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THE MYSTERY OF THE MOOR QUARRY!

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE,
introducing "THE CIRCLE OF TERROR." By the Author of "Fullwood's Victory,"
"The Problem of the Copper Frog," "The Mysterious Schoolboy," etc.

December 29th, 1917.

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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.

HANDFORTH WANTS TO PROVE SOMETHING
—AND HEARS A STRANGE MESSAGE.

"THREE-AND-SIXPENCE!"

"Rats! It was four-and-six!"

"I tell you——"

"I don't care what you tell me, you ass! I've got eyes!"

"Fat lot of use they are!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, get on with your tea, you grumbling fathead!"

Edward Oswald Handforth rose from his chair slowly and deliberately. With great care he commenced to roll up his cuffs. McClure watched him with a certain degree of uneasiness, but pretended to be unconcerned.

"Did you call me a gabbling fat-head, Arnold McClure?" asked Handforth grimly.

"You've got ears, ain't you?"

"Did you call me——"

"Yes, I did!" said McClure warmly.

"And so you are, too!"

Handforth pushed a huge fist under McClure's nose, and held it there ominously.

"Do you see that?" asked Handforth, in deadly tones.

"I should be blind if I didn't—it's big enough!" said McClure. "Take it away, you idiot! It wants a good wash, by the look of it."

"By George!" said Handforth, wrathfully, "I'll—I'll——"

"Oh, get on with your tea, for goodness' sake!" interrupted Church testily. "Blessed if you ain't always arguing, Handy. You'll never let a thing rest! You don't want to scrap over the tea-table, I suppose?"

"Of course, you're right as a rule, Handy," said McClure cautiously. "You're a keen chap, as everybody knows. It ain't often that you're wrong in anything. Sit down and try some of this cake."

Handforth thawed, and removed his threatening fist from the vicinity of McClure's nose. McClure winked out of the corner of his eye to Church, and peace and harmony was somewhat restored.

But tea in study D, in the Remove passage at St. Frank's, was generally marred by a few upsets. Handforth, the redoubtable chief of the study, was a fellow who wanted treating with tact. Church and McClure, however, occasionally allowed their real opinion of Handforth to leak out, and ructions followed. A few soothing words generally restored order. As McClure said, Handforth only had to be rubbed the right way and he was as mild as a little lamb.

The great difficulty was in keeping Handforth rubbed. The only possible solution to the problem was to let him

have his own way in everything. And Church and McClure, although long-suffering, were human beings.

"Blessed if I can make you chaps out!" declared Handforth, as he took three-parts of the cake. "You were looking into the shop at the same time as I was. We were all squinting at those fountain-pens, and admiring 'em. And the price on the ticket was as plain as your nose, Churchy—four-and-sixpence."

"Of course, you can stick to that silly idea——"

"Are you still trying to make out that I'm wrong?" asked Handforth warmly.

"I know a figure three when I see one, anyhow!"

"Well, my hat! I thought we'd finished with the thing, and now I'm jiggered if you don't go and start all over again!"

"You silly ass, it was you who started it again!" exclaimed Church. "Look here, Handy, this ought to go by vote. Both McClure and I say that the price was three-and-six."

"Of course it was!" said McClure. "Plain as anything."

Handforth sat back in his chair and glared.

"So you're both against me?" he said bitterly. "It's always the case! You know as well as I do that I'm right, but you go on like this just for the sake of starting a row. Personally, I hate rows and arguments. There isn't a more peaceful fellow at St. Frank's than me—you know that well enough!"

"Oh, my hat! Do we?" asked McClure faintly.

"You jolly well ought to!"

"Then why don't you stop arguing now?" suggested Church. "It's two against one, Handy, and that's generally good enough. But let's shut up about it. You think what you like, and we'll stick to our opinion. We can prove the thing on Saturday, anyhow."

Handforth snorted.

"By that time the giddy pens will be taken out of the window," he declared. "When I know I'm right, I like to have it proved." He jumped up. "By George! I will prove it, too! I'll prove it within ten minutes!"

Church and McClure stared.

"I suppose you can get over to Bannington and back in ten minutes?" suggested Church sarcastically. "Sit down, and don't be an ass."

"No. I'm going to 'phone," said

Handforth firmly. "That's the only way to settle a dispute like this. I'll ring up the blessed firm and ask them straight out. I suppose you'll be satisfied then?"

"We shall, but you won't!"

"A couple of cock-sure asses—that's what you are!" snorted Handforth, making for the door. "Keep that tea hot for me, or somebody's head'll get punched! And don't scoff all the tarts. They're scarce nowadays!"

"Hold on, Handy," exclaimed McClure. "You can't use the telephone now. You'll have to get a master's permission, or a prefect's. They won't be bothered right in the middle of their tea."

Handforth looked at his faithful chums pityingly.

"There's such a thing as 'phoning without getting permission, I suppose?" he asked tartly. "I don't need permission, anyhow. If it wasn't for rotten injustice I should have been a senior long ago!"

Handforth retired, closing the door after him with a bang which sent an icy draught into the cosy study. Church and McClure grinned as they helped themselves to the jam tarts.

"He'll be the death of us one of these days," remarked Church. "It's a good thing he's gone, though. He'll find out that ~~we~~ we were right, after all."

"That won't make any difference," said McClure. "You ought to know Handy by this time. He'll come back and say that he'd always said that the pens were three-and-six! He'll make us in the wrong, I'll bet anything!"

Meanwhile, the hot-headed Handforth stalked down the Remove passage into the lobby. It was a clear, cold evening, and practically everybody in the Ancient House was at tea. Handforth turned into the little visitor's room—which was strictly forbidden to juniors.

In this apartment an extension telephone was fitted. There were several like it at St. Frank's, with a miniature central exchange. Before Handforth could get through it was necessary for him to be put on to the main connection. This, to Handforth, presented no difficulties.

But as he was crossing the room to the instrument, the bell rang sharply. This could only mean one thing. Somebody had been using the 'phone only a few minutes earlier, and had forgotten to inform the "exchange" that he had

finished. In consequence the extension line was "through."

Handforth lifted up the receiver rather impatiently.

"Hallo! Who's that?" he asked.

"Is that St. Frank's College?" came a man's voice.

"Yes—Ancient House," replied the junior. "But you're on the wrong line. I suppose you want the Head, or one of the masters, or the housekeeper——"

"No; I want to speak to a boy named De Valerie," interrupted the voice. "It is rather important. Could you bring him to the 'phone for me?"

Handforth, although somewhat arrogant, was good-natured.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll go and find him. Hold the line until he comes."

"Thank you!"

Laying the receiver down on the table Handforth left the room. Naturally, he grumbled. Handforth wouldn't have been himself if he hadn't grumbled. It was second nature to him.

"Blessed nuisance!" he growled. "Why should I find De Valerie? Why can't the Rotter answer his own telephone calls?"

The question being rather unanswerable, Handforth glared at the floor as he crossed the lobby. He, in common with every other junior at St. Frank's did not like Cecil De Valerie, of Study M.

De Valerie was a mysterious junior in many ways. He was certainly the most unpopular fellow in the Ancient House, and nobody regretted the fact that he generally kept to himself. Although a rascally fellow, he would have nothing to do with Fullwood and Co., who had been, until De Valerie's arrival, the recognised "rotters" of the Ancient House. In time, perhaps, De Valerie would become a member of the Nut's circle. If that ever happened, he would probably attempt to assume the leadership. Cecil De Valerie was, not the fellow to play second fiddle to anybody.

Handforth arrived at Study M, and walked in. The apartment was empty and dark. The visitor snorted, and went along to the common-room. This was also empty. Hubbard and Farman and Owen appeared, but they knew nothing of De Valerie's whereabouts, and didn't care.

So Handforth grumpily returned to the visitor's room. Just as he was about to open the door, Dick Bennett and Sir

Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson entered from the Triangle.

"Dick Bennett," of course, was only an assumed name for Nipper, the cheerful young assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated criminologist. Nelson Lee and Nipper had been at St. Frank's some little time, and were now well established in their unique identities.

"I say, do you know where that ass De Valerie is?" asked Handforth, pausing.

"He was in the gym. a minute ago," replied Nipper cheerfully.

"Oh, rats to him!" growled Handforth. "I'm blessed if I'm going to rush out there after the cad."

"Is he wanted?"

"Yes; on the 'phone."

"Oh, well, he'd better be told, you know," said Nipper. "It might be his pater, or somebody."

"The chap's been hanging on for two or three minutes," grumbled Handforth. "I don't see why I should waste my time over a rotter like De Valerie. I suppose I'd better tell the chap to hang on another minute or two, and fetch De Valerie——"

"I'll go and tell him, if you like," said Nipper. "You chaps go up to Study C, and poke up the fire, and get the kettle on."

"Dear fellow, it shall be done," said Tregellis-West lazily.

They parted, and Handforth entered the visitor's room and took up the receiver.

"Are you there?" he asked.

"Ah, De Valerie, just a word with you," said the strange voice quickly. "I need not give you my name—you would not know it in any case—but you have to carry out certain instructions——"

"Hold on!" said Handforth. "I'm not De——"

"Listen to me, and don't interrupt," put in the other sharply. "You know the old quarry on Bannington Moor? Be on the edge of it, on the roadside, at eleven o'clock to-night exactly——"

"What the dickens are you blabbering about?" demanded Handforth irritably.

"Confound you, boy, can't you understand me?"

"No, I'm blest if I can! I just came to tell you to hang on——"

"You are De Valerie, are you not?"

"Didn't I just say I wasn't?" bawled

Handforth, losing his temper. "Somebody's gone to fetch De Valerie—he'll be here in half a tick. I told you to hold on, but you wouldn't!"

Handforth distinctly heard an oath.

"You infernal young rascal!" came a furious snarl. "I thought you were De Valerie, and you shouldn't—"

"I can't help what you thought!" roared Handforth. "I ain't supposed to know what's in your silly mind, am I? I'm blessed if I'm going to be sworn at over a telephone! Blow you! Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, go to the dickens!"

Handforth was justly incensed, and he banged the receiver on to the table angrily. Then he stalked out of the room, and was just in time to meet Nipper and Cecil De Valerie entering the lobby from outside.

"Who wants me?" asked the Rotter sharply.

"Go and see!" growled Handforth. "You'd better tell your pal to find some manners, De Valerie. I'm not going to have people swear at me, and talk a lot of silly piffle. He thought I was you for a minute——"

De Valerie started.

"Well, and what did he say?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know—something idiotic!" grunted Handforth. "Couldn't make head or tail of it, and don't want to! You can see after your own fatheaded business!"

De Valerie went into the visitor's room without another word, and Nipper and Handforth walked up the Remove passage together. Nipper was rather curious, and he looked at Handforth with interest.

"Who was the fellow?" he asked.

"Some insulting rotter," answered Edward Oswald. "Thought I was De Valerie at first. Told me to be at the old quarry, on Bannington Moor, at eleven o'clock to-night!"

"By jupiter! That was meant for De Valerie!" said Nipper sharply.

"Of course it was. Some dirty book-maker, I expect," remarked Handforth, with a sniff. "Just as if I want to pry into De Valerie's beastly blackguardism! He's a jolly sight worse than Fullwood, if you ask me! Still, if he likes to go on the razzle, that's his business. It's my opinion that man was off his rocker!"

And Handforth dismissed the matter from his mind. He stalked into Study

D, and left Nipper alone in the passage. Handforth had not been in the least impressed by what he had heard. Nipper, on the other hand, was almost startled.

He stood in the passage, thinking deeply. Then, with a sudden tightening of his lips, he walked straight to a study on which the name "Mr. Peter Alvington" was painted. It was the House-master's study—in other words, Nelson Lee's.

Nipper entered, after knocking, and found the detective sitting before the fire reading and smoking. He looked round with a smile, and nodded for his visitor to close the door.

"Well, young 'un, you're looking serious," he remarked genially.

"I'm thoughtful, guv'nor," said Nipper. "It's ten days and more since we had that bit of excitement about Yakama, isn't it? We'd begun to think that the Circle of Terror had dropped the affair completely——"

"I never had that idea, Nipper," put in Nelson Lee. "Has something fresh happened?"

"Not yet, sir. But Handforth got to hear of something by chance," replied Nipper. "Handforth doesn't think anything about it, naturally, but I think it's significant. It's concerning De Valerie."

And Nipper, in a few words, told his master what had happened. Nelson Lee was very interested.

"So De Valerie is to meet somebody against the old quarry at eleven o'clock?" he mused. "The information is, indeed, interesting. I suspect, however, that the plan will be altered somewhat now. The meeting place will probably be altered, or the time made earlier or later. But it certainly appears as though things will soon be getting busy again. We shall have to be more on the alert than ever."

Nipper nodded.

There was a short silence while they both thought. Certainly, they had a good deal to think about. Recently, there had been some exciting events at St. Frank's. In truth, the old enemies of Nelson Lee, the Circle of Terror, had been operating in the district.

A Japanese junior in the Ancient House named Sessuc Yakama, was the victim of the Circle's activity. There had been a deliberate attempt upon his life, and this had been frustrated through the astuteness of Nelson Lee and Nipper and Co.

For several days there had been a lull, but the detective was convinced that the agents of the Circle would soon try other means. Cecil De Valerie, who was also a new boy, was entangled in the plot.

In short, he had been made the tool of the Circle—without knowing it. He had accepted a sum of money to admit one of the Circle men into the school. This had been done, but only failure had resulted. De Valerie, therefore, had been told that his services would be required later on. It would seem that the time had now arrived. Both Lee and Nipper had reason to believe that De Valerie was heartily sick of the whole affair, and that he wished he had never been drawn into it. Having gone thus far, however, the rascally Removite could not withdraw.

He was in the power of the men who had bribed him, and would do their bidding—fearful of the consequences if he refused. Exactly why the Circle of Terror wished to kill Sessue Yakama was still a mystery. But Nelson Lee was determined to get to the bottom of it sooner or later.

De Valerie had been allowed to think that his rascality was unsuspected. In this way, Lee hoped to get on the track easily when the next move was made. For, with De Valerie unsuspecting, it would be easy enough to keep an eye on him.

For over a week past nothing whatever had happened. But now this telephone call was of striking significance. De Valerie would not have been told to visit Bannington Moor at such a late hour unless for some very unusual purpose.

"Yes, Nipper, we shall have to be more alert than ever," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "You will, of course, tell your chums about this; but say nothing to Yakama himself. And it will be as well for you to keep awake after lights-out. If De Valerie makes a move, follow him. I don't think you need any further instructions than that, my boy. I can trust you to——"

"I hope so, sir," interrupted Nipper, with a smile. "We'll keep our eye on De Valerie all right, and we'll spoil his little game, too. Of course, this affair may have nothing to do with the Circle, but I believe it has."

And it was arranged that Nipper should remain on the alert. He little guessed what exciting events were to

take place in the very near future. And it is rather extraordinary that he and his master had been given the tip by a very slim misunderstanding between the telephone caller and Handforth!

That little tip of Handforth's was to mean—quite a lot!

CHAPTER II.

CECIL DE VALERIE RECEIVES INSTRUCTIONS.

CECIL DE VALERIE opened his study window with extreme caution.

The Triangle was dark and deserted. Only one or two lights gleamed, here and there, behind drawn blinds.

The school clock had chimed the quarter-past-ten two or three minutes earlier. All the boys were in their dormitory, but several masters were still in their own studies. It was necessary for De Valerie to be extremely cautious.

He had crept down silently and carefully. And now, with his head thrust out of the window, he looked about him keenly. The cold night wind blew in his face, and came sighing through the leafless branches of the old elms and chestnuts.

"Confounded nuisance!" muttered De Valerie, between his teeth. "I wish to goodness I'd never touched any of that rotten money! If I'm collared at this game it'll mean the sack!"

But De Valerie knew well enough that expulsion would follow any attempt on his part to ignore the summons which had come to him. He was in a peculiar position, and could not back out.

He slipped through the window, and stood upon the hard gravel of the Triangle. Slowly and carefully he lowered the sash until the window was closed again. Then, pulling his overcoat closely about him, he hurried across the open space.

There was no particularly high wall separating the Triangle from the road. St. Frank's was not a prison. At one point it was easy to slip over into the lane without the slightest difficulty.

De Valerie climbed over, and set off at a sharp walk up the slope. He felt glad that the night was so dark, and hoped that his interview would not be a long one. As Nelson Lee had suspected, the time had been changed from

eleven to ten-thirty. As he walked, the boy had vague fears that some distasteful task would be allotted to him. But De Valerie had no particular scruples, and he was more concerned for his own security than anything else.

He walked briskly, and was comfortable in the knowledge that he had slipped out of the Remove dormitory unseen and unheard.

At least, this is what De Valerie believed.

Had he been aware of the fact that three silent figures were keeping pace with him, about a hundred yards in his rear, he would have been considerably startled. But, the fact of the matter was, Nipper and Co. were on the trail.

Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were following the Rotter with extreme care. And, so successful were their efforts, that he had no suspicion of their close attention.

According to Nelson Lee's instructions, Nipper had kept awake after lights-out. Here his two chums had seen De Valerie get up and leave the dormitory. But they were all ready prepared, and there was no hurrying and scurrying over dressing. The trio had slipped into their clothes during the first fifteen minutes after lights had been put out, and had got between the quilt and the first blanket of their beds. When, therefore, De Valerie had slipped away, they had followed him in less than one minute.

It had been easy to see that he made for his study; and the trackers seized the opportunity to get into the lane in advance. When De Valerie had climbed over, Nipper and Co. had been waiting behind the opposite edge.

"We'd better not do any talking," murmured Nipper, as they were silently following in De Valerie's tracks. "Just keep your eyes open, my sons, and remember that a loose stone may betray us."

"Dear Benny, it's rather unfair to blame the innocent stones," whispered Sir Montie. "If we kick against a loose stone, that'll be our fault—it will—really! I wonder what that frightful cad is up to?"

"My dear ass, we're trying to find that out!" muttered Nipper. "But don't jaw! Your sweet voice carries!"

"Begad! He's insultin' me, Tommy!" breathed Sir Montie.

Tommy Watson grunted, and they all

walked on in silence. As Nipper had said, it was just as well to take every precaution. For it was not only De Valerie they had to contend with. That young rascal was bent upon meeting an astute criminal, who would be keenly on the look-out for trouble.

The old deserted house, known as the Mount, was passed, and the open moor came into view soon afterwards. It was not possible to see far, but the starlight nevertheless rendered De Valerie's figure fairly distinct against the skyline.

He left the road and struck off towards the old deserted quarry. It had been disused for years, and was, indeed, a treacherous place for a wanderer upon the moor. There was no protection of any kind, and there were steep, dangerous cliffs.

De Valerie walked cautiously, and Nipper and Co. were somewhat uncertain as to how they should proceed. For Nipper's keen eyes had detected the figure of a man standing upon a little rise, in full view. Since they could see him, it was more than probable that he would be able to detect their moving forms.

"We'd better lie down flat on our tummies," breathed Nipper. "No sense in giving ourselves away. The best thing we can do is to watch from here, and follow them after they've met."

This was, indeed, the only feasible plan.

Nipper was rather anxious. He had not bargained for such a drawback. Where there were hedges and trees it was easy enough to find cover. But here, any movement would have meant discovery.

The boys were in no way alarmed for their own safety; they knew that they could get away easily enough. But, if their presence became known to De Valerie and the strange man, the plans would be completely upset. And Nelson Lee wanted to get wind of the plot while the enemy was still off guard. If the Circle men knew that they were being watched, they would act with far greater cunning and secrecy. And the results might be fatal.

Nipper and Sir Montie and Tommy Watson saw the two meet. They stood for some moments, and then walked away. It seemed as though they simply vanished into the very earth itself. One second they were there, clearly outlined,

and the next second the moor was bleak and empty.

"My hat! That was sudden!" murmured Watson.

"We'd better push forward," said Nipper briskly. "Come on!"

"Do you think they're watchin', dear boy?"

"That's not likely. They think they're absolutely alone!"

The boys hurried forward, crouching as low as possible out of precaution. They reached the little rise. And there, upon the other side of it, yawned a steep precipice. Nipper and his chums looked right down into the old moor quarry.

"By jingo!" muttered Nipper. "They didn't drop down—Ah, there seem to be some stone steps over there!"

They bore to their right, and presently—after descending a steep slope—came to the cliff-edge. Here, faintly visible, a roughly hewn stairway led downwards into the dimness of the quarry.

In single file the juniors descended. It was necessary to go with great caution, for the stone steps were chipped and worn in places, and a false step would have led to a dangerous fall.

At last Nipper and his chums stood at the foot of the cliff. The quarry seemed to be a place apart from the rest of the world. Ugly, desolate, and wild, it struck a chill into the boys. The wind sighed drearily down from the moor.

"Begad! Ain't it cheerin'?" murmured Montie. "I'm feelin' as happy as anythin'!"

Nipper took a deep breath.

"I'm not!" he said grimly. "We've lost 'em—lost 'em completely, my sons. There's not a sign. We might search this quarry for hours, and do no good. Oh, it's rotten!"

"What shall we do?" asked Watson.

"Nothing—go back to the school—oh, anything you like!" growled Nipper, in disgusted tones.

"We're not to blame, Benny boy——"

"I know you're not to blame, Montie," said Nipper. "But that doesn't make the position much better, does it? De Valerie's gone off with that chap—and we shall only risk discovery by remaining here."

And so the trio turned back with gloomy feelings.

Meanwhile, Cecil De Valerie was with the stranger. Upon meeting, the man had briefly told De Valerie to follow him. They had descended the rough

steps, and had struck off across the quarry to the eastern side—the side which was nearest the school.

At last the pair stood within a kind of cavern, and the darkness was absolutely pitchy—it seemed solid. De Valerie, who was behind, came to a halt, feeling blindly before him.

"Look here," he said huskily. "What's the idea of this? I'm hanged if I'm going into this rotten place——"

"Afraid?" asked the man, with a grim chuckle.

"No, I'm not afraid!" muttered De Valerie. "But I want to know——"

"You'll know soon enough—follow me."

The boy set his teeth.

"I didn't agree to do anything of this sort," he said angrily. "I'm not going to be humbugged about——"

"Don't be a fool, boy!" snapped the other.

As he spoke, he switched on an electric lamp, and a beam of light made everything clear. De Valerie saw that they were standing in the entrance to one of the old workings. A black tunnel stretched away before them, straight into the heart of the cliff itself.

"Are we going up that passage?" asked the Removite.

"Yes."

"Where does it lead to?"

"You'll see—when we get there," said the man. "You know me, don't you. I was at the Mount when you came there last week. My name's Ratley, and I've come to-night to give you instructions."

He turned, and, bending down, plunged into the tunnel. Although De Valerie wanted to ask questions, he could not do so under the present conditions. He followed Ratley with rebellious feelings. But he knew that he must do as he was bid. Otherwise his confederates would "round on him."

The tunnel seemed endless.

Here and there it was narrow; in some places it sloped steeply upwards, in other places it descended. The twists and turns were bewildering. Occasionally a place was encountered where it was difficult to squeeze through.

The underground passage seemed to be of a great age, and had evidently been carved by the hand of man at some remote period. The air was fairly pure,

and the pair had no difficulty in breathing.

De Valerie found it necessary to remove his muffler. The exertion had put him into a hot perspiration, and he was panting heavily. And, at last, Ratley came to a halt.

"Some steps here," he said breathlessly. "Go easy, boy."

They mounted a dozen steep steps, and then found themselves in a curious apartment with an arched roof, and many pillars. It was a vault of some kind, and the stone walls were green with dampness and slime.

"Where the deuce are we?" demanded De Valerie.

Ratley placed his electric lamp on a stone projection, and smiled.

"We're under St. Frank's," he said shortly.

The Removite stared.

"Under—St. Frank's?" he repeated. "Rot!"

"This vault is situated beneath the ruined monastery which adjoins the College House," went on Ratley. "You are surprised, eh?"

"I don't believe it," said De Valerie. "That tunnel was long, but not half the distance to the school——"

"Oh, yes, it was," interrupted the man. "But the lane is winding; and we had to go round the quarry. The tunnel runs straight, in the main, in spite of the twists. And we're under the ruined monastery. You'll be able to get back to bed within five minutes after you leave me."

"Thank goodness for that, anyhow!" growled the Rotter.

The news was most welcome to him, now that he had been convinced that he was, indeed, in the vault beneath the old monastery. He had heard the juniors talking about it on several occasions, but had never been down. Indeed, there weren't many fellows who cared to descend to the dank, dismal place.

De Valerie had been almost alarmed at the thought of having to go all through the tunnel again, and then round the quarry, and along the lane to the school.

"Why did you bring me all this way round?" he asked. "Why couldn't you have met me in the ruins, and saved all this journey?"

"It was necessary that you should know the situation of the place," re-

plied Ratley. "Besides, it would have been risky for me to enter the school grounds, or to lay myself open—— But I don't see why I should explain to you, boy. You have merely to carry out orders. You failed on the last occasion——"

"I didn't fail," said De Valerie sullenly.

"Well, we will not discuss the matter. Only, bear in mind that I shall stand no further failure. What you have to do is simple—and you will have to make no blunder. Do you understand?"

"How can I understand when you haven't told me what you want?"

Ratley laughed softly.

"All you have to do is to bring the Japanese boy, Yakama, down here to-morrow night," he explained. "You must arrive at eleven o'clock."

De Valerie looked at the man in alarm.

"Don't expect me here—that's all!" he exclaimed. "How the thunder do you think I'm going to bring Yakama out of the dormitory after lights-out? How shall I be able to get down without rousing the whole House? I can't drug the little brute!"

"You must bring him," repeated Ratley, grimly.

"How can I do it——"

"That is your concern!"

Ratley bent forward, and his eyes gleamed evilly.

"If you fail this time, there will be no third chance for you!" he went on, with deadly earnestness. "Failure will mean—ruin for you. Do you fully understand that, boy? This is your last chance. Either bring Yakama to this vault at eleven o'clock to-morrow night—or face expulsion from St. Frank's!"

Cecil De Valerie took a deep breath.

"You're playing dirty with me!" he said between his teeth. "The thing's impossible, and you know it——"

"Tush! There are many ways," said Ratley impatiently. "Yakama can be easily tricked, if you only go the right way to work. If you can think of no scheme, you may use a drug——"

"A drug!"

"Don't look so startled," laughed Ratley. "Take this tin box. Inside it is a pad of cotton wool; don't open it unless necessary. But if you hold it under Yakama's nostrils as he sleeps, he will be unconscious for a while. Then you can carry him down. But that's

only a last resort. It will be better for you to trick the boy in some way. In any case, you must bring him."

"Well, and what are you going to do with him then?"

"That is no concern of yours," Ratley replied, as De Valerie took the tin box. "I shall not repeat my warning. You won't see me to-morrow night, but another man will be waiting here. If, of course, something unforeseen happened, so that the project is impossible, you must report at the fixed hour."

The man walked across the vault, and flashed his light upon the lower portion of a steep, circular staircase.

"That's your way up," he said shortly. "Good-night!"

De Valerie did not answer. His mind was somewhat confused, and he stumbled up the circular stone steps until, at last, he reached the top. He found himself among the ruins, with the open sky above his head. He took a deep breath, and wondered if the happenings of the last hour had been real. The cold wind fanned his cheeks, and his brain seemed to clear. Unscrupulous though De Valerie was, he was already realising that this affair of Yakama was deeper than he had suspected. There was something sinister in the whole business. Already De Valerie had seen two or three different men—and on the morrow he would meet another.

"There's a whole gang of them!" he muttered huskily. "Bejove! What a silly fool I was to take that rotten money! But I didn't imagine anything like this—and now it's too late to draw back. Oh, hang! What does it matter, anyhow? I don't care what happens to the Japanese brat! He shouldn't come to a civilised school!"

And, finding a slight amount of comfort in that reflection, De Valerie hastened across to the Ancient House. Although he had been duped, he had vague fears. He preferred them to be vague. He did not care to let his mind rest too acutely upon the situation. Had he known that he was in the power of the dreaded Circle of Terror his fears would have been very real, indeed!

Just for one moment De Valerie had thought of ignoring the orders which had been given him. But he quickly came to the conclusion that such a thing would have been fatal. He was forced to go on with it now—there was no alternative.

CHAPTER III.

DE VALERIE'S TRICK—PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE HIMSELF TAKES A HAND

NELSON LEE nodded sympathetically.

"No, Nipper, I don't blame you in the least," he said. "We can't always be successful, you know. It was a great pity you lost sight of De Valerie; but as nothing has happened of a startling nature, there is no need for us to worry. It is clear that De Valerie merely met the man to receive orders."

"Yes, I suppose so, guv'nor," replied Nipper.

He and "Mr. Alvington," were strolling over the playing fields. Being quite to themselves, a private chat was possible.

It was morning, and lessons would soon be starting. Nipper, having seen his master over by the pavilion, had joined him.

"When Montie and I and Tommy got back to the dormitory we were grumpy and irritable," went on the lad. "But Yakama was all right, so we didn't worry much. De Valerie came in about a quarter of an hour later."

"Plans of some sort have been made—that is certain," mused Nelson Lee. "The boy did not make that journey to the quarry for nothing. The meeting with that man means that some action will shortly be taken. It is even possible that De Valerie means to admit some of these Circle agents into the school."

"To-night, guv'nor?"

"That does not follow, my boy. We may have to wait several days," replied Lee. "When the time for action does come, we may discover some astute, subtle plan. It is necessary, therefore, that we should be exceptionally keen."

"All through losing those rotters last night—"

"Nonsense, Nipper — nonsense," laughed the schoolmaster detective. "You have described the position to me, and I realise that any other result was almost impracticable. We know, at all events, that things are moving."

"But how—and when?"

"We can only be certain of that by careful vigilance," replied Lee. "We must adopt a system, young 'un. To-night, you will remain awake and on the watch until one o'clock—lying in your bed, of course. I can trust you to keep

your vigil faithfully, Nipper. If nothing happens by one o'clock, you may go to sleep."

"But suppose De Valerie gets up at two?"

"In that case he will have to reckon with me," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You will be on guard until one, Nipper, but after that hour I shall take up the task. I shall remain awake until four o'clock—after that time we may safely assume that nothing is planned for the night."

"And what about to-morrow night, guv'nor?"

"The same programme applies," replied Lee. "We must carry this out, Nipper, until the Circle moves—as I am sure it will move. The time may come to-night, or perhaps not until next week. All we can do is to wait and watch in patience. I have told you all this now, in case we get no other opportunity for a private chat."

"I can tell Tommy and Montie, of course?" asked Nipper.

"Certainly. And they may keep watch with you if they choose. I fancy, however, that the young rascals will drop off to sleep," smiled the detective. "They are not so well accustomed to this sort of thing as you are, young 'un. Oh, by the way, if anything happens before one o'clock to-night, you will find me in the study. Until twelve I shall probably be playing chess with Dr. Brett. He is coming over this evening, and isn't particular about early hours."

And so the arrangement was made and settled upon. Nipper felt more comfortable as he went into the class-room for morning lessons. It was good to know that every emergency was prepared for.

De Valerie did not look so arrogant as usual. There was a look in his eyes which Nipper did not like. The Rotter was uneasy, and he was worrying. Certainly, there was something preying on his mind.

As soon as lessons were over, De Valerie went straight to his study, closed the door, and locked it. He had curious habits, and now he poked the fire up, and made it blaze. Then he pulled the curtains over the window, and piled a number of cushions upon the hearth-rug.

With a sigh, he sank into them, and lit a curious-smelling cigarette. For half an hour he lolled there, smoking, gazing into the fire alight.

He was oblivious of the scufflings and clatter out in the passage, and the shouts which came from the Triangle. In his own study De Valerie seemed to live in a world apart from the life of the big school.

Yet De Valerie was not foreign. These curious habits of his, perhaps, had been copied from an uncle. When very much younger, De Valerie had been taken for a long trip abroad by that relative—who had been very eccentric in his ways. And nobody could deny that lolling on cushions in front of a cheerful fire was comfortable.

"It can't be done—it can't be done!" muttered the junior almost despairingly. "And suppose I use that confounded drug? How am I to get the brat right down into that vault? I couldn't carry him all that distance!"

Upon due consideration, however, De Valerie reckoned that he could accomplish the task. For Yakama was quite small and slim. At the same time, the thought of carrying the unconscious junior somewhat appalled De Valerie.

"I must think of something else," he told himself fiercely. "There must be a way—there must—Oh, hang the rotten bell!"

It was dinner-time, and the problem had to be laid aside for the time being. Had De Valerie been absent from dinner unwelcome comment would have been caused. The fact that he was silent and morose was only usual. De Valerie was always a fellow of few words.

In spite of his worried state of mind, he detached himself from his troubles completely during afternoon lessons. Just before the Remove had gone into their class-room, several juniors had attempted to chip the Rotter. But he had taken no notice whatever—until Hubbard sent a pellet of blotting-paper into his left ear. De Valerie had swung round in a fury, and would undoubtedly have attempted violence if Mr. Crowell had not appeared at that moment.

The juniors confidently expected squalls, but they were disappointed. At lessons De Valerie was all attention. There wasn't a more attentive boy in the whole Form. Mr. Crowell was ready to declare that De Valerie was one of his finest pupils.

This was a curious feature about De Valerie. The Removites themselves had had many evidences of his ill-temper and general caddishness. But every master

who had come in contact with De Valerie had nothing but praise for him. He was, indeed, a brilliant scholar in nearly all subjects.

As soon as dismissal came, however, De Valerie took himself off to his study. Again he locked himself in—again he assumed his position on the cushions. Tea was forgotten, and he gave himself up to the problem which concerned him so deeply.

At last a gleam came into Valerie's eyes. It remained there, and when he rose from the cushions, and switched on the electric light, the worried expression had disappeared.

"It'll work!" he told himself confidently. "It's the only chance, anyhow, and if I'm careful, I'll bring the trick off!"

His mind thus relieved, De Valerie calmly set about preparing his tea. Having finished, he did his prep. and ascended to the common-room. That noisy apartment was crowded, but nobody took any notice of De Valerie, and he took no notice of anybody else. He seemed to be detached from all the other juniors.

Bed-time found him all ready prepared, and after the lights had been put out in the dormitory, he lay in bed wide awake, listening to the sleepy chatter of the juniors, as they dropped off, one by one.

De Valerie smiled grimly to himself when the dormitory was, at length, quiet. Everybody was soundly asleep except himself—at least, this is what the Rotter fondly supposed. He little imagined that one junior, at least, was just as wide awake as himself.

The school clock chimed regularly and monotonously. At a quarter-to-eleven De Valerie rose silently from his bed, and dressed quickly. Unknown to him, Nipper lifted his head and listened to the other boy's movements. The darkness of the dormitory prevented the watcher from seeing much.

Having dressed, De Valerie pulled over his head a curious white object which looked like a cowl. As a matter of fact, it was nothing but a pillow-slip with a couple of eye-holes cut in it.

The Rotter crept over to the bed which was occupied by Sessue Yakama. He bent over the sleeping junior, and gently shook him. Yakama stirred, and then turned over.

"Shash!" breathed De Valerie.

"Don't make a noise, Yakama—it's all right, I'm Bennett. There's a little joke on!"

Nipper, in his bed, heard the words distinctly. Needless to say, he was considerably surprised. What game was this De Valerie was playing?

"Is it the worthy and esteemed Bennett?" came Yakama's soft whisper.

"Yes," replied De Valerie. "I want you to help me, Yakama."

The Rotter only spoke in a whisper, and his voice might easily have been mistaken for Nipper's. With the cowl over his head, it was impossible to see his features.

"Is it that you want the help, Bennett?" asked Yakama, sitting up, wide awake. "I am filled with the extraordinary surprise. How is it that you are wearing a covering so grotesque and singular upon your splendid head?"

De Valerie chuckled.

"Just a little wheeze," he said softly. "I've got a cowl for you, too. The fact is, Yakama, I want you to help me in a joke against that cad De Valerie. I suppose you're willing to lend a hand?"

"I am full of wonder," murmured Yakama. "My feelings towards you, Bennett, are of the excellent quality, but I loathe and dread the awful De Valerie. Indeed, I will help you with the most pleasurable delight. But what must I do?"

"Well, I want to teach the cad a lesson," whispered De Valerie. "There's not a rotter in the school worse than De Valerie, and he needs warming up!"

"It is indeed as you say!"

By this time Nipper had recovered from his bewilderment. He didn't pretend to see anything very clearly, but the subtlety of De Valerie's plan was obvious. It was cunning—it was clever.

Nipper had worked it out quickly in his own mind. For some reason or other De Valerie wanted to get Yakama out of the dormitory. He could never have accomplished this purpose in his own identity. He had therefore told Yakama, with perfect calmness, that he was Bennett. The cool audacity of the thing was breathless. Owing to the cowl which covered his head, Yakama could not possibly recognise the other.

The Japanese boy was very fond of Nipper, and would eagerly enter into any "wheeze" that was going. De Valerie knew this, and was trusting to it to see him through. He was confident

of success. He had not hesitated to refer to himself in terms which were certainly well-deserved.

"It is your wish to teach the disgusting De Valerie a lesson, Bennett?" murmured Yakama. "Oh, I will undoubtedly help you. But what is it that you propose? Shall we throw the jug of cold water over—"

"No; it's more elaborate than that, old man," Nipper heard De Valerie say. "Slip your clothes on, and then get into this cowl. We'll give the beast a terrific fright. What we're going to do is something big, you know. Do you remember that old vault under the monastery ruins? We went down there together the other day—"

"It is as you say, Bennett."

Nipper pursed his lips. The calm manner in which De Valerie was proceeding with his plan fairly took his breath away. But Nipper held himself in check, and waited.

"Well, we're going to pop down to that vault now," murmured De Valerie crisply. "I've got some old theatrical clothing down there, and we're going to get into it. See? We'll frighten the wits out of De Valerie!"

"Why have not the honourable chums, Sir Montie and Tommy, come into this wondrous plan of yours, Bennett?" asked Yakama.

"We don't want too many—will you come?"

Yakama laughed softly.

"It is my desire to do exactly as you wish, Bennett," he replied. "See, I am leaving the bed now. It will take me but the few moments to get into my august clothing. Wait for me, I pray you."

Nipper clenched his fists.

"Oh, the young idiot!" he murmured. "The little fathead!"

Nipper was painfully disappointed. He had been expecting Yakama to detect the trickery at any moment. But De Valerie had succeeded in deceiving the Japanese junior—and would, in a minute, be on his way to the old vault.

But Nipper misjudged Yakama.

That small youth was not quite such a fool as De Valerie took him to be. He was, indeed, extremely astute. At first, he had believed himself to be talking to Nipper himself. But the truth came to him all in a second, and he grinned in the darkness. Oh, no! He wasn't going to spoil the fun yet.

Yakama was as ready for a joke as anybody. And he determined that it should, actually, be against De Valerie!

He decided to accompany the deceiver, and would surprise him when the vault was reached. There was something humorous in the idea of deceiving the deceiver.

Yakama was soon dressed, and then he donned the cowl which De Valerie handed to him. The pair stole out of the dormitory silently. And the very instant the door had closed, Nipper hopped out of bed.

He shook Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Up you get, the pair of you," he hissed urgently.

"Begad! What's the matter?"

"De Valerie's gone off with Yakama!" Nipper replied. "Slip your clothes on in two ticks. Buck up, you asses!"

Sir Montie and Tommy needed no urging. Although just aroused from sleep, they were eager to take part in any excitement. The trio dressed quickly—they flung their clothes on roughly, and in considerable disorder. This was gall and wormwood to the elegant Sir Montie. But he bore the ordeal bravely.

Barely four minutes had elapsed by the time Nipper and Co. were ready to go in pursuit of De Valerie and his victim. As soon as they were out in the passage, they hurried towards the stairs.

"We shall never find 'em!" muttered Tommy.

"They've gone to the old monastery vault," said Nipper quickly. "I'll explain the wheeze later on. Yakama's a fathead for being taken in—but I don't suppose he's to blame much. Come on, we'll get through our study window."

They were soon creeping across the Triangle. It wasn't quite so dark to-night, for the stars were shining. The ground glittered with frost, and the College House stood out clearly defined against the sky.

The boys made their way round the angle of it cautiously, and then came within sight of the ivy-covered ruins. At one time the College House had been part of the old original monastery—it was for this reason that the denizens of this House were known as "Monks."

Sir Montie and Tommy were anxious to dash forward without caution, but

Nipper had been well trained, and he was more careful. As they approached the ruins the school clock struck eleven. Nipper remembered, with a feeling of comfort, that his master and the village doctor were playing chess in the former's study.

The three picked their way through the masses of ivy-covered ruins. And at last they reached a low doorway, leading into a portion of the ruin which still stood—although it was roofless. Here, as they were well aware, a circular flight of stone steps led down into the vault.

But, just as they were about to pass through, Nipper dragged them down. They crouched behind the old stonework.

"Somebody's coming!" breathed Nipper tensely.

He peered round, and then saw the easily recognisable figure of Cecil de Valerie. He had discarded his whole cowl, and came striding towards the doorway. But he paused, hesitated, and turned back. Then he stood, motionless, against the stairway.

Nipper and Co. waited. It was impossible for them to move an inch without causing detection. And they were most anxious to avoid that. At the same time, Nipper was worried. What had happened to Yakama?

The young schoolboy-detective came to the only conclusion which seemed possible. De Valerie must have tricked his victim down into the vault, and had imprisoned him there. Now, apparently, he was waiting for the arrival of the Circle agents. This surmise of Nipper's was, of course, wrong. But it was a pardonable error. The lad decided to wait five minutes only. And then, if nothing happened, he would act himself.

But what, indeed, had actually happened?

Why was Cecil de Valerie waiting there? Where was Yakama? The situation can be explained in a few words.

Yakama had accompanied his companion down into the vault with never a thought of danger. The spirit of mischief was well developed in him, and he had determined to turn the tables upon the trickster.

Unfortunately, however, Yakama had had no chance.

He had followed De Valerie into the vault. And there, to his surprise, he found a small, bearded man, with strange, uncanny eyes—eyes that seemed to possess sinister power.

De Valerie himself had been prepared, and he was filled with great relief to know that his object had been achieved so easily. He did not know that Yakama had come down, fully aware of the truth.

"Ah, this is well," said the stranger. "You have done your part excellently, De Valerie. You may go!"

The man turned his eyes upon De Valerie, and the boy shivered in spite of himself. Without a word he turned and left the vault. And Sessue Yakama, momentarily bewildered by the unexpectedness of the occurrence, stood facing the stranger.

The little Jap instinctively knew, however, that there was danger. And he turned to flee. In some strange way, a panic seized him—a wild kind of terror. And yet Yakama was quite a plucky little chap.

As he twisted round, the man gripped his shoulders, and swung him forward. The vault was brilliant with light, for a queer-looking electric lamp stood upon a stone shelf.

"Look at me, boy—look into my eyes!" commanded the stranger silkily.

Yakama looked, and his gaze became fixed. Those eyes gleamed with strange fires. For the life of him, Yakama could not move an inch; he stood transfixed to the floor. He was burning with a desire to flee, but simply dared not move.

Who was this man with such uncanny power?

Had Nipper been present, he would have known in a moment—and he would have been amazed and startled. For the stranger was none other than Professor Cyrus Zingrave himself—the High Lord of the Circle of Terror!

Yakama was held by the professor's intense gaze—and little wonder. Zingrave possessed amazing will-power. He had cowed strong men by his glance, and had forced them to do his will, against their own inclinations. What chance, then, was there for this mere boy?

It was an easy matter to get Yakama completely under control. In short, the unfortunate junior was hypnotised! It was no lengthy business. In less than one minute Professor Zingrave had his victim utterly and absolutely at his mercy.

"Tell me, boy," said the professor softly. "You can hear me?"

"Yes, I can hear you," said Yakama, in a mechanical voice.

"You understand what I am saying?"

"Yes."

"Then heed my words," exclaimed Zingrave, in a curiously intense voice, and keeping his gaze fixed with deadly steadiness upon Yakama's eyes. "You are to carry out my instructions to the letter. Will you do so?"

"You are my master—I can do nothing else."

"Then follow my directions," went on Zingrave. "Ascend these stairs, and go straight into the Ancient House. Mount to the roof, and walk across the leads until you reach the highest parapet. When there, you will mount upon the stonework, and fling yourself down bodily to the stones below!"

"Yes."

"You fully understand?"

"Yes."

"What are you to do?"

"I am to go to the roof of the Ancient House, and fling myself bodily over the edge of the great parapet."

"Those are my orders," said Zingrave softly. "Go, boy, and carry them out!"

Yakama turned as though walking in his sleep. He left the vault without hesitation, and commenced to mount the steps with a steady stride. He was on his way to fling himself to certain death!

The superior will-power of Professor Zingrave was something amazing—something that was almost beyond the understanding. The idea was a ghastly one. In the morning, when Yakama's mangled body was found, one thing could be assumed. It would be concluded that Yakama had walked in his sleep, and that he had accidentally gone to his death.

But Professor Zingrave, for all his astounding cleverness, had not thought of every possibility. At the top of the circular steps stood Cecil De Valerie. The boy was almost terrified, and something kept him there. He was waiting—waiting for he knew not what.

And then Yakama appeared. De Valerie spoke to him, but the Japanese boy made no reply. He walked deliberately and mechanically. The Rotter gazed after him with a quick intake of breath. Vaguely he suspected something dreadful—and he followed.

Cecil de Valerie, although rascally, was not a criminal.

CHAPTER IV.

(Nipper now takes up the narrative.)

IN WHICH SOME STARTLING THINGS OCCUR,
AND NELSON LEE GETS BUSY.

THERE was something strange in De Valerie's attitude as he stood among the ruins. Sir Montie and Tommy and I daren't move an inch, for we should have given ourselves away on the instant. We just crouched against the ivy, and watched.

I had half decided to spring out abruptly and take De Valerie unawares. The uncertainty of the whole business was getting on my nerves. Where the dickens had Yakama got to? Was De Valerie really waiting for the Circle agents to appear?

I was even on the point of giving the tip to my chums when I heard a footfall on the stone stairway.

Then Yakama came into view. De Valerie spoke to him, but he didn't utter a sound in reply. He came on, right past me, and it seemed as though there was a fixed, dreamy look in his eyes. But I couldn't see properly in the gloom. He passed on, and De Valerie followed a few yards behind.

They both left the ruins, and I heard Montie give a little gasp.

"Begad!" he breathed. "It's queer, dear fellows. I'm feelin' awfully unsettled, you know—I am really. Somehow, it ain't quite natural——"

"It's—it's uncanny!" I muttered grimly. "The best we can do is to follow behind and see what happens. There's no sense in acting until we get the hang of things a bit."

"He looks as though he were walking in his sleep!" muttered Tommy Watson uneasily. "What the dickens has that awful rotter been up to?"

We left the ruins without a sound, and saw Yakama and De Valerie, separated by about ten yards, making straight for the Ancient House. They approached the window of Study M, and Yakama pushed it open gentiy. He stepped through, and De Valerie followed after a moment.

But we hurried to our own window; and when we stole into the deserted passage we faintly heard the pair mounting the stairs. It was necessary to go with extreme caution now; for I did not wish to give De Valerie the tip that he, too, was being followed.

Could it be possible that Yakama was quietly going back to the dormitory?

This idea was soon knocked on the head; for, upon arrival in the upper corridor; we heard our quarry mounting the stairs to the attics. I now felt curiously alarmed, but decided to delay action until other things happened.

On the very top landing there was a trap-door leading on to the leads. This was reached by a short ladder, which always stood in position.

Yakama mounted it slowly, and passed out upon the roof. Then De Valerie followed.

"I—I say, this is—rotten!" muttered Watson nervously.

I hurried up the last few stairs, from the half-landing—where we had been watching—and grasped the ladder.

"You chaps come up after me," I breathed. "Don't make a sound, or you'll ruin everything. Yakama has gone up on the roof of his own accord, I'll swear. He's walking in his sleep, or or——"

"Or what, Benny boy?"

"I—I don't know!" I murmured grimly.

The thing that I suspected seemed so wild that I didn't care to put the suspicion into words. I mounted the ladder quickly, and emerged upon the flat leads. The old roof of the Ancient House stretched away before me, with the picturesque chimney-piles and the stone parapets.

Yakama had walked up to the higher leads, and De Valerie was crouching quite close to him. A shocking, startling thought came to me. Was De Valerie going to hurl the Japanese boy down——

"Good heavens! That's wrong, I'll swear!" I told myself. "De Valerie's not such a vile brute—— Oh!"

I heard Sir Montie and Tommy behind me. At the same time a startling thing occurred higher up on the roof. Yakama, still walking deliberately, had stepped from the leads to the parapet itself.

There, for a second, he stood motionless. Before him a sheer drop of I don't know how many feet. There were flagstones beneath—a paved pathway. One slip would mean instant death for Yakama. And he was within an inch of the edge!

Quite suddenly he threw his hands above his head, as though about to dive. His body bent forward, and a sickening

feeling came over me. I was too far away to do anything, and—and——

Cecil de Valerie sprang forward like a tiger. It was one of the swiftest leaps I had ever seen in my life. Even at that tense second I mistook his intentions for the moment. A great shout of fury rose into my throat. I was wild with alarm and helplessness.

De Valerie's arms were flung round Yakama just as the latter was on the point of falling. His swaying weight pulled the Rotter over. It was touch and go for a brief space.

The pair hovered there on the edge of the parapet, in a way which nearly caused my heart to stop beating. Then De Valerie gave a terrific heave. He sent Yakama flying back on the ledge, but he himself overbalanced.

He went right over, a husky cry leaving his lips. But his clutching hands caught the stonework in the nick of time; they obtained a hold; and the Rotter dragged himself back to safety.

"By Jingo!" I gasped. "He's—he's saved Yakama from certain death! And—and I thought——"

Sir Montie and Tommy rushed up.

"Did you see that?" panted Watson excitedly.

I didn't reply, but decided that the time for action had come. In any case, De Valerie had seen us, and so secrecy was no longer possible. We hurried forward, and found De Valerie bending over the boy he had just rescued from certain death. Somehow, I couldn't help shoving out my hand.

"That was ripping of you, De Valerie," I said huskily.

He took my fist mechanically.

"What—what are you doing here?" he asked. "There's something wrong with Yakama, Bennett. Look at him! He seems to be asleep—he was going to throw himself over the parapet. It would have meant death—death!"

"Didn't—didn't you know that Yakama was going to throw himself over?" I asked sharply.

"Good heavens! I never suspected it," replied De Valerie, with deadly earnestness. "How could I think such a horrible thing, Bennett? But I pulled him back in time—I prevented it!"

"Dear fellow, you ain't such a rotter as I thought you were," declared Sir Montie quietly. "Begad! You nearly went down a minute ago—you gave us

an exhibition of rippin' courage, De Valerie!"

The Rotter laughed in a curiously husky way.

"Courage!" he echoed. "Don't talk rot! I was shivering with fear—I'd pulled Yakama back almost before I knew it. I'd led him into this, and it was my job to pull him out. I never dreamed— That fearful scoundrel! What did he do? How did he force Yakama to come up here—"

"Yakama seems to be asleep!" interrupted Tommy anxiously.

I bent over the Japanese boy. He was sitting on the mats, and he seemed to be in a semi-dazed condition. Now and again he passed a hand over his eyes, and was talking softly to himself in his native tongue.

"Wake up, Jappy!" I said sharply.

"Yes, I understand my orders," he said, in a mechanical voice. "I am to go to the roof of the Ancient House, and fling myself bodily over the great parapet."

"He's dreamin'!" declared Sir Montie.

I clenched my teeth.

"No, he's not, Montie," I replied.

"Yakama's been hypnotised!"

"Hypnotised!" gasped De Valerie.

"Begad!"

"There's no other explanation for it," I went on. "Look here, De Valerie, you'd better tell us everything. What's that you were saying about a fearful scoundrel? Did you leave Yakama down in that vault with somebody?"

"Yes," muttered De Valerie.

"Who was he?"

"I—I don't know. A smallish man, with a beard—I'd never seen him before. But his eyes were—were awful!" said the Rotter hoarsely. "They seemed to burn right into me— Oh, I wish I'd never been dragged into the business!"

"A small man with strange eyes!" I muttered. "By Jupiter!"

In a flash the truth came to me. Sessue Yakama had undoubtedly been hypnotised—and by Professor Cyrus Zingrave himself! There wasn't another man who could have done it.

"I didn't mean to harm Yakama—I'll swear that!" said De Valerie chokingly. "I hadn't any idea that—that this would happen."

"There's no need to go into that now," I said crisply. "We must get Yakama down—and we'd better take him straight

to Mr. Alvington. I believe he's still up—playing chess with Dr. Brett, in his study. You'll have to tell the whole truth, De Valerie."

The Rotter nodded.

"I'm ready!" he muttered. "It's the best way, anyhow."

A keen thought had come into my mind. It was quite possible—probable, even—that Professor Zingrave was still in the vault—waiting to see, or hear, of the result of his villainy. It wasn't likely that he would have made tracks at once.

There was a distinct chance, in fact, of trapping him—the High Lord of the Circle himself!

Without a second's loss of time we led Yakama from the roof, and then hurried down to the gov'nor's study. As I had stated, "Mr. Alvington" was there, chatting with Dr. Brett, the genial village practitioner—chess being over.

"De Valerie's got something to tell you, sir," I said, without beating about the bush. "He's been in league with some crooks, and led Yakama into a trap. But De Valerie proved to be the right stuff in the end—he saved Yakama from a horrible death at the risk of his own life!"

And then, in quick, jerky sentences, but speaking with deadly calmness, Cecil de Valerie explained to us all the interesting facts concerning the tunnel which led from the old vault to the moor quarry. He would have gone into further details, but Nelson Lee stopped him.

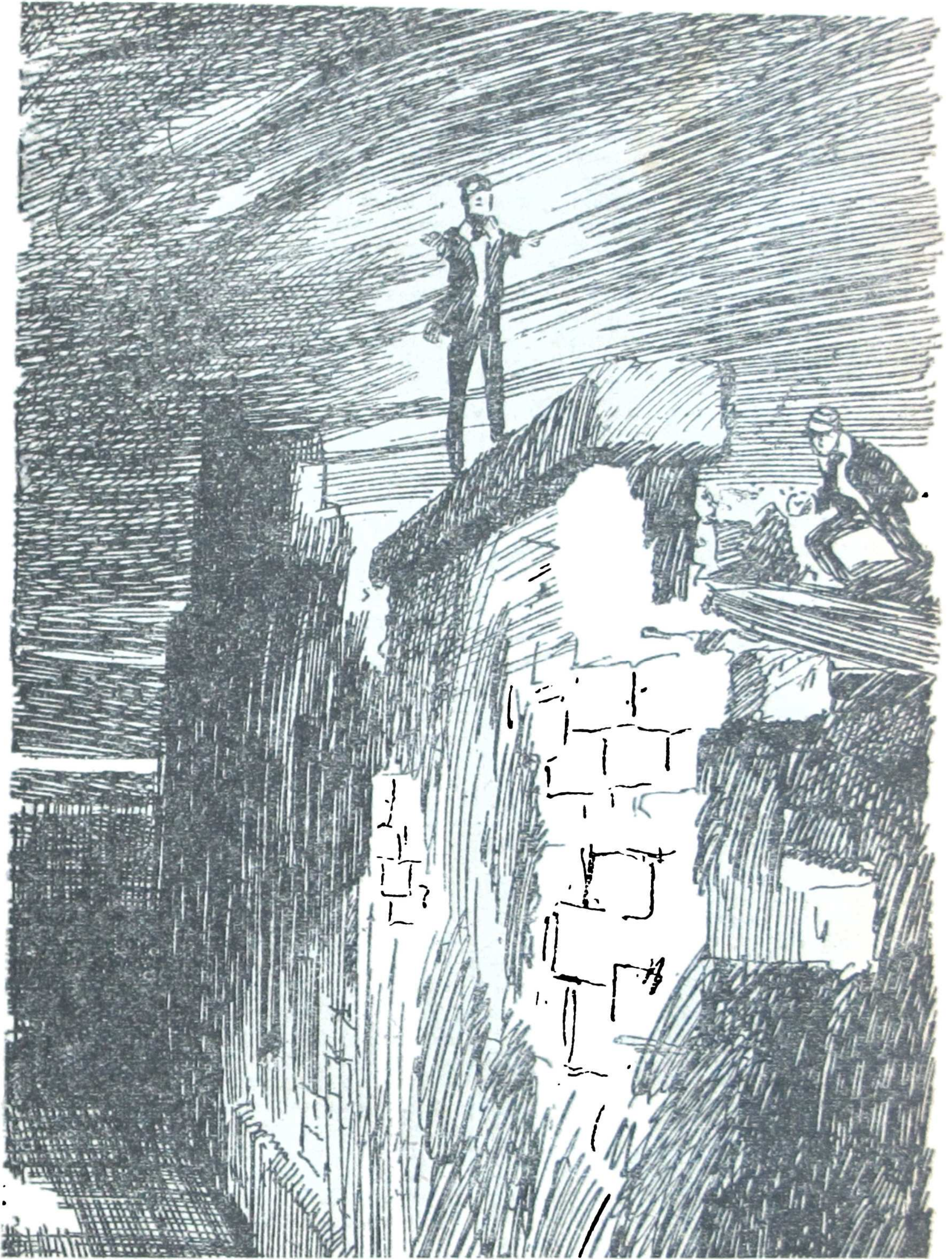
"That is sufficient for the present, De Valerie," said the gov'nor, holding up his hand. "Go back to bed, and remain there."

"Shall I be expelled, sir?" asked De Valerie quietly.

"Your punishment will largely depend upon the extent of your offence, my boy," replied the gov'nor. "By what I can understand you seem to have been the mere tool of others. If that proves to be the case, it will not be necessary for you to leave St. Frank's. But we cannot enter into that now."

De Valerie went without another word; but I noticed a gleam of relief in his eyes. Bolder though he was, I felt just a little sorry for him. He had acted the fool—and would have to pay the price.

I saw that Dr. Brett was bewildered.



Yakama walked up to the higher leads, and De Valerie crouched quite close to him. A startling thought came to me. Was De Valerie going to hurl the Japanese boy down——?—(See page 15.)

"I'm bothered if I can get the hang of things," declared the medico. "Crooks? Hypnotism? Good gracious, there's some silly mistake, Alvington!"

"On the contrary, doctor, we are dealing with a very real and sinister peril," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "Yakama's life has been attempted before—and this time the plot nearly succeeded. By James! What a diabolical scheme! The intention, evidently, was to make it appear that the boy had walked in his sleep."

"But I don't quite see——"

"Really, Brett, we cannot delay another minute," interjected the gov'nor. "The man who hypnotised Yakama is, in all probability, still in the vault. If possible, we must trap him."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Excitin' times comin'!"

Nelson Lee looked at us keenly.

"I shall want you with me, Bennett," he said. "We will hurry to the moor quarry, and cut off the rascal's retreat. You, Brett, will go at once to the vault; and, if you see no sign of the man, plunge into the tunnel. I take it that you are willing to help——"

"Why, I'm only too eager!" declared Dr. Brett. "I'd better take some sort of weapon, I suppose."

He selected the poker from the hearth, and gripped it firmly. I thought, perhaps, that the gov'nor would have offered him a revolver—but it's not everybody who can handle a gun properly, and Brett would probably have refused it.

"I'm dyin' to know somethin'," said Tregellis-West thoughtfully. "Where do Tommy an' I come in, sir? Ain't we goin' to lend a hand? Can't we go with Dr. Brett? Begad, we're willin'——"

"Of course, Montie—of course!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "Yes, the pair of you had better accompany the doctor. Don't run into unnecessary danger. I shall look to you, Brett, to see after the boys."

And before another minute had elapsed we were off.

A lot had been crowded into a little time, and only a few minutes had elapsed since Yakama had emerged from the vault. The chances were that Zingrave was even now making his way down the tunnel to the quarry.

That was why the gov'nor and I were off to the moor—there was more chance of us meeting the scoundrel. With luck, we should make a capture!

CHAPTER V.

(Related by Sir Montie Tregellis-West.)

IN WHICH I DESCRIBE A FRIGHTFUL SCRAP
—AND A SHOCKING DISASTER!

DR. BRETT was as eager as anything, you know.

He led Tommy and me towards the ruins of the monastery at the run, while Nelson Lee and Nipper hurried away to the quarry. Of course, Tommy and I were right in the secret, and we knew everything.

As soon as we got among the ruins the doctor paused.

"Quietly now, boys," he whispered. "I suppose you know where the entrance is? I'm sure I have no idea——"

"That's all right, sir," remarked Tommy. "I know it."

"So do I, begad!" I put in.

We crept through the masses of ivy-covered stonework, and Tommy led the way down the stone steps. As soon as we were fairly started on the descent, however, Dr. Brett took the lead. That poker of his might be needed.

It was frightfully black and eerie.

The walls reeked with dampness, and there was a horrid smell in the air—like earth. Earth doesn't smell horrid, really, but this was a different "niff" to that. It was shockingly earthy, if you know what I mean. Begad! I can't express myself any better.

Down we went, lower and lower. I had seen Nelson Lee hand the doctor a little electric torch, but he wasn't using it yet. I was hoping that he would. There's nothing worse than being enclosed in utter darkness.

We turned another bend, and Dr. Brett came to a sudden halt.

"Shsssh!" he breathed.

We remained perfectly still, and then I noticed a curious glow below me, at the foot of the circular staircase. There was a light down there—the scoundrel hadn't left the vault yet!

This was rather surprising, but we were ready for a scrap, if necessary. I began to wonder how the doctor would proceed. If we crept forward we might be heard, and the rascal in the vault would probably escape.

And, somehow, I wanted to capture him—at least, I wanted to help. It would be simply ripping if Tommy and I and the doctor collared the man. What a surprise for Nelson Lee and Nipper when they returned!

Dr. Brett acted boldly.

He simply pelted down the few remaining stairs, and rushed into the vault. Tommy and I were just behind. The place was lit up by a curious electric-lamp, and on the other side stood the man De Valerie had described.

He didn't seem to be at all startled, but stood there gazing at us steadily and calmly. And his eyes were—awful. Begad, I seemed to feel a cold shiver go down my spine. Small as the man was, I would rather have faced a huge ruffian with muscles like a giant. This man made a fellow feel helpless, in some uncanny way. I understood how Yakama had been hypnotised.

But the stranger couldn't well hypnotise three of us at once, however great his power. And Dr. Brett wasn't a boy—he was a big, healthy man, with a strong will. But even he was checked for a second.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the small man, in silky tones.

Dr. Brett found his voice, and, at the same time, he raised the poker in his hand.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he rapped out angrily. "But for a slight mischance, your plans would have succeeded—Yakama would have gone to his death. But you have failed, and you'll have to answer—"

"Indeed!" said Professor Zingrave smoothly.

Nipper had told me of his suspicion that the man was the High Lord of the Circle himself. Of course, Tommy and I didn't know anything about the Circle of Terror, except what Nipper had told us—but that had been enough. Begad! Dr. Brett knew nothing at all of the real facts.

"Yes, you'll have to answer for this villainy," went on the doctor. "You are outnumbered, you brute, and if you have a grain of sense you will come forward quietly and submit to capture. Otherwise you will find yourself severely handled."

The other laughed softly.

"You are quite amusing, my friend," he exclaimed. "Submit to capture, eh? I don't think my grains of sense will lead me to accept such a proposition. On the contrary, I intend to leave this place at once—"

Dr. Brett hurled himself forward with a shout. Somehow or other, Zingrave's very voice worked us all into a frightful

temper. It was the man's calmness more than anything else which got on our nerves.

I don't think Zingrave was quite prepared for such an attack. The doctor had cast aside his poker—probably fearing that he would use it too forcibly—and now he grasped the intruder fiercely.

"You rogue!" he exclaimed. "You're fairly caught!"

In a second the pair were struggling with great fury. I was greatly amazed at the display of strength which Zingrave exhibited. Although Dr. Brett was a powerful man, he was being overpowered.

"Hold tight, begad!" I gasped. "We're comin', sir!"

Both Tommy and I had been standing looking on—completely rooted to the ground through sheer excitement. But now we tore ourselves up by the roots, so to speak, and rushed forward.

At that second the professor jerked something from his coat-pocket. There was a flash and a report—and the vault was plunged into pitchy darkness. It was an amazing shot. Zingrave had fired at the lamp—and had hit it!

Dr. Brett was, for a second, stunned by the report so close to his ear. I couldn't see what was happening, but I heard him gasp. He commenced stumbling forward, and he brought out his own electric-torch.

The beam of light shot out, and we saw the fugitive just disappearing into a tunnel-entrance. He seemed to be descending some steps. But he paused as the light flooded upon him.

Crack!

Again his revolver spat—and the former performance was repeated. A crack of glass sounded, the light went out, and Dr. Brett uttered a sharp, hissing cry of pain. My heart seemed to drop like lead.

"Are—are you hurt, sir?" asked Tommy Watson shrilly.

"Only shock, my boy," muttered Dr. Brett between his teeth. "The scoundrel hit my torch, and put it out of action. By George! What an aim!"

"It's a good thing he didn't fire at you, sir!" I said, as I felt my way forward. "Why, begad, he might have plugged you!"

"Come—we must follow!" rapped out the doctor grimly.

It was as easy as winking to say that

—but it wasn't so easy to do. The darkness was so frightfully intense that we could almost feel it. Zingrave could have killed Dr. Brett in a moment if he had liked. But it was clear that he only wanted to prevent any pursuit. Killing the doctor would have accomplished this object all right, but the position didn't call for such a fearful crime as murder. Even Zingrave, I suppose, drew the line somewhere.

We heard him descending the steps. As quickly as we could, considering the darkness, we followed. I had a horrid feeling that we were just walking into some danger—blindly.

"Keep behind, boys," said Brett, his voice quivering with rage. "This villain has roused me thoroughly. We mustn't let him escape now!"

The doctor was certainly wild; he had good reason to be. Perhaps he thought that the shot had been intended for him, after all. This was quite possible, of course. In any case, it had been a near shave.

We arrived at the bottom of the steps, somehow. And then Dr. Brett uttered a quick ejaculation.

We had expected to see nothing, but some little distance from us, down a low tunnel, a dull point of light was moving along, fantastically and weirdly. There could be only one explanation.

The fugitive had a torch of his own, and he was now using this so that he could walk rapidly down the tunnel. The beam of light was cast upon the ground in front of him—that's why it looked so indistinct and erratic.

"My hat!" muttered Tommy Watson. "He'll be copped fine! Old Alvy and Benny will be round in time to head him off——"

"Quiet, youngster—quiet!" said the doctor sharply. "Voices carry easily in a tunnel of this sort. Follow me, and don't utter a sound!"

"How's your hand, sir——"

"Confound my hand!" snapped Dr. Brett. "It is quite all right—quite all right!"

He hurried off at a fast run, and Tommy and I followed right behind him. We, of course, went blindly, for there was nothing to guide us.

Running wasn't possible after a while, for the passage narrowed down until, occasionally, we were almost obliged to squeeze through. But if this was a draw-

back to us, it was also a drawback to the fugitive.

By the way in which the doctor kept going I judged that Zingrave's light was still visible. This, in a way, was a good guide. For Dr. Brett was not going blindly as Tommy and I were. If you've ever been in a long, dark tunnel you'll know how helpful it is to have a light—no matter how weak—some little distance ahead of you. Without that Brett would have been compelled to feel his way foot by foot.

Tommy and I could see nothing; we just followed, trusting that we should be able to prevent the awful villain from getting away. It seemed as though the tunnel would never end. We went on and on without a pause.

Quite abruptly we slowed down.

"He's turned a corner, I believe," murmured Dr. Brett. "At least, the light has vanished. Come cautiously now, boys."

"Begad! Perhaps he's waitin' in ambush——"

"Probably. But we must risk that."

We went on again. I couldn't help feeling surprised at the keen way in which Dr. Brett was pursuing the chase. I don't suppose he would have been so eager if the personal element hadn't been introduced. But, you see, Zingrave had fired at Dr. Brett and the worthy medico was frightfully angry. He was evidently strongly in favour of prompt and dire reprisals.

We reached the corner almost before we knew it. Away to our left, practically at right-angles, the dull glow of the electric-lamp was reflected from the floor of the tunnel.

This passage was much wider and higher, and Dr. Brett sprinted along it rapidly. Tommy and I had some difficulty in keeping up with him. But after the doctor had nearly come a cropper on a stone projection, he slowed down somewhat. The light was so near now that I knew that we were gaining.

I was just wondering how the fight would go when a startling thing happened.

Without the slightest warning Dr. Brett uttered a strange, gasping cry. It seemed as though his voice came from my very feet, as though he had sunk into the ground. And there was a slithering, kicking sound.

I was immediately behind, and Tommy

pressed in my rear. At the moment we were all running fairly quickly.

Before I could possibly pull up, my feet simply went into space. Begad, it was a frightful sensation!

I hit the ground with a bump, rolled on my back, and then commenced slithering down into utter blackness with appalling speed. Somewhere above I heard Tommy Watson fall also. And a wild yell told me that he was following me.

What had happened?

My brain was confused and muddled. Of course, Benny and Tommy have always contended that my brain is in such a state perpetually. Perhaps it is. It's not my place to raise questions. But I do know that everything was spinning and horribly confused in this particular instance.

There was a most terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, like you feel when you're going down a lift—only fifty times as bad. And I'm quite sure that my trousers were not being improved.

Slipping and sliding I plunged down. I wasn't actually falling, so that I knew the descent must be a tremendously steep slope. As for pulling myself up, the very idea of it was preposterous.

I might have been going to certain death for all I knew. But that idea didn't come to me. There wasn't time for ideas!

It seemed as though I had only just started when I bumped into something soft, found a boot in my face, and clouds of dust nearly choking me. Sundry gasps led me to believe that I had rolled upon Dr. Brett.

I was just making an attempt to scramble up when Tommy Watson arrived.

It seemed as though he had gained greater speed than I had. At all events, he descended like a sack of coals, bumping and slithering, and making weird noises with his mouth.

Then he hit me, and sprawled over. The tangle was dreadful for a moment or two. Just picture it to yourself. Dr. Brett and Tommy and I were in a mangled heap, struggling and gasping in utter darkness. (Begad! That would want a bit of picturing, too—considering that we were in total darkness!)

But the most amazing thing of all was that we weren't hurt. I had about six or seven bruises on me, to say nothing of numerous scratches, but there was no real harm done. Nothing serious, I

mean. The others were in a similar condition.

"What—what happened?" gasped Tommy hoarsely.

"Oh, begad!" I panted. "Ain't it shockin'?"

"Are you hurt, boys?" came Dr. Brett's anxious inquiry. "Good gracious! I cannot imagine what has happened——"

"We've been slidin' down somewhere, sir," I said, feeling my way clear of the others. "Goodness knows where we are, but——"

At that moment a beam of light was cast down upon us from above. It dazzled us for a second or two; but we were enabled to see the nature of our surroundings. Not very far above, and at the top of a sloping mass of rock, a great hole yawned. The light was held at the edge of this.

I was surprised, for it had seemed that our descent had been very much further. In reality the distance was not at all great. Dr. Brett uttered an exclamation of anger, as we all observed the acute angle of the rock. To climb up it was an impossibility. And there was no other outlet. We were, in fact, at the bottom of a pit.

"Rather a neat trap, my friends, eh?" came the silky tones of Professor Zingrave from above. "You were not prepared for the gaping hole in the floor, were you? Had you known that a narrow ledge existed, you would have been cautious——"

"You infernal rascal!" roared Dr. Brett.

"But clever—don't you think so?" came the smooth voice. "I had no wish to harm you, so I adopted this little ruse. Whether you are ever rescued is a matter which does not interest me."

The light snapped out, and for a moment or two we heard footsteps. Then utter silence followed.

Dr. Brett muttered something under his breath, and struck a wax vesta. The flare of light showed us that our position was only about twelve feet across, and the sole exit was the broad shaft down which we had shot.

Although steep, we could have easily reached the top if there had been any projections, or rough knobs in the rock. But it was perfectly flat and smooth, and foothold or handgrip was impossible.

"How rotten!" I said gloomily. "If

there had only been sharp spikes stickin' out, we should be able to climb up easily."

The doctor gave a short laugh.

"It is just as well that the rock is smooth, Tregellis-West," he exclaimed. "Had it been otherwise, we should have met with very serious injury—and shouldn't have been able to climb up in any case."

"Bogad! I'd forgotten that!" I murmured.

The match had burnt out, and we stood in the darkness again.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Tommy Watson practically.

Tommy always was a practical fellow, and it was a habit of his to ask pointed questions. Questions were all right, but answers were sometimes difficult. This one seemed rather hopeless.

"What is to be done?" repeated the doctor. "I don't know, boys. It seems to me that we can only wait here until rescue comes to us. There is no chance of getting out of this place without assistance from above."

"We—we might have to stay here all night!" muttered Tommy huskily.

"I hardly think so, Watson. Mr. Alvington knows that we entered the tunnel, and there will certainly be a search," replied Brett. "But I am intensely angry. That fellow has fooled me. I shall be utterly ashamed to meet Mr. Alvington when——"

"Oh, come, sir!" I put in. "It wasn't our fault, was it? How were we to know that a frightful hole gaped in the tunnel? It was dark, an' we were followin' that chap almost blindly——"

"Take these matches, Tregellis-West," said the doctor sharply.

"What for, sir?"

"I will tell you. I am going to lie flat against the rock. If possible, I want you two boys to climb up, one over the other," said Brett. "Do you understand my meaning? You, Watson, will rest your feet upon my shoulders, and Tregellis-West will rest his feet upon your shoulders."

"Bogad! Do you think I can reach the top like that?"

"There is just a chance, my boy. At all events, strike a match as soon as you get into position."

It didn't take us long to make the attempt. It was rather sagging to climb right up over the other two, but I did it

after treading on one of poor old Tommy's ears, and then felt above me.

There was no sign of the edge, and so I struck one of the wax vestas. I could have laughed when the flame flared up. The top of the shaft was still four or five feet above me. Not being blessed with patent telescopic arms, I couldn't possibly reach it.

"Well, Tregellis-West?"

"It ain't well, sir," I replied. "I want to be four or five feet higher. There's nothin' to grab hold of at all!"

A minute later we were standing upon the floor again. The silence of the place was something awful. Nipper had once told me about an experience of his in the heart of a great pyramid in Egypt. This reminded me of it, although I don't suppose this adventure was half so bad as his.

And so, in darkness, we waited.

Would Professor Zingrave escape before Mr. Nelson Lee and Nipper could cut off his retreat? Or had he doubled back to the vault?

I was in a frightful state of doubt and uncertainty.

CHAPTER VI.

(Told by Nipper.)

FACE TO FACE WITH ZINGRAVE—WE ARE SURPRISED—THE ESCAPE.

THE gov'nor paused at the summit of the roughly hewn steps which led down into the old moor quarry.

"We have made good time, Nipper," he murmured. "There is no sign here, and we may possibly meet with success. Now, according to De Valerie, the entrance to this tunnel is on the other side of the quarry, directly facing us when we reach the foot of these steps."

"That's right, sir," I replied. "Do you think we shall collar Zingrave——"

"My dear boy, I am not concerning myself as regards that matter—as yet," replied Nelson Lee. "Wait until we sight our quarry before you talk about capture."

"Well, gov'nor, you needn't make puns——"

"This is no time for joking, Nipper!" struck in Lee sternly. "And, let me tell you, we have no positive knowledge that Zingrave is here at all. That is merely a guess of yours."

"Why, don't you think——"

"I think nothing. My mind is open."

After that I thought that I had better meekly shut up. And so we crawled down the rough steps with as much speed as possible. Arriving at the bottom, we cut off across the quarry in the pale moonlight—for a thin, weakly-looking crescent had appeared between two clouds.

The quarry was utterly deserted, so far as we could see. Of course, it was quite possible that we had had our trouble for nothing. As the gov'nor said, however, we shouldn't do any harm by making sure.

The hour wasn't so very late, even now. Eleven o'clock had gone a few minutes since. Naturally, it was late enough from the point of view of a St. Frank's junior. But to the gov'nor and I it almost seemed early.

We found the entrance to the tunnel without much difficulty, for De Valeric had given us full directions. We plunged in without wasting a moment, Nelson Lee refraining from using any light.

This, naturally, would show for a great distance in the passage, and would give any lurker a warning well in advance. Our policy was to creep up the tunnel slowly and silently. So this is what we were doing; like "sleuths on the trail."

As it happened, it wasn't necessary for us to proceed far. Nelson Lee came to a halt after about five minutes, and gripped my hand as a silent token for me to remain perfectly still. And then, as we crouched there, we heard quick, soft footsteps echoing down the confined walls.

"I wonder if it's——"

I broke off abruptly, for the gov'nor pinched me harder than ever. I realised that it wasn't safe to even whisper.

I had been on the point of saying that the newcomer was more likely to be Zingrave than anybody else; I was wondering as to that point. If it had been Dr. Brett and Montie and Tommy, there would have been considerably more noise.

I wondered, also, why there was no light. Surely the chap wasn't coming along in the dark?

A moment later, however, the truth became clear. There was a bend in the tunnel just ahead of us. I knew this by the fact that a funny, subdued, flickery glow made itself apparent.

It grew brighter and brighter until, finally, the figure of a man burst right upon us round the bend. He was carrying an electric torch, and was looking at the ground immediately in front of him.

Nelson Lee acted with great promptitude.

In a flash he had sprung forward. He gripped the newcomer by both arms almost before he became aware of our presence.

"Over with him, Bennett—on his back!" rapped out the gov'nor. "This is certainly the rascal who caused——"

"Let me go—let me go!"

The voice came in a fierce tone, throbbing with fury. But I knew it in a second. We were, indeed, grasping Professor Cyrus Zingrave himself! There was practically no struggle; it was a complete capture.

The professor was on his back, and his wrists were held by the gov'nor in a vice-like grip. I had already whipped out my handkerchief and bound it round the prisoner's wrists in a twinkling.

Nelson Lee took the torch and flashed it upon Zingrave. It was necessary for him to keep up his character as a House-master, and he proceeded to do so.

"Dear me! What a startling occurrence!" said the gov'nor, in a shocked voice. "This is terrible, Bennett—terrible! I'm sure I don't know what to do with the man. How can we get him back to the school?"

I had taken my cue.

"I—I don't know, sir," I said nervously. "Hadn't—hadn't I better run for the policeman? Is he a tramp?"

"I hardly know, Bennett," replied Lee. "I suppose he must be something of the sort."

I nearly grinned. It sounded queer to hear the gov'nor talking in that tone. His voice, too, was more altered than ever—and I had changed mine. We simply couldn't be too careful with such a keen rogue as Zingrave.

He, for his part, had no suspicion of our real identity; I was sure of that. He couldn't have recognised our voices, and he hadn't even glimpsed at our "dials." It wouldn't have mattered much if he had done, if it comes to that. But we had been in darkness, and were still in darkness.

The torch was sending out a gleam of light, it is true, but the blaze of it was in the prisoner's eyes, and everything beyond was hidden. We were beyond.

Somehow, I felt like shouting with delight as I gazed at the writhing High Lord.

"You fools!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Let me go! You don't know what you are doing! I was coming along this passage in pursuit of——"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Come, come!" he interrupted. "That won't do, my friend. Schoolmasters are not quite so simple as you seem to imagine. It is you who have been driven——"

"Then where are your helpers?" sneered the professor, suddenly becoming calm. "Where is the man—another master, I presume—and the two boys? Why are they not here, close behind me? Because they are dead—because I killed them!"

"Good heavens!" I breathed, horror-struck.

Had any other man uttered the statement, I should have laughed. But I knew Zingrave. He was capable of any act of violence, if his own safety was at stake. And the absence of Dr. Brett and Montie and Tommy looked——

"You brute—you brute!" I gasped chokingly.

"Silence, Bennett!" rapped out Nelson Lee. "Allow me to talk to this scoundrel. Not for one moment do I believe his preposterous statement——"

"Go back along the tunnel, then, and see with your own eyes," snarled Zingrave, his usual silky tones made harsh with fury. "The man is dead, and the boys writhing in their death agonies!"

"You said, a moment ago, that all three were dead!" said Lee calmly.

The professor's eyes flashed.

"I accept the position," he exclaimed. "Leave me here with the boy, bound as I am, and go down the second branch-tunnel on the right. You will find a pit, in which the three unfortunates are dying!"

"And, meanwhile, you will escape from your bonds—eh?" asked the gov'nor sweetly. "No, my friend, I am not so foolish. Your words have told me that the real situation is not so desperate as you would have me believe."

Zingrave evidently had thought that he could easily trick this simple (?) schoolmaster! The gov'nor and I had had many encounters with Professor Zingrave. But this was, to my mind, the most satisfactory of any.

There was something almost humorous in the situation. I did not envy the High Lord of the Circle of Terror at this moment. His feelings must have been terrific. He—he, the master criminal—trapped by a paltry schoolmaster!

Zingrave wouldn't have been so enraged had he known our real identities. I'd never seen him give way to fury like this before. And I knew the reason. It was because he thought that we were nobodies.

At the same time, I was terribly uneasy. Had he been speaking the truth about Sir Montie and the others. I simply couldn't believe that they were dying. The professor must have been talking wildly.

But there was something in what he said—I was positive of that. Perhaps the disaster was not so appalling as he made out. Even so, it was probably serious. My chums and their leader had met with treachery at Zingrave's hands.

I wanted to rush along the tunnel—I wanted to make sure. But the most important thing was to render our prisoner so helpless that any attempt at escape would be futile. The gov'nor was thinking the same way, I found.

"Bennett, you will find some thick cord in my left-hand coat-pocket," he said. "Take it out, and bind this man's hands more securely. Then tie his ankles as tightly as you can——"

While he was speaking, Nelson Lee twirled round like a top. I had heard nothing, and I looked round, too. And the gov'nor, it seemed, had only acted in the nick of time. For, as he spun round, a heavy piece of wood whizzed past his head, and caught him with great force on the shoulder.

Lee went down with a thud, the torch flying from his grip.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

I had just caught one fleeting glimpse of a smallish man in thick leather overalls. The light snapped out as he was raising the wood for a second blow. Without a moment's hesitation I doubled up and charged with my head.

This is quite a good trick in an emergency—but now it didn't work. Either I misjudged, or the man shifted his position. My head met nothing, and I stumbled forward blindly.

My feet caught against Nelson Lee as he was rising, and we both collapsed on the floor of the tunnel. Quick footsteps

were audible, and I heard Zingrave's voice, harsh with emotion.

"Go, man—go!" he hissed. "I am following!"

"Right, sir!" came another voice.

Nelson Lee was underneath my sprawling form. I had expected him to spring up like a jack-in-the-box, flinging me aside. But he didn't. He lay there quietly for a few seconds, and then slowly raised himself.

"Are you hurt, my boy?" he asked huskily.

"My head, sir!" I panted. "I caught it against the wall as I fell. I—I say, that brute gave me a terrific swipe——"

"Just momentary agony, young 'un—nothing more," replied the gov'nor. "They are escaping, and we must give chase without loss of time. But for that act of treachery—— But what is the use of talking?"

We scrambled to our feet, and hurried down the dark tunnel, Lee now using his own electric-torch. We had little fear of Zingrave and his underling lying in ambush for us. They had fled to the open.

Zingrave's rescue had been a complete surprise. I dimly realised that he had been talking to us to gain time. He must have known that his confederate was near by. But Nelson Lee, although keenly on the alert, had received no warning until the last second. We're only human, the gov'nor and I, and we're just as liable to be attacked from the rear as anybody else. It was treachery which had robbed us of our victory. In an open fight we should have won hands down.

Mind you, I'm not trying to make out that we were blameless. As the gov'nor told me afterwards, we had been at fault in not keeping a sharper watch. The second man had evidently been waiting in the quarry—hidden, perhaps, behind some masses of stone. He had seen us enter, and had followed.

As Nelson Lee and I hurried down the tunnel I screwed a piece of paper into the palm of my hand. I hadn't the slightest idea what it was, but I put it into my pocket mechanically. As I had been getting to my feet, I felt the paper on the ground. It was instinct, I suppose, which made me pick it up.

We emerged into the quarry without warning.

It was almost like coming out into day-

light, for there was a vast contrast between the inky blackness of the tunnel and the comparative brilliance of the semi-moonlight night.

We could see right across the quarry distinctly.

And there, racing towards the rough stairway, were two black figures. These rudely hewn steps provided practically the only means of gaining the moor, for the edges of the quarry were steep and treacherous.

"Come, Nipper!" muttered Nelson Lee quickly.

We simply pelted across. Even now the gov'nor had not given up hope of effecting a capture. We arrived at the base of the cliff, and commenced mounting the steps as hurriedly as possible. Above us, near the top, were the fugitives. I couldn't help realising that we provided a fine mark for fancy revolver practice.

Indeed, I half expected to hear the sharp reports on the night air. But Zingrave probably feared to create any unusual noise. At all events, he made no attempt to fire. Instead, he attempted another dastardly trick.

A slight noise above us caused the gov'nor to glance upwards. The next second he drew his breath in with a sharp hiss.

"By James!" he muttered. "Quick, lad! Slip on to that ledge!"

Just at this point a narrow ledge ran along the face of the cliff, on both sides of the steps. The gov'nor shot to one side and I to the other. The very instant we had done so a huge boulder, weighing a couple of hundredweight, probably, crashed on to the steps almost on the very spot where we had been standing.

The noise was terrific, and splinters flew in hundreds. They went outwards and upwards, however, and we hardly received one. A moment later a terrific crash from below told us that the mass of rock had reached the bottom.

In spite of myself, I was shivering from head to foot.

It had been an appallingly narrow shave.

But for the gov'nor's timely warning we should have both been dashed to bits. Zingrave, of course, had heaved the thing over from the top. And the steps, being on a slight slope, had received the boulder at the exact spot the professor had required.

"Oh, glory!" I panted. "That was a squeak, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee was looking upwards. But now there was no sign of the two men. Perhaps they thought their work was accomplished, or perhaps they had continued their flight without waiting to see the result of their villainy.

Three steps had been simply wiped away, and the rocks were torn and jagged. It was only with great difficulty that Nelson Lee succeeded in reaching the firm steps above. Then he gave me a hand, and we swiftly mounted to the top.

Even as I was running up behind the guv'nor I had a queer feeling that another great chunk of rock might follow the first. But we reached the top in safety, and stood looking round.

The moor was desolate and gloomy. There remained no sign whatever of Zingrave and his henchman. But just then, as we stood there panting, our breath issuing like clouds of steam on the frosty air, we heard a low, musical hum.

"By Jingo! A motor-car!" I exclaimed furiously.

"No, Nipper. Not a motor-car," was Nelson Lee's grim reply. "Don't you recognise that sound? Professor Zingrave travels in his own special carriage—he is leaving this spot as he approached it."

"An aeroplane!" I gasped.

"Undoubtedly."

The guv'nor was right. We stood there, helpless and angry. Something moved a good distance along the face of the moor. And then a dim shape came between us and the sky. A fast bi-plane was mounting steeply into the air. Its engine was astonishingly quiet, and the machine faded into a speck almost at once.

Nelson Lee and I were alone upon the face of Bannington Moor.

CHAPTER VII.

(Narrated by Nelson Lee.)

THINGS ARE NOT SO BAD AS WE AT FIRST SUPPOSED, AND THE AFFAIR ENDS WELL.

NIPPER turned to me with a slight shiver.

"We have failed, guv'nor!" he exclaimed huskily. "We have failed miserably!"

I turned from my reflective contem-

plation of the bleak expanse of moor, and patted my young assistant on the back.

"On the contrary, Nipper, we have been successful," I replied softly.

"That's a fine kind of success, ain't it?" he growled, pointing to the spot in the sky where we had last seen the aeroplane.

"I was not referring to Zingrave's escape, young 'un," I said. "That was most unfortunate. You seem to forget, however, that Yakama's life is now out of immediate peril. Professor Zingrave's dastardly scheme has been outwitted, and he has fled in disorder. Who will say that he has been successful, and that we have failed?"

"But—but what about Montia and the others?" asked Nipper. "Oh, guv'nor, do you think Zingrave was speaking the truth——"

I patted Nipper's shoulder a little harder.

"An idle threat, my boy," I replied. "We shall not find the doctor and our chums particularly harmed. But come, we will re-enter the tunnel, and explore without further delay."

Even while I was giving utterance to the words I felt that they were insincere. For, to tell the truth, I was gravely troubled concerning the fate of the trio I had sent down into the monastery vault. Their failure to put in any appearance had filled me with vague and terrible doubt.

It was idle, however, to let my imagination run riot. The better course was to make an exploration without the slightest delay.

Nipper and I descended the stone stairway cautiously. The lad's nerves had been severely shaken by the boulder incident a few minutes before. And, truth to tell, I was somewhat affected myself. I should have been scarcely human had it not been so.

At last we re-entered the old tunnel. And now, with my torch flashing out, I proceeded along the ancient passage-way, with Nipper close behind me. Occasionally we would stop and shout, but only the echo of our own voices would come booming back.

After we had proceeded a fair distance we came to a cross-passage. Here we again shouted, but with the same result.

"Shall we explore it, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Not now, young 'un—later on," I replied. "It is improbable in any case,"

that our friends will be in this vicinity."

We went on, looking for signs, but finding none. Just as we were continuing our walk, after having shouted, Nipper gripped my arm.

"Did you hear?" he asked quickly.

"No, I—"

"Listen, gov'nor—listen!"

We stood stock still; and then an unmistakable cry came to our ears. It sounded strange and weird in that narrow, dank tunnel. Hurrying onwards, we presently came upon another side passage. And here, in answer to our hail, the reply came with extraordinary distinctness.

"Begad! It's Benny boy! Rescue, Benny! Rescue!"

"Thank goodness!" gasped Nipper.

That shout had been distinctly hearty, and my own doubts faded away. We ran up the passage quickly, and I suddenly checked myself with great abruptness, causing Nipper to bump into my back. For a yawning hole appeared in the ground at my feet.

And the light from my torch, gleaming downwards, flashed upon the excited and flushed faces of Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Watson, and Dr. Brett.

"You seem to be in trouble," I remarked calmly.

"I'm confoundedly ashamed of myself, Alvington," called up the doctor in a rueful voice. "That brute tricked me—"

"Then it seems that we may cry quits," I cut in. "Bennett and myself actually succeeded in capturing the fellow, but he got away owing to the unexpected attack of a confederate."

Dr. Brett looked almost relieved.

"Hang it all, we can't talk like this," he exclaimed. "For mercy's sake, get us out of this infernal hole!"

"We're shiverin' like anythin', begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

And five minutes later the unfortunate trio were safely in the tunnel—bruised, scratched, but very little the worse for their adventure. Nipper and myself were feeling positively joyful.

We had expected to find our three friends in a far more serious plight. Sir Montie himself has told you of what happened in his own words. Dr. Brett gave me the yarn, and I certainly couldn't blame him for what had occurred. There had been a great deal of excitement—but Professor Zingrave, as

usual, had eluded capture. The famous rascal seemed to bear some kind of charm in that way.

But, notwithstanding his undoubted cleverness, he had failed miserably.

I made a point of seeing Yakama in the morning, early. The boy had undoubtedly been hypnotised. But a good night's sleep had caused him to resume his normal healthy condition, and he remembered nothing of what had taken place since his descent with Do Valerie into the old vault.

I did not think it wise to inform him of the peril which had assailed him. I hinted, however, that all was not as it should be, and questioned him closely as to any possible enemies.

Yakama displayed a childlike surprise, and assured me that he knew nothing whatever of anybody who was ill-disposed towards him. I could not help believing him, although his bland smile could easily have been deceptive.

Nobody but Nipper and his chums and Do Valerie knew of the night's happenings—with the exception, of course, of Dr. Brett. He had promised me that he would refrain from mentioning the subject to anybody, for it was against my wish that the incident should be talked about and converted into local gossip.

Naturally, I informed Dr. Stafford of what had taken place—the headmaster being in my full confidence. He was content to leave the matter entirely in my hands, and this was gratifying.

With regard to Cecil de Valerie, I had a most serious talk with the boy. Before breakfast I took him into my study, and made him stand before me. I knew, instinctively, that Do Valerie was a shifty, rascally sort of fellow. But I could not believe that he was guilty of anything seriously wicked.

"Now, De Valerie," I said quietly, "your better course will be to be perfectly open and frank. Nobody in the school knows of your conduct except Bennett and Watson and Tregellis-West, and Yakama. They have promised me that they will say nothing to the other boys. You deliberately enticed Yakama from the dormitory in order to place him in the hands of a man who was waiting in the vault. No; let me finish. I may as well tell you, now, that other activities of yours are known to me. It was owing to your duplicity that the man,

Howard Dale, was admitted into the school a week or so ago. You lied to me that night, and concealed the truth. You were perfectly aware that Dale tampered with the wall of the bedroom, fixing up an apparatus which enclosed a type of syringe. It was you, also, who operated that syringe on Yakama's first night at the school. You have much to answer for, De Valerie."

The boy stood before me, as pale as a ghost. His lips were set, and there was a look of wild anxiety in his dark eyes. I had been referring to matters which concerned an episode—two episodes, in fact—which had taken place before the arrival of the Japanese boy.

De Valerie found his voice at last.

"Are you going to sack me, sir?" he asked huskily.

"Let me hear your defence first, De Valerie," I replied. "You undoubtedly deserve expulsion, but Dr. Stafford may be disposed to deal leniently with you. It depends largely upon your attitude now. Do not fabricate—I shall know at once if you are giving voice to falsehoods. Do you realise, my boy, the terrible extent of your rascality. Do you realise that on two occasions you have nearly brought Yakama to a frightful death?"

De Valerie gulped.

"I—I didn't know, sir!" he exclaimed wildly. "And—and you said twice——"

"Exactly. The first occasion was when you operated that syringe. At the time the bulb of the apparatus contained pure water, but that was only because I removed the original contents. That bulb, De Valerie, contained a deadly poison.

"I didn't know, sir!" he repeated. "Oh, won't you believe me? I'd never have had anything to do with it if I'd known the truth. Last night, when I saw that Yakama was going to jump off the roof, I rushed forward and saved him."

I nodded.

"I am well aware of that, De Valerie," I replied. "Indeed, your conduct was praiseworthy in the extreme, and I may as well tell you that it was that act which decided me to plead for mercy on your behalf. If you remain at St. Frank's, it will be because of your courageous action last night."

"I've been a fool, sir!" muttered the boy, almost brokenly. "Oh, I've been mad! But I never expected anything of this nature—I didn't dream that there

would be any attempt to kill—to kill Yakama!"

"Tell me, exactly, how you first became involved."

"It was in the train, on my way down from London, sir," replied De Valerie. "I had been at Barcombe School, in the Midlands, and my pater took me away, and sent me straight here. I—I wasn't sacked, sir——"

"No, De Valerie, I am aware of that," I put in. "I am also aware that your father took you from Barcombe because you had managed to get yourself involved in some disagreeable trouble. However, I will not go into that matter. I hope that you will mend your ways while you are at St. Frank's."

De Valerie nodded earnestly.

"If I'm allowed to stay, sir, I'll prove myself all right," he declared. "Well, in the train I met that man, Dale. He told me that a Japanese boy, named Yakama was soon coming to St. Frank's—about four days after me. He told me that I should have to sleep in a special bedroom on my first night, and that Yakama would occupy it on his first night. He said a lot of things I forget, sir. But he gave me twenty-five pounds to help him to get into the school. If you remember, sir, I hauled him out of the river, and he pretended to be ill. It was Dale who fixed up that syringe affair—but I'll swear that I didn't know there was any poison in it!"

"I believe you, De Valerie," I said. "Well, go on. Why did this man want to fix up the syringe? What story did he tell you?"

De Valerie flushed with indignation.

"Why, sir, now I know it all, I was a fool to believe him," he exclaimed. "But I was hard-up—the pater had sent me to St. Frank's without much money—and that twenty-five pounds put me off my balance. Dale told me that there was some political trouble—a Japanese crisis, or something. Yakama was concerned in it—I was led to believe that he was the son of a high official at the Japanese Embassy. Anyhow, Dale told me that some political agents merely wanted to get Yakama from the school—they weren't going to harm him in the least. And another twenty-five pounds came by post on the day Yakama arrived. There was a reminder, too, that I had to work the syringe that night."

I smiled grimly.

"You deliberately chose to be blind

to obvious facts, De Valerie," I said sternly. "You wanted the money, and stifled your suspicion. Come, that is the truth—you cannot deny it. The whole story is palpably absurd."

"I know it is, sir," said De Valerie desperately. "But it's all I know—I swear it! And the night before last I was forced to meet another man who gave me further orders. I couldn't refuse, because they had me in their power. I'd taken the money, and I had to earn it. I simply daren't refuse to obey. That's why I got Yakama into the vault last night."

"And you know nothing more?"

"Nothing, sir—nothing at all!"

I nodded, and remained silent for a while. I felt sure that De Valerie was quite capable of lying; but I knew that he had been telling me the truth now. He had, of course, been duped in the most barefaced fashion. He had been fooled right and left, and had suspected this himself. But I gave the boy the benefit of the doubt—I could not believe that he had known of the true plot. Indeed, his action in saving Yakama's life was evidence of that.

"De Valerie, you have been guilty of very serious rascality," I said sternly. "Your excuse is weak and thin. You may go for the present, and I will report to the headmaster. It may be necessary for you to appear before Dr. Stafford personally. But you may receive some comfort in the information that your punishment will not be so serious as to necessitate your leaving the school."

"Thank you, sir!" said De Valerie huskily.

He walked out of my study without another word.

Dr. Stafford was grave when I told him everything. After due deliberation, however, it was decided that De Valerie should receive a severe flogging—not in public—as I had no wish for the facts to become known.

After breakfast, therefore, De Valerie was called to the head's study. He received his flogging pluckily—probably because he knew he so well deserved it. He was further punished by the imposition of a thousand lines and total "gating" for the period of fourteen days. Upon the top of this his pocket-money was

stopped for the remainder of the term—that is, the pocket-money which was supplied to the head by De Valerie senior for weekly allotment to his son.

The junior seemed to care very little, for he was as cool as ever when I passed him in the Triangle later in the day. His own lounge had returned, and there was the same half-insolent expression in his eyes.

Nipper brought me a most important item of news towards the evening. It appeared that he had picked up a piece of paper in the tunnel just after the struggle with Zingrave. Upon looking at it the lad had discovered that it was a small sheet torn from the pages of a pocket-diary. Upon it were several notes—written in the secret shorthand of the Circle of Terror!

The information was brief, but important. By what I could make out, an agent of the Circle of Terror, named Brunton, was to have an interview with a certain Mr. Toko Nagamo on the following Tuesday at noon. This interview was to take place in a big official building in London. Nagamo, I learned, was a highly-placed Japanese attache, and a man of excellent repute.

This private shorthand note, however, told me much. It practically proved that the Oriental was deeply concerned in the plot—that, indeed, the Circle of Terror was acting under his instructions, and taking his money.

"I cannot believe, Nipper, that this sheet of paper was dropped for the sole purpose of my picking it up," I declared quietly to my young assistant. "It fell from Zingrave's pocket by accident in the tussle. It does not matter if he misses it, for he will feel sure that it cannot be read."

Nipper nodded brightly.

"But what the dickens can we do?" he asked. "We're stuck down here at St. Frank's, gov'nor—"

"But there is such a thing as taking a trip to London, young 'un," I said grimly. "I mean to pursue this affair to the end. The next move will be to interview the excellent Nagamo, and to discover his game. I intend, in fact, to bring matters to a head without delay."

And I will not deny that the outlook pleased me.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

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. But here they are surrounded by a hostile crowd, who shower insults upon them. Just when things look very black a car drives up, and the owner asks them to get in. He is the American Ambassador, and takes them to his Embassy.

(Now read on.)

BOUND FOR ENGLAND!

EVENTS were moving with ever-quickenings pace. Up till the moment of their rescue from the crowd by the American Ambassador neither George Gray nor his brother, in spite of the many warnings they had received and their unhappy experiences at the hands of the Berliners, can be said to have really thoroughly understood the peril of their situation.

But when the well-trained and inscrutable manservant had left them and they were alone in the rooms that had been placed at their disposal at the Embassy, the brothers looked fixedly at each other.

For some seconds neither spoke. At last Jack said, with the faint flicker of a smile on his lips:

"George. I could never have believed

that Englishmen were so hated in Berlin as they seem to be to-day."

"It's the racial character coming out, my boy. Germany hopes to rend the British Empire limb from limb some day. Gad, and to think that they've got the spirit and will to do it, too."

"Do—do you think the Ambassador will be able to arrange for our railway journey, George?"

"Why not? I should think so."

"Did—did you see the huge crowd of men and women, mostly women waiting to see him?"

"I did, Jack boy."

"They weren't Americans, George. Nearly all of them were British, most of 'em ladies, too; and a few were Russians and French——"

"Oh, the French will be imprisoned straight away. He'll never be able to save them. The others, like ourselves, will have a chance, I hope. What disgusting boasts the German officials are, old boy. Did you read how they treated the French Ambassador?"

Jack clenched his fists.

"I wish I could fight some of 'em, George. I'd attempt it, at any rate. It makes my blood boil to think of the way the cads go on."

With a laugh, George dropped his hands on his brother's shoulders.

"There, don't excite yourself, Jack," said he. "You know it's bad for you. You're not strong. We'll keep quiet here, and get to bed early to-night. And we'll leave this hole of a city, I trust, in the morning."

The day seemed never-ending to the brothers. Acting upon advice, they no longer showed themselves abroad. In the evening they saw the kindly American Ambassador again for some minutes.

He informed them that he would hand them their passports in the morning.

"I have drawn especial attention to your case," he said with a kindly smile.

"Your Embassy is besieged. It is impos-

sible for your harrassed Ambassador and his staff to deal with the thousands of applicants who are clamouring at his doors. I will get your affairs attended to, however. But I can't guarantee that any of the advertised trains will start at the times appointed in the morning.

"Does it really mean war, sir?"

Again George Gray put the question, hoping against hope to receive an assurance that there was no danger of such a catastrophe.

Gravely the answer was given.

"Yes. It is certain. I have been behind the scenes, and I know."

"Then it's lucky we'll be able, thanks to you, sir, to leave the country. I shouldn't care to leave myself in German hands if war broke out between Germany and Great Britain."

The Ambassador nodded.

"Yes. It would not be pleasant," he observed. "Be at the station early. Leave by the first train. You may be lucky enough to gain the frontier without further trouble——"

"Then, is there a doubt about it, sir?"

"It is no certainty. More I cannot say."

So he wished them a cheery good-night, and hastened to meet other and weightier obligations.

George and Jack turned in at half-past nine o'clock that night, but they did not fall to sleep until the midnight hour had chimed from a hundred city clocks. Even then sounds of noise and revelry echoed from the restless streets. The German war beast had, indeed, been roused.

In the morning George and Jack rose at half-past five, bathed and dressed, and then anxiously went downstairs to find out whether their new passports were ready for them.

Yes. One of the secretaries of the Embassy, who was already up and doing, handed them the necessary vouchers, which they examined with feelings of devout relief.

A half an hour later they ate their breakfast, and then craved an interview with the American Ambassador.

Upon this occasion his smile and air of complete serenity were absent. He looked tired, worried. Raising his eyebrows, he eyed them with a grave smile.

"We wish to thank you, sir, for all the kindness you have shown us," said

George. "I'm afraid we shall never be able to repay you."

The Ambassador held up his hand.

"Don't talk of repayment," he cried. "It is little enough I am able to do in this terrible time. I can only give you a moment. I hope you will succeed in crossing a neutral frontier. And I wish you God speed."

He grasped them heartily by the hand, smiled, then turned sadly away.

"The decision has been arrived at. Britain will make her declaration to-day, perhaps. To-morrow at the latest. Germany has defied her. It is war."

The pronouncement was not unexpected, and yet, on hearing it, George started as if a blow had struck him, then looked at his younger brother. Jack was very pale. His lips twitched nervously.

"Old man," said the elder brother brokenly, "let's start for the station quick. We must get back to England as fast as we can. Don't you see what this means?"

"Yes, we've got to fight, George."

"We have, old man. And we will fight, too."

They said good-bye to the Ambassador, but he was already deeply engrossed in some perplexing question of international law with two of his secretaries. So George and Jack left him, and, hurrying through the streets, at last gained the railway terminus, which they found besieged by an amazing crowd of English people and foreigners.

Jack gasped as his eyes took in the magnitude of the crowd.

"George," said he, "we shall never do it. There'll never be trains enough to take this lot. We don't stand a dog's chance."

"At any rate," cried George, as he pushed his way among the clamouring, surging, and excited travellers, dodging piles of luggage, and adroitly getting nearer and nearer the ticket offices, "we'll try."

— —

THE RAILWAY JOURNEY.

TRY! Never could George Gray have believed it possible that such utter chaos and confusion could reign at any railway-station as that which, for the time being, at any rate, completely demoralised boasted German organisation there.

True, the queues waiting to get to the ticket-offices were orderly enough, but

how white-faced, tired and anxious the women looked.

It seemed an age ere George managed to secure his tickets for himself and brother.

"We give no guarantees," said the stiff-necked official when George asked him if they ran any risk of not reaching the frontier.

At last George and Jack shook themselves free of the queues, and reached the main-departure platform.

On the way they addressed themselves to half a dozen uniformed officials in order to find out what time the next train departed, and if they were on the right platform.

None of them knew, or if they did, would not tell. They scowled at the unmistakable ring of the English voices, and studied the faces of the two travellers intently.

"There is only one more train," was all they could wring from the sullen porters. "It'll be the last to leave from Berlin. Ach. The trains for Russia are already stopped. There's nothing going east," and, with a grim chuckle, the speaker waved his hand at an adjoining platform which was crowded with hopeless-looking refugees. "Look!"

George Gray looked. The picture that met his eyes was one he never forgot. The majority of the forlorn and dejected creatures who flooded the platform were Russians. There was no mistaking them.

Nearly all were women. Many of the women had children with them.

Heaps of luggage were piled in hopeless confusion, with hardly room to stand or walk between. Some of the women were in tears. Children were screaming or crying for food. Some of the distracted refugees were quarrelling among themselves. Despair gripped at the hearts of most of them, for they were now outcasts in an enemy country, and they had already been made to feel their position.

For hours, George Gray afterwards learned, the majority of them had sat there. Already he had come in contact with some of the grim realities of war.

Up and down the main-departure platform he and Jack walked.

It was thronged with people, mostly English men and women. Every moment the crowd increased. At last there was such a crowd that the surging thousands of a Football Cup Final were as a fool to it.

And after an interminable period of waiting, the train steamed in. A certain part of it was reserved for a strong military guard that was to accompany the departing foreigners to the frontier.

Every carriage door was locked, so that though the doors were stormed and the handles turned, none could be opened.

The imperturbable military guard boarded the "express," which was to beat all German records in the way of slow travelling.

At last some railway officials came along, and the doors of the carriages were opened.

"Stand back there—take your time," was the order, but the eager passengers fought for places, only the women being spared, and not always them.

Every compartment was soon crammed, the corridors were chock-a-block, and the atmosphere indescribable.

"If we don't start soon," growled George in his brother's ears, as they stood at one end of a compartment, George leaning against the door, his brother holding on to a strap, "we shall die of suffocation."

Then came a tedious examination of tickets and passports. Nobody was spared. Finally, the train began to move, and, passing out under leaden skies, swept onward, the rain already beginning to fall.

Sighs and exclamations of deep relief accompanied the start. Anything was better than the suspense they had so long endured. Berlin was being left behind. They were bound for England.

Against that one fact what did anything else matter?

"George, I've often wished I'd never seen the place," said Jack, who looked very pale and washed out. "I've never liked Berlin, and I feel happy at the mere thought of being in London again."

"We haven't got there yet," said George, with a grim smile, and a German who shared the discomfort of the compartment laughed.

George glared at him.

"You nefer will see it, mine friend," said he; "or when you do you will find it in German hands."

George flamed to the ears.

"Never, you beer-swilling sausage eater!" he retorted, and the German rose in his wrath.

There might have been a scene had

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not a lady in the compartment chose on that moment to faint, and so draw the attention to her own piteous plight, to the detriment of the Hun.

Space was cleared, the windows were let down until the rain was driven in. And the corridor outside having cleared somewhat, George and Jack made their way thither.

Here they were able to smoke, and the time passed less tediously.

Most of the other occupants of the corridor were Englishmen like themselves, and all glad to get away.

The wildest rumours were passed from mouth to mouth.

Desperate fighting had already taken place between the Germans and the Russians. The Huns had invaded Belgium. The forts of Liege had been blown down as if they'd been made of cardboard. Or else Liege was defended stoutly, and already a whole army corps of wounded had been brought back to Germany.

Britain was at war. Britain was going to hold her hand.

The German fleet had bombarded Portsmouth. The British fleet had already come to loggerheads with the German Dreadnoughts, and two of the latter had been sunk. And, wildest statement of all, the fuss was all about nothing, and there wasn't going to be any war at all. It was just—bluff.

These and similar rumours were bandied about, and the much-vaunted express kept on stopping on the slightest pretext, and was often held up to allow troop-trains to go thundering by.

At least here was fact, and not rumour. As he watched those heavily loaded trains, chock-a-block with German soldiers in field grey, armed to the teeth, soldiers who cheered madly, and sung hymns of praise of the Fatherland; as he saw trucks bearing guns onward in their hundreds, George knew that the world's peace was being threatened, and began to wonder what part he and Jack would play in the trouble that was to come.

Sometimes a German civilian would stroll along, smoking his big pipe, and chatting pleasantly in English, first to one passenger, then to another.

They had been on the rails for some hours before it struck George that there was method behind all this casual exchange of chit-chat on the part of the Germans. He began to notice how critically these men studied the faces of

the passengers, and how their seemingly aimless and friendly questions were calculated to make every passenger spoken to reveal his business or profession, and to state why he was in such a hurry to get to the frontier.

"Jack," said George, bending down and speaking just above his breath.

"Yes, old man?"

"Those men who keep on talking to the passengers. That young chap who spoke to us—they are German spies."

Jack started.

"Surely not——"

"It's a fact. I'm sure of it. That Englishman who spoke to us a little while ago said that he tried to get to the luggage cage, so that he could fish his tobacco and pipe out of his bag, and they would not let him pass. The luggage was being protected by the guards. Do you know why?"

Jack shook his head.

"I believe they're examining every bit of it during the journey. They're going to make it hot for some of us."

Jack smiled ruefully.

"Well, we'll be all right, anyway," said he, "for we haven't got any."

So the journey proceeded, until at length, as the day drew to its close, and only a third of the distance to the frontier had been covered, the express pulled up at a pretentious-looking station, and they were informed that there would be a long wait, as the main lines were required for the military.

The brothers alighted with other passengers, glad of the opportunity to stretch their cramped limbs, and walked up and down the platform.

The rain was teeming down. Everywhere they looked they saw crowds of soldiers in the all-familiar uniform. Arms were stacked everywhere. The troops were either standing or sitting at their ease.

All looked tired, but they were elated and talkative, notwithstanding.

The officers kept themselves apart.

Every platform was crowded. Trains came in and filled up, then departed—whither none knew.

Others passed through the station, and yet the Berlin express was stranded.

"I'm sick of this Jack," said George. "Let's see if we can find out when we will start."

They made inquiries, but could discover nothing. They might resume the journey

(Continued overleaf.)

in half an hour, an hour, or two hours, perhaps, or they might be kept there till morning.

The women began to weep and to show signs of distress. Some had brought food with them, but not all.

They tried to obtain refreshment, but were informed that the station had been cleared out of everything. Not even a glass of milk was to be got. Gold couldn't have bought it.

George complained to one of the guards, and the German laughed in his face.

Up and down past the distressful groups of women George and his brother strolled. They got rid of their last sandwiches. They, too, were beginning to feel hungry.

The day waned in deepening purple, and night came. Still it rained.

"I'm sick of this. If only we could leave the station for a bit," said Jack.

"Let's try. There's no sign of the train going on. We can't make a start till the rest of the troops have gone. That much they have told me," vouchsafed George. "So let's stroll into the town and have a feed at a cafe."

"Good egg," said Jack, and they wondered why they hadn't thought of it before. Anxiety not to lose their train had kept them hanging about no doubt.

Along the platform they walked, and down the steps leading to the tunnelled way below they hurried. They made for the station exit, and found it blocked by an armed guard.

As they neared the exit the soldiers lowered their rifles and gleaming

bayonets were presented at the Englishmen's breasts.

"Here, what's the meaning of this?" asked George, indignantly. "We are tired and hungry. We are only going to the nearest cafe."

"To the nearest prison, you mean," snapped a German officer, striding towards them. "No one is allowed to leave the station under penalty of arrest."

George pleaded and argued, when the officer pushed him savagely back.

"Say another word, you English swine," he cried, "and I'll remove you under guard."

Jack pulled at his brother's sleeve.

"It's no good old man," he said. "Let's go back and stick it out."

So up to the platform they climbed again, and when they arrived there, found a number of officials, backed by an armed military guard, moving from one group of passengers to another.

"Why, whatever's the matter?" asked George, in dismay, turning to a white-faced woman who stood trembling near him.

"Oh, it's intolerable, infamous," she answered heatedly. "They're putting every one of us to the severest cross-examination. They say they are searching for spies, and we are to be detained here till morning."

The morning, which was approaching so swiftly in spite of the seemingly endless tedium of their enforced wait, was the morning of August 4th.

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