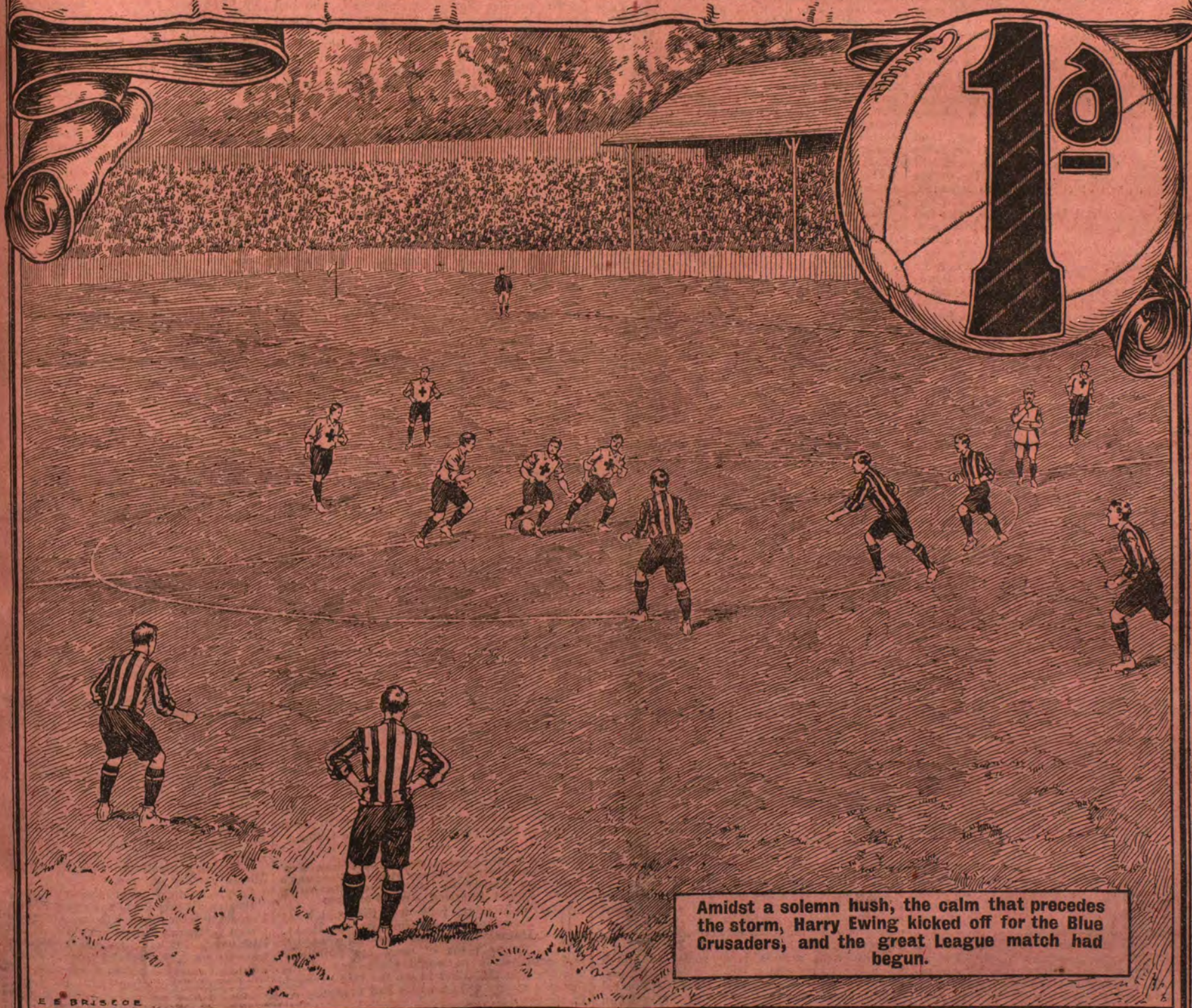


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No. 225. Vol. V.]

EVERY SATURDAY—ONE PENNY.

[SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1906.]

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A STORY YOU WILL ENJOY.



By Popular CHARLES HAMILTON, Author of "Football Fortune," etc., etc.

Prefect and House-master.

THE hour was late. The New House at St. Hilda's was dark and silent.

With hardly a sound the door of one of the Sixth Form bed-rooms opened, and a dim figure stepped into the corridor. The door was silently closed, and the boy bent his head to listen. He heard nothing, save the faint ticking of a clock in an adjoining room, and, reassured by the stillness, he moved cautiously along the corridor.

"Safe enough," he murmured inaudibly. "My hat, it wouldn't do for the head prefect of the house to be caught breaking bounds at night! It's risky, but I must see Bull. Oh, hang it, Temple's still up!"

Harold Trent paused in dismay. At the end of the corridor was the house-master's room, and though the door was shut, the light gleaming beneath it showed that Mr. Temple had not yet retired.

For several minutes Harold stood undecided. It was risky to pass the door, for if the house-master heard a sound he was pretty certain to look out into the corridor. But to return to his room meant giving up his project for that night. He scowled savagely at the door while he weighed the pros and cons. At last he decided, and, stooping down, he removed his boots, and, carrying them in his hand, stole silently forward. Clump! He was just opposite the dreaded door when one of the boots slipped from his hand and fell to the floor with a noise that to his startled ears seemed like thunder. He stood gasping, trembling in every limb, expecting to see the door flung wide open. But from the room came no sound. There was no movement within. The wild throbbing of his heart calmed a little.

Had Mr. Temple gone to bed, leaving his light burning? Had he fallen asleep in his chair? Whatever the cause, he certainly had not heard the disturbance outside his door; and as Trent realised this his courage returned, and he groped for the boot and found it, and continued on his way. A few minutes later he had left the building by a lower window, and, having donned his boots, skulked along in the shadow of the trees.

The night was dark, and at that hour there was no danger of encountering anyone in the quadrangle. He breathed more freely in the open air. Looking up from the dark quad, he could see the light in Mr. Temple's window, but the blind was down, and he could not see into the room.

"Fallen asleep over his books, I suppose," Trent muttered. "He'll be gone to bed before I get back, so that's all serene. Now for a climb!"

He stopped at the ivy-clad wall, at a spot he had noted for the purpose in the daytime. The tough tendrils bore his weight well, as they had bore the weight of many climbers before. He reached the top of the wall, and let himself down upon the other side, holding by his hands for a moment before he dropped.

He let himself go and dropped lightly into the road, and as he did so a hand fell upon his shoulder. He swung round with a gasp of terror at the sudden grip.

"Who—what—" he gasped. An athletic young man was standing before him. Even in the darkness it could be seen that his handsome face was contracted with anger.

"Mr. Temple!"

Trent gasped out the name in utter dismay. It was the house-master!

Trent stared at him open-mouthed. What on earth was Leslie Temple, head of the New House at St. Hilda's, doing out here on the high-road at such an hour? Harold Trent's curiosity was almost as great as his fear.

"So it is you, Trent—you, the head prefect of the New House, breaking bounds at night!" The young master's voice was sharp and contemptuous. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"If you please, sir, I—I—"

Trent paused. What could he say? A falsehood would have come willingly enough to his lips if he could have thought of one likely to be believed. But he could not.

"I am ashamed of you, Trent. I trust you will have the grace to be ashamed of yourself. Whom were you to meet?"

"No one, sir."

"You cannot expect me to believe that. You could not scale the wall from this side without

assistance. But I will not question you now. Return to your room immediately."

Mr. Temple unlocked the little gate to which all the masters at St. Hilda's had keys, and Trent, without a word, entered, and the gate was locked behind him. He was crestfallen and angry, but there was nothing to do but to obey. He thought with alarm of the morrow as he re-crossed the quadrangle. What steps would Mr. Temple take?

He re-entered the house as he had left it, and went silently upstairs. He ground his teeth as he passed the house-master's door, under which the light gleamed, and thought of the needless alarm he had felt there. But in the midst of his mortification and alarm strange thoughts were rising in his mind. What was the house-master doing outside the walls of St. Hilda's at that hour? Why had he not returned to the New House along with the culprit? What was keeping him out?

Harold Trent's eyes gleamed. "There was always something fishy about Temple," he said to himself. "He never talks about his people, and chaps have remarked how worried he often looks when he thinks nobody sees him. Jones was saying the other day that he believed Temple had something on his mind. By Jove, I shouldn't wonder! He'll be down on me like a hundred of bricks over this affair; but—but if I can find out what his little game is I may be able to bring him to terms yet."

In Disgrace.

"I SAY, Trent!" Harold Trent looked up as Sidney Clavering came into his study. School was over, and Trent had not yet heard from Mr. Temple. He had begun to hope that

the house-master had decided to take no notice of his escapade of the previous night.

"What is it, Clavering?" "Mr. Temple wants to see you in his study. And, I say, I fancy it means a row! He's looking as solemn as an owl!"

Trent gritted his teeth as he pushed his books away. The storm had only been delayed, after all.

"I suppose it means a row," he snapped. "He is down on me!"

Clavering looked at him in astonishment. "Why should he be down on you, Trent? You can't accuse Mr. Temple of being unjust."

"Oh, of course, you stick up for him!" sneered Trent. "You're one of his favourites. I'm not that, and that makes all the difference."

"I don't know about being a favourite," said Clavering coldly. "I always try to get on well with Mr. Temple, and I like him, and so does everybody else in the house, excepting yourself, Trent. We've pulled ahead of all the other houses at cricket since he has been with us." He looked curiously at Trent. "Have you been falling out with him?"

"He caught me breaking bounds last night."

"Phew! That's serious!"

"What was he doing outside the walls in the middle of the night?" said Trent viciously. "I fancy Leslie Temple isn't such a paragon as you and the other fellows think."

"Oh, rats!" said Clavering. "If you want to run down Mr. Temple, you'll have to find another listener. I'm off!"

And he left the study.

Trent scowled, and slowly took his way to the house-master's quarters. Mr. Temple's face was very stern when the prefect entered. Young man as the house-master was, he always seemed much graver than his years seemed to warrant. Sometimes, when he played for his house on the cricket ground, a boyish cheeriness crept into his manner, and it was then that the New House lads liked him best. But as a rule he was grave and reserved.

"I have taken time to reflect, Trent, over your misdemeanour," said Mr. Temple. "I have decided not to take you before the doctor. It is, of course, impossible for you to remain a prefect of the house. A prefect's duty is to uphold discipline, and set an example to the other boys. You have done neither the one nor the other. I trust that you will profit by this lesson, for if you should repeat your offence, and it came to my knowledge, the result would be very serious indeed for you."

Trent set his teeth hard.

"So I am no longer prefect?"

"No; I shall appoint another in your place."

"May I ask if it is Sidney Clavering you have selected?" asked Trent, with a scarcely concealed sneer.

"You have guessed correctly. You may go."

Trent's eyes were burning, but he dared not give expression to his rage. But a few minutes after leaving the house-master's study he met Clavering.

"So you have succeeded in ousting me," he sneered.

"What are you talking about?" asked Clavering, in amazement.

"I've got the sack, and you are to be prefect in my place. I see now why you have always curried favour with Leslie Temple."

Sidney Clavering looked at him steadily.

"I've never curried favour, as you call it," he replied. "If Mr. Temple's given me the post, I suppose it's because he thinks I am fit for it. You're not, anyway, after what you've told me."

"Don't preach to me, you—"

"You'd better dry up!" interrupted Clavering sharply. "I can make allowance for your feelings, and I don't want a row with you. But I warn you that I sha'n't stand very much more of your insolence."

Trent looked at him, his brow dark with rage; but there was something in Clavering's face that made him pause. He had very strong doubts about being a match for Clavering if it came to a quarrel, and Clavering was evidently getting angry. So the fallen prefect, with a bitter sneer, turned upon his heel and walked away.

Trent Plays the Spy.

HAROLD TRENT did not meet with much sympathy in his humiliation. He had never been very popular, while Clavering, on the other hand, was generally liked. The former prefect accepted his degradation with outward calmness, and affected to make light of it. But in his heart the hidden rancour grew daily more bitter.

The more he reflected upon the matter, the more he became convinced that the house-master had a secret which he was anxious to keep from the knowledge of St. Hilda's. That it was a disgraceful one, a fellow like Trent was not likely to doubt. But what was it? He was bitterly determined that he would know. Once he knew it he would be able to dictate his own terms, he thought. Then to repay his humiliation on the man who had inflicted it, and to gratify his old grudge against Clavering.

And so he took to noting the house-master's movements with malicious attention. Leslie Temple, utterly unconscious of the espionage, was quite off his guard. And so Trent's opportunity came a few nights afterwards.

The New House, like the rest of St. Hilda's, was wrapped in silence and darkness. Only from the house-master's window gleamed a light. Mr. Leslie's door opened, and he stepped quietly out, and went downstairs. He little dreamed that a door was ajar along the corridor, and that a pair of spiteful eyes watched him go.

Harold Trent left his room, his eyes gleaming. He was on the track at last. He had no scruples about playing the spy; his was not a manly nature. In a few minutes he was in the quadrangle, and from the shadows he watched the house-master unlock the little gate in the wall and pass out. He locked it behind him; but in a minute Trent had climbed the ivy, and was looking over into the road.

There was a silver crescent of moon, and the road was light. The shadow of an elm fell upon the wall and concealed Trent. He saw the house-master move from the gate, and then a dark figure crossed from the trees on the opposite side of the road.

"Have you got it?"

The hoarse voice reached the ears of the boy on the wall. He felt a thrill. He could not make out the stranger's features, but he was roughly dressed, and had a thick, reddish beard. The house-master placed something in his hand.

"How much?"

"Five pounds."

"That isn't much, Leslie."

"It's more than I can well spare," was the curt reply. "You must be satisfied. Yes, I draw a liberal salary here; but no salary could stand the inroads you make upon it. And, look here, I don't want you to meet me so near the school again."

"But at this hour—"

"There is always risk. One of the boys broke bounds the other night, and came upon me only a few minutes before you arrived. Next time I will see you at the old mill. But it will be useless to see you for some time. I have nothing more to give."

"You must make a raise somehow, Leslie. Hang it, I must live! And when you can give me a solid hundred, I promise you that I will make tracks abroad. I'm pretty safe here from the police, but I should feel safer across the water."

"Where am I to get a hundred from?" said Temple impatiently.

"Dr. Manners is rich, and—"

"Hold your tongue, you scoundrel!" said the house-master, in a suppressed voice. "You cur, hold your tongue! Let a suggestion like that pass your lips again, and I'll wash my hands of you and your affairs, at whatever risk."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Have your own way. You know the price at which you can get rid of me. Keep your wool on, Leslie! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Carne!"

The man crossed the road and disappeared. Leslie Temple stood looking after him with a dark brow for some minutes, and then slowly turned towards the gate.

Harold Trent, his heart beating wildly, slipped down from the wall, and hurried to the house. He had heard every word, and his brain was almost in a whirl. His discoveries had exceeded his wildest anticipations.



Clavering saw through the breach in the wall a man sitting on a fallen beam, close by a perforated pail in which a fire burned. He approached cautiously, but the man heard him.

"THE SCHOOL AGAINST HIM," by popular Henry St. John, starts in this week's "Boys' Friend." Now on Sale, 1d.

He was in his room before the house-master re-entered the building; but there was little sleep for Harold Trent that night. He lay awake, thinking. There was much in the affair that puzzled him, but one thing seemed certain—Leslie Temple was in his power!

Trent Dictates Terms.

WHAT do you want, Trent?" The class had just been dismissed, but Harold Trent lingered behind after the others were gone. Mr. Temple glanced at him inquiringly. The two were alone in the deserted class-room. Trent was pale, but he was determined. "I want to speak to you, sir."

"Very well."

Trent crossed to the door and closed it. The house-master viewed this proceeding with visible astonishment. Trent turned towards him again, with an unpleasant flutter at his heart, but still resolute.

"I want to ask you if you can reconsider your decision of the other day, sir."

"Impossible! Clavering gives every satisfaction—more than you ever gave, Trent, at the best of times. If that is all you have to say—"

"It isn't all," said Trent desperately. "I think you'll find it best, Mr. Temple, to restore me to my position. I don't ask it as a favour. One good turn deserves another, and I think you should do it if I keep to myself all I know."

The house-master changed colour for a moment. "Indeed! You are very mysterious," he said, with forced irony. "What are these wonderful things that you know?"

"I know that somebody has a secret, and that he is blackmailed by somebody else," said Trent. "I don't want to trade on it; but, as I said, one good turn deserves another."

"Tell me what you mean," said Leslie Temple sharply; but his face was white. "You have been breaking bounds again, I presume?"

"What if I have?" said Trent half-defiantly. "You've got no right to find fault with me, at all events. I know whom you met last night."

"You—you know!"—Mr. Temple was as pale as death. "You—you young rascal!"

Even Trent was astonished by the effect of his words. He was exultant, too. There was evidently something deeper in the matter than he had deemed. Mr. Temple was more at his mercy than he had calculated.

"Yes, I know," he said coolly; "and all St. Hilda's will know pretty soon if I don't have back the post Sidney Clavering ousted me from."

Mr. Temple was silent. The perspiration was damp on his brow. Trent watched him curiously. He had little doubt as to what the house-master's decision would be.

"If I were to condescend to make terms with you, Trent, for the sake of this—this person," said Leslie Temple, at last, "could I rely upon your silence?"

Trent grinned. He did not believe for a moment that it was for anybody's sake but his own that Mr. Temple was willing to come to terms. But he did not care how the matter was put so long as he was victorious.

"Certainly, sir," he replied.

"Then I will think about the matter."

The house-master abruptly quitted the class-room. He left Trent gleeful, with no doubt whatever as to what the final result would be.

Mr. Temple went direct to his study, and shut himself in. He wanted to think; but the audacity of Trent had taken him so by surprise that he could come to no decision. He knew that the one-time prefect was in earnest, and his whole soul revolted from the humiliation of coming to terms with one who should have been under his authority.

"But Carne?" he muttered. "If I punish this young scoundrel as he deserves, what will become of Carne? If it were only myself—"

He leaned his elbows on the table, and his face dropped into his hands. He did not seem able to think clearly, and yet he must decide.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

He raised his head quickly. His face was like chalk, and seemed strangely old. Sidney Clavering stood at the half-open door regarding him with amazement.

"I—I beg your pardon!" stammered Clavering. "You remember you told me to come, sir? I knocked twice, and you did not answer, so I—"

"I had forgotten," said Mr. Temple, trying to speak in his ordinary tone, but failing dismally. "Come in, Clavering."

"You are not well, sir—another time—"

"No, no; come in now. I want to see you, as it happens."

Clavering came in and closed the door. The house-master rose to his feet.

"I am sorry you saw me just then, Clavering," he said quietly; "but I think I can trust you, my boy."

"Certainly you can, sir!" said the prefect eagerly. "You may be sure that I shall not chatter idly. But—but—"

"But what, Clavering?"

"If there's any trouble, sir, and—and I could help you, I'd be only too glad," said Sidney, colouring at his own temerity.

"I know you would, Clavering, and after what you saw, it would be useless for me to deny that I am in trouble," said the house-master gravely. "I know you will believe, though, that it is by no fault of my own. By a peculiar conjunction of circumstances, I have to bear the burden of another's wickedness, but it is impossible for me to explain. But there is a favour I want to ask at your hands, Clavering."

"Anything, sir."

"Will you resign your position as head prefect of the house?"

Clavering looked at the master in amazement. "Resign, sir?" he said.

Mr. Temple did not meet his eyes. "That is what I said, Clavering."

"You are not satisfied with me?"

"On the contrary, I am more than satisfied. I cannot explain, and I can only throw myself on your generosity, my boy. You have every right to refuse, and if you do so I shall not complain. But if you wish to help me—"

"Can I help you by resigning?" asked Sidney, his eyes opening wide.

"Yes."

"Then I will do so, sir, willingly."

"Thank you, Clavering. Thank you, my boy."

Sidney Clavering quitted the house-master's study in a state of profound amazement and concern. Mr. Temple was plainly in a very disturbed state, and Sidney feared that he was ill. But that did not explain his strange action. Since Mr. Temple's coming to St. Hilda's a very sincere friendship had grown up between Clavering and the young house-master. The lad was a little wounded at being asked to resign, but it was chiefly on Mr. Temple's account that he was concerned. He had heard the whispers that had risen in the house, that Leslie Temple had a secret of some kind. And, though his loyalty to the master of the New House remained firm, strange misgivings began to rise in his mind.

Caught in the Act.

HANG it, I can't sleep!" The night was hot. And Sidney Clavering was disturbed in his mind. After several unsuccessful attempts to compose himself to sleep, he gave it up.

It was nearly a week since the resignation of Clavering. That resignation had been received with amazement by the whole House. And the amazement was intensified when it became known that Harold Trent had resumed his old position.

The New House wondered what Mr. Temple was about. Another circumstance excited comment. The house-master was one of the finest cricketers at St. Hilda's, and the New House had made great strides under his leadership. The House team, captained by Leslie Temple, had defeated in succession the three other house elevens at St. Hilda's. But of late the young master had been lamentably off his form. This had culminated in a defeat of the New House by Todhunter's, in the last inter-house match. Leslie Temple's batting had been wild, his bowling wilder. What was the matter with him?

Harold Trent knew, and Clavering partly guessed. And it was as much the thought of the house-master's unknown trouble as the heat of the summer night that prevented Sidney from sleeping. He gave up the attempt, slipped from the bed, and began to dress himself.

"A turn in the quad will set me right," he reflected. And he went downstairs and let himself out into the quadrangle. In the open air, under the shadowy old elms, the night was cooler, and he was relieved as he paced to and fro.

Suddenly he stopped, in the shadow of a tree. A tall figure had crossed the quadrangle, and even in the gloom he recognised the house-master. He thought of what Trent had said, and coloured with vexation at the thought of having unconsciously played the spy upon the master's movements. He heard the click of the key at the gate, and silence followed. He turned back towards the house. And after taking a few steps, he almost ran into a figure slinking along in the shadow of the elms.

"Clavering!"

"Trent! What are you doing out here?"

The prefect grinned.

"I might ask you the same question, Clavering. I suppose you're up to the same game?"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, come, we may as well be plain with one another! Temple's gone to the old mill to meet the man who blackmails him, and I fancy you know as much about it as I do. You don't mean to pretend that you're here by chance," said Trent impatiently.

Clavering gritted his teeth.

"Do you think I am as mean a cur as you are?" he said quietly. "I came out for a turn in the open air because I couldn't sleep. But what do you mean by somebody blackmailing Mr. Temple? How do you know anything about it?"

"Never mind how I know," said Trent sullenly. "I do know, and I know that your precious popular house-master has committed some crime or other, and the chap holds him in his power, and makes him fork out money. I've seen him give him money."

Back to Clavering's mind came the scene in the house-master's study; Leslie Temple's head in his hands, his white face as he raised it when Sidney entered, and his strange words, that he was forced to bear the burden of another's wickedness.

What was this strange secret?

"You are mistaken, Trent," he said scornfully. "There's a mystery here, but if the truth came out I am certain that Mr. Temple would be found blameless."

Trent laughed.

"Then why does he hold communication with a man hunted by the police?"

Clavering gave a start.

"Are you mad?"

"It's true. I heard the man himself say so."

And he said he'd go abroad if Temple would give him a hundred pounds, and advised him to steal it from Dr. Manners."

Trent grinned at the horror in Clavering's face. He found a keen pleasure in blackening the house-master to the boy who loved and respected him.

"You must be dreaming!"

"Rot! I tell you I heard it."

Clavering's eyes flashed.

"And perhaps you have used this knowledge to gain your own ends—"

"Perhaps I have," said Trent coolly. "That's my business. But I'll have the whole story to-night, and—"

"You won't!"

"Who'll prevent me?"

"I will. You are not going to follow Mr. Temple. What he chooses to do is no business of yours. You cur!"

"You are not my master. I shall go if I like."

"You had better not like, then," said Clavering grimly.

Trent, with a growl of defiance, pushed roughly past him. Clavering grasped his collar and swung him back. The next instant they were fighting like tigers.

A Lesson for Trent.

TRENT was furious, and Clavering was deeply incensed. They closed with mutual animosity. Fierce blows were given and received, but hardly a sound was heard save the deep, irregular breathing of the combatants, and the shuffling of feet. Both were equally desirous not to waken the sleeping school.

For several minutes the struggle continued, and then Trent was flung violently to the ground. He sprang up in a moment.

"Will you let me pass?"

"No!"

And at it again they went hammer and tongs. But slowly and surely Harold Trent weakened before the vigorous assault of Clavering. He still attacked desperately, but his blows grew feeble, his defence less skilful. Again and again Clavering's fists dashed into his face, and more than once he went to earth with a dull thud. Each time that he renewed the combat his defeat seemed more certain.

At length, with a terrible upper-cut, into which he threw his whole strength, Clavering sent the prefect fairly flying.

Trent crashed on the ground like a sack of coal, and did not rise.

Clavering stood over him with flashing eyes. "Will you give up your spying now?"

"Hang you," said Trent faintly, gasping with pain—"hang you, Clavering! You've done me this time, but I'll make you pay for it, and your precious house-master, too."

"Will you give up your spying?"

"Yes, hang you!"

And Trent, rising painfully to his feet, staggered away. Clavering followed him, and saw him into his room before he quitted him. He left the prefect bathing his face in water, and went to his room to do the same for himself. Trent had been terribly thrashed, but Sidney had not escaped without punishment. One of his eyes was closed, and his lips were cut, his nose bleeding. He hardly felt the pain, however. While he bathed his injuries, he was thinking of the house-master.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. And as he lay wakeful, he heard a faint sound, past midnight, which told that the house-master had returned. Where had he been? Was the man who shared his strange secret in hiding at the old mill? It seemed like it; yet what could the house-master of St. Hilda's have to do with a man hunted by the police?

In the midst of doubts and fears, Clavering's loyalty held true.

"He is innocent of wrong-doing," he said to himself decidedly. "Somehow he is in the power of a scoundrel! If I could only help him! Why does he not give up the rascal to the police? What if I"—he caught his breath as a new idea flashed into his mind—"what if I were to do so? The man is evidently a scoundrel, and if he were in prison he could not harm Mr. Temple. If things go on like this, Mr. Temple will have to leave St. Hilda's. Trent will use his power, and others, too, will get to know about it. It must end in ruin for Mr. Temple if it is not brought to an end. Can I save him?" He sat up in bed, his eyes sparkling, excited at the thought. "That he has done nothing wrong I am certain, and he cannot have anything to fear from a denouement. The wretch is working upon his good nature, or is somehow deceiving him. At all events, I can ascertain how matters stand, and then, if it is really as I think, I can save him."

It was almost morning when Sidney came to this conclusion. At last he fell asleep, and did not open his eyes again till the rising-bell sounded through St. Hilda's.

Clavering's Ultimatum.

THE appearance of Clavering and Trent excited comment the next day. Both bore very visible traces of the encounter in the quadrangle, but as neither gave any explanation, their schoolfellows were left to puzzle over the matter. Mr. Temple must have noticed their battered appearance, but he made no remark upon it.

Sidney Clavering was in a very thoughtful mood that day. He had reflected upon his plan, and had made up his mind, though not without some misgiving. But the pale and harassed looks of the house-master decided him. If he could remove this shadow that was darkening the life of the man he loved and respected, he

felt that it was his duty to do it. He went to the nets as usual after school. Mr. Temple did not turn up there. The new House boys were beginning to think that they had cornered Leslie Temple's abilities as a cricketer. Clavering knew how distressed the house-master was when he neglected the game he loved. The practice was over Clavering walked down the riverside in the direction of the old mill. He knew that he could not get lost at that time for calling-over, but he was prepared for that.

The mill was a ruin, having been partially destroyed by a fire many years before. It stood in a lonely spot, and as it had the reputation of being haunted, it was generally avoided. It was a safe place for a fugitive to find quarters in, though such an occupant would find the quarters far from comfortable.

It had been dark some time when Clavering drew near the ruined mill. The place was tangled with thickets, and not easy of approach. As the boy pushed his way through the bushes he caught a ruddy gleam from the darkness ahead. It came from the lower chamber of the old mill, which was still a partial shelter from the weather—sufficient for the summer nights at all events.

"He is there!" muttered Clavering. His heart beat hard. For the first time he struck him that there might be danger in entering the solitary haunt of a known criminal. He was alone and unarmed; but he was the finest athlete at St. Hilda's, and he had a British heart. His pause was only momentary, and then he pushed resolutely on.

He stopped at a great breach in the wall and looked in. A man was sitting on a beam close by a perforated pail, in which a fire burned. The red firelight illumined a round him. On the fire some potatoes were baking. A stone slipped under Clavering's foot, and the man sprang up with an oath.

Savage he looked in the glow of the fire. His face was coarse and hard, and a big beard hid the lower half of it. He glared at Clavering in mingled alarm and rage as the Sixth-Former of St. Hilda's stepped into the ruined apartment over the heaps of rubbish.

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

"I have come to see you," said Clavering calmly.

The man's teeth snapped, and he was upon the boy with the spring of a tiger. Clavering reeled back with two wiry hands clutching at his throat.

"Now," came a hissing voice, "tell me how you came to—"

But Clavering had recovered himself in a moment. He grappled with the ruffian, and with a simple wrestler's trick laid him upon his back. The man went down with a thud.

"None of that, my man!" said Sidney coolly. "You'll—Good heavens!"

The exclamation fell sharply from his lips, for as he went down the man's beard had been torn off, and was now dangling by a single wire, and without the disguise the face was strikingly like one Clavering knew well—the face of Leslie Temple.

"Hang you!" The man staggered to his feet, breathless and shaken. He gave Clavering an evil look, but he did not attempt to come to close quarters again. "Hang you, you devil, I—"

"Are you a relation of Mr. Temple's?" asked Clavering. He thought he understood now the real nature of the house-master's secret, and his heart ached for Leslie Temple. "You may speak freely. I am Mr. Temple's staunchest friend."

The man looked at him curiously.

"I'm his cousin," he said shortly. "Has he sent you here?"

"No; I came to find you. I knew that you had been blackmailing Mr. Temple. I did not know, however, his motive for submitting to your extortions. I know it now. You are hiding from the police, and you are abusing his kindness. And you have threatened to drag his name into your disgrace if you are arrested, have you not?"

"You are mighty clever. What if I have?"

The man's tone was sullen, but he was eyeing Clavering very uneasily.

"Only this," said Clavering, his eyes flashing—"you have to deal now with me, and with the gentleman whose kindness you have abused. I go straight from here to the police-station. Make the most of the interval. You have about two hours."

"You—you won't—"

"I have warned you."

The rascal burst into a stream of pleading promises, and threats, to all of which Sidney listened with an unmoved face. He felt that he was doing right, and he was firm as a rock. "You have two hours," he repeated icily. "Make the most of it."

Carne Temple looked inclined to spring upon him, but he was still aching from his former experience. He hurled a volley of curses after the boy as he stepped from the ruin, but he did not neglect to profit by the warning. Clavering kept his word; in two hours the police were at the old mill. They found many traces of the fugitive's occupation, but the bird had flown. By that time he was far away.

He was never seen near St. Hilda's again.

Clavering said nothing to a soul at St. Hilda's of his visit to the old mill. He had saved the house-master from his terrible incubus, and he was satisfied. He felt that Mr. Temple would be humiliated by his knowledge of the secret, and from motives of consideration he kept his own counsel. When Leslie Temple paid his next visit to the ruined mill he would learn that he was free, and that was enough.

SEXTON BLAKE appears each week in "The Union Jack Library"—1d. every Friday—in a Grand Long, Complete 36,000-word Novel. Mind you get it.

THE HOUSEMASTER'S SECRET.

(Continued from the previous page.)

Trent Before the Doctor—Good for Evil—Conclusion.

LEVEN had struck from the clock-tower of St. Hilda's. A stealthy figure was creeping down the corridor from one of the Sixth Form bedrooms. He paused at a sudden blaze of light.

He started his eyes. The house-master's door had opened suddenly. The house-master stood in the light, and his face was very stern as it fixed upon Harold Trent.

"Where are you going, Trent?"

Trent had changed colour, and his heart was beating hard; but he quickly recovered his nerve. He faced the house-master defiantly.

"I'm going out."

"You are going to do nothing of the kind!"

"Will you stop me?"

"Yes, I will!"

"You'd better take care, sir! I know very well that you've only just come in yourself. I know you."

"You are not, I believe, the judge of your master's movements."

"You have been to the old mill, to see a criminal who is hiding from the police. Do you want me to tell the doctor that?" sneered Trent.

A faint smile flickered over the house-master's face.

"And as I returned," he said, "I saw a bad character, one Bull, lurking near the school—a card-playing swindler, I believe. You are going to meet him."

"Suppose I was?"

"You will go instantly back to your room. You are no longer a prefect of the New House."

"Obey instantly, or come with me to the doctor! He has not retired yet. Are you going to obey me?"

"You dare not!"

"Will you obey me?"

"No!" said Trent desperately.

The next moment the house-master's strong arm was on his collar. He was marched away down the stairs, through shadowy corridors.

He hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He persuaded himself that the house-master was only seeking to frighten him.

He would never dare to take him in to the doctor; yet Mr. Temple seemed in deadly earnest. When they arrived at the doctor's study Trent was quaking. The doctor was up to his eyes with examination papers. Mr. Temple tapped at the door.

"If you please, sir—" faltered the now terrified prefect.

Mr. Temple took no notice. In response to the doctor's "Come in!" he pushed open the door, and entered with Trent.

Mr. Manners adjusted his pince-nez, and gazed at them in amazement.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Temple?"

"I did not disguise from you, sir, when I entered St. Hilda's that I had the misfortune to be connected with a person who had brought shame upon himself and all his connections," said the house-master, in a low but clear and firm voice.

"That person recently took refuge near St. Hilda's, and I assisted him with money. He has since fled, and I have strong hopes of never seeing him again. This boy, having discovered that my cousin was hiding at the old mill, has traded upon the knowledge to the extent of venturing to defy my authority and to break bounds at night for the purpose of meeting a low betting man. I leave you to deal with him, sir. As for myself, I can only say that if you consider my misfortune makes it necessary for me to quit St. Hilda's, I shall submit to your decision as cheerfully as I can."

And Mr. Temple left the room. The doctor's eyes turned upon Trent with a look that chilled the wretched boy to the marrow of his bones.

"Have you anything to say, Trent?"

"I—I—Don't be too hard on me, sir!" whimpered Trent.

"Very well. Go to your room. Pack your box the first thing in the morning. You leave St. Hilda's by the first train. Not a word!"

And Trent went from the room, white as death.

But Harold Trent was not expelled. He threw himself upon Mr. Temple's mercy, and the kindhearted house-master interceded for him, and won his pardon from the doctor.

Even Trent's hard heart was touched by Mr. Temple's forgiveness, and he made some effort to show that he was not wholly ungrateful.

But Sidney Clavering became, and remained, head prefect of the New House, and always, at school and afterwards, the firm friend of the house-master.

THE END.

(Look out for other tales by this justly popular author shortly. Meanwhile remember that "The School Against Him," by Henry St. John, is just starting in "The Boys' Friend." Now on sale, 1d.)

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THE FIRST INSTALMENTS IN BRIEF.

DICK CLIVE had been arrested on the charge of having killed a certain rascally money-lender named Reiss, who had for many months been the cause of much misery in the little village of Belhampton. Now although there had been a quarrel between the two, and blows had been struck, yet Dick was not the cause of the man's death. Nevertheless he was sentenced to death—an innocent man suffering for another's crime. Eventually his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.

He was removed from his temporary prison and taken to London with two other convicts on his way to Wellwood Gaol. He made a bold dash for freedom, but was recaptured.

When the prisoners arrived at Wellwood together with their escort the incident of Dick's rash attempt to escape was reported to the governor—a stern martinet and a stickler for duty. The warders were both severely reprimanded, and Dick was placed on punishment diet (bread and water) for three days.

One of the warders, a fellow named Finch, was greatly incensed against Dick owing to the rebuke he had received through his attempting to escape, and he made an attack on the lad in his cell. But this was not all. He afterwards went to the governor and reported that Clive had assaulted him.

The warder was believed, and Dick was sentenced to be flogged. After the punishment the poor lad was obliged to remain in hospital for a while. Then he returned to his cell to conclude his sentence of solitary confinement. Afterwards he was set to work in the tinsmith's shop, and one of his fellow convicts told him of a plot to escape. Dick promised to throw in his lot with the others—there were seven in the plot altogether.

The eventual moment came when the escape was to be made. Out of the seven only four got away, and two of these were speedily recaptured.

Dick was basely deserted by his comrade, and after many perilous adventures nearly fell into the hands of Warder Finch. After a desperate race he evaded pursuit, and made the acquaintance of a tramp who conducted him to a hayloft on a farm, where they passed the night. Dick awakened to find the hayloft on fire, and in escaping was captured by the farm hands. He was handed over to the police and ignominiously taken back to gaol.

Of course he had to be punished, and he was given three days' solitary confinement with bread-and-water diet, and sentenced to twenty strokes of the cat. The day before the latter punishment was to be enacted Warder Finch offered to get him out of prison if he would bribe him with £300.

Mr. Walton Interferes—The Governor Gives Way.

It was a cold, wet, drizzling day, with heavy, lowering clouds flying across the heavens.

Dick shivered as he marched out into the exercise-yard between two warders. He had been through it all once before, long ago, but how familiar it all was! The triangle was there—the prison doctor, chatting with the chief warder; then the governor came out alone, and last of all, Mr. Walton.

The young clergyman's face was white and drawn; there was a look of pain in his eyes. It would seem as if he was the one about to suffer punishment, and not Dick, who stood upright, facing the governor, with his face set and firm and his eyes steady.

Mr. Walton came over to Dick and touched his arm.

"Bear it—bear it with fortitude; be brave and strong, my poor lad!" he whispered. "I shall suffer with you—for every blow! Your sin was not a great one. Liberty is dear to us all, and it is worth risking much for. You risked, and you have lost. But bear your loss like a man, and forgive them that trespass against you."

"Now then!"

The governor's voice was harsh and loud. He felt the cold. It nipped him after the genial warmth of India. He turned the collar of his fur coat up about his ears and shivered as he looked on while two of the warders fastened the handcuffs about Dick's wrists and secured him to the triangle.

Mr. Walton, in his thin black coat, shivered too, but it was not from the cold.

"This punishment must go on?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Go on? I don't understand you. Of course it must go on. Now, Andrews?"

The warder who had been told off to inflict the punishment stepped forward, and drew the tails of the formidable cat through his fingers.

In the biting cold air Dick's back was laid

bare to the lash. Once more he heard the whistle of the thongs in the air—once more he felt them bite into his flesh—once more beads of agony came out on his forehead.

The young clergyman turned his face away. At each sound of the falling lash he started and shivered as though it was on his back that it fell.

"Coward—coward!" he muttered, and resolutely turned himself about, so that he must look on, though the sight made him sick with horror.

He saw the red blood gush out—he saw the swollen flesh rise into livid weals; then, with the horror of it in his eyes, he turned to look at the governor.

No such sights as these moved the governor. He was too used to them. He had no sympathy, no feeling for the convicts. They were so many brutes, and they had to be treated like brutes. The lash was the only thing for them. He stood with his collar about his ears, and his hands in his pockets, stamping on the ground to keep his feet warm, impatient at the slowness of the punishment, and eager to be back to his breakfast in his own warm room.

"Man's inhumanity to man," Mr. Walton murmured. "That men can do this thing to man!"

Twelve stripes had been given. The prisoner's rigid pose suddenly relaxed; he seemed to sink forward so that he hung by his arms, his head upon his breast, his eyes closed.

The doctor held up his hand.

"Cast him loose," he said. "We'll give him a breather. How many more strokes, Andrews?"

"Eight more strokes, sir."

"Good! We'll give him three minutes, and then he'll be able to take them."

Half fainting, Dick was held up by one of the warders. No attempt was made to throw a cover over him, and he stood half naked in the bitter morning air.

But Mr. Walton came forward, and picking up Dick's coat from the ground laid it tenderly over his shoulders.

"Not worth while, sir," said the warder; "he's to take the rest in a minute."

"They are going to tie him there again—flog him again?" Mr. Walton cried. "I will not believe it. The prisoner is half fainting now."

Dick opened his eyes for a moment and looked at the clergyman; then he closed them again; but that look was enough to send the blood—the hot, chivalrous blood—coursing to the young clergyman's heart.

"He has suffered enough," he said, turning to the governor. "Will you order him to be removed?"

The governor raised his eyebrows.

"The punishment is not over," he said abruptly. "Twenty strokes were ordered, and he has had twelve; there are eight more. Put the prisoner up again, Andrews."

"Stop!" Mr. Walton was quivering with excitement. "I say that this must not go on. The poor fellow is fainting from the pain now. See, he can scarcely stand!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said the doctor, with a laugh. He had his own personal spite against Dick, and the opportunity was too good a one to be lost.

"If you knew the fellow as well as I do, Mr. Walton, you would know that he was malingering. I expect you have a good deal to learn regarding prison life and convicts yet."

"I have yet to learn that British gentlemen can take pleasure in inflicting such punishment as this on a fellow-creature," Mr. Walton said, in a low voice. "I ask you, in the name of humanity, to order that poor fellow to be taken away."

The governor scowled.

"You will kindly attend to your duty, Mr. Walton, and allow me to attend to mine. My duty is to carry out the punishment awarded by the justices. Come, enough of this. We can't stand here in the cold all the morning! Andrews—"

"Once more I protest," said Mr. Walton, in a loud voice. "I protest against this piece of barbarity!"

The warders started, and turned to look at the pale-faced young clergyman with new interest in their eyes. That anyone at Wellwood could raise his voice in protest against the governor was a thing unheard of.

"I have asked you for his sake to stop this punishment; he is not in a fit state to stand it."

"And I tell you—" shouted the governor angrily.

"And now for your own sakes I ask you,"

Mr. Walton said firmly, "for if ill comes of this the truth of it shall be known. I say, even though I have not this gentleman's medical knowledge—I say that the prisoner is not fit to be punished farther; and if, in spite of my protest, you insist on carrying the punishment out, then when harm comes of it the truth shall be known!"

The governor faltered. Like all domineering bullies, he was a gross coward at heart. He could trample on men and crush their feelings. Those that cringed to him he kicked. Few stood up before him and defied him, and when they did it was his turn to cringe.

The chaplain, flushed, bright-eyed, and eager, was standing before him, looking him full in the face.

"If ill comes of this, the consequence shall fall upon the right shoulders," he said.

It was a threat—a deliberate menace.

"I—I have not examined the man," he stammered. "You had better look to him again, Dr. Redman."

"I have examined him, and I say he is fit for punishment still," Dr. Redman said, throwing a glance of unconcealed enmity towards Mr. Walton. "This gentleman's business is to tend souls, and mine the body. If he will attend to his business, I will attend to mine."

"I should be a poor minister if I thought only of souls, and let the body perish. I should be degraded in my own eyes if I stood by silent while such things as this are done. I have not the power to stay your hand, but I have the power to bring home the consequences to you. Sir, it is for you to act as you think fit," he added, turning to the governor. "But remember I have protested."

"Yes, yes; of course. Er—you are new—this is new to you. Dr. Redman, look at the fellow again."

"It is unnecessary."

"I say, look at him!" thundered the governor, glad of the opportunity of turning on someone.

"You have my order, obey it."

Dr. Redman turned away sulkily.

"Once more I say he is fit," he said sullenly.

"And once more I say he is not," said Mr. Walton.

The governor hesitated for a moment; his wavering eyes wandered from the doctor to the chaplain.

"As—as you are new—unused to prison life, I'll humour you, Mr. Walton," he said, with a poor attempt at a smile. "Take the prisoner to the hospital to have his back dressed; the punishment is over."

Hospital Tortures—Dr. Redman Wins.

THANKS to the intervention of Mr. Walton, Dick was not in the terrible state that he was when he had been sent to the infirmary after his first flogging. Yet his back was terribly lacerated and painful, and so stiff that every movement caused him acute pain.

He was grateful to the new chaplain. He knew that in him he had a friend; one bold enough to risk his own position by speaking out boldly on behalf of those who could not speak for themselves. One who felt that it was his mission in this prison to succour and befriend the prisoners, rather than join forces with those who oppressed them, as his predecessor had done.

Yet, though Dick's gratitude to Mr. Walton was never lessened, he was soon to find out that the chaplain's championship of his cause would cause him more suffering than if he had been left to receive the full number of strokes that were awarded to him.

Dr. Redman, remembering what had happened when Dick had been in hospital last, had no love for him; and now that Mr. Walton had worsted him, and had gained the victory over him in the prison yard with an audience of warders and under-warders, among whom the doctor was already exceedingly unpopular, the doctor's dislike for Dick increased tenfold.

It was through Dick that he had suffered defeat at Mr. Walton's hands. It was through Dick that he had nearly got into serious trouble with the governor, and had only averted it by barefaced lying on the occasion of the lunatic's attack on the governor. And as Dick had been a source of inconvenience to him, he was resolved that he would be a source of inconvenience to Dick.

"Hallo, No. 333, you back again! Same thing!" The man who spoke was an orderly—one who had been employed in the hospital when Dick had paid his first visit there.

Dick nodded.

"What's upset the doctor? He's in a tearing rage, and been swearing something awful!" the man muttered.

"He had a row with the new chaplain. Mr. Walton stuck up for me," Dick muttered, "and got me off part of the punishment, and the doctor was for having me receive all the lashes."

"He wouldn't like that. But you ain't out of the wood yet, Clive. It strikes me you'd a-done better if you'd taken your sore back to your cell instead of bringing it here."

The hospital orderly was right, as Dick was