agreed Montie.

And so, while the school simmered, we strolled down to the station. We were serious and thoughtful.

Dr. Stafford had always been fair and even generous in his headmaster-ship. Everything had gone smoothly and serenely. The old Head had been immensely popular with the whole school.

And now, without warning, he had gone!

And in his place was a harsh, overbearing bully of a man who had started as badly as any man could start. Unless there was a satisfactory explanation ready, there would be grave trouble with the fellows.

For everybody believed that Dr. Stafford had been sacked without justification. If it became known that he had resigned—well, there would be no demonstration at all. The Governors were at liberty to appoint whom they chose, and the boys would have to put up with him.

But if the new Head had taken charge because Dr. Stafford had been dismissed, that was a different thing. When we had left London there had been no suspicion that Dr. Stafford would not come with us. It was rather a blow to find a total stranger in possession at St. Frank's.

"But there's no sense in worrying about it," I said, as I walked to the station with my chums. "Let's wait until we hear the full facts before we start getting excited. The Head may have gone away for a holiday, and this Martin chap is probably only a temporary substitute."

"If you call Martin a substitute for the Head, I don't, begad!" remarked Sir Montie. "In my opinion, old boys, Mr. Martin is the most frightful rotter we've ever had in St. Frank's. A master who is lacking in good taste is naturally a fearful bounder. Honestly, dear boys, is there anythin' the matter with my tie?"

"Well, it is a bit—just a little bit—well, noisy," I admitted.

"Noisy!"

"Exactly—loud, you know."

"You awful ass!" exclaimed Montie indignantly. "I refuse to——"

"Hallo! The train's coming in," I interrupted briskly. "We'd better buck up if we want to welcome the guv'nor on the platform."

We broke into a trot, and the noble Sir Montie found it impossible to con-

tinued the discussion regarding fancy ties. We reached the platform just as the train drew to a standstill.

Nelson Lee stepped out of a first-class compartment, and a look of surprise came into his face as we hurried up to him, pushing through the crowds of Sixth Formers who had come by the same train.

"This is quite an honour, boys," said the gov'nor, smiling. "I did not think that you would come down to meet me—"

"The fact is, sir, we're anxious to see you about something important," I broke in. "We want to know all about it—and we thought we couldn't do better than to collar you as soon as you blew in. Look here, gov'nor—I'll put it to you bluntly. Do you know if the Head is coming to St. Frank's?"

Nelson Lee regarded me curiously.

"To tell you the truth, Nipper, I'm rather puzzled about Dr. Stafford," he said slowly. "He seemed very pre-occupied yesterday, but would not admit that anything was wrong. This morning he had gone when I inquired for him, and I naturally assumed that he had come to St. Frank's by an earlier train."

"Well, sir, he's not here," put in Watson.

"Then I presume that he will turn up later on," said the gov'nor lightly. "There is really no necessity for you to concern yourselves—"

"But you don't understand, sir," I interrupted. "There's a fellow at the school—a big bully of a chap—named Howard Martin. He's waltzing about in a cap and gown, giving orders wholesale, and he makes out that he's the new headmaster. Everybody is bowled over, and we don't know what to make of it."

Nelson Lee's expression changed.

"Is this an actual fact, boys?" he asked quietly.

"Begad, rather, sir!" said Sir Monk. "Why, the awful rotter has ordered me to take this tie off!"

"Your ties, my dear Montie, do not

interest me," said Nelson Lee. "But I must admit that I am greatly astonished by what you have told me, Nipper. Much is now clear to me."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Dr. Stafford has evidently been requested to resign—which amounts to a summary dismissal—and I can now understand why he was so worried," went on the gov'nor. "It strikes me as being rather underhand business, and St. Frank's has been tricked."

"It's a beastly shame, sir!"

"The fellows won't stand it, sir!"

"Rather not, begad!"

"I really hope you boys will not cause any great disturbance," said Nelson Lee gravely. "With a new headmaster in power a demonstration would be quite useless. However, I will interview this Mr. Martin as soon as I reach St. Frank's, and then I shall know more about the matter."

Nelson Lee bustled off before we could question him further, and he walked to St. Frank's at a fast pace. He was seriously concerned and annoyed. For this great change to have been made without the knowledge of the Housemasters—Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale—amounted to a slight.

Lee could only think that there had been a misunderstanding somewhere. In any case, he was determined to get at the truth without delay, and as soon as he entered the school he went straight to the Head's study, tapped, and entered.

Within the room were two men. One of them was Mr. Howard Martin, and the other General Ord-Clayton, the Chairman of the Board of Governors. This gentleman was a fierce, fiery-looking individual, and he sprang to his feet with alacrity.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I am glad you have come!" he said briskly. "I wish to introduce you to Mr. Howard Martin, who will in future conduct this school."

Nelson Lee took the new Head's hand without enthusiasm or cordiality.

"And you, I understand, are the Housemaster of the Ancient House?"

said Mr. Martin in a condescending voice. "H'm! I trust that you will fulfil your duties to my full satisfaction, Mr. Lee."

"I shall fulfil them to my own—and that, I think, will be sufficient," said the schoolmaster-detective icily. "May I inquire when this alteration was decided upon, general? I was under the impression that Dr. Stafford was to return——"

"Dr. Stafford will not return," snapped the general. "He resigned his appointment yesterday, Mr. Lee. You will oblige me by refraining from discussing Dr. Stafford in future."

Nelson Lee sat down.

"Am I to understand that Dr. Stafford was dismissed?" he asked.

"You are to understand that Dr. Stafford has no further connection with this school," said General Ord-Clayton. "He concluded his duties yesterday. You must surely admit, Mr. Lee, that it would not have been to the benefit of the school for Dr. Stafford to return."

"I admit nothing of the kind," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Dr. Stafford is a remarkably clever man, a keen judge of character—a kindly, charming gentleman in every way. Under his guidance the school has prospered considerably, and I am convinced that he is one of the most capable headmasters in the country. His loss is a sad one for everybody concerned. The gap will never be filled."

"The gap is already filled, sir!" snapped Mr. Martin.

"I am afraid not," said Nelson Lee. "You are occupying Dr. Stafford's shoes, but his personality will be missed by all. I regret exceedingly that this step should have been taken—and, I may add, I am annoyed."

"Annoyed!" barked the general. "Did you say—annoyed?"

"I did!"

"You will have the goodness to explain what you mean, sir!"

"That will be quite easy," said Lee smoothly. "Dr. Stafford was dismissed

secretly, without the knowledge of the school. I come down here to find this gentleman in control. In no circumstances, General Ord-Clayton, can you tell me that such a condition of things is straightforward and open. I am deeply sorry that Dr. Stafford has been treated so harshly."

The general rose to his feet, his moustache bristling.

"Harshly!" he roared. "Let me warn you, Mr. Lee, that you had better be careful in your choice of words! While Sir Rupert Manderley was chairman he was content to let things slide along in the same old rut. But I have different views—different ideas. I intend to make a great difference in this school, and I realise that no great alteration was possible while Dr. Stafford occupied the post of headmaster. In plain words, he was too slow—he was negligent—he was weak."

"I disagree with you entirely," said Nelson Lee curtly. "Dr. Stafford possessed that quality which is essential in schoolmasters—sympathy. He understood his boys in every way, and he was never lax in his administration. Under his regime the school was happy and content."

"Possibly!" sneered the general. "And what have you to say with regard to the College House affair, Mr. Lee? You know as well as I do that the place was burnt down solely because of Dr. Stafford's carelessness. The expense ran into thousands of pounds——"

"Completely covered by insurance companies," cut in Nelson Lee. "And please let me remind you that it is absolutely preposterous to suggest that Dr. Stafford was in any way to blame. I was here at the time of the occurrence. You were not. It is the acme of injustice to charge Dr. Stafford——"

"That will do, sir!" shouted the general. "It is not necessary for me to listen to you any longer. This gentleman, Mr. Howard Martin, is the headmaster of St. Frank's, and you will oblige me by recognising him as your superior."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I am afraid I cannot do so with any great sincerity," he said quietly. "And please let me tell you, general, that this high-handed attitude on your part will only lead to disaster. Do not forget that the great majority of the boys almost loved Dr. Stafford, and there will be great trouble—"

"Let there be trouble!" said the general harshly. "Mr. Martin is capable of dealing with it. Any disturbance will be put down with a firm hand. Boys need to be treated sternly."

Nelson Lee made no further comment, but retired without even glancing at the men again. He was angry at such shameful injustice.

But at the same time, Nelson Lee was gravely perturbed in mind. He was quite certain that trouble of an alarming nature would occur within the next twenty-four hours.

And Nelson Lee was quite right!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Change at St. Frank's!

"IMPOSSIBLE!"

"It simply can't be true!"

It was nearly tea-time, but nobody was thinking about tea. Not a single junior even commenced preparations for the meal. The fellows stood about the Triangle in little groups, discussing the one all-important subject.

Others occupied the Common-room and the passage. Ancient House and College House alike, the boys were indignant and amazed. Many would not believe that Dr. Stafford would not return.

To a great many boys the change would make little or no difference—so they thought. One headmaster was as good as another, in the opinion of a certain set. If the old Head had retired in the ordinary course of things, a celebration would have occurred, and things would have settled down again.

But this was totally different.

The Head had been sacked—kicked out. There was not the slightest doubt that Dr. Stafford had resigned by command. The boys knew him too well to believe that he had left the old place of his own free will.

And, because of this, a popular feeling of sympathy arose. Dr. Stafford was praised by everybody. Even Fullwood & Co., who had never said a good thing about the Head previously, now found quite a lot to say in his favour.

Undoubtedly, Dr. Stafford had been popular while he ruled over the boys. But now that he had gone, and there was a feeling abroad that he would not return, his popularity was increased tenfold.

"I tell you it's impossible!" declared Handforth firmly. "Why, it's absurd on the face of it! There was a terrific fuss before we went to London—because there was some talk of shelving the Head. Ord-Clayton was ducked in the ditch, and there was nearly a riot. Do you think the old ass would be such a fool as to cause a fresh outbreak of trouble by pushing the Head out?"

"It's not a question of what we think, Handy—it's a fact," I said. "The Head isn't here, and Martin is. Before long there'll be an announcement of some kind, I expect—and then we shall know the truth for certain."

"We want Dr. Stafford!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course we want him here," grinned Pitt.

"Oh, don't be funny!" snapped Handforth. "This isn't a time for joking. I've got a great idea——"

"Forget it!" advised Hart.

"You—you—ass——"

"Bury it!"

"I've got a great idea!" roared Handforth, glaring. "I suggest that we refuse to recognise Martin as the Head! Dr. Stafford is the headmaster, and we're not going to put up with a rotten bully as a substitute."

"Rather not!"

"Good idea, Handy!"

"Ignore him altogether!" went on



Handforth. "The Head was kicked out because of that fire——"

"Shame!"

"He was held responsible—when everybody knows that a dotty Greek kid set the place on fire," roared Handforth. "It's simply been used as an excuse to give Dr. Stafford the boot. And we're not going to stand it."

"We want Dr. Stafford back!"

"Hear, hear!"

The fellows were getting really excited, and I watched them with interest. I knew well enough that the majority of the Removites would cause trouble before long.

But the juniors were not the only fellows who waxed indignant. The Fifth and Sixth were quite alarmed in their own lordly fashion, and serious faces were to be seen everywhere.

It was really a great tribute to Dr. Stafford's popularity. It would not have been so bad if the school had received a warning. But the news had come as a shock, and it could hardly be credited.

But it was soon found that Mr. Howard Martin was not to be ignored. The juniors were treated to a free exhibition of his quality almost at once.

For the new Head came marching through the lobby towards the exit.

As he appeared there was a hush, and the juniors drew back, eyeing him with hostile looks which they made no attempt to conceal. Mr. Martin glared round as he passed along, his bushy eyebrows set in a fierce line.

Quite abruptly he came to a halt, and seized Sir Montie Tregellis-West by the shoulder.

"Boy!" he roared. "Tell me your name!"

Tregellis-West attempted to shake himself free.

"Really, I fail to see why my name should interest you," he said. "But if you are particularly anxious to know, sir, it is Tregellis-West."

Mr. Martin scowled.

"Ah, yes. I think I know!" he said sourly. "You are a baronet?"

"I have that honour, sir," said Montie.

"And because of your title, you doubtless think that you are at liberty to set my orders at defiance?" snapped Mr. Martin. "You will understand, Tregellis-West, that you will receive no favouritism from me——"

"I don't require any, sir, thank you," interrupted Montie stiffly. "Favouritism is unfair, an' the Head was never guilty of it. I shall be pleased when the Head comes back."

"We all shall, sir," said Handforth.

"I am your headmaster now, Tregellis-West, and I shall continue to be your headmaster," exclaimed Mr. Martin harshly. "I ordered you to remove that gaudy tie. You have thought fit to ignore me."

"My tie is perfectly tasteful, sir——"

"You were ordered to remove it—and for your disobedience you will receive a caning," said the Head. "Hold out your hand!"

"Begad, I——"

"Hold out your hand!" roared Mr. Martin.

"I am afraid I must refuse, sir," said Tregellis-West firmly. "I do not regard this as an act of disobedience. Your order was unnecessary and unjust. I do not feel myself called upon to—Ow! My hat! Yarroooh!"

Slash! Slash!

Mr. Martin grasped Sir Montie by the collar, swung him round, and proceeded to lash his cane across the junior's shoulders with stinging force. Montie yelled with sheer surprise.

"You rebellious dog!" panted Mr. Martin. "I will show you that it is unwise to disobey your headmaster. After this caning you will write me one thousand lines, and they must be brought to my study by midday to-morrow."

Slash! Slash!

Mr. Martin continued the caning as though it were to go on for an hour. The watching juniors, silent until now, could stand it no longer. Their boiling feelings surged right over.

"Brute!"

"Leave him alone!"

"Oh, shame!"

The new Head lowered his cane and twirled round.

"Who spoke just now?" he demanded furiously.

Silence!

"If there are any more insulting shouts I will take severe measures to quell the insubordination," said Mr. Martin. "As for you, Tregellis-West, you will go to your dormitory this instant and don a plain tie."

"Yah! Rotter!"

"Bully!"

"You're not wanted at St. Frank's!"

"Boo-o-o-ooo!"

It was a long drawn-out sound, and proceeded from so many juniors that no single fellow could be fairly dropped on. But Mr. Martin rushed at Edward Oswald Handforth, and delivered a slap which nearly knocked Handy flying.

"You impertinent young hound!" bellowed the new Head.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth faintly. "I—I—why, you—you bullying cad! If you touch me again I'll punch your beastly nose!"

Mr. Martin fairly staggered.

"Boy!" he thundered. "Are you addressing me?"

"Yes, I am!"

"I am your headmaster——"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Dr. Stafford is my headmaster. I never saw you before to-day—you're an outsider. If you think you can come here and knock me about, you're jolly well mistaken!"

And Handforth, with a sniff of supreme contempt, turned on his heel and walked out into the triangle. Mr. Martin was apparently nonplussed for the moment—and that sign of weakness revealed his character in a second. Handforth had cheeked him in the most outrageous manner, and the only thing was to deal with the culprit at once.

But Mr. Martin strode away down the passage without uttering a word.

And he was followed by a storm of hisses which could have been heard all over the school.

"The frightful rotter!" exclaimed Montie. "Begad! He laid that cane on with all his strength, you know!"

"Poor old chap!" I said sympathetically. "It strikes me that Mr. Martin won't be much of a success. He ought to have gone for Handforth bald-headed——"

"What?" said Hart. "Do you agree with Martin——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" I interrupted. "Handy was a fathead to jaw at Martin like that, but I don't blame him. A chap of Martin's type is generally all bluster. He won't last a week unless he's careful."

"I hope he won't last a day, begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

Not three minutes later Morrow and Fenton of the Sixth came bustling along. The two prefects were issuing orders.

"Everybody to assemble in the Big Hall," said Morrow briskly.

"What for?"

"What's the idea, Morrow?"

"Don't ask me what for," said Morrow. "Head's orders. The whole school is instructed to assemble. Speech, I suppose. Now then, you kids, look lively! We're in for some rough times, by the look of things."

"I fancy that somebody else is in for a rough time, too!" I said grimly. "What's your opinion of our new Head, Morrow?"

The prefect grinned.

"It wouldn't be good for discipline if I told you!" he replied. "Don't forget that I'm a prefect."

That answer was quite sufficient for me. I was quite curious to find out what Mr. Howard Martin wanted with all the school. The other juniors were curious, too, and there was not likely to be any absentees.

"I expect General Ord-Clayton means to address the whole crowd of us," said De Valerie. "He's going to introduce Mr. Martin——"

"But Martin oughtn't to have shown himself until after the introduction. That's just where he made a bloomer—giving orders here and there before anybody knew who he really was."

De Valerie's surmise turned out to be correct.

Just before teatime the Big Hall was packed to suffocation. Everybody was there—every member of every Form. And there was a general buzz of low conversation until the door at the back of the platform opened and General Ord-Clayton appeared. With him was Mr. Howard Martin.

I noticed that Nelson Lee was not present, and I suspected that the governor was pretty wild with the Chairman of the Governors for his harsh, unjust action. The general was a man of impulse, and he seemed to have the idea that no man on earth was as clever as he was.

He wasted no time, but cleared his throat, removed his glasses, stuck them on his nose again, and surveyed the throng.

"Boys, I am glad to see you all back in the old school," he said, his voice sounding astonishingly loud in the great, silent hall. "I know it is a great pleasure for you all to come back to this noble seat of learning. And I wish to tell you that there are to be some slight alterations."

He paused to see what effect his words would have. They had none—except that the silence was perhaps more deadly than ever.

"There have been alterations to the buildings, as you know," went on the general. "We have been smartened up. We have put on a new uniform, as it were, and we are starting afresh. Well, my lads, the other alterations I referred to concern certain rules of the school—which the governing board has deemed fit to make—and such like. I have also to inform you that your old headmaster, Dr. Stafford, has resigned."

"Spoof!"

"He was sacked!"

"You kicked him out unfairly!"

"Shame!"

"Boo-oo!"

General Ord-Clayton glared round him in shocked surprise. The demonstration mostly came from the juniors, but it was nevertheless disconcerting. The general rapped the table fiercely.

"How—how dare you?" he roared.

"Silence! Silence at once!"

The juniors subsided.

"Dr. Stafford, I repeat, resigned—and I am quite convinced that his resignation was for the good of the school," continued the general. "Dr. Stafford acquitted himself well for very many years, but every man comes to a day when his duties are too arduous for him, and he becomes inclined to slacken his vigilance. Dr. Stafford has retired, and I am sure that you all wish him much happiness in his leisure years."

"The Head didn't want to resign!"

"No—no!"

"We want him back!"

"Three cheers for Dr. Stafford!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheers which rang out came from almost every throat in the Big Hall. There was absolutely no mistaking the heartiness of that outburst. General Ord-Clayton wisely saw that it would be useless to storm at the fellows—so he smiled impatiently and rubbed his hands together.

"I am glad to see that you hold such affectionate memories of your late headmaster," he went on, when he could make himself heard. "And now I will introduce you to Mr. Howard Martin, the gentleman who has accepted the headmastership of this school, and who will henceforth rule over you."

Mr. Howard Martin slightly bowed his head in acknowledgment of the cheers which he probably thought were coming. But the silence which ensued told its own story.

General Ord-Clayton pursed his lips.

"I regret to find that you are not giving your new headmaster a very cordial welcome," he said severely. "Boys,

I should like you to give Mr. Martin a cheer, as a sign of your esteem."

The deadly silence continued.

"Did you hear me, boys?" shouted the general, red in the face.

"Rats!"

"We're not going to cheer that outsider!"

"We want Dr. Stafford back!"

"Three cheers for the good old Head!"

There was an immediate response—for those cheers were for Dr. Stafford. It was really a most ridiculous situation—an embarrassing situation for Mr. Howard Martin. If ever a man received the cold shoulder, he received it. The school showed him plainly that he wasn't wanted.

"I regret to find that I am mistaken," said General Ord-Clayton, in a tone of biting sarcasm. "Knowing you all to be British boys, I naturally assumed that you would be sportsmen. Unfortunately, I find that such is not the case, and the least I say about it the better. I may tell you that Mr. Martin has full power over you all—even fuller powers than those formerly possessed by Dr. Stafford. He possesses the authority to summarily dismiss any undermaster who fails to give him satisfaction, and under his guidance, I am convinced that St. Frank's will prosper as it has never prospered before."

The school was still unresponsive.

"You will fully understand that Mr. Martin is now your Head," said the general. "He has already made a number of suggestions which have met with my full approval. When you leave this hall you will find several important notices on the various notice-boards. There have been certain alterations in the rules, and you must abide by them. No boy will have the excuse of saying that he was not made aware of the new regulations. I wish you all to understand that the discipline of St. Frank's is to be more carefully looked after. There has been altogether too much laxity during the last year or so, and

this must cease. You may now go, and I trust that you will settle down to the new order of things with no useless demonstrations or objectless fuss. Dismiss!"

A moment later the school was crowding out of Big Hall. The boys hardly knew whether to be indignant or angry. Upon the whole, I think they were both. They certainly had every right to be.

## CHAPTER 4.

Something Like a Row!

"GAMMON!

"It's got it on the board, I tell you——"

"You must have read it wrong!"

"Of course!"

"Clear the way, you asses!"

The crowd round the notice-board in the Ancient House lobby was a formidable one. They were mostly juniors, but quite a large number of Fifth Formers were there, too. The Sixth had retired to their own Common-room to read the notice. It was fixed in the junior Common-rooms—but they were packed.

"Gammon!" repeated Handforth. "No tea allowed in junior studies? Rot! I don't believe anything of the sort!"

"Well, come and look for yourself!" yelled Pitt.

Handforth charged through the crowd. Before he reached the notice-board, however, he found his path barred by the huge figure of Fatty Little. The fat boy of the Remove was an enormous size, and Handforth barged into him vainly.

"Can't you clear off, you walking whale?" roared Handy.

"Sorry!" said Little, moving abruptly, and knocking three fellows staggering without knowing it. "I didn't know I was—— Great sausages! Did I knock into you fellows?"

There was some confusion for a moment, but nobody was rash enough to charge Jimmy Little. He was a mountain, and it was a sheer waste of time

to attack him. And during the brief mix-up, Handforth reached the board.

"My goodness!" he gasped. "It's true!"

"About the studies?"

"Yes!" roared Handforth furiously. "All juniors are to partake of tea in the dining-hall! No food, in any circumstances, is to be taken into any junior study, and nothing in the nature of food is to be eaten there. Great pip! It's enough to make a chap faint!"

"Wait a minute!" I said grimly. "There's worse to follow."

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Worse?"

"Read the notice!"

"All junior prep to be undertaken in the Form-room, under the eyes of a prefect or a master," said Handforth dazedly. "Great guns! This—this amounts to two hours' extra lessons in the evening!"

"Exactly!" I said.

"We—we won't stand it!"

"It's tyranny!"

"All juniors to be in bed by eight-thirty," panted Handforth, his gaze fixed on the notice. "Remove included—"

"What!" roared the crowd.

"Remove included!" said Pitt. "We're to be sent to bed with the fags in future—at half-past eight, if you please!"

"We won't go!"

"No fear!"

"Not blessed likely!"

"Supper for juniors is abolished henceforth," read Handforth. "No boy—"

"No supper!" shouted Fatty Little, in horror.

"Not a crumb!" I said gravely.

"Great doughnuts!" gasped Fatty. "No supper! It's impossible, you ass! Do you think I could sleep a wink if I went to bed without any supper? I'm practically a new chap at St. Frank's, but I'm in favour of defying these rotten orders! By chutney, they're absolutely inhuman! It's an attempt to starve us!"

"It's not so bad as that, Fatty——"

"But we must have supper!" roared Little, thoroughly alarmed. "Think of it! Nothing but tea in Hall—no grub in our studies—then off to bed without any supper! I—I'd rather be in prison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, they give you supper there!" snorted Jimmy.

"Supper is only one of the grievances!" bellowed Handforth. "What I don't like is being forbidden to have tea in our studies. And as for doing prep in the Form-room, why, it's out of the question."

"Absolutely!"

"We won't do it!"

"We'll go on strike!"

"Down with the Head!"

"Three groans to Martin!"

The excitement was rather hysterical for a time. Groans were given by hundreds of throats, and the noise was deafening. It was scarcely surprising that half a dozen prefects came along, armed with canes. They had orders to clear the lobby and the passages.

"Steady with that cane, Fenton!" exclaimed Pitt. "Look out! Whoa!"

"Get a move on, then!" said Fenton curtly.

"You don't agree with this beastly tyrant, do you?"

"I've been ordered to clear the lobby, and I'm doing it," replied the prefect. "You'll notice that I'm not making anybody smart. In my opinion, this bit of trouble is nothing to what will happen later on. The Fifth is nearly as excited as the Remove. Mr. Martin will find it necessary to make a few modifications in those new rules of his, I fancy."

"Good old Fenton!"

The fellows crowded out into the Triangle, all of them talking excitedly. And a meeting was held on the spot. It was already growing dusk, and by this time the fellows should have been sitting down to tea. But they did not think of eating then. Indignation ran too high.

"Now, then, Nipper, up on your hind legs!" shouted Grey. "We want a speech!"

"Hear, hear!"

"On the ball, Nipper!"

"I'd rather not, thanks!" I said, shaking my head. "A speech won't do much good at this stage. I want you chaps to quieten down a bit—you're too excited."

"Oh, rot!"

"Go ahead, Nipper!"

Handforth pushed forward.

"If the ass doesn't want to speak, let him keep quiet!" he roared. "I'll spout, if you like!"

"We don't like!"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "I'm going to make a speech, and if you don't like to listen to me, you can do the other thing."

"Everybody in St. Frank's will listen—unless they're deaf," said Pitt. "In fact, the people in the village can hear your voice, Handy. Did you happen to swallow a loudspeaker when you were a baby?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Joking is all very well!" snorted Handforth. "But to joke now—at a time like this—is nothing less than a crime! We've all come back to St. Frank's, and what do we find?"

"You!" said De Valerie, with a sigh. "You're always on the spot, Handy. It doesn't matter where we go, we're certain to find you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We find a great change!" bawled Handforth, ignoring the yell. "The school itself is looking top-hole—no ass denies that—"

"Even you don't deny it," said Hart blandly.

"The place has been re-decorated rippingly," went on Handforth. "We can't grumble at the way in which the builders have done their work. The House on the other side of the Triangle is brand new. And now I find it necessary to refer to something else which is brand new; to be exact—Mr. Howard Martin!"

"Boo-oo-oo!"

"Brand new?" asked Somerton. "By Jove! I thought he was getting stale by this time. He looks rather second-hand."

"He is new to us—that's what I mean," shouted Handforth, thumping McClure's back to give emphasis to his words. "He's new to us, and what I say is this"—thump!—"we won't stand him—"

"Steady on, you ass!"

McClure had had enough, and he wriggled away from his excited leader. Church had already squirmed his way towards the outskirts of the crowd. When Handforth made a speech he generally went in for gymnastic exercises, too!

"Mr. Martin has started the wrong way!" roared Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"He comes here and turns everything upside down—"

"The rotter!"

"He alters all the school rules—"

"Shame!"

"He ruins the routine which has been the custom at St. Frank's for fifty years past!" roared Handforth. "Is that right? I put it to you, as man to man, is it right? Answer me!"

"No!" roared the crowd.

"What!" snapped Handforth. "You won't answer?"

"You ass!" grinned Pitt. "We said 'No' to your question. It's not right that Martin should come here and ride the high horse. It's wrong—decidedly wrong. And it's up to you, Handy, to think of a solution."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, old son!"

Handforth eyed the crowd with a kindly eye.

"Of course, it's only right that you should recognise my leadership," he said carelessly. "I'm the only fellow who realises that something's got to be done. There's no sense in talking. A fellow who stands up and jaws is nothing but a wind-bag—he's no good."

"Then why jaw?" asked Pitt. "You admitted you're a wind-bag—"

"Rot!" shouted Handforth. "I'm going to act now—but a certain amount of talking is necessary to begin with. We wouldn't mind so much if this outsider had carried on in Dr. Stafford's shoes without any alterations. But it is ten times worse than that. This man—this alleged headmaster—has added insult to injury! Deny it if you can! Not content with pushing Dr. Stafford out, Martin comes here and proceeds to turn everything topsy-turvy. Is it good enough?"

"No!"

"Are we going to sit still and do nothing?"

"No!"

"Do you want Mr. Martin as a headmaster?" bawled Handworth.

"No!" roared the crowd.

"Are we going to put up with him?"

"No!" yelled the crowd.

"Are you going to follow my lead in this business?"

"No!" howled the crowd, in one voice. Handforth started.

"What's that!" he shouted fiercely.

"You ought to have heard. The chaps yelled loud enough, anyhow," grinned Pitt. "We are not going to follow your lead, Handy. You'd like to know why? Well, the Remove isn't exactly anxious to be led into disaster. We don't mind listening to you—it's rather good entertainment; but surely you don't expect us to take you seriously?"

Handforth nearly choked.

"You—you dotty lunatic!" he belated. "I've never been more serious in my life. Martin won't be able to deal with me very easily, I can tell you! Poor old Dr. Stafford has been pushed out, and we get this rotter——"

Handforth paused, and looked round him in some alarm. The crowd was melting with singular rapidity. Nearly everybody was making a move for the other side of the Triangle, and Handy was becoming isolated.

"Hi!" he yelled. "I'm making a speech!"

"Can't help that, old man. There's

something more important on hand," shouted Pitt, over his shoulder. "While you're jawing, and while we're wasting our time listening to you, the Fifth is acting."

"Eh?"

Handforth gazed across the Triangle in astonishment. And then he noticed, for the first time, that practically every member of the Fifth Form had collected in a body beneath the headmaster's window.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "There's something doing!"

"Of course there is!" snapped McClure. "You don't expect that everybody in St. Frank's is acting the goat, do you?"

He did not wait to have his nose punched, but rushed off after the other fellows, Church with him. Handforth followed rather more leisurely, in a state of considerable indignation. He saw absolutely no reason why the Remove should desert him to support the Fifth. But, of course, Handforth never did understand things of that kind.

I saw at once that the Fifth was grim and determined. All the seniors were looking grave as they lined up in a solid mass beneath the headmaster's window. But they were flushed with excitement, too.

Personally, I was not in favour of making any big demonstration so early. I realised that we had a stiff job before us, and in my opinion it would be better to wait awhile, and see how things panned out.

I'm the last fellow in the world to sit down under an injustice, and I wasn't prepared to do so in this case. At the same time, I thought it inadvisable to get up a popular demonstration at the moment. Mr. Martin had the support of General Ord-Clayton, and it was not likely he would budge an inch with the chairman of the governors by his side.

But I was interested in the Fifth Form demonstration, nevertheless. The seniors were grimly determined to

make a scene—a very unusual proceeding for the stately Fifth.

The whole affair was being led by Chambers of Study No. 10. Phillips and Bryant were his willing lieutenants, and all the other seniors followed eagerly enough. As I drew near the Fifth commenced.

"We—want—Mister—Martin!"

The shout was uttered by scores of voices at the same moment, and the effect was rather remarkable. It wasn't a series of yells, but one mighty voice, and the words were easily distinguishable.

"We—want—Mister—Martin!"

The Fifth continued the words as a kind of chant, with Chambers standing in front of them with a stick, beating time. I was afraid that many Removites would join it and spoil everything, but they didn't.

At least, not until Handforth arrived. Handforth joined in quickly enough. And soon every other Removite was shouting the demand, too. It was one mighty roar, and I afterwards heard that people in the village, a distance away, were able to distinguish the words quite clearly.

"We—want—Mister—Martin!"

It was quite evident that the Fifth meant to keep it up until the new Head appeared.

A last there was a sign that something was happening. The curtain at the Head's window moved slightly, and then the window itself was pushed up. But it was General Ord-Clayton who made his appearance. He regarded the crowd very severely, and held up his hand for silence.

"We—want—Mister—Martin!"

That was the only response which resulted. The Fifth did not even pause. It took no notice of the general whatever. He might not have existed, for all the recognition he received.

"Boys, what is the meaning of——"

"We—want—Mister—Martin!"

The general was completely drowned

in the yell, which now had a note of defiance in it. Finding that it was impossible to make himself heard, the general retired. A moment later Mr. Howard Martin appeared.

"We—want——"

At a signal from Chambers everybody ceased shouting. The new Head gazed at the throng smilingly. Perhaps he thought it was a demonstration of loyalty.

"Well, my boys, what is it?" he asked beamingly. "You have requested to see me, and here I am."

"I am speaking for the whole Fifth Form, sir," shouted Chambers, amid a tense silence. "I might say I am speaking for the Remove and Third as well

"

"Hear, hear!"

"And what we want to say is this," continued Chambers. "We consider that the restrictions which have been imposed are absolutely unwarrantable and impossible. We request that they shall be dropped forthwith and the ordinary rules adhered to."

Mr. Martin frowned angrily.

"Are you serious, boy?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir!"

"You impertinent young dog——"

"Pardon me, sir; but we require an answer—not abuse," said Chambers.

"How—how dare you!" thundered Mr. Martin. "You will leave this window at once. I refuse to give any answer whatever to your insolent demands!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Martin, but we only made a request," said Chambers. "You refuse to listen to that request—so now we demand that the rules shall be as they were before we went to London. We refuse to recognise the new regulations. Now, you chaps!"

"We—refuse!" thundered the Fifth in one voice.

The scene had evidently been rehearsed, and if Mr. Howard Martin had possessed a grain of sense, he would



have recognised at once that this was a case for graceful submission. His orders were harsh and unnecessary, and he was mad to expect the fellows to submit on their side.

"Oh, so you refuse, do you?" he shouted furiously. "We will see about that, you young rascals! I have no desire to punish anybody severely on this my first day in the school, therefore, I am prepared to overlook this most disgraceful scene. But unless it ceases within one minute from now—unless you quietly disperse—both the Fifth Form and the Remove Form will be confined to the school premises for a period of two weeks. All half-holidays will be abolished during that time, and extra work will be given during the evening. You have one minute to decide."

Chambers laughed angrily.

"That sort of stuff doesn't frighten us, Mr. Martin," he shouted. "We're not going to obey those rules, and—Come back, you rotters! If we don't all stick together we shall go under!"

Chambers looked round him in alarm. That threat of the Head's was a dire one. Gating for a fortnight—no half-holidays—extra evening work! And Mr. Martin was the Head, and he could enforce his order.

Fully half the fellows decided that this was no time for standing up for their rights. They melted away, leaving the other half uncertain.

Many of them followed the deserters, and practically all the Remove vanished. In less than a minute, indeed, Chambers was only surrounded by his own immediate supporters, Handforth & Co., myself, Watson, Tregellis-West, Pitt, and one or two others—a mere handful.

Mr. Martin smiled triumphantly, and retired into his study, closing the window with a slam.

"Well, it was something like a row, at all events!" said Chambers grimly.

"Yes," I agreed. "And something like a frost, too!"

## CHAPTER 5.

## The Tuckshop Raid!

FATTY LITTLE dashed into the Ancient House lobby. His face was red, his eyes were fixed and staring. And upon his face could be seen an expression of absolute consternation and alarm.

"Hi! Look out, you tame-elephant!" shouted Owen major.

"Clear the road, there!" yelled Pitt. Crash!

Fatty Little charged into Owen major and Hubbard and Griffith at full speed. He didn't pause in his stride, but the other three juniors were sent flying. Little was amazingly active for his size and when he gained some momentum he was as difficult to stop as a tank.

"The mad ass!" gasped Griffith, sitting up.

"The burbling lunatic!" panted Owen major.

But Fatty Little rushed on heedlessly. He charged straight into the Remove Common-room, where a large number of juniors were congregated.

I was there with my chums, and the door opened with a crash which nearly smashed the lock.

Jimmy Little rolled in, and four juniors rolled over. The number of fellows that Little knocked down in a day was really surprising, and he knocked them all down unintentionally.

"He's mad!" ejaculated Hart, picking himself up.

"Great pancakes!" gasped Little. "Have—have you heard the latest?"

"Don't get so excited, old son," I said. "What's the trouble?"

"I went to Mrs. Hake for some grub—"

"Oh, grub again!" sighed Nicodemus Trotwood. "You're always after grub, Fatty. We'll see about tea for our study in a minute or two. Oh, but I forgot! We've got to troop into Hall—"

"You—you haven't heard the worst!" shouted Little despairingly. "It's awful! I shan't be able to keep alive for more

than a week in this place! We shall all be starved to death——"

"What's the trouble?" demanded Pitt.

"Mrs. Hake!" said Fatty, with round eyes. "I—I just went into the tuck-shop, you know. It's empty!"

"It wasn't empty when you were in there—it was full!" remarked Hart.

"I—I mean there's nothing to eat, only bread!" yelled Little.

"Bread!"

"That's all! Mrs. Hake hasn't got a cake in the place," said Fatty, in horrified tones. "Not a cake—not a pork-pie—not a sausage roll—not even a jam tart. All she's got is roll and butter."

I grinned.

"Well, there's nothing to make a fuss about in that," I said soothingly. "Mrs. Hake ought to have been more enterprising, I'll admit, but I expect her supplies have failed to come in. She'll have plenty——"

"She won't!" groaned Fatty. "That's just it. Frizzling onions! She's not allowed to sell pastry or cakes or pork-pies! Head's orders! She's forbidden to sell any luxuries to juniors."

"What!"

It was a mighty yell.

"It's a fact!" went on Little. "I nearly had a fit when she told me. The Head won't allow her to sell anything to us—except bread-and-butter; It's awful! I shall starve, you know!"

"I can guess what it means," I said grimly. "Martin thinks that we shall disobey the no-tea order, so he has forbidden the sale of everything except bread-and-butter. We can get that in Hall, so he knows we won't buy that!"

"The mean rotter!" said Handforth hotly. "What about Mrs. Hake? How the dickens will she keep her shop going if she doesn't sell anything?"

"The Head isn't the kind of man to consider Mrs. Hake," I replied. "But we'd better go along and see her for ourselves. Of course, this sort of thing can't last, but we shall be tea-less for to-night, that's certain."

The fellows crowded out of the Common-room, and followed me to Mrs. Hake's little shop on the corner of the Triangle. Several other fellows had made the discovery, it seemed, for the shop was half full with excited juniors.

"It's no good you a-goin' on at me, young gents," Mrs. Hake was saying. "Mr. Martin has given me strict orders not to serve any junior gentleman with anything excepting rolls and butter. What I shall do, I don't know. It's terrible, young gents, that's what it is!"

"But can't you sell cakes?" asked Christine indignantly.

"No, Master Christine."

"Nor buns, nor pork-pies?"

"I mustn't sell anything that might be called a luxury, Master Christine," said Mrs. Hake. "It'll mean ruin for me, that's what it'll mean! Oh, dear! I'm sure I don't know what I can do!"

"It's a sin and a shame!" shouted Yorke. "Things have come to a pretty pass when we can't buy tuck with our own money!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here, Mrs. Hake," said Christine. "Let's have a couple of small tins of sardines—they'll do all right with bread-and-butter——"

"Sorry, but I can't, sir," said the old lady plaintively.

"Not sardines?" yelled a dozen juniors.

"Not anything, young gents, in that line."

"My only hat," said Christine blankly.

There was no doubt about the fact that there were no supplies to be obtained from the school shop. Mr. Martin had apparently prepared well in advance, for Mrs. Hake's shelves were barren—except for several bottles and boxes of sweetstuff. There was evidently no ban upon sweets. But, of course, we couldn't eat sweets for tea.

"It's absolutely rotten!" said Watson dazedly. "What's the idea of barring us from tuck?"

"Mr. Martin, sir, told me that he

didn't want you young gentlemen to do yourselves an injury by eating things which ain't digestible," explained Mrs. Hake. "The Head told me that them things wasn't good for growing boys, and the school supplied enough food for everybody. He said it wasn't right that there should be food lying about in juniors' studies. Mr. Martin reckons it ain't hygienic or healthy."

"Utter rot!"

"I should think it is," I put in. "How does the Head expect you to keep your business together, Mrs. Hake? Most of your trade was in pastry and cakes and meat pies and tinned fish——"

"Mr. Martin reckoned that I should do well enough out of the sweets, Master Nipper," said Mrs. Hake. "But I shan't unless you young gentlemen buy an enormous lot every week."

"Well, I call it a rotten shame," said De Valerie. "And if the Head thinks we'll stand it, he'll find himself mistaken. We're not prisoners—and we're not in a reformatory. I don't see why we should subsist on the school grub, without any luxury at all!"

"Neither do I," I declared grimly.

"Perhaps the Head has overlooked the fact that Mr. Binks keeps a tuckshop in the village. We'll go down there now—there's time before locking-up—and bring back piles of stuff. Then we'll stand about and eat it in the passages, and in the lobby. There's no rule forbidding that!"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "A ripping wheeze! We'll show the old rotter what we think of him! Come on, my sons! There's not much time to waste."

The fellows trooped out of the tuckshop in a body, and made for the gateway. Sir Montie and Tommy and I were among the foremost, I don't know what Mrs. Hake's feelings were as she saw us leaving her establishment in order to patronise her rival in the village.

We all hurried down the lane—at the double, in fact—but the fellow who kept

well in advance was Fatty Little. Big as he was, he had plenty of energy and could run with quite remarkable speed. And it was his intention to arrive at the tuckshop first. He didn't want all the good things to be bagged by the other fellows before he got there.

It was dark in the village, and a light gleamed from the window of Mr. Binks' neat little tuckshop in the High Street. As we passed the window I noticed that it was stocked with good things.

Fatty was already in the shop, and he seemed to be having an argument with Mr. Binks himself, who presided behind the counter in solitary state. I rapped on the counter briskly.

"How goes it, Binko?" I asked cheerfully. "Just let me have a dozen beef patties, two dozen jam tarts, a dozen doughnuts——"

"Steady on, Master Nipper," said Mr. Binks. "I can't serve ye."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I can't let you have anything, young gents," said Mr. Binks huskily.

"What the merry dickens are you talking about?" demanded Watson. "Can't let us have anything? Rot!"

"It can't be done, sir," said Mr. Binks, shaking his head mournfully.

"Why not?" yelled the crowd.

"We've got plenty of money to pay with—spot cash," I put in. "You simply can't refuse to serve us, Binko. Ring off this tommy rot, and get busy. We want tons of stuff this evening."

Mr. Binks rubbed his hands.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what to do! All this custom and I can't take it! And there's nobody else I can sell the stuff to—the village folk won't buy it. Specially got in for you young gents, it was. And I can't sell ye a sixpennyworth!"

"He's dotty!" said Handforth. "Pile over the counter, you chaps, and help yourselves——"

"Don't, Master Handforth," pleaded Mr. Binks. "I shall get into trouble if you take anything——"

"But we'll pay for it, you old duffer," said Handforth.

"Mebbe, sir, but Mr. Martin has forbidden me to sell ye anything," said the old man, getting to the point at last.

"He give me strict orders——"

"Mr. Martin!" gasped Handforth.

"Our new Head!"

"Great Scott!"

"This is beyond the limit—we won't stand it!"

"Hold on, you chaps," I said, as the crowd pressed forward excitedly. "Let's get the true details. Do I understand, Mr. Binks, that you have been forbidden to sell anything to any St. Frank's boy?"

"Yes, Master Nipper, that's quite right."

"You've been forbidden by Mr. Martin?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Binks sadly.

"Well, old chap, you can take it from me that Mr. Martin has got about as much right to give you that order as the village idiot has!" I said grimly. "You're a tradesman, and your wares are for the general public. We're a portion of the general public, and no harm will come to you if you serve us."

"Good for you, Nipper!"

"So that's settled!" said Fatty Little, with a sigh of relief.

"But it isn't, young gents—I daresn't serve ye," said Mr. Binks firmly.

"Oh, my hat!" I exclaimed patiently. "Can't you see, Binko, that Mr. Martin had no right to give such an order to you? He can place the tuckshop out of bounds for us—but that's all. Then, if we want supplies, we shall break bounds, and chance the consequences. But—nobody—not even Mr. Martin—can give you orders about whom you're to sell your stuff to. It's the biggest piece of impertinence I've ever heard of—and if you're scared of the Head, you needn't be. Mr. Nelson Lee will see that you don't get into any trouble. Is that good enough?"

The crowd waited anxiously, and Mr. Binks stood behind his counter drumming his fingers in a worried way. As I had told him, Mr. Martin had no

authority whatever to restrict Mr. Binks' sales. All that the Head could do would be on our side—he could forbid us to visit the shop, but he couldn't forbid Mr. Binks to serve us.

"It's a difficult thing, young gents," said the old man, at last. "Mr. Martin is your Head, and if I displease him I might find myself in hot water. I'm rare worried about it all, but I'm afraid I can't let ye have anything to-night."

"But look here——"

"Have some sense, Binko——"

"Listen to reason——"

Everybody argued, but the old shop-keeper was firm. He wouldn't budge from his decision, and I guessed that the Head had scared him a great deal. Mr. Martin had been down, and had probably bullied Binks into a promise. And the old fellow was as firm as a rock.

"Well, I don't know about you chaps, but I know what I'm going to do," said Handforth, at last. "I'm going to take all the stuff I want, and if you get in the way, Binko, you'll have your giddy nose punched!"

And Handforth leaped over the counter. It was the signal for half a dozen other fellows to follow his example. Mr. Binks was powerless—and he had sense enough to realise it. He stood by, pleading to the juniors.

The tuckshop was raided in wholesale manner. But I took care to stand by the door to see that nobody sneaked out without paying for the supplies he had appropriated. Long, of the Remove, was quite capable of "borrowing" a supply of tuck on the quiet.

There was plenty of money knocking about, and practically the whole of Mr. Binks' perishable stock was seized, and on the counter lay an assortment of ten-shilling notes, silver coins and coppers. If anything, the old man received more than the tuck's actual worth.

And, although he was very worried, he could not conceal an expression of satisfaction as he eyed that pile of

money. He was afraid that he would get into trouble, but, of course, Martin could not harm him.

"Everybody ready?" I asked at last.

"Waiting for you."

"Good! Then let's get a move on!"

I walked briskly to the door, and found a crowd outside, waiting. They were loaded with all kinds of cakes and pastries, and were all cheerful. A good many villagers were looking on, wondering what all the noise could be about.

And we set off to the school, happy in the knowledge that we had a good supply of tuck, and that Mr. Howard Martin had been defied.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### The Mystery of Mr. Martin!

NELSON LEE was looking rather worried as he walked through the village some little time later. He had been to the station to see about certain articles of luggage, and was now on his way back to St. Frank's. It was very dark in the old High Street, for the shops were now all closed, although, of course, the hour was still fairly early.

"Hallo! Is that you, Lee?"

The voice came out of the darkness, and Nelson Lee halted and peered at the dim figure which was responsible for the greeting. He recognised Dr. Brett, the village medico.

"Glad to see you again, doctor," said the schoolmaster-detective heartily. "You sound as hale and healthy as ever. How have you been getting on?"

"Oh, things have been deadily dull here!" said Dr. Brett, shaking Lee's hand. "I have missed your little visits a great deal, Lee, and I've missed running in to see you during a slack hour. I hope you enjoyed yourself in London."

"We had quite a lot of excitement one way and another," smiled Nelson Lee, as Brett fell into pace beside him. "You are coming this way? Good! I'm afraid I'm not in a very cheerful mood this evening, Brett."

"Oh!" said the doctor. "How is that?"

"Well, a certain general on the retired list, known as Ord-Clayton, has set himself out to make an exhibition of his narrow-minded foolishness," said Lee. "I can tell you, Brett, I feel very annoyed."

"I hope you won't start on me!" said Brett, smiling. "But what about Ord-Clayton? I've seen him once or twice, and he strikes me as being a bit of a fire-eater. And what's this I hear about a new headmaster? I wasn't aware that Dr. Stafford was about to retire!"

"Dr. Stafford has been sacked—for that is what it amounts to, actually," said Lee grimly. "Ord-Clayton is responsible, and he has appointed a new Head named Howard Martin, a man who appears to think that a public school is a prison, and that boys are to be treated as so many slaves."

"I'm beginning to understand," said the doctor. "So that's the trouble—eh? But why on earth was such a fellow appointed? Surely Ord-Clayton is not permitted to do exactly as he likes in these matters?"

"Martin was engaged by the Board of Governors, and Ord-Clayton is the chairman," explained Nelson Lee. "His voice is more influential than all the other voices put together, for, to be quite frank, the governors are a set of old fossils! And I am extremely worried concerning the immediate future of St. Frank's."

"You think there'll be trouble?"

"I am sure there will be trouble—it is inevitable."

"With the boys?"

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee gravely. "There have been a number of new rules formulated by Mr. Martin—or perhaps it would be better to call them restrictions. They are to be rigorously enforced by the headmaster."

"And how do you stand?"

"I am nominally an underling," said Lee dryly. "I am to obey this autocrat, and carry out his wishes. Brett, I am pretty certain that Martin and

myself will have some stormy scenes before very long."

"That's deucedly bad!" the doctor declared. "You are beginning to make me fear that you will soon be leaving us, Lee. You are not the kind of man to put up with any nonsense from a bullying blusterer."

"You needn't be afraid, old man," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Mr. Martin will not be able to treat me in exactly his own way. Personally, I am quite on the side of the boys, and I shall champion them right from the start. There was no need whatever for these foolish restrictions to be imposed. It simply means that Martin is anxious to assert his authority. He is not content to come here and carry on in the usual routine. And, quite apart from all this, I intend to get him away as soon as possible. I am thinking of Dr. Stafford."

"He was badly treated?"

"Shamefully treated!" agreed Lee. "The old gentleman is greatly esteemed by the boys, and there'll be big trouble this week. You mark my words, Brett, and don't be surprised if you hear of very severe ructions."

"But what of your position?" asked Brett. "You'll be required to uphold Martin's methods."

"Just for the present I intend to remain passive," said Nelson Lee. "I think it is quite likely that matters will adjust themselves, after a deal of trouble during the first two or three days. The boys will certainly take matters into their own hands, and if Martin possesses an ounce of sense, he will gracefully submit. If he attempts to enforce his will upon the school—well, the real battle will begin. But I am hoping for the best."

"I'll drop in to-morrow," said Brett, as he paused in the road. "I shall be interested to hear how things are going. Well, good-night, Lee! I've got a call to make in this cottage, so I'll leave you here."

They shook hands, and the doctor went to one of his patients, and Nelson

Lee continued his way towards the school. The schoolmaster-detective was very thoughtful as he made his way along the dark lane in the direction of St. Frank's.

A fairly high wind was blowing in the schoolmaster-detective's face as he strode briskly along. The lane was quite deserted, except for himself. But then a rather surprising incident occurred.

Something moved near the hedge, and a dim figure came out to meet Nelson Lee. The latter paused, being fairly certain that the stranger was a tramp, about to ask for a few coppers.

"Is that you, Howard?" asked a soft voice.

"I beg your pardon!" said Lee, rather surprised.

"I know it's you!" went on the voice. "I recognised your figure as you came along. I haven't seen you for five years, but——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Lee, "but I think you are mistaken!"

"That won't do, Howard!" said the mysterious stranger, moving closer in the gloom. "I thought perhaps you'd attempt to ignore me, but I mean to have it out with you! No, don't interrupt! I've suffered enough because of what you did, and now that I'm free, I mean to make you help me! I'm not going back to that living death!"

"But, really, I must insist upon speaking!" said Nelson Lee. "You have apparently mistaken me for Mr. Howard Martin."

"I have made no mistake!" exclaimed the other. "A man does not fail to recognise his own flesh and blood. You infernal blackguard! You treacherous hound! I've been waiting for years to face you and to have it out, as man to man!"

"I'm deeply sorry——"

A match flared, flickered for a moment in the wind, and then went out. But the stranger had had sufficient time to see Nelson Lee's features. He gave a little cry, and caught his breath.

"You—you are not Howard Martin!" he exclaimed huskily.

"I told you I was not," said the schoolmaster-detective. "You were rather too hasty, my dear sir. My name is Nelson Lee."

"Nelson Lee!" shouted the other.

"Yes."

"The—the detective?"

"Yes; although at present——"

But Nelson Lee got no farther. The man backed away, and dived through the hedge. Lee stood quite still, and made no attempt to follow. He was rather surprised by what had happened.

Who was the man who had come out of the hedge? A relation of Martin's obviously. There was an element of mystery in the affair which attracted Nelson Lee on the spot.

He was also permitted to gain a slight insight into the new Head's character. This stranger, who spoke like a gentleman, had referred to Martin as a blackguard and a treacherous hound!

What could it mean?

At that moment Lee's keen ears caught a slight sound down the road. He looked closely, and made out a dim figure coming along from the village. Quite possibly the figure belonged to Mr. Howard Martin.

Lee meant to make sure.

He walked briskly down the road, as though on his way to the village, and within a few moments he came face to face with the new Head. The latter paused, and peered into the gloom.

"Mr. Lee, I believe?" he said gruffly.

"Yes," said Lee.

"I presume you are on your way to the village?" asked the Head. "I should just like to have a word with you, Mr. Lee. General Ord-Clayton has taken his departure. I am now in sole charge of St. Frank's, and I am quite sure that Mr. Stockdale and yourself will pull well together with me."

"I trust so!" said Lee shortly.

"We had just a little touch of unpleasantness earlier in the day," went

on the Head, "but I am sure you have now realised that Stafford was not the right man for this school. He was too slow, too old-fashioned, too easy. I intend to put new life into St. Frank's. I mean to keep the boys more strictly under control. Too much liberty and freedom is bad for youngsters, particularly the junior boys."

"I quite agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "Too much freedom, indeed, is bad for anybody. We must all be restricted in certain ways. But it is my opinion that the rules which have held good for at least twenty years were in no need of revision."

"That is my concern!" snapped Martin. "I have thought fit to alter certain rules, and the boys must obey me. They will possibly object somewhat at first, but what can they do? Nothing! Any insubordination will lead to immediate and dire punishment. I shall crush any rebellion with a heavy hand."

"Let me advise you, Mr. Martin, to be very careful," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"You will please understand, Lee, that I am not in need of advice!" exclaimed Martin harshly.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not my intention to quarrel with you, Martin, neither do I wish to dictate," he said. "But you will be making a grave mistake if you refuse to listen to any grievance which the boys may bring to you. Violence and harshness will never succeed in——"

The Head did not wait for Nelson Lee to finish. He walked up the road, snorting, and Lee was provided with an excellent example of Mr. Howard Martin's manners. Lee smiled to himself and stood near the hedge.

And exactly as he had expected—he heard faint voices shortly afterwards. Gazing into the gloom, he saw two figures higher up the road. Mr. Martin had been accosted by the mysterious stranger.

"This is quite interesting," Nelson Lee told himself. "I had really thought of taking a holiday until

Martin received his quietus, but this little affair makes all the difference. I shall remain here, and I shall make it my business to investigate matters."

The detective was not surprised that the stranger had mistaken him for Martin. He was of about the same build as the Head, and he happened to be wearing a light mackintosh of the same type as Martin's, and the other man had not seen Martin for five years.

So the blunder was not to be wondered at. Lee was very pleased that it had occurred, for it had given him a new interest in Mr. Howard Martin.

What was the secret concerning that harsh gentleman?

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Chopper Falls!

"**T**OPHOLE!"

"By jingo! This is the stuff to give 'em!" said Handforth with his mouth full of ham sandwich. "What do we care for Martin?"

"Nothing!" grinned McClure.

"Less than nothing, in fact," said Pitt, setting his teeth into a jam tart. "I must say that old Binks sells good stuff!"

"Rather!"

The lobby of the Ancient House was crowded; the junior passages were crowded. And all the fellows were partaking of a somewhat late tea. The studies were quite deserted, and the whole situation was really ludicrous.

But none of the rules were broken.

Tregellis-West and Watson and I sat on the foot of the stairs munching beef patties and sandwiches and other good things. The only drawback was that we had no tea. But ginger-beer was a fair substitute.

The feed had commenced shortly before, and everybody entered into it with enthusiasm. Those fellows who were rather nervous of the consequences forgot all about it in their hunger.

Fatty Little was breaking all records. The amount of stuff he packed away

was quite staggering. But as there was a plentiful supply of tuck, nobody begrudged him his private hundredweight—as De Valerie put it.

"Well, it's the only thing we could do," I remarked. "No grub here, so we had to go to the village. The new order says that no food is to be taken into the studies. There wasn't a word about not eating anything in the lobby."

"Of course not," grinned Watson.

"Dear fellows, we are breakin' no regulation," said Sir Montie. "Not that I should be frightfully upset if we were breakin' 'em, begad!"

Handforth looked grim.

"We'll break them to-morrow—don't you worry!" he exclaimed. "Those regulations were made to be ignored. But this little business was just a joke against the Head. When he finds out what we've done he'll send out a new order, I suppose. But he can't punish us for this."

"Of course not," I agreed. "That's just where it comes in. If Martin has an ounce of sense, he'll see the error of his ways, and allow us to feed in the studies. But it's my opinion he'll have about two fits, and then give strict orders that no tuck is to be brought into the House at all."

"Anyhow, we're safe," said Somerton easily.

"And we're enjoying ourselves," remarked Jack Grey. "I say, Reggie, just chuck over one of those dough-nuts."

"Right," said Reginald Pitt. "Catch!"

His aim was rather untrue, for the doughnut whizzed past Grey's head, and struck Morrow's mouth, as he entered the lobby. The prefect staggered back, and the juniors roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why didn't you open your mouth, Morrow?" grinned Pitt. "You'd have caught it nicely."

"You young sweeps!" exclaimed Morrow, looking round angrily. "What the



dickens is the meaning of this? What's the idea of hanging about the lobby feeding out of bags? Have you all gone mad?"

"It's all right, Morrow——"

"It's not all right!" snapped the prefect. "Clear out at once!"

"Rats!" I said. "You know the Head has given an order that no food should be eaten in the studies. It's cold and dark outside, and I know you wouldn't be heartless enough to turn us into the chilly night."

Morrow looked round with a new expression on his face.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "So that's the game! You're evading the new rules by feeding outside your studies, instead of in! Well, you can do it this once, I suppose, but the Head will soon drop on you. Carry on, my children—I shan't interfere."

"Good!"

"You're a sport, Morrow!"

But just then a footstep was heard on the gravel outside, and Owen major, who was near the door, looked out into the gloomy Triangle.

His face, when he turned it back, wore a scared expression.

"The Head!" he muttered.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Cave!"

"Rats!" I said quickly. "Stick where you are, you asses!"

"He's coming this way!" hissed Owen major.

"All the better," I said. "We're doing no wrong, are we? Let him come in and see us—it's just what we want."

"Of course," agreed Handforth. "Gimme one of those doughnuts, Church! I'll have my mouth full when he comes in!"

One or two of the nervous juniors sneaked away, but the majority held their ground. And Morrow didn't move an inch. As a prefect, he couldn't slip away just because the Head was coming; his dignity wouldn't allow it.

Moreover, he had no desire to slip away.

Mr. Howard Martin strode into the lobby, his brow black and thoughtful. He seemed to be intensely worried over something, and for a moment or two he didn't notice anything.

Then, abruptly, he came to a halt and glared at Handforth.

"Boy!" he shouted. "What are you eating?"

"A doughnut, sir," said Handforth, taking a big bite.

"How—how dare you?" thundered the Head. "Where did you obtain it, boy?"

"M-m-m-m-m!" mumbled Handy.

"This is outrageous!" roared the Head. "I gave strict orders—— Good gracious! You are all eating! Pastry—cakes—sandwiches—pork-pies! Upon my soul! I—I am amazed!"

He looked round, and everybody remained silent. Many juniors, however, continued eating.

"Where did you obtain these—these disgusting articles of food?" demanded the Head, after a tense moment.

"Where did you buy them?"

"At Mr. Binks' shop, sir," I explained.

"Binks! I gave the man orders not to sell anything!" snapped Martin. "In the morning I shall see the scoundrel——"

"Mr. Binks is a harmless old chap, sir," I put in. "He refused to let us have any tuck—so we took it."

"You—took it?"

"Yes, sir," I said calmly. "Of course, we paid for the stuff in cash. Binks couldn't prevent us having what we wanted. A whole crowd of fellows went down. And, in any case, he's a free tradesman, and he's at liberty to sell his stock to the general public——"

"Silence, boy!" roared the Head. "From this moment the village is out of bounds!"

"What?"

Everybody gasped with dismay.

"The village is out of bounds!" said

the Head harshly. "Any boy—any junior boy—found in the village to-morrow, or any future day, will receive a flogging before the whole school!"

"But—but that's unfair, sir!" shouted Handforth. "We've never been barred from the village before. How shall we buy things? We're not prisoners!"

"Your name, boy?" snarled Martin.

"Handforth, sir——"

"You will write me five hundred lines, Handforth, for impertinence," said the Head furiously. "I will have obedience and discipline in this school! And every boy here will write two hundred lines for disobedience!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Hold on, sir," I said quickly. "We haven't disobeyed any order——"

"What?" barked the Head.

"Your order was to the effect that no food was to be taken into junior studies," I went on. "This is the lobby. Not a grain of stuff has been taken into a study. We haven't broken any rule at all—so we can't be punished."

Mr. Martin pursed his lips.

"That is a quibble!" he exclaimed. "I intend to punish everybody here. Nipper—I believe you are Nipper—you will report yourself to me in the morning for a caning!"

"What for, sir?" I asked blandly.

"It is not your business to ask questions!" roared the Head. "You have been insolent, and I intend to teach you a lesson. Take all this food and give it to the House matron. Do you hear me? Go!"

"Just a minute, sir," said Morrow firmly. "This food was bought with the boys' own money. And Nipper was quite right when he said that no rule had been broken. I should have stopped the thing at once if it had been against your orders. It's hardly fair to punish——"

"Silence!" shouted the Head. "Who are you?"

"My name is Morrow, sir. I belong to the Sixth."

"Are you a prefect?"

"Yes, sir."

"From this moment, Morrow, you are no longer a prefect," said Mr. Martin harshly. "You are unfit to fulfil the duties of a prefect! Furthermore, I shall punish you for upholding the juniors in an act of rank insubordination!"

Morrow fairly staggered.

"But—but——"

"Enough!" snapped the Head. "I can easily find a senior boy to fill your place. You made no attempt to stop this disgraceful scene, and you will report to me at nine o'clock this evening."

"Re-report!" stuttered Morrow.

"What for, sir?"

"To receive your punishment!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I shall not come," said Morrow calmly. "I'm not a junior—and I'm not going to stand any injustice. You have taken away my prefectship for nothing, and——"

"Silence!" raved the Head. "How dare you bandy words with me?"

"I'm not bandying words—I'm speaking my mind," said Morrow hotly. "You can call me insolent, or anything you like, but I'm not going to be bullied by you or anybody else!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Handforth excitedly.

"Good for you, Morrow!"

"Stick to it, old man!"

"Yah! Bully! Cad! Rotter!"

The Head breathed hard.

"Good heavens!" he shouted thickly. "How dare you? Every boy in this lobby will be detained within the gates for two weeks. All half-holidays will be stopped. As for you, Morrow, I shall flog you before the whole school——"

"Will you?" snapped Morrow. "I don't think so!"

"What—what——"

"If you attempt to touch me, sir, there'll be trouble!" said Morrow furiously. "I'm not a kid, and the Sixth will have something to say about this! You've asked for trouble, and you're going to find it!"

The ex-prefect strode away down the passage, and Mr. Martin glared after him with baleful eyes. He had been defied—defied by a boy! The Head snapped his teeth and walked away.

A perfect storm of hissing and booing broke out, and it continued for quite a minute. And just then Nelson Lee appeared in the doorway. He stared into the lobby with amazement.

"Boys!" he shouted. "What is the meaning of this?"

The uproar ceased as though by magic.

"I'll tell you that, sir," I put in briskly.

I was helped by many fellows, who insisted on adding words here and there. But the gov'nor understood all right, and he looked grave when I had finished.

"I am sorry to hear this," he said. "I am deeply afraid that it is the beginning of a serious rebellion. Morrow was certainly just in his anger, and I shall attempt to smooth matters over with the Head. In the meantime, boys, you will oblige me by maintaining order. I wish to hear no more hissing."

Every junior was ready to respect that wish, and the Ancient House was quiet during the rest of the evening. The Head took no action, and the Sixth waited in vain for the storm to break. They were with Morrow to a man.

But everybody knew that big trouble was brewing. Mr. Martin had set himself against the school—and the school was ready to fight!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### *Trouble in the Air!*

THE next morning, just before breakfast was finished, it was announced that the whole school was to assemble in Big Hall. Nobody knew why, and there was a good deal of speculation on the subject.

"Some more of the Head's rotten

restrictions, I suppose," remarked Watson, with a grunt of disgust.

"Begad! Surely not, old boy!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I don't think we can stand any further restrictions. If things go on at this rate, St. Frank's will be more like a prison. It will, really!"

"If things go on at this rate," I said grimly, "Martin will find himself in a bit of a mess. If he is foolish enough to overstep the mark—well, there'll be trouble."

"There's trouble in the air now," put in Handforth, who was standing nearby. "I can give you my word I'm not going to put up with Martin's humbug for long. My idea is to make a stand —"

"Yes, we know all about your ideas, Handy," I put in. "You're too ram-headed—that's your trouble. But we'd better buck up and get into Big Hall, or we shall have a prefect on our track, and that'll mean a thousand lines each!" I added ironically.

In less than five minutes Big Hall was crowded with curious, wondering fellows, and Mr. Howard Martin was not long in making his appearance. He stood eyeing the school as though he were a despot king of ancient times eyeing his serfs.

"It is not my intention to detain you long, boys," he said at length. "I've called you together because it is my wish that you should witness the punishment of a disobedient young rascal who has been foolish enough to ignore my orders. I am referring to Morrow, of the Sixth Form."

There was a general murmur of astonishment, and all eyes were fixed upon Morrow.

The ex-prefect was slightly pale, but quite calm.

"As some of you are fully aware," went on the Head, "I ordered Morrow to report to me for a flogging. He has failed to do so, and I am now about to administer the punishment he deserves.

The wretched youth was insolent beyond description, and were I a severe man I would expel him forthwith! But, in consideration of the fact that he is a member of the Sixth Form, I am inclined to be lenient. His punishment will be severe, but I shall allow him to remain in the school."

The school remained silent.

"Morrow," said Mr. Martin coldly, "stand forward!"

Morrow remained perfectly still.

"Oh, good!" murmured Handforth.

"Defy him! Ignore the beast!"

"Stick to your guns, Morrow!"

"Don't take any notice!"

Many juniors gave unnecessary advice.

"Silence!" roared the Head. "If there is any further speaking over there I will detain the whole school for a week! Morrow, did you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," said Morrow.

"Then why have you not stepped forward?" demanded Mr. Martin.

"Do you mean to flog me?" asked Morrow.

"Yes, I do!" roared the Head. "I intend to flog you with the utmost severity! Stand forward this instant, Morrow! I shall not order you to do so again!"

Morrow nodded.

"That's just as well," he said, "because I shan't take any notice!"

The Head nearly staggered, and the juniors fairly danced with excitement.

"Oh, good man!"

"That's the stuff, Morrow!"

"Keep it up!"

"Don't be afraid of the rotter!"

Mr. Martin strode forward to the edge of the platform.

"Very well!" he raved. "I will soon deal with this obstinacy. You seem to forget that I am your headmaster!"

"And you seem to forget that I am a Sixth Former!" shouted Morrow hotly. "I'm not a kid! I'm not going to be flogged before the whole school just because you order it! If I'd done something to deserve punishment, I wouldn't

make a fuss; but I've done nothing at all!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "How—how dare you! Are you coming upon this platform, Morrow, or not?"

"I'm not!" snapped Morrow.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Morrow!"

"Fenton!" screamed Mr. Martin. "Fenton—Conroy major—Wilson—Jesson! Seize Morrow and bring him upon this platform! Do you hear me, boys? Seize that young hound and bring him here!"

The four prefects were rather taken aback, but only for a moment.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Fenton quietly.

"What?" shouted the Head. "What did you say, Fenton?"

"It can't be done, sir—that's all," said Fenton. "I am captain of the school, and I am expected to give the other fellows a good example. But I should be untrue to myself, and untrue to the Sixth, if I helped you to humiliate Morrow before the whole school."

The Head clenched his fists.

"Do—do you mean that you refuse to obey my order?" he asked dangerously.

"If you like to put it that way—yes!" said Fenton.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"Stick to your guns, Morrow!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the Head!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Are we going to be bullied and trodden underfoot!"

"NO!"

The junior school simply roared, and for a moment all order was abandoned. The Head shouted and raved in vain. The scene was an amazing one.

Mr. Cowell, Mr. Pagett, and other Form-masters succeeded in regaining order after a few exciting minutes. The Head was still talking, and he was in a towering rage.

"I am amazed, shocked, and astounded!" he shouted. "That the senior boys of this school could be so

outrageously insubordinate is appalling. I shall see that the Sixth Form is adequately punished!"

The Sixth looked rebellious.

"Meanwhile, I intend to carry out my original plan," went on the Head grimly. "Morrow, I will give you one more chance to come upon this platform willingly. I warn you that if you refuse force will be applied!"

Morrow took no notice whatever.

"Do you hear me, boy?" thundered Mr. Martin.

"Yes, sir," said Morrow. "But I still stick to my decision."

"Oh!" snarled the Head. "Very well, Morrow—very well! We will see how much success this attitude will bring you. Since you will not move yourself, and since the Sixth Form refuses to shift you, I will attend to the matter personally! I will have you understand that you cannot defy your headmaster with impunity."

And Mr. Martin, amid a sudden hush, stepped down from the platform, and strode towards the spot where Morrow was standing.

Morrow was not afraid of him, but Morrow certainly was afraid of being yanked on to the platform like a kid in the Second.

He turned on his heel and walked away before Mr. Martin could reach him. He made straight for the exit.

"Morrow," thundered the Head, "come back!"

Morrow walked on.

"Do you hear me?" roared Mr. Martin. "Come back at once, Morrow!"

The ex-prefect vanished through the doorway.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A tremendous yell of derisive laughter went up, and the sympathies of the whole school were with Morrow. The Head spun round, his face purple with rage. He had made himself look ridiculous before the whole school, and he knew it.

"Silence!" he shouted hoarsely. "Every boy in this hall has witnessed

the utter insubordination of Morrow. The wretched boy will leave the school this very day. He is expelled from this instant!"

"Oh!"

"Shame!"

"Boo-oo-oo!"

A perfect storm of booing and hissing burst out. That decision of the Head was unpopular. If Morrow had actually committed a sin, and if the Head had been justified in attempting to flog him, his present conduct would have been justly punishable by expulsion. But Morrow had done nothing.

The whole school was with him. If the Head stuck to his decision there would probably be a revolt before the day was out.

But the Sixth Form was taking a hand in the matter. The seniors held a brief, hurried consultation, and then Fenton stepped forward.

"I wish to say something, sir," he said grimly.

The Head glared at him.

"Well?" he barked. "What do you want?"

"Do I understand, sir, that Morrow is expelled?"

"Yes—he is expelled!"

"He will leave St. Frank's to-day?" asked Fenton.

"I intend to pack him off by the first available train," snarled the Head.

"Very well, sir, I should just like to point out what that decision will involve," said the captain of St. Frank's. "If Morrow goes, every member of the Sixth Form will leave for home by the same train!"

"What?" gasped the Head. "What did you say, Fenton?"

"The Sixth does not intend to see an innocent fellow suffer at your unjust hands," went on Fenton boldly. "If Morrow goes—we go. And you will be left to make your explanations, Mr. Martin, to the school governors. I fancy it will be a somewhat difficult task!"

Fenton walked out of Big Hall, and

every member of the Sixth followed him. The Head stood still, as though dazed.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Sixth!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"If the Sixth goes, we'll go!" yelled Chambers of the Fifth.

"Hurrah!"

"And we'll go, too!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded out of Big Hall, excited and noisy; and Mr. Howard Martin had ample evidence that he had made a big blunder. If he persisted in his present attitude, the whole school would go home!

An hour later, a half sheet of newspaper was pinned on the notice-board in the lobby, and upon it, in the Head's handwriting, were the words: "In consideration of the fact that Arthur Morrow, of the Sixth Form, has hitherto borne an exemplary character, his insubordination of this morning will be overlooked, and he will be permitted to remain in the school.—HOWARD MARTIN, headmaster."

There was a good deal of talk on the subject in the school, but one fact was clear: the Head had climbed down completely, and if he had commanded any respect before he didn't command any now.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Handforth's Great Idea!

"CERTAINLY," said Handforth, helping himself to a cake.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" protested Church. "It couldn't be done, Handy."

"Of course not!" agreed McClure.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "It can be done, and, what's more, it's going to be done. My idea is to give the Head a chance—put it plainly to him that he's got to stop acting the goat, or we'll make things hot for him. See? We'll demand to have all the restrictions done

away with. If Martin refuses, we all revolt. How's that?"

"Idiotic!" said McClure frankly.

"Eh?"

"So it is!" persisted McClure. "Don't get excited, Handy! I say it's idiotic. In the first place, who's going to tell the Head all this? Who's going to put the thing to him?"

"I am," said Handforth.

"You?"

"Yes, I! Why not?"

"You'll soon find out why not, if you try it on," grinned Church. "We're not anxious to lose you, Handy; but if you're looking for the sack, you've only got to go to the Head with that jaw, and you'll be fired out in three minutes."

Handforth shook his head.

"Not if I make it clear to him that my expulsion would lead to a general revolution in the school," he said. "Of course, if I went, you'd all back me up—I can count on that. The Head's a blusterer. All he requires is firmness."

"From you?"

"From anybody," said Handforth. "I'm perfectly willing to put the thing straight to him; in fact, that's what I intend doing. Nobody else seems to realise the gravity of the situation, so I must get busy."

McClure nodded.

"Oh, you'll be busy enough," he agreed—"packing your things to go away! That's how you'll be busy, Handy!"

"Piffle!" snapped Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to be influenced by your cowardly fears? This is a great idea of mine, and I shan't be satisfied until it has been tested. All you chaps think about is your own skins; you never dream of doing anything for the good of the school!"

His chums sighed.

"It wouldn't do any good, Handy," said Church. "It would only do harm—to us. It won't help the school if we're sacked. I suppose? And that's what'll happen if we beard old Martin in his den—and put it to him straight,

as you call it. No, Handy, it's too risky."

"All right—have your own way!" exclaimed Handforth. "I've got my own ideas, and I stick to 'em. All we want to do is to give the Head a fright. Threaten to bar ourselves out, and he'll crumple up. He's as weak as water, and he'll never stand against a strong will. I mean to give him one chance, and if he likes to take it, all well and good. If he refuses to listen to me—woe betide him!"

Church and McClure went on with their tea without saying much. They were quite sure, in their own minds, that Handy would regain his senses before the tea was over.

But they were wrong.

"Well, I'd better be going, I suppose," said Handforth at last.

"Going!" asked Church. "Where to?"

"The Head's study, of course!"

"But—but you're not really going?" said McClure anxiously.

"Haven't I told you a dozen times that I mean it?" snapped Handforth. "I've never seen such—such fat-headed chumps in all my life! You'd better come along and support me——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Church. "We're not coming!"

"We don't want to be sacked!" said McClure.

Handforth glared.

"Do you call yourselves my chums?" he roared.

"That's nothing to do with it!" said Church gruffly. "We're ready to back you up in anything sensible—you know that. But when it comes to an idea that'll mean disaster for all of us—well, we're not having any!"

"Rather not!" said McClure, nodding.

Handforth regarded his chums pityingly.

"But, my dear asses, you don't seem to understand!" he exclaimed, with withering scorn. "You don't grasp the significance of the whole situation. Martin has proved himself to be weak

—he caved in pitifully over that Morrow business, as you know. Well, we've only got to show a bold front, and he'll cave in to us. The Head needs a good jawing, and I'm the chap to do it. He'll crumple up like a house of cards if I make it clear to him that it'll end in revolt if he doesn't."

McClure sighed.

"Oh, you're hopeless!" he said. "Do you think the Head will take any notice of you—a junior? Why, you lunatic, he'll pitch you out of his study, and he'll pitch you out of the school. It's not worth it, thanks!"

"Then you're not coming?" demanded Handforth.

"No!" said his chums in one voice.

"All right!" said Handforth. "I shall remember this—and I shall also make it clear to the whole school that the credit for defeating Martin belongs to me."

"You'd better defeat him first!" said Church tartly.

"Oh, rats!" snapped his leader.

Handforth charged out of Study D, and strode up the passage. He was fully determined to carry out his project—and only physical force would stop him.

Church and McClure knew that physical force with Handforth was hopeless. Even if he was hammered until he was blue, he would still be as determined at the finish. The only way was to let him run on.

By the time Handforth reached the Head's study he was not feeling quite so determined. The nearer he was to Mr. Martin's presence, the smaller his courage. But not for worlds would he have admitted that he was feeling nervous. He was determined to beard the tyrant in his den.

Of course, it was a mad idea, and no fellow in the school would have embarked upon it. But Handforth was always looking for trouble; and naturally he was always finding it.

He tapped upon the door firmly;

"Come in!" exclaimed the Head's voice.

Handforth opened the door and marched in. Mr. Martin was sitting at his desk, and he looked up and stared at Handforth.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Mr. Martin harshly.

It was not a very good opening for Handy, and the famous leader of Study D began to feel that his chums' advice had not been so bad. However, it was too late to draw back now.

"I—I—that is to say—I mean, sir—"

"Out with it, boy—out with it!" snapped the Head. "Your name is Handforth, I think? What do you require? I give you one minute to speak."

Handforth cleared his throat rather huskily.

"The—the fact is, sir, I have come to—to warn you," he said.

"Warn me?"

"Exactly, sir," went on Handforth. "The Remove feels that your new regulations are—are unjust, sir. It's not fair that the tuckshop should be out of bounds, and that study teas should be banned. The fellows are feeling pretty sore about it, and unless something is done there'll be trouble. The Remove particularly is absolutely fed up."

Mr. Martin lay back in his chair. For a second he had been on the point of jumping to his feet, but he refrained. And Handforth failed to see the dangerous glint in the Head's eye.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Martin. "So the Remove is—er—fed up? That is most interesting, Handforth. I shall be quite delighted to hear anything further you have to say."

Handforth smiled.

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," he said, expanding considerably, and totally unaware of the danger signals. "You see, sir, it's this way. The junior school is hit harder by these rules than the senior school. And, as a junior, I feel that it is my duty to say something on the subject. The fellows, as I in-

timated, are getting rather out of hand."

"That is most enlightening," said the Head. "Go on!"

"Certainly, sir," said Handforth. "I don't want to preach, but it's an absolute fact that you've been treating us in rather a rotten way. And most of the chaps are getting furious. I want to warn you that unless you carry on the school just as Dr. Stafford carried it on, there'll be something like a rebellion. I don't want to scare you, sir, but it's a fact that tempers are getting short."

The Head nodded.

"They are, Handforth," the Head explained harshly. "My own temper is no exception to the rule. When you have quite finished, I shall be glad if you will inform me."

"I don't suppose I shall be more than ten minutes, sir," said Handforth. "I only want to make a few suggestions as to how the juniors should be treated. You've listened to me fairly. I thought you were a bit of a beast—I—I mean—beg pardon, sir, but these things will slip out—"

"I think you have said sufficient, Handforth," said Mr. Martin, in a dangerous voice. "At all events, you must say no more. It is now my turn to talk. Come here—stand in front of me."

Handforth felt, at last, that everything was not as it should be. He began to suspect that trouble was brewing. And he walked to Mr. Martin's side rather gingerly.

"Now, Handforth, I will speak," said the Head grimly. "I've allowed you to run on in order to find out now far you would go. I regret to discover that you are not only capable of astounding insolence, but that you are even prepared to insult your headmaster to his face."

Handforth gasped.

"By George!" he said huskily. "I—I—"

"Silence," thundered the Head. "Do not dare to speak again, boy! I have



had patience to listen to your nonsense for long enough—and my patience is exhausted. You are the most impertinent boy I have ever dealt with, and if I thought for a moment that you were really serious I would expel you within the hour."

"Great pip!" breathed Handforth.

"As it is, I believe that you are merely lacking in wits," continued the Head. "You are utterly foolish, and it would be unfair to your parents to inflict your presence upon them. I intend to thrash you soundly for your unwarrantable insolence in coming to my study—"

"You—you're going to thrash me, sir?" panted Handworth, with a gulp.

"As you have never been thrashed before!" exclaimed the Head, reaching for his cane. "And if you attempt to struggle or to resist, I shall double your punishment. Not another word!"

But Handforth was not the kind of fellow to take things lying down.

"Dash it all, sir, I don't see why I should be flogged!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I was only telling you the truth! Unless your restrictions are removed, the whole junior school will revolt in a body!"

"Upon my soul!" shouted the Head. "You are quite impossible!"

He snatched at a walking-stick—his cane being unavailable—and he brought the stick down across Handforth's shoulders with tremendous force. It was a cruel, violent blow, and Handforth staggered.

"Yaroooh!" he howled. "Ow! You—you cad!"

Mr. Martin let himself go. With a face set in a snarl of fury, he grasped Handforth and wielded the stick with all his strength. The junior was quite helpless in the grasp of the powerful bully. It was not Handy's habit to yell, but he yelled this time. He yelled with rage and indignation.

Slash! Slash!

Again and again the stick descended, and Mr. Martin was not particular as

to where the blows struck. Some of them hit Handy across the legs, and he suffered great pain.

"Good gracious!"

The exclamation came from the doorway. The Head turned, his stick poised for another blow, and stared into the face of Nelson Lee.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Bitter Blood!

MR. HOWARD MARTIN frowned. "Go away!" he shouted violently. "Can't you see that I'm attending to this boy? Kindly refrain from interfering now, Mr. Lee. If you wish to speak to me, I will attend to you later."

Slash! Slash!

"Ow-yaroooh!" yelled Handforth. "Rescue, Mr. Lee! This—this bully—yow-ow!"

Mr. Martin continued his savage attack with more force than ever. He was treating the junior with rank brutality—and Nelson Lee was not the type of man to stand idly by and watch.

"Stop that, Mr. Martin!" he said sharply.

"What!" panted the Head, amazed. "What—what did you say?"

"I told you to stop that brutal attack upon Handforth!" snapped Lee. "You are apparently unconscious of the fact, Mr. Martin, that you are acting like a hooligan—and not as a headmaster. Drop that stick at once!"

"How—how dare you?" screamed the Head.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

But he was unable to get more blows home, for Nelson Lee dashed forward, and dragged the stick out of Mr. Martin's hands. He flung it across the room and pushed Handforth behind him.

"Handforth, you may go," said Nelson Lee grimly.

"Thank—thank you, sir!" gasped Handforth. "You're a brick, sir!"

He lost no time in escaping from the study. And Mr. Martin and Nelson Lee were left facing one another in a militant attitude. The Head, indeed, was on the point of flinging himself at the schoolmaster-detective. But he checked himself in time.

"I am astounded, Mr. Lee, that you should have the effrontery to interfere with me while I am inflicting punishment on an impertinent boy!" exclaimed the Head, fighting down his fury with an effort. "You will please understand that in no circumstances will I permit——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Martin, but I did not interfere as you intimate," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You were not inflicting punishment—you were engaged in a harsh and cowardly attack upon a junior boy——"

"You had better be careful what you say, sir!" shouted Mr. Martin. "I will have you understand that I have been invested with full power and authority by the school governors. And if I have any nonsense from you I shall not hesitate to dismiss you at an hour's notice!"

Nelson Lee was quite unmoved.

"Your attitude fills me with nothing but contempt, Mr. Martin," he said quietly. "I shall not attempt to argue with you, or to prolong this conversation in any way. Perhaps when you have calmed down you will realise the true position you have placed yourself in!"

Nelson Lee did not wait for the Head to speak again; he turned on his heel and walked out of the study. There had already been bitter blood between the two, but now it was open hostility. And such a state of affairs, of course, was not likely to last for long.

Meanwhile, Handforth had returned to Study D. He crawled rather than walked in. Church and McClure were waiting, and they were not at all surprised to note Handforth's method of entry.

Indeed, Church had thoughtfully provided a box of soothing ointment.

"Hurt much, old man?" asked McClure sympathetically.

"Oh, no!" said Handforth. "I'm not hurt at all! Look at this!"

He pulled up the leg of his left trouser and pulled down his sock. And there, upon the calf, were two livid weals.

"Great Scott!" shouted Church.

"My hat!" said McClure hoarsely. "Did the Head do that?"

Handforth sat down.

"It's nothing," he said rather wearily. "My back is simply covered with weals—six times as bad as those. The—the beastly brute! He swiped into me with a walking-stick! He was just like a wild animal!"

"How did you get away in the end!" asked Church.

"Mr. Lee came in."

"Oh, good!"

"What did he do?"

Handforth's eyes glittered for a moment.

"He snatched the stick out of Martin's hand and chucked it across the room," he said. "My only topper! You ought to have seen it! I don't know what's happening now, but I wouldn't mind betting a quid that the pair of 'em are engaged in a fight!"

"Did the Head listen to you?" asked Church.

"Listen to me!" said Handforth indignantly. "He listened to every word, and kidded me that he was sympathetic. And then, at the finish, he turned on me like a wild tiger!"

"Well, of course, you were an ass to go there in the first place," said McClure. "I don't like to say that we warned you, or anything of that sort, but you must admit that it was a dotty idea—— Come in, you ass!"

A tap had sounded at the door, and it opened to admit Nelson Lee.

McClure turned very red.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" he stammered. "I didn't know it was you——"

"I can quite believe that, McClure," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "Never mind

—we will let it pass. I came to see you, Handforth. Are you hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir," said Handforth.

Church snorted.

"Nothing to speak of!" he shouted.

"Why, he's covered with weals, sir!"

"Oh, dry up!" growled the victim.

"Let me examine you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee quietly.

The Housemaster looked at Handforth's wounds, and he shook his head grimly.

"I should advise you to go to bed as soon as possible, Handforth," he said. "You will be excused preparation for this evening, and you must have those bruises properly treated."

"Oh, I shall be all right, sir," said Handforth uncomfortably. "I never believe in making a fuss over a few knocks and bruises. Did you dot the Head one in the eye, sir? I—I mean did you——"

"It would not be advisable for me to discuss the subject with you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "It is needless for me to tell you that I do not approve of Mr. Martin's behaviour, and I shall do the utmost in my power to look after the interests of the boys in the Ancient House. But you must not forget that Mr. Martin is the headmaster, and, strictly speaking, I am a subordinate."

"Oh, but that's rotten, sir!" protested Handforth. "You're worth ten thousand of the Head! I can't make out why the governors didn't appoint you!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That is very nice of you, my boy," he said. "But take my advice now and get to bed as soon as possible. And do not talk too much about this little affair. It would only stir up trouble."

Nelson Lee departed a moment later, and Handforth eyed his chums grimly.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you think of it?"

"Think of what?" asked Church.

"Mr. Lee told us to keep quiet about me being knocked about by the Head,"

said Handforth. "Lee is one of the best in the world, but he's not always right, and if he kids himself that I'm going to spare the Head, he's mistaken. The whole Remove will know about that rotten affair within an hour."

"Quite right, too," said McClure. "Mr. Lee is afraid of trouble springing up. That's why he told you to go easy. I expect he's got an idea that there'll be a revolt or something."

"If he's got that idea, he's not far wrong," declared Handforth. "One or two more exhibitions of that sort, and Martin will be kicked through the Triangle, and kicked to the village by a crowd of chaps. We're not going to stand tyrants at St. Frank's at any price."

"Well, let's go to the Common-room," said Church.

"Right," said Handforth, getting up. "Come on—— Yow!"

He made a grimace as the pain caught him. For he was decidedly sore, and his feelings towards Mr. Howard Martin were very bitter.

Ten minutes later, in the Common-room, he was letting everybody know his woes. I was with Watson and Tregellis-West, and at first I thought Handy was exaggerating, as usual.

But this time he had the proof.

"The man's absolutely a bully," I declared. "He has proved himself to be unfit to fill the post of a reformatory chief. He is nothing but a cur!"

"And we're not going to stand him for long!"

"Rather not!"

"Down with the Head!"

"Three cheers for Dr. Stafford!"

"Hurrah!"

"I say, stop that!" I shouted. "We don't want to get up a demonstration now—we shall only have a crowd of prefects on us. 'Don't yell so much. If we're going to deal with the situation, we must remain calm. There's no sense in asking for trouble. We're not prepared to tackle Martin yet.'"

"That's your policy always," said Handworth. "What's the good of wait-

ing? Why not march in a body to the Head's study and hoot him out of the place?"

"If it could be done I'd be with you," I said. "But it can't be done, and it's no good thinking it can. We've got to wait, and I don't think it will be very long before we get our opportunity. Violence is all very well, but I never believe in using it until things are really serious."

"They're serious now," said Handforth; "and what I say is——"

"There's a lot of noise going on in here," said Wilson of the Fifth, putting his head into the Common-room. "If you kids want to make a row, you'd better make it somewhere else. The Head's down on all noises."

"Rats!"

"Blow the Head!"

"He can go and eat coke!"

"And so can you, Wilson!"

Wilson grinned.

"All right—do as you like," he said. "But if the Head comes round and gates you for a month, don't blame me."

He departed, and the juniors regarded one another with indignant looks.

"Well, I'm going to make a speech—and blow the consequences," said Handforth. "Anybody who wants to listen had better collect round. It's up to you to support me."

"Go ahead, Handy!"

"Spout away!"

"If you'll take my advice, you'll spout somewhere else," I put in. "In the gym, for example. There won't be much fear of interruption there, and you'll feel safer. But you can do just as you like, of course."

The crowd decided to go to the gym, and, led by Handforth, the fellows surged out of the Common-room.

"Dear old boy, shall we go?" asked Tregellis-West.

"We might as well be in it," I said.

"Come on."

The Triangle was quite dark, and a

minute or two before the Removites crowded out of the Ancient House, a somewhat dramatic incident took place against the Head's private doorway.

Nelson Lee had been across to the College House to have a few words with Mr. Stockdale. He was on his way back to his own quarters when he was attracted by sounds of commotion near the Head's door. Mr. Martin was apparently engaged in a fierce argument with another man.

"Go away, confound you!" the Head exclaimed savagely. "I don't wish you here. And if you dare to come again, I'll give you in charge——"

"You daren't! You'd be afraid to!" said a hoarse voice. "Don't forget that you're implicated——"

"Keep quiet, you fool!" snarled Martin.

"Well, don't you dare to threaten me——"

"Are you going?" asked the Head in a quivering voice. "I give you just two seconds! If you are not gone by that time, I'll take and pitch you out!"

Nelson Lee felt rather uncomfortable, for he had no inclination to overhear what was going on. At the same time, the detective was interested. For, only a day or two before, he had had a little argument with the mysterious stranger himself.

The man had mistaken Lee for Mr. Martin, in the darkness. And he had said quite sufficient to give Lee an indication that Mr. Howard Martin was not all he professed to be. It was only too clear, in fact, that the new Head had a somewhat mysterious secret which he wanted to keep to himself.

And now the stranger had appeared again—and Martin did not welcome his presence. Lee felt that the little matter would bear a private investigation. And he was determined to give some attention to the subject.

But then, as he was about to slip away, he changed his mind.

He had scarcely turned his back before he heard a thud, followed by a low cry. Turning swiftly, he saw the

stranger lying upon the ground, with Martin standing over him.

"And now you'll clear out!" snarled the Head.

He kicked at the prostrate figure viciously. It was a cowardly attack, for the man seemed dazed by the first blow and incapable of defending himself. As each kick went home the helpless man groaned.

Nelson Lee did not wait.

His blood boiled at the brutal exhibition, and he sprang across the Triangle at a sharp run. Mr. Martin looked up, startled. He saw who the newcomer was, and then delivered another kick.

"Get out of here, you confounded tramp!" he exclaimed harshly.

Crash!

Nelson Lee did not wait to argue matters. He brought his fist up and delivered an uppercut which sent Mr. Howard Martin sprawling backwards. Nelson Lee's blood was up, and that blow gave him intense satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Sack for Nelson Lee!

"HALLO!"

"What's the row?"

Handforth and his followers had just emerged from the Ancient House. Over in the gloom by the Head's doorway something was occurring. Mr. Martin's voice, at all events, was very much in evidence.

I came out a moment later, and I saw that the Head was talking—or rather shouting—at Nelson Lee. All the juniors remained still, listening.

The Head had picked himself up after that knock-down blow, boiling with violent rage. He was relieved to see, at the very first glance, that the stranger had picked himself up in the momentary confusion, and had vanished.

"I should advise you to keep your temper, Mr. Martin," said Nelson Lee calmly. "I was compelled to knock you down—as I always knock a man down who is acting like a brute and a cad."

"You—you infernal hound!" raved the Head. "I'll have the law on you for assault! Not another minute shall you remain in this school—do you understand? You'll go—you will go at once!"

"I advise you to remain calm——"

"You will leave this school at once—do you hear me?" bellowed the headmaster. "You confounded dog, I'd pitch you out with my own hands but for soiling my fingers. Within an hour you leave St. Frank's!"

Nelson Lee remained calm.

"Am I to understand from you, Mr. Martin, that you wish me to tender my resignation?" he asked quietly.

The Head laughed harshly.

"You are to understand nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed. "I will not accept a resignation from you. You are dismissed—you are sacked!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I will not demean myself by entering into an argument while you are in this violent frame of mind," he said. "In the circumstances, I am compelled to accept my dismissal without question. You need have no fear, Mr. Martin. I will go. Only a few moments ago I discussed my resignation with Mr. Stockdale. For, to tell you the truth, I find it impossible to continue my duties while there is a bully and a tyrant of your stamp in complete control."

Mr. Martin seemed as though he were about to choke for a few moments. But, by a great effort, he controlled himself and swallowed hard.

"You will leave St. Frank's at once!" he snarled. "You are dismissed!"

He turned and passed into his own doorway. And as he did so, the spell which had held the juniors broke. They surged forward and crowded round Nelson Lee, excited, anxious, and overwhelmed with dismay.

"You're not going, sir?"

"We won't let you leave the school, sir!"

"Rather not!"

"I must ask you to let me pass, boys!"

said Nelson Lee quietly. "No good will come of this demonstration. I am leaving St. Frank's to-night—for, really, I have no choice."

"We won't let you go, sir."

"Oh, guv'nor, it can't be true!" I shouted, grabbing hold of his arm. "You're not really going, are you?"

"Begad! It's too appallin' for words," said Sir Montie. "You really can't desert us, sir. Just think how frightful it will be here if we are left at Mr. Martin's mercy—without you to stand up for us!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am sorry, boys, but there is nothing I can do," he declared. "In any case, I should have left the school to-morrow, so it makes practically no difference."

He forced his way through the crowd and passed through the private doorway of the Ancient House.

The Removites stood about in groups, talking excitedly, and filled with consternation.

The word went through the school like lightning.

Nelson Lee had been sacked!

Everybody, from the Second to the Sixth, knew the truth within ten minutes. And the excitement was intense. The College House fellows were greatly interested, but not exactly alarmed.

It was a different story with the Ancient House. Seniors and juniors were filled with rage and indignation against the Head. Nelson Lee was almost loved by the majority of the boys, and it was a great blow to the Ancient House to lose him.

Within an hour, Nelson Lee would be gone! Gone for good! It was almost too awful to be believed.

In the junior quarters, the fellows were raving with excitement. It was universally decided that something should be done; delay was no longer possible, and I was as much in favour of immediate action as the others.

There was no time for planning or

talking. Either something had to be done at once, or not at all.

"There's no sense in getting dotty with excitement," I shouted. "The fact is plain. Mr. Lee goes to-night, and there's only one possible chance to save him."

"What is it?"

"Speak up, Nipper!"

"We'll wait out in the Triangle until he starts for the station," I said. "We'll surround him, and we'll refuse to let him go. He can't do anything against the whole crowd of us."

"Oh, good!"

"Ripping idea!"

"Begad! But supposin' he orders us to release him?"

"He'll have to order in vain," I said grimly. "We'll make such a fuss that there'll be no peace until things are altered. The Fifth will be with us to a man, and we can easily count on the Third."

"Yes, rather!"

"So it's up to us to take matters into our own hands," I went on. "The time has come for us to act."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Go it!"

"We'll demand that Mr. Lee shall be reinstated—whether he likes it or not—and that Mr. Martin shall tender a full and complete apology," I continued grimly. "And remember, we can do it!"

"Good!"

"We can force the Head to his knees—if we only stick together in one big effort," I shouted. "There must be no waverers."

"We're ready!"

"Anything to keep Mr. Lee!"

"Good!" I said. "Then the best thing we can do is to get out as soon as possible. Don't forget that if Mr. Lee goes, the Head will make life for us a misery. We've simply got to keep the guv'nor here—at any cost!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Lead on, old son!"

"You're the chap for us!"

Everybody was enthusiastic and full of hope. It was generally believed that something could be done—that it was not yet too late. But then the real blow fell. For we discovered that Mr. Martin was ready to forestall the scheme.

Four prefects appeared in the common-room.

"Now then, you kids, off to bed!" shouted Wilson briskly.

"Bed!" roared Handforth. "There's another hour!"

"Head's orders!" said Wilson.

"Oh, my hat!"

"You have my sympathy, but there's nothing to be done," went on the prefect. "We've received orders to see that every junior is in bed at once. The Fifth is included—and the Fifth has already gone up."

"That's done it," said Hubbard. "We're diddled!"

Unfortunately, there were many juniors who shared the same view—who gave up hope then and there. And half the Remove trooped up to bed without acting, but protesting vigorously.

Talking, however, was useless. The remainder of us were powerless to carry out the project. With such a small number, there was no hope of success. If only the fellows had had the courage to stick together, things might have been different.

But, as the majority had submitted, there was no course for us but to follow their example; and we went up to the dormitory shortly afterwards. At least, everybody except me.

I managed to sneak off to have a few words with the guv'nor before he went. I found Lee in his study, almost ready for departure.

"Guv'nor," I exclaimed, "you're not really going!"

"My dear Nipper, what on earth is the matter with you?" asked Nelson Lee calmly.

"The—the matter!" I said. "You're going away!"

"Exactly! But do you think that I regard this affair as serious?"

"But it's all wrong, sir——"

"Perhaps it isn't!" laughed Nelson Lee. "I have been expecting it—and I had no intention of remaining, in any event. Mr. Martin is a blackguard, and he has been invested with full authority. It is impossible for me to remain in the school in the circumstances."

"But what shall we do without you, sir?" I asked blankly.

Nelson Lee took my shoulder.

"I have no doubt," he said grimly, "that you will get on far better without me!"

"Eh?"

"Think over what I have said," continued Lee. "You will get on better without me, Nipper—far better. You do not seem to realise that it is impossible for you to take any action against Mr. Martin while I am present. To do so would be to offend me, in my capacity as Housemaster. But with me out of the way, you will have a clear field to fight this tyrant on equal terms."

My eyes gleamed.

"By jingo!" I said. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"You must not imagine, however, that I am advising you to do anything rash," went on the guv'nor, his twinkling eyes giving the lie to his tone. "I simply leave it to the school. I have great faith in St. Frank's, and I do not suppose for a moment that the school will allow itself to be brow-beaten and bullied for long."

"When are you going, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"By the nine-thirty train to London."

"And when shall we see you again?"

"That is a question which I cannot answer now," said Lee. "I should advise you to get to your dormitory as soon as possible. Good-night, Nipper! And don't worry. St. Frank's is passing through a strenuous time at the moment, but all will come right shortly."

"By gum! I hope so, sir!" I said fervently.

## CHAPTER 12.

Good-bye to St. Frank's!

HANDFORTH was looking excited when I entered the dormitory.

None of the juniors were undressed, and it was apparent that something was on. The leader of Study D was making a speech, and, for once in a way, the other juniors were listening attentively.

"It's the only thing we can do now," Handforth was saying. "We've got to take matters into our own hands. We've been ordered to bed like so many kids, but that's no reason why we should sacrifice Nipper's ripping wheeze."

"How can we do it?"

"There's an easy way," said Handforth. "There are plenty of bedclothes here, and three windows. How long will it take us to make some ropes and swarm down into the Triangle?"

"By Jove!"

"That's a fine idea!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "What's the good of acting the goat, my sons? If we get into the Triangle, we shall only be rounded up again. The best thing we can do is to leave things as they are——"

"Eh?" said Watson. "You've changed your tone."

"I know I have," I replied. "But I've got a reason for it. Listen to me! I vote that we get to bed——"

"Rats!"

"Dry up!"

"But listen——"

"Not likely," said Handforth. "We're not going to listen to any of your rot, Nipper! We're going down through the windows, and we're going to prevent Mr. Lee from leaving. That's settled."

"But look here——"

The fellows wouldn't let me speak. They were really too excited to attend to anything except the one matter in hand. And within a few seconds the beds were being stripped of their sheets and blankets.

It was a rash step, but the Remove

was in a desperate mood, and nobody particularly cared what happened.

In a remarkably short space of time the ropes were made. I said nothing, for I knew that it was useless to argue, and I realised that it would be far better if the gov'nor did go. We should have a free hand.

I knew that it would be touch and go. Nelson Lee had been almost ready for leaving when I left him. So the chances were that he would be gone when the juniors got out of the dormitory.

And then another idea occurred to me.

Since the Remove was determined, there was no reason why Sir Montie and Tommy and I should not break bounds, too.

Many of the fellows were already swarming out of the windows. I followed suit, but, as I had anticipated, Nelson Lee had already taken his departure. For it was nearly a quarter-past nine, and the train left at half-past.

It was some minutes, however, before this was found out. The juniors collected against the gateway, in readiness to collar Lee as he attempted to pass out. I stood aside with my chums, and I briefly explained matters to them. They readily agreed that it was just as well that the attempt had come to nothing.

"I'll tell you what," I whispered. "There's no reason why we shouldn't slip down to the station, and see the gov'nor off. I'm not particular now about what happens, and we can't be punished any more than if we stayed here. What do you say?"

"We'll go!" said Watson.

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie.

And so, without wasting any further time, we slipped over the wall and started off for the station at the double. I was not positive that Lee had already gone, but it was practically certain.

The crowd in the Triangle soon found it out.

Jesson, of the Sixth, happened to be



passing from the College House to the Ancient House. He could not fail to observe the crowd at the gates, and he investigated matters.

"What the thunder is the meaning of this?" he demanded sourly. "What are you kids doing out of your dormitory? Have you all gone dotty?"

"Oh, dry up, Jesson!" said Handforth. "You can go and eat coke! If you want to know the truth, we're waiting here for Mr. Lee, and we're not going—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jesson. "Mr. Lee left the school ten minutes ago!"

"What!"

"It's not true!"

"All right—you can believe what you like," said Jesson. "Mr. Lee's gone to catch the nine-thirty train, and it's twenty past nine already. Personally, I think it's a good thing he's gone. We can do very well without him—Hi! What the——"

Jesson fled. The crowd had charged at him angrily, and he did not wait to try conclusions with the juniors. It had been rather unwise for him to make that remark about Nelson Lee with the fellows in their present frame of mind.

"Cad!"

"Yah! Rotter!"

Jesson entered the House at a run, and he was followed by numerous yells and shouts. He went straight to the Head's study, and reported the fact that the whole Ancient House section of the Remove was out of bed and in the Triangle.

Mr. Martin seized a cane, and investigated.

He found the Triangle bare and empty.

The fellows had taken the opportunity to slip back into the dormitory.

"Have you been attempting to play a joke upon me, Jesson?" barked the Head. "There is nobody in the Triangle—not a soul!"

"But—but they were here, sir," said Jesson wildly.

"I will go to the dormitory," said the Head. "If I find all the boys in bed, I

shall know that you have lied, and I will punish you accordingly. Come!"

Jesson felt better, for he knew that the juniors could not be undressed in such a short space of time. They weren't. The Remove was attempting to get into bed quickly; but there were still evident signs of the late escapade. Beds were unmade, and the windows were open still.

"What is the meaning of this?" rasped out Mr. Martin. "Every boy here will be punished for this outrageous breach of the rules. You were ordered to bed, and yet you had the insolence to——"

The Head paused, and glared round him.

"Where is Nipper?" he asked sharply. "Where is Watson? Good gracious! Tregellis-West is missing, also. Where are they?"

Nobody breathed a word.

"I think I can tell you where they are, sir," said Jesson. "It's almost certain that they've gone down to the station, to see Mr. Lee off. Nipper, you know, is Mr. Lee's assistant when they're working on detective cases."

Mr. Martin smiled grimly.

"Then we will go into the Triangle and wait until the young rascals return," he said. "Come, Jesson, I will attend to these young rascals tomorrow."

Meanwhile, Tommy and Montie and I had arrived at the station. We were only just in time for the train was on the point of coming in. The gov'nor was standing upon the platform alone, and he regarded us smilingly as we appeared.

"I was half-expecting that you would turn up, boys," he said. "Dear me! One might imagine that you were coming to my funeral by your expressions."

"We don't want you to go, sir," said Watson earnestly.

"We shall miss you frightfully, sir," added Tregellis-West.

"Well, boys, you will soon see me again, never fear!" exclaimed Lee calmly. "You must not imagine that

I am leaving St. Frank's for good. I have been dismissed—"

"Oh, come off it, sir!" I protested.

"My dear Nipper, that is the literal truth. I have been sacked," said Lee, with a chuckle. "However, I am quite content. I did not expect anything better from Mr. Martin's hands. You see, St. Frank's is not large enough for both Mr. Martin and myself. I am going, but it will not be long before Mr. Martin goes for good."

"We'll see to that, sir," I said grimly. "Here's the train!"

Nelson Lee shook hands with us, and a couple of minutes later we were waving good-bye to him as the train moved out of the little station.

Then we hurried back to the school, deep in thought. We were so thoughtful, in fact, that we did not consider the possibility of being detected upon arrival.

Consequently, we ran right into the arms of Jesson and Mr. Martin. The Head faced us, with gloating triumph in his eyes.

"So I have caught you red-handed—breaking bounds after bed-time!" he exclaimed harshly. "Very well! I shall make an example of you! Come with me!"

There was no sense in resisting; we could do nothing alone. Rather to our surprise, we were taken straight to the dormitory. Everybody else was in bed, and a good many fellows were asleep. But Mr. Martin soon awoke them.

"I am about to flog these three boys in the presence of you all!" he exclaimed. "They are guilty of breaking bounds, and you will take this as a lesson not to follow their example. Nipper, stand forward."

I took the flogging without flinching, and without attempting to resist. Some of the juniors were ready to jump on the Head at the moment, but it wouldn't have been good policy. If we really decided to defy Martin, we should have to organise our forces thoroughly. For without organisation we should certainly fail.

And so we took our gruel.

Watson and Tregellis-West received the same punishment as myself—a brutal flogging, altogether out of proportion to the offence. Sore and furious, we were sent to bed on the instant.

"And remember," said the Head sternly, "any further offences committed by this Form will be punished with the utmost severity. I intend to have obedience and discipline. Any boy who presumes to defy me will do so at his peril."

The tyrant took his departure, and the dormitory was left in darkness.

But the fellows did not go to sleep. They had been thoroughly aroused by the events of the evening and by the latest example of Mr. Martin's tyrannical methods. Feeling in the Remove was at fever heat.

They, at all events, were ripe for revolution. It would only be a matter of time—a very short time—before the Remove was ready to set itself in defiance of the tyrant Head!

## CHAPTER 13.

### The New Housemaster!

**T**EDDY LONG, the sneak of the Ancient House, burst into the Common-room flushed and excited. It was after lessons the next day—a Wednesday and a half-holiday. But our half-holiday had been spent in the Form-room. Mr. Martin had decreed that the Remove should employ its leisure time in the Form-room as a punishment for the affair of the previous night. The Head himself had taken the Form, and everybody was feeling fed-up and angry.

Indignation ran high, and the fellows were giving vent to some of their pent-up feelings, when Teddy Long burst in excitedly.

"I say, you chaps, I've got some news!" he panted.

"What kind of news?" I asked suspiciously. "If you've been listening at

keyholes, my son, we don't want to hear a word."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Nipper!" protested Long. "You know jolly well I never listen at keyholes! I—I was just passing Mr. Crowell's study, and the door happened to be open. I happened to hear a few words——"

"And you happened to stop deliberately, didn't you?" asked Pitt.

"I couldn't help hearing, I suppose?" demanded Long warmly. "The Head was talking to Crowell, and telling him something about a new master——"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"A new Housemaster, to be exact," said Teddy Long, pleased that he had made an impression. "I heard it quite by chance, you know. He's coming down this evening, and the Head's already fixed things up with him. He's going to take Lee's place as Housemaster!"

I looked rather grim.

"I don't know if this is true," I said, "but if it is we shall probably be in for a lively time. A new Housemaster of Mr. Martin's choice will turn out to be a rotter of his own breed!"

"Of course it's true," said Teddy Long. "I heard the Head speaking as plainly as I'm speaking to you. He was telling Crowell that the new chap will have complete power in the Ancient House, and that Crowell will have to take orders from him."

"We shall have Crowell resigning next," remarked Tommy Watson. "The masters won't stand too much brow-beating."

"Ahem!"

The cough came from the doorway, and the juniors turned to find Mr. Crowell standing there. Watson turned rather red, and looked alarmed. The Remove Form-master had certainly overheard his remark.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" stammered Tommy.

"You were unaware of my entry, and anything I may have heard was not for

my ears," said Mr. Crowell. "I wish to say a few words to you all, boys."

"Good old stick!" murmured Watson.

"As you are all aware, Mr. Lee is no longer with us," went on Mr. Crowell. "That fact is to be very much regretted——"

"Rather, sir!"

"We didn't want him to go, sir!"

"I can quite believe that, boys," said the Form-master. "Unfortunately, there is little prospect of Mr. Lee returning immediately—although I am fairly certain that he will be in our midst again, sooner or later."

"We hope so, sir."

"St. Frank's isn't the same place without him, sir."

"We are certainly having a few changes of late," agreed Mr. Crowell gravely. "Some of them are changes which are not welcome, but you must remember that it is your duty to respect your headmaster."

"We can't always do our duty, sir," said Watson bluntly.

"Ahem! We will not discuss that," said Mr. Crowell. "What I really came here to tell you is that a gentleman will arrive here this evening to take up his duties as Housemaster, in place of Mr. Lee. You must all remember that he will demand full respect from you, and strict obedience. I sincerely trust that Mr. Wrott will prove to be a trifle more amiable than—ahem! Well, no matter!" concluded Mr. Crowell hastily.

"Mr. who, sir?" I asked.

"The gentleman's name is Mr. Wrott, Nipper."

"By George!" said Handforth. "What a rotten name!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crowell frowned, but took no notice of Handy's remark.

"Mr. Wrott will arrive by the seven o'clock train, and he will probably visit you later on in the evening. So you must be on your best behaviour. That is all I have to say—except that I want you to refrain from any rough horse-play."

Mr. Crowell departed, and we looked at one another.

"He wants us to refrain from any rough horse-play," I said grimly. "With all due respect to Mr. Crowell, I don't see how it's going to be done. My sons, we're going to have a bit of fun with Mr. Wrott."

"Good!"

"How shall we do it—a jape?" asked Watson.

"Something like that," I replied. "It was very kind of Mr. Crowell to tell us the time of Mr. Tommy-Rot's arrival."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we shall be able to prepare for his reception well in advance," I went on. "Mr. Wrott has been engaged by Martin. So we needn't all be detectives to arrive at the conclusion that Mr. Wrott will be a rotter—and that's not meant to be funny. He'll probably be as big a bully as the Head himself. So we'll take that for granted, and arrange accordingly."

"But supposing he's a nice chap?"

"Well, it won't make any difference; we shan't do anything serious," I said. "Now, I want five volunteers for a jape I've got in mind."

"Right!" said Handforth. "I'm one."

"Yes, you'll do," I agreed. "What about the others?"

Tregellis-West and Watson and Pitt and De Valerie were chosen, and they all collected near me.

"What's the giddy mystery?" inquired Hart. "What's the idea of the secret six stunt? What are you chaps going to get up to?"

"We're going to make preparations," I explained. "Everything will be made clear afterwards. Have patience, children, and you will know all. But just at present I don't want everybody talking about the wheeze. Long is with us, don't forget."

"Oh, I say, Nipper!" protested Long. "I wouldn't breathe a word!"

"No—you'd shout it," I said grimly. "Well, my trusty supporters, come

along to the plotting chamber. In other words, Study C."

The other fellows looked somewhat mystified, and quite a crowd collected in the Remove passage while we held a meeting behind the closed door of Study C. When we came out everything was arranged.

There were shouts from the crowd.

"Hallo! They've got their caps on!"

"And their overcoats!"

"Hi, you chaps! Where are you off to?"

"Not a word, you asses!" I said warningly. "Don't forget the gates are shut, and we've got to break bounds. Don't yell it all over the house, or we shall be stopped. It's not six o'clock yet, so there's over an hour before Mr Wrott's train comes in. Be ready for action within an hour. You'll be called upon to lend assistance at the right moment."

"Yes, but what——"

"Nuff said," I interrupted crisply. "This way, my sons!"

The six of us departed, much to the mystification of the crowd. But our movements were not so very strange, after all. Having got safely away from the school precincts, we set off for the village at a brisk walk. Arriving there we paid a visit to Mr. Binks to purchase a quantity of fireworks he had left over from the previous Guy Fawkes day. Then we went on to the station, and reached there with three-quarters of an hour to spare.

Everything was quiet and still. But we were not greatly interested in the station itself. We gave our attention to the Station Hotel opposite—a small inn which was also a livery stable. It was from here that the station cab set out to take up its position opposite the booking-office when a train was due. The place was owned by Mr. Josiah Biggin, a jovial gentleman.

"Good!" I exclaimed, as I looked into the yard. "Old Biggin is in there."

We marched in:

"Evenin', young gents!" said the innkeeper. "What can I do for you?"

"As a matter of fact, we want to hire your old brougham," I said. "But we don't want anything else."

"I don't rightly understand you," said Mr. Biggin.

"We want the brougham only—we're not requiring a horse," I explained.

"No hoss?" asked Mr. Biggin, scratching his head. "I reckon you're havin' one of your jokes, Master Nipper. What'll be the good of the old brougham without a hoss? That don't seem right to me."

I took the old chap's arm.

"It's this way, Mr. Biggin," I said. "We're willing to pay you your own price for the hire of the brougham for a couple of hours. We're expecting a new master, and our plan is to meet him at the station, and to pull him through the village—in a kind of triumphal entry."

"Oh, I see—I see!" said Mr. Biggin, nodding. "You boys allus was up to them sort of tricks. Well, you can have the brougham with pleasure—and I won't charge ye much, seeing that you won't have no horse. But if you do any damage, I'll call upon ye to pay it. I know what ye boys are!"

"I don't think we shall do any damage," I said. "But, of course, there's no telling. If we scrape any paint, or do anything of that sort, we'll pay up. In fact, we'll leave a deposit, if you like—"

"No; I won't have that," said Mr. Biggin. "I can trust ye all right, young gents. I suppose ye'll be wantin' the keb for the seven o'clock train?"

"Yes; but we want it now."

"Why, there's over forty minutes—"

"Exactly, but we want to make a few preparations," I explained. "Now, then, you fellows, put your shoulders to it. We'll take her up to the station yard, and make our preparations there."

My five companions worked with a will, and the old brougham was run out of the livery stable and up into the

station yard. All was quiet, and there was little fear of us being interrupted in our work.

"We haven't got much time," I said briskly; "and it's going to be a ticklish piece of work. Have you got those fuses, Tommy?"

"Yards of 'em," said Watson.

"And the cannon crackers?"

"Yes."

"And the squibs?"

"They're all handy," said Pitt. "We've got two or three electric torches, too, so we shall have plenty of light without any risk of the fireworks going off. Who's going to do the grovelling?"

"Leave that to me," I said.

A rug was fetched off the box in front, and laid underneath the brougham. Then I got down, and commenced work. The idea was quite simple. We were going to smother the brougham with fireworks—all of them unseen, of course—and they would go off at the most unexpected moment.

Somebody suggested that we should fix crackers in the interior, but I was against this.

The jape would be quite good enough with the fireworks outside. It wouldn't be playing the game to ignite crackers in such a confined space.

It didn't take me long to get busy.

First of all a few dozen yards of string was used up, crossed and criss-crossed along the bottom of the brougham, and from axle to axle. And on these strings were hung the fireworks, a safe distance apart.

The most difficult task of all was to fix the fuses, for my idea was to use one match only. The end of the fuse would be at the rear of the cab. When ignited, the spark would run along in various directions, letting off the fireworks in a continuous stream.

The whole show, according to my calculations, would last about three minutes. But those three minutes would be closely packed with excitement. The cannon crackers were enormous things, and sounded like big guns when they went off.

I fixed everything so that no damage would be done to the brougham, for we didn't want to pay compensation afterwards to Mr. Biggin. All round the sides of the vehicle I placed Roman candles in dozens.

It was rather a task to fix these securely, so that they remained upright. But it was done. Another fuse was fixed leading to the top of the brougham, round which was placed a complete square of different coloured flares.

The sight, when all that lot of fireworks went off, was likely to be impressive. And we chuckled hugely as we anticipated the scene.

"Quarter to seven," I said at last. "Hart will be bringing the crowd down soon, and then we shall be all ready."

Seven minutes later I had completed the task. Watson and the others had helped me with a will, and it was certain that the fireworks would go off as planned. The fuses were good, and the air was dry and crisp.

"It'll be like a set-piece at the Crystal Palace!" grinned Handforth. "I'm quite ready to admit, Nipper, that this idea is good. I couldn't have thought of anything better myself."

"Go hon!" I grinned.

"Of course, I should have thought of it sooner or later——"

"Rather later than sooner, I expect," put in Watson. "You'd have thought of it about next July, Handy——Hallo! I hear the sound of approaching footsteps. The crowd is coming!"

The crowd came—fully twenty Removites, a sprinkling of Fifth Formers, and a number of reckless fags. The word had got about that something was to happen, and the fellows didn't want to miss it.

"Listen to me, you chaps," I shouted. "The train's signalled, and she'll be here in a minute or two. Nobody's to breathe a word about the faze, or everything will be ruined."

"We'll keep mum!"

"See that you do," I said warningly. "Leave the jawing to me, and at the

word from me help to shove the old bus through the village. I expect the chap'll be a rotter——"

"He can't help being with a name like that!" grinned Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we want to give him a royal welcome at the station here," I went on. "We'll cheer him to the echo, and make him think that everything is rosy. The shock will come later on, when we get through the village."

"Good!"

"Here comes the train!"

A good many of us passed through the booking-office on to the platform. And there we waited for the arrival of the new Housemaster. We didn't know what he would be like, but we could guess.

And he was destined to receive quite a warm reception.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Mr. Wrott's Arrival

HISS—SS!

The train pulled up against the platform with a jarring of brakes and a hissing of steam. Only two doors opened. One was that of a third-class compartment, and an old lady with a market-bag emerged.

The other door belonged to a first-class compartment, and two figures stepped out upon the platform. One of them was recognised at once, and a gasp of something very much like dismay passed over the crowd.

"The Head!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"We didn't know he'd be here!"

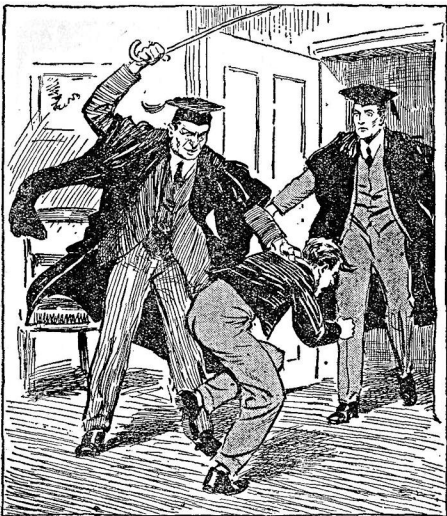
"It doesn't make any difference!" I said. "It's all the better; in fact, he'll probably ride up to the school in the brougham, and we shall get the two of 'em! Let it go!"

"Three cheers for our new Housemaster!" roared the crowd.

"Welcome to Mr. Wrott!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Howard Martin and his com-



"Yaroooh!" yelled Handforth. "Ow! You—you cad!" Slash! Slash! Again and again the stick descended, the tyrant headmaster not being particular as to where the blows struck. "Stop that, Mr. Martin!" The exclamation came from the doorway, as Nelson Lee, the detective-school-master looked in the study.

panion paused and regarded the juniors uncertainly. The Head was frowning darkly, and his harsh face wore an impatient, angry expression.

"What does this mean?" he shouted.

"Go away!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go away at once!" roared the Head. "How dare you cause this disturbance?"

"We've come to give Mr. Wrott a welcome, sir!" I yelled. "He's our new Housemaster, and we're going to take him up to the school in style. No offence, sir—only a little welcome!"

"I will inquire into this affair later," said the Head sourly. "I suspect that you are all breaking bounds. If so, you will be punished. For the moment, I suppose, I must allow you to continue this absurdity."

"That will be best, sir; that will certainly be best," said Mr. Wrott. "I am honoured, I am sure. I hardly expected to be welcomed so—er—so royally. I am certainly honoured!"

I had been taking a good look at Mr. Wrott, and I cannot say that he impressed me particularly. He was a tallish man, with rounded shoulders—so rounded, in fact, that he seemed to possess a perpetual stoop. His head projected from his body like some evil hawk.

His face was dark and sallow, his nose was prominent, and he possessed protruding teeth, which did not add greatly to his appearance. Big spectacles adorned his face, and he seemed altogether repulsive. He would probably prove to be a worthy henchman of the bullying headmaster.

But we had come to cheer him—and we cheered.

"This way, sir!"

"The brougham's waiting!"

"Everything's ready!"

The two masters passed through the booking-office, and paused uncertainly when they saw the horseless brougham. The Head would probably have refused to enter the vehicle, but Mr. Wrott played nicely into our hands.

"I understand!" he exclaimed. "All this is most ridiculous and childish, but I suppose we must humour the boys, sir. They have evidently taken considerable trouble, and we don't want to disappoint them."

They entered the cab, and I sighed with relief.

"Good!" murmured Pitt. "They're in for it now! I thought we were going to be diddled for one awful minute. There'll be a terrible row about this later on, you know. The Head'll go dotty—"

"Let him!" I interrupted. "He can't do much to us at the worst. And it'll be worth a flogging."

"Begad! Rather!"

Several juniors had rushed to close the doors. And, at the same time, they were locked, so that the occupants would not be able to make a dash out when the fun started. We wanted to make sure of this.

"Hurrah!"

"Clear the way for the latest arrival!"

The juniors yelled with all their strength, and the journey commenced. I was at the back of the brougham, ready to ignite the fuses at the right moment. And the vehicle careered along at considerable speed, rattling and jolting along the road.

People in the village turned out of their cottages and shops to see what all the excitement was about. They were highly amused, but they had no idea of what was to come later on.

We left the village behind, and were now on the lonely stretch of road which led up to the school.

"Now's the time!" said Pitt.

"Yes; we're just off," I replied.

"Keep on pushing. The cab's got to continue its journey all the time. You know what's coming, so you won't be startled. The crackers underneath won't hurt anybody."

I struck one of those coloured matches which are called Bengal lights. A red flare followed, and it lasted quite long enough for me to ignite the lower



fuse. A second match ignited the other fuse.

They spluttered along the strings, and we waited rather anxiously. Everything depended upon the success of the fuses. Meanwhile, we continued pushing and pulling, and the two masters within the brougham were still ignorant of the coming surprise.

"I must be allowed to remark, Mr. Martin, that I hardly expected the boys to give me such a welcome as this," exclaimed Mr. Wrott. "From your description of them, I gathered that they were quite ruffianly in their behaviour."

The Head grunted.

"I think I can guess why they are so effusive to-night," he said sourly. "They are all Ancient House boys, and you will have complete control of them, Mr. Wrott. Naturally, they want to get into your good books."

"Huh! Perhaps that is the explanation!" said Mr. Wrott. "I will bear it in mind—"

Ba—a—a—ng!

A terrific report sounded right underneath Mr. Wrott's feet, and he jumped. "Good—good heavens!" he gasped.

"What—what was that?"

Bang! Crash! Bang!

"The infernal young hounds!" raved the Head. "They are having the utter audacity to ignite fireworks—"

Bang! Bang!

The explosions were truly terrific, and it sounded as though the brougham would be torn to pieces by the very force of the reports. But it still continued its way, and the "horses" showed no signs of slackening speed.

The Head wrenched at the door-handle.

"Upon my soul!" he roared. "We are locked in!"

"Locked in!" gasped Mr. Wrott. "How—how dreadful!"

The Head projected his head through the window opening.

"Boys!" he thundered. "Open this door at once—at once!"

Nobody seemed to hear him, and at that second there was a terrific roar and a blaze of light. Sparks flew up by the thousand from half a dozen Roman candles, and the Head jerked himself back sharply. His face was a study.

"Somebody shall suffer for this!" he snarled. "We are helpless, Mr. Wrott; we can do nothing until this—this outrage comes to an end. The boys shall learn that I am not to be treated with such amazing impudence!"

"It is—it is disgraceful—appalling!" said Mr. Wrott sourly.

By this time the carriage had nearly reached the school, and the firework display was in full swing. Crowds of fellows lined the walls of the Triangle, watching the progress of the flaming coach.

For that is what it actually was.

From a distance, the brougham presented a most imposing spectacle. Coloured stars were shooting up from the Roman candles; silver and golden spray showered down in myriads of sparks. And the whole top of the vehicle was a lurid blaze of coloured flares.

Yet I had arranged all the fireworks so that no harm could be done to anybody or anything. Mr. Wrott and the Head were imprisoned in their flaming chariot, and they could do nothing but glare out of the windows helplessly.

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

Everybody was yelling, and the laughter was general. A hundred yards from the gates the brougham was brought to a standstill, and left there. And every junior, myself included, streaked to the walls and climbed over.

I had unlocked one of the doors, on the quiet, before scotting. And by the time the prisoners found out that freedom was theirs, the road was absolutely deserted and the fireworks were giving their last flicker.

"I am amazed," said the Head harshly. "I am astounded that the boys could have dared to play such an

audacious trick. The ringleaders shall suffer with the utmost severity!"

"I agree with you, sir; I agree heartily!" said Mr. Wrott. "It will give me great pleasure to see the young rascals flogged without mercy. We have been insulted—grossly insulted. You were quite right when you described the boys as hooligans, for they are little better!"

"Come with me, Mr. Wrott," said the Head. "We will deal with this matter at once."

They marched up the road and entered the school, and went direct to Mr. Martin's study.

"I intend to visit the junior school at once," said the Head. "Every boy who took part in that outrage shall be given eight strokes with the cane. Furthermore, every boy shall be sent to bed at once——"

"Pardon me, sir——"

"Well?"

"I was thinking that perhaps——" Mr. Wrott paused, and peered at the Head curiously through his glasses. "Perhaps it would be as well if I dealt with the boys personally," he added.

"No, Mr. Wrott, I do not agree."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Wrott, in an oily manner which was peculiarly his own. "I was only thinking that as I am the new Housemaster, it would be fitting if I dealt with this case on my own account. I can assure you that I shall deal with them severely—perhaps more severely than you would yourself."

The Head considered.

"Very well," he said at last, "no doubt you are right, Mr. Wrott. You will have an opportunity of establishing your authority at once. Go immediately, and punish the boys as you think fit. I shall know what you have done afterwards—and I shall be able to judge your capabilities."

Mr. Wrott smiled, and rubbed his hands together.

"You will not be disappointed, sir," he said; "you will certainly not be disappointed."

He took his departure, and the Head sat down at his desk. He seemed to value Mr. Wrott's capabilities with regard to punishing the boys far more than his scholastic attainments.

And while that little discussion had been going on, Mr. Crowell had been performing one of his duties—to be exact, presiding over the Remove during prep. Prep was no longer allowed in the juniors' studies.

The Form-master could not help noticing the grimy condition of many of the boys. He could not help being aware of the fact that some of the fellows were breathless and hot.

But Mr. Crowell was a sport. He said nothing, and appeared to be oblivious of the unusual conditions. Previous to Mr. Martin's arrival, the Remove had regarded Mr. Crowell as a bit of a "beast." He was always so severe, they reckoned. But Mr. Crowell had changed of late. He had probably felt that it was up to him to offset the Head's harshness to a certain degree by leniency on his own part.

"Now, boys, we will get on with our work," he said genially. "You are aware, of course, that Mr. Wrott has arrived——"

"Oh, yes, sir! We're aware of that!" grinned Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must now confine yourselves to the work in hand," said Mr. Crowell gently.

The juniors were as quiet as mice, and work proceeded smoothly for perhaps five minutes. Then the door opened and Mr. Simpson Wrott made his appearance.

"This," I whispered, "is where the band begins to play!"

## CHAPTER 15.

### An Able Understudy!

MR. WROTT looked quite imposing. He was now attired in a flowing gown, and everybody regarded him

with interest. His hawklike face was inscrutable, but there was a certain sinister expression about it which boded ill for the Remove.

"I find it necessary to introduce myself to you, Mr. Crowell," said the new Housemaster. "And I'm afraid that my visit just now is not a particularly pleasant one. I have come to discover the identity of certain boys who instigated a particularly outrageous plot against Mr. Martin and myself."

Mr. Crowell raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed.

"The headmaster and myself were trapped in a brougham smothered with fireworks. I require you to point out to me the boys who are most likely to have been the ringleaders in the disgraceful affair."

The Remove waited breathlessly.

"I am sorry, but I certainly cannot oblige you in that respect," said Mr. Crowell. "I have not the slightest idea who the ringleaders may be, and it will be very difficult for us to discover them."

"Twaddle, sir—twaddle!" rapped out Mr. Wrott. "You will kindly leave this room. I wish to deal with these boys myself. The headmaster has left the matter in my hands, and I shall deal with it."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Crowell tartly.

He swept out of the room, and the Remove looked somewhat dismayed. I nudged Tregellis-West and make a wry grimace.

"This is where we get it!" I whispered.

"In the neck, dear old boy," replied Sir Montie sadly.

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Wrott abruptly. "What is your name?"

Tregellis-West looked up, rather startled, and found that the new Housemaster was pointing an accusing finger at him. He rose in his place.

"My name is Tregellis-West, sir," he said.

"Very good, Tregellis-West," snapped

Mr. Wrott. "You will write me three hundred lines for daring to whisper in my presence. I shall require the lines before you go to bed to-night!"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie.

"What! What did you say?"

"I said 'begad,' sir—quite an unconscious exclamation," said Sir Montie. "I was so frightfully astonished at receiving three hundred lines for merely whisperin'."

Mr. Wrott scowled.

"That is sufficient!" he shouted. "Sit down, boy—no, remain standing!"

"Begad!" said Tregellis-West, bobbing up and down.

"Do not use that absurd expression in my hearing," said Mr. Wrott. "I have told you to remain standing because you are one of the boys who took an active part in the brougham outrage. My eyesight, I may tell you, is quite keen, and I have a remarkably good memory for faces."

Mr. Wrott looked over the Remove keenly. His eyes were like gimlets, and they seemed to bore their way through every junior in turn. Mr. Wrott nodded to himself occasionally, and his sinister face broke into a curious smile.

"Yes, I think so—I certainly think I am right!" he said, as though talking to himself. "You, boy, stand up! And you! And you! And you! Stand up all of you! Yes, you as well, boy!"

His finger pointed to seven or eight juniors in turn. They included myself, Watson, Handforth, Pitt, De Valerie and Hart. I was quite astonished, for I could not imagine how Mr. Wrott had picked upon us so easily. He certainly had an eagle eye to have remembered us all so well.

"Exactly," he said. "Ah! You were the boys who took the principal parts in the outrage I have referred to. Do not dare to utter a word of denial!"

"But, dash it all, sir, it was only a joke," protested Handforth.

"Boy, what is your name?" shouted Mr. Wrott.

"Handforth, sir."

"Very good, Handforth, I shall give

you three extra cuts with the cane for daring to address me," said the Housemaster. "I want everybody here to understand that I intend to maintain discipline and order in this House. I will put up with no nonsense—and my punishments will be severe for every offence. Follow me—the eight of you!"

He stalked to the door, and there was nothing to do but to obey, although some of the fellows were feeling decidedly rebellious. Nobody would have objected to a hundred lines or so, but it seemed that Mr. Wrott was to inflict an exceedingly harsh punishment.

We followed him to his study, and I noticed that some of the fellows were tenderly rubbing their hands in anticipation of the coming chastisement. It was certain to be brutal.

Mr. Wrott closed the door after we had entered, and we were lined up in a row before his desk.

"For your outrageous conduct towards your headmaster and myself I shall inflict a severe punishment," said Mr. Wrott in his oily voice. "I am inclined to be merciful with you. But you have been guilty of a very grave offence—"

"But, sir——" began Jack Grey.

"One word, boy, and I shall lose my temper with you," snapped the Housemaster. "I will not be interrupted. Do you hear?"

Everybody was silent.

"You are the ringleaders," went on Mr. Wrott. "The whole Remove will be punished, of course; it will be sent to bed without supper, and half an hour earlier than usual. But you boys are the actual culprits. You will each receive eight cuts with the cane, and will each write me five hundred lines!"

"Oh!"

"Great pip!"

"Begad!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Wrott savagely. "How—how dare you!"

"But such a punishment is terribly harsh, sir," I protested. "Even the Head wouldn't agree to that! I don't think it's fair——"

"One more word, boy, and I will knock you down!" raved the Housemaster. "You will receive ten cuts instead of eight. Now! You shall be the first, Handforth. Stand forward!"

Handforth clenched his fists, and for a moment I thought that he was going to resist. But he didn't. He stepped forward and held out his hand. It was impossible to defy the Housemaster openly.

Mr. Wrott swished his cane wickedly. It was a long, painful-looking cane, and Mr. Wrott's arm was large and muscular. It was evident that he was about to "lay it on" with all his strength.

"Now, Handforth!" said Mr. Wrott sternly.

Swish!

The cane descended with terrific force.

"Now the other hand!" snarled Mr. Wrott.

Swish, swish!

The eight cuts were delivered, and we expected to see Handforth collapsing. But he bore it bravely. He held his hand steadily, and received the cuts without flinching.

"Wait!" snapped Mr. Wrott. "I promised you three extra cuts for addressing me in the Form-room. Hold out your hand again!"

Swish, swish, swish!

Mr. Wrott paused, panting for breath. We regarded Handforth anxiously, and with a certain amount of wonder. He bore the pain extremely well, by the look of him. But Handy was just that sort. I judged that he was screwing himself up to keep his true feelings to himself.

"Now, sir, it is your turn!" snapped Mr. Wrott.

He pointed at me, and I stepped forward, holding out my hand. The Housemaster regarded me malevolently, and raised the cane.

Swish!

It descended with full strength, and I held my breath in readiness for the stinging agony. But, amazingly enough,

my hand hardly tingled. The second and third blows were the same! The cuts, although delivered with all Mr. Wrott's strength, scarcely hurt me.

No wonder Handforth had been so brave over it! Mr. Wrott's muscular strength was evidently slight—for he appeared to be laying it on with vicious energy. The ten cuts left me unharmed; my palms were just tingling, but in no way tender. I was quite thunderstruck.

And I saw by the expressions on the faces of the other victims that they were being treated in the same way. The terrific caning, in fact, was turning out to be a bit of a farce.

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Wrott at last, flinging the cane down. "That will be a lesson to you, I trust. You will go back to the Form-room without delay, and you will write me five hundred lines each. Furthermore, I require the lines to be finished this evening, before you go to bed. Go!"

"But we can't do them in time, sir—"

"Silence, boy!" snarled Mr. Wrott. "Do not presume to argue with me! Another word, and I will give you another caning. Go, and if those lines are not completed before bed-time, I shall double the imposition!"

We trooped out of the study without another word. Nobody was afraid of a few cuts of the cane, but we certainly didn't want to write a thousand lines. Five hundred were five hundred too many.

When we reached the Form-room we found that the others had been dismissed by Mr. Crowell, prep being over. A few Removites, however, were hanging about for us to return.

"What's the verdict?" asked McClure sympathetically.

"Did you catch it hot?" inquired Church.

"My dear kids, Wrott doesn't know how to cane a fly!" said Handforth. "He must be as weak as a rat—although he certainly doesn't look it. He

used all his giddy strength, and yet he didn't hurt any of us."

"It's more than I can understand, you know," I said slowly. "One might have thought that the chap did it on purpose—just to spare us. But that's rot, of course."

De Valerie grunted.

"Well, there's no getting out of the five hundred lines," he said. "We've got to do them, haven't we? He can't lay lines on lightly! The rotter! Giving us an impot like that absolutely for nothing!"

"We shall have to get busy on the work if it's to be finished to-night," I said quickly. "Talking won't do any good, will it? We ought to think ourselves lucky to be able to hold our pens steady!"

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie. "I was wonderin' how it would be possible to write lines with throbbin' hands, old boy. But my hands are quite comfortable—they are, really."

We lost no time in sitting at our desks and getting ready. And then the laborious task of writing five hundred lines commenced. There would certainly be no freedom for us that night. Every second of our time would be occupied. Mr. Wrott had commenced his duties in the Ancient House by getting himself thoroughly hated.

We had been at work in the Form-room for perhaps ten minutes, when the door opened, and a cough sounded. I looked up sharply.

Mr. Wrott himself had entered.

"Ah! You have completed the lines?" he asked harshly. "Quite good—quite good! Yes, these will do, my boy. They are somewhat slovenly, but I will let that pass. Yes, you may go."

Handforth, whose lines Mr. Wrott had picked up, looked surprised.

"I may go, sir?" he repeated blankly. "Yes, boy."

"But I've only done twenty——"

"How dare you argue with me!" roared Mr. Wrott. "Leave this room at once, Handforth. Go! You have done your lines, but that does not mean

to say that you shall insult me to my face. Leave the room!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Handforth.

He was only too glad to escape.

Mr. Wroth next gave his attention to Reginald Pitt's efforts. Pitt had written about fifteen lines so far, and Mr. Wroth picked them up and examined them, and then nodded approval.

"These will do admirably," he said.

"Boy, you may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Pitt joyfully.

Mr. Wroth treated us all the same. Either he was eccentric, or dotty. His manner was harsh in the extreme, and to argue with him was rather dangerous. But it was remarkable that he should give us five hundred lines, and then be perfectly satisfied with a mere fifteen or twenty!

"I can't understand the beggar," exclaimed Watson, as he walked down the passage. "He seems to be a regular beast. But what's the idea of letting us off like this? He seemed to think that we'd done the whole five hundred! Anyhow, he didn't mention anything about doing any more."

"He was satisfied with what we'd done, so I don't see there's any reason for us to worry our heads," I said. "If he asks for the rest I suppose we shall have to do them. But he told us to clear out, so he can't grumble."

"The chap's a rotter," said Hart grimly. "There's no doubt about that at all."

I looked thoughtful.

"I'm not quite so sure about that," I said slowly.

"Eh?"

"Well, just look at the facts," I went on. "It's as plain as daylight that the Head was going to punish us for the jape. But Mr. Wroth intervened, and decided to deal with the matter himself. He caned us, but it didn't do us much harm, did it?"

"Well, no!"

"He gave us lines, and was satisfied with a mere handful," I continued. "The punishment he ordered was harsh and unreasonable. But the punishment

we have actually received has been light. Don't forget that. According to positive results, Mr. Wroth has treated us fairly well. He's a bit of a mystery."

"He is!" agreed Hart.

And most of the fellows were inclined to be of the same opinion.

Mr. Simpson Wroth was an able understudy of the Head—at least, it would appear so from his manner. But actions spoke louder than words. So far as we could see at present, his bark was decidedly worse than his bite.

After he had left the Form-room he went straight to the headmaster's study, and presented himself to Mr. Martin, his eyes glittering in a self-satisfied manner behind his big glasses.

"Well, sir, I have dealt with the culprits as they deserved," he said.

"Oh, indeed!" said the Head. "I am pleased to hear that, Mr. Wroth. How many boys did you actually punish?"

"Eight, sir—the ringleaders," said the new Housemaster. "I singled them out, took them to my study, and administered eight strokes of the cane to each boy. On the top of that I imposed a sentence of five hundred lines."

The Head nodded.

"Quite right, Mr. Wroth—quite right," he said. "Considering the nature of the offence, the punishment was by no means severe. I am quite pleased with the way in which you have commenced your duties. But I would have you remember that the whole Remove must be punished. It is not sufficient to make an example of the ringleaders."

"I agree, sir—I agree entirely," said Mr. Wroth. "I propose that the Remove be sent up to bed without delay—immediately, in fact. No boy will be allowed to partake of supper, and lights will be extinguished by me within fifteen minutes, instead of the usual half-hour."

"Yes, that is quite a good suggestion," said the Head. "You will please put it into effect, Mr. Wroth. In my opinion, the Remove is the most refrac-

tory Form of all, and we must therefore deal with it severely. Once the boys thoroughly understand that my word is law, they will be cowed."

Mr. Wrott nodded, and departed.

Five minutes later the news was general in the Remove that everybody was to go to bed forthwith—supperless. It was not at all a welcome discovery—but there was nothing to be done.

It only remained to obey the order. And the Remove, with feelings which were too deep for words, trooped up to the dormitory—hungry, rebellious, but helpless.

# CHAPTER 16.

## Not Such a Bad Sort!

"SHAMEFUL!"

"We're treated like a lot of slaves!"

"And we won't stand it!"

"Rather not!"

"Yes; but we are standing it, aren't we?" said Handforth bitterly. "You can call it shameful, and you can say we won't stand it. But what's the position? It's this! We're taking everything lying down! We're taking everything meekly, without lifting a finger! I call it absolutely rotten!"

"My dear Handy, the time isn't ripe for us to lift any finger yet," I said. "Don't make the mistake of acting prematurely. There have been many instances of boys revolting against the masters of Public schools. But how many times have the boys succeeded?"

"How do I know?"

"That's just it," I went on. "In almost every instance the boys have been beaten by the masters—they have been compelled to surrender ignominiously. And why?"

"Because they were weak, I suppose," said Handforth; "because they hadn't a proper case."

"Not at all," I said. "The reason, in practically every instance, was the same. The boys failed simply because they acted too hastily; because they revolted on the spur of the moment. The

natural result was that the masters were able to bring them to their senses in next to no time. If we revolt now, straightaway, we shall be in the same position. Our only course is to wait for a bit, and see how things go on."

"And put up with the Head's rot in the meantime?"

"Yes," I said. "It's the only way. Once we've really rebelled—if it ever does come to that—we shall be able to wipe off old scores. For example, we can pay Wrott back for packing us off to bed like this without any supper. It's not the kind of thing that will make Mr. Wrott popular."

"He's a beast!" said Hubbard flatly.

"Yes, rather."

"And we won't stand him for long

"Shurrup!" hissed Owen major. "He's coming!"

The door opened abruptly, and Mr. Simpson Wrott made his appearance. He glared round the dormitory, and strode into the room. His expression was not at all amiable. He snorted as he looked round.

"What is the meaning of this?" he rapped out savagely.

"The meaning of which, sir?" I asked.

"Why are you not in bed?" snarled Mr. Wrott. "Ten minutes ago I left you here, and there are many boys who are still only partially undressed. Do you require the whole night to remove your clothing? Get into bed at once!"

"We're generally allowed half an hour, sir," said Nicodemus Trotwood.

Mr. Wrott shook his hands fiercely.

"I don't care what you are allowed!" he bellowed. "That is nothing to the point. I have allowed you ten minutes—quite sufficient time. But those boys who are still out of bed will find it necessary to finish their undressing in the dark. I intend to extinguish the lights now."

Mr. Wrott thereupon walked to the switch, and next moment the dormitory was plunged into darkness.

"And remember!" his voice rasped

out of the darkness. "If I hear any disturbance from this dormitory I shall return with the cane. I intend to have submission, and I shall subdue you sooner or later."

Slam!

The door closed, and we heard Mr. Wrott's footsteps passing down the corridor. A murmur of voices broke out.

"It's a bit thick, the light being turned off at this time," said Pitt. "I'm not half undressed!"

"Same here," said De Valerie. "Can't we turn the light on again?"

"No; it's a patent switch, as you know," I said. "We can easily finish undressing in the dark. Mr. Wrott seems to be a very amiable gentleman, my sons," I said satirically.

"Oh, yes!" snapped Handforth. "If he's like that on his first night, what the dickens will he be like after a week? Great pip! We shall all be lunatics by then!"

"You're one now," remarked somebody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who said that?" demanded Handforth grimly. "By George, I'll wipe up the giddy floor with you——"

"Steady on, my son," I interrupted. "Don't forget what Mr. Wrott said. If there's any disturbance he'll return with a cane!"

"Let him," said Handforth. "I'm not afraid of his rotten cane! He can't swipe for nuts. I want to know who called me a lunatic. I believe it was Owen major——"

"Well, you can believe something else," said Owen major. "I didn't call you anything—although I'm quite ready to oblige. The chap who called you a lunatic knew what he was talking about!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Oh, dry up, Handy," interrupted Church. "I want to talk about something else. Did anybody see if Mr. Wrott took that parcel out with him?"

"Parcel?" I asked. "What parcel?"

"Didn't you see it?" said Church. "I'm near the door, and I saw it all

right. When he came in he was carrying a whacking great brown-paper parcel. He put it down by the door, but I don't believe he took it away."

"You've been dreaming," said Handforth.

"Rats! I saw it plainly."

"By jingo, he's right!" exclaimed McClure. "There's a parcel here, just against the wall. It's only loosely wrapped up——"

"Don't open it," I said. "It's not our parcel, you ass. Mr. Wrott may have forgotten it, and he'll be back presently."

"Yes, but——" McClure paused and sniffed. "I—I can smell something good!" he added. "I believe it's grub——"

"Grub!" gasped Fatty Little, rolling out of bed. "Where?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who said grub?" demanded the fat boy. "I'm famished, you know! I haven't eaten a bite since seven o'clock—and then I only had half a loaf with some sardines, and half a dozen dough-nuts and three or four tarts, and a currant cake!"

"Is that all?" I asked. "It's a wonder you're still alive!"

"McClure said something about grub——"

"Yes, and I meant it," said McClure. "I say, you chaps, this is rather queer. You know! This parcel is full of tuck!"

"Great Scott!"

"Let's have a look!"

"Open it!"

Everybody was hungry, having been sent to bed without supper—and a crowd soon collected round McClure and the parcel. It was soon wrenched open, and the juniors tried to see it in the gloom.

"Hasn't anybody got a match?" asked Handforth tartly.

"We don't want matches," mumbled Fatty Little. "I've found something good without a light! This beef-patty is tophole——"

"Clear off, you fat bounder!" roared



Handforth. "I'm blessed if the porpoise isn't scoffing everything before we can see!"

"My hat!" said McClure. "What's this? A candle! Three candles, in fact! They were in the parcel!"

A match was struck by somebody, and two of the candles were lit. Then we were able to gaze upon the contents of the parcel. It was a very large one, and it contained a large supply of good things—cakes, pastry, sandwiches, and all sorts of appetising eatables. There were the three candles, and nothing else. Just the grub and the candles. What could it mean?"

"Gimme one of those sandwiches!" said Handforth hungrily.

He took one, and munched it with great relish. I took one, also, and found it to be excellent. Before a minute had elapsed, every fellow in the dormitory was helping to demolish the good things.

"But just fancy old Wrott leaving the stuff here!" said Watson. "I—I can't make it out, you know!"

"I suppose he was going to have a feed in his bed-room, the glutton," said Handforth. "That's the only explanation, anyhow. Who ever heard of a Housemaster carrying great parcels of food about?"

"To say nothing of candles," I put in. "He wouldn't want candles in his own room, would he?"

"By George, no!" said Handforth. "What are you getting at?"

"Mr. Wrott knew that we should be in darkness once he'd gone," I replied. "He knew that we were all hungry, and I'm not going to believe that a man could forget a parcel of that size."

"But—but——"

"Mr. Wrott left the parcel here deliberately."

"Eh?"

"It's the only explanation," I said. "The Housemaster took pity on us, and brought that grub up. But he wants to make out that it was accidental; or, rather, a piece of forgetfulness. He

knew that we should investigate as soon as he'd gone."

Many of the juniors were sceptical.

"Oh, that's sheer rot," said Owen major. "Wrott is a beast; we all know that. He wouldn't do such a thing, Nipper. He's a rotter——"

"Is he?" I said. "I'm not so sure about it, my son."

"Not sure?"

"No, I'm not," I declared. "What has he done that's been rotten? He caned eight of us—and laid it on so lightly that we hardly felt it. He gave us five hundred lines—and was satisfied with about twenty. He sent us up to bed without supper—and took good care that a supply of grub was here."

"It looks rummy, I must say," admitted Pitt.

"His voice is harsh, and his manner is harsh, but he never hurts anybody," I went on. "It seems to me that it's a pose, put on especially for Martin's benefit. Mr. Wrott wanted this job, and he knew that the only way to get it was to make out that he was stern and severe. By nature he's generous, and he can't reveal his character openly. That's my idea, anyway."

"Begad! I'm inclined to agree with you, old boy."

"Ah, I feel better now!" said Handforth comfortably. "The grub hasn't lasted long, but it was jolly decent——"

"Look out!" hissed McClure. "He's coming!"

"Eh?"

"Wrott!" breathed McClure.

"Who's talking rot!" snapped Handforth. "You cheeky ass——"

The door opened before the candles could be extinguished, and Mr. Simpson Wrott strode into the dormitory. He gave a bellow of fury as he saw the fellows scuttling to their beds.

"Stop!" he roared. "What is the meaning of this?"

Silence!

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Wrott, in a terrible voice. "How dare you leave your beds in this manner? How dare you light candles, and—and—— Good

gracious me! Upon my soul! Food! The remains of a meal!"

The Housemaster seemed to be horrified, and he looked round with a brow which was black with fury.

"Who is responsible for this?" he snarled. "This—this is amazing! That you should have the audacity to partake of a meal in—in the dormitory is past all understanding."

The Remove remained silent.

"I will not waste time by inquiring how this disgusting state of affairs came into being," went on Mr. Wroth savagely. "I will punish every boy in the dormitory alike. You shall all suffer for this act of unparalleled insubordination!"

"But, sir—" I began.

"Silence, boy!"

"I only wanted to say——"

"Upon my soul!" roared Mr. Wroth. "How dare you speak to me, boy? What is it you want to say?"

I could hardly refrain from grinning at the contradiction.

"Just this, sir," I exclaimed. "We found that parcel in the dormitory, here, and, as we were hungry, we naturally divided up the contents. We thought perhaps that you'd left the parcel——"

"I—I!" shouted the Housemaster.

"What do you mean? How dare you suggest that I left the parcel in here?"

"But you brought it in, sir," put in McClure. "I saw you."

"You saw me!"

Mr. Wroth seemed thunderstruck. And then his frown became heavier, and he uttered a perfect snarl of fury.

"By thunder!" he shouted thickly. "You—you have dared to demolish the contents of the parcel which I inadvertently left in this room? I remember now! I did leave it here. Of course—of course! And you have actually descended to robbery in order to satisfy your craving for food!"

"We didn't have any supper, sir!" growled Handforth.

"Supper—supper!" raved Mr. Wroth.

"Boys of your age want no supper; they are better without it! For this amazingly audacious act you shall be punished doubly as heavy as I first intended. I will have no excuses whatever. Every boy shall be punished. You have dared to interfere with my parcel, and you have also broken all the school rules by partaking of food in your sleeping apartment. I intend to be exceptionally severe, and this shall be an example to you. Every boy in this dormitory will write me ten lines!"

There was no intense silence.

"Did—did you say ten lines, sir?" I repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, boy, I did!" snapped Mr. Wroth.

"Tut—tut—ten!" gasped Handforth. "Is—that all?"

Mr. Wroth laughed sourly.

"You are at liberty to write me ten thousand, if you wish," he said. "However, I have given my orders, and you will be well advised to carry them out. I shall require those lines before this time next week."

And Mr. Wroth, with a swish of his gown, strode out of the dormitory and slammed the door behind him. He had not even ordered the candles to be extinguished.

"Well, my only hat!" said Pitt. "If that doesn't take the bun!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"It's amazin', old boy!"

"There's no doubt about it that my surmise was pretty nearly the truth," I said. "Mr. Wroth is an exceedingly peculiar gentleman. He makes a chap feel that he's 'for it,' and then he does nothing. Ten lines each. Well, it's no punishment at all, and we haven't got to hand them in until next week. That's what he gives us after we've pinched about two quids' worth of grub."

"Dash it all! The chap's a good sort," said Watson bluntly. "He may bark at us and rave, and all the rest of it, but he's jolly decent!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the Remove settled down to

sleep, feeling quite comfortable and cheerful. The only fellows who made no attempt to doze off were Handforth and Church and McClure. They, it appeared, had some little scheme on.

## CHAPTER 17.

## A Surprise for Dr. Brett!

**M**R. SIMPSON WROTT, meanwhile, was seated in the big armchair in his study. A cheerful fire burned in the grate, and a big cigar reposed in Mr. Wrott's mouth. Alone, he did not look quite so forbidding.

For the frown had vanished from his face, and if anybody had been there they would probably have noticed a kind of twinkle in Mr. Wrott's eyes. The new Housemaster was certainly something of a mystery.

He was idly scanning the pages of an evening newspaper, and he had just laid it aside when the door opened, without warning, to admit Mr. Howard Martin. The Head nodded curtly.

"You will be going to bed soon, Mr. Wrott?" he asked.

"I trust so, sir—I trust so," said the Housemaster.

"I hope you have succeeded in getting acquainted with your new surroundings," went on the Head. "How are you getting on with the boys? It is necessary to be very harsh with them in order to keep them in check. I presume you have carried out my instructions regarding that point?"

Mr. Wrott shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you not heard me?" he inquired. "I'm aware of the fact that my voice is not gentle, and you must surely have heard—"

"Yes, Mr. Wrott, I have heard you," interrupted the Head. "But talking to the boys is not sufficient. You must cane them; you must give punishments frequently. It is the only way to subdue them and get them completely under control."

"You may leave it safely to me, sir," said Mr. Wrott. "Have no fear on that point. I will get the boys under my control even if I am obliged to cane them every day and three times a day!"

"That is the right spirit, Mr. Wrott," said the Head, nodding. "A man who is gentle is utterly useless where boys are concerned. The junior boys are naturally more untractable than the seniors. We must therefore concentrate our efforts particularly upon the Remove."

"That is what I have always understood," said the Housemaster. "I take it that you are now going out, Mr. Martin?"

The Head looked up sharply.

"For a stroll in the Triangle—nothing more!" he said quickly. "I generally take a stroll before turning in. Good-night, Mr. Wrott!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The Head, who was attired in a big overcoat and a cap, took his departure, closing the door after him. Mr. Wrott sat for a second quite still. There was a thoughtful expression in his eyes.

"Remarkable!" he murmured. "H'm! Why did Mr. Martin make such a point of telling me that his stroll would be confined to the Triangle? Rather a significant point, I am inclined to believe. We shall see!"

He rose to his feet, slipped on a cap of his own, and left his study without turning off the electric light. And the Head, passing through the Triangle, had no indication that Mr. Wrott had departed from his study, for his window still gleamed brightly in the darkness.

But Mr. Wrott was not quite so inactive as the Head imagined. He was, in point of fact, only about two hundred yards in Mr. Martin's rear, as the latter gentleman made his way down the lane in the direction of the village.

The new Housemaster's surmise was correct, it seemed. The Head had not confined his walk to the Triangle. And,

for some reason best known to himself, Mr. Wrott seemed considerably interested in the headmaster's movements.

At all events, he was following the Head down the lane in a stealthy manner. He did not allow himself to be seen.

Mr. Wrott's interest became greatly increased when he saw the Head turn off half-way to the village, and make his way along a footpath across the meadows. Mr. Wrott wondered where on earth the Head could be making for.

But it was not long before he discovered the truth.

After the two men had progressed for a distance of perhaps a mile, the gaunt outline of a quaint, old ruin came into view. It was the ancient remains of Belton Abbey, an old building which had been in ruins for hundreds of years.

It was one of the local objects of interest, and in the summer time visitors were fairly common. Painters were particularly keen on transferring the abbey on to canvas, and sightseers came to explore the dungeons and vaults.

But this was a queer time for Mr. Howard Martin to be bent upon exploring the ruin—on a cold December night, at close upon eleven o'clock! What could the Head's real object be?

Mr. Wrott, apparently, was a very curious individual.

He was determined to watch his chief.

And when Mr. Martin vanished into the ruin, the Housemaster crept up like a shadow, and peered through an ivy-grown window. He was just in time to see the Head vanishing down some steep stone steps.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Wrott. "Most interesting!"

He passed into the ruin as silently as a shadow, and he followed the Head down into the depths. Farther and farther the Housemaster descended, until, at length, he found himself in one of the old dungeon passages. Ahead

of him, quite a considerable way, a flickering gleam of light showed itself.

Mr. Martin was walking along the passage, carrying a candle. But where was he off to? That was the interesting question. Mr. Wrott was greatly interested in the fact that the Head had been carrying a well-filled handbag.

Why?

For what reason was the Head bringing a handbag to this lonely, deserted old ruin? Certainly, such a mission did not appear to be quite in keeping with Mr. Martin's position as the headmaster of a great Public school.

And Mr. Wrott was quite keen to learn what the secret could be. It almost seemed as though he had half suspected that the Head would be making such a journey. At all events, he did not appear to be exceedingly surprised at the strange behaviour of Mr. Martin.

He continued on his way along the old tunnel gingerly. The walls were damp—they reeked of moisture, and the atmosphere was by no means pleasant. However, after continuing his way for another hundred yards, he was aware of a change.

The walls became dry, and the air was purer.

Mr. Wrott himself had no light, but he was guided by the gleam in front. And he told himself that he would be quite secure; he could find his way out without difficulty.

The Head was quite unaware of Mr. Wrott's activities, and he did not even suspect that he was being watched. For he never once looked round, and did not pause in his walk.

And then his shadow became aware of the fact that the Head had halted. Mr. Wrott saw that his quarry had turned into an opening, and the light had greatly increased in brilliance. Mr. Wrott stood quite still.

"Dear me!" he murmured softly.

The sound of voices came plainly to his ears!

Mr. Martin was talking with somebody!

This, indeed was an astonishing situation. The headmaster of St. Frank's had penetrated those aged dungeons, and was conversing with another man. Who could the mysterious one be? Obviously no ordinary respectable gentleman. For no such person would dream of meeting Mr. Martin down in those dungeons.

There was something very mysterious and very sinister about the whole business, and Mr. Wrott almost felt inclined to venture further—on the off-chance that he would be able to overhear some of the words which were being spoken.

But he decided not to. He had no wish to be caught red-handed down there—it was not his desire that the Head should discover his curiosity concerning the matter. So he remained still.

After a while the Head appeared in the passage. He held a lantern in his hand.

"Good-night!" Mr. Wrott heard him say.

And then Mr. Martin came striding along the passage. For one tense moment Mr. Wrott believed that he would be discovered. To flee now would be futile, for he would certainly be seen.

There was only one possibility of escaping detection.

Within a yard of Mr. Wrott, and on the other side of the passage, there was a deep recess in the wall. But could he cross the passage and conceal himself without the Head seeing?

It was a problem—but it had to be chanced.

Mr. Wrott stepped across like a shadow, and slipped into the recess—which, he found, was not so deep as he had believed. Mr. Wrott waited, his heart beating rather rapidly.

The Head came up, drew level—and passed by.

"Good!"

Mr. Wrott murmured a sigh of relief, and he breathed more freely once again. He waited for five minutes—until all sounds of Mr. Martin had ceased. The Head, no doubt, had emerged into the open once more.

Mr. Wrott considered that it was now possible for him to make a little examination. He was curious, and he didn't disguise the fact. Pulling out a small electric torch, he switched it on and moved forward along the passage.

Step by step he progressed, slowly and cautiously.

Then, at length, he came to a blank wall. The passage ended abruptly, in a cul-de-sac! There was no opening of any sort to be seen—no doorway, and no entrance to any dungeon.

"H'm! A secret door, no doubt," murmured Mr. Wrott.

He searched in vain. He could not find any sign or trace of a doorway, and was compelled, at length, to give up the task as hopeless. But he knew that a secret door did exist. He took his departure in a highly pleased frame of mind.

When he emerged from the old ruins, everything was still and silent—the headmaster had nearly reached St. Frank's by this time, probably. And Mr. Wrott set off across the fields at a brisk walk.

He arrived in Bellton Lane in due course, and he was on his way to the school when he became aware of two lights in the distance ahead. They were bearing down upon him, and he recognised them as the twin lamps of a motor-car.

Mr. Wrott waited by the side of the road, and as the car approached he gazed at it searchingly. It was only a few yards from him when he stepped forward and held up his hand.

The car was a two-seater, driven by a youngish, alert-looking man in a heavy fur coat. He applied the brake at once, and pulled his car to a standstill. He regarded Mr. Wrott curiously.

"Well, sir?" he asked.

"You will pardon me, I am sure," said Mr. Wrott. "But I have an idea that you are Dr. Brett, of the village of Belton?"

"That's quite correct—I am Dr. Brett."

"My name is Wrott," said the Housemaster. "I am a new resident master at St. Frank's—"

"Quite so," said Dr. Brett grimly. "I have heard of you, my dear sir!"

"Already?" said Mr. Wrott. "I am flattered!"

"You needn't be," said the doctor bluntly. "I can assure you, Mr. Wrott, that you would not be flattered if you knew how I'd heard of you! But I should like to inform you that the hour is late, and that—"

"Quite so—quite so," agreed Mr. Wrott. "I am particularly anxious to consult with you to-night, Dr. Brett. I ask you, as a very great favour, to grant me this interview."

Dr. Brett considered for a moment.

"Oh, very well," he said. "Jump in, Mr. Wrott."

The Housemaster jumped in with alacrity, and the car was soon speeding towards the village. Dr. Brett was not at all keen upon the interview. He had had a trying day, and he badly wanted to get to bed. And the doctor was not favourably impressed by what he had heard of the new master.

They arrived at the doctor's house, and entered. While Brett put the car into his little garage, Mr. Wrott waited in the consulting-room—a cold, bare apartment, far from cheerful. The fire had died out long since.

Dr. Brett appeared at last.

"Now, my dear sir," he said briskly, as he peeled off his big coat. "If you can make your statement as brief as possible I shall be obliged. You must remember that the hour is late—"

"Quite so, my dear Brett," interjected Mr. Wrott, in a strangely familiar voice. "The hour is late—and the room is cold. Why not have a little chat by the cosy fire in your own den?"

Dr. Brett stared at his visitor blankly. "I—I don't understand!" he exclaimed. "I seem to know—"

"Come, come, Brett!" laughed Mr. Wrott. "Surely you are not deceived?"

"Well, I'm hanged!" shouted the doctor. "Nelson Lee!"

"Exactly!"

And Mr. Simpson Wrott lay back in his chair and smiled broadly.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Coming to a Head!

Dr. Brett fairly staggered. "Lee!" he exclaimed again. "Man alive! I—I can't believe it! Is it really you? But—but it seems impossible! Your face—your figure—your teeth! I never thought such a disguise was possible!"

He grasped "Mr. Wrott's" hand firmly, and wrung it heartily.

"What does it mean, old man?" he asked amazedly.

"That's what I've come here to explain," laughed Nelson Lee. "I thought you would be interested, Brett—and I know that I shall be safe in taking you into my confidence!"

Brett stared at his companion, still lost in astonishment. And it certainly was staggering to find that this forbidding-looking individual was none other than Nelson Lee, the famous detective!

"Come into my den—of course!" said Brett briskly. "There's a fire there, I believe. This way, Lee. Great Scott! It's more than I can believe! Where on earth did you grow those awful teeth?"

"A little invention of my own," smiled Nelson Lee. "Protruding teeth always alter one's appearance to an astonishing degree, Brett—so I frequently make use of them in disguising. They are quite comfortable to wear, I assure you."

"They don't look comfortable," said Dr. Brett. "That's right, take that big chair, Lee. Help yourself to a cigar

Now, I want to know exactly what you mean."

Nelson Lee lolled back in his chair and lit a cigar.

"Well, to tell the truth, Brett, there's not a great deal that I can say," he said. "For one thing I had strong objections to being kicked out of St. Frank's by a man like Martin. And when I left, my firm intention was to get back as soon as possible."

"You haven't taken long, at all events!" said Brett. "But by all that I can hear, you're a terrible person in the character of Mr. Wroth."

"Not quite as terrible as I seem," smiled Lee. "The boys, I believe, are already beginning to tumble to the fact that I am their friend—and not their enemy. Certainly, I have given them no hint. But, you see, I want to keep 'in' with the headmaster at the same time. It will be a ticklish business, but I think I will manage it all right."

Dr. Brett laughed.

"I know you'll manage it. You manage anything you put yourself to, Lee. But I should have thought that you would appeal to the governors with a view to coming back in your own personality——"

"That's because you don't understand the position, Brett," said Nelson Lee. "I'm not going into details, but I will enlighten you to a certain extent. I've every reason for believing that Mr. Howard Martin is not all that he seems to be. Do you follow?"

"Well, not exactly," said Brett. "Do you mean to say that Martin is something—well, is there anything dishonourable connected with him?"

"That's just it," said Nelson Lee. "I am convinced that Mr. Howard Martin has been mixed up in some shady business at some period of his life—and he is probably mixed up in it still. While I retained my own identity it was difficult for me to watch the man. He was very cautious, and gave me no opportunities. And I am sure that he

dismissed me because he was afraid of me in my professional capacity."

Dr. Brett looked puzzled.

"But why?" he inquired.

"Very shortly after Martin arrived here, he was in touch with a rather mysterious stranger," said Nelson Lee. "This man on one occasion mistook me for Martin, and it was that incident which first aroused my suspicions. It was quite sufficient to prove to me that all was not straightforward with the new Head. So, Brett, I thought that it would be rather good if I returned to St. Frank's in another identity. Martin does not suspect me in any way, and I am able to keep my eye upon him at all times. Do you understand? This little plan of mine has many advantages."

"Yes, I can quite realise that now," said Dr. Brett. "But how in the world did you manage to get the job, Lee?"

The detective smiled.

"Well, it was comparatively easy," he said. "Mr. Martin wanted a new Housemaster, and I took good care to be the first to apply. In my present disguise I easily satisfied the Head with regard to my credentials—for he was chiefly concerned with my bullying capabilities. He wanted a man who would treat the juniors harshly—and he was satisfied that I should fill the bill. That's about all, really. And now I'm here, planted on the spot once more, and I shall not become Nelson Lee again until Martin has been cleared out."

"And when do you think that will be?"

"I really don't know—but I do know there will be more strenuous times at St. Frank's in the immediate future," said Lee grimly. "The boys will not stand Martin's bullying ways for long. And it is highly probable that when Mr. Martin leaves St. Frank's, he will take up his residence in one of his Majesty's prisons."

Dr. Brett whistled.

"As bad as that?" he said. "Phew!

Then I can understand why you resorted to this scheme, Lee. I wish you all the luck, old man—and I appreciate the compliment you have paid me by taking me into your confidence."

"My dear man, you are not connected with the school, and you and I have been friends for long past. There was no reason why you shouldn't know, and I shall welcome a chat with you now and again."

"Thanks," said Brett. "By the way, does Nipper know?"

"No."

"Are you going to tell him?"

"Not yet."

"Well, it seems a very queer business to me," smiled the doctor, as he rose to his feet. "I can't quite believe that you are yourself, even now, you know."

"I don't want to boast," said Lee, "but I am certainly very pleased with this particular disguise. Nipper is usually extremely keen on such matters, but he hasn't penetrated this one yet. I think I shall wait until he does—before revealing myself to him. I'll give him one or two hints, and if the young beggar hasn't got enough brains to guess the rest he'll have to remain in ignorance."

The gov'nor left Dr. Brett after a further chat, and he walked back to the school feeling in a much more cheerful frame of mind.

When "Mr. Wrott" arrived at the school he was still thinking of the somewhat remarkable occurrence he had witnessed at Bellton Abbey. The headmaster was certainly up to something fishy, and Lee was highly satisfied with the progress he had made in such a short time.

The very instant Lee entered the gateway he knew that something was amiss. A considerable noise was proceeding from the other side of the Triangle. He recognised Handforth's voice easily, and he also recognised the Head's voice.

"H'm," murmured Lee. "Handforth in trouble again, I'm afraid. The

amount of trouble that boy seems to find is truly remarkable!"

He slipped indoors as quickly as he could, and retired to his own room—for he did not want the Head to know that he had been out. After half-undressing, he slipped into his dressing-gown and emerged into the passage.

He was just in time to see the Head marshalling Handforth and Church and McCluxe into the Remove dormitory.

Nelson Lee strolled up, his face assuming a sour, stern aspect. It was his policy to appear forbidding, and to agree with the Head's harsh methods. If he did not do so he would find himself dismissed. It was, therefore, Lee's intentions to keep in Mr. Martin's good books.

"What is the meaning of all this commotion?" he shouted, hurrying into the dormitory. "Good gracious! Do you realise that the time is nearly midnight—Ahem! I am sorry, sir—"

"It's all right, Mr. Wrott," said the Head. "You did not know I was here. Three wretched boys actually breaking bounds at this unearthly hour of the night."

"Shocking!" said Lee. "Disgraceful!"

"We were only trying to work a jape on Christine & Co., sir," protested Handforth. "There was nothing particularly wrong—"

"Silence, boy!" snapped the Head. "Undress—the three of you!"

They had put their clothes on over their pyjamas, and so they were undressed within a few seconds. They were making for their beds when the Head pulled them up sharply. Everybody else in the dormitory was greatly interested.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Martin. "You will not sleep in these beds to-night! I intend to punish you severely for this escapade. You will spend the night in a cold attic—just as you are, without bedding or blankets!"

"Oh!"



"I intend to teach you a lesson. Come with me!"

And Handforth & Co. were marched out, leaving the Remove boiling with indignation and fury. Nelson Lee went, too. The detective was as angry as the boys, and he did not intend to allow Mr. Martin's punishment to be carried out.

He followed the Head down the cold corridor until the attic stairs were reached. Handforth & Co. were already shivering, and they were really scared. The thought of spending such a cold night in an attic appalled them.

Sleep would be impossible. They would be compelled to keep on the move in order to keep warm. And Handforth, at least, had courage enough to protest.

"It's not right, sir!" he exclaimed. "If we're left up in the cold all night we shall catch chills——"

"Bosh!" snapped the Head. "You are strong—and you can keep moving. I intend you to learn a lesson this time which you will not forget in a hurry. I mean to put my foot down strongly upon the breaking of bounds."

"Quite right, Mr. Martin—quite right, sir!" said Lee sourly. "Make these boys suffer. I am in agreement with your most excellent system of punishment. Yes, this attic will do admirably."

Handforth & Co. were hustled into the cold room, and the door was locked and bolted. There was no escape, and the attic itself contained nothing whatever in the way of warmth.

The Head went away to his own room, and Nelson Lee went back to his bedroom. The affair was settled—it was finished. Handforth & Co. were there for the night, and nobody knew what would happen to them.

But Lee hit upon a scheme.

There were two attics on that particular landing, and Lee was well aware of the fact that both of them contained a trapdoor in the ceiling—leading up beneath the rafters.

Nelson Lee allowed half an hour to pass.

Then he quietly went upstairs with a considerable quantity of blankets from the store cupboard. It did not take long to get up into the rafter space. Then he crawled upon the rafters until he reached the other trapdoor. It came open with a jerk as he pulled.

"Who—who's that?" came a startled voice.

"Great Scott! We're being rescued!" gasped Church.

Nelson Lee didn't say a word. He dropped the blankets down one after another. Then he silently closed the trapdoor and retired to his own room—quite satisfied.

Handforth & Co. would be warm for the night. And when the morning came, and the Head discovered that an alteration had taken place, it would be impossible to discover who had acted the good Samaritan.

Handforth & Co. were joyous as they rolled in the blankets.

"Another mystery!" said Handforth. "Still, we're comfy now—these blankets are ripping!"

"I'll bet Nipper did it," said McClure.

"Rats! If Nipper had done it he'd have said something!" exclaimed Handforth, who was pretty cute occasionally. "Look here, my sons, I'll bet a quid to a rotten apple that we were saved by Mr. Wrott!"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense——"

"He was here when we were shoved into the attic—and we know that he's on our side," went on Handforth. "I tell you, Mr. Wrott threw these blankets down."

"Well, if he did, he's a brick," said Church. "Shurrup! I'm going to sleep."

And while Handforth & Co. were quite comfortable in the attic some exciting events were taking place in the Remove dormitory. I was the ring-leader and I was proud of being so.

As soon as everything was quiet I had

jumped out of bed. Candles were lit, and preparations were made to hold a meeting. Everybody was with me, and not a single junior thought of sleep.

"We can't do anything for Hand-forth & Co. just yet," I said. "We shall have to discuss matters. But, in my opinion, this is the breaking-point. The Head has acted in an inhuman way—and it's time we showed our hand."

"But what do you suggest?" asked Pitt.

"I suggest a rebellion," I replied quietly.

"A—a—rebellion?"

"Yes!"

"When—to-night?"

"At once!" I said grimly. "We can't wait any longer now. But I am not going to do anything that the Form disagrees upon. Before we go any further we'll take a vote."

"Begad!"

"That's the idea!"

"A vote—submission or revolt?"

I looked round the crowd of excited faces.

"Hands up all those who vote for a revolt against the Head's tyranny," I said. "Hands up all those who are on the side of justice and right!"

Every hand that I could see went up.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Now, hands up those who are in favour of submitting tamely to the Head's domination."

Not a hand was raised. Even Full-wood & Co. were with us.

"Great!" I exclaimed. "We're solid. That means to say that our task will be easier. But, remember, there mustn't be any back-sliding."

"Any which?" asked Hubbard.

"You mustn't knuckle under if we get a setback," I exclaimed. "And there's not much 'if' about that. We're bound to get setbacks, and one or two of us will suffer in silence for the good of the cause. This job is going to be a big one."

"It'll take twenty-four hours, at least," said Owen major.

"You're right," I agreed grimly. "Twenty-four hours, at least. In my opinion, we shan't win the fight until a week has passed. If we go out on strike—for that's what it comes to—we must do it properly. No half measures. We're up against the head-master himself, and you can bet your boots that we shall have the tussle of our lives. So, before you enter into this thing you'd better realise the gravity of it. Are you still unanimous?"

"Yes."

"Rather!"

"We're with you to a man!"

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Now we've got to come to some decision regarding how we shall go on. In this dormitory we're solid for revolt, but we don't know anything about the other fellows. I think we ought to be very careful—"

"But we can't ask any of the other chaps to-night!" protested Hart. "They'll flock to us soon enough once we're really on the go."

"I believe you're right there. Very well, then. To begin with, we've got to have good defences—otherwise we shall go under. We've got to have grub, or we shall be starved out. These things must all be thought of, and prepared for."

"We had a barring-out once before," said Watson. "We lived in the old vault, underneath the monastery ruins. Couldn't we try that stunt again? It served us then, so why not now?"

I shook my head.

"My dear Tommy, your memory's at fault," I said.

"It isn't. I jolly well know we lived in the vault—"

"I'm not referring to that," I said briskly. "You forget to mention that we lived there in August, or September—during the hot weather. How would you like to live there now—in the winter-time?"

"My hat! I'd forgotten that!"

"That only shows that everything must be thought of," I said. "This time we've to bar out in the school it-

self. We've got to lock ourselves in one quarter of the building—and hold it against all attacks."

"Great pip!"

"That's a real barring-out," I went on grimly. "We seize the building, and bar everybody out of it—do you follow me? In this case we simply must choose a place where we can live comfortably, and where there's plenty of food. Therefore I suggest that we take command of the west wing of the Ancient House."

"My only hat!"

"It can't be done!"

"Of course not!"

"It can be done—and it's going to be done!" I declared. "We've started on this rebellion now, and we're not going to back out of it tamely. The west wing comprises this dormitory and a few box-rooms and the attics above. We're in a kind of backwater here, as you know. It is peculiarly fitted for our purpose, when you come to consider it."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we've only got to barricade the end of this corridor, and we're shut off from the rest of the House upstairs. At the end of the corridor is a rear staircase, leading below. And where does it lead to?"

"One of the kitchens!" said Pitt.

"Exactly," I agreed. "Immediately beneath the Remove dormitory is a kitchen which isn't often used—but, still, it's a kitchen. In that same part of the building—this part, to be exact—is the largest store-room in the Ancient House. It contains flour, biscuits, tinned meats, tinned fish, tinned milk, and every blessed food you can think of. There's enough to last us a month, if necessary. And all we've got to do to make ourselves secure is to barricade the corridor outside this door, and the passage downstairs. Once that's done, we shall be in sole charge of this wing. We shall have sleeping accommodation, grub, fires, and everything we need for a siege. How's that?"

The Removites stared at me blankly. "It's great!" declared Pitt enthusiastically.

"Begad! I call it wonderful—I do, really!" said Sir Montie. "Without Nipper we should probably have been beaten by the Head!"

"We should!" agreed De Valerie. "Nipper, that idea of yours is absolutely a brain-wave!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's marvellous!"

"And he thought of it all in a minute!" said Pitt admiringly.

"Oh, no, I didn't!" I put in. "It may interest you to know that I've been thinking of this scheme for three days past."

"Oh!"

"I visited the kitchen, I visited the passage against the store-room, and I examined the whole position," I continued. "In short, I satisfied myself that it would be easy to conduct a barring-out here. All we've got to do now is to go to work."

"Now—to-night?"

"Yes, to-night," I said. "We've got six or seven hours straight off, and it's not likely that we shall have any more interruptions. We shall have to be jolly careful to begin with. If we're interrupted in the middle of the barricading job, it'll be all up with us."

"Of course."

"It won't take long," said Watson. "Only two barricades to fix up—one in the corridor, and one in the passage below—"

I sighed.

"It only shows how you don't think of things," I exclaimed. "What about the back door?"

"Eh?"

"What about the windows?"

"My hat!"

"The doors and the windows must be secured," I went on. "But the most important thing is to get up our barricades. We can attend to the windows and other things afterwards. We're going to bolt ourselves in this wing of

the Ancient House, and we're going to defy the Head to do his worst!"

"Hurrah!"

"We won't have any more of his rotten tyranny," I declared. "And now, let's finish with jawing. We've got to get to work in earnest. The first thing to do is to block up the end of this corridor here."

"How's it going to be done?" asked Watson.

I pointed to the beds.

"At a pinch, we can do with half these beds," I said. "We can easily sleep two in each. Besides, they'll never all be used at the same time—half of us will have to be on watch continually. So we can take half the beds and fix them up as barricades."

"Ripping idea!"

"Well, let's get to work," I said. "There's no more time for argument, and we know exactly what we've got to do. Wait a minute, though. If we all start working at once there'll be confusion. We've got to work in gangs."

"Gangs?"

"Exactly," I said. "I want four lieutenants—Pitt, De Valerie, Hart, and Grey. You'll each have a number of fellows under you. Now, don't get squabbling. As long as we work in harmony we shall be all right."

Things were soon arranged.

The beds were soon dismantled, and then they were carried to the door, and stacked there. We only used half of them, for we found that we should not need more. They were strong and serviceable.

And when I took measurements out in the corridor I made a lucky discovery. At a certain narrow place, near the end of the passage, the beds would jamb tight between the walls.

And soon afterwards we were fixing up the barricade in earnest. Some fellows were rather nervous to begin with, for they knew that if discovery came now it would be all up with our schemes, and we should never have

another chance of planning a barring-out.

Everything, in fact, depended upon our initial efforts.

Success or failure—which would it be?

## CHAPTER 19.

### Ready for Action!

L UCK seemed to be with us, for the precious minutes passed, and there was no sign whatever of our being disturbed. Once we had the barricades up, we should be able to hold the fort against any numbers.

The most important matter of all was the upper corridor. And this we tackled with a will. The main barricade in the upper corridor grew rapidly.

The iron bedsteads were the first articles to be jammed tightly between the walls. We were unable to hammer, and so we placed the bedsteads in position and forced them tight by sheer pressure.

And the defences, when completed, were quite formidable. They nearly reached to the corridor ceiling, and there wasn't room enough for a cat to crawl in. I surveyed the work with great satisfaction.

"Fine!" I said. "And now we'll go downstairs and block up the passage. We can easily make these defences stronger in the morning—after the discovery. We can hammer to our heart's content, without fear. Five or six of you had better remain here on guard. You're in charge, Watson."

A large party of us went down the rear stairs, and we lost no time in examining the position. We were afraid to turn on the electric light at first, and worked by the illumination of a small electric torch.

The passage downstairs was much narrower than the upper corridor, and we decided that our best plan would be to block it up with furniture from the kitchen—one or two heavy tables, chairs, and such like—anything, in fact,

as a temporary defence. Big improvements would be made on the morrow.

I was not breathing freely yet. There were five windows and a door to be seen to, and they were likely to prove difficult. In fact, I was afraid they would be the hardest proposition of all.

For it must be remembered that we could not make any noise—for fear of being interrupted and discovered. And to make the windows properly secure, it was necessary to place bars right across the glass.

"Boards and screws will do the trick," I said briskly. "You see the advantage of us having possession of the store-room. There are heaps of screws there, and we can fix the boards on without making a sound. But it'll be pretty hard work, and it'll mean all hands to the pump. We'd better divide into parties, and take one window each."

"Good!" said De Valerie. "That's the style."

Boards were found in plenty right down in the basement—or, rather, the cellar. There were many old packing-cases, and we could knock these up with only a small amount of noise—and there was not much fear of that noise being heard upstairs.

An hour later the boards were ready, and then commenced the task of fixing them across the windows. This was done thoroughly, two big screws being placed at each end of every board.

Unfortunately, there were only two screwdrivers to be found, so the work did not proceed as swiftly as I would have liked. However, just as the clock was booming out the hour of four, the windows were finished.

The back door had been treated in the same way.

We were barricaded in!

The west wing of the Ancient House was ours. We couldn't get out, and nobody could get in. We didn't want to get out because it was our task to hold the fort until we gained our victory.

We had certainly decided to remain besieged until we had won. If necessary, we could hold out for three weeks. And I was quite sure the Head would give in before then. He would refuse to parley with us to begin with, of course—but when he found that we were determined, he would have no alternative but to submit.

"The news of this barring-out will get all over the place," I said, talking to a knot of Removites. "The Head will have to settle the affair as quickly as possible—or he'll have the governors buzzing down here on his track. As long as we remain firm we shall be all right. So, whatever happens, keep smiling."

"Rely on us, old man," said Pitt.

"We won't throw up the sponge!"

"Begad! Rather not!"

"We're out for victory!" yawned Grey.

"That's how I feel," I remarked, smiling. "We're all sleepy, as a matter of fact. But I don't suppose we shall get much sleep yet awhile. Some of you can take a nap if you like—but I shall require at least a dozen fellows to remain on guard. We mustn't be taken by surprise."

"Well, let's go round and see everything is all serene," suggested Watson. "There's nothing like being certain."

I agreed, and a small party of us went the rounds. We commenced with the ground floor. The back door was locked and bolted—and barred. The kitchen window would have withstood a battering-ram.

The two passage windows were fully protected, and the small store-room window was quite safe enough—for it was provided with strong iron bars. There were cellars, a scullery, and other apartments, but they all led nowhere. The only exits to the outer world, so to speak, were the rear door and the passage.

The passage was well protected. For six or seven feet it was barricaded almost to the ceiling. Tables and

chairs, stools and other oddments had been jammed tightly between the walls. Left unguarded, the barricade could have been broken through within a short time.

But we had no intention of leaving the barricades unguarded. And with a crowd of defenders at the rear, it would be a difficult task for Mr. Martin to force a way through. Our safety depended upon the holding of our stronghold.

Everything downstairs was secure; so we continued our way up the rear staircase to the other floor. The dormitory windows were boarded up, too—for we realised that even short ladders could be used to effect an entry. The corridor was blocked up most effectively by bedsteads, and a small army could not have forced its way past.

With regard to the attic windows, we did nothing. Only high ladders could reach them, and we could easily deal with any possible attackers in such a position. There was a skylight at the top of the attic stairs, however, leading on to a flat roof. This would certainly need attention.

But it was most improbable that Mr. Martin would attempt an entry that way to begin with; so I decided to leave the skylight until to-morrow.

Now that the vital work had been accomplished I wanted my followers to get as much rest as possible. For, after their hard work they were inclined to be somewhat grumpy and irritable.

But I easily excused this. One is always liable to be grumpy after a night of hard work with no sleep. So I collected the whole crowd in the dormitory, and had a few words with them.

"My sons, we're bottled up now," I said smoothly. "The barring-out has commenced, and it's going through to victory. The die is cast, and it's too late for us to think of drawing back. If any of you fellows regret—"

"Rats!" said Pitt. "Nobody regrets anything."

"That's good." I went on. "Now, I've

got a suggestion to make. You all know that three of our members are missing—namely, Handforth, Church, and McClure. We've been too busy to think of them until now—"

"Poor chaps," said Hart. "They're freezing in the attic."

"Exactly," I said. "And the unfortunate thing is that the attic isn't in this wing. Handforth & Co. are isolated from us, and if we allow things to continue as they are now, Study D will be out of this rebellion altogether."

"I don't think!" said De Valerie. "Handforth will be the first chap to rush to our flag, as soon as he gets his liberty—"

"If he's able to," I put in grimly. "Don't forget the Head's nature. He'll guess that Handforth & Co. will want to join us—and he'll probably keep the poor chaps locked up for days."

"That's true enough," admitted Pitt. "They won't have much chance."

"Well, now that we've finished the most important work, I see no reason why we should not attempt a rescue," I continued. "I shan't feel comfortable until those three chaps are with us—and if we can have them with us at the start, it'll be all the better. I want two volunteers—"

"I'm one!" said Watson promptly.

"Begad! An' here's another, old boy!"

"I'm game!"

"Same here, Nipper!"

"I only want two, thanks," I smiled. "I'll take Tommy and Montie. We're going to rescue the prisoners. But before we go I should like to say a few more words. I want to talk to you seriously."

"Go ahead, general!"

"Well, this is going to be a grim business," I declared. "The Head won't give in to our demands easily—he'll fight like the dickens before he surrenders. It's up to us to prove that we're not rebelling for the mere sake of causing a fuss. We've taken this step

because our liberties have been interfered with, and because life was becoming unbearable."

"Hear, hear!"

"We only want a solemn assurance that all the restrictions will be removed, and that nobody will be punished for taking part in the barring-out," I went on. "We've got to behave ourselves properly. The Head mustn't have the slightest excuse for picking any fellow out for insulting language and behaviour. When he barks at us, don't yell at him—don't insult him."

"That's asking a lot," said Owen major. "Knowing that he can't get to us, we shall naturally feel a bit daring —"

"That's what I'm pointing out," I said. "You'll feel like pointing out a few home truths. But don't do it. Leave the talking to me—and I'll confine myself to the actual business. Montie and Tommy and I are going off now to find Handforth & Co., and I expect we shall return in about twenty minutes' time. Be on the look-out."

"Hold on!" said Armstrong. "How will you get out? We're barricaded in, and if you pull down some of those things——"

"You weren't with us when we made that upper barricade," I interrupted. "We left a small space at the bottom, blocked only by a rolled-up mattress. When that's pulled away, there's an exit. It's just as well to remember these little things in time."

"But isn't it dangerous?" asked Armstrong.

"Not a bit," I replied. "The attackers won't know the place is there—and even if they find it out it'll be no use to them, because we can prevent anybody crawling through without the slightest trouble. Now then, my sons, let's get off."

"We're waitin', dear old boy."

I was rather anxious, for the time was passing, and before long some of the servants would be getting up. At all costs, we should have to rescue Hand-

forth & Co. before the school awakened for the day's happenings. It was likely to be an eventful day in St. Frank's history!

The mattress was pulled out, and Tommy and Montie and I crawled through silently. We were wearing no boots, and we padded softly down the corridor to the other attic stairway—on the other side of the building.

The whole school was still and silent. Not a sound broke the quiet of the night. And we crept up the stairs like shadows. We were not quite certain which attic Handforth & Co. occupied, but there were only two, so we should not lose much time in finding out.

I had my electric torch with me, and when we reached the tiny landing, I switched the light on. An open doorway yawned before us. Next to it a door was closed. The apartment beyond was occupied by the prisoners.

"Locked, of course," I whispered, as I tried the handle. "And this lock is a strong one, too."

"What shall we do?" breathed Tommy. "We can't force the door, I suppose? It'll make too much noise——"

"Yes, I'm afraid it will," I agreed. "But I didn't come unprepared. We can't force the lock in the ordinary way—but we might be able to wangle it. What price these?"

I displayed half a dozen keys I had brought with me.

"Begad! You think of everythin', dear old fellow," said Sir Montie admiringly.

"If they won't fit, we shall have to think of some other wheeze," I said. "Hold this torch, Tommy."

He took it, and I fitted the keys into the lock one after another. The first three were no good whatever. The fourth half turned, and then jammed. I could not even get it out again.

"What's wrong?" whispered Sir Montie.

"It's turned the wards half over, and then jammed," I said. "The best thing we can do is to force it the rest of the

way—if such a thing is possible. We'll have a shot, anyhow."

I took one of the other keys, and slipped it through the hole of the key already in the lock. With this leverage I was able to put more pressure on the key. It bent slightly in my hand; then something grated harshly, and a snap sounded. The key had broken in the lock.

But the door swung open when I turned the handle.

"Good!" I murmured. "It's busted the lock—but that doesn't matter a toss. I hope we've come to the right number!"

As a matter of fact, I was rather doubtful. There had been no sound from within the attic, and it was almost certain that Handforth & Co. were awake—for they were without blankets, and wore nothing but pyjamas. It was hardly possible that they had dropped off to sleep under such cold conditions.

I took the torch from Watson, opened the door, and peered in, flashing the beam across the floor of the attic. Then I uttered a low whistle, and stared in considerable astonishment.

"Well, my only hat!" I exclaimed.

"What's the matter, old boy?" asked Sir Montie.

"Look!"

We all entered the room, and Tommy and Montie stared, too, when they saw what had caused me such surprise. In the far corner of the attic was something which looked like a big bundle of blankets, at first sight.

Then three heads were visible. And it was then obvious that Handforth and Church and McClure were sleeping soundly and warmly, covered with quite a respectable quantity of large blankets.

"The Head had pity on 'em, after all, then," I murmured. "I didn't think he was such a merciful sort of chap. You stay by the door, Tommy, and give us the tip if you hear any suspicious sound."

Sir Montie and I advanced, and a moment later we were shaking them.

Church and McClure were the first to awaken, and they blinked up at me in bewilderment.

"Hallo! Who's that?" mumbled Church. "What the dickens—I say! Where are we? Oh, yes! In that giddy attic!"

"Attic!" said McClure dully. "I—I—"

"Wake up, my sons," I broke in softly.

"Give Handy a punch, and——"

"Don't talk so much," growled Handforth, turning over. "Why the dickens can't you chaps keep quiet—— Hallo! What the thunder—well, I'm blowed!"

Handforth sat up, and it was some moments before he and his chums were thoroughly awake. Then they remembered that they had been placed in the attic by Mr. Martin.

"He said you were to stop here without any blankets," I remarked. "Where did you get these from?"

"They dropped from the ceiling," said Church.

"Eh?"

"They dropped, you know—down from that trap door——"

"I didn't ask you to be funny," I broke in.

"It's true, you ass," said Handforth. "We hadn't been here ten minutes before a pile of blankets dropped on to us. Did you do it?"

"No!"

"I thought as much," said Handforth. "I wouldn't mind betting a quid it was Mr. Wrott! He's not such a bad chap as we thought—and he must have crept up into the other attic, got through the trap door, and piled these blankets down on to us. We should have frozen without them."

"Well, we needn't go into that now," I interrupted. "We're in a hurry. The Remove has revolted, and we're in the middle of a harring-out."

"A—e, which?" gasped Handforth.

"A rebellion!"

"My hat!" said Church.

"The revolt is in full swing," I said. "We thought you chaps would like to



be in with us—that's why we've risked everything to come here and rescue you. The Remove is determined to fight against the Head's tyranny, and the battle will be commencing in an hour or two. Are you game?"

Handforth's eyes glittered.

"Game!" he roared. "Why, it's the best thing you could have done! We're with you to the last breath!"

"You needn't yell!" I said warningly.

"But it's worth yelling about," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I thought of a barring-out myself, but I wasn't sure about the rest of you. And you always seem to look upon my ideas as potty."

"That's because they generally are potty," I said briskly. "Well, come on—don't waste any more time here. We should look a bit sick if we were pulled up before we got back to our stronghold."

Handforth & Co. lost no time in following us. We succeeded in getting through the barricade without causing any alarm. The chums of Study D were dumbfounded when they saw the preparations we had made.

"It was jolly good of you to fetch us out of that attic," said McClure warmly. "It's worth a term's pocket money to be in an affair like this. What's the time? When will the fun begin?"

"You'd better get that idea out of your head at once," I said sharply. "There won't be any fun, McClure. This is a very serious business."

McClure grinned.

"Well, the Head can't sack the lot of us—and as long as we stick together we shall be all serene," he said. "Personally, I'm as keen as mustard on this business, and it's a certainty that we shall—"

Reginald Pitt rushed up.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "The alarm will be given in two minutes!"

"By jingo!"

"Warren's up—he's in the Triangle," said Pitt. "And, what's more, he's having a look at the barricaded windows!"

I hurried to one of the dormitory windows, with several fellows at my heels. The lower sash was already up, and I leaned out curiously. The dormitory was in darkness, except for a single candle.

It was still dark out in the open, of course. But the gleam of a lantern showed near the Ancient House wall. And we saw the portly figure of Warren, the school porter. Warren was about to commence his early morning duties.

But he had been attracted by the fact that something was wrong with the lower windows. And he was holding his lantern up close to the glass, and staring at the boards which were screwed across.

"My heye!" we heard him mutter. "What's the meanin' of these 'ere?"

One of the juniors gave a slight cough and Warren's gaze turned upwards. He stared at the dormitory window in real amazement, and took a step or two backwards.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "If some o' them young ribs ain't awake! I reckon a miracle must have 'appened."

"Cheerio, Warren, old bean!" said Pitt lightly. "How goes it? How do you like getting out of your snug little bed at this hour of the morning?"

Warren gasped.

"Which I don't understand, young gent," he said. "You ain't supposed to be up yet! The risin'-bell don't ring yet—not for another hower! And what's the meanin' o' these 'ere boards—"

"You'd better get about your business, old son, and leave us to ourselves," I broke in. "There's nothing for you to worry about, anyhow. You'll find out the truth soon enough."

Warren shook his head, and moved off muttering to himself. He evidently didn't like the look of things, and as he vanished round the angle of the building I turned to the juniors who were crowding round me.

"We'd better look slippy now," I said.

"The trouble will begin in less than half an hour, unless I'm greatly mistaken. To your action stations, my merry rebels!"

## CHAPTER 20.

### Defying the Tyrant!

CLANG—clang!

The rising-bell rang out with an extraordinary amount of noise. It seemed so to us, at all events. It was because we were all awake, listening for it. Contrary to my anticipations, there had been no alarm so far.

Warren had apparently considered that our early rising was none of his business; or he had thought it wiser not to report matters to the headmaster. Warren had a great respect for Mr. Howard Martin. He was also anxious to keep his post as porter at St. Frank's. He apparently considered that it would be better for him to know nothing about the affair.

"We shan't be long now, anyhow," I said. "The other chaps will be getting up—the Third and the Fifth. As soon as they come into the corridor they'll see the barricade, and then there'll be a terrific noise. My hat! Won't there be a pile of excitement before long!"

"Rather!"

"And a pile of trouble, too," said Watson bluntly.

I took good care that all our positions were guarded. The Remove was distributed evenly; so many fellows at each barricade. It would be impossible for the Head to break through unless he brought an enormous force against us. And he certainly had no such force available at a moment's notice.

The trouble commenced almost immediately afterwards. Wilson, of the Sixth, came marching down the corridor in his dressing-gown. He was up earlier than usual, and he was on his way to the bath-room. It was daylight by now, although the morning was bleak and raw. Wilson paused as he was about to turn into the main corridor. He

stared at the barricade in sheer astonishment.

I was on the other side of it, with a number of supporters—for I was pretty sure that we should have our first interview with the Head at this spot. The barricade was provided with a number of holes and slits, through which we could see quite easily. Wilson continued to stare.

"What the deuce—" he began.

Then he broke off, and moved forward, his intention being to examine the obstruction at closer quarters. It was certainly surprising to find a mass of bedsteads and bedding piled up in the passage, from wall to wall.

"Good morning, Wilson!" said Hart cheerfully.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Wilson. "Who's that behind there? What on earth's the meaning of this? What have you kids been up to? There'll be a row if the Head comes along and sees —"

"Prepare yourself for some news," I interrupted calmly. "It will interest you to know, Wilson, that the Remove has gone on strike. The Remove is fed up with Mr. Martin's tyranny, and it's not going to stand any more of it!"

"You—you must be mad!" gasped the prefect.

"Not at all—we're sensible!"

"Why, you young idiots! You'll be expelled for this!" exclaimed Wilson angrily. "Stop this nonsense at once, and don't be such a set of young fools! You'd better clear away this stuff before any of the masters come along!"

"You're naturally astonished," I said. "But we've done this thing thoroughly, Wilson, and we're not giving in. We're barring-out everybody from this section of the building. We shan't come out until the Head agrees to all our proposals."

The prefect was at a loss for words.

"But—but you don't realise what you're doing," he gasped, at last. "The ringleaders will be sacked on the spot! You can't hope to defy the Head!"

You'll be beaten within a couple of hours. Take my advice, and chuck the thing up now."

"Too late," I said grimly. "We've decided."

Wilson continued to stare for a few moments, and then marched off.

"He's going to report," I said. "We shall have the Head here within five minutes now. Stick to your guns, and be ready to defend the fortress. We shall be in the thick of the fight before long."

But it was not Mr. Martin who came.

Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed before voices were heard, and then Wilson came into view, with Mr. Crowell beside him. The master of the Remove was only half-dressed, and his face was grave and troubled.

"You must be mistaken, Wilson," he was saying. "I really cannot believe—Good gracious! This—is this extraordinary! Upon my soul!"

He surveyed the barricade blankly.

"Boys!" he shouted, after a moment. "Are you there? Nipper! Tregellis-West! Pitt! Can you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," shouted a dozen juniors.

"Remove this obstruction at once," shouted Mr. Crowell angrily. "How dare you act in such an insane manner? I cannot understand what has possessed you!"

"I don't want to offend you, sir, but we can't obey your orders," I said quietly.

"What!"

"We've no quarrel with you, sir, but we must defy your orders," I went on. "We're only up against the Head, sir, and I want you to understand at once that we're still loyal to you. You've been a brick, sir, and we all respect you!"

"Yes, rather."

"Three cheers for Mr. Crowell!"

"Hurrah!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "I—I cannot allow this! It is preposterous for you to say that you respect me when you act in this outrageous manner.

You have evidently taken leave of your senses, and I may say at once that the ringleaders will be punished with the utmost severity. Do you realise that you are setting all authority at defiance? It is disgraceful—outrageous!"

"Our very object in barring-out is to set the Head's authority at defiance, sir," I said. "He's a bully and a tyrant, and we wouldn't be British boys if we submitted to his brutal methods!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll stick to our guns until we win!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the tyrant!"

Mr. Crowell fairly turned pale.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed helplessly.

"I—I'm at a loss. What can we do, Wilson? The foolish boys are evidently determined."

"Well, sir, the kids have made it plain that they're not up against you, but only against the Head," said Wilson. "And, strictly speaking, the Head's brought this on himself. I'm not surprised—"

"Wilson, I am amazed that you should talk in such a manner," interjected Mr. Crowell sharply. "The headmaster may have been somewhat harsh, but that is no excuse for these boys to set all authority at defiance. Hum! I—I really don't know what to do."

"We'd much rather you went away, sir," shouted Pitt. "We don't want to offend you in the least—we want to deal with the Head—not with you. Our quarrel is with him."

"Very well, you shall deal with the Head," said Mr. Crowell. "But I warn you at once that you will be dealt with very drastically. Take my advice, and cease this nonsense forthwith. I will do my utmost to keep the matter from Mr. Martin's ears."

"That's jolly good of you, sir," I said earnestly. "But we've started on the rebellion now, and we're going through with it. We've rebelled against Mr. Martin—but that's all."

Mr. Crowell nodded.

"Then I will leave it for Mr. Martin

to deal with," he said. "He has certainly brought this on himself, and—Ahem! Come, Wilson!"

They marched off, leaving everybody excited.

"Crowell's all right," I declared. "He knows jolly well we're justified, but he doesn't like to say so. I only hope that he won't come here again. It's rotten for us to disobey him—because he's a good sort!"

After that the news got about rapidly. Wilson told some other members of the Sixth, and then the Fifth learned about it, and the Third was soon in the know. A crowd of fellows thronged the corridor beyond the barricade. They were curious and excited.

"I say, you young asses!" shouted Chambers of the Fifth. "It's like your cheek to go out on strike—but I must say that I'm with you. You have my sympathy—and you'll need more than mine before long. I shan't much care to see half a dozen of you being packed off home."

"You won't see that!" shouted Handforth. "We're out to win—and if you had any pluck you'd come and join us. Now, then, you chaps out there! Are you going to stand the Head's tyranny, or will you join us in our fight for freedom?"

"By gad!" said Chambers. "The young beggars mean it. We'll see how they go on, and if they last out the day we might consider joining in. We've had enough of the Head——"

"Cave!"

Somebody gave the warning, and the crowd vanished from the landing like magic. Mr. Howard Martin came striding along. His hair was ruffled, he was obviously unwashed, and he was attired in his dressing-gown. His face was simply purple with fury as he surveyed the defences.

"Good heavens!" he snarled. "This—is this astounding. They have dared to defy me, Mr. Crowell—openly! It is absolutely outrageous!"

"It is certainly serious," admitted Mr. Crowell.

"Boys!" thundered the Head. "I will give you one minute to take these obstructions away! One minute, remember. The ringleaders will be publicly flogged, and every other boy will be detained for the period of four weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a yell of defiance.

"Upon my soul!" gasped the Head. "Did—did you hear, Mr. Crowell?"

"I could scarcely do otherwise," said Mr. Crowell.

"We don't want you to get angry, sir," I shouted. "I may as well tell you that I'm the leader in this rebellion——"

"Oh, indeed!" snapped the Head. "I am glad you have admitted that fact, Nipper. A rebellion, eh? Very well! I shall make an example of you by administering a flogging and expelling you forthwith from the school——"

"We're all in it, sir!" shouted De Valerie. "Nipper's no more to blame than we are. We stand or fall together—and you can't sack the lot of us!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Martin. "How dare you address me in that insolent fashion? I order you to surrender immediately. If you dare to defy me for one moment longer I will remove you by force."

"It's all very well to talk like that, sir," I said firmly. "But we happen to be in a position where we can talk on equal terms with you. If you prove yourself to be reasonable and just we will obey your order, and we will surrender at once. But you must listen to our terms first."

"Your—your terms?" thundered the Head.

"That's what I said, sir."

"Your insolence is unparalleled!" stormed Mr. Martin. "You infernal young hound! You shall pay dearly for this impertinence! Do you think for one moment that I will consent to listen to terms from a pack of rebellious young dogs——"

"You won't improve matters by abus-

ing us, sir," I interrupted. "All we want is justice. We want our liberties restored—we want the school to be run as it was run by Dr. Stafford. And nobody in the Remove is to be punished for this rebellion. We don't deserve punishment, because we have only rebelled against a tyranny which it was impossible to bear. That's the plain truth, sir, and I don't mind saying it. Give us back our liberties, and we'll surrender at once."

The Head laughed harshly.

"Never, in the whole course of my experience, have I heard such astounding insolence," he shouted. "Once again I order you to submit. If you do not do so I will take such steps that will compel you to give in. Do not imagine for one moment that this insane rebellion can continue."

"We're not giving in, sir."

"Never!"

"We're out for liberty and justice!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with bullying!"

"Down with tyranny!"

The noise was considerable, and for a time the Head roared and raved at us in vain. When he made himself heard he was shouting in the same strain as before. He might as well have saved his breath, for we took no notice of him.

"I will wait till you have calmed yourselves!" he bellowed. "I will give you thirty minutes, and not a second longer. In half an hour I will come back, and if these obstructions are not removed, I will take measures to remove them by force. Take care how you defy me."

He turned on his heels and strode away. He was followed by a yell of derision, and a storm of hisses broke out. The Removites were reckless now. The rebellion had started in real earnest, and the juniors didn't care what happened.

"Well, we're in for it now," said Owen major, taking a deep breath. "By jingo! There's going to be plenty of excitement before long. He is going to take the defences by force, eh?"

"Not while we've got any strength!" I said grimly.

"Begad! We shall have to hold the fort at all costs, you know—we shall, really!" said Sir Montie. "It's going to be a frightfully excitin' fight!"

And Tregellis-West was probably right.

## CHAPTER 21.

### A Plan of Action!

"SOMETHING must be done, Mr. Wrott—something swift and drastic," declared the Head, pacing his study with agitated strides. "This—this rebellion is altogether startling—it is unprecedented!"

Mr. Simpson Wrott nodded.

"The boys are excited, sir," he agreed. "It is a shocking affair. It is all the worse because there is no visible solution to the problem. The Remove have the upper hand——"

"What?" roared the Head. "Are you insane, Mr. Wrott?"

"Ahem! I—I am sorry if my words offend you, sir," said Mr. Wrott apologetically. "I really wish to convey my opinion. How is it possible for us to make the young dogs surrender?"

"I will force them——"

"But they have barred themselves into a most secure portion of the school," said Mr. Wrott softly. "Do you realise that, sir? They have beds, food—and, in fact, everything necessary for a long siege. They will be able to beat off any ordinary attack. I fail to see how we can cope with the disgraceful situation."

"You are a fool, Mr. Wrott!" raved the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wrott meekly.

"You had better say no more!" roared Mr. Martin.

"No, sir."

"Don't keep on saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' like an infernal parrot!" shouted the Head severely. "This rebellion is utterly preposterous, and the boys will not dare to defy me for long."

Where is Mr. Stockdale? Where is Mr. Crowell? Where is Mr. Pagett? Why don't the fools come?"

Mr. Wroth thought it wiser to say nothing. The Head had called a meeting of masters in the study, and Mr. Wroth only had arrived so far. Mr. Martin would have been considerably astonished if he could have known that the sour-looking "Mr. Wroth" was none other than Nelson Lee.

Lee was not surprised at the action the Remove had taken. He had probably anticipated something of the sort—for he knew that the juniors would not submit to an intolerable tyranny for long.

His policy, however, was to be "down" on the rebellion. He affected to share the Head's views, and his condemnation of the boys was violent. But Lee secretly admired the Remove for its pluck.

"Ah! You have condescended to come, then!" snapped the Head.

Mr. Stockdale entered the study, followed by Mr. Pagett, Mr. Crowell, Mr. Suncliffe, and two other masters.

"I do not understand, sir," said the Housemaster of the College House. "You requested me to attend here—"

"That is enough, Mr. Stockdale," snapped the Head. "I do not wish to argue. We are faced with an appalling situation. Do you realise that the Remove has actually defied all authority? Do you realise that the Remove has defied me to my face? Are you aware of these facts?"

"The whole school is aware of them," said Mr. Stockdale.

"I am inclined to believe that you, Mr. Crowell, are partially responsible for this astounding rebellion?" continued the Head harshly.

Mr. Crowell started.

"I, sir?" he exclaimed. "Really, I—"

"You have treated the boys too easily—too softly," said the Head. "They require firmer control—"

"I disagree, sir," said Mr. Crowell coldly. "When it is necessary, I am

always severe. But I do not see the justice in being harsh and cruel with the boys on all occasions."

"You are quite right, Mr. Crowell," declared Mr. Stockdale. "That, in fact, is the cause of the whole business."

"What!" snapped the Head. "What did you say, Mr. Stockdale?"

"The boys have revolted solely on account of the harshness and injustice meted out to them since your appointment to the headmastership, sir," said Mr. Stockdale boldly. "I am not afraid of telling you to your face that the juniors have been treated abominably!"

Mr. Martin clutched at his desk.

"Upon my soul!" he gasped. "How—how dare you, sir? A few more words from you, sir, and you will be dismissed as summarily as Lee was dismissed! I will have no nonsense from my undermasters!"

Mr. Stockdale's eyes flashed.

"It is quite possible that I shall not wait to be dismissed, Mr. Martin," he said angrily. "And let me tell you this. If I go from this school, every other master will leave with me!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Mr. Crowell.

"We will certainly support you, Mr. Stockdale," said Mr. Pagett warmly.

The Head choked back something, and his lips twitched nervously. He probably realised that he would be wiser to moderate his tone. He would be in a sorry plight indeed if all the masters walked out in a body.

"We—we will say no more on the subject," he said thickly. "I have called you together, gentlemen, to discuss this—this appalling situation. The Ancient House section of the Remove Form has appropriated the west wing of the building, and the boys are defying all authority."

"The position is grave, sir," said Mr. Pagett. "I must be allowed to mention that no such situation ever arose while Dr. Stafford ruled. It therefore

seems obvious that the boys are objecting to your administration——"

"Enough, sir!" snarled the Head. "I will show these young brutes that it will not pay them to revolt against me—me, their headmaster! I have formulated new rules, and the boys will adhere to them."

"Ahem! They seem to be doing the opposite just now," murmured Nelson Lee.

"Perhaps so, Mr. Wroth—perhaps so!" barked the Head. "They will not resist much longer, however. I intend to break their mutinous spirit with an iron hand. And the ringleaders shall be sent from the school in disgrace."

Mr. Stockdale shook his head.

"I cannot say that I entirely agree with such a proposition, sir," he said. "No doubt the boys are wilful, and should be punished. But seeing that they have a certain amount of justification, I should seriously consider meeting them to a certain degree——"

"Meeting them!" shouted the Head savagely. "Good heavens! Are you suggesting that I should parley with them?"

"I am, sir," said Mr. Stockdale.

"Then you must be insane——"

"On the contrary, I think I am most sensible," snapped Mr. Stockdale. "Please let me tell you, Mr. Martin, that I am not in the habit of being characterised as insane; furthermore, I am not prepared to put up with such treatment from you. You asked me for my opinion, and I declared that the boys' demands should be met to a certain degree——"

"I positively refuse to even consider such a proposal," shouted Mr. Martin violently. "They have defied me, and never shall I agree to listen to a single grievance. I have asked you all to come here because I wish to find out some means of driving the rebels from their stronghold."

"I am afraid we cannot do much in that direction, sir," said Mr. Pagett. "The young rascals are in a peculiarly secure position. They have organised

their rebellion with astuteness. You must admit that."

"It is a difficult problem—an extremely ticklish matter," murmured Nelson Lee, with an affected scowl. "The wretched young dogs are laughing at us, for we are powerless——"

"Nonsense, Mr. Wroth—nonsense," barked the Head. "We are very far from powerless. I intend to take action immediately. You will please call the school together in Big Hall, gentlemen. I intend to address the boys at once. Lose no time."

The other masters were only too glad to get out of the Head's study; they were already exasperated beyond endurance. Mr. Martin's overbearing attitude was quite unbearable.

It was not yet time for breakfast, the hour, indeed, being quite early. Most of the fellows were down, and groups of juniors were gathered all over the Triangle, excitedly discussing the astonishing situation.

Christine & Co., of the College House, were particularly interested. Bob Christine himself was addressing an animated group of juniors, and his speech was not exactly an uninterrupted one.

"The question is, what shall we do?" Christine was saying. "We're members of the Remove, don't forget, and it's up to us to take some action. We sympathise with the Ancient House chaps, of course. That's taken for granted."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"He's the chap to show the Head a thing or two!"

"Rather!"

"And what we've got to do is to let the rebels know that we're supporting them—morally, at all events," went on Christine. "Everybody must agree that it was jolly plucky of the bounders to start a barring-out——"

"Hear, hear!"

"If we had been placed in the same position we might have done the same thing," went on Christine. "But we

haven't got the facilities in the College House."

"Besides, we're a smaller crowd," said Talmadge. "We only represent just over a third of the Remove, and we wouldn't be strong enough to start a rebellion. I think we ought to go in with the other chaps."

"Revolt, do you mean?"

"Yes!" said Talmadge.

"But we can't do it, you ass!"

"Yes, we can," said Talmadge obstinately. "We can go in a body to Nipper's stronghold and ask for admittance. Dash it all, the Remove might as well stand together in a case of this sort. We're all in the swim."

Christine shook his head.

"It's a good idea, but the time isn't ripe for us to put it into execution," he said. "It wouldn't be wise for us to take such a step now. Let's see how Nipper and his crowd get on first. If they need support, we'll rally round and back them up."

"We ought to back them up at once," declared Talmadge. "There's no sense in delay, Christy."

"Yes, there is," said Christine. "We might be more useful outside. Supposing those Ancient House chaps got into a bit of a difficulty? Supposing they want supplies of some kind? They might be able to give us the tip, and we'll lend a hand. I tell you it'll be better for us to wait awhile."

"Perhaps you're right," said Yorke. "At the same time, I should like to —"

"Now then, you kids!" exclaimed Fenton, hurrying up. "You're wanted in Big Hall—at once. Buzz in."

"It's not time for prayers yet, Fenton," said Christine.

"You won't have any prayers," said the prefect grimly. "The Head's going to make a speech, and you've got to listen to it."

"Oh, rats!"

"We don't want to hear the rotter blarney!"

"It's not a question of what you want

—you've got to do it. The Head's in a particularly nasty temper."

The juniors thought it wiser to go indoors. They were not rebels—yet, and heavy punishment would follow if they dared to disobey the headmaster's order.

And, five minutes later, Big Hall was crowded. The Remove ranks were extremely thin, for only a minor portion of the boys were present. The rest were occupying the west wing of the Ancient House.

There was considerable talk in the Big Hall, but the masters and prefects did not attempt to stop it. They were partly in sympathy with the Remove, and they considered that Mr. Martin was going to work in quite the wrong way. But it was useless to argue with him, or offer advice.

The Head appeared on the raised platform, and there was an immediate hush. It was plain to see that he was in a furious temper, for his brow was black and his eyes glittering dangerously.

"Boys, there is no necessity for me to go into any details regarding the extremely serious situation which has arisen," he said harshly. "You are all aware of the fact that the major portion of the Remove Form has had the astounding audacity to barricade themselves into the west wing of the Ancient House—"

"Good luck to 'em!" shouted somebody.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

The Head danced and gesticulated.

"Silence!" he roared. "How—how dare you interrupt me in this disgraceful manner? Who uttered those rebellious words?"

Silence.

"Mr. Crowell, the voices came from your section of the hall!" raved the Head. "Who were the boys that spoke?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir," said Mr. Crowell, although he probably



knew. "Boys, you must not interrupt. Be silent, please."

"Do you expect the young dogs to take notice of such talk?" shouted Mr. Martin savagely. "The next boy who interrupts will be flogged——"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Get back to where you came from!"

It was impossible to detect the fellows who gave voice to the calls. Two, at least, came from the ranks of the Fifth. And the Head, pale with rage, glared round him helplessly.

"I shall remember this disgraceful scene!" he said thickly. "It seems that a wave of revolt is passing through the school. It is the natural result of years of inefficient administration——"

"It's the result of a week of tyranny, you mean!"

"Oh, good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence!" bellowed the Head. "My patience is being tried beyond endurance! If there is one more interruption the whole school—the whole school, remember—will be detained for three half-holidays!"

The threat was effective; nobody spoke.

"I intend to stamp out this rebellious spirit at once, without a moment's delay," went on Mr. Martin, after a moment. "The Remove has broken into open revolt. The young hounds have barred themselves into a section of the building, and they refuse to surrender."

Still there was silence.

"I am determined to have no further nonsense," continued the Head. "I have called you together here because I want you to thoroughly understand that the rebels must not be supported in any way. Any boy, senior or junior, who openly sympathises with the misguided band will be instantly punished."

"You'll have to punish the whole school, then!" yelled somebody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We all sympathise!"

"Rather!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "I will prove to you that my words are not idle! The whole school is detained for the next three half-holidays——"

"Oh!"

"Shame!"

"We won't be detained! We'll all revolt!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Head fairly shook with anger. But he realised that St. Frank's, as a whole, was in a dangerous mood. The majority of the boys were on the verge of breaking out into rebellion—following the example of the Remove. And Mr. Martin hastily sought to relieve the situation.

"If you will all be silent, I will cancel that punishment," he shouted. "I am firmly determined to bring the Remove to submission, and I realise that the only argument to be used is—force. The young rascals must be routed out of their stronghold forthwith!"

"Who by, sir?" asked Fenton, of the Sixth.

"By the Sixth Form and Fifth Form," said the Head grimly.

"Oh!" said Fenton.

"I order the Fifth and Sixth Forms to proceed at once to the west wing of the Ancient House," continued the Head. "You will attack the barricades at all points; you will pull the obstructions down; you will drive the juniors out. Go, and obey my orders!"

The Fifth and Sixth looked at one another uncertainly. Some of the seniors were rather unsettled, but others were determined. They shook their heads, and remained in their places. And the wobblers gained courage, and stood their ground, too.

Mr. Martin watched with growing impatience.

"Do you hear me, boys?" he shouted.

"Yes, sir," said Morrow.

"Then go at once——"

"We're not prepared to fight against

the Remove fellows, sir—some of them our own minors," said Conroy major. "We're at St. Frank's for our education, not to settle your quarrels, sir."

"Oh, good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Conroy major, I am amazed that you should dare to address me in that manner," said the Head harshly. "I will deal with you later. For the present, you will go with the remainder of the Sixth Form to the west wing."

"No!"

"We won't go!"

"We're not doing your dirty work!"

"Rather not!"

"Good luck to the Remove!"

And the Fifth and Sixth, as though it had been pre-arranged, walked out of Big Hall in a body. The Head raved until he was purple—but it made no difference. The seniors had revolted on their own account! They were not rebels in the same sense as the Remove—but they refused to obey the Head's orders.

Christine & Co. and the Third yelled themselves hoarse. They streamed out of the hall without waiting to be dismissed. And Mr. Howard Martin, fairly choking with helpless fury, roared in vain.

The situation was decidedly acute.

## CHAPTER 22.

### The Plot

"THREE cheers for the Sixth!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hip-hip—"

"Hurrah!"

"Now three cheers for the Fifth!"

"Hip-hip—"

"Hurrah!"

The noise was deafening. The rebels let themselves go with a vengeance. It was just breakfast-time, and the news had come through that the seniors had refused to take any hand in the Head's quarrel with the Remove.

"Jolly decent," said Pitt enthusias-

tically. "If the seniors had sided against us we should have been in a bad way. Good old Sixth! Good old Fifth! They're with us!"

"I knew they would be," I said. "There's no need for all this fuss, my sons. We're backed by the whole school, and if the Head isn't careful he'll have every fellow in St. Frank's revolting."

"All the better if they do revolt," said Watson.

"Of course," I agreed. "It would bring the rotter to his knees in a minute. But we can't hope for that—yet. The school hasn't rebelled. The seniors have only declared their intention of remaining out of the fight. We're safe for the time being—so we can have some grub!"

Breakfast was a happy-go-lucky meal. Only half of us could partake of the food at one time, the other half remaining on guard. Fatty Little was in his element. He was the chief cook, having appointed himself to that position.

His fat face was glowing with pleasure, and his fat hands were very active. He had made a big batch of bread, and it was served hot for breakfast, with plenty of butter.

The bread wasn't quite light, and Handforth declared that it contained a few nails, tin-tacks, and other oddments, but it went down all right. Fatty was certainly a good cook.

The coffee was quite up to the mark, to judge by the requests for more. Little himself had eaten until he could eat no more—and that's saying quite a lot. His capacity was tremendous.

"I don't mind if we go on revolting all the giddy term," he said happily. "This is the first time I've had enough grub since I came to St. Frank's! I hope we shall go on with this game for weeks and weeks and weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, Fatty," I said. "This revolt won't last much longer than three or four days. It might end within a few hours, in fact. There's no telling."

"Hours!" gasped Little. "Great pan-cakes! But—but it can't end to-day, Nipper! I'm going to cook dinner, and—and all sorts of things! If the Head agrees to our demands, make some more demands!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That wouldn't be playing the game, my infant," I said. "But you needn't look scared. I don't suppose we shall come to a settlement to-day. The Head's a hard nut to crack, and he won't give in tamely."

"He hasn't so far, anyhow," said Handforth. "What can he do? Nothing—absolutely nothing! I'll bet he had a double-barrelled shock when he went to that attic and found me missing!"

"What about us?" asked McClure.

"Oh, you!" said Handforth. "You and Church don't count. I was the chief prisoner, and the Head must be raving about losing me."

"Why should he rave?" asked Hart.

"Why?" repeated Handforth. "Because he knows that I'm a dangerous chap!"

"Well, everybody knows that," said Hart. "Strictly speaking, you ought to be in a padded cell——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" howled Handforth. "I mean I'm dangerous to the Head! I'm one of the leaders of the rebellion, and the Head knows his job's a lot more difficult with me against him!"

"Oh!" said Pitt. "That's a bit of news. I'm always glad to learn something fresh. It's the first time I knew you were a leader. I thought you could only punch chaps' noses——"

"Well, I can do that all right!" exclaimed Handforth grimly.

Biff!

"Yaroooh!" roared Pitt, holding his nose. "You—your burbling jackass——"

"Peace, my sons, peace!" I interrupted. "We don't want any quarrelling in the ranks. If you're not careful, Handy, you'll be committed to three hours' C.B.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The idiot ought to have been left in

that attic!" snapped Pitt. "Supposing we send him to the Head with a formal note, explaining our terms? Handforth is a great chap for bearding lions in their den!"

"I'm game," said Handforth.

"Good!" said Pitt. "Get the note ready, Nipper. Once Handy goes with it, he'll never get back!"

"Christine's at the kitchen window," called Watson, from the end of the passage. "He's with a whole crowd of Monks, too."

We went to the kitchen window to investigate. Behind the barricading boards, Christine & Co. were standing in a crowd. They were shouting words of encouragement, and some of the fellows were asking to be admitted.

"We want to join you," yelled Clapson.

"We're all in the Remove," said Oldfield. "Our place is with you in there."

"Jolly good of you," I replied, through the boards. "But we're quite O.K., thanks. Take my advice, and stay out of this as long as you can. We're out for victory, but we may not get it. The Head won't play any games with you, my sons—he'll be afraid to. You stick tight, and wait. You're more useful to us out there, just at present."

"That's what I say," declared Christine.

"Then listen to your Uncle Christy, and take heed," I said. "There's no telling how things'll go—and the rebellion's only just started. It's my opinion that we shall have a big fight. Hallo! Jesson's coming this way!"

"Rats to Jesson!" said Christine, turning.

The prefect strode up grimly.

"Clear away from here, you kids!" he ordered. "The Head's ordered that there is to be no fraternising with the enemy——"

"Go and eat coke!" said Yorke politely.

"You young sweep——"

"You're not one of our prefects," said Christine. "We don't take orders

from you, Jesson. "I'd advise you to mind your own business."

The unpopular prefect scowled.

"No cheek!" he snapped. "Mr. Martin has invested me with full powers over all juniors, and you've got to obey my orders. Clear off!"

"Rats!"

"We don't care anything for you, Jesson!"

"Rather not!"

Jesson shrugged his shoulders.

"All right—do as you like," he said grimly. "But if the Head comes out here and sees you, there'll be a good deal of trouble. So don't say I haven't warned you. It seems to me you're all catching the rebelling spirit!"

And the prefect walked off briskly.

There was not much to fear of Mr. Martin coming on the scene at that moment, however. For Mr. Martin was in his own study, talking earnestly with Nelson Lee. The Head would not have been talking earnestly with Nelson Lee if he had known that gentleman's real character.

"It is apparent that force will not be successful, Mr. Wrott," said the Head, pacing his study agitatedly. "The other boys will not only refuse to obey my commands, but they are quite in sympathy with the mutinous young scoundrels who are now in possession of the west wing. We must think of something else, Mr. Wrott—some subtle scheme to make the boys give in."

"Exactly, sir—exactly," he said, rubbing his hands together. "The infernal young brats have defied you in the most disgraceful manner, and it is time that something drastic was decided upon. But I must confess myself at a loss. I am unable to suggest any plan—"

"I have a plan," interrupted the Head grimly. "I will go to the boys and listen to their demands. Such a thing is totally against my principles, but something must be done. And, although I shall pretend to consider the young dogs' proposals, I shall be really tricking them."

"How, sir?" asked Lee interestedly.

"How?" said the Head. "I will make them a promise. I will tell them that if they give in quietly there will be no punishments, and negotiations will be started regarding the various demands. The boys will give in—and then we shall have them absolutely at our mercy."

"But your promise—"

"Bah! I am not concerned over that," snapped the Head. "A promise to such rebels is not valid. I am fully justified in going to any extreme in order to bring about the finish of this rebellion."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Quite so, sir—quite so," he agreed. "H'm! Highly amusing! The scamps will receive a somewhat unpleasant surprise after they have removed their barricade. An excellent idea, sir."

The Head nodded.

"I thought you would agree in that respect, Mr. Wrott," he said. "Once the boys are under my control again they will receive drastic punishment—and Nipper and several other ring-leaders will be expelled on the spot."

"Good" murmured Mr. Wrott. "Splendid, sir!"

"I shall visit the upper corridor—now, at once," went on the Head. "Perhaps you had better not come with me, Mr. Wrott—I intend to meet the boys in a humble spirit, as it were. They will think that victory is theirs."

Mr. Wrott chuckled again, and the two men passed out of the study together. The Head made his way upstairs, but Nelson Lee did not accompany him. He went briskly along the passages until he arrived at the west wing of the Ancient House—on the ground floor.

He halted when he arrived at the barricade across the passage. The Head, at the same moment, was at the upper barricade.

Nelson Lee heard excited voices as he appeared.

"Look out! Here's old Rotten Wrott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him a groan!"

"Silence, you young brats!" roared Nelson Lee. "How dare you treat me with disrespect—"

"Dry up, you fellows," said Handforth. "Mr. Wrott's all right in the main. The first chap who groans will get my fist on his nose!"

"I am gratified, Handforth, to find that you are somewhat discerning," said Lee. "But let me tell you that I will stand no nonsense. And you will be well advised to stick to your guns. Ahem!"

"What, sir?"

"To surrender!" barked Mr. Wrott. "Listen to no promises, and do not heed soft words. Harsh words are the only kind that you require. Mr. Martin is now addressing your leaders in the upper corridor—and his words will be of the utmost importance. Do not forget Mr. Martin's character, and plan your actions accordingly. You must realise that your position is serious, and you're in a tight corner. The impudence of your procedure is appalling! Huh!"

And Nelson Lee, with a snort, turned on his heel and strode away. He had already observed that Sir Montie Tregellis-West had removed his eye-glass and was polishing it—a sure sign that Sir Montie was thinking.

"Begad!" exclaimed the swell of the Ancient House. "Did you hear what Mr. Wrott said, dear fellows? His words were remarkable—they were, really."

"He talked a lot of rot," said Hubbard.

"But pray consider, old boy," said Sir Montie. "Do not heed soft words, and do not listen to any promises! Begad! I really think I'd better hurry upstairs an' see what is doin'!"

Tregellis-West lost no time, but went up the little back stairway to the upper corridor, where he found a large crowd of excited juniors gathered near the barricade. On the other side, Mr. Martin was talking.

"I have realised, boys, that you have

the upper hand," the Head was saying in mild tones. "The position is quite intolerable, and I cannot allow it to continue for a moment longer. I want you all to surrender—"

"Never, sir!"

"We're out for victory!"

"And you will receive victory—since you are so determined upon it," said the Head from the other side of the barricade. "If you will come quietly out now, no single boy will be punished. Furthermore, your demands will be listened to reasonably and sympathetically."

"Oh!"

"That's different, sir!"

"You say that nobody will be punished, sir?" I asked grimly. "You promise that the rebellion will be completely overlooked?"

"Yes, Nipper, that is so," replied Mr. Martin grimly. "I have decided to be absolutely lenient. And, what is more to the point, when you have all resumed your normal duties, I will meet a deputation of the Remove, and will discuss all the grievances with a view to settling them forthwith."

"But will you promise to settle them, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, Nipper, I will—most decidedly," said the Head. "You have gained your victory—completely and absolutely. What is your answer?"

"Well, sir, I think we'll just have a minute's consultation," I said. "We realise that you have made a big concession, and—"

"Just a minute, old boy!"

Sir Montie was tugging at my sleeve.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Pray listen for a moment," whispered Tregellis-West. "I urge you not to take any notice of Mr. Martin's promises."

"Oh, that's a bit thick, Montie," I protested. "Even the Head wouldn't be such a dishonourable rotter as to make promises and break them as soon as we've given in. He daren't do such a thing."

"I am quite sure that he means to trick us," said Sir Montie. "Listen!"

And he briefly explained how "Mr. Wrott" had hinted at the Head's intentions—how he had told the fellows to pay no heed to soft words. I listened grimly, and when Montie had done I knew the truth.

"There's no getting away from the fact, Mr. Wrott is on our side," I declared. "He knew the Head's game, and he went down there and gave you fellows a word of warning. Good for Mr. Wrott!"

"But what shall we do?" asked Pitt quickly.

"Listen—and you'll hear," I replied, in a grim voice.

I returned to the barricade, feeling angry. The Head had resorted to a dirty, despicable trick—if Mr. Wrott's warning was to be believed. And I would soon settle the question definitely.

"Well?" said the Head sharply.

"Before the Remove surrenders, sir, we want your assurance that nobody will be punished, and that all our demands will be met," I said. "We want —"

"I have already made those promises, Nipper," snapped Mr. Martin.

"Yes, sir, by word of mouth," I replied. "We want you to set down those terms in writing. We want your promise in black and white. As soon as we receive it, we will surrender."

The Head turned red with rage.

"Infernal impudence!" he roared. "I will not write a line, confound you! Is my word not sufficient?"

"I'm afraid we cannot accept it, sir."

"You dog!" bellowed the Head. "Are you daring to suggest that I should make a promise I have no intention of fulfilling?"

"I suggest, sir, that if you seriously intend to fulfil it, you will not object to setting it down in writing," I replied quietly. "We only require it as a safeguard, and we shall certainly refuse to give in until we get that written promise."

The Head nearly choked.

"I will not write a line—never!" he raved. "You have my promise by word of mouth, and it is sufficient. No boy will be punished, and your demands will be met. Now, what is your answer?"

"We stand firm, sir," I replied curtly.

"What?"

"We remain as we are now—rebels," I replied. "Good-morning, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

"Long live the revolution!"

"Hurrah!"

And the headmaster, fairly gnashing his teeth with rage, stood helplessly by while the Remove roared its approval of my decision.

Mr. Martin's trick had failed!

## CHAPTER 25.

### An Interesting Discovery!

NIGHT had arrived, and the position was unchanged.

The Remove had calmed down somewhat since morning, but it was just as determined to carry on the rebellion until final victory was gained. The Head's very attitude proved that his promise had been hollow and treacherous.

Since that interview, Mr. Howard Martin had not shown himself. And we were all quite certain that Mr. Wrott was the cause of the failure. He had given us the tip in the most obvious manner, and we were grateful to him.

But Mr. Wrott, too, kept out of the way. We had not seen anything of him since the morning, and everything had been quiet—except, of course, for various demonstrations on the part of the other fellows, out in the Triangle.

The west wing of the Ancient House had been placed out of bounds, and nobody was allowed anywhere near it. But this did not prevent some daring spirits from venturing to the barricaded windows, in order to whisper words of support and sympathy.

It was now night—after 10 p.m., i.e.

fact. The school had gone to bed, and it certainly seemed that we were to be left quite to ourselves. The Head was in a quandary—he did not know what to do, or which way to turn.

The bulk of the rebels had seized the opportunity of having a good, sound sleep. Some of the fellows had been in bed since the morning. These got up in the late evening, refreshed and brisk. And the guards of the day took their places in the beds. Everything, in fact, was going swimmingly.

Sir Montie and I had managed to obtain several hours' sleep in the afternoon and evening, and now we were quite alert. I was determined to be on guard throughout the night—for, in my opinion, it was the most dangerous period.

"If the Head means to strike, he'll strike during the quiet hours of the night," I said. "He'll do it while all the rest of the school is asleep, and I mean to do a bit of scouting work almost at once."

"Venture outside, do you mean?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'm game, of course—I'm quite willin' to take any old risk," said Sir Montie. "But how do you propose to get out, dear fellow? The Head might be watchin', an' it'll be dangerous to remove some of the barricades—"

"Exactly," I agreed. "We're not going out that way."

"Really, old boy, I fail to understand," said Tregellis-West. "We are barricaded everywhere, and it is impossible to find an exit—"

"It's not impossible," I interrupted. "What has become of your memory, Montie? Don't you recollect that secret stairway leading from the old tower down to the very basement?"

"Begad!"

Sir Montie gazed at me in wonder.

"But, old boy, you're quite wrong," he went on. "You have overlooked the fact that the tower is not situated in this wing—"

"I haven't overlooked it," I interrupted. "The exit, down in the base-

ment, is situated on the other side of the barricade—that is, outside our own domain. So, if we get in that stairway, we shall emerge in the enemy's country."

Sir Montie scratched his head.

"But the tower," he began. "I can't see—"

"Oh, I'd better explain," I interrupted. "The farther exit to the stairway is in the tower itself—but there's another exit—a doorway—in the dormitory corridor. All we've got to do is to slip in, and steal down the stairs."

"Oh, good!" said Sir Montie. "I certainly overlooked that fact, dear old boy. But pray tell me why you are thinkin' about gettin' out?"

"So that we can do some scouting," I replied. "I've got half an idea that the Head means to attempt trickery to-night. It's just the thing he would do. And we want to be absolutely on our guard. I shall leave De Valerie in sole charge while I'm away."

I wasted no further time, but made my preparations.

De Valerie had known nothing of the secret stairway, and he was greatly surprised when he heard. But he was also enthusiastic regarding the idea, and he urged me to be cautious.

"Don't you worry, my son," I said briskly. "We shan't allow ourselves to be collared easily. We shall probably be back within half an hour. Don't tell the others, or they might get jawing."

So, without further ado, we hurried away. The secret panel was situated nearly opposite the dormitory doorway, and it was an easy matter for Montie and I to slip through into the narrow passage.

We closed the panel, and I switched on my electric torch. The place was stuffy and dusty, and I grinned as I noticed Sir Montie's rueful expression. His jacket was already smothered with grime.

"That's all right, Montie," I grinned. "It'll brush off."

"This suit will be utterly ruined by

the time I get back," said Tregellis-West. "Never mind. I am the last fellow in the world to grumble."

"Well, take my advice, and talk as little as possible," I said. "These panels aren't very thick, and we don't want anybody to hear our sweet voices. We're on a risky expedition, so we must be careful."

"Dear fellow, I quite agree."

We proceeded down the narrow stairs slowly. They were steep and treacherous, and a fall would have had nasty results for either of us. But at length we arrived at the foot of the stairway, and stood in the basement.

This door opened out into the foot of the passage beyond our barricade. So we were able to get out of our fortress in secret, without removing a single board.

We found the passage in darkness. A window was just near by, and this was not barred or fastened. It was quite an easy matter for us to slip out like a pair of shadows into the lesser gloom of the Triangle.

Everything was quite still and silent—except for the gentle rustling of the chill December wind in the branches of the old chestnuts. The place seemed to be deserted and forlorn.

"Not a soul about," whispered Sir Montie.

"There's no telling," I replied. "We must move cautiously."

"Lead the way, dear fellow. I'm with you."

We went all round the Triangle, round the Head's garden, and, in fact, made a detour round the school. But we did not see a sign of anything suspicious, and were at last forced to the conclusion that everything was actually quiet. If any attack was to come, it would be from within the school.

And so, at last, we returned.

We got back into the passage without incident, and quietly stole into the secret stairway. Our intention was to return to the dormitory passage without delay.

"Well, we've had a scout round, and we've drawn blank," I said. "It doesn't matter so much—in fact, it's all the better. It shows that there's not much possibility of our being disturbed before the morning."

"It's really remarkable——" Sir Montie paused, and kicked against a projection in the wall, about a foot from the floor.

"Pray throw your light here, old boy," he said.

"What have you found?" I asked curiously.

We examined the spot, and it seemed to us that the stonework was not quite so even at that point. Before the stairway actually commenced there was a short, narrow passage. One wall consisted of panelling, and the other of brickwork. And Montie and I were greatly interested.

"There seems to be something unusual about this spot, certainly," I agreed. "That chunk of bricks seems to be out of place, somehow. And yet it looks solid enough, Montie—Great Scott!"

"Begad!"

I had pressed on the projecting brick with considerable force, and, to the surprise of both of us, a square section of the wall moved back, revealing a dark, earthy-smelling cavity.

"What-ho!" I murmured. "This is interesting, my son. There's no end to these surprises. This is probably another tunnel, leading in quite a different direction. I vote we explore it now, while we're on the job."

"I'm with you, dear boy."

"This discovery might mean a lot to use," I said. "This part of the school used to be an abbey, or a castle, hundreds of years ago. It's only natural to suppose that the cellars are honey-combed with secret passages. But we needn't discuss the ancient history of St. Frank's. Let's get busy."

I bent down, and led the way through the opening, flashing my torch before me. And I was not surprised to find that a tunnel stretched before me



—low, with rough, stone walls, and a damp, earthen floor.

The air was far from being pure. Montie and I proceeded along the tunnel curiously. We continued our way for several hundred yards, and there was no sign of any stoppage.

I judged that the end of the tunnel was situated somewhere among the old monastery ruins—for that was the most reasonable assumption.

But I turned out to be wrong.

For, after proceeding for another hundred yards, we came upon a mouldy old door. It was literally mouldy and mildewed, but the mechanism seemed to be fairly well preserved.

It was some moments before I could force back the bolts, but at last the door creaked open, and a wave of pure, fresh air swept upon us. But we were not in the open. We had emerged into a low, stone building, in which was a door leading out to a garden.

I recognised the spot at once.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I murmured. "We've come out in that old stone summer-house, Montie. We're right in a corner of the Head's private garden!"

"Is that so!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "This is most remarkable, dear old boy."

"We seem to have had our trouble for nothing," I said. "There's not much to be gained by staying here, Montie."

"Admitted!" murmured Tregellis-West. "I really think, dear boy, we'd better retrace our steps— Begad!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I heard something—a voice," whispered Montie.

We both listened intently, and Montie proved to be correct. For not one voice, but two voices were audible. And the sound of footfalls accompanied them. The voices grew louder and more distinct.

And one of them belonged to Mr. Howard Martin!

"We had better sit down in the

summer-house yonder," the Head was saying. "We shall be quite private there, Briggs. Rather cold, perhaps, but we cannot be too careful. I do not wish to take you into the school itself—for reasons which you will well understand."

"Right you are, gov'nor," said the other voice. "I've got the idea."

Sir Montie gripped my arm.

"They're comin' here, old boy," he murmured. "What a really remarkable piece of luck. If a thing happened like this in a story I should say it was ridiculous. Real life is always stranger than fiction, begad!"

"It's a coincidence, that's all," I said, "We'll nip back behind this doorway, and stop there. We shall be able to hear every word that's spoken. We can leave the door ajar."

"But it'll be risky——"

"No, it won't," I interrupted. "It's as black as pitch in here, and they

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won't dare to strike a light. Stand still, and don't even breathe."

"That's rather a tall order, old fellow, but I'll do my best," said Montie.

We succeeded in getting back into the tunnel without making any noise. And when the Head entered the summer-house, accompanied by the mysterious Mr. Briggs, there was nothing whatever to tell them that two venturesome enemies were very close at hand.

"This is much better," said the Head. "Now, look here, Briggs, I've brought you here because I want to talk to you quietly and seriously. To begin with, your business with me is absolutely private. I am paying you well, and your men will be paid well. I do not want any word of to-night's happenings to be spread abroad."

"You can be easy on that point, guv'nor," said Mr. Briggs. "Me an' my mates won't say a bloomin' word. We've got good money, and you've promised to give us some more. So we shan't get gassin'. This business is privit, an' we won't forget it. But I don't quite understand what the game is exactly."

"You'll understand in a moment, my man," said Mr. Martin. "I've already told you that a considerable number of junior boys have rebelled against the school authorities. At the present moment they are securely barred into the west wing of the Ancient House. They intend to defy me until I give in to their demands, and that, of course, will be never."

"It wouldn't do for you to give in to the young varminths, sir," said Mr. Briggs. "Them young hounds need a good thrashin'. Talkin' ain't no use."

"That's why I have engaged you, Briggs," said the Head. "The matter is really very simple. You are to be here with all your men at one-forty-five exactly. And at two o'clock you will smash down the barricades which the boys have set up. These rebellious youngsters are to be captured."

"It'll be easy, sir," said Mr. Briggs.

"Why, I've got twenty men at least—all ready an' willing. It'll be kid's play to get the upper 'and of a parcel of cheeky schoolboys!"

"Don't you be too sure, Briggs," said the Head. "It won't be an easy task, but you will certainly succeed. The boys have taken a great many precautions, but I have no doubt that we shall catch them napping to-night. And once the barricades are broken down the rest will be easy."

"Leave it to us, guv'nor. We'll do the trick."

"The attack is to be a surprise one. You must give the boys no warning of your approach," continued the Head. "But I can give you further details later on, Briggs. Where are your men at the present time?"

"Out in the lane, sir."

"Are they all good, reliable men?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to call 'em reliable, sir, but they're just the blokes for this job," said Mr. Briggs. "I got 'em together in Bannington mostly. Rough young chaps with no work, and willin' to earn a half-quid easy."

"Well, you will bring them all to the Ancient House doorway at one-forty-five," said the Head. "I will have some refreshments in readiness for you—"

"You're the kind of gent a feller don't often meet," said Mr. Briggs enthusiastically. "But I don't reckon we shall have much trouble in routin' out them kids. They won't be able to lift a finger agin us."

The Head nodded.

"Well, my man, I think I have told you all that is necessary at the moment," he said. "If possible, I want this affair to be secret. I should like even the school servants to be in ignorance of it. So your main aim, when you attack, is to be as quiet as possible."

While speaking the pair were moving out of the summer-house, and Montie and I were not able to catch Mr. Briggs' reply. But we had heard more than sufficient—and we were both tense with excitement and satisfaction.

"Talk about luck!" I breathed. "Did you ever know such a stroke in your life before? We came to this place by sheer chance, and the Head and this ruffian walk in and let us hear all their plans."

"Dear fellow, we shall wake up soon—we shall, really," said Sir Montie. "It is too good to be actually true."

"Luck generally favours the winning side," I exclaimed. "And this time we'll teach the Head that his rotten tricks won't pay him. Think of it, Montie, think of the depths to which the Head has descended! He's hired a gang of Bannington roughts to fight against us! I never dreamed of such a thing."

"It's frightfully low down, old boy," agreed Montie.

"But we'll beat the Head at his own game," I said grimly. "Now that we're warned we can take precautions. And when that attack begins we shall be ready for it!"

## CHAPTER 24.

### A Narrow Escape!

GOOD fortune was undoubtedly with us that night.

We had discovered the Head's plans by a pure stroke of luck. But it was not exactly extraordinary; for it was only natural that the Head should take his hired ruffian into a quiet, secluded spot, away from the school. That Montie and I should have been in the summer-house at such an opportune moment, however, was remarkably fortunate.

"We'd better be getting back, old boy," breathed Sir Montie.

"Look here," I said briskly. "I've been thinking. We shall want ammunition of some kind."

"Ammunition?"

"Exactly," I said. "There's no sense in letting the matter stand as it is. We can't fight this gang with our bare fists—we should go under within five minutes. There's going to be a battle at two o'clock, and our only chance of

winning is to have weapons that will beat off the Head's crowd."

"But what kind of weapons?" asked Sir Montie.

"I don't know—the matter needs a good deal of thinking about," I said. "Fortunately, we've a good deal of time at our disposal—nearly three hours, in fact. And we can make active preparations during that time. My suggestion is this: you hurry back to the fort, and give the warning to those fellows who are awake. Don't rouse the others until I come—"

"But aren't you coming with me?"

"No."

"Dear fellow, pray tell me what the idea is?" said Montie.

"I'm going to venture out again—in search of weapons and ammunition," I said grimly. "We've got to take action now, and I might as well see what I can do now I'm here. You go in and give the warning, and I'll follow in about half an hour."

"You are quite determined on this?"

"Quite!"

"Then it's no use arguing," said Montie, with a sigh. "But, really, old boy, I shall be frightfully anxious until you come in. I don't like the idea of your bein' out here alone."

"That's all right," I said crisply. "You buzz along."

Sir Montie went without further protest, and I left the secret door slightly ajar, and stole away through the Head's garden. To tell the honest truth, I was rather worried.

I knew very well that the Head was set upon making a grim, determined effort to finish the rebellion in one fell swoop, so to speak. He meant to drive us out of our fortress by sheer force.

And we should need all our wits about us to repel the attack. Our bare hands would be useless—we should require some kind of ammunition. And this, in itself, was a problem.

We could not very well use anything which would do the attackers bodily harm. We should have to think of something which would beat them off

harmlessly. And it was rather a knotty point to tackle.

However, I thought it would be just as well to scout about in search of defensive weapons. And I stole out of the Head's garden at length, and made off in the direction of the domestic out-buildings.

Possibly I should find something there which would help me.

I kept my eyes open wide, and my ears were on the stretch. As far as I could judge I was quite alone, and I had no fear of being captured.

I was just turning a corner of the dark building when I heard a slight sound behind me. I turned on the instant. A big form was actually on the point of springing at me as I twisted round.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

I dodged, but I was a second too late.

A hand clutched at my shoulder, and the fingers closed tightly over my jacket. The next second I was yanked round and held firm, with my hands behind my back. And I saw that my captor was the Head himself!

"Hold still, you young brat!" snarled Mr. Martin, panting heavily. "Let me see your face! Why, what—"

The Head uttered a snort of triumph.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "You are Nipper—Nipper!"

"Yes, I am!" I replied. "You've colored me, Mr. Martin, and I've got to give you credit for it. I didn't think you were smart enough to creep up behind me in that way!"

"You impudent puppy!" grated the Head. "I'm amazed that you should address your headmaster in such terms. You are the leader of this rebellion, and you are in my power. Let me tell you that your supporters will soon be in a similar position. And you, my lad, will be sent from this school by the first train in the morning—after being publicly flogged and expelled."

I had nothing to say. For I realised that the Head had the upper hand. I was his prisoner now, and there was

very little prospect of my getting away.

"You will be wise, and you will walk quietly," barked the Head. "I intend to take you indoors, Nipper, and I shall lock you in the cellar until the morning. If you attempt to escape now, your flogging will be all the more severe."

I didn't say a word, but marched off with the Head meekly and resignedly.

Of course, I was as grimly determined as ever, and I decided upon a last, forlorn chance. As I had anticipated, the Head had relaxed his grip somewhat—believing that I was resigned.

With a sudden wrench I tore myself away, twisted round, and dashed off. The Head gave a snarl of fury and tore after me. And then I met with a most abominable piece of luck.

My foot caught against a stone, and I sprawled over. By the time I was on my feet again, the Head had caught me—and he was holding me firm. I felt sick at heart—and my hopes fled.

But still I struggled wildly and furiously.

"Hold still, hang you!" shouted Mr. Martin. "You got away once, but you will not get away a second time—"

And then a really astonishing thing happened.

A form dashed up out of the darkness. It blundered right upon us, and two fists struck out at random. One hit the Head, and the other bowled me clean over backwards.

I seized my chance on the moment.

Up I scrambled and dashed off. And I heard the voice of Mr. Wroth! But I didn't wait to hear what he said, or what the Head said. I was free—and I streaked away for the old stone summer-house with lightning speed.

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee was bending over the Head.

"Dear me! I sincerely trust you are not hurt, sir?" he asked pantingly.

"Hurt!" raved the Head, jumping up, purple with rage. "You fool! You dolt!"

"Really sir—"

"What do you mean by interfering?"

roared the Head of St. Frank's fiercely. "You raving idiot! I was struggling with Nipper—I had just captured the young ruffian! And you come along and allow him to escape. Mr. Wrott, you are absolutely a fool!"

Nelson Lee bowed.

"I am deeply sorry if I have offended you, sir," he muttered, looking flustered. "I—I—that is to say—really, I——"

"Don't stand gabbling there!" snarled the Head. "Help me to find the brat! He went off in the direction of the Triangle, and we might still be in time to recapture him. I will tell you what I think of you later on!"

Nelson Lee thought Mr. Martin had already said quite sufficient, but he did not object. It was not Lee's policy to fall out with the Head.

And while they were vainly searching, I got back into the tunnel, and was quite safe. I paused for a breather when I arrived within the building. I had had a remarkably narrow escape and I had Mr. Wrott to thank for it.

The gov'nor had maintained his character so well as Mr. Wrott, so perfectly, that even I had no suspicion then that Nelson Lee was so near at hand. But I did know that he was responsible for my escape."

"Wrott did the trick for me," I told myself grimly. "He bowled the pair of us over on purpose—and deliberately allowed me to get away. Good old Wrott! He's got a pretty violent bark, but he's one of the best. He's a bit of a mystery, too, and I shall have to give more attention to him."

But, for the moment my chief aim was to get back to my supporters. And when I arrived in the dormitory corridor I was welcomed warmly by Sir Montie.

"Dear fellow, I'm frightfully glad to see you back safely," he said. "I haven't told anybody yet—I thought it better to wait until you came back."

"You're lucky to see me now," I said. I explained what had occurred—and several other juniors listened to my story. And they all agreed that my liberty had been gained for me by the timely intervention of the somewhat mysterious new Housemaster.

"But all's well that ends well," I exclaimed. "I'm here, and the Head's raving about me. He can't follow, because he doesn't know how I got in. And now I've got something else to tell you—something far more important."

"More important?" said Pitt.

"Yes. We are up against it. We are going to be attacked by a gang of twenty roughs!"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

My announcement certainly startled the fellows, but they showed no sign of weakening.

"Now," I went on, "the point is this: Can we resist these roughs? It means a fierce fight, and some of us are going to get hurt. I don't want you fellows to enter into this scrap if you consider that we shall get it in the neck. If you think so, we will chuck up the sponge now, before it's too late, rather than suffer defeat and a licking at the hands of these roughs."

"Never!" exclaimed my supporters.

"No surrender!"

"Stick it out!"

"Down with the tyrant Head!"

"Right!" I said, greatly relieved that the fellows were unanimous in fighting it out. "Then we resist Martin, the martinet, and his hired roughs to the end!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the stuff!"

And the Remove, having taken that fateful decision, waited grimly for the next move of the enemy.

The St. Frank's barring-out was to go on—it was to be a fight to a finish!

THE END.

"REBELS OF THE REMOVE!"—the sequel to this thrill-packed story—will appear in "THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN" LIBRARY No. 288, on Sale, Thursday, January 7th. 1937.

## SPEED MERCHANTS OF THE SNOWS

**W**HAT is the greatest sport-thrill in the world? A footballer's—when he scores a vital Cup Final goal and hears the roar of 90,000 frenzied spectators? A cricketer's—as he sees the ball going away for the winning run in a Test match? A boxer's—as his opponent is counted out and the referee proclaims him a world champion?

The thrill of a lifetime in every one of those; few men have the luck, the skill, the will-to-win that brings it. And yet there's one brand of sportsman who can claim to have found a bigger, more exhilarating thrill than any of these provide—the ski-jumper.

### The Thrill of Ski-ing !

Not many of us have had the chance to watch the real thing, for it has never been possible to stage ski-jumping in this country. But you've probably had a glimpse of it in the news-reel at your local cinema—and even that's enough to fetch a gasp at the sheer thrill of this supreme winter sport.

Through the eye of the camera, looking high overhead from a spot at the end of the landing-stretch, you see a tiny figure on skis start on its run down to the take-off. Swiftly, under the urge of his sticks, the jumper gathers speed, vanishing for an instant from those below as he flashes down to the take-off platform. Then, like a stone from a catapult, he is shot out over the appalling drop—a hurtling figure 100 feet from the ground—arms circling to maintain his balance, as he falls and falls.

From first to last the longest ski-jump takes no more than five or six seconds; but what unsurpassable thrills must the man with the nerve and skill to attempt it cram into that space of time! The world's record stands at something over 160 feet, the greatest leap man has ever made—or is ever likely to!

### 80 m.p.h. Over Snow !

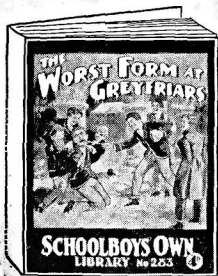
Second in speed, daring and thrills only to the ski-jump among winter sports comes bobsleighbing. This is a development of tobogganing in which, instead of one man riding, there is a crew of four or five. Naturally, with such a dead weight to carry, the bobsleigh is a heavy piece of work—difficult to control, and dangerous to turn over when cornering at eighty miles an hour, for that's what a first-rate bobsleigh team can do, flat out.

Of course, it's the cornering that gives these speed-merchants of the snows their greatest "kick." To hurtle round the top of the wall-like banking, every man swaying outwards at the leader's order, tilting to an ever-crazier angle until it seems bobsleigh and crew must turn over and crash, is a nerve-tingling experience for the oldest hand at the game. Quite often three or four bends like this have to be taken with scarcely a breathing-space in between!

The margin of error is dangerously narrow; a fraction of a second's mistiming by the man at the wheel will send him and his crew hurtling over the edge, often—in spite of their padded clothes and crash helmets—to be picked up seriously injured or worse. That's the gamble, and perhaps without it bobsleighbing wouldn't possess the thrill that it does.

Then there's ice-yachting. You may not have seen, or even heard of it; but the man who's sailed an ice-yacht will tell you there's no other winter sport to match it. The yacht itself is nothing more elaborate than a triangular timber frame, set on three steel runners—one acting as rudder—with a single sail set forward. Nothing much about that to suggest speed, yet you have to hold on for dear life when an ice-yacht has anything like a good wind behind it. They've been known to reach ninety miles an hour—nearly twice as fast as the actual wind speed—and sudden gusts will whip them clear off the ice for miniature fifty-yard flights!

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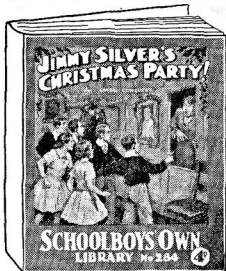


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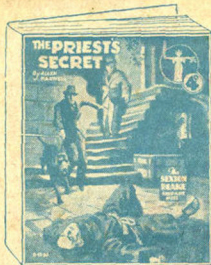
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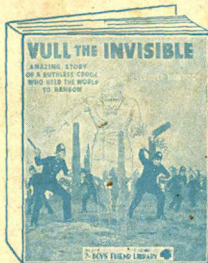
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