

No. 133.—LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL AND "CIRCLE" NOVEL

1^D. THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY 1^D.



THE CASE OF THE JAPANESE SCHOOLBOY!

(INTRODUCING THE "CIRCLE OF TERROR.")

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by NIPPER and Others, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Problem of the Copper Frog," "Fullwood's Cunning," etc., etc.



A GAMBLE FOR A LIFE;

OR, THE CASE OF
COUNT LUXBURC.

Is the Title of This Week's
Magnificent Long, Complete
Detective Romance

IN THE

UNION JACK LIBRARY.

SEXTON BLAKE & TINKER

Play an Adventurous part in this
Thrilling Mystery and Detective Drama.

OUT ON THURSDAY.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



THE CASE OF THE JAPANESE SCHOOLBOY!

(INTRODUCING THE "CIRCLE OF TERROR.")

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER
AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by
NIPPER and Others, and Prepared for Pub-
lication by the Author of "The Problem of the
Copper Frog," "Fullwood's Cunning," "The
Mysterious Schoolboy," etc., etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College, to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Secret Society, the Fu Chang Tong, whose hatred they have incurred. Although living in the school in the characters of master and pupil, Nelson Lee and Nipper, nevertheless, find many opportunities to utilise their unique detective ability in various mysterious and adventurous cases.

CHAPTER I.

(Set down by Nipper.)

IN WHICH CERTAIN OF CECIL DE VALERIE'S
PROPERTY TAKES AN UNEXPECTED STROLL
INTO THE TRIANGLE.

PRAYERS were just over.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, and my cheery self, were engaged in the process of sunning ourselves upon the Ancient House steps. St. Frank's was looking its best in the bright winter sunshine.

It was a glorious morning. The frost still held—it had been continuous for over a week—and there was no sign of a change. The majority of the Removites regarded it as preposterous that there should be any lessons. Skating on the frozen Stowe would have been far more enjoyable.

I won't say that I didn't agree with this view. But, for some extraordinary reason, the esteemed head of St. Frank's, Dr. Stafford, didn't see things through junior eyes. He considered that lessons were of paramount importance.

There was one consolation; the day was a Wednesday, and therefore a half holiday. Football, important as it was, had been temporarily forgotten. King Frost held sway. The afternoon would

be devoted to skating and winter sports generally.

"Hallo," remarked Watson, looking towards the gates. "Here comes old Muddy. Wonder if he's bringing you a remittance, Montie?"

Tregellis-West yawned.

"Dear fellow, I shouldn't be surprised," he said languidly. "I'm expectin' some cash. It'll be in currency notes—it will, really. An' I loathe currency notes. They're shockin' things to handle, begad!"

"I'm rather fond of 'em, myself," grinned Tommy. "They represent cash—and that's the main thing."

We watched "Muddy's" progress across the Triangle with interest. His proper name was Jeremiah Mudford, and he was the village postman. But not a junior at St. Frank's ever called him anything but Muddy. This was rather unkind, really, for the postman was a neat, tidy man by nature.

An elegant junior came out from the lobby and stood on the steps with his hands in his pockets. De Valerie, of the Remove, was looking as supercilious as ever. His very expression irritated me. He seemed to consider that the atmosphere of St. Frank's was not good enough for him to breathe.

He was a fellow with queer habits; and, indeed, some of his ways were rather mysterious. With his deep-set, dark eyes, and long black hair, he had a somewhat foreign appearance.

Cecil de Valerie was a new boy at St. Frank's; he had only been in the school a few days. Yet within that short space of time he had earned for himself the nick-name of "The Rotter."

This was mainly because he seemed to be dissatisfied with everything and everybody. St. Frank's, in his opinion, was a very low place indeed. This was strange, for De Valerie himself was by no means a gentleman.

Hitherto, Fullwood and Co., the Nuts of the Ancient House, had held full sway in every manner which was characterised by the other juniors as "rotten." But De Valerie was of a different type to Fullwood. The great Ralph Leslie Fullwood was more of a fool than a rascal; but the new fellow was far from being a fool. He was so deep that nobody could quite understand him.

Somehow or other he seemed to be repellant. He made the other juniors feel uncomfortable whenever he was near. Perhaps this was because of his desire to remain aloof. On his first night at St. Frank's he had actually bribed his study mate to clear out. And De Valerie was in sole possession of Study M. Here, of an evening, he would often sit before the fire on a pile of cushions, smoking a queer kind of cigarette, and brooding in solitude.

Now, however, he was looking almost cheerful. He was on the point of descending the steps when a hail came from the group of juniors clustered round Muddy, the postman.

"Letter for you, De Valerie!"

The voice was that of Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove. De Valerie nodded, but made no verbal reply.

"It's registered," shouted Long.

De Valerie still made no reply, and the postman approached the steps and handed the letter over. De Valerie signed the receipt, and merely glanced at the envelope with casual interest. It was a somewhat bulky letter, and Teddy Long's eyes gleamed as they rested upon it.

"A remittance, I'll bet!" he said eagerly. "I—I say, De Valerie, old chap, you might lend me half-a-quad—I say, didn't you hear me? Don't be an

ass, you know! Lend me—Yah, you rotter!"

Teddy Long turned his tubby person round indignantly. Cecil de Valerie had walked into the Ancient House without a word. That was one of his little ways. He would sometimes be in the common-room, and would not utter a sound for an hour on end. He treated Long as though the latter had no existence whatever.

"The cad!" exclaimed Teddy warmly. "He might have lent me— Oh, is that letter for you, West? I—I say, be a sport, old chap. I'm stony until the end of the week. You might loan me —"

"I might do a lot of things, dear boy," smiled Sir Montie. "I might cuff you for bein' such a little worm, you know, but it's too faggin'. An' as for makin' you a loan— Begad! What was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a cheery cackle from the other side of the Triangle.

Sir Montie needn't have asked the question. A snowball had whizzed through the air with unerring aim, and it caught the unfortunate Long fully in the mouth just as he had got it open. The fat junior sat down on the steps with great abruptness.

"Begad! That's rather too bad, you know," said Sir Tregellis-West, stuffing his letter into his pocket. "It came shockin'ly close to me."

"It came a lot closer to Long!" I grinned.

"Yow! Ooooh!" roared Teddy Long wildly. "Oh, my hat! Who—who did that?"

A second snowball came, shot past my ear, and burst upon the brawny chest of Handforth, who was just emerging from the lobby.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth, staggering.

"This is where we get busy," I remarked grimly. "Those fatheaded Monks seem to be getting lively. They're asking for trouble. Suppose we find it for 'em?"

On the other side of the Triangle several juniors were gathering up snow into tightly packed balls. These bright youths were the redoubtable Christine and his merry men. Bob Christine and Co. belonged to the College House side of the Remove, and were naturally the deadly enemies and rivals of the Ancient House fellows.

Nobody needed any hint. Already Handforth and Tommy Watson, and several other fellows and myself, were hastily making snowballs. There had been a fresh fall during the night—only a slight one, but there was enough snow lying about to provide ammunition for a veritable battle.

Away from the shelter of the porch the wind cut round the Ancient House gustily. It was a very high wind—bordering on to a gale, in fact. Christine and Co. had the advantage of it; but this did not save them from a perfect deluge of snowballs. In less than a minute a fine scrap was raging.

Teddy Long, who had been the first casualty, still sat upon the steps vainly endeavouring to scrape the snow out of his neck. He was feeling sore in more than one sense, and gave a very lurid description of the Monks to anybody who cared to listen. Long firmly believed that Sir Montie had been about to hand over the much-needed loan, but Tregellis-West was now well "over the top," so to speak, and engaging the enemy hotly.

There was a sudden thud behind me. Glancing round, I saw that one of the flying snowballs had displayed itself picturesquely upon one of the study windows.

"Look out, you asses!" I roared. "You'll smash some of this glass if you're not careful!"

The window behind me was thrust up forcibly, and the angry face of Cecil de Valerie was thrust out.

"Who did that?" he shouted, glaring round.

"Rats to you!" bawled Handforth aggressively.

And with great impartiality Handforth delivered a snowball, which had been intended for the enemy, fairly and squarely upon De Valerie's face. It was a good shot, and De Valerie gave a howl.

He staggered back into his study. And then a curious thing happened. Somebody opened his door, I believe. At all events, there was a sudden rush of wind through the study. I heard it rattling the window-pane with great violence.

And then, like a shower of extra large snowflakes, a sheaf of papers came flying out into the Triangle. They fluttered everywhere, some being borne upon the wind right round the angle of the building.

"Great Scott!" shouted Hubbard. "Quid notes!"

The battle was stopped automatically. I couldn't help grinning. The papers were, indeed, currency notes. The whole Triangle seemed to be littered with them. They lay in the snow in every-direction.

"Where the dickens did these drop from?" gasped Handforth in astonishment. "Who's showering quids all over us?"

"They came out of De Valerie's window!" I grinned, picking some of the notes up. "It's his own silly fault. He shouldn't open his window in a wind like this. It was asking for trouble—especially with a pile of currency notes lying loose."

"Begad! The chap must be rollin' in wealth!" said Sir Montie mildly. "It's amazin', dear boys. There's twenty or thirty pound lyin' about here. It's a shockin' waste of money to throw it away like this!"

De Valerie came blundering out.

"Give those notes to me!" he shouted furiously. "They're mine! Don't you lay your dirty fingers on them, you cads! If there are any missing——"

"Do you think we want your rotten money?" roared Handforth, who had picked several of the flimsy slips out of the snow. "Pick 'em up yourself!"

Handforth deliberately tossed the notes into the air, and they blew about wildly. I couldn't altogether blame him for his action. Several other juniors, too, had dropped the notes like hot bricks. De Valerie's tone had set the fellows' backs up at once.

"Let him collect his own beastly money," said Tommy Watson indignantly. "Blessed if I know where he gets it all from. Something fishy about it, to my mind."

De Valerie flushed scarlet.

"What do you mean?" he demanded passionately.

Watson was somewhat surprised.

"Well, I didn't mean anything," he said, in his slow, deliberate way. "But since you've turned so blessed red there might be something in what I said, after all. But I don't want to know your giddy secrets!"

It seemed to me that Tommy's unconscious shot had told; and De Valerie, in his anger, had betrayed himself. I had several notes in my hand, and was just about to hand them to their owner, when I paused. The top paper, I suddenly noticed, was not a Treasury note at all.

It was nearly the same size but of ordinary white paper. And as I glanced at it I simply couldn't avoid noticing the words which were pencilled upon its surface, right in the centre of the sheet: "Don't forget—to-night." I started just a trifle, and decided that it would be better for me to drop the paper to the ground. I did so, together with the notes, and walked away.

I didn't feel guilty. Reading another fellow's private correspondence was contemptible; but this had been a pure accident. I had seen the words without intending to read them at all. As a matter of fact, I was rather pleased that I had seen them.

It was rather a lesson for De Valerie, although I don't think he was very grateful for it. If he had kept his tongue still, and had refrained from making the objectionable remark, everybody in the Triangle would have helped him to collect his scattered property. As it was, he was compelled to scour the whole expanse single-handed.

The snow-fight had been stopped by the incident, and Christine and Co., who had been getting the worst of it, didn't seem inclined to renew it. I strolled off with Sir Montie and Tommy, and told them of the curious message I had accidentally seen.

"My hat, that's about that Japanese kid!" said Watson quickly.

"You're right, Tommy boy," said Sir Montie. "'Don't forget—to-night.' Begad, that sounds rather thrillin', doesn't it?"

"I don't know about thrilling, Montie," I replied grimly. "It sounds significant, if you like. Look here! I'm going to have a word with the guv'nor at once—before lessons. He ought to know about this!"

And a minute later I was hurrying to "Mr. Alvington's" study, in the Ancient House. Nelson Lee, I found, was glancing over the morning's newspaper.

"Well, young 'un," he said, by way of greeting, "what's wrong? You've got an unusually solemn expression on your face this morning."

"I thought I'd better come and tell you, guv'nor," I said. "De Valerie's just had a registered letter, stuffed with currency notes, and with just a slip of paper in it, saying, 'Don't forget—to-night.' It looks rather fishy, eh?"

And I told Nelson Lee how I had happened to see the words. He laid his paper aside, and nodded slowly.

"Not exactly fishy, Nipper," he remarked. "In a way, this is not unexpected. We already suspected that De Valerie was to act a certain part during the dark hours of to-night. This letter seems to clinch the matter."

The guv'nor stood before the fire and lit a cigarette. For fully five minutes he remained silent, deep in thought, and during that time my own mind was busy. I was going over the events which had lately taken place at St. Frank's.

The arrival of Cecil de Valerie had been the signal for a big surprise, for, at just about that time, Nelson Lee had made the astonishing discovery that agents of the Circle of Terror were in the district.

As everybody knows, the guv'nor and I had been fighting the dreaded Circle for many months—long before we had come to St. Frank's—so we were tremendously surprised to find that the scoundrelly society had sent emissaries down to this quiet country spot.

No; they weren't after us. We were Nelson Lee and Nipper no longer, and were quite satisfied that the Circle of Terror had not probed our secret. These agents were in the vicinity for quite a different reason.

Somehow or other, De Valerie was mixed up in the affair. By means of a trick, he had been the means of admitting a stranger into the Ancient House on his first night at the school. This chap, Dale by name, had faked up an arrangement in De Valerie's bedroom—the bedroom which was always occupied by a new boy during his first night.

Well, the guv'nor had made an astonishing discovery. Just over the head of the bed, in this particular room, he had found a tiny brass nozzle. This led through into an old box-room adjoining. There was a small rubber bulb here, and it had been filled with deadly poison. It was as clear as daylight that a grim plot had been hatched. A new boy—a Japanese kid named Sessue Yakama—was due to arrive at St. Frank's to-day. If it hadn't been for Nelson Lee's discovery, he would have gone to sleep, never to awaken.

But Nelson Lee had substituted the poison by water, and the deadly contrivance was now harmless. He had done it secretly, of course. The devilish trick had been planned by the Circle agent, who had gained admittance to the school. There were other Circle men in the neighbourhood, living at an old house

called the Mount, on the edge of Bannington Moor.

Why the Circle of Terror wanted to kill the Japanese boy was a complete mystery. We hadn't got to the bottom of it by any means. But it was fairly certain that De Valerie was acting under the orders of the criminals. It would be his task to press the bulb in the dead of night, while Yakama was sleeping, and thus murder him as he lay in bed.

But Nelson Lee was quite satisfied that De Valerie was acting innocently. It was too monstrous to suppose that the fellow could knowingly commit such a deed. He had been stuffed up with some yarn or other, and didn't know the horrible nature of the contrivance. That's what the guv'nor thought, anyhow.

This had happened towards the end of the previous week, and since then we had been watching and waiting. Nothing had happened until now. We hadn't seen any sign of the Circle agents. De Valerie, at least, had acted as one would expect a schoolboy to act. There had been no secret meetings, or anything of that sort.

Of course, the Circle men had been waiting and watching, too. They fondly believed that their trap was all ready laid, and that no hitch had occurred. Yakama was to be killed; that was the object of all the plotting. I suppose it was only a local affair of the Circle's; just a side-line, so to speak. But it was nevertheless sinister and deadly.

If the poison had been administered, the poor chap would have died while he slept, and in the morning there wouldn't have been a trace. Any doctor would have said that death had been due to natural causes. Foul play would never have been suspected. It was lucky that Nelson Lee was on the spot.

The Headmaster himself knew nothing of the plot. The guv'nor had thought it best to keep his own counsel for the time being. There wasn't any need to alarm Dr. Stafford uselessly.

"Well, Nipper, the period of waiting is nearly over," said Lee suddenly, jerking an inch of ash from his cigarette into the fireplace. "It is quite clear to me that De Valerie has received a sum of money from the Circle—his payment, doubtless, for the part he is playing. It is a reminder, too, that he must not fail in his allotted task to-night."

"But he will fail," I said cheerfully. "At least, the poison-spray will fail. A few drops of water won't do any harm,

will they? And what about Yakama? What time will he arrive, guv'nor?"

"I wished to speak to you on that subject, my boy, so it is just as well you looked in," replied Nelson Lee. "Yakama will be here by the three o'clock train this afternoon. It is possible that De Valerie will attempt to chum with him, so that his own position will be strengthened. If possible, I want that to be avoided."

"The Japanese kid won't chum with a rotter like De Valerie, sir."

"De Valerie may set himself out to be very obliging and genial," said Nelson Lee. "He will probably go to great lengths to influence Yakama. Therefore I should like you to go down to the station with your two chums and be with Yakama from the moment he steps out of the train."

"Oh, we'll meet him, guv'nor, of course, and take him under our wing," I replied. "We'll look after him as though we loved him. But I expect he'll be a queer kid, won't he? We shall hardly know how to manage him."

"Oh, I expect you'll get on!" Nelson Lee paused as a bell clanged out. "Morning lessons, young 'un," he went on. "You'll have to be off now. Well, keep your eyes well open, and see that Yakama comes to no harm. I don't anticipate danger of any sort—to-day, at all events. But it is just as well to be upon the alert. There is danger abroad, and precaution is absolutely essential."

"Trust me, guv'nor," I said, as I moved towards the door.

Nelson Lee laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I do, Nipper—implicitly," he said quietly.

CHAPTER II.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH SESSUE YAKAMA ARRIVES, AND CAUSES ME A LARGE AMOUNT OF ANXIETY.

"**H**ERE she comes, dear fellows!" said Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, gazing up the line through his pince-nez.

"Good!" I said.

From the above you might imagine that we were talking about some pretty girl, or something of that sort. But the "she" in this case was merely a somewhat rattly local train.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I were on the platform at Bellton Station, and it

was just after three o'clock. The train, carrying Sessue Yakama, was within sight. We had arrived at the station in good time, and had mapped out quite a decent little programme for our movements during the afternoon.

We had sacrificed our afternoon's skating, and we were intent upon devoting our whole attentions to the fulfilment of the gov'nor's wish. In short, we were going to look after the new junior like three fathers.

I had been expecting that De Valerie would come down to meet the train himself. But he had cleared off immediately after dinner, with a pair of skates slung over his back. So it was evident that he, like the rest, was out for an afternoon's sport. We had the field clear to ourselves.

"I wonder what the chap will be like!" remarked Tommy Watson reflectively.

"No good wondering," I said. "We shall see him in two ticks."

The train steamed into the station and came to a standstill. We scanned the carriage doors with interest, and then I caught my breath in sharply and clenched my fists.

Two figures had emerged from a first-class compartment. First of all, a small boy in Etons jumped lightly to the platform; but he was immediately followed by another fellow, a bigger boy, with sleek black hair and a sallow complexion.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie blankly. "De Valerie!"

"But—but we saw him go off skating!" said Tommy, in amazed tones.

"The cunning rotter!" I explained, between my teeth. "Don't you understand? He went off like that on purpose to deceive us—and we were asses enough to be deceived! Of course, he went to Bannington and met the new kid there, when he changed out of the London express. He's been jawing at him ever since!"

"Dear Benny, this is appallin'!" said Montie seriously.

"We'll get Yakama away from that cad, anyhow!" I exclaimed grimly.

We marched up the platform and faced De Valerie and the new boy. Sessue Yakama was quite a little chap, but he seemed to be wiry and strong. His face was essentially Japanese, but quite pleasant, and his eyes twinkled brightly. He was smiling in an infectious manner as we came up.

"What do you chaps want?" demanded De Valerie curtly.

"We came down to meet Yakama."

"Well, you're not wanted! I've met him," said the Rotter unpleasantly. "He doesn't want cads of your sort to speak to him! He's something like myself—rather particular. You can clear off as soon as you like!"

I was about to make a hot retort, but checked myself, and bit my lip. I wasn't anxious to have any squabble in front of Yakama straight away. De Valerie knew this, and was taking advantage of the situation.

"These are the fellows I was telling you of, Yakama," he said, in a silky voice. "You stick to me, and you'll be all right."

Sessue Yakama smiled even more broadly.

"You are of the kindness itself to me, excellent De Valerie," he murmured, in very good English and in a musical voice. "My gratitude is overwhelming, and I will take heed of your splendid words."

"Begad," said Sir Montie, "this is shockin', dear fellows! Our characters have been maligned. De Valerie must have been tellin' some frightful whoppers about me! I don't know what to do—I don't, really!"

I held out my hand to Yakama.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Yakama," I said cheerfully. "We three have come down to give you a welcome, you know. We shall be jolly pleased to take you up to the school and show you round."

The Japanese boy looked at my hand calmly.

"It is the hand that is not of sincerity," he said, still smiling. "It is with excessive regret that I must refrain from shaking it, as my inclination demands. But I have been told base things, and——"

"You mustn't believe what De Valerie's been telling you——"

"I am extraordinarily sorry," interrupted Yakama softly. "I go with my magnificent friend here, and leave you with much regrets."

And Yakama walked off down the platform with De Valerie, who grinned with malignant triumph. My hand was still outstretched, and I drew it back angrily. In spite of Yakama's pleasant words, he had delivered a deliberate rebuff.

"The—the cad!" exclaimed Tommy furiously.

"Are you referrin' to Yakama?"

"No, ass, I'm not!" snapped Watson. "I'm talking about that black-haired rotter, De Valerie! He's mucked up our

programme completely. We can't very well drag Yakama away from him, can we?"

I drew a deep breath.

"And the gov'nor said he trusted me," I muttered. "By Jupiter, something's got to be done! This is what comes of being too jolly cocksure! We're a set of fatheaded blockheads!"

"Dear Benny, you're strikin'ly complimentary," murmured Montie.

"Oh, rats!" I snapped, as De Valerie and the Japanese boy disappeared through the booking-office. "I'm wild—thundering wild! The Rotter's been telling Yakama a faked yarn, running us down until he thinks we're unfit to be touched! We can't blame Yakama. He's a Jap, anyhow, and doesn't know English ways properly. I've never been so wild before!"

"It's no good being wild," said Tommy practically. "What's to be done?"

"Well, we'll keep them in sight, anyhow," I said. "De Valerie can think what he blessed well likes! I'm not going to let him get up to any rotten tricks. If he takes Yakama straight to St. Frank's, all well and good. But if not——"

I didn't finish, but hurried out of the station with my chums. I was anxious as well as angry, for the very thing had happened which the gov'nor had asked me to avoid. De Valerie had got round the new boy, and it would now be jolly difficult to carry out Nelson Lee's instructions.

When we arrived outside, we saw the pair just leaving the station. They had paused for a moment or two in the booking-office to give instructions about Yakama's luggage.

Apart from the hitch in my arrangements, I was pleased with Sessue Yakama's appearance. He seemed to be quite a cheery little chap. His manner of speaking was somewhat flowery, perhaps, but he had a splendid knowledge of English. And I judged that he would be quite popular at St. Frank's.

My fears regarding what might happen were ill-founded, for De Valerie took his charge to St. Frank's without pausing anywhere. This, at all events, was satisfactory. They were by the towing path, and we followed not far behind.

There was a lot of skating going on, for the river was frozen hard from bank to bank. At the bottom of the playing

fields De Valerie cut across, and took the new boy straight into the Triangle.

We saw them disappear into the Ancient House, and I hurried my footsteps.

"We'll get hold of the kid somehow," I declared grimly. "He's not going to have tea in De Valerie's study, anyhow. I'll prevent any games of that sort!"

"Dear boy, there will be difficulties," said Sir Montie.

"Difficulties are made to be overcome!" I snapped.

"I'm rebuffed!" said Tregellis-West in a pained voice. "It's shockin' to have to admit it—but I'm rebuffed—by Benny, too. But things'll happen before long. I've got a feelin' that——"

"Oh, blow your feelings!" I growled. "Don't lag behind, you ass!"

Montie smiled to himself, and we all hastened into the Ancient House. The lobby and passages were deserted, for almost every fellow was out upon the ice. But it was getting near tea-time, and quietness would not reign for long in the old school building.

"They've gone to Study M, I expect," I said grimly.

We halted outside De Valerie's study, and I tried the handle. As I had expected, the door was locked. I simply glared at the panels and banged upon them with my fists.

"Who's that?" came De Valerie's voice angrily. "Clear off!"

"Look here," roared Tommy Watson before I could speak, "unlock this rotten door. We want——"

"I can't help what you want—go away!"

I was about to make a hot reply on my own account, but I checked myself. It wasn't a bit of good making a fuss in the passage. And it was quite beyond our powers to enter Study M by force.

De Valerie was an extraordinary fellow. He had had a stout lock fitted to his door, and nobody knew what went on in his study when he retired to its privacy. It was known, however, that he was in the habit of lolling in front of the fire on cushions, smoking strange-smelling cigarettes.

And now De Valerie had got Sessue Yakama with him, his influence would undoubtedly have a strong effect upon the new boy. First impressions are lasting, and Yakama was an Oriental himself; he would easily take to De Valerie's strange ways. And the thought of him

becoming the Rotter's boon companion was unpleasant.

I was quite sure that De Valerie was not sincere; he had an axe to grind, and was only making friends with Yakama for that reason. And, unfortunately, the Japanese junior had allowed himself to be caught in the net.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I went along to Study C in a black mood. The fire was nearly out, and this did not seem to cheer us up in the least. Tommy, however, piled some coals on and busied himself with the preparations for tea.

After a while Sir Montie went out in order to wash himself. Sir Montie generally washed himself about ten times a day on the average, whether he needed it or not. Cleanliness and tidiness was, with Tregellis-West, almost a religion. I have never seen him anything but spruce and clean.

By the time he came back the kettle was singing musically, with a glowing fire beneath it. The table was set, and everything in Study C was looking cheerful, except its occupants. Tommy and I had scarcely spoken a word since our noble chum had departed. He came in now with a gleaming face—fresh from the towel—and gleaming eyes.

"Begad!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Tea's ready, Montie——"

"They're in the lobby, dear fellow."

"Eh? Who's in the lobby?" I asked.

"Why, De Valerie an' the new kid—just come along from Study M," said Tregellis-West. "De Valerie's introducin' Yakama to all the fellows. The cheek of it, begad! Introducin' him just as though he were the kid's guardian!"

I jumped up.

"We're on in this scene!" I said briskly. "Come on, ye cripples!"

"Dear Benny, I'm perfectly sound," murmured Montie. "It's shockin' to be referred to as a cripple, begad! You're always doin' it——"

"Rats!" I interrupted cheerfully.

We passed out into the passage, and I was feeling much better in spirits. I had feared that De Valerie would keep Yakama in his study to tea—and I had, indeed, formulated a plan for the rescue of Yakama. It seemed that this plan would not be necessary now. Obviously De Valerie had successfully "got round" the Japanese junior, and was now triumphantly introducing his "chum" to all and sundry.

The lobby was rather crowded—which

was not surprising. Yakama had aroused general interest, and the juniors were all anxious to see him and pass judgment. Some fellows had openly expressed the view that it was rather above the limit to have "a giddy heathen" shoved into their midst. Others rather liked the idea, since it provided a change.

The crowd was mostly composed of Removites, but there were one or two seniors, and quite a number of noisy fags.

Cecil de Valerie was smiling in that half-sneering, oily way of his, which had always earned him such general disfavour. Sessue Yakama, on the other hand, was grinning all over his face with keen enjoyment. He was in no way nervous, and appeared to be quite at his ease.

"Ain't he got a tongue?" demanded Handforth curiously.

Nearly everybody was talking, but Handforth's voice, as usual, swelled above the rest in unmistakable tones.

"Wait a minute, I've got something to say!" exclaimed De Valerie, holding up his hand. "Can't you stop this silly chatter?"

The talk stopped almost at once—but not because De Valerie had given instructions. Indeed, the Rotter was at that moment in dire peril of being thrown out into the Triangle in an inverted position. The fellows were not likely to have their talk characterised as "chatter."

"Hold on!" I shouted, pushing through. "What's the idea of this, De Valerie? I didn't know that you'd been given the job of taking Yakama under your wing? I'm captain of the Remove, and it's up to me to introduce Yakama——"

De Valerie scowled.

"I don't want any of your rot, Bennett!" he snapped. "Yakama is a friend of mine, and you're a stranger to him. He knows all about you and your precious pals—he knows what a set of cads he's been pitchforked into. I've told him all about this old barn of a school——"

There was an angry roar.

"Let him finish, you asses!" I shouted. "Let him run on!"

"Like the ripplin' brook, begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "He'll never stop, dear fellows!"

"I'm going to say what I came here to say," declared De Valerie calmly.

"You needn't think that I'm enjoying this job, because I'm not. But I've chummed up with Yakama, and he's agreed to share Study M with me. He'll make no other friends at St. Frank's—except myself. As a matter of fact, he knows jolly well that there's not another fellow worth chumming with! We're going to stand aloof from the common herd. Is that clear?"

"The common herd!" breathed Sir Montie. "Oh, ain't it awful?"

"Anything more to say?" I asked grimly.

"No, that's all."

"Give the Rotter the frog's march!" roared Handforth.

"Wait a tick!" I interjected. "Let Yakama give us his views."

If the fellows hadn't been anxious to hear Yakama speak, De Valerie would have been slaughtered on the spot. His calm way of giving utterance to the most insulting and disparaging things, exasperated the fellows to a point beyond endurance. That was just De Valerie's little way. He always spoke of everything and everybody in the most slanderous terms.

"Yes, let the Jap kid speak!" shouted Tommy Watson.

"I don't suppose he can!" put in Handforth. "We don't want to hear his heathen jabber——"

"The English is magnificently known to me, and I am of the proudest of boys because it is so," said Sessue Yakama, still smiling good-naturedly. "It is with the extremo pleasure that I meet you all. I am immeasurably delighted to be situated amongst the boys of this superb and irreproachable nation."

There was a silence of surprise in the lobby.

"My hat! He knows some long words, anyhow!" gasped Handforth. "Did you hear that, you fellows? He's immeasurably delighted!"

"He's nothing of the sort," snapped De Valerie, scowling. "Yakama doesn't know the meaning of these words. He's showing off——"

"You are making the great mistake, De Valerie," put in Yakama softly. "I am pleased to express my view that I know the meaning of all the words I have voiced. And you must permit me to point out that you have been preposterously wrong in your remarks concerning my intentions. It is with pain that I correct you."

"What do you mean, you silly young ass?" growled De Valerie.

Yakama beamed round him.

"I have been taught that a herd, in your wonderful language, is invariably applied to beasts, such as cattle," he explained. "Surely, De Valerie, it is the insult that you speak when you refer to these splendid boys as beasts and cattle? I am shocked beyond a degree. And I do not think these boys are all of the same quality as yourself, as you intimated."

"I didn't intimate anything of the sort——"

"I crave your pardon, my noble De Valerie, but I think you did," smiled Yakama sweetly. "You referred to them as the set of cads. Surely that was the untruthfulness? It is you who are of the class of cads——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well spoken, Jappy!"

De Valerie went white with rage.

"You young heathen!" he roared. "I'll——"

"Is it the commonplace amongst British boys to call their chums such names?" asked Yakama smoothly. "But I have not put you right yet. I am not your chum, De Valerie—surely I should be the fool if I wished it to be so? And I am not filled with the great anxiety to live with you in Study M. You must pardon me for this explanatory conversation, but you have been labouring under a stupendous misapprehension—you have, indeed, been harbouring a most extraordinary delusion."

"Oh, corks!" gasped Hubbard. "Ain't he a prize-packet?"

"A giddy walking dictionary!" declared Handforth. "I'm blessed if he don't know more long words than I do!"

"That's not very surpris'n', dear boy," murmured Montie.

"Have you been playing a game with me, you little cad?" roared De Valerie furiously.

Sessue Yakama smiled even more broadly.

"Surely it is the game that you have been playing with me?" he suggested.

"It was not I who consented to become your chum—it was not I who wished to share the superb study with the countless cushions. If you will allow me to say so, my feelings towards you are of the contemptuous and scornful——"

"What!" roared De Valerie.

"It is painfully true," said Yakama.

"Have you not spoken the malicious things about these wonderful boys? Have you not endeavoured to contaminate my mind with undeserved slanders? The idea is within my mind that you mistook me for the fool. Oh, but I am not. And I owe these three boys the apology that is of the abject variety!"

Yakama stepped across to Sir Montie and Tommy and myself. He held out his hand frankly, and we took it.

"At the station I was in the state of bewilderment," he explained. "De Valerie had been anxious to put that into my mind which is poisonous. At the commencement I half believed him. But then, dear friends, I grasped the understanding of the trick. And I allowed the joke to run on. Was it not good? Was it not of the excellent that I should pull the leg of De Valerie—as I have heard it expressed in your splendid language? De Valerie is not of my friends."

"Why, you—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly rich! Serves you right, you cad!"

De Valerie was completely at a loss. I grinned with delight, for Yakama had made it quite clear that he had seen through the Rotter's trickery. The Japanese junior was far keener than he appeared to be.

"I'll smash you, you yellow——"

"It is with extreme pleasure that I should like to be smashed," smiled Yakama. "But surely that is a wrong word? I am not the piece of china that can be smashed. But I shall be most happy to oblige you if you are anxious to lay hands upon me. But I fear that you are full of brag."

Before anybody could stop him, De Valerie sprang forward. He had flown into one of his violent fits of temper. He lashed out with all his fury and strength, and I expected to see Yakama go down, badly hit. But something very different happened. Like a flash of lightning the Japanese boy ducked.

He gripped De Valerie in an extraordinary manner. It was all so quick that nobody quite saw it. But the next second the Rotter thudded to the floor on his back, and Yakama was calmly brushing his coat-sleeve.

"It is with sorrow I see this," he murmured. "It was not my wish that I should——"

"Well done. Jappy!"

"How the dickens did you manage it?"

"Ripping!"

The fellows were simply buzzing with excitement and delight. De Valerie picked himself up, all his fury gone. But he was pale, and his dark eyes glittered evilly.

"By thunder!" he snarled. "You will pay for that, you little worm!"

He stalked out of the lobby, and a derisive jeer followed him. Sessue Yakama found himself surrounded by an excited, laughing crowd. That little exhibition of ju-jitsu on his part had been nothing much in itself. But the Removites were simply delighted with it. The manner in which De Valerie had been exposed was simply gorgeous.

I could have hugged Yakama, but wrung his hand instead. There wasn't the slightest doubt that the Japanese junior would be very popular at St. Frank's. He couldn't possibly have started his term at the school in a better way. He had gained popularity at a jump.

And De Valerie's little scheme had failed completely.

CHAPTER III.

(*Nipper continues.*)

WHICH DEALS WITH CERTAIN STRANGE HAPPENINGS AFTER LIGHTS-OUT.

NELSON LEE tossed some cigarette ash into the fire and smiled.

"Yakama appears to be blessed with a sense of humour, Nipper," he remarked. "I am very glad that he estimated De Valerie at his true worth, and took such pains to make the fact known."

"Yakama's all right, sir," I declared. "He's a splendid little chap. The fellows are jolly pleased with him, I can tell you. I'm going to have him in Study C, with Montie and Tommy, for the time being."

"Is he agreeable to that?"

"Rather, guv'nor! Seemed to like it when I suggested it," I replied. "And is there really a plot against him?"

Nelson Lee became suddenly serious.

"You've no need to ask that question, Nipper," he replied gravely. "The plot against Yakama is a very grim one. The very fact that the Circle of Terror is engaged upon the affair makes that point clear. To-night, if the Circle's plans had materialised, Yakama would have died."

"Thank goodness you're here, sir," I

said. "I can't think that De Valerie knows anything about that poison, and it's a bit steep to believe that he's even going to press the bulb."

"I don't think De Valerie is very deeply involved, Nipper," exclaimed "Mr. Alvington" thoughtfully. "He is a foolish boy in many ways, in spite of his affected manners and habits. Although cunning and unscrupulous, he possesses very little power of concentration, and is very gullible."

I nodded slowly.

"In the morning the Circle will know that Yakama isn't harmed," I said. "What's going to happen then, guv'nor? Will the kid still be in danger?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You think the Circle will make another attempt—"

"My dear Nipper, you know the Circle of Terror. At least, you should," interjected the guv'nor. "The Circle does not admit defeat. If a certain task is set, the Circle perseveres until that task is accomplished. For some reason unknown to us, Yakama's life is in danger. I have decided to protect the boy."

"Well, you've taken the first step already, sir."

"Exactly! But your services will be required to-night, young 'un."

Nelson Lee lit another cigarette, and stared absently into the fire. We were in his study, and it was nearly bedtime. After a while, the guv'nor turned to me and gripped my shoulder.

"I don't think there will be much to do to-night, Nipper," he said quietly, "but there's no telling what this queer business will lead to. We know, however, that our old enemies, the Circle of Terror, are operating down here. We must be cautious; we must be careful. For, above all, we must not allow our true identity to leak out. That is of the highest importance. At the same time, you and I must protect this Japanese boy from violence. We have received no commission to do so, but we have seen so far into the plot that there is no backing out. Indeed, I would not wish to back out. I am keenly interested. It is quite an enthralling problem. As for the police, the material we have at our disposal is unsuitable for supplying to them. We must work alone."

"I'm game for anything, guv'nor," I said eagerly.

"I'm quite sure of that, my boy," smiled Nelson Lee. "Well, Yakama will sleep in the 'new boy's' bedroom, as is

customary at St. Frank's. I want you to leave your dormitory after the other boys are asleep, and to conceal yourself in the box-room which adjoins Yakama's sleeping apartment."

"But De Valerie will be awake! He'll see me go!"

"I had not neglected that point," said the guv'nor. "It requires a little thought, Nipper, but I think you will be able to hit upon some idea. You are usually ingenious in such matters. We will talk it over in a few moments. But you must wait in the box-room until some move is made. At one o'clock I will relieve you. I have duties to perform, and I could not enter upon this vigil before midnight without my absence being noticeable. So, Nipper, you must keep watch during the first period. It is possible, of course, that De Valerie intends to admit a Circle agent into the House. If so, we shall have to capture him red-handed. But I do not consider this probable. De Valerie has been given this task, I believe, for it is only a light one. The mere pressure of the rubber bulb would originally have meant death to Yakama. As things now stand, however, the contraption is harmless."

Nelson Lee and I talked for a few minutes longer, and then I took my departure. I found Sir Montie and Tommy waiting for me eagerly in Study C. They were well aware of my mission, and were anxious to know Nelson Lee's plans.

For my two chums, of course, were in the know, and were as much interested in Yakama's strange peril as I was.

"It's just upon bedtime, my bonnie boys," I said crisply. "We've got to arrange things quickly. De Valerie will keep awake, as sure as fate, so we've got to diddle him. It wouldn't do for him to see me leave the dormitory. He'd suspect things in a tick."

In five minutes Tregellis-West and Watson knew everything. As they were to help in a little wheeze of mine, it was necessary that they should be well acquainted with it.

The bell rang a few seconds later, and the Remove trooped up to the dormitory. Sessue Yakama had been taken up to his own little bedroom by Morrow, the head prefect. When a new boy came to St. Frank's, he always spent his first night there. If he happened to be a nervous kid—just the sort the juniors would rag unmercifully—he was allowed a special bedroom for perhaps a week.

Conroy major, of the Sixth, came and

saw lights out, and for some few minutes there was a buzz of talking going on. The dormitory was in pitch darkness; just what I wanted. We couldn't see across the room, even.

"Begad, has anybody got any water?" came a murmur from Sir Montie's bed.

"Plenty in the bathroom, if you want it," growled somebody.

"I think I'll get up, dear boys. I think I'll go along to the bathroom," said Tregellis-West, sitting up in bed. "It's a shockin' thing to go to sleep thirsty, ain't it? Begad, it's cold!"

"You ass! You don't want to go to the bathroom now," grunted Tommy Watson.

"Dear fellow, I'm goin'."

"Oh, you chump! I suppose I'd better go with you," went on Tommy. "You'll go and lose yourself if you're not looked after. You'll have to make haste about it, though. I'm blessed if I'm going to freeze!"

There were several chuckles as Montie and Tommy tumbled out of bed. While this was going on, I had slipped from between the sheets, and was rapidly donning my socks and slippers and dressing-gown. Nobody saw or heard me—not even the junior in the next bed. And then I stuffed my pillow down the bed in order to cause a hump. This wasn't really necessary, but it was just as well to take the precaution.

My two chums felt their way to the foot of their beds. Then came a bump, some gasps, and several exclamations.

"Begad, you've knocked me down, dear boy."

"You dotty idiot!" roared Tommy. "What did you bump into me for?"

Between the two of them they caused quite a little commotion, and meanwhile I had slipped like a shadow to the door. De Valerie, who was lying in bed awake, thought—as the rest of the fellows thought—that only Tregellis-West and Watson were out of their beds.

Thus, when they left the dormitory, I slipped out with them. My departure had been unseen and unheard. When, a few minutes later, my chums returned, De Valerie was under the impression that every bed was occupied. Had I attempted to slip out without the "cover" of Tommy and Montie I should probably have failed.

But I was now in the passage, and everything was as I wished. Without a sound, I slipped along to the box-room, entered, and closed the door softly behind

me. It was cold in there, and as black as pitch.

In my dressing-gown pocket I had a little electric-torch, and I pulled this out and flashed it on for a moment. One wall was really a kind of thick partition. This separated the box-room from Yakama's bedroom. An old picture hung in the centre, and behind this was concealed a small rubber bulb, fitted on to a brass holder. The thing was harmless now, but it was essential that we should make sure of our suspicions concerning De Valerie.

There were some old trunks and boxes on the other side of the room. Behind these I found a mattress and a pile of rugs. The guv'nor evidently had placed them there. In two minutes I was well wrapped up and quite cosy.

Anybody entering would fail to see me, for I was quite concealed behind the trunks; and, in any case, smothered by the rugs, I was almost unrecognisable as a human being. I had no fear of being spotted.

Of course, it was quite early yet, and it was necessary for me to keep awake till one o'clock, when the guv'nor would relieve me. But I don't mind admitting that I was jolly near dropping off to sleep on more than one occasion.

I had kept vigils ten times as acute as this one, and occasionally with terrible discomfort to contend with. Here I was as cosy as possible, and lay among the rugs, half asleep and half awake.

Would De Valerie come?

I didn't trouble myself to think much, but lay in a drowsy condition. My chief concern was to keep myself awake.

The time passed slowly, and I heard eleven o'clock boom out; and then, after an age, midnight. I now became more alert, and forced myself to keep my eyes open. If any action was to be taken, it would surely be taken before long. It wasn't likely that De Valerie would wait until the small hours. There was no reason why he should.

I heard the quarter chime, and then the half; and just as the echo was dying away, there was the sound of a light touch upon the door-handle. It couldn't be the guv'nor so early, and I held myself rigid. The door opened slowly and cautiously, and somebody stepped in and closed it again. I couldn't see a thing, for the darkness was intense; but I could hear the breathing of the intruder.

And then, while I was straining my eyes, a beam of light hit the ceiling. I ducked in a second, and then peered

cautiously round the edge of one of the trunks. Cecil de Valerie stood just against the partition, attired in his dressing-gown.

It was all over in less than a minute.

He concentrated the light from his torch upon the wall, moved the picture, and then took the little rubber bulb firmly between his thumb and finger. I distinctly saw him press it until its contents—water—had been ejected. That water, as a matter of fact, had been sprayed over Yakama's pillow, in the next room.

But for Nelson Lee's activity, the devilish arrangement would have contained poison, and the Japanese boy by this time would have breathed his last. As matters now stood, he was probably sleeping as peacefully as ever. The spray was so fine that it would not have awakened him. It had been ejected from the nozzle in a vapour.

De Valerie wasted no time. Having accomplished his object, he switched his light off and left the box-room. I waited for about ten minutes, and then followed; but I did not return to the dormitory. I made my way to Nelson Lee's bedroom, and quietly slipped in.

The guv'nor was sitting before the fire, reading, and he looked round quickly.

"It's happened, sir!" I said in a whisper.

"Oh, indeed! So early?" murmured Lee. "Well, so much the better, Nipper. And it was De Valerie who accomplished the task?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "He's gone back to bed now. He didn't seem at all frightened, or anything like that."

"The boy will have to answer for this unscrupulous conduct of his," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It is just as well that we know the thing for certain. De Valerie will have no opportunity of denying complicity in the plot. But, as I told you, the real peril will not make itself apparent until the Circle agents learn of this failure. It is then that our real work will commence."

I remained in the guv'nor's bedroom for just over an hour, giving De Valerie full time to get to sleep, and then I crept back to the dormitory. Even if the Rotter had been awake, I don't think he would have detected my entering.

I stole in, crept to my bed, and was soon between the sheets, and I went to sleep wondering what would happen on the morrow. What would happen when Yakama was found untouched?

CHAPTER IV.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH DE VALERIE GOES UPON A SECRET MISSION—I OVERHEAR A FEW THINGS, AND THEN A LOOSE BOARD LEADS TO AN UNEXPECTED DISASTER.

CECIL DE VALERIE was looking perfectly unconcerned when he took his place at the breakfast-table the next morning.

Mr. Crowell sat at the head of the Remove table, of course, the guv'nor presiding over that of the Sixth. There was a considerable amount of whispering among the juniors, for breakfast had started, and Sessue Yakama had not yet put in an appearance.

His place was next to mine, and the chair was empty. Nelson Lee, I believe, had purposely delayed Yakama's appearance, so that he could note the effect upon De Valerie when the Japanese boy did not appear. I, of course, also kept my eyes open.

Breakfast was only just fairly on the go when Yakama was brought in by Conroy major, of the Sixth. Yakama was beaming, as usual, and I looked quickly over at De Valerie.

The Rotter was just sipping his coffee when his eyes rested upon the late comer. Just for a second De Valerie remained rigid, but he showed no other sign. He set the cup in the saucer without a tremor, and continued his breakfast. He seemed, indeed, to be totally unconcerned.

I was practically sure that he knew nothing of the real plot. If he had expected Yakama to die, he could never have acted so superbly. I believe he was surprised, but he cleverly concealed his emotion.

The Circle plot, of course, had failed—and that meant that the agents of the grim society would get busy again—get busy with redoubled efforts. I shared Nelson Lee's view that we should not have long to wait.

Just before afternoon lessons the guv'nor met me in the Triangle, and we had a few words together—being quite alone. There was nothing unusual, of course, in a master chatting with a junior.

"I want you to keep a very watchful eye upon De Valerie, my boy," said "Mr. Alvington" softly. "It is probable that he will leave the school to-night, in order to meet somebody. If so, you must fol-

low. I cannot keep my eyes upon De Valerie as you can. Don't forget that adventure I had at the Mount. If De Valerie goes anywhere, he will pay a visit to that place. So be on your guard, Nipper."

"But if I'm watching De Valerie I can't very well look after Yakama, guv'nor," I said. "And, somehow, I shouldn't like to leave him——"

"If you find it necessary to follow De Valerie, take one of your chums with you," advised Nelson Lee. "The other—Tregellis-West or Watson—must remain with Yakama until you return. It is possible that nothing whatever will occur, but we must be careful—very careful."

I nodded.

"I'll keep my eyes skinned, sir," I said. "I say, this business is just as serious and exciting as any of our proper cases——"

"My dear boy, it is a 'proper' case," put in the guv'nor gravely. "The fact that we are at St. Frank's makes very little difference. We are up against the Circle—and you have excellent reason to know what that means."

Some other fellows came near a minute later, and Nelson Lee and I thought it better to part. But I knew what I had to do, and lost no time in telling Tommy and Montie what was in the wind.

Later on, just before we had tea, I made a suggestion. Yakama wasn't in Study C, and so I seized the opportunity.

"Look here," I said. "If we're going to be on the alert, we can't all squat down together. De Valerie might go out at any time now—it's dark already. We've got to do the thing properly, or not at all."

"What do you suggest, dear, fellow?"

"Well, there's only one thing to be done," I replied. "We must fetch our coats and caps in here, Montie, and have them all ready, so that we can bung them on in a second. And we shall have to take it in turns, patrolling the Triangle."

"Doing what?" asked Tommy, staring.

"Patrolling the Triangle," I repeated calmly. "We must keep an eye on De Valerie's study——"

"My dear chap, there's no need to freeze out of doors," said Watson. "Can't we watch in the passage?"

"And let De Valerie slip out of his window in the meantime," I grunted.

"Oh, I'd forgotten the giddy window!"

"That's just what we mustn't do," I went on. "All these things have to be taken into consideration, my son. I'll take the first half-hour outside. I'll walk up and down between the Ancient House steps and the chestnuts. Both the steps and De Valerie's window are in sight all the time. If I see him come out I'll dash to our window, and tap on it. You'll have to be ready, Montie, with the coats and caps."

"No need for that flurry, is there?" asked Watson.

"No need," I echoed. "Why, you ass, De Valerie will get to the gates in a tick, and he'll be swallowed up at once in this darkness. The only thing to do is to take every precaution—although there may be no move to-night at all."

Everything was quickly arranged. I may as well say that Nelson Lee had given Yakama a few hints as to his position, hoping, thereby, to gain a little information. But it was quite certain that Yakama knew nothing. He was certainly unaware that his life was in any danger—and the guv'nor didn't give him any hint as to that aspect of the case. But Yakama was as shrewd as Lee himself, pretty nearly, and had sense enough to ask no questions.

He only knew that it was necessary for somebody to watch over him, and, although he smiled, he raised no objection. I had a private idea that Yakama could look after himself quite decently.

Knowing what he did, therefore, he wasn't surprised at the plans I had made. He and Montie and Tommy sat down to tea while I kept watch out in the Triangle. It was still freezing, although not quite so severely as it had been. I had the great open space quite to myself, and was glad of this. My presence there would have caused comment had it been generally known.

At the end of the half-hour Montie, having finished his tea, would relieve me. But, as it happened, it was not even necessary. As a result, I missed my tea altogether. But that was only a detail.

I noticed that the light was burning in De Valerie's study. But, after I had been on the watch for twenty minutes, this suddenly went out. Swiftly, and without a sound, I ran to the window of Study C, and crouched down beside it.

Exactly two minutes later I saw De Valerie walk briskly out of the Ancient House, wearing his overcoat and muffler.

He started off across the Triangle towards the gates. I tapped upon the window-pane urgently.

The sash was up in a tick, and Sir Montie came tumbling out. Tommy Watson handed over his overcoat and cap—I was already wearing mine, of course. Montie and I started off towards the gates without a word. De Valerie's figure was visible for a moment under the shaded lamp at the gateway.

"All ready, dear fellow?" whispered Tregellis-West, as he struggled into his coat. "I was just finishin' my last cup of tea, you know. But it's shockin' of me to grumble, ain't it? You haven't had any tea at all."

"Oh, blow tea!" I muttered. "De Valerie's just gone out—he turned up the slope, I believe. I suppose Tommy will look after Yahama all right?"

"Dear boy, we needn't worry over that at all."

I was feeling rather pleased, for I hadn't expected De Valerie to make a move so soon as this. There's nothing worse than hanging about—waiting. The Rotter had obliged us by acting promptly.

Out in the road we could hear his footsteps pacing briskly upon the hard ground. He had taken the direction away from the village—he was walking towards Bannington Moor, the edge of which was only a little distance away.

"It's just as the guv'nor suspected," I murmured. "He's making for the Mount, and he's going to see those Circle scoundrels. Don't talk loudly, for goodness' sake. If he spots that he's being followed he'll give up the whole thing."

"Dear Benny, I'll be as silent as a mouse," declared Montie.

We were wearing ordinary boots with rubber heels, and, as everybody knows, one can walk almost noiselessly shod in that way. It's the heel that makes all the difference. Montie and I were very cautious, too, and we followed De Valerie successfully; he was totally unconscious of our attentions.

The Mount was an old house which had long been deserted. The country people said that it was haunted, but that was all tommy-rot. It was simply in a bad state of repair, and was situated in a bleak spot. So nobody wanted it. Just recently, however, some stranger from London had rented it; and those strangers, as Nelson Lee had discovered, were agents of the Circle of Terror.

The house lay back from the road, near the moor, but it was surrounded by trees. We heard, rather than saw, De Valerie enter the gateway. The fastenings clicked, and footfalls sounded on the hard gravel.

And when Montie and I reached the gate we were just in time to see the front door open. A dim light was back in the house somewhere, and two figures were silhouetted against it—that of De Valerie and a man.

The visitor was admitted at once, and the door closed with a soft thud.

"Dear boy, that is where we fail," murmured Sir Montie. "What can we do now? We can't break in, an' there's no telling how long De Valerie will be —"

"We'll buzz round to the back," I said quickly. "I'd give anything to overhear what De Valerie tells those chaps."

"But that would be eavesdroppin'—"

"Eavesdropping be blowed!" I interrupted. "This isn't a schoolboy matter, Montie. It's a question of life and death, strictly speaking, and anything is permissible. Come on, we mustn't lose a second."

The front of the house was in darkness, and we made our way to the rear quickly and noiselessly. And here a window glowed warmly. Thick red curtains covered it, and we could see nothing—not even a shadow. From within came a low murmur of voices, but it was quite impossible to hear any single word.

"N. G.!" I breathed. "Can't we get in somewhere?"

"Begad! Ain't that askin' for trouble?"

"We don't always get what we ask for," I whispered. "By Jupiter! That window looks rather inviting, doesn't it?"

We silently crept over to a small window which obviously belonged to a larder or store-cupboard. It was closed and fastened, but a pane of glass was broken out, and a piece of brown paper had been pasted over as a substitute.

I broke it gently, felt up, and pushed the catch back. The window, which was of the casement variety, swung open easily.

"My hat! What a piece of luck!" I breathed. "We'd better not both get in, Montie—too risky altogether. You wait out here, on guard."

"But, Benny boy, you're running into danger—"

"That can't be helped," I cut in. "Besides, you're out here in case of emergencies. If you hear horrible yells you'll know that I've been collared. That's where you'll come in. But I shall get out all right. Don't move from this window unless you're absolutely forced to."

"Trust me, old boy!"

He gave me a hoist up, and I was through the window in a couple of seconds. De Valerie himself hadn't been in the house over a minute, and this early success was very gratifying.

I found myself, as I had expected, in a big cupboard, with store shelves all round. The door opened easily, and I saw that I was in a wide passage. At the end a stream of light came from beneath a door.

I stole up on tip-toe, holding myself ready for instant flight if necessary. I had already found that the cupboard door was provided with a lock, and I placed the key on the inside. In the event of pursuit I could delay the men for a sufficient length of time to allow me to escape.

I felt my way cautiously along the wall, feeling for any obstructions. But I soon arrived at the door, and stood listening intently. De Valerie's voice was plainly audible, and also those of two men.

"Then the boy is all right?" came an angry inquiry.

"Not harmed in the least," De Valerie said. "That stuff doesn't seem to have worked—although that's not my fault. I'm fed-up with the whole business, if you want to know the truth. I didn't bargain for all this confounded——"

"You were paid to do this work, and you have failed!"

"I haven't failed!" said the Rotter hotly. "I carried out the instructions to the letter, and if the stuff didn't have effect, that's not my fault. You told me that Yakama would be harmlessly drugged, so that you could get hold of him during the night. I was surprised to see him come down to breakfast."

"You have failed——"

"Don't I keep telling you that I haven't?" declared De Valerie angrily. "I was a silly fool to have anything to do with the beastly affair. But I shall have to go on with it now, because you've got hold of me. Why didn't you take Yakama away, as you said you would? I don't care a hang what happens to him,

but as he wasn't coming to any harm, I didn't see anything wrong in——"

"Silence, boy!" grated one of the other voices. "Let me think for a moment."

I was thinking, too.

I had already heard sufficient to tell me that De Valerie, rotter though he was, had no knowledge of the true plot.

He had been told, it seemed, that the bulb arrangement contained nothing but a harmless drug. The silly ass had been duped, as the gov'nor had suspected. He was more of a fool than a knave. He had been dazzled, probably, by the large sum offered for his services.

The Circle agents must have learned that De Valerie was due at St. Frank's a few days before Yakama, and had probably suggested the thing to him in the train, on his way down to the school. And De Valerie, having gone thus far, couldn't back out.

As I well remembered, he had chucked money about freely on his arrival—and a fresh batch had arrived only that morning. These Circle men had expected their dupe to do his part. Of course, he'd done it, but the result wasn't at all satisfactory. That, however, was Nelson Lee's doing.

"I cannot understand it, De Valerie," the harsh voice exclaimed. "The only explanation is that you did not press the bulb as I directed. When we arrived we found Yakama wakeful, so we could not effect the plans we had laid."

"Couldn't you have drugged him again?" demanded De Valerie warmly.

"Not without creating a commotion—which would have been fatal."

This, I could guess, was merely for De Valerie's benefit. The men hadn't been near the school; they had no intention of kidnapping the Japanese boy. They were merely keeping up the story they had originally told to De Valerie.

Naturally, they would have had a different yarn to spin if Yakama had been found dead in his bed. In all probability, they would have accused De Valerie of having given the victim an overdose of drug. I expect that was the fixed plan. In any case, De Valerie would have been made the scapegoat. These Circle men would have accused him of causing Yakama's death—thus keeping his lips sealed.

It was very cunning—but it hadn't worked. And the Circle agents were furious to think that their plans had miscarried. They assumed that De



As Nipper listened intently at the keyhole, he heard one of the men say :
" You were paid to do this work, and you have failed ! " — (See page 16)

Valerie had bungled—and I couldn't blame them for having that idea. There was no reason for them to suspect that the poison had been removed.

"Tell me, boy, when did you accomplish your task?" asked the voice of the second man—a quieter, more refined voice.

Just about half-past twelve," replied De Valerie.

"Was Yakama asleep?"

"I suppose so. I didn't go in to see."

"What did you do in the boxroom?"

"Why, I pressed the bulb, as I had been told."

"Did you press it hard?"

"As hard as I could."

"Slowly or quickly?"

"Slowly, with a steady pressure."

"H'm! Then it's most extraordinary that the drug failed," said the man.

"There is one of two things to conclude—indeed, only one thing. You did not do your part properly——"

"I did—I tell you I did!" shouted De Valerie furiously.

"Don't yell like that, you young brute!" snapped the man. "You have failed in this, and you must hold yourself in readiness to carry out other orders."

I heard De Valerie grunt.

"You said that there was one of two things to conclude——"

"I dismissed the other at once," put in the man. "It came to my head that Yakama may, possibly, have been out of his bed at the time. But, even if that was the case—and such a thing was most improbable at that hour—he would have been affected upon laying his head on the pillow."

I could easily read the man's thoughts. In such an event as he described, Yakama wouldn't have been killed, but he would have been badly affected—and this could not have escaped notice in the morning. The fact that Yakama was absolutely unharmed afforded these men much speculation and worry.

I couldn't help seeing the somewhat humorous nature of the situation. These three in the room were quite in the dark as to the cause of the failure. But I, listening outside, could have explained matters in a twinkling, had I so chosen.

Needless to say, I didn't choose!

"Well, what's to be done?" De Valerie asked abruptly.

"You had better take your leave," re-

plied the man with the harsh voice. "But remember this, young fellow. You've had a big sum of money, and you have given no satisfaction for it. We haven't done with you yet——"

"Hang it all, I've finished!" protested De Valerie.

"Oh, no, you haven't—not by any means! You must be prepared to act in another way, later on—this week, probably. You will receive instructions in due course."

"What instructions?" demanded De Valerie.

"That is sufficient—for the present."

"But I want to know——"

"Tut-tut! I can't bother with you now," interjected the man testily. "Go back to the school, and await our summons. And, remember, keep your mouth shut. If a word of this leaks out it will be you who will suffer—not us."

I stepped back quickly, for De Valerie would open the door in a moment, and I had no wish to be caught. A door was close beside me, half open. And, in a jiffy, I was concealed in the darkness of the room. Only just in time, for the door of the other apartment opened, and De Valerie and one of the men emerged, and went along the hall.

The door slammed, and the man came back along the hall, re-entered the room, and his voice was again audible. With great care I emerged. Perhaps I took too much care, for I attempted to pull the door to after me. It gave a loud creak, and I stood stock still, startled.

Then, as I heard a chair being pushed back with a jerk, I turned swiftly, and fled. Owing to that fatheaded blunder of mine, I had given the alarm. I oughtn't to have touched the silly door at all!

Then, all of a sudden, disaster came.

My foot, or rather, the toe of my boot, caught upon the hedge of a loose board. It must have been that, for there was no other obstruction of any sort. At all events, I went headlong, and my face hit the floor with a thud. For the life of me I couldn't help letting out a yell of agony. When a chap falls bang on his nose he knows it! (That's a pun, but it wasn't meant to be!)

And, even as I was scrambling up, half dazed, there was a quick patter of feet behind me. My arms were seized in a fierce grip, and I was held tight. In that one second I felt thankful that good old Montie was outside!

CHAPTER V.

(Told by Sir Montie Tregellis-West.)

IN WHICH I DO GREAT THINGS, BUT COME A FRIGHTFUL CROPPER IN THE END!

SOMEHOW, I had an idea that there was going to be trouble—I had, really. I didn't like Bennett going into the house at all. It seemed to be too frightfully risky, to my mind.

He was looking for trouble—and he found it, begad!

Nipper had been gone for quite a little time. I'm bothered if I know whether to put his name down as "Bennett" or "Nipper." I always called him Bennett, of course, but I suppose I'd better put his real name down here. No reason why I shouldn't, is there?

Well, he had been inside the house for a while, and I was out in the cold, freezing. I couldn't move about much, because I was afraid of making a din. And it would have been simply appalling if I had caused an alarm. Nipper would have suffered—not me.

I heard a door open on the other side of the house, and then it closed with a slam. Just for a minute I was quite startled.

"Begad! That must have been Do Valerie," I told myself. "He must have just gone. But what about Benny? I hope the idiot hasn't got into any shockin' trouble. The very thought is startlin'!"

But as nothing else happened I calmed down again. In fact, I expected to see Nipper come out at any minute. You can't imagine what a terrific shock I got when I heard him yell.

It was followed, almost at once, by a second shout. But this was smothered almost in a second, and the harsh tones of a man's voice came to my ears.

"Oh, glory!" I gasped. "He's been collared! I knew it would happen—I knew there was goin' to be somethin' appallin'!"

Just for an instant I stood still, thinking of about fifty things all at once. But this wasn't any good. They all got mixed up, and my brain simply throbbed. So I shook myself and clenched my fists.

I didn't think of my own danger. I didn't want to rush away from the place. At the same time, I wondered if it would be better for me to hurry off to get help. But where?

There were no houses between the Mount and the school, except a few cottages. I couldn't very well get help at those. Besides, the position was a queer one—amazingly queer.

Nipper hadn't any right in the house, strictly speaking, and if I brought somebody else into the thing he might get into awful trouble. There's no telling in matters of that sort.

No, the only thing was to act on my own judgment.

Then it struck me that I was in a horrid position myself. I stood just outside the window, and if the men came into the cupboard they'd spot me in a tick. But everything was quiet now. They seemed to have gone to another part of the house. All the same, I shifted my position.

After passing through a rustic gateway, I found myself in the old garden—a wild wilderness of a place. It had been left to go to rack and ruin for years. Underfoot there were dead leaves from a dozen autumns. But these were all frozen stiff into the ground, and I didn't make any noise as I moved.

I didn't exactly know where I was going, but there was a hazy idea in my mind that Nipper might have been taken to the other side of the house. Perhaps he was being imprisoned in an empty room.

But then, as I was moving along the wall, I saw a faint flicker of light come upwards—out of the ground itself. Begad! I was so surprised that I stood stock still.

The light was unsteady, and yellowish. It appeared to come out of the ground quite close to the wall of the house. And, at the same time, I heard voices. What on earth could it mean?

But then I jumped to it. Of course, the light was coming from a grating, and poor old Nipper was being placed in a cellar! You know the kind of cellar I mean. One of those with a sort of shoot leading upwards, an iron grating covering the top.

Trembling with excitement, I moved quite near. By kneeling down I could see into the cellar distinctly. And there, at the far end, was Nipper. His hands and feet were bound with rope, and there was a thick woollen scarf tied all round his face. Two well-dressed men were bending over him, one of them holding a candle.

"Infernal young busybody!" I heard

one of the men say. "You'll stay there now—until we decide what to do with you. I don't think you'll get back to the school to-night, my fine fellow!"

"Begad! What a position!" I murmured to myself.

But I wasn't alarmed, and I wasn't even startled. Now that I knew where Nipper was all my calmness returned. I'm not such a cool chap as Nipper tried to make out, but I don't often lose my head. Now and again, when things get wrong, I become somewhat flurried—but it's only for a second.

I saw the men go out of the cellar by means of some stone steps. A door slammed, and bolts were shot. And after that came absolute silence. I wondered how it was that I had been so lucky. I hadn't any trouble at all in locating my unfortunate chum.

But now, what could I do?

There was a heavy iron grating between us, and he might just as well have been in prison. He couldn't do a thing to help himself, anyhow. I didn't risk whispering down to him. It wouldn't have been any good, anyhow, for he couldn't have replied. So I just came to a decision.

It's easy enough to guess what that was. The only thing to do was to get the grating loose, and to slip down into the cellar. That sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But just consider the difficulties.

The grating was solid, and it was rusted into its seating, and absolutely immovable. Besides this, it was frozen—and I expect you know what a frightful job it is to move anything heavy that's frozen in that way.

The only tool I had was my pocket-knife. Anybody with any sense will admit that I couldn't shift a half-hundredweight with a pocket-knife! Naturally, I didn't try. I had more respect for my pocket-knife than that.

I gripped the bars, and pulled and wrenched. I tried upwards and sideways, and everything else, but I couldn't shift the thing a mite.

This exertion had the effect of warming me up—but it didn't have any other effect. I paused at last, realising that I was only wasting a frightful amount of valuable energy.

"This won't do," I gasped breathlessly. "What I want is a crow-bar."

I looked round me vaguely. I didn't expect to see a crow-bar lying about any-

where, but I wanted inspiration. As a matter of fact, I saw nothing. The darkness hemmed me in. The wind sighed rather mournfully through the leafless branches of the trees.

My spirits began to droop again. I had been telling myself that everything would soon be perfectly all serene. I decided that gratings were extremely nasty things—especially when they're old and rusty.

If I had sat there all night I couldn't have done any good. The only thing was to get up and go in search of a crow-bar. This seemed a hopeless sort of task, and I didn't expect to gain any success. You can't find crow-bars knocking about just when you want them.

A thick stick wouldn't be any good, because I couldn't wedge it in anywhere. Besides, it wouldn't have been strong enough. A spade, or a fork—but they weren't strong enough, by any means.

Oh, dear! I felt hot with helplessness. There was Nipper, just on the other side of that grating, and I couldn't possibly get at him! It was something like a nightmare—when a fellow keeps reaching for something, and it always eludes him.

I crept about the garden, after carefully marking the place where the grating was situated in my mind. I must have spent over a quarter of an hour in that way, and when I had finished I leaned against an old fence, and tried to think.

I concluded that my only course was to hurry away for help—and I'd wasted heaps of time, too. My hand touched something cold and frosty. I started. It felt like iron!

In a second I had twisted round, and was examining the fence. Then I made a discovery which filled me with joy. My goodness! I jumped when I saw what I had been leaning against.

It was a rustic fence all right, but it had been built over an old iron railing. I suppose the ironwork had got old and twisted, and looked ugly. And so one of the bygone tenants had covered it with rustic work. That's quite a common dodge, I believe.

It seemed to be made of thick tubing—gas barrel, I expect. Anyhow, I grabbed a length of it, and pulled. It seemed firm at first. But then, when I used leverage, it gave considerably.

"Begad! Will it come," I panted.

I gave a mighty heave, using all my strength. The next second I was on my

back, and a dull, metallic sort of thud sounded. The confounded piece of tube hadn't been fixed at all! It must have been rusted through at the end for years, and was only just holding on.

I scrambled up, and found that the piece I had freed was about five feet long, and seemed quite sound in the main. Without wasting another second I hurried to the house, and found the grating without difficulty.

My fears were soon at rest—for I had a horrible thought that the iron wouldn't go between the bars. But it did, and I put gentle pressure on to it, using it as a lever. But I wasn't out of the wood yet.

For a long time the grating showed no sign of budging. The gas-barrel, on the other hand, began to bend.

And so I altered my tactics. I went all round systematically, putting pressure on every side. And, at last, I felt the first sign of movement. The rusty grating was being released from its seating.

Once a corner of it was loose, the rest was easy. Almost before I expected it, the heavy bars came up, and I was able to put my fingers beneath. Then, with a heave, I lifted the grating until it rested against the wall of the house.

"Ripping!" I murmured triumphantly.

I didn't care to think what my hands were like. I'd scratched them in several places, and they were all over rust and mud. They'd be rough for a week! The thought was so awful that I dismissed it at once.

The next thing was to get down into the cellar. This was easy enough, for the well wasn't so very deep, and by lowering myself down, my feet soon found the brickwork. I simply slithered the rest of the way, and landed in the cellar with a thud.

"Are you here, dear boy?" I gasped.

A low mumble answered me. I felt my way across, and my fingers encountered Nipper's bound form. In less than ten seconds I had dragged the muffler from his head and face. He gave a little gasping sigh.

"Montie! You old bounder!" he whispered.

"Begad! There's a greetin'—"

"My dear old son, you're splendid!" he murmured. "How the dickens did you manage to find me? I'd given up all hope—I thought that you'd be collared next!"

"Didn't you hear me fiddlin' with the gratin', dear boy?"

"Grating? What grating?"

"I got in here from the garden——"

"By Jingo! You ingenious beggar!" murmured Nipper joyfully. "So that's what you've been doing. Thanks, Montie, you're a brick!"

"Dear boy, don't talk rot!" I protested.

"But I won't ask you any questions now," went on Nipper. "Those rotters collared me, and shoved me down here. I suppose you saw the light?"

"Yes; it was streamin' out, an' gave me the clue, you know," I explained. "I shall begin to feel like a detective before long, begad!"

Nipper chuckled.

"You've got the makings of one in you, old man," he said. "But we'd better clear out of this as soon as we can. These chaps are agents of the Circle of Terror, don't forget, and they're absolutely ruthless. They'd kill us for two pins!"

"Begad! Would they really?" I gasped. "For two pins, Benny? That's shockin'ly poor payment for such work——"

"Great Scott! Can't you be serious?" hissed Nipper. "Untie these strings, for goodness' sake."

Nipper was soon freed, and he gripped my hand tightly. Then, without delay, we moved over to the grating. Escape was perfectly easy. We had only to slip out, and we should be on the road in less than two minutes.

"You first, Montie," murmured Nipper.

"Nothin' of the sort, Benny boy——"

"Oh, all right—just as you like!"

Nipper scrambled up with my help, and gripped the edge of the grating. He hoisted himself slowly and steadily. And then, with fearful suddenness, he released his hold, and we both tumbled headlong backwards.

Crash!

The grating clanged down with a noise which sounded absolutely deafening. It must have been heard over every corner of the house.

"Great goodness!" I panted. "What happened?"

Nipper jumped up, breathing hard.

"It was my fatheaded fault!" he hissed. "You ought to have gone up first, Montie. You knew where the

grating was, and I didn't. What a thundering ass I was!"

"But—but how——"

"Why, I touched it, and I felt it coming down," breathed Nipper huskily. "I simply had to leave go. My fingers were on the edge, and they would have been crushed to bits if I'd kept my hold."

"By glory, so they would! You did the right thing, Benny."

"Quick! We haven't got a second."

Nipper raised himself again, and stood on the well of the grating. He was just able to reach the iron bars. I heard him gasping as he heaved, and I wondered how long it would be before the Circle men came."

"Oh, lor', I can't budge it—I can't budge it!" exclaimed Nipper hoarsely. "I'm not tall enough to get any purchase, and the rotten thing's jammed. We're trapped, old man—and it's all my fault!"

"Ain't it cheerin'?" I said calmly.

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Nipper. "Can't you realise that we're absolutely diddled? Get up here beside me, and see if you can help. I might be able to get on to your shoulders."

"There ain't no room for me, dear fellow."

All the same, I tried to squeeze my way up. It couldn't be done, however, and I dropped back helplessly.

"Oh, how rotten—how awfully rotten, Montie!" exclaimed Nipper. "Thank goodness, Tommy Watson is guarding Yakama all right. We needn't worry about him. But if we could only get out——"

"Whatever happens to us, old man, Tommy will stick to Yakama," I said quietly. "These men don't seem to have heard the crash, an'—— Begad! They're here!"

For, while I was speaking, I heard soft footfalls behind me. The next second I was gripped from behind, and flung to the floor with tremendous force. Nipper jumped into the cellar from the well of the grating, and rushed to the rescue. But the darkness caused him to run into the very arms of our attackers.

It was all over in two minutes.

We found ourselves completely overpowered. Our hands and feet were bound, and then a light was brought. The two men I had seen before were looking alarmed and hot, and their eyes gleamed brutally.

"So you thought you'd get away, eh?" snarled one of them. "How did you get that grating up, you young dog?"

I had an idea the man was addressing me, but I didn't take any notice. He grabbed my shoulder roughly, and shook me until my head was in danger of falling off.

"Begad! What a horrid feelin'!" I gasped.

"Who are you, boy?" he demanded angrily.

"Oh, I thought you knew," I said. "I'm a young dog, ain't I?"

"I don't want any of your infernal sauce!" rapped out the man. "Here, Ratley, search the young cub's pockets!"

This didn't take them long—but their pains were rewarded. As it happened, I had written a letter to my uncle, Lord Westbrooke, and it was still in my pocket, ready for the post. It was only a few lines of no importance—a request for a war-time remittance, in fact.

The men tore it open without a scruple, and hastily read it. They found nothing else on me except my pocket-book, with a few currency notes in it—the last of my dwindling stock—and some odds and ends.

"This kid seems to be a baronet," said the man who had been called Ratley. "Well, it's his own fault if he suffers; he shouldn't interfere in things that don't concern him!"

Of course, the men believed that we were a couple of silly schoolboys. That's just where they were wrong. I won't deny that we were schoolboys, but we weren't silly. At least, Nipper wasn't. And, strictly speaking, he wasn't a schoolboy at all! The rascals thought that we were of no importance whatever.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Ratley suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked the other man.

"I have just thought of something—this letter has put the idea into my head," said Ratley, with a keen look. "Do you remember what these boys said as we were coming in? 'Tommy Watson is guarding Yakama,' or something to that effect. Come upstairs—we must talk this over at once!"

"We'd better make these cubs secure first!"

Our bonds were tightened until they hurt us, and our faces were muffled. It wasn't even possible for us to talk. We were in a fearful predicament, and no

mistake. I seemed to have made matters worse, instead of better. But, be-
gad, I had only acted for the best.

We were left by ourselves in total darkness. Nipper tried to speak, but couldn't manage it, and so we lay there, side by side, miserable and in pain. The cold, too, was intense.

What did that man mean? What idea could my letter have suggested? I couldn't quite make it out, but I had a dim fear that something bad was going to happen. Were they going to trick poor old Tommy in some way?

Were they going to use that letter of mine for some beastly purpose? I couldn't get the hang of things at all, so I gave up thinking. Nipper and I could do nothing but wait. All idea of escape was out of the question.

And so we waited, rather hopelessly.

CHAPTER VI.

(Set down by Tommy Watson.)

THE TRAP WHICH DIDN'T SUCCEED—NELSON
LEE AND I GO TO THE RESCUE.

I WAS very worried, for Nipper and Montie had been away a lot longer than I had expected, and De Valerie had already come back. Why hadn't Nipper and Montie come back? I thought that something had happened, but didn't know what. I was worried. Why didn't they come back? Something must have happened.

(Note by Nipper.—After reading the above manly effort by old Tommy, I decided that he wasn't cut out to be an author. So, from this point, I'm going to put his story into ship-shape for him. He'll be able to tell the main facts, of course, but I shall make it read smoothly. As I told him, he couldn't expect anybody to stick stuff of that sort! Tommy was quite wild, but I remained firm.)

The fact that De Valerie had returned to St. Frank's told me that his mission—whatever that was—had been accomplished. And, naturally, I was on the look-out for Nipper and Sir Montie.

After half-an-hour had passed, and they still failed to put in an appearance, I became somewhat worried. But it was still early in the evening, and lots of things might have happened to delay them.

Yakama was with me in Study C. He was puzzling over his prep., for the

broggar seemed to revel in work. That was rather remarkable, for most of the fellows revelled in getting out of work!

I had done my prep., and just mooned about uneasily. I hadn't actually seen De Valerie, but I had heard him talking out in the passage. I had also heard Handforth dilating at great length upon De Valerie's physical appearance, his lack of manners, and his low mental powers. Handforth, apparently, had a grievance against De Valerie, and was airing it in the passage for the benefit of anyone who happened to be passing. There was no doubt whatever that De Valerie had returned!

At last the door of Study C opened, and Edward Oswald Handforth's unlovely head projected itself into the room. He looked round inquiringly.

"Hallo! Where are those other asses?"

"There's one at the door," I said snappily.

"Are you calling me an ass?" demanded Handforth warily.

"Yes, ass! I am, ass!"

Handforth sniffed.

"Can't expect politeness here," he grunted. "Jappy seems to be jolly busy over those rotten books. Like work, I suppose?"

"It is a glorious enjoyment to work—is it not?" asked Yakama smilingly.

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Handforth. "You may think it glorious, but I don't. In my opinion, prep. ought to be abolished! I've a good mind to get up a deputation to the Head!"

"Oh, rats! What are you growling about?" I asked irritably.

"Well, that cad De Valerie upset me," said Handforth. "Didn't you hear what he said as I passed him in the passage? Told me that my head wasn't so good as a bullock's! Said that I had got a carcass like an elephant!"

I grinned.

"Well, he wasn't far wrong," I remarked. "Everybody knows it, Handforth."

Handforth slowly and deliberately commenced to roll up his sleeves. This was quite a habit of his. He seemed to think that the action was most impressive, and would bring forth a hasty apology.

But I grinned all the more, walked across the study, and gave him a shove. He floundered into the passage, and sat down with a bump.

"None of your silly rot, Handy," I said easily. "That sleeve-rolling-up business may work all right with the fags—Hullo, what the dickens are you doing in the House, Warren?"

The school-porter was coming along the passage, and he halted before the door of Study C. Handforth, who was bent on dire revenge, found his way blocked by six feet of bulky humanity. So, with a snort, he took himself off down the passage. Perhaps he thought it was the wisest thing to do.

"I've got a letter for you, Master Watson," said the porter, entering the study.

"A letter for me?" I asked curiously.

"That's right, young sir," said Warren, who was quite a decent chap, as porters go. "It was just given to me at the gates. It's urgent, so I hears. An' I brought it in right away. The gent give me half-a-crown, too."

"The gent?" I asked quickly.

"I didn't see who he was, but he was a real swell," replied Warren. "Told me to bring this letter right in."

"Why, it's from Montie!" I ejaculated in surprise, as I glanced at the writing on the envelope. "All right, Warren. Thanks!"

The porter took his departure, and I looked at the letter curiously. What had happened? Why had Montie written to me? Yakama was writing busily, and was engrossed in his work. I tore open the flap, and took out a sheet of Montie's own notepaper—a few sheets of which, I knew, he always carried in his pocket-book.

I read the note with considerable astonishment. It must have been hurriedly written, to judge by the writing. It just said:

"Dear Tommy,—Bennett and I have been doing things. Can't explain now, but we want you to bring Yakama to the old stile against the twin oaks as soon as you can. It's very important. We'll be waiting there for you. Come straight away, but don't tell anybody else. Something very unexpected has happened; but you'll know all about it when you see us—only bring Yakama without losing a minute. MONTIE."

"By Jingo," I exclaimed breathlessly, "I knew that there was something in the wind! What the dickens can those two asses have been up to? I say, Jappy!"

Yakama—who was already known throughout the Ancient House as "Jappy," looked up, with a smile.

"It is the excitement which has gripped you, Watson," he said.

"Well, I'm a bit excited," I admitted. "Look here! I've got a note here from Montie. He and Bennett want me to take you up the road for some reason. I suppose you're game?"

Yakama beamed.

"My understanding of the English is thorough, I believe," he said softly; "but it is your words that are strangely put, Watson. I am game? I was under the impression that 'game' meant football or cricket—"

"I mean, are you willing to come?" I interrupted. "It's urgent, you know."

"It is Montie who writes?"

"Yes. He wants me to take you."

"Then I will go with the splendid willingness," smiled Yakama. "If the august Tregellis-West and the great Bennett wish for my company, I should be the impolite fellow to refuse. Let us go, Watson!"

"Good!" I said. "We'll buzz down to the cloakroom."

I stuffed Montie's letter into my pocket, and we both left Study C, and hurried down to the cloakroom. Most of the fellows were at prep., and the passages and lobby were empty. It was after locking-up, but a detail like that wasn't worth considering. We could easily slip out through the masters' gate.

We emerged into the Triangle, and found the air to be sharp, with a biting wind cutting into our faces. The ground was hard beneath our feet, and glistened in the reflected light from the many windows.

"Come on, my son!" I said briskly. "We must hurry!"

"I will go at the greatest speed you require," said Yakama willingly.

I was thinking of Montie's note. He certainly must have written it in a hurry, because the writing looked more sprawly than his usual fist. And it was queer that he and Nipper should want me to take Yakama to the old stile! Why the dickens couldn't the fatheads have come right to the school?

Just before we reached the masters' gate, I came to a halt—a sudden halt. I stood still, thinking deeply. A rather startling idea had entered my head.

"It is not in this way that we shall hurry, Watson," said Yakama gently.

"Hold on a minute!" I exclaimed.

"I'm wondering, Yakama! Do you think that letter was all right? Oh, but you wouldn't know! You're not familiar with Montie's fist like I am. It's thundering funny, all the same!"

The idea had become a strong suspicion. A shiver seemed to go down my back as I stood there. Was everything all right? Nipper had warned me very impressively not to leave the school grounds with Yakama; and now Montie had sent me a note, telling me to take the Japanese boy up to the stile!

Why hadn't Nipper written himself? He was with Montie—that was certain—and somehow—Oh, I didn't know what to think. But vaguely I had an idea that there was something wrong somewhere!

And then in a second I decided what to do.

"By George, I'll go to old Algy!" I told myself. "He'll know!"

A feeling of relief came over me as I thought of Mr. Alvington. I couldn't quite think of him as anybody else but Mr. Alvington, although he was really Nelson Lee, the famous detective.

"Come on, Jappy!" I said briskly. "We'll go to old Alvy, and ask his advice. I believe there's something queer about this affair!"

"There is no pretence that I comprehend, but I will willingly go with you to Mr. Alvington," said Yakama. "But do you think the esteemed Housemaster will wish us to bother him in his great labours at this hour?"

"Oh, he'll not be bothered!" I declared.

We re-entered the Ancient House, and walked straight to Nelson Lee's study. I knocked rather nervously, for, although I knew everything, I couldn't help feeling a bit awed in the Housemaster's presence. Every junior does.

"Oh, it's you, Watson?" said Mr. Alvington, as I entered. "Why have you brought Yakama here?"

"I haven't brought him, sir," I said—"at least, I did bring him. But I want to speak to you about something else. Bennett and Tregellis-West went out just after tea. They followed De Valerie somewhere."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Ah, has anything happened?" he asked keenly.

"I don't know, sir, exactly," I replied. "But De Valerie came in about three-quarters-of-an-hour ago. I was expecting the others, but they didn't

turn up. Then I got this note from Montie."

"A note from Montie?"

"Yes, sir. Warren brought it."

"Who gave it to Warren?"

"A man at the gate, sir."

"A man?" asked Nelson Lee quickly.

"A man, Watson?"

"That's what Warren said, sir."

I handed over the note, and Mr. Lee took it, with a keen expression in his eyes. He looked over it rapidly, and then took a deep breath. When he looked up at me, there was a grim expression in his eyes.

"Why did you come to me, Watson?" he asked quietly.

I hesitated.

"Well, sir, I thought you'd better know," I replied.

"Nothing else?"

"It—it was rummy, sir—that's all!"

"In short, you suspected that all was not right?"

"I had an idea that way, sir," I replied. "I was just starting off with Yakama when I suspected things. It seemed jolly strange that Montie should write in that way. Did I do right in coming to you, sir?"

"My dear boy, I cannot commend you too highly," said Nelson Lee. "You have proved yourself to be very shrewd and quick-witted. This note is nothing more nor less than a trap, and it has failed to draw you into it. I am very pleased with you, Watson."

"I'm glad of that, sir," I gasped. "But—but I don't quite understand. Ain't that note from Montie at all? The writing looks a bit squiffy. I—I mean it's not like his usual fist."

"This note was not written by Tregellis-West at all! It is a somewhat clumsy forgery," declared Nelson Lee.

"Thank Heaven you did not take Yakama out, Watson! He would have met with dire disaster had you done so."

I was somewhat bewildered.

"I—I don't quite understand, sir," I stammered.

"I think I can reconstruct what has occurred with a fair measure of accuracy," said Nelson Lee shrewdly. "Nipper and Sir Montie followed De Valerie to the Mount; that, I take it, was his destination. De Valerie came away, but the others remained—scouting round, probably. They have been captured by the Circle's agents."

"Captured!" I gasped.

"I am afraid there is nothing else to

think, Watson," went on Mr. Lee. "It is, indeed, obvious. They were captured, and are now prisoners. The men presumably found this notepaper upon Sir Montie's person, and they concocted this letter, with the intention of decoying Yakama into their clutches. Owing to your astuteness, they have failed."

"But—but what's to be done?" I asked, in alarm.

"Why, we must act without a second's delay!" replied Nelson Lee briskly. "This matter is very serious, Watson, and we must not waste a second! Wait here a few minutes while I take Yakama to Dr. Stafford."

Nelson Lee left the study with the Japanese boy, and I felt my head whirling. Nipper and Montie captured! It didn't seem real; but it must have been. As I stood there waiting, a great wave of thankfulness swept over me.

How glad I was that I had come to Nelson Lee!

He, of all men, would be able to effect a prompt rescue.

CHAPTER VII.

(Related by Nelson Lee.)

THE RESCUE OF NIPPER AND SIR MONTIE—
ANOTHER EPISODE IS CLOSED.

MANY misgivings filled my mind as I returned to my study after leaving Sessue Yakama with the Headmaster. I had explained very little to Dr. Stafford, for there was very little time to waste. It was necessary, however, for me to leave the Japanese boy in safe hands during my absence.

I did not overlook the fact that I was dealing with the Circle of Terror. Perhaps there was a double trap, although that was not probable. It was far better, however, to prepare for emergencies.

I found Watson waiting anxiously for me. I was very pleased with him, for he had shown great shrewdness in coming to me. Many boys in his position would have hurried off without a thought, and then the mischief would have been done.

I had seen at a glance that the handwriting was forged. Moreover, the whole train of events was easy to follow. I was keenly anxious concerning Nipper and Tregellis-West. I was well aware of the ruthless methods of the Circle of

Terror, and I was alarmed for the boys' safety.

"Are we going straight off, sir?" asked Watson eagerly.

"Without a second's delay, my boy," I replied. "Do you know exactly where this stile is?"

"Why, yes, sir! It's just against those two oak-trees that grow close together, just before you get to the Mount."

I nodded.

"We will make for that spot, Watson," I said. "It is on the way to the Mount, and so we shall not go out of our course. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall find two men lurking there—not Nipper and Sir Montie."

"My goodness! What would have happened if I hadn't come to you, sir?"

"I hardly care to think, Watson; but the result would have been appalling," I replied grimly. "In a way, this trick may pan out excellently, for, since these men will be waiting at the stile, they cannot be at the house. We shall thus have a clear field. But come!"

Having donned my overcoat and hat, we passed out quickly. I had a mind to question Warren, but decided to leave it until later. A minute's delay might make all the difference in such an acute situation as this.

Watson and I walked along the road very quickly. The wind had risen somewhat, and was whistling icily through the trees. After we had covered the major part of the distance to the stile, I deemed it advisable to leave the road.

We therefore clambered over a gate, and continued our way under cover of a thick hedge. The meadow we were in was frozen hard, and so walking was easy. The sound of the wind drowned any slight noise we may have made.

The stile was on the other side of the road, and at last we drew opposite to it. I warned Watson not to breathe a word, and told him to take extra care while walking. The twin oaks grew near by, and there was no mistaking the spot.

Through a small gap, I peered across the narrow road. The darkness was not exactly intense, for a few stars were shining through the rifts in the clouds. I set my teeth as I looked across at the stile.

Two tall figures were plainly visible. They were the figures of men, and they were lurking there, ready to pounce out as soon as Watson and Yakama came along. I even caught one or two words which were spoken:

"... sign of them so far."

"Hardly time yet. ... minute or two. ... trick will succeed, never fear."

I smiled grimly.

"I don't think so, my friends," I murmured to myself. "And I don't think you would be so comfortable if you knew who you were dealing with."

I touched Watson lightly, and we walked on without a sound, the hedge concealing us very effectively. There was a bend in the lane a little farther down, and, having reached the end of the meadow, we emerged once more.

"Did you see, Watson?" I murmured.

"Yes, sir. They were men, weren't they? I didn't hear what they said."

"I caught several words, my boy, and our suspicions were fully justified," I said softly. "This is a splendid chance, and we must take full advantage of it. There may be a third man at the Mount, but I don't think so. At all events, we must risk it."

"What are we going to do, sir?"

"We are going to break into the house. We are going to rescue the boys."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Watson excitedly.

We did not walk any longer, but pressed our elbows into our sides, and ran as fast as our feet would carry us. The Mount was only a little way beyond, and we soon saw its dark bulk outlined against the night sky.

All the windows were dark, and the place looked desolate and dreary.

I pushed open the gate, and we ran towards the house. The front windows were shuttered inside, as I saw at a glance. At the rear, however, there were more opportunities.

Without hesitation I drew my revolver, and gave Watson an electric-torch. This was flashed about, and the light shone upon a small window with a pane of glass broken. In its place was a torn piece of paper.

"Do you see, my boy?" I muttered tensely. "The others must have entered by this means. They were captured within the house. You remain out here while——"

"Must I stay outside, sir?" asked Watson, in dismay.

"You may follow me in if you wish," I said quickly. "But be careful, Watson."

We were within the house in less than a minute. It was better to dispense with

all doubt at once, and so I stamped about noisily. No sound came in reply, however. The old house was empty!

"We must search," I exclaimed. "There is very little time at our disposal, for the Circle men may return at any minute. Shout, Watson—shout!"

He lost no time, but yelled lustily.

Only the echo of his own voice came to us, and a dreadful fear began to steal into my heart. Somehow, the Mount seemed to be a place of evil; its sinister aspect made me uneasy and anxious.

What had happened to Nipper and Sir Montie?

Had they escaped already, or had the Circle men——? I clenched my fists and strode down the passage. It was idle to imagine things which might never have occurred.

Watson shouted again and again, a note of anxiety now in his voice. But there was still no response. We were just about to walk on once more—I had an idea of exploring the upper rooms—when I gripped the lad's arm.

"We will give one shout, and then remain quite still," I said tensely.

The shout was given, and then——

From somewhere below us there came a curious, muffled sound. Watson heard it, and he looked up at me with startled eyes. The sound was hardly human—but I recognised it on the instant.

"What—what was it, sir?" asked the boy.

"It was Bennett and Tregellis-West—replying," I said grimly.

"But I didn't recognise their voices——"

"When one is gagged, Watson, it is rather difficult to speak fluently," I went on, striding down the passage. "Ah! This looks like a cellar-door, and both bolts are shot home, you will observe. Things may not be so bad as we thought, after all, my boy."

Watson slipped back the bolts, and pulled the door open.

"Careful—careful!" I exclaimed quickly.

My warning was necessary; for the lad, in his excitement and eagerness, had been about to rush through the doorway. Had he done so, he would have met with a nasty fall. For, immediately on the other side of the door, a flight of steep stone steps led downwards.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Tommy Watson breathlessly.

He flashed the torchlight downwards, and the white beam rested upon two familiar forms.

"There they are!" roared Watson joyfully. "Oh, you bounders! What the dickens have you been up to?"

He simply tumbled down the steps, and I followed him. Nipper and Sir Montie were both sitting up, and, in spite of the perilous nature of the situation, I could not refrain from smiling. The pair were very forlorn as they sat upon the cellar floor. They were bound and helpless, but the very expression of their eyes told me that there was nothing wrong with them.

"How—how did you find us, guv'nor?" panted Nipper, as soon as I had jerked the muffler from his face. "I—I thought that those rotters were going to trick Tommy Watson into bringing Yakama——"

"Watson has proved himself to be very astute," I replied.

"(Oh, rot! I—I mean——" Watson paused and turned red.

"But there is no need to go into those details now," I continued. "Dear me, Montie, your elegant clothes appear to be in a disreputable state. And, upon my soul! What on earth have you been doing to your hands?"

They were grimy, and had evidently been bleeding in several places. Tregellis-West gazed at himself in the light of the torch with an expression of pained surprise in his eyes.

"Begad! Ain't it shockin'," he exclaimed dolefully. "Ain't it simply appallin', dear fellows? I shall have to get back before anybody sees me—I shall, really. I'm in a frightful state of——"

"Oh, blow your state, Montie," interrupted Nipper. "I want to hear what's been happening. Montie and I have been having some rare excitement, guv'nor," I went on. "I was collared first, he came to the rescue, and then he fell into the enemy's hands, too!"

Nipper outlined the events very briefly while we were untieing the prisoners' bonds. I listened with interest.

"De Valerie's just a tool, as you said, sir," went on Nipper. "I overheard a lot—enough to tell me these Circle rotters have stuffed De Valerie up with some fat-headed yarn. The silly ass hasn't had any idea of what he's been doing. He's not so bad as I thought he was."

"Well, Nipper, we must enter into this later on," I said briskly. "There is no

time to waste now. I may as well explain, however, that your rescue has been brought about mainly because of your captors' over-eagerness to get Yakama into their hands. They sent a forged note to the school—supposedly from Tregellis-West—and Watson was nearly deceived. Happily, he had good sense enough to come to me before taking Yakama into the trap."

Sir Montie gazed at me indignantly through his pince-nez.

"Begad! What frightful nerve, you know!" he exclaimed. "They forged a letter—in my handwriting? I shall have to——"

"You'll have to calm down, Montie," I interrupted sharply. "Our best policy is to leave this house without a second's loss of time. Once outside, we shall lie in wait, and I will settle upon some plan."

Accordingly, we left the cellar, the boys greatly excited. Nipper and Montie were both chilled with the cold, but soon warmed themselves up by active exercise. Just as we were moving down the passage I came to a sudden halt.

"Quiet!" I hissed tensely.

My three young companions stood stock still and held their breath. I had not been mistaken; for, clearly and distinctly, we heard the sound of a key turning in the lock of the front door. The two Circle agents had returned!

"In here—quick!" I muttered sharply.

We all entered the room, and I pulled the door to until it was nearly closed. The men came down the hall talking angrily and with many oaths. They had been disappointed, and there was some excuse for their impatience. They went right past, and I heard the bolts of the cellar door being shot back.

"By James!" I murmured. "I—I wonder——"

I crept out, and saw, in the dim gloom, the two men descending the cellar. In less than one second they would discover the truth. But in that second I acted. Speeding along the passage, I gripped the door of the cellar, and slammed it to. The bolts shot into place.

Alarmed cries came from below, and Nipper and his chums rushed up.

"My hat! You've trapped them!" gasped Nipper.

"The opportunity was too good to be missed, my boy," I replied calmly. "These fellows are now nicely bottled

up, and they will remain below until the police can come——”

“The grating!” ejaculated Montie suddenly.

“What grating?”

“There’s a grating which leads out into the garden,” put in Nipper quickly. “It isn’t fixed in any way, only jammed. Montie and I couldn’t shift it, but those chaps are tall, and they’ll be able to reach up——”

“Good gracious!” I exclaimed, snapping my fingers.

In a bunch we dashed for the rear door, and had some little difficulty in tearing it open. But, at length, we ran round the house. And there, ahead of us, we saw two dim forms pelt away into the darkness. They raced across the garden like shadows, and were swallowed up in the black night.

“Escaped!” roared Nipper. “After ‘em——”

“No, boys—no!” I said sharply. “A chase in this darkness would be doomed to failure. I never attempt a task which is obviously impossible. These men are already out of sight, and we might scour the countryside for hours on end without meeting with the slightest success.”

“Oh, how—how utterly rotten, begad!” said Sir Montie dismally.

“It is unfortunate, certainly,” I said. “But we must accept the fortunes of war, my boys. Although these men have eluded us—owing to a sheer stroke of

ill-luck—I think we may claim all the honours in this affair. Their scheme has been defeated, and we remain the victors.”

A search of the house revealed nothing—not even the slightest clue. And the next day there was no sign whatever of the Mount’s late occupants. They had vanished, and the place was left deserted.

The first trick of the Circle of Terror had failed—and they had no idea as to why their plans had so miscarried. They probably put it down to the chance interference of schoolboys.

Sessue Yakama was safe, and the plot against him was, for the time, dropped. But had the Circle of Terror finished—or would they become active in some other way?

Why, indeed, did they wish to kill Yakama?

Nipper told me all that had taken place—all that he had overheard—and I knew that De Valerie’s duplicity was not exactly criminal. At all events, he was allowed to remain at the school for the time-being—sooner or later, he would have to answer for his misdeeds.

I was positive of one thing. The Circle of Terror would not drop the matter tamely. Before so very long another move would be made. And Nipper and I held ourselves in readiness.

When would the first sign come? And what would it be?

THE END.

Another “Circle of Terror” Yarn,

Under the Title of

“The Mystery ^{of} the Moor Quarry,”

Will appear next week. It deals with the further Adventures of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK’S COLLEGE.

Out On Wednesday.

Price ONE PENNY.

BEGIN OUR NEW SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Hands of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By **CLEMENT HALE.**

The Chief Characters in this Story are:

TED MORRIS, GEORGE GRAY, and his brother JACK, who are the English staff of the Berlin Rovers, a football club in Germany.

OTTO BRACK is a German member of the team. But another German, named

CARL HOFFMAN, is friendly. He advises the three Englishmen to leave Germany at once, as war is imminent. Ted Morris is the only one who takes this Advice. The Grays are betrayed the next night by their landlord Kutz, who brings in the police. They escape, however, by the window, and get into the street. They then take to their heels and the policeman follows.

(Now read on.)

WAR FEVER.

G EORGE GRAY was no coward, nor was his brother Jack devoid of pluck.

Yet a thrill of apprehension ran through them both as they tore through the streets with the echoing cries of the police officer thundering after them.

On they tore to the first turning in the street, Jack keeping pace with his long-striding and stronger brother, for he was light upon his feet and quick.

There they turned and gazed for a moment behind them.

They could see heads thrust out of the upper windows of their lodging-house, could hear whistles screaming.

Kutz's sinister face was turned towards them. They could see him gesticulating wildly. The other heads were capped by the aggressive spiked helmet of the Berlin policeman.

"The traitor," hissed George Gray, shaking his fist at Kutz. "Jack, I'd

give something to have his head within punching distance of my arm. He'd know it."

They braced their energies for a renewed flight.

The policeman whom George had felled so adroitly was lumbering towards them, brandishing his drawn sword in his hand. His helmet lay upon the pavement whence he had just risen.

Ringling curses and threats rang from his lips in guttural German.

In spite of their perilous situation George Gray could not forbear a laugh, so grotesque was the appearance of the lumbering policeman.

Setting back his head and opening his mouth wide, he let forth an echoing peal which made their enemy more furious than ever.

They were recalled to the need for action, however, by hearing a cry behind them.

Round they swung to see a civilian confronting them, a powerfully built man, who sprang at George Gray like a tiger.

Others, alarmed by the cries and the police whistles, were coming from all directions. The street seemed alive.

George looked before and behind him. The policeman with the drawn sword was near at hand. And he meant business.

"Seize the English spies," they heard him roar, and then— Crash!

The scabbard of his sword swung round between his legs, tripped him up as neatly as could be, and caused him to measure his length upon the road.

Encouraged by this bit of luck, George met the man who came at him with a stinging blow in the face that sent him staggering.

Then he and Jack resumed their flight, dodging the half-hearted attempts that were made to arrest them.

On they went, on, on, turning down

another street, then diving into an alley-way, and so through it to one of Berlin's innumerable arteries until they emerged from it into a broader thoroughfare, and so to the Unter Den Linden.

Here they slackened down, panting for breath.

They had run enough. They had shown their pursuers, they believed, a clean pair of heels, and to run in this busy thoroughfare would be to court suspicion.

They dropped into a walk.

"It was a close shave, Jack," said George.

"You're right, old man. And to think that that blackguard Kutz betrayed us."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"We've done with him, unless he crosses our path again, Jack. And, I say, what duffers we were to get ourselves into such a mess? Carl warned us. We ought to have known better, and yet, after the friends we've made in Berlin, who'd have thought——"

"You can't trust 'em, George. There aren't many Germans like Carl—and, I say, shall we have to leave our luggage behind us?"

"I expect so. The sooner we escape from Berlin the better."

At that moment they heard frenzied cheering, and looking ahead of them to ascertain the cause, they saw a whole army of straw hatted Berliners, shouting and cheering madly, waving German flags, and singing at the pitch of their voices.

In a swelling roar came the strains of "The Watch on the Rhine," the Prussian war song. The sounds were taken up and repeated in the opposite direction. They turned and stared. More crowds of straw-hatted men and youths, more flag waving, and more singing of the National song, the very sound of which made George Gray frown.

And apart from the singing crowds they could see groups of four and five and six men, straw-hatted like the rest, with mouths flung wide, yelling like madmen as they came along with arms linked and swept every unoffending and harmless pedestrian from their path as if he or she were dirt.

"It's the war fever, George," muttered Jack.

George Gray frowned. What were

these men made of who dreamt war, taught war, thought war, ate and drank war, and allowed the virus of it to mingle with their blood, driving them to the very borders of insanity?

He watched them while he regained his breath, and then with a pull at Jack's arm, bore him in the direction of the Palace.

When they got there, early though the hour was upon this glorious August morning, they found the gates besieged.

A dozen public meetings were being held at one time. The speakers, with faces inflamed, inspired, their breasts smothered with National favours, were thundering out the doctrine of war to the eager and absorbed crowd.

Among them moved newspaper sellers, carrying news-bills in their hands, and with scores of news-sheets thrust beneath their arms.

"Necessity Knows No Law." Such were the words the placards bore, and George smiled grimly at sight of it.

"These people need a lesson very badly, George," observed Jack, whose face was pale, whose eyes were dull with misgiving, and he sighed.

"And they'll get it, Jack, if Britain enters the war. But we've dodged our enemies. Let's get along to the station and buy our tickets for the journey."

— —

A FRIEND!

SWIFTLY, without a moment's pause, they hurried by the nearest route to the great railway terminus from which they would leave for Holland or Belgium, as the case might be.

Belgium was perhaps out of the question, for already rumours were afoot to the effect that there had been heavy fighting between the German and the Belgium troops, and that the German armies had been safely held at Liege. Were the sinister rumours true? And, if so, since Britain had vowed to support Belgium in the event of invasion, what then?

It was with pulses throbbing and hearts beating more quickly than normal that George Gray and his brother joined a long queue of Englishmen and Englishwomen who were anxious to leave for home.

It seemed an age ere they got to the

ticket office, for every would-be-traveller was plied with innumerable questions.

At last George faced a sour visaged and bumptious official.

"I wish to book a journey to London, for my brother and myself," he began, when the man snapped him short.

"Ah! You are Englishmen, and of fighting age. Have you your passports?"

"Yes."

"Show me."

George presented the vouchers which he had ready, and the man scrutinised them closely, compared the portraits with the originals, and then laughed and shook his head.

"These will not serve," he exclaimed. "You cannot travel with them. Next."

"But——" George began.

"You cannot travel," shouted the official. "You must obtain special permits, and even then I will not guarantee that you'll pass the frontier. We are at war."

"How and where are we to obtain the special permits?" asked George hotly, his cheeks flaming, his eyes flashing.

"That is your affair. Next."

"You German pig," bawled George through the opening of the ticket office, and the official started as if a whip had struck him. He was too astonished to make any adequate reply, and George and Jack walked hurriedly away.

"What's to be done now, George?"

"We'll apply at the British Embassy. Of course, everything will be topsy turvey now there's a war on. Confound the luck! Here, come on,"

They retraced their steps, and again entered the Unter Den Linden.

Here they found the great boulevard so packed with people that it was almost impossible to get along.

The cheering and singing never stopped for a moment. Every time a soldier in the familiar field grey uniform of the Fatherland showed himself, he was pounced upon and lifted shoulder high.

The city had gone stark staring mad.

Slowly they elbowed their way forward, returning with interest the nudges and shoulder thrusts that were meant to bar their way.

So irritated were both the English footballers by this time, that they did not care a straw what became of them.

A man aimed a blow at George with his stick. The sturdy footballer struck him between the eyes in retaliation, pulled

the stick from his grasp, snapped it in two across his thigh, and sent the pieces hurtling through the air.

The enraged German sprang at him.

"You pig!" he snarled.

"You German Hun," shouted George.

"Ah-h!"

The man's eyes flamed, his lips quivered with excitement, and pointing a shaking finger at the Englishmen, the fellow bellowed to the crowd that began to swarm about them. "Look! Look at the English spy! Down with the cursed English! Lynch them! Lynch them!"

George realised in a flash the mistake he had made. In the state of mind the excited crowd were in, a victim would be welcome. They were longing to tear and rend, and already many English residents in Berlin had been hustled and ill-treated by the mob.

George and his brother were pushed and driven from place to place.

Had it not been for the resolute attitude they adopted, they might have been thrown down and trampled to death.

They struck at the faces nearest them, they pushed and they fought, gradually working their way across the broad thoroughfare.

But already George had been hit several times, and his hat been bashed in by the blow of a heavy stick. Jack's face was bleeding from a cowardly blow.

In all that vast crowd they did not appear to have a single friend.

George began to give himself up for lost.

"Jack," he panted. "I'll try and fight a passage for you—get away if you can. We'll meet at the Embassy."

"No, George. I shall stay with you."

"Don't be silly. I'm all right."

George saw an infuriated German swing a stick above his head, and quick as thought he dodged the deadly aim. The stick fell—but not on Gray's head. Instead, it landed full in the face of a shouting German, who fell bleeding to the ground. In a moment the crowd opened up, and the man who had struck the blow bent over the fallen and only half-conscious figure.

This diversion turned the scales in favour of the Englishmen for a moment, and then, before the crowd could attack

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

them again, there came a loud too-tooting of a motor horn, and a splendid car forced its way along the boulevard, driving the mob before it like sheep.

They had either to give way or be run down, and they scattered as well as they were able. Even so, the progress of the vehicle was much hampered, and its advance slow. Gradually it came nearer, and at last it came abreast of George and his brother.

The chauffeur wore a smart livery. The owner, a distinguished-looking man, was obviously not a German.

It seemed that he had seen the scrimmage from a distance, and that he understood. To George Gray's astonishment he beckoned to him, and opened the side door of the car.

"Quick," said he, in English, strongly tinged with an American accent, his face lighting up with a kindly smile. "Jump in—you are not safe in this crowd."

"But, sir——" George began.

"Don't argue. Jump in. Your friend, too."

George looked around him. They were hemmed in on all sides, and the anger of the crowd was rising once more. Their situation was more desperate than it looked.

"Thanks," said the sturdy footballer. "In with you, Jack."

He helped his brother, who climbed into the sumptuous vehicle.

Then he followed, and the door of the car was shut.

"Drive on; get through the mob even if you have to run some of them down," cried the American to his chauffeur.

THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR!

THE order was obeyed, the car moved on, and the cursing and angry Germans were driven left and right before it.

Still the vehicle only moved at a footpace.

Men with furious faces kept pace with it, shrieking at the occupants.

"Down with the English! Down with the English!"

Then a man more daring than the rest, leapt upon the footboard, and craning his neck, spat at them, reviling them with a filthy oath.

George Gray felt that he could have

killed him. Jack rose with an indignant cry, but it was the American who acted.

He rose, and swift as thought, seized the rascal by the throat, shaking him in his fierce grip as a terrier shakes a rat. Then, when he had done enough, he hurled the man clear of the wheels, so that he fell into the road.

"Down with the English spies. Down with the traitors to the Fatherland."

Others sprang upon the footboard, foremost among them an officer who seemed beside himself with rage. He clutched at the American.

"Ah, you shall go to prison for that!" he hissed.

The American struck his hand aside.

"Don't touch me, or you will answer for it," said he, in a voice that thrilled with a note of sternness. "I am the American Ambassador, and you will interfere with me at your peril."

By this time the car had been brought to a standstill.

Some policemen on duty in Unter Den Linden forced a way to it. They were now appealed to, and listened quietly to the frenzied explanations of the crowd.

One of them turned to the American.

"Your name, sir, if you please."

"I am the American Ambassador. I have just come from the Palace after interviewing the Kaiser. I claim your protection."

The police officer stepped back, drew himself stiffly up as he recognised the Ambassador, and saluted.

"Your pardon, Excellency," he exclaimed, and then issuing an order, he and his men drove the startled crowd back.

"Make way for the American Ambassador," they shouted, and the word was passed. Like magic the crowd melted, till the car was able to proceed, and soon they had swept into a side street, and by means of a detour, quickly reached the American Embassy.

"Say. You Englishmen were looking for trouble," said the Ambassador as he and they got out of the car. "It's not safe for a Britisher to show his face in the open in Berlin these days."

"We are trying to get away, your Excellency."

"Can't you?"

"Not on the passports we hold. We must apply for others."

"H'm, a ruse to detain you in Berlin until after the declaration of war by

(Continued overleaf.)

Britain, which is hourly expected, and then—you will be interned."

"You think there will be war, sir——"

"It is a certainty. Britain's honour is at stake. She can have but one course to pursue."

"Then we are lost."

"H'm, you're in a precious tight corner. No British passport will be honoured. It's useless for you to apply to your Embassy. Your Ambassador is busy packing up. Besides, the place is besieged, and the police watch every man and woman that enters its doors."

"What can we do then, sir?"

The American Ambassador looked fixedly at them.

"Come with me," he cried. And they followed him up the broad flight of steps into the imposing mansion, which was his place of residence. The vestibule was crowded. The audience chamber was packed. All sorts and conditions of English-speaking people were to be found there. Their friend signed to them to follow.

Then, when they were alone in his study, he questioned them, and learnt their story with interest. He seemed to be much taken with them, and smiled grimly when their story was told.

"Say, it seems to me that you require a friend in this crisis," he declared. "And so, as it's not safe for you to be

abroad, I propose that you spend the night here as my guests. I'll get your papers made out for you, and authorised by the German High Authorities, so that even in the event of an outbreak of war with Britain, you may get safely across the frontier. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes; thanks, your Excellency," answered George. "It is more than kind of you——"

"Bah! We will be brothers in arms in this war."

He rang a bell, and when his servant answered, ordered him to show the two strangers to their rooms.

"They stay the night," he declared. And so Jack and George followed a stiff-necked and punctilious man-servant along carpeted corridors, and up a grand staircase, to two simply but comfortably furnished apartments on the third floor, and there they were left alone.

"Jack," cried George enthusiastically, as the door closed upon the manservant. "Great Scott, we are in luck, we are in luck, for it means escape for a certainty now."

But he and his brother did not dream of the many vicissitudes and misfortunes that were to dog their steps and bring them almost to the grave, ere they saw the shores of their native land again.

(To be continued.)

Don't Forget Tommy and Jack!

IF you have not got a chum who would like to read this Story, hand in your copy of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the nearest Post Office, and you will help to give some Soldier or Sailor a pleasant hour. - It costs you nothing, and you will be repaid by the knowledge that you have shared your enjoyment with another—perhaps many others.

*Order your Copy in Advance in order
to make sure of obtaining it, and*

Don't Forget Tommy and Jack!