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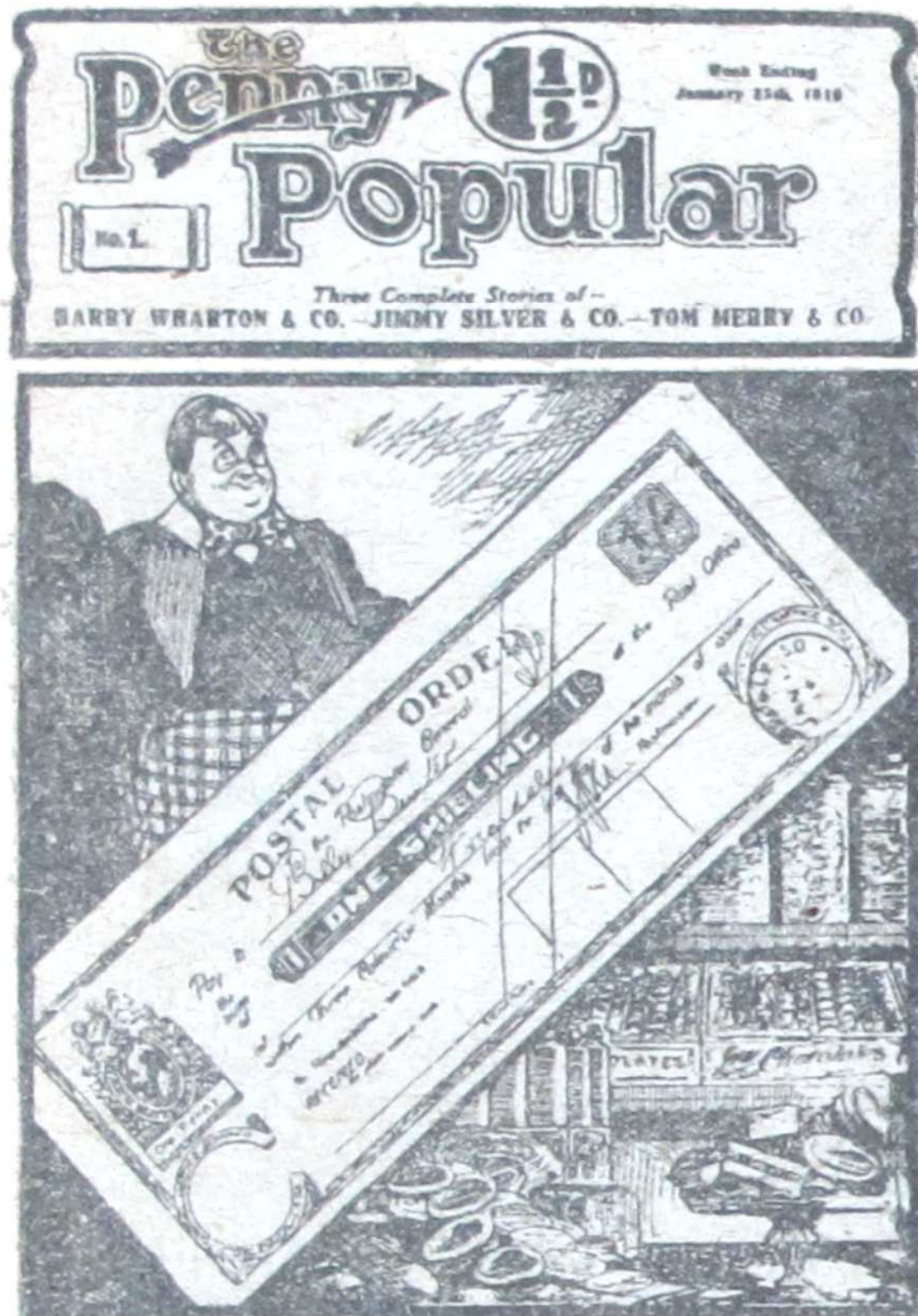


In silence the Colonel's bedroom was entered, and the search began through the pockets of his coat.

UNDER THE HEEL; Or, A MASTER'S TYRANNY!

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S. By the Author of "The Freak of St. Frank's," "Discipline Let Loose," "The Soldier Housemaster," etc. Jan. 25, 1919.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

PLOTTERS OF THE NIGHT.

"**R**EVOLT!" said Talmadge, of the Remove.

He looked round at his companions with a grim expression.

"It's the only way out of it," he went on firmly. "If we're going to jib against all this military discipline rot of Clinton's, revolt is the order of the day. And if we all stick together we shall win."

"What about the Head?" asked Clapson uneasily.

"A mutiny in the Remove won't be disrespectful to the Head," replied Talmadge. "We shall simply be bucking against the colonel's tyranny. If the Head likes to chuck Clinton out, we'll surrender as meekly as lambs. Or even if Clinton drops this discipline business—that'll do just as well."

"It's too jolly risky," said Oldfield, shaking his head.

And there were many juniors who agreed with him. A revolt was a serious step, and it involved drastic punishment if the movement failed—which was not a supposition to be lightly cast aside. Unless carried through boldly and ruthlessly, a mutiny was almost doomed to disaster.

And there was no boy in the College House Remove who could actually be called a great leader. Bob Christine, the Remove skipper on the College House side, was the chief mover in all Form matters, but even he wasn't capable of conducting a mutiny with a positive assurance of success. Moreover, Christine wasn't available, and the rest of the Monks were rather lost without him.

The meeting was a whispered one, and took place in almost total darkness. For the hour was just eleven-thirty, and the scene was the Remove dormitory in the College House at St. Frank's.

Lights had been out for nearly two hours, but not a junior had slept. The events of the day had been such that it was felt that something had to be done. There had been talks of this kind before, but they had always ended in smoke, so to speak. But on this occasion it seemed likely that a move would be made.

For matters had reached a head in the College House.

Colonel Howard Clinton, the new House-master, had aroused his boys to such a pitch of desperation that inactivity and tame submission was no longer possible. Human endurance can stand much, but the colonel had overstepped the mark.

Ever since he had arrived at St. Frank's, at the beginning of the term, Clinton had imposed upon the College House juniors a harsh military discipline which was not only out of place, but an absurd farce. The Ancient House, and all the seniors, regarded Clinton as a freak. The College House Removites—who suffered most at the colonel's hands—regarded him as an utter beast.

And certainly they had excellent reason. For the soldier Housemaster had set himself out to make the juniors detest him. But they feared him as well, and until this night there had been no really serious thought of mutiny.

Life in the College House had been something in the nature of a nightmare for the past two or three weeks—that is, life regarded from the standpoint of the Remove. Drilling had been the order of the day—drilling, parading, route-marching. This had been bad enough while the colonel had conducted the drilling personally. But matters had been tremendously worsened by the arrival of Sergeant Donnell.

This man had been imported to St. Frank's by Clinton, and he had been invested with the most preposterous powers. He could punish the juniors as he liked; he could give

them what orders he chose; and no boy dare answer him back without swift punishment following.

All Removites and juniors of lower Forms were compelled to salute both the sergeant and Colonel Clinton at all meetings. The thing was unbearable; but yet it had been borne so far.

And Donnell was a bully of the worst type. It was bad enough to have him in the school in the capacity of drill instructor; but he was ten times worse than that. He spied upon the boys, shadowed them, and reported every little delinquency. Things had reached such a stage now that no junior could feel comfortable in eating his own tea in the privacy of his own study.

Privacy, indeed, was no more. And all this because of Colonel Clinton's insane idea to enforce a strict discipline. It was generally agreed that the Housemaster had "a bee in his bonnet" on the subject. He had even instituted a system of sentry duty, and always referred to the College House as "the barracks." The state of affairs was akin to a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera—from the point of view of an onlooker. The fellows who had to suffer the tyranny thought something very different.

At first Christine and Co. had appealed to the Head. But Dr. Stafford could not side with the juniors against their own Housemaster—such a thing was impossible. But the Head knew exactly what was going on, and he had already communicated with the school governors, urging them to give Clinton his marching orders without a moment's delay.

But the governors were not a brisk body of gentlemen, and there was really no telling how long Clinton would remain. Dr. Stafford himself was the Headmaster, but he didn't possess the authority to give Clinton the sack. The colonel was a Housemaster, and an important person. Had he been a mere Form-master, things would have been very different.

And matters had gone from bad to worse. Naturally enough, the juniors resented the constant drills and parades. Outbreaks of a minor character were inevitable, and a flood of punishments had followed.

As a crowning incident, Bob Christine had attacked Sergeant Donnell, and had actually knocked the bullying instructor out of time. For this offence—which, in strict truth, had been fully justified—Christine had been sentenced to a terrible flogging and cells for a week.

Several attics had been converted into cells by the freak Housemaster. And in one of these Christine was suffering his solitary confinement. During the whole seven days he would not be allowed to speak to a soul, and his fare would consist of nothing but bread-and-water. It was a brutal punishment, and one which would not have been allowed to be inflicted if the Headmaster had known of it.

But Dr. Stafford lived in a world apart from the juniors, and they did not think of

sneaking. It was far better to act for themselves—and that was the object of this nocturnal meeting in the dormitory.

Bob Christine's lot was not quite so bad as the majority of the fellows believed. For Tregellis-West and Watson and I—Nipper—had taken a hand in the game the previous night. Unknown to a soul, we had mounted to the roof of the College House at midnight, and had taken Christine, via a trap-door in the ceiling of his prison, a supply of blankets and books and luxuries in the eating line. So he was not likely to suffer very considerably.

But I'm wrong when I say that we did this unknown to a soul. For Nelson Lee, my respected gov'nor, had spotted us just as we were about to mount the ladder to the roof. Like the splendid sport he is, Nelson Lee allowed us to carry on—although, of course, the fact that he knew was to be kept strictly secret. He knew well enough that we were engaged upon an errand of mercy, and, although he was our Housemaster, he hadn't the heart to punish us for breaking bounds after lights-out.

In the morning we had told Yorke and Talmadge, Bob Christine's two particular chums. But nobody else knew, and the fact that Christine was not suffering as the colonel intended him to suffer made no difference to the general situation.

As Charlie Talmadge had said, the only course was to revolt.

And that needed very serious thinking over. There were a great many details to consider. The greatest drawback was the thought that a mutiny would collapse. In that case, the juniors' lot would be terrible indeed.

But the whole position was so utterly wretched that the Removites were beginning to become reckless and desperate. A great many of them didn't care what happened, and this argument was propounded with much emphasis by Yorke.

"Supposing we revolt, and the whole thing collapses?" he said. "What's going to happen? We shall be punished; but Clinton can't flog the whole Remove. He'd impose a general gating, or extra drills."

"That would be nice, wouldn't it?" growled Nation.

"Well, it wouldn't be much worse than things are now," retorted Yorke. "What time have we got to ourselves? When can we go out to the village, or on to the playing-fields? It's nothing else but drilling—rotten discipline from morning till night. Even if we fail we sha'n't be any worse off."

"That's true enough," said Talmadge. "And if we only stick out we shall win. The idea is to revolt in a body—just like the Ancient House fellows did when they jibbed against that beast Hunter."

"Great Scott! A barring-out?" breathed Oldfield.

Talmadge shook his head.

"That's impossible," he said. "Nipper and those other chaps had the advantage of summer weather, and it was comparatively easy to sleep out of doors. But where could

we go, with frost and snow on the ground? No, we've got to stick here—and the College House is no place for a barring-out."

"Then what can we do?"

"Mutiny—strike," said Talmadge grimly. "Simply refuse to do any more drills, or to salute, or parade. We'll go in to lessons, of course, and we'll stick to every school rule. We mustn't have a general mutiny—only against this discipline. If we did anything else we should shove ourselves in the wrong at once. It'll be a revolt against Clinton and Donnell. And when the Head sees that we're determined, he'll force the colonel to change his tactics."

"Perhaps!" grunted Nation.

"Well, I'm going to suggest a good way of starting the mutiny, anyhow," said Yorke. "We can't very well do anything without Christine. Before the morning—now, at once, in fact—we've got to rescue our skipper. We've got to fetch him out of that rotten attic."

There were several grunts.

"Oh, talk sense!" snapped Oldfield. "How the dickens can we rescue Christine? You know jolly well he's locked in. Those attics have got two patent locks on each door—and the colonel keeps the keys. If we tried to smash down the door the whole House would be roused."

"I'm not suggesting anything so fat-headed as that," said Yorke. "Look here if you chaps are funky you'd better say so. But this thing's got to be done boldly, and I'm willing to take my chance with the rest of you."

"Why don't you speak plainly, you ass?" growled Talmadge.

"That's what I am doing," went on his chum. "The colonel's got the keys, I know, and he carries them in his pocket—I've seen him pull 'em out. What does a man do with his trousers when he's in bed?"

"Hangs them on a bed-post or a chair, or something."

"Then, all we've got to do is to sneak into Clinton's bedroom and pinch his keys," said Yorke grimly. "If we go at it quietly he won't wake up, and we shall have Christine out in next to no time."

There was a short silence. Roddy Yorke's plan was bold in the extreme, and the juniors were rather taken aback. To enter the Housemaster's bedroom and to take his keys was an extraordinarily daring idea. But it was certainly the only way, if Christine was to be rescued.

"It's a bit thick," said Clapson slowly. "Supposing the colonel wakes up?"

"Well, what can he do?" asked Yorke. "He won't be able to see who's in his bedroom, and the chaps can nip out in a tick. But the chances are that they'll be undisturbed, and will get the keys easily."

"They?" repeated Nation. "Ain't you going?"

"I might; it all depends," said Yorke. "In an affair like this I reckon we ought to draw lots. That'll be absolutely fair. Three

chaps must go, and we ought to decide which three straight away."

"That's only reasonable, of course," agreed Turner. "I'm blessed if I want to go, but I don't mind standing my chance. How's it going to be decided?"

"We'll tear some paper up into little bits—one scrap for every chap here," replied Yorke briskly. "All the pieces will be blank except three, and they'll be marked. The fellows who get those marked papers will have to go."

Nobody could object to this scheme, although several juniors—those of weaker spirit—felt like doing so. To have objected, however, would have been to label themselves cowards, and there was no murmur of dissent.

The lots were soon drawn, and, curiously enough, both Yorke and Talmadge picked marked papers. The third fellow was Harron, who was a self-reliant junior, with heaps of pluck. The choice could not have been better.

"It's no good wasting time," said Yorke crisply. "We'll start right off."

"But Clinton may not be in bed yet," objected Talmadge.

"H'm! I forgot that," said Yorke. "It's not twelve yet, is it? I suppose we'd better wait until after midnight, so's to give the beast plenty of time to get to sleep. Meanwhile, we'll be dressing."

Yorke was proving his worth as a leader now that it was necessary. Hitherto he had never had any cause to assert himself in any particular way, but he was undoubtedly conducting this project with great success. And the other juniors were quite ready to follow his lead.

Midnight boomed out soon after the chosen three had donned their clothing. All the other fellows were huddled in their beds, sitting up with the bedclothes tucked securely round them.

There was no hurry whatever, for the Remove had the whole night, if necessary. But after the quarter-past had chimed, Talmadge and Harron became impatient, and voted for an immediate move.

"Clinton must have been asleep for hours," said Harron. "He went up to bed just after ten, and there's no prospect of his being awake now. Let's buck up and get it over."

"I'm ready!" said Yorke promptly. "Wish us luck, you chaps."

"And don't go to sleep until we get back," added Talmadge.

They were assured that everybody would remain awake, and departed from the dormitory with hopes of good fortune expressed by many whispered voices. It was a risky project, and if it succeeded the position would still be serious. For it would mean that the die was cast and the revolt was inevitable. With Christine free, Colonel Clinton would have been defied, and it would be madness to abandon the mutiny as soon as it had started.

The three juniors crept along the passages as silently as three shadows, Yorke leading

the way. Talmadge wore felt slippers, but the other two didn't possess any, and so they were each wearing three pairs of socks—their own and four pairs belonging to other boys, who willingly lent them for the occasion. In such freezing weather this protection was necessary.

Thus provided, however, the midnight plotters made no sound, and they arrived outside the door of Colonel Clinton's bedroom without incident. And now that the great moment had arrived even Yorke, the ringleader, was feeling somewhat nervous. He would have been a peculiarly constituted fellow had he felt differently. It was something like bearding the lion in his own den.

But Yorke did not hang back.

"I'll go in first!" he breathed. "You'd better come in with me, Tally. You stop at the door, Harron."

"Good!" whispered Harron, with relief.

Yorke turned the handle, and the door opened noiselessly. The two juniors stole into the room without making the slightest sound. But they felt inclined to dodge back, for the bedroom was not in darkness, as they had anticipated.

A fire was blazing in the grate, and the flickering light illuminated the apartment brilliantly—at least, so it seemed to the juniors, who had just come out of the darkness of the passage. And the colonel, if he awakened, would be able to see and recognise the intruders on the instant.

This was most disquieting, but there could be no backing out now. Yorke paused after he had entered about a yard, and gazed round at the bed almost fearfully. He half expected to find Clinton eyeing him with that cold, grim look of his.

"Great Scott!" gasped Yorke.

"Shut up, you ass!"

"But—but he isn't here!" ejaculated Yorke, the relief in his tone very apparent. "Well, I'm jiggered! We've come for nothing."

Both Talmadge and Harron came right into the room now, quite bold. Yorke was quite right; Colonel Clinton was not in the bedroom, and the bed itself was undisturbed, proving that it had not been slept in.

"It's queer, ain't it?" breathed Talmadge. "Where the thunder can he be at this time of night? And what's that on the foot of the bed? Looks like Clinton's coat, doesn't it?"

The colonel had been wearing a tweed suit during the day, and all three juniors at once recognised the coat. Further, the trousers and waistcoat were hanging on the opposite knob of the bed.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it," remarked Yorke. "But it's as clear as daylight that Clinton came up here, changed his clothes, and went out again. What can it mean?"

"Rats to that!" said Talmadge. "I don't care what the colonel does! Let's see if the keys are in the pocket of those trucks. That's what we've come for—and it'll be a walk-over if we find 'em straight away!"

This seemed too much to expect, but it turned out to be true. There was only one key, however—at least, one key which could fit the locks of the attics. It simply proved that all the locks were of the same design, with a master-key for the lot.

This was all the better, and Yorke quickly took the key from the bunch of others and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now we'll make ourselves scarce," he murmured softly.

They could hardly credit their good fortune. It had been dead easy, and all three juniors felt that it would be wonderful if they succeeded in escaping without an encounter with the colonel.

The door was closed softly, and the trio stood in the darkness of the passage.

"We'd better get back to the dormitory," suggested Yorke. "We'll listen for Clinton, and then go up to Christy later on. It'll be too risky to wander about the passages while the colonel is——"

"Cave!" hissed Talmadge in sudden alarm.

Somebody was ascending the stairs! And that somebody, without a doubt, was Colonel Clinton! In another five seconds he would be in the corridor—and the plotters would be caught red-handed!

CHAPTER II.

THE DECISION OF THE MONKS.

YORKE was the first to make a move.

"Quick!" he gasped. "There's a recess at the end of the passage, and our only chance is to crouch in it. Follow me!"

There was no time for objection, although both Talmadge and Harron firmly believed that they would be detected. The trio stole along the passage silently, and reached the recess just a second before the colonel appeared—for it was the colonel.

It was a moment of great tension.

Clinton arrived at his bedroom door, opened it, and passed within. The juniors saw a flood of light come out into the passage as the colonel touched the switch. The boys were now clearly visible, if the colonel should happen to glance out of his doorway. But he didn't.

He closed the door, and the Removites heard the key turn in the lock. They breathed three sighs of relief.

"A jolly near thing!" whispered Talmadge. "We'd better scoot!"

"Not yet," advised Yorke. "We can easily slip away if we hear him unlock his door again; but that's not likely. And I want to make sure that he's in his bedroom for good. Keep quiet and listen!"

His companions obeyed, and it was a comparatively easy matter for the three to guess what was going on within Colonel Clinton's bedroom. They heard the Housemaster poke the fire up; they heard him moving about as he undressed. Two soft thuds announced the fact that he had taken his boots off.

And, finally, a slight creaking of springs

made it fully evident that the colonel had got into bed. But the light was still on; a streak was escaping from beneath the door.

"Reading in bed, I suppose," muttered Talmadge. "It may be hours——"

"There it goes!" breathed Yorke.

The streak of light had suddenly disappeared. The colonel had a switch just over the head of his bed, and there was now no doubt that Clinton would not interrupt the proceedings which the juniors had planned.

It was just as well to be sure that the Housemaster was in bed. Yorke and Talmadge and Harron did not trouble themselves further with wondering why it was that Clinton should have been out at such an hour of the night. The boys were thinking of Christine, and they made the next move immediately.

"We'll go straight up to the attic now," whispered Yorke. "No sense in returning to the dormitory without Christine. Come on, my sons."

The plotters, greatly satisfied with their work so far, stole along the corridor and soon arrived at the stairway which led up to the attics. They had burned their boats now, so to speak. The key had been taken from Colonel Clinton's pocket, and it could not be replaced, either—since Clinton's door was locked.

It had only been by a mere fluke, indeed, that they had obtained the key at all. Yorke's original scheme of taking the key from the colonel's pocket while the colonel himself lay in bed asleep would have been doomed to failure. The plan had only succeeded because Clinton had been absent.

The boys knew which "cell" Christine occupied. It was the third one from the end of the upper passage. And, arriving at the door, the rescuers received a bit of a surprise.

A light, weak and flickering, was gleaming under the door.

"The boulder must be awake," murmured Yorke. "Oh, I know! I expect he's having a feed——"

"How can he feed without any grub?" murmured Harron.

"You don't know, do you?" grinned Yorke. "Nipper and those other chaps of Study C brought Christy a whole pile of grub last night—blankets and books and candles, and all sorts of things."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" breathed Harron. "That was jolly decent of 'em!"

"Rather! Nipper's a real sport!"

Yorke fumbled with the door, and found the lower keyhole. Click! The key fitted perfectly and turned with ease. The second lock, at the top of the door, was just as easily conquered, and the door swung open.

The light had now been extinguished, and some very pronounced snores were coming from the direction of Bob Christine's bed. It was well done; but those snores couldn't obliterate the smell which had arisen from the snuffed candle—to say nothing of a distinct odour of sardines.

"Chuck it, you ass!" grinned Yorke.

"What the dickens did you put the candle out for?"

A gasp came from the darkness.

"Yorkey!" ejaculated Christine. "Oh, my hat!"

"We've come to rescue you, old son," said Yorke. "Talmadge and Harron are with me, and you needn't pretend to be asleep. Light that candle again."

A match spluttered, and Bob Christine was soon gazing at his chums with blank astonishment.

"You gave me a terrific start," he said. "I thought it was old Clinton—and I shoved biscuits and sardines and all sorts of things under the bed. I know jolly well that three or four blobs of candle-grease fell into the sardines."

"It'll improve the flavour!" grinned Talmadge. "It seems to me that you've been having a jolly fine time up here——"

"Oh, yes, rather—I don't think!" interrupted Christine sarcastically. "It's a fine time when a chap has to get a bit of decent grub in the middle of the night—and then only biscuits and cold stuff. Nipper's a fine chap for bringing all that grub, and I'm hugely grateful, but I'd give a month's pocket-money for some hot tea or coffee!"

He regarded his rescuers wonderingly.

"But how the dickens did you manage it?" he went on. "I'm blessed if I can get the hang of things. I suppose you've just come to pay a call."

Yorke lost no time in explaining, and the Remove skipper grew very serious. When at last he knew the exact truth he frowned with perplexity.

"It's jolly good of you to take all these risks," he said. "But what's the good of it? We can't mutiny—the discipline's too jolly strict for that——"

Yorke stared.

"Well, you're a fine leader!" he said indignantly. "We've rescued you so that you can take command of things. Everybody in the Remove is awake—waiting for us to bring you back. We've all decided not to stand the colonel's tyranny any longer. We're going to revolt against it."

"It's a serious step," said Christine dubiously.

"Of course it is—we know that," put in Talmadge. "But we sha'n't try to get out of lessons, or anything of that sort. The idea is to jib against all drills and parades and saluting. The only way to put a stop to the foolery is to act in unison."

"That's the word," said Yorke approvingly.

"It sounds all right," said Christine, who was more farseeing than his chums. "But would it pan out quite so beautifully? Clinton's got the upper hand——"

"If you don't want to lead us, you can stop here," said Yorke tartly.

Christine grinned.

"Don't be an ass!" he said calmly. "It's the Form's decided. I'm with it—right through to the last. And I'll take the lead, too. But it's just as well to think of all the

aspects of the case. The Remove is ripe for revolt—well, revolt it's going to be! And the best thing we can do is to get down to the dormitory and hold a discussion."

Bob Christine, although still doubtful, was instantly ready to take up the reins. And the cell was vacated, and the four juniors stole down the passage. But Christine suddenly remembered the food and the blankets and the candles. So the attic was again visited, and everything was cleared out except the furniture and the bedclothes which had been provided by Clinton. The key was left in the lock—and Clinton could think what he liked. He would know the truth, anyhow, by the absence of the key from his bunch.

Arriving at the Remove dormitory, Bob Christine was hailed with enthusiasm. Only one or two fellows had dozed off, and these were very soon awake again. Christine's remaining stock of biscuits, etc., was soon demolished and got out of the way. And the blankets and books were stowed away in the cupboard—to say nothing of sundry empty tins and some odd candles.

"Well, you've done it," remarked Page, half nervously.

"Do you think we were going to stand Clinton's beastly tyranny for much longer?" demanded Yorke. "He may be a ripping scholar, but his spell in the Army ruined him for a schoolmaster. He's dotty on discipline."

"It wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for Donnell," said Christine thoughtfully. "I think we ought to make our main complaint against the sergeant. We'll demand his dismissal, and the colonel will probably drop everything else—"

"That won't do," objected Yorke. "Probably is no good. This mutiny is simply against the military tyranny—and nothing else. If we all refuse to salute, or to do any drilling, Clinton can't force us. We've only got to stand firm and we shall win."

Bob Christine nodded.

"The Head will step in, of course," he said. "If Dr. Stafford upholds Clinton, we shall have to rebel against the Head too. But I don't believe he will uphold the beast—he can't. He'll see that we've got a just cause, I reckon, and he'll advise Clinton to moderate his discipline. There won't be any complete surrender, my sons."

"There's got to be!" declared Talmadge.

"It's all very well to talk, but the Head's prestige would be gone for good if he tamely knuckled under," said Christine. "The same applies to Clinton. We shall be satisfied if the colonel agrees to sack Donnell and relax the discipline. Within a week things will be normal."

"Christine's right," said Yorke thoughtfully. "If we demand too much we sha'n't get anything at all. We've got to be moderate. But I vote we flout Donnell openly—refuse to recognise him. We'll cut him dead, and squash him if he interferes with any of us."

"That's the idea," agreed Christine. "He's

a disgrace to St. Frank's, and we're not called upon to obey his rotten orders. The Head will send him packing, even if Clinton doesn't. It's no good complaining to the Head in the ordinary way; we've tried that. Open revolt is our only course."

"It'll mean the sack for the ringleaders," said one junior.

"Christine and Yorke, I expect," remarked another.

"And we shall all be flogged and gated——"

"Look here, I don't want to hear any growls!" snapped Christine crossly. "If any of you fellows are funky, you can stand out—you can go on as usual, and obey Donnell, and do all the rotten drills. I'm not asking a single chap to come into this revolt if he doesn't want to. That's plain."

"It'll be a lot better if the Remove sticks together solidly," said Yorke. "The College House Remove, I mean. We don't want any blacklegs. If any funk stands out he'll be barred by all the rest of us!"

"Rather!"

"We're all in it together!"

Nine-tenths of the juniors were eager for the revolt; and the waverers were soon won over. The mutiny would lose half its strength if several fellows refused to take part in it.

It was only natural that a few weak spirits should desire to back out; but the feeling in the Remove was too strong, and the weaklings were compelled to fall into line with the rest.

"I'm thinking about the morning," said Christine slowly. "Clinton will know all about my escape before the rising-bell rings. Donnell will go up to the attic early, I expect, and he'll find it empty. Then the colonel will come along here, and catch us napping. I shall be collared and hauled back into that 'cell' before we can do a giddy thing."

"We shall have to be up early," said Yorke.

"Rats!" growled several voices.

"It's the only way," said Christine sharply. "You can get up before rising-bell for once, I suppose? By half-past seven every chap will be downstairs—and then we sha'n't be at a disadvantage. Some of you don't seem to realise the seriousness of this thing. If we're going to revolt, we're going to revolt properly—or not at all. Half-hearted measures are absolutely fatal."

"We're in grim earnest," said Talmadge.

"You are—and so am I," went on Christine. "But if we're going to be let down by the other chaps——"

"I'm in earnest, you ass!" snorted Yorke.

"It was my idea, mainly!"

"Of course you're included, Yorkey," said Christine. "I'm referring to those other chaps. If they mean to leave us in the cart we won't have any mutiny. I'll go back to the attic, and you can lock me in and chuck the key away. Clinton will think he's lost it."

Several juniors protested warmly.

"No jolly fear!" said Clapson. "We've started—and we'll go on!"

"Yes, rather!"

"That's what I thought," said Christine. "But it's just as well to be sure. Once we've actually started in the morning we can't chuck it up. So we might as well reach a positive decision now."

"I vote for a determined revolt," said Yorke.

"And so do I!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Complete defiance of military discipline!"

"Rather!"

"Down with Donnell!"

The Remove was practically of one voice, and Bob Christine no longer doubted the determination of the fellows to go through with the mutiny. The juniors' grievance was a serious one, and a desperate remedy was needed.

And at that night meeting the die was cast.

Things had reached a pass, and further submission was impossible. In the morning Colonel Howard Clinton would find that the smouldering fire had burst into a dangerous flame.

CHAPTER III.

GETTING THEIR OWN BACK.

"NOT so cold this morning," I remarked cheerfully.

"It'll be thawing by this evening, I'll bet," said Tommy Watson, with a grunt. "Just our luck! The ice on the river is first class at present, and we only had a few days' skating."

I grinned.

"It's no good grumbling at the weather," I said. "Everybody does it; but the weather doesn't change just because people want it to. So what's the good of grumbling?"

"Dear old boy, I was never good at conundrums," observed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, carefully getting into his elegant trousers. "But you are quite right in sayin' that the weather ain't so cold. I expect the snow's meltin' in the Triangle."

We were in the Remove dormitory in the Ancient House, and the rising-bell had gone some little time before. Fellows were in various stages of dressing on all sides, and others still clung to their beds. It was the general habit of some juniors to lie between the sheets, calculating to a second how long it would take them to get washed and dressed. At the very last moment they would scramble into their clothing, pretend to wash, and scrape down just in time.

But I preferred to dress leisurely and wash thoroughly, and, of course, there were a good many juniors who followed my example. It was only the slackers who loved their beds so dearly.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Jack Grey, from the window.

"A bit surprisin'—what?" grinned De Valerie. "I expect it's another stunt of the colonel's. But Christine and Co. won't like it."

"Won't like what?" I asked.

"Come and have a look out here," said Pitt, grinning.

Several boys had collected at the dormitory windows, and I went over and joined one group. Then I saw the reason for the somewhat surprised expressions. Christine and his merry men were out in the Triangle, fully dressed, and talking together in little clumps.

"They must have got up long before rising-bell," I remarked thoughtfully. "They're not drilling, either. Great Scott, Christine's out there himself!"

"Why shouldn't he be?" asked Hubbard.

"Wasn't he sentenced to seven days' hard labour," I exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, solitary confinement, then," I amended. "How the dickens did he get out? I'll bet the colonel didn't repeal his sentence!"

Bob Christine's presence in the Triangle was very surprising. And it was also evident that the Monks were in a considerable state of excitement. Something was apparently "on."

We hastened with our dressing, being anxious to get down in order to question the College House fellows and to learn what was in the wind.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I were among the first to sally out into the Triangle. It wasn't exactly thawing, but was just on the verge. The snow was still lying everywhere, now trodden down over the whole expanse of the Triangle.

Christine and Co. were gathered over by the College House, and I was just about to stroll over when Sergeant Donnell came striding out. Bob Christine saw the drill instructor at once, and gave his chums a grim look.

"Now for it!" he murmured. "Keep a stiff upper lip, my sons!"

The Monks had expected Donnell to put in an appearance long before. But it had been just as well to get down in good time. The sergeant stood on the steps and surveyed the juniors almost pleasantly.

"Up early, ain't you?" he asked. "Well, you might as well do a bit of drillin', now you're out here. And you'd best salute me, too!" he added sharply.

Donnell was a big, burly man, with a red, beery face and unpleasant little eyes. He was coarse in appearance, coarse of voice, and coarse by nature. It was an insult to the juniors to appoint this man as their drill instructor.

Only one fellow saluted in reply to the sergeant's order, and this was Dallas, who momentarily lost his nerve.

"Now then, Dallas!" shouted Christine quickly.

Sergeant Donnell turned his head, and his little eyes opened wider as he beheld Bob Christine's figure. The Remove skipper was supposed to be in his cell, and Donnell had not noticed his presence in the Triangle until this moment.

"Who let you 'out, Private Christine?" roared the sergeant.

Private Christine—it was Clinton who had

instituted the absurd system of designating the boys "privates"—took no notice whatever of Donnell's inquiry, but calmly turned his back.

"D'ye hear me, you young cub?" bellowed the sergeant.

Christine appeared to be in deep conversation with Yorke and Talmadge. The mutiny had begun! Christine was deliberately ignoring the sergeant—whereas, until this morning, the Removites had been compelled to obey Donnell's every order.

Trouble had been anticipated—and trouble came.

"You young brat!" snarled Donnell harshly.

He strode forward and grasped Christine's shoulder. But the next moment seven or eight juniors pulled at the sergeant from behind, and it sent him reeling backwards. The man was so amazed that he could only bellow incoherently for a moment or two.

"They've done it!" I exclaimed grimly. "It's a mutiny—and I don't blame the chaps, either. They're ignoring Donnell's command."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez and gazed across the Triangle.

"Bogad! There's goin' to be some excitement—there is, really," he declared, shaking his head sadly. "Dear old fellows, this is where we witness a frightful commotion."

"And a jolly good thing, too!" declared Handforth, of the Remove. "Huh! It's about time these fatheaded Monks got busy. Why, if I'd been a College House chap I wouldn't have stood that boozy rotter's non-sense for five minutes!"

"Yes, you would, Handy," I said—"you'd have been forced to. Months ago, when we had that chap Hunter in the Ancient House, we didn't think of barring out until life had grown unbearable. That's what it's like in the College House now—only, of course, the case is quite different."

We watched the happenings over by the College House with great interest.

Sergeant Donnell had found his voice again. But, by the time he recovered both his voice and his balance, the Monks had strolled off, and were quite a distance from him. The sergeant was amazed—and more than startled.

He suddenly swore with great violence, and dashed forward.

"You insubordinate young dogs!" he thundered. "Fall into line—do you hear me, hang you? Get into line! Private Christine, come here!"

Bob Christine turned this time, and stared fully at the sergeant.

"You needn't give us any orders," he said steadily. "We don't mean to obey you, Sergeant Donnell. We're fed up with your bullying."

"Good man!" roared Handforth across the Triangle.

The sergeant went red in the face with fury.

"You impudent little hound!" he shouted, dashing forward and seizing Christine. "I'll

show you whether you can cheek me or not! I'm going to give you the hiding of your life—and then you'll be sent back to your cell!"

"Rescue, Remove!" yelled Christine, struggling. "Back up, you chaps!"

There was an immediate rush. Donnell was already belabouring Christine with his heavy fists, and the sight of this rendered the juniors reckless. Even Handforth, who wasn't a College House fellow, started off across the Triangle to the rescue.

"Come back, you ass!" roared a dozen voices. "The Monks can deal with Donnell."

Handforth was persuaded to return—by the simple expedient of half a dozen fellows pelting after him and hauling him back by force. That was the only kind of persuasion which was of any use with Edward Oswald Handforth.

"You silly chump!" I growled. "It wouldn't be right for us to interfere—the Monks have revolted, not us. My hat! Donnell's going through it!"

Handforth protested vigorously, but I took no notice of him. I was gazing at the scene which was being enacted over on the other side. Bob Christine had been promptly released, and the sergeant was now in a desperate plight.

The excited Monks had now seized him, and he was sprawling in the snow, with a crowd of fellows round him like so many wasps round a jam-jar. Christine and his men had lost all control of themselves now—so far as Donnell was concerned. And the sergeant was properly put through the mill—as Christine described it afterwards.

Shouting and swearing, the man was rolled in the snow—which was now quite muddy—bumped, and roughly handled generally. After five minutes of this treatment Donnell had almost vanished beneath the coating of snow and mud, and his arrogance had completely gone.

"Give him another roll!" yelled Clapson.

"Stuff the snow down his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't let him go yet!"

"Stoppit, young gents, for mercy's sake!" gasped Donnell hoarsely. "I won't do a thing to you if you let me go!"

"We'd rather not take your word," said Christine grimly. "You're going to pay for all your bullying, you cowardly rotter!"

"Wait till the colonel knows about this!" snarled the sergeant, suddenly revealing his rage, and struggling with great violence to get free. "You'll be flogged and punished! Ugh-h-hh!"

Donnell was unable to say anything further, for Yorke had clapped a huge fistful of muddy snow into the man's mouth. He spluttered and gasped desperately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Donnell swore, and Christine grunted.

"Stop that, you blackguard!" he shouted angrily. "Here, give him another roll, you chaps! And you'd better fill up his mouth again!"

The sergeant had to pay for his blasphemy, for the juniors, thoroughly enraged,

handled him more roughly than ever. They were in revolt in earnest now, and all thoughts of nervousness had passed. Excited and reckless, they were quite ready to treat Colonel Clinton in the same way, regardless of the consequences.

Donnell was practically exhausted after a few minutes.

"Have mercy on me!" he gasped, terrified. "Lemme go, young genta!"

He whined like the coward he was, and the Removites were utterly disgusted at the exhibition.

"Oh, let him go!" growled Christine contemptuously.

"Yah! Funk!" howled a group of daring fags, who were excited onlookers.

The sergeant staggered towards the College House, a truly appalling spectacle. Mud smothered him from head to foot, and dirty snow was caked upon him so much that he shed masses of it as he walked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Donnell turned when he reached the steps.

"You'll pay for this, you young demons!" he snarled hoarsely. "You'll——"

He broke off as a crowd of juniors rushed at him. The next second the sergeant was fleeing into the House in utter terror. He vanished, and Christine and Co. gazed at one another rather breathlessly.

"That's the first round, anyhow," said Yorke, with satisfaction.

Christine nodded.

"Clinton will be out in a minute or two—raging," he said. "Be ready for him; but don't cheek him. We mustn't forget that he's our Housemaster, and the Head wouldn't give us a hearing if we were disrespectful."

"We're not going to obey his rotten orders!" snorted Talmadge.

"Not if they're connected with military discipline," said Christine. "But we shall have to obey him in other things. If he tells us to go indoors, for example, we shall have to go in. But if he starts any of his 'line up' business, he'll find we're not quite so tame!"

"Look here," said Yorke grimly, "I'm not going to obey Clinton at all—and most of the fellows are with me. What the dickens do you mean by talking this half-hearted stuff, Christine? You're supposed to be leader——"

"We're only rebelling against the discipline—that's what I mean," interrupted Christine. "But perhaps you're right, Yorke. We'll tell the colonel that we won't obey him until Donnell has been sacked."

"That's the idea—— Oh, crumbs!" gasped Talmadge. "Here he is!"

He felt rather nervous, in spite of himself. Colonel Clinton had just appeared on the College House steps. One glance was sufficient to show that the Housemaster was in a tearing fury. His face was almost purple, and his eyes were glittering with determination and harshness.

"Private Christine!" he thundered.

Bob Christine took no notice, but con-

tinued talking to Yorke and Talmadge. He was rather unsteady, but as determined as the colonel.

"Do you hear me, Private Christine?" roared Clinton furiously.

Still the junior took no notice. Everybody looked on with great interest and excitement. I wondered what would happen now, and Sir Montie and Tommy gave me significant looks. A storm was about to break.

"You insubordinate young scoundrel!" raved the colonel, striding forward. "Answer me at once, Christine!"

"Speaking to me, sir?" said Christine promptly.

"Yes, boy, I was! Why didn't you answer before?"

"I don't happen to be a private, sir—that's all!" said Christine steadily.

There was an approving murmur.

"Oh, good!" came several voices.

"You—you don't happen to be a private!" stuttered Clinton. "You insolent puppy! You good-for-nothing young rogue! Go indoors at once, and await at headquarters until I come in!"

"Do you mean your study, sir?" asked Christine. "We've decided not to call your study 'headquarters' any longer, sir. And we——"

The colonel nearly choked.

"You—you've decided!" he thundered.

"Upon my soul! The whole company of you shall suffer dearly for this! Fall into line, and march to the barrack steps. Do you hear me?" screamed the colonel.

Nobody had taken the slightest notice of him, and he glared round in amazement and rage. He—Colonel Howard John Clinton—had been defied! The colonel wondered if the world was coming to an end.

"Fall into line, you confounded brats!" he bellowed.

Christine regarded him steadily.

"It's no good shouting like that, sir," he said. "We're not going to obey you."

"What?" gasped the Housemaster dazedly.

The world certainly was coming to an end!

"The Remove has decided, sir, not to stand any further discipline," explained Bob Christine, with wonderful courage. "We have ignored Sergeant Donnell, and we don't intend to recognise him again."

"How—how dare you?" stuttered Clinton.

"It's not a question of daring, sir," said Christine. "This military discipline is a lot of rot——"

"Eh? What? What did you say, boy?"

"It's a lot of nonsense, sir," declared the rebel leader. "We're schoolboys—not soldiers or cadets. We haven't the slightest intention of being disrespectful to you, sir, and we are willing to obey your orders in all House matters. But we have revolted against the discipline and the bullying brutality of Sergeant Donnell."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, Christine!"

"And the Remove demands that Donnell shall be dismissed, sir," went on Christine firmly. "When he has left St. Frank's, and

when you have given us your promise that all military discipline shall be discontinued, we will surrender."

The colonel was fighting to recover his composure. Bob Christine had been rather led away, so to speak, and his eloquence had even taken the Monks by surprise. Christine had been absolutely daring and audacious in stating the terms of the Remove.

"I understand, Private Christine, that you are the spokesman for the Remove?" said Clinton at last, and speaking with slow deliberation. "Very good. I have been made aware of your demands. You insist upon Sergeant Donnell leaving the school; you are quite determined that discipline shall cease. Quite so. And now, I presume, you are awaiting my answer?"

Christine didn't reply; the colonel's tone was ominous.

"We want fair play, sir!" shouted somebody from the rear.

Colonel Clinton nodded. He was so furious that he was calm—a deadly, significant calmness. It was, in fact, the calm before the storm.

"I have no intention of wasting time on you," said the Housemaster. "Every boy here belonging to the College House will fall in at once and march indoors. You will go straight to the lecture hall and await my coming. Every boy who has taken part in this utterly disgraceful scene will receive a flogging, and will be confined to barracks for the remainder of the term. You, Private Christine, will suffer solitary confinement for a period of twenty-one days——"

"Oh!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

The colonel's fury burst forth in a flood.

"Silence!" he roared violently. "The next boy to speak will be——"

"Bully!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Bow him over!"

"Tell him to go to the dickens, Christine!"

The colonel started. His anger was slightly modified; he had never imagined for a moment that the juniors would defy him so boldly to his face. He had received a frozen shock, for he had thought that the boys would quietly submit. It was a mistake which most arrogant tyrants are apt to fall into.

"We only want you to drop this drilling and semi-military discipline, sir," said Christine. "If you'll give way now, this affair won't go any further; but I won't answer for the conduct of the Remove if you refuse to consider our demands."

"Your—your demands!" bellowed Clinton. "I have never heard of such scandalous impudence in all my life! I'll—I'll——"

Words failed him, and he suddenly decided that action was necessary. And the next second he flung himself forward and grasped Bob Christine fiercely and cruelly, swinging the junior round by sheer force.

"We shall see!" he snarled savagely.

Colonel Clinton, in that tense moment, was in grave danger of sharing the drill-

instructor's fate. For quite a number of fellows rushed forward to Bob Christine's rescue. Before they could do anything, however, a sharp, cold voice broke in upon the Monks' excited cries.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance, Colonel Clinton?"

There was an instant hush. Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the Head of St. Frank's, stood regarding boys and Housemaster coldly and sternly.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE KEEL!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST sighed deeply.

"Dear old boys, what a frightful pity!" he exclaimed, with regret in his voice.

"What's a pity?" growled Handforth.

"The Head comin' on the scene just at this moment," explained Montie. "I was livin' in hopes of seein' the colonel doin' his bit towards clearin' up the Triangle. Begad! It would have been really rippin' if Clinton had been treated like Donnell. He deserves it—he does, really."

"The Head always butts in like that," grunted Watson.

"Oh, well, perhaps it's best," I remarked.

"Christine and Co. wouldn't have had a leg to stand on if they'd rolled Clinton in the snow—although he does deserve it as much as Donnell."

"Shut up!" said Reginald Pitt politely. "Listen!"

We, of course, were interested spectators. And we kept to our side of the Triangle, so that neither Clinton nor the Head could have any excuse for dropping on us.

"Please allow that boy to go, colonel," said the Head quietly.

Colonel Clinton swung round, his face distorted with passion. He still held Bob Christine firmly, but the other boys had held back.

"You will oblige me, Dr. Stafford, by allowing me to deal with this boy as I think fit," he shouted. "I intend to thrash him soundly——"

"You forget yourself, sir!" interrupted the Head coldly. "Please release Christine this instant. I am aware that there has been some insubordination, and I have come out to see what can be done."

"Three cheers for the Head!" roared somebody.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip-hip-hurrah!"

The cheers were given with a will, and then some other rash junior was foolish enough to call for groans for Clinton. But they weren't given; the Monks respected the Head's presence.

"This boy has acted in the most disgraceful fashion!" exclaimed the colonel, releasing Christine reluctantly. "His conduct, Dr. Stafford, is utterly bad. And it seems that the other boys are in agreement with him. Perhaps you are aware, since you have been

watching these proceedings, of what has occurred to Sergeant Donnell?"

The Head did not miss the sneer in Clinton's voice.

"No, colonel, I do not know what has happened to Sergeant Donnell," he said quietly. "I do know, however, that Donnell has displayed on many occasions a brutality which I strongly deprecate——"

"You do not understand the position, sir!" snapped the colonel. "They are wild—they have been allowed to run riot, and I have made it my duty to drill them and to knock them into shape. It seems that the boys were criminally neglected before I came to the school——"

"Oh!"

"You are mistaken, colonel," said the Head, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "And I cannot allow you to traduce a gentleman—namely, Mr. Stockdale—who always conducted the College House ably and with a kindly care for his boys. I must request you to confine your remarks to the matter in hand."

"Three cheers for Mr. Stockdale!" called Yorke excitedly.

There was an answering roar immediately.

"Really, boys, you must restrain yourselves," said the Head gently. "I am fully aware that you regard Mr. Stockdale with something akin to affection, but you must not allow your feelings to get the better of you."

"You amaze me, sir!" said the colonel, breathing hard. "These—these boys have revolted—they have defied me—and you address them as though they were well-behaved and deserving of approval! Do you know, Dr. Stafford, that the young scoundrels had the utter audacity to roll Sergeant Donnell in the snow?"

"That was very wrong of them," said the Head sternly. "But I must request you to moderate your language, Colonel Clinton. I cannot allow you to refer to these boys as young scoundrels. The whole position is distressing, and I beg of you to explain, calmly and quietly, what the exact nature of the trouble is."

Clinton gritted his teeth.

"I have already stated what has occurred," he snapped. "The boys began by defying Donnell—and then they defied me. Notwithstanding my order for them to fall into line, they deliberately insulted me—and Christine was the ringleader. Last night this young wretch was suffering solitary confinement in his cell, and I am at a loss to know how he escaped."

"It is just as well, I think, that he did escape," said Dr. Stafford grimly. "If I amaze you, colonel, you have certainly succeeded in amazing me. What nonsense is this? What can you possibly mean by saying that Christine has been undergoing solitary confinement in a cell?"

The colonel had made a slip, and he knew it.

"It is merely a term for a system of punishment which I have instituted," he said

quickly. "But that is not the main point, Dr. Stafford. All these boys are in revolt, and I shall be greatly obliged if you will retire and allow me to administer the punishment they deserve."

"I shall retire when it pleases me," retorted the Head, adjusting his glasses and gazing at Bob Christine. "I have heard this charge against the boys, colonel, and now I intend to hear what Christine has to say."

Clinton made a curious sound in his throat.

"You—you intend to hear what Christine has to say!" he ejaculated thickly. "Good heavens, sir, you astound me! Why—why should this young rebel have a hearing? Why should he be allowed to lie to his heart's content? I protest, Dr. Stafford—I protest vigorously!"

The Head turned to Christine.

"Tell me why you dared to set your Housemaster's orders at defiance, my boy," he said kindly. "Unless you can offer a very full explanation for your conduct, your punishment will be severe."

"I'm ready to answer for what I've done, sir," said Christine quietly. "I'm backed by every fellow in the College House Remove—we're all in this affair equally, and we were justified in revolting."

"That is for me to decide, Christine."

"Well, sir," said the junior, gaining courage. "Colonel Clinton keeps us drilling for too long, and we all object to the saluting and the route-marches. This is a school, sir, and not a military training establishment. And it's disgraceful, I think, having cells for punishment. I have been kept in a cold attic since the night before last, and I only had bread and water to eat and drink."

"What was your offence, Christine?"

"This is sheer nonsense——" began the colonel hotly.

"Kindly allow the boy to continue, sir," cut in Dr. Stafford.

"My offence was a breach of discipline, sir," said Christine quietly. "I knocked Sergeant Donnell down in the common-room."

The Head started.

"Dear me!" he ejaculated. "You—you knocked the sergeant down, Christine?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how could you accomplish such a feat?"

"He's all blubber, sir—I—I mean, he's a heavy drinker, and he's in frightful condition," said Christine. "He tried to knock me out, but I knocked him out instead. And for that I was flogged terribly by the colonel, and sent into solitary confinement. I'm sore now, sir."

"The boy is lying," snapped Clinton harshly. "I scarcely touched——"

"I don't mind showing the weals on my back, sir!" said Christine, his eyes flashing dangerously. "Shall I show Dr. Stafford, sir?"

"Don't be a fool, boy!" snarled the colonel hastily.

But the Head understood. Clinton was

afraid to let Christine prove his words. He attempted to change the subject.

"The boy was guilty of disgraceful conduct," he said. "He attacked Donnell—"

"Only because Donnell was brutally knocking Yorke about, sir," interjected Christine quickly. "The sergeant's a bully of the worst type, and the whole Remove protests against him."

"Hear, hear!"

"We won't stand him, sir!"

"It is astonishing that you allow this scene to continue, Dr. Stafford," said the colonel acidly. "It is not only opposed to all authority, but positively unseemly. Christine acted like a young hooligan in attacking Donnell—"

"I think it would be more correct to say that Donnell acted like a hooligan," interrupted the Head sternly. "The man proved his savagery in engaging in a fight with a mere junior schoolboy. He is evidently unfit for his post, Colonel Clinton, and unless he alters he must leave the school."

There was a murmur of delighted approval.

"I engaged Donnell, and I am responsible for him," shouted the colonel. "He shall remain just as long as I choose, sir. I will not submit to interference in the control of my House—"

"You are forgetting yourself, colonel," said the Head quietly. "Well, Christine," he added, turning to the junior, "you may be sure that Sergeant Donnell will alter his ways—I will see to that."

"We want him kicked out, sir."

"I cannot allow you to talk in that way, my boy," said Dr. Stafford. "Donnell will remain at St. Frank's, but his powers will be reduced. He will be merely your drill-instructor—"

"But we've revolted against the drilling, sir," protested Christine. "We have decided to ignore all orders that have got anything to do with military discipline—even if they're given by our Housemaster."

The Head frowned angrily.

"You are talking wildly, Christine," he exclaimed. "Donnell shall be warned, but it is your duty to obey Colonel Clinton in all things. If he decides that you shall practise these drills and parades, you must do so without question."

"Oh, sir!" said Christine blankly.

"Oh, sir!" echoed the crowd.

"That is my last word on the subject," went on the Head. "Under no circumstances can I allow you to display disrespect to your Housemaster. I may probably persuade him to moderate his discipline, but for the present you must not question his orders."

"Then Donnell isn't sacked, sir, and the discipline is to continue?"

"Precisely—"

"In that case, we've revolted for nothing, sir—"

"I shall punish you, Christine, if you repeat that absurd statement," interrupted the Head severely. "How dare you talk of revolt? You are forgetting yourself, my boy. Always remember that your Housemaster is

entitled to your respect and obedience. Were it otherwise, there could be no authority whatever. Let this scene come to an end at once."

And the Head, with a slight nod to Colonel Clinton, walked away through the snow towards his own private door. Christine and all the other Monks were rather taken aback. The Head, after promising so well, had failed them!

"Sssssss!"

A chorus of hisses sounded, and there could be no doubt whatever that they were intended for the Head. The Monks simply couldn't help themselves. They were not only disappointed, but they were reckless and furious. Dr. Stafford had upheld the colonel!

"My hat!" I murmured to my chums.

"That's a bit rotten!"

"Well, the Head deserves it!" growled Handforth. "He must be dotty!"

I was watching the Head, and I saw him start slightly and go a shade paler. He knew that the hiss was meant for his ears, but he took no notice. It pained him enormously, for it was probably the first hiss he had ever heard directed against himself during his long period at St. Frank's.

"Begad! It's rather rough on the Head, old boys," remarked Montie. "He couldn't do anythin' else but agree with Clinton, you know. A Headmaster can't agree with a lot of juniors against their own Housemaster."

Tregellis-West was quite right; but Christine and Co. could not look at the matter in that light. The thing which struck them at the moment was that the revolt had been a dead failure. The promise that Sergeant Donnell would reform might mean anything or nothing—probably nothing. The Head didn't see a tenth part of what went on in the junior school. And it was also evident that Colonel Clinton was to have full sway in the College House—that he was to be allowed to continue his insanely preposterous military regulations. What on earth could Dr. Stafford be thinking about to countenance such conduct?

Christine scarcely knew what to do, and he gazed round at the other fellows somewhat blankly, and many angry, grim glances met him. The colonel himself was looking very pleased, for he had certainly come through the scene with flying colours. The Head had made him angry at first, but everything was all right now.

Clinton faced the rebels triumphantly.

"You will all fall into line and stand at attention," he rapped out. "Private Harron, you will enter the barracks and fetch Major Grayson at once. I intend to put you through an hour's drilling without delay."

Nobody moved, and somebody asked what about breakfast?

"This morning there will be no breakfast," retorted the colonel fiercely. "You have forfeited all right to your morning meal. Drilling will do you far more good—and Sergeant Donnell shall take charge of you. I have no doubt that he will derive great pleasure from the task!"



Whack !
The snowball thrown by Cornelius caught the Colonel fairly on the left ear and burst over his collar and face with a horrible squelching sound.
(See page 17.)

Clinton was positively gloating over his victory, and his tone maddened the juniors enormously. If they obeyed him now they would be under his thumb for good, and they would have gained nothing—nothing whatever.

"Are we going to stand it?" shouted Yorke, shrill with excitement.

"No!"

The answer came in a roar from dozens.

"Down with Donnell!"

"Down with Clinton—and tyranny!"

The colonel started violently.

"What!" he bellowed, his face turning purple with fresh fury. "You confounded young hounds! How dare you——"

"We don't give in!" yelled Christine defiantly. "We're not going to give in until the sergeant's dismissed and all the discipline is done away with! Three cheers for the revolt!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The cheers that went up were rather cracked, but eloquent of the Monks' feelings. Handforth grinned with complete pleasure.

"That's the stuff to give him!" he exclaimed approvingly. "If those asses had knuckled under I should have punched Christine's nose the next time I met him! Now we're going to see some excitement, you chaps!"

"Looks like it," I agreed. "Well, the colonel asked for it. The rotter! Telling the chaps they wouldn't have any breakfast! That was about the worst thing he could have done."

"The Monks are defying the Head now, dear boys," observed Sir Montie seriously. "It's gettin' quite grave—it is, really. Begad! I don't blame the dear fellows, though. I should have done just the same."

The colonel was completely taken aback. The storm was raging now far worse than it had raged before—just when he thought it was quelled. All his shouted orders were unheeded, and at last he dashed in amongst the boys and seized both Christine and Yorke.

"You are the young dogs who led this fresh outburst!" he thundered harshly. "By heavens! I'll punish you—— Stand back there, you—— How—how dare you molest me—— Great goodness!"

A surging crowd of fellows had swarmed round the Housemaster. They were in grim earnest, and Clinton had sense enough to read the danger-signals. He was in the very midst of a seething mob of wildly excited, reckless schoolboys. At that moment they were ready for almost any disorderly act.

There was a rush of Ancient House fellows, and I was amongst them. We were quite interested to see the pompous, bombastic colonel rolled in the snow. It would be a spectacle from which we should derive much pleasure.

"Over with him!" roared half a dozen voices.

"Give him the same as Donnell!"

"Boys—boys!" gasped Clinton desperately.

"Yah! We don't want to hear you!" shouted the mob.

"Go back to the Army!"

"Go and join the Huns!"

"Bully!"

"Beast!"

"Down with Clinton, the tyrant!"

The whole Triangle was simply echoing with these excited shouts. What had occurred previous to the Head's intervention was tame in comparison to this. The thought of defeat had aroused the Monks to a pitch which had been deemed impossible half an hour ago. And Colonel Clinton was more than alarmed. He became thoroughly scared. These boys meant business!

Not until that moment had the colonel fully realised his unpopularity; not until that moment had he imagined that the Removites could be so grimly determined. And it came to the colonel, with a considerable shock, that he was in dire peril of being mobbed in a most dangerous manner. The excited boys were not responsible for their actions, and Clinton was in real peril indeed.

There was only one way out—and he knew it.

"Over with him!" roared the crowd.

"Boys!" shrieked the Housemaster desperately.

"Close his mouth, somebody!"

"Boys—boys!" screamed Clinton. "I—I surrender!"

"Easy enough to do that when you're collared!" yelled Talmadge. "Don't take any notice of him——"

"If you will release me at once, and will drop this revolt, there shall be no punishments!" gasped Clinton hurriedly. "I will relax the discipline, and will consider the dismissal of Sergeant Donnell!"

"Dry up, you——"

"Hold on!" shouted Christine. "Don't get so excited, you asses! If the colonel's willing to meet our demands, it's all we want. We've won—we've got the victory! The colonel's agreed to our terms!"

"Hurrah!"

The boys immediately drew away, and Clinton uttered a gasp of positive relief. He had escaped a severe mauling by the very skin of his teeth. Handforth was simply disgusted, and stalked straight into the Ancient House, grumbling.

"This scene is too disgraceful for words," panted the colonel. "It must end, boys. I realise now that I have been wrong in attempting to ignore your desires. They shall be given full attention, and the dismissal of Sergeant Donnell will be my first consideration."

"You'll drop all the military discipline, sir?" asked Yorke.

"This is no place for a discussion," said the colonel. "Ah! The breakfast-bell is just sounding. Go indoors quietly, and assemble in the lecture hall when breakfast is over. I will meet you there, and we will thrash these troubles out once and for all. If this

revolt ceases at once I guarantee that no boy shall be punished."

"I accept your word, sir," said Bob Christine quietly.

The colonel nodded and stalked away—rather hurriedly, for he was still half afraid that he would be rolled in the snow. The juniors gazed at one another breathlessly, flushed and excited.

"Do you think he meant it?" asked Harron. "Was it safe to take his word?"

"Oh, we can't doubt it," replied Christine. "Clinton may be a tyrant, but he's been one of His Majesty's officers, and has won the D.S.O. We were bound to accept his guarantee."

The Remove trooped in to breakfast, still flushed with excitement. One point they overlooked—which even Christine overlooked—was that the colonel had made no promise except the one regarding punishment—and that only held good if the rebellion came to an end.

Clinton had only hinted at dismissing Donnell—the matter was to be "considered." He would also relax the discipline; he hadn't promised to do away with it. Relaxing it, as the colonel had expressed himself might mean a relaxation for only a single hour. He had not bound himself in any way.

But the juniors did not see through Clinton's cunning, and they were all feeling extremely contented as they hungrily partook of breakfast. This meal demolished, the Remove made its way to the lecture hall. And here the first surprise awaited them.

Christine and Yorke and Talmadge went in together, and they found Grayson and Shaw and Perry, of the Fifth, there. These three seniors were the boys whom Colonel Clinton had appointed "officers." And they were not alone in the lecture hall, for Sergeant Donnell was there, and four prefects and five other Sixth-Formers. Once Christine and Co. were in they were helpless—they couldn't get out again. But nobody tried to get out. It was generally believed that the seniors were there to take part in the discussion. Only Christine suspected the actual truth—and it was too late now to say anything.

Within five minutes the Remove was there to a man—excepting the Ancient House fellows, naturally. And Colonel Clinton appeared, brisk and alert. He mounted to the platform, and stood surveying the crowd with his monocle screwed firmly into his eye. It was evident, from his very attitude, that he was once more arrogant and overbearing.

"Now, boys, we will have a little chat together," he said, a grim note in his voice. "I gave you my word that your grievances should be considered, and I will briefly relate what I propose to do. I also told you that I should consider the dismissal of Sergeant Donnell."

The colonel rubbed his hands and smiled. "I have already done so," he went on.

"And, after due thought, I have decided that Sergeant Donnell shall remain—"

"Remain, sir!" gasped Yorke. "But—but you promised—"

"I promised that the matter should receive my consideration—and it has done so," snapped the colonel. "I also gave you my word that the discipline should be relaxed. I intend to release you from a certain amount of drilling each day, but you will still be required to perform a great deal. Moreover, to compensate for the lack of drilling, you will be marched out more often."

"We've been tricked!" roared Talmadge furiously.

"It was all bluff!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Silence!" shouted the colonel. "Let me finish before you dare to say a word. I have not tricked you—"

"You have—you have!"

"Let's continue the revolt!"

"If you do so, you will forfeit all right to consideration!" bellowed the colonel. "Listen to me, boys. I made you a promise that nobody shall be punished if the rebellion came to an end. That promise of mine will be faithfully adhered to—if the revolt ceases."

"What if it doesn't, sir?" demanded Christine hotly.

"In that case, Private Christine, I intend to exact a drastic punishment," snapped the colonel. "It appears that you are no more to blame than the other boys—I fully appreciate that. And the punishment shall fall equally upon you all—but in this manner. Every third boy in the ranks of the Remove, counting as you now stand, will be flogged soundly, here and now. Furthermore, those boys will be sent to bed supperless for a fortnight. They will be confined to the precincts of the school for a period of one month. Finally, those boys will be given double the amount of drilling of the others."

"Oh!"

The Remove was filled with dismay.

"So you see, boys, I intend to stand no nonsense," went on the Housemaster. "Continue this revolt, and the punishment will fall upon one third of you—the others will go scot free. Unjust, you say? But it is within your power to escape all punishment completely. Drop this nonsense at once, give up your revolutionary ideas, and the whole disgraceful incident will be allowed to pass over. I will even allow Christine to retain his liberty, and will ask no questions as to how he escaped. It is for you to choose."

The threatened punishment was terrible. The juniors were appalled. They could continue the revolt, of course, but what result would that bring? With Sergeant Donnell and all the seniors in the lecture hall a fresh outbreak would be impossible. The Removites might succeed in breaking out, but they would be forced to surrender sooner or later. And then every third boy would be flogged, gated, and punished in other ways. The prospect was too awful to contemplate.

By a trick—which, after all, could not actually be called a trick—Colonel Clinton had gained the upper hand. His promise was not repudiated, and it was up to the boys to accept it or leave it. Christine was quite

positive that the colonel was nervous—otherwise he would never have conceded so much. For it was quite surprising that he meant to inflict no punishments. It simply proved that Clinton was enormously anxious for the revolt to come to an end.

The juniors did not possess the strength to face the ordeal. Several of them were quite ready to take the risk—Christine and Co. being the leaders. But fully two-thirds of the rebels decided that surrender was the only course. It was easy. Nobody would be punished—and, after all, they wouldn't be any worse off, even if they were no better. And to obstinately continue the mutiny would be simply asking for trouble.

And so the rebels surrendered!

Nearly weeping with chagrin, Christine and Co. were compelled to knuckle under.

CHAPTER V.

THE TROTWOOD TWINS ARE USEFUL.

VICTORY!

Colonel Clinton, without the slightest doubt, had gained an absolute victory. The revolt had failed—the juniors were under the heel of the tyrant. Look at it which way they would, Christine and Co. could not see how they had gained. It was quite true, however, that Christine would still have been suffering in his cell but for the revolt. His release, however, was a mere triviality. The objects of the rebellion had not been gained—not one of them. And a further outbreak was quite out of the question.

Colonel Clinton made quite sure of that. Strict regulations were introduced, to prevent the juniors banding themselves together. Four beds were taken into the Remove dormitory during the day—and these in future would be occupied by Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, and by two prefects. The seniors were entirely opposed to the idea, but they were in much the same position as the juniors—they couldn't refuse to obey the orders of their Housemaster.

And in the dinner recess the wretched Removites were strenuously drilled by the triumphant Sergeant Donnell. All idea of further revolt had been knocked out of them. For if they rebelled against the colonel's rule a second time the punishment would be swift and sure. Besides, they had accepted Clinton's terms, and couldn't back out now.

"Silly asses!" said Pitt. "I wouldn't stand it!"

"Neither would I!" declared Handforth.

They were standing on the Ancient House steps, watching Sergeant Donnell drilling the Monks. I was with them, and Montie and Tommy were beside me.

"It's all very well to talk, dear boys," said Tregellis-West, shaking his head. "If Clinton was our Housemaster we shouldn't stand him—Nipper would be as firm as a rock, begad! But there ain't a chap in the College House with Nipper's determination. Christine's a rippin' fellow, but he hasn't got the influence,

you know. An' he's scared of the colonel now."

"You're not far wrong, old man," I agreed. "If we had been tricked like those chaps we shouldn't have tamely submitted. But it's easy enough for us to criticise—we don't have to suffer. These poor chaps are under Clinton's heel, and they know it. After all, what would be the good of a fresh outbreak?"

"They could stick to their guns, I suppose?" demanded Handforth.

"It requires great courage for that," I replied grimly. "I'm not suggesting that Christine and Co. haven't got courage, but I do say that they're not strong-willed enough to carry through a revolt to a successful conclusion. And we mustn't forget that the Head is against them—and that's rotten. Clinton settled the first outbreak by something which was jolly near a piece of trickery, and now the chaps will be so closely watched and guarded that they won't be able to organise again."

The Ancient House-juniors were really sympathetic—except for such fellows as Handforth and Fullwood and Co. Handforth was a ram-headed youth, and in his opinion Christine and Co. ought to have carried on the rebellion ruthlessly. Fullwood and Co., of course, gloated over the Monks' misfortunes—for the Nuts of the Ancient House were utter cads.

"The whole situation is most distressing, my good friends," remarked Nicodemus Trotwood, of the Remove. "I cannot altogether blame those unfortunate boys who we now observe indulging in the most preposterous gyrations and contortions."

"Did you get that out of the dictionary?" asked Handforth tartly.

"My good Handforth, I assure you that the dictionary originally supplied me with the information regarding many useful words," replied Nicodemus mildly. "Indeed, what is a dictionary for if not to impart knowledge?"

McClure grinned.

"Handforth doesn't use dictionaries for that purpose," he remarked. "They're generally employed to chuck at Church and me in Study D!"

"Dear me!" said Trotwood. "That is a most improper use for such a worthy book. And pray consider the result of such treatment to the binding! It is highly probable that the books will ultimately be greatly dilapidated—"

"They're that already," grinned Church. "But you needn't look so shocked!"

Nicodemus Trotwood was shaking his head sorrowfully, and the subject of Study D's dictionaries was obviously giving him great concern. Nicodemus was a remarkable youth, both in appearance and in character.

He had come to St. Frank's with his twin brother at the commencement of the present term. The pair were identical in appearance—lank, skinny, with thick masses of sandy hair and prominent noses. They had the same coloured eyes—brown—and it was really impossible to tell t'other from which.

But the resemblance between the two brothers ended with their outward appearance. Nicodemus looked simple and childlike, but he was as sharp as a needle. Cornelius, his brother, was really simple and childlike. There lay the chief difference.

But Cornelius was also deaf, and it was only necessary to address one of the two when in doubt, and their identity would become instantly known. Nicodemus was the owner of a most astonishing memory, and he was also possessed of quite extraordinary ventriloquial powers. To look at him one would set him down for a fool—and that was a very big mistake to make.

"Christine has my deepest sympathy," remarked Nicodemus, in his mild, serene way. "I undoubtedly consider that Christine might have displayed more determination, but we must be patient with him. After all, Christine is not to be compared with the unsurpassed junior captain we are fortunate enough to possess on our side of the Triangle."

I bowed low.

"Certainly!" said Handforth obligingly.

The next second his boot came in contact with the tight portion of my trousers, and I rolled over in the snow.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" I roared, jumping up. "What did you do that for?"

"Eh?" said Handforth. "You were asking to be kicked, weren't you? You bent down with your back view to me, and I naturally thought——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dotty chump!" I shouted. "I was bowing to Nicodemus."

"Well, you ought to explain these things," grinned Handforth. "But I'm blessed if I can see why you should bow to that freak!"

"Pray allow me to point out, my good Nipper, that I fully appreciate your recognition of my modest little tribute," beamed Nicodemus. "Handforth, as we all know, is a youth with very little understanding——"

"What?" snorted Handforth, his grin vanishing. "Who's got very little understanding?"

"They always say that people with limited brain capacity are somewhat hasty of temper," beamed Nicodemus. "Please let it be understood that I am not indulging in personalities. But really your temper, my dear Handforth, is surprising short."

"And you can draw your own conclusions, Handy," grinned Pitt.

Edward Oswald, who wasn't quite sure whether he had been insulted or not, decided to adopt his famous attitude of lofty disdain, and he marched into the Ancient House, followed by many chuckles. It was very difficult to get the better of Nicodemus when he came to a war of words. And the elder Trotwood—he was about twenty minutes older than Cornelius—was a formidable fighting man, too. His strength was astounding, when he liked to exert it.

"The unhappy Monks were too miserable to resist the drilling and the discipline. It was

a relief to find, however, that Clinton had been as good as his word with regard to Sergeant Donnell—although the Head was probably responsible. The sergeant was quite subdued in his manner towards the boys, although he kept them hard at drill. His usual bullying was conspicuous by its absence.

After tea Christine and Co. were allowed to remain in their own studies. It seemed that the colonel had learned his lesson, and was relaxing the discipline somewhat. But he was doing it unobtrusively—and it was probably merely a temporary reaction. On the morrow things might be worse than before.

Colonel Clinton had been out during the afternoon, and when he returned in the dusk he strode across the Triangle with a somewhat savage step. Unfortunately, he got into direct line of a snowball which had left the fingers of Cornelius Trotwood—that mild youth having indulged in the pleasure of casting the snowball at Grayson, of the Fifth, who was near the gym. Cornelius, for all his mildness, was not without daring.

Whack!

The snowball caught the colonel fairly on the left ear, and it burst over his collar and face with a horrible squelching sound. Clinton gave a bellow, and twirled round—his temper by no means improved by the cackle of laughter which proceeded from a group of Ancient House fags.

"Who—who dared to throw that snowball?" roared the colonel fiercely.

"My dear sir, I beg of you not to give way to excitement!" exclaimed Cornelius, running up in some agitation. "You were most unwise in crossing the Triangle just at the psychological moment. It was I who cast the ball of snow, but it was not intended for your ear, which, I am afraid, is somewhat besmeared——"

"You confounded young liar!" roared the colonel furiously. "You deliberately tried to hit me, and you shall be punished. This affair shall be reported to your Housemaster to-night!"

Cornelius nodded.

"Yes, sir, I am afraid it is," he said mildly.

"Eh? What do you mean, boy?"

"I understood you to say that your ear was a perfect sight——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The colonel fairly boiled.

"You are insulting me deliberately, you young scoundrel!" he exclaimed between his teeth. "Do not think for one moment that I will put up with such nonsense. You heard what I said quite clearly!"

"Indeed, sir, I really think you are——"

"What!" thundered Clinton.

"I think you are acting most queerly!" said Cornelius, with quiet dignity.

"How—how dare you?" shouted the colonel, fairly dancing. "You will come with me at once, boy, and I will take you straight to Mr. Lee's study. I shall not be satisfied until you have been flogged before my eyes!"

"That is a most unwarrantable thing to

say!" exclaimed Cornelius warmly. "I have told you no lies——"

"Lies—lies!" gasped the colonel. "By Heaven! Come with me at once!"

He grabbed Cornelius and dragged him along.

"Really, sir," panted Trotwood, "it is hardly fair of you to call me a dunce when there has been no discussion on scholastic subjects——"

"You impertinent young hound!" snapped Clinton.

He hustled Cornelius into the Ancient House, and raced him along the passage until Nelson Lee's study was reached. Then he burst in without ceremony, hot and flustered, and with Cornelius looking the worse for wear.

"Really, Colonel Clinton——"

"I have brought this boy to you, Mr. Lee, for severe punishment," snapped Clinton frigidly. "The young rascal has been deliberately making fun of all I say——"

"One moment, colonel, please," interrupted Nelson Lee, turning to the junior. "Tell me, Trotwood, what is your Christian name?"

"Really, sir, I am not to blame!" protested Cornelius.

"He is adopting the same tricks with you, sir!" snapped the colonel.

Nelson Lee laughed heartily.

"I am afraid your hasty temper is responsible for this little misunderstanding, colonel," he said. "This lad understood me to say that he was to blame—whereas I really mentioned the word 'name.' Trotwood is, unfortunately, deaf, and unless one speaks very loudly indeed he is liable to misunderstand. I cannot punish him on account of his affliction, colonel."

Clinton glared angrily for a moment, and then he looked very foolish. But for his pompous nature he would have known that Cornelius was deaf. The junior was not under his control, and he took no interest in the Ancient House fellows.

"Pah!" he snapped. "The boy should have told me!"

And, without a word of apology, he stormed out of Nelson Lee's study. Cornelius was allowed to go—considerably puzzled. Arriving at Study L, he found his brother preparing tea, and entertained Nicodemus by relating the incident.

That little encounter with the colonel was to mean quite a lot, although this was not apparent at the time. Two hours later, when the Triangle was dark and deserted—at seven-thirty precisely—Colonel Clinton emerged from the College House and made his way over to that portion of the school wall which was conveniently low. And here he came to a halt and gave a faint whistle.

"I'm here, sir," came a whispered voice.

"I was expecting you to be here, Hardy," said the colonel sourly. "Why were you not at the Lodge this afternoon? I went there, and you had apparently deserted the place. Being the sole occupant, you ought not to go out when you are expecting me——"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I wasn't expecting you this afternoon," said the man on the other side of the wall. "You left a note on the table, telling me to be here at half-past seven, and so I came. As it happens, I wanted to see you this evening."

"And I am anxious to see you, Hardy," said the colonel. "How are you getting on?"

"It's all ready, sir," replied Hardy, "and I should like us to try the experiment to-night. The stuff is only quarter strength, but it will do to begin with—and it's very deadly, too."

"Quite strong enough, Hardy, I will warrant," murmured the colonel. "If this trial is successful—as I am convinced it will be—we will try the next one with rank poison of full strength."

"That's what I was thinking, sir," said Hardy. "If you can be at Stowe Lodge at midnight, we will——"

"Very good—I will be there," interrupted Clinton. "I don't want you to be seen near the school, Hardy, so you had better make yourself scarce. By the way, did you try the stuff on William?"

"Yes, sir, this morning."

"With what result?"

"He died within ten minutes, sir."

"H'm! It seems that it is quite dangerous, although only quarter strength," said Colonel Clinton. "All right, Hardy, you'd better get off. I'll be there at midnight to the minute."

The stranger vanished into the gloom, and Colonel Clinton, with a little sigh, turned and walked into the open portion of the Triangle. But suddenly he paused. A dim figure was moving amongst the trees near by, and the colonel caught his breath in sharply.

"Who is that?" he demanded, his voice strained and husky.

The dim figure took no notice, and the colonel marched up to it. A junior evidently, and he had been walking dangerously near to the meeting-place. Clinton grasped the boy, and peered into his face.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly.

"Really, my dear sir, I must beg of you to relax the pressure on my shoulder; you are hurting me considerably," said the boy mildly. "You gave me quite a start, and I trust——"

"You are that infernal young idiot of a Trotwood!" snapped the colonel. "What are you doing out in the Triangle at this hour?"

"No, sir, I was not looking at the clock-tower——"

"What!" ejaculated the colonel. "Don't be a fool, boy!"

"Joy, sir?" said Trotwood mildly. "I am afraid I did not quite catch——"

"Go indoors, you little donkey!" barked Clinton irritably.

He strode away, leaving Trotwood gazing after him in meek astonishment. The colonel was quite satisfied that the deaf junior had not heard a word of what had passed between him and the stranger, Hardy.

But Colonel Clinton was wrong.

He had made a little mistake—due to an effort of strategy on the part of the apparently deaf junior. For he wasn't deaf, and he wasn't Cornelius Trotwood. He was Nicodemus!

And that made all the difference!

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEADLY FUMES!

NICODEMUS TROTWOOD was a very simple youth in appearance, but very keen in reality. He had realised in a second that it would be a smart move to affect deafness. The colonel's mistake was only natural, and he was quite positive that he had been speaking to the afflicted Cornelius.

The twins were as alike as two peas, and even if it had been broad daylight the colonel would have been deceived just as thoroughly. Nicodemus quickly made up his mind, and he entered the Ancient House and went straight to Study C in the Remove passage.

His shock head appeared in the doorway while I was explaining to Tregellis-West and Watson that the forthcoming football match against Bannington Grammar School would be an absolute walk-over—for us. Nicodemus beamed into Study C good-naturedly.

"Come in," I said. "Don't stand there with the door open, my son. It's cold, and there's a draught. And who are you, anyhow?"

"Really, my dear friends, I think it will be necessary for Cornelius and myself to wear distinguishing badges," said Nicodemus, entering the study, and closing the door softly behind him. "I was wondering if you had time to spare to grant me a short interview?"

I grinned.

"You can have three if you like," I replied generously. "Tommy and Montie and I are all willing to be interviewed—only don't take too long over the job, because we've got to finish our prep."

Our visitor sat down.

"The truth is, my dear Nipper, I wish to talk about Colonel Clinton," said Nicodemus. "You, as head of the Form, are perhaps the keenest person in this section of the Ancient House. Moreover, you are the assistant of a very famous detective, and it is only right that you should be told of this mysterious incident—I might even describe it as a sinister incident."

"What's he jawing about?" demanded Watson.

"The dear old boy appears to be ramblin'," observed Sir Montie.

"Far from it, I assure you," said Trotwood, shaking his head. "If you will listen, I will tell you what occurred. I was in the Triangle, having gone out, in reply to my dear brother's repeated requests, to search for a missing pocket-knife. Cornelius himself is now searching, I believe, in the common-room and in other portions of the House."

"And allowed you to go out into the cold, cruel night?" I grinned.

"I am stronger," explained Nicodemus calmly. "Well, that is really a minor point. Whilst near the trees against the wall I was somewhat astonished to observe Colonel Clinton striding towards me. I halted, having no wish to encounter the hot-tempered gentleman. And then, to my further astonishment, the colonel engaged in a conversation with a man on the other side of the wall. My position was embarrassing. I desired to go, but could not do so without revealing my presence. And so I remained, an unwilling eavesdropper."

"Begad! That was rather awkward, old boy," said Sir Montie.

Nicodemus nodded.

"The point I wish to inquire upon is this," he said. "Do you think it is usual for a Housemaster of a respectable school to discuss poisons and the killing of William with a stranger over the wall?"

We stared at Trotwood wonderingly.

"The killing of William?" I repeated.

"That is what I understood."

"You must have been dreaming," said Tommy Watson gruffly. "What the dickens do you mean by coming here with this fat-headed yarn?"

"I am sorry if it strikes you in that light—"

"Hold on, Nicky!" I interrupted. "I can see that you've got more to tell us. Who was this chap the colonel met?"

"His name, I believe, is Hardy."

"And do you know where he came from?"

"A place called Stowe Lodge—"

"Great Scott!" I ejaculated, gazing at Montie and Tommy. "Stowe Lodge! So that's the chap's name. It seems that you've struck something on the head, my son!"

"But what of this Stowe Lodge?" asked Nicodemus mildly.

"I'll tell you later on," I said. "You trot out your yarn first."

"Very good," replied Nicodemus. "If you will listen carefully I will repeat the conversation which took place—and then you may judge for yourselves. The colonel reached the wall, and a strange voice at once said, 'I'm here, sir.' The colonel replied: 'I was expecting you to be here, Hardy. Why were you not at the Lodge this afternoon? I went there, and you had apparently deserted the place. Being the sole occupant, you ought not to go out when you are expecting me.' At this point the other man interrupted, and said: 'I'm sorry sir, but I wasn't expecting you this afternoon—'"

"Hold on!" I interrupted, gazing at Trotwood somewhat wonderingly. "Are you repeating the conversation word for word?"

"Precisely."

"Well, you're a marvel!" said Watson.

"We knew you had a freak memory, Trotwood, but this is about the limit! Do you mean to say that you can remember every single word that passed between the colonel and that other man?"

"It is all quite fresh in my mind," replied

Nicodemus smoothly. "Pray let me make it clear that I am not inventing the phrases—they are the precise words used by the two men. It surprises you, no doubt, but it is a simple matter to me, and I claim no credit."

"Well, go on!" I said. "Let's hear the rest of it."

Trotwood went on from the point where I had broken in. And he told us exactly what had passed. We had no means of verifying his statement, but I was quite sure that he had made no mistake.

"You couldn't have come to a better place, Nicky," I said grimly. "So the colonel is going to Stowe Lodge at midnight, and there's going to be an experiment with some deadly poison which is only quarter strength, but which killed William within ten minutes?"

"Oh, it's idiotic!" growled Watson. "Who's William, anyhow? You're not going to suggest that the colonel's a murderer, I suppose?"

I chuckled.

"Cats have names, haven't they?" I said. "I suppose this William is a cat, or a rabbit, or a guinea-pig. It would be too silly to think anything else. But the information is jolly interesting. It's quite certain that our suspicions of Stowe Lodge weren't far wrong. The colonel's up to some deep game—and it looks like a dangerous, criminal game, too. No respectable schoolmaster has secret meetings with men who dabble in deadly poisons."

"I am afraid I am sorely puzzled," remarked Nicodemus.

"And so are we," I replied. "All we know, Trotwood, is that Colonel Clinton has been in the habit of visiting this Stowe Lodge. He's been at great pains to hide the fact that he goes there, and there's some mystery about it. But Mr. Lee's been investigating, and he's already found out that the colonel and this other man go about Stowe Lodge wearing masks. It's a queer business altogether, and the gov'nor is quite interested. He was nearly collared once—twice, in fact—but he managed to get away safely each time. The House is bolted up like a prison."

"Most remarkable!" said Nicodemus. "And what do you intend doing, my dear Nipper?"

"Well, I think I'll go straight along to Mr. Lee's study and tell him what you overheard," I replied. "Or, better still, you come along yourself—you can repeat it a lot better than I can. It's a case where the gov'nor ought to come in."

We went at once, and I assured Nicodemus that he needn't be afraid that Nelson Lee would suspect him of deliberate eaves-dropping. But, as it happened, we didn't tell the gov'nor anything about the affair—we couldn't. When we arrived at his study we found it dark and empty. And then I suddenly remembered that the gov'nor had mentioned something about going over to Ban-nington with Mr. Brett during the evening.

And he wouldn't be back until after lights-out. I couldn't wait up for him, of course.

This put another idea into my head. I told Nicodemus that he would have to tell his story to Nelson Lee in the morning, and then I went back to Study C.

"We can't tell the gov'nor to-night," I explained to my chums, after I had mentioned that Nelson Lee was absent, "and so we'll do something else. We'll get up after lights-out and investigate on our own."

Sir Montie looked dubious.

"It wouldn't be right, old boy," he protested. "An', besides, if we got up after lights-out we could tell Mr. Lee."

"We could," I agreed thoughtfully. "But I don't think we'll take any chances. As likely as not the gov'nor would pack us off back to bed—and that wouldn't suit us at all. No, my sons, we'll act on our own this trip, and tell Mr. Lee in the morning. That will be the best way."

Sir Montie and Tommy were with me, of course. My chums were always ready to back me up through thick and thin—even when they didn't quite agree with my proposals. But on this occasion they did agree.

We would investigate at Stowe Lodge, although our investigations would probably consist of merely watching the house and seeing Colonel Clinton arrive and depart. However, there was no telling how the affair would develop. In such an adventure we couldn't very well make our plans beforehand.

And so it came about that three dim forms rose from their beds in the Remove dormitory at half-past ten, when everybody else was asleep. At all events, that is what we supposed at the time. But before I had pulled my trousers on I detected movements from the other side of the dormitory.

"Who's that?" I breathed suspiciously.

A dim shape came towards me.

"Dear me! Are you venturing out also?" whispered the voice of Nicodemus Trotwood. "My dear Nipper, I intend breaking the school rules, and the thought really appalls me. But the situation is such that I feel justified——"

"Do you mean to say you're going to Stowe Lodge?" I murmured.

"That was my intention."

"You deep bounder!" I went on. "All right, you'd better come along with us, Nicky. We'll all four go together. What do you say?"

"The plan pleases me greatly."

I couldn't very well tell Nicodemus not to come, since he had supplied the information upon which I was acting. Besides, he had a perfect right to be with us, and I knew that he could be trusted.

Montie and Tommy—particularly the latter—were rather opposed to Trotwood's presence. He seemed to be an outsider, but I thought differently. On the Trotwood twins' first day at St. Frank's I realised that Nicodemus would be a very useful fellow in detective work.

We made our exit without incident, and I

was rather pleased to see that a light was gleaming from Nelson Lee's study. The gov'nor was having a read before the fire probably, and he was safe indoors for the night.

Stowe Lodge was only a comparatively short distance from the school, and it was situated on a lonely spot, near the banks of the river, between the main road and an outlying farm.

It could be easily reached by the towing-path, and we chose this course. The thaw had set in thoroughly during the day, but now, at night, there was a return of frost, and the ground was hard and slippery, and left no impressions.

We arrived at Stowe Lodge just as eleven o'clock was striking—an hour before the colonel himself was due. This left us plenty of time to get carefully concealed amongst the thick bushes with which the garden of the Lodge was filled.

We did not enter by the front gate, but made our way into an adjoining meadow, climbed over a low fence, and got into the garden from the side. Creeping forward, we were able to approach the house under complete cover.

And when we arrived within direct view of a small side-window we saw that a light was showing from behind the curtains. But it was extinguished even as we looked at it.

"Hallo!" I breathed. "What does that mean, I wonder?"

"It's no good askin' me, dear fellow," murmured Sir Montie.

But we soon found out. After about five minutes the front door opened, and we distinctly heard the latch pulled to. Then a dim form walked to the gate, passed out into the road, and vanished into the night.

"That was Hardy," I murmured grimly.

"Then we've come for nothing?" asked Watson. "The house is empty now, and there's no fun in watching an empty house that I can see——"

"You silly ass!" I hissed. "Nothing could be better. The place is left deserted, and the colonel won't be here until midnight. We can reckon on Hardy being away for half an hour, I should think."

"But what are we going to do, my dear Nipper?" asked Nicodemus mildly.

"You're not going to do anything," I replied. "But I mean to get into the house, if possible. It's too good a chance to be missed!"

"Dear boy, it's quite impossible," declared Tregellis-West. "You were tellin' me about the back door bein' double-locked, an' the windows are certain to be all fastened——"

"I'm an expert at the game," I interrupted. "Anyhow, I've made up my mind, and it's no good arguing. I want you, Tommy, to get back to the hedge against the road and keep your eyes open. As soon as anybody comes in sight give Nicodemus the warning. He'll be here with Montie, a few feet away, near the house. Montie can buzz round to the back, where I shall be, and hand me the tip. There'll be no chance of my being taken by surprise."

"An admirable programme," commented Trotwood. "I am quite willing to do my share to the best of my ability. Of all four of us, you are the best fitted for the task of entering the house, Nipper, and so I have no grumble to voice."

But Sir Montie and Tommy tried to persuade me against the plan. Their efforts were in vain, and I stole off towards the rear of the house. The entry was absurdly simple, notwithstanding the precautions which had been taken. The scullery window was barred effectively, but there was a cellar underneath, with a heavy iron grating flush with the wall.

Hoisting this up, I dropped into the darkness, and easily felt my way to the steps. The door at the top, giving upon the rear passage, was not even locked. And this is the case with most well-protected houses—there is nearly always a way of getting in which has been overlooked. But I hadn't hoped for anything so easy as this.

I was using my electric torch now, fully on the alert, and with my ears on the stretch. Stowe Lodge was certainly deserted, but I didn't want to be caught there. My object was to have a quick look round and then get out again.

Getting my bearings, I entered the hall and made for a door which I knew led into the room which had been illuminated. This door was right at the back of the hall, and a turn hid the front door from view.

There was a curious kind of smell in the air, something like sulphur, which caused a catchiness in my throat. But I took no notice of this. The door was locked, but the key was projecting.

I was just on the point of turning it when I noticed a curious thing. Completely round the door—sides, top, and bottom—there was rubber packing. This intimated that all air was being excluded from the locked room, and I was rather puzzled.

However, the best thing to do was to have a look in, and I turned the key. It was a latch lock, and I was obliged to hold the key back while I pushed, for it only gave a half-turn.

The door opened, and I flashed my light into the black cavity, but taking care to keep the beam towards the floor. Then something terrible happened. I had only got one foot inside the room when a great wave of choking, sickly fumes enveloped me. I staggered back, saw thousands of lights dancing before my eyes, and just remember crashing heavily to the floor.

And after that everything was blank.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF STONE LODGE.

"TWENTY minutes to twelve," murmured Sir Montie anxiously.

He and Trotwood were holding a little discussion, and they were standing just against the rustic gate which

led to the rear quarters. Tommy Watson was still on guard near the road.

"Nipper's been gone for nearly half an hour," went on Montie. "I'm gettin' nervous, old fellow. What can have happened to him?"

"I am sorely afraid that his investigations have not gone as smoothly as he anticipated," breathed Nicodemus. "I really think, my dear friend, that it is our duty to go round and see——"

"Begad!" gasped Tregellis-West abruptly.

He stood staring at the bushes near by. A man was standing there, and he came forward even as Montie watched. There was no time to escape—no time to dodge. Tommy Watson must have failed!

"What are you doing here, boys?" came a grim voice.

Montie started, for it seemed to him that the voice was familiar. But the man was a stranger—an ill-dressed individual, with a matted beard and a slouch hat. He grasped Montie's arm tightly.

"Don't get alarmed, Tregellis-West," came a whisper. "You know me, don't you? What is the meaning——"

"Mr. Lee!" panted Sir Montie, with great relief.

"Not so loud, my boy," said Nelson Lee softly. "I spoke first so that you should recognise my voice and be aware of my identity. Why are you here—and Trotwood, too? Where is Nipper? I have not the slightest doubt that Nipper is the prime mover in this midnight excursion."

"We're all in it together, sir," said Montie loyally. "But we'll explain afterwards. Nipper's inside——"

"Inside!" echoed Nelson Lee sharply. "In the house, do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good gracious! The reckless young rascal!"

"But there's nobody else there, sir," Montie hastened to explain. "Colonel Clinton is comin' here at midnight——"

"How do you know that?"

"Well, we do, sir. Begad! I can't explain now—I can't, really!" said Tregellis-West, in alarm. "There ain't time, sir! We saw the other man come out just after eleven, an' Nipper decided to get in. He's been gone for over half an hour, an' we were gettin' frightfully anxious. The colonel will be here before long."

Nelson Lee considered for a moment.

"How did Nipper get in?" he asked quickly.

"Somewhere at the back, sir."

Again Lee considered. He had come here to-night for the purpose of getting into the house himself, if it could be managed. And it was somewhat disconcerting to find that he had been forestalled. But there was no time for further questioning, although Nelson Lee was curious to know full details.

He came to a quick decision.

"Very well, Montie," he said softly. "You remain here with Trotwood. By the way, I have not seen Watson. He is generally with

you, I believe? Did he go to the rear with Nipper?"

"No, sir. He's keepin' watch near the road."

"Dear me! Quite an army of you!" said Lee grimly. "I came from the other direction, and so Watson and I missed one another. Well, stay here, and wait until I return. But if the colonel comes, or the other man, conceal yourselves and lie quiet."

Nelson Lee left the boys, and passed through the rustic gateway to the back of the house. One glance at the windows told him that they had not been interfered with. He was about to pass on when he caught sight of the raised grating near the ground. He approached, and smiled.

"Trust Nipper to find a way!" he murmured. "I suppose the reckless young idiot is looking round, and has forgotten the time."

The schoolmaster-detective quickly lowered himself through the hole, and dropped into the cellar. He pulled out his electric torch, but took the precaution to push a slide over the glass bulb—a patent arrangement of his own. There was a tiny hole in the centre of this slide, and the beam was reduced to a mere wisp of light—just sufficient to show him his way forward.

He reached the steps, and mounted to the rear hall. Here he paused, listening. Not a sound came to his ears, except one or two creaks from the boards beneath his feet.

"Where can the rascal be?" thought Nelson Lee.

He moved forward, and turned a corner, which took him into the rear part of the front hall. And there, lying huddled against the wall, was a figure. In one second Nelson Lee knew that the figure was mine.

Perhaps the gov'nor's movements served to arouse me. At all events, I stirred slightly as he bent over me, and then gradually began to regain my wits. The first sensation I had was one of horrible sickness.

"Oh, my hat!" I muttered. "I feel rotten!"

"What happened, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee gently, pulling me up into a sitting posture. "You are looking very pale, my lad."

I stared at him blankly for a moment.

"I—I don't remember," I muttered huskily. "Where are we, sir?"

"In Stowe Lodge——"

"Oh, yes, of course!" I broke in. "That's right, sir—it's coming back now clearly enough. But how the dickens did you get here?"

"Never mind that, Nipper. Why are you in this condition?"

I stared at the rubber-packed door almost fearfully. It was closed, as before, and locked.

"I reckon I've had a narrow escape, sir," I whispered. "If that door hadn't closed, I should have been dead by this time. I expect there's a spring on the back, or it's fitted with those patent dropping hinges. Anyhow, it closed, and the latch went into place automatically. Thank goodness!"

"But, my dear lad, what is there in that room to fear?" asked Nelson Lee.

"I meant to have a look in there, sir," I said huskily. "But as soon as I opened the door a cloud of awful fumes came out and overpowered me. It was poison, I expect—poison gas!"

"Good gracious!"

"It's right, guv'nor," I went on, gaining strength, and fighting against the sickness. "Trotwood overheard Clinton talking about some poison stuff—quarter strength, too. Great Scott! I should have been killed if the stuff had been full strength! But how long have I been lying here—what's the time, sir?"

"Nearly twelve——"

"The colonel's coming here at twelve!" I gasped in alarm. "We must get out, sir! We may just do it—and there's nothing to show that we've been in. I reckon I ought to be thankful——"

"Yes, Nipper, you have had a narrow shave," said Nelson Lee. "I'm not going to scold you, but you were undoubtedly rash. But come! Do you think you can walk, if I assist you?"

"Easily, sir," I replied quickly.

I was feeling much stronger already, although that dreadful sickness was as strong as ever. Actually I wasn't much harmed; and I had escaped because the door had closed so promptly. I had only breathed in a little of the gas, and the closing door had prevented any more fumes enveloping me as I lay unconscious.

I got to my feet somehow, the guv'nor helping me. But I was so dizzy that I could hardly stand. Everything was going round and round. We went down the hall, and managed to find the cellar door.

"That poison stuff——" I began.

"Hush, Nipper, hush!" breathed Nelson Lee sharply.

We both halted. And we heard the front door opened; we heard murmured voices; we heard feet being scraped on a hard mat. Hardy had returned, and the colonel had come with him.

"Oh, goodness!" I whispered.

Nelson Lee said nothing. He edged his way through the cellar doorway, and drew me with him. The door was closed, and we stood on the steps for a few minutes, waiting tensely.

The murmured voices continued for a moment or two, then a door closed. The pair had gone into one of the front rooms probably. We were anxious to get out of the house, since there could be no object gained by revealing our presence. We had learned much, and Clinton would have no knowledge that intruders had been within Stowe Lodge.

Crossing the cellar, we reached the grating, and Nelson Lee hoisted himself up, and then gave me a hand. We were soon standing in

the cold night air, and the grating was replaced in position.

"Now, Nipper," murmured Lee. "We must get away quickly."

Against the bushes we met Sir Montie and Tommy Watson and Nicodemus. Watson had seen the pair approach the house, and had given the alarm—only to find that I was still missing, and that Nelson Lee had gone after me.

"Begad!" breathed Montie. "You're all right, then, Nipper boy?"

"Oh, I'm feeling fine!" I groaned.

They helped me through the trees and over the fence. We arrived in the roadway, and then felt quite safe. The little spell of excitement was over, and a reaction came at once.

I will draw a veil over the next few minutes. I need only say that while Nelson Lee talked with the other three chaps I spent a horrid time against the hedge—saying good-bye to my supper and tea. I was terribly sick, but I felt heaps better afterwards.

My brain cleared, and the dizziness completely went. Nothing remained except a bad headache and a sore throat.

Nelson Lee had been hearing Trotwood's story, and he was impressed.

"You must keep this to yourself, Trotwood," he said warningly.

"You may rely upon me, sir," said Nicodemus. "Indeed, I shall not even mention a word to my dear brother. He is a simple, trusting boy, and would speak of the matter without thinking. I, however, know that silence is golden."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That's a good principle, Trotwood," he said. "Well, Nipper?"

"I'm feeling piles better, sir," I replied cheerfully. "That awful gas has cleared itself out of my system now—to say nothing of various other things which I needn't mention. But what the dickens can it mean——"

"We will discuss that as we walk back to the school," interjected Lee. "I shall abandon my plans for to-night. Indeed, I have really accomplished them, since I came here with the object of entering the house."

In the morning I had almost completely recovered from the effects of my dose of the strange poison-gas. But I was grimly determined, as well as Nelson Lee, to find out the truth. I have rooted objections to being gassed—although, strictly speaking, I had only myself to blame.

Colonel Howard Clinton was a novelty in Housemasters; and he was to prove this to the hilt in the near future—the immediate future, in fact. And events were destined to take a grim, terrible turn. It was a turn which took us all by surprise, and which left us horrified.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

OUR POPULAR SCHOOL SERIAL!

The Chums of Littleminster School.

A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

The First Chapters.

BASIL HOOD is a new boy at Littleminster School.

On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. Challis is chosen to play for the School against Ragley. He does very well in the match, and receives congratulations on all sides.

(Now read on.)

BASIL HOOD IS MISSING.

FAWCETT and Raymond had, in delightful nervous fashion and with blushing cheeks, come up to him and faltered out their meed of praise; but, strangely enough, Basil had not accompanied them.

Nor had he been to Challis's room since. Strange, thought the big boy, and forthwith he sought out Raymond and inquired after Basil.

"I haven't seen him, Mr. Challis," said the little boy. "Don't know where he's vanished to. Haven't set eyes on him since the match ended."

"No," chimed in Fawcett, who was with Raymond. "I think he went off to see what became of that hooligan chum of Myers's, who was chucked out of the grounds by Mr. Evans."

Challis stared, and, frowning, asked what the boy meant. Fawcett explained, and Challis's face grew darker.

He began to feel strangely afraid, questioned the boy closely, and then went in search of Basil. But, although he searched high and low, although he went up to the dormitory to see if the junior was there, he failed to find him. Even when at last he went down to join the Ragley men at the spread, over which the Head presided, Basil was not to be found.

In the interest and excitement of that meal, a joyous function of a simple nature, in which mutual compliments were showered around, Challis for the time being forgot all about his bag. But as soon as the Ragley men departed in their brake he rushed away and again inquired after the boy. Basil was not in the school.

Challis thereupon sought Mr. Evans and told him of his fears.

The master was astonished.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I ordered that fellow from the town out, and had trouble with him. But I can't think young Hood's absence is connected with his visit to the school. I'll go and question Myers."

The master hurried to Myers's study, and found that unsatisfactory boy bending over his studies with a face white and troubled.

"Have you seen anything of young Hood, Myers?" the master asked.

The boy quailed.

"No, sir," he answered. "Is there anything the matter?"

"He is not in the school, that's all," said Mr. Evans shortly. "Young Raymond suggests that he may have followed that man Smart, who came up to see you. By the way, I must ask you what there is between you and that man, Myers."

"Nothing, sir," protested the senior, rising. "I—I—er—bought a fishing-rod of him, that's all. And—he—he's presumed upon it, that's all."

"Very well. You must see that he never enters the school grounds again. If he does, you will get yourself into serious trouble, Myers. Did you see him after I ordered him out of the grounds?"

"No, sir."

"And you have seen nothing of Basil Hood?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. That will do."

Mr. Evans retired, feeling very uneasy in his mind. It struck him that Myers was lying.

Upon rejoining John Challis, the master repeated the conversation that had passed between himself and Myers, and John's anxiety increased.

"Would you mind if I were to try and find him, sir?" he asked.

"Not at all, Challis. I will help you."

They left the school together, and while

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Challis took the road that led to the town, the master turned in the opposite direction.

For an hour they searched and made inquiries, and then returned to Littleminster. Still there was no news of Basil Hood.

Much troubled, Challis made for his study. He was convinced now that something awful had happened. And as he neared his study door he saw Grainger, the school captain, hurrying towards him.

"I say, Challis," said the captain anxiously, "I've just heard about young Hood. What do you think has happened to him?"

"I don't know," cried the big boy. "Come in, Grainger. I'd like to have a talk with you."

He opened the door of his room, turned on the light, and then, with a low cry, bounded forward, for upon the worn hearthrug in front of the empty grate lay the figure of a boy.

Challis was on his knees in a moment, almost sobbing as he raised the poor bruised and battered head and chafed the boy's small hands.

"Oh, Grainger," he choked, "it's Hood! And see what some cowardly brute has done to him!"

Grainger looked, nodded, rushed away, and came back presently with a basin of water, a sponge, and a towel. At his heels crowded one or two of the smaller boys, who were sent roughly away.

Just then the school bell clanged loudly. It was bedtime.

A minute later Mr. Evans entered the study.

He saw Challis supporting the unconscious form of Basil Hood, while Grainger ministered to the fag's comfort with hands as tender as a woman's.

"I wonder what has happened. Who could have done this?" asked the master. "Why, the poor little fellow's clothes are wet, and covered with dust. He must have been cruelly used. But whoever did it shall answer for it in full!"

At that moment Basil's eyelids flickered, the long lashes parted, and he looked up, dazed and frightened, to smile as he recognised the faces that were bending over him.

"Is that you, Mr. Challis?" he murmured in a low voice. "Oh, I thought I should never get back to the school, and I—I came straight to you—but you were out—and—and—I think I must have fainted."

"There, there, my dear boy," said Mr. Evans gently. "Keep quiet, and don't talk until you're stronger. You'll be better by-and-by."

BASIL EXPLAINS.

THE doctor, who had been hurriedly sent for, now arrived, and a restorative soon brought Basil round.

He was gently set in Challis's big armchair, his feet were placed upon a smaller chair, and pillows propped him up.

Slowly the colour chased the pallor from

his wan cheeks, and now that the stains had been washed from his face only the cuts and bruises showed.

"I think he may venture to talk now," said the doctor, after making a further examination.

Mr. Evans and the doctor sat beside the injured boy. John Challis and Grainger stood gazing gloomily down on the little fellow, the former frowning heavily.

"Now, Hood," said the master, "I want you to tell us how this happened."

The fag's face flamed.

"I—I don't think I'd better, sir. I don't want to get anybody into trouble, and I hate sneaking."

"You would be right if the matter were not so serious. I insist upon knowing who injured you, Hood."

"It was that brute, Joe Smart, sir."

"What, the cad whom I turned out of the grounds this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how did you come in contact with him?"

"I saw Myers join him, sir, and I wondered what they were up to. I saw Myers join him out in the road, and I followed them. I suppose I deserved what I got for spying, Mr. Evans, but—somehow, I couldn't help it!"

The master's face darkened.

"And do you mean to say that Myers was there when that cowardly brute attacked you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he made no attempt to interfere?"

"He told Smart not to hurt me."

"But he did not interfere? He stood by and watched that cowardly hound ill-use you like this, without raising a finger to help you? Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me the whole story, please."

And so Basil, as he lay still, told all there was to know.

"That will do," said the master, when the fag had finished. "I am glad you have kept nothing back, Hood. You have done the right thing."

The fag was then carried by John Challis up to one of the "isolation rooms," as the large rooms set apart for sick cases were termed, and put to bed there.

"I dare say he'll be better after he's been in bed a day or two," pronounced the doctor. "Only it would be inadvisable for him to run about, or attempt to renew his studies for some time."

"Mr. Evans," said the boy, as they were about to depart, "please don't say anything to Myers. I don't want him to be punished through my fault."

"Myers shall have justice done him—nothing more nor less," said the master kindly. "Good-night, my lad!"

They returned to Challis's study. There the three talked over the unhappy affair again.

"There is something gravely amiss," said

(Continued overleaf.)

the master sternly. "I intend to sift this matter to the bottom. Hood has been shamefully treated shamefully! That hooligan might have killed him!"

"You will place the matter before the Head, of course, sir?" said Grainger, in a troubled voice.

"Yes. It is a matter that calls for his interference. Meanwhile, I shall consider whether it would not be wise to have Smart arrested."

Grainger and Challis exchanged glances. They had other views.

"Better not do anything hastily, sir," advised the captain. "After all, one always do that. It would be better, would it not, to sift the matter to the very bottom before any action were taken at all."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Evans. "We shall see."

He wished the boys good-night, and left them. Grainger waited a moment to wish Challis good-bye, and to have a private word with him before turning in.

"I see you have your own views as to the best way to deal with this blackguard Smart, Challis," observed the school captain.

"I have, Grainger. I mean to make a call on him to-morrow after school, to demand a personal explanation." And Challis's lips tightened ominously.

"Exactly. Just what I thought! I'll come with you, Challis."

"Better let me go alone. I don't mind taking risks, Grainger. It doesn't matter to me; but I wouldn't get you into trouble for the world. Remember, you're the school captain!"

Grainger laughed grimly.

"And, therefore, must uphold the honour of the school," he returned. "It's no use, Challis. If you're going to call on this cat Smart, you'll need a witness. I intend to go with you, and there's an end of it."

Challis looked hard at his captain for a moment, then extended his hand and gripped Grainger's firmly.

"Thanks," he cried

IN WHICH A BULLY GETS HIS DESERTS.

THE following afternoon the two stalwart schoolboys left the gates of Littleminster together.

Both looked very grave, and were silent and moody for quite a while as they strode along the leafy lane that led to the town.

"Did you see Myers this morning?" asked Grainger, turning suddenly, and eyeing his companion with a searching glance.

"Yes," was the short answer.

"Upon my soul," the captain went on, "I never saw such a change in a man! He looks ghastly. Challis, I've never particularly cared for Myers, but, upon my soul, I feel quite sorry for the chap now."

"So do I," growled John Challis.

"And I'm determined, for his sake as much as for that of the school, to probe this mystery to the bottom. Mr. Evans and the Housemasters would have tackled Smart in a way different from that we'll adopt, but I doubt if it would be anything like as effective." And his lips tightened perceptibly.

"It will mean a fight. Do you mind?"

"No," answered Challis, lengthening his stride, while the fire that burned in his grey eyes showed how bitter was his anger and resentment against the cowardly bully who had so savagely ill-used his little chum Basil.

Grainger watched Challis in silence for some time. He respected his mood, but wondered nevertheless.

"Do you know what there is between this cat and Myers, Challis?" asked the captain at last, with an abruptness that made John start and change colour.

"No, Grainger," he replied. "Can't say I do."

"But there has always been ill-feeling between you and Myers," the captain pursued relentlessly. "Why?"

"Oh, he never treated me fairly, and he bullied young Hood."

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY,

UNDER THE TITLE OF

"DR. STAFFORD'S ORDEAL!"

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