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THE REBEL REMOVE.

A Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S. Specially written by the
Author of "The Remove in Revolt," "The Barring-Out at St. Frank's," etc.

May 4, 1918.

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A Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER
AT ST. FRANK'S. Specially written
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Revolt," "The Barring-Out at St.
Frank's," etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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

CHAPTER I.

(The narrative commenced by Nipper.)

THE FLUSH OF VICTORY—CHRISTINE AND CO.
CALL—AND TROUBLE FOLLOWS THEM.

THE Remove Form of the Ancient House at St. Frank's was at tea.

I only call it tea because we were partaking of it at the recognised tea-hour. As a matter of fact the only "tea" we had was water. That sounds rather Irish, but it can't be helped.

Biscuits and sardines, or biscuits and jam, took the place of the prosaic bread-and-butter, and the fellows were munching under the dome of the heavens, with the evening sun shining upon them.

No, it wasn't a picnic; we were simply occupying our stronghold among the ruins of the old monastery in the corner of the Triangle. For the Remove was in revolt, and we were rebels. Although the barring-out was only twenty hours old, we were already known to fame—and the other St. Frank's fellows—as "the Rebel Remove."

As Form-captain, I was the Commander-in-Chief of the Remove Revolutionary Army, and, although it was totally against all military discipline, I was taking tea with a crowd of mere privates. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Burton and De Valerie were occupying the same strip of wall with me.

Other fellows, officers and men together, were sprawling about with handfuls of biscuits or slabs of cake. We were on the watch—waiting for the first sign of activity from the enemy's lines.

The enemy, speaking broadly, consisted of anybody who attempted to dislodge us from our strong position. But, actually, our only enemy was Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., the Housemaster of the Ancient House.

It was this Hunnish gentleman who was responsible for the whole trouble. Owing to his harsh, cruel methods of conducting the House—and the Remove in particular—the juniors had broken out into open revolt, and this barring-out was the result.

I take great pride in recording that I suggested the barring-out, and that I had organised it from start to finish. Well, not to the finish, because the end wasn't in sight yet. Mr. Hunter was obstinate, and he would not admit defeat. We were equally obstinate, and, in the same manner, we wouldn't admit defeat, either.

A deadlock had been arrived at.

As we were determined to triumph, it was now "up to" Mr. Hunter to make the next move. The Remove was flushed with victory as it was. The first battle with the enemy had left us the complete victors.

During the morning Mr. Hunter had attacked our position, fondly imagining that we should succumb at once. We hadn't. Mr. Hunter had succumbed. He had retired in confusion and rage, smothered from head to foot with soot and cinders, and soaked to the skin. Incidentally, a large number of Sixth-Formers and other fellows had shared his fate.

On our side there hadn't been a single casualty; we had emerged victorious. And since that battle there had been no sign from the enemy. Various items of news had

floated in from time to time, and all the evidence seemed to prove that Mr. Hunter was recovering from the shock in the privacy of his own study.

These bits of news were imparted by Fifth-Formers and fags and members of the College House Remove—our deadly rivals in ordinary times. Just at present, however, Christine and Co., the leaders of the Monks, were on friendly terms. House rows, owing to the peculiar circumstances, were "off."

An admiring crowd of Third-Form kids stood beyond the defences even now, watching us partake of tea hungrily, as though they hadn't tasted food for days. Conroy minimus and Owen minor, having elder brothers in the ranks of the rebels, seemed to imagine that they were specially privileged, and had the cheek to ask their majors for biscuits. Needless to say, they didn't get any. We were on rations, for our food supply was not everlasting. The spoils from the Ancient House store-room, which the one and only Handforth had secured at the start of the barring-out, would not last longer than two days.

It had seemed an appalling pile of food-stuff originally. But, with such a number of hungry mouths to feed, the pile had diminished alarmingly. However, Mr. Hunter would probably give in before our food gave out. If he didn't—well, there was other food in the world.

Of all the fellows who had the best reason to hate Mr. Hunter, Tregellis-West and Watson and I took first place. For we had been imprisoned by the Housemaster in the bare tower of the Ancient House, and had been fed upon a starvation diet of bread-and-water. Our escape had been the real beginning of the barring-out.

The school as a whole was in sympathy with us. The lordly Sixth, who had great ideas about discipline, strongly disapproved, of course. But, for all that, we had many friends in the Sixth.

To the fags we were heroes of the first order. Our only real enemies were Starke and Kenmore—both prefects, and both hateful bullies. They were Mr. Hunter's toadies and the natural enemies of the Remove.

Mr. Hunter's autocratic rule was all the more unbearable because he was a newcomer, and because he was, all said and done, a temporary Housemaster. Mr. Alvington was our real Housemaster; and Mr. Alvington, as you probably know, is merely another name for my respected guv'nor, Nelson Lee.

Nelson Lee had been called away from St. Frank's on a special Government mission, but I knew well enough that he was still in the district; and I knew also that he was on the track of Mr. Hunter for some reason. Hunter was a criminal, that much was obvious. And this knowledge made his Prussian methods all the more unbearable. I felt justified in defying him.

This rebellion, once started, had to pursue its course until we had gained the victory.

To knuckle down now would be fatal. Expulsion would be the sentence of the ring-leaders, and the rest of the Remove would receive frightful floggings. So for our own sakes we were forced to hold out.

"Hunter and Co. will get busy before long," I declared, after "tea" had been finished. "He won't allow us to remain here another night if he can help it. So you'd better prepare yourselves for squalls, my sons."

"Dear fellow, ain't we prepared already?" asked Sir Montie languidly.

"Yes; but we mustn't get lax," I said. "We've done well so far, but we mustn't imagine we're going to have everything our own way. Hunter will try a different dodge next time, and we shall have to have our eyes skinned."

"Oh, we're safe enough!" said Handforth, waving his hand. "If you don't feel up to the job, Bennett, you can make me Commander-in-Chief—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared, and Handforth glared. "Anything funny in that?" he demanded warmly.

"Rather!" grinned De Valerie. "You ain't cut out to command, Handy."

"Didn't I find the grub you've been eating?" roared Handforth. "Didn't I command the party—"

"You did wonders, Handforth, old fellow," I said soothingly. "In fact you surprised the natives. We never thought you had it in you. But you needn't worry about the command; I'm the chap for that job."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather! Benny's our man!"

The fellows were quite enthusiastic, and I felt complimented. But of course we hadn't suffered a reverse yet, and so my prestige was high. If it were humanly possible I didn't mean to suffer a reverse, either.

"Hi! You in the trenches!"

It was a cheerful hail from beyond the defences, and I saw Bob Christine and Yorke and Talmadge standing there. They were on the other side of the surrounding wall. This was mainly composed of ordinary faggots, bound securely together with barbed-wire. Having nothing else, we had been compelled to use these. And they had certainly proved satisfactory.

"Hallo!" I called, standing up. "What do you Monks want?"

"We want to come inside, my buck," said Christine. "We've got something for you."

"None of your larks, mind—"

"No, it's pax—honest Injun," grinned Yorke.

Within a minute the "entrance faggot" had been removed, and the three College House juniors crawled through. Christine was carrying a large parcel. He and his chums were surrounded by the rebels.

"What's that—grub?" asked Handforth, indicating the parcel. "Like your rot, I must say! Fancy bringing a rotten parcel of grub like that! It won't go round for half a meal!"

Christine chuckled.

"You're welcome to eat 'em if you like," he said. "I didn't think you'd got to that stage yet. Besides, you ain't Eskimos."

"Eskimos!" gasped Handforth.

"By jingo!" I said crisply. "Have you brought some candles?"

"Six pounds of 'em," nodded Christine.

"I thought——"

"Christine, my son, you're a walking benefactor," I said heartily. "We should have been in the dark to-night, pretty nearly. Where did you manage to get that terrific pile from?"

"Bought 'em from the house-dame," said Christine. "Two three-pound parcels. I had a dickens of a job to get 'em, but here they are. Just a little present from the College House—to show that there's no ill-feeling, you know."

"Good old Christine!" exclaimed juniors warmly.

It was a welcome present, and we all appreciated the Monks' thoughtful action. We needed candles badly. Tubbs, in fact, had searched the village in vain, candles being rather scarce in Bellton. Tubbs was the Ancient House page-boy, but he had been dismissed by Mr. Hunter, and had joined forces with us, acting as handy-man in general.

"Jolly good of you, of course," said Handforth. "But what was that silly rot about Eskimos?"

"Why, Eskimos eat candles," I grinned. "At least. I've heard so."

Handforth grunted, and turned to answer a question of McClure's. Bob Christine and Co. were looking round them with interest. I was fairly sure that they envied us, and rather wished that they were in the rebellion too. But their own Housemaster, Mr. Stockdale, was a decent old stick.

"Well, we won't stay," said Christine. "If Hunter spotted us here, he'd report to Stocky, and we've got strict orders not to have anything to do with you chaps. You're beyond the pale, so to speak."

"Beyond the palings, you mean," grinned Owen major.

"Silly rot, of course," said Talmadge. "But we don't want to get into trouble."

"Right-ho!" I replied. "And thanks muchly for the candles."

The three College House juniors took their departure. They crawled through the opening and walked away. But a slim form, in cap and gown, bore down upon them like a whirlwind.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Watson. "Hunter's copped 'em!"

"Hard lines!" I remarked. "He ain't their Housemaster, though."

Christine and Co. had made no attempt to dodge out of the way—there hadn't been sufficient time. Mr. Kennedy Hunter faced them with a black brow; his former smile of geniality, which had been so characteristic, had vanished of late.

"You have been mixing with those infernal young blackguards!" he rasped angrily.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Christine. "It's not our habit to mix with blackguards——"

"How dare you, Christine?" snapped Mr. Hunter. "How dare you bandy words with me? Those boys are unmitigated young scoundrels——"

"They're our friends, sir," interrupted Talmadge stoutly. "There's no harm in having a few words with some pals, I suppose?"

"I do not choose to argue with you," said Mr. Hunter. "Go into your House, and remain there. Go at once—at once!"

Christine and Co. bristled.

"I don't see why we should, sir," said Yorke hotly. "You're not supposed to give us orders like that. You ain't our Housemaster, anyhow. We'll go in if Mr. Stockdale tells us to——"

"How—how dare you!" thundered Mr. Hunter. "You wretched young puppies——"

"Puppies!" gasped Christine furiously.

"Bowl him over!" shouted Handforth, waving his arms. "He ain't your Housemaster, Christy. Shove the rotter in the fountain for interfering! I'll come and give you a hand, if you like!"

"Shurrup, ass!" I growled, turning.

Mr. Hunter, in his present mood, was not standing any nonsense, or what he was pleased to consider nonsense. He grasped the three juniors by the coat-collars and commenced yanking them across the Triangle.

Christine and Co. would certainly have caused trouble; but at that moment I spotted the tall figure of Mr. Stockdale rapidly crossing the Triangle. Mr. Stockdale was looking very angry.

"Please release those boys at once, Mr. Hunter!" he called out sharply.

Mr. Hunter came to an abrupt halt, but he did not relax his grip. Christine and Co. were helpless for the moment. And the two Housemasters glared at one another for a few seconds in silence.

"Release those boys at once, Mr. Hunter!" repeated Mr. Stockdale curtly.

"Indeed, I refuse to do anything of the sort!" was Mr. Hunter's furious reply. "They have been conversing with those rebellious young hounds yonder, and I intend to cane them with the utmost severity——"

"You will pardon me, sir, but if any caning is to be administered, I will attend to it at once," interrupted Mr. Stockdale, with rising anger. "But, for that matter, I do not think that any caning is necessary."

"What you think, Mr. Stockdale, is no concern of mine——"

"Possibly not," said Mr. Stockdale hotly. "I assure you, Mr. Hunter, I will not put up with any of your tyranny. These three boys belong to my House, and you have no control over them whatever. Unless you release them this moment, I will use force!"

"Force!" shouted Mr. Hunter violently.

"Yes, sir—force!" thundered Mr. Stockdale.

And he looked so formidable that Mr. Hunter instinctively released his grip. Needless to say, I and the other rebels were witnessing this little argument with great enjoyment. It was providing quite a diversion.

Christine and Co., released, looked somewhat uneasy.

"Boys, you will each take two hundred lines," said Mr. Stockdale, frowning at them. "This morning I gave precise instructions to the effect that nobody was to have dealings with those misguided juniors who have seen fit to revolt against authority. You have disobeyed my orders, boys, and you must be punished."

"Thank you, sir," said Christine and Co. meekly.

They scudded away, and the two Housemasters eyed one another fiercely.

"Of course you are at liberty to conduct your House in your own way!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, with bitter sarcasm. "Personally, I am doing my best to see that authority shall be maintained. My efforts will probably fail, since you see fit to flout my orders at every opportunity, Mr. Stockdale."

"That is an absolute fabrication, sir!" thundered Mr. Stockdale. "I have never attempted to interfere with your boys in any way whatever. This disgraceful rebellion of the Remove is a convincing indication that your own system of authority is utterly false and un-British. You will please understand, Mr. Hunter, that under no circumstances will I allow you to interfere in matters that do not concern you in the slightest!"

Mr. Hunter fairly danced with rage.

"Very well—very well!" he snarled. "You have insulted me sufficiently, Mr. Stockdale. You will regret having done so before many days have passed!"

And with that dark threat Mr. Hunter swept away. His progress across the Triangle was accompanied by groans and jeers from the Rebel Remove. Mr. Stockdale glanced at us, but made no sign. And we, to show how thoroughly we appreciated his action, sent up a rousing cheer.

Mr. Stockdale smiled slightly and walked away.

And then a period of quietness set in. The other fellows took good care to steer clear of the monastery ruins after what had happened, and I seriously wondered when the finish of the affair would come.

Somehow I was beginning to have an idea that Mr. Hunter would prove obstinate—that victory would not be ours for yet awhile. For we were obstinate, too. And if neither side would give in it would have to be a fight to the finish.

But if Mr. Hunter was determined, so was the Remove!

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE ARGUMENT—HANDFORTH IS RECKLESS
—MR. CROWELL IS FED-UP.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH snorted.

"I'm blessed if I can see why I should be bothered with two asses like you chaps!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You pretend to be my chums, and all you can do is to argue and argue. It's my good-nature, I suppose—any other fellow wouldn't put up with your rot!"

Church and McClure, breathing hard, were of the opinion that they were the good-natured ones, and that the amount of "rot" they had to stand from Handforth was almost past human endurance. To have given voice to this opinion, however, would have been disastrous.

Church and McClure remained silent with difficulty. They had no desire to go about for the next two or three days with black eyes and swollen noses. Handforth was by no means a bully, but he was thoughtless, and his fists were of formidable proportions. He used them for aggressive purposes without the slightest warning, and his chums were by no means immune from attack because they were his chums.

"Going to sulk now, I suppose," went on Handforth, with a heavy sneer. "Nice sort of pals you are, I must say! I just make a sensible remark, and all you can do is to scoff at it. You'd better clear off!"

This, to say the least, was rather ungrateful. It was Handforth's watch in the chapel tower, and his chums had consented to keep him company. The other juniors were in various places; some of them strengthening the defences under Nipper's guidance, and others being below in the vaults, arranging matters for the night. Still more were engaged upon the task of manufacturing fresh supplies of ammunition. But only Handforth and Co. were keeping watch.

Church rose to his feet.

"Well, let's go and see what the other chaps are doing, Clurey," he said carelessly.

"Any old thing," said McClure, yawning.

Handforth glared at them.

"You ain't going, are you?" he asked.

"Didn't you tell us to clear off?" demanded McClure.

"Oh, well, you can go if you like," snapped Handforth. "It's just what I'd expect of you—deserting a pal when he can't move. I know your game, you rotters. You're going to get to a safe distance, and then shout insulting things up at me."

Church and McClure, who had no intention of indulging in this pleasant pastime, were inclined to be indignant.

"Oh, you're an ass!" snapped McClure crossly. "You always were an ass, and always will be, I suppose. You can't help it. And as for calling you 'general'—well, I'm not going to be so potty!"

Handforth snorted again.

"Bennett's appointed me commander of

the west section of the defences, and it's only right that I should be recognised," he said grimly. "You chaps are just privates, understand, and it's rank insubordination for you to argue with me. This is the Remove Revolutionary Army, ain't it? Well, if I had my way, there'd be proper military discipline. None of these loose goings-on. In fact I'm going to suggest that all the commanders should take titles for themselves."

"Rot!" snapped Church.

"Oh, I don't expect you to agree, because you're privates," went on Handforth. "Bennett's the leader, so I reckon he ought to be known as General Bennett. And De Valerie and me and Farman, who are all in command of sections, ought to be colonels. That's my idea."

"Yes, you'd make a fine colonel!" sneered McClure heavily.

"A regular nut, in fact," remarked Church, with an attempt at humour. "That's the kind of kernel you'd be!"

"I don't want any of your rotten chestnuts!" declared Handforth indignantly, and with unconscious humour of his own. "I'm serious. As a matter of fact, I shall insist upon being called Colonel Handforth—by you chaps, anyhow. I don't see why my authority shouldn't be recognised."

"There's a lot of things you don't see!" growled McClure. "You can make an ass of yourself if you like—but I'm not taking any. And, if it comes to that, officers are supposed to show their pluck. Now, a real officer wouldn't mind strolling across the Triangle——"

"Well, I wouldn't mind, come to that."

"Yes, I can see you waltzing across the Triangle just at present," said McClure sarcastically. "I'll tell you what! If you'll trot over to the gates and back, I'll call you Colonel Handforth as much as you like!"

"Same here!" grinned Church. "Go it, Handy!"

Handforth glared.

"I'm on duty, and I can't leave my post," he said tartly.

"Oh, that's nothing," remarked Church. "We'll keep watch for you. Of course, you daren't go—'tain't likely! So don't talk any more rot about colonels. I'm fed up with the whole giddy subject."

Handforth rose to his feet slowly.

"I daren't go, eh?" he said deliberately. "And if I do go, you'll both call me Colonel Handforth?"

"Ye-es!" said Church and McClure uneasily.

"Mind, I'll make you stick to that!" declared Handforth, glaring at his chums with a fixed determination in his eyes. "Daren't cross the rotten Triangle! Huh! I'll jolly well show you whether I dare! I'll make you eat your words!"

"You—you ain't going?" gasped McClure.

"Yes, I am!"

"Across—across the Triangle?" yelled Church.

"Why not? There's nobody in sight, except a few fags——"

"Why not?" roared McClure frantically. "Why, you silly ass, you'll get copped as sure as fate! Starke'll collar you, or Hunter himself; and then you'll get flogged and sacked!"

"Rot! I can run, I suppose!"

The madness of Handforth's contemplated action took the breath completely out of Church and McClure. And there was no arguing with Handforth. Once he had made up his mind, it was made up. There was no drawing back with the great Edward Oswald. He considered such a course to be undignified. And Handforth's dignity was weird and wonderful, and beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals.

"Don't—don't be an ass, Handy!" panted McClure. "You'll only get yourself into frightful trouble. Church didn't mean it when he said that you daren't go—did you, Church?"

"Of course I didn't!" said Church breathlessly.

Handforth sniffed.

"You shouldn't say things you don't mean!" he exclaimed. "You dared me to cross the Triangle, and I'm jolly well going! Besides, if I carry out my part of the thing, you'll have to stick to yours—you'll have to address me as colonel!"

"Oh, my only topper!" gasped McClure.

He was appalled at the very prospect of being forced to address Handforth in such a manner. But it was his own suggestion! When he had uttered it he had had no notion that Handforth would be mad enough to agree.

"Look here, Handy," said McClure, with a great effort, "if you buzz across the Triangle you'll be trapped for certain! We—we'll call you colonel, anyhow—won't we, Church?"

"I—I suppose so," said Church desperately.

But their efforts were useless.

"I'm going!" said Handforth firmly. "I'm not going to have you chaps saying that I was funky of it. You remain here and keep on guard—and watch me. I sha'n't be more than two or three minutes."

Before the others could protest further Handforth descended the half-broken steps to the foot of the ruin. And he had reached the loose faggot by the time Church and McClure recovered their wits sufficiently for action.

"Hi, Bennett!" yelled Church frantically.

Nipper looked up sharply.

"Hallo!" he called. "Enemy in sight?"

"No! That ass Handforth is going to the gates," shouted Church. "Collar him, for goodness' sake! He's on his dignity——"

"The silly fathead!" exclaimed Nipper warmly. "We'll soon—— Look out, Bo'sun! Grab Handforth! Oh, my hat!"

Burton, who was a little distance away, made a grab at Handforth as the latter dodged out through the small opening in the defences. But the Bo'sun was a shade too slow, and Handforth emerged into the Triangle.

"No, don't go after him!" shouted Nipper, as the Bo'sun looked round. "It

would only cause a commotion, and three or four chaps might get copped. Very likely Handy will get back all right if he's allowed to go quietly."

There was sound reason in what Nipper said. After all, it would have been silly to draw attention by chasing Handforth. The chances were that he would reach the gates and be half-way back before any prefect spotted him. And then, of course, an easy run would take him to safety.

Handforth never counted the odds. He never stopped to consider the prospects of success when he started upon an adventure. And in nine cases out of ten he blundered through successfully.

His progress across the Triangle was watched with great interest by all the Rebels who were above ground. The others, down in the vaults, were now being urgently summoned to the surface—in case of an emergency. For if Handforth was collared, an attempt at rescue would be imperative.

"Why the dickens doesn't he hurry?" growled Church fiercely. "He's swaggering along as though the whole blessed school belonged to him. And now those Second-Form kids are setting up a howl! Oh, there'll be trouble!"

Church concluded resignedly, but with great concern in his voice. This affair, although seemingly slight, was really serious. If Handforth was actually captured by Mr. Hunter, he would certainly be flogged and expelled within an hour.

And the exasperating way in which he strolled across the Triangle made the Rebels dance with impatience. They promised Handforth a warm time when he got back—if he ever succeeded in doing so.

Handforth was not enjoying himself, however. He pretended to be in no hurry whatever, and his affectation of indifference was difficult to maintain, for actually Handforth had a wild desire within him to scoot back to the rebel stronghold as fast as his legs would carry him.

But his dignity forbade any such action. He firmly determined to walk to the gates sedately, to glance carelessly up and down the road, and to stroll back without deigning to turn his head.

This programme was quite excellent—if it could have been carried out. Unfortunately it was doomed to failure. Handforth was rather upset by the fact that eight or nine fags were scampering round him, yelling excitedly.

"Yah! Rebel!" howled one daring youngster.

"Rebel—rebel!" shouted the chorus.

"Clear away, you young bounders!" roared Handforth, forgetting that his voice closely resembled a megaphone. "I'll give you a thick ear, young Owen—"

"Yah! Come and do it!" shouted Owen minor, of the Third.

Handforth did not accept the invitation, wisely deciding that his time was limited. He felt like a British soldier walking boldly through the German lines in broad daylight,

and he half expected to see swarms of the enemy appearing from behind every tree. Just before he reached the gates Handforth glanced round.

"Oh, corks!" he murmured uneasily.

The ruins of the old monastery seemed to be miles away. He had never thought that the distance was so great before. And the numerous ways in which he could be cut off during his retreat came as a shock to him.

But he fought down his growing fears, and half regretted that he had so promptly accepted McClure's challenge. Not only was he far from the Remove camp, but he was now actually out of earshot.

He reached the gates at last, and breathed a sigh of relief as he stepped between the massive posts. Nobody had seen him except the handful of fags, and his retreat would be far easier.

"Hallo! Why, what— Well, I'm hanged!"

Starke, of the Sixth, came swinging into the Triangle. He nearly knocked Handforth over, and just for a second the pair stared at one another—Starke in amazement, and Handforth with real consternation.

His dignity deserted him at that critical moment, and he turned to flee. But Starke threw out his hand and grabbed Handforth's shoulder firmly. The junior attempted to free himself, but his efforts were useless.

"Leggo, Starke!" roared Handforth frantically.

"Not just yet, my fine young rebel!" exclaimed Starke, with grim satisfaction. "Thought you could defy us, eh? This'll mean the sack for you, Handforth—and serve you jolly well right!"

"You—you rotter!"

"Hold him, Starke—that's the way!" cried a hateful voice behind Handforth. "Splendid—splendid! We will make an example of this wretched boy!"

The next moment Mr. Hunter grasped Handforth by the collar and held him firmly.

Handforth stared round him with wild eyes.

"Help!" he bellowed. "Rescue, Remove! Rescue!"

He glanced over towards the camp, but he could see no sign of activity. And Mr. Hunter, with vicious anger, commenced slashing Handforth cruelly across the shoulders with his walking cane.

"Ow! Help!" roared Handforth. "You—you rotter! You Prussian! Ow!"

"Silence, you infernal young blackguard!" shouted Mr. Hunter furiously.

He continued slashing and Handforth continued yelling. Neither noticed Mr. Crowell on the Ancient House steps. But the Form-master was now running across to the gates rapidly.

Meanwhile Nipper was quickly organising a rescue party. There were many volunteers, and twenty fellows were soon streaming out of the stronghold. Once outside, they formed up smartly, and advanced at the double, with Nipper at their head.

But then Mr. Crowell intervened.

"Mr. Hunter—Mr. Hunter!" he shouted

angrily. "You're forgetting yourself, sir! You will injure the boy——"

Mr. Hunter spun round, dragging Handforth with him.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" he raved. "This is no concern of yours. If you can do nothing but interfere, go away!"

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The stick descended again and again, and the dust flew from Handforth's coat.

"Stop! Stop at once!" thundered Mr. Crowell angrily.

The Housemaster applied the stick more fiercely than ever. And Mr. Crowell, losing all patience, grasped the other master's shoulder and swung him round forcibly. Mr. Hunter was taken completely by surprise. He tripped, and sat down upon the gravel with a thud which shook every bone in his body.

"Now, sir!" panted Mr. Crowell hoarsely.

Handforth, finding himself free, fled. He was aching and sore, but he had never moved so swiftly in all his life as he did just then. But Starke had no intention of seeing the prisoner escape so easily. The prefect gave chase, and the pair careered across the Triangle madly.

In his excitement Starke did not notice the rescue party, which was even then passing the fountain. He became aware of the presence of the rebels when Handforth burst in amongst them. And then Starke paused.

Too late! The prefect was surrounded in a second. He was literally picked up by dozens of hands. Shouting and struggling, he was carried along like a cork over the waves.

Splash!

Walter Starke rose through the air, and descended with terrific force into the fountain pool. And there he gasped and spluttered while the triumphant rebels beat a strategic retreat, with Handforth in their midst.

The whole affair had not occupied three minutes yet, but there had been plenty of excitement. It was a fortunate thing that Handforth had escaped; but the incident was to lead to a permanent rupture between Mr. Hunter and Mr. Crowell.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Handforth. "I'm half skinned!"

"Serves you right!" said Nipper sharply. "You shouldn't have been such a pig-headed ass! You deserved a whopping, anyhow. We were going to scalp you, but I dare say you've had enough."

Handforth was quite sure of it, and he groaned again.

"Shurrup!" said Watson. "Crowell and Hunter are going it hammer and tongs!"

The rescue-party was just outside the defences, and Nipper called a halt. Both the masters were talking in loud tones, and their words were clearly audible. Mr. Hunter was dancing about violently.

"You will leave the school at once, you interfering fool!" he raved. "You have assaulted me——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Crowell hotly. "And let me tell you, sir, that I will take no insults from you. Furthermore, I shall

remain at St. Frank's until Dr. Stafford returns!"

"You will go this very night!" bellowed the Housemaster.

"I am disgusted with you, sir—I will have nothing more to do with you!" said Mr. Crowell. "In future I positively refuse to be associated with such a despicable creature as yourself. I intend to accept Mr. Stockdale's hospitality, and shall remain in the College House until you are sent in disgrace from the school!"

And Mr. Crowell, refusing to argue further, walked away in a white heat. Just for a moment the rebels thought that Mr. Hunter was determined to follow; but the tyrant of St. Frank's turned, his face working with fury, and strode towards the excited juniors.

"By Jingo! He's coming here!" said Nipper sharply. "Inside, my sons!"

The rebels scampered within the defences, and they took up their positions upon the ruined walls. And there they waited for Mr. Hunter.

The coming interview promised to be interesting!

CHAPTER III.

(The narrative resumed by Nipper.)

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS—FIRMER THAN EVER—
BREWSTER AND CO. ARE USEFUL.

MR. KENNEDY HUNTER came to a halt five or six yards from the defences. His eyes were gleaming evilly, I could see, but he attempted to smile with his old beaming benevolence.

"Well, boys, hasn't this farce gone on long enough?" he asked quietly.

"It isn't a farce, sir," I replied. "I should think that battle this morning told you that. We're determined to win; we're standing up for our rights and our liberties."

"Hear, hear!"

"No surrender! Victory or nothing!"

Mr. Hunter frowned angrily, but checked himself.

"I assumed that you would have realised the utter impossibility of your position by this time," he exclaimed grimly. "Make no mistake, boys; you are not going to triumph over me in this disgraceful affair. You shall be punished severely—for it is certain that you must give in at the finish."

"Not so jolly certain, either!" shouted Owen major.

"You think not?" said Mr. Hunter. "Let me point out a few obvious facts. You fondly imagined, boys, that I should be frightened by this mad action of yours—that I should overlook everything in my frantic anxiety to have this disgraceful business ended. But that is not the case. I am not frightened; and I am prepared to leave you to yourselves until you grow sick of the life and come cringing to me for mercy. Your bold rebellion is doomed to failure, I can assure you."

The rebels were not so ready with their answers; Mr. Hunter's quietly spoken words

had impressed them. This was a new attitude for the Housemaster to take. But I was not deceived.

"If you are prepared, sir, so are we!" I replied calmly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Benny!"

"And we're not going to knuckle under," I continued. "We shan't come cringing to you for mercy, because you'll get tired first. We've got food here, and we've got the British spirit in us!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the good old Union Jack!"

The cheers were given with terrific gusto, and Mr. Hunter stood listening with a grim smile in the corners of his cruel mouth.

"Have you finished, boys?" he asked orderingly. "The British spirit is splendid, I will admit; but it will not sustain you for long. Your food will run out—and then you will surrender to me on any terms. Do you realise that?"

"There's plenty of other food!" roared Tommy Watson.

"Yah! Go away, you Hun!"

"Pelt him——"

"Now then, stop that!" I shouted hotly. "No violence, you asses! This is a peace conference—although I don't think it'll come to anything. We're prepared to discuss our terms, sir, if you are."

Mr. Hunter shook his head.

"I am not prepared to discuss your terms, Bennett," he replied. "You are at liberty to surrender at once, if you will agree to my decision. I have come to the conclusion that you have been led away by excitement, and I am inclined to deal leniently with you."

"Oh!"

"What's the programme, sir?" I asked grimly.

This was certainly a change, and I was curious to hear what Mr. Hunter's "lenient" terms were like. I was not very hopeful.

"If you will all return to your House in an orderly fashion, I will punish only the ring-leaders," said Mr. Hunter. "The others, I am convinced, are not to blame. The leaders of the rebellion, however, will receive severe punishment."

"What sort of punishment, sir?" I asked.

"You, Bennett, and several other boys will be instantly expelled," said Mr. Hunter benevolently. "With regard to——"

I laughed.

"That's enough, sir!" I interrupted curtly.

"What do you mean, you insolent boy?" rapped out the Housemaster.

"I mean that we don't want to hear any more," I replied. "Our terms are plain. We don't return to the Ancient House until you promise that no punishment of any sort shall be inflicted. In addition, we want our full rights restored—cricket, and the playing-fields——"

"Hear, hear!"

"The House to be run on British lines, and not German!"

"That's the way to talk!" roared Handforth.

"When you are prepared to meet our reasonable demands, sir, we'll return like lambs," I concluded. "That's all I've got to say."

Mr. Hunter nearly choked.

"You impertinent young scoundrel!" he shouted, casting aside his reserve. "You dare to talk of 'reasonable' demands! You shall be flogged until you cringe. Leniency, I realise, is a mistake. The whole Form shall be flogged——"

"Same old tale!" jeered Watson.

"Try something else, you rotter!"

"Souise me! Let's try a few bombs, mess-mates!"

The rebels had received no orders, but they were exasperated. And Mr. Hunter was pelted with soot-bags from all sides. They burst over him in a bewildering shower. He completely disappeared in the black cloud, and his roars were appalling.

"Let him have it!" bawled Handforth, who was still sore.

Mr. Hunter fled blindly, a wild figure, casting clouds of soot on all sides. He had discovered that the Rebel Remove was as firmly determined as ever. A perfect roar of jeers went up from the fellows.

"Well, he asked for it, that's one thing," I remarked comfortably. "A little more soot won't do him any harm. The more fully he understands that we're firm, the sooner he'll give way. But it's going to be a stiff fight, my merry soldiers!"

"We don't care!"

"Rather not!"

"No return until Hunter goes—that's our motto!" shouted Handforth, who was feeling extra vindictive at present. "I'm blowed if I'll return while that giddy Hun retains control of the Ancient House."

And, as a matter of fact, I had an idea that it would come to that in the end. Mr. Hunter was showing us that he would stand no nonsense. And as we were firmly resolved to stick to our guns, the position was somewhat difficult. If we wouldn't give in, and if Mr. Hunter wouldn't give in, some other solution was absolutely necessary.

And the best solution of all was for Mr. Hunter to quit.

For the present, however, there had been practically no talk of this. We were out to win, and this encounter had fired the Rebels with renewed enthusiasm. The great barraging-out was progressing well. It was going stronger than ever.

The night was before us, however, and if the other fellows were optimistic, I was very thoughtful. I don't mean that I was pessimistic—not a bit like it. But I knew very well that it would be necessary to keep a very strict lookout once darkness had fallen.

Without a doubt Mr. Hunter would make a determined attempt to dislodge us in the darkness. He would plan a surprise attack. But I didn't mean to be surprised. And it was necessary to make very careful arrangements.

"Now, look here," I said seriously, addressing the crowd. "We've been successful all along the line, so far, and, if it's possible, we mean to win through. But to-night will

be the big test. Not a fellow can think of going to bed until twelve o'clock, at the earliest."

"Oh, that's rot!" exclaimed Fullwood promptly.

"You don't seem to understand the position," I replied. "If you did, you wouldn't call that remark of mine rot. Hunter will prepare a big attack this evening, and every fellow has got to be at his post constantly. And even after bedtime we shall only be able to sleep in shifts. The rest will have to be ready for emergencies."

"Say, you're dead right, pard," said Justin B. Farman, nodding. "I guess there's hull piles of hoss-sense totin' around in your brain-box. We'd be mad guys, sure, to go to sleep and leave the place open for Hunter to walk right in."

There was a chorus of approval.

"In addition," I went on, "I shall station scouts all round the Triangle, at different points. At the first sign of enemy movement these scouts will have to hurry in and report."

"Jolly good!" declared Handforth. "That's the way to do it, Benny. I was going to suggest the same thing myself—What the dickens are you grinning at, McClure?"

McClure wasn't grinning at all when I looked at him, but plenty of others were. Handforth had a remarkable habit of thinking of things after they had been suggested by other chaps. It was just one of his little ways.

"Any other brilliant ideas, Handy?" I asked. "I don't want to take the words out of your mouth, you know. Let's have 'em first."

Handforth waved his hand.

"I shall be thinking a lot of ripping stunts before long," he said airily. "You can rely on me, Bennett. It wouldn't be a bad idea, by the way, to light bonfires all round. Then we could see what we were doing."

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "That's a brilliant suggestion, Handy, old boy. It would show Hunter what we were doin' beautifully, wouldn't it?"

"To say nothing of having the police flying round in scores," I added. "We don't want to be carted off to chokey for defying the lighting regulations. Try again, Handforth."

"Well, of course, if you choose to make fun of me like that," said Handforth loftily, "I'll keep my ideas to myself."

"Good," said Watson. "That's the best place to keep 'em!"

"Look here——"

"Peace, children!" I interrupted. "We don't want any squabbling now. Where's Tubbs?"

"'Ere I am, Master Bennett," said Tubbs, coming forward.

"Well, Tubby, old son, I want you to pop down to the village as soon as it gets dusk," I said. "You've got to buy three or four spirit stoves from the ironmongers, and a few kettles, and that sort of thing. There's about ten pounds of tea amongst our stores, to say nothing of piles of condensed milk,

so I don't see why we shouldn't have something hot before we go to bed."

"Oh, ripping!"

There was quite an amount of enthusiasm. Tubbs was ready enough to go upon the mission, he being the only member of the garrison who could safely venture out. He would be very loaded on the return journey, but he didn't mind it a bit.

As I had explained to the fellows, I meant to give Mr. Hunter no opportunity of catching us napping. It would be easy enough to sleep in batches, and to keep a strict watch throughout the night. This was absolutely necessary. Just a little slackness on our part, and we should find ourselves done. Mr. Hunter was just the man to await an opportunity.

When darkness descended it found us well prepared. Fortunately the weather held beautifully fine. We were being greatly favoured in that respect. The night was mild and still, with the stars twinkling brilliantly overhead.

Candles were placed at intervals on the stairs, so that there could be no confusion in ascending or descending. All these things were trivial, but important, nevertheless. I found it necessary to use my wits at every turn. A barring-out isn't a simple matter, by any means.

Tubbs had gone off in the dusk, and I was expecting him back at any minute now. Hot tea would put all the fellows in a cheerful humour. We had plenty of water, fortunately, for a small brook trickled by just behind the ruins, and the water was pure and refreshing. This brook also provided us with ample washing accommodation.

Only a few fellows were down below; the majority of us lolled about the ruins, chatting in low voices. And a sudden scraping of faggots warned us that somebody was there. It proved to be Tubbs.

The poor chap was nearly bent double. He was loaded with dozens of parcels, one of them being a can full of spirit for the stoves. These turned out to be highly satisfactory. Tubbs had also brought kettles and a large selection of mugs. In fact he had done wonders in the shopping line.

But we didn't examine his purchases until later on—for Tubbs brought a piece of news.

"I dunno as I've done right, Master Bennett," he said in a breathless whisper, after he had set his parcels within the enclosure. "But I met three young gents from the River 'Ouse School——"

"Great pip!" gasped Watson. "Did they try to raid you?"

"Oh, no, Master Watson."

"You're talking about Wellborne and Co., ain't you?"

"No, not them nasty young warmints," replied Tubbs. "I'm speaking about three real young gents. One of 'em's named Brewer or something——"

"Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, I suppose," I interrupted. "Yes, Tubby, those fellows can be relied upon all right. I suppose they've heard all about our little trouble here?"

"Yes, Master Bennett, an' they want to

come and see you," replied Tubbs. "They came with me right up the road, and they helped me wunnerful well with all these 'ere parcels. Real young toffs, sir. An' they're waitin' just outside the wall. I've got to take 'em word whether they can come and 'ave a look at you or not."

"Oh, let 'em come!" was the general verdict.

So Tubbs was sent off to bring in the visitors while we examined his purchases. Brewster and Co. were quite splendid chaps, and it was on the cards that they would be very useful if we were forced to hold out for several days. They would be able to help us, in particular, with regard to the food problem. Outside friends were just what we wanted now.

Tubbs returned very shortly, and Hal Brewster and Georgie Glynn and Dave Ascott followed him into the enclosure. These cheerful youths were in a state of awe, for it seemed to them we were committing a terrible crime.

"I suppose you don't mind us coming, you chaps?" asked Brewster, rubbing his curly hair. "We heard all about it this morning, and wouldn't believe it at first. My word! You're going strong, ain't you?"

"Nothing else for it," I replied. "You see, Hunter—that's our new Housemaster—is an absolute Prussian in his ways, and we've gibbed against his rule. That's all. We're barring-out until he climbs down."

"And suppose you fail?" asked Ascott.

"My dear innocent kids," put in Handforth, in a condescending fashion, "what's the good of asking foolish questions? Suppose we fail? We don't suppose anything so fat-headed! You seem to forget that I'm here!"

"Yes, we did overlook that point," said Brewster, staring. "Of course we don't know who you are, but that voice of yours is worth a fortune, anyhow."

"None of your cheek!" growled Handforth. "It strikes me you could do with a barring-out at your school. You've got plenty of bright specimens there, haven't you? What about that awful rotter named Wragg?"

Brewster nodded.

"He's a bit of a Hun, I suppose," he admitted. "Wragg's our Form-master, but we can't organise a rebellion like this. School's too small, for one thing, and the majority of the chaps wouldn't have enough pluck. Besides, we Commoners are in the minority—and Wragg's in high favour with the Honourables."

I nodded. I knew something about the River House School already. Brewster and Co. were the leaders of the decent chaps, who called themselves "the Commoners" in order to distinguish themselves from the rotters, who were known as "Honourables." A barring-out at the River House wasn't possible.

Brewster and his chums were full of admiration, and they were enthusiastic in their promises to do everything in their power if called upon. I knew that these new friends would turn up trumps if we required their assistance.

But I, with every other Removite, was anxious to see the rebellion through without the assistance of others. This was only natural. At the same time, it was just as well to be prepared for emergencies.

Brewster and Co. stayed about an hour, and then took their departure. It was necessary for them to get back before locking-up, and they promised to look round on the next evening, to see how things were progressing.

I let them out, and heard them creep away. But three minutes later there was a hurried shaking of the faggot-wall, and I quickly challenged.

"Who's there?" I demanded.

"Just a word, Bennett," came a whisper in Brewster's voice.

I removed the loose faggot, and Brewster and Co. crept through. Their faces were showing traces of excitement.

"Anything wrong?" I asked quickly.

"We thought we'd better give you the tip," said Glynn. "There's a lot of dark forms creeping along in this direction. They're not making a sound, and I reckon it's a surprise attack."

"So we came back," added Brewster.

"Good men!" I exclaimed heartily. "Thanks awfully. Honestly, I didn't expect that Hunter would get busy so early as this. You've probably saved us from defeat, and we'll thank you properly to-morrow."

"Rats!" said Brewster cheerfully.

I advised them to slip away by creeping round the defences and then cutting across to the playing fields. They did so, and evidently got away without being observed, for we heard no alarm.

Without loss of time I organised the defence. Every fellow was at his post, with piles of ammunition handy. My scouts had not yet taken up their positions, for it was still comparatively early. In spite of my precautions I had overlooked this possibility, but, thanks to the River House chaps, we had been warned.

And so we waited, silent and still. From outside it probably seemed as though we were all below, and that we had left the defences to take care of themselves. Mr. Hunter and Co. were destined to receive a shock!

Quite suddenly the tension was broken.

"Boys!" came a soft call. "Are you there, boys?"

I thought it as well to answer.

"Hallo!" I exclaimed. "Who's that?"

"It is I, Mr. Hunter," came the reply. "I believe I am speaking to Bennett?"

"That's right," I replied. "Anything we can do, sir?" I added pleasantly.

"I have changed my mind, boys," said Mr. Hunter. "We can have a little talk here, and I have no doubt we shall arrive at a satisfactory settlement. There are to be no expulsions, and I am willing to meet your demands in all material respects. I wish to go over the points carefully, one by one."

"Right you are, sir," I said grimly.

"What's his game?" whispered the Bo'sun. "He's singing a different tune, ain't he?"

"Shssssh!" I breathed. "It's a dodge, you ass!"

"Souise my maindeck!"

Of course it was a dodge. I saw through it easily. While Mr. Hunter was talking glibly and sweetly on this side of the ruins, a party of attackers was collecting on the other! It was a contemptible trick, and it gave me a hint of Mr. Hunter's character—not that I needed one. It also proved that Mr. Hunter had taken the full measure of our determination.

"Slip to the rear, Bo'sun, and tell Farman and De Valerie to keep their men on the alert," I whispered. "This is a trick—there's going to be excitement in a minute or two. Buzz off!"

Burton slipped away on his mission, and sundry whispers from behind told me that my warning had been given. It was necessary, too.

"Are you all listening, boys?" called Mr. Hunter. "I want you to stand round in a group, so that you can hear all that I have to say."

"Go ahead, sir," I said.

"I may inform you that I am quite alone," continued Mr. Hunter glibly. "I trust you to treat me as British boys ought to, and not repeat the disgraceful attack of the early evening. Now, listen."

He paused, and we listened. Probably Mr. Hunter was alone—on this side of the monastery ruins. That quibble did not deceive me. Mr. Hunter probably felt that he was excused in making it—but we knew that it was nothing but a contemptible and deliberate lie.

"I will allow you to come back to your House at once," said Mr. Hunter. "Every boy will receive a thousand lines, but no other punishment. I cannot allow the cricket to be resumed, but the playing-fields—"

"Half-a-tick, sir," I interrupted. "Is this the way you're meeting our demands?"

"Certainly. I am willing—"

"Look out!" came a shout from the rear. "Get ready for the attack!"

"Give it to 'em!"

At the same second the air became thick with peas, soot-bags, and other articles. The attack had commenced! But it was we who had got in the first blow!

Starke and a crowd of Sixth-Formers, assisted by Bates and several grooms, had attempted to tear down the rear defences. But they scarcely touched them, for a deadly fire was poured in as they ran forward.

The surprise was complete in every way—but it was the attackers who were surprised and not the defenders! Howls and yells rent the air, and the atmosphere became thick with soot and sand and goodness knows what else.

Mr. Hunter did not escape. For the second time that evening he was pelted furiously and was unable to retreat in time. His contemptible trick had brought disaster upon his head—and disaster to his valiant troops.

For five minutes the battle raged hotly. Three times the attackers rushed forward. They probably felt that they couldn't get

any blacker than they were, and to be defied by mere juniors like this was rather steep.

Their efforts, however, were useless. Our ammunition was holding out, and we still had reserve supplies. It was used liberally, and we became nearly as black as the enemy.

But the fight was too hot to last. Beaten back again and again, Starke and his men were forced to admit defeat. Mr. Hunter, at a safe distance, raved almost incoherently. But his efforts were useless. Once again we had proved our grim determination to hold out.

The plot had failed, and we sent up ringing cheers of triumph as Mr. Hunter's defeated army retired demoralised and baffled!

CHAPTER IV.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

SIR MONTIE AND TOMMY AND I GO EXPLORING—
WITH AMAZING RESULTS.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST yawned. "It's a shockin' waste of time, Benny boy," he remarked, shaking his head. "Just think of all the beauty sleep we shall lose, begad!"

"You don't want any beauty sleep," I said briskly. "You're beautiful enough as it is, my son."

"Pray don't be so utterly ridic., dear old boy," protested Montie.

"Fatheaded, indeed, I call it," grunted Watson.

"Well, if you chaps want to stay in bed, you can do so," I said, glaring at them. "I'm going, anyhow."

"Dear fellow, we wouldn't think of desertin' you."

My chums were dressing, and I was engaged in the same occupation. The time was just eleven-thirty at night. A queer time to be dressing? Well, perhaps so, but we were bent on a queer mission.

Everything was quiet above. We had kept watch with the others in accordance with my original arrangements, and I was quite certain that Mr. Hunter had had enough for one night. He knew that we were prepared, and he realised that a surprise attack was not possible.

But I didn't relax my vigilance because of this. Half the rebels were on the watch even now. But it was our turn below, so to speak. For two hours we should be undisturbed, and I had arranged with my chums to go on an exploring expedition during this particular "watch" below.

De Valerie and Church and Owen major and a lot of other fellows had come down with us, and we had all tumbled into bed without delay. Within five minutes everybody was asleep—including Montie and Tommy.

But I had roused them up relentlessly. And now we were just about to start off. If our absence were discovered by the other juniors, I could easily explain that we had been having a look along the quarry tunnel. And they would assume that we had been

there for the purpose of seeing that everything was all right.

As I hinted before, we had every reason to suspect that Mr. Hunter was not merely a Prussian in his methods of ruling the Ancient House; he was up to some sinister game, and I was greatly interested.

For example, he had penetrated these tunnels in disguise on more than one occasion. He had dealings with mysterious characters, who appeared only at night. Indeed, only the previous night an exciting incident had occurred. Nelson Lee had appeared, and he had given me plainly to understand that his principal "game" was Mr. Hunter himself. But the gov'nor couldn't go into details because he had been sworn to secrecy. This was awkward, but I couldn't grumble.

We had chased a mysterious individual along the tunnel and had trapped him. He turned out to be a German named Lieut. Otto Reinhardt—a German officer prisoner-of-war, who had escaped from internment.

This cheerful individual was undoubtedly connected with Mr. Hunter in some way, and the knowledge of this connection made me all the more determined in my resolve to oust the tyrant from St. Frank's and to defy him while he remained.

Nelson Lee had been left with the prisoner in the tunnel, and I was pretty sure that he had carried him away to the police.

There were many branch tunnels leading out of the main one. They were really the old quarry workings, which had been deserted for years. But Mr. Hunter and his queer associates did not wander through these underground passages for the mere pleasure of it. They had some nefarious reason for doing so. And, although Nelson Lee had warned me to steer clear of trouble, I was intent upon looking into things.

And now an excellent opportunity had occurred.

Without the other chaps knowing anything about it, Sir Montie and Tommy and I could steal away upon our trip of exploration. The slight loss of sleep would not do us any harm, and we could easily make it up on the morrow if we wanted to. For I fully believed that the day would be uneventful. Mr. Hunter wasn't likely to give in yet awhile.

"Ready?" I whispered.

"When you are, dear boy!" replied Sir Montie, buttoning his coat.

Two candles were burning in the vault, but all the boys were asleep, and our exit was not noticed. I had my electric torch with me, and I led the way down the tunnel, flashing the light occasionally.

The ground was well known to us—in the main tunnel at least. We had passed through on many occasions. It was the numerous side tunnels which I was bent upon exploring. We should probably meet with no adventures whatever. But, on the other hand, there might be a lot of excitement.

My chums, of course, knew all about Nelson Lee. They knew that I was Nipper, and all

the rest of it. I had no secrets from them. And, although they pretended to grumble, they really wanted to participate in this trip. Once the sleep had left them—they were as bright as possible.

I led the way very cautiously.

This was necessary, for I knew that traps were probably laid for unwary marauders. The German officer I have referred to fell into a pitfall which had been specially prepared for somebody—the gov'nor, possibly. And this pitfall had been a good one, for it had been invisible. A frail covering had given way abruptly, pitching the fellow into a deep cavity.

I was not at all anxious to test another trap of the same sort—although the presence of Tregellis-West and Watson made a difference. They could easily help me out if I fell headlong.

"Walk with your feet close against the walls," I whispered. "It'll be a bit awkward, but it's safer."

"Any old thing you like, Benny," murmured Sir Montie.

We progressed slowly, and before long came to the spot where the German had fallen. The pit was still uncovered, and it yawned at my feet as I paused. It was quite empty. And as we all halted the silence in the tunnel was oppressive. It seemed like something almost audible, if you know what I mean. I suppose it was the singing in our ears.

And the darkness, when I shut off the torch, hit us in the face. It was solid. A fellow with shaky nerves would have been in a poor way down in that tunnel. But all three of us were pretty strong in that way; we were not at all affected.

We passed on, after examining the pit, and presently came to a branch passage leading sharply to the left. I placed my light close against the floor and examined the sand.

"Not this one," I murmured. "Let's go on."

"Why not this one?" asked Tommy Watson. "What difference does it make which passage we try, anyhow?"

"Just look here," I said keenly.

Both my chums gazed at the floor intently as I flashed my light down.

"Well, what about it?" asked Tommy.

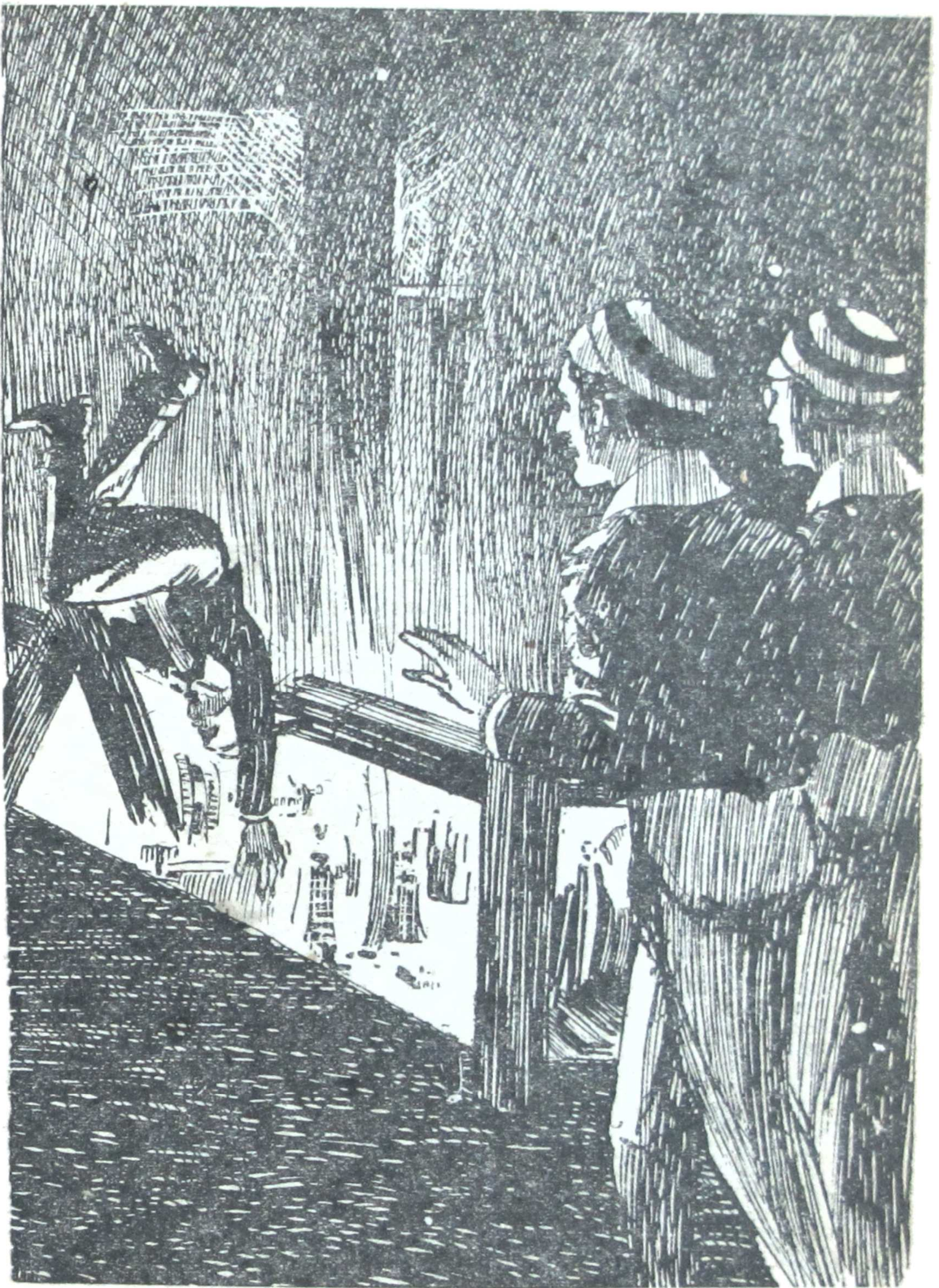
"Nothing to see there—only sand."

"Exactly!" I agreed. "But you'll notice, my son, that there are only one or two footprints. The traffic along this tunnel is practically nil. Therefore we don't want to waste time in exploring it."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "I should never have thought of that, you know—I shouldn't, really! It only shows, Tommy boy, that you need a frightfully keen brain. Benny's brain is a wonderful thing. It's a thinkin' brain. He doesn't overlook these little details, you know. It's amazin'ly interestin'."

"H'm!" said Watson. "Let's get to the next tunnel."

We passed on slowly, after listening intently. Our progress was slow in the



There was a loud, splitting crack, an even louder yell of alarm from Tommy Watson, and he pitched headlong down to the big floor space.

(See page 15.)

extreme, for I hesitated to use the light frequently. Enemies might be about, and a light in such a place as this was fatal.

My right hand, passing along the wall, abruptly entered space. I halted at once, and warned my chums to listen. We heard nothing whatever. The silence was really unnerving, and Watson became irritable.

"What's the matter now?" he demanded at last.

"Keep your hair on!" I breathed. "And don't talk so loudly, you ass!"

I switched on the light, with the bulb close against the floor, so that the light should be confined. And I saw at once that we had arrived at another tunnel. The flooring here was smothered with recent footprints.

"See?" I whispered intently.

"Blessed if I can!" grunted Watson. "You don't call those footprints, do you?"

"What are they, then?"

"I don't know, ass," said Tommy. "A drove of sheep might have been along——"

"That's very likely, isn't it—in this tunnel?" I said sarcastically. "You didn't expect each footmark to be clearly outlined, did you? My dear chap, I was taught this sort of business by the gub'nor—the cleverest detective living—and I know what I'm doing."

"We believe you, old boy," breathed Sir Montie. "Carry on, an' we'll follow. We place ourselves in your hands, Benny."

"Good. Then come on."

We walked slowly along the tunnel. It sloped sharply downwards for the first twenty feet or so, and then assumed the level again. And it twisted and turned continuously; but there were no other openings. This was just as well, for I didn't want to get lost in the old workings.

So far our course had been easy; we could find our way back without the slightest trouble. But complications were always liable to occur, especially if we didn't keep our wits about us.

Mr. Hunter might be down here, for all we knew. But our own affairs—the barring-out, and all connected with it—were forgotten for the time being.

After walking steadily for ten minutes I felt another blank space. There was another pause while we listened, and then I ventured to show my light. Out of this branch tunnel still another branch jutted off—and again to the right.

"My hat!" muttered Watson. "We shall get lost at this rate, Benny!"

"Hats!" I said. "If we take this tunnel we shall know our way back easily enough. Can't go wrong, in fact. You leave it to me, old chap. Just look at the floor, and see what a tale it tells."

They both looked down.

"It's a frightfully puzzlin' tale, Benny," murmured Sir Montie.

"Can't you see?" I asked. "All the footprints lead down this new branch; there's scarcely one mark leading straight on. And, by jingo, it is a new branch, too—a fairly recent excavation!"

"But the quarry's been deserted for years——"

"I know that," I interrupted. "That's what makes this all the more significant. Just look at the walls and judge for yourselves."

A very brief examination satisfied my chums. The rock walls were of a different colour to all the others, and they bore positive signs of having been hewn out of the solid earth recently. But this was only at the entrance. A few yards along the tunnel the space widened into a natural fissure, and the floor was rough and uneven.

Apparently a few feet of rock had been excavated in order to join the fissure with the tunnel, thus forming an exit. I felt, as I again crept forward, that we were on the verge of a discovery.

And I wasn't wrong.

For, scarcely a minute later, the fissure took an abrupt turn. And there, in the distance ahead, was a dim, subdued light! We all came to an abrupt halt and stared. A curious, low hum came to our ears, rising and falling monotonously.

"Oh, Caesar!" breathed Watson.

"Not a sound!" I whispered tensely. "Follow me cautiously——"

"You—you ain't going on?" asked Tommy.

"Why not?" I said. "This is just our chance. If we're spotted, we stand a good chance of getting away. We're active, and we've got a decent light. Of course we're going on!"

And I walked gingerly forward. My chums followed close at my heels, and so we progressed for some little way. The light in the distance grew stronger and the hum increased. The light was not a naked one—it seemed to be reflected from a lower level, somehow.

Then, all at once, we emerged into a great cavern.

It was most surprising, and we paused in sheer astonishment. And we were not on the floor of the cavern either. We stood upon a gallery, six or seven feet above the floor proper. We should probably have walked right on, tumbling down headlong, if it hadn't been for a stout wooden rail.

The gallery seemed to run right round the left side of the cavern, for the rail could faintly be discerned in the distance. I turned round to my chums and placed my hands on their arms.

"Not a sound, mind!" I breathed. "No jawing after this."

"Good enough, Benny!" murmured Tregellis-West.

There was no need to use the torch now. I crept forward along the gallery, and worked my way round. The light was coming from another cavern, which opened out of this one. Two big holes in the rock were brilliantly illuminated, showing that there were big lights burning in the other cavern.

The hum had now increased, and I knew that some kind of machinery was working. And I could swear that the light was electric!

The whole thing seemed like a dream.

What was this extraordinary underground workshop we had stumbled upon? How was Mr. Hunter connected with it? What had that German officer been doing down in the tunnels?

I resolved to find out, if possible, what the secret was. But I knew that extreme precaution was now necessary. A blunder on my part would not only involve me in disaster, but Montie and Tommy would suffer, too.

We crept along the rock gallery, but soon came to the end of it. The blank wall faced us, and there was no way down to the lower level—unless we dropped down. This would be easy enough, for the distance was slight. But how should we get up again, in the event of a surprise? Climbing up a bare seven-foot wall is different to dropping down it!

I leaned over the wooden rail and attempted to see into the second cavern. But I could only catch a glimpse of men moving about and of several big machines working steadily.

Sir Montie and Tommy were leaning over, too. Watson stood a little distance away, nearer the blank end. And he quivered with excitement as he bent over the rail—a rail which was separated from the one which bore the weight of Montie and I.

And it was then that disaster occurred.

There was a loud, splitting crack, an even louder yell of alarm from Tommy Watson, and he pitched headlong down to the big floor space!

CHAPTER V.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

CAPTURED—IN THE ROCK PRISON—VISITED BY A HUN—A SURPRISE.

WE witnessed the fall of Tommy Watson with horrified eyes.

It had been so unexpected that I was helpless with consternation for a moment. The wooden rail had snapped beneath Tommy's weight and he had fallen. It was quite simple, but appalling, nevertheless.

"Begad!" exclaimed Tregellis-West gaspingly.

That exclamation brought my senses back. Only a few seconds had passed, and I dimly saw that Watson wasn't hurt by his fall. He was scrambling to his feet rather dazedly.

"Quick, Montie!" I panted. "We must get down—"

"Look, dear fellow—look!" exclaimed Montie quickly.

And even as he spoke two men appeared from the other cavern! They had been attracted by the loud snap and the yell from Watson. One of them rushed forward, and the other paused.

Then the cavern became flooded with light. Shouts rang out, and Watson turned round and round helplessly, looking for a way of escape. Before he could move a yard, however, the first man was upon him.

"Rescue!" yelled Watson frantically, as he was grasped.

"Dear boy, it's up to us!" gasped Sir Montie.

"Come on!" I said, between my teeth.

Montie and I dropped down heavily. Even as we alighted I knew that this attempt at rescue was doomed to failure. But what else could we do? It was impossible to leave Tommy Watson in the lurch—that would have been rotten. His fall had been an accident, pure and simple, and the most we could do was to rush to his aid.

We alighted just as the second man came up. I saw that they were both strangers, and that they seemed to be refined-looking chaps. I was more interested, however, in their muscular development.

They were weedy, and by no means formidable.

"All together!" I panted, fired with sudden hope. "Smash 'em, my sons!"

I sailed in desperately and delivered a straight punch upon one man's nose. He reeled back and sat down. Following up my advantage, I pounced upon him and held him down, hardly able to believe in my good luck.

Sir Montie was helping Watson to tackle the other fellow; and, between them, they were doing well. Just for a second I even had hopes of getting away. But then several shouts sounded along the cavern and there was a quick scamper of feet.

Four other men rushed up, and I was pulled back and held tightly. My chums suffered in a similar way, and for a moment there was silence, except for the panting gasps of us all.

The man I had "downed" was dabbing his nose angrily.

"Schoolboys!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming with alarm and relief, strangely combined. "Bah! It is nothing, friends! The alarm was not necessary. There are no others!"

"Look here," I said indignantly, "what's the meaning of this? You've got no right to make us prisoners!"

"Do not be a fool, boy!" snapped the man. "What are you doing in this place? How did you get in—eh? How did you get in?"

"Find out!" roared Watson.

"There is nothing to fear, friends," went on the man with the punched nose. "These boys know nothing. They were probably exploring the tunnels, and stumbled upon the cavern by accident. In any case, we will make them prisoners for the time being. We can do nothing else. Bring them along, Henri."

"Oui, m'sieur," said another man briefly.

I had recovered my coolness. These men were a queer lot, I saw. Three of them were obviously British, one was just as obviously French, and the other two, I could stake my life, were Germans!

The whole affair seemed like a nightmare, and I wondered what on earth it could all mean. We were forced along roughly, and taken to a short flight of stone steps which led to the gallery.

Up these we went, and, reaching the gallery, we were suddenly confronted with a heavy wooden door, which was fitted with great bolts. Provision had evidently been made for possible prisoners!

"Pitch them in," said the man in command.

"Would you not question the lads, m'sieur?" asked the Frenchman.

"Not at present, Henri," replied the other. "Pitch the brats in. I mean to have the whole place searched at once. There may be other boys about—although I don't think it is probable."

We were pushed into a dark cavity one by one, and then the door banged behind us and we heard the bolts shot. I was rather surprised, for I had half expected that we should be bound hand and foot. This was much better.

"Well, this is a nice go, my sons!" I said calmly.

"Dear fellow, will you kindly pinch me?" asked Tregellis-West. "I'm dreamin'—I am really! All this can't be real, begad! I'm shockin'ly bewildered! Ow! Oh, dear! That'll do splendidly, Benny! I ain't dreamin' at all!"

I had pinched Montie severely, and he jumped.

"Are you hurt, Tommy?" I asked.

"Hurt!" snorted Watson. "Of course I'm not! And don't go and blame me for this, because I couldn't help that rotten rail breaking——"

"I'm not going to blame you," I interrupted. "It was a sheer accident, and it's no good crying over spilt milk. Let's have a look where we are."

I switched on my torch and flashed the beam of light round. The place was a tiny cave, hewn out of the rock. The roof was only a foot above our heads, and all the walls were bare. The door, roughly constructed, was nevertheless stout, and would defy any amount of heavy blows.

"No way out of this place," I remarked. "We're properly trapped."

"It's a shockin' position," said Tregellis-West. "What about the barrin'-out, dear fellows? What about Hunter? What about the other chaps? What about——"

"Oh, dry up, you giddy old parrot!" snapped Watson. "What's the good of going on like that? We're prisoners, and I suppose we shall be kept here for months—on bread and water! Or perhaps we shall be left to starve!"

"That's nothing," I said. "We might be tortured——"

"Tortured!" gasped Watson.

"No, you silly ass!" I exclaimed briskly. "I was only continuing in your own special pessimistic strain. You seem to have got the jumps, Tommy. There's nothing to worry over——"

"Ain't there, really?" asked Montie mildly. "Begad, I thought there was, you know! It's surprisin' how I got that impression. But you know best, Benny."

"Nothing to worry over particularly," I

went on. "I've been in worse holes than this, and I've managed to get out. Don't get into a panic, and don't run away with the idea that there's no way of escape."

"We can blow that door down, I suppose?" asked Watson sarcastically.

"No; but seize the first opportunity to make a break for it," I said. "It'll come sooner or later. Anyhow, it's no good worrying. I shouldn't be surprised if we received a visit from the Hunter-bird before long."

"Mr. Hunter!" panted Watson, starting up. "Oh, rot!"

"It's quite likely," I said. "He's connected with these mysterious persons down here, and it'll be reported to him that three schoolboys have been collared. He'll buzz along like one o'clock and have a squint at us. Oh, there's some excitement coming before long, I can tell you!"

"You don't seem to care twopence!" snapped Watson crossly.

"Well, it's no good getting ratty," I replied—"or irritable, either!"

"Sorry!" muttered Watson. "But you're so jolly cool, you know!"

"It's just a habit of Benny's," said Tregellis-West. "He's an amazin' chap for keepin' his head, begad! Just look at me. I'm shiverin' with excitement and fright—I am, really! I may not sound like it, but I am!"

We attempted to keep our spirits up, but inwardly we were all despondent. What was this affair to lead to? How were we to escape? I began to realise that the position was not only alarming, but desperate.

Our conversation flagged after a while, and we sat silent, each busy with his own thoughts. An hour passed in this way. Then I moved about restlessly, trying to think of some way of escape. No sound came from outside, and it seemed as though we had been left utterly to ourselves.

I was just about to make a remark to my chums, when the bolts of the door rattled and a few beams of light filtered through the cracks. Then the door swung open, and a man entered with a small, patent kind of swinging lamp. I looked up, expecting to see the evil face of Mr. Hunter.

But it was another evil face, which I instantly recognised.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

For the man was the German we had chased in the tunnel the previous night—the man Nelson Lee had captured—Lieut. Otto Reinhardt!

"Ach, pigs of Englander boys!" he grunted, eyeing us. "You vos happy, hein?"

"How—how did you——" I began.

I was about to ask him how he had escaped, but the words choked in my throat. I was greatly alarmed for a moment. The presence of this German here struck me as being significant. Had Nelson Lee lost him? Had the gov'nor been surprised in the tunnel, and was he a prisoner himself?

My thoughts were swift, and I was terribly worried. Thoughts of my own safety had

vanished, and I was concerned about the gov'nor.

"You step into te danger," said Reinhardt pleasantly. "You suffer te capture, mein leetle poys. Vell, it ees te misfortune, hein? It vos te rash action, and now you pay te price."

He laughed softly, swung his lamp round, and then moved out of the little cave. His lamp was switched off, and we were left in darkness. He shot the bolts silently, for there was scarcely a sound, and then his footsteps died away.

"Begad! That was queer, you know," remarked Montie.

"Yes. What the dickens did he come for?" said Watson. "I expect Hunter will be along in a minute—"

I felt a slight draught at the back of my neck and turned swiftly. Then in a second I had taken out my torch. I flashed it on, playing the light full upon the heavy wooden door.

It stood slightly ajar!

"Great Cæsar!" I exclaimed softly.

I opened the door gingerly. Yes, it was certainly unfastened. I listened. Not a sound came to my ears. Otto Reinhardt had gone, leaving the door open! I was so astonished that I scarcely heard the amazed remarks of my chums.

"It—it must be a trick of some sort," I muttered at last.

I couldn't possibly believe that the man had been so careless as to leave the door open by accident. But there it was—open! The way to freedom was clear. The whole incident was astounding.

Such an act of carelessness was incredible—and I didn't believe it. Trick or no trick, however, I meant to take advantage of the opportunity. If we ran into a trap—well, our position wouldn't be any the worse.

"Come on, my sons!" I whispered briskly.

"Is it wise, old boy?"

"I'm blessed if I know exactly—"

"There's somethin' in it, you know—there must be," said Montie sagely. "That horrid German wouldn't give us our liberty like that. It's some frightful Hun trick, dear fellow. We shall be collared, and then he'll laugh at us."

"There'd be no rhyme or reason in such a thing," I objected. "Even a Hun wouldn't be such a fool as all that. I don't pretend to understand—and I'm not going to try to puzzle it out. Let's scoot off."

Watson hesitated.

"We—we might fall into a pit, or something—" he began.

"It's possible," I interrupted. "But there's a chance of escape here, and we should be asses to ignore it. That Hun might have forgotten to bolt the door—although such a thing seems mad. Let's try our luck."

"Go ahead, then," breathed Montie.

We passed out, and crept swiftly along the gallery. The lights were still showing in the second cavern, and the hum of machinery sounded as before. But not a soul was within

sight, and we reached the fissure without mishap.

"Begad, it's amazin'!" breathed Tregellis-West. "Too amazin', I'm afraid."

But we negotiated the fissure in safety and turned into the tunnel. Down this we sped swiftly, and at the junction with the main tunnel I called a halt. Nothing but the sound of our own breathing came to our ears.

"By Jupiter," I muttered breathlessly, "we've done it!"

"We ain't in the vault yet, Benny," said Sir Montie. "I don't want to be a growler, but I can't quite believe—"

"But we've escaped!" hissed Watson, quivering with excitement. "Oh, my hat! I can't believe it—it seems like a giddy dream!"

There was a sudden movement in the main tunnel. I twirled round, catching in my breath.

And there, eyeing us grimly, stood Otto Reinhardt!

CHAPTER VI.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

AMAZING!—MR. HUNTER GETS BUSY—WITHIN SIGHT OF DISASTER.

JUST for a moment we stood utterly breathless.

A great rage surged within me. It was a trick, after all! There was to be no escape for us!

I sprang forward, meaning to fly at the German recklessly. But he took a quick step backwards and raised his hand. His finger was pointing in the direction of the vault and he was smiling. His eyes twinkled amusedly.

My rage left me, and I breathed hard. The man's meaning was as clear as daylight. He was silently telling us to return to the vault!

"We—we can go?" I gasped.

Reinhardt nodded, and twitched his pointing finger.

And then, as he regarded me steadily, his left eyelid flickered. I stared in amazement. The German had deliberately winked at us! Before I could say a word the patent lamp went out and we were plunged into darkness.

There was a soft padding of feet, and then silence. I hastily fished out my own torch and pressed the button. The shaft of light illuminated the passage. We were alone again!

"Well, I'm hanged!" I gasped breathlessly.

"Let's—let's run for it!" panted Tommy Watson.

This seemed the most sensible thing to do, and we hurried along the tunnel in a mental state which positively defies description. I was completely bewildered—so I don't know how Tregellis-West and Watson were feeling. Judging by their ejaculations, their minds were in a state of chaos.

But we had escaped!

Or, rather, we had been released—by Reinhardt! It was so amazing, so incongruous, that I couldn't credit it. Some Germans, I dare say, have human feeling, but it wasn't within the scope of probability that this man should deliberately give us our liberty.

And he had winked! As I led the way along the tunnel I remembered his eyes. They had been twinkling in a manner which was the opposite of evil, and I strove hard to get my thoughts into proper shape.

How had the German escaped from Nelson Lee? What had happened to the guv'nor himself? Where was—

"Great Scott!" I yelled abruptly.

I came to a halt. Sir Montie bumped violently into me, and Watson bumped violently into Sir Montie.

"Begad! What on earth's the matter, dear boy?" gasped Tregellis-West, just managing to save his pince-nez. "Are we trapped again?"

I faced round, my eyes gleaming excitedly. "I've just thought of something!" I breathed, in a shaky voice.

"Well, I wish you'd think more quietly, that's all!" grunted Watson from behind. "I've nearly busted my nose against Montie's back. I never knew he was such a bony bounder—"

"Begad! Pray don't be so insultin'!" said Montie severely.

"I've just thought of something!" I repeated. "My only Aunt Rebecca! What a set of asses we were not to jump to it before!"

"Jump to what, you fathead?" demanded Watson crossly.

"Didn't you see that German wink?" I asked, bending forward. "Didn't you notice how his eyes were twinkling? And isn't it beyond belief that he should deliberately release us, and give us a safe passage back—"

"Quite right, Benny boy," put in Sir Montie. "We're all amazed. But ain't we wastin' time, dear old man?"

"Rats!" I hissed. "That German wasn't a German at all!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" snapped Watson.

"Who was he, then?"

"The guv'nor himself!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Nelson Lee himself!" I declared grimly. My two chums stared at me as though I had suddenly taken leave of my senses. Their amazement was too great for words.

"I'll bet anything you like that I've hit on the truth," I went on. "What a silly idiot I was not to think of it before! Of course he was the guv'nor—there's not the slightest doubt about it!"

"You're—you're dotty!" panted Watson. "Hold him, Montie!"

"Yes, we shall have to restrain the poor fellow," said Tregellis-West, gently grasping my arm. "He may get dangerous—"

I wrenched myself away.

"Oh, don't be such asses!" I exclaimed quickly. "I tell you I've hit upon the

truth! That chap was Nelson Lee—in disguise!"

"Disguise!" gasped Watson.

"Exactly!"

"But—but it's impossible—"

"Haven't I told you often enough that the guv'nor's a marvel at disguising himself?" I went on. "It's as plain as anything. Reinhardt was collared, and probably handed over to the police. But Nelson Lee made himself up exactly the same, and now he's impersonating the rotter."

"Phew!" breathed Sir Montie. "It's a bit tall, Benny!"

"The guv'nor's done it before—impersonated people, I mean," I said. "It's the only explanation which fits in with the facts. It makes everything understandable. That German wouldn't have released us, but Nelson Lee would!"

"It's a bit too steep, Benny!" said Watson, shaking his head.

"Well, we can't settle the point for ourselves," I replied. "The best thing we can do is to get back while we're safe. But I'm right, my sons—it was the guv'nor who gave us our liberty!"

Although Sir Montie and Tommy were rather doubtful, I was convinced. The bewilderment had left me. Taking it for granted that the supposed German had been Nelson Lee, everything became perfectly clear and feasible.

Of course I couldn't be absolutely sure without facing Reinhardt again; but, as I told my chums, it was the only explanation which fell in with the circumstances, and I decided to let it rest there.

With regard to the mystery itself, that was still as obscure as ever. We were no nearer a solution, although we had seen much. In fact we were far more puzzled now than we had been before.

What was that vast underground workshop? Who were the men we had seen? What possible reason could they have for acting in such an extraordinary manner? And how, above all, was Mr. Hunter connected with the whole queer business?

That our unworthy Housemaster was associated with the queer crowd in the cavern was certain. I half believed that he was the leader of the whole mysterious gang. But it was really impossible to form any definite theory.

Therefore I didn't try. I just dismissed the whole affair from my thoughts as soon as the vault was reached. Fortunately I have a happy knack of forgetting things until I want to remember them again. A chap can't do any task properly if he has got something else on his mind.

We had been absent nearly two hours, and the watch had not been changed. Very quickly we slipped into bed, and were asleep in next to no time. Ten minutes later, however, we were hauled out—to relieve the others. This was distinctly hard lines, but I felt that we had been fully compensated.

Later on, of course, we had quite a lot of sleep. The system of watches worked well,

and throughout the whole night the fortress was not once left unprotected. Merely because everything was quiet, that didn't guarantee that no attack would be made.

Mr. Hunter was a wily bird, and it would be just like him to assault our stronghold between four and five o'clock in the morning. And I certainly had no intention of giving him the slightest chance of success.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I took our turns at scouting, and I'm very much afraid that both my chums dozed at their posts. At all events, when I went round to get their reports, Tommy required shaking twice and Montie three times.

As they were scouting near the defences, this lapse didn't matter much. It was the "forward" scouts who were the most important. It was the task of these rebels to watch the school from close quarters and to report the first sign of activity.

Dawn came at last, and no alarm had been given. I went to bed then and had a sound sleep. When I rose again I found the sun shining brilliantly and everything was looking delightfully fresh. Birds were singing in the trees and Handforth was singing as he washed. Needless to say, the combination was not musical.

I had a thorough wash myself in the brook, and then felt as fresh as a daisy. By seven o'clock everybody was out of the vault and great preparations for breakfast were commenced.

Over by the Ancient House, Warren, the porter, was becoming active, and there were other signs that the great school was stretching itself for a new day's work. I wondered how we should fare on this morning.

Watching the preparations for breakfast was a pleasant occupation, no doubt, but I had something else in mind.

"I want twenty volunteers," I said briskly.

"Eh? What for?" asked Owen major.

"There's some work to do in the vault," I replied. "It strikes me that that tunnel entrance ought to be barricaded. It's a back way into the heart of our defences, and we can't afford to take any risks. Who's game?"

There were plenty of volunteers, and we descended to the vault and commenced the erection of a rough barricade. I was taking this precaution because I realised that Mr. Hunter would probably use any measures in order to force us to surrender. And an attack from the rear, by means of the tunnel, was not at all unlikely.

Very shortly I was to find out that my surmise was correct!

Lacking solid materials, we were compelled to build the barricade with anything we could lay our hands upon. It was mainly composed of chunks of stone, bricks, empty tins, and stray faggots. It wouldn't withstand a big shock, but nobody could get through without making an appalling din—and that would give us warning. Half a dozen fellows, properly armed, could easily guard the tunnel mouth and prevent any number of attackers from getting through.

I felt more satisfied when this was done. And as I was surveying it Handforth came pelting down the old stairs.

"Enemy in sight!" he shouted urgently.

"In force?" I asked.

"No, only Hunter."

"Oh, another peace-parley," I said. "Well, if Mr. Hunter is willing to discuss our terms sensibly we'll jaw with him; but I'm afraid that he is too full of bluff and bluster to be reasonable."

I left three fellows below in case of emergency and ascended with the rest. And I found that breakfast was in full swing, and that Mr. Hunter was walking across the Triangle towards our stronghold.

He came to a halt a short distance away, and I noticed that the old benevolent smile was illuminating his features. He looked one of the kindest men imaginable. And I grimly told myself that trouble was brewing. That genial smile always foreshadowed something particularly unpleasant.

"Yah! Go away!" shouted Hubbard, with his mouth full.

"None of that rot!" I said sharply. "Give Mr. Hunter a chance to speak!"

"I appreciate your generosity, Bennett," exclaimed Mr. Hunter silkily, from beyond the defences. "I have only a few words to say this morning; but they are words which are of the utmost importance."

"Go ahead, sir."

"I am about to give you one more chance of surrendering quietly," said Mr. Hunter. "It is most distasteful to me that this quarrel should have occurred, since I am anxious to be on good terms with my boys."

"Oh!"

"Hypocrite!"

"Rats!"

Mr. Hunter beamed as the many remarks came to his ears.

"It is very sad that I should be so misunderstood," he exclaimed, shaking his head. "You will find me quite a tame person if you treat me well. And because of my generous nature I am willing to make peace upon terms which I deem both lenient and reasonable. It is most degrading that I should be compelled to speak of terms at all, but I am anxious to have this rebellion settled."

"I can quite believe that, sir," I said drily.

"We're anxious to have it settled, if it comes to that," called out De Valerie. "But we're not willin' to give in on any terms—what?"

"Rather not!"

"You will find that I am astonishingly generous," declared Mr. Hunter. "The Remove must return to the Ancient House at once. There will be no punishment of any sort. I have decided that you shall be allowed to go scot-free."

"Oh!"

There was a general gasp of astonishment, and everybody listened.

"Do you mean that seriously, sir?" I asked, taking a deep breath.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Hunter. "There will be no floggings inflicted, and your school-life will proceed as usual. But you must return to your House at once—without the slightest delay."

"What about the cricket, sir?" I asked keenly.

Mr. Hunter waved his hand.

"Such matters can be discussed afterwards," he said carelessly.

I grinned.

"It's not quite good enough, sir," I said calmly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Hunter, frowning.

"Why, this trick of yours won't work—that's all," I replied. "We don't happen to be a set of babies. The cricket can wait until afterwards, can it? That means to say that you are going to have everything your own way after we have surrendered. I'm sorry, Mr. Hunter, but we can't surrender until we have your positive assurance that all our demands shall be met."

Mr. Hunter set his teeth.

"You are trying my temper sorely, Bennett," he said. "I have given you the chance of escaping all punishment, and you are fit to ignore it. I may as well inform you that the cricket will not be allowed. Neither will the playing-fields be placed within bounds."

"What about study teas?" shouted Teddy Long.

"There will be no continuance of that disgraceful system while I have control of the Ancient House," said Mr. Hunter. "Partaking of tea in junior studies is a habit which can only lead to greediness and uncleanness. In these matters, at least, I shall remain firm."

"We rebelled because of your interference with the school customs," I said. "And we're certainly not going to surrender on such terms, Mr. Hunter. So it's quite useless talking any further."

Mr. Hunter roared.

"Very well, you young fools!" he shouted furiously. "I give you one hour—one hour only. If you have not returned to the Ancient House by nine o'clock exactly, you shall be forced—"

"Yah! On away!"

The roar was unanimous.

"I shall return at nine o'clock," bellowed Mr. Hunter. "If you are not in a better mind then, you will have nobody but yourselves to thank for what occurs!"

And the Housemaster, with swishing gown, stalked away. Somehow, I began to feel just a little uneasy. The gleam in Mr. Hunter's eyes hinted that he had a trump card up his sleeve.

But the other fellows were quite comfortable. I did not give voice to my fears, for I should only have been set down as a pessimist. The rebels were firmly convinced that Mr. Hunter would make another

general attack. We had plenty of ammunition, and so nothing was feared.

But I thought differently. Surely Mr. Hunter would not be foolish enough to try another frontal attack? He had failed on other occasions, and there was no likelihood of defeating us this time.

No; I had an uneasy inkling he had a surprise for us. To be quite frank, I believed that an attack would be made in great force. A large number of fellows would keep us busy on the surface, while another party came along the tunnel. That was my idea.

Nine o'clock boomed out at last. Breakfast had been cleared away by this time, and as the clock struck out the last note Mr. Hunter emerged from the Ancient House. He came walking across rapidly.

"Well, boys, your answer?" he demanded when he arrived.

"No surrender, sir," I replied firmly.

"That is final?"

"Quite, sir."

"Very well, Bennett—very well!" snapped Mr. Hunter. "You will not be able to say that I did not warn you fully. I regret exceedingly that drastic action will be necessary."

He walked away quickly, and the rebels gazed at one another with growing excitement. It was only too evident that a new attack was imminent.

"De Valerie!" I called out sharply.

"Hallo!"

"I want you to take ten men down into the vault," I said. "There may be no attack from the tunnel, but I think it's likely. I trust you to keep the enemy out, De Valerie."

The Rotter nodded.

"Good enough," he said briskly. "I shan't fail, Bennett."

There were some signs of insubordination when De Valerie proceeded to choose his men. Everybody was anxious to remain on the surface, to take part in the excitement. But I stepped in and settled the matter.

"What's all this grumbling?" I demanded. "When we started the barring-out every fellow agreed to accept my orders—without question. I want every fellow to go with De Valerie who has been given instructions. If we're going to win we must all be willing to do our best."

"Hear, hear!" said the chaps who were going to stop on the surface.

De Valerie took his men down without another grumble, and I set about organising the defences for repelling the attack which was even then being prepared. On the other side of the Triangle Mr. Hunter was forming up a crowd of Sixth-Formers and several others of a nondescript variety—practically the same crowd that had attacked before. Starke and Co., however, were not in evidence—and I grimly told myself that my surmise had been correct—Starke was leading the party round by the quarry!

I felt rather sorry for the Sixth-Formers. They were pretty decent chaps, and had been

compelled to obey Mr. Hunter's orders. And they were certainly in for another beating. We could easily defeat this crowd.

It caused us some astonishment to see that five or six of the enemy were carrying pails of water. What could they hope to do with those? Even if they drenched a few of us, we shouldn't particularly mind.

"Potty idea!" said Handforth with a sniff.

We watched and waited, quite ready for anything. The attackers came to a halt twenty yards away. Mr. Hunter gave a sharp order, and Bates and Warren and three other servants stepped forward. Each carried a pail of water, and they came forward at the double, spreading out as they did so.

"Mad!" said Watson contemptuously.

"Now then—fire!" I called.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

The air became thick with our "bombs," and in less than ten seconds the six attackers were converted into niggers. But they staggered on doggedly in face of the fire, enveloped in clouds of soot.

Splash! Splash!

The pails of water were flung over the faggots in a sweeping fashion. Not a drop came over the top, and I found my wonder giving place to amazement. What on earth could be the meaning of this futile effort?

The rebels were yelling with laughter. But quite suddenly Sir Montie sniffed the air. As he did so I caught a whiff of something pungent and unmistakable.

"Petrol!" I shouted hoarsely.

And then the truth came to me in a flash. Those pails hadn't contained water, but petrol! I nearly staggered when I realised the awful truth. One match would set fire to our whole system of defence; the faggots would go up in a roaring blaze. Mr. Hunter's stratagem fairly took my breath away.

"Stand back, there!" roared Mr. Hunter.

I was somewhat surprised that he had given that warning. I repeated it urgently, for I knew that the burst of flame would scorch everything within its vicinity. The rebels backed away hastily and in some confusion.

I heard Mr. Hunter run forward. There was a slight pause, and then a lighted ball of paper rose in the air and fell—into the faggots. Just for one breathless second nothing happened. But then, with a sound which was almost a report, the petrol blazed. A solid ball of flames rose roaring into the air.

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The dismay was general, and the rebels were on the verge of panic. This trick had completely demoralised them. It was utterly impossible to defend our stronghold now, for the flames forced us back.

The heat was terrible, and the fierce crackling of the faggots warned me that the attackers would be able to break through within ten minutes. I felt stunned—dazed.

Disaster had come at last!

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE SITUATION—MR. HUNTER IS AMAZED—THE REBELS WIN AGAIN.

H 189-8-33!

The flames rose in a solid wall, completely encircling the rebels' stronghold. And after that first wave of panic the fellows were filled with a great rage. This trick was dastardly—it was the act of a Prussian.

Several boys might easily have been burned during that first burst of fire. But owing to Nipper's prompt warning, everybody steered clear.

The heat was awful, and Nipper was forced to admit that a retreat was necessary, and the only means of retreat lay down in the vault. He shouted urgently to the juniors to keep their heads, and his voice was heeded.

In an orderly fashion the entire Revolutionary Army disappeared down the old stairway into the vaults. Arriving below, a terrific hubbub at once broke out. Nipper took no notice. His face was pale and he was grim. He was thinking deeply. This emergency had arisen, and he felt that it was up to him to discover a solution.

Unless something was done quickly the disaster would be complete; the rebels would suffer an ignominious defeat. And once Mr. Hunter gained the upper hand there could be no second revolt.

But the position was hopeless—hopeless!

Nipper clenched his fists desperately. As soon as the fires died down Mr. Hunter would lead an attack down the stairs. Others would come along the tunnel. It would be possible to hold them back for a time, no doubt, but in the end surrender would be inevitable.

"I knew what it would be," said Fullwood bitterly. "This is what comes of trustin' to a chap like Bennett! We shall be flogged—"

"Oh, shut up, you growler!"

"Fullwood's right, anyhow," declared Merrell. "What's the good of this? It was Bennett who suggested this place—and a fat lot of good he's done. We're simply beaten—whacked to the wide!"

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"I'm going to fight any rotter who grumbles!" he roared. "Great pip. How was Benny to be prepared for such a rotten Hun trick? It's a beastly shame for you chaps to start grumbling—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We'll still have faith in Bennett!"

"Rather!"

Nipper looked round. His face had lost the intent look; and slowly a grin overspread his features. Mechanically the other rebels stopped talking, and they waited breathlessly. Nipper's grin gave place to a chuckle, and the chuckle merged into a roar of gleeful mirth.

"Very funny, ain't it?" sneered Gulliver crossly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nipper.

"He's hysterical!" said McClure anxiously. "The shock's turned his brain!"

"Just a little wheeze!" gasped Nipper, wiping his eyes. "It's—ha, ha, ha!—it's the joke of the season, my sons!"

"Surprisin'ly funny, begad!" said Sir Montie, nodding.

Apparently the whole Remove thought so, for two minutes later every fellow was roaring.

"Mind, we shall have plenty of trouble afterwards," said Nipper. "But Hunter's going to be diddled!"

And the Remove Revolutionary Army became intensely active. Meanwhile Mr. Hunter, flushed with triumph, stood upon the surface, waiting for the fires to die down. He was confident of complete victory.

Nipper had formed a shrewd guess as to the reason for this desperate step on Mr. Hunter's part. The Housemaster had learned of the boys' escapade of the night, and he had realised the urgency of getting hold of them. He was wildly anxious to do so—for they knew too much. It was Mr. Hunter's genial intention to imprison Nipper and Co. in the Ancient House tower again.

And this attack had been made with the object of squashing the Remove rebellion once and for all. It was thorough. As Nipper had surmised, another party of the enemy was advancing from the rear.

Starke was in command of ten Sixth-Formers, and he was leading them to the old quarry on Bannington Moor. They intended penetrating the tunnel and reaching the monastery vault from the other side. Thus the Remove would be trapped.

In the quarry the party met a gentleman with a lantern. His name, he said, was Mr. Smiles. He didn't look it, for he had a gloomy countenance. He was small and bent and wore glasses.

"Leave it to me, boys," he said. "I'll guide you through the tunnel."

Starke grunted and followed.

The prefect didn't altogether approve of this stranger. But Mr. Hunter had arranged the matter personally. Mr. Smiles was a friend of the Housemaster's, and Starke and Co. did not trouble themselves to think deeply.

Mr. Hunter, of course, was wary. He had no intention of letting the Sixth-Formers wander down the side tunnels in the quarry workings. Therefore Mr. Smiles had been provided as guide.

The party plunged into the big cave which formed the entrance to the tunnel. And within a minute they were hurrying along in single file. Mr. Smiles leading. The deep pit in the centre of the tunnel had been strongly covered, for there was now no sign of the yawning hole.

And at last the destination came into sight. A glance revealed the fact that a barricade had been erected.

"We'll soon have that thing down," said Starke grimly.

The party came to a halt against the barricade and listened. All was silent as the

grave. The Sixth-Formers looked at one another curiously.

"Hunter's done the trick already," said one of them. "We're late for the fair, Starke. Well, I'm not sorry; I didn't want to fight a pack of silly kids. Hunter must have routed the young asses out."

"Looks like it," replied Starke savagely. "Let's have the barricade down, anyhow."

Mr. Smiles stood in the rear while the attacking party wrenched at the barricade. Within five minutes the obstacle had been removed, and Starke and Co. entered the vaults. They were all bare and empty. Not even the fellows' beds remained.

"The fun's over long ago," grinned one of the Sixth-Formers.

"Well, boys, I will leave you now," said Mr. Smiles. "Good-bye."

He went into the tunnel and walked rapidly away. Starke and his men nodded, and then strode across to the stairway. Many candles were burning, and the whole place was bright.

Starke led the way up to the surface, and he was rather breathless when he reached the top. The sun was shining into the old ruins, but the air was blue and hazy with smoke. The fires had died down, and Mr. Hunter was in possession.

"You did the trick, then, sir," panted Starke.

"A complete rout, Starke," said Mr. Hunter, rubbing his hands. "Dear me! Are the young rebels so subdued? Are they quietly following you—"

"Following me, sir?" exclaimed Starke, puzzled.

"Certainly. I thought—"

"We haven't set eyes on the young rotters!" declared Starke.

Mr. Hunter started violently.

"What nonsense are you talking, boy?" he rapped out. "Where are the rebels?"

Starke and Co. stared.

"Where are they?" repeated Starke blankly. "How should I know, sir? I thought you'd already collared them—"

"Are they not in the vaults?" roared Mr. Hunter madly.

"Not a sign of 'em, sir—"

"You are insane!" bellowed Mr. Hunter, his composure vanishing. "I tell you that you are mad! The wretched boys have not come up—"

"Not—not come up!" gasped Starke. "Oh, rot, sir! They couldn't have melted into thin air! We haven't seen them, so it's obvious that they came up the stairs and got out this way!"

Mr. Hunter fought for breath.

"Confound you, Starke!" he roared chokingly. "You must have blundered! The rebels have not come to the surface—they are still below somewhere. Perhaps they passed along the tunnel—"

"Impossible, sir!" said another Sixth-Former.

"How is it impossible, boy?" snapped Mr. Hunter.

"Well, they couldn't have passed us, for

one thing," replied the other. "And, in addition to that, there was a barricade across the tunnel-mouth. It must have taken at least an hour to build, sir. And it was built from the inside, too."

"That's right, sir," agreed several others.

Mr. Hunter fairly shook with rage.

"Then—then the boys are still in the vaults!" he thundered. "You fools—"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Wilson of the Sixth, "the vaults are empty."

"By heaven!" raved Mr. Hunter. "Somebody shall suffer for this!"

He rushed to the stairway and commenced the descent. Starke and several others followed him. This mystery was almost uncanny. The Rebel Remove had completely and utterly vanished.

Mr. Hunter could not believe it. He had been so positively confident of complete success that this shock almost drove him out of his mind. The Remove had been trapped—trapped beyond hope—and yet it had managed to escape!

And the most astounding part of it all was that no method of escape was visible. Reaching the vault, Mr. Hunter commenced a frenzied search. He half believed that there was another exit—an exit which had escaped the notice of everybody. But a thorough search revealed nothing.

Certainly a dungeon-like place was discovered by opening a trap-door in the flooring, but it led nowhere. Mr. Hunter was forced to admit himself baffled at last, and he stood in the centre of the big vault glaring round him balefully.

"What is the meaning of this amazing mystery?" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Those boys must be somewhere; they could not have vanished into thin air. By heaven! I shall find them before long. And then—and then—"

What would happen then was so awful that even Mr. Hunter could not find words to express himself. But numerous search parties scoured in vain. For hours there was tremendous activity. The tunnel was searched, the quarry, and every inch of ground within the school property. But the result was nil. The Rebel Remove was very conspicuous by its absence.

And at last Mr. Hunter was forced to one conclusion. He could think of no other explanation whatever. He believed, in fact, that the Remove had escaped by means of the tunnel after all.

This solution seemed mad enough, but what other explanation was there? Mr. Hunter raved, all to no purpose. He sent messengers out in every direction in order to discover the first item of news regarding the missing rebels.

But no news arrived.

The Remove Revolutionary Army had simply melted away!

As it happened it hadn't melted far.

Although Mr. Hunter had been in complete ignorance of the fact, the Remove had been within six feet of him during his search of the vaults. For the explanation, seemingly so extraordinary, was wonderfully simple.

The whole Remove, to tell the absolute truth, was packed into a secret chamber which opened out of the old vault. Only three boys had known of the existence of this hidden chamber—Nipper and his two chums.

Not another soul in the whole school—outside the Remove—knew anything about it. Several other Removites had been let into the secret some weeks before, but they had said nothing. They now realised the value of their silence.

Nelson Lee himself had been forcibly cast into this secret chamber by Nipper and Co. on one famous occasion—when the school-master-detective had been menaced by murderous agents of the Circle of Terror. That was before the advent of Mr. Hunter, but it had occurred only recently.

The thought of it had come to Nipper like a flash of brilliant light into complete darkness. And he had laughed at the idea of "dishing Mr. Hunter" so neatly. The Remove had laughed with him when they learned of the wheeze.

The secret chamber was large, but the fellows were in very close quarters indeed. The door was made of solid stonework, and so cunningly constructed that it could not be detected from the remainder of the wall. Nipper alone knew the secret of the hidden catch.

Under his guidance all the beds had been carried swiftly into the chamber. The little food which remained was not available, since it had been carried upstairs for use at dinner time. It was beyond reach now.

Hot, uncomfortable and silent, the Remove had crouched while the search went on. But their retreat had not been discovered, and they felt fully compensated for the discomfort they were suffering.

Nipper was extremely cheerful. The position demanded very careful thought and quick action, but the commander-in-chief was confident. Luck had favoured them so far, and he believed that all would go well.

At all events, it could not be denied that the Remove Revolutionary Army was still victorious.

Mr. Kennedy Hunter had been foiled once again. This knowledge acted as a splendid tonic to the rebels, and they were all fired with one grim resolve. There was to be no surrender, and the fight was to continue.

They were determined to stick to their guns until victory was won!

THE END

NEXT WFFK!—(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 First Chapters.

GEORGE GRAY, his brother JACK, and WILSON, are three members of the Berlin Rovers, a football Club in Germany. When war breaks out they are interned in a camp at Oberhemmel, but one night they manage to escape. The alarm, however, is given, and there is nothing to do but to run for it. Kutz, a brutal gaoler, gives chase.

(Now read on.)

THE END OF KUTZ.

AT first Kutz did not realise his danger. It was not until several bullets had whizzed by, close to his head, that he began to think that he had better leave the road, and trust to the patrol to overtake the Britishers.

After all, what chance did they stand, in an enemy country, especially as the countryside would be roused and search made in every hole and corner? The Grays and the man Wilson would never succeed in their mad adventure.

Yes. He would leave it to the others.

So he swung aside from the road, leaping for safety.

As he did so, George Gray instinctively seized Jack and pulled him down, while he called to Wilson to throw himself upon the road.

They plunged down, and not a moment too soon.

As they fell the air literally crackled with echoing rifle-shots, while from one point a machine-gun blazed away. The Germans had got the wind up in earnest, perhaps because they knew that the wire that shut the camp in was no longer electrified.

Even the sentries blazed away, and the bullets hissed and whistled everywhere.

Kutz had not the sense to throw himself down; probably did not realise his peril.

And so, even as he reached the margin of the road, a bullet struck him, and his death-scream went shrilling along the road.

Up he threw his arms, and rising on his toes, stood for a moment poised. As he did so, several other bullets thudded home, and down he plunged upon his face.

George shuddered. He heard the scream and the fall.

Kutz lay a few yards away from him. He sprang erect, ran to him, bent over him, turned him upon his back, and tried to look into his face.

As he did so the beam of a searchlight flooded the road, and much of the fields on each side of it. It played upon the face of the traitor and revealed George to his enemies.

George saw glassy eyes looking up into his, and, slipping his hand to the region of the heart, felt for the beat there.

There was no response.

He rose and looked along the road, to see spurts of flame flashing from the soldiers' rifles.

He turned and looked at the others.

Wilson and Jack were pausing, irresolute, with the beam of the searchlight fastened upon them, wondering what they could do.

The bullets were whistling all around them.

"Kutz is dead!" he cried hoarsely. "I believe several bullets struck him. At any rate, he's gone, and he deserved his fate. It'll be our turn next, if we don't watch out——"

"Which way can we go, George?" asked Wilson, looking round him in every direction, like a stag at bay.

"Across the fields. The road is no longer safe. Quick! Come on!"

So he leapt clear of the road, and they followed him.

On they blundered, on and on, from one field to another, until they could run no longer.

George felt as if his brain were about to burst and his heart to stop. Jack was exhausted. Even the stalwart Wilson had had enough.

Suddenly Jack fell prone among the cabbages through which they were forcing their way, and lay there, unable to move.

The searchlight still followed them with its beam.

George uttered a groan.

"Down with you, Wilson. We have done our best. We can do no more. Lie close; it is our only chance."

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

And so they lay there, in the damp, with the rain lying upon the cabbage leaves, while their enemies hunted for them everywhere. Search-parties had been organised, and were scouring the fields, searching the houses near, tramping along the road, and leaving nothing undone to discover the whereabouts of the fugitives, while cheer after cheer rang from the lips of the prisoners in the hated camp, who knew by this time the names of the three men who had managed to get away, and who had been the cause of all the hullabaloo.

All through the night they lay in the field among the cabbages, while at times their enemies came perilously close.

At last the searchlight went out. Then the day broke, and in the dawn they peered about them.

George uttered a low cry. Why, they were not more than four hundred yards away from the main road, even now. And everywhere their enemies swarmed. What was to become of them? How could they escape? Was their luck to forsake them at the last, and would they be sent back to the hated camp after all they'd suffered?

Such were the thoughts that flashed across his mind, and in the hopeless grey of the heavy morning he found no answer anywhere.

A DARING MOVE.

TO be free, and yet in danger of capture at any moment. To have risked so much, done so much, and yet to find themselves still within sight of the hated camp, with the town looming above them at the rise of the hill, only a short distance away, and enemies swarming everywhere, would have broken the bravest of spirits. Small wonder, then, is it that the hearts of the escaped prisoners sank as they lay amid the cabbages, in the rain-soaked field, cold and miserable, hardly daring to raise their heads for fear of being seen.

They were hungry, cold, and a prey to reaction. They ate the raw leaves and prayed for guidance, for hope seemed to have left them.

Now and then one or another would camouflage his head with a torn cabbage-leaf and look about him. And they had good cause for fear.

A mist hung over the ground. Through this mist they saw the soldiers hunting like hounds over the fields. The work was being systematically done.

Well, they could do nothing but lie low and wait.

At last, exhausted, Jack fell asleep, and George, lying full length, his head supported upon some stumps, nursed his brother as a mother nurses her child.

Wilson, grim and silent and very pale, but as alert and watchful as ever, kept guard.

Sometimes they heard voices near. Once the enemy were within twenty yards of them; but luck came their way. The searchers passed on, and all was quiet again.

Then the rain began to fall again, lightly but persistently, and all around them the country was grey and moist. The rain seemed to dishearten the searchers, and towards the middle of the day everything about them was quiet.

Presently George's eyes closed from sheer fatigue, and he slept.

He must have slept for hours before a firm hand shook him into life again. Wilson was looking at him, whispering in his ear.

"It's all right. I don't think they'll find us before night. We've got a chance."

A chance! George blinked, widened his eyes, and looked up, to find that evening was upon them. The day ended in gloom. Night came suddenly, and soon.

He screened his face and looked in the direction of the road.

There was the distant camp; there the white line of the well-made highway leading to the town. He could hear voices, but saw no one.

"Have you been asleep?" asked George of Wilson.

"No, my lad. One of us had to keep watch. We've had some close squeaks, too. I can tell you. They brought out the dogs, but the beasts couldn't pick up any scent. We'll make a move as soon as the day shuts in."

"Right," said George, stretching his cramped and numbed limbs as well as he could while lying. Jack still slept, and the boy looked very white and ill. It would be a pity to rouse him until it was time to move on, George thought.

Half an hour later he gently wakened his brother, and the three of them, making for the main road, passed along it, walking firmly, looking out for enemies as they went, but taking the road that led them from the town.

In this way they trudged, stiff and tired at first, but with greater vigour after a time, until they came to a side road. Along this they made their way, passing several groups of old farm labourers as they went.

"Good-night!" sang out one of the Germans.

"Good-night and good luck!" answered George in the language, and with a perfect accent. His heart was in his mouth, but they were not challenged, and walked on.

And presently, ahead of them in the darkness, they saw a red tail-light of a waggon or some other vehicle gleaming. They heard men talking, and hesitated whether to proceed or not.

Desperation urged them on.

"We must risk it; and, besides, it's neck or nothing!" whispered Wilson, who kept up amazingly, seeing how tired he must have been.

So they hurried on, and at close range saw that there were several carts, stacked high with hay, drawn up at the side of the road, and that the men in charge of them were

(Continued overleaf.)

standing in a group, smoking and discussing the chances of the war.

The men stood by the foremost cart. There were three of them.

"George!" whispered Wilson.

"Yes?"

"They are old men. It's hard on them, perhaps, but it's our only chance. Let's attack them, beat 'em down, truss 'em up, and steal the carts if we can."

George gasped at the daring of the plan, but with a nod he agreed.

"Jack," he said, "will you do your share? Remember, they are Huns. We must do it, or go back to the camp."

"Anything but that, George, old man. I'm with you!"

George handed his younger brother a stick he'd picked up on the road.

"Use that," said he. "Wilson and I will manage with our fists. Now, quick, before they suspect."

The three waggoners had stopped talking, evidently suspicious of the strangers. George, Wilson, and Jack advanced straight towards them, George calling out a greeting in German as he came. And then—

In a flash George had struck one of the men a crushing blow on the jaw, which bundled him over like a ninepin. Wilson, with a punch and a trip, dropped number two, the biggest of the three, whilst Jack, with a well-directed blow from his stick, hit the other senseless to the earth.

While he looked at the fallen man, George and Wilson struggled fiercely with their victims, hitting without mercy, until they too, were quiet.

"Jack, quick, go to the carts, and see if there's any rope there," ordered George.

Jack sprang like a madman to the waggons. Yes, there was rope, and plenty of it, on the footboard of the very first waggon, coiled in neat and orderly fashion. He brought it back with him, and five minutes later the three men had been stripped of their coats, were tied hand and foot, and gagged as neatly as could be. Wilson and George took care that each should be able to breathe, and the men were then lifted and carried off the road, and dumped down in the field close by.

"Now," said Wilson, with a short, nervous laugh, for the fight had unnerved him a little, "I'll drive the first waggon; Jack, you take the second. George, you bring up the rear, and let's get on the move without loss of time."

"Ah, but which way are we to go?" asked George, in perplexity.

"Straight on."

"Do you know where the road leads to?"

"No."

"Then I say right about, and through Oberhemmel. We shall know where we are then. Quick!"

"Back 'past the camp, George?" asked Jack, wonderingly.

"Yes, boy."

"Think of the risk!"

"We must take it. And, after all, bold measures will be best, perhaps."

Quickly each slipped on the dry coat he had taken from the waggoners, pulled the stolen caps down over their heads, and, mounting each his cart, they swung the horses round and went at a jog-trot along the road in the direction of the camp.

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY,

UNDER THE TITLE OF

"STICKING TO THEIR GUNS!"

Will deal with the further Thrilling Adventures of Nipper and his Remove Revolutionary Army against the Hunnish Housemaster, Mr. Hunter.

Don't Miss

"STICKING TO THEIR GUNS!"

On Any Account!

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

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