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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 great school in the character 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.

(Told by Nipper.)

IN WHICH I INCITE THE REMOVE TO PERFORM
AN ACT OF RANK INSUBORDINATION.

IT was a half-holiday at St. Frank's. The spring afternoon was simply glorious. There had been rain during the previous night, but it had rather improved the playing-fields than otherwise. I had personally inspected the Remove pitch on Little Side just before dinner, and had found it in top-hole condition.

The day was really more like one in early summer than spring, and the weather was perfect for cricket. The great summer game had not really commenced at St. Frank's, but all the teams, senior and junior, had been hard at practice for some little time.

And this afternoon I had arranged to meet Bob Christine's team—that is, the College House section of the Remove. It was now time for the match to commence, but not a single member of my own eleven was near Little Side.

Fate, in the person of Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., had willed otherwise.

To be quite brief, the Remove was detained for the whole afternoon. When I say "the Remove," I am naturally referring to the Ancient House side only, unless I specify otherwise. As I was skipper of that side myself, all my interests were centred on affairs concerning my own House. Bob Christine was junior captain in the College House, and he and I were keen rivals—although the best of friends.

And while the cheerful shouts of the pleasure-seekers rang out on the playing-

fields, the Remove sat in the Form-room, sullenly fuming. The welcome "clack" of bat meeting ball was by no means pleasant on this occasion; the sound merely accentuated the misery of our own position.

Mr. Crowell, our respected Form Master, was seated behind his desk. But he wasn't working. Neither, for that matter, were we. Mr. Crowell was a sport, and he was simply carrying out the letter of the Housemaster's order. He was detaining the Remove for the afternoon.

During the last few days there had been ructions at St. Frank's. Or perhaps I had better say that ructions were on the point of coming. There had been a change in the Ancient House—a change for the worse.

Nelson Lee, my respected guv'nor—known at St. Frank's as "Mr. Alvington"—had taken his departure from the school. He had accepted a special commission in the Secret Service, and was engaged upon some mysterious task which even I couldn't know. But I had strong reason to suspect that the guv'nor was still in the neighbourhood—that his work, in fact, was even connected with Mr. Hunter in some way.

It was this latter gentleman who had filled Nelson Lee's vacant place. It was only a temporary measure, but the fellows were not likely to stand any nonsense because of that.

Mr. Kennedy Hunter had delighted everybody upon his arrival at St. Frank's. He was one of the most genial men one could imagine; his smile was calculated to set anybody at ease; his voice was as soft as silk, and he seemed the most harmless individual under the sun.

But it is said that appearances are decep-

live. With regard to Mr. Hunter, the truth of this had been made obvious within the first hour of his arrival.

For, to be quite blunt, Mr. Hunter was a beast!

That may sound somewhat strong, but there wasn't a fellow in the Remove who had any other opinion. Indeed, the Housemaster had already earned for himself the questionable nickname of "The Hun." And if ever any man lived up to his name, Mr. Hunter did! His methods were Prussian to the core, for his one idea seemed to bring about a state of terrorism in his House.

I suppose he was suffering from a serious attack of swelled head. He had been placed in a very responsible position, and he wasn't quite equal to it. His ideas became inflated, and he conceived the weird notion that everybody must bow to his command—that all the old-established rules of the school should be turned topsy-turvy in order to please his own whims.

Moreover, Mr. Hunter's sense of justice was uncanny. When he administered punishment, he did so with a severity which was not only unwarranted, but positively brutal. And it was his favourite trick to inflict punishment without giving the slightest reason for so doing. The fellows were left to guess, and in many cases they had not performed the offence for which they were thrashed.

Naturally the Remove resented such treatment. I say the Remove particularly, because Mr. Hunter seemed to be concentrating his whole evil attentions, for some unknown reason, upon my own Form.

He had dismissed Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy—who had occupied his post for over two years—and had imported a hulking youth named Bates. There wasn't the slightest doubt that Mr. Hunter was employing Bates as a spy, although the very idea of it seemed preposterous. Bates would overhear the juniors talking, and would then report to the Housemaster.

It was owing to this system, in fact, that the present situation had arisen. Bates had been rolled in the mud by some Fifth Form fellows. He thoroughly deserved it, and the Remove had been gleeful.

But only that morning Mr. Hunter had calmly accused the Remove of being the culprits, and had punished us by cancelling our usual half-holiday. The indignation at this sentence had been simply enormous. Fullwood and Co., the contemptible Nuts of the Ancient House, had jibbed, and had decided to speak to the Housemaster. The Fifth Form was responsible, they declared, and they weren't going to take punishment for nothing.

Accordingly, Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell had gone to Mr. Hunter's study. They emerged in various attitudes of agony, and the rest of the fellows had very rightly declared that it served them jolly well right. Mr. Hunter, in short, had caned them severely, refusing to listen to a word.

Chambers and Co., of the Fifth, the real

culprits, had done the right thing. They had attempted to tell Mr. Hunter that they were the authors of the attack upon Bates. But Mr. Hunter had dismissed them after inflicting the same treatment which had fallen upon Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell.

It was only too obvious that the Housemaster had deliberately punished the Remove, and that he did not want to learn the actual facts. He had got his knife into the Remove, and meant to keep it there. The gross injustice of the whole proceeding was nearly unbelievable.

Matters were reaching a head at St. Frank's, although it would probably be some little time before a crisis really occurred. The fact remained that the Remove was detained for the afternoon, and that the cricket match with Christine and Co. was "off." And this was not the only evidence of Mr. Hunter's harshness.

It was a time-worn custom at St. Frank's for the Remove fellows to have tea in their own studies. Mr. Hunter had thought fit to forbid this, and in future the fellows would have to partake of tea in hall. This meant a stoppage of all dainties; the discontinuance of the cheery little parties which gathered for a "feed" in the Remove studies.

Tea in hall was really a last resort; Removites who had become stony, and who could not obtain an invitation to somebody else's study, then betook themselves to the dining-hall. And here they participated in the somewhat weak tea and good, plain fare which was provided.

For the whole Remove to be condemned to this treatment was well-nigh unbearable. And, to make matters worse, Mr. Hunter had given the order that on this particular day we were to receive no tea at all! This was part of the punishment for assaulting Bates—which we hadn't done!

It could not be denied, however, that the hardest blow of all was the suspension of the cricket match. I had been looking forward to this afternoon the whole week through, and the whole team shared my keen disappointment.

We couldn't crowd out of the class-room in a body, although our feelings were very rebellious. Such an act would have been rank insubordination against Mr. Crowell. And our Form Master was well respected and well liked. We should not have dreamed of doing anything disrespectful or mutinous.

Personally, I felt that it was up to me to do something. As Form captain, I was supposed to take the lead in all matters concerning the Remove. But it was a terrifically difficult position. What could I do—a mere junior—against the Housemaster himself? A deliberately organised rebellion was not to be thought of. Bad as matters were they were not bad enough for that.

It seemed to me that we could do nothing but stick it. If Mr. Hunter continued his harshness, however, things would reach a pass sooner or later. A crash was inevitable.

And I knew more than the other fellows, too. Sir Montie Tregellie-West and Tommy

Watson, my own study chums, shared the little I knew, of course. For example, I had seen Mr. Hunter leaving the school disguised in a false beard; I had seen him meet another man on the edge of Bannington Moor. And I was quite convinced that something of a very fishy nature was going on. Mr. Hunter wasn't such a stranger to the district as he professed to be.

For the present, however, all these little matters were dismissed from my mind. I could do nothing but fret and fume over the hateful confinement in the Form-room on such a sunny afternoon. Glancing at the clock, I saw that the time was within five minutes of that fixed for the start of the match.

Naturally, Bob Christine was all sympathy, and he had arranged to practise all the afternoon, and to meet my own team on the following half-holiday. It was the best we could do under the circumstances.

The cheery shouts of the fellows outside, the pleasant sound of the batting, irritated me enormously. If we had only done something to deserve the punishment it wouldn't have mattered. But the appalling unfairness of the whole matter made me long for the time when Nelson Lee would return and reoccupy his position as "Mr. Alvington."

Luckily Mr. Crowell was on our side, so to speak. He was thoroughly disgusted with Mr. Hunter and his methods. And, although it was necessary for him to detain us during the afternoon, he had given us no particular work. The juniors, for the most part, were reading or chatting.

Talking in class, as everybody knows, was strictly forbidden. Mr. Crowell had given us no permission, but he sat behind his desk reading a novel, and pretended to be deaf. This must have been somewhat difficult, for there was quite a buzz of conversation going on in the class-room.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were leaning upon the window-sill, gazing out across the Triangle to the playing-fields. Distant figures in cricketing flannels could be seen moving about the green spaces. And the sun shone with June-like heat.

"It's shockin', Benny—absolutely shockin'," said Sir Montie feelingly. "I was goin' to do wonders this afternoon—I was, really. I feel in terrific form, begad. I could make a century this afternoon—"

"Oh, don't jaw!" growled Watson. "I—I feel like kicking!"

"Can't be did, my son," I said. "If Mr. Crowell wasn't here it would be a different thing. He's been decent all along, and if we tried any tricks we should place ourselves in the wrong. No, we've got to stick it.

The others nodded gloomily.

"Souze my scuppers! It's hard lines to stick below," said Tom Burton, shaking his head. "It's a shame, messmates, that we can't go up on deck on a day like this. I reckon Hunter ought to be shoved in irons and keelhauled!"

Tommy Watson sniffed.

"That's too good for him, Bo'sun," he said gruffly. "Hunter wants to be slaughtered—badly. If ever a chap deserved to be boiled in oil, he does. He needs something lingering—"

"It seems that we're havin' that—what?" remarked De Valerie, from behind. "We're lingerin' here instead of bein' on Little Side. It's a good thing Crowell's so decent. By George, there'd be rebellion in the Remove if he turned against us as well!"

I nodded, and didn't say what was in my mind—that there would probably be rebellion in any case. I don't profess to be a prophet, but by the way things were going it struck me very forcibly that Mr. Hunter was riding for a fall.

The door opened, and a continuous succession of snorts passed through the Form-room. For Bates had entered—Bates the sneak—Bates the contemptible. He was a loose-limbed youth of about seventeen, with a coarse, sneering face and little piggish eyes.

"Well, Bates, what is it?" asked Mr. Crowell curtly.

"Telegram, sir," said Bates, throwing the buff-coloured envelope down.

"You will oblige me, Bates, by picking that up and handing it to me in a proper manner," said Mr. Crowell, to the delight of the Remove. "If Mr. Hunter is content to put up with your insolence, I am not!"

Bates, who had been grinning at the Form, suddenly scowled. He picked up the telegram and handed it to Mr. Crowell.

"You may go," said the Form Master, nodding towards the door.

Bates went and closed the door behind him with a bang. I saw Mr. Crowell compress his lips, but he tore open the envelope and quickly read the message. The fellows watched him with considerable interest.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Form Master, removing his glasses and polishing them with an air of annoyance. "This is most awkward—most unfortunate. Really I hardly know what to do."

"Anything serious, sir?" I asked politely.

"Oh, no, Bennett—nothing serious at all," replied Mr. Crowell, smiling. "But it is certainly annoying in the extreme. To-day is a half-holiday—"

"Not for us, sir," said De Valerie calmly.

"No, my boy. I am extremely sorry to say that it is not," said the Form Master with sympathy. "A friend of mine wishes to see me in Bannington, and has actually wired an appointment for four o'clock. You see, boys," he added confidently, "I had arranged to run into Bannington this afternoon, and my friend was aware of my intention. I did not expect to see him, however, and he apparently thought it wise to acquaint me of his plans."

"Can't you wire him back, sir?" I asked.

"Hardly, Bennett. My friend lives in Helmsford, and a wire would arrive too late," replied Mr. Crowell thoughtfully. "I am afraid I shall be compelled to desert you, boys."

"That's all right, sir," said twenty voices.

We weren't at all anxious to get rid of Mr. Crowell, but if our afternoon was ruined we didn't want his to be. From our point of view matters would probably be much worse; for it was quite on the cards that Mr. Hunter himself would take us in hand. We all realised that.

"Thank you, my boys," said Mr. Crowell, smiling. "I will see Mr. Hunter at once. I am afraid my departure will make your own position more irksome, since it will probably be necessary for you to work a trifle harder than you are doing at present," he added drily.

We assured him that it didn't matter a jot, and I gave him my word that every junior would remain within the Form-room until he returned with a substitute. I was pleased by the way in which Mr. Crowell accepted my promise.

He strode from the Form-room, and there was an immediate buzz. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell and Merrell and Co. were looking excited.

"Now's our chance!" said Fullwood promptly. "We'll cut!"

"You cad!" roared Handforth. "Hasn't Bennett given his word that we're going to stay? You ain't going to move from this room, you rotter!"

"Oh, rot!" sneered Fullwood. "Who's going to stop me?"

"If somebody else doesn't, I shall!" I said pleasantly. "And you're jolly daring, ain't you, Fullwood? What about Hunter? If we left the Form-room he'd drop on us like a hundred of bricks; it would probably mean lines for a week."

Fullwood scowled, but didn't reply. He realised that there was a large amount of truth in what I said, and the prospect of slipping out of the Form-room was not so alluring.

Mr. Crowell returned within five minutes—with news. He was accompanied, to everybody's dissatisfaction, by Kenmore, of the Sixth. Kenmore was a prefect, and one of the most unpopular in the Ancient House at that.

"Mr. Hunter is away from the school at present, boys," said the Form Master. "I am leaving Kenmore in charge of you. You must regard him as my locum tenens, and obey his orders."

"Very good, sir," I said respectfully.

"Do not give the boys any particularly hard work, Kenmore," went on Mr. Crowell, turning to the prefect. "And release them promptly at four o'clock."

"All right, sir," growled Kenmore.

Mr. Crowell retired, and we glared at Kenmore and Kenmore glared at us. If we were not exactly pleased, Kenmore was simply bubbling with wrath. As I afterwards learned, he had been routed out of his study by Mr. Crowell when in the midst of an interesting story. Very reasonably Mr. Crowell had decided that Kenmore could read just as well in Form-room as in his own study.

"Crowd of young sweeps!" snapped Kenmore. "It's a nice thing when I've got to

mess up my afternoon in this way. Shut up there, Handforth! If there's any talking, I shall start giving lines!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Kenmore!" protested Tommy Watson.

"Take fifty lines, Watson!" rapped out Kenmore.

"You—you rotter!" breathed Tommy under his breath.

Detention under Kenmore was not exactly pleasant. The Sixth-Former, more out of spite than anything else, made us pull out our books and set us a particularly distasteful task. Then he retired behind the desk and went on reading his book.

Hardly any of the fellows worked, although they pretended to do so. An idea had occurred to me, and I was turning it over in my mind. I had given my word to Mr. Crowell that nobody would leave the Form-room while he was absent in search of a deputy.

But that promise had been fulfilled; Mr. Crowell had made no reference to anything further. He had left us in Kenmore's charge. If Kenmore couldn't keep us in hand, that would be his look-out. And he had already overstepped the authority which Mr. Crowell had given him; he had set us a heavy task instead of a light one, as the Form Master had expressly stated. My eyes gleamed as I came to the conclusion that a certain wheeze was well worth attempting.

"Look here!" I whispered to Watson and Sir Montie. "Why shouldn't we play that match after all? Hunter's out, and he can't stop us—"

"I suppose we can play cricket in the Form-room?" asked Watson tartly.

"No, you ass—but we can take French leave!" I said grimly.

"Begad!"

My chums stared at me. Their breath was taken away for a few moments, and both were dubious.

"What if Hunter returns in a minute or two?" asked Watson.

"That's not likely," I said. "He's gone out for the afternoon, in all probability, and he won't turn up until after tea. Anyhow, the match is worth it. Hunter can't kill us, can he?"

I sent a whisper round, giving a few details of my plan. Handforth and Co. received it with enthusiasm; De Valerie nodded promptly. And the majority of the other fellows were just as ready to take the chance. Only Fullwood and Co. sneered. They were anxious to gain their freedom, but they did not want to participate in any scheme of mine.

Kenmore was quite ignorant of the impending storm. And I took the opportunity to arrange matters in advance. I left my place and went to the cupboard—presumably for some ink. But when I came back I had several lengths of thick string behind my back, to say nothing of sundry dusters.

The fact of the matter was, everybody was feeling reckless. We were so irritated by the unjust detention that we were ready to risk almost anything to gain our freedom.

And it couldn't be denied that everything was very favourable for a breakaway. Both Mr. Hunter and Mr. Crowell were out, and when we were reported afterwards—as we certainly should be—the punishment couldn't be very severe. Breaking detention was not a crime, and it would probably mean lines all round, or detention on the next half-holiday—and that wouldn't matter so much.

I made up my mind suddenly.

"I say, Kenmore," I said, standing up.

"What the dickens do you want?" growled the prefect, looking up impatiently.

"It's rather rotten for you to be stuck in here, ain't it?" I said. "Why not go back to your study——"

"I don't want any of your infernal cheek, Bennett!" snapped Kenmore.

"The fact is, we were thinking of walking out," I went on calmly. "What do you say? Is it a go?"

"I say that you'll take two hundred lines for being a cheeky young hound!" roared Kenmore angrily. "And if you don't shut up I'll make it three hundred!"

"I'm only giving you a gentle hint," I said. "If you like to walk out quietly it'll be all serene, but if you don't——"

"Well?"

"It won't be all serene, that's all!" I said grimly.

Kenmore took Mr. Crowell's cane and stood up.

"Come down here, Bennett!" he exclaimed curtly.

"That's good enough!" I said promptly. "Pile in, you fellows!"

Kenmore had asked for it—and he got it! At the word every fellow in the Form-room, with the exception of Fullwood and Co., left their places, and bore down upon the startled prefect. He was overwhelmed in a moment, and he went down with a bump.

"You—you confounded young——"

But the rest of Kenmore's outburst was drowned, and he completely disappeared beneath the pile of fellows who tumbled upon him.

CHAPTER II.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH BOB CHRISTINE AND CO. ARE DELIGHTED—AND KING CRICKET HOLDS SWAY.

KENMORE was speechless.

This wasn't very surprising, considering the fact that two or three dusters were bound round his mouth. They were rather dirty, but, as Handforth remarked, this gave them quite a flavour.

Kenmore's hands and feet were bound, and he was squatting amid the old lumber at the bottom of the cupboard.

"Good-bye!" I said cheerfully. "See you later, Kenmore!"

I closed the doors and locked them. There were several holes in the top, so Kenmore wouldn't die of suffocation. He

couldn't say that we hadn't given him fair warning, anyhow.

"Begad, it's rather excitin'—what?" said Tregellis-West languidly. "But I've been thinkin', dear fellows. Hadn't we better lock up Fullwood and Co. as well?"

"You idiot!" roared Fullwood.

"You see, old fellows, Fullwood's rather a treacherous bounder," went on Sir Montie calmly. "He's quite capable of releasin' Kenmore as soon as ever we've gone out—he is, really."

"Well, it won't matter if he does," I said briskly. "Once we're on the cricket-field, Kenmore won't be able to fetch us off. He's got more sense than to try, I expect. He'll simply wait until Crowell returns, and then report us."

Two minutes later we streamed out of the Form-room in a triumphant procession. Some of the fellows had been rather nervous at first, but the unexpected freedom had given them confidence. And, as I told them, we couldn't be scalped. And the cricket-match was well worth a couple of hundred lines or so.

I hurried my team up into the dormitory in double quick time. Kemp, who wouldn't be playing, rushed off to Little Side to inform Christine of our escape. Meanwhile we all changed into flannels with record speed; even Sir Montie was finished by the time we were—which was akin to a miracle.

"Come on, my bonnie boys!" I said gaily.

We trooped out, and found the junior playing-fields in a state of great animation. Bob Christine met me with a grin upon his good-natured face.

"You've got a nerve, ain't you?" he asked.

"My dear chap, I was thinking of you," I said coolly. "I didn't want you to miss the match, you know."

Christine grinned.

"Well, it's nothing to do with me, thank goodness!" he said. "We've got a decent Housemaster on our side—not a mouldy old Hun! Still, I'm not going to ram that down your throat; I dare say you'll get it pretty hot for this."

"Oh, rats!" I said cheerfully.

The College House fellows were extremely delighted. They were as anxious to play the match as we were, for they were labouring under the extraordinary delusion that they were going to wipe us up.

Considering that we were late in starting, it was decided that the match should be a single-innings one. Christine won the toss, and sent in Talmadge and Clapson to bat.

My own team went into the field, and Tommy Watson bowled the first over. Tommy wasn't much good at batting, but he was a first-rate bowler, although not exactly brilliant.

It was my intention to give one or two fellows a trial—De Valerie and Yakama, for example. They had shaped well at practice, but in a proper game it was quite possible that they would not show such good form.

I was more particularly interested in Cecil De Valerie. He was a curious fellow in many ways, and at one time he hated me like poison. But a great deal of De Valerie's bad habits had been dropped since his arrival at St. Frank's, and for the last week or two he had been doing his very utmost to "make good." In fact I rather liked De Valerie.

Justin B. Farman, of course, was one of the strongest men of my eleven. At bowling, in fact, he was the strongest. I, myself, was rather hot with the bat, and I had no particular qualms as to the result of the match.

Talmadge and Clapson were good batsmen, and for some little time they piled up runs steadily. Talmadge's wicket, however, went over with a crash, and Tommy Watson grinned cheerfully.

Christine himself went in next, and the College House fellows who had gathered round the ropes looked on with interest. Christine was their strong man, and it was confidently expected that he would mount up a pile; some optimistic Monks even hoped that their skipper would touch the century.

Alas for their hopes!

Christine walked to the wicket with a smile of confidence, but did not look exactly pleased when he found that he was facing Farman. On one famous occasion, when the American junior had first arrived at St. Frank's, he had clean bowled Christine first ball.

Farman gripped the leather carelessly and took a very short run. But the ball left his fingers and sped down the pitch with such rapidity that it was scarcely seen. Christine was taking no risks, and he stone-walled it.

"Hot stuff—what?" remarked De Valerie.

He was undoubtedly right, for Farman's next ball was sent much slower, and seemed to be the opposite of dangerous. Christine lifted his bat and swiped away as though he intended sending the ball soaring right over the school buildings themselves.

Curiously enough, however, his bat met nothing, and he gazed round dazedly as he heard a sharp click. His middle stump was lying a yard away.

"Say, how's that?" grinned Farman.

"Out!" roared the field.

Bob Christine turned very pink, and walked off glumly.

"What price duck's eggs?" growled Clapson.

"Oh, dry up!" said Christine. "That chap's simply mustard! I thought that ball was as easy as pie!"

Turner took Christine's place, and he was dismissed after mounting up eight runs. The game proceeded briskly, and after a while I decided to give De Valerie a chance, and sent Watson into the field.

"I'll do my best, Bennett," said De Valerie gratefully. "I suppose I shall put up a poor show in comparison to Farman—"

"That's all right," I interrupted. "Let's see what you can do."

De Valerie's first balls were somewhat wide,

and the Monks seized the opportunity to mount up their runs. Perhaps they considered that the Rotter was quite useless, for Clapson, at least, who was a steady batsman, became careless.

De Valerie sent down an extremely inviting ball, and Clapson took the bait. He hit with all his strength, and the leather went soaring skywards.

The batsmen were running their hardest, but I had my eye on the ball.

"Now then, Bennett!" roared Watson excitedly.

I took only a short run, and the ball simply dropped into my waiting palms. Clapson grinned ruefully, and walked off.

The score stood at thirty-five. The batsmen were now Page and Yorke, and before another five minutes had elapsed Yorke's stumps were knocked sideways. It was De Valerie who had taken the wicket, and I could see that he was gaining more confidence. It wasn't my intention to take any of the bowling myself, for I believed that there were better men for the job.

Page refused to be dismissed. He didn't mount up many runs, but he was an obstinate sort of batsman. Yorke's place was taken by Billy Nation, and then things began to hum. Nation had never shown any great brilliancy with the bat, but this afternoon he came out of his shell with a vengeance.

Cricket is a game of great uncertainties, and Christine, who was looking rather down in the mouth, bucked up after Nation had piled up twenty-five runs and was still going strong.

Farman was bowling like a demon, but somehow he couldn't get past Nation's guard, and the Fossils were sent leather-hunting continuously. By the time Page was run out, owing to an over-zealous desire to obtain another run, the score stood at ninety-three.

Freeman went in to bat, and commenced well by scoring a three. There was a cheer from the Monks when the century was reached, but it was by no means enthusiastic. The scoring, actually, had been rather poor. Nation was the only man who was making a decent show.

By the time one hundred and twenty went up on the board we were becoming somewhat impatient. It was quite time that Nation received his dismissal, for he alone was responsible for sixty-three of the runs.

Freeman was doing well, too, in spite of the first-class bowling. The pair seemed to settle themselves down, and were working well together, mounting up the runs with a steadiness which was rather disconcerting.

"Say, I guess my hand's got kinder lazy," remarked Farman with a puzzled frown. "I sure thought I could make these galoots quit real slick. Mebbe some other man would care to try his hand?"

"You stick where you are, Farman," I said.

"Guess you're skipper," replied the American boy easily.

I sent De Valerie into the field, however,

and put Yakama in his place. Yakama was something of an uncertain quantity, so to speak. The Japanese junior was extremely keen on cricket, and he had shown up well at practice. He was a tricky little bounder, too, and I thought perhaps he might be able to do something. At all events, it would be just as well to try.

"Now, look here, Jappy," I said solemnly. "You'll be facing Nation this over, and you've got to clean bowl him first ball."

Sessue Yakama smiled serenely.

"It is the extremely tall instruction that you give me," he said. "But I will use every endeavour to comply with your esteemed wishes, Bennett. I am of the absurd opinion, however, that you will receive the stupendous disappointment."

"Well, let's see what you can do."

Yakama's first ball was tame—surprisingly tame. The Monks grinned hugely when Nation sent the leather to the boundary. And the field looked somewhat wrathful. Handforth was inclined to be indignant.

"Send that young ass off, for goodness' sake," he exclaimed. "We shall never get an innings at this rate, Bennett!"

"Who's the captain of this team?" I asked tartly.

Handforth growled under his breath. A moment later he was cheering madly, for a most surprising thing occurred. Yakama's second ball seemed to be exactly like the first. It was slow, easy, and devoid of all trickiness.

Nation raised his hat and grinned. Then, just as he was about to swipe, the ball seemed to take a curious twist, and it simply curled round his bat and leisurely knocked the bails flying.

"Great pip!" gasped Nation, staring.

"How's that, Umpire?"

"Out!"

"Well done, Jappy!"

"Good man!"

Nation couldn't quite make it out, but he walked off the field with a fair amount of jauntiness. He had seventy-seven runs to his credit, and that was distinctly good. The score was now one hundred and forty-two.

The next man in was Dallas—and he was the next man out, too. For he was caught out, first ball, by Sir Montie.

The dismissal of Nation seemed to be the signal for a crack-up. Anyhow, the rest of Christine's men made a poor show. Perhaps Yakama's bowling had something to do with it.

The Japanese boy had provided us with a big surprise, and his performance was not merely a flash in the pan. He took two wickets in succession with the most surprising ease. A fellow can stand up firmly against swift bowling; but Yakama's slow, easy style was unusual. His tricks were ever-changing.

The Monks were all out at last for one hundred and forty-nine runs. If Christine hadn't had cruel luck at the start the score would probably have been over two hundred,

for Christine was a jolly good man when he got going.

"We ought to whack 'em easily, my sons," I remarked to my men, against the pavilion. "You'll have a chance to show what you can do with the bat now, De Valerie, I'm going to send you in first, old scout, with Tregellis-West."

"Thanks," said De Valerie, flushing with pleasure.

So far there hadn't been any sign of the detested Mr. Hunter. All was going serenely. And if Kenmore had got free he hadn't shown up. I was hoping that we should be able to finish the match uninterrupted.

But hopes are not always fulfilled!

CHAPTER III.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH MR. HUNTER DELIVERS A STUNNING BLOW.

BOB CHRISTINE AND CO. took the field cheerfully.

They had the idea that we shouldn't be able to equal their score; for, if we had good bowlers, so had they. Clapson and Yorke were famous for their bowling, but I wasn't afraid of them.

De Valerie and Sir Montie went in to open the innings, and I watched keenly. I was rather anxious, in fact. The match was, in a way, a trial affair. In a big fixture I wouldn't have played De Valerie, but I didn't care particularly whether Ancient House lost their match or not. I was judging the form of my men.

The Rotter had had no chance before at all, and it was only fair that he should be given a "try out," as Farman expressed it. He had done decently at bowling, but I had an idea that he would surprise the natives with the bat.

I saw that De Valerie was facing Clapson's bowling, and I watched anxiously. Clapson was hot stuff, and it was evidently Christine's idea to dismiss De Valerie for a duck's egg.

Whizz!

The leather shot down swiftly. Click! It was a beautiful hit. De Valerie and Sir Montie were running—one, two, three. Yes, four!

"Too good to last," remarked Tommy Watson critically.

But it wasn't.

De Valerie sent the next ball to the boundary. After that he gave a surprising performance, and I looked on with a grin of complete satisfaction. Neither Clapson nor Yorke could touch the Rotter.

He foiled all their efforts, and mounted up the runs rapidly. Sir Montie, too, was going strong. It looked as though the pair were in for the afternoon. The score mounted rapidly, and already stood at thirty-four.

"Ain't we going to have a chance?" grumbled Handforth.

"My dear chap, if Montie and De Valerie can keep on at this rate, I don't care whether I get a chance or not," I said. "And as for you, Handy, I don't suppose you'll pile up more than five or six runs——"

"You ass!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to make a century!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared, and then sniffed. He wasn't very strong at cricket, and I had only included him in the eleven out of good nature—and to see exactly what he could do. He had always talked such a lot about his wonderful playing that I thought it would be as well to give him an opportunity of proving his words.

Not that Handforth boasted. He had a curiously warped idea in that respect; he really thought that he could do these things. And when he failed he was far more surprised than the other fellows—who had been expecting it.

Sir Montie's wicket went down at last, and a little buzz of applause greeted him as he elegantly came off, with his bat tucked under his arm.

"Begad! I've done frightfully, dear boys," he said apologetically. "I feel that I have let my side down, you know. You were relyin' on me——"

"And I didn't rely in vain, old son," I said heartily. "I expected you to make about a dozen runs, and you've obliged by eighteen. My dear chap, that's jolly decent. Centuries ain't made every day."

If every batsman equalled Montie's score we could easily win. De Valerie already had twenty-nine runs to his credit, and he looked good for another twenty-nine. I sent in Handforth to take Montie's place.

"We're safe now," I said, with a wink. "With your hundred, Handy, we shall do splendidly."

"Trust me," said Handforth, with a nod.

I didn't tell him so, but I didn't trust him at all. As a matter of fact, he just managed to make two runs, and then he sent the ball slap into Talmadge's hands, who was waiting in readiness.

"By George!" said Handforth. "That ain't out, is it?"

"Looks like it to me," grinned Dallas, who was wicket-keeping.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth. "That's jolly queer, you know. Why, I haven't made twenty yet, have I?"

"Yes, exactly—with the nought left off!" grinned somebody facetiously.

For once in a way Handforth was looking subdued. As he had gained two more runs than I had expected, however, I was quite satisfied.

"Splendid!" I said, patting him on the back.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Handforth. "That was a fluke, you know. How the dickens was I to know that ass Talmadge was standing there?"

"Well, the fielders do generally stand

about to collar the ball, don't they?" said Hubbard. "Hallo! It's me now? Good!"

Hubbard went in cheerfully, and came out glumly. He was really a decent batsman, but a fluke had happened to him, too—in the shape of a spread-eagled wicket. Tommy Watson took his place, and then, for a time, the batting was fairly steady.

Watson mounted up a comfortable fifteen, and then lost his wicket, from a smart throw-in by Yorke. De Valerie, all this time, was still doing wonders. The total score stood at eighty-two, and De Valerie had contributed over half. When Yakama went to the wicket, however, De Valerie was clean bowled by a smart shot from Clapson. He had done well, and I was pleased with him.

"You're safe, old man," I said, as he came off amid a good deal of applause.

"Safe? What for?"

"Why, I'll find you a place in the House team, of course," I said heartily.

"I say, that's jolly decent of you, Bennett," said De Valerie, with shining eyes. "Thanks awfully!"

After our strained relations in the past, De Valerie had probably thought that I should not give him a regular place in the eleven. But as long as he kept up his present form, he was a first-class man.

With Yakama and Farman batting, the play was somewhat dull for a time. Yakama was not nearly so good at batting as bowling. This, of course, wasn't to be expected. A good bowler is very rarely a good batsman. He shines at one or the other.

The score mounted up slowly. But I was not troubled. I soon discovered that Farman was a sticker, although he didn't do much. He just kept his end up, and made no attempt to play to the gallery, snatching a run here and there.

Yakama came out first, and I sent in the Bo'sun. He met with bad luck, and came out within five minutes. Christine and Co. were beginning to look cheerful, for if things went on at this rate we should be all out for about a hundred all told.

I had purposely refrained from going in myself, because I was anxious to give the others a chance. But now I took my bat and marched briskly to the wicket.

"You go on just as you are, old chap," I said to Farman.

"Sure," nodded the American boy.

"Guess I ain't after no all-fired centuries."

I was confident, although I realised that I might easily equal Handforth's performance. Really great players are often dismissed with only a couple of runs to their credit. I wasn't a great player by any means, but I considered myself fairly decent.

During the first over I managed to take four, and after that I began to settle down. Yorke was bowling, and he didn't trouble me at all. I just knocked the leather all over the field, and Farman and I were kept on the run continuously.

"Gee! This is going some!" he panted, as we passed on one occasion.

Clapson had a try at me after a while, but I knocked his bowling all over the place. Perhaps I was feeling in particularly good form that afternoon. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie enthusiastically declared that I was doing wonders, but I won't say that myself.

The Monks, however, couldn't budge me, and I was enjoying the batting immensely. Farman was caught out at last, and his place was taken by McClure. By this time the score stood at 127—which meant that we had to take another 23 to win. McClure contributed seven of these himself during the first four overs, and in the meantime I knocked up another six, for I hadn't received much of the bowling.

"Ten to win," I remarked comfortably. "Oh, we shall do it on our heads!"

Actually we did not accomplish this remarkable feat. McClure was steady, and even if he received the order of the boot I still had another man to play.

I dispatched the ball nearly to the pavilion a minute or two later, and that was worth three. Then McClure took a single run. A pair of two's from my bat brought things fairly close.

With only two to gain the result of the match was a foregone conclusion. Christine and Co. were by no means glum, for they hadn't done so badly. And, after all, this match was not a House fixture proper—it didn't count.

But even at this eleventh hour, so to speak, the Ancient House stood within an ace of losing, for an event occurred which had been quite unlooked for. Clapson was just about to bowl to me when a warning shout caused him to pause.

I glanced round, and then stood rigid.

Mr. Kennedy Hunter, his gown flying in the breeze, was hurrying towards the spot with rapid strides. He paced upon the field and waved his hand angrily. It was really the first time I had seen the Housemaster enraged. His beaming smile had vanished, and he was scowling furiously.

"Stop!" he shouted shrilly. "Stop at once!"

"Oh, my hat!" I heard Clapson exclaim.

Within two runs of winning, and we had been ordered to stop! Just for a moment everybody stood stock-still with consternation. I set my teeth grimly, and nodded to Clapson.

"Play up!" I roared.

Clapson, who wouldn't suffer any punishment, seeing that Mr. Hunter was not his Housemaster, obeyed with alacrity. He prepared to take a short run, but Mr. Hunter was already close upon the pitch.

"Stop, I tell you!" he shouted wildly. "How—how dare you continue playing after I have ordered you——"

Whiz!

The ball sped down straight for my wicket; Clapson, at all events, had not sent down a "dud" shot. I met the leather fairly, but it soared aloft in the most aggravating fashion,

and I saw a couple of fieldsmen running like mad.

"Run!" I shouted desperately.

McClure needed no second bidding. He tore down the pitch, and I followed his example. Mr. Hunter at that moment arrived in the centre. He made a frantic grab at me as I passed, but I dodged and reached the crease.

A hurried glance told me that the fieldsmen had missed the catch and the ball was already being sent to the wicket. It was the only chance, so I swung round, intent upon taking another run.

McClure did the same, and as we pelted across the ball whizzed in. It was touch-and-go for half a second. But even as I jammed my bat down upon the crease the wickets flew asunder.

It was a win!

"Oh, well played!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Hunter, completely ignored, stood practically in the centre of the pitch, quivering with rage. In spite of his order we had finished the game. In the excitement of the moment we had hardly realised the gravity of the situation.

But now that the game was won we were quite ready to pay the piper. Disobedience now would have been madness.

"This exhibition of insubordination in disgraceful beyond words," fumed Mr. Hunter, pale with passion. "Every Remove boy belonging to the Ancient House will line up before me at once! Hurry yourselves, you young dogs!"

There were several gasps, but the fellows knew better than to jib. They all lined up and stood quiet. We had not expected such a scene as this. For the Housemaster to interrupt the game in such a fashion was unheard of.

"Who is responsible for this rank mutiny?" demanded Mr. Hunter.

"I am, sir," I said quietly.

"Begad! We're all in it, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Every one of us!"

"Bennett ain't to blame, sir!"

Mr. Hunter eyed the Removites grimly.

"Very well," he said in a subdued voice.

"Since you are all to blame, you shall all be punished. I observe that several Remove boys are absent, but they will receive the same sentence as you all."

We made no reply, but waited for the next event. I shouldn't have been surprised if Mr. Hunter had set about us, one after the other, with his open fist. But he did not do this. He stood there breathing hard, regarding us all with glittering eyes. Meanwhile Bob Christine and Co. stood looking on with unsympathetic grins. They were rather enjoying the scene, in fact.

A change came over Mr. Hunter. His temper subsided, and the old beaming smile broke out upon his thin features.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed softly. "You must forgive me, boys, for giving way to an outburst of temper. But you have been very unruly, and I was seriously annoyed. I am

deeply sorry that this regrettable incident has occurred."

The change in his tone was so sudden that the fellows stared. Some of them looked relieved, fondly believing that Mr. Hunter was reconsidering his decision.

But I was not to be deceived. This change was very ominous. I was quite sure that Mr. Hunter's genial smile was far more dangerous than his blackest frown. This sudden reversion to his customary attitude was far from being a healthy sign.

"Yes, I am deeply sorry," he repeated. "It was very wrong of you, boys, to lock Kenmore in the cupboard and to break away from the Form-room. I am disappointed in you. It is fortunate that there are one or two good boys in the Remove—for did they not release Kenmore?"

There was an angry snort from several juniors. Pullwood and Co., of course, had performed the trick; and in all probability they had escaped the punishment which was to fall upon our heads.

"You will all form into double file and march into the Triangle," went on Mr. Hunter pleasantly. "Now, smartly, boys!"

The whole proceeding was undignified, but we could do nothing but obey. To be marched into the Triangle in such a fashion, like a crowd of fags, was hard to bear. But we made no attempt to disobey the command.

Had we done so it would have been sheer rebellion—and matters had not come to that pass yet. As for myself, I was not particularly startled. The match had been played in spite of Mr. Hunter's order, and there was a considerable amount of satisfaction in that thought.

It was not for us to grumble because punishment was now about to be administered. After all, we could only be caned or sentenced to further lines. And by this time we were becoming experts at the art.

Many chuckles came from the College House fellows as we marched away. They were sorry for us, but the humour of the situation was quite apparent to them. We could see nothing funny in it ourselves!

Arriving in the Triangle, we were ordered to halt. And now we stood at attention, and Mr. Hunter marched down the line with the air of a drill-sergeant. He was beaming all the while, and looked perfectly harmless.

I noticed Kenmore at one of the study windows. He was looking extremely pleased, for any punishment which could befall us, no matter how severe, would not be too harsh in his eyes.

"I really think it will be necessary for me to inflict a severe sentence," said Mr. Hunter softly. "You have been very naughty, my boys. It was wrong of you to leave your Form-room after having been ordered to remain there during the afternoon."

"We'll do our detention next half-holiday, sir," I said respectfully.

"Very possibly, Bennett—very possibly," said Mr. Hunter. "But I am thinking of another punishment—a punishment which will

fit the crime. Cricket is a splendid game, no doubt, but there are times when it should not be played."

"May I say something, sir?" I asked boldly.

"Certainly, Bennett—certainly," replied Mr. Hunter engagingly.

"I only want to tell you, sir, that we didn't act with any disrespect to Mr. Crowell," I said. "He was called away, and Kenmore took his place. I know we acted wrongly in locking Kenmore in that cupboard, but—"

"I think that is sufficient, Bennett," interposed Mr. Hunter sweetly. "You really must not make these excuses for yourself."

"They're not for myself, sir," I said. "I'm speaking for the whole Form."

"Quite so—quite so!" beamed Mr. Hunter. "Well, boys, I was saying something about a punishment, I believe? I have no wish to be severe, and for this once I will overlook the offence."

"Oh!"

"Great pip!"

There was general amazement.

"I shall give you neither lines nor corporal punishment," continued Mr. Hunter. "I think, however, that the game of cricket is rather unnecessary. Suppose we dispense with it?"

"I—I don't follow you, sir," I said blankly.

"Yet surely my meaning is clear, Bennett?" smiled the Housemaster. "You are the captain of the team, I judge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Bennett, you must please understand that all Remove cricket in the Ancient House is strictly forbidden."

"For to-day, do you mean, sir?"

"For to-day, and for every future day," replied Mr. Hunter, his face wrinkling into a sunny smile. "Furthermore, I must remind you all that the playing-fields are placed out of bounds for every boy belonging to the Remove. You may dismiss!"

"But—but—"

"That is all, Bennett."

Mr. Hunter turned and walked into the Ancient House. The Remove was too utterly startled to give voice to any expression for a moment or two. But then the full enormity of the punishment was realised.

No more cricket—and the playing-fields were cut of bounds!

The Remove was simply thunderstruck with dismay.

CHAPTER IV.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH BOB CHRISTINE AND CO. TURN UP TRUMPS, AND SIR MONTIE AND TOMMY AND I FOLLOW A STRANGER, WITH SURPRISING RESULTS.

THE spell seemed to break all in a second, and a truly alarming uproar arose in the old Triangle. Very seldom had such scene of indignation been witnessed at St. Frank's.

"No more cricket!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Playing-fields out of bounds!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Rather not!"

The fellows swarmed round me in a wild swirl; Mr. Hunter had addressed his remarks to me, and the Removites naturally looked to me to state my opinion. I was Form captain, and it was up to me to do something. But the shouts were so confusing and numerous that I couldn't make myself heard.

"We won't stand it, Bennett!" roared Handforth.

"It's beyond the limit!"

"Hold on!" I yelled, trying to make myself heard. "There's no sense in getting excited like this——"

"He ought to be booted out!" shouted Watson excitedly. "There ain't any room at St. Frank's for Prussian Huns!"

"Rather not!"

"Hear, hear!"

A terrific cry arose at once.

"Down with the Hun!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Three cheers for freedom and liberty!"

The three cheers were given with terrific gusto, and the Removites howled themselves hoarse, attracting half St. Frank's into the Triangle, to see what the tremendous uproar was about.

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The excitement was now intense, and I knew that it was quite useless attempting to reason with the fellows until they had calmed down. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were as enthusiastic as the others. I verily believe that I was the only fellow who kept his head—with the exception, perhaps, of Cecil De Valerie.

"Rather excitin'—what?" he grinned.

"Idiotic!" I growled. "This'll do no good."

"Three cheers for old Alvy!" bawled Handforth like a megaphone.

A wild shriek of enthusiasm arose, and the cheers were given almost incoherently. Somebody, however, called for groans for Hunter the Hun in the midst of it. This resulted in a most extraordinary mixture, for half the fellows were groaning and the other half cheering.

Fenton, of the Sixth, came striding out of the Ancient House, a frown upon his brow. Fenton was the captain of the school, the skipper of the First Eleven, and a thoroughly decent fellow all round. Everybody liked and respected him.

"Stop this!" he shouted angrily. "What's the excitement about, you silly kids?"

"Down with the Hun!"

"Hurrah!"

"You buzz off, Fenton!" bawled Handforth excitedly. "You're a decent chap, but we don't want you interfering in this——"

"Take a hundred lines, Handforth, for cheek!" shouted Fenton. "You infernal young sweeps! If you don't stop this din at once I'll give the whole crowd of you five hundred lines!"

The uproar subsided with surprising

alacrity. The Removites were not exactly afraid of lines, but Fenton was respected, and his presence cooled them down a good deal. He looked round wrathfully.

"Now, what's the trouble?" he demanded. "I've never seen such a scene here before. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

"You don't know what's happened, Fenton," I said grimly.

"It's that rotten Hun——" began Handforth.

"Let Bennett speak!" snapped the captain of St. Frank's tartly.

"Hunter detained us in the Form-room all the afternoon, Fenton," I explained.

"Yes, I know. A pretty rotten thing, too," said Fenton. "But you've got to put up with these worries in the Remove——"

"But that's not all," I interrupted. "We were left in charge of that rotter Kenmore, and—well, we weren't standing that, I can tell you. We shoved Kenmore in the cupboard and left him there."

"And now you've been punished, I suppose?" said Fenton grimly. "Well, it serves you right, you cheeky young bounders. Don't you know better than to lay hands on a prefect?"

"We played our match with the College House," I replied quietly. "We were prepared for punishment, Fenton, and we shouldn't have jibbed at lines or canings; even if we'd been gated for a fortnight we shouldn't have cared much. But Hunter's come down too heavy altogether."

Fenton eyed me steadily.

"Well, what's he done?" he asked.

"Banned all cricket, and placed the playing-fields out of bounds!" I replied.

Fenton whistled.

"By Jove! That's a bit steep, I must admit," he said, looking serious. "It'll be a jolly good thing when Mr. Alvington comes back."

"But what are we going to do until then?" roared Handforth.

"You'll have to stick it!" replied Fenton grimly. "My dear kids, you can't jib against your Housemaster. I'm sorry for you, but I can't do anything. He's abolished study teas in the Remove, hasn't he?"

"Yes," I growled. "And there's no tea for us this evening, even in Hall!"

"H'm! You seem to be getting it in the neck!" remarked Fenton. "Well, my advice is this: Steer clear of Mr. Hunter all you can. Don't aggravate him, and carry on until Mr. Alvington returns. This sort of thing won't last long, that's certain."

"It can't," I replied firmly. "Things'll come to a head soon."

"Well, don't do anything silly, that's all."

And Fenton, having given us that excellent advice, walked away. I could see that he was quite disgusted with Mr. Hunter's edict, and his sympathies were all with the Removites. But Fenton, although school captain, could not very well interfere. He was under Mr. Hunter's orders himself, as a matter of fact.

His interruption had been of sufficient length to allow the fellows to recover their

wits, for, to tell the truth, they had been nearly off their heads with indignation and excitement.

"It's no good making a row about it," I declared, addressing the whole crowd. "Hunter's the Housemaster, and we can't jib against him unless we decide upon open revolt. And that's a bit too steep. We shall have to do as Fenton says and stick it until old Alvy comes back."

Edward Oswald Handforth snorted.

"You're a fine skipper, ain't you?" he roared disdainfully.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, ain't you going to do something?" demanded the leader of Study D. "You're not going to take this thing lying down, I suppose?"

"You can suppose what you like, Handy," I said grimly. "I'm certainly not going to do anything fatheaded. We'd better calm down, and then discuss the situation later on. We shall probably be able to think of some way out if we set our wits to work. But violence isn't to be thought of."

"Begad, you're right, dear old boy—you always are right!"

"Bennett's the chap to stand by!"

"Hear, hear!"

"This affair wants a level head," said De Valerie coolly. "My dear kids, we can't leave ourselves in better hands than Bennett's. If we do as he says, we shall do right."

I nodded approvingly, and my estimation of De Valerie was even higher than before. In fact he was turning out to be a thoroughly decent chap.

"The immediate matter to be settled is tea," I went on. "We can't have any grub in our studies, and we're barred from Hall this evening. I don't know about you chaps, but I'm jolly hungry!"

"We're starving!"

"Well, something's got to be done," I continued. "Hunter didn't say anything about the tuck shop, so we'd better raid Mrs. Hake's establishment——"

"She's sold out!" growled Teddy Long, with a gloomy expression.

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob Christine, of the College House Remove, came forward with several of his followers. They were all looking rather serious, and I knew that they had been listening to the proceedings from the very start.

"Clear off, you fatheaded Monks!" roared Handforth. "We don't want you interfering in our affairs——"

"My dear chap, we're coming to the rescue," said Christine coolly. "You whacked us at cricket, but it was a jolly good game, and a near thing, anyhow. And House rivalry might as well be shoved aside for the time being. I've got a suggestion to make——about tea."

"Oh!"

"Go ahead, Christine, old man!" said Handforth genially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The change in Handforth's tone was astonishing.

"There's nothing to prevent you all accepting invitations out to tea, is there?" went on Christine cheerfully. "How does that strike you? I've been talking it over with the fellows, and each study in our House is open to entertain three visitors—and the rest can squash in anywhere, if necessary. The only stipulation is that you've got to bring your own giddy sugar!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

I fell upon Christine's neck.

"My dear chap, you've earned my undying gratitude!" I said heartily. "You've come to the rescue when we were in dire straits!"

"Good old Christine!"

The Remove was in a good humour again—for the most important thing, at the moment, was connected with certain empty cavities which urgently required filling up. The cricket could wait for a bit.

It was really jolly decent of Christine and Co. to invite their deadly rivals to tea. It proved that in an emergency the two Houses at St. Frank's were on the most friendly terms possible. And this was an occasion when it was necessary to bury the hatchet—as a temporary measure.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie and I naturally took tea in Christine's own study. We were the two skippers, and this was as it should be. Study Q in the College House, therefore, entertained Study C of the Ancient House.

The rest of the fellows squeezed themselves in somewhere or other. Rations were rather limited in one or two studies, but nobody grumbled. Tea of any sort was better than no tea at all. And there was great satisfaction in the thought that the tyrannous Hunter had been diddled.

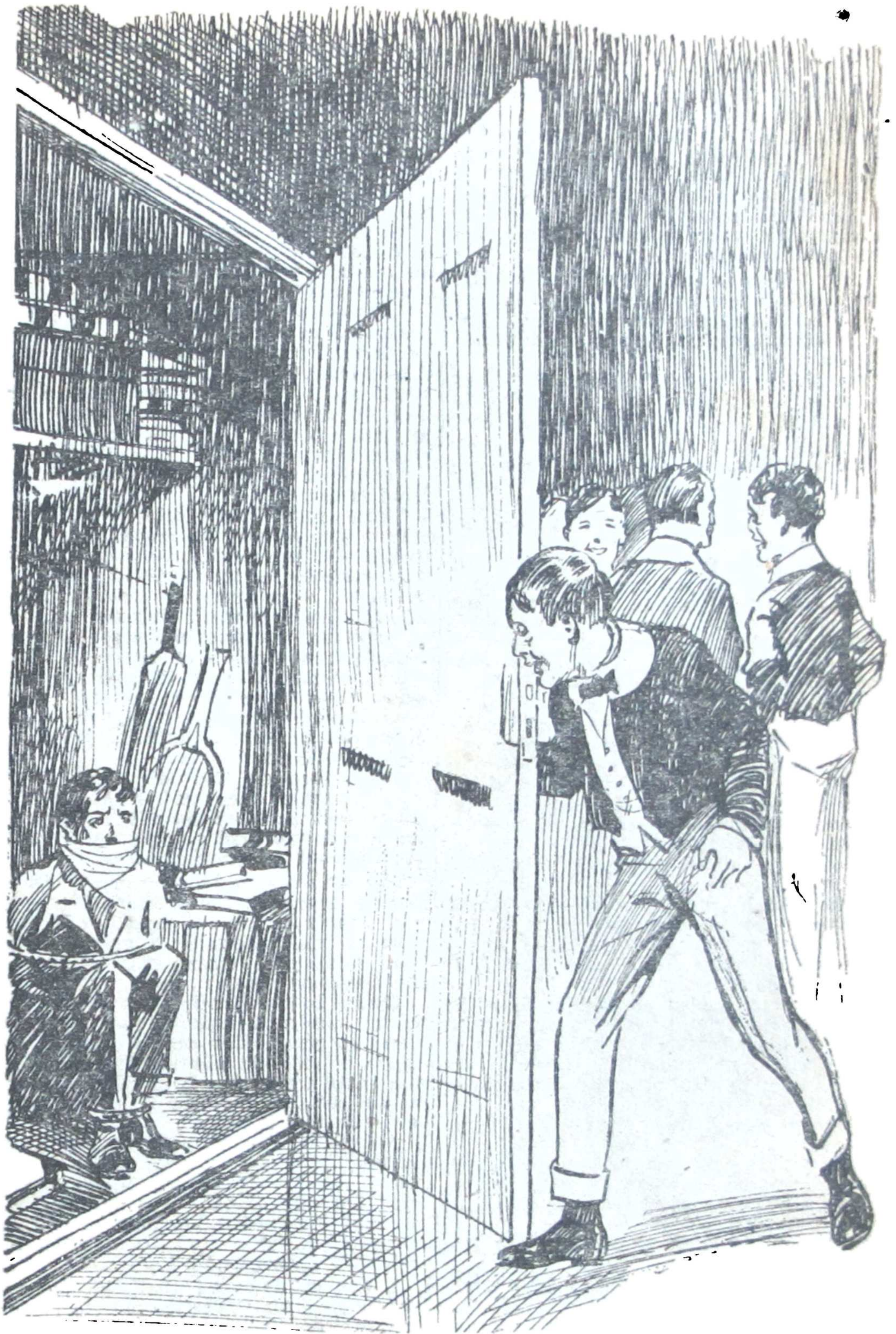
His "no tea" order had been completely flouted—and he couldn't possibly punish anybody, for there had been no mention of invitations to the College House.

I took the opportunity to send the word round, while the fellows were still at tea, that a meeting was to be held in the Ancient House common-room at six-thirty sharp. There was not the slightest doubt that there would be a big attendance. Only Fullwood and Co., probably, would fail to turn up.

The Nuts had released Kenmore, of the Sixth, and as a reward they had been allowed tea in Hall in the Ancient House. And the ban upon cricket pleased them immensely. They were not in the least affected—except that their compulsory practice was now stopped. And, not unnaturally, Fullwood and Co. were highly satisfied.

The majority of the Remove, however, were alarmed. No cricket was an appalling situation to face; and, even worse, the playing-fields being out of bounds struck a chill into every heart. Life would scarcely be worth living at St. Frank's under such conditions.

At six-twenty I marched into the Ancient House common-room with Sir Montie and



Kenmore's hands and feet were bound, and he was squatting amid the old lumber at the bottom of the cupboard. —(See page 5.)

Tommy. A good many fellows were already there, and after another ten minutes had elapsed there wasn't a man missing—with the exception of the Nuts. And their absence was quite desirable.

Handforth had already mounted upon the table, and was holding a meeting of his own. His audience consisted solely of Church and McClure, the other fellows refusing to listen. But Handforth seemed serenely ignorant of the fact. His voice boomed through the room monotonously.

"Pull that ass down!" I exclaimed briskly.

There was a move towards Handforth at once. He instinctively discovered that danger threatened, and he glared round wrathfully.

"I'm making a speech!" he roared. "Now, look here, I say that we're not going to stand any rot! We're not going to stand—"

Somebody pulled the table, and Handforth's words, so far as he himself was concerned, came true. He certainly wasn't standing any longer.

"You—you thundering idiots!" he howled, scrambling up.

"Oh, dry up!" I shouted. "I didn't call this meeting so that you could spout, Handy! I'm skipper, and I'm going to do the jawing."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Benny!"

"Gentlemen of the Remove——"

"Hurrah!"

"Shut up, Hubbard!" I snapped. "What's the good of my trying to speak if you bawl out 'Hurrah' before I've started? Gentlemen of the Remove, we are collected together for the purpose of discussing the unfair and utterly rotten action of our respected Housemaster——"

"Yah! He ain't respected!" bellowed Handforth.

"Who said he was?" I went on. "Don't you know sarcasm when you hear it, you ass? We've got to come to some settlement—— Oh, rats! What the dickens is the matter now?"

There was a sudden commotion near the door. Several fellows were lounging with their backs against it, and they were sent flying inwards, and some little confusion was caused owing to the fact that Owen major had trodden upon Hubbard's left ear.

"What's wrong, there?" I shouted impatiently.

"My ear's nearly squashed—that's what's wrong!" howled Hubbard, scrambling up. "Some silly idiot pushed the door from outside—— Oh, my hat!"

Starke of the Sixth pushed his way into the common-room.

"By George! Hubbard wasn't far wrong—what?" drawled De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any of your rotten cheek!" said Starke, glaring. "Come on, Kenmore, and you others. We'll soon clear this crowd!"

My anger rose. Starke was a prefect, and every junior in the Ancient House hated him—and not without reason. For Starke was one of the biggest bullies St. Frank's ever had the misfortune to own.

He was followed into the common-room by Kenmore and Wilson and Conroy major—also prefects.

"What's the meaning of this?" I demanded hotly.

"You'll soon know the meaning of it," said Starke. "Now then, clear out as fast as you like, the whole job-lot of you!"

There was an immediate uproar.

"I suppose we can't hold a meeting now?" I shouted angrily.

"Sorry, Bennett," said Wilson, who was a decent chap. "Hunter's given us orders to break up this meeting, and we can't very well jib against it. Don't be such a confounded rotter, Starke! No need to growl at the kids like that!"

"Break—break up the meeting?" I stutted indignantly.

"Yes; you'd better take it quietly.

This was rather too much to ask. We took it—but we didn't take it quietly. With four prefects in the common-room it was impossible to continue the meeting, and the fellows were dispersed. But my indignation was nothing compared to the general uproar. Handforth was nearly on the verge of tears—tears of rage, I mean. This treatment was what might have been expected had we been Second-Form fags. And the Remove, of course, considered itself the most important Form in the House.

And before we had fairly got over the shock another one was provided. A new notice had appeared upon the board. Burton saw it first, and his jolly voice was soon shouting out in wrathful tones.

The Bo'sun's anger was not misplaced. For the notice was in Hunter's handwriting, and calmly announced that no Removites were to meet together in greater numbers than four! This meant that a Form-meeting was impossible.

Rather to my surprise, the juniors took it fairly calmly. I suppose they had experienced so many other shocks that the significance of this did not occur to them. But the plain truth was painful. Every liberty which the Remove had previously enjoyed was being taken away.

Before long, at this rate, we should simply be under the heel of a tyrannous ruler, and there wouldn't be a thing worth living for. Mr. Kennedy Hunter was conducting the Ancient House—and the Remove in particular—with a rod of iron. It was the mailed fist with a vengeance.

I was so disgusted that the thought of sitting in Study C was unbearable. And so I carted Tregellis-West and Watson out into the Triangle, where the cool evening air was blowing through the leafy branches of the elms and chestnuts. Overhead the stars gleamed brightly.

"Begad! Things are gettin' to a shockin' pass, you know," remarked Sir Montie seriously. "Somethin' will have to be done. Benny—it will, really. We might as well be in Prussia, an' done with it!"

"Couldn't be worse, anyhow!" grunted Watson.

"He's getting past all bounds," I said, between my teeth. "We've got to think of a wheeze, my sons—Hullo!"

I stopped abruptly, and gazed over at the Housemaster's private door. My attention had been directed there by the faint sound of Mr. Hunter's voice. And now I saw a man's form briskly walking to the gates.

He wasn't Hunter, but there was something vaguely familiar about the stranger's walk, which was of a curious, swinging gait. And, suddenly, I jumped to the truth.

"By jingo!" I whispered hurriedly. "That's the chap I saw the other night, behind Bellton Wood. He met old Hunter, and the two went off together. Looks rather fishy, to my mind."

On the face of it there was nothing particularly strange in this visitor. Mr. Hunter was at liberty to have as many callers as he chose. But I had every reason to suspect something sinister.

Only a day or two before I had followed Mr. Hunter along a remote footpath, and the Housemaster, on that occasion, had taken the precaution to don a false beard. He and this other man had met, and had vanished in a rather curious manner.

Now, the Housemaster of a respectable school does not meet strangers by night in this fashion, unless there is something very seriously the matter. And I determined, then and there, to act. The guv'nor had taught me to make prompt decisions, and to move without delay.

"Look here," I whispered quickly. "I'm going to follow that chap. You had better stay behind—"

"Rot!" said Watson promptly.

"Well, then, keep as far behind me as you can," I amended. "But for goodness' sake don't let yourselves be seen or heard. Savvy?"

I didn't wait for them to answer, but glided over the Triangle. I steered clear of the gates, because of the overhead light which hung immediately above them. For all I knew, Mr. Hunter was still at his door.

The wall was low at one point, however, and I quickly climbed over it. Faintly I could see the stranger striding along in the direction of the moor. I followed, and certain faint noises behind me told me that Sir Montie and Tommy were hot upon my track.

My quarry was of an unsuspecting nature. At all events, he did not once turn round, but strode onwards briskly. Now and again I saw the glow of a cigar-end, and the fragrant aroma of smoke came occasionally on the wind.

The chase continued for some little time, and the direction taken was exactly as be-

fore. The stranger took the footpath, and I found myself behind Bellton Wood, with the bleak expanse of Bannington Moor stretching out ahead. The old, disused quarry was faintly visible in the starlight.

Without the slightest warning the man vanished. He had been picking his way through some big chunks of rock, and he suddenly ceased to exist; at all events, that is how it looked.

While I remained still waiting, my chums crept up.

"Where is he?" whispered Watson tensely.

"Don't know!" I muttered. "He seems to have been swallowed up!"

"Begad!" breathed Montie. "That would be rather uncomfortable, dear fellow!"

I moved forward, my chums dutifully dropping behind. And three minutes later the mystery was explained. Right in amongst the rocks I discovered a black cavity leading downwards. It didn't seem to be much—merely a shallow pit—and I shouldn't have suspected anything under ordinary circumstances.

But this incident had told me that I was now gazing upon the entrance to a tunnel—an underground passage, in fact. And I quivered with excitement and eagerness. What could be the explanation of all this mystery? What was Mr. Hunter's connection with the affair?

I turned to my chums with set teeth.

"Shall we—shall we venture?" I asked tensely.

"Dear old boy, I leave it to you."

"Same here, Benny."

I made up my mind swiftly.

"Good enough!" I said. "We'll see where this tunnel leads, my bonnie boys. I'll go first, and you chaps keep behind, as you have been doing."

And, without more ado, I plunged into the unknown.

CHAPTER V.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH WE ARE CAPTURED, SET FREE, AND BEWILDERED IN RAPID SUCCESSION.

I WAS quivering with excitement as I felt my way along the low, narrow tunnel. As I had suspected, the underground passage led straight away in a steep descent, and the sides and roof were smooth and dry. The air, although stuffy, was by no means foul, and breathing was an easy matter.

I had only taken one glimpse at the tunnel with my electric torch, for the light would have been very dangerous. I had just seen that the going was clear, and had plunged the tunnel into darkness again.

Sir Montie and Tommy came behind me, for there was no room for us to go abreast. Although we had listened for a full minute

we had heard not the slightest sound. The silence, in fact, was almost uncanny.

Tommy Watson was rather tiresome at first. He continually pressed into my back, and told me to hurry onwards. At last I was compelled to waste a minute or two in convincing him that undue haste would probably lead to disaster.

After that he was all right, and we progressed. It would have been foolish in the extreme to hurry along recklessly. We knew well enough that the stranger was somewhere ahead, and it was quite likely that he would hear vague noises, and they would give him the tip that he had been followed.

It was imperative, therefore, that every precaution should be taken. I impressed upon my chums the necessity of maintaining complete silence. I also barred all jawing. Something told me that we were on the track of the heart of the mystery—that this tunnel would lead us to something criminal. Mr. Hunter was undoubtedly connected with the whole business, and I could not help remembering that Nelson Lee himself was engaged upon the case. That fact alone spoke volumes.

The tunnel after a while became level, and we felt our way cautiously along foot by foot. I tested every yard of ground before venturing over it, for I had no wish to tumble headlong down an unsuspected pitfall.

But when I felt for the left-hand wall again, by which I had been guiding my footsteps, I found nothing but thin air. The tunnel must have widened out, for a step to the left did not bring me to the side.

And Tommy Watson, who was bringing up the rear, suddenly uttered a faint noise.

"Benny!" he whispered.

"Shut up!" I replied quickly. "Didn't I tell you—"

"Yes, but I heard something behind me just now," breathed Tommy, his voice quivering a little. "I—I thought—"

"There's nobody there, you see," I interrupted. "Only a loose stone, I expect."

"Bogad!" came Sir Montie's voice. "I can't feel anythin', old boys. The roof seems to have disappeared, an' there ain't any walls!"

"We must have walked into a cavern," I said softly.

I took another step forward, feeling for my electric torch at the same time. But just at that moment something of a very startling nature occurred. A dazzling light blazed in my eyes, and I gasped. After the pitchy darkness of the tunnel this sudden beam completely blinded me. And Tregolles, West and Watson, of course, were in a similar plight.

"Hands up!" came a low, grim command.

"Hands up, you brats!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Watson.

"Better give in," I muttered sharply.

For, my sight partially returning, I had

caught the unmistakable glint of a blued-steel revolver-barrel. It was projecting just in advance of the light, and all behind it was intensely black. The glare of the electric torch completely concealed the man who had surprised us.

We all raised our hands above our heads, since there was nothing else to do. We were at a total disadvantage, and resistance would certainly have led to disaster. Whilst we were clearly outlined by the brilliant glare, our opponent remained concealed. All we could see was the menacing revolver.

"You infernal young spies!" came the voice again. "You will pay dearly for this interference. I have a mind to shoot you upon the spot! Your remains would never be discovered in these old quarry workings!"

"Look here, it's all very well to take that tone," I said calmly. "We've got as much right in this place as you have, I suppose? The place is public property—"

"I want no impudent replies— Oh!"

The last seemed a mere gasp, for I only faintly heard it. For at the same second a deafening report rang out in the confines of the cavern. Right from behind Tommy Watson came a red flash. Watson yelled, but the noise he made was trivial to the howl which arose from the man with the torch.

Something clattered down, and I knew in a second what had happened. Watson's ears had not deceived him—somebody had been following! And he had now fired a bullet, and it had torn the revolver from the stranger's grip.

"Say, cut it right out!" came a sharp, crisp voice. "Guess you ain't hurt none, sonny. That pill just hit your gun, an' didn't hurt you any. Stand right still, or there'll be some more fancy shootin'!"

It had all happened so quickly that we were bewildered. The voice of the second stranger was pleasant, but icily cold. That he was an American was very obvious, and he could undoubtedly shoot "some."

A muttered curse came from the other man. The torch was still held in his hand, but he abruptly switched it out, and we were plunged in darkness.

"Hello!" came a low mutter from behind.

At the same instant another light appeared, but this time it was from the American's torch. He did not hold it, but laid it upon the floor, so that the light was diffused over the whole cavern. A rush followed, and I saw that the two men were fighting desperately.

It was short and sharp.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I stood still. We wanted to help, but couldn't see an opening. Moreover, the American appeared to be fully capable of dealing with the other fellow single-handed.

The beam from the torch cast a bright light upon the ground; but the upper part of the cavern was only dimly illuminated,

and it was impossible to see the features of the combatants.

The revolver-shot had not seriously harmed the fellow who had threatened us; it had merely deprived him of his weapon. He was now fighting desperately—like a beast. He kicked and scratched viciously.

But the American dodged all these "fouls" easily, and, just as I was getting ready to sail in, he delivered a terrific upper-cut which laid the other man flat on his back with a heavy thud. He lay there, breathing heavily, but completely whacked.

"Begad! muttered Tregellis-West. "That was rippin'!"

Our rescuer turned on us sharply.

"Say, kids—quit!" he exclaimed, in crisp, breathless tones.

"Yes, but—" I began.

"Quit!"

"We want to thank you—"

"Quit!" repeated the American—"right now!"

He was insistent, but we were slow in moving towards the tunnel-exit. He came over to us, and hustled us along sharply. I saw that his face was lean and pale, and a small beard grew on the point of his chin.

"It was awfully good of you to rescue us, sir," I remarked, as we hurried along the tunnel. "I don't know how—"

"Say, there's a heap of things you don't know, sonny," cut in the man. "Guess you'd best steer clear of these blamed affairs. They ain't for boys to meddle with. I'm sure riled with you for buttin' in. Say, you deserve thrashin' good 'an' proper. Hike along there, sonny!"

Tommy Watson, who was leading, broke into a trot. The American's command was grim, and we were all hustled along breathlessly. I wondered what had become of the man in the cavern. Probably he was engaged in counting the stars.

At last we reached the exit, and the cool night air fanned our heated cheeks. Our companion regarded us sternly, and pointed towards the footpath.

"Git goin', kids," he said. "An' don't git around this lay-out again. Say, there's a heap of danger knockin' around right here—"

"But who are you?" I asked quickly.

"Say, don't you ask no fancy questions," replied the man. "You'd sure have been fixed by that guy if I hadn't been around. Jest quit, sonnies—an' don't meddle again."

He pointed once more, and we could do nothing but obey. There was something irresistible in the stranger's tone of command. When we had progressed a hundred yards I glanced back. The figure was still standing there, quite still, and his hand was pointing as before.

"Begad! I'm all muddled, you know!" murmured Sir Montie. "It seems like a dream, Benny boy."

"It was queer, certainly," I agreed. "There's something of a rummy nature go-

ing on, my bucks. I wonder who the dickens that Yankee chap can be? Not one of the rotters, that's certain. I don't know what would have happened to us if he hadn't been handy. There was something familiar about him, somehow."

"I didn't notice it," remarked Watson, as we walked.

"Not about his voice, or his appearance." I went on. "But the commanding way in which he spoke—Hullo! What's this?"

I had placed my hand in a pocket, for no particular reason, and my fingers came in contact with a piece of crumpled paper. It hadn't been there before, I could swear, because I hate having rubbish in my pockets.

I took it out, and smoothed it between my fingers. Sir Montie and Tommy watched me curiously. They could hardly see what I was doing in the starlight, but they knew, at least, that I was handling a piece of paper.

"What's that?" asked Watson.

"Blessed if I know!" I replied. "Hold on a minute."

We all paused, and I switched my electric torch on. There were a few words written upon the paper, and I suddenly gave a short gasp. For the words were these: "Do not concern yourself with this mysterious affair, my boy—you will know all the facts in good time. Just carry on." After that came a curious, little ornamental scroll, which had been hurriedly executed. I knew, however, that it was Nelson Lee's private mark—the sign which did duty for his signature, and which I alone knew.

"Great Caesar!" I panted amazedly.

"What's the matter with you, ass?"

"That—that American!" I said, staring at my chums. "He was the guv'nor!"

"Old Alvy?" yelled Watson.

"Old Alvy himself," I replied, breathing hard. "Just look at this! It was written by Nelson Lee, and he must have shoved it into my pocket as we were coming along the tunnel. Fancy keeping us in the dark like that!"

"Dear boy, I can't quite believe it," said Tregellis-West. "He wasn't a bit like old Alvy, you know—"

"That's nothing," I interrupted. "The guv'nor is simply a wonder at disguise, and he can deceive me ten times a day if he chooses. What a silly ass I was not to tumble to it at the time. We could have asked him a whole heap of questions!"

"Let's go back?" suggested Watson eagerly.

"No good. He wouldn't be there now." I said, shaking my head. "Besides, he's told us not to interfere. I'm bothered if I can get the hang of this business at all. Where does Hunter come in? What's he got to do with the mystery?"

"Begad! It's no good askin' me, old boy," protested Tregellis-West.

"I wasn't asking you, Montie," I replied. "I suppose we shall have to let the thing rest for the time being. But if the guv'nor

thinks I'm going to take any notice of his tommy-rot, he's jolly well mistaken!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I'll try and bowl Hunter out if I get the chance," I said grimly. "If things go wrong it'll be the guv'nor's fault—he shouldn't play the giddy ox like this! I don't believe in being left out in the cold."

As a matter of fact I was rather indignant. And it hurt my dignity a trifle to realise that he was conducting this affair without consulting me in the least. He was probably sworn to secrecy by the fatheaded Government officials, but that didn't make any difference to my point of view. I dare say I was unreasonable, but I never have professed to be a saint.

When we arrived at the school we were still puzzled and half bewildered. The events which had just happened were almost unreal. And I was just a little uneasy with regard to the guv'nor.

This was silly of me, for, in my heart, I knew quite well that Nelson Lee was fully capable of looking after himself. More than that, he had looked after us as well. And there was a certain amount of comfort in the knowledge that the dear old guv'nor was hovering somewhere in the near vicinity.

I was not allowed to ponder over the affair much. For as soon as I entered the Ancient House I discovered that some excitement was brewing. My chums and myself had marched out into the Triangle as soon as the Remove meeting had been broken up, you will remember. We had left the fellows seething with indignation.

They didn't care so much about the meeting, but this restriction upon their liberties was not to be stood tamely. Coming right on the top of the cricketing ban, it served as added fuel to the smouldering fire.

In fact an outburst had occurred.

Edward Oswald Handforth was the outburst, to be exact. His two chums, Church and McClure, by no means shared his enthusiasm. But, as in duty bound, they felt compelled to stick to their leader through thick and thin.

I had every reason to suspect that Handforth had persuaded his loyal chums to cast in their lot with him by the application of his fist. Handforth's fist was like a young leg of mutton, and it had terrific driving power behind it. Anybody who refused to listen to reason—Handforth's reason—invariably felt the weight of those formidable fists.

"What's the row?" I demanded curiously.

The fellows were all collected in the lobby, and a din was proceeding. I couldn't help grinning. If this wasn't a meeting, what was it? But the Housemaster's order regarding meetings only applied to a regular collection of fellows in one room. It was impossible to divide the Removites into fours, or less, continually. Informal meetings, such as this, did not count.

"It's that ass, Handforth," remarked the Bo'sun, grinning. "Souise me! He's got a new idea in his crows-nest, messmate!"

"What's the fathead up to now?" I asked.

"Why, he's going to appeal to the Head," explained Burton. "He's talking about leading a deputation to the skipper's cabin—I mean the Head's study. Bust my mains'! Handforth won't do any good by that. The skipper can't haul the mate over the coals, can he?"

"Begad! I can't quite follow you, Bo'sun, old boy."

"He means that the Head can't interfere with Hunter," I explained. "I'm not sure you're not right, Bo'sun. Dr. Stafford hates using his authority—he likes to leave the direction of both Houses to their respective Housemasters. That's only natural, of course."

"Besides, dear boy, I expect the Head has got his eye on Hunter, you know," said Sir Montie sagely. "When things get really thick he'll put his foot down. Begad, he'll have to!"

"Of course things ain't thick now?" asked Watson sarcastically.

"They might get thicker, old fellow—there's no tellin'."

"Well, let's listen to Handforth," I said, with a grin.

And we pushed our way through the crowd and faced the excited leader of Study D. I could tell, by the glint in Handforth's eye, that he was determined; and when the redoubtable Edward Oswald was in that mental state, things generally happened.

And, as a rule, those things happened to—Handforth!

CHAPTER VI.

HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE DETERMINED—AND THINGS CERTAINLY HAPPEN.

NIPPER and his chums experienced some little difficulty in forcing their way through the crush, but at last they faced Handforth, and the latter eyed them aggressively.

"I don't want any interference from you, Bennett," he exclaimed loudly. "This is my show, and don't you forget it!"

"I'm not likely to forget it while you're about, Handy," I replied. "But, my dear chap, don't be a silly idiot! You're talking about going to the Head, aren't you?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Take my advice, and don't go," I replied.

McClure slapped Handforth's back with great heartiness.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "I knew what Bennett would say—and he's Form captain, Handy. You'd better follow his advice, you know. Come to consider it, it is a potty idea——"

"Didn't you agree to come with me?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"I—that is to say—well, of course, I didn't exactly mean that," stammered McClure, somewhat nervously. "Don't be a fathead, Handy, old man——"

"See that?" bawled Handforth.

McClure could scarcely help seeing it. Handforth was holding his fist within an inch of his faithful chum's nose, and McClure was not at all desirous of having that dangerous member of Handforth's anatomy in such close proximity.

"See that?" repeated Handforth grimly. "If you ain't careful, Arnold McClure, you'll feel the weight of it. You've had one or two punches to-night, and you'll have a few more if you try to back out!"

"What a chap you are!" snorted Nipper. "What's the idea, anyhow? If anybody ought to go to the Head, I'm the chap for it, but I'm not going to be such an ass. You'll only get a giddy lecture."

"I don't want any of your rot, Bennett," said Handforth, waving his hand. "And it would take a better man than the Head to lecture me, I can tell you. I shall be a messenger of the cause of justice, and I'm going to stick up for the rights of the Remove. Liberty! Freedom! That's my watchword!"

"Which is, dear fellow?" asked Sir Montie curiously. "Liberty or freedom?"

"Both!" roared Handforth.

"Begad! Then it won't be a watchword, you know," said Tregellis-West, shaking his head. "Besides, we ain't askin' for freedom at all. Dear Handy, you're on the wrong track. It's justice we want—"

Handforth snorted.

"Rot!" he said, glaring round. "The Remove wants freedom, and I'm going to get it. I'm going to show you chaps the stuff I'm made of, I can tell you. I'm going to have all Hunter's orders squashed, and, what's more, I'm going to tell the Head that we want four half-holidays a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!" sighed Sir Montie.

"Anything wrong in that?" shouted Handforth deantly.

"Rather not!" grinned Nipper. "It's a ripping programme!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"Four half-holidays a week or death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth looked round suspiciously. He wasn't quite sure whether the fellows were making fun of him or not. Handforth was strangely obtuse in such matters, although sharp enough in others. He never could see when he was being laughed at. He fondly imagined that the fellows were now enthusiastic over his precious plan of campaign.

"That's the idea," he said with determination. "I'm going to tell the Head that we want our full liberty again, and I ain't going to leave his study until I've received a positive promise!"

"Or a thunderin' good hidin'—what?" grinned De Valerie. "One or the other!"

"The other, I think!" chuckled Nipper.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, you silly idiots!" roared Handforth. "Just you wait! That's all I ask. Just you wait until we come back."

"We?" exclaimed Church with a start.

"Yes, we!" shouted Handforth. "If you think I'm going alone, you're jolly well mistaken. You won't be much support," he added bitterly, "but I daresay you'll be better than nothing. Come on!"

Church and McClure sighed, and prepared to follow their hot-headed leader.

"Hold on!" called out Nipper urgently.

"What's the matter?" asked Handforth, turning back.

"Hadn't you better provide yourselves with some padding—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth snorted, and he carried his two reluctant chums off in the direction of Dr. Stafford's study. As he went, Kenmore came down the passage and frowned angrily.

"Clear out of the lobby, you young sweeps!" he ordered. "Haven't you seen Mr. Hunter's notice? No meeting allowed."

The fellows dispersed, and, meanwhile, Handforth and Co. proceeded on their way to the Head's study. By the time they reached the door of that sacred apartment, Church and McClure became afflicted with a strange nervousness. But Handforth was as determined as ever.

"I—I say, Handy," murmured Church.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Don't you think—I—I mean, wouldn't it be better to leave it until to-morrow?" gasped Church, with the idea of putting off the evil hour. "The—the Head may be busy—"

"All the better," said Handforth promptly. "I mean to show him that we're not going to stand any rot! The Head's all right—I'll punch anybody's nose who says he isn't—but he's got to have a few home-truths rammed into him. We're going to do the ramming—see?"

Church and McClure didn't see, but they pretended to. Handforth was past mere argument, and his study mates resigned themselves to the inevitable. After all, a caning from the Head would be better than black eyes and thick ears from Handforth. It was either one or the other, and Church and McClure were wise in their choice.

Tap!

Handforth rapped upon the Head's door sharply. He didn't even wait for an invitation to enter, but opened the door and walked into the study with all the boldness in the world. In such a mood as this Handforth would have bearded the Prime Minister himself without a qualm. He felt just ready to face the whole Board of Governors with his complaints.

Church and McClure followed him on tip-toe, and even then they wavered. Handforth heard Church close the door. The Head was sitting in his chair reading a newspaper, and his face could not be seen.

"Ahem!" coughed Handforth firmly.

The paper descended, and Handforth gasped. For, instead of the Head, he gazed into the beaming face of Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A.

"Great pip!" panted Handforth breathlessly.

"What do you want here, my boy?" inquired the Housemaster, with a genial smile.

"We—we've come——" Handforth paused, at a loss.

"Did I understand you to say 'we,' Handforth?" asked Mr. Hunter.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Handforth. "We were going to——"

"One moment, my lad. Is it usual for you to refer to yourself in that manner?" asked the Housemaster, with a slight frown.

Handforth looked bewildered, and turned round. Then a yell escaped his lips. Church and McClure were nowhere to be seen. At the last moment their courage had failed them, and they had fled. Handforth breathed hard, and he heartily wished that he had fled also.

"I—I thought there were two chaps here, sir," he stammered, his courage oozing away. "We—that is, I—came to see the Head, sir."

"Indeed! For what reason, Handforth?"

"I was going to speak to him, sir."

"I really did not suppose that you would come here for the mere purpose of looking at him," said Mr. Hunter drily. "What you had to say to the Headmaster, Handforth, you can say to me."

"Cue-cue-can I, sir?"

"Certainly, Handforth."

"I—I don't think so, sir!" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean—— Oh, corks! I think I'll go, sir!"

And Handforth made for the door. Just for a moment he thought that he would escape. All his courage had fizzled away. Mr. Hunter's beaming smile had acted upon him in the most disconcerting fashion. He could have faced a harsh frown defiantly, but it was impossible to gaze into the Housemaster's smiling face and retain his equanimity. Handforth's determination deserted him at the crucial moment, and his one desire now was to flee.

"Handforth!" came Mr. Hunter's soft voice.

"Did—did you speak, sir?" asked Handforth nervously.

"You are quite aware, my boy, that I called you," said Mr. Hunter, rising from his seat. "You will be good enough to come over here."

"I—I'd rather not bother you, sir!"

"I can assure you, Handforth, that your presence is most entertaining," said Mr. Hunter sweetly. "I want you to tell me your reason for coming to this study. Upon what grounds did you propose to consult the Headmaster?"

Handforth stiffened.

"I'd rather not say, sir," he replied. "In fact it's—it's a private matter. And, if you'll pardon me saying so, sir, it hasn't got anything to do with—with anybody else," concluded Handforth lamely.

"Quite so," murmured Mr. Hunter, with perfect understanding. "I grasp your point

exactly. I am sorry to disappoint you, but Dr. Stafford has left St. Frank's——"

"Left!" shouted Handforth, a horrible thought flashing into his mind.

"For a few days," concluded Mr. Hunter.

"Oh, thank goodness! I—I thought——"

Handforth stopped abruptly. He realised that his relief was somewhat ill-advised. For Mr. Hunter could quite easily follow the train of thought which Handforth had been pursuing. And it was scarcely calculated to make the Housemaster amiable.

"Dr. Stafford has left the school for a few days," explained Mr. Hunter. "Until his return you will please regard me as the principal."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Handforth, with involuntary dismay.

This was news indeed! The Head was away, and Mr. Hunter had practically appointed himself Headmaster during Dr. Stafford's absence. The Ancient House was the premier House at St. Frank's, and always took first place. In the event of the Head being called away, the Housemaster of the Ancient House took nominal charge. It was, of course, a mere matter of form.

But Mr. Hunter, apparently, had decided otherwise. During Dr. Stafford's absence he was, to all intents and purposes, regarding himself as the Head of St. Frank's. Mr. Stockdale, of the College House, had held his appointment for twenty years, but he had no authority whatever over the other Housemaster.

"I have not the slightest doubt, Handforth," continued Mr. Hunter, "that you came to this study for the express purpose of airing a fancied grievance——"

"Fancied?" gasped Handforth.

"Under those circumstances you must be prepared to accept a little gentle correction," said Mr. Hunter smoothly. "You will please hold out your hand, my boy."

Handforth nearly fell over backwards.

"You—you ain't going to cane me, sir?" he panted.

"Exactly!"

"Cane me—me?" stuttered Handforth, scarcely able to believe his ears. "I'm—I'm Handforth, sir."

The leader of Study D apparently found it quite impossible to believe that any man could so far forget himself as to suggest corporal punishment. Handforth's dignity was of a weird and wonderful nature; to hear him speak one would be fully justified in suspecting that he came second only in importance to the Headmaster himself.

"Hold out your hand, Handforth."

Edward Oswald forgot himself, and did so. He was so dazed that he scarcely knew what he was doing. And before he could withdraw his hand Mr. Hunter's cane slashed down with terrific force across the open palm.

Swish!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Handforth, dancing.

"Now the other hand!"

It was in Handforth's mind to resist, but

something in Mr Hunter's manner warned him that he had better not do so. So he held out his other palm and received a second cut which fairly made him writhe.

"You may go, Handforth," said Mr. Hunter softly. "Oh, and there is something else. You will kindly instruct Bennett and Tregellis-West and Watson to come to this study at once."

"Yes, sir," groaned Handforth. "Certainly, sir!"

He made his way out, feeling that there was to be some slight consolation for the scandalous treatment he had received. Handforth was by no means vindictive, but the thought that Nipper and Co. were to share his woes was gratifying. Handforth, on this occasion at least, had no wish to shine alone.

Once out in the passage, the great Edward Oswald recovered, in a partial degree, his dignity. It was impossible to recover it completely while he was walking along the passage like a crab, doing his utmost to fold himself into a double knot. His hands, large as they were, felt fully double their normal size.

The news he imparted to the waiting Removites caused general consternation. Dr. Stafford away! This meant that they were entirely in the hands of the Hun! And Handforth's treatment at Mr. Hunter's hands was scarcely given a thought. The leader of Study D was much gratified, for he was not exactly anxious to be closely questioned. And having given Mr. Hunter's message to Nipper and Co., he set out upon a search.

For some unaccountable reason Church and McClure were missing. They were to be found nowhere, and Handforth's fury quietened down—as it always did. Church and McClure knew a thing or two!

Nipper and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West made their way to the Head's study in a gloomy mood.

"You can bet your little boots we're in for trouble, my sons," said Nipper, shaking his head. "Hunter's had some information about our jaunt this evening—he knows that we went into that tunnel. I shouldn't be surprised if we get gated for the rest of the giddy term."

"You always were a cheerful chap, Benny," murmured Sir Montie.

They arrived at the study and entered, and Mr. Hunter regarded them with his usual smile. Had they been unaware of his real character, they would have been set at their ease. As it was, they suspected trouble.

"I have sent for you boys because I have reason to believe that you went for a little walk this evening," said Mr. Hunter. "Is that so?"

"There's nothing against going for a walk. I suppose, sir?" said Nipper respectfully.

"Nothing at all. I merely wished to know where you went."

"Begad! We went for a walk," said Sir Montie, with mild surprise. "Just a

little stroll across the meadows. We didn't do wrong, did we, sir? We ain't barred for going for walks?"

"Where did you go?" persisted Mr. Hunter.

Nipper looked grim.

"I don't think you've any right to ask us, sir," he said boldly. "I don't mean to be disrespectful, but life wouldn't be worth living at St. Frank's if we had to tell our Housemaster where we went and what we did. We went for a walk, sir—and that's all we can say."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Tommy Watson nervously.

"Quite right, Benny boy!"

Nipper's chums were loyally backing up their leader. Mr. Hunter merely compressed his lips a trifle, and nodded.

"I quite grasp your point, Bennett," he said quietly. "I take it, then, that you do not wish to confide in me?"

"That's right, sir," said Nipper steadily.

"Very well—you may go."

Nipper and Co. passed out of the study. They proceeded for some little way down the passage, and then eyed one another.

"Thank goodness that's over" said Watson with relief.

"I hate to be pessimistic, Tommy, old boy, but I don't believe it's over yet," said Tregellis-West, shaking his head. "Hunter won't give in like that, you know. There's somethin' frightful brewin'. What do you think, Benny?"

Nipper smiled grimly.

"I think you've got a lot of sense in that napper of yours, Montie," he said. "There'll be trouble to-morrow, or I'll eat my own whiskers!"

Considering that Nipper had none, this was a rather hollow threat. But the three Removites were fully convinced that Mr. Hunter had not yet finished with the matter.

As events proved, their conviction was not unfounded!

CHAPTER VII.

SHEER PRUSSIANISM—MR. STOCKDALE BUTTS IN—DEFEAT FOR THE HUN.

MR. CROWELL was in a good humour.

The Remove had just settled down to morning lessons, and the Form Master was exceedingly lenient with the boys. They had been somewhat unruly, but not a single cross word had passed Mr. Crowell's lips.

The truth of the matter was he was anxious to show them every consideration. He knew that the Remove had suffered much at Mr. Hunter's hands, and he felt that it was incumbent upon him, therefore, to make their lot as light as possible.

The Remove appreciated their Form Master's kindly consideration, and work was now progressing smoothly.

Nipper and his chums were not exactly easy, for they still believed that Mr. Hunter

would show his teeth in some way or other. He probably knew all about their escapade of the previous evening, and possibly suspected that they knew more than was good for them—or, rather, good for him.

Five minutes later the expected happened, which was not according to custom, since it is said that it is generally the unexpected that happens.

Mr. Hunter strode into the Form-room, his gown rustling round his slim figure. Mr. Crowell could not prevent a frown of annoyance crossing his brow. If there was a thing he detested, it was to be interrupted in the middle of lessons. And an interruption from Mr. Hunter was well-nigh intolerable.

"Ah, Mr. Crowell, I wish to perform a little ceremony," said the Housemaster genially. "It will probably occupy twenty minutes or half an hour, but the majority of the boys, no doubt, will be glad of the respite."

The majority of the boys glared. Handforth's startling news was still fresh in their minds. And the thought of Mr. Hunter being practically the Head was calculated to make the Juniors furious.

"The chopper's coming down, my sons," murmured Nipper softly.

Mr. Crowell did not look at all pleased.

"I do not understand you, sir," he said coldly.

"I find it necessary to administer a severe flogging to three boys in this Form—namely, Bennett, Tregellis West and Watson," said Mr. Hunter.

"Indeed, sir?" replied the Form Master, breathing hard. "I was not aware that those boys had misbehaved themselves. On the contrary, I have nothing but praise for them. They are, indeed, three of the best behaved boys in my Form. May I ask how they have transgressed?"

"Really, Mr. Crowell, I must decline to satisfy your somewhat unreasonable curiosity," replied Mr. Hunter, with a beaming smile.

Mr. Crowell almost turned pale; then he walked quietly out of the room and closed the door behind him. It was a silent protest, and Mr. Hunter did not miss it. But he smiled upon the Remove quite genially.

"You will leave your places, boys, and follow me out into the Triangle," he said. "Bennett, Tregellis West and Watson, you will stay behind until the last, and bring up the rear."

The Removites were frankly astonished. And, if the truth be told, they were not at all averse to marching out into the sunny Triangle. The novelty of this proceeding made it almost welcome.

The rest of the school was at lessons, of course, and the Triangle presented a quiet, deserted aspect. Not only the Ancient House members of the Remove had come out, but those boys belonging to the College House were present, too. Mr. Hunter's order had embraced them all.

When Nipper and Co. emerged they found

the majority of the fellows lined up in a semicircle. In the centre of the arena, so to speak, stood a large wooden block, and Bates, the new page-boy, stood in attendance. Near him were Starke and Kenmore, of the Sixth. And Fenton and Reynolds, also of the Sixth, were standing a little way off.

"Begad! Is it an execution, dear boys?" murmured Sir Montie. "I'm beginning to be frightfully nervous—I am, really! Is Bates holdin' an axe—?"

"Don't be an ass, Montie," growled Nipper uneasily.

There was certainly something sinister in the appearance of the preparations. Montie's suggestion was somewhat pessimistic, perhaps, but it was quite obvious that Mr. Hunter had made ready for a flogging of a most unprecedented order.

Nipper, Tregellis West and Watson took their places among the last fellows to come out; but they were immediately ordered by Mr. Hunter to step forward. They did so with a certain sinking feeling in their interiors. The question of resistance seemed hopeless, since there were four prefects on hand in addition to Mr. Hunter and Bates.

"Now, boys, you will take your punishment one by one," said Mr. Hunter, as though he were distributing prizes. "Suppose we single you out for the first flogging, Tregellis West?"

"Begad! That would be ripplin'!" said Sir Montie languidly.

He stepped forward with calm composure, adjusted his pince-nez, and gazed round him with a smile of perfect serenity. The rest of the Remove stood in their ranks, nearly boiling with wrath. Nobody knew why Nipper and Co. were being punished, but they suspected that the three had been singled out because they were the recognised leaders of the Form.

"Tregellis West, you will place yourself across this block," said Mr. Hunter, swishing an ugly-looking birch.

"Don't do it!" came a dozen hissing whispers.

"Silence, you young rotters!" roared Starke, glaring.

Sir Montie smiled.

"Really, sir, I must decline," he said quietly.

"Am I to understand, Tregellis West, that you refuse?" asked Mr. Hunter coldly.

"I really could not demean myself to such an extent, sir," replied Montie firmly. "And, if I may say so, the whole matter is frightfully disgusting."

"Bravo!" said Bob Christie loudly.

Mr. Hunter beckoned to the prefects.

"Seize that boy, and hold him across the block while I flog him!" said Mr. Hunter, in even tones. "Smartly now, lads!"

Starke and Kenmore moved forward, but Fenton and Reynolds hung back. The captain of St. Frank's curled his lip contemptuously. He had great ideas of discipline, but there was a limit.

"You will please understand, sir, that I can take no part in this disgraceful out-

rage," said Venton firmly. "Reynolds is with me, I believe."

"Rather!" said Reynolds promptly.

Mr. Hunter's grip upon his birch tightened.

"Do you dare to disobey me?" he said, breathing rapidly.

"In an affair of this sort—I do!" was Venton's reply.

And he and Reynolds walked into the Ancient House without another word. A subdued cheer went up from the Remove, and it would have grown louder had not Mr. Hunter promptly suppressed it.

"I will deal with those insubordinate young rascals later on," he said icily.

"Starke—Kenmore! Seize that boy!"

Sir Montie was grasped. He struggled valiantly, but the two seniors easily held him, for Bates assisted by holding his feet. A continuous succession of hisses arose from the rank of the Remove.

"Shame!"

"Prussian!"

The juniors were nearly upon the point of mutiny, but they had not yet reached the point of open rebellion. Had this scene been allowed to take its course, there is little doubt that a definite outbreak would have occurred.

But Mr. Crowell came striding out of the Ancient House, and with him was Mr. Stockdale, the master of the College House. Mr. Hunter had his back towards them, and he raised the birch and brought it down with stinging force upon Sir Montie's elegant form.

Nipper sprang forward furiously.

"You brute!" he shouted, white with emotion. "You Prussian brute!"

Mr. Hunter spun round dazedly. Just for a moment he stared at Nipper as though he could not believe his ears.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Bennett!"

"Down with the tyrant—let's rush the cad!"

One minute later a serious revolt would have occurred. But Mr. Stockdale strode forward with a face which expressed complete indignation and horror. He was an elderly man, and somewhat strict. But this exhibition of brutality aroused his ire to boiling point.

"Mr. Hunter!" he shouted sharply. "What is the meaning of this? Good gracious me, have you gone mad, sir?"

The new Housemaster turned, his eyes flashing. The juniors watched with intense interest, and for a moment there was dead silence.

"May I ask what business this is of yours, Mr. Stockdale?" asked Hunter coldly. "You will please understand that I am in sole control during Dr. Stafford's absence."

He turned, gripped his birch fiercely, and

raised it. Sir Montie was still being held firmly upon the block, and Nipper had lost something of his fury. But Mr. Hunter had overreached himself on this occasion.

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Stockdale hotly. The other master turned round, his face working with fury.

"I will stand no interference from you, Mr. Stockdale!" he shouted.

"Have you gone mad, Mr. Hunter?" panted Mr. Stockdale. "I warn you, sir, that if you proceed with this disgusting exhibition I shall interfere. I shall certainly not stand by and witness—"

"Confound you, sir!" roared Mr. Hunter. "Stand aside!"

He raised the birch. Swish! It descended with truly appalling force, for Mr. Hunter was wildly infuriated. Before the stroke got fairly home, however, the Housemaster's hand was seized.

Mr. Stockdale, white with indignation and excitement, tore the birch from the other's hand. He flung it far across the triangle, and then stood quivering with passion.

"Touch that boy again!" he thundered, "and I will knock you down!"

A wild, frenzied cheer arose. The juniors surged forward in an irresistible rush. Starke and Kenmore were sent flying. Bates received a terrific punch on the nose from Handforth, and he reeled back with a wild howl. Sir Montie was released, but the Removites then pulled themselves up.

"Enough of this vile exhibition!" thundered Mr. Stockdale. "Upon my soul, sir, I am absolutely ashamed to acknowledge you as an associate!"

Mr. Kennedy Hunter had turned deathly pale. He knew, in that instant, that he was beaten. He knew, also, that such a scene as this, in the presence of the juniors, was fatal to all authority.

"Very well," he said, attempting to steady his voice. "We will let the matter rest as it is—for the time being!"

And, with swishing gown, he strode into the Ancient House. His progress was accompanied by a loud series of hisses and groans.

Mr. Hunter admitted defeat. Under the circumstances he could do nothing else. The flogging was abandoned, and Mr. Crowell marched his excited Form back into the House.

After lessons Sir Montie showed Nipper a small piece of paper. It was a scrap of note-paper, apparently torn from a letter. Upon it were several words—written in German.

And it had fallen from one of Mr. Hunter's pockets during his brief struggle with Mr. Stockdale!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By CLEMENT HALE.

NOTE.—As the title "In the Hands of the Huns" has already been used, we have altered the name of our Serial to the above.

The Chief Characters in this Story are :

GEORGE GRAY and his brother **JACK**, who are the English Staff of the Berlin Rovers, a football club in Germany. When war breaks out they are sent to an outdoor prisoners' camp at Oberhemmel. Von der Klutz is the Governor's name. He is a just but arrogant man, and he refuses to build shelters for the prisoners. George notices one evening that the sky is becoming overcast. He throws himself down for the night, but is unable to get any sleep. Suddenly a drop of rain falls on his forehead. It is followed by another and then still more.

(Now read on.)

SHELTERLESS.

THE sleepers stirred, awoke, rose. One of them came up to George and spoke to him.

"Good heavens, the rain! What's to be done?"

"Nothing can be done, Wilson," George Gray replied. "We're at the mercy of these inhuman beasts. We've no shelter, we shall get none. To attempt to pass the wires would mean death. We're shut up in a trap, and our only hope is that the rain won't last."

A voice called to George. It was his brother Jack's.

George went to him, and put his arm round him.

"We're in for a rough time, old boy," he murmured. "And goodness knows how we shall get out of it!"

He tried to speak with cheerfulness, but his voice rang with a funereal note that betrayed the hopelessness within.

By this time all the prisoners were awake and moving about. Their voices echoed everywhere. Up and down and round about they walked in groups, consternation gripping every heart.

With every moment the rain fell with increasing violence. In a quarter of an hour the surface of the hitherto parched ground

was slippery and insecure. Off the hardened earth the rain ran into the gullies and gushed along them, soon becoming six, nine, even twelve inches in depth.

In the darkness the roving prisoners, searching in vain for a sheltered position, splashed into the water, soaking their feet.

Uprturned collars were no protection. The rain soaked their clothes through, soaked their cloth caps, spouted from the brims of their bowler hats, reduced straws to ruin in no time.

With it all a gusty and cold wind blew, and they walked up and down, with shoulders bowed, heads bent down, hands in pockets, shivering and wretched beyond conception.

To the wires they went, and with difficulty repressed the desire to force their way through; even though death lurked in a touch many of them were tempted to make the attempt.

The sentries, warmly clad, strode up and down, only keeping the shelter of their boxes at intervals. They were on the alert, and seemed to expect an attempt at escape, for as they heard the Englishmen talking among themselves they called out, warning them that they would fire upon the slightest pretext.

So the hours of the night wore their way slowly onward, with the rain pouring without cessation.

Tired out at length, some of the weaker of the men threw themselves down upon the rain-soaked earth, and, huddling together in batches, pooled their wretchedness.

Some shook their fists in the air and cursed the inhuman brute who had condemned them to such a plight.

They cursed the Kaiser, they cursed the Junkers, they raved and swore at everything German, and prayed fervently that Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, and Japan, Powers that stood for all that was worth living for in this troubled world of ours, might triumph.

And a few of the sterner and stouter spirits like George Gray drew together, and in bated whispers, heedless of the rain, talked of the one thing that was ever uppermost in their minds—escape!

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

DR. HOBERHAUS.

AND so the time passed until the morning dawned.

As the night passed and the day came they were able to view their plight in all its wretchedness.

Rain pools flooded portions of the camp. The gullies, running water now, fed these miniature lakes, which grew forever bigger.

All around them, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the miserable rain-soaked landscape, upon which the clouds discharged their contents with never-lessening violence.

George uttered a cry of horror as he saw the plight of some of the unlucky prisoners.

Their faces were white and ghastly, their teeth chattered in their heads, their eyes looked dully out of darkened sockets, their hair hung wet and matted over their foreheads. Their clothes clung to them, and from their garments the rain water drip-dripped as they walked.

One or two of the unfortunate wretches had turned their belongings out on to the ground, and were cowering under the protection of trunk or bag as they sat upon the ground.

In the grey of the dawn, with the cold wind biting to the bone, the condition of the unhappy prisoners was indescribable. Such misery as they endured then none of them had ever known, and their lot was destined to grow worse and worse after the coming of the dawn.

George felt and believed that food would be brought to them early under the existing circumstances, but it was not so. No bearers of wholesome if scanty food tramped the road from Oberhemmel.

The weather conditions were too bad for that. And, after all, who were these men who shivered and drooped out in the open, that soldiers of the Fatherland should get a wetting for them?

No help or succour was sent them, and, rushing to the wires, the prisoners heaped curses on the sentries, shook their fists at them, and told them exactly what they thought.

One or two of the brutes took it badly and threatened to shoot.

"Shoot, then, you blackguards!" shouted Ablott, beside himself with rage. "After all, it would be more merciful than to let us die here of hunger and exposure."

One or two of the men spoke to the prisoners fairly, and expressed their sympathy and regret.

"The governor did not expect it to rain," said one of them. "All would have been well in a week. Something will be done soon."

There was small comfort to be got from such an assurance from such a man.

The behaviour of some of the prisoners here leant a spice of humour to the situation. They stripped, and with the scantiest of clothing about their loins, allowed the rain to patter down upon them. Shiver they did, but they seemed to prefer their nakedness, as

being better suited to the conditions than the wearing of clothes.

"If they don't send us food soon," growled George Gray, as his eyes roamed helplessly about him, "some of them will sicken and die!"

Indeed, one or two were bordering on collapse already. They were stretched out upon the soaked earth, motionless, and white, looking as if they were already dead.

So the hours of the morning ebbed slowly away.

At last something happened. A motor-car came speeding swiftly along the road from the town, and reaching the camp, stopped. Out of it leapt a little fat man, wearing a waterproof. He was swiftly joined by the officer in command of the guard.

The two stood talking together for some time, and the wretched prisoners, who flocked to the wires, saw the little man gesticulating eloquently, stamping his feet, waving his arms, now pointing to the prisoners, then to the town, then at the pile of wood and iron that was meant to form shelters for the interned, anon at the water which lay so heavily inside the wired-in space.

And finally the little German, with a show of authority that surprised George Gray, insisted on being allowed to pass the wires.

Beyond, a hundred angry prisoners awaited him.

"Herr Doctor I warn you!" said the officer. "You are risking your life, they will rend you to pieces! They are mad, these English dogs!"

"Bah!" snapped the little man.

Fearlessly he advanced, and round him surged the prisoners. He removed the pince-nez he wore, cleaned the glasses, and fixed them. Then he looked into the pale and wasted faces of the shivering prisoners, and seemed shocked at their plight.

One of the captives, a burly Irishman named O'Connor, went up to the little fat German. He raised his clenched fist.

"Boys," he cried, "we've got one of 'em. Some of our pals will die through this; let's finish him and make sure of one German at any rate."

Wilson seized him roughly and drew him back in time to prevent the delivery of the blow.

The little fat man did not appear to be afraid.

"My friends," he cried, in well-oiled gutturals, for his voice was musical, "I am sorry for dis. Tell me what you haf to complain of, besides the rain, dat I may report to the commandant?"

"Complain of!" shouted George Gray. "Complain of! Can't you see? Look around you, and judge! We've had no food yet! We are starving! Some of the poor wretches will die unless aid is sent quickly. Go and tell the commandant how things stand with us, tell him unless he sends food and something hot to drink quickly, he'll have murdered half the prisoners here; and tell him

(Continued overleaf.)

if he comes down to the camp he'd better bring a regiment with him, for, wire or no wire, if he shows his face we'll storm the barncade and tear him limb from limb!"

The mild eyes of the little fat man scanned George's flaming face with a sympathetic glance.

"I will tell him how things stand," he replied. "You shall have the food and the drink, and something shall be done to ameliorate the conditions immediately." As for the sick, I will attend to them. I am Dr. Hoberhaus. It shall be my business. It is shogging! I am sorry!"

So he turned away and left the camp. As he departed hisses and hoots rang echoing in his ears. He paid no heed, but, entering his car, addressed a few more words to the under-officer in charge of the guard, and then went flashing and splashing over the muddy road in a mad race for the town.

While the German doctor drove towards Oberhemmel, leaving behind him promise of more humane treatment of the prisoners, the unlucky Britishers interned in the open camp remained sullen and mutinous, cursing the Fatherland and everything German.

Nor could their position have been conceivably worse, unless plague or pestilence had struck them down.

As George Gray passed along the rain-soaked and water-logged field with Wilson on his one side, and his shivering brother Jack, whose face was as pale as death itself, on the other, cries of horror rang from his lips.

He saw strong men lying in the mud, shaking with the ague, their faces ghastly, their eyes glazed, all the strength gone out of them.

Others were huddled together side by side and back to back while the rain beat pitilessly down.

Others still made for the wires, swearing they would risk life itself in the attempt to escape from the awful place, but the sight of the death-dealing wire, and the armed sentries, whose number had been doubled, somehow managed to stay them.

A haggard man ran up to George and peered into his face, his hair sticking to his forehead, his face wet and ashen.

"For pity's sake come and help—young Holt is dying," he muttered hoarsely.

Holt was a frail and good-natured lad, twenty-one years old, who was on the eve of returning to England when the war broke out. He had from the first taken things badly. George found him lying in a state of collapse, his head supported on a rain-soaked and folded coat.

His condition was pitiable in the extreme. Gray tried to comfort him, but the poor lad merely opened his eyes and smiled.

"It'll be over soon," he murmured. "I haven't any pain now, but in the middle of the night it was awful."

George could do nothing for him. They hadn't a drop of brandy amongst them. Nor could they get any. No canteen had yet been erected near the wires. Even if there had been, few of them had any money, and those who had written home, begging that some cash might be sent out to them, had not received any replies as yet.

They couldn't even barter their clothes for such comforts, for there was no one to barter with.

George wandered on, and saw many more cases almost as bad as that of young Holt.

His brother was nearly as prostrated. Indeed, Jack staggered once and fell, half-fainting, into his brother's arms.

"Stick it, old fellow," whispered George. "We'll make a bolt for it the first chance we get. Only you must hold out. I can't go without you, you know."

Jack thanked George with a smile, and pulled himself together, and so they wandered on, their feet splashing in the flood as they made a tour of the wires.

And at last the doctor came back again in his car. And he didn't come alone. He brought the Governor or Commandant Von der Kutz with him.

The whole party alighted and passed the wire barriers that gave admission to the field.

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

UNDER THE TITLE OF

"THE REMOVE IN REVOLT"

will deal with the drastic action taken by Nipper and his friends against the "Prussianism" of Mr. Hunter.

DON'T MISS IT ON ANY ACCOUNT.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY. WAR-TIME PRICE—THREE-HALFPENCE