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**THE FREAK OF ST. FRANK'S;**  
**Or, TOO MUCH MILITARISM!**

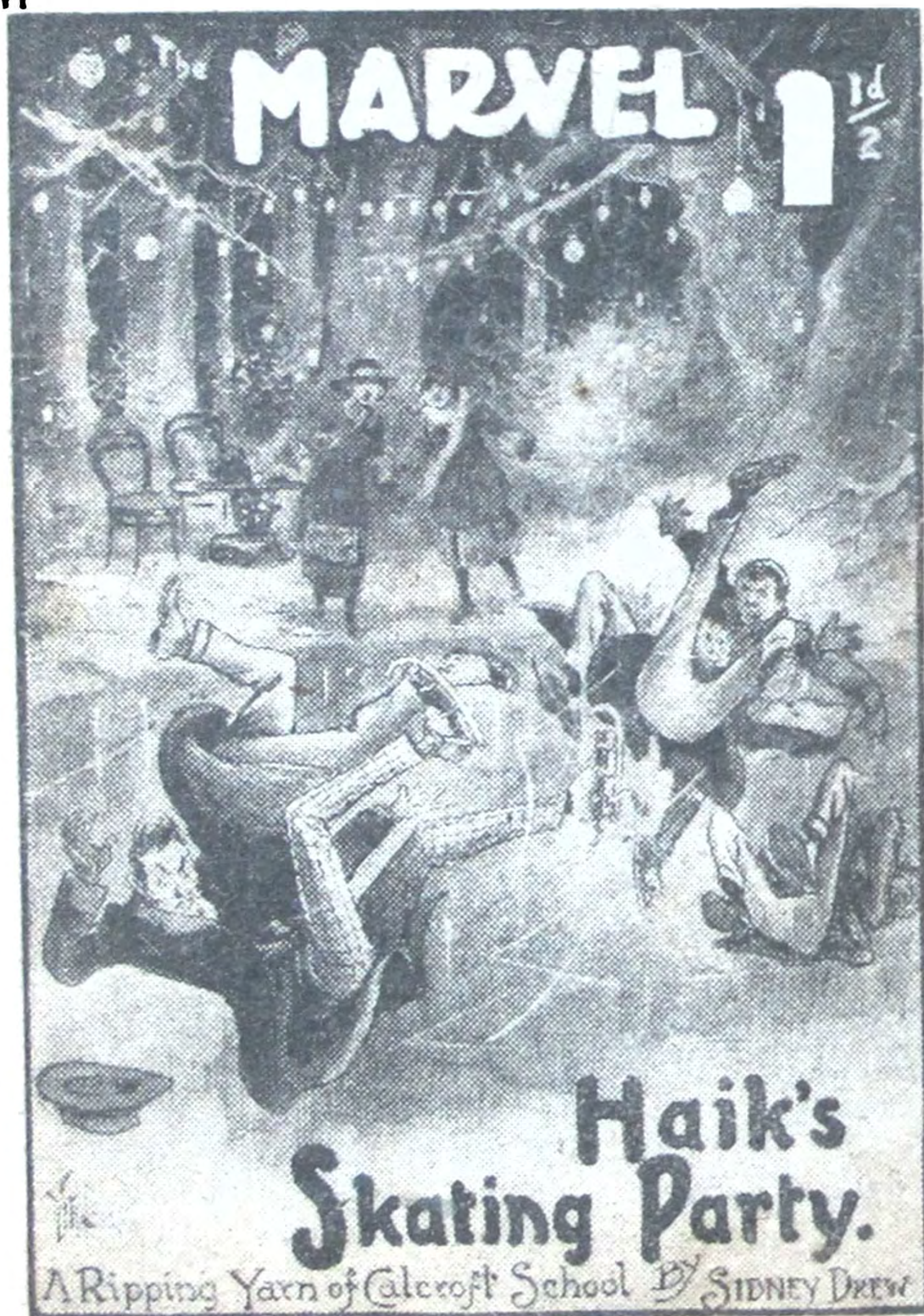
A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Mystery of Grey Towers," "The Soldier Housemaster," and many other Yarns. Jan. 11, 1919.



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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE INDIGNATION MEETING.

"ORDER!"

"Dry up, you jabbering asses!"  
"Silence for the chair!"

The common-room in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was crowded to overflowing. The occasion was an important one. A meeting of the Remove was in progress, and the subject under discussion was vital.

Of course, Remove meetings were common enough, but this was an extra-special gathering. The most novel feature of the whole affair was that it was really a College House meeting—and yet it was taking place in the Ancient House common-room.

For once in a way the Fossils and the Monks were at peace—rivalry was put aside, and we had buried the hatchet. I had suggested the idea to Bob Christine, the leader of the College House Removites, and he had been extremely grateful.

For meetings were barred in the College House. Colonel Clinton, D.S.O., the Monks' new Housemaster, had put a stop to junior gatherings of all kinds, on the ground that they were opposed to discipline. Colonel Clinton was an exceedingly militant gentleman, and he had even gone to the length of attempting to introduce his military ideas into the lives of the boys under his care.

"Order!"

"Silence for the chair!"

Handforth's melodious voice bellowed out, and there was a short period of semi-quietness. Bob Christine, who was chairman, took advantage of the lull and rose to his feet. The chair was situated on the common-room table, which had been pushed against the wall, and Christine occupied an elevated position.

"Gentlemen, I have the honour to address you this evening on a matter which is of the utmost gravity," he shouted. "This matter concerns the College House solely, and we

have to thank the Fossils for being allowed—"

"Bravo, the Fossils!"

"Go it, Christy!"

"We are here to protest," roared Christine. "Our liberty is at stake——"

"Hurrah!"

"Three groans for Clinton!"

"You'd better not give 'em!" I shouted abruptly. "Your precious Housemaster wouldn't mind butting in here in the least if he heard anything suspicious. And groans would be very significant to him."

The groans were not given.

"This meeting must be conducted quietly," went on Christine, looking round him severely. "I know you feel pretty sore about things, but we don't want the meeting messed up before we've got half through it. Something has got to be done, and we're all here to decide upon the best course. Clinton is a beast——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Clinton is an autocrat——"

"Absolutely!"

"Clinton is off his chump——"

"Clean dotty!"

"He has acted in the most outrageous manner——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Am I going to speak, or not?" roared Christine, glaring. "Don't keep interrupting, you fatheads! I'm going to give you a brief outline of Clinton's career since he arrived at St. Frank's a few days ago—at the beginning of term——"

"We know it all!" yelled Billy Nation.

"That doesn't matter," said Christine.

"I'll remind you of the various events. We want to fully realise the magnitude——"

"Hear, hear!"

"The magnitude of Clinton's sins," declared Christine firmly. "When we heard that he was coming, we rejoiced—although it was pretty rotten to know that poor old



Stockdale, our old Housemaster, was laid up with pneumonia."

"Good old Stocky!"

"Let's hope he gets well soon!"

"We rejoiced over Clinton because we knew that he had fought the Huns on the Western Front," went on Christine, warming to his subject. "Before joining the Army he was Housemaster at a huge school in the Midlands or somewhere, and it was ripping to know that he had earned the D.S.O. on the Somme. We were proud of the fact that our new Housemaster was a fighting man of the right sort. But did we know that Colonel Clinton would try to become a Hun himself?"

"No!" roared the crowd.

"Did we know that he was dotty on military discipline?"

"No!"

"Do we know it now?"

"Yes!"

"And are we going to stand it?"

"No!"

"Rather not!"

"There you are, then!" roared Christine, giving way to the excitement of the moment and thumping his hand down upon the nearest thing within reach—which happened to be the noble head of Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"There you are, then!" repeated Christine, thumping away, and jerking Montie's glasses off. "I maintain that——"

"Begad!" gasped Tregellis-West. "I wish you would maintain these things without thumpin' my head, dear old boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Christine glared.

"Was that your head?" he exclaimed.

"How was I to know? You shouldn't shove your head in my way! I maintain that Colonel Clinton isn't to be stood! Military discipline is all right in the Army, but I don't see why we should stand it at St. Frank's!"

"Down with discipline!"

"Down with militarism!"

"I shouldn't yell quite so loudly if I were you," I put in. "And I don't agree with that shout, either. Discipline is necessary—if it isn't carried too far. Clinton does carry it too far, that's all."

"Yes, Nipper's right!" went on Christine, calming himself. "We've got to be moderate—this isn't a rebellion. What did the colonel do as soon as he got here? What did he do?" roared Christine.

"Really, old boy, it's no good askin' me," said Montie mildly.

"I wasn't asking you, you ass!" shouted the leader of the Monks. "I was simply making a statement. Clinton came here, and we cheered him royally. Instead of thanking us he called us a lot of impudent puppies, and generally behaved like a beast. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, we were willing to overlook that first incident," said Christine generously.

"Then the colonel showed his hand. He

decided that everybody in the College House was to be trained like soldiers—he called us troops, he called the College House the barracks, and he called his study his headquarters. Now, I ask you—isn't that sheer rot?"

"Madness!"

"Rather!"

"And, not content with that piffle, he appointed three fellows in every form to be officers," went on Bob Christine. "Officers, mark you, in the Remove! Major—captain—lieutenant! And he chose three fellows who can't lead for nuts!"

"Who can't lead?" shouted Freeman—who was the "major."

"You can't!" retorted Christine warmly.

"But that's not the point we're discussing. Colonel Clinton made the College House the laughing-stock of the whole school. To put the lid on it, he ordered that everybody was to salute him, and that all the officers were to be saluted. Then he marched us all into the Triangle and made us behave like a collection of idiots!"

"Speak for yourself!" snapped somebody.

"I'm speaking for myself and everybody else," said Christine firmly. "The Sixth-Form chaps refused to take part in the nonsense, but all the rest of us had to obey Clinton's orders. Then the Head came on the scene and put a stop to the whole business——"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Rats!" roared Christine recklessly. "The Head doesn't deserve any cheers!"

"Oh!"

"Up till now we've always regarded Dr. Stafford as the finest Head any school could have," went on Bob. "We worshipped him when he came and dismissed us in front of Clinton. But then, after that, Clinton announced that all the juniors were to undergo his rotten training. In fact he's hypnotised the Head into giving his consent—and the Head ought to be ashamed of himself!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you're going a bit too far, ain't you?" asked Pitt. "Better not let any of our prefects hear you yelling like that. The Head may have a good reason for giving Clinton his length of rope. I don't suppose it'll last long, anyhow."

"It looks like lasting too long for us!" said Christine warmly. "Under Clinton's rule there's scarcely a minute we can call our own. Meetings are barred in the College House, and life is a misery. We can't move anywhere without being compelled to salute, and when we ought to be on the football field we're drilling—marching and forming fours and all that rot! If we allow Clinton to go on, we sha'n't be able to call our souls our own! It's got to stop!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's got to stop at once!"

"If not sooner!" grinned Pitt.

"And we're going to take action!" said Christine grimly. "I'm not suggesting that we should openly rebel—that wouldn't be the right thing. Clinton isn't a bully, and he'd



be all right if it wasn't for his cranky ideas. But he's a freak—and we can't be ruled over by a freak! It's in the Head's power to stop this foolery, and we're going to demand that it shall be stopped."

"Hurrah!"

"We're going to demand our rights!"

"Good!"

"And we're not going to accept any compromise!"

"Not likely!"

"Clinton seems to think that boys ought to be made into soldiers before they leave school—even before they become seniors," went on Christine. "Is there any sense in that?"

"No!"

"Is it right?"

"No, it isn't!"

"And are British boys going to stand it?"

"No!"

"Perhaps they'll have to!" I said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps we won't!" snorted Christine.

"It's a painful statement to make, but it's true. Colonel Clinton seems to be imbued with the idea of Prussian militarism——"

"Steady on!"

"Go easy, Christine!"

"Isn't it true?" bellowed the leader of the Monks. "Don't you call it Prussian militarism to force us to drill every minute of our spare time? I'm not saying that Clinton is a Prussian himself. He's simply got a bee in his bonnet on the subject; it's the result of being in the Army for a year or two, and having a pompous, arrogant disposition. He's got us under his thumb, and he's showing his power. And we're not going to stay under his thumb!"

"No! Rather not!"

"Just compare our Housemaster with Mr. Lee, the Housemaster on this side," went on Christine. "Does Mr. Lee bounce about and throw his weight all over the show? Of course he doesn't! He's the right sort—he's Mr. Nelson Lee, one of the finest detectives in the country!"

"Hear, hear!" I said promptly.

"It might be thought, perhaps, that Mr. Lee wouldn't be any good for a schoolmaster, seeing that he's had so much to do with criminals," continued Christine. "But is that so? No! He's the kindest-hearted master St. Frank's has ever seen—he's generous and good-natured. If any of the juniors are up to some little tricks, Mr. Lee will be blind to it, as likely as not; but yet he can be stern when necessary. You Ancient House fellows are thundering lucky, and I can realise it now. Your Housemaster is a top-holer."

"One of the best!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Nelson Lee!"

There was no stopping the fellows this time. The Monks as well as the gov'nor's own boys joined in the cheering. I was greatly pleased, of course, for it was fine to know that Nelson Lee was held in such esteem. Those cheers were not likely to cause much

comment, and we didn't fear an interruption by prefects.

"Clinton isn't fit to walk on the same ground as Mr. Lee," went on Christine, when he could make himself heard. "Mind, I'm only speaking now with regard to his qualities as a schoolmaster. He may be a brave soldier—in fact he is—but we can't excuse him on that account. I propose that this meeting should pass a resolution that an organised protest against military discipline should be made."

"I second that!" shouted Charlie Talmadge promptly.

The resolution was carried unanimously, amid much enthusiasm.

"That's all very well," I pointed out; "but how are you going to make this organised protest? It's one thing to talk, and another to do the thing. If you go to Clinton, he'll give you ten days C.B.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He might give us something worse than confinement to barracks!" said Christine grimly. "I heard from a Fifth-Form chap this morning that Clinton is preparing some box-rooms—converting 'em into cells!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He means to do the thing thoroughly," declared Christine. "Why, if we allow it to go on, the College House will become like a beastly internment camp, or something. We've got to put our foot down—now!"

Nicodemus Trotwood, of the Remove, looked alarmed.

"I beg that you will be careful," he exclaimed mildly. "I have a somewhat painful corn on the third toe of my right foot, and a display of indiscriminate stamping might prove fatal to my unfortunate affliction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We sha'n't hurt your corn, funny face!" said Christine, grinning.

"I am well aware that my face is funny," said Nicodemus. "I have long since got past the stage when such insults aroused feelings of ire within me. It is a painful fact that my brother Cornelius and myself are distressingly ugly!"

"Well, there's nothing like being frank about it," said Handforth.

"There are other faces equally as ugly, of course," went on Nicodemus, gazing upon Handforth's face in a critical manner. "In fact I'm not at all sure that I do not see some faces even more ugly!"

"Are you talking about me?" bawled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You seem to know the dreadful truth, Handy!"

"If this fathead says that I'm uglier than he is, I'll soon make his face into a different shape!" roared Handforth aggressively. "In fact, it might be a good thing—we should be able to tell him from his brother, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nicodemus was in no way perturbed.

"My fists, my good Handforth, may not be quite so large as yours, but that is really an advantage," he exclaimed softly. "You



"See, my knuckles are prominent, and they would not be at all comfortable, coming into forcible contact with such a large part of your face as your nose appears to be!"

"What about your nose?" snorted Handforth.

"Ah! My nose is even larger than yours, my good friend," smiled Nicodemus. "It is not my wish to be boastful, but is it not a fact that all great and clever people have noses which are larger than the average?"

"Well, there's something in that, of course," admitted Handforth, calming down. "I suppose my nose is a bit above the average, isn't it? I'm not suggesting that I'm clever——"

"You wouldn't dream of such a thing!" grinned Pitt.

"Well, is this an argument about facial beauty, or is it a Remove meeting?" demanded Christine sarcastically. "If you chaps want to talk about your faces, why can't you go into a quiet corner and fight it out?"

Handforth snorted, and Nicodemus Trotwood merely smiled. Nothing seemed to rattle his temper. His brother Cornelius stood close beside him, with a somewhat vacant expression upon his face—which was a replica of Nicodemus's. The twins had only arrived this term, and they were queer-looking specimens. Long, skinny, all legs and arms, and with bony, prominent features.

Nicodemus was remarkable in the fact that he had an amazing memory. If he had been asked to repeat Bob Christine's speech he could have done so almost word for word. His memory was astounding beyond all ordinary understanding. And Nicodemus was not such a simpleton as he looked—or as he affected to be. Cornelius was simple in real truth, and he was afflicted with a certain deafness. He was only in the common-room because his brother was there—and not because he could hear much of what was going on. He turned to his brother amiably.

"You have been indulging in conversation, my dear Nicodemus," he remarked. "May I inquire the purport of your remarks?"

"My good Cornelius, the subject commenced with my distressing corn," explained Nicodemus. "We must not further interrupt the meeting."

"It would be somewhat drastic, surely?" said Cornelius mildly.

"Eh?" shouted his brother. "What would be drastic?"

"Did you not suggest giving Handforth a beating——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better try it on!" snorted Handforth. "I'd show you what was what!"

"Ah, I understand!" said Cornelius. "You are hot, my good Handforth? Perhaps it would be as well to open one of the windows——"

"Who brought these curios into the common-room?" demanded Christine tartly. "How the dickens can we get on with the subject while this rot is going on? We've

passed our resolution, and the next thing is to get to work!"

"Pray do so," said Nicodemus promptly. "You may rely upon me to keep my unfortunate brother quiet. He is a trial sometimes, I will acknowledge."

He seized his twin's arm and marched Cornelius over to a corner of the room, Cornelius inquiring, as they went, what reference Nicodemus had made to the College. The deaf junior confused words appallingly, although it was no fault of his own.

"Now we can get on with the business," said Christine. "What were we talking about before those skinny fatheads butted in? Oh, I know! We've got to put our foot down, and put it down hard."

"But how?" asked York. "That's the question—how?"

"There's only one thing to be done," replied Christine grimly. "We'll form a deputation, and then go straight to the Head and lay the whole matter before him. And we'll do it at once—now!"

The Monks looked dubious.

"He'll only hoof us out of his study," said Talmadge, shaking his head.

"Will he?" exclaimed Christine. "We'll see about that, my sons! The only way to combat this evil is to strike at the root of it. By going to the Head we shall get a hearing immediately. This is no time for hesitating—we've got to be bold and determined. I'll lead the deputation. Who'll back me up?"

"Oh, I'll back you up," said Talmadge.

"And so will I?"

"And I!"

"We're all with you, Christine!"

Bob Christine nodded.

"Good!" he said briskly. "I shall only want five of you—six will be quite sufficient, including myself. Talmadge, Yorke, Nation, Clapson, and Oldfield. You'll do fine. We'll get it over at once. Ready?"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HEAD'S DECISION.

**T**HE deputation was not looking very confident—excepting the leader. Bob Christine was full of confidence, however, and his attitude gave the others courage. It was a serious thing to visit the Headmaster's study, especially upon such an errand as this.

The juniors, in cold fact, were to lay a serious complaint against their Housemaster, and it was very doubtful whether the Head would countenance such a thing. It was opposed to all authority.

But the circumstances were undoubtedly exceptional. Colonel Clinton was behaving in such an outrageous manner towards his boys that some organised protest was absolutely necessary. It was useless appealing to the colonel himself. Therefore, only the Head remained.

Bob Christine was a fellow of spirit, and he



had no intention of accepting the new order of things without doing his utmost to stop it. It all depended upon the Head's attitude. Judging by Dr. Stafford's past record, he would sympathise with the boys and agree with them.

But how could he do so in this case? Could he side with the juniors against their own Housemaster? It struck me that it was a tall order, and I was doubtful. The Head might agree with the juniors whole-heartedly, but I questioned whether he would give voice to his real feelings. If any semblance of authority was to be maintained, he couldn't. It was an unheard-of thing for Dr. Stafford to combine with the fellows against their own Housemaster.

But, as I remarked, this case was unprecedented, and it was impossible to say what the Head would do until the matter was laid squarely before him.

It was going to be laid squarely before him now.

The deputation, grim and determined, left the common-room and marched towards the Head's study, led by Christine. They were all nervous, except the leader. But there was not much fear that Dr. Stafford would punish them for their temerity; he would sympathise with them inwardly, even if he didn't say so.

Just outside the study door the deputation halted.

"I—I say, Christine——" began Yorke.

"Well?" said Christine grimly.

"Don't—don't you think we'd better think of something else?"

"You silly fâtheads!" hissed Christine.

"There's nothing to be afraid of!"

"Who's afraid?" demanded Oldfield warmly.

"Yorke is, anyhow——"

"No, I'm not!" snorted Yorke. "But I think—— Oh, corks!"

The Head's study door opened abruptly, and Dr. Stafford himself stood there. He gazed sternly at the six juniors over the tops of his glasses.

"What is the meaning of this, boys?" he demanded. "Surely you know better than to quarrel outside my door? Be off with you at once! This section of the House is out of bounds, as you are well aware——"

"We—we've come to see you, sir," gasped Christine.

"Indeed!"

"We're a deputation, sir."

"A what, Christine?" asked the Head sternly.

Bob Christine pulled himself together.

"A deputation, sir," he repeated. "We—hope you'll hear what we've got to say, sir, and give it your earnest consideration. It's a matter of—of great importance, sir. We represent the juniors of the College House."

Dr. Stafford looked very grim.

"I have a mind to send you off at once, boys," he said. "It is not permissible for juniors to send a deputation to me; you should go to your own Housemaster if there is any complaint to make. However, since

you are here, I will give you a hearing. Come into my study."

The deputation entered rather nervously, wondering what on earth they should do with their hands. These members caused them no embarrassment as a rule, but in the presence of the Head hands were a nuisance. The juniors couldn't put them in their pockets, and it wasn't polite to put them behind their backs. So they had to hang there, feeling three times their normal size and rather grubby. Until this minute Christine and Co. hadn't realised that their hands needed washing.

Dr. Stafford, however, was not taking any notice of the deputation's hands. He seated himself at his desk and gazed at the boys as they stood before him.

"Who is the spokesman of this party?" he asked.

"I am, sir," said Christine.

"Very well, my boy; proceed."

There was something cold and chilling about the Head's tone, and Bob Christine's confidence began to ooze away. But he braced himself up, and determined to show his companions that he was equal to the occasion.

"We—we've come to you, sir, because we couldn't very well go to our own Housemaster," said Christine huskily. "We wish to complain, sir——"

"But why could you not complain to Colonel Clinton?"

"You—you see, sir, we want to complain about the colonel!" gasped Christine.

"Oh, indeed!" said the Head ominously.

"Well, go on."

"I hope you won't think we're disrespectful, sir," continued Christine hastily. "We don't mean that, sir——"

"Rather not, sir," said the rest of the deputation.

"And we've got no complaint against Colonel Clinton as a Housemaster, sir," went on Christine, gaining confidence. "All we wish to protest against is the colonel's ideas about discipline. They're—they're mad, sir!"

"It is hardly for you to criticise your Housemaster's methods, Christine," said the Head coldly. "If this is all you wish to say, I'm afraid I cannot allow the interview to proceed."

"But you don't agree with Colonel Clinton's methods yourself, sir!" put in Christine boldly. "Only the other day, when the colonel was making us march past him in the Triangle, you came along and stopped it all—you told our Housemaster that it was absurd, and dismissed us!"

Dr. Stafford nodded slowly.

"I have no wish to be cross with you, my boys, but I cannot allow this interview to proceed," he said kindly. "I fully realise that you have some cause for complaint, but you surely understand that I cannot possibly regard with favour a complaint uttered against your own Housemaster. You are quite right when you say that I dismissed you on that morning, and that I characterised the whole proceeding as absurd. But it was



then a matter concerning the whole House—and it is not that now."

"But it concerns us, sir," said Christine quickly.

"No doubt," agreed the Head. "It certainly concerns you, my boys. But juniors are in a position differing from seniors. It was not in accordance with the dignity of senior forms for them to be paraded in the Triangle, before their Housemaster, at the salute. With you it is different—"

"Oh, sir!"

"You must not come to me with grumbles concerning Colonel Clinton," went on the Head grimly. "It is absolutely unwarrantable, and I cannot possibly regard it with tolerance. I shall not punish you on this occasion, but you must refrain from running to me with your troubles on any further occasion."

"But the colonel means to drill us like soldiers, sir," protested Christine.

"He's going to make us salute him, and we've got to salute our officers too, sir!" put in Yorke. "It's mad, sir! How can we live like that? How can we recognise three of our own chaps as officers?"

The Head rose to his feet.

"I cannot discuss the matter further with you, my boys," he said quietly. "You must take your leave without delay. I have been patient, and I sympathise with you to a certain extent. But as long as Colonel Clinton remains your Housemaster you must obey him in all things. He is your chief, and you must not come to me with these complaints. It is for Colonel Clinton to conduct his House as he thinks best, and I shall certainly not interfere."

"We—we wanted you to stop the nonsense, sir—"

"That is enough, Christine!" interjected the Head curtly. "I cannot allow you to refer to your Housemaster's rule in those terms. You had better say no more, or I may become angry and punish you. You may go."

"But—but—" began Christine helplessly. "You are dismissed, boys."

Without another word the deputation turned and made for the door. Five of them passed out, but Christine turned back at the last moment. He rebelled at the thought of leaving empty-handed, so to speak. The interview with the Head had been a farce, for the result was nil. And Christine was reckless.

"It's not fair, sir!" he burst out. "We didn't come to St. Frank's to be made into soldiers before we're even seniors! Colonel Clinton's a tyrant, sir, and everybody in the whole House thinks that you ought to put your foot down—"

"Silence!" snapped Dr. Stafford angrily. "How dare you, Christine?"

"I'm right, sir!" shouted Christine. "It's disgraceful—that's what it is! Colonel Clinton hasn't any right to treat us like so many sheep, ordering us about and making us salute him! It's a farce, and if it gets into the papers St. Frank's will be the laughing-

stock of the country! It ought to be stopped—you ought to stop it!"

Christine paused, breathless, rather astonished at his own daring. His chums outside gazed at one another fearfully. One thing was certain—Bob Christine would be soundly flogged for this exhibition of insubordination. Christine himself believed so—now that he had delivered himself.

But the Head did not become furious, as the boys had supposed.

"Christine, I cannot possibly overlook that outburst," said Dr. Stafford quietly. "You will write me two hundred lines. You may go!"

Bob Christine went, rather dazed.

"Two hundred lines!" gasped Yorke, as they went down the passage. "Oh, my only hat! I thought you were going to be slaughtered!"

It was certainly astounding, and the juniors were frankly at a loss—all except Christine. And he was quick-witted enough to jump at the truth. And his anger subsided at once. He had got the clue.

"Two hundred lines!" he said deliberately. "Why, chaps have been publicly flogged for less than what I did! There's only one explanation, you chaps. The Head agrees with us—he's dead against Clinton."

"Then why didn't he say so?" demanded Nation.

"Well, when you come to think of it, he couldn't," replied Christine. "What would be the good of a Head who agreed with juniors against their Housemaster? If Dr. Stafford had really upheld the colonel's rot, he would have swiped me fearfully for that outburst. But he knew I was right—and he couldn't punish me for telling the truth. So he just gave me a few lines for the sake of appearances."

"By jingo!" said Yorke. "You're right, Christine. But what does it mean? Simply that we've got to stand Clinton's tyranny!"

And this was the view held by everybody when the deputation explained what had occurred. I wasn't at all surprised. It was what I had expected, and I told Christine so.

"You'll have to stick it," I said. "There's no getting out of it, my son. The Head can't put a stop to it without having a terrific row with Clinton—and he can't very well do that."

"Can't he pitch Clinton out?" asked Yorke warmly.

"Not very well," I replied. "Housemasters are appointed by the school governors, and they're to blame—not the Head. But, of course, they didn't know that Clinton would turn out like this. They appointed him because of his first-class qualifications—and nobody can deny that he's a clever man. I'll bet the Head's already communicated with the governors. Be patient, and—"

Christine snorted.

"Patient!" he interrupted. "If we've got to wait for the governors to act, the whole term will be over before Clinton gets his marching orders. The governors are a set of



old furies, and they won't do a giddy thing!"

"They'll have to—if the thing gets to a scandal," I remarked. "Well, my dear chaps, it's no good grumbling. You know the truth now. Clinton's got a free hand—the Head doesn't mean to interfere. He can't interfere. You'll have to grin and bear it."

Christine nodded gloomily.

"We've done the best we can," he said. "It's no good blaming the Head—although a lot of chaps are rather bitter. They don't take the trouble to reason things out. If the Head wasn't here we could rebel—like you chaps did with that rotten Housemaster of yours, Hunter. But we can't rebel in this case without involving the Head; and we respect him too much to defy him. No, we've got to stick it—although I don't know how the dickens we're going to do it!"

The Monks went off despondently. Some of them were bad-tempered, and this soon revealed itself.

The Triangle was dark and cold, the ground being frosty. Just outside the College House lobby a group of juniors were arguing heatedly, and Bob Christine hurried over to them.

"What's the row here?" he asked. "Don't have a squabble just outside—"

"You shut up, Christine," roared Freeman, of the Remove. "This silly ass has been telling me I ought to resign!"

"So he ought!" snapped Billy Nation—who was the silly ass referred to.

"Resign what?" asked Christine.

"Why, he's the Form major, ain't he?" said Nation. "Didn't Clinton appoint him to be the commanding officer of the Form? Major Freeman! If anybody ought to be major, it's you, Christy!"

"Well, perhaps so," admitted Christine. "I'm Remove captain."

"That's nothing to do with it!" roared Freeman. "I've been telling Nation that he's got to salute me——"

"I'd rather salute old Warren," snapped Nation. "He's only a giddy porter; but he is in uniform, anyhow! This silly fat-head——"

"Are you talking about me?" demanded Freeman.

"Yes, I am!"

Freeman did not say anything further, but he punched Nation's nose rather severely. They were both decent chaps, but the events of the evening had made them hasty-tempered. And the next second they were scrapping vigorously.

"Stop it, you idiots!" shouted Christine.

"Rats!" bawled Freeman. "I'm going to——" "Ow!"

Nation's fist had thudded upon his mouth, and the two juniors fought with greater energy. A crowd was round them in a twinkling, and nobody made any attempt to stop the "mill" except Christine.

"You'll have the prefects out here, you asses!" he hissed.

"Cave!"

It was a shout of warning from the lobby, and there was an immediate scuffle. The spectators melted into the gloom of the Triangle; but Freeman and Nation were too excited to hear or see anything. They were going at it hammer-and-tongs.

"Boys!" thundered a powerful voice. "How—how dare you fight here?"

Freeman and Nation broke apart, gasping. They knew that voice! Colonel Clinton came stalking down the steps, and he grasped the two juniors before they could move a yard. His red face was redder than ever with anger, and his bushy eyebrows worked up and down ominously.

"Freeman!" he roared. "You disgraceful young puppy!"

"I'm sorry, sir——"

"Sorry!" bellowed the colonel. "By gad, boy, you deserve to be drummed out of the regiment! You are an officer—the senior officer of your company!"

"Nation and I were having an argument, sir," gasped Freeman.

The colonel glared.

"An argument!" he shouted. "Are you aware, Major Freeman, that your nose is bleeding, and that your left eye is greatly swollen? By gad, sir, you're a disgrace to the regiment! How is it that you, an officer, can demean yourself by engaging in a common fight with a mere private—a member of the rank and file?"

Freeman looked bewildered.

"We—we didn't think of that, sir," he said nervously. "Nation and I are pals generally——"

"It is utterly out of the question for an officer to be friendly with a private!" snapped the colonel. "You will report yourself to headquarters within half an hour, Major Freeman."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Freeman.

"As for you, Private Nation, you are confined to barracks for the period of two days," went on the colonel. "Now get out of my sight—the pair of you!"

The two juniors scudded into the House and made straight for the common-room, where many juniors had already congregated. Both Nation and Freeman had forgotten their quarrel by this time and were on good terms.

"Confined to barracks for two days!" grunted Nation. "In common-sense language that means that I'm gated! I'm blessed if I know what's going to happen to you, Freeman! You'll get cells, or something!"

Freeman grinned.

"A caning, I expect," he remarked. "Well, I don't care! I've never heard of such rot! He wants to make me cut my own chums—just because they're privates! I didn't understand that before."

There was much speculation as to what form Freeman's punishment would take. But Colonel Clinton was such an extraordinary man that the juniors were quite at a loss.



There was really no telling what the Housemaster would be up to next.

Freeman presented himself at "head-quarters"—the colonel's study—at the end of half an hour. It was now nearly supper-time, and Freeman was half inclined to think that he would be sent up to bed without food.

The Housemaster was sitting at his desk, and before him were Grayson, Shaw, and Parry, of the Fifth. Freeman regarded them unfavourably. Grayson and Shaw were bullies of the worst type, who never missed an opportunity to perform a vindictive trick against the Removeites.

The colonel screwed his monocle into his eye and gazed at Freeman sternly.

"Ah, you have reported yourself as I ordered, Major Freeman," he exclaimed, settling himself back in his chair. "Do you realise the enormity of your offence?"

"No, sir," said Freeman bluntly.

"I have come to the conclusion that you are utterly unsuited to the appointment of major," said the colonel, bending forward suddenly. "You are degraded, sir. Do you understand that? You are degraded to the rank of private."

Freeman did not look very impressed.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly. "Thank you, sir."

"I want no impertinence!" snapped the Housemaster. "I have no use for officers in my regiment who have no understanding of the responsibility which rests upon their shoulders. Private Freeman, you may go."

Freeman almost smiled. He was so relieved that he felt quite happy. This punishment didn't concern him in the slightest—in fact he was rather glad. In his opinion it was far better to be a private than a major. The Remove officers were liable to be treated with hostility by the rank and file. It had been an absurdity from the start to appoint officers from the Juniors themselves.

Colonel Clinton had evidently realised this blunder, for he called Freeman back when the Removeite had almost reached the door.

"In future, Private Freeman, you will take all orders from the three officers you now see before you," said the colonel.

"Officers, sir?" repeated Freeman, looking round vacantly.

"Yes, boy," snapped Clinton. "Major Grayson, Captain Shaw, and Lieutenant Parry. In future these seniors will take command of different sections of the Remove Company. You may go."

Freeman went, and he hastened to impart his news to the other members of the Remove. They received it grimly, and with a feeling of despair. Grayson and Shaw had been appointed officers of the Remove!

The position was far worse than before. The Fifth-Formers would be given full powers, and Christine and Co. knew only too well that the bullying seniors would make the Remove sit up for past affairs.

The lot of the College House juniors was not a happy one!

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MYSTERY OF STOWE LODGE.

**S**NOW fell during the night, and the next afternoon, which was a half-holiday, found the whole countryside concealed in a mantle of whiteness. There had been such a lot of snow, in fact, that football was almost out of the question.

I decided to go for a walk with my chums, for the sky was clear now, and the sun shone good-naturedly upon the snowy landscape.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I emerged from the Ancient House in our thickest boots, our warmest overcoats, and with woollen gloves covering our hands—at least, the hands of Tommy and myself. Sir Montie preferred to encase his elegant fingers within expensive fur gloves.

We half expected to find the Monks being drilled over by the Ancient House, but this was not taking place. Bob Christine met us, however, and there was something approaching a smile upon his face.

"The colonel's going out this afternoon," he announced. "Wants to have a look at the countryside, I suppose. But Grayson—he's our lovely major—has been ordered to give us some drilling later on."

"I should think Grayson will like that," I grinned.

"He's raving, I believe," said Christine. "He was going to have a cosy afternoon in his study with some pals—card-playing, I expect. I shouldn't be surprised if he forgets all about the drilling."

"You won't mind, dear fellow," remarked Montie.

"Not a bit."

And Christine walked off, leaving us to make our way to the gates. We arrived there just at the same moment as the chums of Study E—Jack Grey and Reginald Pitt. They, too, were in thick boots and overcoats.

"Going anywhere?" I asked cheerfully.

"Only for a walk," smiled Grey.

"Then we might as well all go together," I said. "Of course, if you fellows want to be alone——"

"Rats!" said Pitt. "We'll come along with you."

And so we started off, tramping briskly in the direction of the village. It was our intention to go through Bellton, take the Bannington Road until we came to the footpath skirting Holt's farm, and then return to St. Frank's by way of the river.

"The ice ought to be getting fairly thick by this time," I remarked. "If the frost only continues and gets a little sharper, we shall have some ripping skating by Saturday."

Pitt grinned.

"I've heard those tales before," he remarked. "It'll be as frosty as the dickens until Friday night, and we shall all be in the highest glee at the prospect of skating. Then on Saturday morning we shall wake up and find that a terrific thaw has set in. It always happens like that."

"Begad! There's somethin' in what you



say, old boy," agreed Sir Montie. "I've noticed it time after time. Just when the ice is in perfect condition a thaw comes. But there's no need to be pessimistic, you know. We can hope for the best."

"We had some skating last year," said Watson. "I wonder if——"

"Hallo!" I interrupted. "That's Dr. Brett just ahead, isn't it?"

A figure had just emerged from a house a hundred yards in front of us, and I recognised him as Dr. Brett, the village practitioner. He was quite a decent man, and he and Nelson Lee were great friends.

"Going for a walk, boys?" he inquired genially, as we came up.

"That's the idea, sir," I replied. "Are you going in this direction?"

The doctor nodded.

"Just for a little way," he replied. "I wanted to see you, too. I've heard a few rumours concerning the new Housemaster up at the school. He's a bit of a novelty, isn't he?"

"You'd better ask Christine, sir," grinned Pitt. "Christine will tell you all about Colonel Clinton—he's the Monks' Housemaster, not ours."

"Yes, I know that," said Dr. Brett. "Colonel Clinton, eh? What sort of a man is he—in appearance, I mean?"

"Oh, tall," I replied. "Stiff as a poker, and wears an eyeglass. Big moustache, and a face which seems to be red by nature. Talks to everybody as though they were dirt beneath his feet. Oh, a regular corker!"

Dr. Brett grinned.

"Quite a comprehensive picture, Nipper," he remarked. "Yes, he's the same man right enough."

"The same man, doctor?" said Sir Montie mildly.

"Yes. I was having a chat with a soldier friend of mine a few weeks ago," replied the doctor. "He was home on leave from the front. He belonged to Colonel Clinton's regiment for a time, and knew quite a lot about him. It seems rather a coincidence that the same colonel should come here, but I don't suppose it is. I didn't remember his name again until I heard of this new Housemaster."

We were greatly interested.

"Was your friend an officer, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, a lieutenant," said Dr. Brett.

"He spoke highly of Clinton's bravery in the field. One of the most fearless men one could meet. He was in action constantly, and the incident which earned him the D.S.O. was a wonderful exhibition of cool courage. He really deserved the V.C., according to my friend."

"Begad!" remarked Sir Montie. "Then the colonel ain't such a bad chap, after all, dear fellows. In fact, he is a frightfully good sort——"

"No, Tregellis-West, that is where you are wrong," interrupted the doctor. "The colonel lacks nothing when it comes to a matter of courage; but his men simply detest him in all other respects."

"Oh!" said Montie.

"He was strict to the point of absurdity on all questions of discipline," went on Brett. "In the words of my lieutenant friend, he was 'an undesirable boulder.' His nose was always in somebody's else business, and it was his particular delight to interfere in matters which did not concern him in the least. The men under his command hated him, and were always hoping that he would get wounded and sent back to 'Blighty.'"

"Begad! Not really, sir?" asked Montie, in a shocked voice.

"I am only telling you of what I have heard," said the doctor. "I suppose it is unwise of me——"

"Rats, sir!" I grinned. "It's not news to us. We've seen quite enough of the colonel to guess what he was like on active service."

"I suppose you have," smiled Brett. "Well, that's all I know. Clinton was loathed in France, and his men blessed the day when he received a dose of poison-gas and was invalided home. By what I can hear, the colonel has brought his objectionable habits to St. Frank's with him. He is rather crazy on discipline; but it is certainly extraordinary that he should attempt to impose his wild ideas upon the boys of his House."

"He's a freak, sir!" said Jack Grey. "The fellows are calling him that already. I can't understand why the Head allows him to practise his rot."

Dr. Brett smiled.

"I am not going to suggest that the Head is afraid of Clinton," he said; "but Dr. Stafford is rather a quiet old gentleman. I should say it would be an unpleasant task to argue with such a fire-eater as the colonel. And, so long as Clinton doesn't go too far the Head can't very well interfere."

"Christine and his chums think the colonel has gone a lot too far already," I chuckled. "Still, the position's a rather difficult one, and if the colonel likes to make himself unpleasant he can do a lot in that direction before he's given the order of the boot. A Housemaster can't be sacked like a boot-boy."

"That's just the trouble," agreed the doctor, pausing. "Well, I shall have to say good-bye, boys. I'm off down this lane."

"Good-bye, sir."

We raised our caps—a recognised custom at St. Frank's—and Dr. Brett went his way. We continued ours.

"So Clinton was a proper beast out at the front, was he?" remarked Pitt. "I'm not surprised to hear it. And the Monks will have a few shocks yet, I'll guarantee. The colonel hasn't fairly started on the war-path yet."

"Well, let's talk of something more pleasant," said Watson.

We were soon engrossed in "footer-jaw," and discussed the prospects immediately ahead. We had several important matches fixed up, but the Remove Eleven fixtures



looked like being upset—if the colonel persisted in his efforts.

We couldn't get rid of Clinton, somehow. He came into the conversation constantly. It was quite on the cards that he would choose a half-holiday for his drilling displays, and that might be fatal to the Eleven—for Clinton would probably consider that football was of minor importance.

"If anything like that happens we shall have to do the best we can with our chaps," I said. "I think the Ancient House can put a team into the field which will knock spots off any other old eleven."

"Rather!" agreed Watson. "We've got Grey now—and he's a first-class man."

"Thanks!" said Jack Grey, smiling.

"Oh, I'm not flattering you," went on Watson. "You've proved your worth, my son. How about you, Pitt? You haven't done much."

Reginald Pitt shook his head.

"I haven't had much of a chance," he said quietly. "It's been my own fault, of course. Last term I acted the fool, and didn't deserve any consideration. But I was hoping that Nipper might be able to give me a look in this term."

"It's up to you, Pitt," I said promptly. "Any fellow can become a member of my eleven if he proves himself worthy of it. You'll have plenty of chances at the nets before long. We should have been practising this afternoon if it hadn't been for this snow. Come on—we go down this path."

We had arrived at the stile which gave on to the footpath, and were soon marching through the crisp, powdery snow, still talking about football. Having crossed a couple of meadows we found ourselves in a small lane, down which we walked until we came within sight of the river.

This lane was not much of a thoroughfare, mainly supplying Holt's Farm and one or two isolated cottages. I don't think it went beyond the farm at all. The only decent-sized house between us and the village was a fairly modern building named Stowe Lodge—being called this owing to its proximity to the River Stowe.

I don't know why this house had been built on such an isolated spot, and the matter was certainly not worth troubling about. We had heard that the house had new occupants, but we didn't know anything about them. It wasn't a cottage, by any means, and it had probably been taken by some retired tradesman or other, who was anxious for a quiet life.

We had no thoughts in our minds of Colonel Clinton as we trudged past Stowe Lodge, intending to strike the towing-path further on. But we were to be reminded of the new Housemaster in a rather singular fashion.

There were some trees growing in the front garden of the house—or, rather, some big laurel bushes, which hid the lower windows until one was right opposite the gate. As we passed we looked at the house casually.

And there, gazing out of one of the windows, was Colonel Clinton.

"Hallo, the giddy colonel's soon made some friends——" began Watson.

But he broke off abruptly, for Clinton, catching sight of us, had retreated into the room, behind the curtains, with astonishing swiftness. And I was positive that his face expressed sudden alarm.

There was nothing surprising in the fact that the colonel was there; he had a perfect right in Stowe Lodge, so far as we were concerned. But why had he dodged back? That was queer, at all events.

"Did you see that?" I asked.

"Something rummy about it," said Pitt. "Clinton didn't want us to see him, did he? He nearly fell over backwards in his haste. But why on earth should he hide himself? What does it matter about us seeing him?"

"Dear boys, it's the colonel's business," remarked Montie smoothly. "I don't mind what he does—I don't, really. If it pleases him to dodge back, he can dodge as many times as he likes. But it is certainly surprising."

"He looked scared, too," said Watson.

"That's what I thought," I agreed. "And yet there was no reason why he should have been scared. Perhaps it was our fancy—and, anyhow, Montie's right. It's his business."

"Mine, dear old boy?" asked Montie, in surprise.

"The colonel's, you ass!" I grinned. "I don't care what Clinton does in his spare time. I suppose the people who live here have got friendly with him."

"They've got queer tastes, then," said Pitt.

We should have thought nothing more of the incident, had it not been for Colonel Clinton's behaviour when we arrived back at St. Frank's. We wasted a lot of time on the river, so he easily got ahead of us.

The ice wasn't thick enough for skating, but it was coming on beautifully. Another day or two of keen frost, and the Stowe would be alive with skaters; not merely St. Frank's fellows, but people from the village and from Bannington.

We were feeling quite cheerful as we turned in at the big gateway, warm and hungry. The prospect of a cosy tea in Study C was alluring, and Pitt and Grey had been invited to share our table.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Watson. "He hasn't lost much time!"

Colonel Clinton was in the Triangle, quite near the gateway. He was drilling a squad of glum-looking Third-Formers. The lads didn't like it at all, but there was no getting out of the thing. Their Housemaster meant business.

As he saw us, however, he changed his tactics.

"You seem to have no idea of order, you young idiots," he shouted. "Pull yourselves together—do you hear me? One might think you'd been marching all the afternoon. I look fresh enough, don't I? And yet I have been tramping over Bannington Moor ever since dinner time!"



I looked at my chums rather queerly, but said nothing.

The colonel had done it well, but I wasn't deceived. He had taken no notice of us apparently, but had abruptly ceased his orders to the fags, and was now talking to them loudly.

"Do I look tired?" he shouted. "Brace yourselves up and look smart! That's the way! I think nothing of a ten-mile walk, and I've been on my legs over since dinner-time—out in the open air, on the moor. Attention! Do you hear— By gad, I'll show some of you!"

The colonel moved down the line of frightened fags, jabbing one here and shaking another there. By this time I had moved across to the Ancient House, my chums with me. Watson was grinning.

"Fancy us being mistaken like that!" he remarked.

"Like what?" I asked.

"We thought we saw Clinton in that house," said the innocent Tommy. "I could have sworn it was the colonel at that window."

"An' so it was, old boy," said Sir Montie sagely.

"Eh?" Watson stared. "Oh, don't be an ass, Montie! How could it have been the colonel if he was tramping on Bannington Moor all the afternoon?"

Tregellis-West smiled.

"I agree, dear Tommy, that Colonel Clinton could not have been in two places at the same time," he observed. "But I am quite sure, nevertheless, that we saw the gentleman at the window of Stowe Lodge."

"You silly fathead!" snorted Watson. "Didn't Clinton say that he'd been on the moor all the afternoon?"

"Exactly."

"Well, he wasn't telling a whopper, I suppose?"

"I am shockin'ly afraid that he was, dear boy."

"Oh, rot!" said Watson. "I don't believe—"

"Come along to Study C," I interrupted.

"We'll get this thing clear."

Watson, who was not blessed with extra-sharp wits—although he had heaps of good, sound common-sense—was rather inclined to be impatient, and when we arrived in Study C he looked at me steadily.

"What's the idea?" he asked, in his blunt way.

"I don't know," I replied. "It's rather mysterious. Did we see Colonel Clinton at one of the windows of Stowe Lodge about forty minutes ago?"

"We couldn't have done," said Watson.

"We did, dear old boy," declared Montie. I looked at the others.

"Yes, I saw him," said Pitt.

"I was looking the other way just at that moment," said Jack Grey. "I was just too late."

"Well, there's four of us, anyhow," I went on. "We all saw the colonel dodge back from that window—proving that he

didn't want to be seen. We were agreed upon that point at the time."

"Yes, but—"

"Hold on, Tommy," I interrupted. "We spent some time on the ice, and then came home. The colonel was in the Triangle, drilling some fags—just against the gateway, remember—"

"What have we got to remember that for?" asked Watson.

"Because it's an important point," I said. "Clinton placed himself there deliberately—so that he should spot us as soon as we got in. Then, pretending to ignore us, he told the fags that he had been on the moor all the afternoon. He told them that for our benefit solely. Those words were meant for our ears."

"That's what I reckon," said Pitt. "For some reason, best known to himself, he wants to diddle us. He wants us to believe that he was on the moor, instead of in that house. He thought we should all be bluffed like Watson."

Tommy Watson glared.

"Look here—" he began warmly.

"It's no good, Tommy," I pointed out; "you were bluffed. You were quite certain that we had been mistaken about the man we saw at the window of Stowe Lodge."

"Well, I'm not quite sure, even now," said Watson obstinately.

I grinned.

"There you are, you're admitting that you were diddled," I said calmly. "Clinton kidded himself that we should all be like you. Your brains are all right, my son, but they don't work fast enough. They need lubricating. The colonel told a deliberate lie, although, in a way, it was indirect. It was meant for us, although it wasn't addressed to us. Clinton thinks, perhaps, that we didn't see him very distinctly at the window, but that we might have had an inkling—an inkling which has been swept away by his reference to Bannington Moor just now. That was his object, at all events."

"And what does it all mean?" asked Jack Grey.

"That's what I want to know," I said.

"It's perfectly plain, though, that Clinton is tremendously anxious to hide the fact that he was in Stowe Lodge. It may mean nothing, or it may mean a lot. I'm inclined to think there's something fishy about it. Clinton wouldn't have gone to such lengths if his presence in that house was an innocent one."

Reginald Pitt whistled.

"Do you think it was bad, then?" he asked. "Has the colonel some guilty secret?"

"I don't know; but I shall tell the gov'nor all about it, and hear what he says," I answered. "To say the least, the incident was strange, and there's no telling what it may lead to."

So, for the moment, the matter was dropped. But I kept it in my mind, meaning to tell Nelson Lee as soon as I could get hold of him. As it happened, I was able to impart my news almost immediately.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE ROUTE MARCH.

**N**ELSON LEE, at the time of our conversation in Study C, was having a few words with Dr. Stafford in the latter's sanctum.

And the subject of their talk, like ours, was Colonel Clinton.

"He is a most capable man, Mr. Lee," the Head was saying. "I have not the slightest fault to find with him regarding his scholastic qualifications, although, I must admit, he has displeased me in other directions."

"I have been rather surprised, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Perhaps I had better add that I have been disappointed also. I hope you will not think that I am interfering—"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the Head. "What nonsense, Mr. Lee! Do not talk that way, I beg of you. You may say exactly what you please, and I shall not be offended. Why have you been disappointed?"

Nelson Lee lay back in his chair.

"Soon after the colonel arrived," he said, "we saw a display of foolery which cannot in any way redound to the credit of this great and historic college. Colonel Clinton made himself conspicuous in a ludicrous fashion by compelling his boys to march past him at the salute—as though they were troops of the line. Such conduct, Dr. Stafford, can only bring ridicule upon the school."

The Head looked distressed.

"I am aware of it, Mr. Lee," he agreed. "I am painfully aware of it."

"Very properly you intervened," continued Lee. "You went out into the Triangle and stopped the farcical scene. That was most praiseworthy of you, if I may say so, for I am aware that the task was a most unpleasant one. But I was surprised and disappointed when I discovered that you had sanctioned the continuance of the absurdity, providing only the junior boys were affected. Surely the juniors are as deserving of consideration as the seniors?"

Dr. Stafford was silent, but only for a moment or two.

"They are, Mr. Lee—of course they are," he said slowly. "I do not deny the thing for a moment. But you do not understand the position as I do, and I beg that you will say nothing further."

"If that is your wish, I will comply," said Nelson Lee. "I have only the right of our friendship to say a word on the subject—"

"The position is hateful, Mr. Lee," broke in the Head. "It is as galling to me as it is to you; the junior boys have every right to complain, and I will see that matters are righted as soon as possible. But just for the present I earnestly request you to press no further inquiries."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I will respect your wishes, of course," he said shortly.

"Dear me! This is a pity—a terrible pity," exclaimed Dr. Stafford, with some show of

alarm. "You are displeased, Mr. Lee—I know it. I can tell that your manner has changed. But I will give you my word that my hands are tied. For the moment I am compelled to bow before the colonel's arrogance."

Nelson Lee regarded the Head quietly, and he smiled.

"I am sorry, doctor," he said. "I did not quite understand."

"And you cannot understand—yet," went on the Head quickly. "My lips are sealed at present, but I can tell you this much. Colonel Clinton will not remain at St. Frank's a second longer than I can help. My most fervent desire is that he should go, for I realise that his presence is a disgrace to the fair name of this school. I have already written to Sir Rupert Manderley and several other governors, laying the full facts before them. I trust with all my heart that they will see fit to dismiss this man at once. Whatever his previous attainments may have been, he is now utterly unfitted to fill the position to which he has been appointed."

"I am afraid the governors will not hurry themselves," said Nelson Lee.

"That is what I fear."

"And meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, the colonel must have his head," said Dr. Stafford, shaking his head in distress. "I can do nothing, Mr. Lee. And, really, so long as Clinton does not go too far with his nonsense, no great harm will be done. I shall certainly keep him in check to the best of my ability. And there, I am afraid, we must leave matters for the present."

Nelson Lee took his departure. He walked down the corridor in a very thoughtful mood. Why was the Head unable to use his full authority over Clinton? There was something strange about the whole matter.

The schoolmaster-detective had refrained from questioning the Head further, although he had been anxious to do so. And his departure from Dr. Stafford's study practically coincided with my resolve to tell him about the Stowe Lodge affair.

So when I was on my way to the cloak-room, a moment later, I ran into the governor in the passage.

"I've got something to tell you, sir," I said—"something important."

"Then you had better come to my study, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee.

"I'll be along in two ticks," I said. "I'm just going to hang this coat up in the cloak-room."

I reached the governor's study as soon as he did. And after the door had been closed I told him exactly what we had seen at Stowe Lodge, and how Colonel Clinton had attempted to hoodwink us.

"I think the colonel's deeper than we know of, sir," I concluded. "There's something about his eyes I don't like. And I'm pretty sure he was up to no good in that house. Otherwise, why should he try to put us off the scent?"

Nelson Lee thoughtfully lit a cigarette.





Handforth and McClure, carried away by excitement, had barged into the Colonel, and the next moment he was lying upon his back in the snow!—(See page 17.)



"H'm! A queer incident, Nipper—certainly a queer incident," he said. "Are we to have another mysterious affair to investigate? It seems that our sojourn at St. Frank's is providing us with plenty of scope for detective work of the most delicate quality. But we must not take too much for granted."

"What do you think of the affair, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"I think very little of it, Nipper."

"Oh, sir!"

"At present, that is," continued Lee. "There may be developments—there is no telling. We must wait awhile and see how matters proceed. At all events, I shall certainly bear your story in mind, and I may even make a few quiet investigations."

"Will you need me, gov'nor?" I asked quickly.

"Not at this stage, young 'un," he replied. "This Stowe Lodge business may be a mere trifle, so don't let your imagination run riot. Just go on as usual, and leave things to me."

"All right, sir," I said. "But you'll tell me if you discover anything, won't you? That's only fair!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"You needn't worry your head, Nipper," he smiled. "I'll remember you if there is any work to be done. Get along with you—it's tea-time."

I took my departure, and met Bob Christine in the lobby. He had just rushed in, and one look at his face told me that something fresh had cropped up. Christine was nearly crying with rage and helplessness.

"It's the limit!" he gasped. "Absolutely the limit!"

"What's the latest?" I asked sympathetically.

Christine clenched his fists.

"The beast!" he roared. "The utter——"

"What's he done now, you ass?"

"It's not what he's done—it's what he's going to do!" panted Christine, as De Valerie and Somerton entered the lobby and joined us. "In five minutes—five minutes from now—the whole Remove has got to assemble in the Triangle!"

"I shan't be there," said De Valerie calmly.

"The College House chaps, I mean," shouted Christine. "It's nearly dark, and it's tea-time! And we've got to go off hungry—in this snow and darkness!"

I grabbed Bob Christine's arm.

"Explain yourself, ass!" I said. "Where have you got to go to?"

"How do I know?" roared Christine. "It's a route march!"

"A—a which?" gasped De Valerie.

"A route march of eight miles——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you can cackle!" snorted Christine.

"Isn't it enough to send us dotty? A route march—just as if we were trained soldiers! Eight miles—without any tea! I feel like kicking somebody!"

"Don't kick us, old chap!" grinned Somerton. "Kick the colonel—he deserves it more than we do, you know!"

"He deserves to be boiled in oil!" fumed Christine fendishly. "He deserves to be hung, drawn, and quartered! He deserves—— Oh, what's the good of talking? I wish he'd been gassed while he was at the front!"

"I believe he did get a touch of it," I remarked.

"He ought to have had more—enough to keep him quiet all the rest of his life," said Christine, driven callous in his righteous anger. "Just think of it, you unfeeling rotters! Eight miles—on empty tummies!"

"We're overwhelmed with sympathy," I said solemnly. "Can't you get out of it? Come along to Study C and have some tea——"

Christine danced.

"What's the good of that?" he howled.

"The beast would only drop on me afterwards and half murder me! We can't defy our own Housemaster! Oh, why was he born? Why did the fatheaded governors appoint him?"

"I'm not good at riddles," said De Valerie.

"You silly ass——"

"Hallo! This is about the limit, I should think!" roared Handforth, appearing from the Remove passage with Church and McClure. "A beastly Monk in our lobby calling one of our chaps a silly ass!"

"It's all right," grinned De Valerie. "He'll call you a silly ass next—he feels like it. Don't mind him; he's nearly dotty with worry. He's just going off on an eight-mile walk, to give him an appetite for tea—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth stared.

"An eight-mile walk?" he repeated. "Well, of all the idiots——"

"It's Clinton, you fathead!" shouted Christine. "Do you think we want to go for rotten walk in this snow? The colonel going to take the whole crowd of us on route march!"

"A—a which march?" said Handforth blankly.

"Come over here, Handy," I put in. "Christine, you'd better buzz off, or you'll be late for the start. You have our sympathy, and we hope that you'll thoroughly enjoy the walk. Give the fellows our love."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Christine snorted at this expression of sympathy, and stamped out of the lobby into the Triangle.

"What do you want me for?" demanded Handforth, staring at me.

"You'll see," I replied shortly.

And we collected together in a group, and were joined by a crowd of other fellows. Meanwhile, Christine was only just in time. The College House section of the Remove was lined up on the other side of the Triangle, in the dusk of the winter's day. They were not a happy gathering.

The wind was icy, cutting across the snow-covered Triangle from the playing-fields in chilling gusts. But the fellows would soon



get warm once they started on the long march.

The colonel himself had not put in an appearance yet. The Removites were being marshalled into line by Major Grayson and Captain Shaw, who took a keen delight in the whole proceeding. They weren't going on the route march, and so they could afford to look pleasant.

"Now then, Private Yorke!" roared Grayson.

"What's the matter?" snapped Yorke fiercely.

"Don't slouch like that——"

"Mind your own business!" roared Yorke. "Kata to you! If you think you can bully me, Grayson, you're jolly well mistaken! I've a good mind——"

"Shurrup, ass!" muttered Talmadge.

"I'm not going to shut up!" snorted Yorke. "The colonel ought to be kicked——"

"Oh, indeed!" came Clinton's cold tones from the rear. "Very well, Private Yorke, we shall see—we shall see!"

Yorke nearly fainted. The colonel had approached from behind the column, and now stood pulling on his gloves. His eyeglass was in his eye, and a freshly lighted cigar was between his teeth. Evidently the colonel did not consider that military discipline demanded that he should not smoke.

"I have to report gross insubordination on the part of Private Yorke, sir," said Grayson, with great relish.

"Quite so, Major Grayson," nodded the colonel. "I heard the wretched youth with my own ears. For the moment we will dismiss the matter. Private Yorke shall receive adequate punishment upon our return."

"Our—our return, sir?" asked Grayson, in a startled voice.

"That is what I said."

"But—but Shaw and I aren't going, sir!" said the Fifth-Former.

"Captain Shaw and you, Major Grayson, will certainly accompany us on this route march," said the colonel grimly. "How dare you think otherwise? Are you not officers? Is it not your duty to obey my orders without question?"

"Ye-es, sir," gasped Grayson. "Of—of course, sir."

But both he and Shaw were looking extremely sick. They hadn't thought for a moment that they were to be included in the absurdity, and they had gloated over the discomfiture of the juniors. It was now the juniors' turn to gloat over them. Bob Christine and Co. almost felt happy for that moment. The dismay of their two Fifth-Form "officers" was a sheer joy to them.

"Eight miles!" groaned Grayson. "Why should we stand it?"

"Don't be an ass!" muttered Shaw. "We've got to!"

And there was no doubt that Shaw's words were perfectly true. Colonel Clinton was their Housemaster, and they dared not defy him. They had thought it a huge joke to be given powers over the Remove, but this was altogether beyond a joke.

"Attention!" barked Colonel Clinton.

The juniors suddenly pulled themselves upright.

"Major Grayson, you will march in the centre of the column, to keep the boys in order," continued the colonel. "You, Captain Shaw, will bring up the rear, whilst I shall take the lead."

Clinton strode forward until he reached the end of the double line.

"Right turn!" he said sharply.

Two-thirds of the fellows turned to the right, and the other third to the left, and there was considerable confusion for a few moments. But this was only a detail, and the column was soon in order.

"Mark time!" roared the colonel. "Left—right—left—right!"

"Ain't it awful?" groaned Christine, as the order was obeyed.

The Removites near him did not trust themselves to speak. They were conscious that numbers of fags, mainly belonging to the Ancient House, were standing by in a grinning, appreciative crowd. The humiliation of this farce was terrible, and Christine and Co. felt that they would never hold up their heads again.

"March!" bellowed the colonel.

He led the way, and the column marched briskly out of the Triangle and entered the snow-covered lane, followed by a shrill cheer from the fags who had been left behind.

If any members of the unfortunate Remove had cherished hopes of slipping away into the gloom, these hopes were now futile. Those at the rear of the line had seriously thought of dropping out as soon as the lane was reached; they were willing to face the after-consequences.

But the colonel had defeated them. Grayson and Shaw knew well enough why they had been ordered to go on the route march. They were there to see that no juniors fell out of line. And, since they had to go, the Fifth-formers vented their rage upon the Remove.

And so the route march started. But it was destined to end in a very different manner from that intended by Colonel Clinton—the Freak of St. Frank's!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FOSSILS TO THE RESCUE!

"SOMETHING'S got to be done!" I declared grimly.

I stood in the lobby of the Ancient House, surrounded by a large number of fellows, including those who had heard Bob Christine's wallings, and Watson, Tregellis West, Pitt, and Grey, who had come along from Study C to find out what had become of me.

"That's all very well," said Handforth; "but what can we do? I suppose you're referring to those silly Monks?"

"Exactly!" I agreed. "Christine and Co.



are out in the Triangle now—at least, I can hear the colonel's lovely voice; so I suppose the fellows are still there."

"Souise me!" exclaimed the Bo'sun, glancing out into the dusk. "They're just getting ready to march off, shipmate."

"Well, we haven't much time to lose," I said briskly. "Now, look here, Christine and Co. are our rivals, but that's no reason why we should desert them in their hour of need. Their beastly Housemaster means to march them off on an eight-mile waltz, and it's a shame. Something's got to be done about it."

"We can't tell Clinton to give it up, I suppose?" said Handforth sarcastically.

"No, that's no good," I replied. "It's rather a difficult matter. Strictly speaking, it's nothing to do with us, and we're not called upon to interfere. But, at the same time, it would be rather sporting if we——"

"Pray let me make a suggestion, my good friends——"

"Look here, funny face!" snorted Handforth. "There's no time to waste over your rot! You'd better go and hide yourself somewhere!"

Nicodemus Trotwood looked at Handforth mildly.

"Can't you hear me?" roared the latter. "Oh, my hat! It's the deaf bounder! Clear off, you silly——"

"My good Handforth, you are quite wrong in supposing that I am my unfortunate brother Cornelius," said Nicodemus. "I am in full agreement with you when you declare that there is no time for rot. Therefore, my friend, would it not be just as well if you gracefully retired into the background?"

Handforth glared.

"Are you suggesting——" he began.

"Do you realise that those Monks are just on the point of going?" I interrupted sharply. "There's no time to waste—not a second. Trotwood, old son, you don't mind trotting off, do you?"

Nicodemus beamed.

"Not in the least—if you are not anxious to hear the suggestion which I was about to voice," he replied. "It is far from my desire that I should intrude my presence upon those who are anxious that I should depart."

I looked at the skinny junior keenly.

"If you've got an idea in your head, let's hear it," I said crisply. "Don't take an hour over the job, either."

"Oh, this is a waste of time," began Watson impatiently.

"I really trust not," said Nicodemus mildly. "Since my arrival in this great school I have learned that the Monks are our deadly rivals—although, forsooth, they are keen friends withal."

"Go hon!" said Handforth heavily. "Gadzooks! You don't say so?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is not a moment for hilarity," went on Trotwood, gazing at Handforth severely. "The College House and the Ancient House are at war, although it would appear that a truce has been called for the present, as a

temporary measure. But is it necessary, dear friends? Has not the time arrived when it would be excellent for us to fall upon our foes and smite them?"

"You'll get smitten in a minute!" snorted Tommy Watson.

"But consider, my good Watson!" protested Trotwood. "It is quite possible that you will smite me, but, really, it is equally possible that I might strike back—and that would be unfortunate. My suggestion is quite simple."

"Look here, old chap——" I began gently.

"Wait—just one moment!" interrupted Nicodemus. "We are here in force, and I imagine that we can easily defeat the column of Monks who are even now marching through the gateway. Indeed, they will be willing to submit to capture. We attack from an ambush—we call upon the force to surrender—we march our prisoners back in triumph! Is it not feasible?"

I slapped Trotwood's back heartily.

"It's the wheeze!" I declared. "Nicodemus, old son, you've hit on the very idea that we want—you've got brains after all!"

"What's the good of that fatheaded idea?" roared Handforth.

"It speaks for itself," I replied. "And Nick was short and concise for once. An ambush is the very idea! What's going to happen when we attack? Christine will spot the wheeze in a second, and the Monks won't put up any fight at all. They'd rather submit to defeat from us than go on this giddy route march. And House rows are always taking place."

"And what about Clinton, pray?" demanded Owen major.

"We shall have to ignore him—in the excitement," I replied briskly. "Take no notice of him—pretend you don't see him. Rush out and see which way they've gone, Tommy. We shall have to head them off."

Watson was off like a shot, and, meanwhile, the juniors were compelled to admit that Nicodemus Trotwood's scheme was good.

"Well, it's not so bad, anyhow," said Handforth grudgingly. "It's beastly cheek for a new chap to suggest anything at all. As a matter of fact, I had an idea in my head on the same lines——"

"Yes, we know all about that," I interrupted. "The worst point about your ideas, Handy, is that they don't show themselves until somebody else has made the suggestion. You're all right as a fighting man, but not as a commander."

Handforth didn't know whether to take it as a compliment or an insult—it was neither one nor the other. And while he was still deciding, Tommy Watson returned and announced that the Monks were going towards the village. They had, indeed, only just vanished through the gateway.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "We can dodge across the playing-fields and get into our positions further down the lane, and ambush the party beautifully. Everybody ready?"

"We're waitin', old boy," said Montie. "You have apparently overlooked the fact



that I am wearin' good clothes, an' a scrap in the lane won't do me any good—it won't, really. But I am whim'. It is for the good of the cause."

Handforth hustled towards the door.

"All follow me!" he said briskly. "I'll lead—"

"You shouldn't get these silly ideas into your noddle, Handy," I interrupted, in a sweet voice. "I'm leader of this sally, don't forget."

"Sally?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Who's she?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I didn't wait to explain to Handforth but led the way out into the Triangle, followed by nearly every fellow in the Ancient House Remove. A House row was always agreeable, but this one promised to be exceptionally entertaining.

Tea was forgotten for the time being; we should only be away about twenty minutes at the most, and the fellows were willing to postpone their feeding. The plight of Christine and Co. was a serious one, and they couldn't act for themselves.

Snow was descending now, and the heavy clouds looked as though they would go on discharging snow for hours yet. The light of the dying day had almost failed, and everything was gloomy and dim.

We hurried across the playing-fields at the double, and broke through the hedge at the bottom. We were now in a meadow, belonging to a neighbouring farmer, but the juniors were always allowed to make use of this meadow. It bordered the lane on one side, and as I came to a halt against the hedge I heard the soft tramp of feet in the snow, accompanied by an occasional command.

We kept silent, and hurried on, the snow deadening our footfalls completely. There was a bend in the road just ahead, and I immediately called a halt.

"You take charge of ten chaps, De Valerie," I said quickly. "Dodge across the road and wait there, behind the hedge—it's full of gaps. Attack when I give the word."

"Right!" said De Valerie.

He wasted no time, but led his men across instantly. I turned to Reginald Pitt, and nodded.

"You'll command the flanking party," I said. "When we go over the top, as it were, you'll creep along the hedge with six fellows, and then attack from the rear. See? The whole job ought to be easy."

"Leave it to me," said Pitt briskly.

"And where do I come in?" demanded Handforth.

"You'll be my first lieutenant," I replied, knowing that Edward Oswald had to be satisfied somehow. "When the moment of attack arrives you'll—"

"They're coming!" hissed Watson suddenly.

Handforth was unable to offer any objection, even if he had felt like doing so. For Colonel Clinton, at the head of his gloomy "troops," had swung into view round the

bend. He was striding along doggedly, his head bent to the driving snow, his cigar long since out. Very possibly he regretted the whole affair now that the snow had come on, but he wouldn't admit it for worlds. The route march had to go on, right to the end.

I waited until the colonel was well past, and then sprang up.

"Charge!" I yelled lustily. "Down with the Monks!"

This was our usual battle-cry, and I had only voiced it now for effect. Actually, we were engaging in this enterprise in order to assist our rivals in their trouble. And at the word we tumbled down into the lane.

We swarmed into the ranks of the Monks, taking them completely by surprise. In a second the utmost confusion reigned. "Major" Grayson, yelling furiously, was bowled over into the thick snow, and Shaw met with a similar fate.

"Go it, the Fosses!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

He evidently made the mistake of thinking that this was a real House-row, for he attacked Yorke and Talmadge with all his strength, sending them flying backwards into several other fellows.

"An ambush!" gasped Christine. "Oh, my hat!"

"Smash 'em!"

"Anything's better than this rotten route march!"

"You ass!" I hissed, with my face close to Christine's ear. "It's only swank. You've got to surrender!"

"Great corks!" yelled Christine.

He backed away, and stared round him wildly.

"It's no good, you chaps!" he shouted. "We're outnumbered. We shall have to give in without a fight—"

"Boys!" roared Colonel Clinton, striding forward. "Boys! How—how dare you? Get into line at once! Good heavens! What—How the— By gad!"

Handforth and McClure, carried away in the excitement, barged into the colonel violently. Clinton went over in the snow, and a fresh yell went up. The Monks, now thoroughly excited and aroused, were "scrapping" with a will. Pitt's flanking party had come along at the right moment, and had turned the tide completely in our favour. De Valerie, too, had waited for a few seconds after my order to charge—an idea of his own.

The result was quite good, for the Monks imagined that they only had my comparatively small force to contend with. They found out their mistake when De Valerie and his men arrived from the other side of the lane. And then, to cap all, Pitt's crowd appeared. The whole raid was gloriously successful.

Colonel Clinton scrambled to his feet furiously, but one glance told him that any effort to regain order would be futile. Grayson and Shaw were conspicuous by their absence. The Fifth-Form bullies had no



authority over the Ancient House chaps, and the Fossils were by no means scared of handling the seniors roughly.

The colonel raved and shouted for about a minute, and then he gave it up. The whole affair was scandalous, and the most annoying fact was that nobody took any notice of him. His voice was heard, of course—it must have been heard in the village; but the raiding party studiously ignored the enraged Housemaster. And the Monks were far too busily engaged to be able to obey Clinton's command.

"Give in, you asses!" shouted Handforth.

"Surrender!"

"You're outnumbered and outfought!" I yelled. "We claim you as prisoners, and you've got to march back to the cages."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of Monks joined in that laugh, for, truth to tell, they were feeling greatly relieved. They were only too willing to march back to St. Frank's as prisoners in the hands of the victorious Fossils.

Even under ordinary circumstances Christine and Co. would have been beaten. And these were far from ordinary circumstances. Christine knew at once that we were not engaged in a genuine House battle. He grasped the idea quickly, and the other fellows understood, too.

"We surrender!" shouted Christine, grinning.

"Rather!"

"It's a win for the Fossils!"

"And we're saved from the route march!" murmured Christine.

They fell easy victims to their deadly rivals, and they were marched off, prisoners, with astonishing willingness. Before the battle had really developed into a decent scrap the Monks were being hustled up the lane towards the school, guarded closely by the victors.

Colonel Clinton followed, raving.

And then something unexpected occurred. We had hardly entered the Triangle when the tall, athletic figure of Nelson Lee loomed up through the snow. He came to a halt, and watched the proceedings with interest.

"What's the excitement about, boys?" he asked genially.

"Oh, nothing much, sir," I replied, winking at him violently. "Only a little trouble with the Monks. Nothing to do with—"

"With me, eh?" said the gov'nor, as I paused. "Quite so, Nipper. You are painfully clear, although you do not express yourself in so many words. Well, I'll take the hint and walk indoors. But you must really make less noise, boys."

Nelson Lee nodded and walked away. And the Monks, in addition to the Fossils, sent up a cheer. What an astounding difference there was between the Housemaster of the Ancient House and the Housemaster of the College House!

The gov'nor, however, was checked before he reached the steps.

"Mr. Lee—Mr. Lee!" roared a fierce voice. Colonel Clinton strode in at the gateway,

and Nelson Lee turned. Everybody else stood still, looking on with interest. The snow was now coming down faster than ever, and we were all half smothered.

"Now for the giddy trouble!" muttered Christine.

"Mr. Lee, I demand that you shall punish these infernal boys with the utmost severity," shouted the colonel, waving his arms. "They have acted in the most disgraceful fashion, and it is your duty—"

"Will you kindly explain, Colonel Clinton?" interrupted Lee.

"There is nothing to explain—you can surely see with your own eyes what has occurred," snapped the colonel. "Unfortunately, I have no authority over these wretched boys, but you have. I was marching at the head of these juniors, intending to take them on a route march of eight miles—"

"You surprise me, colonel!" said Lee quietly. "Surely this is not the evening for such a march as you describe?"

The colonel glared.

"That, sir, is my business!" he roared. "Don't you dare to dictate to me what I am to do! I demand that you shall thrash every boy belonging to your House who took part in this scandalous outrage! I demand that you shall punish them at once!"

"That, sir, is my business!" retorted Lee calmly.

A suppressed murmur of joy went through the crowd, and Colonel Clinton fairly danced in the snow.

"There is no necessity, sir, for you to repeat my words like—like a parrot!" he belated. "These confounded boys of yours are allowed to do as they like, apparently. It is a pity they are not under my control—"

"I must ask you, Colonel Clinton, to confine yourself to that which is within your province!" interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "You have your methods of controlling your boys, and I have mine. It is most unseemly that there should be any argument on the subject in the presence of the boys themselves. If you will tell me what these Ancient House juniors have done I will inflict the punishment I deem necessary."

The colonel pulled himself together.

"I have not the slightest doubt that the whole affair was deliberately planned as an insult to me!" he declared fiercely. "My boys were attacked—brutally attacked—"

"Oh no, sir!" shouted Christine.

"It was only a House row, sir."

"Nobody's hurt—it was only a bit of fun."

"Silence, you young puppies!" thundered the colonel. "How dare you interrupt me in this barefaced fashion. The attack was a brutal one. I witnessed it, and I have eyes in my head. Not only that, but your boys, Mr. Lee, knew full well that I was leading the column. They ignored me—ignored me, sir!—and marched off their so-called prisoners in defiance of my orders. That, sir, is the outrage of which I complain, and I insist upon the culprits being punished!"



We all wanted—the majority of the fellows being anxious.

"There is no doubt, colonel, that the juniors acted somewhat disrespectfully, but they were probably excited, and these House quarrels are not at all serious," said Nelson Lee. "Indeed, it is rather to the good that there should be a friendly rivalry existing between the two sections—"

"To the good!" snorted the colonel.

"Precisely; and I see no evidence of violence, such as you suggest," went on the governor. "I must punish the boys, certainly—they have committed a breach of discipline, and it is necessary for them to refrain from these impulsive outbursts. Every boy who took part in the raid will stand forward."

I led the way, and the rest of the Fossils disengaged themselves from the Monks, and most of them were looking scared.

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "The chopper's comin' down, old boys."

"Hard, I expect," remarked De Valerie.

"I cannot countenance your action, my boys," said Nelson Lee, addressing the snow-covered crowd. "Colonel Clinton is fully justified in reporting the matter to me. You will all go indoors at once, and each boy will write me twenty lines!"

"Twen-twenty, sir?" gasped Handforth faintly.

"That is what I said, my boy!" exclaimed the governor, trying to speak sternly, and failing to conceal the twinkle in his eyes. "I have made the punishment coincide, as I think, with the severity of the offence. You may dismiss."

Colonel Clinton almost choked.

"You are mad, sir!" he bellowed. "Twenty lines! It is a farce—it is no punishment whatever! The boys will simply laugh—"

"There is really no reason why they should not laugh, colonel," interrupted Lee. "The whole affair was a boyish prank, and I do not intend to magnify it into anything more serious. And please remember that I can inflict such punishment as I deem fit. The imposition I have inflicted is, if anything, somewhat severe in comparison with the offence!"

And, with that parting shot, Nelson Lee walked away. But he was followed by a great cheer from the juniors. Not one of them misunderstood the governor's action. It meant that he entirely approved of the raid.

As for Colonel Clinton, he was completely defeated, and the Monks stood by in a silent crowd, inwardly gloating with joy. But would they be compelled to go on the route march, after all? That was the point which worried them.

But the result of the affair was as I had anticipated.

The colonel dismissed his boys with a curt word and strode away. The snowfall was more than he had bargained for, and I imagined that he was only too pleased to get out of the route march in this easy manner.

At all events, Christine and Co. were saved from the ordeal, and they were intensely

pleased—for the first time in history, perhaps—at having been taken prisoners by their rivals of the Ancient House.

But the Monks didn't know what their Housemaster yet had in store for them.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NELSON LEE MEETS WITH EXCITEMENT!

NELSON LEE was thoughtful.

He was striding down towards the village with the intention of calling at the post-office for a supply of stamps and to mail some letters. It was still comparatively early in the evening.

Snow was falling heavily, and a high wind drove it fiercely into Lee's face as he strode along. But he was not thinking of the snow; neither was he thinking of his errand to the post-office.

Colonel Clinton was engaging his attention. The schoolmaster-detective remembered the incident of the afternoon—which I had described to him. It was certainly puzzling. Why had the colonel done his best to conceal the fact that he was within Stowe Lodge? What secret was there to keep hidden?

Nelson Lee did not magnify the affair. It might have a very simple, innocent explanation. But he could not help remembering that on Clinton's very first night at St. Frank's a curious incident had occurred.

The colonel had been prowling about the College House after midnight, and had alarmed a senior—who had reported to Lee. The detective had been told by Carlisle—the senior in question—that a masked man was within the House, and Lee had at once investigated. He had chased the masked man, and had found him to be Colonel Clinton!

But the soldier-Housemaster had had a ready explanation, and the affair had been passed over. Clinton declared that the mask was one which he had brought from the battle-front with him—a souvenir. But Nelson Lee was doubtful. He had an uneasy suspicion that the colonel had been lying.

And now this happening at Stowe Lodge. It suggested that Clinton was not the open, honest man he appeared to be. He was certainly a brave soldier—even his enemies admitted that—but brave soldiers are not always honest men.

Colonel Howard John Clinton—to give his full name—was something of a mystery; and Nelson Lee was instinctively attracted. He felt that it was necessary for him to keep his eyes wide open. Under ordinary circumstances Lee would not dream of prying into another man's private concerns. But in this case the colonel had deliberately lied with regard to his movements. Why? Nelson Lee was quite anxious to find out.

Therefore, after he had visited the post-office in Bellon, it was only natural, perhaps, that he should turn his steps in the direction of Stowe Lodge. The detective



wanted to have a look round—a kind of preliminary scrutiny.

He was rather glad that a group of people were walking just ahead of him down the narrow lane; they were inmates of the farmhouse, probably, which was situated at the end of the track. And their footprints were clear in the snow, making a confused trail of marks. Lee was able to walk in these, thus concealing his own approach.

But the snow was still descending in flurries, and the ground would soon be white again. Lee dropped behind somewhat, and when he arrived opposite the lonely house he was quite alone on the road.

There was a little cluster of trees growing at the edge of the meadow adjoining the Stowe Lodge garden, and Nelson Lee scrambled through a gap in the hedge and plunged through the trees.

Only a low fence divided the garden from the spinney, and Lee paused against it. He could see both the front and side of the house over the tops of the thick laurel bushes which grew on either side of the gravel path.

One window was illuminated, and this was at the side. The front was completely dark, except for a dim light showing through the ornamental glass of the door. Nelson Lee observed that the thick curtains which covered the lighted window were not absolutely drawn to in the centre; a small opening remained.

"It will be an entirely unwarrantable act, but I have a mind to peep in at that window," he told himself. "Indeed, it savours of spying, and I suppose I ought to strongly condemn the action—but I am curious."

Nelson Lee, having made up his mind, never hesitated. He lightly scaled the fence and crept forward. The only point which concerned him was the trail he would leave in the snow. But there was no pathway on this side of the house, and it was most unlikely that anybody would venture round in such weather. And within an hour his tracks would be completely covered by the fresh fall.

The garden was more or less of a wilderness. At all events, there were no laid-out flower-beds, and the coarse grass—now concealed by the snow—went right up to the wall of the house. Nelson Lee approached the window and took a look round him before going quite close.

The darkness was intense, and the snow was coming down in dense masses now; the fall had increased in intensity during the last minute or so. It was a wild night, indeed, and Nelson Lee had no fear of being disturbed.

He found that the slit between the curtains was smaller than he had supposed. It was indeed only a mere crack, not more than an eighth of an inch wide. But by placing his eye quite close against the window pane Lee was able to obtain a glimpse of the apartment within.

He could see very little of the room itself,

merely the edge of a table fairly close to the window, and the wall opposite. The lamp by which the room was illuminated evidently stood upon the table, for the red cloth was quite brilliant, although Lee could not see the lamp itself.

Occasional flickers of light upon the wall beyond told him that a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate. But there was no sign of any human occupants. Indeed, all that Lee could see was perfectly ordinary and nondescript. It was exactly what one would expect to see in a rear apartment of such a house.

Then, as Lee stood there watching, a shadow fell on the wall and a figure came abruptly into view. It was that of an elderly man, to judge by the appearance of his back, which was towards Lee. It was bent as though the man was misshapen in some way. And he appeared to be performing some operation to his face.

Lee was rather puzzled, but soon knew the truth. For quite suddenly the man turned, and Lee caught a full view of the man's face—or, rather, what should have been his face. Then the figure shifted out of vision.

A hideous mask had concealed the stranger's features!

This, at all events, was somewhat startling. It was no ordinary mask, either, for the eye-spaces were covered with glass, and the general appearance of the man's head was liable to give anybody a big start.

But Nelson Lee had not moved a hair, and he watched with renewed interest. It seemed as though his suspicions were justified, for it was certainly not commonplace for such a figure as this to adorn the interior of a quiet country house.

But the detective was not to obtain another glimpse; for as he was watching he distinctly heard the front gate slam heavily. In a second he had backed into the darkness, away from the window.

But an old bucket was standing near by, half-filled with snow, and nearly concealed. Lee, in moving backwards, kicked the bucket with some violence, and it clattered over. The detective stood quite still.

"Confound the thing!" he muttered irritably.

The new-comer had heard the sound, evidently, for almost without warning a dark form loomed up, and Lee instinctively dodged. But he had been seen, and a man flung himself forward and grasped Lee's shoulder just as the latter was making off.

"What the deuce do you want here?" snapped a harsh voice.

Lee made no reply, but he felt slightly alarmed as he recognised the tones of Colonel Clinton.

This was a disaster. If the colonel discovered the identity of the intruder, Lee would find it difficult to explain his presence in the garden. After all, he was a trespasser, and had no right whatever on this property. The incident would end most unfortunately if Clinton learned the truth.

So Nelson Lee made no reply, and strove to



Keep his face averted as he struggled. The darkness was intense, and there was not much danger, but it was better to be on the safe side.

One gasp, even, and Clinton might recognise his adversary.

Lee struggled with all his strength—and this was necessary, too. For Clinton was immensely strong, and he was now fully determined to make this intruder a prisoner and learn his identity.

Finding that he could not gain his freedom at once, Lee adopted a new method. He spoke, but not in the voice of Nelson Lee.

"I wasn't doin' no 'arm, guv'nor!" he panted, in a whining tone. "I ain't seen the sight o' food for—"

"Keep still, you scoundrel!" snapped the colonel. "I intend to give you in charge for this affair. I have not the slightest doubt that you were contemplating burglary, and you had better give in at once."

"Lemme go, you old ijit!" gasped Nelson Lee hoarsely.

He made a huge effort, and succeeded in breaking free. Before the colonel could grasp him again he was streaking down the path and made his exit by means of the front gate. He heard the colonel thudding after him, but had completely vanished into the gloom by the time Clinton reached the gate.

Nelson Lee had escaped, for when it came to a matter of running, he could outdistance his pursuer with the greatest ease. And he reached the main road to the school without incident, and here he was pleased to find that the road was plentifully smothered with freshly made tracks. Even if the colonel was following, he would lose all sign of his quarry on this road.

Lee breathed a sigh of genuine relief, and he upbraided himself in no unmeasured terms for having been so appallingly careless.

"Still, no harm is done," he told himself, with a grim smile. "The colonel certainly has no inkling of the truth; he will merely assume that a tramp has been prowling about, and will forget the incident by the morning. At the same time, I shall have to be extremely cautious in future."

Nelson Lee also realised that it would be awkward for him if the colonel learned that he had been out for an hour at that particular time. Fortunately Lee had made no mention of his absence to anybody, and it was quite likely that he would be able to get in by the side-door unobserved.

He did so, and reached his study without incident. The heavy curtains before the window completely concealed the light, so nobody could tell whether Lee had been absent or present during the past hour or so.

"Well, what on earth does it mean?" the detective asked himself, as he lit a cigarette and poked up the fire. "Why does Clinton go to that lonely house in secret? And who is the strange man in the mask?"

Nelson Lee grimly determined to find out the truth sooner or later. But he would display more caution in the future. Colonel

Clinton was on the alert, and Lee wished to give him no hint that his movements were being watched.

But before Nelson Lee had another opportunity of pursuing his investigations, the Monks were to find that their militant Housemaster had no intention whatever of giving them a breathing-space!

## CHAPTER VII.

### FROM BAD TO WORSE!

"SENTRIES!" ejaculated Bob Christine indignantly.

"Eh?" said Tommy Watson.

It was the following morning—a fine, clear morning after the snow—and Bob Christine and Yorke and Talmadge had come over to the Ancient House lobby to impart the latest news from the "barracks" across the Triangle.

Christine and Co. were looking indignant and furious, and Watson and Tregellis-West and I were listening with interest. Handforth was there, too, and De Valerie, and several others.

"Sentries!" repeated Christine. "Isn't it the limit?"

"But I don't understand, old boy?" said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez and gazing at Christine. "I am frightfully dense, of course, an' you must be patient with me. Nipper an' Watson are awfully considerate in that respect, begad! I fail to see where these sentries come in—"

"Clinton has given orders that a sentry is to be on duty at the door of the College House at all times of the day, except during lessons," snorted Yorke. "The Remove chaps have got to do it—half-hour spells of duty, in turn. Clinton has got it all planned out to the last second. I've got to go and relieve Clapson after brekker, and remain on duty until morning lessons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Handforth.

"Funny, ain't it?" growled Christine, glaring.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Handforth.

"You wouldn't think it funny if you had to stand outside on the steps in this cold weather!" snapped Christine. "You wouldn't think it funny if you had to salute three beastly Fifth-Form cads every minute of the day!"

"Yes, but we don't have to do these things," said Handforth sweetly. "So we can see the humour of 'em. You can't. You're prejudiced. It's the joke of the giddy term, my sons! Sentries on duty at the door of the College House! Do you have to carry rifles?"

"Oh, rats!" said Christine crossly.

"Keep your hair on—"

"You've got to be patient, Handy," I put in. "These poor chaps are having a frightful time with their freak of a Housemaster. It's our duty to sympathise—not yell with laughter. I think Clinton's dotty. It's sheer lunacy to introduce sentry duty in a school!"



"Glad somebody agrees with us," said Christine, with a sniff at Handforth. "It's no laughing matter, I can tell you. A sentry is to be posted outside headquarters, too——"

"Outside where?" asked De Valerie.

"Headquarters—that's Clinton's study," explained Yorke. "We've been ordered to call it that, and we're getting used to it now. Clinton means to have a sentry always on duty outside his door. Perhaps he's afraid of a raid or something!"

"Oh, everything's unbearable!" went on Christine. "We can't call our souls our own. We're persecuted like galley-slaves. As soon as lessons are over this morning we've got to parade!"

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "How awful, dear old fellow!"

"Awful!" groaned Christine. "Awful isn't the word for it! We've got to parade before Clinton—eyes right, form fours, and all the rest of the fatheaded rot! Then he's going to give us a surprise, he says—this evening. I suppose he's got some other ghastly idea to spring on us!"

"Perhaps we're going to have manoeuvres in the field!" said Yorke bitterly.

"Well, you won't have to stand him for long," I said. "He can't last——"

"He can last long enough to turn all our hairs grey!" exclaimed Christine gloomily.

"Oh, it's simply—— Hallo, what's that?"

"Sounds like a foghorn," suggested De Valerie.

"Or Handforth's voice!" added Watson thoughtfully.

Handforth glared.

"You leave my voice alone!" he roared. "If you think——"

"Shut up, Handy!" I interrupted. "We can't hear anything while you're bellowing like that. You're like a loud gramophone in a small room!"

It took Handforth several seconds to recover from this insult, and by the time he found his voice he found also that everybody had emerged into the Triangle. We soon saw what the trouble was.

Grayson, of the College House Fifth, was having a chat with two fags on the other side of the Triangle. The fags were yelling, and Grayson was bellowing.

"Why didn't you salute me, you little sweep!" he demanded harshly. "Don't you know that I'm an officer?"

"We ain't supposed to salute you," shouted Parry minor, of the Third. "You're one of the Remove officers——"

"That doesn't matter!" roared Grayson. "I'll teach you manners! And don't forget to call me Major Grayson in future!"

"Yah! Fine major, ain't you?" yelled Parry sneeringly.

Possibly he felt rather daring because his elder brother was in the Fifth, and had been appointed "Lieutenant" by Colonel Clinton. This senior was quite moderate, and took no advantage of his position—which he intensely disliked. But Grayson and Shaw were bullies, and they gloried in the power which had been given them.

"You cheeky young hound!" shouted Grayson furiously.

He grabbed Parry minor and the other fag, and proceeded to knock them about in the most brutal manner. Cruel by nature, Grayson took delight in persecuting these youngsters in the knowledge that he would have to face no consequences.

But Grayson was wrong.

"Are we going to stand this?" demanded Christine fiercely. "My hat! Are we going to see those kids knocked about——"

"Rather not!" said Yorke and Talmadge at once. "Rescue, Remove!"

Several other Monks answered the call, and there was quite a rush of Removites to the rescue. Christine and Co. lost all caution at the exhibition of brutal bullying. And they rushed recklessly to the attack.

Grayson saw them coming in the nick of time, and he released the two fags as though they had become suddenly red hot.

"Clear off, you Remove kids!" he panted. "And why don't you salute—— Yarrah!"

Grayson's authority counted for nothing at that moment. The Removites completely overwhelmed him in their rush, and he was flung to the ground violently—although without hurting himself in the thick carpet of snow.

"Roll him!" roared Yorke excitedly.

"Rather! That's the idea!"

The excited Monks rolled the senior in the snow vigorously, in spite of his roars and gasps and threats. By the time they had finished Grayson had vanished. Only a writhing, snow-covered mass was visible. The snow was down his neck, in his hair, in every crevice of his clothing, and his mouth was full.

He staggered to his feet, and the snow fell off him in showers. But Grayson had had quite enough, and he lurched indoors drunkenly, gasping out vengeance.

"My sons," said Bob Christine, "we've done it!"

"Looks like it, anyhow," panted Yorke. "Well, I don't care! I'm blessed if I'm going to be a spectator to such rotten bullying!"

Christine was right. Within ten minutes "Captain Shaw" rounded up the six juniors who had taken part in the assault upon Grayson. They were marched straight to headquarters, where Colonel Clinton was grimly waiting.

"You wretched mutineers!" exclaimed the colonel harshly. "It has been reported to me that you have dared to lay fingers upon your major—your superior officer. It is even reported that you rolled Major Grayson in the snow. What have you to say in answer to the charge?"

"Nothing, sir, except that Grayson deserved it," said Christine quietly.

"Deserved it!" thundered Clinton. "You dare to stand there and make such a statement, Private Christine!"

"We all back Christine up, sir," exclaimed Yorke loyally.

"Yea, rather, sir," said the others.



"Grayson was bullying some fags——" went on Christine.

"Silence, boy!" shouted the colonel. "There can be no question of bullying. Major Grayson is an officer, and you must understand that your action was one of gross insubordination. I intend to punish you with the utmost severity."

Clinton's military ideas did not abandon the application of the cane, and Christine and his chums were flogged unmercifully. But they uttered no sound, and took their punishment—unjust as it was—bravely.

They fondly imagined that this was to be the finish of the incident. But Colonel Clinton evidently meant to make an example of these juniors, so that it should be a lesson to the whole Remove.

"You will now be escorted to your cells, you wretched young rebels!" exclaimed Colonel Clinton curtly.

"Cells, sir?" gasped Christine.

"That is what I said, boy," snapped the Housemaster. "If there is any more insubordination after this initial outburst, the punishment will be doubled."

Christine and Co., aching all over, and in dire pain, were taken away to the "cells." These were attics at the top of the House, which had been converted according to Clinton's orders. Heavy bars had been placed before the little windows, making escape that way impossible. The doors were provided with two patent locks, and the keys were always in the colonel's possession.

Three juniors were thrust into one, and the other three into another. And there they were left, cold and miserable.

The furniture was of the plainest type, merely consisting of a bare form and a bare table. The cells were not heated, and the only method of keeping warm was to pace up and down, or to exercise in other ways.

The prisoners had had no breakfast, and they wondered how long this punishment was to last. Surely they would be released in time for dinner? But they were not. The dinner-hour came, and the captives heard the welcome sound of the gong. But it meant nothing to them.

The afternoon was like a nightmare. Icy cold, terribly hungry, the six juniors remained in their prisons. They had spent the whole day in confinement—a whole day with empty stomachs. And they were healthy, hungry juniors.

Just before tea they were released—pale, cold, and almost cowed. If Colonel Clinton had relied upon this treatment serving as a lesson, he had not relied in vain. The punishment had been appalling.

It was most unlikely that Grayson would be rolled in the snow a second time! The very sight of Christine and his chums was enough to convince the other Monks that any sort of resistance was hopeless.

It was impossible to appeal to the Head. Dr. Stafford had decided not to interfere with Colonel Clinton's rule. And the surprise which the colonel had hinted at proved to be one which gave the juniors a fresh shock.

Tea in Study Q that evening was a most stupendous meal. Christine and Co. wanted to make up for lost time—and they certainly had every opportunity. The other fellows brought in contributions to the table until it was overloaded—until there was enough to provide rations for two dozen.

Warmed, and with their hunger satisfied, the late prisoners were greatly cheered. And in place of the despair which had stolen over them came a great rage. And they felt like organising a general revolt. The only trouble was that such a thing could not be done. They had to stick it.

At seven o'clock all the juniors of the College House were ordered to attend in Big Hall. And there Colonel Clinton introduced them to a stranger, a man of forbidding appearance. He was broad and brawny, and looked very much like a stale prizefighter. His puffy face showed evident signs of heavy drinking, and his little eyes had a cruel glitter. It was quite obvious, however, that he was an ex-Army man.

"Now, boys, let me introduce you to Sergeant Donnell," said the colonel pleasantly. "He is a man who has distinguished himself greatly on the field of battle, and you must all respect him."

"I don't think!" murmured Christine grimly.

"Sergeant Donnell is your new drill instructor," went on the colonel, to the juniors' dismay. "I am determined that you shall be disciplined thoroughly, and Sergeant Donnell is to be obeyed in all things. I have invested him with full powers, and no order of his is to be questioned or disregarded. Sergeant Donnell will inflict punishment when he thinks it necessary, and it will be within his power to set you any task he cares to decide upon. So long as you obey him all will be well. But there must be no insubordination of any kind. If there is, the punishment will be harsh, for I intend to whip you into submission sooner or later. You must also salute the sergeant on all occasions and address him as 'sir.' As your drill instructor, he will in future relieve me of the task."

Meanwhile, the fellows of the Ancient House looked on; but were no longer grinned at our unfortunate rivals. We could do nothing to help, but we could at least sympathise.

How was it to end? And how were Nelson Lee's investigations to pan out? Some very exciting times were destined to occur at St. Frank's before the end came. At present it was not even remotely in sight!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)



**OUR POPULAR SCHOOL SERIAL!****The Chums of Littleminster School.****A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.****By ARTHUR S. HARDY.*****The First Chapters.*****BASIL HOOD** is a new boy at Littleminster School.*On his arrival he makes a friend of***JOHN CHALLIS**, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

**MYERS** and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. Challis is chosen to play for the School against Ragley. Myers is left out, and turns up to look on at what he believes will be Challis's downfall. Four wickets are down for 15, and Challis is called upon to face the Ragley fast bowler, Rylands.

*(Now read on.)***HOW THE SCHOOL WON!**

**C**HALLIS played the first two balls in a snatchy, nervous fashion, and then, as his colour returned to his cheeks, the feeling of paralysis which had numbed him passed away. His eager eyes roamed the field, and, with a firm, slashing hit, he sent Rylands's next ball to the boundary.

Again he scored a boundary, this time with as neat a cut as one could hope to see, the fifth he drove to the off, and the sixth ball of the over he hit clean as a whistle past the ropes in the long field, and over the heads of the little group of juniors who were standing there.

Hurrah! In one over Challis had doubled the score. 31 for 4 wickets. Things were looking up, indeed!

Vernon now scored a one, and gave Challis the bowling.

John was in the humour, indeed, now. Driving the bat from the shoulders, and getting wrists and forearms well on to the ball, he hit out at everything, and the chagrined googly bowler saw 20 runs added from his

bowling before the over was finished. They took him off after that!

It made no difference to John Challis, who batted as if inspired. Vernon again cleverly gave him the bowling, and the new Littleminster player scored a boundary past slip, and then, amidst a scene of wild excitement, smashed one straight back along the wicket no higher than the waist of the bowler.

Ford—such was the Ragley boy's name—snatched at it. There was a crack. Boy and ball rolled over, and as he fell upon his back the plucky fellow held up his right hand to show the ball tightly clutched in his iron fingers.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Challis stood a moment, gazing at the boy who had caught him in blank wonderment, and then, with a gay laugh, made for the pavilion, pulling off his gloves as he went.

Five wickets were down now, and the score stood at 56. Of this total Challis claimed 40, and not a single bye or wide was set down to Littleminster's credit. John had only been at the wickets a few minutes, but, by George, he had made the most of his time! It had been a Jessopian display, without a trace of a fluke in it.

As he neared the pavilion he saw a cheering crowd of Sixth-Form boys awaiting him, saw Grainger smiling there, and the Head clapping his hands vigorously.

"Well—played—Challis!" roared the boys.

John, smiling and blushing modestly, raised his cap, and would have passed them, had not Grainger barred the way.

"Thank you, John!" he cried. "You did wonders! But what a pity you couldn't have stayed in longer!"

"It was a grand catch," said the boy.

"One of the most wonderful I have ever seen," cried Dr. Mason. "I thought for a moment the ball would kill Ford. He took a risk. How he held the ball I cannot tell! It was hard lines to be out like that; but you did well enough, my lad."

"Thank you, sir," said John; and, getting off his pads, he retired to the pavilion, to watch the rest of the innings from there.

The innings did not last very long. Upon Challis's retirement Farren went on again, and he and the deadly fast bowler soon put paid to the Littleminster team.

Vernon played a careful 9, and was then clean bowled. Andrews scored 5. Byfleet

*(Continued on p. iii of cover.)*



managed to scrape up 8. There were 3 byes recorded, and the rest were out for ducks, the innings closing for 79 all told. Seventy-nine against the powerful Ragley eleven!

Myers chortled at that.

"What a rotten show!" he sneered. "It seems to me that Challis has set up dry rot in our side. Ragley will eat us!"

"If they do, it won't be Challis's fault," cried Ponsonby hotly. "He did his best. It was a grand innings. He did his utmost to smash the Ragley bowling, and it's my firm belief if that beggar Ford hadn't had the beastly luck to hold that catch he'd have done it."

"Bah!" sneered Myers. "His innings was a series of flukes!"

But now Ragley were coming in to bat, and the Littleminster crowd, very down in the mouth, sat silent and dazed, expecting to see their favourites slaughtered.

But it was to be an afternoon of sensations, as the sequel proved.

Ragley's best men went in to open the innings—their captain, Sharp, and a determined stonewaller named Hibbert.

Grainger and Andrews took the bowling.

It was Grainger who opened. He was a fine medium-pace bowler, and he got a lot of work on the ball; so much so, that Hibbert, who had to deal with it, blocked steadily, and no runs were scored.

Andrews then took up the bowling.

The Littleminster crack then tempted Sharp with a loose one, which he scraped up, and was nearly caught from it. The slip seemed to unnerve him, for the next ball, which showed fast and low for the wicket, caught him in two minds, and away went his middle stump, turning over and over as it landed, the balls flying yards away.

Hurrah! 1 for 0! And Sharp, after viewing the mess of his wicket, returned to the pavilion by no means pleased with himself.

"The pitch is as fiery as possible!" he growled, in explanation of his defeat, as he tugged at his pads.

Well, it looked as if there was something wrong, with the wickets falling like ninepins, and Rylands, who was next in, shaped timidly, but kept Andrews out.

Hibbert now began to bat more confidently, but, as he tried to block a straight one, it rose from his bat, and was held fast by Byfleet behind the wicket.

"How's that, umpire?"

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

"What about Ragley now?" piped Ponsonby, in a frenzy, and Myers relapsed into glum silence.

Two wickets down for 0. There was a chance for Littleminster yet!

Gregory was next man in—a tall, stalwart Ragley boy. To show his contempt of the bowling, he cut the ball neatly for a single, and then drove one to the off boundary—this against Grainger.

But the captain of the school had him with the next ball. It looked easy, but slid

under the bat in the weirdest way as he stepped across the wicket to pull it to leg; and the "How's that?" was answered by the umpire (from Ragley) with a stern "Out!" He was out l.b.w., and three wickets were down for 5 runs.

The middle of the team now did better; but Grainger and Andrews were in a dangerous mood. The dust fairly flew as the fast bowler sent the leather hurtling towards the stumps. The 4th wicket at 23, the 5th at 27, the 6th at 27, the 7th at 41, Farren putting up a very neat display before he was caught in the long field by Galloway; and Ragley were finally dismissed for 53, the score including three wides and five byes.

And then what a scene there was! Though the scores were the lowest recorded over a very long series of years, Littleminster had won the game. They had won it because of the grand bowling of Grainger and Andrews, who bowled unchanged; but behind it all was that startling and hurricane 40 of Challis, which had laid the foundations of the victory. Without that, even the grand bowling of the two Littleminster cricks would not have availed.

Over the pitch the boys ran. As the players left the field they mobbed them. The youngsters cheered the loudest of all, and hemmed in their favourites.

"Bravo, Challis! Well played, John Challis! Hurrah!—Three cheers for Littleminster! And one for the losers! A bigger one for Grainger!—Hip—hip—hip—hurrah!"

The flannelled cricketers had to literally fight their way to the pavilion, in front of which the crowd gathered, cheering and shouting like mad!

"I must say," commented Dr. Mason, "that it was a thrilling day, a sensational match! And we won deservedly!"

### AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

**A**FTER an interval for tea the Ragley eleven came out to field again, and, as before, Grainger and Moreash went in to open the innings.

This time they shaped very differently. The game was won.

The Ragley bowlers seemed to have lost heart. Certainly their bowling was nothing like so perfect as before, and every loose ball was hit away until the score mounted by leaps and bounds. Over 40 runs were recorded on the board before Moreash retired for 23. Then John Challis came in, and, batting as if inspired, he proved that his former display had been no fluke. He and Grainger remained until they had topped the century, when the innings was declared, and Ragley went in to play out time, but without having a ghost of a chance. Andrews and Grainger held them up as before, and with half their team out for 33 the game was ended.

But before the end came something had happened.

(Continued overleaf.)



During the time when the success of Ragley had seemed certain, that is, after the dismissal of John Challis, when the wickets fell like rain, Myers had sat triumphant and jubilant, sneering at Ponsonby, and openly expressing his satisfaction, until a Sixth-Form boy named Jones strode up to him, white to the lips and trembling, and said, in a choking voice:

"That's quite enough, Myers! If you shout for the enemy again I'll punch your head!" Myers glared defiantly at Jones, saw that he meant what he said, and became silent.

"Dirty cad!" growled Jones, as he passed Ponsonby. "Why, even the chaps from Ragley have more decency than to behave like that."

After the last wicket had fallen Myers moved away and sat apart from Ponsonby. He occupied a seat on a form, cuffing one of the juniors who objected to his coming, and took his place. Round him were a sullen and defiant crowd of lads. Basil Hood, Fawcett, and Raymond openly expressed their contempt of Myers, for they felt themselves strong enough to defy him.

"Look! He's Littleminster, and he wants Ragley to win!" said Basil hotly.

"And they will win!" sneered Myers. "We haven't a chance! Outside Grainger and Andrews, we've no team. Challis's innings was a fluke."

And then in came Ragley to bat, with the results we have already seen.

Myers's face, as he sat and saw the stumps shattered by Andrews and Grainger, was a study in profound dejection.

At first he reckoned the whole thing a fluke. But after a while, as he saw how dead in the wicket the two were, and how the batsmen fumbled the bowling, he knew for Myers was not a bad cricketer.

And when the end came he sat silent and moody, while Basil Hood and the rest of the juniors linked hands and danced round him, shouting and jeering, yelling until the air cracked.

Myers, with clenched fists, dashed at them, aiming a blow at Basil, then striking out wildly at the others. They broke, and, turn-

ing, ran to join the rest of the boys, who were cheering the winners in.

It was as Basil Hood turned to cast another glance at Myers that the "something" happened.

To his blank astonishment, Basil saw a seedy, shabby figure, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, strolling round the pitch, and making straight for Myers.

In a moment he recognised Joe Smart, the cad who had turned up on the athletic ground when Grainger gave Challis his first trial spin.

Hello! What was the fellow doing here? the boy wondered.

He stopped and watched.

It was as he expected. The cad made straight for Myers and addressed him. He saw Myers reply hotly, then turn to walk away.

But the cad caught him by the arm, and the two fell to arguing.

"Myers is in no end of a rage," thought Basil. "Wonder what that brute has got against him?"

At last he saw Myers wave the other away with an impatient gesture, saw the cad laugh, nod, and swing about on his heels, and Myers fall into his seat again, with hands clasped and face drawn and pale with worry.

The cad, with an insolence that staggered the fag, actually had the cheek to walk back in front of the pavilion, and even to stand there, listening to the comments the boys were making on the play.

Here Mr. Evans caught sight of him.

"What are you doing here?" asked the master.

"Nothing. Heard there was a cricket-match on, and thought I'd like to come in and have a look. I ain't doing any harm."

"You have no right here. Leave the ground at once!"

Joe Smart snorted defiantly.

"Why should I? It's a free country! I like a good match. Besides, Mr. Myers told me I could come."

Mr. Evans's face darkened.

**(To be continued.)**

## "DISCIPLINE LET LOOSE!"

IS THE TITLE OF

### NEXT WEEK'S STORY.

It is another Magnificent Complete Yarn of St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER and his Chums, and COLONEL CLINTON, the Soldier Housemaster.

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