

REBELS OF THE REMOVE!

by
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

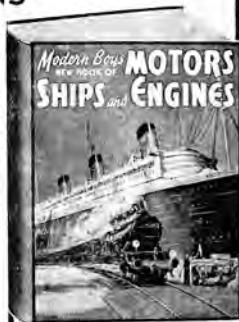


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REBELS OF THE REMOVE!

by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



"Up, the rebels! Down with the tyrant!" That's the battle cry of NIPPER & Co., the chums of the Remove. They are fed-up with the tyrannical regime of MARTIN the martinet, the new headmaster of St. Frank's, and they hit back at him in no uncertain fashion!

The Narrative Related Throughout by NIPPER.

CHAPTER I.

The Rebels of St. Frank's!

ELEVEN—twelve!

Midnight boomed out solemnly from the old clock-tower at St. Frank's. The great school lay dark and silent under the chill sky of the January night. Everything was quiet and asleep.

At least, one might have supposed so. No one, for instance, would have suspected that a large number of junior boys were in sole possession of the west wing of the Ancient House. True, it was their customary place of abode at night-time for the Remove dormitory was situated in the west wing.

But they had got possession of it in quite another sense.

It was not peaceful possession. The Remove had seized that part of the building, and were grimly holding it against all attackers. In short, they had taken command of the west wing by force, and were defying the headmaster.

And I am proud to say that I was the original instigator of the whole rebellion. It doesn't seem much of a thing to be proud of, on the face of it, but this was a very peculiar kind of revolt.

Mr. Howard Martin, the headmaster of St. Frank's, was an absolute tyrant,

He was a bully of the worst type, and under his iron rule life had not been worth living. He had made a particular "set" against the Remove.

And the Remove, becoming exasperated and fed up, had taken matters into its own hands. The net result was a rebellion. That state of affairs had existed for well over twenty-four hours already, and the Head had been unable to shift the rebels from their stronghold. He had made efforts to do so, certainly, but they had fallen through; and now, at midnight, it seemed that everything was quiet. There was no hint or sign of a coming attack.

But appearances are sometimes deceptive, and I, for one, was well aware of the fact that Mr. Martin was contemplating an assault. He was preparing to take the west wing by storm, and to rout us out.

It was very fortunate that I knew of the plan, for I should be able to take steps accordingly. We were very secure in our fortress, and only a very violent attack could possibly hope to succeed.

Mr. Howard Martin had not been at St. Francis' long, and he was filling the shoes of Dr. Stafford, who, in the opinion of the whole school, had been relieved of his duties in a most unjust manner.

However, we were not thinking of Dr. Stafford just then. Our troubles concerned Mr. Martin, his successor. This harsh gentleman had proceeded to wield the lash as soon as he arrived in the school. His methods were brutal. His rules and regulations were tyrannous.

The Remove, after standing a lot of injustice, had determined to end it all by breaking into revolt.

We were fighting against a system which was brutal, and we felt justified in our action. We had made our preparations at night, and in the morning Mr. Howard Martin had found himself defied.

In full possession of the west wing,

we had a splendid position. On the upper floor there was the dormitory—our own sleeping quarters. Immediately below this was a kitchen and some store-rooms, the latter being loaded with foodstuffs of every kind.

Thus we had sleeping accommodation and enough food to last us for a clear fortnight. The only exits to the wing were securely barred. Heavy barricades blocked the upper corridor and the lower passage, and every ground-floor window was boarded across in the most thorough manner. We were taking no chances; we could not afford to.

Our very success depended upon holding out until the Head was forced to give in, and it certainly seemed as though we should be able to carry out our project.

The Head had been dumbfounded at first, and he had done everything in his power to shift us from our stronghold. But the Fifth and Sixth, knowing well enough that we were justified in our cause, had refused to take any part in an attack, and Mr. Martin, after resorting to a ruse which had failed, was now contemplating a different form of activity.

He had decided to rout us out at all costs, for he was as grimly determined not to give in as we were. This, of course, was easy to understand, for surrender on the Head's part meant an admission of weakness, and Mr. Martin was not the kind of man to give in tamely.

By pure chance I had learned, an hour or so earlier, that the Head was planning an attack on our stronghold at two a.m. I knew that the attack would be a very fierce one, and for a particular reason.

He had hired a number of rough characters from Boston and Birmingham, and his scheme was to get us routed out in one swift onslaught. And it might have succeeded had I not overheard the Head giving a few orders to the leader of the gang, which was due to arrive at two o'clock. Thus I should

be able to take all precautions necessary.

The majority of the rebels were sleeping soundly, secure in the belief that nothing would disturb them during the night. The Removites were glad of a good sleep, for they had had very little since the larring-out had commenced.

I was very tired myself, but I did not show it. As commander-in-chief of the whole force, it was my duty to remain on the alert—more particularly when there was danger in the air.

I was on guard in the upper corridor, and with me were De Valerie, Reginald Pitt, Hart, and Tommy Watson. Trevellick-West was in charge of a party which guarded the lower passage, and other juniors were watching the various boarded windows. I was most particular in my methods, and kept every possible entrance under close guard. I should give the Head no opportunity of taking us by surprise.

"What I'm worried about," I said thoughtfully, "is ammunition. As you fellows know, there's going to be some excitement at about two o'clock. The chaps who are asleep don't know a thing yet, and there's no reason why they should be disturbed. But we must have ammunition."

"I don't see that it's really necessary," remarked Hart. "Our barricades are all strong, and the enemy can push as hard as they like, but they won't shift us."

I shook my head.

"You seem to forget that the enemy will be able to pull the obstructions down from the other side. It's very necessary that we should have something to drive them off. We must have weapons of some kind."

"Pea-shooters?" suggested Pitt.

"You ass!" said De Valerie. "This isn't a joke."

"The idea is a good one, all the same," I said. "As a matter of fact, I've got two dozen pea-shooters in readiness, to say nothing of an unlimited supply of good hard peas. A sudden

volley of those little beggars is able to make a chap squirm a bit. But pea-shooters and peas won't be sufficient. We must have something better, something more effective."

"Yes; but what?" asked Watson.

"That's what we've got to decide," I said. "Use your brains, my sons, and help me in this problem. By Jove, I've got it!"

"Thought of something?" asked Pitt.

"Bicycle pumps," I muttered.

"Gone doty?" asked Watson, staring. "What the dickens do you mean—bicycle pumps? Talk sense, for goodness' sake!"

"I am talking sense," I replied briskly. "Out in the bike-shed there are at least twenty good pumps, and a pump makes a first-class squarter. A good pump, filled with liquid, will send out a squirt almost as powerful as a garden syringe."

"That's true enough," admitted Hart. "But I'm afraid water won't stop a crowd of roughs!"

"We've got a barrel of treacle downstairs in the store-room," I said briskly. "Mix that treacle with water until it's of a medium consistency, and it's not a very nice concoction to receive in your face. That sticky stuff will keep a crowd back as effectively as anything. I've got another idea, too; but I'll tell you more about that later. Those pumps will come in useful in many ways."

"Exactly!" agreed De Valerie. "But you've forgotten something!"

"What's that?"

"We haven't got the pumps here! They're in the bike-shed!"

"I hadn't forgotten it," I said. "Three or four of us will have to steal out immediately and raid the shed. We can get out by the pantry window. It'll be easy enough to unscrew two of the boards."

"But old Martin might have some of his rotten hired men on guard," put in Hart, shaking his head. "I'm afraid

the game wouldn't be worth the candle, Nipper. What if you got captured?"

"We've got to have those pumps," I declared. "Everything depends upon our success in beating off the attack. If I'm collared—well, you'll have to carry on without me. I'm ready to take the risk."

"Good man!" said De Valerie. "But I've got a suggestion to make. If you'll leave this affair in my hands, Nipper, I'll do my best to carry it through. I shall only want one volunteer. Two of us on this job will be sufficient."

"I'm game!" said Hart promptly.

"That's the style!" exclaimed De Valerie. "If we're captured, we shan't be much loss. We'll be martyrs to the cause. Now, don't start objecting, because we're determined to go, and we're just as determined that you shan't go, Nipper. The commanding officer can't afford to risk capture."

"It's decent of you—jolly decent! I wouldn't let you go if I couldn't rely on you. Get off as soon as you can, and if you're captured sing out at the top of your voices. Then we shall know the worst."

De Valerie and Hart lost no time in making preparations. They descended to the lower part of the building, and two of the boards in the pantry were quietly removed—in total darkness, of course.

Then the pair set off to run the gauntlet to the bicycle shed. A number of other fellows had been aroused, and active preparations were afoot. I superintended the removal of the treacle from the barrel in the stove-room. Fortunately, we had plenty of pails and other vessels.

These were half filled with water from the kitchen tap, and then treacle was added. The mixture was not too thick and not too thin, and, squirted from bicycle pumps, it was calculated to cause the maximum amount of discomfort.

"It's going to be a battle," I explained, "but we can't use weapons

that will cause any serious harm. We're not out to do any damage to anybody, even though they are a lot of hired rousties. Our chief aim is to keep the barricades intact, and all we need is a system of defence which will keep the rotters off without doing any harm."

"Well, this ought to make them sweet-tempered, begad!" smiled Sir Montic. "Treacle is just the stuff, you know. It is, really. By Jove, I've got some of the shockin' mess over my jacket!"

"You'll have worse troubles than that, old son," I said cheerfully. "What about the daring adventurers outside? Any sign of 'em?"

"Not yet," said Pitt.

He was near the pantry door, and another fellow was at the pantry window. They were in readiness to resist any surprise attack, if one should come. De Valerie and Hart had ventured out into the gloom, and nothing further had been seen or heard of them.

Just when I was beginning to get rather anxious, however, there was a murmur from Pitt. He beckoned to me.

"Owen major reports that he has sighted mysterious forms approaching," whispered Pitt. "We'd better have a look."

I passed into the pantry with Pitt, and we stole to the window. Outside in the Triangle everything was black and still. There was certainly no sign of any impending attack.

Owen major was at the window, and he pointed over in the direction of the gymnasium.

"I saw two figures—" he began.

But at that moment he paused, for some slight sounds came from outside, and along the wall edged a pair of dim forms. It was impossible to tell who they were, so we prepared ourselves for any emergency.

The forms came to the window.

"You there, Owen?" whispered a voice.

"Oh, it's you, then?" I said softly.
 "Good!"
 "Who'd you think it was?" asked Hart—"the enemy?"

"Well, we can't be too careful," I replied. "How did you get on?"

"Great!" whispered De Valerie. "We bagged every giddy jump there was. There's not one left in the shed!"

"Good!"
 They scrambled into the pantry, and the barrading boards were screwed in position again. After that we retired into the big passage and examined the booty. There were pumps of every size and description, and the majority of them were in excellent condition.

"We'll have a little demonstration," I said briskly. "The rubber connections won't be necessary. The liquid can be squirted straight out of the pump. Stand down the other end of the passage, Tommy, and see if I can reach you with the mixture!"

Tommy Watson grinned.

"Oh, certainly!" he said. "I don't think!"

The other fellows grinned, but nobody volunteered to test the effects of the sweet concoction. The pump filled easily, and it projected a column of water and treacle far down the passage.

With seven or eight of those weapons working at each barricade, we should not have much difficulty in keeping off the attackers. The pea-shooters, too, would be useful. A swiftly projected pea is not a pleasant article to receive in the face.

The clock had already struck six, and I saw to the work vigorously. Special parties were placed at every vulnerable point. I was in charge of the barricade in the upper corridor—this, in my opinion, being the most likely point of attack. The corridor was filled with bedsteads and bedding, and once these obstructions were pulled down there would be nothing to prevent a break-through.

And so, in readiness, we waited. With nerves on the stretch, and with

ears listening for the slightest sound, we stood at our positions. The Head, no doubt, would believe that we were asleep and off our guard, and he would lead his attack stealthily.

Well, we should be in readiness. Mr. Martin would receive a big surprise when the actual moment came. I had not embarked upon this rebellion with the intention of allowing my supporters to be beaten. We were out for victory, and nothing else would suit us.

"Quarter to!" whispered Pitt, as the school clock boomed out solemnly. "Perhaps the bounders won't begin until later——"

"Hut!" I breathed. "Didn't you hear something?"

Everybody remained perfectly silent. And the intense stillness was broken by the sounds of stealthy footsteps on the stairs—a good many footsteps. And now and again a whispered order.

The attack was almost due to commence!

CHAPTER 2.

The Attack!

"WHERE'S Nipper?"

Cecil De Valerie asked that question in the softest whisper. He came up in the rear, and I slipped noiselessly away from the vicinity of the barricade, and caught hold of him in the darkness.

"What's the matter?" I asked sharply. "What are you doing up here?"

"We heard sounds two minutes ago," breathed De Valerie. "I thought I'd better come up and report——"

"The best thing you can do, my son, is to get back to your action station," I interrupted tensely. "There's a crowd creeping up the stairs now—so it's pretty obvious that the Head means to attack us at two points simultaneously—up here and in the lower passage."

"My only hat!"

"We shall need all our wits about us to resist the attack," I went on. "Don't

forget to resort to drastic measures if necessary. And your motto is to be 'no surrender.' Fight as you've never fought before."

De Valerie nodded, and silently departed. I returned to my own station, and found the other guards in a considerable state of excitement. Tommy Watson pulled my sleeve as I came up, and put his mouth to my ear.

"Martin's up here himself," he breathed. "I just heard him whispering."

"That means that we're to receive the brunt of the attack," I said. "All the better. We've got all the best men up here."

That period of waiting was decidedly nerve trying. We were afraid to speak, and afraid to move, and we were in total darkness. Hubbard was standing ready by the electric-light switch. When I sang out the order he would turn the light on in a flash, and we should get busy.

I listened intently and heard the Head's whispered voice.

"Go carefully now, men," he said under his breath. "The obstructions are just in front of you. Pull them down as quietly as you can to begin with. If the boys come out, use all your strength. Break through in one tremendous effort. If the barricade is removed within five minutes I will double your pay."

"Right you are, giv'nori!"

"Leave it to us, sir."

The voices were rather coarse, and I guessed that we were up against some tough customers. And at that moment came the sound of the barricade being touched.

The period of waiting was over.

"Right, Hubby!" I shouted. "Up with the lights!"

Click!

The corridor became flooded with electric light, and several hoarse gasps sounded from behind the barricade. Through the spaces we could see a motley crowd of rough-looking men and

youths. The Head stood behind, well in the rear, and his face was glowing with rage.

"So the young brats are ready!" he roared. "Very well! Go ahead, men! Pull down those obstructions——"

"Hold on!" I shouted. "Listen to me, you chaps! You've been hired to dig us out of this part of the building, but you've got no quarrel against us. If you're foolish enough to attack, we shall resist!"

"Stow yer lip, you young 'ound!" roared a voice. "At 'em, mates!"

Half a dozen of the men rushed at the barricade, and within a few seconds they succeeded in pulling down one of the bogtreads. During those seconds our peashooters were being filled, and the pumps charged.

"Fire!" I roared.

Hiss—ss!

A shower of peas rattled against the faces of the enemy. Two or three of the men staggered back, cursing. Others ducked their heads and continued. Then the pumps got to work. Out of every crevice in the barricade squirted a stream of sticky liquid. It spurted over the faces of the attackers; it got into their eyes; it tangled their hair. They were momentarily blinded.

"Gug-gug-groooh!"

"You young 'ounds—gug-gug-gug!"

The attackers roared with dismay and consternation. And the defenders yelled with triumph—and never for a second did they relax their efforts. The rain of peas continued, and the spurts of treacle poured out continuously. It was a stout defence.

"Give it to 'em!"

"Let the rollers have it hot!"

"Hurrah!" roared Standforth. "Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

"Are we going to surrender?"

"No!"

"Are we going to beat the rollers off?"

"No—Yes!" shouted the Juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of the gravity of the situation, a good many fellows were laughing with sheer excitement. It was undoubtedly an extraordinary situation. And for the moment Mr. Martin's hired ruffians were held in check.

It was the same downstairs.

De Velerie and his men were having a stiff time, but there was no danger of the defences being broken. The crowd of roughs there was not such a large one, and the juniors had no difficulty. The peas and the treacle did the rest. The attackers were driven off with comparative ease.

It was in the upper corridor that the chief attack was concentrated. Mr. Martin, in his excitement and rage, rushed forward until he was within the zone of fire. He was determined to smash down the barricades.

"Put some energy into it, you fools!" he shouted. "You're not going to be beaten by these infernal schoolboys! Use your strength!"

"Ave a go yourself, guv'nor," snapped one of the men. "See 'ow you like a pin of sticky mess in your eye!"

"The stuff can't hurt you!" roared the Head. "Why don't you—Grooch! Gug-gug-grooch!"

The Head sat down abruptly in the corridor. Several juniors had taken the opportunity to concentrate their fire upon Mr. Martin. The result was disastrous—for the bully of St. Frank's!

Peas rattled upon his face in dozens; squirts of treacle smothered his face until he was hardly recognizable. He attempted to pick himself up, and another storm of "bullets" struck him.

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do you like that, Mr. Tyrant Martin?" yelled Watson.

Mr. Martin forgot his dignity, and crawled out of range on all fours. When he rose to his feet behind the crowd, he was nearly insane with fury. And he egged his men on in violent terms.

The fellows certainly did their best.

They advanced again and again, but were beaten back by the hail of peas and the streams of sticky liquid. Several of the men retired altogether.

"Keep it up!" I shouted grimly. "We're winning!"

"Rats!" bawled Handforth. "We've won!"

"Of course we have!"

"We haven't won yet," I declared.

"Those rotters will make another charge—you see. And we shall have to be well prepared for it. Have you got those spare pumps ready, Hart?"

"Yes," replied Augustus Hart.

"Charged?"

"They're full up," said Hart. "At the word from you we'll come into action. We're the relief party!"

I nodded with satisfaction. Hart and half a dozen others had done nothing so far. They were waiting in the rear, and they would be used if the present system of defence failed.

The attackers had been beaten at first—but they soon found that the peas were fairly harmless, and that the treacle was similarly so.

The peas stung somewhat, but the men were tough. The treacle, provided the attackers kept their heads down, did little harm. And, once the men were smothered, it mattered little whether they received further doses.

So the roughs charged with lowered heads, and several of them succeeded in getting right up to the barricade. Then they commenced to tear down the obstructions. Once through, the position would be grave.

"Let 'em have it!" I roared. "Fire!"

The order was quite unnecessary, for the fellows were working overtime. Peas were dispatched in scores every minute; the treacle was used up at a surprising rate—and the corridor, in consequence, was already in a shocking condition. But we didn't care about this.

"They're beating us!" gasped Pitt, after a few moments longer. "They're breaking down the barrier, and we can't stop 'em."

"We've got to stop them!" I snapped grimly.

I examined the position. Half the attackers were right close to the barricade, working furiously to pull down the badsteads and other articles. Others were standing back clearing their eyes of trouble.

The roughs were attacking in series, as it were. When some of the men became too sticky to go on, they retired, and their places were occupied by the fellows who had been having a breather.

Thus, a continuous assault was being made—and the effect was disconcerting. Piece by piece, the barricade was being torn down—and the inevitable result of such an onslaught would be that we should meet with defeat.

I quickly made up my mind.

"Stand back, you chaps!" I shouted.

"Stand back?" gasped Griffith.

"Why, we're being whacked—"

"Stand back!" I repeated. "Make way for the relief force!"

"Good!" yelled Hart. "We're here."

"Then let it go—for all you've worth!" I exclaimed briskly.

Hart and his men came to the fore, their weapons—bicycle pumps—at the ready. They were only a handful, but they were destined to turn the scale in our favour. They applied their weapons vigorously.

"Press on, men—press your attack!" shouted Mr. Martin. "You'll have that barricade down within a few minutes if you use your energy!"

"Leave it to us, sir!" shouted one of the men. "We're gettin' the better of the young dogs!"

"Good. Briggs—good!" said the Head.

"Within two minutes we'll be through, sir," panted Briggs, who was the leader of the gang. "We'll—shush—shush— A-tish-choo!"

Mr. Briggs sneezed violently. His companions sneezed violently. And quite a number of the defenders sneezed, also.

The meaning of this change was obvious.

Two pumps, held by Hart and Co., contained pepper!

And the powder was pumped out in clouds through the barricade. The majority of the pepper filled the corridor like a fog, beyond the defences. The attackers found themselves gasping and choking in the grip of the stuff.

They breathed it down in clouds; it entered their eyes, blinding them for the time being.

Hart and his men did not cease their efforts. As soon as the pumps were empty, full ones were brought—there was a huge canister of pepper available. I had discovered it in the store-room, and realized its value at once.

"A-tish-choo!"

"Oh my hat!" gasped Handforth.

"It's—it's—choo!"

"Keep up the attack, men!" roared Mr. Martin. "You are winning—"

"Slow yer lip!" started one of the men. "Come ah' try— A-a-a-tish-choo! Cuss these kids! Grooh! A-a-a-tish-choo!"

"We can't stand it, mates," gasped another man. "My eyes are watering!"

"A-tish-choo!"

The men were absolutely helpless, and they reeled away from the barricade, with smarting eyes and stinging throats. Mr. Martin's orders were unheeded, and the crowd charged down the corridor.

"And if you come again, you'll get it worse!" I yelled. "We've got enough pepper here to keep back an army!"

"You young dog!" bellowed the Head. "I'll teach you that you cannot play these tricks upon me, confound you! Briggs! Order your men—"

Briggs swore violently.

"We didn't come 'ere to be blinded!" he snapped. "I ain't goin' to keep this game on, for one—ah! I know these blokes won't have no more of it. You can deal with them young cubs yerself!"

"I will double your money—"

"Yus, an' we'll be blinded!" roared one of the men. "Go to blazes!"

"We've done with you—we're goin' home!"

"Yus, come on, mates!"

And the whole crowd of men, still half-blinded, staggered down the stairs into the open air. Mr. Martin raved in vain. His faithless army would not stand by him.

And a perfect roar of triumph went up from the rebels.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"We've gained the day!"

"Three cheers for the rebels!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll never give in—we're out for victory!"

"Begad! Rather!"

"I guess we're havin' a real dandy time!" grinned Periman. "Say, the way we beat off them galoots was real bully!"

"We'd better not crow too soon," I said warningly. "We're victorious at present, and I think we shall be left alone for the rest of the night. But we mustn't be too certain—and we mustn't relax our efforts."

"Wise words, O mighty Nipper," grinned Pitt.

Meanwhile, the situation in the lower passage was almost identical with our own. The gang of roughs down there had been a much smaller one, and the pepper ruse had not really been necessary. But De Valerie had decided upon it, nevertheless. And the result was entirely satisfactory.

The attack was beaten off, and the gang fled into the open long before the fight was finished upstairs.

When I went down to see how things were getting on, I found the passage quiet, and De Valerie looking pleased with himself.

"Everything O.K. here," he said. "Armstrong just came down from your barricade and told us that the battle was won."

"Yes," I said, "we've beaten the blighters off—but as I told the chaps

just now, we mustn't be careless. The Head's in a lowering rage. We shall probably have further trouble before the morning—so we mustn't relax our vigilance."

"Of course not," agreed De Valerie. "We'll keep on the alert all night."

"We've beaten the bully (his time, anyhow)," ejaculated Grey, with satisfaction. "I reckon it's a complete triumph for the rebel Remove!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"And if there are any more attacks, we'll deal with them in the same way!" declared Watson. "The Head's an ass if he thinks that he can smash the rebellion by hiring a crowd of Bannington roughs!"

"We'll never surrender," said De Valerie grimly. "And this little episode ought to convince the Head that we're in earnest, and that we mean to use every effort to maintain our position. There's only one method of getting us to throw up the sponge."

"And what's that?"

"The Head's got to give way," declared De Valerie. "As soon as he submits to our terms, we'll return to normal duties. And he'll have to submit, sooner or later. It's the only course."

I nodded.

"Perhaps so," I said. "But the Head won't submit yet. He won't give in until every resource has failed. You've got to realise, my sons, that this is going to be a stiff fight. And if we mean to win, we shall have to keep up our courage and determination."

And the other rebels knew that I was speaking the truth.

We had won so far, but how long would the affair last?

CHAPTER 2

Bulky Mysterious!

MR. HOWARD MARTIN was in a fury.

Sticky and uncomfortable, his temper had already been tried to the

almost. But he felt like letting himself really go when his paid roughs gave up the fight and retreated into the open air.

The Head strode out into the Triangle, his brow black.

Briggs and the other men were standing in a group against the Ancient House steps. The majority of them were blowing their noses, and they were apparently engaged in a sneezing competition.

The noise they made, in fact, was so considerable that a good many fellows were at the dormitory windows, above—Third Formers and seniors. There were faces even at some of the windows of the College House.

"What's the trouble down there?" sang out Chambers of the Fifth.

"Go back to bed, you infernal young busybody!" shouted the Head furiously. "Go back to bed at once!"

"I was only asking——"

"Another word, boy, and I will come up there and cane you!" bawled the Head. "Go in—everybody! Close all those windows! If my orders are not obeyed I will make some of you smart!"

Most of the windows were closed down hurriedly, and there were no further inquiries from Chambers. The Head approached his hired gang, and regarded the men with sour contempt.

"Well?" he snapped. "Are you ready?"

"Ready to go home—yes!" said Briggs coarsely.

"You fool!" exclaimed Mr. Martin. "You must attack those barricades again——"

"Not likely, guv'nor," said Briggs. "These chaps have had enough o' them blamed kids. We've finished."

The Head stamped his foot.

"Finished!" he exclaimed harshly. "You must be mad! I engaged you to rout those confounded boys out of their stronghold—and you must carry out your agreement. Come, no nonsense. Get back inside."

Several of the men growled audibly.

"Go and bury yourself!" snapped one of them.

"Y'see?" said Mr. Briggs. "They won't have no more of it, Mr. Martin. You just spoke about an agreement. It strikes me, you didn't tell me what there was to be done. You said we simply 'ad to dig out a parcel of naughty schoolboys——"

"I told you the truth," snapped the Head.

"Mebbe," agreed Mr. Briggs. "But you forgot to mention that the boys would use treacle an' peas an' that blamed pepper. We didn't come here for that game, guv'nor, an' we ain't 'avin' any more of it."

"You cowardly hounds!" raved the Head. "Do you call yourselves men? Are you going to be beaten by those confounded brats——"

"Look here, guv'nor, talkin' won't do no good," interrupted Mr. Briggs grimly. "We agreed to come here, an' you've given us 'arf our money. We want the other 'arf—an' then we'll clear!"

"You dolt!" snarled the Head. "Do you imagine for one moment that I will pay you a farthing? I was a fool to give you anything at all!"

"Look here, Mr. Martin——"

"I refuse to hear anything," exclaimed the Head sharply. "You have failed miserably in this affair, and now you have the utter audacity to demand more money!"

"You agreed——"

"I agreed upon nothing!" roared the Head. "The money I was to pay was only available if the rebels were captured. You have failed, and you ought to think yourselves very lucky that you have got half the arranged sum. Why don't you pull yourselves together, and earn your pay in full? Make another effort——"

"It's no good, guv'nor—we've finished," said Mr. Briggs. "An' wot's more, we don't leave this 'ere place until we get that other money."

"Then I regret to inform you that you must remain for a very long time!"

shouted Mr. Martin thickly. "You will not get another penny from me——"

"Oh, won't we?" roared Briggs. "Just you pay up, or you'll find yourself in trouble—you blamed swindler!"

"What?" gasped the Head.
 "Let's break the bloomin' winders!" yelled one of the men furiously. "Why, if he won't pay, we'll smash up the whole darned school. Grab them stones, mates. There's plenty lyin' about!"

There was a rush for the stones, and the Head panted with alarm.

"Control yourselves, you madmen!" he shouted.

"Will you pay us?"
 "Confound you no——"
 "Then pelt the old rotter with stones!" roared one of the roughs.
 Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Three or four stones whistled past Mr. Martin's head, and he fairly shook with fear. His precious men were turning upon him—and it was exactly what he deserved. Having hired the scum of Bannington, he could not very well expect them to be gentle in their methods.

"Stop!" he gasped thickly. "I—I will pay!"

"Old on, mates!" sang out Mr. Briggs. "The old bloke is goin' to pay up. You don't want to get excited!"

The roughs dropped their stones, and gathered in a crowd, and Mr. Briggs resolved on behalf of the others the remainder of the promised sum. And it was only then that the men consented to take their departure.

They went off, shouting and laughing in derision. And the Head was not very gratified as he heard those sounds. He had paid his money, and there was nothing whatever to show for it.

Needless to say, I was at one of the dormitory windows during the discussion, and many other fellows were there, too. We saw the men go off, and we knew there was no trickery as I turned to Sir Montie and Tommy, who were beside me.

"Good!" I said. "We're all right now."

"Rather, old boy," agreed Sir Montie.

"There's no fear of another attack to-night. It's a frightfully good victory for the Remove."

"Hurrah!"

"Three groans for the Head!"
 The groans were executed with much realism, and Mr. Martin, standing down in the Triangle, gnashed his teeth with rage. He strode away to his own House, muttering fiercely to himself.

He was not the only master who was awake, however.

The time was between two and three in the morning, but Mr. Simpson Wrott was active.

He was fully dressed, and had apparently been wideawake for some time. And he stood in the shadow of the trees in the Triangle.

Mr. Simpson Wrott was the new Housemaster of the Ancient House. Mr. Martin was pleased with him on the whole, for he treated the boys roughly, and bullied them at every turn.

But the Head was not aware of the fact that Mr. Wrott's punishments were generally of the lightest variety. His bark was terrible, but his bite was not to be feared. And the Head, so far, was not aware of the fact that Mr. Wrott's sympathies were entirely with the boys.

There was an excellent reason for this.

Even I was unaware of it at the time, but the surly Mr. Wrott was none other than Nelson Lee himself—in disguise. The governor was acting his part with superb skill, and nobody in the whole school had the slightest suspicion of the actual truth.

Nelson Lee had been sacked by Mr. Howard Martin. And the famous schoolmaster-detective was not the kind of man to take such treatment lying down.

Instead of defying the Head openly, he had left the school—with apparent meekness. But he had returned a few days later—in the character of Mr. Wrott. And there was an excellent reason for his surprising tactics.

Lee had good cause to believe that

Mr. Howard Martin was not the gentleman he affected to be. He was a bully and a cad, but most of the fellows thought that Mr. Martin was honourable in other respects.

Nelson Lee thought otherwise. He had, in fact, certain suspicions concerning the Head, and he decided that the only method of investigating the matter was to be on the spot—in a character other than his own.

And so he had come to St. Frank's as "Mr. Wrott." The Head believed him to be a rather foolish person, ready to follow his lead in everything. And Lee allowed Martin to maintain this view. It suited his purpose.

Nelson Lee had known full well that Mr. Martin had intended routing out the rebels late that night.

And Lee had been waiting—in readiness. I learned, some little time afterwards, that the gov'nor's plan was to frustrate the Head if the barricades had been pulled down. Fortunately, his good services in this direction had not been required.

But there was other work for the gov'nor that night.

He had been about to enter the Ancient House, in order to return to his bed-room, when he changed his mind.

For he became aware of something which altered his plan.

Mr. Howard Martin had appeared. And now the Head was attired in an overcoat, muffler, and a cap was pulled over his brow.

"Ah, this looks rather interesting," murmured Nelson Lee. "I should not be at all surprised if the excellent Mr. Martin is making another visit to Belton Abbey. I must certainly follow this up."

The Head strode out of the private gateway, and walked briskly down the lane. Nelson Lee had no difficulty in following. The famous investigator was a past-master in the art of shadowing.

As Lee had surmised, the Head was, indeed, making tracks for the old ruins of Belton Abbey—an isolated place

situated some distance from the school, and reached by means of several foot-paths.

Only a night or so earlier Nelson Lee had tracked the Head in a similar manner. And he had made the somewhat astonishing discovery that a stranger was concealed in a dungeon far below the ruins.

Lee had his own suspicions as to who this stranger was, and why he was there. He was also determined to confirm them. For, he was assured, as soon as he could establish his facts, Mr. Martin's reign at St. Frank's would come to an abrupt termination.

On a former occasion Lee had heard the mysterious stranger, but had not seen him. And, upon investigating the tunnel, he had found nothing whatever. The unknown man was in a place of concealment.

To-night, if possible, Lee intended to go a step farther.

His task of following the Head was all the easier because he knew where Mr. Martin was bound for. And when the old abbey came within view, Nelson Lee slackened his pace.

He halted a few steps farther on, and saw Mr. Martin vanish amid the ruins. This time Nelson Lee did not attempt to follow. He stood quite still, in the shadow of some bushes, waiting.

"There is no object in my venturing farther," he told himself. "I might just as well wait here, in perfect security, until Mr. Martin returns. After that there are some interesting possibilities."

The affair was rather mysterious, and it was for this reason that it appealed to Lee all the more.

His wait was not a very long one. After twenty minutes had elapsed, the Head reappeared, and he strode away down the footpath, entirely oblivious of the fact that his movements had been watched.

He vanished completely, and Nelson Lee made quite sure that the Head had really gone before he took any action on his own account. Then he moved

cautiously forward and entered the ruins.

He found an old stairway, and proceeded down this until he reached a damp tunnel. An electric torch aided his progress now, and as he walked along he found that the tunnel became dry farther down.

But it ended abruptly—and blankly.

A solid wall faced the detective, and there was no sign whatever of a doorway. Stonework surrounded him. The arched roof overhead was solid; the floor was composed of the earth itself.

But Nelson Lee knew that there was a doorway of some kind, and he resolved to test the matter at once.

"Are you there?" he shouted loudly.

And his voice, strangely enough, was exactly similar to that of Mr. Howard Martin. He did not have to wait long for a verification of his suspicions. For an answer came out of the very walls.

"Of course I'm here," said the muffled voice. "What have you come back for?"

"Open the door, and I will tell you," shouted Lee.

And his electric torch, shedding its light upon the dull walls, revealed the fact that a portion of the stonework moved backwards. A black space appeared, and it grew wider and wider.

Nelson Lee entered.

But as to what took place in that secret dungeon—well, I'm afraid I can't record that just now.

CHAPTER 4.

Another Report:

BREAKFAST was a great success in the rebel stronghold.

Patty Little, as chief cook, was in his element, and he certainly prepared some remarkable dishes. He was justly proud of himself, and the majority of the juniors were perfectly satisfied with his efforts.

"You'll do, Patty," I declared approvingly. "These eggs are ripping—and you cook the bacon to a turn."

The fat boy of St. Frank's beamed.

"Well, I've had a bit of experience at cooking, you know," he said. "It's a hobby of mine. Anything connected with grub interests me."

"As long as we have decent food, and manage to keep off the attacks, we shall be all serene," said Pitt comfortably. "The Head seems to have given it up as a bad job—for the time being, anyhow."

"He'll have to give it up altogether before long," I said grimly. "A thing like this can't be kept secret, and it'll get to the ears of the Governors soon. They simply can't allow this state of affair to exist—and then there'll be a big inquiry and everything will be all serene. So all we've got to do is to hold out. It's simply a siege, and while we hang on tight we shall be O.K."

"Of course we shall—we all know that," said Handforth. "What's the good of telling us stale things of that sort? Which reminds me that these biscuits are jelly stale."

"Well, it's no good grumbling——"

"Why can't we have bread?" demanded Handforth. "There's a ton of flour in the store-room, and heaps of preserved eggs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you grinning at, you asses?" roared Handforth.

"You don't use eggs to make bread," said Patty Little, grinning.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "How the dickens are you going to make it light without eggs?"

"Well, you can use yeast, or baking-powder," said Patty, who had a thorough knowledge of his subject. "We don't happen to have the yeast, but there's a tin of powder, and I mean to make a big batch of bread for tea."

"Pity you didn't make some for breakfast," said Handforth. "These biscuits are awful."

"Don't grumble at the food, Handy," I said.

"I wasn't grumbling——"

"Well, it sounded like it," I said. "You ought to be jolly pleased that

"you've got some first-rate grub to pack into your tummy. I reckon that Fatty has been doing wonders."

Jimmy Little beamed.

"Just wait until dinner-time," he said. "I'm going to open some tins of meat, and prepare a hot dinner. We haven't got any potatoes, but biscuits won't go so bad with a lot of gravy. And I'll make a pudding to finish with."

"What kind of a pudding?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"A plum duff."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "Plum duffs are as stale as the dickens. We're always having 'em. I'll tell you what. I'll make a currant pudding—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll make a currant pudding which will surprise you!" roared Handforth defiantly.

"Yes, I bet it will!" grinned Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And kill us, too—probably," added Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here you can jolly well keep out of it, Handy," said Fatty Little warmly. "Cooking is my department, and I'm not going to have you butting in. Great pancakes! If everybody wanted to cook—"

"What's the matter with pancakes?" interrupted Watson. "You mentioned 'em just now, Fatty. Why shouldn't we have pancakes for dinner?"

"Because Fatty couldn't make 'em," said Hubbard.

"Oh, couldn't he?" roared Little. "I'll show you whether I can make pancakes! We'll have 'em for dinner."

"Oh, good!"

"And I vote for currant pudding," said Handforth. "Look here, I'll tell you what. Give me a corner of the kitchen, Fatty, and I'll make that pudding on my own. And if I don't make a success of it I'll eat my hat."

"We'll make you eat the pudding!" I chuckled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was very enthusiastic, and as soon as the breakfast things were

washed up, he set about making his currant pudding.

Church and McClure, his faithful study-mates, attempted to evade their leader, but Handforth was not to be tricked. He pressed his claims into his service, and they were kept busy. In fact, many of the fellows declared that Church and McClure made the pudding, and that Handforth's share in it was nil.

Fatty Little's life was not worth living that morning. It was really a wonder he succeeded in preparing any dinner at all. For when Handforth was not roaring at the top of his voice, he was punching Church and McClure.

Pieces of dough and any amount of currants were thrown about the kitchen wholesale. And those fellows who happened to look into the kitchen during operations were quite determined to have nothing to do with Handforth's concoction.

"Dash it all, there's a limit, you know," remarked Owen major. "I'm blessed if I'm going to eat his beastly currant pudding—after the currants have been used to wipe the floor with!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He actually picked 'em off the floor with a shovel!" said Owen major warmly.

But even Handforth was not quite so bad as that. He had shovelled some currants up, but they had been used as fuel for the fire. Owen major was under a mistaken impression that those currants had been incorporated in the pudding.

Considerable interest was evinced among the fellows when dinner-time was nearly due. There had been no activity during the morning; we had not even caught a single glimpse of the Head.

The rest of St. Frank's continued the even tenor of its way. Lessons proceeded as usual with the other Forms. But there was a feeling of unrest in the school which could not be mistaken.

The gong sounded its welcome note, calling the rebels to dinner, and it said

much for Patty Little's organisation, that the gong sounded almost exactly at the same moment as the big bell rang for the ordinary dinner in the big dining-hall.

The first course was excellent in every way. The meat was prepared in a special manner of Patty's own—a kind of hot hash, with plenty of gravy. Unfortunately, we had no potatoes, but the biscuits were available in plenty, and these were all right when soaked in the gravy.

And after that came some very excellent pancakes. Patty had been working like a Trojan all the morning, assisted by half a dozen willing helpers.

Handforth's currant pudding made its appearance amid much curiosity.

He produced it from a large cloth, and it was not a very good sign when the pudding fell upon the larger dish with dire results—to the dish. It cracked in pieces, and there was a yell of laughter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Isn't it light?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "It was McClure's fault, the silly idiot!"

"Mine!" howled McClure.

"What did you want to drop the pudding like that for?" demanded Handy. "You know jolly well that pudding is a solid article——"

"This one looks like lead!" remarked Pat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has anybody got a hacksaw?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you can cackle all you like!" snapped Handforth. "You won't cackle after you've tasted this pudding!"

"We shall crawl away and die!" said De Valerio.

Handforth snorted, and at last he managed to get the pudding safely upon another dish. Its appearance was not appetising. It was drab in colour, and it had a somewhat solid appearance which did not speak well for its

edibility. And when Handforth proceeded to carve there was fresh laughter.

The amateur chef used a huge carving knife, and he found it necessary to apply all his strength in order to force the blade through the pudding. And when he removed the slice it came out in a thick slab.

"Who wants a piece?" asked Handforth briskly.

There were no answers, and Handy looked surprised.

"Hold out your plates!" he exclaimed.

"We're having pancakes, thanks," said Grey smoothly. "We can't manage two courses, you know, Handy, and I always prefer pancakes to cannonballs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny ass!" sneered Handforth. "You needn't have any pudding if you don't want it. I don't care a jot. There's all the more for Church and McClure and me!"

Church and McClure started.

"Ah?" said Church blankly.

"Hold your tongue, my son!"

"I—er—I—— The fact is, Handy, I'm having pancakes, thanks," said Church. "I—I don't think I could manage any of that pudding to-day."

"Same here," said McClure hastily.

Handforth laid down his knife.

"I don't want to cause any trouble," he said deliberately. "I should regret to start punching noses here. But if you fellows think you're going to scorn this pudding of mine, you're mistaken! Will you take a piece quietly, or shall I ram it down your throats? Just say the word!"

"Really, Handy——"

"Throw slices of the pudding at their giddy heads," advised Tommy Watson. "One piece will be enough, Handy. They'll be shinned for hours——"

"You silly ass!" howled Handforth. "Back up, Arnold McClure. I suppose you know I'm waiting for your plate? And yours, too, Walter Church!"

Handforth's chums looked at one an-

other rather hopelessly. They knew there was no getting out of the ordeal, and at last they gave in. Handforth triumphantly placed huge slices of his famous pudding upon their plates.

He also helped himself, and took several huge bites. The other juniors watched him with interest—and Church and McClure with anxiety. But Handforth, except for a somewhat sickly smile, seemed in no danger.

"It's ripping!" he said warmly. "Just taste it!"

Church and McClure tasted it. They didn't like it, and when asked to describe what its flavour was, they were completely at a loss. As McClure said, it was like nothing else on earth.

But, in order to save trouble, they consumed their portions. The other juniors were not exactly surprised, an hour later, to find the chums of Study D looking decidedly queer.

"Anything the matter, Handy?" I inquired, coming across Handforth at the bottom of the stairs, sitting in a doubled-up position.

"No, not at all!" gasped Handforth, jumping to his feet, and clutching at the balustrade for support. "I feel—ow!—ripping, thanks. Ow! Oh, my hat!"

He doubled up again, and his face was pale and drawn.

"It's that pudding!" I said grinsly.

"Pudding!" echoed Handforth. "Oh, don't rot! I'm going to punch Fatty's nose before long!"

"What for?"

"For giving us that awful meat concoction of his!" said Handforth, with difficulty. "It's—ow!—it's made me feel horribly bad!"

"You just said you were all right!" I grained. "Take my advice, and get into bed. The best thing you can do is to sleep it off, old son. Indigestion is a painful complaint, and—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Handforth.

He dragged himself upstairs, and a

soar of laughter from up above told me that the other juniors were not exactly sympathetic towards the sufferer. Church and McClure were already up there, writhing.

And while the unfortunates were doing their best to get over their agony, a most interesting little drama was taking place in the Triangle. Tommy Watson informed me that the Head was there, and I was rather interested.

"It might mean another attack," I said briskly. "We'd better keep our eyes skinned, Tommy. Let's get to a window."

We marched away to the dormitory window, and leaned out over the sill. Mr. Martin was out there, in the Triangle. He was talking to Jesson, of the Sixth. Jesson was a prefect, and one of the most unpopular fellows in the school. He was something of a bully, and it was generally thought that he would do his utmost to keep in the good graces of Mr. Martin.

We could hear the conversation between the pair quite easily. An argument seemed to be in progress. A crowd of Third Formers were standing at a respectful distance, watching the proceedings with interest.

"You know very well, Jesson, that I strongly object to fancy attire of any sort," the Head was saying. "It is your duty to set the younger boys a good example, and not a bad one."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Jesson, in a humble voice, "but I didn't think I should offend you with this tie."

"You do offend me, Jesson—you offend my vision, and I must require you to remove the tie," declared Mr. Martin. "I had occasion to remonstrate with one of the junior boys on the same subject, but I did not think I should find it necessary to point out such a gross fault in a senior."

"Very well, sir," said Jesson respectfully. "I'll remove the tie between now and tea-time—"

"You will remove it at once, Jesson," snapped the Head.

"But I'm just off to the village, sir."

"Your plans do not interest me, boy," interrupted Mr. Martin. "You'll go indoors this instant, and remove that atrocity!"

"The witch, sir?"

"The atrocity!"

"That's rather strong, sir," protested Jesson, with some warmth. "I've always considered this tie to be very quiet and tasteful. I don't see any reason why you should talk about it in that way!"

The Head frowned.

"It is not my intention to argue with you, Jesson," he said solemnly. "Neither does it interest me to hear your own views with regard to the abomination you are at present wearing. I have already ordered you to go indoors, and unless you do so at once I shall be compelled to adopt severe measures."

Jesson's eyes gleamed.

"It's not usual for a prefect to be threatened in that way, sir," he said sharply. "I don't like being ordered about in front of these juniors—"

"I don't care what you like!" shouted the Head hotly. "Do as I say, Jesson, or you will be sorry. If you dare to answer me back again I will bring this cane across your shoulders!"

The Head whisked his walking cane threateningly.

"My hat!" breathed Watson. "It looks like trouble."

"Good old Jesson!" said Pitt. "I don't often say a good word for him, but he's showing the right spirit now. If I was in his shoes I'd take that cane away from the Head and snap it in two."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "Just look at that!"

Everybody was looking without my telling them. For that little argument between the Head and Jesson promised to end in violence. The prefect had already lost his temper, and Mr. Martin's threat appeared to incense him more.

"You'd better not try those games on, sir!" he exclaimed, after a short pause. "Please don't forget that I'm a prefect—and not a kid. I'm not in the habit of being camed."

"Oh, indeed!" barked the Head. "Perhaps I shall make a habit of hitting or caning you, Jesson! You appear to forget that I am your headmaster, and you'd better realise that I will have no nonsense from you. Go indoors at once, you insubordinate young scoundrel!"

Jesson clenched his fists.

"You'd better be careful, sir!" he shouted thickly.

"Careful!" raved the Head. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am not willing to stand much more of your browbeating and bullying!" shouted Jesson fiercely. "I'm just about fed-up with your con-founded tyranny, Mr. Martin! I don't care a snap for you!"

"Hurrah!" roared several Removites. "Good old Jesson!"

"Go for him!"

"Down with the tyrant!"

Those shouts seemed to enrage Mr. Martin more than anything else. He raised his cane and brought it down sharply.

Swish!

It landed upon Jesson's shoulders with a thwack, and Jesson staggered. For a moment he stood quite still, pale with anger. His eyes were blazing, and his hands quivered. He was at the end of his patience.

"You—you rascal!" he shouted violently.

Crash!

Jesson's fist lunged out. Mr. Martin attempted to dodge, and he succeeded in partially missing the blow. But it caught him on the shoulder. He reeled, and fell in a heap to the ground.

"Hurrah!" yelled the Removites.

"Oh, good man!"

"Go for him, Jessy!"

Jesson bent over the fallen headmaster. But he pulled himself back,

suddenly realising the enormity of his offence. And the prefect stood there, pale and shaking.

He had knocked down the Head!

"You—you insolent young ruffian!" snarled Mr. Martin savagely. "By Heaven! You shall suffer for this outburst, Jesson!"

"You brought it on yourself, sir——"

"Enough! Not another word, sir!" stormed the Head. "I am absolutely amazed that you, a prefect, should dare to strike your headmaster. Your crime is beyond redemption, Jesson, and I can only take one course."

"And what's that, sir?" asked Jesson.

"You are expelled!"

Jesson staggered, and an audible murmur rose from the watching Third Formers.

"Don't you go, Jesson!" shouted one of the rebels. "Defy the beast—just the same as we've done. We'll take you in."

"Father!"

"Come on, Jessy!"

"You are quite welcome, old man!"

Jesson looked up at the windows, and his flushed face took on a grim expression. I felt certain that the prefect would join the rebel Removites—and I was not exactly pleased with the prospect.

Jesson was a blustering sort of fellow, and if he came among us he would probably cause trouble.

However, in the circumstances, I was quite willing to admit him into the circle. I couldn't very well refuse after the other fellows had invited him. And, after all, he was now on our side, against the tyrant.

"Go indoors at once, boy, and pack your things!" snapped the Head curtly. "You will leave this school by the first available train, and I will write to your father, explaining that you are a black-guardly young scoundrel——"

"Rats!" snapped Jesson fiercely.

"What! What did you say?"

"You can write to my father what you like, but I'm not going away from

this school!" roared the prefect. "I don't recognise your authority——"

"You—you——"

"I don't regard you as my headmaster," shouted Jesson. "You're an outsider, and you can go to the dickens!"

"Good—good heavens!" gasped the Head. "I have never been so insulted——"

But Jesson was walking away. He strode briskly into the Ancient House, leaving the Head speechless in the Triangle. The instant he arrived in the lobby, Jesson broke into a run and pelted upstairs.

He raced across the landing, and halted against the barricade, glancing anxiously over his shoulder.

"I say, you kids!" he panted huskily.

I was already waiting behind the barricade, for I had anticipated this move.

"What's the matter, Jesson?" I asked briskly.

"Let me in, for goodness' sake!" gasped the senior. "I've been sacked, and I've defied the Head——"

"I know," I interrupted. "I heard everything from the window, Jesson."

"Then let me in, quick!" said Jesson hoarsely. "The Head might be coming up, and I shall be collared."

"Right-ho!" I said briskly.

Low down in the barricade a rolled-up mattress was jammed against one wall. This could be removed easily, and it was then possible for a fellow to squirm his way through.

The mattress was pulled out rapidly.

"You'll have to crawl through," I explained. "You can manage it, Jesson. Back up, if you want to join us."

"Thanks awfully!" gasped Jesson.

A moment later he was through, and only just in the nick of time. For Mr. Martin, pausing heavily, appeared in the corridor. His face was as black as thunder as he saw what had happened.

Jesson of the Sixth had joined the rebellion!

CHAPTER 2.

The Trailers!

MR. MARTIN strode up to the barricade.

"You young fool!" he shouted. "You are making it worse for yourself, Jesson, in associating with those subordinate brats!"

"They're the only fellows who had any sense," snapped Jesson. "They got fed up with your tyranny days ago. If the rest of the boys in this school had any gumption, they'd pitch you out neck and crop!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the talk, Jessy."

"I can only take it that you are mad, Jesson," exclaimed the Head. "Do you realise that you are a member of the College House? Do you realise that you are mixing yourself with these infernal Ancient House rebels—"

"I realise all that, sir," interrupted Jesson; "and I realise that I've done the best thing. I'm not going to be sacked from the school by you, and if you attempt to break down these barricades, I'll help to defend them, with the rest of the fellows!"

"That's the stuff to give him, Jesson!"

"Pile it on, old man!"

"I'm not doing this because I like it," proceeded the prefect. "But I don't see the fun of being expelled for—for nothing. I'll admit I struck you, Mr. Martin, but not before you slashed out at me. So that makes it even. And I'll stick or swim with these chaps."

The Head nodded grimly.

"Very well!" he snarled. "We will see—we will see, Jesson! You will have cause to regret your madness before long."

And Mr. Martin strode away, followed by a yell of contemptuous laughter. The Head was beaten, and he could do nothing.

Jesson turned to me, his face flushed. He was decidedly dishevelled and untidy. He held out his hand.

"Thanks, Nipper!" he said earnestly. "You're a brick!"

"That's all serene," I grinned. "You've joined the Liberty Party now—we're out for liberty, you know. You're quite welcome, Jesson; but you'll have to behave yourself, and accept my leadership."

Jesson smiled.

"I've been a bit of a roller at times, I know," he confessed frankly. "That's all over now, isn't it? We'll sink all differences in the common cause. I'm one of you, and I'll forget that I'm a Sixth Former."

"That's the idea," I said, pleased with his attitude. "I may as well tell you straight out that if you try any high-and-mighty games, you'll be squashed. I'm the leader of this crowd, Jesson, and—"

"You don't want me to throw my weight about because I'm a senior?" said Jesson, nodding. "All right; I understand. And you can accept my word that I'll obey orders in all things. I came here on my own account, and I'll consider myself under your leadership."

"Good for you, Jessy!"

"That's the right spirit!"

"Rather!"

The juniors were very pleased with the prefect's attitude. I was rather sceptical. I half-feared that Jesson would begin to assert himself after an hour or so had passed.

But I was wrong.

Evening came, and we had no cause to complain of Jesson's manners. He was cheerful and jokey, and made himself extremely agreeable. He made no attempt to "boss" the juniors.

Before the evening was out Jesson was accepted as one of the rebels. He was proving himself to be willing and eager to help. He even offered to help in washing up the tea-things; and after that he wanted to be placed on guard, exactly similar to the other rebels.

I met him in this respect, and appointed him to a window in the lower passage, with two juniors. Each of the windows was constantly guarded by

three fellows, and the barricades by half a dozen.

This was the normal guard. Never, for an instant, was an opening left unguarded. There were plenty of us to do the work, and it was just as well to be on the safe side.

That night it was my turn to be off duty until two o'clock in the morning. Then I should turn out, with a number of others, to relieve the "watch." These fellows who had been on duty would be free to seek their beds.

I went to bed soon after eight o'clock with the others. I preferred to keep the watch during the critical hours of the night, for some of the juniors were more than inclined to drop off to sleep in odd corners, if everything was quiet.

Before dropping off to sleep, I set my alarm for two o'clock. My "alarm" was my own brain. I was capable of waking up almost to a minute—a handy little habit the gov'nor had got me into.

And, for some unknown reason, I awoke at ten minutes to one—over an hour before the watch was due to be changed. I glanced at my ticker curiously, and wondered what had disturbed me.

Everything was perfectly still.

The other juniors in the dormitory were sound asleep. A few whispered voices, outside the door, told me that the barricade guards were alert and watchful. Everything seemed to be peaceful.

Yet, somehow, I was uneasy. Perhaps the remembrance of the previous night disturbed me somewhat. The Head had attacked then, and there was a chance that he would attack again.

At all events, I found it impossible to sleep again. So I quickly slipped out of bed, and dressed myself. Then I crept out of the dormitory, and glanced at the fellows who were on watch.

Three of them were wide awake, but the other three were dozing.

"Everything O.K.?" I whispered. The juniors looked round.

"Hallo!" said Grey. "What are you doing here? It isn't two o'clock yet."

"It hasn't struck one, even," said Armstrong.

"I woke up for some reason," I explained. "I'm going to have a look round in a minute. Have you fellows heard any sign of trouble brewing?"

"Not a sound," said Grey. "I reckon the Head will leave us severely alone to-night. Last night's experience was enough for him, I should imagine. I shouldn't think it's possible for him to keep up the game much longer."

"There's no telling," I replied. "We're all right for another ten days, anyhow. And we're simply got to win in the finish."

Jack Grey nodded.

"Oh, we shall win all right!" he said. "But it's my belief the Head will cave in before to-morrow evening. Christine of the College House told us just before bed-time that this affair is reported in the local papers."

"Well, I expected that," I said grimly.

"It's bound to get to the ears of the Governors before to-morrow," said Grey. "They'll be buzzing down, I expect; and then there'll soon be a settlement. I vote we add something else to our demands if the Governors come."

"What's that?"

"We'll refuse to submit until Martin is pushed out and Dr. Stafford is reinstated," said Jack Grey. "What do you think?"

"I think it's a first-class idea," I said promptly, "and if the Governors do come down, we'll certainly press that point. We'll also make a demand that Mr. Lee shall be reinstated, too."

"Yes, rather," said Griffith.

"But we needn't continue the subject now," I went on. "We haven't won yet, and I've got a kind of idea in my head that we shall have some trouble before the night's out. So be on the alert, and give the warning at the first sign of alarm."

I really was uneasy, and I passed downstairs, hoping that everything

would be all right. The main passage, below, was quiet and deserted, although three fellows were on the watch at the end window. Other juniors occupied the kitchen, and there was certainly not the slightest indication that trouble was brewing.

"What are you doing here?" asked Pitt, in the passage. "It's not time for you yet."

I explained matters again.

"So I'm just having a look round."

I added, "By the way, where's Jesson? I thought he was on guard down here?"

"So he is," said Pitt. "As far as I know, he's in that little passage at the back, keeping watch on the window with Owen major and Canham."

"All right," I said. "I'll go and have a look at them."

I moved down the passage noiselessly, for I was wearing slippers. It was rather dim down there, for the only light was that cast from the wider passage behind me. There were one or two recesses on either side, and as I passed one of these I came to an abrupt halt.

A distinct snore had sounded.

The snore was repeated, and I knew that somebody was in that recess, sleeping. I felt rather angry as I pulled out my electric torch and flashed it on.

"Well, my hat!" I muttered.

Within the recess were Owen major and Canham. The two juniors were covered by a thick rug, and they were sound asleep. Strictly speaking, they ought to have been on guard.

And *that* was how they were carrying out their duty!

I was about to give them a good shake, when I decided to wait for a minute or two. Jesson was probably responsible. I decided to have a word with him on the subject.

So I switched off my torch, and walked along until I came to the bend. Then, again, I paused—and, this time, with a start. For I distinctly heard voices.

I glanced cautiously round the corner of the wall.

The passage beyond was short, with a fairly large window at the end. It was slightly moonlight outside, and the window itself, with its protecting boards, was disagreeably outlined.

Something else was outlined, too—the figure of Jesson, of the Sixth!

Perhaps there was nothing very startling in this, but there was something startling in the occupation which was employing Jesson's time. Screw-driver in hand, he was removing the screws from the boards; in short, he was taking down the barricade!

It was quite startling to me, and for a second I did not guess the actual truth. Then, as I stood still, I heard quite sufficient to convince me of what was going on.

"It's all right, sir; I shan't be long, now," breathed Jesson softly.

"You had better not talk, my boy," came the Head's voice.

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" whispered Jesson. "The kids who were with me are sound asleep, and the others are too far away to hear me. The two youngsters were sleepy, so I advised them to go and have a nap, just on the quiet."

"Quite a smart little dodge, Jesson!" came the Head's voice.

I clenched my fists fiercely.

The truth was borne in upon me with a rush. Jesson was a traitor within the camp, and it was obvious that he had been a traitor from the very start.

"Talking about smart dodges, sir, this ruse of yours is simply a stunner!" whispered Jesson, with a chuckle. "The kids swallowed that quarrel of ours whole; they thought it was all genuine, instead of being faked up for their benefit."

"I must confess that I was somewhat pleased with myself, Jesson!" chuckled the Head.

"Within a few minutes I'll have these boards all down, and you can lead your force of men in. We'll be able to capture the whole crowd with ease."

"Splendid, Jesson—splendid!"

"Over half the fellows are asleep, and the other half will be too dazed and

confused to offer the slightest resistance," said Jesson.

Only for another moment did I stand idle.

We had been tricked, and it was almost too late to avert disaster. I suddenly sprang into activity.

"Help!" I yelled, at the top of my voice. "Rescue, Remove! Help—help!"

And as I shouted, I hurled myself forward to the attack.

CHAPTER 6.

The Sentinels!

JESSON twirled round, gasping.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

"We—we——"

He got no further, for I was upon him. I hit out right and left. My fists crashed into Jesson's face, and he staggered back, howling.

"You confounded rotter!" I shouted thickly. "You treacherous cad! I know what your game is now, and if you get out of this affair with your whole skin, you'll be lucky!"

"You mad little fool!" gasped Jesson. "I—— Yarrah!"

Jesson staggered back again, yelling, as my fists came into action again. Outside the window, I was dimly aware of quick movements.

There were several boards already missing from the window, and it would be quite an easy matter for anybody to gain an entry. And it was clear to me now that the headmaster was outside with a whole army of men, the same men, possibly, who had attempted to storm the fortress a night before.

But my shout for assistance had been heard.

Pitt came rushing along, with several other fellows, and they charged into the passage one after the other.

"What's the matter here?" shouted Pitt anxiously.

"It's an attack!" I yelled. "Quick! Come and help me to collar Jesson!"

He's a rotten traitor, and I caught him in the act of admitting the enemy!"

"Great Scott!"

"The cad!"

"The howling rotter!"

"Collar him!"

Jesson was soon in the grasp of many hands. He was held by four juniors, and his struggles were futile.

"Take him away and lock him in the small cellar!" I parted. "We haven't got time to deal with him now, so we'll put him in a safe place. He'll never escape from that cellar."

Shouting and struggling, Jesson was carried away. He was very sorry now, probably, that he had taken such a cad-dish part in the affair. But it was too late to be sorry. I was determined to make an example of him later.

Meanwhile, there was grim business to attend to.

At least five of the Head's hired attackers were in the act of forcing their way through the window. Three were actually in the passage, and others were piling in. The barricade had been forced!

And I was there alone, except for Tregella-West and two other juniors. Pitt and the rest were dealing with Jesson, and my yell for help had evidently not been heard upstairs.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "Things look bad, dear boy—they do, really! We shall have to buck up—Yow! Oh, you shockin' ruffian!"

Montie found himself struggling with one of the invaders. The enemy was actually within the gates, and the situation was serious. Unless we used every effort, we should be beaten.

And there was no time now for peashooters or pepper-squirters. It was a question of sheer fighting—strength against strength. The weaker would go under.

The commotion was considerable. Everybody was yelling and shouting. Pitt took care to raise his voice to the highest pitch, as he and the other juniors led Jesson away to the cellar,

and a number of fellows came pelling down from upstairs, the majority of them from their beds.

For the guards had not dared to leave their posts. It was an alarm, and their duty was to remain on the watch, whatever happened. And it was owing to the delay in the arrival of reinforcements that disaster nearly came.

I was fighting furiously, but it was impossible for me to stem the tide with only a handful of fellows to help me. We were slowly forced back by the enemy.

And the Head's men were now piling through the window in a continuous stream. The force was increasing with every minute that passed. Pitt and his men turned in time to cause a slight check, but that was all.

The fight was a grim one. The juniors went into the battle with a determination which surprised me. They showed tremendous fight, and battled against the heavy odds with a fierceness which was bound to tell.

The majority of the attackers were powerful men, but they had little knowledge of boxing, and although their brute strength enabled them to force us back, they only did so at considerable cost.

The men received blows continuously, and this had the effect of enraging them. One or two juniors received swipes which nearly stunned them, and certainly put them out of action for the rest of the battle.

"Keep it up!" I gasped, wiping a smear of blood from my lips. "Don't give in, you chaps! We'll beat 'em yet!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" yelled Pitt. "We're not done yet!"

"There's plenty of fight in the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

The boys and the men surged in the passage in a confused mass. The light was poor, and this added to our difficulty. Also, the confined nature of the battleground was against us.

And all the while the Head was trying his men on from the window, where he was safe.

"Just one big effort, men!" he shouted. "It won't take you long, and then you'll have the boys beaten."

"We'll settle the young brats, sir!" shouted one of the men.

The excitement continued without a stop, and when we had been forced back until we were almost opposite the kitchen door, the tide began to turn. Other juniors had come down, and our ranks were greatly swelled.

The effect of this was soon apparent.

The advance was stopped, and the invaders found it impossible to proceed farther. But they were still a dangerous force, and I knew that we should have all our work cut out to haul them back into their own territory.

"We're winning!" I shouted. "Stick to it, you fellows!"

"We're all right!" roared Handforth, who had just come down. "By George, this is just what I was longing for—a scrap!"

Handforth sailed in with all his strength. He was a great fighting man, and he never counted the odds at all. He charged into three hulking ruffians with perfect confidence, and his fists got busy.

Smash! Thud! Crash!

His blows landed all round. True, a few of them hit the wrong fellows, but that was only a detail with Handforth.

He found himself face to face with a giant of a man who looked like a prizefighter. His fists were as big as boxing-gloves, and he caught Handforth in the chest with a left which lifted the leader of Study D right off his feet.

But Handforth was not disconcerted.

"Take that, you hulking brute!" he bellowed.

And he delivered a return punch, and put all the weight of his body behind it. The huge man staggered, and the next second he had collapsed upon his back. Two of his companions

(tripped over him, and for a moment there was confusion.

And it was here that we seized our advantage.

We made one terrific onslaught, and the invaders were forced back by sheer strength. Patty Little had appeared upon the scene by this time, and he was of great help. It was not so much his fists that were handy, but his bulk.

He simply threw himself forward into the crowd, and something was bound to go. Patty was an enormous weight, and when he charged he shifted three of the roughs at least six feet.

And from that moment victory was assured.

"Clear 'em out!" I yelled. "They're backing already!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're winning!"

"Keep it up, you beggars!"

The juniors were keeping it up, and although many of them were suffering from black eyes and bleeding noses, they did not attempt to back out of the final struggle. They knew only too well that everything depended upon this battle.

The climax came in a rather unexpected way.

Two of the invaders happened to smash against one another in the confined part of the passage. They came to blows, and a moment later they were engaged in a fight.

The other men, finding themselves hard pressed, decided that the game was hopeless, and they retreated in confusion and disorder. Helter-skelter, they piled through the window into the rear yard.

And once the majority of them had backed out, there was nothing for the others to do but to follow suit. They were, in fact, pitched out neck and crop, and the two beauties who were fighting between themselves shared the fate of the others.

"You dolts!" roared the Head. "Charge again!"

"We've done enough charging for one

night!" snarled one of the mob. "It's no good, guv'nor! These kids are hot stuff; they don't mean to be took! I've finished with the game, and you won't see me no more!"

"Nor me, neither!"

"We're just about fed-up!"

The Head roared and shouted in vain. And while he was engaged in this occupation several juniors were hastily screwing the boards into position again. When all was safe and secure, I breathed a sigh of relief.

"My goodness!" I panted. "It was exciting, but we got the better of the rotters. It's another victory for the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"How many casualties?" I asked.

"Dozens!" groaned Watson. "McClure is half dead, I believe, and both Handy's eyes are closing up."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with my eyes!"

"McClure was knocked down by Handy," put in Church. "My hat, it was a pretty big swipe, too!"

But all the damage, upon examination, proved to be superficial. The bulk of the fellows were suffering from bruises, black eyes, thick ears, and so forth, but there was nothing more serious.

"Well, I reckon we're jolly lucky!" I said at last. "If I hadn't spotted Jesson at his rotten game we should have been taken by surprise and beaten. We ought to celebrate this."

"We will," declared De Valeric—"by punishing Jesson!"

"Yes, that's the idea!" I agreed. "But, first of all, we'll see that everything is all secure, and that the guards are at the posts. Then the remainder of us will put Jesson on trial."

"Good idea!"

"We'll sentence him as a traitor deserves!"

"Hear, hear!"

It did not take very long to make ourselves tidy. Spanges were needed, and a certain amount of court-plaster. But, on the whole, we looked only slightly

war worn. The enemy had come off the worst.

When all was ready I went round to the various points, and saw that everything was in order. For the second time the Head had failed, and he was probably tiring of the game.

"The trial will be held at once," I said, after I had descended to the lower passage again. "Everything is all serene upstairs, and if there is any alarm the fellows will yell. We're all wide awake now, so there's not much danger of another attack. We can devote our attentions to Jesson."

"Where shall we hold the trial?" asked Handforth.

"In the kitchen."

"Oh, good!"

The kitchen was soon converted into a criminal court. The jury sat all round the table; the judge—myself—occupied a chair which stood on the top of a small side-table.

Chairs were placed for counsel and for the prisoner. And Jesson was released from the cellar and brought in. He was held firmly until he was placed in his chair. Then he was released.

The College House prefect looked about him rather nervously.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"The prisoner must not speak unless he is addressed," I said sternly. "Cyril Jesson, you will regard yourself as the prisoner at the bar—"

"Don't talk kiddish rot!" snapped Jesson. "If you don't let me go there'll be trouble—"

"Silence!" I ordered.

"It's a lucky thing for you I wasn't given another five minutes," said Jesson. "You were nearly beaten, you little fools! I tricked you nicely!"

"It is evident that you do not realise the enormity of your offence," I exclaimed coldly. "Jesson, you will remain silent. Before calling any witnesses I will make a brief statement on the case."

"That's not usual," put in Handforth.

"Oh?"

"It isn't the custom for the judge to

make statements," said Handforth, shaking his head. "You ought to keep silent, my son, until it's time to pass sentence, if the jury finds the prisoner guilty—"

"Oh, we shall find him guilty," said one of the jurymen.

"We're not conducting this case according to the ordinary rules of a criminal court," I said. "We're making our own rules, Handy; and one of them is that you are to dry up."

"Yes, dry up, Handy," said Owen major. "I'd like to say something. That awful cad told Canham and I—"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "Your evidence will come later, Owen. You will be called into the witness-box at the right time. At the present moment Cyril Jesson stands before us accused of treachery in the first degree."

"Hear, hear!"

"You young idiot—" began Jesson.

"Silence!" I ordered sternly. "Every interruption on your part, prisoner at the bar, will mean an added punishment. Now, gentlemen of the jury, I went on, "you all know how Jesson quarrelled with the Head in the Triangle this afternoon. You all know how he was sacked—"

"That's what I can't understand," said Noys. "If he was sacked like that, how did the Head plan this game with him?"

"I will explain," I replied. "At that time I, too, was deceived by the cleverness of Jesson's and the Head's acting. I thought that Jesson was really expelled, and that he came to us for protection and aid."

"You poor little idiots!" sneered Jesson.

"We were idiots; I'll admit it," I replied. "We ought to have known better than to trust a cad of your kind, Jesson. However, we did trust you, and we even placed you on watch, with two fellows. We accepted you as a rebel, and we had no suspicion of your duplicity. I shall now require Owen major to enter the witness box and tell

the gentlemen of the jury what happened between the hours of eleven and twelve."

Owen major entered the witness-box. "It was this way, you clings," he said. "I suppose Canham and I are to blame a bit, and I don't mind admitting it; but how were we to know that Jesson was such a treacherous beast?"

"Tell us what happened, you ass!" said Handforth.

"Give me a chance," exclaimed Owen. "Soon after eleven, I think, Canham yawned—"

"Rats!" said Canham. "It was you who yawned, you boulder!"

"I didn't yawn until after you—"

"Yes, you did—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, my hat!" I exclaimed. "Shut up, you fatheads! How can we conduct this case properly if you keep wrangling? It doesn't matter who yawned first. There's no crime in yawning, anyhow. Proceed, Owen major."

"Well, Canham yawned, and I yawned," said Owen.

"We shall all yawn soon," put in Tommy Watson.

"Jesson asked us if we were tired," continued the witness. "We said we were all right, and that we should be relieved at two o'clock. But just before midnight I began to doze a bit, and Canham was sleepy, too."

"Well?"

"Jesson told us that he could guard the window all right," said Owen. "He said he would yell if there was an alarm. So Canham and I thought it would be all square if we had a bit of a nap on the q.t. We went into a recess and dozed off."

"You went sound asleep, you mean," I said grimly. "You ought to be kicked for deserting your post like that, you boulders. But we'll overlook it this once. Well, go ahead, Owen."

"That's all there is," said Owen major.

"All right, you can stand down," I said. "We needn't take Canham's evidence, because it'll be the same as

yours. Now, we have an interesting position. Jesson was left alone by the window—as he had planned."

"The beastly cad!" exclaimed Hart warmly.

"For some reason I awoke before my usual time," I went on. "I got up, dressed, and went round on a tour of inspection. I found the prisoner unscrewing the boards and talking to the Head."

"The traitor!"

"The rotten boulder!"

"I heard quite sufficient to make it clear to me that Jesson had played a dirty trick upon us," I said.

"Oh, so you were spying, eh?" answered Jesson.

"You're the only spy among us," I retorted sharply. "And you stand there, in the dock accused of a grave crime. You plotted with Mr. Martin, and you arranged the mock quarrel, so that the Remove would be hoodwinked."

"Yes; and you were hoodwinked," said Jesson sourly.

"You appealed to us for shelter," I went on. "You came to the barricade, begging to be admitted. What did we do? I ask you, Jesson, what did we do?"

"You acted like the fools you are," said Jesson.

"We accepted your word," I declared. "We believed that you were a fugitive from the Head, and that you were defying him. We took you in—"

"And I took you in," grinned Jesson contemptuously.

"We took you in, and treated you as one of ourselves," I said. "We gave you shelter, and we trusted you. We allowed you to have the freedom of the whole west wing. And what did you do in return for our trust and kindness?"

"The cad turned on us," said Handforth warmly.

"Exactly!" I said. "He attempted to give us all away to the Head; he did his utmost to admit the enemy into our stronghold. I am doubtful if the prisoner realizes the full nature of his great crime."

"Cut this foolery short," snapped Jesson. "You're a pack of young donkeys. You're defying the school authority, and it was my duty, as a prefect, to—"

"Do nothing," I broke in. "Your power as a prefect is only available in the College House," I continued. "You have no authority over us, Jesson. And yet you considered it your duty to play a low-down trick—"

"Hang you!" rapped out Jesson. "Why don't you get it over?"

"We'll get it over soon enough," I exclaimed. "Gentlemen of the jury, is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" said the jury, in one voice. "Good!" shouted Handforth. "And what's the sentence?"

"That the prisoner be boiled in oil, and afterwards birched," said Owen major. "I vote we make an example—"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "You seem to forget that I'm the judge, Owen major. It is my duty to pass sentence upon the prisoner. And I hereby solemnly pronounce that the prisoner shall be tarred and feathered!"

CHAPTER 2.

Tar and Feathers!

"TAR and feathers!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Are you serious, Nipper?"

"Of course I'm serious," I declared, as the juniors put the question. "I sentence Cyril Jesson to be tarred and feathered!"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"Couldn't be better!" said Handforth. "It's the finest punishment a rascal of this sort could have."

"Hear, hear!"

Jesson, looking pale and alarmed, laughed nervously.

"Don't be such young fools," he said. "All this is pretty good, as a joke, but you've carried it far enough—"

"You won't find much joke about it,

Jesson," I interrupted. "This sentence is a serious one, and it is going to be put into effect at once. Do you understand? You are to be tarred and feathered—now!"

Jesson turned quite pale.

"You mad young idiots!" he snapped. "You'd better not— Oh, but you haven't got any tar. I might have known you were only bluffing. The sooner you let me go, the better."

"Yes; what about some tar, Nipper?" asked Canham.

"I hadn't forgotten it," I replied. "Down in the cellar, in one corner, is a small barrel. It contains tar, as I found out yesterday. There is sufficient there to tar a dozen fellows. There are heaps of pillows upstairs, and we have all the materials for the sentence."

"Hurrah!"

"Let's do it now!"

"Collar him!"

Jesson jumped up.

"You'd better stand back," he roared. "If any of you touch me— Look out! Why, I'll—I'll— Leggo, Handforth! I'll—I'll—"

But the prefect was unable to proceed further.

He was seized, and his struggles were of no avail. Everybody was thoroughly satisfied with the sentence I had named. The prisoner was to be tarred and feathered! It would be a fitting punishment for the traitor!

Fortunately, we had the materials on hand, otherwise I should not have mentioned such a punishment. Jesson was taken out into the passage, and down into the cellar. He was now thoroughly frightened.

"Look here, Nipper, don't go on with this—this rot," he pleaded. "I'm sorry I played that trick—"

"It's too late to be sorry," I interrupted. "Strip!"

"Oh?"

"Strip!" I ordered. "Take all your clothes off!"

"I won't!" roared Jesson. "I refuse—"

"All right; just as you wish," I said. "If you won't strip, we shall strip you. Take your choice."

"But look here——"

"I'll give you three seconds to commence," I said grimly.

Jesson saw that I was in earnest, and he did not attempt to argue further. He commenced undressing.

He tore off his clothes, and then he was ordered to don a bathing costume. I had pity on him to that extent, at all events. His condition would be quite bad enough even with the bathing costume on.

He gave a gasp of relief as he donned the costume. Surrounded by juniors as he was, he had the sense to do as he was told. As the first sign of refusal to carry out orders, force would be applied. Jesson knew it, and he wisely decided that it was better for him to submit.

But he was filled with an inward rage, and he glowered at us as he put on the costume.

"Now, Jesson," I said, "you will stand still. Have you got that white-wash brush, Tommy?"

"Here it is," said Watson.

"Good! Hand it over!"

I seized the brush, and two or three other fellows obligingly poured a quantity of tar into a big pan. I soaked the brush, and then applied it to Jesson's legs. He started as the brush touched him, and his face went purple with fury.

"If you don't leave me alone I'll smash you!" he shouted thickly. "You young cads! I'll — I'll — gug-gug-grooch!"

I had flicked the brush upwards, and Jesson's face underwent a change. The lower part of it was blackened, and a quantity of tar had entered his mouth. His appearance was quite ludicrous.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled, and Jesson gargled. But he did not attempt resistance again. He was thoroughly tarred—so thoroughly, in fact, that by

the time I had finished he was looking like a nigger.

He was black from head to foot, and he did not look at all comfortable. He was probably feeling awful. And it would take hours and hours—and a large number of hot baths—to remove that tar.

"Now for the feathers," I said briddly.

"Here they are, old son," said Hart. "Stand clear!"

He was carrying two big pillows. He slit them open with his penknife, and shook out the feathers upon the floor. It was surprising what a pile of feathers came from those two pillows.

"Now, Jesson, kindly roll yourself in those feathers," I said smoothly. "If you don't, you'll be rolled in by force—and we shan't be gentle. You'd better back up about it, too!"

"I'll get even with you for this!" panted Jesson shakily.

He threw himself into the feathers—since there was nothing else to be done. After a few rolls his appearance was extraordinary. White from head to foot, he looked like some weird and wonderful specimen from the Zoo. Feathers smothered him everywhere.

He was clothed in the things. His face and head were obliterated, and he could hardly see.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You look fine, Jessy—ripping!" grinned Handforth.

"Now we'll get rid of him," I said. "What he does after this is his affair. He's been tarred and feathered, and the sentence of the court has been carried out. Bring him along to the barricade!"

"He can bring himself along, thanks," grinned Hart. "I won't touch him!"

Jesson was only too anxious to get away. He passed out of the cellar in the midst of a chuckling crowd. And when we arrived at the barricade, in the passage, I gave a few orders.

"Remove some of the obstructions,"

"I said, 'Jesson's got to get out, and this is the simplest way. We can easily build the barricade again. All hands to the pump!'"

Several juniors became active, and a space was soon cleared.

"Now, Jesson," I said, "You can clear off—and remember, that if you try any more of the same tricks, we'll give you something even worse than tar and feathers. You can shift as soon as you like!"

Jesson climbed over the barricade without a word. He left his trade mark on everything he touched. But the feathers clung to him lovingly, and his appearance was not altered when he stood on the other side of the defences.

"You infernal young dog!" he snarled savagely. "You'll pay for this before long! By Heaven! You'll pay for it!"

"Clear off while you're still safe," I said. "You think you can say what you like, now that you're on that side of the barricade——"

"Mark my words," panted Jesson. "I'll make you suffer for this outrage!"

"Get your pea-shooters ready," I said briskly. "Fire!"

There were no pea-shooters ready, but Jesson did not know this. He turned and fled, helter-skelter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's done," I said. "I don't think we were unduly hard on the cad, do you?"

"He ought to have been chased through the village like that," exclaimed Handforth. "He ought to have been exposed to public view. As it is, he'll crawl away, and nobody will ever know."

"Won't they," I said. "It'll take Jesson all to-morrow to clear that tar off—and the whole school will know of the affair. I'll see to that. I'd like to see the Head's face when he gets to know of the incident."

The Head, as it happened, knew already.

Jesson was pretty certain that Mr. Martin was in his study. He would

not have retired to his bedroom yet. And Jesson was sure of this when he saw a light gleaming in the Head's study.

Jesson soon made up his mind.

"I'll go to the Head!" he muttered savagely. "I'll show him what those young demons have done! He'll make it all the hotter for them later on!"

The prefect hurried away through the dark passages, leaving a trail over every yard of ground. He was not aware of the fact that a cardboard placard was repeating on his back, held in position by a length of string from his neck.

And Jesson's decision was exactly what we wanted.

He rushed along until he came to the Head's study. A light gleamed under the door, and Jesson did not wait to knock. He burst in like a whirlwind, and stood upon the carpet inside.

Mr. Martin glanced up—and gasped.

"What, what! Good gracious!" he exclaimed faintly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Wroth.

The latter gentleman—Nelson Lee—was in the study also. He had been called there by the Head to discuss the situation. Lee guessed the truth in a moment, and he could hardly repress a smile. Secretly, he was very pleased, for he knew that Jesson thoroughly deserved this fate.

"Great Heavens!" gasped Mr. Martin. "What—what is it?"

"It's I, sir!" roared Jesson.

"Upon my soul!"

"Those infernal kids did this!" roared Jesson.

"I do not understand. Great goodness!" gasped the Head, the truth suddenly dawning upon him. "Are you Jesson?"

"Yes, I am!" howled Jesson. "Look at this, sir!"

The Head rose in his chair, and his brow was black.

"I am looking, Jesson," he said grimly. "What on earth has happened to you? What are all those white places of stuff——"

"I fancy the boy has been tarred and feathered, sir," put in Lee mildly. "Dear me! What a shocking state he is in! This is appalling, sir—quite appalling! Who can be responsible?"

The Head pursed his lips.

"Tar and feathers!" he repeated. "Good Heavens! What a scandalous outrage——"

"What are you going to do, sir?" demanded Jesson wildly. "Those kids did this! They made me strip, they made me get into a bathing-suit, and then they painted me all over with tar, and rolled me in feathers!"

"It is outrageous," said the Head. "Never, in the whole course of my career, have I met with a case like this. You had better visit the bath-room at once, Jesson. I will question you further when you are more presentable. It is obvious, in any case, that these rebels are absolutely abandoned."

"They ought to be expelled, sir—all the crowd," panted Jesson.

"You may be sure that the ring-leaders will be expelled when the time comes, Jesson," said Mr. Martin grimly.

"Nipper was the fellow who ordered me to be tarred and feathered, sir——"

"I might have guessed as much," said the Head, compressing his lips. "Nipper, it appears, is the leader in all these acts of hoodlomanism!"

"I am afraid we shall find it very difficult to beat these boys, so long as Nipper is in control," said Mr. Wrott.

The Head laughed harshly.

"We will beat them, never fear," he exclaimed. "I have been frustrated several times, but I have a scheme in mind which simply cannot fail."

"That is most interesting, sir," said Lee. "And—and will you put this plan of yours into execution to-night?"

"No, Mr. Wrott, not to-night," replied the Head, rubbing his hands. "I shall leave it until to-morrow. I will give the rebels cause to think that I have given up the game as a bad job—and then—but why are you waiting, Jesson?" broke off the Head. "Go at

once, sir—go to the bath-room—good gracious! You have made the carpet in a shocking mess! Go, you young fool!"

Jesson turned, and the Head stared.

"One moment, boy," he said sharply. "What is that on your back?"

"Feathers, I suppose, sir," snapped Jesson sarcastically.

"There is something else," said the Head. "Come here, Jesson. That's right. Now turn round. Dear me! A placard of some—some——"

Mr. Martin's words died away. He was reading the notice which was hung upon Jesson's back.

"TAKE WARNING! IT WILL BE THE HEAD NEXT TIME!"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Martin. "Is—is it possible—is it conceivable—that these wretched boys have dared to threaten me? Do they mean to imply that they would—ahum!—tar and feather me?"

"One would certainly suppose so," said Lee smoothly.

"And they would, too!" declared Jesson, with a certain amount of relish. "If they ever get hold of you, sir, they'll roll you in tar and feathers—like they did me. They're absolutely reckless, and they don't care what they do. They've got enough nerve for anything."

Mr. Martin was rather pale.

"I must be careful," he remarked. "To think that the boys would dare to touch me—but you may go, Jesson. Get into a bath at once."

Jesson went, and the Head turned to Nelson Lee.

"This—is this—is startling, Mr. Wrott," he exclaimed nervously. "I really must be very cautious in future! It would be ghastly if those boys were to treat me as they have treated Jesson!"

"They are capable of it, sir—quite capable," said Lee, nodding grimly.

The Head paced his study.

"I will take care to avoid close contact with the rebels," he said, after a moment or two. "They nearly got hold

of me to-night! Good gracious! I shudder to think of what might have happened—"

"But I understand you to say, sir, that you mean to defeat the boys fairly soon?" asked Lee. "I hope—"

"I intend to have the Remove under my full control again within forty-eight hours," declared the Head. "I will bring these rebels to their knees, Mr. Wroth! I have had enough of this foolery, and it must end."

Mr. Martin spoke grimly, but Nelson Lee wondered how much success would attend the Head's new efforts. Somehow, the disguised detective had an idea that the rebel Remove would not be beaten at all!

Time, however, would show.

CHAPTER 8 Hiding Out!

"FOG!" said Cecil de Valerie, with disgust.

"Yes; it's a pretty rotten morning," agreed Pitt. "Still, it doesn't make much difference to us. We're cooped up in here, and I don't care if it snows. Look at the old chestnuts."

The two Juniors were at one of the windows in the Remove dormitory. It was early morning, and the grey light of the November day was filtering through a dense pall of fog-like mist.

The ghostly boughs of the old chestnut trees in the Triangle were only just visible. The imposing gateway of the school was invisible. It was even impossible to catch a glimpse of the College House.

"I hate fog," said De Valerie. "I was on a steamship once, when I was quite a kid, and we were in a fog then. I remember my mater was in mortal fear of an accident, and we did bash into another ship, too."

"Very interesting," grinned Pitt. "But the west wing of the Ancient House doesn't happen to be a ship, and there's not much danger of us bash-

ing into anything, my son. Hallo! Here's Nipper."

I approached the window, and gazed out into the mist.

"Yes, by Jove!" I said. "It's possible!"

"Eh?"

"It's quite possible," I declared.

"What's quite possible, you ass!"

"Potatoes," I said absently.

"What!" yelled Pitt.

"And greens," I added. "Oh, yes—heaps of greens—"

"He's dotty," shouted Pitt, grabbing hold of my shoulders. "What's the matter with you, you rambling ass?"

I looked at Reginald Pitt thoughtfully.

"I'm not rambling, and I'm not dotty," I said. "Do we need potatoes?"

"Yes, rather!" he replied promptly. "We haven't tasted potatoes for three or four days."

"Do we need greens—cabbages, and that sort of thing?"

"You bet we do!"

"Good!" I said. "We can get heaps of 'em this morning—if we're lucky."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can catch on," declared De Valerie. "We're bottled up in this wing—barricaded on all sides—and yet you jaw about getting a supply of vegetables. It can't be done, Nipper. We've got all sorts of grub in the store-room, but not fresh vegetables."

"Exactly," I said. "Well, there's no reason why we shouldn't have a change. I'd rather like roast beef for dinner to-day. A chap gets tired of tinned stuff always. How would roast mutton do?"

Pitt stared.

"You're off your rocker!" he said flatly.

I grinned, and patted him on the back.

"Think," I said smoothly. "Think for two minutes!"

"Rats!" retorted Pitt.

"Dear fellows, isn't it a shockin' mornin'?" inquired Sir Montie Tregeagle-West, entering the dormitory.

"It's a lovely morning," I said promptly.

Sir Montie adjusted his piece-ree.

"Begad! Did I understand you to say that the mornin' was lovely, Nipper, old boy?" he inquired mildly.

"You did."

"But you were joking, surely?"

"Not a bit of it," I said. "I think it's a perfectly ripping morning. This is exactly the weather I should have chosen—if my choice had been possible."

"Dear old boy, aren't you feelin' well?" asked Montie anxiously.

I grinned.

"Never felt better," I replied. "It's quite possible that I seem a bit mad to you—but there's a method in my madness. I don't usually like fog, but I simply adore it this morning."

"But why?"

"Because it's going to help us—I hope."

"Help us?" repeated Pitt. "How?"

"I suppose you've never seen the supply-van arrive on a Thursday morning at the rear quarter of the Ancient House?" I said. "I suppose you've never seen beef and mutton being carted into the cold-storage-room? You've never seen sacks of potatoes and baskets of cabbages—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated De Valeric, taking a deep breath.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie.

"You—you mean we can raid that van?" asked Pitt, his eyes glittering. "Nipper, give yourself a pat on the back! That van ought to be here by this time—it generally arrives about seven—and it's a quarter past already."

"It's been delayed through the fog. Hallo!" I said, peering through the mist. "Look at that, my sons! Feast your eyes upon it!"

Down below, on the ground, a big van was lumbering past. It was only just visible through the fog. But it was unmistakable. It was the supply van we had been referring to!

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "What shall we do, old boy?"

"Raid it!" declared Pitt.

"If we do anything at all, we've got to do it at once," I remarked. "My idea is simple. It's foggy, and we can creep out without being seen. Hardly a soul is out and about yet. About a dozen of us can perform the raid—and return loaded with fresh meat and other stuff. Is it worth trying?"

"Doubter!"

"I should say it is!" said De Valeric.

"Are you game?"

"Yes!"

"Then we'll make a move," I said briskly. "Get some of the other chaps together and tell them what the game is. Perhaps you'll understand why I like the fog now. Without it we couldn't go on this stunt."

"Of course not," grinned Pitt. "You're not dolly, after all."

Everybody was enthusiastic.

And everybody wanted to come on the raid. This was impossible, of course, and I selected about a dozen strong fellows.

The raiding party, with me at its head, collected downstairs in the lower corridor. The barricade here was high, but we knew how to wangle it. By the removal of two or three articles, it was possible to slip over with ease.

"Come on, my sons," I said softly.

"And remember—no talking!"

"Right!" exclaimed Handforth.

"Lead on, McDuff!"

I crossed the barricade, and made my way down the passage to a fairly large window. It opened with ease, and a moment later I was outside, in the chill mist.

The other fellows followed me closely.

And in this way we passed like ghostly shadows round to the back of the Ancient House. Quite abruptly we came within sight of the supply-van—a huge motor lorry. It was covered in, and at the moment it seemed to be deserted.

"Splendid!" I whispered. "I'll bet the driver is having a cup of tea. Now's

our chance! What a glorious piece of luck!"

It was, indeed. The van had been left to itself in the fog. And it stood there—at our mercy!

I climbed aboard, and poked the canvas at the rear. My gaze fell upon all manner of food articles. There were several sacks of potatoes, five or six sacks of cabbages, two or three carcasses of sheep, to mention only a few things.

"Grab hold, somebody," I said softly.

I handed down enough mutton to last us a couple of days, and two of the juniors grasped the carcass, and lost no time in hurrying away with it. There was no sense in waiting about, for we might be surprised at any moment.

A sack of potatoes was a different proposition. Several juniors found it necessary to stagger under its weight. But I felt extremely satisfied when I saw the heavy sack disappearing into the fog.

Two others took some cabbages; and this left only three of us. While I was looking round to see what could be found, there was a bellow of fury, and I turned to see the lorry-driver glaring up at me.

"What are you doing there?" demanded the man angrily.

"It's all right, old chap," I said coolly. "We've taken all we require—thanks."

"Why, you—you——"

"Good-morning!" I said briskly.

I leaped down, dodged the man with ease, and vanished into the fog. He came blundering after me, but he went in the wrong direction, and I grinned as I came upon Pitt and Tommy Watson waiting near the wall of the house.

"We were just coming back for you," panted Watson. "We scooted when we saw that chap——"

"That's all right," I interrupted.

"The raid's been discovered—and all the better. That carman is bound to go to the Head, and it'll give Mr. Martin an appetite for breakfast when he hears what we've taken."

We got back into the west wing without any difficulty whatever. The fog

had concealed our movements so thoroughly that it was child's play, and there was much joy and satisfaction among the ranks of the Remove.

Jimmy Little, the fat boy of St. Frank's, was in ecstasy.

"Great doughnuts!" he exclaimed. "This is simply great! You chaps ought to have a medal each! By chutney! I can prepare a glorious dinner for to-day—roast mutton, with boiled potatoes and cabbage! Think of it! Oh, my only hat!"

And Paddy Little snacked his lips in anticipation. Food was his god, and he took as much joy in preparing it as eating it.

The rest of the juniors were equally pleased, and there was general satisfaction in the manner in which we had braved capture by venturing out into the open.

And meanwhile the Head was informed.

He was in his study, slowly pacing up and down before the fire, when Tubbs, the page-boy, entered after timidly knocking.

"Well, boy, what is it?" snapped the Head shortly.

"If you please, sir, Richards wants to see you," said Tubbs.

"Who the deuce is Richards?" barked the Head.

"Please, sir, he's the driver of the motor-van what's outside now," said Tubbs. "He wants to make a complaint, sir——"

"I can't see him!" said the Head curtly. "Go away, Tubbs!"

"It's about them boys, sir," said Tubbs, who took secret joy in informing the Head of the Remove's victory. "They've come out of their fork, sir, and took a lot of things off the supply-van—mutton and vegetables——"

"What?" roared the Head.

"Please, sir——"

"Tell the man to come to me at once," said Mr. Martin severely.

Tubbs escaped, and he grinned all over his face as soon as he got into the passage. He lost no time in inform-

ing Mr. Richards, and that gentleman, in a state of considerable nervousness, was ushered into the Head's presence.

"Oh, so you're Richards, are you?" demanded Mr. Martin.

"Yes, sir."

"What's this I hear about those infernal boys taking some food off your van?"

"It's true, sir," said Richards nervously. "This 'ere fog is so thick that you can't see a clear yard. And I hadn't left the van for more than ten minutes before——"

"You were grossly careless," snapped the Head. "Tell me what the boys look."

"Meat and vegetables," said Richards; and he proceeded to go into details regarding the extent of the Remove's capture. The Head listened with clenched teeth.

"That's enough—you may go!" he snapped abruptly.

The man went, and the Head glared into the fire.

"This is getting intolerable—absolutely intolerable!" he exclaimed under his breath. "What will the young dogs be up to next? They seem to be masters of the situation."

The headmaster clenched his fists.

"But not for long!" he grated. "I shall have them on their knees soon!"

And an expression of malicious satisfaction came into his eyes. Apparently Mr. Howard Martin had thought of some means to gain his end.

What was his next move to be?

CHAPTER 8.

No Water!

"I DON'T like it," I said thoughtfully.

"Eh?" exclaimed Fatty Little, with a start.

"I don't like it at all," I repeated.

A crowd of us were sitting in the kitchen, partaking of tea. The day had passed quietly, and now night was upon us again. The fog had cleared and it

was quite clear outside. The kitchen fire was warm and cosy, and Fatty's tea first class. With considerable pride he had served up Welsh rarebit on toast.

"You—you don't like it?" asked Fatty anxiously.

"No," I replied, taking a mouthful of toast.

"You silly ass! Five minutes ago you said it was good—and you're eating it all the time," exclaimed Little warmly. "I'm jolly sure I don't want you to eat the stuff if you don't like it!"

I looked at the fat boy, awoke to reality, and grunted.

"I'm not talking about your grub, Fatty," I said. "This cheese-stuff is top-hole. How you make it so tasty beats me. When I said 'I didn't like it' I was referring to the general situation."

"Oh!" said Fatty. "That's nothing!"

"It's everything," I corrected. "Just consider the facts. We commandeered a supply of fodder this morning, and the Head must have gone dotty with rage about it. Yet he did nothing—he didn't ever appear."

"Well?" said Watson. "Is that a bad sign?"

"I fancy it is," I replied.

"Are you anxious for trouble, then?" inquired Jack Grey.

"Of course I'm not," I said. "But I know jolly well that trouble is to come. The Head's silence and inactivity means mischief. And it's up to us to be on the alert."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West nodded.

"Dear fellow, I entirely agree with you. I do, really," he observed. "The Head seems to have a particular likin' for makin' trouble in the night. Perhaps he thinks he'll catch us nappin'."

"That's the idea, of course," I agreed. "It's necessary to keep a sharp look-out continually, and be in readiness for any emergency. The Head's desperate, and he'll probably use desperate methods."

The first indication we had that something fresh was brewing came from Fatty Little. The stout junior had prepared quite an excellent tea, and every-

body had enjoyed the meal. But shortly afterwards he came bustling into the dormitory, where I was about to settle down to a snooze. I intended to snatch a few hours' sleep in the evening, so as I could be on guard in the early hours of the morning.

"Not asleep yet?" said Patty, with relief.

"No," I said. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm blessed if I know," replied Little. "But I thought I'd better report to the chief—which is you. The fact is, we haven't got any water."

"Haven't got any water?"

"Not a drop!"

I sat up on the bed.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You had plenty of water before tea, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, but there is none now," said Patty. "We've only got one tap to rely on, and when I went to it a few minutes ago to draw some water for washing up, there was nothing doing. Great pancakes! What shall we do?"

"I'll come down and investigate," I said briskly.

I was soon down in the kitchen with Patty Little. Tommy Watson and Burton were at the tap, turning it on and off. But no water came from it. The tap had never failed before.

"This looks pretty serious," I said, after a minute or two. "There's not a drop of water here, and there's only one explanation. Our supply has been cut off!"

"Great pip!"

"What the dickens shall we do?"

"We must have water!"

The fellows were rather concerned.

"Do you think the Head knows anything about it?" asked Watson.

"I think the Head is responsible," I replied. "He has cut off our water supply—and it's a disaster I've been expecting for days. I haven't said anything, because I didn't want to worry anybody. But you'll easily understand that we can't hold out without water. The Head has only just remembered

about the water supply, I suppose. The position is serious."

"But we can get water from somewhere else, surely?" said Handforth. "Dash it all, we're not going to be beaten by a silly little thing of this sort!"

"You don't seem to realise that it's a big thing," I said. "We must have water. Exactly how we're going to manage I don't know—but I shall have to go scouting."

"Good!" said Pitt. "Do you want any volunteers?"

"No, thanks."

"Retreat!" said Pitt, changing his tone. "But you must have somebody with you, Nipper. We can't let you venture out alone—"

"You needn't worry about me," I interrupted. "I shan't come to any harm. And it'll be much safer for only one to go."

The fellows didn't like the idea, but I was quite firm.

And, five minutes later, I slipped into the passage beyond the lower barricade, and made my exit from the Ancient House by means of the small corridor window.

The evening was as black as pitch, and for a short time I could see nothing whatever. A chilly wind was whistling round the angles of the building, and the dark sky was clouded.

I didn't exactly know what to do. Water was essential, and we had to have a supply. As a commencement, I decided to investigate in the region of the kitchen—on the off-chance that I should discover the spot where the water had been cut off.

I crept round the wall very cautiously. I was beginning to see a little more distinctly by this time, for my eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. And as I moved round the angle, I came to a halt.

A figure moved on the other side of the Triangle.

I watched closely, for I wanted to see who the figure belonged to. Quite possibly it was only a Fifth Former, or a

perfect, or perhaps the school-porter

My thoughts came to a stop abruptly. For, as the figure passed a lighted window, I instantly recognised it. It belonged to Mr. Howard Martin. The Head himself was quite close to me, then, and I momentarily forgot my original purpose.

Somehow or other, I had an inclination to follow the Head, for I had a vague idea that he was up to further mischief. Quite possibly he had other ideas in mind to bring us to our knees.

And to be forewarned is to be forearmed. I decided that my best policy would be to shadow Mr. Martin—for a few minutes, at all events. I wanted to satisfy myself that he was not trying on any fresh offensive.

There was a certain amount of risk in crossing the Triangle, but I decided to take it, and I reached the other side in safety, and only a hundred yards in the rear of my quarry.

The Head was strolling along the lane in the direction of Belton, and after I had progressed some little distance I slackened my speed and came to a halt. Mr. Martin, apparently, was merely going to the village, and there would be no object in my following him any longer.

I had satisfied myself on the point in question, and turned back.

Then I gave a startled gasp.

For, directly in front of me, was the tall figure of a man. I had not had the slightest notion that he was there, and he must have crept up behind me with the silence of a panther.

I was not at a loss, however.

I dodged to one side and prepared to run—without waiting to find out who the man happened to be; but a hand came out and gripped my shoulder like the jaws of a vice. I was swung round helplessly.

"Not so fast, young man—not so fast!"

I drew my breath in sharply, for I had recognised the voice in a moment.

The man was Mr. Simpson Wroth—the Head's understudy!

"I—I—dash it all, sir, I'm only——"

"There is no necessity for you to make excuses, Nipper," exclaimed Mr. Wroth sourly. "I have caught you red-handed, you young rascal. Do you imagine for a moment that I shall allow you to go free again?"

"But—but how did you get here, sir?" I asked blankly.

"It is not your business to ask questions," exclaimed Mr. Wroth harshly. "You are the ringleader of these rebels, and you will come with me. No, don't struggle, or you will be hurt!"

But I was struggling—desperately.

All my efforts, however, were in vain. I tried every trick that was known to me; I twisted, I wriggled, I even attempted one or two ju-jitsu movements—but found that they were counteracted on the instant. At the end of two minutes I was quite exhausted by my own efforts.

"Well," said Mr. Wroth smoothly, "have you had enough?"

I made no reply. I was feeling too bitterly disappointed and angry. And my temper was not improved when I noticed that Mr. Wroth himself was quite fresh, and not even out of breath.

"Now, Nipper—march!" he exclaimed grimly.

I couldn't very well do anything else for he pushed me in front of him, and in that way we progressed until we reached the Triangle. Just within the gates, my captor brought me to a halt.

"Now, my boy—get indoors!" exclaimed Mr. Wroth in a soft whisper. "Get indoors and stay there. It is very foolish of you to venture out alone. Mr. Martin is a keen man, and he is very much on the alert."

As he uttered the last words Mr. Wroth turned and walked out of the gateway again. I stared after him in blank amazement, and for a few seconds I was quite at a loss. He, Mr. Wroth, was in favour of the Remove, and totally against the Head.

I had suspected it all along—but now I had proof.

And, instantly, my calmness and composure returned to me. I realized that here was a chance which might never occur again. I slipped out of the gateway, and saw the figure of the House-master sliding down the lane.

I followed.

He had warned me to leave the Head alone, but he certainly would not suspect that I had turned my attentions to him. I hardly knew what I expected to find by shadowing Mr. Wroth, but I thought perhaps the game would be worth while. He was a somewhat mysterious individual, and I had a fancy to investigate.

Somehow, I could only look upon him as a friend, and I felt slightly guilty as I crept along the road near the hedge—just keeping Mr. Wroth in sight. However, I did not allow any scruples of that kind to interfere with my work.

To my astonishment, Mr. Wroth crossed the stile which led into the depths of the wood. And he was soon swallowed up in the blackness of the gaunt trees.

I was just about to cross the stile when I came to a halt, and crouched down. For I had heard a voice—and I guessed the truth.

Mr. Wroth had met somebody just within the wood.

I crept a little nearer, and then stood quite still, listening. A low voice came to my ears, but a sudden gust of wind made it impossible for me to understand what was being said.

And then came a brief period of calm.

"—been here twenty minutes, old man," said a voice distinctly. "I'd like you to know that my feet are infernally cold, and that I'm nearly frozen through! Did someone detain you?"

Just for a moment I thought that I was dreaming. That voice was almost as familiar to me as my own. There was no mistaking the tone, and I knew at once that I was right. I could hardly

keep myself from yelling with sudden excitement.

For the voice was that of Detective-Inspector Lennard—of Scotland Yard!

CHAPTER 19.

Hearing the Climes!

"GREAT Scott!"

I muttered the exclamation in a tone of sheer amazement. Lennard was one of Nelson Lee's oldest friends—and one of mine. What was he doing down here? What possible business could he have with Mr. Wroth?

It was more than I could understand, and I did not attempt to puzzle it out. I crept nearer to the stile, and then came upon a gap in the hedge. Without hesitation I slipped through that gap, and came out behind a huge oak tree. On the other side of this tree were the two men.

I half stood up, listening intently.

"Oh, I see," Lennard was saying. "Well, that makes it different, of course. I can quite understand why you have to act cautiously, Lee. It's the best way in the circumstances."

Lee!

I nearly jumped from the ground, but just managed to keep myself under control, still listening with my ears on the stretch.

"You see, Lennard, I can't afford to take any chances," came the voice of Nelson Lee himself. "Martin is nearly at the end of his tether, and the time will soon be ripe for us to act. But, until then, I mustn't give him the slightest inkling of what is on foot."

Nelson Lee was there! My beloved gov'nor was talking to the chief-inspector! And I decided that secrecy was no longer necessary. I dashed out from behind the tree, and started Lennard considerably.

"What the—who—by James!" exclaimed the Yard man. "It's Nipper!"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Lennard," I panted, looking round. "I—I thought I heard Mr. Lee here! But—but—"

I gazed and looked round blankly. Nelson Lee was not visible. The only other figure was that of Mr. Simpson Wroth. And even then, with such a direct clue in my possession, I did not immediately suspect the truth.

"You infernal young sweep!" exclaimed Mr. Wroth fiercely. "How dare you come here? Why did you not go indoors when I ordered you to? You followed me—you had the audacity to shadow me after I had given you back your liberty!"

"I—I—" I began breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Lennard. "You're decidedly dull this evening, Nipper."

"Hush, Inspector—hush!" grated Mr. Wroth.

And then, in a flash, the truth came to me.

"The gov'nor!" I gasped. "You're—the gov'nor!"

"Of course he's the gov'nor. Didn't you know it?" grinned Lennard. "Why, young 'un, Mr. Lee has been at St. Frank's in this get-up for a good many days now. You must be slow—"

"But—but— Oh, my goodness!" I panted. "Mr. Wroth! You're the gov'nor, after all! And—and I didn't know— Oh, you boulder, sir! Why didn't you tell me?"

Nelson Lee seized my shoulder.

"When you have quite recovered your composure, Nipper, I'll have a word with you," he said grimly. "It may interest you to know that I am decidedly angry with you for daring to—"

"Oh, come off it, sir," I protested. "I am the clup to be angry! You've been here for days, and you didn't let me know! I can understand everything now. I can understand why you've treated us so jolly leniently, and—and all sorts of things. I suppose there isn't such a person as Mr. Wroth?"

"Of course not," said the Scotland Yard man.

"Since you know so much, I'd better tell you everything," explained the gov'nor, with a sigh. "It was un-

doubtedly wise of you to turn the tables on me just now by shadowing my movements. I fancied I had got rid of you in a neat manner."

I stared at Nelson Lee excitedly.

"It's a marvellous disguise, sir," I declared. "I've spoken to you scores of times within the last week; I've looked into your face, and I've listened to your voice. But I've never had the slightest suspicion. Ey jingo! What a ripping ideal! You left St. Frank's, and you came back the very next day!"

"Deucedly good, I call it!" exclaimed Lennard. "I can't understand how he manages these things, Nipper."

"I dare say you were very busy, my lad, and you didn't give the matter very much thought," said Nelson Lee. "However, you know the truth now, and it doesn't matter so much—since this affair is nearly at an end."

"Why didn't you let me into the secret, sir?" I demanded warmly. "I call it mean of you—"

"Eh?"

"And it wasn't sporting, either," I said.

"The cheeky young beggar is actually giving you a lecture, old man," said Detective-Inspector Lennard. "Take my advice, and kick him off. Or, if you like, I'll do the job for you. Say the word, and I'll duck him in the ditch."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"We musn't be hard on him, Lennard," he said softly. "Perhaps he has a certain amount of cause to be angry. He always thinks he is badly treated if I happen to make a move without his knowledge."

"Well, I think you ought to let me know what's happening, sir," I said. "But I can't understand things at all. What is Mr. Lennard doing here?"

"He came because I requested him to come."

"But why, sir?"

"I have an excellent reason—"

"That's evasive, sir," I broke in. "I believe you've got something up against Mr. Martin, and if so, I think you might let me into the little secret. We've de-

fed the bullying rotter for days now, and we mean to defy him until we gain victory. We shall never surrender."

"Well, I don't suppose you will," said Nelson Lee. "And I must disappoint you, Nipper, in one respect. I cannot give you any further details to-night. You have interrupted my chat with Mr. Lennard, and I have no further time to allow you. Moreover, I do not intend to discuss the subject with you now."

"Why not?"

"Because you have quite enough to think of without that," said Lee. "Your hands are full, Nipper, and my advice for you is to keep to your own part of this affair. I can safely promise you that the end will come very swiftly now."

"To-night?" I asked eagerly.

"It might—but I don't think so," replied Nelson Lee. "In the meantime, you had better go back to your stronghold, and keep on the alert."

"Are you wild with us for rebelling, sir?" I asked.

Nelson Lee patted my shoulder.

"As the Housemaster of the Ancient House it is my duty to be fustious," he said. "But, at this moment, Nipper, I am a private individual. I am just myself. And, personally, I do not blame you in the slightest degree for taking matters into your own hands."

"Oh, good!" I exclaimed. "It's fine to hear you say that, sir."

"You have been very moderate in your actions throughout the rebellion," said Lee.

"Well, sir, I'll go back," I said briskly. "I'm feeling as bright as a jack now, because I know everything is all square— Hold on, though, I've just thought of something."

"Well, what is it?"

"We've got no water, sir."

"No which?" asked Lennard.

"Not a drop of water—"

"Do you mean that your supply has been cut off?" said Lee.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, Martin was talking to me about that only this morning," went on the

guy'nor. "I'm afraid you have a somewhat difficult proposition there, my lad. The pipe has been cut in the far part of the House, where it joins up with the main supply pipe. At all events, Mr. Martin intimated that he would cut the pipe at that point. It would be quite impossible for you to mend matters."

"I don't know what we shall do, sir," I said, rather worried. "We must have water, or we shall be compelled to surrender—"

"Can't you fix up a hose, or something?" suggested Lennard.

"By Jingo! That's not a bad idea, Mr. Lennard!" I exclaimed. "I've just remembered that there is a hose—it needs thinking over."

"Well, go away and think over it," said Lee briskly. "Don't bother us any longer, my lad. If I find that you have no water by the morning I will see what I can do in the matter. If possible, however, I should advise you to obtain a supply of some sort."

"I'll try, sir," I said.

"I'm hanged if I know what the kids are coming to," said the chief inspector, with a shake of his head. "Rebelling, and striking against authority! It's getting rather serious. Before long we shall find these youngsters getting up a union of their own and demanding more grub or a strike!"

I didn't take much notice of Lennard's banter, and after a few more words with the guy'nor I crept away in the darkness. I was feeling light-hearted and cheerful, in spite of the problem which awaited my attention.

I decided to say nothing to the other fellows regarding my discovery. They would have to wait until the end of the rebellion before they learned "Mr. Wroter's" real identity.

Having reached the school again I scouted about for some little time, and when I finally returned to my followers, my eyes were gleaming with satisfaction, and I was feeling quite content.

"Well, my luck?" asked Pitt, as I appeared.

"Heaps," I replied.

"Found some water?"

"I think we shall be able to fix up a supply quite easily," I replied. "I've been nosing about, and I've settled on a plan. As you all probably know, there's a water tap in the Head's garden."

"I didn't know it," said De Valerio.

"Well, there is one," I went on. "It's used during the summertime for watering the flower beds. There's generally a long hose running from it."

"That's right," said Watson, nodding. "I've seen it."

"Well, my idea is to fix that hose, and run it along to the Ancient House wall, and up into one of the barricaded windows—"

"But it'll be seen," protested Handforth.

"Not if we do the work thoroughly," I declared. "All we need is to camouflage it a bit where it is necessary. At the window, for example, there's a bush, and we can run the hose up behind the bush so that nobody can spot it. And the bulk of the pipe can be buried just under the ground. It needn't go across the Triangle, because a corner of the Head's garden comes right through the north-west corner of this wing. Anyhow, it can be wangled."

"What about the hose?" asked Watson. "Is it there?"

"No."

"Then what's the good of talking, you say?" snapped Tommy. "I thought as much! That hose is always carted indoors for the winter months, and we can't find it at a moment's notice—"

"The hose," I interrupted, "is in the woodshed. I saw it there not ten minutes ago. And it won't take us an hour to fix."

"Good!" said Pitt. "I suppose we'll do the trick after midnight?"

"We'll do it now!"

"But is it safe?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "The Head's out, and even if he comes back he won't go into the garden—and we

shall have scouts posted at different quarters. Anyhow, I think it'll be easier to do the job now than to leave it until the school is asleep."

The other juniors were quite in agreement with my argument, and before long a dozen of us had ventured out upon the mission. Water was necessary, and until we obtained a supply we could not consider ourselves secure.

The hose was fixed up without much trouble, and it proved an easy task to bury the greater part of it beneath an inch or so of soil. The only difficult part of the programme was to conceal the hose where it entered the window.

And we got over this by not using the window at all. The hose was pushed through a little grating, into a cellar. And it was so effectively concealed that it could not have been found, even if searched for.

And, after an hour's hard work, the thing was done.

We had not been disturbed, and we returned to our fortress highly satisfied—and with our water supply fully restored. Once again we were in a position to defy the Head until further orders.

CHAPTER 11.

Late for Calling Over!

BOB CHRISTINE glanced at his watch.

"Heaps of time yet," he said comfortably. "Time to see this giddy picture through, anyhow."

"Yes, but we don't want to be late—"

"There's half an hour yet," said Christine.

Yorke subsided into silence, and the two Remove juniors settled themselves down to enjoy the picture. They were in the Rannington Cinema, as it was a half-holiday at St. Frank's that day.

Roddy Yorke was rather anxious about the time, for he was not in favour of losing the train home to Beilston—the station for the school. Times

were strange at St. Frank's, and late-comers were dropped on heavily.

In fact, it was a very serious offense to be late for calling-over. With Mr. Howard Martin filling the position of headmaster, the juniors found it necessary to be extremely careful.

The Ancient House fellows had rebelled against the brutal Head's authority, but Christine & Co., of the College House, were still under Mr. Martin's authority.

"Sure your watch is right?" asked Yorke, after a short time.

"En?" said Christine. "Don't bother—"

"Yes, but it loses—"

"Rats to my watch!" snapped Bob Christine. "I put it right by the station clock, anyhow. Don't telt so much."

They watched the picture with great interest, and Christine did not show any sign of restlessness until the film was nearly at an end. Then he glanced at his watch repeatedly.

"Oh, blow!" he said. "We shan't be able to see the finish. The train goes in ten minutes, Yorkey. Still, we can sprint to the station in five, can't we?"

"Better go now," advised Yorke. "We've got to call at the confectioner's—"

"By jingo, yes!" said Christine briskly. "Come on, my son!"

They left the cinema, and emerged into the Bannington High Street. And right opposite stood the Town Hall, with the illuminated clock towering high above the old-fashioned shops.

"You—you ass!" roared Yorke. "Look at the time!"

Christine gazed upwards, started, and then consulted his watch. Finally, he gazed at Yorke in dismay.

"Well I'm blessed!" he said blankly.

"We've missed the train!" exclaimed Yorke. "It goes in two minutes, and we can't possibly get to the station in time! This'll mean a flogging for be-

ing late for calling-over! What's the good of a rotten turnip like that?"

"But I put it right," protested Christine. "In fact, I put it three minutes fast, because it generally loses a bit. I thought we had bags of time, you know. I'm jolly sorry, old man—"

"Oh, don't make a song about it!" growled Yorke. "We shall have to walk home now; we can't wait two hours for the last train. If the Head gets to hear that we're late, we shall be half-skinned. He's a brute!"

"That's too complimentary for him," said Christine. "We shall have to think about joining in with the Ancient House chaps if things get any worse. And, by all appearances, there's not much chance of them being any better."

Yorke granted.

"I'm worrying about the immediate trouble," he said. "We've got about half an hour to get to the school—even now. Get a move on!"

The two juniors walked down the High Street briskly. It was a fine evening, considering the time of the year, and the roads were not very muddy.

But Christine and Yorke had not proceeded far before the former came to an abrupt halt. He stood staring across the road at the opposite kerb, and Yorke gazed in that direction, too.

"What are you staring at, Bob?" he asked.

"That bike," said Christine, with a curious note in his voice. "It belongs to one of the Bannington chaps—a tradesman's bike, you know. I was wondering if we could borrow it—"

"Impossible," said Yorke. "These Bannington fellows are up against us, and they've been getting rather warm on the job lately. It can't be did, Christy. We'd better make up our minds—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Christine. "I'm not anxious to be flogged, even if you are. Here's a way of getting to the school in time. I'm not

suggesting that we should ask for the bike."

"But you said we could borrow it?"

"Without permission, I mean," explained Christine. "We can easily put matters right to-morrow. We can't think of pinching the bike, of course, but there's no harm in—"

"It's not a bad wheeze," put in Yorke. "There's one of those strong carrier things fixed on the front, I see. I could squat in that while you did the pedalling, you know."

"Oh, could you?" said Christine. "Lazy beggar!"

They advanced across the road leisurely, in order not to attract attention. Their minds were already made up.

The situation certainly was urgent, and their intentions were quite honourable. They would be quite willing to pay for the use of the jigger—afterwards. And it was certainly inviting.

"Jump on!" said Christine quickly.

Yorke lost no time in slipping into the basket carrier, which was attached to the head of the machine. Christine got astride the machine, and a second later the pair were speeding down the street.

"Good!" muttered Christine. "We haven't been spotted!"

He pedalled hard, and when he had turned the bend in the road he was feeling confident that the "theft" had not been observed.

"Of course, we could get into serious trouble for this," said Christine, as he pedalled. "But nobody could accuse us of trying to pinch an old iron like this. It's only worth about ten bob!"

"My conscience isn't troubled, anyhow," remarked Yorke complacently. "Whew! Go easy over these bumps, you ass! These iron bars aren't very springy, you know. I got a fearful jolt that time!"

"Don't growl!" said Christine. "You've got the best job, anyhow!"

They sped on, and were feeling easy in mind again. For they were now

certain that they would be able to reach St. Frank's in time for calling-over.

As it happened, however, they were not to have everything their own way.

They fondly believed that their movements had been unobserved. But this was not the case.

The owner of the bicycle happened to be a youth named Jim Blundle. He was the senior boy of the Bannington Council school: a good-natured sort of fellow, with red hair and ample features.

Jim Blundle was "up against" the St. Frank's fellows simply because of the rivalry that existed between them, and not by reason of any personal animosity. If it came to a pinch he would probably turn up trumps; but his anger was somewhat great when he found that his bike had vanished.

"Well I'm blowed!" he exclaimed blankly. "Who's pinched my jigger?"

He went out into the middle of the road, and stared up and down.

"Looking for something, mate?" inquired a passing labourer.

"I left a bicycle here five minutes ago!" exclaimed Blundle warmly. "Some thieving beast has walked off with it—"

"Why, I saw a couple o' them college kids take a bike from that herb—not two minutes back," said the man, jerking a thumb over his shoulder. "Two o' them kids from Belton, they was."

"St. Frank's chaps?" asked Blundle wrathfully.

"Ay—that's what they were."

The Council School boy turned red with anger.

"The awful young blighters!" he exclaimed. "Which way did they go?"

"Down the road towards Belton."

"Thanks!" said Jim Blundle, quickly. "I'll teach the beggars to meddle with my machine! Like their blooming sauce!"

He ran down the road, and was fortunate enough to meet two of his particular pals round a corner. These

youths were on bicycles—one being a butcher's boy—and the other a grocer's assistant.

"What's up, Jim?" asked one of them, as Blundie rushed up.

"I want you chaps!" panted Blundie quickly. "What do you think, Tom, two of them St. Frank's chaps have run off with my bike!"

"My 'at!" said Tom Kitchen. "Check!"

"Check!" echoed Blundie. "Why, it's—it's robbery! I want you chaps to come with me down the road—it won't take us long to overtake the rotters, and we can wipe 'em up proper. Are you game?"

"I'll come," said Kitchen promptly. "I've finished my round, and I'm always ready for a bit of sport—particularly against them college blokes. What about you, Ringham?"

The other lad, Bill Ringham, shook his head.

"I've got to get back to the shop," he said.

"Pros you can lend me your bike," suggested Jim Blundie promptly.

"I could do that——"

"Good!"

Jim didn't wait for any more, but seized the bicycle from the other boy's hands, and jumped into the saddle. A moment later he and Tom Kitchen were pedalling down the road for all they were worth—bent upon swift and dire vengeance.

Meanwhile, Christine and Yorke, all unconscious of the impending trouble, were gliding along the country road towards Beilton. As long as they kept up a comfortable speed, all would be well.

"We'll change places soon, if you like," said Yorke, after a while. "I'm not so sure about this being the best job, Christy. I think I'd rather be in the saddle. These iron bars are jolly hard."

"Right-ho!" said Christine. "We'll change over now."

He jumped off, and Yorke tumbled

out of the carrier. Just as the pair were about to remount the bike, two twinkling lights came into view far in the rear, and the juniors needed no telling that the lights belonged to two bicycles.

"Somebody else coming," remarked Yorke, glancing back. "I wonder if we were spotted——"

"No need to worry about that," said Christine briskly. "Let's buck up and get going again."

A moment later they were proceeding as before, except that Yorke was now in the saddle.

But retribution was near at hand.

They were unable to go at the pace which was attained by the pursuers. Jim Blundie and Tom Kitchen were using their best efforts, and they rapidly overhauled the two St. Frank's juniors.

But they really made a mistake in expending so much energy on the ride. For by the time they had overhauled their quarry, they had not much breath left in them for fighting purposes. Christine and Yorke, on the other hand, were comparatively fresh.

"Ere they are!" exclaimed Blundie breathlessly. "Hi, you burglin' college kids! Get off that bike!"

"My hat!" muttered Yorke. "We were spotted after all. What shall we do, Christy? Pedal on, or jump off?"

"Better stop and explain," said Christine. "We can't very well pinch the finger in front of the chap's eyes. Besides, we couldn't outride the bouncers, anyhow. I believe it's that Blundie chap, of the Council school—the one they call Glinger. Pull up, old son."

Yorke slowed down and jumped off the machine. A moment later he and Christine were jostled forcibly. The two Council school boys, having placed their machines against the hedge, charged to the attack without asking questions.

"Steady on, you asses!" exclaimed Christine. "We've got to explain to you——"

"We don't want none of your blown-in' explanations," shouted Blundle breathlessly. "We're going to wipe you up, you bounders! We'll teach you to pinch a bike wot don't belong to you."

"Yes, but look here—"

Bliff!

Blundle's big fist thudded into Christine's cheek, and the leader of the College House juniors staggered under the force of the blow. He was somewhat incensed by that attack, and came to the conclusion that his only course would be to retaliate. He simply wasn't going to be punched by a Council school boy without punching back—with interest.

Yorke, at the same time, was having a little trouble with Tom Kitchen.

As a result, a very lively scrap was in progress less than a minute later. The four boys were going at it hammer and tongs, and blows rained furiously.

The fighters had the lane to themselves, and they swayed to and fro, and up and down, exchanging blows freely. But the St. Frank's boys were the more skilled in the noble art of boxing.

What they lacked in brute strength, they made up for in science. And the Council school boys were not so fresh as their opponents. They soon began to realise that they had been rather unwise in forcing a combat.

Thud! Crash! Bliff!

Blundle and Kitchen reeled under the blows which were showered upon them. Finally, they both went down under terrific drives, and Christine and Yorke stood victorious on the battle ground.

"Perhaps you won't be so jolly handy with your fists next time!" exclaimed Christine breathlessly. "Goodness knows, we didn't want to scrap with you, Blundle. But you bluffed me. Here's ten bob for the loan of the bike—and you can go to the dickens."

"Hear, hear!" said Yorke, panting heavily.

They strode away, leaving the

Council school boys exceedingly the worse for wear, and heartily sorry that they had commenced the scrap. They discovered, for the first time, that the St. Frank's fellows were quite honourable.

"Still, we'll have our own back, one day!" exclaimed Blundle darkly. "We've got ten bob—and that ain't so bad. But I mean to pay them kids back for closin' up my eye like this!"

Meanwhile, Christine and Yorke were hurrying through Belton on foot. They had given up hope of reaching the school in time for calling-over. That scrap in the lane had settled the question, once and for all.

"We might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," remarked Christine, as he walked along. "There's no need to hurry, Yorke. Five minutes or so won't make any difference now."

The two juniors proceeded on their way to St. Frank's feeling resigned.

"There's one consolation, anyhow," remarked Yorke. "We shall get a licking, but we gave those cheeky Council school chaps a pretty good dusting!"

"That won't be much consolation while we're being flogged by the beastly Head!" growled Christine. "Look here, the best thing we can do is to sneak in quietly, and perhaps we shan't be noticed."

But ill-luck was against them.

Almost as soon as they entered the College House they were dropped on by Jesson of the Sixth. They knew, as soon as they saw the spiteful prefect, that they were in for trouble.

"Oh, so you've come in, have you?" said Jesson grimly. "What do you mean by being late for calling-over?"

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" said Christine. "We lost our train, that's all. Everybody's liable to lose a train now and again."

"It'll cost you something this trip," said Jesson unpleasantly. "I suppose you know it's a serious offence to be late! I've had orders from the Head to send you to his study as soon as you

show up. You'd better cut off straight away!"

Yorke and Christine glanced at one another, and walked down the passage without another word. They were, as a matter of fact, too completely disgusted to express their feelings in mere speech.

CHAPTER 12.

The Common-room Meeting.

"COME in!" Christine and Yorke shivered slightly as they heard the harsh invitation. They were outside the Head's study, and Christine gingerly opened the door, and the pair entered nervously.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Howard Martin, laying his pen down, and gazing severely at the two juniors. "You are the two boys, I presume, who were absent from calling-over?"

"Yes, sir."
 "I will have you understand that my orders are to be obeyed!" said the Head grimly. "You are well aware of the rules, and you can have no excuse for being late—"

"But we have got an excuse, sir!" put in Christine quickly.

"What did you say, boy?"
 "I said that we had an excuse, sir!" exclaimed Christine boldly. "We went to Bannington, and lost our train."

"Bah! That is no excuse whatever!" snapped the Head. "You have no right to lose trains, and if there are many boys late for calling-over in future, I shall place both the village and Bannington out of bounds. In this present instance, I intend to flog you."

"But—but—"

"Silence!"
 "But it's not fair to flog us, just for being ten minutes late!" shouted Christine recklessly. "When Dr. Stafford was here—"

"You confounded young brat!" thundered the Head, jumping to his feet. "If you dare to utter another

word, I'll flog you in public! Keep silent, and prepare to receive your punishment!"

Christine seemed to swallow something with difficulty. He realised how hopeless it was to fight against this tyrant single-handed. He sighed, and resigned himself to the inevitable.

And he and Yorke received a flogging which was utterly savage and uncalculated. When the head had finished, he pointed to the door.

"Go!" he exclaimed roughly. "You, Christine, will understand that you are restricted to the school grounds for the period of two weeks! And if there is any more of your nonsense, I will take even sterner measures!"

The two juniors left the study, boiling with inward rage.

Out in the passage they gazed at one another with tense looks.

"The beast!" muttered Yorke. "Oh, the awful beast!"

"We're not going to stand it!" exclaimed Christine, between his teeth. "Do you think I'm going to stick being gated for a fortnight?"

"What else can you do?" asked Yorke.

"You'll see, my son—you'll see!"

There was a grim note in Christine's voice—a note which seemed to indicate that he had come to a final decision.

He led the way straight to Study Q, and marched in. Talmadge was there, busy at prep. He had a bit of a cold, and thought it wiser not to go with his chains to Bannington.

"Hallo!" he said, looking up. "You're late—"

"Come down to the Common-room!" interrupted Christine bluntly.

"Eh? What the—"

"Don't ask questions!" said Bob. "It's important!"

He passed out of the study again, and Talmadge jumped up and followed him out into the passage. Christine visited several other studies in a like manner, and by the time the Common-room was reached he had a big gathering.

In fact, almost every College House Removee was present. They knew that something big was in the wind, but they hardly knew what. Christine was their accepted leader, but he was seldom in a mood of this sort. Bob Christine usually took things very easily.

"What's the trouble?" asked Clapson seriously.

"Listen to me, you chaps," said Bob, in a tense voice. "Shut that door, Nation, and put your back to it! And speak as quietly as you can—everybody. We don't want any interruptions."

"Blessed if I can see what the game is!" remarked Oldfield.

Christine cleared his throat.

"It's this!" he said deliberately. "The time's come for us to throw in our lot with Nipper and his crowd on the other side of the Triangle! The time has come for us to—revolt!"

"Great Scott!"

"It can't be done, you ass!"

"Of course not!"

"You're off your rocker, Christine!"

"It can be done—and it shall be done!" exclaimed Christine tensely. "I'll tell you why I've suddenly come to this decision, and if you've got an ounce of spirit between the lot of you you'll back me up!"

He paused impressively, and the juniors regarded him rather wonderingly.

"It's no good talking wildly, old son!" said Clapson. "We can't revolt—we're not in the same position as the Ancient House chaps. We can't bar the Head out of this House, and it wouldn't be playing the game to plant ourselves on Nipper & Co."

"Nipper has invited us to join him two or three times," said Christine. "I'm willing to take him at his word—if you chaps are ready to follow me. You all know what a beast and a bully the Head is."

"Hear, hear!"

"He's a roller of the worst type!"

"Give him a groan!" said Nation.

"Shut up, you ass!" snapped Christine. "We don't want any row here

now. If any prefects get to know what's on, they'll sail in and break up the meeting. And I've got a lot to say yet."

"Go it!"

"On the ball, Christy!"

"If you wouldn't yell so much, things would be better," said Christine grimly. "You've got to realize that this is a serious matter, and the time has come for us to make a final decision. Yorke and I were late for calling-over—"

"We all know that!"

"We were ten minutes late," went on Christine—"ten minutes only, and when we got here Jesson collared us and said that the head was waiting for us in his study. It wasn't sufficient for Jesson to give us fifty lines. He'd received orders from Martin that we were to go to his study."

"Did he whop you?"

"He flogged us as though we were guilty of theft!" exclaimed Christine, his voice quivering with rage. "And just because I said a word of protest, he's gated me for a fortnight. And this, mind you, because Yorke and I were ten minutes late for calling-over!"

"Phew!"

"The awful brute!"

"He ought to be kicked out of the school!"

"Are we going to stand it?" demanded Christine. "That's what I'm asking you—are we going to stand it without retaliating?"

"No!" exclaimed Yorke hotly.

"We'd like to do all sorts of things," said Clapson. "But, dash it all, we can't collar the Head and flog him, can we?"

"Perhaps not," said Christine. "But we can all ignore him!"

"Go out on strike, you mean?"

"You can call it what you like," said Bob—"strike, revolt, or anything! It doesn't make any difference, so long as we defy the bullying rather! My idea is for us to make the plunge to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes," said Christine tensely.

"What plunge?"

"You—you ass! There's only one plunge that we can take, and that is to join hands with good old Nipper!" said Christine. "If we'd had any sense we should have joined the barricade when it first started. But it's never too late to mend, and we can still defy the Head."

"It's a good idea," said one of the juniors, "but I'm not sure whether the Pestsis would like it. They'd probably kick up a dust if we presented ourselves at their stronghold."

"That's my idea, too," remarked Cobb.

"Besides, it wouldn't be fair to 'em," added Holroyd. "I'm game for anything you like, Christy, and you've only got to say the word; but I have my doubts about the wisdom of taking such a drastic step."

"Look here!" exclaimed Christine grimly. "Don't you realise that we shall be doing the Pestsis a good turn by joining the revolt? Why, the Head will be at his wit's end! He'll have a much stronger force to fight against, and he'll begin to realise that there's practically no hope of bringing the Remove to Ra Jonees. This rebellion has gone on long enough—too long, in fact—and it ought to be ended!"

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Munroe. "That's a bit extraordinary! You say it ought to be ended, and yet you're talking about joining it! If we join the revolt, we shall make it worse!"

"Exactly!" agreed Bob, nodding. "It's got to be worse before it's better. By falling into line with Nipper & Co., we shall help materially in bringing the rebellion to an end. Just look at the local papers!"

"Eh? What about the papers?"

"Haven't you seen them?" said Christine. "The Bannington Gazette, for example, contains a long report of this rebellion business in its last issue. And did you ever read such a string of rotten misrepresentations?"

"The paper ought to be squashed!" said Yorke indignantly. "The editor ought to be bodied in jail!"

"I don't suppose the editor's to blame at all," said Christine. "He was supplied with information by the Head. And if we bring this rebellion to a finish—or help towards it—the truth will come out. Then public opinion will be on our side, and the Head will get what he deserves. He'll be hounded out of the place for good!"

"That sounds too good to be true!"

"The Head's in complete control now, and he'll take a bit of shifting," said Page, shaking his head. "We all know he's a beast, and we're all fed up with him, but I'm not sure about the wisdom of joining in with Nipper. What about the food problem, then? I don't suppose they've got an unlimited supply of grub, and if we all pile on to them, we shall probably make them go on short rations—"

"That only shows what an ass you are!" interrupted Christine. "Listen to me! My idea is this: After lights-out to-night, we'll creep out of bed, dress, and then sneak downstairs. It won't take us ten minutes to lock the store-cupboard in the larders—they're all quiet and deserted after ten o'clock. We'll carry away with us all the grub we shall require for a week, so we needn't beg any from the Ancient House chaps. It's only fair that we should take our own fodder, and perhaps we shall help the other rebels, too."

"My hat!"

"That's a good idea, you know!"

"Topping!"

"Good for you, Christy!"

"There's not likely to be any hitch, because the Head thinks we're meek; he's not taking any precautions with the College House," went on Christine. "And I want to know, here and now, how many of you are willing to follow my lead? I'll take the vote straight away."

"Good egg!" said Yorke.

"Hands up all of you who will join in this stunt!" said Christine. "Now then, up with your fingers!"

Every hand in the Common-room went up.

"Good!" exclaimed Christine heartily. "That's what I was hoping for. My sons, you're true blue. We'll beat the Head yet!"

"Hurry!"

"Dry up, you asses——"

"Look out!" roared Billy Nation, from the door. "I can hear two or three chips coming—perfects, I expect!"

"Pretend to be reading, or something," said Christine rapidly.

A small table stood by, with some chessmen set out upon a board. Christine and Yorke sat down at the table, and pretended to be playing—with a crowd of other Juniors looking on.

Several others collected round the fireplace, and the remainder hastily pulled papers out of their pockets and pretended to read. The transformation was really remarkable for its swiftness.

And when Jesson and two other prefects strode in a couple of seconds later, they beheld a very peaceful scene in the Common-room. Jesson swished his cane, and looked round suspiciously.

"Huh!" he exclaimed. "What was the noise I heard just now?"

"Noise?" repeated Talmadge blandly.

"Yes, I heard shouting and cheering."

"Oh, that?" said Talmadge. "I suppose a few chaps can make a bit of noise in the Common-room. Jesson? There's no harm in cheering a fellow when he makes a good move, is there?"

"A good move?" repeated the prefect.

"Chess!" explained Talmadge, waving his hand.

"You'd better be quiet, kids—that's all," said Jesson. "If I hear any more noise from this room, I'll come and clear the whole crowd of you out. Remember that!"

And Jesson departed, with the other Sixth Formers—totally unsuspecting of the fact that a most important decision had been arrived at by the College House members of the Remove.

The rebellion was destined to spread.

And the hour for the great moment was drawing rapidly nearer!

The tyrant of St. Frank's was destined to receive a shock before long!

CHAPTER II.

(Continued in Part I.)

"WHAT of the night, O lusty sword?"

"All's well!" grinned Reginald Pitt.

We didn't usually address one another in that manner, but I was feeling somewhat light-hearted that evening, and I had addressed Pitt half humorously as I approached the barricade of which he had charge.

"All's well?" I repeated. "Good, my sons. If I was a betting chap, I'd lay ten to one that we shall have Mr. Bully Martin on his knees before another forty-eight hours have passed."

Pitt looked thoughtful.

"That's rather an optimistic view, but you may be right," he said. "Anyhow, it doesn't seem that the Head is getting up to any mischief to-night. We still hold the fort, and we're ready to stand a siege of another ten days, if necessary. We shall win in the end."

Practically every other rebel was of the same opinion. Most of them had lost count of the days; they hardly knew how long they had been in revolt. As a matter of fact, the barring-out had been going on for well over a week, and still we held our own.

The whole affair was becoming notorious. Reports of it were in the papers; the countryside in general was discussing the extraordinary situation. Even one of the big London dailies had published a small photograph on the subject.

And, naturally, the School Governors had learned, to their horror, of the appalling state of affairs which existed at St. Frank's. To the best of my knowledge, General Ord-Clayton himself was to come down to St. Frank's on the morrow.



In a moment Christine & Co. swung the Head in the air and then sent him headlong into the muddy puddle. Splash! Mr. Martin landed on his face, and sprawled there in the mud and wet. "Ouch!" he gasped. "Yarough!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

General Ord-Clayton was the chairman of the Board of Governors, and it was he whom we had to thank for the appointment of Mr. Howard Martin. The general was practically as bad as the bullying Head.

His one idea seemed to be that we should be ground down—that school-boys ought to be kept under an iron discipline. And he appointed Mr. Howard Martin to the position of head-master because Mr. Martin was a harsh bully.

Well, the general's experiment had failed, for the net result of Mr. Martin's appointment was the present rebellion.

He would probably get a big shock when he arrived on the morrow. His presence would make no difference to us. We would only surrender upon condition that the school was run on humane lines—and not like a reformatory.

It was nearly midnight, and St. Frank's was asleep. At least, it should have been asleep. Half the rebels were very wide awake, however. I was not foolish enough to leave the barricades with only a handful of fellows in charge.

Whether there was any possibility of attack or not, I was very strict on the question of keeping an alert watch. It had already been proved that it was necessary.

"There's not much fear of any trouble to-night, Montie," I remarked, as I strolled down the lower passage with him. "It's my belief that the Head is at his wits' end. Ord-Clayton is coming to-morrow, and Martin won't know what the dickens to say to him."

"There'll probably be a frightful bust-up, dear old boy," observed Tregellius-West sagely. "You know what a shockin' bad-tempered old buffer the general is. When he finds out the state of affairs, he'll go off like a volcano—he will, really. An' then things'll happen."

"To us?" I asked.

"Possibly; but it's far more probable,

old fellow, that things will happen to Mr. Martin," said Montie. "In any case, I have a kind of feelin' that the end is drawin' near. Begad!"

"What's the matter?"

"Listen, old boy. Didn't you hear somethin'?"

"No. I don't think— Yes, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "I certainly heard a kind of tapping sound just now."

"That's what I meant," whispered Montie. "It's at one of the windows."

"An attack perhaps," I breathed. "By jingo! We'd better investigate at once."

We made our way quietly down the passage to the end window, from whence the strange tapping sound proceeded.

One or two of the other fellows on watch had heard the sound, too, and they were coming along from their usual station.

"You heard it, too, then?" whispered Conroy minor. "Do you think it means trouble?"

"There's no telling," I replied. "But we'll soon see."

That part of the passage was in darkness, and I groped my way to the window, and peered through a slit between two of the boards. At first I could see nothing, but then I made out several dim outlines on the other side of the window.

My first thought was that they were men—attempts to force the window quietly. Then I saw that the figures were small, and they were close-fitting caps. They were, in fact, boys.

"Queer," I muttered. "Hold on a minute!"

We had fastened the barricades in such a way that it was possible to open the lower sash slightly if desirable. With some difficulty I pushed it up, and then bent down so that my mouth was on a level with the opening.

"Hallo, out there," I whispered.

"Who is it?"

"That you, Nipper?" breathed a familiar voice.

"Christine, by Jove!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Christine!" echoed Clifton.

"Bead!"

"What's the ass doing out there?"

"Don't jaw. I'll have a word with him," I said. "I say, Christy, what's the idea of this? You might be spotted, you know."

"Are you all deaf in there, you fat-headed asses?" came Christine's voice. "Do you know that we've been out here for about two hours—tapping at the windows to attract your attention?"

"I suppose you mean two minutes—that's nearer the mark," I said. "Sorry we've kept you waiting, my lord. What's the trouble?"

"We want to come in, you duffer!"

"To—to come in?"

"Of course," said Christine.

"How many of you, for goodness' sake?" I asked.

"The whole crowd—every Remove fellow from our side," whispered Christine. "We've decided to throw in our lot with you, Nipper. There's no reason why the Remove shouldn't be solid."

"Good man," I exclaimed heartily. "We'll have these boards off in two minutes, and then you can slip in as quietly as mice. What a shock for the Head to-morrow!"

I turned to the other juniors.

"Bustle about!" I said briskly.

"We're going to have visitors. Help me to take these boards down."

"Look here," said Conroy doubtfully. "I don't want to say anything—"

"Good!" I interrupted. "Then dry up!"

"You ass! I mean, I don't want to growl," went on Conroy. "But do you think it'll be as well to admit those giddy Monks? Don't forget our food supply is running short, and with a lot more mouths to feed—"

"That's enough!" I interrupted. "We can't consider details of that sort now. These fellows have come here to join us, and we've got to admit them. If there's any food trouble within a day or two, we can deal with it then. Our

position will be tremendously strengthened with the Monks joining us."

"Yes, I suppose it will," admitted Conroy. "Oh, well, you're in command, Nipper, and we'll leave it to you."

"Thanks, awfully!" I said.

Conroy grinned, and helped with a will to remove the barricading boards. The last two were just being removed when there were sounds of counteraction from outside. Somebody whispered "cave," and there was an immediate stir.

"Look out!" I heard Clapson mutter.

"The Head's coming."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We'd better bunk—"

"Rats!" I exclaimed sharply. "The Head can't do anything to you. Ignore him! If he orders you back to your House, take no notice of him. Come on, my sons—you can pile in as soon as you like!"

And then the Head's voice boomed out.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he shouted furiously. "Good gracious, boys! What are you doing out of your beds—?"

"It's all right, sir. We're only joining the rebels!" shouted Christine boldly.

"What—what?" roared the Head. "Upon my soul! Every boy here will immediately return to his dormitory—"

"Yah! Go home!"

"Fats!"

"We're not taking orders from you!"

"We're fed up with your bullying!"

One shout led to another, and, once the juniors had fairly started upon the rebellion, a perfect chorus of defiant yells sounded in the still air. The Head rushed up, boiling with rage.

"You young hounds!" he screamed. "I will show you whether I am to be defied or not! How—how dare you, you wretched boys! Leave my arm alone. Good gracious! What—what—"

The Head ended up in a gasp, for, to his horror, he found that the juniors no

longer feared him. He had rushed up, intending to strike terror in the hearts of the rebels, but, instead of doing this, Christine & Co. had turned upon him, and he found himself grasped by many hands.

"Chuck him in the mud!" roared somebody.

"Roll him in the puddles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!"

"Boys—boys!" panted the Head frantically. "Are you mad? Remember that you are dealing with your headmaster——"

"We're not likely to forget it!" shouted Nation. "We've been waiting for this chance for weeks! We're fed up with you, and we're fed up with your bullying! This is where we get a bit of our own back!"

"Hurrah!"

"Help—help!" screamed the Head.

"Oh! Ow-yow! Yaroooh!"

The Head, having been raised high in the air, was swung out sideways, and then allowed to drop at the end of the swing. He sprawled on his face in the somewhat thick mud of the Triangle—for there had been a good deal of rain earlier in the day.

Splash!

Mr. Martin descended into a puddle with a considerable amount of noise.

"Ouch!" he gasped. "Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now give him a roll!"

"Good!"

The Head was not allowed to scramble up. He was rolled over and over in the mud. And it was only when the task became too dirty that the juniors gave it up. Then, yelling with laughter, they tumbled into the open window. Mr. Martin, looking more like a scarecrow than a headmaster, fled from the scene.

The juniors had shown him, at all events, that any respect they may have originally felt for him had entirely disappeared.

"Here you are, Nipper—hang on to this," said Christine, handing over a huge sack.

"What's that?" I inquired curiously.

"Grub," said Christine.

"Grub!"

"You bet," replied the College House leader. "There's tons more of it outside, all piled against the wall. We raided the College House store-room, you know. We thought we'd better provide our own fodder."

I slapped Christine's shoulder.

"Good man!" I exclaimed heartily.

"Now then, Controy, what have you got to say now?"

"Nothing," exclaimed Controy minor, "except that these Monks are bricks. Good luck to 'em! Long live the rebellion!"

"Hear, hear!"

The commotion had caused most of the other juniors to come hurrying down. Many had risen from bed in order to find out what the trouble was. And there was general satisfaction when the truth was known.

Christine & Co. had joined the revolt, and the Remove was now sold.

CHAPTER 14.

The General Takes Command!

HOOT-HOOT!

A big, grey motor-car rolled silently through the big gateway of St. Frank's, and glided over to the headmaster's private doorway. It pulled up, and one of the doors opened.

A rather smallish man alighted—an elderly gentleman with a fierce type of countenance, red, and with a bristling moustache adorning the upper-lip. In spite of his small stature, he carried himself with pompous dignity.

This gentleman was General Ord-Clayton.

The chairman of the governors had arrived to investigate—and to put a prompt end to the rebellion. This, at all events, is what he fondly believed.

It was rather early, and everybody was at breakfast. Consequently, the Triangle and the school grounds in general were deserted.

If the general expected to find St. Frank's looking a wreck, he was disappointed. Outwardly, there was no change. Everything looked normal and peaceful; an air of quietness and order reigned everywhere.

"Huh!" grunted the general. "It seems to me that Martin has exaggerated things—or the rebels have been quelled. I sincerely trust that such is the case."

The general mounted the steps to the Head's doorway, and gave the bell a violent pull.

But he need not have troubled, for Mr. Howard Martin himself opened the door at that moment.

"Ah, I'm very pleased to see you, sir," he said, taking the general's hand. "Now that you have come, the position may be improved, possibly."

"Possibly—possibly!" snapped the general. "Don't be absurd, Martin. I have come here to put an end to this outrageous situation—since you appear to be quite incapable of dealing with the matter yourself."

"Really, sir, I—"

"Tush!" interrupted the general. "No doubt you have plenty of glib excuses, Martin. I am amazed that you should allow the boys to defy you in such a manner as you have described to me. Such a condition of affairs has never existed before in any Public school."

The Head bit his lip.

"I would suggest, sir, that we discuss these matters in the privacy of my study," he said, with dignity. "You are apparently unaware of the fact that many boys are listening to your words."

General Ord-Clayton swung round, and found a group of Third Formers enjoying the scene.

"Go away!" roared the general fiercely. "How dare you hang about here! Go away, at once!"

The lads retired, grinning. And when they arrived at a safe distance they plucked up courage enough to give a howl of derision.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the

general. "Is it possible that those boys dared to jeer at me, Martin? It seems to me that you have been amazingly lax in your discipline—"

"On the contrary, sir, I have been extremely strict," snapped the Head. "But the boys of this school are the most unruly youngsters I have ever had under my control!"

"Pray do not be so ludicrous, Martin," snorted the general. "Huh! Under your control, indeed! It seems to me that they are out of your control, sir—completely out of it, by gad!"

The Head, not wishing to allow the argument to continue on the doorstep any longer, led the way to his study. The pair entered, and it was quite clear that General Ord-Clayton was in a bad humour.

"Now, Martin, I want you to tell me the exact state of affairs," he said grimly. "All the facts, remember. I have come here to put an end to this infernal business."

He stood before the fire, and stuck a big cigar between his teeth.

"Now, sir!" he snapped, as though he were addressing a small boy.

"The position is somewhat intricate," said the Head, swallowing his growing wrath with difficulty. "If you will listen calmly, I shall be able to describe matters much more easily."

"A preliminary to excuses, I suppose?" sneered the general.

"I am making no excuses," replied Mr. Martin coldly. "The facts are quite clear—if you will only permit me to speak. The trouble actually started after I had punished three boys for most unruly behaviour. I merely locked them in an attic for the night, deeming that such treatment would quell their rebellious spirit."

"Well? What then?"

"In the morning I was amazed to find that the rest of the boys in the Remove—the Ancient House section, that is—had openly revolted," said the Head. "For the moment I was quite non-plussed."

"You had no right to be," said the

general. "Did you do nothing to put an end to the disgraceful affair?"

"I did everything," replied Mr. Martin. "The boys had barricaded themselves into the west wing, and they openly defied me—quite openly, sir. What could I do?"

"What could you do?" stormed the general. "For one thing, you could have ordered the senior boys to dislodge the young wretches——"

"That plan did not escape my notice, sir," interrupted the Head. "I called the school together, explained the facts, and gave my orders to the Sixth Form. The seniors walked out of the Hall, and refused to obey my commands."

"The young monkeys!" snapped the general. "Well?"

"After that I tried various expedients to dislodge the boys—all in vain," said the Head. "I have done everything in my power, general. And this morning I find that the College House section has joined hands with the Ancient House boys. The Remove is now completely in revolt—and they hold the west wing securely."

The general puffed at his cigar fiercely for a moment or two.

"Disgraceful—unprecedented!" he growled. "Upon my soul, Martin, I hardly know what to say. The situation is certainly difficult. When a big party of boys defy authority in this way they are hard to deal with."

"I will not deny that statement," said the Head grimly.

"However, the young scamps will not dare to ignore me," went on General Ord-Clayton pompously. "They will remember that I am the Chairman of the Governors—and they will listen to me."

"I hope so, sir," said Mr. Martin.

He had his own private views, but he had not think it advisable to mention them.

"To begin with, I will visit these boys, and give them my orders," went on the general. "It will be better, I think, for you to remain here, Martin,

I wish to speak quietly and seriously with the youngsters."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Martin. "Just as you wish."

The general stalked out of the study, and a few minutes later he had mounted to the upper corridor, and approached the main barricade in the west wing.

I was there, waiting—for I had guessed that the general would make his appearance sooner or later. There was a good few other Juniors on the spot, and there was a hush of anticipation.

"Now, don't forget—let me do the talking," I whispered. "And don't do any yelling or cat-calling. This rebellion is being conducted with dignity. I want the general to see that we have a good case."

"He's too obstinate to see anything," muttered Pitt.

The general came to a halt on the other side of the barricade.

"Boys," he exclaimed, "are you listening to me?"

"I'm here, sir," I said. "I can hear everything you say. If you address me, you address the whole Remove. I'm the leader."

"Huh! It is just as well that you have admitted that, you rebellious young rascal!" exclaimed the general sourly. "You are Nipper, I presume?"

"That's right, sir."

"Very well, Nipper, you fully realise, I suppose, that you will receive the bigger punishment?" said the general. "You cannot hope to remain in this school after what has happened—after the shocking spirit of revolt you have fostered among your Form-fellows. You will be expelled——"

"That's hardly a nice way to begin negotiations, sir," I broke in. "The Remove is quite determined that nobody is to be expelled—and if you have come here merely in order to threaten us, there's no necessity for this interview to continue."

The general snorted with rage.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul! How—how dare you be so impertinent! It seems to me that you have defied authority far so long that you have no respect for anybody. Do you realise, you young scoundrel, that you are addressing the Chairman of the School Governors?"

"I realise that all right, sir," I replied. "But that's no reason why I should be afraid to speak the truth."

"I shall remember this, Nipper—I shall certainly remember it!" snapped the general. "You will please understand that I require you to put an end to this disgraceful rebellion at once. You are to take down these barricades, and you must return to your normal duties within the hour. Do you understand?"

"Your words are quite plain, sir," I replied. "If I agree, what terms are you willing to—"

"Terms—terms!" shouted Ord-Clayton. "Upon my soul! Do you dare to speak to me of terms? You will obey my orders unquestionably, and you, as the ring-leader, will be flogged and expelled—"

"Hold on, sir," I interrupted.

"Er? What—what did you say?"

"I asked you to hold on, sir," I replied. "You seem to have got a wrong idea into your head. It's not my intention to be impudent, but I should just like to point out to you that we have no intention of surrendering unless our conditions of surrender are fully granted."

"Your—your conditions?"

"That's what I said, sir," I went on grimly. "It won't take me half a minute to explain. If you want us to return to our normal duties, you must agree to these terms. Nobody is to be punished in the slightest degree—since we rebelled against a tyranny which could not be endured. Our actions were justified in every way—and therefore it would be rotten to punish us."

"Good gracious!"

"Furthermore, we demand that the

school shall be conducted on those lines which were adopted by Dr. Stafford," I proceeded. "Under Dr. Stafford's guidance, everything went smoothly at St. Frank's, and although we should prefer to see Dr. Stafford back, we do not insist upon that. But we do demand that Mr. Martin shall conduct the school as Dr. Stafford conducted it; we demand that all our privileges shall be restored, and that we shall all be allowed to go unpunished."

"Hear, hear!" echoed many of the juniors.

"The—the astounding audacity of the boys!" grated the general furiously. "You young rascal, do you expect for a moment that I will agree to such proposals—never, sir! Never! You will be punished as you deserve!"

"In that case, sir, we'll dispense with the argument forthwith," I said calmly. "When you come to me in a different frame of mind, I will listen to you. But at present we are only wasting time. Good-morning!"

I walked away, and the other juniors followed me. General Ord-Clayton was left stranded, as it were, and my final words had somehow slung in a manner which left the general gasping for breath. He certainly could find no words to express himself—not at the moment, anyhow.

When he did recover his breath, there was nobody to listen to him.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, red with wrath. "This is appalling! Martin is right—these boys are utterly abandoned. They do not know the difference between right and wrong. Some drastic measures must be taken!"

He strode away, and when he arrived in Mr. Martin's study, he found that Mr. Wroth was with the Head—although, of course, the general had no idea that Mr. Wroth was actually Nelson Lee.

"Well, sir?" asked Mr. Martin, in a slightly sarcastic tone. "Have you compelled the boys to surrender?"

The general's eyes glittered.

"I want no taunts from you, Martin!" he snapped. "You know well enough that I have done nothing of the sort. The young wretches are absolutely hardened. They care nothing for authority—and I must be allowed to remark that the whole situation leads me to believe that you have been lamentably weak in your administration."

"It is hardly fair to say that, sir," exclaimed the Head sharply. "I've done my best, and Mr. Wrott is fully aware of that fact."

"I cannot help agreeing that Mr. Martin's words are quite true," said Nelson Lee, in his disguised voice. "Every expedient has been tried. But those boys are wide awake, and I am afraid it will be impossible to dislodge them from their stronghold. Force, in my opinion, will never solve the difficulty."

The general stamped his foot.

"Your opinion, sir, has not been asked for—and will not be asked for!" he exclaimed. "I should like you to realise that I require you to speak only when you are spoken to. Tush—piffle! Force is the only argument which the boys will understand. And force, let me tell you, will soon be applied!"

"In what way, sir?" asked Mr. Martin.

"We need, mainly, a large force to assist us in breaking down the barriers which at present protect the rebels," said the general.

"Really, sir, I cannot see——"

"Do not interrupt me," snapped the general sourly. "A large force, I repeat. If necessary, I will scour the whole neighbourhood for a sufficient number of men to storm those baracades——"

The general paused, listening.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "What is that infernal din?"

He strode to the window, and glanced out into the Triangle. The beating of a drum could be heard, accompanied by the rather discordant notes of many hutes.

"It sounds like a cadet corps," suggested Nelson Lee dryly.

"A cadet corps!" echoed the general. "By gad, sir, I realise, now, what it means. For a moment I suspected that those wretched boys were up to some tricks. But this noise is merely being caused by a party of boy scouts—a considerable party, I may add. I passed them on the road, this side of Bannington."

"The Bannington troop, probably, on one of their route marches," suggested Nelson Lee mildly.

"Well, we will not allow them to interrupt our discussion," went on General Ord-Clayton. "As I was saying—— Great Scott! An idea has just occurred to me. By gad! I am certain that I shall be able to defeat these rebellious schoolboys within an hour. Yes, within an hour, sir!"

"But how——"

"You will learn in a moment or two," said the general, pacing up and down, his eyes still glittering. "The scheme will solve the problem which confronts us!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Storming of the Fort!

MR. MARTIN was puzzled. "I cannot quite follow your line of reasoning, general," he said. "Why should the sound of that bugle suggest a solution to you?"

"Why?" exclaimed the general. "You are very dull this morning, sir! These boy scouts—they will help——"

"You mean that they will storm the west wing?" asked Lee quickly.

"Exactly, sir—exactly," snapped the other.

"But their numbers will not be sufficient, I am afraid," said the Head.

"Then you need be afraid no longer," retorted Ord-Clayton. "There are over a hundred of these scouts. They are boys of action—and with their trained skill, they will be able to effect an entry

into the west wing with comparatively no difficulty. It is a splendid suggestion."

"But will the boys agree?—that is the question."

"I shall compel them to agree," snapped the general. "You do not seem to realise, sir, that I have been in the habit of commanding all my life. I have but to give orders, and they are obeyed. They will be obeyed, let me tell you, in this present instance."

"I hope so, sir," said the Head doubtfully.

He followed the general out into the Triangle, and then out into the open lane. They were just in time to see the leaders of the scouts coming round the bend, with considerable noise and bustle.

They were all boys, and the leader appeared to be a youth with ginger hair and rough features. He was, in fact, no less a person than Jim Blundie, of Bannington.

The Council school leader was also the leading spirit in the Bannington scout movement.

And at present, in full glory, he was leading his followers on their tramp across country. Tom Kitchen and Bill Ringham were also present—the trio were generally together. They regarded General Ord-Clayton somewhat curiously as they drew opposite.

"One moment, boys—I should like a word with you!" exclaimed the general abruptly.

Blundie called a halt.

The whole line of scouts came to a standstill, the bugles were silenced, and the drums ceased to rattle.

"Want to speak to me, sir?" said Jim Blundie.

"Yes, boy, I do," said the general. "Further, I require your assistance in a little matter. I have always understood that scouts are supposed to be useful members of Society—that they are always ready to maintain law and order?"

"That's so, sir," said Blundie. "If

we can do anything in that line for you, you won't find me raising any objections. What's the game, sir?"

"Now, my boy, I wish to talk to you privately for a moment or two," said Ord-Clayton. "This gentleman by my side is Mr. Howard Martin, the headmaster of St. Frank's School."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Blundie gently.

"You may be aware of the fact that there are a number of boys in this school at present defying discipline and order," continued the general. "The Remove Form, to be exact, has revolted against authority, and is at present disregarding all orders and commands."

"Cheeky young beggars, sir," said Blundie warmly. "We did 'ear something about it—quite a good bit, in fact. It's time them young rascals was put in their proper place."

"I am glad you take that view, my boy—a most sensible view," said the general approvingly. "Here is a ten-shilling note to put into your pocket."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Blundie. "And now what have I got to do for it?"

"The position is this," said the general. "These Remove boys have barricaded themselves into the west wing of the Ancient House so securely that, for the moment, we are powerless to dislodge them. They have had the unprecedented audacity to defy me to my face—to say nothing of defying their headmaster. I am anxious to effect a settlement at the earliest possible moment—and the only way to do so is to take the west wing by force."

"I see, sir," said Blundie, nodding. "That's where we come in—eh?"

"Exactly," replied the general. "That is where you come in, my boy. These juniors have flouted every rule of the school—for no reason, mark you. They have simply taken it into their heads to be rebellious. Something must be done—and swiftly. If you will agree to assist in this matter, I can promise

you that you will be liberally rewarded."

Jim Blundle shook his head.

"I don't know as that would be right, sir," he said. "We scouts don't expect money for doing somebody a good turn. I don't feel exactly comfortable about that ten bob you gave me—"

"Pooh—pooh!" interrupted the general. "That is nothing, boy. What I want you to do is to form your men into several parties, and to attack the west wing at several different points simultaneously. Do you think you will be able to engage in this little affair for me?"

Blundle considered.

"I shall have to ask the druggist, sir," he said. "I can't very well give you an answer right off."

"Remember that what I am asking you to do is in the interests of justice and authority," said the general. "Something must be done, and I thought perhaps that you would be honoured to lend me your valuable assistance. You are a fine-looking set of boys, and I am sure that you will use your efforts in the cause of discipline."

Compliment was not lost upon Jim Blundle, and he nodded.

"Just a minute, sir," he said. "I'll have a chat with the fellows!"

He walked away, and was soon talking to an eager crowd of scouts. They listened to him attentively.

"You see, mates, it's this way," explained Blundle. "These 'ere gents want us to give them a hand with them cheeky Remove kids. They're still in revolt, and they've pinched a whole lot of the Ancient House all to themselves."

"Yes, but where do we come in?" asked Tom Kitchen.

"Why, you'll help, of course," replied his leader. "You know as well as I do that discipline is everything. If a crowd of cheeky kids sets their back again authority, there's trouble—and we've heard all about these Remove buggers. They're a set of young rotters—that's what they are."

"You're right there, Jim."

"Rather!"

"An' what 'ave we got to do?"

"Raid the Ancient House," said Blundle grimly. "Don't you think it's the best thing for us to do? You remember what happened the other night? See my eye? That was give to me by one o' them bloomin' kids—blow him! 'Ere's a chance right in our hands to get a bit of our own back."

"Nor a bit o' it!"

"We've always been up against these kids—but, somehow, we've never had a real go at 'em," went on Blundle. "There's been times when we've been beaten to the wide—just because they've been in stronger numbers. But this time the position ain't the same. We're in a position to knock spots off the kids—an' we shall be able to get our own back."

"Well 'elp, Jim."

"O' course we will!"

"Only too glad to!"

"It'll be a fine bit o' sport!"

The scouts were unanimous in their approval. There had always been a kind of rivalry between the Bannington Council school and St. Frank's. And here, as Blundle had said, was an opportunity to indulge in a scrap. And to do so, moreover, right under the eyes of authority.

It was a chance not to be missed.

On many occasions the Council school boys had longed for the chance of routing their rivals. But they had never been granted a real chance. They had been afraid to approach too near to St. Frank's, in case the Head complained to their own schoolmaster.

But this affair was different.

Mr. Martin himself—to say nothing of General Ord-Clayton—was anxious to see them engage in combat with their deadly rivals. The scouts needed no pressing. They were only too eager to fall in with the general's suggestion.

Jim Blundle returned to the two waiting men.

"It's all right, sir," said Jim. "We'll do it—and glad to."

"Ah," said the general. "Splendid—splendid! You reveal the right spirit, my boy, and I will see that you do not suffer for your efforts. Defeat these rebels, and you will be very handsomely rewarded—yes, I insist upon that. You can use the money for new uniforms, and such like."

"You're a gent, sir," said Blundie enthusiastically. "Well, what do we do first? I'll take orders from you."

"Of course—of course," said Ord-Jayton genially. "Now, let me see. You know the geography of the school better than I do, Mr. Martin. What would you suggest in the way of an attack?"

The Head, greatly pleased with the situation, looked thoughtful.

"Well, it would be advisable, I think, to storm the west wing from several different points simultaneously," he said. "For example, a number of scouts can attack the lower windows, another batch can deal with the barricades indoors—while still more scouts can mount ladders to the windows."

"We ain't an army, sir," said Blundie with a grin.

"No, my boy, I know that," said the Head. "But you are sufficiently strong in numbers to carry out the plan I suggested. I have ladders ready; for, to tell the truth, I was contemplating an attack of this style myself. These ladders will reach the dormitory windows, and it is quite likely that all the boys who mount them will enter without resistance. The rebels will be fully engaged downstairs, and at the barricades."

"We don't mind a few knocks, sir," said Blundie. "We'll give a few back, don't you worry."

Exactly ten minutes later the attack commenced.

The west wing was stormed.

There had been previous attacks, but never on such a scale as this. The Head had employed thirty or so men for the job, but they had been fellows with no enthusiasm, and not a atom of pluck.

The present proposition was different. Jim Blundie & Co. were in force—and nobody could accuse them of being cowards. Well over a hundred scouts there were—many of them boys we had never seen or heard of. They were neutral in the whole affair, but they were naturally willing to back up their companions.

And over a hundred determined boy scouts was a different affair to thirty roughts.

We had no idea that anything was brewing until the attack had actually commenced. I had no opportunity of finding out the truth. Moreover, I never dreamed that the general would attempt a daylight raid.

The sound of the bugles and the drums had smote our ears earlier, but as they had ceased, we assumed that the scouts—as we rightly judged them to be—had passed on.

Thus, only at the last moment, did we discover the truth.

And then we knew all about it!

I was just finishing a rather late breakfast when Reginald Pitt came rushing into the kitchen. There was a flush in his cheeks, and his eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"Halls!" I exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

"We're—we're being attacked!" gasped Pitt. "We shall be down if we ain't careful. There's over a hundred of 'em, Nipper!"

"Eh? Hundred of what?"

"Scouts!" panted Pitt. "Bannington Council school chaps!"

"What!" I ejaculated, jumping up.

"The Head must have paid the coppers to do the job," said Pitt hurriedly. "You remember we heard the bugles? It's Jim Blundie and his crowd. They're rushing at the building! Great Scott! Hear that?"

A hammering sound, followed by a crashing of glass.

"Sound the alarm!" I yelled. "Hurry yourselves, you chaps!"

Orders were shouted by the dozen;

fellow rushed to their action stations. And it was soon seen that we were dealing with a dangerous problem. My position was in the upper corridor, in charge of the main barricade.

Just as I reached it there came the noise of running feet, and then the scouts came to the attack. They used their staffs to break down the obstacles which had protected us for so long.

There was no time to obtain ammunition—pen-shooters, or squirters. We simply had to rely upon our strength. And we were outnumbered at every point of onslaught.

"Go it, chaps!" I heard Blundle roar. "We'll soon have the beggars out!"

The barricade was being pulled down rapidly, and nothing we could do seemed to stay the advance of the attackers. Bit by bit they succeeded in weakening our defence.

"This won't do," I gasped. "Rush downstairs, Tommy, and see how they're going there! If De Valerie can spare any men—bring 'em along. Hurry!"

"Right!" panted Tommy Watson.

He dashed away, with the sound of strife ringing in his ears. It came from every quarter. Downstairs he found that the position was far worse than upstairs.

Every window was being attacked in tremendous force. And the boy scouts were not pretending to gain an entry; they were actually doing so! The windows were being forced, in spite of the defenders' efforts.

De Valerie spotted Watson at once.

"Thank goodness you've come," he exclaimed huskily. "Rush upstairs for help, Watson! We must have some—"

"You ask!" roared Watson. "I've come down here for help!"

"Oh, my hat!" said De Valerie. "We shall be whacked—whacked by these rotten Council school bouncers! Isn't Nipper holding his own at the upper barricade?"

"They're breaking through," gasped Watson. "We can't stop 'em, you know—fit, look out! Some of the scouts

have got through— Oh, goodness! This is the finish of us!"

It had all come so suddenly that the majority of the rebels were still partially dazed with shock. They fought desperately—not that this repelled the storming parties.

Watson, finding things going so badly downstairs, rushed up again. He was just in time to see the barricade being torn to shreds—just in time to see the scouts pouring through the gap.

A tremendous struggle was in progress, and I was personally fighting with Jim Sturdle. And in the middle of it Soumerai came pelting along the corridor from the dormitory.

"Look out, Nipper!" he yelled. "The enemy's in! They're piling through the dormitory windows! We can't hold 'em back!"

"Do your best!" I panted.

"That won't make no sort of difference to you," said Blundle. "We've got you cooked, my sons. It's about time you knew somethin' about our order. Nice goings on—rebellin' against authority— Yareeh!"

Blundle sat down as my fist hammered into his face. Next moment he was on his feet again, and we were soon scrapping vigorously. Other fellows were rolling and falling about on all sides.

And in the dormitory there was the same story to tell.

Scrambling up the ladders, the scouts had pretty everything their own way. At the windows a few juniors had stationed themselves, to resist the invaders. But they were unable to stem the tide.

The scouts poured in at a continuous stream—once the breach had been made.

And the rebels, fighting at the barricades and windows, found themselves at a disadvantage. For the scouts, coming from the dormitory in ever-increasing numbers, were able to conduct a flanking attack. We were surprised in the rear, and the result was inevitable.

The scouts simply overwhelmed us. The defeat was all the more bitter because we had not suspected it.

My feelings were too deep to be expressed in mere words.

After all my troubles—after holding out so successfully all through, we were beaten by our rivals of the Bannington Council school! It was pulling in the extreme.

The light was one which left us honourably defeated. We had fought hopelessly against heavy odds, and we had gone down. It was not our fault.

Blundle & Co. had got the upper hand—but at a cost.

With the barricades gone, with the windows open, our fortress was a fortress no longer.

General Ord-Clayton, having waited until all danger was over, stalked into the arena, as though he had accomplished the whole affair. He reminded me of the celebrated Duke of Plaza Toro, of "Gondoliers" fame, who "led his regiment from behind; he found it less exciting."

Certainly, the general had not displayed much enthusiasm during the thick of the battle.

He was as pleased as Punch, and we were unable to defy him any longer. Surrounded by the victorious scouts, we were helpless.

Disaster had overtaken the rebellion!

CHAPTER 12.

The Tables Turned!

GENERAL ORD-CLAYTON rubbed his hands together with pleasure.

"Splendid, my boys—splendid!" he exclaimed. "I hardly hoped for such an early victory as this. You have defeated these wretched rebels, and they are now powerless."

"I thought we'd do the trick, sir," grinned Blundle.

"I was determined to put a finish to this rebellion—and I have done so."

gloried the general. "You see, Mr. Martin? I do not play with the affair as you did."

The Head frowned.

"You will pardon me, sir," he snapped. "I have not played in the slightest degree. Fortune favoured you this morning—"

"We will not discuss the matter, sir," interjected the general. "It is sufficient that we have gained the upper hand."

"Yes—by a piece of mean trickery," I said hotly. "These Bannington chaps don't know the truth, or they wouldn't have lifted a finger to help you! I know Blundle too well for that!"

Jim Blundle looked surprised.

"Oh, do you?" he said. "I don't 'old with defying good rules—"

"Silence, boy!" roared the general.

"Eh?" gasped Blundle.

"I ordered you to be silent!" shouted Ord-Clayton. "Nipper, I shall deal with you later for your insulting conduct—"

"You can do as you like!" I retorted amrily. "You have beaten us by a trick, General Ord-Clayton—a mean, contemptible trick!"

"By gad!" ejaculated the general.

He seemed to be overcome by my impudence; and I noticed that Jim Blundle was frowning a bit. The general's harsh words had surprised him somewhat. Having gained his end, Ord-Clayton was no longer polite to the scout-leader.

"Did—did you hear, Mr. Martin?" asked the general, pale with anger. "Did you hear what this outrageous rascal said? Within an hour he shall be flogged before the whole school!"

"I agree with you, sir—I agree heartily," said the Head. "Afterwards Nipper will be expelled—together with the other ring-leaders."

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Tommy Watson faintly.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie.

"There will be many accounts to settle," said the general, glaring at me. "This revolt is the most disgraceful

affair I have ever heard of in my career, and the culprits shall be punished accordingly. It is my intention that ten boys shall be sent away in disgrace!"

"Ten, sir?" gasped Hubbard.

"Yes, boy—ten!" roared the general.

"They shall be flogged and expelled. And after that the discipline will be even more rigid than before. It is the only way to keep you in check!"

"But look 'ere, sir," put in Tom Kitchen. "We didn't know as you was goin' to kick any of the kids out of the school!"

"What you knew, and what you did not know, does not interest me," said Ord-Clayton sourly. "You have been of some slight assistance to me, and I appreciate it. I will give you orders when you may go."

"Orders!" muttered Blundle. "Oh, my 'at!"

"Some slight assistance!" echoed Kitchen. "Did you 'ear it?"

"This is what you get for working for a man like General Ord-Clayton," shouted Handforth wrathfully. "You silly lunatic!"

"Boy, be silent!" roared the general.

"Rats!" said Handforth boldly.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the general harshly. "Then you are still unruly? I will deal with you, boy, later. You shall be the second boy to be flogged and expelled. And when the punishments are over, the Remove will be ruled with an iron hand. I intend to frame new regulations altogether."

"Something like a prison, I suppose?" suggested Handforth bitterly.

"You—you infernal young bound!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Handforth.

"Your voice worries me!"

"Good gracious!"

"I don't mind telling you what I think of you, in the least," said Handforth, with delightful candour. "I'm going to be flogged and expelled, so what difference does it make?"

"You will see, you confounded young

wretch," roared the general. "I intend to frame new regulations, I say. The Remove will be confined to the school gates constantly—throughout the whole term! I will not allow a single Remove boy to leave the school property!"

"Oh!"

"Furthermore," proceeded the general, pleased with the impression he had made—"furthermore, your lessons will be longer each day. You will stay in your class-room an hour later than the other boys. The junior studies will be closed completely. Do you understand? And for the rest of this term the Remove will be sent to bed supperless!"

"Phew!" muttered Blundle. "That's a bit steep!"

"Not 'arf!" said Kitchen, nodding. "If we'd know'd this, Jim, we wouldn't ha' interfered—hey? This old bloke!"

"What!" roared the general. "What did you say, boy?"

"I wasn't talkin' to you, sir," growled Tom Kitchen.

"You referred to me as a—ahem!—as a bloke!" snapped the general. "I have never been so insulted in my life. Take that, you young ruffian!"

He delivered a cuff which sent Kitchen spinning, his cheeks flaming red.

"My 'at!" gasped the boy acont.

"Stop them games, sir," said Blundle sharply.

"Eh?"

"We ain't standing that sort of thing, sir," went on Blundle. "We come here to give you a 'and, and then you knock us about. I thought you was a genial sort of bloke—bloke, do you hear? But you seem to be a nasty-tempered blighter!"

"Upon my soul!" said the general. "This—is—is insufferable!"

The Council school boys were rather increased, and little wonder. They had no fear of Ord-Clayton. He could do them no harm, and they did not mind

stating their minds—in their own blunt way.

"Hold on," I exclaimed grimly. "I'd like a word here."

I had been preparing myself for the moment, and I spoke with determination.

"Be silent, Nipper!" shouted the general.

"I'm sorry, sir—but I'm going to speak," I went on. "I mean to let these Bannington boys know the exact truth of the case. Look here, Blundle, will you listen to me for two minutes?"

"Certainly," said Blundle. "Go ahead."

"I refuse to allow—" began the general.

"No, you don't," interrupted Jim Blundle. "You don't refuse nothin' of the sort—you can't. I an' my mates are here in force, sir, and we want to hear what Nipper has to say. If you don't be quiet we'll shove you outside."

The general nearly exploded—but he realised, in time, that the Council school boys were quite capable of such an act.

"Go it, Nipper," said Blundle.

"Thanks," I said. "I knew you were a sportsman, Blundle. We've had a few rows, now and again, but they've always been good-natured. I'll just explain the whole position. The rebellion started because our headmaster, Mr. Murkin, is a bully and a tyrant."

"You—you—" began the Head furiously.

"Let him speak, if you don't mind!" exclaimed Blundle.

"A tyrant," I repeated. "He imposed the most harsh and unreasonable restrictions: he punished fellows for doing nothing. Our liberties were taken away and interfered with at every turn. We decided to take action—so we rebelled. We took possession of this part of the house—and meant to remain here until our terms were granted. All we wanted was a promise that nobody would be punished, and that the old rules and regulations would

be restored. We didn't revolt for the fun of it, or because we like being unruly. We revolted because we're not in favour of standing tyranny!"

There was a short silence, the Council school boys eyeing one another uncertainly and uncomfortably. There was a ring of truth in my statements, and they could not fail to be impressed.

"It's a bit awkward, mate," said Blundle at last. "We didn't know—"

"Do you believe this young liar's tongue?" shouted the Head furiously.

"Upon my word, general, I cannot understand why you allow this—"

"He can't do nothing else," snapped Blundle.

"That's the position," I went on quietly. "It's all the perfect truth. We were within an ace of victory when you came along with your men, Blundle."

"We sort of mucked it all up—eh?" asked Blundle.

"Yes," I replied. "And now—well, we're properly in the cart now. I shall be flogged and expelled, and a good few other chaps will share my fate. I wouldn't mind so much if we deserved it—but we don't. You've played us an awful trick, Blundle, but I don't blame you. You didn't know."

I extended my hand, and Jim Blundle took it warmly.

"Good for you, Nipper—you're a sport!" he said heartily.

"So he is!" shouted many of the other scouts. "We've made a bloomer!"

Blundle nodded, and took something from his pocket.

"You can take this 'ere thing back, sir," he said, tossing a folded ten-shilling note to General Ord-Clayton. "I don't want your bloomin' money. You got us to fight these fellows by a lot of lies—"

"Lies!" roared the general. "How—how dare you suggest—"

"And we're not having any of it," went on Blundle calmly. "We've done

the bars, but it won't take long to repair it!"

"You—you mean——" I began.

"Exactly, mate," nodded Jim. "All we've got to do is to clear out—an' you'll be just the same as you was before we built in. See? We'll make it all right, old son. Don't you worry."

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "Good old Ginger!"

The Head and Ord-Clayton exchanged startled glances.

"You must be mad, boy!" snarled the Head. "You would not dare to——"

"Wouldn't dare, wouldn't we?" shouted Blundie. "You'll see, and what's more, we'll give you a taste of somethin', you bloomin' bully!"

"Good heavens!" panted the Head nervously.

He turned abruptly, and hastened out of the dormitory—where the discussion had been taking place. Several scouts tried to stop him, but he succeeded in getting out.

"Now, then, lend a hand with this one," yelled Blundie. "Come on, mates! We'll run him along the passage——"

The general backed away.

"Don't—don't you dare to touch me!" he gasped frantically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of derisive laughter went up. The Removites were feeling light-hearted again. They knew that Blundie and his men could easily repair the error if they liked—and they did like. They had been convinced by my straightforward story of the facts.

Several scouts rushed at the general—but I stopped them.

"Half a minute!" I shouted. "I want to ask a favour."

"Go it!" said Blundie.

"I want you to leave the general in our hands—barricaded in with us," I said, with gleaming eyes. "If you do that, you'll not only repair the error, but do us a tremendous service, too."

Jim Blundie laughed.

"You can have the old buffer, we welcome," he said. "We don't want him!"

The general nearly wept with fury.

"You—you young lunatics!" he exclaimed thickly. "You—you would not dare to touch me! Let me go! Do you hear me? Let me go!"

But he was surrounded by Handforth & Co., Pitt, and a good few others, who made sure that he didn't escape. The judges were delighted at the sudden turning of the tables.

Blundie led his men out through the open windows below. They poured out in crowds, laughing unconvulsively. Out in the Triangle they met Mr. Howard Martin. The Head was looking alarmed and anxious. He knew what dire consequences would follow if the general was left in our hands.

"Boys," he shouted earnestly, "I want you to listen to me——"

"Shut up! You're a bully!" roared Kitchen.

"Listen to me!" repeated the Head. "Nipper was speaking only a part of the truth; he exaggerated matters, and you must not be led away by everything you hear——"

"We're not going to be led away by what we hear now, anyhow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are doing a terrible thing," shouted the Head. "You are leaving those wretched boys in full control again—you are making them the masters of the situation. And, with the general in their hands, they will be able to force me——"

"Go indoors, Bully!"

"Slide!"

"If you don't, you'll be pelted!"

"Yah! Bully! Yah!"

The Head made one more attempt.

"Boys, I will give you ten shillings each if——ug-zug-zug-zug!"

Mr. Martin made that extraordinary sound as a handful of mud smote him fully in the mouth. He staggered back,

half-blinded, and nearly choked. And he sat down in a deep puddle of water with a tremendous splash.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do it again!" yelled Ringham. "I didn't see it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Martin, realising that his was a hopeless task, scrambled to his feet, and hurriedly went indoors—being bespattered liberally with mud. Blundie & Co. had changed over with a vengeance!

"All right, Nipper—get ahead with puttin' up the boards," shouted Blundie cheerfully. "We'll keep guard till you're all nicely fixed again!"

"Good man!" I replied. "We'll do as much for you one day!"

The work of restoring the barricades proceeded apace, while the boy scouts remained outside, guarding the position. The Triangle was deserted except for these Banington fellows. The St. Frank's boys were in their class-rooms, busy at morning lessons.

And at last everything was as before.

The boards were on the windows once more, and the barricades in the passages were firm and secure. Then, and not until then, did Jim Blundie show any sign of shifting.

"O.K. now?" he asked. "Right! We'll continue our march, then. Good luck to you!"

Many of the scouts were narked, but they did not bear any malice. Black eyes and thick ears were plentiful on both sides, as a matter of fact. But the main point was that we were secure in our stronghold once more.

And now we held the trump card.

We had General Ord-Clayton with us—a prisoner in our hands!

Some of the Removites were rather nervous, but I wasn't. I knew well enough that victory was certain for us, if only I played the game in the right way. Mr. Martin feared the worst, too.

He was patting his study, with Nelson Lee standing at the window. Lee was

secretly delighted with the turn of events, but he did not look delighted. His expression was one of sour disapproval.

"This business is disastrous. Wrot—absolutely disastrous!" exclaimed the Jend savagely. "It all comes of the general interfering. I knew what would come of his infernal blundering. He has got himself imprisoned with these boys now—"

"But surely it is for him to worry?" suggested Lee.

"What about me?" snapped the Head. "If those boys make the general promise anything—hang them! I don't know what to think!"

He continued pushing up and down, agitated beyond measure. He had reason to be agitated, for he saw defeat looming large upon the horizon.

The Remove held the upper hand!

And (he Remove knew it!

CHAPTER 17.

Victory for the Rebels!

"AND now for business!" I said grimly.

The excitement was over, and everything was as usual in the west wing. But there was a big matter to be attended to—a matter which, in my opinion, was to bring complete victory to our cause.

General Ord-Clayton, in his endeavour to bring disaster upon us, had only brought disaster upon himself. He had gained an entrance into our fortress, only to be left there—a prisoner in our hands.

Some of the fellows were awed.

It was a terrible thing to detain the Chairman of the Board of Governors in this way! Perhaps it was. But the general was as much a bully as Martin, and he needed a lesson.

"To business, eh?" repeated Pitt. "I say, Nipper, do you really mean to rag old Ord-Clayton?"

"I'm not going to rag him," I replied.

"I'm simply going to make him give in to us. I don't think it'll be necessary to touch a single hair of his head. If possible, I want to avoid ragging him, as you say."

"But what's the idea?" asked Reginald.

"You'll see," I said briskly. "Come on, my son."

We hurried upstairs, and in the dormitory we found the general sitting sullenly on the edge of a bed. Handforth & Co. and a dozen other juniors were keeping guard over him.

He looked up as I entered.

"You foolish boy!" he exclaimed, with unusual reserve. "You will presently regret this outrageous conduct on your part. If you will allow me to go free now—at once—I may be inclined to overlook—"

"I'm sorry, sir," I interrupted, "but I've come here to talk things over seriously. There's much to be settled, and I think we might as well get it over quickly. Please don't imagine for a moment that we mean to harm you. But it is in your power to right our wrongs, and we want you to do it."

"I will do nothing—nothing whatever!" snapped the general angrily.

"You have only got to say the word, and the Head will have to obey you," I went on. "Well, sir, this is the position. If you will agree to our terms of surrender, we will go back to lessons within an hour—right now, in fact."

"I will not even listen to your terms—let alone agree to them," shouted the general fiercely. "You impertinent boy—"

"Pardon me, sir, but I haven't been impertinent yet," I broke in. "The Remove rebellion was justifiable."

"Tosh!" snapped Ord-Clayton. "I refuse to listen to another word!"

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir—because I'm afraid you'll have to listen," I said quietly. "We were justified in rebelling, as I said before, and it would be unfair to punish us. In any case, the terms of the Remove are these."

"I won't hear them!" bellowed the general.

"The terms are these, sir," I went on smoothly. "No boy is to be punished in any way whatever; we are all to be allowed to continue the ordinary routine from the moment we surrender. All our lost privileges are to be restored. Tea is to be permitted to junior studies, and the whole school, in fact, is to be conducted exactly as Dr. Stafford conducted it."

The general's cheeks puffed out with fury.

"Are you mad, boy?" he barked.

"No, sir—I'm simply stating our terms," I answered.

"Then you may as well save your breath, young man," rapped out the general. "I shall not give way an inch. Understand that, once and for all!"

I nodded.

"Only about a week ago, sir," I said reflectively, "we managed to get hold of Jenson of the Sixth. He's a prefect, and he's a particularly low-down sort of a cad. He tried to trick us, and we paid him back. In brief, sir, we smothered him with tar, and rolled him in feathers."

"You young scoundrels!" exclaimed the general. "It was a disgraceful affair! Good heavens—"

He broke off, and stared at me blankly.

"Are—are you insinuating—" he began.

"That we shall tar and feather you, sir?" I asked. "Well, it's not impossible, is it? But you can avoid all unpleasantness by agreeing to sign a little document I have prepared—a document, stating the terms just as I have named them. Will you sign, sir?"

"Tar's awfully sticky, sir," remarked Handforth. "It must be awful to be smothered with it from head to foot! Why, it takes weeks and weeks to get it off—"

"And feathers aren't very nice, worn over tar," put in De Valerie. "Just

think how queer you'd look, sir, being led through the Bellon High Street, dressed in nothing else but tar and feathers!"

The meaning of all this talk was quite obvious.

"Boys, you would not dare!" gasped the general huskily.

"It's only a small document, sir," I exclaimed. "It won't take you a minute to sign it—and then we shall have your word in writing, and the Head will be unable to bully us any more—"

The general jumped to his feet in a frenzy of fury.

"I will do nothing—nothing!" he roared. "I will not sign any document, and if you dare to touch me—"

"Oh, well, I suppose it must be done," I said, with a sigh. "Bring him downstairs, you chaps. This way, sir, please. It'll make it a lot easier if you come quietly."

He didn't come quietly, by any means—but we got him down in the rear store-room at last. Here several preparations had been made. The electric light was on, and the floor of the room was smothered with a big pile of feathers.

In a corner stood a pail of tar, with a big brush in it.

The general eyed everything, horrified. Somehow, the whole scene was very impressive, and it indicated that we meant business.

Of course, we really had no intention of submitting General Ord-Clayton to a tar-and-feather ordeal. But there was no reason why we should not make him believe that we were quite prepared to go to such lengths.

The very thought of it would probably be enough.

"Boys! You are mad!" shouted the general. "You do not know what you are doing!"

"Yes, we do, sir," I said grimly. "We intend to have our own way in this matter. It's about time this rebellion came to an end—and an opportunity has arisen for us to finish it. It's not

fair that any of us should suffer—since our cause has been a just one. As I said before, if you like to sign that little document, all will be well. If not—"

"I won't sign—I won't sign!" shouted the general, his voice rising higher and higher in a sudden frenzy of fury.

I reached out my hand.

"Pass over the tar brush, Handy," I said casually.

"Certainly!" said Handforth with great promptitude.

He handed it over so well that, incidentally, he splashed Church and McClure—not only their faces, but their clothing.

"You careless ass!" howled McClure. "Look what you've done!"

"And look at me!" howled Church.

"Don't make a noise here, you asses," said Handforth sternly. "Tar's healthy—it'll do you good. Don't forget that this is a solemn occasion. We are about to take a very grave step."

"Well, hand me the brush, and don't jaw," I said briskly.

Handforth gave me the brush, dripping with tar, and I walked over slowly and deliberately towards the now thoroughly frightened general. I had thought that he would give in earlier, and I was just beginning to be troubled.

Would the ruse succeed?

"Now, sir, please hold yourself steady," I said. "I wouldn't like to get any of this stuff in your eyes—"

"Take that brush away!" yelled the general. "I—I will sign—no, by gad! I'll be tarred and feathered before I submit!"

"Pile it on!" advised Handforth. "Soak him with it, Nipper!"

"Don't waste time—get busy!" advised Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

"Now, sir," I said sharply. "Hold ready for the first dab!"

I shot the brush forward within an inch of his face.

"Stop—stop!" gasped the general hoarsely.

"Well, sir," I said, holding my hand. "I—I—confound you, I will sign!" grated Ord-Clayton. "But, remember, I am doing so under protest. I hope I am a gentleman, and I shall not go back on my word. But you are a set of unprincipled hooligans—simply that and nothing more. You have forced me into this infernal affair!"

"We knew that force was the only thing to apply, sir," I said, producing a sheet of paper and a fountain-pen with great promptitude. "Sign here, please, sir."

The general took the paper, and hesitated for a second.

"If you destroy that, sir, I have two duplicates—exactly the same," I said calmly. "So it would only be a waste of time."

"Hang you!" barked the general.

He signed the document reluctantly. I took the paper from him, glanced at it, and folded it up.

"Now, sir, I should just like to tell you that we've meant no disrespect to you," I said smoothly. "Our sole aim has been to stamp out the tyranny which Mr. Martin has practised since he arrived here. You don't know the facts as we do, sir—or you wouldn't blame us so much. It's for the best that we've done this, and if we have displeased you in any way, we apologise."

The general regarded us sourly.

"It is easy for you to apologise now—after you have gained your end!" he exclaimed harshly. "I will have nothing more to say to you—nothing whatever. You have won your victory, and I must submit. One day, however, you will regret having treated me in this way."

"I don't think so, sir," I said quietly. "It's far more likely that you'll regret having appointed Mr. Martin to the headmastership. I don't think it'll be long before you get a big shock. Hand-forth, kindly escort General Ord-Clayton to the barricade, and clear a way for him."

I rather fancy that the general was impressed by our politeness, for his rage had certainly diminished by the time Hand-forth and a few others had escorted him to the exit.

Meanwhile, the juniors were crowding round me, eagerly scanning the document.

It contained the general's signature, and he pledged himself to restore all our liberties, to see that no member of the Remove was punished in consequence of the rebellion, and it was guaranteed that the school in future would be run on precisely the same lines as those adopted by Dr. Stafford.

"It's victory for us!" shouted Pitt enthusiastically.

"Hurrah!"

"Victory for the rebels!"

"We've won—we've won!"

"Three cheers for Nipper."

Three cheers were given with a will, and for a short time there was quite a considerable commotion. This was not very surprising, for we had gained the triumph for which we had been striving so hard.

And, ten minutes later, the first Remove fellows to enter the Triangle for many days—Ancient House juniors, that is—walked out boldly. Others followed, and presently we were all out as usual.

Morning lessons were over just then, and soon there were great crowds surrounding us, eager for information.

"Oh, so you've been beaten at last, have you?" sneered Jesson, coming up.

"No, thanks!" I replied. "We've won, Jessy—and you'll find a great many of your powers taken away this afternoon—in fact, they're taken away already. So you can go and eat coke!"

"You cheeky young sweep!" snapped Jesson angrily.

But we took no notice of him, for at that moment Chambers and Bryant of the Fifth came bustling along.

Chambers was enthusiastic.

"Good men!" he exclaimed briskly.

"Well, I don't think you'd manage it. There must be some brains in the Remove, after all! This stand of yours means better conditions for everybody in the school. Good luck to you, kids!"

The excitement continued practically until dinner time. And then the school was called together in the Big Hall. The general, it seemed, had decided to make a speech, and not a single fellow was absent when Ord Clayton appeared upon the platform with the Head by his side. Mr. Martin was looking as black as thunder, although he pretended not to be upset.

"Going to make the best of a bad job, I suppose," whispered Handforth. "He ought to say nothing—he'll only go and put his giddy foot in it, I expect."

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Crowell sharply.

General Ord Clayton stepped to the edge of the platform.

"Boys, the information I am now about to give you is probably well known to you already," he said. "The Remove Form is now facing me, in its proper place in the school. I can only say that I am glad the unfortunate rebellion is at an end. At the same time, I wish to remark that I am seriously annoyed by the manner in which the ringleaders of that rebellion obtained their own way."

"Nobody blames the kids, sir!" shouted Chambers.

"Rather not!"

"Good luck to the Remove!"

"Ahem! We will say as little on the subject as possible," exclaimed the general hastily. "I now wish to state that Mr. Martin and I have held a conference, and we have come to one or two important decisions."

"No boy in the Remove is to be punished for his part in the regrettable affair which is now ended. And from henceforth Mr. Martin will conduct the school in a different manner—and he hopes that you will do your utmost to

make up for the many wrongs of the past."

"It's easy enough to jaw like that!" murmured Handforth. "Important decisions! What rot! It was we who came to the decisions!"

"Of course it was—but the general must say something, you ass," whispered Church.

The general had a good deal more to say, but there was nothing much of interest in it. He was simply doing his utmost to gloss over the whole unfortunate business. The Remove was quite content—for everybody knew that the general, harsh as he was, would not go back upon his written word.

The Remove had won its victory, but, somehow, I had an idea that Mr. Howard Martin would not remain long at St. Frank's. Nelson Lee gave me a hint that very evening, as it happened.

He was now "Mr. Wroth," of course, and I had very few opportunities of chatting with him. But he managed to catch me alone in the passage.

"Look out for something like a sensation soon, Nipper," he murmured confidently. "I think you can guess what I mean."

"Yes, rather, sir," I replied. "Good business!"

Those few words of the governor's told me that he was ready to show his hand, and the downfall of the St. Frank's tyrant was now only a matter of hours.

CHAPTER 13.

A Disfigured Gussie

"SARDINES, please!" I said briskly. "Take the lot!" invited Watson, with great generosity. "You'll only find one and a half there, but that's a detail. Montie's been in the tin already!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked up.

"Regad! That is a frightfully absurd statement, old boy," he observed. "I have removed a couple of sardines from

the tin, but I have certainly not been in it. Try the tongue, Nipper."

"I've already got my eye on it, thanks," I said.

Tea in Study C, in the Remove passage at St. Frank's, was quite a cheerful meal. The electric light glowed upon a plentiful table, and the fire in the grate blazed and crackled merrily.

"A bit of a change from yesterday," remarked Watson, as he stirred his tea. "By jingo! It's good to be back in the study again. I wonder what the Head's feelings are just now? He hasn't shown himself to-day at all."

"That's not very surprising," I said. "He's been whacked completely by the Remove! My sons, we ought to feel jolly pleased with ourselves—and we do. Come in!"

A tap had sounded on the door, but nobody entered in response to my invitation. The tap sounded again.

"Come in, you fathead!" I shouted.

The door opened, and a youth, attired in a thick overcoat and a soft hat, entered, smiling cheerfully.

"How goes it, my children?" he exclaimed.

I jumped to my feet.

"Tinker!" I ejaculated. "Well, my hat! This is jolly good! Come in, old son, and make yourself at home."

"That," said Tinker, is precisely my intention."

He peeled off his overcoat, and tossed his hat on to a bookshelf. This visit on the part of Sexton Blake's famous young assistant was quite a surprise to me.

"That's better," said Tinker genially. "Tea is ready, I notice. Good! This cold air makes me rather hungry, and I'm just ready for a good blow-out. Five minutes later, and all the grub would have been gone!"

"That's all right," I grinned. "There's plenty more to be got. We shall have to get in a few extra things,

anyhow. Sit down, Tinker, old son, and let's hear all about it. What business has brought you to this remote corner of the world?"

Tinker sat down.

"I happened to be in Bannington," he explained. "The guy'nor sent me down to interview a man, and the said man is away from home—won't be back until to-morrow. So, knowing that you hung out in this district, I ran over to get board and lodging on the cheap."

"Are you really staying the night, Tinker?" I asked.

"Yes, if I obtain permission from your respected Head," replied Tinker. "If not I shall get a doss in the village somewhere. I noticed one or two nice-looking inns on the way from the station."

"Oh, we'll manage it somehow," I said. "The Head's a beast—although we've tamed him pretty well lately. But I think it'll be all serene if we obtain permission from Mr. Wroth."

"Mr. What?" said Tinker.

"Mr. Wroth," grinned Tommy.

"What a delightful name," remarked Tinker. "And who, may I ask, does this cheerful gentleman happen to be?"

"He's our Housemaster," I explained.

"Your Housemaster?" repeated Tinker, staring. "But—but I thought that Mr. Nelson Lee was filling that honourable position?"

"He was, old boy; but he isn't now," said Sir Monte, shaking his head. "It's a shame, but Mr. Lee went away days ago. Mr. Wroth was engaged by the Head, and he's not such a bad sort. You'll see him, I expect."

"I'll take you along and introduce you soon," I chuckled.

Tinker looked at me curiously.

"Why the accompanying grin?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," I said. "Get on with your tea, old man. I say, Tommy, you might buzz out to Mother Blake's and get some sandwiches and flapjacks, and

blancets and jam-tarts, and doughnuts, and mince-pies, and cream-rolls——"

"Preparing for a banquet?" asked Tinker.

"No—for your tea."

"Great Scott! I don't want a cart-load," grinned Tinker. "In fact, I can make do with what's here."

But Watson hurried off to obtain some more grub.

"You look pretty comfortable here, I must say," remarked our guest, as he sampled the tongue. "I expected to find you in a shocking condition. What's all the fuss about a rebellion and a barring-out?"

"It's over," I said.

"There was some trouble, then?"

"Y'oubt!" I repeated. "My son, we've been in a state of siege for many days, and the end only came yesterday."

"There was a paragraph in a London daily," said Tinker. "And I heard some rumours in Bannington to-day. I thought it was all a yarn—or, at least, a mere exaggeration of the truth."

"What did you hear?" I asked.

"That the Remove had revolted, and that grim and ghastly battles were being waged between the boys and the Head's hired army," said Tinker. "I heard that people were being tarred and feathered ten times a day, and that there was a grave danger of a general strike throughout all Public Schools—in support of the St. Frank's lot. I heard that the Head was a double-dyed scoundrel, and that the leader of the junior rebels was a triple-dyed young hooligan——"

"That's me," I grinned. "Well, dispense with what you heard, Tinker. I'll tell you the solid facts. The rebellion started ten or twelve days ago, and I was the fellow who urged the Remove to revolt."

"Bad lad!" said Tinker severely. "You're an agitator——"

"Rats!" I said. "The fellows didn't

need much urging, I can tell you. You remember the whole school went to London while repairs were going on down here—after that fire?"

"Yes," said Tinker.

"Well, when we got here we found that Dr. Stafford had gone, and a perfect beast named Mr. Howard Martin, was the Head. From the very first moment he started playing monkey tricks with us."

"Is that usual?" asked Tinker politely.

"Oh, don't rot!" I exclaimed. "The Head proved himself to be a bully and a tyrant—he got himself hated by everybody, and he seemed to be particularly severe on the Remove. Well, we got to the point when we couldn't stand any more—so the Remove revolted."

"I don't suppose you were to be blamed," observed Tinker. "If I'd been here, I should have done the same, I expect. But how did it end? Weren't you hung, drawn, and quartered for your nerve?"

"We defied the Head, and we held the possession of the west wing—and refused to give in until our terms were met," I went on. "Of course, the Head was as hard as a rock, and he did all he could to defeat us. But he couldn't do it, and, finally, General Ord-Clayton himself came down."

"And who is General Ord-Clayton, may I ask?"

"He's the Chairman of the Board of Governors—a fiery, hot-tempered old chap who ought to know better," I explained. "Well, he blistered about, but only succeeded in getting himself captured by the Remove. We threatened to tar and feather him unless the Remove terms were granted."

"Phew!" grinned Tinker. "That was a bit steep, wasn't it?"

"We shouldn't have done the tarring, of course," I said. "It was only a threat. But it worked, and our demands were met and the school went back to

its normal condition. That happened yesterday, and the Remove has hardly got back to its normal state yet. The fellows are settling down, though."

"You seem to be a pretty warm lot down here," remarked Tinker. "Ah, good! Here's our cheerful friend with the extra supplies of grub."

Tommy Watson entered, and Tinker was soon doing his utmost to show us that his appetite was nearly as big as Fatty Little's.

"So everything's all serene now?" he asked presently.

"I don't know about all serene," I replied. "The Head's still here, and I suppose he'll be tamed for a bit. But he's bound to break out again—if he stays. It's my opinion, though, that he'll clear out before long. Or to be more exact, he'll be cleared out."

"By the Governors, you mean?"

"No," I replied; "by someone else. When you've finished stoking up we'll run along to Mr. Wrott's study. I dare say he'll allow you to sleep in the Ancient House here."

Tinker soon finished his tea, and then I escorted him down the passage to the Housemaster's study. We were continually stopped by other fellows, who insisted upon being introduced to Tinker.

However, we arrived at last, and I tapped upon the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed a harsh voice.

I opened the door, and we both entered. Nelson Lee was sitting at his desk. He was a forbidding looking person, and Tinker regarded him somewhat uncertainly. I gave the governor a quick wink, and he understood.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" he asked curtly. "Who is this, Nipper? Why have you brought this stranger here? You know very well that I am busy! Go away! I can't be bothered now!"

"What a genial gentleman!" murmured Tinker.

"We won't keep you long, sir," I said demurely. "This is Tinker—a friend of mine. I was wondering if you would mind him sleeping here to-night—in the Ancient House, I mean."

Mr. Wrott frowned.

"Yes, I do mind," he snapped. "I object strongly. I have no intention of throwing the Ancient House open to tinkers—"

"Tinker is his name, sir," I grinned; "not his profession."

"Oh, I see—I see!" said the governor, keeping up the joke well. "To judge by his appearance, I should imagine that he were a mere travelling tinker—a knife-grinder and saucepan-mender."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Tinker wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I yelled—I simply couldn't help it.

"Nipper—Nipper!" roared the governor. "How dare you bring this—this person into my presence, and then roar with foolish laughter? Go away—the pair of you!"

"Look here, sir, I don't see why you should insult me like that!" exclaimed Tinker warmly. "I'm the assistant of Mr. Sexton Blake—"

"Is that so?" said "Mr. Wrott." "I don't care if you are the assistant of the King of Timbuctoo! If you were awake you would realise that there is something peculiar in these present circumstances."

Tinker looked mystified. There was certainly every reason for him to be surprised, for Nelson Lee had spoken the last words in his own voice, and the abrupt change was certainly astonishing.

"Don't you know me, Tinker?" said the governor, with a chuckle.

Tinker still looked puzzled.

"I know that you spoke to me in a very queer way just now, sir," he said, "and I know that your voice seems a bit familiar to me. But I don't think

"I've ever had the pleasure of meeting you—"

"You don't ask!" I grinned. "And you call yourself a detective!"

"Come, Tinker!" smiled the gov'nor. "Surely you—"

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Tinker suddenly. "You're Mr. Lee!"

"Hush—hush!" exclaimed Lee quickly. "You needn't say it quite so loudly as that, my boy. I don't want the truth to be known generally just yet."

Tinker grabbed the gov'nor's hand. "This is great, sir!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "By George! You seem to get some excitement down here, after all. I'll half-skin Nipper for playing a trick like this on me!"

"What are you doing down here, anyhow?" asked Nelson Lee.

Tinker explained. "That's the position, sir," he concluded. "If I can stay at St. Frank's for to-night I shall be awfully obliged. But I am wondering why you are here in this get-up. Are you engaged on a case, sir?"

"Well, to be exact, I am," replied the gov'nor. "I can't go into any details just now, Tinker, but I dare say Nipper will explain a few things. In any case, I can assure you that the excitement is not yet all over—and perhaps you will see the finish of the affair."

"That's good," said Tinker. "If there's going to be some trouble down here, I'll do my bit. I always seem to find trouble somehow. I suppose you're referring to Mr. Martin?"

"Well, yes," agreed Lee. "But I don't want to talk to you just now, my boys. Don't forget that I am Mr. Wroft, and your prolonged presence here would seem—well, peculiar. To-morrow, no doubt, I shall be myself again."

Tinker and I took our departure a moment or two later, and Tinker was looking very thoughtful.

"I thought you were as dull as ditch-water down here," he remarked, when we had arrived at Study C again. "But

I'm blessed if you don't get more excitement than I find in London!"

I chuckled.

"We don't do so badly," I said. "This case the gov'nor's on just now is rather a mysterious business. I don't know much myself. But it's in connection with the Head, and you can take my tip that Mr. Howard Martin will soon receive a big shock."

"But what has he done?" asked Tinker.

"I don't know," I replied. "I do know, though, that our mutual friend, Detective-Inspector Lennard, is down here—and a high Scotland Yard official wouldn't come to Bellson for his health."

Tinker whistled.

"Lennard, eh?" he exclaimed. "Then it is something big! I say, your gov'nor is pretty keen, you know; he doesn't let much grass grow under his feet. I'm glad I came along, now—jolly glad."

CHAPTER 10.

Handforth's Latest!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH brought his fat down on the study table with a crash which set the cups rattling, and caused a plate to jerk off the edge and splinter to pieces on the floor.

"Yarrah!" howled McClure, jumping up hurriedly.

His sudden action tipped the table completely, and Handforth's cup of tea descended into his lap.

"Ow-yow!" yelled Handforth. "I'm scalded. Owl! You—you—"

"I'm scalded, too!" hooted McClure. "You cat's-ass—"

"You clumsy dummy!"

"You fatheaded idiot!"

"You blithering elephant!"

"You awful rotter—"

"Go it!" grinned Church. "I think you're winning, Handy."

"You—you tackling idiot!" roared Handforth. "All you can do is to sit there and grin at us! Look at my trousers! I'm scalded!"

"Look at my waistcoat!" bellowed McClure. "It's absolutely ruined! Why the dickens can't you behave like a human being?"

"Why, you—you prize dummy!" shouted Handforth. "What about you? What do you mean by jumping up like that, and tipping my cup of tea over?"

McClure snorted.

"It was your fault!" he replied warmly.

"My fault!"

"Yes, it was!"

"You silly jesser——"

"Didn't you bang your fist on the table?" demanded McClure fiercely.

"Didn't you upset the teapot? The hot tea poured all down my leg—and I couldn't help jumping up! If you're scalded, I'm jolly glad!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"Well there's no sense in making a fuss," he growled. "Pick that bread and butter up, Church, and don't grin like a Cheshire cat!"

Handforth, as a matter of fact, realised that the catastrophe was his own doing. He wouldn't admit it openly, but he decided that it would be wise to say as little as possible.

Upsets in Study D were nothing unusual. It was generally known that crockery was doomed if it went to the apartment occupied by Handforth, Church, and McClure. They usually smashed one plate or cup per day, on the average.

"Blessed if I can see what caused the trouble," remarked Church, when order was partially restored. "Have you got a grudge against the table, Handy? What was the idea of hammering it like that?"

"I've got an idea, you ass," said Handforth.

"And you tried to knock it into the table?"

"You fathead!" snapped Handforth. "I was simply about to emphasise the fact that we ought to do something. You fellows seem to forget that when I get an idea I want to bring it to materialisation in the shortest time possible."

"You'd better bring it over here" said Church.

"Bring what?"

"That idea of yours."

"But why should I bring it——"

"There's a wastepaper basket in this corner," exclaimed Church blandly.

Handforth glared.

"You dotty fathead!" he said witheringly. "I suppose you call that funny? My ideas are as sound as——"

"A cracked bell!" put in McClure tartly.

"Look here!" roared Handforth. "If you don't want to hear this idea, say so! I'm not going to let you into the know if you don't want me to. Just say the word, and I won't talk on the subject again."

"The word!" exclaimed McClure promptly.

"Why, you—you—you——"

Handforth paused, and bestowed a glare upon his chums which was calculated to freeze them on the spot. But, somehow, they did not look at all frozen. They were both grinning.

"Now we can get on with tea again," remarked Church carelessly. "I don't suppose that bread-and-butter will be much good after being used to clean the floor. And there's not much tea left, either."

Handforth rolled up his sleeves deliberately.

"Listen to me, you chaps," he exclaimed. "I want to ask one thing—just one thing. Are you going to listen to my idea, or not? Just say the word—a plain 'yes' or 'no'—it's all I want."

"But I thought we'd already done that," said McClure mildly.

"You won't listen?"

"Well, you gave us our choice, and we'd rather not—Yaroooh!"

Biff!

"That's for you!" roared Handforth, pushing his fist into McClure's face. "And this is for you, you grinning—Ow-you-ow!"

Handforth's left, swinging round, had been intended for Church's nose. But Church dodged in time, and Hand's fist crashed upon the back of the chair—with serious results to his knuckles.

"That serves you right!" exclaimed Church fairly. "You ask us if we want to hear your beastly idea, and because we say we don't you try to lash out. Why can't you act like a reasonable chap?"

"Because he isn't one!" said McClure, holding his chin.

"If I have any more of your rot, I'll chuck the pair of you outside," exclaimed Handforth, breathing hard. "I won't ask you this time—I'll order you!"

Handforth stood up majestically.

"You call yourselves my chums, and yet you turn away from me when I want your support," he said, with withering contempt. "Do you call that palpy?"

"But you gave us our choice!" howled Church.

"Because I thought you would listen!" admitted Handforth. "Well, you've got to listen—see? This wheeze of mine is too good to be chucked away. Only yesterday the rebellion came to an end—and we won."

"Go hon!"

"We won!" repeated Handforth. "In fact, we won easily, and the Head is now as harmless as a dead kitten. But he's a cad and a rotter, and I'm blessed if I can see why we should stand him."

"We can stand him now, you ass—his sting's been drawn," said Church. "Everything will go on as usual with us—just as it did when Dr. Stafford was Head—"

Handforth banged the table again.

"That's just it!" he shouted.

"Sh?"

"That's just the point!" exclaimed Edward Oswald.

"What's the point?"

"Dr. Stafford," said Handforth.

"We'll get up a written demand—signed by the whole Form. We shall simply say that we require Mr. Martin to clear out, and Dr. Stafford to come back to his old post. Why should we put up with Martin any longer? We want Dr. Stafford!"

"Of course we want Dr. Stafford back—nobody denies that. But it can't be done," said Church.

"Besides," added McClure, "if Martin is compelled to do things correctly, we can't very well grumble at him. But if he starts any of his hum-kum again—well, then we can get busy."

Handforth tapped the table impatiently.

"That's rot," he said. "There's no reason why we should put up with Martin at all. It's a wonder to me how the chap has got the nerve to stick on at all. If he'd had any sense of decency, he would have resigned before now. And my idea is to compel him to resign."

"Compel him?"

"Exactly," said Handforth. "Our demands were granted before—because there was no other way out of it. We've shown our power, and the Governors are afraid of us now. We've only got to threaten to revolt if Dr. Stafford isn't reinstated, and the Governors will be shivering in their shoes."

"I don't like to be a damper, but I believe in speaking my mind," said McClure. "Do you want me to give you my true opinion of that wheeze?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I think it's rotten!" said McClure bluntly.

"Hear, hear!" echoed Church.

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Handforth grimly. "You think it's rotten?"

"Yes."

"All right—I've finished with you," said Handforth. "I don't want to hear another word on the subject. I got a good idea, and all you can do is to call it rotten. I thought you had more regard for Dr. Stafford."

"Oh, you hopeless idiot!" exclaimed McClure, with a sigh. "We'd like nothing better than to have Dr. Stafford back again. But we can't threaten to go in revolt once more, Handy. It—it wouldn't be the thing. Besides, if Martin goes on all right, we shan't have any reason to demand it."

But Handforth was obstinate.

"We want Dr. Stafford," he said, "and if you won't support the wheeze, I'll find some fellows who will."

"Good," said Church. "Go and try."

"Yes, I will!" snipped Handforth. "You'll see, you faithless bounders."

He wrenched open the door and strode out. The first study he visited was that occupied by Reginald Pitt, Jack Grey and Timothy Tucker.

"Wait a minute," murmured Church. "It'll soon come!"

They waited. Handforth's somewhat unmusical voice was heard. A few shouts of laughter followed, Handforth's voice rose to a roar, and then there was a scuffle.

The next second Edward Oswald emerged from Study E "on his neck." He slithered across the floor, sat down with a bump, and the study door closed.

"My—my goodness!" gasped Handforth dazedly.

"Good!" said Church. "That's the way to do it, Handy. You said you'd find supporters, didn't you?"

"You silly fatheads——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling hussies——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure retired into Study D, yodling. And Handforth picked himself up, dusted himself down, and grimly looked about him. He was by no means discouraged. Being hurled out of one study was a mere trifle.

He stalked away to Study M, occupied by Somerton, De Valerie, and Hart. He strode in without knocking, and found the three juniors about to commence prep.

"I've got an idea——" began Handforth.

"Bolt it!" said Hart promptly.

"You ass——"

"Take it away and bury it!" advised De Valerie.

"I've got an idea!" roared Handforth. "I want you chaps to support me in it. If you'll only listen for a few minutes——"

"Sorry," said Somerton. "We're just about to start prep, old chap. If we listen to your idea, we shall be still starting prep by supper-time. And we don't want to have a row with Mr. Crowell in the morning."

"But the idea——"

"Yes, we know," said Hart, nodding. "You needn't tell us, Handy. We know exactly what it is."

"Eh?" said Handforth. "How do you know?"

"Why, they're all the same—your brain waves," explained Hart. "It's simply the finest idea under the sun—it's the greatest wheeze that ever smote a master brain. And it's worth—well, it's worth at least a bad ha'penny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to be funny, I'll clear out!" said Handforth. "I'm serious——"

"Impossible!" said Hart. "How can you be serious, Handy, when you're a born comedian?"

"I'm serious!" howled Handforth. "This idea is concerning Dr. Stafford. The Remove has got to get away again. Justice must be done. And justice

won't be done until Dr. Stafford fills his old position once again."

"Well, that's right enough," agreed Hart. "We're not going to deny that statement, Handy. We shall all be jolly pleased to see Dr. Stafford again. He's the finest headmaster any school could have. But I don't quite see how we can get him back at St. Frank's again."

"You don't see it?" said Handforth. "That's because you're too dull—you're too dense!"

"Politeness is a virtue!" observed the Duke of Somerset mildly. "It's one of the qualities I've always admired in you, old chap. When you speak to other fellows, you are always so delightfully charming."

The sarcasm was not lost on Handforth.

"I'm a fellow of business—I haven't got time to use fancy words," he said. "And I repeat—you're dense. You can't see how it's possible to get Dr. Stafford back at St. Frank's?"

"Our brain power is too weak for such an effort," confessed De Valerie sadly.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Handforth. "All we've got to do is to send a demand to the Chairman of the Governors—General Ord-Clayton. The demand must be signed by everybody in the Remove. And unless the general agrees to obey—well, we should use force."

"The demand, I suppose, is that Dr. Stafford shall be reinstated?"

"Exactly," said Handforth.

"And what's the force we shall use?"

"Another barring-out," said Handforth. "Don't you see? We've done it once, and we can do it again. We've shown our power now, and the Governors won't dare refuse—"

"It's hopeless, old man," said Hart. "We had a reason for rebelling before; we rebelled against tyranny. But if the Head conducts the school in a decent way, we can't make fancy demands of that sort. We should all like Dr. Staf-

ford to come back, but I dare say we shall exist without him. Your idea, Handy, is about as good as I expected it would be. In other words, it's rotten."

"And there's a draught," said De Valerie. "You don't mind closing the door, do you? After you've passed outside, of course."

"Look here—"

"Hand up the poker, Gussy," said De Valerie carelessly.

"Certainly," grinned Augustus Hart.

"You silly asses—"

"Thanks!" said De Valerie, brandishing the poker. "Now, Somerset, if you'll hold his arms, and if Gussy will hold his feet—"

But Handforth had fled.

The occupants of Study M looked rather businesslike, and Edward Oswald came to the conclusion that he would be safer in the passage. He was usually quite ready to battle with anybody, but a poker was an awkward article to argue with.

For about fifteen minutes he continued his task. And during that short space of time it was really remarkable how Handforth suffered. A thick car did not discourage him, and a swollen nose seemed to make him more determined. A black eye certainly made him pause to think, and when he was hurled bodily forth from two studies in succession he came to the conclusion that the Removites were not prepared to give him any reasonable measure of support.

Great ideas were evidently not favoured in the Remove!

CHAPTER 20.

The Headmaster's Secret!

TINKER looked round with approval. "Good!" he exclaimed. "In fact, top-hole!"

"Not so bad, is it?" I remarked. "Jolly decent of Mr. Wrott to let you have this bed-room for to-night, and

decent of him to let me keep you company, too. We can have a good old jaw before we go to sleep."

Tinker nodded.

"Yes, rather!" he agreed. "We've got plenty to talk about."

The pair of us were standing in a cosy little bed-room in the Ancient House. It was situated not very far from the Remove dormitory, and was, in fact, in the same corridor.

Nelson Lee had very kindly allowed Tinker to have the use of the bed-room, and when I suggested that I should sleep in the room, too, the gov'nor raised no objection. It was bedtime now, and the Remove had already retired.

Tinker glanced at his watch, and grinned.

"What an unearthly hour!" he remarked. "I haven't been to bed as early as this for months. Half-past nine! Ye gods and little fishes! London's only just beginning to wake up!"

"We needn't go to sleep just yet," I said. "If we douse the glem by half-past ten we shall be all right. I want you to tell me about the cases you've been engaged on recently."

For the better part of an hour we sat in bed, talking about detective work and criminal investigation in general. Then, when we were both beginning to yawn, the light was extinguished and we went to sleep.

It only seemed a few minutes to me, and then I was awake again. I don't know what caused me to awaken, but I suddenly found myself staring in the darkness. And the school clock boomed out a single stroke.

"Now, is that one o'clock, or only a half-hour?" I wondered.

The matter was soon settled, for I had my luminous watch under the pillow, and I found that the time was actually one o'clock. I had therefore been sleeping for a considerable length of time.

Everything was quiet and still, for

scarcely a breath of wind stirred. And as I lay in bed there, I fancied I heard a slight crunch of gravel in the Triangle. I listened intently, and then I knew that I was not mistaken.

I slipped out of bed, wondering. Who could be outside at this hour?

"Hallo! What's wrong?" came a whisper from Tinker.

"Who told you to wake up?" I breathed.

"Nobody," said Tinker. "But you woke me."

"I did?"

"Yes; getting out of bed, you know," said Tinker. "It doesn't take much to arouse me, you know. The springs creaked a bit. What's the time?"

"One o'clock," I replied. "Look here, I—"

"You're not going to get up just yet, I suppose?" asked Tinker with sarcasm.

"I heard somebody in the Triangle just now," I said in a whisper. "I don't suppose it means anything, but you never know. And, somehow, I've got a feeling that there's excitement in the air. You remember what the gov'nor said? Anyhow, I mean to have a squint outside."

While speaking, I gently raised the lower sash of the window. It went noiselessly, and a moment later my head was outside in the cold night air.

At first I could see nothing and hear nothing. Then I became aware of two dim figures, moving along near the wall. There was something stealthy about their movements, and I watched wonderingly.

"Yes, this way, Robert," came a whisper. "Go carefully, for there are many ears—and some of them may be alert."

I started.

The voice was that of Mr. Howard Martin!

What was Mr. Martin doing in the Triangle? And who was Robert? There was something strange about the affair.

"If you follow me closely we shall arrive at the door within a minute," came the Head's voice again. "But be very cautious. In no circumstances must anybody know that you are here. Do you understand?"

"Of course—of course!" said the other man. "You are too nervous, Martin."

The figures disappeared round a corner of the house, and I knew at once that they were making for the Head's private doorway. They had come round near the wall in order to avoid attention—and had only succeeded in awakening Tinker and me. And, now that we were awake, we were determined not to go to sleep again in a hurry. There was something afoot.

"Did you hear?" I whispered, turning.

"No," said Tinker, from his bed. "What's in the wind?"

"I don't know," I replied; "but just now the Head crept along this wall with a man he called Robert. They've gone into the private doorway, I believe."

"Crept along, did you say?"

"Yes."

"But why?" said Tinker. "What's the idea of creeping? It's the head-master's own doorway, isn't it? Why should they creep towards it? Isn't the Head the master of his own part of the building?"

"That's just it," I said. "That's just the mysterious point. Why should Mr. Martin bring a visitor here at one o'clock in the morning, and take him into the house as though he were a burglar?"

"Don't ask me," said Tinker. "I'm not a magician."

"But you agree that it's rummy?"

"I do. It's really suspicious."

"That's just what I think," I said. "There must be something about that man that the Head wants to keep quiet. You'd think he'd be pretty free at this hour, and yet he was extra cautious."

"A mistake," commented Tinker firmly. "That's just where Mr. Martin made a bloomer. Over-cautiousness is worse than none at all, because, if anybody else happens to spot it, there's suspicion aroused."

"Exactly," I breathed. "If the Head had brought the chap boldly across the Triangle, I should have gone back to bed without thinking a thing. As it is, I mean to investigate."

"Oh, ~~not~~!" said Tinker. "How can you investigate? You're not suggesting that you should go and listen at the Head's door? It's not worth the candle, because it's ten chances to one that you won't hear anything. And there's always the possibility of being surprised."

"No; I wasn't thinking about listening at the door," I said.

"The window, then?"

"No."

"Well, there's nowhere else," said Tinker, yawning. "Were you thinking about listening at all?"

"Yes, of course," I said. "I'll be easy—"

"I'm blessed if I can see it," interrupted Tinker. "You don't want the door, and you scorn the window. If you don't buck up and explain, I'll get out of bed and push your face into the cold water jug."

I went over and sat on Tinker's bed.

"Listen!" I said intently. "Some time ago I made a bit of a discovery. There's an old stairway leading from the lower right down to the basement. It must have been in existence for hundreds of years, and there are only a few fellows who know about it. The masters don't know anything."

"A secret tunnel, do you mean?"

"Yes," I replied. "It's only narrow, and it's musty. But the chief point is that once we're in there we're safe from being spotted."

"This is all very interesting, and you've made me curious to examine that stairway," said Tinker. "But how

is it connected with your delightful headmaster and his mysterious companion?"

"It's connected this way," I answered. "This stairway, Tinker, has got several secret doors at intervals, leading out into different rooms. Well, one door is in the Head's study, and there's a little spy-hole which can be opened unseen from the other side. And every word that's spoken in the room can be heard in the tunnel."

Tinker sat up.

"Now you're talking!" he exclaimed briskly. "Fine, Nipper! I didn't think we'd have any excitement down here; but it seems to me that there's quite a good chance of making things hum. You don't think we shall be prying, or anything, if we listen——"

"Rather not!" I exclaimed. "The Head's a rotter, and I believe he's a crook, too. I shan't feel any compunction in listening to his conversation with that other man. We might get on the track of something important."

Tinker slipped out of bed.

"I'm game for anything you like," he said. "Lead the way, old son, and I'll follow. Anything mysterious is just in my line."

It didn't take us long to slip our clothes on; and then we crept from the bedroom and made our way along the dormitory passage. Tinker was eager for anything, and I felt extremely glad that he had arrived on the scene. Between the pair of us, we stood a chance of making discoveries.

"Here we are!" I breathed.

I flashed the light from a small electric torch upon a portion of the panelling in the wall. Tinker examined the spot with interest.

"Open, sesame!" he murmured softly.

"No; it won't open of its own accord," I chuckled. "The proper entrance is upstairs, in the tower; but there's a doorway here, if my memory's right. Anyhow, we'll have a try."

I bent down, and, after one or two unsuccessful attempts, I touched the little portion of woodwork which operated the catch. The panel did not spring back mysteriously, or anything of that sort, but simply opened about an inch.

"Good!" I breathed. "Follow me, old man."

I pushed the panel open wide, and I did not feel very pleased when it creaked audibly. However, it was not likely that anybody would hear, and Tinker and I passed into the narrow, stuffy stairway.

I closed the panel securely, and then flashed my torch on again. We were standing in an extremely restricted passage, with panelling on one side and stonework on the other. Overhead sloped more stonework, and at our feet a steep stairway yawned. Other stairs led upwards in the rear.

"We'll go down," I whispered. "And, for goodness' sake, move quietly. If we're heard there'll be the dickens to pay. And if you want to speak to me, put your mouth close to my ear and just breathe."

"Don't you worry," said Tinker. "I'm not one of those school kids; I'm experienced in this sort of thing."

We proceeded downstairs slowly, and with extreme caution. It was quite possible that our efforts would be fruitless. But the element of uncertainty in the adventure added to its interest.

After a while we came to a place where the stairway ended abruptly, and a short tunnel lay before us. I took hold of Tinker, and put my mouth close against his ear.

"The Head's study is just at the end of this little stretch," I murmured. "So I'm going to put the light out in a tick. We can't take any chances. You grab my coat and follow. And stop when I do."

"Right, O chief!" whispered Tinker. "Lead on!"

After progressing for a few yards, I put out the torch, and walked on at a much slower pace. It soon became evident that it was not necessary to have the light to guide us.

Few low voices came to our ears. And within a few moments I felt the little projections which indicated the secret door. Both Tinker and I came to a halt, and stood there as silently as shadows.

With my fingers I felt about cautiously, and presently I found the little object I had been searching for. I pushed it back gently, and almost at once a tiny shaft of light shot through into the blackness. I could see Tinker's face quite distinctly as he bent close to me.

"You have a look first," he said.

I applied my eye to a little spyhole, and found myself looking directly into Mr. Howard Martin's study. The Head himself was standing before his desk, and a stranger stood on the hearthrug.

I could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise.

For the stranger was an extraordinary-looking individual, and I realised why the Head had been so cautious in the Triangle. It would have certainly been an unwise proceeding to allow himself to be surprised with this man as a companion.

For the fellow was practically attired in rags. His hair was long and unclipped, and it was evident that he had not visited a barber for many weeks. His beard and moustache had a ragged appearance.

I moved away, and Tinker looked. The two men within the study were silent at the moment. The Head was looking into some books, and the other man was greedily devouring some sandwiches.

"Jolly queer," breathed Tinker, into my ear.

"What do you make of it?" I breathed back.

"Nothing," murmured Tinker. "But it looks promising."

And then the Head's voice came to our ears.

"Yes, Robert; that's right," he said, in a low voice. "If we reach Liverpool by to-morrow, we shall be able to get on that boat without difficulty. And within a fortnight we shall be in South America."

"I don't quite see it," said Robert. "It's not so easy to get out of England, Martin. Besides, it wouldn't be safe—"

"Don't talk nonsense, man," snapped the Head. "All you can do is to growl and grumble at everything I suggest. I know the captain of this ship personally. It's only a small cargo steamer, and I've been watching its movements in the papers for a week or two. She's in Liverpool at present, and we simply must get there by to-morrow. That means that we leave St. Frank's to-night."

"But there are no trains——"

"Trains! Who is talking of trains?" demanded Mr. Martin. "I have made every preparation, Robert. These infernal boys here suspect nothing—I have deluded all. The recent rebellion was not entirely unfavourable. And now the school is normal, it is time for us to go."

"But we cannot leave in the middle of the night," protested the other.

"Yes, we can," said the Head. "In fact, it is the only way in which we can leave. I have a small two-seater motor-car in readiness. It is a good car, and will take us North without trouble. Petrol is aboard in plenty, and there will be no need for delays."

"I don't like it," said the other man. "I tell you candidly, Martin, I don't like it. Why should we flee the country in this way——"

"Why—why?" snapped the Head. "You must be mad, man, to ask me why! You are wanted by the police—wanted badly. You escaped from prison

over a fortnight ago. If you are re-taken——"

"Don't speak so loudly!" muttered Robert.

"There is nobody to hear," said Martin. "The school is asleep—sound asleep. We are absolutely alone here."

I couldn't help smiling slightly. What would the Head have said if he could have known the actual facts? Both Tinker and I were tense and alert; we were learning a few details which opened our eyes.

"It is better to be careful," said Robert uneasily.

"You needn't fear," said the Head. "Good gracious! You are as nervous as a kitten——"

"You would be nervous if you had been through what I have been through," said the other fiercely. "You don't realize what it means to hide from all decent men, Martin! You don't know what it means to be hounded——"

"Oh, be quiet!" interjected the headmaster testily. "You are continually harping in that string, confound you! I have done everything possible, Robert. You came to me that night, opening everything——"

"Who should I have come to?" demanded Robert, his voice quivering as he spoke. "I came to you, Martin, because you are the man who should now be in my shoes. I served two years of that living death—for the crime you committed! And when I came here to seek shelter, you turned me away! If I had not insisted, you would have——"

"Stop—stop, you fool!" snarled Mr. Martin. "I have heard that story a hundred times! What is the use of repeating it again and again? Supposing you did serve two years for the crime I committed? What then? Does it do any good to throw it repeatedly in my face? I was lucky—I escaped. You were unlucky—you were fool enough to get arrested!"

"Fool enough!" exclaimed Robert hotly. "How could I avoid it, when

you faked up the evidence to point in my direction? When I think of your filthy, dastardly conduct, I wonder how it is I came here to breathe the same air as you! I am only doing it because I want my freedom—the freedom which belongs to me!"

The Head muttered an oath.

"Will you never cease your arguments?" he demanded. "We have no time to talk in this way now, you madman. We must get away while we have the chance. I have nothing to fear; but I want to help you."

"Oh, yes," said Robert, bitterly. "You will help me by helping yourself—to somebody else's money! You were a thief two years ago, Martin, and you are a thief still! How you managed to get this post at St. Frank's amazes me."

"It was not difficult to fake the credentials," said the Head contemptuously. "But we are talking at random again. We have no time to spare. I am prepared to give up everything so that you shall get out of the country. You are my brother, and I cannot leave you in the lurch."

The other man gave a short laugh.

"You care as much for me as you care for the coals in this scuttle!" he exclaimed. "Your words don't deceive me, Martin. You wish to get out of the country because you are contemplating a villainous robbery. And I don't agree with it—I don't like it at all!"

The Head swore again.

"Your likes and dislikes are nothing to me," he snapped. "You will do as I say, Robert—or go back to prison! You can take your infernal choice. Now be quiet; I am tired of your growlings!"

The two men were silent for a time, and Tinker and I had an opportunity of glancing at one another. These glances were full of tense excitement and wonder. We hardly knew what to think.

But one thing was certain—we had hit upon a very pretty plot!

CHAPTER 21.

The Making of the Escape.

THIEF!

A Mr. Howard Martin, the headmaster of St. Frank's, was a thief!

And the man with him was his own brother. Much that had been mystifying to me previously now became clear. The Head, evidently, had been concealing his brother somewhere in the district—probably in the ruins of Bellton Abbey.

Robert was an escaped convict, fleeing from justice. But, according to all that Tinker and I had heard, Robert was quite innocent—Martin himself was the guilty party.

And there could be no doubt on this point.

For the Head had admitted that fact in my hearing. He had faked up evidence in order to incriminate his innocent brother. And that brother, having escaped from prison, had come to St. Frank's for shelter.

He had obtained it grudgingly. His villainous brother not being eager and willing to shelter the man he had wronged. We were gaining a keener insight into Mr. Howard Martin's character. We had always known him to be a bully and a cad, but the fellows had never suspected him of being a criminal.

And now I understood why Nelson Lee had held his hand.

I suspected that the gov'nor knew a good deal about the case, and he had refrained from acting because he did not wish to have the innocent Robert recaptured. The gov'nor's object was to get Martin himself—and get him so securely that his unfortunate brother would be granted his freedom.

It was a grim story altogether.

And now, it seemed the Head meant to make a bid for liberty—he was keen upon going this very night. Robert, on the other hand, was not agreeable.

I felt very thankful that Tinker and

I had entered the secret passage. We had been enabled to learn much—and our information, no doubt, would be of considerable help to Nelson Lee.

I was about to make a suggestion to Tinker, when Martin spoke again.

"It amazes me why you should hesitate, Robert," he said. "You don't seem to realise what an excellent chance it is. We shall both be able to get away from England, and we shall be set up quite comfortably."

"I don't want it," said the other man. "All I desire is to remain here, in my own country—with my name and my honour cleared."

"That's impossible," said Martin. "I know well enough that you are too good-hearted to give me away, Robert. Moreover, you daren't!"

"I daren't?"

"Of course not!" sneered Martin. "In fact, you couldn't do so. Your statement would never be believed, for there is no suspicion against me. You are the guilty party, in the eyes of the law, and, if you are recaptured, you will be clapped in prison again—with three or four years added to your sentence!"

"You infernal hound——"

"Don't become violent—remember where you are," interrupted Martin. "I only brought you here because it will be easier for us to leave together. Moreover, I want your help. This safe contains a very large sum of money—many thousands of pounds, in fact. General Ord-Clayton trusts me implicitly, and I have been able to twist him round my little finger. I won't go into details, but I can tell you that I have got here seven thousand pounds in cash, and from fifteen to twenty thousand pounds in cast-iron securities—securities that can be disposed of without the slightest difficulty—once we are in South America."

Robert uttered an exclamation.

"Look here, Martin, I don't like it," he said decidedly. "It isn't right—it isn't honest——"

"Honest!" snapped Martin. "Do you think I care about that? We can't be troubled with any false scruples, you fool! You and I, Robert and Martin Horley, must leave this country at the earliest possible moment. There is a chance for us to get out at once—by a ship which goes to-morrow. We are going—do you understand? And we are going with our hands as full as we can fill them."

"With your hands, you mean," said Robert Horley. "I will touch nothing of your shameful money, Martin—not a penny. What is more, I will take care of myself—I will not consent to go with you. I would prefer to go to prison, and serve my time, than to run away with you—leaving my name in disgrace. I have half a mind to shout for help if you attempt to rob the school!"

"If you dared to raise your voice, I would kill you!" said Martin fiercely. "Yes, Robert, I would kill you! Treachery from you would be the last straw. You ungrateful hound, you are worthless!"

Robert caught his breath in.

"You talk of treachery!" he said fiercely. "You dare to talk of treachery! And it was you who sent me to prison for your own crime! You call me ungrateful, when I held my tongue—"

"I am tired of this!" snarled Martin. "Keep silent, Robert. We are leaving St. Frank's within half an hour. Help me to prepare. Pull yourself together, man, and don't be such a fool!"

Robert did not reply, and Martin moved over to the safe, and commenced turning it out.

Tinker nudged me.

I looked up from the little spy-hole, and found Tinker's mouth near my ear.

"What shall we do?" he breathed.

"I don't know," I replied, speaking in the same way. "But it seems to me that it's up to us to act in some way. Perhaps I'd better speak up, and give the guv'nor a word of warning."

Tinker nodded.

"That's what I was thinking," he said. "Mr. Lee ought to know. You buzz off, and I'll keep watch here. I'll make a mental note of everything that passes, so you won't miss anything."

"Good!" I said promptly. "I'll go."

Having come to a decision, I lost no time.

Creeping up the passage, I was soon mounting the steep stairs. At last I arrived in the upper corridor, and I was breathing rather hard, when I turned towards Nelson Lee's bed-room.

My thoughts were busy.

Mr. Howard Martin—or, to give him his real name, Mr. Martin Horley—was contemplating a big robbery! He had duped General Ord-Clayton, right and left, and was now about to decamp with everything he could lay hands upon.

And this was the man who had been appointed headmaster of St. Frank's!

I was simply astounded.

The events of the night were so extraordinary that I could hardly convince myself that I was not suffering from a nightmare. But it was real enough.

I realised that Tinker and I would be the means, probably, of preventing a big robbery. Nelson Lee, sleeping peacefully in bed, was unaware of the drama which was being enacted in the Head's study.

Without a sound I opened Nelson Lee's bed-room door, and walked into the dark apartment.

"Guv'nor!" I whispered.

Silence.

"Guv'nor!" I repeated. "Wake up!"

Still there was no response. It was unusual for Nelson Lee to sleep so soundly. He was always a light sleeper, and the slightest whisper could awaken him, as a rule. I took out my torch, and switched it on.

"Come on, sir!" I urged. "I've got something to tell— Well, my hat! I've been talking to the thin air!"

Nelson Lee's bed was empty.

There was nobody in the room. The

governor, then, was prowling about somewhere on his own. I realised that there was more happening that night than I had first believed.

Nelson Lee, probably, was waiting somewhere for Mr. Martin—waiting for the rascally Head to make a move. And the Head was within the house all the time, preparing to flee the country.

In the circumstances, I decided to get back to Tinker.

There would be no sense in my venturing out in the hope of finding Nelson Lee. He might be miles away.

And, with Tinker, I stood a chance of doing something.

So, leaving the bed room, I hurried along the passage to the secret entrance to the stairway.

Within a couple of minutes I was inside, making my way down the steep stone steps. I reached the level stretch after a while, and walked cautiously along—my torch being extinguished.

I was guided by the spot of light which came from the spy-hole. But, somehow, the light seemed to be stronger. The secret passage was quite bright, in comparison to the surrounding blackness.

I arrived at the spot—and received a shock.

Tinker was not there!

Furthermore, the panel leading into the Head's study was slightly ajar! Only one explanation was possible. Tinker had passed through the doorway into the study.

This indicated that the Head and his brother had cleared off—and Tinker had followed on their trail.

I had my hand on the door, ready to open it, when I was brought up with a jerk. The Head's voice came to my ears!

"Tie him up securely, Robert. Good heavens! To think that the young spy was there—watching us all the time! It is high time we left! After this, we dare not remain another minute!"

I applied my eye to the hole, my heart beating rapidly.

Tinker was lying on the couch, his face completely muffled with a cushion. He was secured by the cords from the window curtains. Tinker's feet were also bound. He was helpless.

I tried to reconstruct what had happened.

Tinker had entered the library. Why? What on earth had impelled him to do such a mad thing? For he had simply walked into the hands of the enemy.

It was so astounding shock for me—but, as it happened, I was destined to learn the truth almost at once.

"It was your fault, you fool," Martin went on. "If you had not acted the madman, Robert, this boy would not have interfered. But it is better that he did, perhaps. We can now be sure of getting away in safety."

"The lad saved my life," said Robert Horley fiercely. "You dangerous scoundrel! I didn't think you were so utterly bad, Martin. You had that knife within an inch of my throat when the boy burst in!"

Martin laughed harshly.

"It was only bluff," he snapped. "Do you think I meant it?"

"I know you meant it," said Robert quietly. "You were too enraged to know what you were doing."

"Nonsense," said Martin. "I had no intention of harming you—you cowardly fool. But when you talk in that way I certainly lose my temper. Do you realise that we are in a dangerous corner? Do you realise that we must leave at once, if we are to retain our liberty?"

Robert Horley nodded.

"We must leave, certainly," he agreed. "But I will leave on one condition only, Martin—on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"You are to take no stolen money," said Robert. "I will not come with

you if you dare to touch a penny that is not yours. You may be a thief, Robert, but I am not—and I will not associate myself with you. Go, if you want to—go, and take your dirty spoils. I will not set the police on your track. But I will not come with you."

"By heaven, you will!" snarled Martin. "Do you think I will leave you behind—to be captured and arrested? Do you think I will allow you to set the law on me? You may say that you will let me go—but I do not believe you. I shall be satisfied if you are with me—and your are coming."

"I will come if you leave the money behind—not otherwise."

The Head simply shook with rage.

"This boy interfered when I lost my temper five minutes ago—but there will be nobody to aid you if I lose my temper again!" he exclaimed savagely. "I will give you one chance, Robert. Will you come with me—now?"

"Only if you——"

"Will you come unconditionally?"

"No!" said Robert firmly. "I am an honest man—I have always been an honest man—and I will not become a criminal at your bidding! I would go back to the prison—steady, man—steady! Put that paper-knife down——"

"I will not!" snarled Martin. "If you do not agree—now then! Don't you dare to interfere—all right, you fool! We shall see! You will have only yourself to thank. A-ah!"

I started into the study tensely.

The two men, both white-hot with rage, were struggling fiercely—as no doubt they had struggled when Tinker interrupted. Tinker had only done so because he had feared that Robert would be harmed. And Tinker had been made a prisoner without any delay.

I watched fascinated. The men were still swaying to and fro. And I saw that Martin held a murderous-looking paper-knife. There was a light of murder in his gleaming eyes—it was unmistakable.

Robert was fighting for his life—god he was far the weaker of the pair. Back and back he was furred. At last he could go no farther, for the big desk came in the way. He made desperate efforts to gain possession of the knife; but the task was hopeless.

"Yes, it is the better way," hissed Martin. "You shall be left behind, Robert. There is no reason why you should worry me any longer."

"Don't be a mad fool," gasped Robert. "You—you——"

I realised that the time had come for action. I, too, would butt in. But I resolved not to get myself colored. I pushed open the panel, and slipped quietly through.

Martin's back was towards me, but Robert saw my entry in the first second.

"Stop, Martin—stop!" he muttered. "There is another boy——"

"You think you can trick me?" snarled Martin. "Oh, no! I'm not so easily taken in—what—what—by heaven!"

For, at that moment I gripped Mr. Martin from behind. I twisted my arms round him, and tried to wrench him away.

"Come on, you fellows!" I gasped. "We'll get him yet!"

Martin swore horribly.

The next second he used every ounce of his strength—in a mad effort to gain his freedom. I was lifted bodily from the floor, and hurled across the room.

I alighted on the table, on all fours.

The momentum sent me slithering on to the floor, taking a pile of books and papers with me. Martin did not return to the attack, or things might have gone badly with me.

He rushed at the door, tore it open, and vanished.

His brother, quivering with emotion, and pale to the lips, stood against the lounge, staring at me. Then, suddenly, he collapsed backwards, and lay huddled on the lounge—completely unnerved, and helpless.

I didn't trouble to go to him. I knew that he would be useless for anything. I pitied him—I wanted to help him. For Robert Horley had proved himself to be an honest, upright man.

But there was no time.

The rascally Head was escaping!

I rushed at Tinker, tore the cushion off, and unfastened his ropes.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Tinker. "We shall have to be slippy, my son! We've made a frightful muck of this affair! He's bunked!"

"We shall be able to catch him," I panted. "What happened to you?"

"Just what happened to you," said Tinker. "They were fighting, and I hurried in. But Martin gave me a cosh with a ruler, and I was knocked out for a tick. Then I was bound up."

I slipped the last rope off.

"Well, come on," I gasped. "We must chase this rotter—"

"Great Scott!" muttered Tinker, staring.

He was gazing at the window, and I followed his glance. Then I started. The bottom sash of the window was open, and framed in the opening were the heads and shoulders of two men.

They were Nelson Lee and Detective-Inspector Lennard.

CHAPTER 12.

The Chase.

NELSON LEE sprang into the room. "What is the meaning of this, Nipper?" he asked sharply.

"Martin has escaped, sir," I panted. "This gentleman here is his brother—"

"I am well aware of that," interrupted the gov'nor. "Mr. Horley and I have met before, and I know that he is an honourable man. But what have you been doing? Where is the Head?"

"Gone, sir—he escaped!"

"Just like these youngsters!" exclaimed Lennard sourly. "All our plans messed up, Lee, Tinker, too! You ought to know better, you confounded young rascals!"

"We—we didn't know—" I began.

"You had no right to interfere," snapped Lee. "Mr. Lennard and I were waiting for Martin to appear, but knew that something was wrong—because of the noise."

"It's your own fault, gov'nor," I said obstinately. "You should have taken me into your confidence. Tinker and I thought that we were doing the best thing possible. We didn't know that you were on the track. You weren't here—"

"It is just as well that the boys interfered, Mr. Lee," put in Robert Horley weakly. "I owe them my life. Martin would have killed me, but for the timely intervention of these young gentlemen."

"That makes a difference, of course," said Lee, his anger subsiding somewhat. "But after I had made my plans it is annoying to find them upset. We must hurry away, Lennard."

"I think not," said the Scotland Yard man. "I'd better keep my eye on this man. He is Robert Horley, and he is badly wanted—"

"Nonsense, man," interjected Lee. "This gentleman is as innocent as I am. Martin Horley is the culprit—as I shall prove to the world before long. He has escaped, but I have no doubt that we shall be able to find him."

"He's got a car, sir," I said. I heard him saying—

"A car?" echoed the gov'nor sharply. "I did not know that! He must have been very careful about it—but listen! I think I hear—"

Lee broke off, and dived out of the window. I followed, and Tinker and Lennard scrambled through. We all stood just outside, listening intently. My thoughts were busy.

I knew that Nelson Lee had had plans of his own—he had intended capturing

Mr. Martin red-handed. And Tinker and I had spoilt things, somehow. But we were not to be blamed. We had done our best.

Throb—throb—throb!

The pulsating beat of a motor came to our ears. The sound came from the rear of the house, but got nearer and nearer. The car, evidently was making its way along the lane—and I would soon pass the main gates.

The throb increased to a purr, and as it did so, Nelson Lee and Lennard rushed at the gates. They arrived just a shade too late. For the car shot past while they were still ten yards off.

"Confound!" raved Lennard.

"Listen!" exclaimed Lee. "Perhaps we shall be able to determine which road the man takes when he is through the village—sound carries well to-night. Then we can ring up the police of Bannington or Carstowe."

"Splendid!" muttered the chief-inspector.

We stood like statues, listening. The hum of the speeding car came to our ears distinctly. It was still in the lane, and travelling at a reckless speed, apparently. The car had no lights, and the night was dark.

Hum-m-m-m!

The car was roaring along at full throttle, to judge by—

Crash!

The sound was clear and distinct—a dull, elongated crash. Then came complete and utter silence. The steady hum had gone. The effect was almost uncanny, and a queer feeling passed down my spine.

"Great Scott!" I muttered.

The others said nothing for a couple of tense seconds. And I was reminded of a dreadful sound I had heard on one or two occasions—an aeroplane smash. The steady roar of the motor, the splutter, the crash—and then an uncanny, unearthly silence—a silence which was eloquent of disaster and death.

"Our chase won't be a long one, after all," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Lennard cleared his throat huskily.

"Doesn't seem like it," he muttered.

"That was an accident, Lee—and a mighty bad one, too. I'll warrant the car is a heap of ruins. Must have overturned at a corner, I reckon."

"That is the explanation, undoubtedly," said Nelson Lee. "The man was mad with fear, and he drove all out. In the darkness he misjudged the road, I imagine, and charged up the bank."

"What—what shall we do, sir?" asked Tinker.

"We must hurry to the spot at once," said Nelson Lee. "The man may not be dead, and we must do all we can for him."

"I'll stay here," remarked Lennard. "It's just as well, I think."

He was an official detective—and Robert Horley was wanted by the police. So Lennard was staying, to keep his eye on the prisoner.

Nelson Lee hurried through the gateway, and Tinker and I followed. This night was full of drama, and I hardly knew what the time was, or how long Tinker and I had been out of our beds.

Tragedy was abroad, too, it seemed.

We hastened down the lane towards the village, certain that we should be the first to arrive on the scene of the dreadful accident. The countryside was asleep, and the disaster had occurred, probably, in the open lane.

This proved to be the case.

Half-way to the village we became aware of something dark piled up against one of the leafless hedges. It projected above the hedge, and revealed a jagged edge against the sky-line.

"There it is," I muttered.

We arrived on the spot.

The motor-car was right on top of the hedge, bottom upwards, and a complete wreck. Both the rear wheels were smashing to atoms, and were lying in splinters all over the road.

Tyres were strewn everywhere, with bits of the lamps and other accessories. It was a terrible mess. The car was simply matchwood.

It must have leaped into the air cleanly, to overturn and disintegrate upon striking.

Nelson Lee turned to us grimly.

"I should advise you to hang back, boys," he said quietly. "I have a torch here. I will examine the wreckage. The sight is not likely to be a pleasant one."

"I—I think we'll wait here, sir," I said huskily.

Tinker agreed. We were capable of standing the shock, if necessary. But it was not necessary. It was quite sufficient for Nelson Lee to look for the late headmaster of St. Frank's.

We waited for several minutes, without speaking. Somehow, we did not feel like conversation.

We saw Nelson Lee examining the wreckage bit by bit. His torch flashed here and there—fleeing sometimes, steady at others. Once or twice Lee tore away pieces of the debris.

He climbed the bank, and got over into the meadow beyond. Two minutes later he was back, and he walked towards us.

"Well, sir?" I asked unsteadily.

"I am amazed, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "Martin is not here!"

Tinker and I stared.

"Not—not there?" I gasped.

"No, my lad."

"You—you mean, he's escaped, after all?" I yelled.

"It certainly seems so," said Lee. "Perhaps he was flung bodily out, and escaped with only a few bruises. I am certainly astounded. I expected to find the man half-torn to shreds."

"But are you sure, sir?" asked Tinker. "Isn't it possible that Martin is right underneath the car—pinned down?"

"It is just possible," agreed Nelson Lee. "I want you to help me, boys.

We will attempt to shift the car, and make certain. But, somehow, I believe that the rascal has eluded us."

I whistled.

"It's possible that he jumped out of the car before the crash," I said. "Perhaps he wrecked it deliberately—just to diddle us."

"That is hardly likely—because we are not diddled," replied Lee. "No, Nipper. The affair was a pure accident. And Martin, it seems, was blessed with fool's luck. He was flung out, apparently unhurt."

We found it a fairly easy task to move the wreckage—because it was poised on the bank, almost balancing. One combined heave from the three of us sent the car crashing over into the meadow.

Nelson Lee flashed his torch about.

The light only revealed smashed and torn branches and twigs, and a wild assortment of odds and ends belonging to the car.

Howard Martin—or Martin Horley—had escaped!

"This is an unpleasant surprise, in a way," said Nelson Lee. "I was not anxious to find the man dead; but it is now fairly evident that the fellow is fleeing across the country. Ah! One moment. What is this here? What is this?"

"Looks like grass, sir," I said.

The gov'nor was flashing the light of his torch upon a patch of coarse grass near the ditch; we had climbed over into the meadow. I bent closer, and became aware of some dark patches on the grass.

"What is it, sir—oil?" I asked.

"Oil? No, Nipper," said Lee. "Something far more significant."

"Blood?" remarked Tinker.

"Yes, my boy."

"I can see it now," I said tensely. "Then Martin didn't get off scot-free, after all. Look there! Those stains seem to go right along, sir. Why, there's a trail of them!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Martin was wounded," he said; "possibly a bad gash on his arm, since he seems to have walked strongly. Perhaps we shall be able to follow his trail; and if we hurry up, we may overtake the man."

"Sure to, sir!" I exclaimed. "Good! This is miles better. I didn't like to think of the man being done in."

We set off without any waste of time.

Nelson Lee leading, with his torch to the ground we progressed fairly rapidly. Martin must have bled pretty badly, for the bloodstains were continuous. They provided a certain trail.

Over the meadows we went, through gaps in the hedges, and then across fields. After a while, Nelson Lee turned to us.

"I think I know where our wounded friend has made for," he said. "Right from the start we have been travelling in the direction of Belliton Abbey. It is apparent that Martin has sought seclusion in the old dungeons—where, for a time, he concealed his brother."

"You think we shall find him there, sir?" asked Tinker.

"Yes," said Lee. "He certainly cannot have gone far, in his serious condition. He has lost a deal of blood, and, in any case, his capture is certain, sooner or later. The Abbey is already within sight."

The old ruins were visible in the near distance, looming against the skyline, gaunt and ghostly.

Sure enough, the trail continued to lead in that direction, and at last we arrived within the ruins themselves. Here and there a blood-stain showed—and Nelson Lee extinguished his torch.

We halted for a moment.

"Now, boys, this will probably be a fishish business," murmured the guv'nor. "It is possible that Martin is armed—and I do not intend you to go into any danger. You must remain behind."

"Look here, sir——"

"I am quite firm, Nipper."

"And so am I, sir," I said warmly. "If you can go into this danger, so can we. Eh, Tinker?"

"Yes, rather!" declared Tinker.

"We want to be in at the finish—that's all," I said. "Martin won't be able to do much in his present condition. And if he is a bit desperate—well, we shall be ready to give a hand."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I suppose I shall have to give way," he said. "But you really must keep well in the rear until I permit you to advance. Martin is desperate—he is unscrupulous—and he will not hesitate to use violence."

"Neither shall we, sir," said Tinker grimly. "I'd love to use violence. I owe the rotter one for collaring me in the study."

We moved towards the gap in the floor which led down into the dungeons. Everything was black and still. The place might have been a habitation of the dead, for all the sounds there were.

Nelson Lee commenced the descent, and we followed fairly closely in his rear. For the first few steps all was right.

Then a startling thing happened.

As the guv'nor passed under the stonework, there was an ominous rumbling, a thud and a crash.

A mass of stonework had fallen—and there lay Nelson Lee on the jagged stairs, silent and motionless!

CHAPTER XX.

Cornering the Tyrant!

"GOOD heavens!" I exclaimed, horrified.

Both Tinker and I dashed forward, careless of any consequences to ourselves. If we thought anything, we believed that the stonework had fallen of its own accord, owing to age.

I had a horrible fear that the guv'nor was badly injured. And I knelt by his side, and caught his hand feverishly.

"Guv'nor—guy'nor!" I panted. "Are you hurt—?"

"Merely dazed for a moment, Nipper—nothing more," said Nelson Lee, to my great relief. "The big stone missed me by an inch, or I should have been done in for good. Only a small boulder struck me."

"Thank goodness!" I said fervently.

"Jolly lucky, sir!" exclaimed Tinker. "How did it happen? I suppose these stones are old and crumbly?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lee, picking himself up, and rubbing his head. "But it was no natural fall, Tinker."

"What do you mean, sir?"

I mean that the huge stone was poised up there deliberately, so that it would fall at the slightest vibration," said the guy'nor. "Mr. Martin, in spite of his injury, is still ingenious. It seems that we shall have a difficult task in capturing him. We must be cautious."

Nelson Lee brushed himself down, and continued his progress down into the old tunnels leading to the dungeons. But he went more carefully now, testing every foot of the way.

I was sure that his head must be aching terribly, but he did not show any sign of it. There was grim work on hand, and it had to be attended to. The guy'nor was not the kind of man to grumble at a little pain.

We reached the tunnels at last, and proceeded down them slowly. But there was no sign of any human being. The farther we penetrated, the less chance it seemed that we should find the fugitive Mr. Martin.

At length we came to a place where progress was impossible. The tunnel ended in a blank wall, and there were similar walls on either side.

"He's not here, after all, sir!" exclaimed Tinker.

"I think he is!" said Lee grimly.

He directed the light of his torch upon the ground, and there, quite distinctly, were several fresh bloodstains.

"Phew!" whistled Tinker. "That's obvious enough, anyhow!"

"He must have turned back," I remarked.

"No, Nipper, he didn't turn back," said Nelson Lee. "In a moment you will see our quarry; but I should advise you to stand well back. It is just possible he has a revolver."

Lee bent down low, and then he reached up and pressed a portion of the solid brickwork about half-way up the wall. As he did so there was a kind of dull hammering noise, and a portion of the wall gaped open.

Whiz!

A huge chunk of rock came hurtling out, to smash against the opposite wall. It was followed by another piece, which also struck the stonework harmlessly. Nelson Lee had been wise in crouching low.

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He did not wait for any more missiles to come, but lunged forward with tremendous energy.

Tinker and I rushed up at the same moment, both of us flashing our electric torches. We arrived just in time to see the gov'nor grappling with Mr. Howard Martin. We were ready to help on the spot.

But no help was needed.

Martin Horley—to give the man his real name—was unable to deal with Nelson Lee at close quarters. His left arm hung helplessly by his side, and, after a brief tussle, he was overpowered.

"Lee!" panted Martin harshly. "Nelson Lee! How—how did you get here?"

"You have not been aware of the fact, Mr. Horley, but I have been at St. Frank's almost all the time," said the gov'nor. "Possibly you remember Mr. Simpson Wroth? I was that gentleman!"

The Head nearly choked.

"You—you were Mr. Wroth? I do not believe it!" he panted. "And if you think you can do me any harm, you are mistaken. You will prove nothing against me—nothing."

"That, of course, remains to be seen," said Nelson Lee. "For the present I must request you to come with me. Mr. Lennard, of Scotland Yard, will take you in hand, Mr. Martin Horley."

The Head uttered an exclamation.

"It is easy enough for you to take me now," he exclaimed bitterly. "I am powerless to defend myself."

"So I observe," said Lee. "Let me see your arm—"

"I want no attention from you—"

"Come—don't be foolish," said Nelson Lee sharply. "You have lost enough blood already. Lend me a hand, boys."

Martin's coat was removed, and we then found that his left arm was terribly gashed, although the bone was not broken. He had sustained a serious flesh wound—a wound which would necessitate stitches.

"Horley, I should advise you to be quite frank about everything," said Nelson Lee. "The truth is known—and I have plenty of evidence against you. You are guilty of a robbery for which your brother was convicted, over three years ago. You also intended fleeing from St. Frank's with a considerable amount of stolen property—"

"It is a lie!" snarled Martin.

"Of course, if you prefer to keep up that attitude, I need say no more," said Lee. "It will be the worse for you in the long run, as you ought surely to realize."

Martin said nothing, but followed us out of the dungeon weakly, and in a condition which plainly revealed his utter dejection. He was beaten, completely, and he knew it.

By the time we arrived back at St. Frank's the Head was on the point of collapse and had to be assisted by Nelson Lee.

Lennard was waiting anxiously for us, and the gov'nor handed over the prisoner.

"You won't have any difficulty with your prisoner, Lennard," he remarked.

"Indeed, Martin Horley had to be taken to his study first, where he was revived a little and his wound dressed by Lee. Then he and his brother departed with Lennard for the police station."

Thus it was that the tyrant of St. Frank's made his ignominious exit from the school he had tried to govern with an iron hand—and failed miserably.

CHAPTER 23.

All Secret!

"H^EARD the news?"

Practically everybody was shouting that question in the junior school the next morning. No

copy had made any direct statement, but it was really astonishing how the truth got about.

At all events, the news was known that the headmaster had been arrested, and that he had already been taken away. The juniors were in a ferment about it.

"This means that Dr. Stafford will return—of course," exclaimed Pitt, heartily. "Oh, good business!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"We want him back again!"

"And good riddance to the tyrant!"

The fellows hardly knew what to say. And then there was a fresh wave of excitement caused over the strange appearance of Nelson Lee on the scene.

However, after breakfast, Nelson Lee addressed the whole school in the Big Hall. Briefly, he explained the facts, and reassured everybody that the late headmaster's brother would soon have his freedom, and that Martin would be clapped in gaol.

The school was amazed when it learned that Nelson Lee had been with them for many days past—in the character of Mr. Wrott. A good many of the fellows, in fact, refused to believe it—until, in a humorous moment, Nelson Lee adopted Mr. "Wrott's" tone of voice for a brief space.

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip—hip——"

"Hurrah!"

"We never guessed the truth, Mr.!"

All sorts of shouts rent the air, but Nelson Lee only smiled. There was a feeling in the school of great relief. Everything was coming right. The tyrant had gone—he had made his ignominious exit—and Nelson Lee had returned. Only one thing was necessary

to complete the satisfaction of the whole school. And that was to have Dr. Malcolm Stafford return to his old appointment.

The juniors were particularly keen on that point.

"Is Dr. Stafford coming back, sir?" they roared.

"We want the old Head!"

"We want Dr. Stafford!"

"Hurrah!"

"Please, sir, is there any chance?"

Nelson Lee held up his hand.

"I cannot speak while you are making so much noise," he said. "I sincerely trust that Dr. Stafford will be prevailed upon to return—and I think there is a distinct chance that such will be the case——"

"Hurrah!"

"But you must not count upon it too much," went on Lee. "If possible, I will try to let you know definitely this evening——"

"Oh, good!"

"Dr. Stafford must come back, sir!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors were still excited when they were dismissed. Morning lessons that day were a bit of a fiasco, for the masters could not do much with the boys. It was the reaction after the barring-out, and after the harsh treatment of the late Head.

It was only to be expected.

Everybody was anxious to hear all the details regarding the Head's crime. It was known that he had secreted his brother for some time near the school, and that Robert Horley was quite innocent. It was also known that the Head had attempted to make off with a considerable sum which he had obtained from General Ord-Clayton.

Tinker, of course, took his departure that day, and was glad he had visited the old school.

Nelson Lee had two important announcements to make in the afternoon,

They were announcements which filled everybody with joy.

"Well, boys, I have some news for you," said the governor, addressing the school. "The first item is that General Ord-Clayton has resigned the chairmanship of the Board of Governors——"

"Oh, hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Three groans for the general!"

Nelson Lee listened, smiling in spite of himself.

"I can hardly countenance such a demonstration as this," he said severely. "However, I will say no more if you will keep quiet——"

"Why don't you become the Head, sir?" roared Handforth.

"Oh, good idea!"

"We want you to be Head, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Mr. Lee's the man for us!"

But the gov'nor shook his head.

"No, boys, you are quite wrong," he said. "Moreover, I have much better news for you—news which will please you far more. Dr. Stafford——"

"Hurrah!"

"Dr. Stafford has consented to return——"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Three more cheers!" bawled Handforth.

"Hurrah!"

"When the Head comes we'll raise the roof!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors were doing their utmost to raise the roof already—and even the seniors were cheering as they had seldom cheered before. Everything was turning out all right. As Handforth remarked, everything in the garden was lovely.

There was considerable joy and commotion. Great excitement prevailed when it was learned that Dr. Stafford himself was returning the next day.

"Talk about rosy times!" exclaimed

Pitt, grinning. "This is what comes of taking a firm stand, you know. I give Nipper all the credit for this——"

"Rats!" I said. "Nipper doesn't want it!"

"But it was your idea about the rebellion, and you carried us through to victory," said Pitt. "If it hadn't been for you——"

"Mr. Lee would have put things straight, just the same," I interrupted. "So it doesn't make much difference—only we had a jolly exciting fortnight during the larring-out."

The following afternoon was a red-letter day in the history of St. Frank's.

Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the dear old Head, returned. He was liked by the majority of the boys, for Dr. Stafford was renowned for his kindness, his sympathy, and his understanding.

He was also respected for his sternness, when sternness was required.

He returned unobtrusively, arriving on foot fully two hours before he was expected. The Remove had intended going down to the station in force—and perhaps the Head had been warned of something of this kind. At all events, he entered the Triangle early in the afternoon, while all the fellows were at lessons.

By a piece of luck, Nicodemus Trotwood happened to be glancing out of the window just as the Head entered. Nick looked twice, stared, and then turned an excited face to the Farm.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Trotwood," snapped Mr. Crowell. "how dare you talk?"

"But—but the Head's just come, sir!" gasped Trotwood.

"The Head!" roared the Remove.

"He's just arrived!" exclaimed Trotwood. "He walked in the gateway——"

"Hurrah!"

He was interrupted by a terrific roar which went up. Mr. Crowell did his

attempts to control the Form, but it was a sheer impossibility. Fellows were standing up and cheering, and Mr. Crowell raved in vain.

"Let's go outside and chair him!" howled Handforth.

"Oh, good idea!"

"Come on!"

"Hurrah!"

"Boys — boys!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "How—how dare you? Take your seats at once! Handforth!"

I couldn't help grinning as I watched Mr. Crowell's vain efforts. The Form was out of hand, and a moment later it surged out into the Triangle—and I don't mind admitting that I was one of the first fellows to reach the open air.

The Head was just entering his house, and as the Remove rushed across the Triangle, the Fifth Form came pouring out of the windows of the Fifth Form Room. Such an exhibition of enthusiasm had never before been witnessed at St. Frank's.

Dr. Stafford, looking just the same as ever, stood on the top of his steps, surveying the crowd. For ten minutes the Triangle and the whole school echoed with the cheering.

As soon as there was a lull, somebody started a fresh outburst, and the Head could do nothing but wait. At last, however, the fellows practically winded themselves; then Dr. Stafford held up his hand, and there was silence.

"Boys," exclaimed the Head, in his well-known deep, kindly voice, "I cannot tell you how deeply I appreciate this wonderfully cordial greeting on

your part. Since I have been away I have missed you great——"

"Not a tenth so much as we've missed you, sir!"

"Rather not, sir!"

"St. Frank's hasn't been the same, sir."

"It is good to hear you say that, my lads," said the Head. "I have come back because I have been asked to return, and also because I was anxious to be amongst you again. There have been some evil times during my absence, and I trust that everything will now run smoothly——"

"It's bound to run smoothly with you here, sir!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"For he's a jolly good fellow——"

Somebody started singing, and within ten seconds the whole school had taken up the refrain. It roared out in a terrific burst, and I was afterwards told that the singing was distinctly heard on the outskirts of Bannington. I wasn't very surprised to hear this, for the din was deafening.

Of course, the excitement died down eventually. That evening spreads of the most "gorgeous" nature were held by the dozen. All the tuck in the village was bought up, and double the quantity could have been sold.

And everybody was happy in the knowledge that the school would very soon resume the even tenor of its way. There had been some troublous times in the old school, but everything had panned out happily in the finish, thanks to the rebels of the Remove.



The END



FREAKS AFLOAT!

DID you ever see a rotor ship? You're not likely to have forgotten it, if you did, for she was one of the queerest craft ever seen afloat. Picture a small cargo steamer with a giant liner's funnels rearing up from her decks, and you'll get a good idea of what a rotor ship looked like—hopelessly top-heavy, ready to heel over at the first real "blow" she met.

Not So Crazy!

But appearances were never more deceptive. The stronger the wind, the better the rotor ship stood up to it. The huge, towering funnels were in reality revolving cylinders of light but very strong metal, that caught the wind in just the same way as a sailing ship's canvas.

In fact, the rotor ship went one better; she could utilize the wind in whichever direction it was blowing and add a useful number of knots to her speed. Only two ships of this type were built; luck was against them, and, after a brief try-out they were scrapped. But the rotor ship will be remembered, if only for one thing—it was a floating freak that wasn't half as crazy as it looked.

Nothing like that can be said about most of the other curiosities that have been launched under the name of ships. Most of them had their short but spectacular lives in the forties and fifties of last century, when steamship design was hardly out of its infancy. As an example, there was the Connector, though whether she was one ship or three ships is still something of a mystery. Anyway, her claim to fame was that she had been built in three sections, loosely joined together with hinges, something like a toy snake. D'you get the idea?

Well, her designers thought they did,

in fact, they were quite sure her loosely-joined, free-and-easy lines would enable her to ride comfortably in the roughest weather, gliding over the waves as if she were a sea serpent. Then, on arrival at port with her cargo of coal, she was to be divided into three sections for speedy unloading. • It sounded fine; the ship was built—but then the Connector's owners found themselves up against one little snag. She didn't work.

Floating Pudding Basins!

Then came the famous "cigar" ships, looking like exaggerated submarines, running to a very sharp point fore and aft. The designers' hope was that these bullet-like craft would cut through the ocean at the then staggering speed of 23 knots—but it was just another fond delusion.

With the 'seventies arrived something still more fantastic—the "popoffas." These looked more like floating pudding basins than ships, for they were circular, with six engines each driving its own propeller. Admiral Popoff, their designer, thought he had hit on something absolutely revolutionary in warships—and so he had, for when they came to try the first one out, she spun round and round in the water like a top, and with her engines running full out only made seven knots!

Sea-sickness would be a thing of the past to-day if one inventor's great idea had worked out in practice. "Let the ship roll as much as she likes," he said. "We'll have our passenger saloon swinging free, so that whatever the rest of the ship may be doing, the saloon will always hang upright." Well, they tried it out. The whole saloon, weighing 130 tons, was built separate from the hull and set on gimbals. The effect was terrible. While the ship swung in one direction, the saloon lurched sickeningly in another and far worse one. Whether any of the passengers lasted out the voyage is not on record—but that floating freak never made another trip!

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Printed in England and published on the first Thursday in each month by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 5s. each. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Loch, Limited; and for South Africa, Central News Agency, Limited.