

TYRANT AND SPORT!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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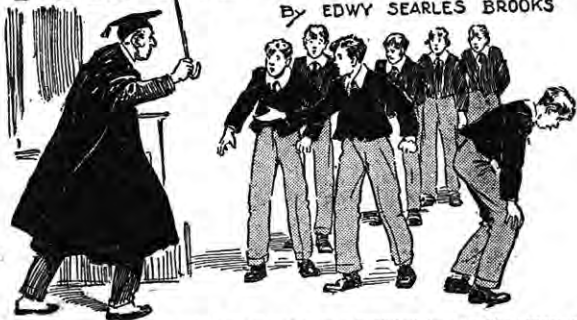
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TYRANT AND SPORT!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



One moment the Head of St. Frank's is a bullying tyrant, the terror of the school; the next, he is his old, benevolent self! What's come over him? Nelson Lee sets himself the task of solving the mystery—a mystery which is to have far-reaching effects at St. Frank's!

CHAPTER 1.

One Football and Two Fellows!

CRASH!

"Oh, my hat!"

Reginald Pitt stared aghast at the window of Dr. Malcolm Stafford's study. The top pane was shattered to atoms, and this was not at all surprising, considering that the football had left Pitt's toe with considerable force. It was most unfortunate, however, that a gust of wind, eddying fiercely round the Ancient House, should have carried the leather so disastrously out of its course.

It was morning, and Reginald Pitt and De Valerie, and Handforth and one or two others had been punting

the football about the Triangle. Strictly speaking, this was against the rules, but most of the masters and prefects winked at the defection.

I happened to be standing on the Ancient House steps, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, my chums of Study C, were with me. Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez, and stared.

"Dear old boys, I'm seriously afraid that Pitt is in for a frightful wiggin'," he observed. "Begad! That window is in a shockin' state—it is really."

"Yes, it looks slightly bent," grinned Watson.

Pitt was still standing his ground—he made no attempt to scuttle off, as many fellows would have done. He

was to blame, and he was quite prepared to stand the racket.

From sheer instinct many juniors had made themselves scarce, and now they were watching from various handy corners—from behind the old chestnuts, and other points of vantage.

The door of the headmaster's house opened, and Dr. Stafford came striding out, a frown upon his brow. The Head was rather a striking figure of a man—tall, well built, perfectly straight, and with a kindly face. His head was covered with iron grey locks of curly hair.

"Pitt!" he exclaimed severely.

"Yes, sir?" said the junior.

"Who kicked that football through my window?"

"I did, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Head, coming towards the Removite. "You kicked the football through my window, Pitt? I cannot possibly believe that it was a deliberate action on your part."

"It wasn't, sir!" said Reginald Pitt quickly. "It was a sheer accident, and I've never been so surprised. You see, sir, I kicked towards the gates, but just at that very second a gust of wind came shooting round the corner, and it caught hold of the football and sent it smashing into your study."

"Quite a plausible explanation, my boy," said the Head dryly. "No doubt it is true, for the wind is certainly very gusty and erratic this morning. Nevertheless, I am greatly annoyed with you, Pitt."

"Yes, sir," said Pitt meekly.

"The fault was yours entirely, and I shall certainly not allow you to put any blame upon the innocent wind," went on Dr. Stafford curtly. "Possibly you are aware of a certain rule, Pitt, which forbids all boys to play football in the Triangle?"

Reginald Pitt looked at his feet.

"Ye-es, sir!" he confessed.

"You are aware of that rule?"

"Of course, sir."

"Then you have absolutely no excuse," declared the headmaster. "You stand before me, Pitt, self-confessed, and guilty of a serious offence. I suppose I ought to take you to my study and give you a severe flogging."

"I—I'll pay for the new pane, sir—"

"Tut—tut—tut!" snapped Dr. Stafford. "Don't be so absurd, young man! I shall not be so harsh as to make you pay for the damage. But I want you to realise that you will be seriously inconveniencing me by this careless act of yours. The weather is cold, and a broken window is certainly not an added comfort to one's study. Furthermore, there are fragments of glass strewn over my desk and papers, and it was only by pure chance that I escaped being cut."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Pitt penitently. "I—I hardly know what to say—"

"Perhaps you'd better say nothing," interrupted the Head, with a slight smile. "There, there, my boy, we won't make a mountain out of a molehill. But let this be a lesson to you for the future—and bear in mind the school regulations. For your breach of rules on this occasion you will write me two hundred lines!"

Pitt looked up in astonishment.

"Thank you, sir!" he ejaculated eagerly.

The Head nodded, and turned towards his doorway. But, just before entering, he looked back once more.

"I will throw the ball out to you," he said. "But don't attempt to kick it about the Triangle any more."

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!" exclaimed Pitt.

A minute later the ball came dropping out, and Pitt seized it, and tucked it under his arm. Then he removed himself as quickly as possible from the scene of his crime. He was at once surrounded by a crowd of fellows.

"Lucky bounder!" exclaimed Handforth. "I thought you were going to

be licked! How many lines did he give you?"

"Two hundred!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"He's a sport!" went on Pitt enthusiastically. "You can't get away from it, you chaps, the Head's a real brick. Two hundred lines for breaking his window and strewing glass all over his study!"

"Well, it's just like him," I said. "The Head always has been kindly and considerate—one of the best. I don't think he could be really harsh, even if he wanted to be. It's not in him."

"But, I say, we shall have to go easy," said Pitt. "I was an ass to kick that ball so hard. On a windy day like this we must avoid punting the giddy leather about in the Triangle."

"Rather," I said. "Well, come on!"

There was plenty of time for a little exercise on the playing field, and so off we went. Handforth remained behind, but this was only because he was in the middle of an argument with Church and McClure.

"Oh, dry up!" said Church, at last. "What does it matter which way the wind was blowing? Pitt broke the window, and there's an end to it."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "But I maintain that if he'd kicked properly, the ball would have gone over towards the shrubbery. Pitt was an ass to—Hi! Come back, you asses!"

Church and McClure, tired of the argument, had walked off. Handforth glared after them, and then he became aware of a soft chuckle. Turning, he saw that Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan, the Indian junior, was near by.

"Well, what are you cackling at?" demanded Handforth tartly. "Who told you to mix in, you—you giddy chunk of chocolate?"

Hussi Khan showed all his white teeth in a dazzling smile.

"I regretfully make the honourable apology if I was of the great rudeness," he observed. "And surely it is only the hen which performs the sound of

cackling? I was merely preposterously amused—"

"Nobody told you to be amused!" snapped Handforth. "I will stick to what I said at the start; Pitt was a fat-head to kick that ball so high. If I'd have kicked it, no window would have been smashed."

Hussi Khan smiled.

"The august Pitt was preposterously upset by the action of the wind," he said. "As you probably observed, the wind swept round the building with extraordinary violence and gentility. Such a gust as that was unexpectedly calculated to lift the honourable football upon its bosom and carry it through the exquisite window of our ridiculous headmaster."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth.

"My dear chap, I can't stay here talking to you, or I shall be in the same place all the morning. You ought to learn shorthand, so that you can say everything by dots and dashes!"

And Handforth stalked off, to avoid any further argument. He was a fairly talkative fellow himself, but Hussie Khan could give him points any day. The Indian junior was a terror when once he got going.

Morning lessons soon commenced, and when the juniors were released at dinner-time they observed that the Head's study window had already been repaired. And the incident was almost forgotten, except by Pitt, who had to write the two hundred lines. However, he didn't mind this much. It was a very light punishment in comparison to what he had anticipated.

During the afternoon the wind dropped, and the weather became dull. There was every sign of rain in the air, but it did not descend. After dark it could do what it liked, but we waited the time immediately after lessons to put in some serious practice on Little Side.

We were particularly keen on football this term, and the Junior Eleven had been doing great things.

We were therefore quite pleased when lessons were over to find that the rain still held off. Watson and Tregellis-West and I sallied out. Watson with the football under his arm. It was the very same ball that Pitt had kicked through the Head's window.

"Here you are, Nipper," said Tommy, as we ran down the Ancient House steps. "Pass it back to me."

He dropped the leather on the ground, and gave it a gentle tap. As we ran along I tapped it back to Watson. He then indulged in a little exhibition of dribbling, and was just on the point of passing to Sir Montie when he was brought up short.

"Watson!"

The voice was cold, sharp, and commanding.

"Eh? Why, what——"

Tommy Watson came to an abrupt halt, and his heart jumped. For Dr. Stafford was striding towards him, very stern and severe. Watson stood quite still. After all, he had done nothing.

"Speaking to me, sir?" he asked.

"You know very well, Watson, that I am speaking to you!" retorted the Head. "I think you are fully aware of the fact that you are breaking one of the school regulations by playing football in the Triangle?"

"But—but I'm not playing football, sir!"

"Don't dare to argue with me!" snapped the Head. "I say you were playing football, and I intend putting a stop——"

"But—but all the fellows do it, sir!" protested Watson. "It's nothing new—ever since I can remember, we've punted a football about in the Triangle without being pulled up."

Dr. Stafford frowned.

"Simply because the masters and prefects have been somewhat lax in their duty, it does not mean to say that you must take advantage of the fact," he exclaimed sternly. "I punished

Pitt this morning for kicking the football through my window, and now I find that you have the audacity to repeat his offence."

"But there's no wind now, sir; it's practically dropped," said Watson. "Besides, I was only dribbling the ball——"

"I have no intention of arguing the matter out with you, Watson," broke in the Head. "You will come with me to my study at once."

Tommy gave a glance round at Sir Montie and me. We returned expressions of sympathy. I was certainly surprised. I had hardly expected the Head to pull Watson up as he had done.

The junior followed Dr. Stafford into his private doorway, and a few moments later they were both in that stately apartment which was regarded with a certain amount of awe by most juniors. The Head's sanctum was a comfortable room, lined with book-cases, with a soft carpet on the floor, luxurious easy chairs, and other comforts. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate.

The Head seated himself at his desk, and gazed across at Watson, who was standing at attention.

"Now, Watson, I intend to have a serious talk with you," said the Head. "I want you thoroughly to understand that I mean to put a stop to this constant breaking of the school rules. By this I do not mean to imply that I shall make an example of you, but I am annoyed by the general behaviour of you junior boys in the Triangle."

"I—I didn't know that we were doing any harm, sir," said Watson.

The Head's eyes suddenly blazed.

"You didn't know!" he shouted. "How dare you make such a ridiculous statement?"

"I—I didn't mean to be ridiculous, sir," stammered Tommy.

"If you answer me back I shall flog you severely!" said the Head harshly.

"Don't dare to trifle with me, sir! I will not stand it—do you hear? I will not stand it! I have suffered enough through being annoyed and irritated!"

Dr. Stafford had risen to his feet, and he came round the desk and towered over Tommy Watson, who was rather startled. He had hardly been expecting such an outburst as this.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he muttered. "I—I didn't mean to trifle, sir!"

"Don't mumble at me—speak up, boy!" shouted the Head, with strange violence. "I am keeping my temper in with difficulty, and if you dare to try me further I shall cane you!"

There was something rather peculiar about the Head's tone. His voice seemed to quiver with hidden fury. And Watson was not the only one who was surprised by this unusual exhibition.

To tell the truth, Dr. Stafford himself was startled.

He had brought Watson into his study merely for the purpose of lecturing him—of pointing out, quietly but firmly, that kicking footballs about in the Triangle must stop. But, somehow or other, the junior's voice irritated Dr. Stafford beyond all measure. But why should it? Even the Head himself didn't know.

And, in spite of himself, he found that he was losing control of his temper. He had a fierce inward desire to seize Watson by the scruff of the neck and beat him—for the sheer pleasure of seeing him in agony.

This indeed, was a startling thing to realise. The Head fought against it. By nature he was kindly and gentle, and for him suddenly to become aware of this change was staggering.

He clenched his fists and held himself in hand, although, vaguely, he felt that the slightest spark would act as a fuse to the explosive bomb within him. Only by a supreme effort did he retain his self-control.

"All right, my boy—all right!" he

said, with forced calmness. "We will not proceed with the matter. You may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Watson, with relief. "I didn't mean to annoy you, sir, and I hope that you will forgive me."

Again the Head's eyes blazed.

"I did not tell you to speak, Watson!" he thundered. "Go at once. Go, before I do you an injury!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Tommy Watson.

That was a very unfortunate remark, but it had been wrung from him by the light which had suddenly leapt into Dr. Stafford's eyes. The words acted like a bombshell upon the Head. They irritated him to such an extent that all his efforts to keep himself within check were of no avail.

The Head uttered a low, inarticulate cry of savage fury. He reached forward, grasped Watson, and the junior gasped with pain at the fierce grip. And he was startled, too.

For the Head's face was distorted with hideous rage.

CHAPTER 2.

On the Carpet!

TOMMY WATSON was like a baby in the convulsive grip of the Head.

What was the meaning of this strange and terrible change which had come upon Dr. Stafford with such appalling abruptness? How was it possible that such a naturally kindly man could behave so savagely?

Tommy Watson was scared out of his wits by this unsuspected exhibition of brutality. And, if Watson had only known it, the Head himself was equally frightened.

He knew well enough that he was acting like a brute—he knew that he was behaving in a manner that he would have been the first to condemn

with bitter scorn and contempt. And yet, in spite of all his efforts—and he fought fiercely to keep control of himself—he could do nothing. Some demon within him had taken full possession of his body.

And then the headmaster hardly knew what he did. He only knew that a fierce, exultant joy was thrilling him. He had this boy in his grasp—and he was about to beat him unmercifully. To the Head's horror he found that the prospect delighted him. Indeed, his emotions were so complex and extraordinary that he hardly knew whether he was sane, or whether madness had come upon him.

"What—what's the matter, sir?" gasped Watson, in a sobbing voice.

"Don't speak to me, boy—don't goad me on!" choked the Head thickly. "By heaven! I will thrash you within an inch of your life! Don't struggle—don't attempt to thwart me!"

But Watson did struggle—he tried to tear himself away with all his strength. Dr. Stafford was like a beast. His voice had changed—his expression had become brutal and revolting.

The junior was terrified. Tommy Watson was no coward, and he was the last fellow in the world to squeal when he had to take punishment. But in his heart he believed that the Head had gone insane. He was in the grip of a madman! And his terror was not so much because of any peril that might come upon himself, but it was rather the terror of suddenly discovering this awful knowledge.

"Let me go—let me go!" shouted Watson fiercely.

The Head laughed with savage glee.

"No, no—not yet!" he muttered softly. "Not yet, Watson! I have not done with you, my boy—I have not finished with you. This shall be a lesson to you not to disobey the school rules again. And it may also teach you the folly of answering me back!"

In spite of his fright, Watson could not help being struck by the Head's words, for, surely, they indicated that he was quite rational? There was no madness about the Head's speech. The Head was himself all right, but some inner demon had taken temporary possession of him.

Swish!

The Head grasped his cane and brought it down with all his strength. It struck Tommy Watson upon the legs, and he jumped wildly. But the only sound he uttered was a sharp hiss as he drew his agonised breath in.

"Now this will teach you!" said the Head, with tense satisfaction.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Again and again the cane descended—fiercely and recklessly. It smote Watson upon the back, on the arms, and upon his thighs. The pain was considerable, and each cut was like the sear of a red-hot iron.

"Oh!" panted Tommy, at last. "Oh! Stop, sir! I—I can't stand it!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The thrashing unmercifully proceeded. Racked with pain in every limb, fighting and gasping for breath, but still uttering no cry, Tommy Watson sank wearily to the floor.

And then Dr. Stafford staggered back, and flung the cane from him. He was gulping for breath, and he suddenly uttered a hoarse cry of horror. He swept a hand across his brow, and stared at Watson dazedly.

"What have I done?" he muttered brokenly, his voice hoarse and strained. "Heaven above, what have I done?"

He swayed as he stood, and then sank back into a chair. His mind was filled with horror. All in a second, it seemed, that awful impulse had gone from him. He had returned to his real self again. That mysterious influence within him had faded away—had lost its power.

But yet, even while Dr. Stafford was thinking in this way, he somehow knew

that the slightest draught would again fan that wild spark into flame. Even when he looked at Tommy Watson he felt the longing come over him to seize the boy and thrash him afresh.

But it was too awful for words—too terrible to be really true.

Tommy Watson stirred, swayed up into a sitting posture and looked round. His face was filled with pain, and his cheeks were very white. Never before had Tommy Watson received such an unmerciful thrashing.

He had been too dazed towards the finish to know whether it had actually finished or not. But now the numbness of his limbs was departing—to be replaced by a smarting agony which would not be denied. Try as he would Tommy Watson could not prevent his features from twisting. And he looked over towards the Head with a scared, fierce gaze.

At that moment Watson hated Dr. Stafford as he had never hated any man in his life before. He regarded him as a brute—a tyrant—a wild beast! And, mixed with Watson's other emotions, was one of blank amazement. He had always regarded the Head as a man of kindly nature. Even in his floggings, Dr. Stafford had never been harsh or cruel.

But this was appalling—too terrible to contemplate.

Watson did not wait for the Head to dismiss him.

His one thought was to get out of the study—to get beyond Dr. Stafford's reach—and so, pulling himself to his feet, he staggered slightly, and then moved towards the door.

Every movement brought fresh agony to him, and he instinctively felt that if the Head touched him again, he would attack his persecutor with every remaining ounce of strength.

"Stay!" exclaimed the Head hoarsely.

Watson grasped the door-handle and turned it.

"Do you hear me, Watson?" came

Dr. Stafford's cold voice. "Stay here! I command you to halt—"

Watson wrenched open the door and tore himself out, and as he pelted down the passage at a swaying run, he heard the headmaster thunder across the study. A wild cry of rage came to Watson's ears.

He didn't look round. He didn't turn.

But at last, when he arrived in the Remove passage, he slackened down and glanced behind him. There were other fellows within call here, and if the Head came he would be safe.

But Dr. Stafford did not come.

Just then the door of Study D opened, and Edward Oswald Handforth emerged. He was in a hurry, for he turned sharply down the passage and was about to break into a run, when he caught sight of Watson. Handforth came to an abrupt halt.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated.

He continued to stare, and Watson said nothing.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth. "You're as pale as a ghost, by George! Aren't you feeling well, Watson? I say, pull yourself together, you ass!"

"I—I'm all right!" muttered Watson. "Anyhow, I shall be soon. I—I'd like a glass of water."

Handforth looked alarmed, and just then Pitt and Jack Grey appeared.

"Quick—come here!" shouted Handforth. "This fathead's ill, or something! He's going to have a fit, I believe."

"I—I tell you I shall be all right soon!" panted Watson. "I'm not going to have a fit, and there's nothing wrong with me. Where's Nipper? I want to speak to him."

"Why, he's out in the Triangle," said Pitt. "I think he's waiting for you. Great Scott, you're looking jolly seedy and as white as a sheet! Feeling out of sorts?"

"I'll explain later," said Watson dully. "Let's go and find Nipper first."

"All right, I'll hurry on and get hold of him in the Triangle. You follow quietly, old son."

A moment later Grey found me waiting just against the Ancient House steps. I was with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and we were both wondering what had happened to Tommy Watson to delay him so long.

"I say, Nipper, Watson's taken queer," said Grey, as he hurried up.

"Taken queer?" I repeated, staring.

"Yes; he looks awfully bad!" exclaimed Grey. "He's as pale as a ghost, and his voice is all funny. He's in the Remove passage now with Handforth and some of the chaps. He says he wants you particularly. He is coming out now."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "This is shockin', dear old boy! I'm frightfully concerned to hear that Tommy is unwell."

When Watson appeared, looking decidedly groggy, he tried to recover his composure.

And he certainly was feeling a lot better. The acute smarting was dying down, leaving only a dull, aching pain, and a little colour was returning to his cheeks. A glass of cold water had revived him.

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth. "The poor chap's gone dotty, I think. We've asked him to sit down six times, but he won't take any notice. He says he'd rather stand up."

"What's wrong, old son?" I asked concernedly.

"I—I've been through the very dickens of a time!" replied Watson huskily.

"Where?"

"In the Head's study."

"He didn't lam you, did he?"

"The worst licking I've ever had!" replied Watson quietly.

"But what on earth for?" I asked blankly. "He gave Pitt two hundred lines for breaking his window with a football, so he couldn't possibly give

you more than fifty for just punting the ball about in the Triangle."

"That—that's what I thought," muttered Watson. "But he went mad, I think. Oh, my goodness! I've never been so scared in all my life. I—I can see him now, staring at me!"

And Tommy shuddered, in spite of himself. We all looked at him curiously, quite unable to understand. There was something very queer here.

"Scared?" I repeated. "What were you scared of?"

"The Head."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" protested Handforth. "Nobody's ever scared of the Head; he's such a good old sort."

"Of course he is!" agreed Pitt readily.

"Good old sort!" echoed Tommy Watson bitterly. "He's a beast, a brute, a— a wild animal!"

"Here, steady!" I protested. "You mustn't talk about the Head like that, Tommy!"

"But he is—and worse!" said Watson fiercely. "He's a tyrant—a bully. He slashed into me like a savage!"

"Oh, you're potty!" exclaimed Pitt. "Don't talk rot like that, Watson. The Head's not a bully, and he's not the kind of man to act in a cruel way—"

"Don't you call this cruel?" interrupted Watson harshly. "Don't you call this the work of a beast?"

He pulled up the left sleeve of his coat, and there, to our horror, we saw several ugly-looking weals. The man who had inflicted those marks was an inhuman wretch.

CHAPTER 3.

The Science Master's Advice!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST uttered a cry of horror.

"Dear old boy!" he protested. "This—this is appallin'! You are not suggestin' that the Head caused those shockin' weals?"

"Yes, I am!" said Tommy Watson grimly.

"But it's impossible!" said Pitt. "Why, somebody's been slashing into you with fearful force. The Head would never do a thing like that, and you can't make me believe it!"

"Rather not!" said Handforth.

Tommy Watson was feeling stronger now, and the scepticism of the juniors revived him even more.

"Come to the study and I'll show you some more," he said quietly; and we all trooped in to our study.

"Help me off with my coat, Nipper; I'm too sore to manage it alone," said Watson.

Pitt and I complied, and then Tommy requested us to pull up his shirt. We did so, revealing his bare back. We almost recoiled with horror, for his back was livid with terrible bruises and weals.

"My hat!" I gasped. "This—this is terrible!"

"Awful!" said Grey.

"I—I've never seen anything like it!" muttered McClure.

The fellows were silent while we tenderly replaced the coat. I mentally resolved to take Watson to the dormitory almost at once, so that I could rub his sores with soothing ointment; but at the moment we were all anxious and eager to hear how these terrible marks had been made.

"My only hat!" said Grey. "Whoever's done this is a bullying cad, right enough! What are you going to do, Watson? You ought to complain to the Head. He'll skin the chap who whacked you like this!"

"Don't you believe what I say?" demanded Watson hotly. "The Head did this himself. I've never been so staggered in all my life!"

"But it's almost beyond belief!" exclaimed Grey.

"Well, I believe it, anyway," I said quietly. "Watson isn't a fellow to spin a yarn, you chaps. But there's something behind it—something beyond

our understanding. I want to get to the bottom of it."

"And so do we!" said Pitt grimly.

"If you'll let me do a bit of talking, I'll tell you what happened," said Watson. "No; I won't sit down. I don't feel up to it. The Head took me into his study and jawed on about breaking the regulations. That was nothing; I was expecting it. Then he seemed to get a bit fierce, but it passed off and he told me to go."

"He dismissed you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what then?"

"I thanked him, and that seemed to get his rag out, for some unearthly reason," went on Watson. "Anyhow, he grabbed hold of me, and his face was like a demon's. It was the Head's face all right, but there was an expression of absolute cruelty and savagery on it. I hope I'll never see another face so distorted with awful brutality!"

"I say, draw it mild!" protested Church.

Watson looked at him steadily.

"However strong the terms I use, I can't possibly express to you in words the horror of the whole thing!" he exclaimed. "I wish to goodness somebody had been there to see it. The Head turned into a wild animal!"

To say that we were astounded is putting it very mildly. To hear such news of our beloved Head was a tremendous bombshell. Dr. Stafford was honoured and respected throughout the school. It was generally acknowledged that he was the kindest headmaster who had ever ruled the destinies of the famous old school.

To hear that he had acted as Watson had described was almost beyond belief, and yet we couldn't doubt the stolid Tommy. He wasn't the sort of fellow to exaggerate or draw upon his imagination. In nearly everything he was as blunt as they make 'em, and always to the point.

I glanced round at the juniors. They were all looking serious and concerned,

and they were gazing at Tommy Watson in an awe-stricken manner as we made our way to Study C.

"Poor old Tommy!" I said softly. "You've been through it awfully. I'm sorry, old fellow—terribly sorry!"

"Begad! We all are, dear old boy!" "I should think so!" added Pitt.

"We've been so surprised that we haven't had time to sympathise. But I reckon somebody ought to be made to pay, even if it's the Head himself."

"You ought to write to your people about it!" said Church bluntly.

Watson shook his head.

"I won't do that—I don't want to stir up a pile of trouble," he said. "Perhaps the Head was worried about something, or he might be going dotty. I don't know. Anyhow, he seemed to go raving mad while he was whopping into me."

"Let's have a look at those weals again," said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to stand and jaw—I'm all for action. But even if I get the sack I'm going to make the rotter pay!"

Watson lifted up his sleeve again, and while Handforth was examining the arm, Tommy suddenly noticed that somebody was standing in the doorway, for the door itself had been carelessly left open.

The somebody was Mr. Hugh Trenton, the science master of St. Frank's.

"Anything wrong, boys?" he asked cheerily.

"Nunno—nothing much, sir," said Tommy Watson.

Mr. Trenton entered the study. He was a fairly youngish man, upright, and pleasant-faced. He had not been at St. Frank's very long, but he was quite popular with all the fellows. He had a free-and-easy style, and made it a habit to mix with the juniors, interest himself in their work and pleasure, and generally make himself agreeable. He was what the juniors called a "pally" master.

"Nothing much?" he repeated. "Now then, my boys, that yarn won't wash—

—not with me, anyway. I saw some marks on that arm of yours, Watson. Who's been lamming into you with a cane?"

"Oh, it's all right, sir!" said Watson uncomfortably. "I'd rather not say anything, if you don't mind."

"Well, that's a pity," said Mr. Trenton. "I don't want you chaps to think that I've been eavesdropping, or anything like that. But as I was coming along the passage I happened to hear something about the Head. Do you mean to tell me that Dr. Stafford thrashed you like this, Watson?"

"Oh, well, if you know, sir, there's no sense in my keeping quiet!" said Tommy. "Yes, sir, the Head did this."

And, briefly, he explained the circumstances.

"Amazing!" said Mr. Trenton gravely. "I can't help believing, young 'un, that you are exaggerating a bit. But that can't be possible, either, because those weals speak for themselves. It's rather terrible, and I shouldn't like a story of this sort to get about too much."

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Handforth. "I'm going to tell everybody; I'm blessed if I'll stand by silent while—"

"But you don't realise, my dear chap, what it means," interrupted the science master. "From all I've heard, the Head is a kindly man, and not the sort to ill-treat a boy."

"He's got the finest reputation of any headmaster, sir," I said quietly.

"That's what I thought," said Mr. Trenton. "Well, kids, don't be too harsh with him because of this; it seems to be his first lapse. Goodness knows it's not my place to discuss the Head. But it seems to me that Dr. Stafford might have been in a fit of temper. Don't make too big a song about it, but just wait and see how things go on. That's my advice."

Pitt looked at him warmly.

"You're a brick, sir," he said. "It's splendid of you to talk like that, but it

really depends upon Watson himself. I'm not quite sure what I should do if I had been treated like he has."

Watson sighed.

"I shan't say much—what's the good?" he exclaimed dully. "You can bet I don't feel particularly amiable towards the Head. At the same time, I wouldn't dream of complaining to the governors, or anything like that. Perhaps we'd better let it pass."

"You good-natured ass!" growled Handforth. "The man who slashed into you like that ought to be horse-whipped!"

"My dear Handforth, you can't go and horsewhip the Head," said Mr. Trenton dryly. "There's only one course to take—and that is to complain to the governors. And I know Watson won't do anything of that sort. To begin with, it wouldn't do any good, and, besides, it's quite likely that the Head himself will make amends in some way when he cools down."

There was no doubt that the fellows were impressed with the science master's generous attitude. But, try as I would, I could not help vaguely feeling that Mr. Trenton was not absolutely sincere. Why I should have this idea I don't know, because the science master was everything that could be desired, cheerful, friendly, free-and-easy and altogether likeable.

But the idea stuck—and I couldn't get rid of it.

Mr. Trenton went off after a few minutes, then I tenderly took hold of Watson's arm, and led him towards the door.

"Come along—upstairs!" I said softly. "We've got to attend to you, my son. We can do some more talking afterwards."

"I'm all right!" growled Watson.

"No you're not, and you've got to come."

Tommy was not feeling strong enough to resist, and we got him out into the passage, and then along to the lobby. We were hoping that we

should not be stopped by anybody. But it was fate which brought Nelson Lee along at that very moment. The famous schoolmaster detective noticed on the instant that something was amiss. He fixed his gaze upon Watson.

"Dear me! What is this?" he asked kindly. "Watson! Not unwell, surely—not our sturdy Watson?"

"It's nothing, sir," said Tommy hastily.

"But it is something, Watson, as I can plainly see," said Nelson Lee.

"Good gracious! What is that mark upon your leg?"

And then, of course, the truth had to come out. Nelson Lee listened with an incredulous expression in his eyes as we told him. Indeed, I had very seldom seen the guv'nor express such amazement.

"But this is extraordinary!" he exclaimed at length. "I can only assume that Dr. Stafford was labouring under a delusion, Watson. He must have imagined that your offence was far greater than it actually was."

"Don't you believe me, sir?" asked Watson.

"Certainly I do."

"Then you're wrong about what you just said, sir!" exclaimed Tommy. "The Head wasn't under any delusion. Why, he told me to go. And then just because I said a few words he turned into a wild beast!"

"Come, Watson—"

"It's true, sir, absolutely true!"

"Are you sure that you didn't provoke Dr. Stafford?"

"Quite sure."

"You said nothing cheeky or disrespectful?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"And yet the Head flew into an overpowering rage?"

"I don't know whether you can call it rage, sir," said Watson. "I've never seen anything like it before. I believe he'd have murdered me if I'd stayed. He called me back, but I bunked; I was scared out of my wits. I heard him

rush to the door, and he made an awful cry."

"And what then?"

"I don't know, sir. He went back into his study, I suppose," said Watson. "I came along the passage, to join the other chaps; I thought I should be safer. Oh, I do wish you'd see the Head, sir, and find out if there's anything wrong!"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"What precisely do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Well, sir, I've got half an idea that the Head went out of his mind," replied Watson. "And yet that can't be right, either, because he knew what he was doing, and he knew why he was lamming into me."

"It is all very mysterious and unaccountable," said Nelson Lee. "And I want you boys to keep as quiet as possible about this. It would be appalling if the whole school got to know about it. I have no doubt, Watson, that your own feelings towards Dr. Stafford are bitter and—"

"I don't know, sir," interrupted Watson. "I've always respected the Head very much. In fact, I've looked upon him as the best headmaster a school could possibly have. So I'm not going to judge him too harshly because he let himself go for once."

"You're too jolly good-natured," growled Handforth.

Nelson Lee was just about to speak when Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy, hove into view. He quickened his pace as he saw Nelson Lee. And when he came up he was looking somewhat scared.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "Can I have a word, sir?"

"What is it, Tubbs?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why, sir, the 'Ead would like to see you in his study at once, sir," replied the page-boy. "It's most important, says the 'Ead, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Very well, Tubbs, I will lose no time," he said. "I must leave you now, boys; but I will see you again, Watson."

And Nelson Lee hastened off. We gazed after him for a moment, and then turned our attention upon Tubbs. But we didn't need to question the page-boy. He was only too eager to talk.

"I say, young gents, I dunno what's come over the 'Ead!" he whispered confidentially. "He's looking something queer, I can tell you."

"How do you mean—queer?" I asked.

"I dunno; he scared me," said Tubbs in an awed voice. "Rang for me, he did, and when I got in 'is study he was looking as pale as a sheet of paper. 'Go and fetch Mr. Lee,' he says. And so I come along."

"Was the Head angry?" I asked.

"Lor', no, Master Nipper," replied Tubbs. "Not what you might call angry, but sort of irritable and impatient-like. And he don't look well, neither. There's somethin' strange-looking about him."

We couldn't get much more out of Tubbs, and we led Tommy Watson upstairs to be attended to. And, in the meantime, Nelson Lee arrived at Dr. Stafford's study. He tapped, and walked in.

CHAPTER 4.

His Second Self!

DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD looked up sharply as Nelson Lee entered.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I am glad you have come so promptly—very glad!" he exclaimed with trembling voice. "I fear there is something wrong with me—something very wrong. I need your advice."

Nelson Lee regarded the Head critically.

"I trust it is nothing actually

serious?" he said quietly. "You certainly look somewhat pale, Dr. Stafford, and I judge that you have been recently labouring under some powerful emotion."

"Sit down, Mr. Lee—please sit down!" said the Head, motioning Lee to a chair. "One moment, though—just one moment. May I trouble you to get me a small glass of brandy from the sideboard? I think it would brace me up."

"Certainly!" said Nelson Lee.

He fetched the brandy, and Dr. Stafford sipped it at first, and then gulped it down. This was the first time that Nelson Lee had ever seen the headmaster partake of spirits. It was a most unusual occurrence.

"Now, Mr. Lee, I want to take you into my confidence. I want to explain what has occurred in this study. I am staggered—I fear that I am going out of my mind. For I have committed an unpardonable crime."

"Dear me!" said Nelson Lee. "You are speaking very harshly about yourself, Dr. Stafford—"

"And with reason," interrupted the Head. "You will agree with me, Mr. Lee, that I have acted as no normal human being could possibly act. And I feel weak and ill with the horror of it all."

Nelson Lee again gave the Head a critical glance. There was no sign of anger here—no animal-like ferocity, such as Tommy Watson had described. Lee did not disbelieve the junior, but he certainly had an idea that Watson had exaggerated.

"Please tell me what is worrying you," said Lee quietly.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Lee, because I feel that you might be able to understand—that you can possibly help me," said the headmaster. "In many ways you are as skilled in medical science as any doctor. That is why I am anxious to have your opinion."

"You flatter me, Dr. Stafford," said the detective.

"No, no—that is not my intention," denied the Head. "I will be blunt—I will not spare myself. Less than half an hour ago I had a junior boy in my room here—Watson, of the Remove. Mr. Lee, I treated that boy as only an inhuman brute would treat a dog. I caned him until I was exhausted—until he fell to the floor, white and drawn with agony."

Nelson Lee's face hardened somewhat.

"I am astounded that you should say this, Dr. Stafford," he exclaimed quietly.

"There is one thing I want to ask, Mr. Lee—have you seen Watson?"

"Yes, I have."

The Head stepped forward.

"Tell me," he said eagerly. "Is the lad very bad?"

"He is able to walk, and I do not think he is at all injured," said Nelson Lee. "But there is not the slightest doubt that he has been brutally treated. I am staggered, Dr. Stafford, that you should tell me you have treated Watson in this manner. It is almost beyond belief."

"I caned him until I was no longer capable of wielding," said the headmaster. "To tell you that I am grieved and ashamed is but a feeble attempt to express my emotions."

The situation was somewhat delicate, and Nelson Lee was rather at a loss for a moment. He therefore remained silent.

"I have told you the worst—I have made my confession," went on the Head. "And now, Mr. Lee, I will tell you the rest. I flogged this boy—without reason and without mercy. But I performed this basely cruel act against my own will—against my own inclinations."

"The whole thing seems to be very strange and complex," commented Lee.

"Strange is not the word, Mr. Lee—

and I fear that my brain must be giving way," said Dr. Stafford quietly. "Yet that is an extraordinary thing, for this morning I was feeling in far better health than usual—and now, except for a slight faintness, I am just myself."

"How did this remarkable outburst commence?"

"I do not exactly know—but I was exceedingly irritable during the afternoon," replied the Head. "I don't know why I should have been, because there was really nothing to irritate me. I was angry with myself for being so touchy and bad-tempered. And so I went for a short walk. I had just arrived back when I met Watson in the Triangle. The boy was kicking a football about—which, as you know, is contrary to the strict rules of the school. However, in ordinary circumstances, I should never have noticed this innocent breach."

"But this evening, I gather, you felt abnormal in some way?"

"Precisely—precisely!" said the Head quickly. "That is the exact word, Mr. Lee—I was abnormal. And I stopped Watson and commanded him to come with me into my study. Somehow or other I felt that I wanted to talk to him, and I had an uncontrollable desire to lay my hands upon the lad and punish him then and there."

"But, in your heart, you had no desire to harm him?"

"None whatever," said the Head. "When he was in my study I tried in vain to keep myself in complete control. But, strangely enough, his very words seemed to goad me on to an excess of violence. Heaven alone knows why they should have done, because the boy was submissive and respectful."

"Why, then, did you act in such a way?"

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Lee—I can give you no plausible explanation of my conduct!" confessed Dr. Stafford

humbly. "I can only tell you what I felt—what I suffered. I told Watson to go, and he made some remark to me—quite innocent—and an intense and overpowering desire to seize him and thrash him came over me. It was not my own will—in some vague way I knew that a demon within me was guiding my brain."

"It is all very peculiar," said Lee, frowning.

"It seems so to you, and I fear that this explanation of mine seems weak and paltry," explained the Head. "It must sound like the feeble excuse of a brute who has realised his own fault. But that is not the case, Mr. Lee. I fought against that desire for cruelty. But it was no good. My will-power was gone, and I grasped Watson and held him."

"And that strange influence was still at work?"

"It was stronger than ever," replied the Head. "A fierce, horrible joy took possession of me as I felt my fingers grasp the lad's shoulder. And then, before I could attempt to control myself, I was beating him—hitting him again and again with every ounce of my strength. Even while I was doing this I knew that I was a blackguard and a scoundrel. But I couldn't hold my hand—I couldn't check myself. Then, exhausted and surfeited with this bestial orgy, I staggered away."

"H'm! Peculiar—very, very peculiar!"

"And that is all I can tell you, Mr. Lee," concluded Dr. Stafford weakly. "I tried to stop the boy from leaving the room—and I am indeed thankful that he took no heed of my commands. I tremble to think of what might have occurred if he had come back in response to my order."

"And after he had gone?"

"I lay in my chair and recovered my breath. And, in some subtle way, I returned to my normal attitude," said the Head. "It appeared, Mr. Lee, as

though a second self came to the fore. My own personality was obscured—obliterated. And in its place there stood forth this harsh brute of a being. It was me—all that is bad in me—with my good qualities dulled into inaction. But now I am myself, and I pray that I may never have another such experience."

"You have given me an interesting problem, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee quietly. "In one or two minor details your story reminds me of the case of a man who was under the influence of hypnotism."

"Good heavens! You do not suggest—"

"No, no! That is impossible," said Nelson Lee. "If you had been under any such influence, Dr. Stafford, you would have remembered nothing of your actions afterwards. There is no trace of hypnotism here. But I am nevertheless convinced that some evil influence was at work. How this influence affected you, or where it emanated from, are questions which I cannot hope to answer at this early stage of my investigation. However, you may be quite sure that I shall do my utmost to arrive at a solution of the mystery."

"And in the meantime," asked the Head, "what is the school thinking of me? What will all the boys say when Watson explains how harshly and cruelly I treated him? What can they say?" he added bitterly. "I shall be condemned—and justly."

"I hardly think it is so bad as that, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "Only a few boys know of what happened—and they, I feel sure, will keep it completely to themselves. Indeed, they have promised me that such will be the case."

"I am relieved to hear that—intensely relieved," said the Head. "And yet it is not right—it is not just. Why should this brutal crime of mine be hushed up? Why should I be excused for my terrible conduct?"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"Come, come, Dr. Stafford, there is no reason why we should make too much of it," he said, smiling. "As I have said, I am convinced that you are not responsible—and, that being so, I will assist you, and do all that I can. Do not worry too much, and take my advice—go to bed at once."

And, a few minutes later, Nelson Lee took his departure. But the Head did not go to bed. He sat there in his study, in front of the crackling fire. He gazed into the burning embers, and his face was grave and troubled.

Little did he imagine that this was only just the start of the strange events which were soon to take place at the old school.

CHAPTER 5.

The Man in the Fog!

"FOGGY!" exclaimed Handforth grumpily. "What rotten weather, if you like! We might just as well be in London, with all this murk and fog and drizzle. It's enough to give anybody the hump!"

He was standing by the window in Study D, gazing out into the blanket of inky thick, foggy drizzle which enshrouded the Triangle. It was rather late in the evening, and things were quiet in the Remove passage.

Church and McClure were just finishing their prep, and Handforth had been puzzling his wits over a short story which he was contributing to my own little school magazine. Whether Handforth's contribution would ever be published was quite another question. So far, his literary outpourings had been singularly prolific—and singularly awful. The only fellow who couldn't see this was Handforth.

"Never mind the weather," said Church, looking up. "It's jolly cosy in here, and there's no need to grumble. I wonder how Watson's getting on?"

"Oh, he's all right," said Handforth.

"I was in Study C just now, and he's a lot better, doing his prep, I think. But I'm not going to think about that business now—there's something more important on hand."

As a matter of fact, Tommy Watson was a very great deal better. After my treatment he bucked up, and his pains decreased. He was a sturdy beggar, and within two or three days he would be quite himself."

"Fat lot of good having study-mates," went on Handforth. "You chaps are about as much use as wooden statues."

"What's biting you now?" asked McClure.

"Nothing's biting me, you fathead!" snapped Handforth. "But I'm just starting a ripping boxing story—a regular stunner. In fact, it'll be the best boxing story that's ever been written!"

"Well, of course, there's nothing like modesty!" observed Church.

"There's no need for a genius to be modest!" said Handforth. "I'm not boasting, of course, but I've discovered that I'm a perfect terror when it comes to writing."

"You are!" said Church.

Sarcasm was lost upon Handforth.

"That's just what I said," he agreed. "A perfect terror, my sons. I didn't even realise it until I started writing. And then I found that I could reel off the most dramatic stuff by the yard. Of course, I could write these stories and get them published in the best London magazines—but I don't want to take my talent away from the school!"

Church and McClure tried hard not to smile. Handforth wasn't actually bragging—whatever his faults, he wasn't a boaster by nature. He really and truly thought that he could do these things, and he was stating them as a matter of fact.

"If you're so jolly smart at that sort of business why do you want any help

from us?" asked McClure pointedly. "We don't claim to be genial asses!"

"What?"

"Geniuses, I mean!" added McClure hastily.

"Even if you did claim it, nobody would believe you!" said Handforth tartly. "What I want to get at is this. In my story there's a champion boxer—a young kid in the Third. He is pushed along by a giddy promoter who is a bit of a swindler. And this kid is booked to fight Joe Louis for the world's championship."

"And I suppose he wins it?" grinned Church.

"Of course he does—he knocks Joe Louis flying," explained Handforth. "The kid's only twelve, but that's a detail. I'm making him a marvellous boxer—"

"He must be marvellous, too!" chuckled McClure.

"Well, he's something like me!" explained Handforth modestly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling fatheads—"

"Dash it all, Handy, that's going a bit too far!" said McClure. "Why, you can't box half as well as Churchy. You may be a jolly good fighter when it comes to slamming, but taking boxing as an art—a science—Church can show you a good few points."

"You—you pitiful ass!" snorted Handforth.

"My dear chap, it's true—you can't deny it," said McClure. "Hang it all, give credit where credit is due. Church couldn't knock you out, any more than he could knock a house over. But at an exhibition of real boxing he could show you many points. I'm not making an idle statement—you can prove it just when you like."

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"I'll jolly well prove it now!" he roared.

"Here, steady on!" gasped Church, backing away. "This is nothing to do

with me. What the dickens did you start him off for, Clurey?"

"Do be sensible, Handy," put in McClure quickly. "I didn't say that Church could fight you. Fighting's different to boxing. You're heavier than he is, and not in the same class."

"Huh! You're dotty!" snapped Handforth. "I'll tell you what. I'm not going to let this thing stand as it is. We'll soon put it to the test properly. Come over to the gym, and we'll shove on the gloves and get some of the chaps to act as judges—there's bound to be a few there."

"Right!" said McClure promptly. "Are you game, Church?"

"Of course," said Church.

Handforth stared.

"Come on—we'll soon settle this!" he said grimly.

The three juniors donned their caps and sallied out. They went along the passage, through the lobby, and then out into the Triangle. The fog was certainly very thick. Wreathing billows of it swirled across the doorway, and it was impossible to see the lights of the College House through the murk. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and all ordinary sounds were deadened.

"My hat!" said Church. "It's like pea soup!"

"Doesn't taste like it!" grunted McClure.

It was a sea fog which had come up from the coast during the evening. The juniors wended their way over the damp Triangle in the direction of the College House. They seemed to be walking in a world of their own, but they knew their way, and could have found the gymnasium blindfold.

And, just as they were opposite the old chestnuts a little puff of wind came along and cleared the fog for a moment. The trees stood out clearly, and were then swallowed up again. But during that brief spell the juniors

saw something which rather surprised them.

Standing against one of the old trees was a figure—the cloaked figure of a man!

There was no mistaking it. He had moved slightly, probably in an attempt to hide himself in the fog. He was certainly not a member of St. Frank's. He wore a strange cloak, and his soft felt hat was drawn over his eyes. Handforth came to an abrupt halt.

"Did you see him?" he whispered tensely.

"Yes; who was it?"

"Somebody who oughtn't to be here," replied Handforth. "What does he mean by lurking about the Triangle? I'll bet he's a burglar—waiting for everybody to go to bed!"

"Oh, rats!" said Church. "You always were a chap to imagine things."

"I'm going to have a look into this!" said Handforth. "If the man's O.K. he'll be able to give an account of himself. But it's thundering fishy—that's all I can say. If he's come on real business he wouldn't lurk over there amongst the trees. And even if he isn't a burglar he might be a bookie, or some scallywag of that sort—waiting to have a word with Fullwood, or Kenmore of the Sixth. We'll touch him up!"

Handforth wasted no further time, but ran swiftly towards the trees, with Church and McClure in close attendance. They arrived, and Handforth nearly drove his nose into one of the trees before he could pull up.

There was a movement near by, and a shadowy figure hurried off.

"There he is!" shouted Handforth. "This way!"

He ran sharply, and could just see the dim figure moving in the fog ahead. Handforth increased his pace, and grasped the stranger's shoulder. But his hand was shaken off, and the man plunged blindly on.

All three juniors were excited by now. The very fact that the fellow had fled proved that he was not there on legitimate business. And Handforth & Co. were so close behind that there was hardly any possibility of their quarry getting away. More than once Handforth got hold of him, only to lose his grasp again.

They went charging through the fog. And then something happened which the juniors had been half-expecting. Their sense of direction told them that they were making towards the shrubbery, behind which lay the monastery ruins. And suddenly the stranger went plunging wildly into a thick mass of bushes. He had not known they were there until it was too late to pull himself up.

And so great was his speed that he crashed right through the first bush without losing his balance. Handforth & Co. crashed after him. It was unfortunate that Edward Oswald should have fallen over just then, his ankle catching upon a broken branch. Church toppled over his back and McClure charged into the pair of them. And by the time they extricated themselves there was no sign or sound of the stranger.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Where—what— You—you blundering asses!" he roared. "We've lost him now—and it's all your fault!"

"Our fault!" yelled Church.

"Of course!"

"You—you—"

"Oh, it's no good arguing—that won't do any good!" interrupted Handforth. "Didn't you come blundering over me after you'd tripped me up?"

"Who tripped you up?"

"You did!"

"Why, you chump!" shouted Church. "You fell over that bush, and we stumbled over you. It was your fault, Handy, and it's like your nerve to accuse us. It was a sheer

accident, so what's the good of talking? The man's gone, and we can't hope to find him in this soup!"

"We'll jolly well try to, anyhow," said Handforth doggedly.

They pressed on, skirting round the bush. And just then Handforth remembered that he carried a pocket electric torch. He had forgotten it until this moment. As he had explained to his chums, a detective never went out without an electric torch. And as Handforth considered himself a detective, he was naturally well supplied.

He jerked out the electric lamp, and switched it on. A bright beam of light shot out, but the rays were only cast back by the fog, and the light hardly penetrated more than four or five feet.

Handforth & Co. went through the shrubbery, and then continued their investigations among the old monastery ruins. But, after spending ten minutes at this job, even Handforth realised that it was a sheer waste of good time. The mysterious stranger had easily given his pursuers the slip, aided by the friendly mist.

"Oh, well, it's no good!" growled Handforth. "Still, it's rotten, all the same. We shall never know who that chap was, or why he was lurking in the Triangle. And I'd have given a quid to find out. It might have been a real case this time, my sons!"

"Let's get back," said Church, shivering. "Ugh! This fog's as cold as ice!"

They wended their way through the ruins, and then back through the shrubbery, and past the bush which had been the main cause of the trouble. Handforth still had his electric torch going.

"Hold on!" said Church suddenly. "What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I just saw something glinting in that bush."

"Glinting?"

"Never heard the word before?"

asked Church sarcastically. "Just shove the light on that bush again, and you'll see what I mean. I don't suppose it's anything important, but you never know; and you're always searching for clues."

"Blessed waste of time!" growled Handforth.

He directed the light of his torch upon the bush. But it was some moments before the object which had attracted Church's attention was found. He had caught that one glint at an angle.

However, at last the thing was located. It seemed to be of silver, and was tangled among the twigs and branches. Church picked it out, and then discovered that the little silver object was affixed to a silken cord. The ends of the cord were frayed and broken.

"This looks jolly queer," said Church. "I wonder what it can be."

"What is it? A shilling?" asked Handforth.

"A shilling? No, you ass!" went on Church. "It's about the same size as a shilling, and it's a disc. But it's much thinner, and there's a design on it. Look! It seems to be a kind of a circle with a diamond inside it!"

"Diamond?" asked McClure. "Then it must be worth something!"

"Not a real diamond, you chump!" growled Church. "That's the design—a diamond shape within a circle. It must mean something, I suppose. That chap we chased must have dropped it as he ran."

Handforth smiled pityingly, and grabbed the silver disc.

"You blockhead!" he exclaimed. "Dropped it! Of course he didn't drop it! I'll bet he wore this thing hanging on his waistcoat. And the cord caught in a twig, and it was pulled out without him knowing anything about it. Let's take it into the lobby and look at it properly."

Church felt like asking how the disc

could have been pulled from the stranger's waistcoat when that waistcoat was completely covered by a heavy cloak. But he didn't want to raise any further arguments. So the three juniors found their way back to the Ancient House lobby.

I was just passing through as they entered, and Church called to me at once.

"I say, Nipper," he said. "Come and have a look at this!"

"Who told you to call Nipper?" demanded Handforth darkly. "This is our mystery! We don't want any outsiders in this. I'm going to investigate the affair thoroughly, so you needn't worry."

I grinned as I came up.

"What's the dark and terrible secret?" I inquired. "Hallo! That's a rummy looking thing you've got, Handy. What is it?"

"Find out!" replied Handforth gruffly.

"Professional jealousy, I suppose!" I chuckled. "All right, Handy. I won't butt in. I'll allow you to investigate the problem to your heart's content. In fact, I'm not interested in the least."

But Church and McClure—who had a sad lack of faith in their chief—insisted upon telling me all about it. They explained how they had chased the mysterious stranger, and how the disc had been discovered. I listened with growing interest, until, indeed, I became convinced that this was not one of Handforth's usual wild-goose chases. There was something really serious behind it.

"And this little thing was hanging on the bush?" I asked.

"Yes," said Handforth. "It was evidently fixed to the man's waistcoat, like a watch-chain, and it was pulled off —"

"No," I interrupted. "It's far more likely that it was round his neck. That's why this silken cord is so long. When he plunged head first into the

bush, a branch caught him, and the cord was pulled out and broken. I don't suppose the man knew anything about it."

"You can have your own opinion, of course," said Handforth airily. "Personally, I think that's a dotty idea. Just as if a chap would carry a disc of this sort round his giddy neck!"

"Well, it's far more likely than carrying it across his waistcoat," said Church. "I reckon Nipper's idea is the most plausible. But what are we going to do about it? Don't you think we'd better tell somebody?"

"I don't know yet," I said. "Of course, the whole thing may be a fizzle; Handforth's detective chases generally are—"

"What!" snorted Handforth. "You rotter! This is what comes of letting you into the secret. You can jolly well clear off—"

"Now, boys, no quarrelling!" said a pleasant voice from the rear. "What's the merry argument? Let your uncle hear all about it!"

Mr. Trenton came up, smiling.

"It's nothing much, sir," said Handforth. "You see, we found— Why, great pip! What on earth—"

Handforth broke off abruptly, for the science master had changed colour, and he was staring fixedly at that curious silver disc. He staggered back slightly, and a hoarse exclamation rose in his throat.

CHAPTER 6.

The Mystery of the Silver Disc!

WE stared at Mr. Trenton in astonishment.

What could be the reason for his startled gaze? Why was he staring at that little silver object so fixedly?

"Anything the matter, sir?" I asked curiously.

"What? Oh—er—nothing!" exclaimed Mr. Trenton, hastily pulling

himself together. "Nothing at all, Nipper. Quite a curious little object. Where did you say you found it?"

I could tell at once that Mr. Trenton was forcing himself to be calm, and that it was only by an effort that he succeeded in assuming a careless tone. His eyes were gleaming strangely—almost with a look of fear, I thought.

"We got it off that bush, sir," said Handforth lucidly.

"Bush? What bush?"

"Out in the Triangle, sir."

"You young ass! That's no explanation!" said Mr. Trenton sharply. "What do you mean—you got it from a bush in the Triangle?"

"You see, that man left it there when he escaped," explained Handforth.

Again the science master started.

"What man?" he demanded.

"Why, the fellow we were chasing," explained Handforth. "He managed to get away from us, but he left this behind as a clue."

"Let me see it," said Mr. Trenton.

"There you are, sir," said Handforth, dangling it in front of the science master's eyes, but taking care not to let it out of his own possession. "It's a clue, sir, and it might lead to the arrest of the burglar. I'm going to investigate the whole mystery."

"Don't you be such a young monkey!" said Mr. Trenton, still trying to be careless. "Quite an interesting little relic, by all appearances. I can't imagine what it represents, but it seems to be a badge, or something of that kind. You'd better leave it in my keeping, Handforth."

"I'd rather not, sir."

"Nonsense! Come along!" laughed the science master. "Hand it over!"

Handforth looked obstinate.

"I don't want to offend you, sir, but I found it, and I'm entitled to keep it until the right owner is discovered," he

said firmly. "In any case, if I gave it to anybody at all, I should ask my Housemaster to take charge of it."

This, in a way, was a slight upon Mr. Trenton, and the latter was not slow to see it. He looked grim for a second, but then broke into a laugh.

"Well, hang it all, we're not going to quarrel," he said lightly. "Have your own way, Handforth; I won't press you, my obstinate young spark."

And Mr. Trenton, chuckling, strolled away.

"He's a decent sort, but he needs putting in his place now and again," remarked Handforth. "Likely I was going to hand it over to him! It's a clue, and there's no telling what it may lead to. There's a mystery here, my sons, that means a tremendous lot of investigating. I'm going on the track at once."

"Out in this fog?" asked Church.

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, draw it mild——"

"Out in this fog!" said Handforth grimly. "Don't you know that it is always better to get on the track of a criminal while the scent's hot? Ask Nipper here—he'll tell you all about it."

"Well, that's a good principle, of course," I agreed. "At the same time, Handy, it mustn't be taken too literally. I don't see how you could very well get on this scent to-night. As far as I can understand, you lost the chap hopelessly in the fog."

"Yes, we did," said Church.

"Then it'll be a sheer waste of time to go out," I said. "You might just as well look for a needle in a haystack. Take the advice of an old hand, my son. Go straight to Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it, and give that silver disc over into his care."

Handforth shook his head.

"Not likely!" he retorted. "This is my case, and I'm not going to present it to Mr. Lee. I'm going on the track at once, and you can jaw until Dooms-

day, and you won't make me change my mind."

"Oh, all right! Have your own giddy way!" I exclaimed. "But I warn you, you'll go on a fruitless journey. It's a sheer waste of time and energy to go out into this fog."

I walked off, considerably puzzled about what Handforth & Co. had told me. Previous to that I had been sorely exercised in mind regarding the singular behaviour of the Head.

And now this second mystery had come—although I hardly suspected that there was any particular significance about the silver disc. The fellow whom Handforth & Co. had seen was probably a tramp on the lookout for what he could sneak. In that case the little badge was quite valueless, and meant nothing.

Handforth & Co. remained in the lobby for a little while. Church and McClure looked out into the fog, and shivered. The night was cold and miserable, and Study D seemed particularly cosy when the two juniors thought of it. Church shook himself vigorously.

"Well, there's no sense in stopping here," he remarked. "Come on, Clurey—we might as well get to the study if Handforth's going out. There's no reason why we should stay here."

"None at all," agreed McClure promptly.

Handforth glared.

"Your old tricks, eh?" he snapped. "So you think I'm going on this trip alone?"

"Of course you are!"

"Well, I'm not—you're coming with me!"

"Oh, ring off, Handy!" protested Church. "It's your wheeze—we don't want anything to do with it. Besides, a detective can always follow a trail better if he's by himself. That stands to reason. We're awful blunderers, and we should only get in your way at every turn. If you want to secure good re-

sults, you couldn't do better than go by yourself!"

Handforth seized his two chums firmly and determinedly.

"We're all going!" he exclaimed. "And if you chaps want to back out you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You ought to be only too jolly pleased that I'm taking you with me."

"We're not pleased!" roared Church. "We don't want to go!"

"Well, you're coming—but first of all we'll slip into the study and make out a little plan of action," said Handforth. "We can't very well discuss matters here—there's no privacy in the lobby. Come on."

The three juniors hurried along the Remove passage until they came to Study D. They entered, Handforth switched on the electric light and closed the door. McClure went over and poked the fire into a blaze.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "In any case, it'll soon be supper-time, and there's no chance of going out on an investigation. Do be sensible, Handy, and give it up."

Handforth made no reply. He was standing near the table, examining the little silver object under the strong light of the electric lamp. He turned it over and over, but could make no more of it. Just a silver disc with that quaint design on one side.

Handforth put it down after a while and left it on the table. Then he went over to the easy chair, turned McClure out of it, and sat down. He stared absentmindedly into the fire.

"I can see it all!" he murmured, after a while.

"Eh?"

"I've reconstructed the whole crime!" said Handforth.

"What crime?"

"Why, the—the— Well, I know exactly why that man came here, and what he meant to do," went on Edward

Oswald. "I've been deducing things. All you need is brain power on a job of this kind. You need a clear head, and all that kind of thing. Listen to me, and I'll explain."

"Oh, go on!" groaned Church.

"Well, first of all, the man came to St. Frank's with the idea of committing burglary," said Handforth. "That was his chief scheme."

"How did you deduce that?"

"Easy! Why should a man come to St. Frank's and lurk in the Triangle? Not because he wanted to see anybody, or he'd have walked straight in. Not because he was merely a common or garden tramp, for in that case he would have gone round at the back, cadging things from the domestic quarters. That's absolutely logical, and you can't get away from it."

"Well, anything else?"

"Of course—a lot else," said Handforth. "This chap was standing in the Triangle, and he was probably waiting there for an hour."

"How do you know it was an hour?"

"Because I took a squint at the ground under the trees, and found a lot of footprints there," said Handforth wisely. "That shows that the chap had been walking round and round, digging up the gravel with his boots."

"Oh, first class!" said Church. "I suppose you've forgotten that a crowd of fags were playing about around those trees earlier in the evening? Racing round them, and stirring up the ground?"

Handforth frowned.

"That's nothing—the footprints I mean were made by this man," he said. "Then again, I deduce that he was about five-foot-six, fairly young, and quite active. That would serve as a good description for the police."

"What was his face like?" asked McClure.

"How do I know, you ass?"

"But can't you deduce that?"

"You fathead! A detective can't deduce things unless he sees 'em!" snorted Handforth.

"My dear old Handy, deduction isn't seeing things," said Church. "Deduction is getting at facts without seeing anything at all."

Handforth rose to his feet.

"Do you think you're going to teach me my own giddy business?" he snapped. "I know what I'm doing—and I know that you chaps will get some prize thick ears if you don't shut up. I'm right in the middle of my thoughts, and I don't want any more interruptions. You'd better hand me that silver disc. I want to give it another examination."

Church was about to pick it up when a most unexpected occurrence took place. Without the slightest warning the lower sash of the study window was flung up with a crash. A billow of mist came rolling in, and it was so thick that only the shadowy outline of a man could be seen. Church and McClure stared at the window, rather startled, and Handforth twisted round.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply. There was no reply.

"Trying to be funny, eh?" roared Handforth, leaping to his feet. "By George, I'll punch your giddy nose for playing a trick like this—"

Hissssss!

There was a sudden sound of small objects falling through the air. The juniors had a glimpse of stones coming into the room with great force. They instinctively ducked. The man outside in the fog had obviously picked up a handful of coarse gravel, and had flung it.

Bang—bang—bang—pop!

The pebbles rattled against the wall and the door. And several of them smashed against the glass electric lamp—the single bulb which provided the study with light. There was a loud pop as it exploded into a hundred fragments, and the room was plunged into inky darkness.

CHAPTER 7.

Vanished!

NELSON LEE stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"A very peculiar story, Nipper," he exclaimed. "I must confess that I am rather puzzled. It is a pity I was not out in the Triangle at the time, or I might have caught a glimpse of this mysterious stranger."

"Only Handforth and his chums were there, sir," I said. "Of course, they messed it up—they let the chap get away—"

"We can hardly blame them because of that, young 'un," interrupted the guv'nor. "In such a fog as this I am not surprised that the stranger eluded capture. Indeed, it would have been rather astonishing if he had been held. But what is this story about a silver disc attached to a piece of silken cord?"

"Well, you see, sir, the man was hanging about the Triangle for some reason, when Handforth & Co. disturbed him," I explained. "He bunked, and they chased him. In the fog he blundered into one of the bushes against the shrubbery. I suppose he caught his neck, and a twig caught the cord off, and broke it."

"Leaving this peculiar disc attached to the bush?"

"Exactly."

"H'm! Quite probable, Nipper—quite probable," mused Nelson Lee. "It was rather astute of Handforth, I must say, to rescue that disc, and take possession of it. You saw it, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it like?"

"It's simply got a circle with a diamond inside the circle," I replied. "Quite a simple affair, but rather striking in effect. It seems to me that it must be an emblem, or a badge. Possibly it's simply the badge of a giddy society or a trade union."

"I hardly think that, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I shall certainly come along to Handforth's study and have

a look at it. The circumstances are entirely peculiar—and, I may say, most significant."

"Why significant, sir?"

"Well, Nipper, I think we can assume, with a fair amount of accuracy, that this lurking stranger was in the Triangle for the sole purpose of meeting Mr. Hugh Trenton, our worthy new science master."

I looked at the guv'nor hard.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "You—you don't suspect Mr. Trenton——"

"I have no suspicions against Mr. Trenton—yet," interrupted Nelson Lee. "It is possible that I shall never have any suspicions against him. But, my dear lad, it must be obvious to you that Mr. Trenton knows something about this circle and diamond emblem. His very attitude when he saw the thing proved that. Now, there are several theories which may proceed to develop. For example, is Mr. Trenton associated with the stranger who lurked in the Triangle, and, if so, what does this association amount to? Again, is Mr. Trenton in fear of this stranger, and was he alarmed when he caught sight of that sign?"

"Well, he looked a bit scared," I said.

"There are many lines of inquiry which we can take up," went on the detective. "I am aware, too, Nipper, that your description of this disc awakens a kind of echo at the back of my mind."

"An echo, sir?"

"Yes, it has struck a chord of my memory," said Lee thoughtfully. "I cannot recall where I have heard of that disc previously, or in what connection, but I certainly have met with it somewhere, and I mean to discover the truth."

"Do you think there's anything criminal at the bottom of it?" I asked.

"It would be most unwise of me to think anything of the sort," said Nelson Lee. "The business may be simple and innocent. On the other hand, it may be complex and sinister. In spite

of myself, I am inclined to the latter view, although, strictly speaking, we should keep our minds quite open. I don't like all this mystery, Nipper—it means something. We have got to discover the real lie of the land."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet and crossed the study.

"You going along to see Handforth, sir?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Oh, good!"

I led the way out, and we were soon hurrying towards the Remove passage. Just when we reached it we heard a sudden noise, like the rattle of stones upon a door. And this noise was accompanied by a soft, peculiar bang.

"Hallo!" I said. "What was that?"

Nelson Lee compressed his lips.

"I don't know—but I suspect——"

He got no further, but ran on at full speed. Arriving at the door of Study D, he wrenched it open and found the apartment in total darkness. Church came blundering into the detective, and Handforth's voice could be heard.

"After him, you fatheads!" he roared. "Don't stand looking! There you are—I've got him! Quick! Bring a light!"

The room, plunged into total darkness by the sudden extinguishing of the electric light, had brought about great confusion. Handforth & Co. floundered about the study, bewildered and rather alarmed.

They instinctively knew that some intruder had entered the room—that black figure who had been outside in the fog. Why he had come in Handforth did not know, and could not guess. There was not much time for thought.

And then, in the total gloom, Handforth grabbed hold of the figure—he had seen it looming near the window, dimly and vaguely outlined against the fog. Incidentally, the figure belonged to McClure, but Handforth was not aware of this fact. He clung desperately to his chum, and yelled for lights.

"You fatheads!" he roared. "Don't stand there blocking up the doorway! Bring a light before this rotter gets away!"

"Gug — gug — gug — grooh!" mumbled the prisoner.

I dashed into the study, pulled out my electric torch, and switched it on. Handforth was revealed, clutching McClure lovingly round the neck. Edward Oswald looked up triumphantly.

"Hold him!" he gasped. "Lemme a hand!"

"No necessity," I said shortly. "McClure doesn't need holding!"

"What?"

Handforth gazed at his prisoner wildly, and dropped him.

"You—you silly lunatic!" roared McClure furiously.

"Do—do you mean to say that I was grabbing you all the time?" snorted Handforth. "Why, you babbling fat-head, why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I tell you when I was nearly choked?" gasped McClure. "You ought to have had more sense —"

"Well, what the dickens do you mean by getting in my way?" yelled Handforth. "A nice mess you've made of it, I must say. We've lost the chap now—absolutely lost him! Pah!"

Handforth turned towards the door, glaring.

"And don't stand there, blocking all the light out!" he snapped. "Move, you silly ass!"

"Don't be quite so impatient, Handforth," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Handforth nearly fainted.

"I—I didn't know it was you, sir!" he panted. "I—I didn't mean to call you a silly ass, sir! I—I thought—"

"It really doesn't matter what you thought, Handforth, and I quite overlook your hasty method of address," said Nelson Lee. "It appears that there has been a little excitement here?"

"Yes, rather, sir," said Church. "We

were all talking when somebody threw up the window——"

"Did you see who it was?"

"No, sir, the fog hid him completely."

"That was unfortunate. And what then?"

"Why, sir, the rotter threw a handful of pebbles," said Church. "He chucked them at the electric light, and smashed it at once, leaving us in darkness. But I don't think he came into the room."

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "I saw to that. I dashed to the window at once, and guarded it all the time."

"I rather fancy you are wrong, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "Unless I am mistaken, I can plainly see some muddy footprints on the carpet, and the Triangle, as you know, is quite muddy just now."

"So he did come in!" exclaimed Handforth warmly. "By George! I'll find out who it was and smash him to a pulp!"

"It won't be quite so easy—— Ah, that's Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Now we can have a look round."

I had just come in with the electric lamp from Study C. I removed the smashed lamp from the holder and put the new one in its place. The study was immediately flooded with light.

We all looked round curiously.

The window was still wide open, and the fog was entering in thin wreaths and whirls. And there, on the carpet, quite distinct, were some blurry footprints. They had undoubtedly been caused by the man who made the raid.

"But what did he come in for?" asked Handforth. "That's what I can't make out. There's nothing valuable in this study——"

"One moment, Handforth," interrupted Lee. "Have you got that silver disc you found out in the Triangle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, you have?"

"Of course, sir," said Handforth. "I was looking at it only ten minutes ago,

and when the window was flung up I was concentrating my mind upon the problem. I've got a certain theory, sir, and I mean to collect all the available data, and then proceed with this investigation. The exact hypothesis of the case——"

"Really, Handforth, I do not think it is necessary to waste time in this way," interrupted Lee, vainly endeavouring to repress a smile. "Let us deal only with facts. Theories are not required just now. You say you were looking at the silver disc ten minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir?" replied Handforth. "By the way, how do you know anything about it?" he added suspiciously. "Who told you——"

"My dear boy, you are most aggravating!" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "Why do you ask these unnecessary questions? Nipper told me about the silver disc, if you must know."

Handforth snorted.

"I wanted to investigate this case alone!" he grunted.

"Perhaps so, Handforth, but it appears to me to be of some importance," said the detective. "Please let me see that silver disc."

"Oh, all right, sir," growled Handforth. "But I don't think it's quite playing the game. This is my giddy case, and—— Why, hallo! What the——"

Handforth broke off, and stared hard at the table.

"Anything wrong?" I asked quickly.

"Which of you chaps took it?" asked Handforth, staring at his chums.

"Eh?" said Church. "Took what?"

"That disc, of course."

"We haven't touched it——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Handforth. "You know jolly well I left it on the table. It couldn't walk off on its own accord, I suppose. I left it here——just in the middle, against the ink-stand. And now it's gone!"

Nelson Lee gave me a grim look,

"So our mysterious intruder was successful in his enterprise," he said smoothly. "I feared as much, boys."

"What——what do you mean, sir?" gasped Handforth.

"Come, come," protested Lee. "To a crime investigator of your wonderful ability it should surely be as clear as crystal that the silver disc was removed from the table by the unknown gentleman who entered by means of the window?"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth blankly. "So——so that rotter came in, pinched that disc, and cleared off again?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The thieving bounder!" snorted Handforth. "Now I can understand!"

"Yes, you're just beginning to get a glimmering of what we knew from the very start," I explained sweetly. "You'd make a fine detective, Handy, if your brain worked a little faster. At present it seems to be rusty."

"You——you rotter!" roared Handforth. "I'll——I'll——"

"You'll do nothing, Handforth!" interrupted Nelson Lee firmly.

Edward Oswald clenched his fists.

"I'm jolly well going out on the trail, though!" he declared. "It's likely I'm going to let this burglar Johnny break into my study and escape scot free! I'm going on his track, and I'll collar him before bed-time!"

Nelson Lee seized Handforth firmly by the shoulder.

"Listen to me, young man!" he exclaimed grimly. "I forbid you to leave the school premises—in any case, you are well aware that it is not permissible for you to go out of gates at this hour. This matter appears to be of some importance, and I cannot allow you to engage in any of your amateur efforts. Take notice of what I say, Handforth, for I am in stern earnest."

The leader of Study D looked blank.

"But——but——"

"Protesting is useless, my boy," went on Lee gently. "It may be a disappointment to you, but I dare say you will get over it. There is another point. Keep your tongue still about this matter. Don't talk to the other boys about it. It is most important that there should be no gossip."

"We promise, sir," said Church and McClure promptly.

"And have I your word, Handforth?"

"Why, yes," said Handforth reluctantly. "Of course, sir. If you wish it, I'll keep as mum as an oyster. But—but I wanted to go out and pick up the trail—"

"I am very sorry to dampen your enthusiasm," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But I really think your efforts would be futile, Handforth. This fog renders any attempt at pursuit well-nigh hopeless. Now, boys, remember what I said, and try to forget the whole affair."

And Nelson Lee smiled, nodded to us, and passed out of the study. I looked after him thoughtfully. If he wanted us to forget the whole affair, I was pretty certain that he wasn't doing any forgetting.

CHAPTER 8.

Dr. Stafford Lets Himself Go!

"**S**ILENCE for the speaker!"

The junior Common-room was crowded. It was within a quarter of an hour of supper-time, and most of the Remove had collected together round the cheery fire in the Common-room.

They were all talking at once, and the din was considerable. Handforth & Co. had just come in, and, of course, Handforth was shouting at the top of his voice. He had lost no time in getting into an argument with Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey.

I wanted to make an announcement regarding the football, but I couldn't get a word in edgeways. It was De

Valerie who had yelled for silence. He might as well have addressed the four walls.

"It's no good," he said, turning to me. "The asses are all babbling at once. You'll have to leave it until we're in the dormitory—we shall all be there, and there'll be some chance of making yourself heard."

"All right," I replied. "That'll do, I suppose."

The noise continued. It was generally like that towards supper-time, but this evening the fellows seemed to be particularly bad. Handforth was the main culprit. He insisted upon making himself heard, so he adopted the simple expedient of yelling above all the other voices, and, as everybody else yelled as well, the result can be easily imagined.

Handforth was feeling a bit sore. He had badly wanted to investigate the mystery of the silver disc. And here he was in the Common-room, and all his marvellous abilities in the detective line were running to waste. He felt decidedly indignant about it.

And the only way to relieve his feelings was to roar at somebody. He had started by practising upon Church and McClure. But they had fled to the Common-room and Handforth, of course, had followed.

And while the din was at its height the door burst open, and Teddy Long whirled into the room. He was hot and breathless, and his face was red; his eyes shone with excitement and alarm.

"Cave!" he gasped.

"What's the matter with you, worm?" asked Owen major politely.

Teddy Long panted for breath.

"The—the Head!" he said huskily.

"Keep quiet, you fatheads!"

"The Head?" repeated Owen major.

"Yes."

"What are you getting at, you young dummy?"

"He—he's coming!" panted Long.

"He—he's got a cane in his hand and an awful look in his eye. I've never seen him so fierce before. I—I believe he's coming to the Common-room."

I had heard Teddy Long's words, and so had Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. We exchanged glances. Was it possible that Dr. Stafford was in another of his savage moods?

"What's that you were saying, Long?" I asked sharply. "Oh, for goodness' sake keep quiet, you chaps!"

My sharp tone had some little effect.

"It's—it's the Head!" exclaimed Long, gazing round at the juniors. "He's coming here with a cane."

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I tell you he is!" shouted Teddy, glaring. "I—I happened to pass him in the lobby just now. He—he looked awful. And I had to jump yards, or he would have swished my legs."

"Pity he didn't," remarked Pitt.

"I tell you he's in a terrible temper," said Long. "There was a look in his eyes that fairly made me hop."

"Anything would make you hop, you miserable little coward," said Hubbard. "Don't take any notice of him, you chaps. He's my study-mate and I know what he's like."

"You—you disbelieving rotters!" shouted Teddy Long. "Well, I don't care. I only came to warn you for your own good. If you don't like to believe what I say you can jolly well do the other thing! Rats to the lot of you! I'm off!"

"Who said so?" asked Handforth grimly.

He reached forward, seized Teddy by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Yow—yaroooh!" roared Long violently. "Ow—yow— Help!"

"My hat!" gasped De Valerie. "What sort of a row would he make if he was hurt?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Long believed in the policy of yelling first. He had discovered that it was a far less painful method. If he started roaring before he was hurt it generally happened that he had to suffer less.

And Dr. Stafford, outside in the passage, came to a sudden halt.

For once in his life, Teddy Long had been speaking the truth, and it was the irony of fate that his own yelling voice should cause the Head to make straight for the Common-room.

Dr. Stafford was indeed carrying a cane. He looked fierce and angry, and his usual kindly expression was displaced by one of malevolent fury. He had been aware of a noise in the junior quarters, and he had set out with the intention of putting a stop to it—swiftly and effectively.

At any ordinary time the Head would not have troubled. A noise from the junior Common-room was usual enough, but in the Head's present mood he could not stand any irritation, and that din irritated him beyond measure.

He had come to the junior passage, but the noise had subsided, and he had half-decided to turn back. He only took two steps before Teddy Long's yelling voice burst forth.

Dr. Stafford turned, his face working with rage.

"The young hound!" he muttered between his teeth.

At almost a run he made his way to the junior Common-room.

He burst into the Common-room like a whirlwind.

"Silence!" he thundered.

His entrance had an immediate effect.

Every boy stood stockstill, every tongue became silent. The juniors gazed at Dr. Stafford in wonder and something approaching fear.

The silence, indeed, was like a pall during those first few seconds; it hung heavily over the whole room.

And then the Head broke the stillness.

"You noisy young rascals!" he shouted, his voice hoarse and thick. "What's the meaning of all this commotion? How dare you create such a noise and disturb the whole school?"

"It—it wasn't me, sir!" gasped Long faintly.

"Oh, it wasn't you?" shouted the Head, striding forward. "We'll see about that, you——"

"I—I didn't make a sound, sir," howled Long wildly.

He broke away from the other juniors, and dodged to the back of the Common-room. The Head charged after him, whirling his cane carelessly and with considerable force. It swished round with a hiss.

"Yaroooh!" roared Handforth.

The cane had struck him accidentally, and the blow caught Handy on the wrist, and he was quite hurt.

"Who made that noise?" snapped the Head, twisting round. "Answer me! Who made that noise just now?"

The fellows were now thoroughly scared. There was something about the Head which made them want to rush away. He was not the Dr. Stafford they had always known. He seemed like somebody different.

"I made that noise, sir," said Handforth gruffly. "You swung that cane round and caught me——"

"Oh, indeed!" grated the Head. "Perhaps you will make more noise if I swing the cane round again. We will see—we will see."

Swish—swish—swish!

The cane hissed down repeatedly. Twice it struck Handforth before he realised what was happening. Then, with a wild yell, he jumped backward about two yards, and dodged behind some of the other juniors.

"Oh, by George!" gasped Handforth. "I—I'm hurt!"

The Head rushed after him, knocking

the juniors down as though they had been ninepins. He seemed to go mad for the moment, and his face was now pale and drawn, and his eyes glittered with a strange fire.

"You young dogs!" he shouted. "You think you can do as you like? You think you can defy your own headmaster? We will see about that. Every boy in this room will take two thousand lines for insubordination and disobedience of rules."

"Two thousand lines!" said Pitt blankly.

"Yes, boy, two thousand lines!" roared the Head. "If you dare to say another word I will flog you within an inch of your life! I'll show you whether I am the master of my own school or not!"

Everybody looked dazed. Two thousand lines for kicking up a bit of a din in the Common-room. It was absolutely unheard of. Tommy Watson nudged me and looked into my face.

"You can understand now, eh?" he whispered.

"By Jove, rather!" I agreed softly.

I was indeed somewhat staggered. I had never believed it possible that the Head could behave in such a way as this. And then, before Watson could make any further remark, the Head went charging after Teddy Long.

Long scampered round the Common-room, and the Head went in pursuit, slashing his cane about, and striking the dodging juniors here and there. They yelled with pain, and the noise in the Common-room was about four times as bad as it had been originally.

And then Morrow arrived.

Morrow of the Sixth was a prefect, and he entered the Common-room with a gleam in his eye and a cane in his hand.

"Stop this noise!" he shouted. "What on earth are you kids making such a din for? If you don't shut up I'll——"

"Morrow!" bellowed the Head.

"What is the meaning of this? How dare you interfere in this unwarrantable manner?"

Morrow nearly fell over backwards.

"I—I didn't know you were here," he stuttered. "I—I—I thought——"

"What you thought does not interest me!" snarled Dr. Stafford harshly. "Go, at once! Go, before I strike you!"

"Strike me!" repeated Morrow. "But—but——"
Swish!

The Head's cane came down with a flutter upon the prefect's back.

"Oh!"

The juniors panted for breath as they watched. Morrow gave one start, went as red as a beetroot, and then all the colour fled from his face. He clenched his fists and compressed his lips.

"It's not usual to strike a prefect, sir," he said with difficulty.

The words seemed to goad the Head into an uncontrollable fit of rage. He slashed out again and again, but Morrow wisely got out of reach. And then, in the midst of it, Nelson Lee strode sharply into the room.

"Dr. Stafford!" he exclaimed. "Good gracious! Please control yourself, sir—remember that you are the headmaster of this school!"

At the sound of Nelson Lee's voice, Dr. Stafford started. He turned, his face working curiously. His eyes blazed, but they seemed to contain a dazed look, too. Then, abruptly, his shoulders drooped.

"Why, Mr. Lee," he muttered. "What—what is the matter?"

"I think you are feeling rather unwell, Dr. Stafford," said Lee quietly. "Please come with me, and we will go straight to your study. You are labouring under some excitement, and——"

"Thank you—thank you very much!" exclaimed the Head, articulating his words with difficulty. "I need no help, Mr. Lee. It is not at all necessary for you to assist me."

"Very well, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "But please let me urge you to calm down, and——"

"Yes, yes, of course," muttered the Head hoarsely.

He strode away, somewhat unsteady, and went straight to his own study. The fit of rage had apparently left him now, and when he arrived in his own sanctum he sank down in his easy chair and uttered a long sigh of weariness and acute distress.

"What has come over me?" he murmured, raising his clenched fists, and beating his forehead. "I'm going mad—mad! And yet—and yet in all ordinary respects I feel well—I feel healthy and strong. What will the boys think of me—what ghastly trouble am I making for myself?"

And, meanwhile, turmoil reigned in the Remove, and the sole topic of conversation in the lower school was the Head's recent astounding conduct.

CHAPTER 9.

Afraid of the Head!

"CAVE!"

"He's coming!"

"Look out!"

Owen major, Hubbard, Armstrong and one or two more of the lesser lights of the Remove at St. Frank's, scuttled hastily out of sight behind the gymnasium. They ran like rabbits, and concealed themselves hastily.

One might have imagined that a demon was approaching.

An expression very much like fear could be seen in the eyes of two or three of the juniors. They watched cautiously and carefully from their cover. And the reason for their hasty retreat was not so terrible-looking, after all.

In fact, he was no less than Dr. Malcolm Stafford!

The Head was striding sedately

along, crossing the Triangle. His gown was waving in the breeze, and his mortar-board was planted firmly upon his head. He was dignified, serious, and very scholastic.

Dr. Stafford himself had not failed to notice the action of the boys. He merely compressed his lips, and walked on. He turned the angle of the gymnasium, and came within sight of De Valerie, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, Dick Goodwin, and Tom Burton, who were chatting in a group.

They looked up as he approached.

"Look out!" muttered De Valerie. "Better shift!"

They were not so hasty as the other juniors. But their concerted movement towards the playing-fields was plainly obvious and apparent. They had shifted in order to avoid coming in close contact with the headmaster.

Again Dr. Stafford saw this, and he compressed his lips even tighter.

"They shun me!" he muttered bitterly. "Good gracious! What a terrible state of things! What an appalling pass! My own boys turn from me, and make off so that I shall not come in contact with them!"

The Head was under no delusion regarding the matter. And twice more before he reached his own door did he experience the same thing. Chambers and Bryant, of the Fifth, were crossing the Triangle. As soon as they saw the Head, they deliberately altered their direction.

A little farther on a group of fags were larking about with a tennis ball. The instant they saw the Head they turned and raced like a crowd of mice into the Ancient House.

"Terrible!" murmured the Head. "Far, far worse than I thought!"

He entered his doorway, and made his way with flagging footsteps to his study. He reached that apartment, and sank down into his favourite easy-chair.

A more kindly man than Dr. Stafford it would be impossible to find. But in the lower school the first question asked that morning had been "How is he to-day?" And very soon it had been found that he—the Head—was his normal self. He was the Head that St. Frank's had known for many years.

It was nearly time for morning lessons. Breakfast, of course, was over, and the fellows were strolling about the Triangle, or chatting in groups, waiting for the bell to sound. The air was crisp and clear, and the sun was shining with a watery brilliance. There had been rain the previous day, and it was quite probable that some more would shortly arrive.

"I can't help thinking there's something fishy about it," I remarked, as I chatted with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, in Study C. "The Head would never act as he did of his own accord."

"But he must have done," said Watson. "He wasn't following somebody else's orders, I suppose?"

"It's very strange," I said thoughtfully. "Between you and me and the coal-scuttle, I've got an idea in the back of my napper that Mr. Trenton has got something to do with the Head's queer behaviour."

My chums stared.

"Mr. Trenton?" repeated Watson blankly.

"Yes."

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie. "But dear old boy, that is utterly ridiculous! You are frightfully off-side—you are really! How could our new science master be connected with the Head's fits of temper?"

"I don't know how—that's what I want to find out," I replied. "Of course, this sounds silly to you—"

"It does!" agreed Tommy Watson bluntly.

"At the same time, there may be

something in it," I went on. "Mr. Trenton is a very pleasant chap—genial, free-and-easy, and always smiling. He's immensely popular with the chaps."

"And deserves to be," declared Watson. "I like him very much."

"Dear old fellow, have you anythin' against him?" asked Montie.

"Well, no, not exactly—nothing that I can name, anyhow," I admitted. "But, in spite of myself, I don't trust the chap."

"Why not?"

"He always strikes me as being insincere," I said. "I don't know why, but I feel uncomfortable when he's near by. Anyhow, I'm going to keep my eye on Mr. Hugh Trenton."

"I don't think he's got anything to do with the Head," said Watson.

"It may not seem so—"

"And there's another point," interrupted Watson. "Look here, has it struck you that there might be an impersonation dodge going on here?"

"A which?"

"Well, you know what I mean," said Tommy. "The Head looks like another man when he's in this terrific rage. Do you think it possible that he might be the victim of a plot?"

"What kind of a plot?"

"I've been wondering if there's another man pretending to be the Head," said Watson eagerly. "See? He gets dressed in the Head's clothes and then goes about creating the merry dickens—"

"My dear ass, you're talking out of your hat!" I interrupted. "Hasn't he had talks with Mr. Lee? Do you think the guv'nor would be deceived by an impostor? No, not likely! It's the Head all right, and he's either going mad or bad—one or the other. Which-ever it is, he's not fully to blame."

Watson shook his head.

"I don't agree," he said. "And the sooner he leaves St. Frank's the better."

Why, the governors will be obliged to kick him out if he does any more bullying. If this sort of thing goes on—well, the whole giddy school will rise in revolt against him."

"That's possible, of course," I agreed. "But, somehow, I'm rather on the Head's side."

"You're on his side, my dear fellow?" asked Sir Montie mildly.

"Yes, I am."

"You approve of the way he lammed into me?" asked Watson, with a glare.

"Well, no—"

"But you said—"

"My dear chap, why don't you let me explain?" I said. "I'm on the Head's side in this way—I sympathise with him because I believe that he is good, kindly, and as considerate as ever. When he gets into one of those black rages he's beyond his own control. Do you catch what I mean? He probably knows that he's giving way and acting in a beastly manner, but he sort of can't help himself. And it's quite likely that some hidden influence is at work. Something we can't see—something which even the Head himself is unable to fight. Now, if that really is the case, it's hardly fair to blame him. He ought, in fact, to receive our sympathy, and I'm not doing any condemning until I know a bit more of the truth."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear old boy, you are getting beyond me," he said. "I simply know that the Head has recently been givin' way to shockin' fits of temper. If I get in a temper, I don't blame anybody else for it, and if I do anything frightfully bad at such a time—well, it's up to me to accept the consequences."

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Watson.

"Well, of course, that's logic," I replied. "Upon the same line of reasoning, the Head ought to be made to accept the consequences of his own

actions. In any case, we shan't do any good by arguing the point. We'll just let matters stand, and see how they progress."

Very soon afterwards we all trooped into the Remove Form-room, for morning lessons were about to begin. There was still an air of rather subdued excitement about—for the one topic of conversation in the whole school was the recent extraordinary behaviour of Dr. Stafford.

Lessons progressed smoothly for a while. Mr. Crowell, of course, made no reference to the subject which had caused such general comment. Among the masters the whole thing was tabooed, except between themselves.

And then, somewhere about the middle of the morning, the door of the Form-room was thrust open. I glanced up, stared, and then felt my heart beat a little more rapidly than usual.

The newcomer was the Head.

And he was different. His hair was untidy, a cold, cruel light gleamed in his eyes, and in his right hand he held a cane.

Evidently some trouble was brewing.

CHAPTER 10. Frightfulness!

MR. CROWELL looked up with a start, adjusted his spectacles, and was visibly agitated. He, too, could see that Dr. Stafford was different.

With one accord every junior in the room rose to his feet, and stood respectfully at attention.

"We're in for something, by the look of it!" murmured Handforth.

"Shush, you ass!"

Mr. Crowell rapped his desk.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Er—I am glad to see you, sir," he added, turning to the Head. "Is—is there anything—"

"Thank you, Mr. Crowell, but you

will please speak when I address you!" interrupted the Head coldly. "H'm! So this is what goes on during the morning—eh? I must tell you frankly, Mr. Crowell, that I am disgusted."

Th Form-master raised his eyebrows.

"Really, sir—"

"The boys are untidy, far from clean, and the whole Form-room has the appearance of disorderliness and slovenliness which is positively detestable to me!" proceeded Dr. Stafford harshly. "I must see an improvement upon this, Mr. Crowell. Within the next few days I shall expect to find a very different order of things in this class-room. I am surprised, sir, that you can be content to sit in an apartment so disgustingly untidy!"

Mr. Crowell tried to speak, but only gulped.

Then he looked round the Form-room, vainly seeking for justification for the Head's remarks. There was none. As a matter of fact, Mr. Crowell took a particular pride in keeping the Form-room tidy and neat. The juniors were punished if they were slovenly in any way.

More than once Mr. Crowell had expressed regret that the distempered walls were shabby, that the paintwork was old—and that, in fact, the whole room badly needed redecorating. Mr. Crowell could not be blamed for the walls being grimy.

"I am sorry, sir," he said quietly, at length. "I was not aware that this Form-room compared badly with any of the others—"

"That is enough!" roared the Head.

"Really, Dr. Stafford—"

"When I command silence, Mr. Crowell, silence I shall have!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "Please understand that I will accept no impertinence from you!"

Mr. Crowell staggered.

"Impertinence!" he gasped. "I

—I am amazed—"

"Further, I require you to be silent

when I order silence!" interrupted the Head. "It is not my wish to have a quarrel with you, Mr. Crowell, but I can tell you frankly that there will be a serious disagreement between us unless you immediately bow to my commands."

Mr. Crowell, red in the face, and nearly choking with indignation, stood silent. He had never been addressed in this manner before. The Head, in fact, had always treated his under-masters as equals, and had never made the slightest attempt to browbeat or bully them.

"I must protest against this treatment, Dr. Stafford!" said Mr. Crowell coldly.

"What!"

The Head barked out the word so suddenly that the Form-master jumped.

"I—I must protest!" repeated Mr. Crowell shakily. "I—I am not in a position of a stable-boy or a footman, sir. It is most distasteful to me to be addressed in such a manner——"

"Distasteful!" shouted Dr. Stafford. "Oh, indeed! And who are you, pray? Who are you, Mr. Crowell, to state your likes and dislikes? A Form-master—a man who is by no means indispensable to the school, and who could be replaced without the slightest difficulty. Please have no misapprehension upon that point, Mr. Crowell. Further, if you will persist in being impudent, I shall be compelled to adopt drastic measures."

"My only hat!" muttered Jack Grey.

And his amazed exclamation was merely an indication of the whole attitude of the Remove. Every boy there was astounded to hear this squabble between the headmaster and Mr. Crowell. He was the last Form-master at St. Frank's who deserved such harsh treatment. For Mr. Crowell was conscientious, thoughtful, and always applied himself to his work keenly and assiduously.

"If I have displeased you in any way, sir, I shall have no hesitation about handing in my resignation," said Mr. Crowell stiffly. "In any case, it would be far better, I think, to discuss such intimate matters as these in private, and not before the whole class——"

"You appear to think you are a person of considerable importance, Mr. Crowell," said the Head, with acid contempt in his voice. "Importance! Dear me! What an absurd idea! With regard to your resignation, you surely do not think I should wait to receive such a paltry document? If I choose, Mr. Crowell, I shall dismiss you on the spot!"

"Upon my soul!" panted Mr. Crowell. "This is too much, sir——"

"Hear, hear!" shouted a number of juniors.

"Silence!" roared the Head, twirling round.

He glared at the Remove fiercely. There was something a little different about the Head to-day. He was not himself, certainly. That kindly, benevolent look had vanished from his face. His features had become drawn and hard, his eyes shone coldly and cruelly. Every trace of goodness had left him. And there only remained the well-known, easily recognisable features. The man who faced the Remove at that moment was undoubtedly Dr. Malcolm Stafford—but his own personality had vanished, and another had taken its place.

"Who has dared to interrupt me?" went on the Head gratingly. "Every boy who spoke just now will come forward and stand before me!"

Not a boy moved.

"Oh! So you defy me—eh?" rapped out the Head. "I expected something of the kind. Very well. I can see that it will be necessary to adopt somewhat sterner measures. Nipper!"

I came forward at once.

"You, I believe, occupy the position

of captain of this Form?" asked the Head, glaring at me ferociously.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who those boys are?"

"I prefer not to say, sir," I replied.

"Come, come! That answer will not satisfy me!" snapped the Head. "What you prefer, and what you do not prefer, is of no consequence, Nipper. You have, in fact, admitted by your very words that you can name the boys who shouted out."

"I am sorry, sir, but I couldn't possibly tell you their names," I replied quietly. "Quite a number of fellows called out, I believe, and from every corner of the room. I couldn't possibly know them all."

"Do you know any of them?"

"Well, it's hardly fair——"

"Do you know any of them?" thundered the Head, shaking me fiercely.

"Yes, sir!" I replied.

"Then tell me their names!"

"No, I can't, sir!" I said hotly.

"Good old Nipper!" shouted several juniors.

The Head went purple with fury for a second. He glared round the room, he clenched his fists, and he breathed hard. Then, with an effort, he regained full control of himself and gave his full attention to me.

"I am making discoveries!" he said harshly. "I never imagined that such insubordination and insolence existed among the junior Forms. I have commanded you to tell me the names of the boys who interrupted me, and you have refused. Unless you reconsider your decision within ten seconds, Nipper, I shall thrash you!"

There was a tense silence.

"The ten seconds have gone, sir!" I said quietly.

"Upon my soul!" shouted the Head. "You—you dare to add to your impertinence! We will see, Nipper—we will see!"

He swished his cane suggestively.

"Hold on, sir!" said Handforth grimly. "We're not going to stand by and see you lam into Nipper when he's done nothing. I'm one of the boys who interrupted a little while ago."

"And I'm another, sir!" sang out Pitt.

"And I!" said Grey.

"Here, too, sir!"

Over a dozen fellows held up their hands. They were certainly not going to see me birched because I wouldn't give their names away. The Head released me at once, and eyed the juniors from beneath lowering brows.

"Oh!" he said, his voice cutting like a knife. "So you are the culprits? You are the boys who dared to——"

"We didn't do anything wrong, sir!" said Handforth boldly. "We only reckoned that you were going a bit too far with Mr. Crowell——"

"Silence, boy!" roared Dr. Stafford. "Good heavens! What are things coming to? You—you, a junior school-boy, dare to criticise my actions and my words? You reckoned that I was going too far with Mr. Crowell? How dare you? How dare you have the unexampled audacity to have any opinion whatever on the subject?"

"Dash it all, sir, we aren't blocks of wood!" said Handforth.

It was quite characteristic of the leader of Study D to argue the matter out—even with the Head. Any other junior endowed with an ounce of common-sense would have remained meekly silent, whatever his thoughts. But Handforth was not like that. If he had been facing the whole board of governors he would have had his way.

"What—what is that?" demanded the Head harshly. "Blocks of wood? For that gross impertinence, Handforth, you will write me five hundred lines. I shall require those lines by seven o'clock this evening."

"But—but——"

"Silence!" interrupted the Head. "And now, with regard to the other

matter, I have a few words to say to you. Let me tell you, Handforth, that you are not allowed to have any opinion at all regarding my actions. Whatever I choose to do, I shall do without——"

"It's not only my opinion, sir, but the opinion of the whole Remove," broke in Handforth stoutly. "Every fellow here reckons that you went a bit too far with Mr. Crowell. He's the best Form-master at St. Frank's, and it's not fair to say that we're a slovenly lot, and—and all the rest of it!"

"Oh, the hopeless ass!" groaned Church.

"He'll be skinned alive for that!" breathed McClure.

Dr. Stafford, however, did not fly into a rage as everybody expected. He merely looked at Handforth, with the expression in his eyes becoming somewhat grimmer. Then he turned to the class.

"Tell me, boys, is Handforth correct?" he asked sharply. "Is he correct when he states that the Remove, as a whole, disapproves of my attitude towards Mr. Crowell?"

"Yes, sir!" shouted the Remove in one solid voice.

And every hand was raised—even Fullwood & Co. joined in.

"That will do, boys—that will do!" said the Head. "We have here an entire Form which disapproves of its headmaster's actions. And we have here, I may add, an entire Form which is going to pay very dearly for its display of gross insubordination."

There was a silence.

"Nipper—Handforth, you may go back to your seats," went on the Head. "I shall not punish you individually. It is quite apparent that every boy in this room is equally guilty. Therefore, you shall all suffer the same."

"Pardon me, sir, but you do not think——" began Mr. Crowell.

"What I think, sir, is my own con-

cern, and I have not asked for any interruption!" snapped Dr. Stafford curtly. "My eyes have been opened this morning in a way that has appalled me. This Form is unruly, insubordinate, and its general manners are little removed from the manners of a set of young hooligans!"

"Oh!" said the Remove.

"And, as a punishment, every boy here will remain in the class-room until eight o'clock this evening!" exclaimed the Head, with a certain ghoully delight. "Understand—eight o'clock this evening. Perhaps that will cool your ardour!"

The Remove was somewhat surprised—and relieved. The punishment was by no means as harsh as they had been anticipating.

"Since you have displeased me, Mr. Crowell, I must insist upon your remaining with the boys the whole of the time," went on Dr. Stafford curtly. "You quite understand the nature of this punishment, I believe?"

"I think so, sir," said the Form-master. "I am to bring the boys into the Form-room after tea and detain them until eight o'clock."

"No, no, no!" shouted the Head impatiently. "Good gracious! What on earth put such an absurd idea into your head, Mr. Crowell? Have you no wits? Are you deaf?"

"I understood you to say that the boys were to remain, detained, until eight o'clock this evening!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, who was rather confused and bewildered. "Surely that is what you said, sir?"

"Precisely!" said the Head. "And I meant it—literally. You realise what that means? The boys and yourself are not to leave this apartment, in any circumstances, until eight o'clock to-night."

Mr. Crowell started back.

"But—but dinner—tea——" he began.

"There will be no dinner for the boys

in this class-room," rapped out the Head. "Neither will there be any tea. It is now—let me see—just about eleven o'clock. In other words, the Remove is detained within this apartment for the period of nine hours."

"What!" gasped Fatty Little, aghast.

"You may well look startled!" said the Head, with a smile of cruel pleasure. "Possibly you did not understand the nature of my command? But you surely understand it now. Until the hour of eight o'clock to-night no boy will leave this room. Lessons will continue uninterruptedly throughout the morning, afternoon and evening. There will be no dinner and no tea. And let me say at once that any boy who dares to disobey will be instantly expelled from the school."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Detained for nine hours!"

"No dinner!" moaned Fatty. "I shall be dead before eight!"

"My only hat!"

Mr. Crowell was positively panting with excitement.

"Dr. Stafford, this—this is surely a joke?" he panted breathlessly. "In no circumstances can you intend to enforce this—this impossible detention. Consider, sir—consider what it means! It will be cruel to keep these boys here for so long—literally starving them—"

"It will do them good!" interrupted the Head harshly. "And we will not discuss the matter any further, Mr. Crowell. I will simply say this, however. It will depend upon how this Form behaves itself whether any supper will be allowed to-night. If I receive a bad report, the whole Remove will be sent to bed the instant it is released."

And the Head turned on his heel without another word, passed out of the class-room, and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER 11.

Nothing Doing!

"WELL, I'm jiggered!" Handforth looked round somewhat dazedly as he uttered the words.

"Detained until eight o'clock," he went on. "No dinner, no tea! I—I've never heard anything like it in all my giddy natural!"

"It—it's awful!" said Church.

"We—we can't do it!" howled Fatty Little. "I—I'm feeling faint already! I was wondering how I could last until dinner-time. I can't go through the afternoon and evening without—"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Pitt. "It wouldn't do you any harm to starve for a couple of days, Fatty. You're like a camel—you carry about a week's supply on board always."

"Why, you ass, I'm empty!" roared Fatty.

"Boys, boys!" protested Mr. Crowell sharply. "Please remember that you are in the Form-room. I must have silence at once. This will never do. I cannot allow you to shout in such a manner."

The Remove settled itself down, and became fairly quiet.

"Perhaps it would not be wise for me to discuss Dr. Stafford's recent visit," went on Mr. Crowell quietly. "I can only say, boys, that I am amazed, and I can hardly believe that the headmaster is in his usual state of health."

"You mean he's going dotty, sir?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Ahem! I did not use such an expression as that, my boy," said Mr. Crowell. "So far as I can see, Dr. Stafford was irritated and annoyed, and the punishment he has inflicted is not only severe, but quite unprecedented in the history of the school. Since it is not within my power to make any change, it would be quite idle to discuss the subject."

And Mr. Crowell, with bowed head, looked down at his papers. The Form-master, in fact, was feeling humbled and humiliated. He had received unheard-of treatment from the Head. Indeed, if Dr. Stafford had continued in the same strain a minute longer, Mr. Crowell would have walked straight out of the room. The Form-master was rather glad now that he had retained full control of himself.

"Well, my beauty, what have you got to say?" muttered Watson, nudging me.

"Yes, dear old boy, we shall be delighted to hear your opinion—we shall, really!" said Sir Montie softly. "Do you sympathise with the Head now?"

I had expected something like this.

"In a way—yes," I replied calmly.

"What!"

"I don't believe he really means it," I continued. "He was serious enough at the time, but something tells me that it wasn't Dr. Stafford who was acting in that way. It was another personality altogether."

"Oh, rot!" growled Tommy. "You're dotty!"

Mr. Crowell was still bending over his papers. He took no notice of the low chatter which went on freely all over the class-room. In the circumstances, Mr. Crowell knew that it would have been useless to command silence. The juniors simply had to deliver themselves of their pent-up feelings.

"Are we going to stand it?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "That's what I want to know."

"What else can we do?" asked Church.

"Well, we could ignore it, and all walk out in a bunch when morning lessons are over," said Handforth. "That would show the Head that we aren't standing any of his beastly rot!"

"Oh, dry up!" muttered McClure. "Do you think we can defy the Head like that?"

"Yes, and if we walked out, as you suggest, Handy, a dozen of us would get the sack," added McClure. "We can't do anything. We've simply got to stick it, and all the talking in the world won't make any difference."

Handforth glared.

"You've got no spirit!" he said witheringly. "You've got no backbone! The Head couldn't sack the lot of us, and if he tried it on half a dozen or so, the rest would go on strike or something. The whole school would back us up, I tell you. I vote we clear out at half-past twelve, as usual."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Bob Christine, who was just behind.

"We're with you, Handy," added Pitt.

"It's all very well to talk like that," said Talmadge, "but we shall look a bit blue if the Head sacks a dozen of us. It's one thing to jaw about striking, and another thing to do it."

"Well, I'm game!" said Handforth stubbornly. "I don't mind risking——" Rap, rap!

"Now, boys, we really must return to our work," said Mr. Crowell, striking his ruler sharply on the desk. "This won't do at all."

Mr. Crowell was almost himself again. His face was a trifle pale, perhaps, and there was a sad, hurt look in his eyes. But the way in which the Remove had taken his part had plainly told him that the boys were loyal, and he was not so sharp as he might have been.

The juniors settled down—or pretended to. But Handforth had an obstinate set about his jaw.

"What are we going to do about it, sir?" he asked bluntly.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know, Handforth!" said Mr. Crowell. "It is quite useless to discuss the matter now——"

"Why is it, sir?" interrupted the leader of Study D. "It's got to be talked about some time, hasn't it? What about dinner? Does the Head really think that we're going hungry?"

"Yes, what about dinner, sir?" asked Fatty Little anxiously.

Mr. Crowell made a helpless gesture.

"Really, boys, I do not know what to say!" he exclaimed, with a worried look in his eyes. "Perhaps Dr. Stafford will be himself again before dinner-time. It is most probable that he will regret his decision, and cancel the extraordinary punishment. We must wait and see."

As a matter of fact, I half-expected to see Dr. Stafford appear towards twelve-thirty—the time we should have been released. But the half-hour struck, and nobody came near the Form-room. Mr. Crowell sat at his desk, worried and jumpy.

"You may put your books away, boys," he said, looking up.

"May we—go out, sir?" asked Fatty eagerly.

"No, Little, you may not," replied the Form-master. "You know perfectly well that Dr. Stafford has detained the whole class. I am sorry, boys—I feel for you keenly—but, unfortunately, I am unable to help you."

"The fags are out in the Triangle already!" growled Hubbard, from the window.

"I should not look out, if I were you, Hubbard," said Mr. Crowell. "Strictly speaking, I ought to keep you at work—for that is what Dr. Stafford ordered. But I cannot bring myself to the point of carrying this farce to such a length. You may talk freely, but please do not raise your voices. And keep your places. We will resume work proper at two-thirty."

"Oh, by gravy!" groaned Fatty. "That means no dinner. We shall starve!"

"Mr. Crowell's a sport," murmured

Pitt. "He's making it as easy as possible for us; he can't do more. If he let us out, and the Head knew that he was responsible, he would get the bullet straight away."

"Of course he would," I said. "He's a brick!"

Mr. Crowell paced up and down for a few minutes, thinking deeply. The position was a galling one for him. He was detained with the class! He was kept in, just as though he had been a junior himself! It was humiliating. Mr. Crowell was not standing it. He could not. His dignity would not allow him to.

"Listen, boys," he said suddenly.

There was silence at once, and we all looked at Mr. Crowell.

"I am going out now, and I look to you to remain in the Form-room," he said quietly. "Indeed, it will be serious for you if you take your leave, for you will have to answer to Dr. Stafford. What you do is, strictly speaking, your own concern. I strongly advise you to obey the Head's command. It would grieve me to see several of you expelled."

"Do you think it would really come to that, sir?" asked Grey.

"I do," replied Crowell. "Having taken up this position, the Head cannot very well depart from it. So let me again urge you to remain within this apartment. I am going straight to Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Hurrah!" yelled several juniors.

"Mr. Lee is our Housemaster, and it is right that he should know of this," went on Mr. Crowell. "I will persuade him to interview Dr. Stafford at once, although I fancy that Mr. Lee will need no persuasion. It is possible that, between us, we may effect your release from this detention almost at once."

"Oh, good!"

"We wish you luck, sir!"

"Rather!"

Mr. Crowell nodded, and passed out of the Form-room, closing the door after him. He had taken the only course possible. He simply could not submit to remaining a prisoner. Action of some sort was necessary.

The instant the door closed the juniors left their places and crowded round in bunches. Some of them talked about leaving the class-room, but none of the fellows seemed inclined to lead the way.

And in the middle of the excited talk the door opened. Chambers and Phillips and Bryant, of the Fifth, looked in. They were somewhat excited, it seemed, and they whistled as they surveyed us.

"Hallo!" said Chambers. "You, too!"

"What do you mean—'we, too'?" I asked, pushing forward.

"Why, don't you know?" said Phillips. "The Head's been going the pace this morning. Came into the Fifth Form Room and kicked up old Harry!"

"What!"

"Tell us about it!"

"What did he do, Philly?"

The Removites crowded round excitedly.

"Oh, we've been having verbal earthquakes, and things of that sort!" explained Chambers, grinning. "Old Pagett got it in the neck properly from the Head—not that he didn't deserve it, the old reprobate! He's been wanting something of this kind for years. We hugged ourselves when the Head threatened to kick Pagett out of St. Frank's."

The juniors were thrilled by this news. The Remove was not alone! Mr. Pagett, the master of the Fifth, had evidently been in trouble, too! He was a sour-tempered gentleman, and the Fifth would have shed no tears if their Form-master had left the school never to return. But there was no such luck.

"The Head came in here and kicked up a dust no end," said Handforth. "And he's detained the whole giddy Form until eight o'clock to-night! We've got to stick in here, without grub, until bed-time nearly!"

"What!" gasped Chambers. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Phillips and Bryant.

The Remove glared.

"Funny, isn't it?" asked De Valerie tartly.

"Rather!" grinned Chambers. "Why, you young fatheads, you aren't taking any notice of that rot, are you? The Head ordered us to go without dinner—to stay in our Form-room until tea-time. The same punishment as you've got, only yours is more so. Do you think we're taking any notice?"

"Not likely!" said Phillips and Bryant.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Did he say the whole of the Fifth?"

"Yes."

"And are you the only chaps who've come out?"

"No, we're all out," replied Chambers. "We're not such asses as to take that kind of treatment lying down. The best thing you can do, my children, is to come out of this Form-room in a body. Only don't blame me if anything happens. I expect I shall have quite enough trouble on my own shoulders."

"Yes, let's all clear out!" shouted Handforth.

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Little. "I shall have time to go to the tuckshop."

"Come on!"

There was a rush towards the doorway. Just two seconds of consideration would have led the juniors to remain, perhaps. But in the heat of the excitement the whole Remove swept out into the passage.

And after that, of course, it was too late.

The juniors had broken out. And Chambers was quite correct when he said that the Fifth had been detained also; but the seniors were not likely to submit to such drastic punishment.

However, having broken detention, the only thing was to brazen it out. As Handforth explained, when it came to obeying such a ridiculous command—there was nothing doing!

Fatty Little did not know exactly how things were going, and he believed in making hay while the sun shone. So he spent every penny of his available cash in Mrs. Hake's tuck-shop. He stoked himself up well, so to speak, and carried a further supply about with him, to be consumed when there was available space.

The rest of the fellows lounged about the Triangle, trying to look careless and at ease. They were waiting for dinner. But, in spite of themselves, they were rather jumpy, and every time a master appeared they looked at him with nervous expressions.

"It's a good thing we didn't give old Crowell our promise not to shift out," I remarked. "In any case, it wouldn't have been much good for a few of us to stay behind. We're probably in for it now."

Tommy Watson nodded.

"Well, I don't care," he said. "The Head can't do much; he can't sack the whole Remove and the Fifth as well. There's safety in numbers."

Tregellis-West was about to add a remark of his own. He certainly said one word, but it was full of expressive dismay. He had glanced at the Ancient House doorway, and now he was still looking in that direction.

"Begad!" he ejaculated.

Dr. Stafford had just emerged, and was now standing in the doorway looking out ferociously into the Triangle. And upon his face there was an expression of harsh, relentless fury.

CHAPTER 12.

Harsh Punishment!

"TROUBLE," I remarked, "is about to arrive."
"In chunks!" said Tommy Watson.

The Head came out of the Ancient House doorway and stood at the top of the steps. One glance at him was sufficient to tell us all that he had not changed, except, perhaps, that his fury had increased.

"Attention!" he shouted abruptly.

Instinctively, mechanically, every junior within hearing brought himself upright and stiff. The slightest word of the Head was always a command. Some of the fellows who were in the act of sneaking off came to a halt as they stood.

"Form up in double file!" ordered the Head. "Yes, the Remove and the Fifth. Any boy who fails to obey me will be publicly flogged and expelled."

"That's done it!" said Church huskily.

"I don't see why we should obey!" growled Handforth. "If all the other chaps would ignore him, it would be all right. I'm game, but it's no good me doing it alone. The only thing is to keep together."

"You ass!" muttered McClure. "We're helpless!"

Handforth glared at him.

"Are we?" he roared. "We'll jolly well see about that! Back up, Remove! Are we going to submit? No! Let's walk the other way. Come on; rally round! Our motto is—no tyranny!"

Handforth stalked away, fondly imagining that every other fellow in the Remove would follow him. Unfortunately he stalked alone.

"Oh, the hopeless duffer!" groaned Church.

The Head smiled evilly.

"Take no notice of that insubordinate young rascal!" he shouted. "Come along, boys—form into double

line! Handforth, stop at once! You hear me? Come here this instant!"

Handforth paused, hesitated—and was lost.

"Why, you—you rotters!" he gasped. "Aren't you going to rally round?"

"We can't defy the Head, you fat-head!" hissed Owen major.

Every fellow in the Remove, with the exception of about half a dozen, was in the Triangle at the time. They all formed into line, since there was really nothing else to be done. To talk about defying the Head was one thing; actually to defy the Head was another!

I should have been ready enough to follow in line with the rest of the Remove, whatever they did. But I was certainly not going to lead any revolt. This was no time for open rebellion. I knew perfectly well that no revolt could possibly be successful if it was started in a rush.

Failure was bound to come—dismal failure. For a school rebellion to be successful, careful planning was necessary. Much had to be done in advance—in secret.

There was not any doubt that the Head's strange actions were sowing the seed of revolt. But whether the seed would ever develop remained to be seen. To break out in open defiance of the Head just now was simply asking for trouble. Handforth had asked for it—loudly.

The Remove, nervous and agitated, stood in double file. The Fifth had followed suit. They were seniors, certainly, but when face to face with Dr. Stafford they had no defiance left in them. Only about half the Fifth was present, but they formed up meekly enough.

The Head looked round, and then waved his hand.

"Morrow, Wilson, Carlile," he shouted, "come here at once!"

The three prefects were all within

sight. Morrow and Wilson had been chatting together, and were now looking on at the scene, and speculating what would happen. They started as their names were called.

"What, are we going to catch something, too?" said Wilson.

"Looks like it," murmured Morrow. "We'd better go."

They went, Carlile coming from another direction.

"You boys are all prefects!" barked the Head. "Search the school at once, and bring every member of the Upper Fourth and the Fifth Forms to their class-rooms at once. Go!"

The prefects went—words appeared to be unnecessary.

"Handforth!" rapped out Dr. Stafford.

The reckless Edward Oswald was still standing on his own, having failed to fall in line with the rest.

"Spe—speaking to me, sir?" he said, with an air of assumed ease.

"You know very well, Handforth, that I am speaking to you!" retorted the Head. "You will stand at attention for the moment. Ah, you could not have appeared at a more opportune moment, Fenton!"

Fenton, of the Fifth, had just come out of the doorway.

"Anything wrong, sir?" he asked, looking round.

"There is a great deal wrong, Fenton," replied the Head harshly. "However, I am capable of dealing with such a situation. Kindly take charge of Handforth at once."

"Take charge of him, sir?"

"Exactly. Lock him in the punishment-room."

Handforth went a sickly colour.

"Pun — punishment - room!" he gasped.

"It may interest you to know, Handforth, that your recent act of defiance will cost you the full

penalty," said the Head. "I am not the kind of man to make idle threats, as you are well aware. I told you in advance that any boy who defied me would not remain at St. Frank's."

"You—you don't mean that you're going to sack me, sir?" panted Handforth.

The Head rubbed his hands together gloatingly.

"This evening you will be flogged in the presence of the whole school," he replied. "Immediately afterwards, Handforth, you will be publicly expelled, and will leave these walls within the hour."

"But—but—"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "Not one word, Handforth. I have told you my decision. It is final!"

Handforth swayed slightly, and looked at Fenton in a haggard kind of way.

"Oh, my goodness!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Steady on! Keep a stiff upper lip!" muttered Fenton. "Sorry, kid, but you'll have to come. I've got to obey orders."

They went inside, the Head looking after them with a fierce glint in his eye. And all the other fellows in the Remove felt nervous and uneasy. Handforth was sacked! Open defiance, it seemed, was utterly useless. It simply brought dire trouble for the defiant ones.

"Mark time!" shouted the Head sharply.

The juniors, flustered, hardly knew what they were doing. Never before had anything of this nature occurred at St. Frank's. It was unheard-of for the Head to take personal command of a Form.

"Now, march straight into your class-rooms at once!" shouted Dr. Stafford. "If any boy dares to fall out he will share the same fate as Handforth!"

Nobody fell out; the Remove Form-

room was reached within a few minutes. The Fifth, at the same time, trooped into their own apartment. The stragglers were brought in a few minutes later by the prefects.

"Morrow, you will go into the Fifth Form class-room and remain there until I arrive," said the Head curtly. "If any boy is absent I shall hold you responsible. If you desert your own post, expulsion will await you. Go!"

Morrow compressed his lips and went.

"And now," went on the Head, "I will deal with you!"

He turned to the Remove, who were all standing in their places, looking nervous and uncomfortable. The Head was apparently enjoying the whole business. He took a kind of fiendish glee in witnessing the discomfiture of his victims.

"You will sit down!" he commanded. "Now, I intend to say a few words before proceeding with the punishment. It was grossly inordinate of this Form to leave the class-room after the strict instructions I had given. Mr. Crowell is largely to blame for the whole occurrence, and I may tell you at once that Mr. Crowell will leave the school at the end of this present month."

"Oh!" said the Remove.

"I require no interruptions!" proceeded the Head. "I intend to make you obedient. While I am headmaster of this school no junior boy shall defy me. You were ordered to remain here until eight o'clock to-night. Yet, soon after my back was turned, you thought that you could ignore my orders and walk about as you pleased. I intend to show you the error of such ways. As a lesson to you, every boy will remain in this apartment until bed-time."

"Oh!"

"But—but—"

"Silence!" barked the Head. "Until bed-time, I said, and until bed-time I meant! Any boy who utters one word

will be soundly flogged. You will not leave this apartment until the bell for retiring rings to-night. And for the rest of this week you will all be confined within gates. Further, there will be extra lessons every evening from six-thirty until eight-thirty. I am determined to have complete and absolute submission from you!"

The Remove sat dumb, appalled by the severity of the sentence.

"That is better! I can see that you are realising who is master!" went on the Head harshly. "De Valerie, stand out here!"

De Valerie, who sat at the end of the front row, came forward.

"Hold out your hand!" commanded the Head.

The junior held it out.

Swish!

"Oh!" gasped De Valerie, taken aback.

"Again," said Dr. Stafford curtly.

Swish, swish, swish!

Cecil de Valerie received four stinging cuts—two on each hand. And the Head laid it on with all his strength. De Valerie was rather staggered—he had not been expecting anything of this kind. And he wondered why on earth he had been selected for this special punishment.

As it turned out, it wasn't special at all.

For the Head proceeded to take every boy in turn—and each one received four stinging slashes. In short, Dr. Stafford was caning the whole Remove! This punishment was in addition to the unheard-of detention.

Some of the fellows at the back congratulated themselves that they would come last. By the time the Head had reached them he would have exhausted himself, and they would thus get off lightly. Unfortunately, however, Dr. Stafford was displaying quite unsuspected energy. The last ten juniors were swished every bit as severely as the first ten.

My hands were burning and filled with agony I had "copped out" like all the others. And those fellows who howled—such as Teddy Long and Gulliver and Merrill—they received an extra cut each. So the howling didn't do them much good.

Finally, Dr. Stafford stood back and gazed at the Form.

"Now, perhaps, you will try to remember that I am the headmaster of this school, and that my orders are not to be flouted!" he said fiercely. "I am going now—but, if any boy leaves his place he will be expelled. Remember—I am in earnest!"

The Head strode out of the Form-room. And after the door had closed behind him not a single fellow had moved from his place. At least, not until several minutes had elapsed.

"The beast—the brute!" said Owen major. "And—and we've got to stand it! We've got to submit like a lot of galley slaves! The Head's a beast and a bully!"

"Hear, hear!"

But the voices were now subdued.

"It'll end in a revolt!" said Pitt. "That'll be the end of it, you mark my words. I'm ready even now——"

"Steady on, Reggie, old son," I put in. "That kind of talk won't do. A revolt would be useless—in any case, it couldn't be managed unless it was properly planned in advance. We're up against the Head, and we've got to submit. There's no alternative."

But the Remove seethed with fury and impotent helplessness.

CHAPTER 13.

The Head's Two Personalities!

ST. FRANK'S was in something of a ferment.

Afternoon lessons were just over—over, that is, for all the fellows excepting those belonging to the Remove and the Fifth. These two unfortunate Forms remained in their class-

rooms—and were destined to remain there, by the Head's orders, until bedtime.

Dr. Stafford's harsh punishments were the talk of the whole school. The fags were rather awed, and gathered together in groups, discussing the situation with bated breath.

They were, in fact, in mortal terror of some dire punishment falling upon their own heads. Even the Sixth, lordly and aloof, had an uncomfortable feeling that they might be in for some trouble of their own.

With the Head in his present mood, there was no telling what might happen.

The Remove fairly seethed with helpless fury and indignation and irritation. To be hemmed in the Form-room like this was galling. The Fifth suffered in the same way. Their experience with the Head—their hands were still tender—had told them that it would be fatal to "jib" again. A revolt against the Head's authority was quite out of the question—at least, without careful preparation.

Edward Oswald Handforth languished in the punishment-room.

Miserable and sick at heart, his outlook was black and terrible. Within an hour or so now he would be publicly flogged and expelled. It was almost too awful to be believed—but the Head had meant it.

Handforth, of course, had done nothing to deserve expulsion. He had been foolish, certainly, in openly defying Dr. Stafford earlier in the day—but quite an ordinary caning would have met the case.

Mr. Crowell was in charge of the Remove. He seemed subdued, unusually quiet, and there was a sad expression in his eyes. Some of the spirit had been knocked out of him, and he could give the fellows no hope.

He had interviewed Nelson Lee, and the latter had promised to see the headmaster. But Mr. Crowell expressed

the opinion that such an interview would be barren of result. Nothing, in fact, could be done.

Personally, I had expected a visit from Nelson Lee during the afternoon. But the guy'nor had not come anywhere near. And now that lessons were over—in the usual sense—I was beginning to feel rather despondent. It was getting on for tea-time, and I was the owner of an extremely healthy appetite.

We had all gone without dinner, and now that tea-time was at hand we felt ravenous. But there was little prospect of partaking of any food that day. Many of the fellows declared that they would write home at the first opportunity. Some of the wild suggestions included a scheme to break out and go for the police. But all this, of course, was mere talk—and idle talk at that.

As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee was by no means as indifferent to the situation of his non-appearance would seem to show. Earlier in the afternoon he had approached Dr. Stafford. The Housemaster-detective had been with the Head for exactly two minutes—quite sufficient time.

For the Head had fairly raved at him. He would not listen to reason, and any attempt at argument was futile. The only course, therefore, was to wait. And Nelson Lee now considered that he had waited long enough.

He left his own room and made his way straight to Dr. Stafford's study. And there was a somewhat grim look in his eye as he entered, after a preliminary tap. He found the Head sitting right back in a deep armchair.

It was dusk, and the study was gloomy, except for the faint flickerings from the fireplace.

"Well? Who is that?" came the Head's voice, harsh and irritable.

Nelson Lee compressed his lips. Apparently there was not much change for the better. Lee advanced into the study and stood close to the Head.

"Perhaps you can spare a few minutes, Dr. Stafford," he said quietly.

"No, no—it is quite out of the question," snapped the Head. "Please go at once, Mr. Lee. I wish to be alone—quite alone. Go!"

"I am sorry, but I think it is my duty to remain," said Nelson Lee firmly. "To be frank, Dr. Stafford, I want to have a quiet talk with you, and—"

The Head waved his hand.

"I want no talk—get out of this room!" he shouted. "Who do you think you are? I am the headmaster of this school, and I will not be dictated to by you, or anybody else. Don't make me lose my temper, Mr. Lee!"

"The loss of your present temper would not be regrettable," said Nelson Lee gently. "Come, Dr. Stafford, we must not quarrel. I am seriously afraid that you are not well, and I am hoping that we may come to a better understanding."

He seated himself in a chair opposite to the Head, quite ignoring the latter's impatient snort and angry glare. Lee lifted the poker and gave the fire several hearty digs. The coals broke up, and a cheerful blaze resulted.

"Upon my word, Mr. Lee, your audacity is unexampled!" exclaimed the Head harshly. "Shall I tell you once more to leave this room—or shall I be compelled to resort to violent measures?"

Nelson Lee made no reply. He sat forward in his chair and looked Dr. Stafford up and down with those clear, penetrating eyes of his. He searched the Head's face—his eyes—his wrinkled forehead—his mouth. He examined every line, and did not fail to notice the slight twitching of the Head's fingers.

"No, Dr. Stafford, I am not going," he said firmly.

"You're—you're not going!" snarled the Head. "How dare you? How dare you defy me in this disgraceful——"

"It is necessary that we should face this matter out," interrupted Lee. "Threats are useless. I shall take no notice. Violence would be not only undignified, but equally futile. Sit still, Dr. Stafford—try, if possible, to sleep."

For a moment it seemed that the Head was about to fly off into an uncontrollable fit of temper. But he seemed to pull himself together, and, with clenched fists, he relaxed himself into the cushions of the chair. He remained there, glowering at Lee and breathing hard.

The detective had tried this with a deliberate purpose. And he had proved that the Head was not capable of withstanding his strong will. Lee had, by sheer force of his own personality, compelled the Head to calm down.

But Nelson Lee was worried and puzzled.

This Dr. Stafford was not the Dr. Stafford that Lee had previously known. He was like another man. Even his voice sounded different—it had a harsher, more discordant note. His very facial expression was changed. The soft lines had vanished altogether, to be replaced by a cruel tightening of the lips and a menacing lowering of the eyebrows.

And yet the Head was healthy enough. He was not feverish, he showed no sign whatever of any type of illness. It might have been supposed that his brain was affected—but, even in his worst tempers, he knew precisely what he was doing and clearly indicated that he was perfectly rational.

And while Nelson Lee was studying the problem in this way there came a tap at the door, and Mr. Hugh Trenton appeared. At the first moment he did not see Nelson Lee sitting there, for the room was nearly dark except for the gleam of the firelight. And the science master looked straight at the big chair where Dr. Stafford sat.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," said Mr. Trenton softly. "I trust you are

reeling better— Why, what— I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee! I did not catch sight of you sitting there until this moment!"

Nelson Lee looked keenly at the science master.

"If I were you, Mr. Trenton, I should withdraw," he said. "Dr. Stafford is not quite himself—"

"Must you discuss me as though I were a patient in a hospital?" snarled the Head abruptly. "Who is this—who is this? Oh, Trenton! Get out of this study before I kick you out!"

Mr. Trenton started back.

"Really, Dr. Stafford!" he protested. "I—I—"

"One more word from you, sir, and I'll pitch you out of the school to-night!" shouted the Head fiercely. "Go away! Do you hear? I won't be bothered by every infernal fool who chooses to come into this room!"

Mr. Trenton's eyes gleamed for a second, but he bowed.

"Very well, Dr. Stafford!" he said quietly. "I will withdraw."

He turned, walked quietly across the room, and went out, closing the door behind him. Nelson Lee said nothing. He sat quite still in his own chair, and watched the Head as he lay back and closed his eyes.

Now and again the Head would start up—but always he found Lee there, watching him closely and intently. And at last it seemed that Dr. Stafford went off into a doze. His breathing was even and regular.

For well over half an hour he remained like this—until he gave a sudden shiver, and sat up. Nelson Lee was there, having remained motionless. Dr. Stafford passed a hand across his brow and shivered again.

"The room is chilly," he muttered. "Would it be too much trouble, Mr. Lee, for you to poke the fire up somewhat?"

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee readily.

He bent forward, and there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. He poked the fire into a blaze again, and when he looked up the Head was himself. That is to say, the cold compression of his lips had relaxed, his glowering eyebrows were softer and more gentle. His whole expression, in fact, was that of a kindly, elderly gentleman.

"Heaven help me, Mr. Lee!" he muttered brokenly.

The detective pretended to appear surprised.

"You are in trouble?" he asked gently.

"In trouble!" echoed the Head, with a bitter note in his voice. "Good gracious, Mr. Lee, don't you know—are you in ignorance of the truth? I have been acting like a brute—a bully—a blackguard! I know it—and that is just the ghastly nature of the whole business!"

"Why have you acted in that way, Dr. Stafford?"

"Why? Because—because I was unable to prevent myself," replied the Head huskily. "It may sound absurd to you, Mr. Lee—it must surely sound absurd to any man in his right senses. But I am telling you the absolute truth when I say that I had no power to alter my actions of the earlier part of the day. I know quite well that I behaved worse, perhaps, than any hooligan would behave. And yet, during that ghastly spell, I actually took a keen delight in making my poor boys suffer. What can I do, Mr. Lee? Heaven above, what can I do?"

"That is one of the matters I am anxious to discuss," replied Nelson Lee. "I came here this afternoon, Dr. Stafford, to have a quiet talk with you, but I found that you were hardly in a—well, in a normal condition—"

"I insulted you, Mr. Lee—I know it," interrupted the Head brokenly. "I treated you in a dreadful manner. Please forgive me—please try to understand that I was incapable of control—"

ling myself. Indeed, it was not I who spoke to you—it was another being! I seem to be two people, Mr. Lee! At times everything that is good and noble in me vanishes—and I become a bully and a cur. Until quite recently I never suffered from these horrible bouts. But of late I have periods when I find it impossible to account for my feelings. My good qualities seem to lose their grip—I cannot keep control of myself. And everything wicked and brutal and bad comes to the fore. I am appalled—terrified. I had not the faintest idea that I possessed such sinister, wicked characteristics."

Nelson Lee bent forward in his chair.

"Dr. Stafford, I am convinced that you are not to blame for what has been taking place," he said quietly. "I have been observing your actions very closely and carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that you—that is, your present self—cannot be held responsible."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee. I am indeed grateful for those words," said the Head wearily. "But I do not deserve them: my wickedness should be punished for it is futile to say that I am not responsible. If I am not, who is? I have committed these actions; it is a part of my own personality which causes me to do these things."

"Possibly—possibly!" admitted the detective. "But are you quite sure that the blame is yours, and yours alone? I am becoming suspicious, Dr. Stafford."

"Suspicious?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"I cannot put my suspicions into words at present," said Nelson Lee. "But I am certain of this much: There is some evil influence at work—some influence of which you are in total ignorance. I am even ready to believe that some cunning and clever enemy is using his powers—"

"Enemy?" echoed the Head, startled.

"That is impossible, Mr. Lee—quite,

quite impossible! I have no enemies. I am two characters in one—my good self is fighting against my bad self, and the latter, it seems, is getting the better of the tussle. More than once of late I had feared that my mind is becoming unhinged."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I do not think you need alarm yourself in that way," he said. "According to my observations, Dr. Stafford, your brain is as clear and level as ever it was. These peculiar moods of yours are apparently brought on by some mysterious influence of which we are completely in ignorance."

"I feel so helpless, Mr. Lee—so appallingly helpless!" exclaimed the Head. "And I am intensely worried by the thought of my actions during these—these attacks. Really, I can call them nothing else. This morning, for example, I acted like a bully and a blackguard. I punished the Fifth Form and the Remove, and even now, at this minute, both those Forms are confined in their own class-rooms."

"And Handforth is awaiting a flogging and expulsion," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the Head, starting up. "You are right, Mr. Lee—you are right! I had overlooked that unfortunate junior for the moment. I fear I insulted both Mr. Crowell and Mr. Pagett, and I shall make it my duty to apologise to them at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, please let me thank you for having such patience with me, Mr. Lee."

"Were I not convinced that you are helpless in this matter, my attitude would be different," said Nelson Lee. "But, as I have already told you, Dr. Stafford, I cannot bring myself to believe that these strange attacks of yours are a natural phenomenon. Your theory of brain trouble is quite wrong."

"I trust it is, Mr. Lee; but, in my opinion, there is no other possible

explanation. And I may tell you at once that Sir Howard Tukesdale, the famous brain specialist, is visiting me to-morrow morning. I shall ask him to be perfectly frank, for I want the complete truth regarding my mental condition. In the meantime, I must do my utmost to repair the damage that I have caused. I am wasting time here while those unfortunate youngsters are suffering punishment which they do not deserve."

"You intend to cancel the impositions you have imposed?"

"Yes, at once, Mr. Lee!" replied the Head decisively.

CHAPTER 14.

Nelson Lee's Startling Adventure!

"SIX o'clock!" said Fatty Little in a hollow voice.

"Over three hours before bed-time, and no grub!" remarked Hubbard with a kind of gloomy relish. "Do you think you'll last out, Fatty? Will you still be alive?"

The fat junior groaned.

"Alive!" he echoed. "You—you torturer! All you can do is to keep reminding me of grub. By gravy! I shall be stark dead before nine. Look, I'm caving in already. I'm feeling like a bladder that's been pricked."

And Fatty Little, in order to illustrate his meaning, flapped the lower part of his waistcoat, fondly imagining that this indicated a void beneath. But Fatty was as large as ever, and, as a matter of fact, he was the only fellow in the Remove who had had a square meal since breakfast.

All the rest of us had gone without dinner, and were now fairly ravenous with hunger, and when one knows that food is beyond reach, it makes one feel even hungrier. Fatty, of course, had laid in a supply during the brief interval when the Remove had broken detention.

"Blessed if I know what we're going

to do about!" said De Valerie. "It's a cert we won't stand much of this kind of thing, though. The Head ought to be kicked out of his job for——"

"Not so loud, you ass!" muttered Jack Grey.

But Mr. Crowell, seated at his desk, took no notice of the things that the juniors were saying. In fact, he allowed the Remove to do practically as it liked. He only insisted upon comparative quietness. The boys moved about and chatted in groups, and quite a crowd had collected round the fire. Work was not thought of.

All sorts of whispers of revolt were going about. But they were idle enough—the juniors had already had a taste of what would happen if they pitted themselves against the headmaster.

Church and McClure were probably the most miserable pair in the Form-room. They missed Handforth more than they cared to say. Their redoubtable leader was in the punishment-room, awaiting a flogging and expulsion.

"It's—it's too awful for words!" muttered Church. "When we come out of here old Handy will be gone!"

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed McClure, startled. "I hadn't thought of that, you know. He'll be gone, and we shan't see him any more. He won't even be able to say good-bye to us!"

"Poor old Handy!" said Church broken. "He had his faults, but he was one of the best, all the same. To—to think that we shan't see his chivvy at St. Frank's any more! I—I can hardly believe it!"

And just then, before the juniors could continue the conversation, the door quietly opened and Nelson Lee appeared. There was a buzz at once—a subdued, excited whisper of voices. Some of the fellows hurried towards the gov'nor with eager eyes and flushed faces.

"Anything fresh, sir?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"Has Handforth been sacked yet, sir?"

"Really, boys, I cannot answer you all at once!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, smiling. "You will be delighted to learn that Dr. Stafford has thought better of his earlier decision. Your punishment is cancelled."

"Oh!"

"Can—can we go out, sir?"

"Can we have some grub?" yelled Fatty excitedly.

"Yes, boys. You are at liberty to leave the Form-room just as soon as you like," said Nelson Lee. "But wait—wait! Dear me! There is not such a rush, surely? I would like to say a few words to you."

Some of the fellows who had darted to the door came to a halt. I was by the guv'nor's side, and I could see a little twinkle in his eye. I felt convinced that this happy state of affairs was his doing.

"I'll bet we've got to thank you, sir!" I said heartily.

"Yes, rather!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

"Boys, boys!" protested Mr. Crowell. "Do please try and control yourselves. Well, Mr. Lee, I am delighted to hear that Dr. Stafford has cancelled this most unjust punishment—"

"Which reminds me, Mr. Crowell, that Dr. Stafford would like to see you as soon as possible in his own study. I rather fancy he wishes to apologise for what has happened to-day," added Lee in a low voice.

Mr. Crowell brightened up visibly.

"Boys, please let me say a few words before you depart!" exclaimed Lee, addressing the juniors. "I have already told you that your punishment is cancelled. Dr. Stafford further desires me to say that in consequence of your lost leisure time, there will be no prep this evening, and you will be allowed to remain downstairs an hour later than usual."

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, ripping!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"No, no!" shouted Lee. "Make no mistake, boys. These are not my orders. I am merely carrying them out on behalf of Dr. Stafford. It may interest you to know that a special meal has been prepared in the dining-hall—a kind of high tea. The Head, as you will realise, is doing his utmost to compensate you for what you have already suffered. Those boys who care to partake of high tea in the hall will please go there at once."

The juniors, shouting and laughing, rushed away. And when they arrived in the dining-hall they found the Fifth already in possession. Good humour was restored, and there were no further ugly things being said about the Head.

"Oh, he's not such a bad old sport, after all!" exclaimed Owen major. "He was in one of his giddy tantrums this morning, and he thought better of it. My hat! What a ripping spread!"

"And no prep to-night, and an extra hour!" said Singleton. "Dash it all, we aren't doing so bad! I'm satisfied, for one."

And when the juniors had finished their meal, they were feeling comfortable and quite at ease. A little stir of excitement had been caused at the commencement of the high tea by the arrival of Edward Oswald Handforth.

Handforth, it seemed, had received a full pardon, and was as much at liberty as any of the other juniors. Church and McClure were apparently more relieved than Handforth himself. Good humour in the Remove and the Fifth was fully restored.

The Head had undoubtedly done his very utmost to atone for his harshness, for he fully realised that the punishments he had inflicted had been utterly uncalled for. The fellows forgot their trials in the Form-room.

There was no prep to be done, and an extra hour of liberty to be enjoyed. However, when the bed-time actually

came, all the members of the Remove were only too glad to go up to the dormitory.

And there was not the usual amount of chatter that night. The extra hour had caused general sleepiness, and, as a result, the Remove dropped off to sleep at once. The Fifth did likewise.

By eleven o'clock the school was quiet and still.

Dr. Stafford had retired early, feeling worried, troubled, and not quite himself. He had a headache, and he was constantly concerned by the thought that he might soon go off into another of his unaccountable fits. He could not prevent them—he had no idea when they were coming; but when they did come it was absolutely beyond his control to ward them off. It was hardly surprising that the worthy Head was filled with worry and concern.

Nelson Lee, in the privacy of his own bed-room, did not immediately go to sleep. He sat until well after midnight in the armchair before the fire, lazily attired in pyjamas, dressing-gown, and slippers. And there he sat, with only the flickering of the fire to illuminate the room, pulling steadily at his pipe.

The famous detective had no desire to sleep.

He was thinking—he was turning over theories in his mind. These lapses on the part of the Head were unnatural. There was something behind them—something sinister and terrible, and Nelson Lee was using all his wits to get at the truth.

Dr. Stafford's own idea that his brain was affected did not commend itself to Nelson Lee. He was something of a specialist in his own way, and he was fully convinced in his own mind that the Head was perfectly normal. His extraordinary outbreaks were not connected with insanity.

However Lee was rather glad that Sir Howard Tukesdale was coming down, for this celebrated brain

physician would be able to satisfy Dr. Stafford, once and for all, that his brain was in no way diseased.

Nelson Lee had certain suspicions. He had observed many peculiar things of late—little trifles which no ordinary person would think worthy of attention. But Lee was on the alert; he was certain that some grim power was at work with the object of driving Dr. Stafford from the school.

And this mysterious power would undoubtedly succeed unless measures were taken, promptly and decisively, to counteract the peril. Nelson Lee's great difficulty lay in the fact that he had no positive starting point for any real investigation.

However, the detective was convinced of one thing—this unknown power was humanly controlled. And thus it stood to reason that someone associated with the headmaster himself was secretly at work. Who could this someone be? Nelson Lee had his own ideas, and he was keeping his eyes wide open.

And yet, at the same time, Lee knew that there were others—outside the school—who were concerned in this plot. He remembered the incident of the quaintly designed silver disc.

"Yes, that little emblem has a place somewhere in this queer puzzle," Nelson Lee told himself. "I rather fancy I can fit it in where it belongs."

He remembered that Mr. Trenton, the science master, had seemed taken aback when that disc had been shown to him. What did Mr. Trenton know about it? Was Mr. Trenton connected in any way with this mystery?

So engrossed was Nelson Lee with his thoughts that he had allowed his pipe to go out, and the fire to die down. And the bed-room was dim and gloomy, only the faintest glow from the dying coals being visible.

And then, just as Lee was about to rouse himself, he became rigid.

A sound, faint and indistinct, had come to his quick ear. He didn't move; he remained seated in his chair as

motionless as a statue. But, although he could not see, he knew that the door of his bed-room had opened.

And now, with every nerve on the stretch, he continued to wait.

The back of his chair was towards the door, and it was one of those high backs—Lee was sunk right into the depths of the soft cushions. But he knew, almost as certainly as possible, that the door of the bed-room was opening inch by inch.

Nelson Lee had had experiences of this kind before. He "sensed" the presence of the stranger within the room rather than saw or heard him. And another certain indication was the faint glow from the embers in the fireplace.

The opening of the door had caused a slight draught—and this draught, in turn, caused the dying coals to glow afresh. And still Nelson Lee did not move. He remained in his chair waiting.

His brain worked quickly. Who could this marauder be? Who was it that came stealing into his bed-room at dead of night—clearly under the impression that the detective was snugly between the blankets and fast asleep? Nelson Lee did not form any rash guesses—he was waiting to find out for certain.

On the other side of the bed-room there was a big wardrobe with its central door containing one massive mirror. This, as it happened, was slightly open, and Nelson Lee's attention was attracted towards it by a slight movement.

The mirror was at such an angle that he could see the figure of the intruder moving forward between the doorway and the bed. This was fortunate—and quite unexpected. Lee stared at the mirror intently.

The coals in the fireplace glowed rather more brightly.

The detective saw a figure—dim and indistinct, but it was the figure of a man. It was, of course, impossible to recognise the features, or even the

general shape of the visitor. Lee could only be certain that he was tall and active. He moved like a shadow, with stealth and care.

And then, just when he got near the bed, the stranger suddenly flung himself forward, careless of further secrecy. Nelson Lee whipped out of the chair and swung round. He saw a knife gleam in the faint glow. It swept down, thudded heavily upon the bed, and a low gasping grunt came from the intruder.

"Great Scott!" muttered Nelson Lee. He was surprised—he had not anticipated anything of this sort. This intruder had tried to murder him. Believing Lee to be in the bed, the man had struck swiftly and terribly.

"Hands up!"

Nelson Lee rapped out the words and drew a revolver from his pocket. The figure swung round, making a curious snarling noise at the same time. And before Nelson Lee could press the switch of his electric torch—which he had taken from another pocket—the unknown was upon him.

He came across the room in one leaping swoop.

"No you don't!" shouted Lee. "By Jove! What's this game?"

He found himself compelled to fight for his life. The stranger was as strong and agile as Lee himself, and that deadly knife in his hand was a source of awful peril. Lee struggled fiercely—desperately.

For this, as he knew, was a battle for his life.

In the intense gloom he could see nothing distinctly—he could not even tell who this man was. He uttered no word—the only sounds were the heavy breathing of the two men as they struggled for the mastery.

Just for one flash Lee had an opening!

Crash!

His fist swung round and thudded into the jaw of his attacker. The man gave a grunting cry and the next

second he staggered, and Lee seized his right wrist. A sharp twist, a gasping howl of pain, and the knife went clattering to the floor.

"Now we are on more even terms!" panted Lee curtly.

They fought on. At one time it seemed as though Lee would be the loser, for this stranger was possessed of a kind of maniacal strength. But Nelson Lee's superior skill told.

And at last the unknown gave a grunt and sagged to the floor. All the strength seemed to go out of him, and he lay still. Nelson Lee pulled himself up, breathing hard, and took his electric torch from his pocket.

He switched on the light, his heart gave a leap as the white beam shone fully upon the stranger's face. But it was only for one fleeting second that Lee was able to see. The man lifted a foot and kicked at the detective's arm with vicious violence. The force was so great that the torch was jerked high into the air, and it fell with a thud to the floor. Lee's arm caused him agony.

Then there was a scuffle. The intruder leapt to his feet like a monkey, dashed to the door and passed out. Lee, arriving at the door, caught a glimpse of the figure as it dashed along and shot round the bend.

The detective did not follow—it was not necessary.

In his mind there came a vision—a kind of photographic plate of the face he had seen. That one tiny glimpse had been enough—Lee had seen, and he was not likely to forget.

His nerves were of steel, but he was conscious that his face was slightly pale. For the memory of that face filled him with nausea and horror. A livid face with bared teeth, twisted, distorted lips, and eyes that glowed with beast-like ferocity and savage hatred.

It was hardly a human face—it was like nothing that Nelson Lee had ever

seen before. And yet, in spite of its awful unhuman-like features, there was something vaguely familiar about that dreadful countenance.

"Upon my soul!" muttered Nelson Lee. "Is it possible? Is it possible? This is far more appalling than I ever imagined!"

His escape had been a narrow one, and he knew this quite well. Light sleeper as he was, he would never have heard the faint sounds caused by the mysterious intruder as he entered the room. And that knife would have descended—

Lee did not care to ponder over the matter. It was only by luck that he had been sitting in that chair. And, even so, it had been touch and go for a while, for the unknown had possessed the strength of three ordinary men. The detective had little fear that the intruder would return.

He switched on the electric light, locked the door, and then surveyed the scene. The knife was lying just at the foot of the bed. Lee picked it up and carefully examined it. It was quite an ordinary dagger, with a bright steel blade of considerable strength. There was no mark on it which would lead to any identification of its owner. Lee handled it very carefully.

He placed it gingerly on a side table, and then searched about for further signs. But except for a ruck or two in the carpet, and a disarranged mat, there was nothing of any significance.

At least, not until Lee glanced at the foot of the bed. It was rather a handsome piece of furniture made of polished walnut. The lower rail was wide, and perfectly smooth. As Lee glanced at it he remembered that the intruder had laid his right hand firmly upon the polished surface during the course of the struggle.

"That may be very helpful," murmured Lee grimly.

He went to a cupboard and removed a small leather travelling case. From

this he produced a little metal box. When he had removed the top there was another lid, but this one was finely perforated.

Very carefully Lee dusted the top of the bed rail with fine grey powder. When this was done to his satisfaction he gave a few gentle puffs. The powder disappeared as though by magic from the polished walnut surface. But there were four small smudges left!

"Excellent!" muttered Nelson Lee. "Excellent!"

He gazed at those smudges intently, even bringing into operation a powerful magnifying lens. The marks were finger-prints—perfect examples, clear-cut and with every line visible.

Although the unknown's grip had only been momentary, it had evidently been a firm grip. And those finger-prints were likely to be useful. Nelson Lee had an idea that he might be able to do without them—but it was not the famous detective's way to leave anything to chance.

Then and there he prepared his camera and a charge of magnesium. With the camera at close range, the flashlight hissed, flooding the bed-room with blinding light for a second. The shutter clicked—and those finger-prints were preserved perfectly for future reference.

Lee was not satisfied until the film was developed and a print taken. It was not a quick process, but Nelson Lee did not mind. He considered that his reward was well worth the trouble. The print was a great success for the photograph seemed almost clearer than the original.

And the detective went quietly to bed.

He did not search the school or make any attempt to get on the track of the hideous object that had paid such a murderous visit to his room. Why? Perhaps Nelson Lee thought it unnecessary to search.

He certainly knew a great deal more than he would have been willing to tell—and a grim suspicion which had been lurking in his mind for days was becoming a terrible certainty!

Nelson Lee, in fact, was getting on the scent!

CHAPTER 15.

The Specialist's Verdict!

"SEEN it?" asked Owen major excitedly. "Seen what?" I said. "What's the sensation?"

I had just come down, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were with me. It was morning, and the Remove was feeling more like itself. The juniors had already forgotten the trials of the previous day.

"Begad!" remarked Sir Montie. "There is evidently somethin' the matter, dear old boys. The fellows are shoutin' frightfully—they are, really!"

Hussie Ranjit Lal Khan, the Indian junior, came up.

"The excitement is preposterous and of the extraordinary intensity!" he said, smiling and showing all his pearly teeth. "It appears, my honourable chums, that our worthy and disgraceful headmaster has pinned an absurd notice to the august board. It is a beautiful and inglorious notice—"

"Oh, dry up, Chocolate!" broke in Jack Grey. "You'll take half an hour to say what I could put into six words!"

"Really, my supremely polite chum, I use the perfect English of our wonderful language," said Hussie Khan softly. "It is important that a subject should be described dutifully and inaccurately."

"You can do that all right!" grinned Watson.

"I thank you for the esteemed complimentary insult," said the Indian junior. "I am always of the most sincere confused lucidity. As I re-

marked henceforth, our unworthy headmaster has pinned a sheet of ludicrous paper upon the——"

"Come and have a look at it," yelled Owen major. "If it wasn't in the Head's writing I'd say it was a jape of some kind. But there's no doubt about it at all—and I reckon the Head's true blue!"

"Hear, hear!"

I turned to my chums.

"This seems interesting," I said. "We'll look into it."

And I walked briskly to the notice-board, very delighted to hear the fellows using words of praise for Dr. Stafford. For, although I had suffered with the rest on the previous day, the idea had constantly been with me that the Head was not to blame for his extraordinary actions. I was convinced—as Nelson Lee was convinced—that Dr. Stafford had been under some mysterious influence.

Pushing my way through the crowd I came opposite the notice-board. And there, fastened in a prominent position, was a large sheet of paper. It was covered with the Head's well-known handwriting, and had his signature at the bottom. As Owen major had said, there was no spoof about it.

And I was certainly rather astonished as I read the following:

"To the Scholars of St. Frank's!

"It is not necessary for me to refer to the unfortunate incidents of yesterday, for all of you know the full story. I feel, however, that it is my duty to give an explanation of my seemingly harsh conduct. I am revealing no secret when I state that although I am apparently in a perfect state of health, I am, nevertheless, suffering from some peculiar and mysterious malady which temporarily deprives me of my normal temperament. I can offer no explanation, since I am far more mystified and worried than anyone else within these walls.

"If on any future occasion I behave contrary to my general custom, I urge you to be patient. It is possible that I may administer undeserved punishments. If this is the case, such punishments will be cancelled later. This notice is, as I am aware, a somewhat extraordinary one, but, since all the circumstances are extraordinary, it is necessary.

"I want every boy to know that I have his welfare at heart, and that the honour of this splendid old school is my dearest treasure. In my capacity as Headmaster I shall continue to guide you, and I am hoping that from now onwards everything will go along smoothly and comfortably.

"MALCOLM STAFFORD (headmaster.)"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Tommy Watson.

"A complete climb-down!" grinned Gulliver. "That's what it is! The headmaster of a big Public school like this snivelling an' excusin' himself for actin' the bally bully! I reckon it's about the limit!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fullwood sneeringly. "It's enough to make a chap feel sick!"

"If you had felt any other way I should have been surprised," I said, with contempt. "The Head required a great deal of courage to write that notice, and I reckon we ought to admire him for being man enough to state publicly his regret."

"Rather!"

"And we shall know next time," said Reginald Pitt. "If he sacks anybody when he's in one of his tantrums it won't matter—the chap will know that everything will be all serene when the head cools down."

De Valerie looked thoughtful.

"Yes, it'll work all right in a case like that," he remarked, "but what when the Head gets on to his other games?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he was in one of his fits for hours and hours yesterday," said De Valerie. "And during that time he can do some damage."

"Believe me, he can!" said Solomon Levi, nodding.

"He can cane the whole lot of us, make us go without grub, and goodness knows what else," added De Valerie. "You see what I mean? He can punish us and we can suffer while he's off the deep end, so to speak. So long as he gives heavy impositions and expulsions it won't matter, but we shall have a dashed lot to complain about if he repeats his merry old games of yesterday."

"Rather!" said Hubbard. "De Valerie's right."

"Of course."

"Well, the Head hasn't started any of his merry old games yet, as you call them," I said, "so you needn't get shouting. Everything's all serene, so far, and it's quite likely that the Head will be himself in future."

"Let's hope so, anyway."

Mr. Crowell came along shortly afterwards, and he was looking particularly pleased and serene. As a general rule, Mr. Crowell was of a somewhat tart disposition, and this new attitude of his proved that he was in high good humour.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Stafford had apologised handsomely to Mr. Crowell—much to the latter's embarrassment—for the unfortunate trials of the previous day. Mr. Crowell suddenly felt himself to be a person of some importance, and he was duly impressed by a new realisation of his own greatness. For the headmaster to apologise was quite out of the common.

But, after all, Dr. Stafford was doing the right thing. Nobody knew better than himself that he had been absolutely in the wrong. And, by having the courage to admit this, he commanded the respect of all, except a mere handful like Fullwood & Co.,

who had not the sense to appreciate the position.

There was just a little confusion in the Form-room that morning owing to the fact that the Remove had done no prep the previous evening, but nobody minded; even Mr. Crowell was joky and genial and tolerant.

And while the Remove was at lessons a powerful limousine glided noiselessly into the Triangle, and came to a halt in front of the Head's doorway. From this luxurious car stepped a tall gentleman with iron-grey hair, a firm, clean-shaven face, and a brisk manner. He was Sir Howard Tukesdale, the celebrated brain specialist.

In the Head's study Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford had witnessed the arrival of the expected visitor. Lee had said nothing regarding his adventure during the night; he had kept that quite to himself.

"I want you to remain, Mr. Lee, while Sir Howard makes his examination," said the Head, with a slight show of nervousness. "I don't mind admitting that I am somewhat agitated. I have a terrible fear that Sir Howard's verdict may be unfavourable, and it is more than possible that he will not tell me the truth."

"I should not alarm yourself unduly, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee gently. "It is more important that you should keep your mind as calm as possible."

The Head nodded.

"There is just one point, Mr. Lee," he said. "After the examination I should like you to have a few words with Sir Howard in private. He will doubtless tell you the truth; he will give you his frank, honest opinion of my condition. I want you to tell me exactly what he reports, whether it is liable to worry me or not."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Very well," he said readily "I will do as you request."

"That is a promise, Mr. Lee?"

"I have given my word."

Further conversation was impossible, for at that moment Sir Howard Tukesdale was announced. Tubbs, the page-boy, felt and looked extremely important as he ushered the distinguished visitor in.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Dr. Stafford!" said Sir Howard as he came forward with outstretched hand. "Your summons was an urgent one, and I came down at the earliest possible moment."

"I am greatly obliged, Sir Howard," said the Head. "Please let me introduce you to Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Why, good gracious!" ejaculated the specialist, turning to Lee and adjusting his pince-nez. "My dear Lee, I am delighted to meet you again! I had completely overlooked the fact that you were here. Of course—of course! This is quite an unexpected pleasure!"

Nelson Lee smiled as he shook hands. He had met the brain specialist on two or three occasions in the past—not particularly in a professional capacity, but at social functions.

After a few formal remarks Sir Howard turned and looked at Dr. Stafford with a critical eye.

"Well, Dr. Stafford, I have an idea that you are a busy man," he said crisply. "I don't wish to waste more of your time than is necessary. So it would be as well, perhaps, to get this little examination done with."

"I can assure you I am most anxious to hear your verdict, Sir Howard," said the Head concernedly.

And so, without any further delay, the brain specialist commenced his careful and delicate examination. Nelson Lee, meanwhile, remained perfectly silent, and looked on. It was perhaps twenty minutes before Sir Howard had finished, and then he regarded Dr. Stafford with a twinkle in his eye.

"A rather delicate matter," he remarked. "You sent for me, Dr. Staf-

ford, because you had a vague suspicion that your mental condition was questionable—eh? You had a fear that your brain was overworked?"

"Yes, I have been greatly worried—"

"Then, my dear sir, you need not worry any longer," interrupted the specialist crisply. "I have seldom examined a more healthy patient than yourself. So far as all my knowledge goes, your brain is normal and perfectly healthy. There is not the slightest reason for you to worry yourself. And the mere suggestion of insanity is too preposterous for serious consideration. To be quite candid, Dr. Stafford, you are robust and healthy in body and mind."

A great look of relief swept over the Head's face.

"I am indeed thankful to hear those words, Sir Howard," he said. "But I had feared that your verdict would be quite different. At the moment I certainly feel quite myself, but yesterday matters were different. As I fully explained to you in my letter, I have had periods of extraordinary temper."

"Tell me about these peculiar attacks."

The Head did so, and he made no attempt to spare himself. He told the blunt truth—describing his own sensations and his feeling of helplessness when he knew that he was doing wrong.

"Strange—very strange!" said Sir Howard thoughtfully. "I don't quite remember coming across an exactly similar case. And, to be frank, I must confess that I am somewhat sceptical. Please do not misunderstand me, Dr. Stafford. I am not doubting your word, but perhaps these tempers of yours are not as bad as you seem to think. They may be merely the result of excessive irritation upon a highly strung nature. I can safely assure you, however, that your fear regarding your brain is quite unfounded."

The specialist was more puzzled than

he was really ready to admit regarding the headmaster's strange symptoms. Indeed, Sir Howard was reluctant to believe the truth. His examination had revealed to him a virile, active brain, with no trace of disease. The Head, in fact, was in perfect health.

What, therefore, was the meaning of these strange attacks of temper? Sir Howard could find no explanation, and, finding none, found it difficult to credit what was told him.

Later on he accompanied Nelson Lee to the latter's own study. Dr. Stafford was feeling much better, and there was an expression of relief and thankfulness in his eyes. He was very pleasant to Mr. Trenton, who had presented himself in the study at the moment of Sir Howard's departure.

"Now, Sir Howard, I should very much like a few words with you in private," said Nelson Lee as he closed his own door. "I realise, of course, that mental cases are very delicate, and it is not always wise for the physician to be perfectly candid with his patient—"

"In this case, my dear Lee, there was no reason why I should be otherwise," interrupted the specialist. "Dr. Stafford's fears are quite unfounded. They are, in fact, preposterous! He is in a perfect state of health."

"You are quite satisfied as to that point?"

"Quite."

"You found no sign of any local disturbance—"

"None whatever," interrupted Sir Howard. "I can only repeat to you, Mr. Lee, that the worthy gentleman has been worrying himself needlessly. A fit of temper—what is it? Not insanity, surely? Everybody is liable to develop temper at certain times; it really depends upon the general conditions."

"Would you consider Dr. Stafford a type of man to go off into a cold, cal-

culating rage without any apparent cause?"

"No, I should not."

"Yet that has happened several times," said Lee quietly. "Without the slightest atom of reason, Dr. Stafford has frequently dropped his own personality entirely. He has become, in fact, a different being—a cruel, heartless tyrant! And yet, by nature, he is quite kindly and tolerant!"

"H'm! Peculiar—most peculiar!" said Sir Howard, stroking his chin. "I certainly cannot account for this, Mr. Lee. But perhaps you are exaggerating somewhat?"

"On the contrary, I have not told you the worst."

"Well, well, there is no accounting for temper," said the specialist, brushing the matter aside. "And, believe me, Mr. Lee, that is all this amounts to—just the vagaries of temper."

Sir Howard glanced at his watch.

"Dear me," he added, "I must be on the move?"

"Need you go so quickly?" interrupted Lee. "If possible I should like you to remain for an hour or so, Sir Howard. I do not know for certain, of course, but I have an idea that Dr. Stafford will go off into another of his strange attacks before the morning is out."

The specialist lifted his eyebrows.

"What reason have you for anticipating such a thing?" he inquired.

"My reason would sound somewhat preposterous to you, so I prefer to keep it to myself," replied Nelson Lee smoothly. "But I should very much like you to make this examination a thorough one while you are here, and you will agree that it would be far more satisfactory if you could see Dr. Stafford while in one of these—bouts, shall we call them?"

"Certainly, I agree that it would be helpful," said Sir Howard. "But, really, Mr. Lee, I cannot wait indefinitely—"

"That will not be necessary," broke in Nelson Lee. "I wish you to favour me further, Sir Howard. It may seem strange to you, but I want you to take your leave at once, apparently for good. But you will, however, return shortly after luncheon. And I shall be surprised if you find Dr. Stafford in the same position as he is now. Please do this for me, and I am sure your time will not be wasted."

Sir Howard shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "I know you too well, Mr. Lee, to think that you would purposely waste my time. You have some scheme at the back of your head—eh? Well, well, I won't inquire into it at the moment. I can wait. I will return after luncheon."

And almost immediately afterwards Sir Howard Tukesdale's big car glided smoothly out of the Triangle. Nelson Lee was the only soul in the whole school who knew that the specialist would be returning after a brief interval.

The Remove came out of its Form-room soon afterwards, and there was a good deal of curious talk regarding the Head's visitor. Everybody knew, of course, that a distinguished individual had arrived by car, had stayed for about an hour, and had then left.

"I wonder who the dickens it could have been?" said Owen major. "One of the governors, I'll bet."

"That's it," said Armstrong, nodding. "I suppose the governors heard about the Head's little tricks, and one of them came down here to put him in his giddy place. I'll bet there won't be any more trouble."

"Well, it's got nothing to do with us," remarked De Valerie. "We don't know for certain that the visitor was one of the governors."

"Who else could it have been?" demanded Griffith. "I expect the Head's been told that if he doesn't behave himself in future, he'll get kicked out. That notice has been taken off the

board, and it's pretty certain that the Head feels a bit of an ass. If he doesn't, he ought to!"

"Shush!" said Pitt. "It's not respectable to talk about the Head like that, my sons. Somebody told me that the visitor wasn't one of the governors at all, but a giddy brain specialist."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seems a bit queer, but you never know," said Pitt. "In any case, it's got nothing to do with us. Leave the Head alone; he's all right now, and —"

Reginald Pitt paused abruptly.

He was standing just at the bottom of the Ancient House steps, and, happening to glance up, he found himself gazing into the face of Dr. Stafford, who had approached noiselessly.

And there was something about the expression of the Head's face which told Pitt distinctly and definitely that he was certainly not "all right." The Head's eyes gleamed with a cold, malicious light which could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER 16.

The Brute!

D R. STAFFORD strode forward to the top of the Ancient House steps, and gazed down upon the knot of juniors. Owen major and Griffiths were edging away, but they froze in their tracks, as it were, as they found the Head's eagle eye upon them.

"Pitt, Armstrong, Owen, De Valerie, Griffiths!" exclaimed the Head harshly. "Line up at once—here, just in front of me! Yes, you also, Grey! Come along; make haste! Line up and stand at attention!"

The six juniors, rather startled, obeyed the command, and formed up in a neat line. Some little distance off a number of other fellows watched in partial cover, ready to flee at a second's

notice if such a course should be necessary.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth. "The Head's off again!"

"Yes, and we can thank our lucky stars we weren't with those other chaps!" whispered Church. "The best thing we can do is to scoot!"

"Rather!" agreed McClure uneasily.

The three juniors of Study D were safely in cover behind two of the old chestnut-trees. Handforth sniffed at his chums' remark.

"Rats!" he said lightly. "We're safe enough here. Even if the Head spots us, we can nip off before he knows who we are. Shut up, you fat-heads, and listen! There's going to be trouble!"

"Looks like it!" muttered Church.

The three juniors were rather staggered. After that public notice of the Head's everybody had believed that there would be no recurrence of the unfortunate happenings. It had been taken for granted that Dr. Stafford would keep himself well in hand, and would make no further exhibition of his terrible and newly acquired temper.

But now, only a few hours after that notice had been first pinned up, the Head was going off again in just the same way.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked Pitt boldly.

"Don't dare to ask me questions, boy!" replied Dr. Stafford, coming closer and casting his eye up and down the line. "H'm! Dirty, untidy and altogether slovenly! Your collar, Griffith, is positively disgraceful! There are two buttons missing from your waistcoat, Armstrong—"

"I—I caught myself on a fence, sir," gasped Armstrong.

"That is no excuse!" rapped out the Head. "You will all take five hundred lines for general untidiness of appearance. And now I have something else to say. When I approached a moment

ago, you were talking about me—you were discussing me as though I were one of yourselves!"

"We didn't know you were near by, sir," said De Valerie. "And we weren't saying anything insulting—"

"Silence!" thundered the Head furiously.

The word was shouted out with such violence that the six juniors were considerably startled. Up to that moment the Head had been speaking harshly, but calmly. And then, all in a flash, his temper broke loose like a summer thunderstorm. His voice bellowed out, and his face flushed red. His very features changed, giving him the appearance of a savage bully. The boys would never have believed that a human face could undergo such a horrifying transformation.

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Owen major shakily.

"I will have you understand, once and for all, that I am not to be discussed!" roared Dr. Stafford. "Furthermore, I mean to impose restrictions upon the Remove which will effectually break your wilful spirit. But, to begin with, I will deal with you—I will punish you as you deserve!"

"But—but we've done nothing, sir!" said Pitt.

The Head turned upon him like a tiger.

"For that interruption, Pitt, you will stand forward at once!" he snarled. "Come—at once! Hold out your hand!"

Slash!

"Ow—ow!" gasped Pitt involuntarily.

The stroke was a fearful one, and Pitt's hand felt as though a red-hot iron had seared it. The Head positively grinned—an animal-like, malicious curl disfiguring his mouth, and almost baring his teeth.

"Perhaps that will teach you to keep your tongue still!" he said

thickly. "Has anybody else got anything to say? Come, I am waiting!"

The juniors were silent. The sneering tone of the headmaster's voice was something they had never heard before. And the look in his eyes positively frightened them. They all wanted to flee—to run for their lives. But they could not move an inch. The Head's gaze was upon them, and they felt numb and helpless.

"You will stand forward one at a time," snapped the Head curtly. "I intend giving you four cuts each, and I hope this will be a lesson to you all—and in future you will possibly refrain from discussing me!"

De Valerie was the first in the line, and he stood forward. To think of defying the Head was impossible—single-handed, at all events.

"Stand still—and if you make the slightest outcry, I shall double the punishment!" exclaimed the Head, with vicious malevolence in his voice. "Now, stand quite still!"

Slash—slash!

The cuts were brutal, and although De Valerie made no outcry, he winced and turned pale as the cane swished down upon his palm. He took his punishment bravely, and then stood aside, trembling in every limb.

The others were not so stoical, with the exception of Pitt and Grey. They made no outcry, but Armstrong, Griffiths and Owen major were not made of such stern stuff. They fairly howled, and received double rations. By the time the Head had finished with them they were blubbing like Second Form kids; and, really, they couldn't actually be blamed. The agony they were bearing was appalling. Their hands were puffy, swollen and raw.

"Now, you may go!" panted the Head. "I intend quelling— Ah!"

He paused as Mr. Crowell appeared round an angle of the Ancient House. The Remove Form master had been across to see somebody in the College

House, and he was returning in an excellent humour.

"Mr. Crowell!" shouted the Head harshly.

Mr. Crowell started, came to a halt, and adjusted his glasses.

"Dear me!" he said mildly.

"Don't stand there!" stormed Dr. Stafford. "Come here, sir—come here at once! I wish to have a word with you regarding your boys."

Mr. Crowell approached, flustered.

"Yes, sir?" he said. "I—"

"I will do the talking, thank you," cut in the Head sourly. "I have noticed, Mr. Crowell, that your boys are slovenly, untidy, and their manners are atrocious. What is the meaning of this?"

Mr. Crowell was completely at a loss.

"Really, sir?" he said confusedly. "Slovenly? I—I was not aware of it—"

"Not aware of it?" thundered the Head. "Have you no eyes?"

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Mr. Crowell.

"For some little time the Remove boys have been getting from bad to worse," went on Dr. Stafford. "I hold you to blame, Mr. Crowell. You are too lax, too careless. This must alter. You understand? From now onwards you will deal more severely with the boys—or the post as Form-master will be no longer open to you."

Poor Mr. Crowell looked round helplessly.

"But—but I was not aware that I had been lax, sir!" he exclaimed. "I have always governed my boys firmly but kindly—"

"Kindly!" sneered the Head. "Kindness is a waste of time with junior schoolboys. You must be harsh—you must be absolutely strict. I have decided that the Remove and the Third shall continue lessons every afternoon until six o'clock—"

"Oh!" said a dozen juniors in dismay.

The Head whirled round.

"Another word, and I shall punish the whole school!" he raved wildly. "You hear, Mr. Crowell? In the evening the boys will also attend lessons—from seven o'clock until nine. I mean to put an end to this appalling state of slackness. It has gone on quite long enough."

The Head glared round. In various parts of the Triangle fellows were standing in little groups—the majority of them behind cover. Pitt, De Valerie, and the other four unfortunate juniors who had been caned, were still close by, and an evil smile came upon the Head's face as he surveyed them.

"Perhaps you will now understand that I am not to be trifled with," he said grimly. "I have by no means finished, and——"

He paused suddenly, for at that second Bryant of the Fifth came shooting out of the Ancient House, yelling. Close in his rear was Chambers. Bryant was not yelling with pain, but with laughter, and Chambers was looking somewhat wrathful. Evidently a joke had been played upon that highly important person.

"Wait until I catch you!" roared Chambers. "I'll—I'll——"

Bryant's laughter terminated as he caught sight of Dr. Stafford. The Fifth Former, in fact, nearly collided with the Head, and he only just brought up in the nick of time. Dr. Stafford grasped his arm fiercely.

"Ow—yaroooh!" howled Bryant. "Oh, my hat! You're hurting me, sir!"

"Indeed!" snarled the Head. "Perhaps this will hurt you more!"

Crash!

The Head brought his fist round like lightning, and it thudded into Bryant's face before the senior could dodge. He gave a wild howl, staggered and fell headlong. It had been a brutal blow.

"Oh!"

Chambers pulled himself up so abruptly that he almost fell down. And he was about to dart back into the Ancient House when the Head pulled him up.

"Come here, Chambers!" he demanded harshly.

"Why, what—what's the matter, sir?" asked Chambers huskily.

"I will tell you what is the matter after you have obeyed my orders!" said the headmaster. "Ah that is better! How dare you rush about the school premises as though you had suddenly become bereft of your senses! I want you to understand at once, and for all time, that I will have no wild behaviour. As a punishment, Chambers, you will submit to a flogging."

"A—a flogging, sir!" gasped Chambers amazedly.

"Yes."

"But—but——"

Swipe! Swipe!

Chambers roared with agony as the Head's cane descended upon his shoulders. The Fifth Former dodged and ducked at the same time. It was unfortunate that he did so, for the Head's third blow was just descending, and the cane caught Chambers on the back of the head.

He uttered no sound, but rolled over on the ground. As a matter of fact, he was partially knocked out, but the Head evidently did not think so. He gazed down at Chambers fiercely.

"Get up!" he commanded. "Confound you! Get up, I say!"

Chambers stirred and groaned.

"You—you infernal young hound!" raved the Head.

He kicked at Chambers viciously, acting as only a bully and a brute could act. Bryant, who was just getting to his feet, flung himself forward, reckless with pain and excitement. He pushed the Head out of the way roughly.

"You're hurting him, sir!" he panted. "It's rotten—it's unfair—it's brutal—"

"How—how dare you!" screamed the Head, livid with rage. "Bryant, you will leave the school at once, do you hear? At once! You are expelled! Furthermore, I intend to flog you—"

"Oh, do you?" shouted Bryant recklessly. "If I'm sacked, I don't care! But I'll bet you won't touch me, you—you brute! You cowardly cad! You ought to be sent to prison."

The Head seemed to go mad, and he rushed at Bryant like a bull. But Bryant knew what would happen to him if he was caught, and he fled. He was appalled at what he had said, but in the excitement of the moment he could not have prevented himself. He charged full tilt into the Ancient House.

Whizzing down the passages he dodged into a study, slammed the door and locked it. Then he slipped out of the window into the Triangle. The Head, entering the passage a second too late, did not know what had happened to his quarry.

And the exertion and the excitement seemed to calm him somewhat. He came to a halt in the passage, breathing hard and huskily.

Then, after waiting a few moments, he went straight to his own study.

Nelson Lee was pacing up and down in his own room. He had seen most of what had taken place, but he had decided not to interfere. He knew well enough that his interception would not have improved matters.

His lips were pursed, and there was a frown upon his brow. But he was right—he had told Sir Howard Tukesdale that the Head would probably go off again before dinner-time. And Nelson Lee's guess had been correct. But was it merely a guess?

The attention of the juniors was diverted just then by the arrival of

a big limousine, which glided noiselessly into the Triangle. Sir Howard Tukesdale, true to his word, had returned. Within three minutes he was in close conversation with Nelson Lee, and, immediately afterwards, the pair went to Dr. Stafford's study.

They found the Head pacing up and down. There was a wild look in his eyes, his hair was ruffled, and he swung round with something like a snarl as the pair entered.

"Get out of here!" he said thickly. "Who in the name of mischief told you to bother me? Do you hear, Lee? Go—and take that man with you!"

"Bless my soul!" said Sir Howard amazedly.

The transformation was absolute and complete. In spite of what Nelson Lee had told him, he had never believed that such a change could be possible. The Head seemed to be another man altogether. His very expression was different—the set of his features seemed to be coarser. Every refined line had vanished.

Nelson Lee took no notice of the command, but advanced.

"Go!" shouted the Head. "Shall I tell you again—"

"Calm yourself, Dr. Stafford!" interrupted Nelson Lee sternly. "No, don't attempt to bully me. Sit down. Try, if possible, to control yourself. Sit—down!"

Lee spoke grimly and deliberately. Just for an instant the Head seemed to have a battle with himself. But his will was not equal to the strain of fighting against Nelson Lee's superior brain force. There was something rather terrible about the famous detective as he stood in front of Dr. Stafford.

The Head crumpled up quite suddenly, and sat down in an easy chair.

"Now, Dr. Stafford, Sir Howard will examine you," said Lee curtly. "Make no attempt to hinder him. You will submit quietly. Is it not your own wish

that this examination should be a thorough one?"

"You shall pay for this!" muttered the Head, his eyes burning fiercely. "By Heaven, Lee, I will not be treated—"

But the words seemed to fail him, and he sank back. And while he had the opportunity, Sir Howard Tukesdale made a further examination of his patient. Dr. Stafford was sullen and glowering. But he did not resist.

"Thank you, Dr. Stafford," said Sir Howard at length. "I am quite satisfied. I wish you good-day!"

"Get out before I kick you out!" snarled the Head.

Sir Howard and Nelson Lee retired, and when they reached the latter's study, the brain specialist shook his head.

"An evil nature, Mr. Lee—nothing else," he declared. "There is not the slightest trace of insanity—no indication that Dr. Stafford's brain is weak, or his intellect crumbling. He is in full possession of all his wits, and perfectly healthy."

"So I imagine," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Your own opinion is exactly the same as mine, Sir Howard. I was convinced from the start that Dr. Stafford was not troubled by any mental disease. But does the case strike you as in any way peculiar?"

The specialist shrugged his shoulders. "Peculiar!" he echoed. "My dear sir, it is unique! In all my experience I have never known a man who could have two such separate and distinct natures. But the simple truth is obvious. Dr. Stafford is subject to these sudden fits of violent savagery and temper. They are not due to insanity or any form of brain trouble. The man is simply a brute—but has so far managed to veneer his real nature successfully. I am amazed that he should be in such a responsible position!"

"You are quite settled as to this opinion?"

"Quite!" said Sir Howard firmly. "These outbursts of Dr. Stafford's are merely an indication that his wild nature—his true nature—is asserting itself. I must admit, however, that it is rather strange that this side of the man's character should have remained a secret until recently."

"Very strange indeed," agreed Nelson Lee. "And it will be quite interesting to watch the developments."

Sir Howard took his departure almost at once, and when Nelson Lee was alone once more there was a peculiarly grim smile upon his lips.

"You may be famous, Sir Howard, and you may be clever," he murmured, gazing out into the Triangle. "But for once you are wrong. I agree with you that there is no sign of insanity, but you are quite off the mark when you declare that Dr. Stafford's real nature is a vile one. It is not his at all—it is merely forced upon him against his own will. Yes, this case is quite unique."

And Nelson Lee sat down, lit a cigarette, and thought deeply.

CHAPTER 17.

The Agitator!

"COMRADES, fellow slaves, and sufferers!"

Timothy Tucker adjusted his green-tinted spectacles and gazed at his audience. The tame lunatic of the Remove at St. Frank's was evidently bent on making one of his famous speeches.

He had perched himself upon a rough piece of ornamental stonework in the corner of the Triangle, not far from the gateway leading into the playing fields. It was morning—cold and clear, with a sharp frost in the air.

Lessons had only been over a short time. Timothy Tucker, to tell the truth, had been planning his speech most of the morning, which accounted for his dreamy, far-away look during lessons. Mr. Crowell had awarded

T. T. two hundred lines for inattention, but he had completely forgotten this.

"Comrades!" he shouted again in his thin, piping voice. "I am standing here to address you on a subject which is foremost—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go, it, Tucker!"

"Really, I must protest against these unseemly interruptions!" exclaimed Tucker severely. "The audience will oblige me by remaining silent!"

"Right you are," said Owen major. "The audience has no objection—both of 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Hubbard.

Sad to relate, there was absolute truth in Owen major's remark, for T. T.'s audience consisted merely of two fellows; and they were thinking of strolling off even at that moment. It was Tucker's greatest grievance that he could never claim the attention he deserved.

"Gather together!" shouted T. T., waving his hands wildly. "Collect round, my comrades! There is a vital matter to be discussed."

"Good!" said Hubbard. "Come on, Owen!"

"H'm! Quite so—quite so," went on the speaker. "We are dealing with grim facts. We are oppressed; we are ground down under the heel of a rank tyranny—a system which is rotten to the core!"

"Something like this apple!" said Pitt, strolling up.

Whizz!

Pitt hurled the apple, but judged it so that it missed Tucker by a few inches. The tame lunatic of the Remove blinked, and then stared severely at Reginald Pitt. T. T. shook his finger at him.

"I must protest!" he exclaimed. "Really, my dear sir, I must protest! You do not seem to realise that I am just about to make an important speech. The actual importance of this speech is so tremendous, so absolutely

vital, that every boy in the school ought to be listening to me and supporting me!"

"Good!"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Tucker. "This is most distressing. Really, my dear sirs, I cannot find words to express my feelings. It grieves me beyond measure to find such levity in existence when every face ought to be sad and stern—when every heart ought to be steeled to a state of cast-iron hardness!"

"How can you make steel into cast-iron?" asked Pitt curiously.

"These interruptions are unseemly," replied Tucker. "Yes, they are most unseemly. H'm, h'm! That is so! Indeed, they only serve to show the feeble and decaying intellect of the modern schoolboy!"

"Well, a decaying intellect is better than one that's decayed altogether!" retorted Pitt promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you suggesting that my intellect is decayed?" shouted Tucker, whipping off his spectacles and staring round wildly. "Dear, dear! I am being insulted. I can see that disciplinary treatment is necessary. I shall be forced to administer it, my lads!"

"Go ahead, T. T.!"

"H'm! Quite so!" mumbled Tucker. "Upon second thoughts, I am willing to overlook the insult. The matter on hand is of such importance that it admits of no delay. We must get on with the matters which are upon the agenda. Only this morning I scribbled out a minute concerning this most important subject."

De Valerie sniffed.

"That's nothing!" he said. "I scribbled out a half-hour!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I fail to comprehend—Dear, dear, dear!" said Tucker. "You are labouring under a most ridiculous

mistake, sir. When I say that I scribbled a minute, I am referring to the fact that I made a memorandum—a note—a few words to remind me of some points I have to deal with. And let me say now, before any further time is wasted, that my subject this morning is—the Head!"

"Oh!"

"Steady on, T.T.!"

"Better let the Head alone, old son!"

"We shouldn't like to see you sacked!" said Pitt, shaking his head. "We'd never get another comedian to take your place!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of fellows had collected round Tucker by this time. In addition to Pitt, Grey, and De Valerie, Singleton and Solomon Levi strolled up. Jerry Dodd and Tom Burton, of Study F, were just arriving, and Fatty Little was on his way. Perhaps he thought there was some grub knocking about.

"Yes, comrades and fellow slaves," went on Tucker, "it is my intention to address you upon the vital subject of our headmaster and his recent tyrannous behaviour. It is a subject which affects us all!"

"Better not let any of the prefects hear you talking like that, old son," called out Singleton.

"You think I care for the prefects?" shouted Tucker. "And, in any case, would they bring harm down upon my head? No, my dear sir, they would not. For the prefects are in sympathy with us; they are just as keen to rid the school of this tyrant as I am!"

"Shut up, you fathead!"

"Traitor!"

"What—what!" exclaimed Tucker. "You call me a traitor? How dare you? As a matter of fact, I am a traitor. Yes, I admit it. I glory in it. And I call upon you to support me—I call upon you to become traitors, too!"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"I don't know whether it is piffle," said Pitt. "I'll guarantee that half the fellows in the lower school would become traitors to the Head if they saw a chance of doing it without suffering any consequences. Everybody must admit that the Head's been a brute recently——"

"Thank you, my dear sir—thank you!" shouted Tucker. "That is the correct word to use. Quite so—quite so! That is certainly the word to use! A brute—a tyrant—a man possessed of the attributes of a beast!"

"Steady on, Tucker! Draw it mild!"

"Better go easy!"

"And why should I draw it easy and go mild?" demanded Tucker lucidly. "Why should I? Is it not the truth that the Head has displayed the habits of a beast? Is it not the truth? And is it right that I should be punished for telling the truth?"

The audience was silent for a moment. Every fellow there knew that Tucker was, indeed, speaking far from wildly. His remarks were, upon the whole, strictly truthful.

"The truth can always stand the full light of day!" shouted Tucker. "And I maintain, boldly and openly, that we are living under a system of brutality and tyranny. That, my dear sirs, is my contention. Are we going to submit? Are we going to allow this state of things to continue?"

"We can't help ourselves!"

"We've got to submit, old son!"

"No—I say no!" shouted T.T. firmly. "We must rise in a body and cast out this system once and for all. Yes, my friends, we must rise! Rise—rise! Comrades and sufferers, it is our duty to place our strength upon the side of justice. Meek submission to this brutal regime will do us no good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The funny ass is right there!"

"We certainly ought to do something!"

"I call upon you, my comrades, to support me," went on Tucker. "There is work to be done—work of an important nature. I suggest that we band ourselves together into a party; and this party is to be called the Brotherhood of the Free!"

"We shouldn't be free for long!" remarked Hubbard.

"And why not?" shouted T. T. "Why not, my dear sir? You do not know what magnificent schemes are in my head. I am appealing now for members of the Brotherhood of the Free. I want this society, this party, to become strong and all-powerful. Do you not realise, comrades, that we are helpless and powerless in our present condition? Banded together, however, under this great banner of freedom, we should assume a new power—a power which would become as strong as our present weakness."

"We shall be a tremendously powerful party, then!" grinned Pitt.

"My words were badly chosen; but I will improve upon them," said Tucker. "We shall assume a power as strong as our present weakness is weak. That is better. H'm! H'm! Quite so. Much better. Now, friends, let me enrol you as members of the new brotherhood. Organised, we shall be in a position to dictate our terms to all and sundry. Tyranny will never exist while we have that power—"

"Rats to your giddy brotherhood!" said Pitt.

"Dry up about it, T. T.!"

"Perhaps the time is not quite ripe," exclaimed Timothy Tucker. "Possibly I have been foolish in mooted the subject so early; but later, after you have submitted to further harshness and degradation, you will come to me—you will remember my words. At present I will confine myself to the matter in hand. The Head has been a brute and a bully—"

"Hear, hear!"

"A rank rotter!"

"A tyrant!"

"Oh, indeed!" came a quiet voice from the rear. "So that is your opinion of your headmaster, boys?"

The juniors twirled round, startled, and found themselves looking at the grim features and stern eyes of Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER 18.

Waning Popularity!

TIMOTHY TUCKER looked at Nelson Lee inquisitively.

"Really, my dear sir, I failed to observe your approach!" he exclaimed. "However, I am delighted that you have decided to join my audience—"

"Get down from that stone at once, Tucker!" commanded Nelson Lee curtly.

"Really, my dear sir—"

"I do not want to repeat my order, young man!"

"But—but I beg of you to consider, sir!" said Tucker hastily. "I have merely addressed my comrades upon a matter of vital importance—"

"In other words, you have been agitating their minds against their headmaster," said Nelson Lee. "Such talk cannot be allowed. Disloyalty to the headmaster is disloyalty to the school itself."

"But pray consider, my dear sir!"

"Tucker, you will write me one thousand lines!" said Lee grimly. "Yes, the punishment is severe—I intend it to be. Owen major, you will write me a similar imposition. You, De Valerie, will take five hundred lines."

"What for, sir?" asked De Valerie blankly.

"You referred to the headmaster as a tyrant—"

"Well, isn't it true, sir?" broke in De Valerie. "I don't see why you should mind us telling the truth! Everybody in the whole school knows

that Dr. Stafford has been like another man during the last week or so——"

"You need not continue, De Valerie," interrupted Lee sharply. "Whatever the school knows, that fact does not give you permission to criticise your headmaster openly. If I hear any boys participating in such a discussion as this again, I shall make my punishments much more severe—I shall, in fact, inflict drastic floggings."

The juniors were silent.

"Now that I have the opportunity, I should like to talk to you seriously," went on Nelson Lee. "I am convinced that it is merely boyish thoughtlessness which impels you to hold these little discussions. If you would only take all the facts into consideration, you would not be so harsh in your denunciation of Dr. Stafford."

"The Head isn't the same as he used to be, sir," put in Singleton.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"With that remark I agree," he said. "But why can't you think of Dr. Stafford as he has always been, and not judge him solely according to his recent hasty actions? It is not my business to make any appeals on behalf of the headmaster, but I do wish you boys would be a little more thoughtful."

"In what way, sir?"

"Ever since you have been at St. Frank's you have always found Dr. Stafford to be an ideal headmaster," replied Lee. "He has been considerate, just, and kindly in all his actions. I will admit that during the last week or so he has performed one or two actions which are not in keeping with his general character. But is that any reason why you should reverse your opinion of him so completely?"

"Dash it all, sir, the Head's been going it a bit too thick!" protested De Valerie. "Everybody knows that——"

"If you mean that the headmaster has forgotten himself once or twice recently, I will agree with you," said

Nelson Lee. "But surely you can overlook these trifles, for, taking everything into consideration, they are trifles. You boys are particularly bitter because you have been the chief sufferers. Your bitterness, therefore, is perhaps easy to understand. The Head has asked you all to have patience, and to remember that if undeserved punishments were inflicted, such punishments would be cancelled later."

"But the Head can't cancel canings, can he?" asked De Valerie. "After he's swiped into us, and made our hands raw, he can't do much good. And when he gets into one of his tantrums, there's no telling what's going to happen."

Nelson Lee looked grim.

"De Valerie, I object to that term," he said sternly. "You must not say that Dr. Stafford gets into 'tantrums.' It is not only untrue, but objectionable. Cannot you boys appreciate the fact that the Head is doing his utmost to keep himself under control—that he is as kind at heart as he ever was? Can't you realise that these strange attacks are beyond his control?"

"But it seems so queer, sir," put in Owen major. "The Head never used to have these violent fits of temper. And it's not right that we should have to suffer, is it? He's given all sorts of new orders—that we're to do lessons until six o'clock, and then have extra lessons in the evening——"

"But those orders have already been cancelled, Owen major," interrupted Lee. "At the present moment the Remove is enjoying the same liberty as it has always enjoyed. Such remarks, therefore, are idle. My advice to you all is this—if Dr. Stafford behaves strangely at any future time, do not attempt to answer him back if he accosts you. Obey his orders implicitly, no matter how harsh they may seem. Discipline must be maintained. And it is contrary to all law and order for you boys to get together and talk against

your headmaster. Don't let it occur again."

"All right, sir!"

"As for you, Tucker, I shall be very severe if I ever catch you at this sort of business in the future," said Lee.

And the Housemaster without another word, turned and walked away.

The crowd waited until he had gone some little distance, and then the remarks flowed freely and volubly. Just as Nelson Lee left the group, I joined it. I had seen the guv'nor talking as I was leaving the Ancient House, and I had come across to find out what the trouble was.

The first words I heard were not exactly pleasant to my ears.

"The rotter!" said De Valerie gruffly. "He's getting nearly as bad as the Head, and he's supporting him in his bullying tyranny. It's the last thing I expected from Mr. Lee, but it proves that he's no class!"

"Rather!" said Owen major.

"All this talk about discipline!" sneered Armstrong. "Fancy telling us to submit to everything the Head likes to do—submit without saying a word! Lee's a beast, and I'd be jolly glad to see him kicked out of St. Frank's—together with the Head!"

I walked up to Armstrong grimly.

"I'm giving you just ten seconds!" I said.

"Eh?"

"Seven seconds now!" I added curtly.

"What the dickens are you talking about, you ass?"

"If you don't apologise immediately, I'll knock you down!" I replied. "You've just called Mr. Lee a beast, and said that you'd be glad to see him kicked out of St. Frank's. You've got to apologise for it."

"Rats!" said Armstrong. "I'm not going to—"

Crash!

"Ow—yaroooh!"

Armstrong went over backwards, headlong, and I looked at the others.

"Anybody else asking for it?" I said hotly. "You miserable cads! You set of worms! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves for talking against my guv'nor like that?"

"Oh, don't ride the high horse!" snapped De Valerie. "You'd better try to knock me down—that's all! I agree with everything that Armstrong said—"

"Right!" I cut in. "We'll see about—"

But before I could do anything I was seized by half a dozen fellows, and held firm.

"Steady on!" grinned Pitt. "There's no need for us to have squabbles over nothing, Nipper. Have some sense! The Triangle is no place for punching noses!"

"Let me go!" I panted. "Do you think I'm going to stand here and listen to these rotters running Mr. Lee down?"

"Well, he's been supporting the Head," shouted Armstrong, struggling to his feet. "And you know as well as we do that the Head is a brute!"

"If Mr. Lee supports the Head, so do I!" I snapped. "You haven't got any more brains than a collection of insects!"

"What?"

"You're as empty-headed as Tucker!"

"Dear, dear, dear! Really, my dear sir—"

"Hasn't Mr. Lee always been one of the best?" I went on hotly.

"Yes, until recently—"

"Until recently be hanged!" I shouted. "He hasn't changed in the slightest degree. But he knows that Dr. Stafford isn't responsible for these queer attacks of his; and if he's not responsible, it's not fair to blame him. There's something queer about the whole business, and the guv'nor knows it. He's asking you to have patience, because he hopes to get to the bottom of the mystery before long."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said De Valerie. "What do you mean—the Head isn't responsible? If I get into a raging temper I don't blame anybody else!"

"Yes, talk sense, Nipper!" said Owen major.

"That's just what I am doing; but I might as well address myself to a brick wall," I replied bitterly. "It's no good trying to make idiots understand! You don't seem to realise the simple truth, Dr. Stafford is as kindly and as generous as ever he was, except when he's in one of his peculiar moods."

"Well, that's what we're grumbling about," exclaimed De Valerie. "We don't see why we should be compelled to suffer because the Head chooses to go off in these rotten fits of temper."

"He doesn't choose to go off into them," I interrupted. "They come, and he can't help himself."

"Something happens which seems to alter his character; and you can take it from me that there's something fishy about the whole business. There's somebody working against Dr. Stafford—somebody who wants to get him chucked out of the school."

"Oh, rats!" said De Valerie. "You're getting just as bad as Mr. Lee; and if you can't talk better sense, I'd advise you to dry up. Anyhow, until you show more intelligence, I'll steer clear of you!"

And Cecil De Valerie walked off.

I breathed rather hard as I looked after him. De Valerie and I had always got on very well together, and it was a pity that a breach of this sort should open. And I had an idea that this was only the beginning of things.

I joined Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West in the Ancient House lobby, and they could see at once that I was not quite myself.

"Begad! Who's been ruffin' your sweet temper, dear old boy?" inquired Sir Montie, regarding me critically

through his pince-nez. "I trust that nothin' very serious has happened?"

"Oh, nothing much," I replied gruffly. "I've just knocked Armstrong down, and had a row with De Valerie—that's all."

"All," echoed Watson. "About enough, I should think!"

"I found them running the guv'nor down—calling him a beast, and saying they'd like to see him chucked out of the school," I said hotly. "And they're not the only ones, either. Half the chaps in the Remove are talking against Mr. Lee all the time."

"That's frightfully bad form—it is, really," said Tregellis-West, shaking his noble head. "Dear old boy, I quite approve of your action in knockin' Armstrong down."

"Rather!" agreed Watson. "But why should they talk against Mr. Lee?"

"Because the guv'nor has been trying to make things easy for the Head," I replied. "He knows well enough that Dr. Stafford isn't to blame for these strange attacks of his, and he's telling the chaps to have some patience. And all they can do is to say that the guv'nor is as bad as the Head himself."

"Well, the Head hasn't been playing the game, has he?"

"Look here, Tommy, are you starting the same tricks?" I asked grimly. "Are you running down the Head? Because, if so it means that you're running down Mr. Lee, too—"

"Oh, it's all right—don't get excited," said Watson. "I'm with you every time, Nipper. I think I suffered more from the Head than any other chap—but for Mr. Lee's sake I'll forgive him willingly. Is that good enough?"

"It's just what I expected of you," I replied. "I know I can trust you chaps—and I think a good few others will remain true too. But I can tell you quite plainly that there's going to be trouble in the Remove before long."

In the meantime, Mr. Trenton, the

popular science master, had joined the group in the Triangle. I saw him as I glanced out through the Ancient House doorway, and I frowned.

"Oh, there'll be some nice talk going on now," I growled. "That oily bouncer is jawing with the chaps! The more I see of Trenton, the more I dislike him."

"Blessed if I can understand you," said Watson. "Trenton's all right—quite a decent chap. And he's getting more popular every day."

"The more popular he gets, the more I detest him. Take my word for it, he's no blessed good," I said grimly. "If you can't see it now, you'll see it later on."

Out in the Triangle, Mr. Trenton was making himself very pleasant. Just recently he had got quite into the habit of strolling up to groups of juniors and entering into their conversations.

On the face of things, Mr. Trenton was very pleasant and easy. He had gained popularity from the very moment he had entered the gates of St. Frank's.

But Mr. Trenton was deep—very deep.

CHAPTER 19.

Just Like Handy!

DE VALERIE nodded wisely.

"It's no good talking," he said, "the Head has been going it a bit too strong. I'm all for law and order, but when things get too bad—well, there's a limit. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Strictly speaking, young man, I ought not to pass any opinion," smiled Mr. Trenton. "But we all understand one another, don't we?" he added, glancing round at the group. "We're all pals, eh?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Every time, sir!"

Mr. Trenton nodded.

"Good!" he said. "Then we can have a little confidential chat. I rather like talking with you fellows. I want you to regard me as one of yourselves. A master who holds himself aloof can never really understand his boys. I think that's why we get on so well—because I mix with you a good deal."

"Yes, sir, that's it."

Mr. Trenton knew how to stroke the fellows the right way.

"Well, about the headmaster," he said. "I've found him to be very generous, kindly natured, and fair. I'm bound to say that. His little lapses are unfortunate, and perhaps he has been somewhat harsh. But you mustn't take too much notice of them. However good and generous a man may be, he is always liable to be something of a tyrant if he gives way to fits of temper. Mind you, I'm not exactly referring to Dr. Stafford," added the science master. "I'm speaking in a general way."

"Of course, sir!"

But the juniors quite understood that Mr. Trenton actually did mean the Head.

"To-day has been quite an easy period for you," went on Mr. Trenton, smiling round. "The headmaster has been a model of all that he should be."

"Mr. Lee's been a bit unreasonable, sir," said Owen major, in an injured tone. "Just because we were talking about the Head, he gives us lines!"

"For merely discussing the Head?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come, come!" protested Mr. Trenton. "That's not all, surely?"

"Some of the chaps were saying what they thought about the Head, sir," explained Jack Grey. "It was Tucker's fault, really, because Tucker was agitating them—you know what an ass he is, sir."

"Really, my dear Grey!" protested T. T. "Dear, dear! What an atro-

cious slander! Quite so! The position is this, my dear sir——"

"There is no need for you to tell me the position, Tucker," chuckled Mr. Trenton. "I rather fancy I know it. But just take my advice, boys—don't let your Housemaster hear you talking about Dr. Stafford."

"Why should he give us lines?" asked Armstrong. "We don't mind talking about the Head when you can hear, sir. You don't give us lines——"

"My dear boy, I'm different!" interrupted Mr. Trenton. "I'm not a Housemaster—I haven't got the responsibilities that Mr. Lee has. I suppose he considers it his duty to punish you for saying anything against the powers that be. He regards it as treachery to the Head, the school, and all that sort of thing. Of course, my ideas are different—but we needn't go into that."

"It's because you're jolly decent, sir," said Owen major warmly. "That's why you're different—you understand us."

The science master nodded.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I rather pride myself that I understand boys," he said. "I like to live with them—with you, I mean. If we all pull together there can't be any friction. And that's my idea all the time—to pull together, and proceed swimmingly."

"I wish you were the Head, sir!" said Canham.

"Oh, rather!"

"I'll bet everything would go on smoothly, sir," said Hubbard. "As it is, we don't know what might happen any minute. With Dr. Stafford going off into these fits of temper, and Mr. Lee backing him up and distributing lines—why, it's simply awful!"

"Now, Hubbard!" said Mr. Trenton severely. "Not content with running the headmaster down, you are adopting the same tone with Mr. Nelson Lee! I'm sorry to hear that! It indicates a spirit of discontent."

"Well, we are discontented, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Things are all going wrong in the Remove!"

"At the same time, you've got to grin and bear them," said Mr. Trenton.

"Take my advice, and discuss such matters as these out of Mr. Lee's hearing. He's a Housemaster and must maintain discipline. If you want to pour your troubles out into sympathetic ears, you can always run into my study."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You're a brick, sir!"

"No—just a human being like yourselves," smiled Mr. Trenton. "I don't believe in a schoolmaster being stuck upon a kind of pedestal and held aloof from his boys."

Mr. Trenton nodded to the crowd in general, and strolled off. He was conscious that he had made a big impression.

If the juniors had only paused to consider they might have realised that Mr. Trenton was an expert in the art of using soft soap. His smooth tongue, his pleasant smile, his air of friendliness and sincere sympathy—they all helped him to gain the confidence and support that he was after.

I had watched it from the first, and I was under no misapprehension regarding Mr. Trenton's game. Of course, I had had more experience than the majority of the juniors, and I had met Mr. Trenton's kind before, in other walks of life.

It had been an insidious progress. Any of the fellows, had the question been put to them point-blank, would have declared that Mr. Trenton had made no bid for popularity; they would have said that the science master had become popular on his own merits.

For, in simple truth, the Removites didn't grasp the fact that Mr. Trenton was using any and every opportunity—and his silky tongue—to worm

his way into the confidence of the juniors. He told them to come to him for sympathy, he scolded them for talking against the Head and the gov'nor; but, in the same breath, he tacitly approved of the disloyal remarks.

And yet, if Mr. Trenton had been accused of agreeing with such disloyalty, a score of fellows would have instantly declared that he was as true as steel to the school. It was just the way that Mr. Trenton did these things.

He was clever—he was so clever that he appeared to be simple. And the conviction was growing stronger and stronger within me that our precious science master was a man to be very wary of.

The crowd of juniors still kept on talking after Mr. Trenton had gone. The dinner bell was due to ring at any moment, and the fellows were anxiously awaiting to hear the welcome sound.

"One of the best chaps we ever had at St. Frank's, that's what Mr. Trenton is," said Griffith, with a wise nod. "I used to think that Mr. Lee was the best master here, but he's a washout. He's turning into a beastly strict beast. I'd ten times rather have Trenton as the Housemaster."

"Eh, what's that? Trenton as Housemaster?" exclaimed Edward Oswald Handforth, strolling up, and catching the latter part of Griffith's remark. "What awful rot!"

"It's jolly sensible!" said Owen major. "The whole blessed Remove would be glad to see Mr. Trenton in Lee's shoes. We're all getting fed up with his domineering ways."

Handforth glared.

"Why, you rotter!" he roared. "Just let me hear you running Mr. Lee down again! Trenton's all right—but he'd be no good as Housemaster."

"Of course not!" said Church. "Trenton may be all right as science master, but he'd never be able to run the Ancient House."

"Lee ought never to be a school-master, anyhow—he wasn't cut out for it," growled Armstrong. "St. Frank's would be better off without him."

"Well, of course, talking about detectives, I'll admit that Mr. Lee is rather out of his element here," said Handforth. "Strictly speaking, he ought to be occupying his time on criminal cases. But you can't deny that he's always been a ripping Housemaster."

Clang—clang!

"Well, we won't argue about it," said Grey. "There goes the dinner bell."

They trooped indoors, but after dinner Handforth was not disposed to let the subject rest. It was quite characteristic of him to ponder over a subject during a meal, and then reopen it afterwards, when everybody else had forgotten all about it. In the lobby he talked loudly.

"Of course, you can't get away from the fact that Mr. Lee is wasting his time," he observed, talking to nobody in particular. "It's ridiculous, strictly speaking, for him to be looking after a lot of schoolboys when he could fill his time in with exciting detective cases."

"What are you talking about, you ass?" I asked, as I passed by.

"About Mr. Lee, of course."

"What are you starting the same game, too?" I demanded gruffly. "What's wrong with all the chaps in the Remove? Not content with running the Head down, you're beginning to talk against the gov'nor as well!"

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not running him down. I think he's one of the best—but I'm permitted to have an opinion, I suppose? And I reckon that he's simply wasting his talent by remaining at St. Frank's. Perhaps it would be better for him if he went back to London and investigated detective mysteries."

"I reckon he's got quite enough to keep him busy here," I said grimly.

"That's just the trouble," grunted Handforth. "I never get a look in!"

"A look in where?"

"Why, if there's anything mysterious happens, I'm never allowed to investigate," said Handforth, in an aggrieved tone. "I never get a proper chance of showing what I'm worth. If there's any mystery to be investigated I've got to take a back seat, and Mr. Lee gets on the job. But if he went, there'd be nobody left, and so I should have a clear field."

I chuckled.

"Poor old Handy!" I grinned. "But there's no need to worry. When you get bit older you'll be able to start in the detective business yourself, and after you've made an awful hash of it, you'll realise that you were really cut out to be a coal-heaver or a road-mender!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure roared, and Handforth glared.

"You—you babbling fathead!" he snorted. "If you think that's funny, I don't. On the whole I should be rather pleased if Mr. Lee went away—"

"For good?"

"Yes!"

"Well, if the gov'nor went, I'd go with him," I said. "Then what would you say?"

"Why, that would be all the better!" replied Handforth promptly. "You're only skipper of the Remove because of favouritism. It's my job, really—and if you clear off, I'd soon make things hum!"

And Handforth, having uttered this parting shot, strode out of the Ancient House into the Triangle—fondly imagining that he had squashed me. The yell of laughter which followed him out, however, probably told him that he was mistaken.

With Church and McClure in close attendance, he marched straight across to a group of fellows who were leaning

against the gymnasium wall. They were all talking intently, and the subject of their conversation was easily guessed. Of late, nearly all discussions concerned the Head, or Nelson Lee, or Mr. Trenton.

"I reckon we ought to get up an agitation," Armstrong was saying. "Tucker's right—the time's come when we ought to act. All this talk is no good. We can jaw and jaw for ever, and nothing will be done."

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Pitt.

"I reckon that Mr. Lee ought to resign!" replied Armstrong.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"You can call me what you like—but I'll stick to my own opinion," said Armstrong stubbornly. "Mr. Lee ought to resign, and clear out. If he did that we should have Mr. Trenton as House-master, and perhaps the Head would clear off, too. Something's got to be done, anyway!"

Pitt grinned.

"I think something is going to be done!" he remarked.

Handforth, who had been listening, was rolling up his sleeves. There was a light of battle in his eyes, and it was quite apparent that somebody was about to find some trouble. Handforth was just ready for it—he hadn't punched anybody's nose all day—which was almost a record for him.

"Put up your hands!" he said, thrusting a huge fist under Armstrong's nose. "Buck up, you cads, or I'll knock you flat!"

Armstrong backed away.

"What's the matter with you, fathead?" he growled. "I wasn't saying anything to you, and I didn't ask you to butt in."

"I didn't need any asking!" snapped Handforth. "You were saying that Mr. Lee ought to resign and clear out. Well, I don't allow that!"

"You don't allow it?"

"No, I don't!"

"Oh!" said Armstrong sourly, and with a sneer in his voice. "I'm awfully sorry to hear that! Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to mind your own blessed business! I've got my opinion, and I'll state it without asking your permission. Understand?"

Handforth fairly towered over the other junior.

"Why, you—you cheeky cad!" he belowered. "Just because these other chaps are here, you think you can talk to me as you like! But I'm not going to stand by and hear Mr. Lee run down!"

"Why, you were saying that it would be a good thing for Mr. Lee to resign," exclaimed Church. "You told Nipper—"

"Never mind what I told Nipper!" roared Handforth. "Are you going to put up your hands, Armstrong, or shall I knock you flat?"

"You can go and eat coke!" snapped Armstrong.

He turned his back, but the next second Handforth twisted him round and planted a fist squarely in the middle of his face. Armstrong nearly turned a somersault as he went over backwards. He was certainly in the wars. This was the second time he had been knocked down that day—and for the same reason.

"Ow!" he howled. "Yow — yaroooo!"

"Get up, and I'll knock you down again!" shouted Handforth.

Armstrong did get up, but his recently acquired courage failed him, and he fled. He made tracks across the Triangle like a hare, and Handforth rushed after him. But, even if Armstrong wasn't a good fighter, he could certainly run well. And he gave Handforth the slip somewhere in the direction of the playing-fields.

Handforth returned, quite ready to punch another dozen noses if neces-

sary. It was quite immaterial to him that he had, himself, stated the very same thing that he had attacked Armstrong for. Handy hadn't really meant it, but Armstrong had. That was just the difference.

Trouble was certainly brewing in the Remove, but the little breezes which had blown so far were nothing compared to the squall which was soon destined to break!

CHAPTER 20.

Getting Violent!

"READY?" asked Bob Christine genially.

"Waiting for you!" I replied with a nod.

"Rats!" grinned Christine. "You haven't got all your men here."

It was some little time later—getting on for two-thirty, in fact. And, as the day was a half-holiday a football match had been arranged. It was not one of the regular fixtures, but just a match between the College House and the Ancient House.

The bulk of the star footballers in the Remove Eleven all belonged to the Ancient House, and House matches were, therefore, rather a one-sided affair. Christine had more than once attempted to alter this—he had searched the ranks of his section of the Remove in vain for fellows who could make his team a strong one.

"Of course, we're going down—that's taken for granted," said Bob. "But we'll try and give you a good game. With Pitt on your side, and Tregellis-West and you and Handforth—"

"Keep your hair on," I interrupted. "I'm giving the reserves a chance to-day. Pitt's not playing, and neither is Sir Montie. And I'm trying Doyle in goal instead of Handforth. Your side, Christine, ought to be good enough to whack us."

Bob Christine brightened up.

"Well, that's better," he said heartily. "With all the best chaps playing, it's hardly fair. There's more interest in a game if the teams are more evenly matched."

I agreed.

And very shortly the two elevens took the field. Reginald Pitt and Sir Montie and the other members of the regular team stood looking on.

"Go it, my sons!" shouted Pitt. "If you let these Monks whack you you deserve to lose your places for good!"

"Rats!" roared Talmadge. "We're going to wipe you up!"

The game soon started, and quite a lot of interest was taken in it, the ropes being crowded with interested spectators.

The Head was forgotten, together with all his recent doings. In the interests of football, the fellows had no time to think of their recent squabbles about Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford.

I was trying Conroy minor at out-side-right—Reginald Pitt's position—and he proved to be a bit of a disappointment.

This, perhaps, was due to the fact that much was expected of him, and, at first, he was rather nervous. Three times in succession he had chances to centre the ball, but he muffed every opportunity. After Pitt's masterly playing, Conroy's efforts seemed almost pitiful.

"Buck up, Conroy!"

"Wake up, you ass—put some life into it!"

Conroy did buck up. He settled down, and soon afterwards he raced away up the field, controlling the ball quite cleverly. Then he centred well, the leather dropping close against my foot.

I trapped it promptly, and without a second's hesitation shot for goal. There was no time to waste, for both the College House backs were coming at me. The leather left my foot at great speed.

Oldfield, in the College House goal, jumped desperately. But he was just a shade too late, and the ball lodged in a corner of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good old Nipper! Well played, Conroy!"

"First blood to the Fossils!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

We were just lining up again when there came an interruption. Bryant, of the Fifth, was acting as referee, and he paused just as he was about to blow his whistle. He stared out across the field.

"Buck up, Bryant — don't go to sleep!" said Christine. "Blow away!"

"Hold on!" said Bryant. "The Head seems to be—— Well, I'm hanged!"

He broke off, and stared harder than ever. I turned round, and all the other footballers followed the direction of the referee's gaze. There was ample reason for Bryant's astonishment.

Dr. Stafford was striding on to the playing pitch!

"What the dickens——" began Christine amazedly.

"Keep cool, you chaps!" I said, in a low voice. "The Head's on the war-path, by the looks of him! Whatever he says, don't answer him back! When he's in this mood he needs careful handling!"

The Head approached grimly.

"Every boy will remain perfectly still!" he rapped out harshly.

His usually kindly face was set and drawn into hard lines. His eyes glittered with an evil, relentless light.

"Anything the matter, sir?" asked Bryant.

"Yes!" said the Head coldly. "Leave this field, Bryant!"

"Le—leave the field!" stuttered Bryant. "What for, sir? I'm refereeing this match for the juniors——"

"Your services are no longer required, Bryant," cut in the Head. "The game ceases from this moment!"

The juniors gazed at one another in dismay.

"Ceases, sir?" shouted Christine, running forward. "What for? We've only just started. We've got to go on—"

"Oh, indeed!" snarled the Head, turning on him fiercely. "You have got to go on, eh?" Another word from you, Christine, and I will flog you! This game is finished, and every boy will go at once to the Form-room!"

I walked forward and faced the Head. "May I speak, sir?" I asked respectfully.

"Well, well, what is it?" snapped Dr. Stafford.

"Is there anything that we have done to earn your displeasure, sir?" I asked. "We would like to finish this game, and—"

"Silence!" broke in the Head.

I pulled up, and compressed my lips. Knowing that defiance only angered him the more, I had attempted different tactics. I wanted to see what the result would be if I spoke humbly and meekly. Apparently, this only irritated the Head more.

"I want no impertinence from you, Nipper!" he went on harshly. "I have ordered you to leave this field. You are the captain of the Remove, and it is your duty to lead the way. Go at once, and without further comment!"

I bridled up somewhat.

"But why, sir?" I demanded. "Have we done anything wrong?"

"There has been a disgraceful amount of noise from this part of the playing-field!" replied Dr. Stafford curtly. "For some little time I excused it, but as the disturbance increased I decided that the cause must be removed without further delay. This football match, apparently, is the sole reason for the unearthly catcalls and wild shouts. Not another word, Nipper—go!"

The juniors were all crowded round excitedly.

"It's not fair, sir!" shouted Christine. "We're always allowed to play football on our holidays!"

"We haven't been making more noise than usual, sir!"

"Not so much, sir!"

"And we can't have football without shouting!"

"Of course not, sir!"

All the fellows were shouting at once. Dr. Stafford glared round ferociously. The protestations of the fellows, it seemed, were only making him more determined to enforce his order. The cold light in his eyes blazed forth into fierce anger.

"You insubordinate young hounds!" he shouted. "For this gross exhibition of insolence you will all be barred from football for the whole period of this term!"

"Oh!"

"Your immediate punishment will consist of detention in the Form-room for the remainder of the day!" went on the Head curtly. "I mean to have every boy in this school thoroughly subdued! You must all understand that I will not put up with any nonsense! Go at once without a single word!"

In ordinary circumstances the juniors would have obeyed without question for to defy the Head was never to be dreamed of; but just now they were worked up to a high pitch of excitement by the injustice of Dr. Stafford's decision. Right in the middle of a game here they were compelled to abandon it and go indoors! And football was to be barred for the rest of the term!

The juniors unable to control themselves burst forth into protest.

"Can't we finish the game, sir?"

"We've always been allowed to play football!"

"It's not fair to stop us!"

"Rather not!"

"Steady on, you chaps!" I shouted. "Dr. Stafford will give us permission to finish the game, I know. Won't you,

sir?" I added, turning to him. "We'll all go straight into the Form-room afterwards—"

I broke off with a gasp, for the Head suddenly swung his hand round and grasped me by the back of the neck. He gave me a violent shove which sent me sprawling on the grass.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Unless every boy obeys me at once, I will ban football permanently! Any boy who remains on this field after one minute has elapsed will be expelled from the school!"

"Oh, will he?" roared somebody in the crowd. "Don't budge, you chaps!"

"We're not going to!"

"No fear!"

"We can't all be expelled!"

The fellows, red with excitement and indignation, clung together. By this time the majority of the spectators had crowded round, and the excitement was at its height.

The Head had worked himself into a fine rage, and now he glared round with eyes that fairly blazed with fury. And in the midst of it Fenton, of the Sixth, came running up. The captain of St. Frank's had been practising on Big Side, and he had come across to see what the trouble was.

"Anything wrong here, sir?" he asked as he arrived.

Dr. Stafford turned on him savagely.

"If you interfere, Fenton, I will knock you down!" he shouted thickly.

Fenton started back.

"Why, what—" he began.

"Go away from here!" stormed Dr. Stafford. "I didn't ask you to come, Fenton, and I don't need you! But stay—your services may be useful! Take charge of these insubordinate young rascals, and march them into the Form-room."

Fenton looked rather helpless.

"Don't you try it, Fenton!" shouted De Valerie.

"We're not going!" yelled Armstrong.

"Rather not!"

"We're going to stay here and finish the game!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with tyranny!"

Fenton almost went pale with amazement. Here was the beginning of a minor rebellion, and it promised to develop into something big. But, after all, it was impossible to defy the headmaster to his face.

"Now then, boys, be sensible!" shouted Fenton, when he found his voice. "You won't do yourselves any good by making a fuss. If the Head says you've got to go indoors, you've got to go!"

"Hear, hear!" I said. "Take it calmly, you chaps, and—"

But they wouldn't listen to me, and all sorts of shouts and yells were raised. And in the middle of it the Head stamped up and down, and looked really dangerous. This is what I had been afraid of. Driven to an excess of anger, the Head was quite capable of doing somebody a serious injury.

But his rage found a different outlet.

"Oh!" he shouted roughly. "So you defy me! You think that you can ignore my orders! Very well, we will see! From this moment there will be no more football in the junior school. The game is permanently forbidden!"

And Dr. Stafford suddenly rushed away, to the astonishment of us all. He made straight for one of the goals. The juniors looked after him, wondering what his intention was. And now they were beginning to get just a little afraid. The courage of excitement and indignation was dying down.

"What's he going to do?" asked Owen major huskily.

"Goodness knows!"

"I say!" muttered Grey. "You went a bit too far, you know—"

"Rats!" shouted Armstrong. "We're not going to put up with his rot!"

The Head arrived at the goal, and

commenced pulling fiercely at one of the uprights with his bare hands. The post shook slightly, but, of course, the Head's efforts made little or no impression upon the sturdy post.

After a moment or two he desisted, and glared round. Morrow, of the Sixth, was close by, looking on in blank amazement.

"Fetch me an axe!" snarled the Head, turning on him like a whirlwind.

Morrow started.

"Speaking to me, sir?" he gasped.

"Yes, Morrow, I am!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "Go and fetch me an axe!"

"An—an axe, sir?" repeated Morrow blankly.

"Yes, you infernal idiot—an axe!" snarled the Head. "Am I surrounded by fools? Don't you understand what an axe is? Obey my orders at once, Morrow!"

"Yes, sir!" said Morrow weakly.

He ran off, rather anxious to escape from the Head's fury. He was filled with astonishment. What did the Head intend doing? What could he want with an axe? Morrow was rather scared.

He arrived at the tool-shed, and as it happened, Josh Cuttle, the school-porter, was pottering about within. Mr. Cuttle was attired in his working clothes, with a green apron about his middle.

"Got an axe here?" asked Morrow bluntly.

"There was somebody axing for an axe!" said Cuttle gloomily. "Why was there somebody axing for an axe? Ax me! Because——"

"Don't try to be funny, Cuttle!" snapped Morrow. "It's serious! The Head wants a chopper—I believe he's going to do some damage!"

Josh Cuttle's face lighted up.

"Which was good!" he said cheerfully. "Why was it good? Ask me! Because there was going to be trouble—

and when there was trouble there was something to make a man's heart feel good!"

"You—you garrulous old idiot!" snapped Morrow. "If I'm not back quick with that axe, I shall get the sack."

Mr. Cuttle positively beamed.

"There was somebody going to get the sack!" he exclaimed. "There was trouble brewing! Things was looking good! Last week there was an axe in this here shed, but this week there wasn't no axe! Why wasn't there? Ask me! Because I took the axe away!"

"Oh, you hopeless washerwoman!" roared Morrow frantically. "Where is the axe?"

"Storms was breaking!" muttered the porter. "And when storms was breaking it was a time to act quick. The axe, Master Morrow, is just agin the wall outside. I was going to use it, but——"

Morrow didn't hear the rest. He dashed out and found the axe tucked away behind a spade and fork. It was a heavy axe—one of those big implements capable of felling a tree. Morrow seized it and hurried away towards the playing fields. He was hoping that the Head would have calmed down by the time he arrived; but he found that Dr. Stafford was still standing against the goal-posts, and his brow was as black as thunder.

"You have been an appalling time, Morrow!" he snarled. "Ah, that will do splendidly—splendidly! Chop down these goal-posts!"

Morrow started back.

"Chop them down, sir?" he yelled.

"Don't bark at me, confound you!" bellowed the Head. "You heard what I said—chop down these goal-posts!"

"But—but——"

"You will leave this school to-night, Morrow!" thundered Dr. Stafford, striding forward and wrenching the

axe out of Morrow's hand. "Stand aside, or you will be hurt!"

Morrow dodged quickly, and the axe swung round with all the Head's strength—and Dr. Stafford was a sturdy man in spite of his age. Round in a wide semi-circle the juniors had collected, and they were watching breathlessly. It seemed absolutely impossible that the Head could be contemplating such a terrible act.

Crash!

The axe bit into the woodwork deeply. The Head wrenched it out, and then commenced hacking away with all his strength. The blade of the axe was sharp, and it cut into the woodwork deeply, and sent the splinters flying. And, after all, a goal-post is not a very heavy article.

Within a minute it showed signs of falling.

The crowd was awe-struck now. The Head's fury was something to fear, for a man who could get himself into this state of savagery was not to be treated lightly. But the juniors were looking grim and furious.

No action that the Head could have performed was calculated to enrage the fellows as much as this. Football was barred, and, to prove it, the Head was destroying the goals!

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The last blows were delivered, and then the goal-post sagged over. The other upright was not sufficient to bear the added strain, and the whole affair collapsed backwards with the net—ruined!

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"That's done it!"

"The rotter!"

"Oh, the destructive beast!"

"Booh—booh!"

In a second, dozens of fellows were hooting and booing. The Head, hot and perspiring, glared round and strode away. He uttered no word, but his very look was eloquent enough.

The hurricane was not yet over!

CHAPTER 21.

Nelson Lee Takes Command!

"MAD! Absolutely off his rocker!"

"Oh, no doubt about it!"

Crowds of juniors were talking excitedly in the Triangle. And not juniors alone, for Fifth-Formers and Sixth-Formers were discussing the Head's latest activity with as much animation as the juniors.

"He's gone too far this time—not a question of it!" said Chambers of the Fifth. "I'll admit the juniors are a big handful, but it's sheer madness to forbid football and wreck the goalposts."

"And the matter isn't over yet," said Bryant. "Just you wait and see!"

The juniors, of course, were more violent in their choice of words.

"The rotter! The savage beast!" shouted Armstrong recklessly. "A man like that isn't fit to look after convicts, let alone schoolboys! He ought to be kicked out of St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And we're going to ignore him, too!" went on Armstrong. "In fact, I vote we go on with the match, just as if nothing had happened. That'll show the Head that he can't fool about with us just as he likes."

"How can we play with one of the goals wrecked?" asked Griffith.

"Oh, it won't take us long to set it up again!"

"Good idea!"

"I stepped forward, looking rather grim. Armstrong, I had noticed, had recently been coming out of his shell; hitherto somewhat obscure, he was now blossoming forth into an agitator and a leader. And, what was more, he had already obtained a fair number of supporters.

"Hold on a minute!" I said curtly. "Look here, Armstrong, you seem to have an idea that you're in a position of authority. But I happen to be captain of the Remove, and I take your

attitude as a direct challenge to me. Well, it won't work—and the fellows won't follow your violent policy."

"What do you mean?" demanded Armstrong roughly. "Who asked you to interfere?"

"I asked myself," I replied. "Haven't you got sense enough to see that it would be absolutely fatal to break out into open defiance? You're not powerful enough to do anything like that. You're dealing with the Head, and if you're not jolly careful you'll find yourself sacked! And a few other chaps will be sacked with you!"

"Rats!" sneered Armstrong. "If I was sacked, nearly every fellow in the Remove would back me up—and so would the Fifth and Sixth. The whole school would support me! Everybody's wild with the Head—"

"Now, then, you chaps, inside with you!" said Morrow crisply.

We turned, and found the Sixth-Former looking grim. In other parts of the Triangle, Fenton and practically every other prefect was going round. It was quite evident that something big was afoot.

"Inside?" repeated Armstrong. "What for?"

"Because you're ordered inside—that's what for," replied Morrow curtly.

"Go and eat coke!" said Armstrong. "We're not going!"

Morrow frowned.

"You'll write me two hundred lines, Armstrong, for cheek!" he snapped. "Just because the Head went queer for a few minutes, some of you fellows seem to think that you can defy every form of authority! The whole school is to collect in Big Hall at once, and if there are any absentees, they'll catch it hot!"

Morrow walked away, and Armstrong looked somewhat sheepish.

"We're still living in a state of law and order, old chap," I said cheerily. "If you want to lead a rebellion, take my advice—wait until the right

moment comes. You will only bring disaster on yourself by opening your mouth too wide. But the best advice of all is this—don't try any rebellion at all!"

Armstrong grunted, and I walked away.

We arrived in Big Hall, and found the school rapidly assembling. It was, of course, impossible for every fellow to be there, for it was a half-holiday, and a certain number had gone out for the afternoon. But quite two-thirds of the whole school happened to be on the premises, and all these were in attendance.

It was almost unheard of for the school to be brought together on a half-holiday, and the fellows didn't like it at all. It was their recreation time, and to be interfered with in this way was exasperating and annoying.

In the midst of the low murmur of talk the door at the back of the platform opened, and Dr. Stafford emerged. I looked at him closely, hoping for some sign of a change; for I thought it possible that his spasm, so to speak, was over.

But the first glance told me that such was not the case.

The Head's brow was black, and his eyes shone with savage fire. There was something about his very bearing which boded ill for anybody who dared to cross him.

"Silence!"

The prefects on all sides spoke the word curtly, and a complete stillness descended upon the well-filled hall. The headmaster advanced to the edge of the platform, and surveyed the fellows as a wild beast surveys its victims—glowering, fierce, and with savage triumph.

"The whole school is not assembled!" he rasped out. "Where are the others?"

Fenton stepped forward.

"Being a half-holiday, sir, a certain

number of fellows are away," he explained.

"They had no right to be away!" shouted the Head. "When these boys return they will be severely punished!"

"But they didn't know, sir——"

"Don't argue with me, Fenton!" snarled the Head. "Go back to your place! So a certain number are away! They shall suffer—to the utmost extent! As for the rest of you, I have something to say!"

"Something sweet, by the look of it!" murmured Handforth.

"Shs-s-sh!"

Dr. Stafford, fortunately, did not hear the interruption.

"As you are all aware, a certain number of boys in the Remove have openly defied me," he went on. "As a punishment, and as an object lesson to you all, I smashed down one of the goals on Little Side!"

"Shame!" came a subdued voice from the rear.

"Who spoke that word?" roared Dr. Stafford furiously. "The boy who uttered that word just now will stand forward!"

There was no movement.

"Very well!" said the Head. "Very well! You will see whether I am to be flouted and insulted! I have noticed that the whole school has recently grown insubordinate, disrespectful, and absolutely blind to all form of authority. I am determined to crush this insolent spirit, once and for all. There will be no more laxity while I am headmaster!"

The school listened in astonishment. I noticed the prefects exchanging glances. Mr. Crowell stroked his chin and looked significantly at Mr. Pagett, who gave his shoulders an expressive shrug.

Nelson Lee was standing by himself, and his lips were pursed, and he was regarding Dr. Stafford closely and intently. The gov'nor knew well enough that the Head was not absolutely responsible for all he was saying.

"From now onwards there will be an end to all lenient methods!" went on the Head harshly. "It has been proved that such methods are a failure. You have liberties—far too many—and you take advantage of these liberties in every possible way. I am putting my foot down on all such unnecessary freedom."

The Head appeared to be working himself up into a fine state of fury, for his voice had been rising, and he was now thumping his fist into his other palm with fierce energy.

"Your leisure time is too long—your school hours are ridiculously short!" roared Dr. Stafford. "Football is unnecessary——"

"Oh!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Football, I say, is unnecessary—and not only unnecessary, but degrading and brutal! It is merely a waste of good time, and while so many of you are covering yourselves with mud, others can do nothing better than stand by and watch—impairing their health. And, not content with merely watching, they disturb the whole countryside by their frantic and uncouth shouts. The whole thing is wrong, and it shall cease!"

"Cease?" shouted a dozen juniors.

"No—no football, sir?" asked Fenton incredulously.

"Exactly, Fenton—no football!" replied the Head, nodding with keen enjoyment. "Rather a shock, eh? I had an idea I should surprise a few of you! From to-day onwards there will be no football! I am the headmaster, and I forbid it!"

"Oh!"

"No football!"

"Get away—he can't mean it!" shouted Wilson, of the Sixth. "The first eleven's got to play Redcliffe on Saturday, and——"

"Silence, Wilson!" stormed the Head. "You will come to my study this evening to be flogged! How dare you interrupt me?"

"To—to be flogged, sir?" gasped Wilson.

"Yes!" raved the Head, shaking his fists with blind fury. "I will show you! I will prove that I am master here! Good gracious me! Fenton—Morrow—Mr. Crowell—Mr. Pagett! Are you mad—are you all deaf? Cannot you quell this storm of noise which is arising?"

Dr. Stafford, having worked himself up to a fierce pitch of rage, was now almost beside himself. Certainly a considerable din was going on, for juniors and seniors were excitedly discussing this devastating order. Mr. Crowell and the other masters shouted for silence.

"I have never witnessed such a disgraceful scene in all my career!" exclaimed the Head, panting for breath. "It further goes to prove the truth of my words; the spirit of insubordination is even stronger than I had suspected! But it shall be stopped—there will be no more disrespect!"

"But, hang it all, sir, the fellows will take this badly!" protested Fenton hotly. "Football is the most popular game at St. Frank's, and to have it banned like this—"

"Fenton!" screamed the Head wildly. "Go to my study!"

"What for, sir?"

"I will tell you what for when I arrive!" panted Dr. Stafford. "But wait—wait! It will not be necessary for you to go! Here, before the whole school, I publicly expel you for insolence and unruliness!"

The captain of the school stood perfectly still, but his face turned pale.

"I—I am expelled, sir?" he asked quietly.

"Yes; you will go away this very afternoon!" roared the Head. "I will write to your father, giving him my reasons for sending you home in disgrace. Do not utter a word, sir, for at the first syllable I will flog you!"

Fenton breathed hard. The situation

was rather tense, for every member of the Sixth was filled with righteous and furious indignation. For their skipper to be sacked in this way, for no earthly reason, brought every senior to the point of desperation. They broke ranks and crowded round him.

"Don't you go, Fenton!" shouted Wilson recklessly.

"Don't budge an inch, old man!"

"We won't let you go!"

"We'll back you up—we'll stand by you, Fenton!"

"To the last!"

Dr. Stafford screamed with rage.

"To your places, you young hounds!" he shouted, his voice cracking. "How dare you? I have given my orders, and those orders shall be obeyed! As a punishment for this disgraceful scene, I intend to cancel every half-holiday for the remainder of the term, and the first boy who protests will leave St. Frank's with Fenton!"

"I protest, sir!" shouted Morrow promptly.

"So do I!" roared Chambers.

"Same here!" yelled Handforth.

"We all protest!"

A perfect storm of shouts went up. By this time the whole school was at white-hot heat with anger, and any little respect that they had felt for the Head was blown away. They had no awe of him now. They simply ignored him.

"You'd better sack the whole school!" yelled Armstrong. "If Fenton goes, we all go!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll all stick together!"

"Rather!"

Dr. Stafford staggered back, nearly choking.

"You infernal young dogs!" he screamed. "Be silent at once! Get back into your places! I shall—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of derisive laughter went up.

Every shred of respect for the headmaster had vanished, and it was not merely the juniors who were taking part in this extraordinary scene.

In fact, the Sixth Form led the way out of Big Hall, a number of big fellows crowding round Fenton, and talking to him excitedly. Even the prefects made no attempt to restore order. They knew well enough that any such attempt was doomed to failure.

"Boys—boys! Just one moment!"

The voice was loud, firm, and incisive. Every fellow instinctively came to a halt, for there was something commanding about the tone. I turned my head, and saw that Nelson Lee was now standing upon the platform.

Nobody had made his exit, so far, from the hall, although many members of the Sixth had succeeded in getting to the door. But they came to a halt now. Nelson Lee was looking grim and determined.

"Come, boys, this sort of thing won't do!" exclaimed the gov'nor sharply. "Have you taken leave of your senses? Have you lost all idea of authority and obedience? Go back to your places this instant!"

The words in themselves had exactly the same meaning as the words Dr. Stafford had uttered. But to ignore them was impossible. There was something about Nelson Lee's tone which made every junior and senior hesitate. And, having hesitated, they were lost. The one-minute rebellion was over.

Everybody went back to his place. There was perfect silence in Big Hall, and all eyes were turned upon Nelson Lee's grim, determined face.

"I am very glad to see that you have not entirely lost your wits!" said the famous detective coldly. "What manner of behaviour is this—that you should all openly ignore your headmaster's orders? I am surprised—astounded—that you should so far forget yourselves. The junior element I

can excuse—but for the senior there is no justification."

"We're not going to see Fenton sacked, sir!" shouted Bryant.

"It is not your place to question any action of Dr. Stafford's!" retorted Nelson Lee curtly. "Have you boys no more sense than to act in this way? Don't you know what such an affair might lead to? You are all aware that Dr. Stafford is not himself this afternoon. That being so, you ought to realise that it is your duty to be patient."

"But what about Fenton, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Fenton will leave St. Frank's if the headmaster so orders it," said Nelson Lee.

"Oh!"

"However, I have every reason to believe that Dr. Stafford will think better of his hasty decision," went on Nelson Lee calmly. "In fact, boys, you can take it as quite certain that Fenton will not be expelled."

"Hurrah!"

"If you would only exercise patience, this kind of trouble would not come about," continued the gov'nor. "However, it is impossible to allow you to act as you choose. In any circumstances, discipline must be maintained. You will all dismiss, and refrain from creating any disturbances."

"What about football, sir?"

"There will be no football this afternoon!" replied Lee curtly.

"No football, sir!"

"But we're in the middle of a game, sir!" shouted Christine.

"We must finish it, sir!"

"Oh, you must?" snapped Nelson Lee. "We will see about that! You have all heard Dr. Stafford's decision—there is to be no football! If I find any boys playing the game I shall punish them severely. The playing fields for the remainder of the day are out of bounds!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's as bad as the Head!"

"A jolly sight worse!" shouted Armstrong.

"Come, boys, what have I just been telling you?" exclaimed Nelson Lee sharply. "Control yourselves—and let me hear no more of these rebellious interruptions. You may be quite sure that I shall do my very best to persuade Dr. Stafford to think better of his decision regarding football. However, at the moment it would be futile to bother the Head on such a subject. So have patience, and maintain order. I am hoping there will be good news for you to-morrow. You may dismiss."

The school crowded out of Big Hall. The rebellion was quelled—nipped in the bud. Nelson Lee had stepped in just in the nick of time, and a disaster had been averted.

But Nelson Lee's popularity had ebbed away like an outgoing tide.

CHAPTER 22. Finger-Prints!

"COME in!"

Nelson Lee called out somewhat impatiently in response to my knock.

I entered his study, and found the gov'nor lying back in an easy-chair, toasting his feet before the fire. He appeared to be in a lazy attitude, and he was evidently taking things easily. But I knew at once that Nelson Lee was hard at work—with his brain.

I closed the door behind me, and advanced into the room. Everything was fairly quiet now, and the majority of the fellows had cooled down after the excitement of the afternoon. It was evening, and Tregellis-West and Watson and I had only just finished tea in Study C.

"Well, Nipper, what do you want?" asked Lee quietly.

"I want to have a jaw with you, sir," I replied, sitting on a corner of the desk.

"I presume you mean that you have come for a little chat?" said Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, Nipper, I am not exactly in the mood for a chat just now. However, since you are here, I don't quite like to send you away. I have been thinking deeply, and there has been quite a lot to engage my thoughts."

I nodded.

"So I should imagine, gov'nor," I said. "My hat!—Things seem to be going wrong with a vengeance now! The fellows are talking against you like one o'clock!"

"Let them talk!"

"You're losing your popularity, sir."

"My dear Nipper, duty is far more important than popularity," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "It is my duty to stand by Dr. Stafford and the school, and I am doing it. No matter how things look—no matter how appearances may seem—I am determined to stand by the Head all the time."

I frowned.

"That's just the trouble, sir," I said. "All the chaps misunderstand you—they're saying that you're just as bad as the Head himself, and that you're turning into a tyrant."

Nelson Lee smiled somewhat amusedly.

"I am not appalled by the present state of affairs, young 'un," he observed. "It is a pity, no doubt, but, given time, things will right themselves. These hasty juniors will realise that the headmaster is a much injured man, and that he's the victim of a particularly dastardly plot."

"My goodness!" I said. "Is that really the case, sir?"

"It is!"

"Well, I suspected something of the kind, but I'm all in the dark," I said. "The chaps will be sorry later on, of

course—when they understand that the Head hasn't been able to help himself. And your popularity will return when it becomes known that you have been on the track of this plot. Just now you're about as popular as a fox in a chicken-run! Mr. Trenton is the new star in the firmament. All the fellows are buzzing about him like flies—they think he's as sweet as a jam-pot!"

Lee smiled again.

"My good Nipper, if you imagine that you are imparting some news, pray let me disillusion you," he said dryly. "I am well aware of the fact that I am no longer a person of much importance at St. Frank's. I am now regarded as the headmaster's ally—I am a tyrant and a disciplinarian. And our worthy science master, Mr. Trenton, is busily receiving all the bouquets."

"It's rotten, guv'nor," I protested.

"From your point of view it may be unfortunate, but I have no time to think of such trifles," said Nelson Lee. "After all, my popularity is of small importance. The headmaster's exhibition to-day was deplorable—the worst attack he has yet had. It was only by prompt measures that I averted an open rebellion."

"Yes, and I'm afraid that things will go from bad to worse unless the Head alters," I said gravely. "Awful things are being said in the Remove—and in the Fifth and Sixth, too! Seniors as well as juniors are talking about a revolt!"

"So long as they only talk about it, Nipper, no harm will be done," said the guv'nor smoothly. "And boys are very fond of talking about things they have no intention of doing. Let them talk—if it eases their minds. But they mustn't talk in my hearing. I will not listen to any disloyalty to Dr. Stafford."

"But, hang it all, sir, you can't blame them!" I said. "The Head's

been shocking of late, and it's no wonder that the chaps are backing up against it. How is he now—the Head, I mean?"

"Dr. Stafford retired to his own rooms, although I'll admit that I had some little difficulty in persuading him," said Nelson Lee. "At the moment he is sleeping, I think, and it will do him good. When he wakes up later on, he will be more like himself, and will intensely regret his drastic orders of the afternoon."

I scratched my head.

"It's a mystery to me, guv'nor," I said. "Is it absolutely a fact that the Head can't help himself?"

"Dr. Stafford is not the kind of man to have these attacks naturally," replied Nelson Lee. "I can tell you quite candidly, Nipper, that some enemy is working against our unfortunate headmaster—a hidden, secret enemy. I cannot go into any details now."

"Just like you, guv'nor," I grunted. "You find out all sorts of things, but you won't let me into the secret. What about that silver disc?"

"I am convinced that the silver disc is the emblem of a certain gang or society," said Nelson Lee.

"Then there's more than one man against the Head?"

"There are several men in this band," said Nelson Lee. "So far I have only been able to make certain of one, but, fortunately, this one is the prime mover in the whole business. I have my eyes well on him, Nipper, and it will only be a matter of time before I have my case complete. But the affair is of such a character that it is quite impossible for me to act decisively at the moment. It is a game of patience, and I must await my opportunity."

"Are these men really dangerous, sir?" I asked, fumbling in the dark.

"Dangerous—and deadly!" replied Nelson Lee. "It may interest you to

know, Nipper, that my life was attempted two or three nights ago."

"Great Scott! And I knew nothing about it!" I exclaimed. "What happened, sir?"

"Nothing much; but my demise would have been a matter of certainty if I had not chanced to sit up late before the fire in my bed-room," replied the gov'nor calmly. "A gentleman with a large knife visited me, and performed some really destructive efforts upon my bedclothes. Had I been between the sheets at the time, I should have had no opportunity to defend myself. As it was, I overpowered my ferocious visitor, but he escaped."

"Didn't you attempt to follow him?"

"Such a course was unnecessary, since I discovered the identity of my visitor," replied Nelson Lee. "I merely caught one glimpse, but that was sufficient. To make quite sure, I took some photographs of his finger-prints—for future use. One must always think in advance, Nipper."

"Oh, you've got his finger-prints, have you?" I said, with interest. "Whose are they, sir?"

"That I cannot tell you just now," replied the great detective. "However, it may interest you to know that I have since obtained a second set of prints, and these correspond in every detail with the others. Yes, Nipper, I am getting my man firmly enmeshed in the net. But it would be foolish to draw my net in just yet, for I wish to make a bigger catch."

"Oh, you always talk in riddles!" I grunted. "You never will let me into the know, gov'nor. You've been taking finger-prints, and escaping death by inches, and goodness knows what else! These people seem to be pretty desperate—and they're working against Dr. Stafford. What's the idea?"

"It is quite a simple one—to drive the Head from St. Frank's."

"But why?"

"What a youngster you are for questions, Nipper," smiled Nelson Lee. "I cannot tell you the precise reason for this attempt to drive Dr. Stafford from the school. But, as you must know, it is a particularly cunning attempt—since the plotters are causing Dr. Stafford to bring about his own undoing. I can tell you positively that the Head is not responsible for his present harshness. When in these moods he is under some evil influence."

"Yes, but what influence?" I persisted.

"Think, my dear lad—think!" said Nelson Lee. "You must know that it is not hypnotism, and it is certainly not poison. Dr. Stafford is in a perfect state of health, and his mental balance is even. Have you formed any opinion as to the chief culprit?"

"Rather!" I replied promptly. "He's Mr. Trenton!"

Nelson Lee raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, indeed!" he said. "Why do you assume that Mr. Trenton is responsible?"

"Because he's a sly beast," I replied. "He's a cunning, oily rotter! Ever since the first minute I saw him, I've detested him more and more! I don't know why it is, gov'nor, but I distrust him. I instinctively know that he's no good."

"Well, your judgment has always been very sound," said Nelson Lee approvingly. "We will be frank, Nipper. Mr. Hugh Trenton is deeply involved in this mysterious case. I am giving you no information by saying that, since you have already guessed it."

"And the blighter has got the whole Remove by the ears!" I growled disgustedly. "The other Forms, too! Nine chaps out of ten think he's a good sort. They simply look on the surface, and don't see underneath."

"That is generally the way," said Lee. "You must remember, Nipper, that we are different from most people. We have had a great deal of experience

of criminals, and we are thus able to discriminate. The majority of the boys at St. Frank's are quite unsophisticated in such matters. Mr. Trenton makes himself pleasant and genial, and is always sympathetic. Therefore he is voted to be a good fellow. It's just the way of the world, my lad."

"Yes, I suppose it is," I agreed. "Thank goodness we can see a bit farther than our noses, sir! But why is Mr. Trenton working against the Head?"

"As I told you before, I don't know."

"How does he make the Head go off into these strange attacks of savagery?"

"Again you have floored me, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "That, indeed, is the most mystifying point in all these mysterious circumstances. How does Mr. Trenton change Dr. Stafford's character? How does he turn him from a kindly man into a brutal tyrant? That is a perplexing question, and I would give much to know the answer. However, I am working hard—secretly for the most part—and when I have discovered the actual truth, I shall be in a better position to take action."

"It's a queer business, guv'nor," I said thoughtfully. "I wish all the fellows could understand it as we do. They're groping in the dark, and they've got a totally wrong idea of the whole thing. If the Head has many more of his strange fits, the whole school will be in a state of revolt."

Nelson Lee leaned forward.

"A revolt would be disastrous," he said. "If a certain section of the boys rebelled against the headmaster, it would not be so bad, but for the whole school to turn against him would be a tragedy. It would mean success to the enemy, and that is just what I am fighting to avoid."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that if the school turns against the Head, only one thing can result," replied Nelson Lee

quietly. "Dr. Stafford will be compelled to send in his resignation, and Mr. Trenton will be triumphant. At all costs that must be avoided. And there is a way in which you can help me in my fight, Nipper."

"Good!" I said keenly. "Let me hear what it is, guv'nor."

"I am afraid it will be difficult, and you will be misunderstood," said Lee.

"But I want you to stick up for Dr. Stafford on any and every occasion. No matter what excesses of tyranny he performs, I want you to talk in his favour. Not only this, but it is most important that you should get as many supporters as possible—the whole Remove, if it can be managed."

"I'm afraid that's out of the question, sir," I said. "Quite a number of the chaps are bitter already, and they won't listen to reason. They're as much against you as they are against the Head."

"Very well, gather your forces together," smiled Lee. "Get your chums to trust in Dr. Stafford, and get them to trust in me. Your efforts in this direction will be of incalculable service. If you can only get the Remove to back you up and remain staunch, we will defeat the wiles of our enemies."

I thrust out my hand.

"Guv'nor, it's a go!" I said keenly. "I'll do it!"

And we shook hands on it.

CHAPTER 23.

The Beginning of the Split!

TIMOTHY TUCKER looked round the crowded Common-room impressively.

"Comrades and fellow-sufferers, I have a few words to say on a most important subject!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. "Quite so! The position is this, my dear sirs—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, T. T.!"

"Dear, dear, dear!" protested Tucker. "These interruptions are most deplorable. As you are all aware, Mr. Nelson Lee has drawn a portion of Dr. Stafford's mantle over his own shoulders. In other words, since I fear you may not comprehend such subtle smiles, Mr. Lee has recently been showing signs of becoming a tyrant."

"Good!"

"A tyrant—a slave-driver!" shouted Tucker. "Yes, my dear sirs, Mr. Lee's character is changing—and, mark you, it is changing for the worse! As I have repeatedly said, the time has arrived for us to rise in all our might. I urge you to become members of the Brotherhood of the Free——"

"Oh, turn off the gas!"

"Dry up!"

"We don't want any of your Brotherhood rot!" said Jack Grey. "We're free enough already——"

"Free!" exclaimed Tucker. "Really, my dear sir, you are absurd! I repeat it—absurd! What freedom do we possess? None—none whatsoever! We are driven like cattle——"

"Who stuck that fathead up there?" I demanded, as I entered the Common-room. "More treacherous talk against the Head! Tucker, if you don't dry up within ten seconds, I'll yank you off that chair by your long ears!"

"Really, my dear sir——"

"Tucker's right!" shouted Armstrong. "And it's true that Mr. Lee is a tyrant!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats!"

"Go it, Armstrong!"

"Dry up!"

All sorts of shouts filled the Common-room, and I was rather relieved to hear that quite a number of fellows were opposed to Armstrong's view. I had just had a talk with Tregellis-West and Watson, after my visit to the gov'nor's study, and we had decided

to commence operations without any delay.

Entering the Common-room, we found things in a somewhat lively state. I strode forward and pushed Timothy Tucker off the chair on which he had been standing. He protested vigorously, but I ignored him.

"Now listen to me, you chaps," I said grimly. "We've got to have a complete understanding, one way or the other. There's going to be no more of this confusion. You've got to declare yourselves."

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Well, at present things are all at sixes and sevens," I said. "Some of you are against the Head, and some against Nelson Lee, and others quite indifferent. That's got to alter. We're going to take a vote, and every fellow must give his opinion. Then we shall know exactly how we stand."

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Watson. "That's a good idea."

"Jolly good!" agreed Pitt. "But it's no good doing a thing by halves. We're not all here——"

"Exactly," I agreed. "That's why I'm going to get some of you fellows to run round and collect the rest. We're going to hold a Form meeting, and every fellow in the Remove must attend. It's a question of the highest importance."

"A Form meeting?"

"Oh, good!"

"Buck up, you chaps—buzz round!"

There was a shout of excitement at once, for a Form meeting was an occasion of the highest possible urgency. Now and again there would be an impromptu meeting, but a regular Form meeting was somewhat different.

In no circumstances was any fellow excused; every single junior in the Remove had to attend, whether he wanted to or not. It was an unwritten law, and it was a law that had never been abused.

Pitt and Grey and many of the others hurried out of the Common-room at once. Griffith and Owen major, supported by three or four more, rushed across to the College House, for Christine & Co. were to be included in this. Although members of the rival House, they were, nevertheless, of the Remove. Their absence was not to be thought of.

And House rows at such a time as this were distinctly "off."

Quite a number of juniors had been anticipating something of this kind. With football banned—only temporarily, perhaps—and with many other matters of importance in the balance, a meeting of the whole Form was essential. But nobody exactly guessed what my real intentions were.

"Now, who's going to do the gas-sing?" demanded Pitt, looking round when the whole Remove was present. "This promises to be interesting—and I suppose it'll end up, as usual, in several free fights. I'm the chairman of the meeting, and I call upon—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm chairman!"

"For goodness' sake, don't argue about it!" I snapped. "Let him be chairman, Pitt—or we shall never get any peace."

"Just as you like!" grinned Reginald Pitt. "Go ahead!"

"If anybody interrupts he'll get a punch on the nose!" roared the chairman, glaring round. "Understand, I don't allow any interruptions. This meeting has been called together for the purpose of—of— Well, Nipper knows what it's been called together for. I have much pleasure in requesting him to make a speech. Of course, I shall address the meeting afterwards, and I want to say at once that—"

"Order!"

"Dry up, you ass!"

"You're only the chairman!"

"Why, you rotters, I mean to

speak!" snorted Handforth. "I've got all sorts of things to say, and now's my chance to get them off my chest. I call for silence—"

Handforth may have called silence, but he only obtained wild catcalls and energetic interruptions. In the midst of it all I jumped upon the table and held up my hand. I was looking serious—I felt serious.

"Now, then, you chaps, this won't do," I said quietly. "If this row goes on we shall only have the prefects about our ears, and then the whole meeting will be smashed up. The subject is a serious one—it's the most important discussion that's come up during the whole year. So do try and keep quiet for a bit."

My words had due effect, and silence was obtained.

"Who's going to make this speech—you or me?" asked Handforth warmly.

"I am," I replied. "Don't be an ass, Handy—you'll have plenty of chance to join in afterwards," I added. "Before we go any further I want to explain to everybody why the Form has been called together."

"That's what we're waiting to hear," said Bob Christine.

"Out with it, Nipper!"

"I'll bet it's about the Head!"

"Yes, and football!"

"As a matter of fact, it is about the Head," I said. "That's not a particularly brilliant guess of somebody's. Before answering me I want you to think. How many of you are against the Head, and how many in favour of him? That's the point I wish to get at."

"Oh, that's easy," said Christine. "We're all against him!"

"Rather!"

"Well, we'll put it to the vote," I said. "Hands up all those chaps who're against the Head."

Nearly every hand in the Remove was raised at once. I surveyed all those paws grimly.

"Right," I said. "Now, hands up those who are willing to support the Head!"

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, loyal to me, raised their hands at once.

But they were alone. Theirs were the only votes in favour of Dr. Stafford. Things looked bad—and it seemed that my task would be a heavy one.

The split in the Remove would be very wide indeed!

CHAPTER 24.

The Rival Camps!

"H A, ha, ha!"
A yell of laughter and derision went up from the Remove as Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West lowered their hands. My two chums looked rather red.

"How do you like it?" grinned Fullwood. "You'll find a fat lot of support for the Head in the Remove—I don't think! Now you'd better take a vote on Mr. Lee, an' you'll find the result just the same."

"Dry up, you cads!"

"Who told you to speak, Fullwood?"

"I hardly expected anything different," I exclaimed, looking round. "In the circumstances it is only natural that you should all be feeling pretty sore against Dr. Stafford. At the same time, I mean to take a second vote—and I have an idea that the result will be a bit different. Because I'm going to explain things. You're a thoughtless set of bounders, and you don't fully realise the position. So it's up to me to put the facts before you."

"We know quite enough already!"

"Of course we do!"

"There's no need for you to jaw, Nipper!"

"None whatever, my dear sirs—none whatever!" said Timothy Tucker.

"Comrades and fellow slaves! Listen to me—listen to the voice of reason! Listen——"

The voice of reason was drowned by a loud series of yells. Timothy Tucker subsided—chiefly because Handforth grabbed him from behind, and unceremoniously sat him in the fender.

"Whether you want me to put the facts before you or not, I'm going to do it," I said firmly. "Do shut up, Hubbard! And don't make so much noise over in that corner, Fatty! This matter is of the utmost importance. When you vote against Dr. Stafford you are automatically voting against Mr. Lee."

"How do you make that out?" said Pitt.

"In this way," I explained. "Mr. Lee, as you know, is in a responsible position at St. Frank's. If the Head

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happens to be away, or ill, it's the guv'nor who takes temporary command. He's the Housemaster of the Ancient House—which is, of course, the premier House at St. Frank's—

"Rats!" roared Bob Christine.

"Yah!" howled all the other College House fellows. "Swanky Fossils!"

"Mouldy Monks!"

"Peace—peace!" I shouted sharply. "For goodness' sake don't start a House row now. We don't want this meeting to end up in a pitched battle!"

"Well, don't swank about the Ancient House," said Christine gruffly.

"My dear fellow, I'm doing nothing of the kind," I said. "The Ancient House is much bigger than the College House, and it's an established fact that Mr. Lee has far greater responsibilities than Mr. Stockdale."

"Well, I admit that," said Christine. "Old Stocky's of no importance!"

"Well, that's all I mean to say," I continued. "When the Head is incapacitated Mr. Lee takes charge of things. This afternoon he brought the Fifth and Sixth to their senses when they were on the point of starting a revolt. Mr. Lee's very position compels him to support the Head. It would be absolutely impossible for the guv'nor to take any action opposed to Dr. Stafford. You've been running him down on all sides lately, you've been accusing Mr. Lee of harshness and tyranny. That's unfair."

"Rubbish!" said De Valerie. "You can't get away from the facts, and Mr. Lee has been harsh. He's been caning chaps, and giving them lines all round just because they happened to say things against the Head."

"It's not right to blame Mr. Lee for that," I said stoutly. "As Housemaster he's compelled to take action—he can't listen to these disloyal things and wink at them. And there's another point—which you've missed altogether.

Dr. Stafford is more to be pitied than condemned——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, you fathead!"

"Don't talk rot like that!"

"You're dotty, Nipper!"

"Clean off your silly rocker!"

"Think so?" I said grimly. "You've made a mistake—I'm perfectly sensible. I've reasoned things out, and you haven't. What I said just now is perfectly true. The Head needs our sympathy—not our condemnation. He can't help these attacks—there's some hidden enemy responsible for the whole rotten business, and Mr. Lee knows it. He's doing his best to fight against this peril."

"Oh, don't talk such piffle!"

"You may think it piffle now, but before long you'll find out that I'm right," I proceeded. "I can't say who these hidden enemies are, because I don't know exactly. But the Head's real character is unchanged. When he chopped down the goalposts this afternoon he was suffering from some evil influence. All you've got to do is to wait—have patience—and everything will come right. To go against Mr. Lee now is disloyal and unfair."

"I reckon it's about time we had a new captain in the Remove!" shouted Armstrong boldly. "What's the good of this chap? He's all in favour of Mr. Lee and the Head! I reckon that we ought to have a new Head and a new Housemaster, and Mr. Trenton's the man to be Housemaster of the Ancient House."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, Armstrong!"

"Trenton for us!"

"Every giddy time!"

I glared almost ferociously.

"Wait a minute!" I shouted. "Oh, so that's it, is it? You're all in favour of Mr. Trenton? So it amounts to this: A number of you are in favour of Mr.

Lee, and a number in favour of Mr. Trenton. Well, you've got to declare yourselves now. We're not going to have any more uncertainty. We'll divide up into two parties—those who support Mr. Lee, and those who support Mr. Trenton. And we'll continue under two banners. I've tried to keep things together, but a split is unavoidable."

"Good!" shouted Armstrong. "We shall understand one another better now. There's nothing like being straightforward. I call upon you chaps to support me. I'm all in favour of Mr. Trenton. He's a decent sort. He sympathises with us, helps us, gives us advice, and is a pal all round. Mr. Lee is harsh, and he's always imposing heavy punishments. I'm in favour of Mr. Trenton, and I don't mind telling you straight out that I'm dead against Mr. Lee and the Head. All those chaps who believe in my view hold up their hands—"

"Wait!" I shouted. "Don't vote yet!"

"Why not?"

"Because I've got a few more words to say," I replied. "We're going to take a vote, and it might as well be an honest one. Armstrong calls upon you to vote in favour of Mr. Trenton. I don't call upon you to support him or to support me. I just want you to weigh all the facts, and then vote according to your own consciences. All the facts are clear enough. You all know Mr. Lee—you've known him a long time. Until this trouble started with the Head the guv'nor was the most popular master at St. Frank's. Unless you're unfair and unjust you'll all admit that my guv'nor has been a true sport. Many of you have been with him during the holidays to distant parts of the world. I'm not saying too much to remind you that he's saved some of your lives—"

"That's got nothing to do with this," put in Griffith.

"Yes, it has!" declared Grey. "Nip-

per's right. We mustn't forget that Mr. Lee is as true as a die. He may be acting a bit queerly now, but he can't very well do anything else."

"Mr. Trenton, on the other hand, is a newcomer," I continued. "We've only known him this term, he hasn't been here long enough, strictly speaking, to be tested. A number of you are blindly shouting that we ought to support him, and make him House-master in Mr. Lee's place. I'm not saying anything against Mr. Trenton. But, compared to Mr. Lee, what claim has he upon you to obtain such support as Armstrong asks for. So, before voting, I want you to think it out carefully—talk it out between yourselves. There's no sense in doing a thing in a hurry."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Handforth. "I suggest that you all think over this matter for a quarter of an hour—we'll take the vote afterwards. I'm just the same as Nipper—I don't believe in trying to influence you by talking in favour of one man, and talking against another. You've just got to know the facts, and give your votes accordingly. Mr. Lee is one of the finest chaps breathing. He never gives punishment unless it is deserved. He's a sport, and he looks after us all in the Ancient House with as much care as a father."

"Hear, hear!" said Church and McClure.

"Mr. Trenton is a greasy rotter!" went on Handforth boldly. "He's always sneaking around the chaps, toadying to them and trying to get their sympathy. He's not to be trusted, and it'll be a bad day for St. Frank's if he ever steps into Mr. Lee's shoes. I don't believe in trying to influence you —"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy—same as ever!" grinned Pitt. "He doesn't believe in influencing us, you chaps. He hasn't said a word against Mr. Trenton, has

he? He hasn't breathed a syllable in favour of Mr. Lee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Comrades and fellow slaves!" shouted Tucker, leaping up and waving his arms. "I must beseech you to listen to the voice of reason. Quite so! The words of Comrade Handforth are ridiculous and absurd! I am addressing you now, and my words are serious and important. You must not support the advocates of autocracy. You must join the ranks of the masses—you must become members of the Brotherhood of the Free! You must— Really—I—I— Yaroooh! Dear, dear!"

Timothy Tucker suddenly collapsed. His feet were yanked from under him, and he sat down with abrupt force. After that he was not allowed to make any further speeches. The juniors collected together in groups, discussing the situation.

And at last they declared that they were ready to vote. They had thought everything out thoroughly, and would give their opinion one way or the other—either against Nelson Lee, or in favour of him.

The thing was done properly. I stood upon the table with a notebook in my hand, and I meant to take the names of every fellow who voted against the giv'nor. I gave the signal at last.

"Now then—for Mr. Trenton!" I said crisply.

The number of hands that went up came as a bit of a shock to me. Study A and Study B were solid. Study C and Study D did not raise a finger, of course. Tucker was the only one in Study E who voted for Mr. Trenton. As he explained, he didn't believe in the science master, but Mr. Trenton was certainly an improvement on Nelson Lee. There were a great many other fellows who voted; for example, Merrell, Marriott and Noys, of Study G; Doyle, Armstrong and Griffith of

Study J; Clifton and Simmons of Study K; and quite a number of others, including many from the College House.

"You're quite settled in mind about this?" I asked. "You all vote against Mr. Lee?"

"Yes!"

"Right you are!" I said grimly. "I've got your names, and I think you're a set of disloyal fatheads. Now for the others. Hands up everybody who undertakes to stick up for the giv'nor!"

A large number of hands were raised.

"Remember, you've got to stand by this vote," I declared. "Whatever happens in the future, I shall expect your support, and look for it. Once having decided, there must be no backing out. That's quite understood, isn't it?"

"Yes, we all agree to that," said Handforth.

I took the names, and I was pleased to find that all the best fellows in the Remove were on my side. The full list of the Ancient House fellows numbered more than I expected, and included Handforth & Co., Pitt and Grey, Burton, Conroy minor and Jerry Dodd; the Trotwood twins and Fatty Little, De Valerie, Somerton and Singleton, and Solomon Levi and Dick Goodwin. And, of course, Bob Christine was staunch with me, and Talmadge and Yorke and Clapson, and many other Monks.

"Now, you chaps, listen to me," I shouted. "From now onwards we're two rival camps. I'm the leader of the Loyalists, and I mean to stick up for Mr. Lee right through, whatever happens!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the Loyalists.

"Cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yah! Rotters!" yelled Hubbard. "Down with tyranny!"

Armstrong leapt upon the table.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "What price me for the leader of the Rebels? That's what we'll call ourselves—Rebels! Elect me leader, and I'll guarantee that Mr. Lee gets kicked out, and Mr. Trenton takes his place!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Trenton!"

"Rebels for ever!"

"Armstrong for us—he's the man!"

And Timothy Armstrong, of Study J, was promptly elected the leader of the Rebels. Fullwood was anxious to be the chief, but he couldn't even obtain a

hearing. And when T. T. suggested himself as a leader he was yelled down.

Armstrong was coming out strong. Hitherto he had been in the background, but now that this trouble had arisen he had sprung into prominence like so many other revolutionary leaders.

The die was cast—the Remove had split into two sections.

The Loyalists and the Rebels were about equal in numbers, and it was absolutely certain that some thrilling times were ahead!



(Rebellion at St. Frank's! Read how the Rebels seize the Ancient House and defy the Loyalists! "THE CHRISTMAS REBELS!" is a thriller throughout—see that you don't miss it. It is out on Thursday, December 1st.—Ed.)

GHOSTS OF THE WATER

The Phantom Wherry.

THE legend of the Flying Dutchman is world-famous; how the sighting of it forebodes tragedy and disaster. Not so famous, but quite as baffling, is the story of the phantom wherry that a Thames boatman claims he saw going under London Bridge. In it were three persons, two men and a woman, all dressed in a fashion long since dead and gone. The strange craft passed from the boatman's view under the bridge, but never came out on the other side.

There is a possible solution to the mystery in the fact that a Mistress Fordham, daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant, fled from the man her father wished her to marry and made for the ship which the man of her choice was in. She was drowned with her companion under London Bridge. This was in the year 1560.

There is a strange story of the seventh island of the Canaries. In fifteenth-century charts there are seven islands shown, whereas to-day there are only six. Yet at times this seventh island, which has, apparently, vanished into the sea, can be distinctly seen, a speck, thickly bushed and with a white building on it.

The islanders are convinced that it is the ghost of the island that has sunk beneath the waves, and so far there has been no other explanation.

The Farø Cutter.

Ghosts are usually used in reference to apparitions of human beings, and it is strange to hear of ghosts of material things such as boats and islands. Maybe

it is just sailors' superstition, but many of these apparitions have been seen by those who place no faith in "hoodoo."

One of these inexplicable mysteries of the sea occurred at the port of Reykjavik, Iceland, in April, 1927. One evening two vessels entered the harbour, an Icelandic trawler and a Farøe cutter. The latter had two boats in tow, and in one of these were two men in oilskins. The crew of the trawler, the crew of a pilot boat, and the harbour-master had noticed, as many others, the letters of identification, which were FD. There was no activity in the cutter, so the harbour-master ordered the port doctor to go aboard her.

When the boat with the doctor aboard put out it was to find that the cutter had vanished into thin air. The hard-headed Icelanders are not fools, yet many would have sworn to seeing the cutter. No explanation has ever been found for her disappearance, and she is considered to have been just a ghost.

A Ghostly Warning.

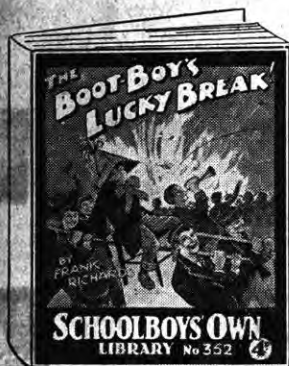
The appearance of a ghost ship off Boffin Island, near the coast of Connemara, is reckoned to be a warning. Like the Flying Dutchman, this phantom presages evil.

One day in October, 1927, some fishermen from Boffin Island were returning from a day's fishing. Suddenly there was sighted a curragh, a light boat made of timber and tarred canvas. The curragh was following them, but there was no one aboard her, and the boat had a strange, misty look.

The fishermen were convinced it was a ghost ship, and that it was following them as a warning.

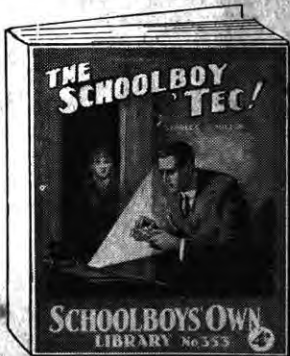
On the next day they refused to go fishing, and it was well they did, for a terrific storm blew up so suddenly that fifty-one fishermen were drowned.

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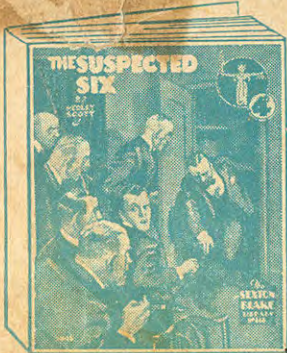
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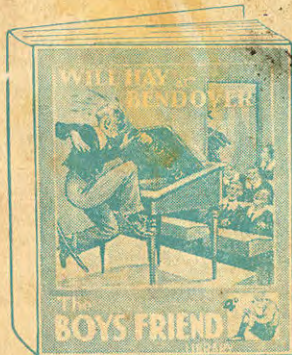
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