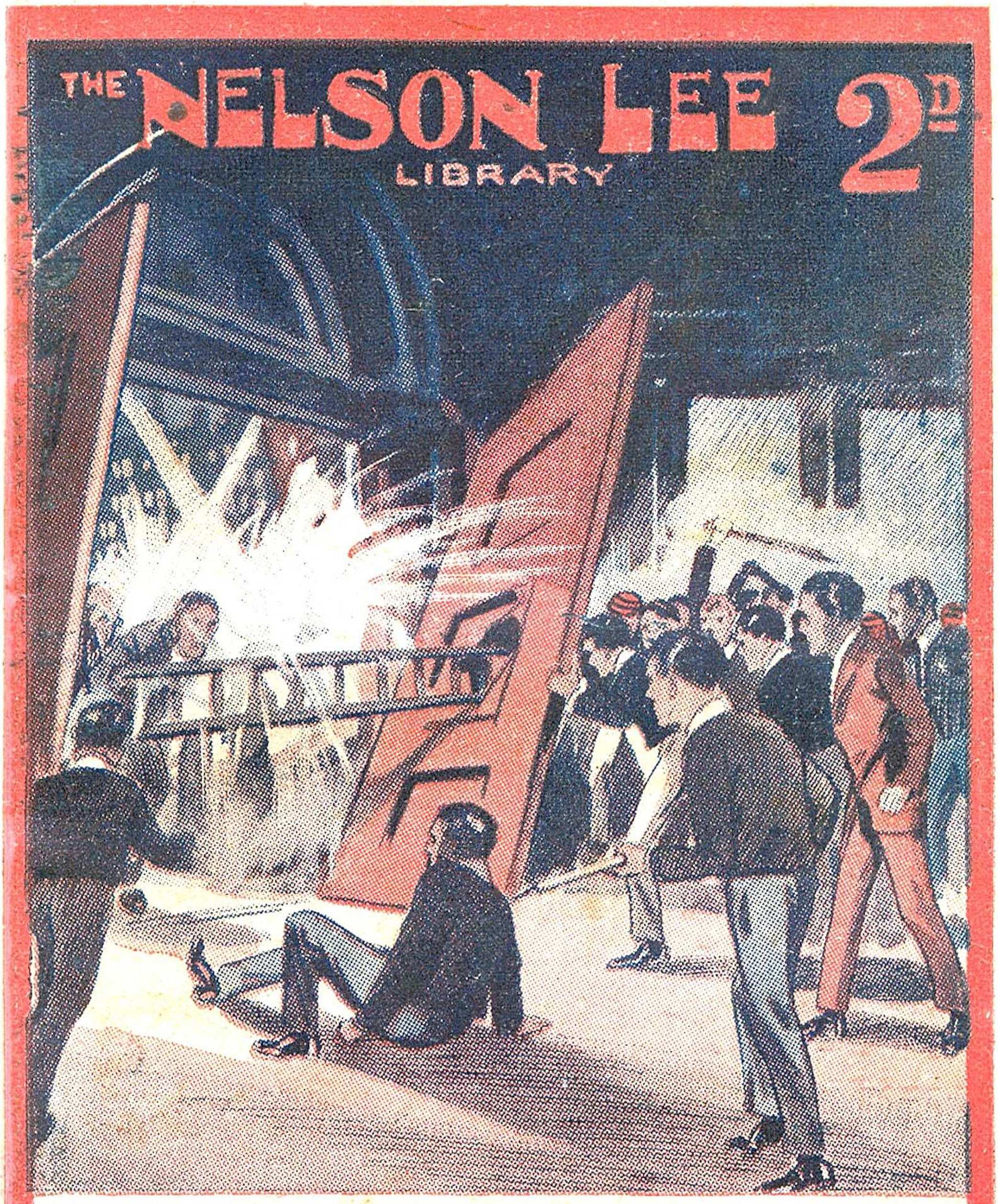
THE ATTACK ON THE REBEL STRONGHOLD!

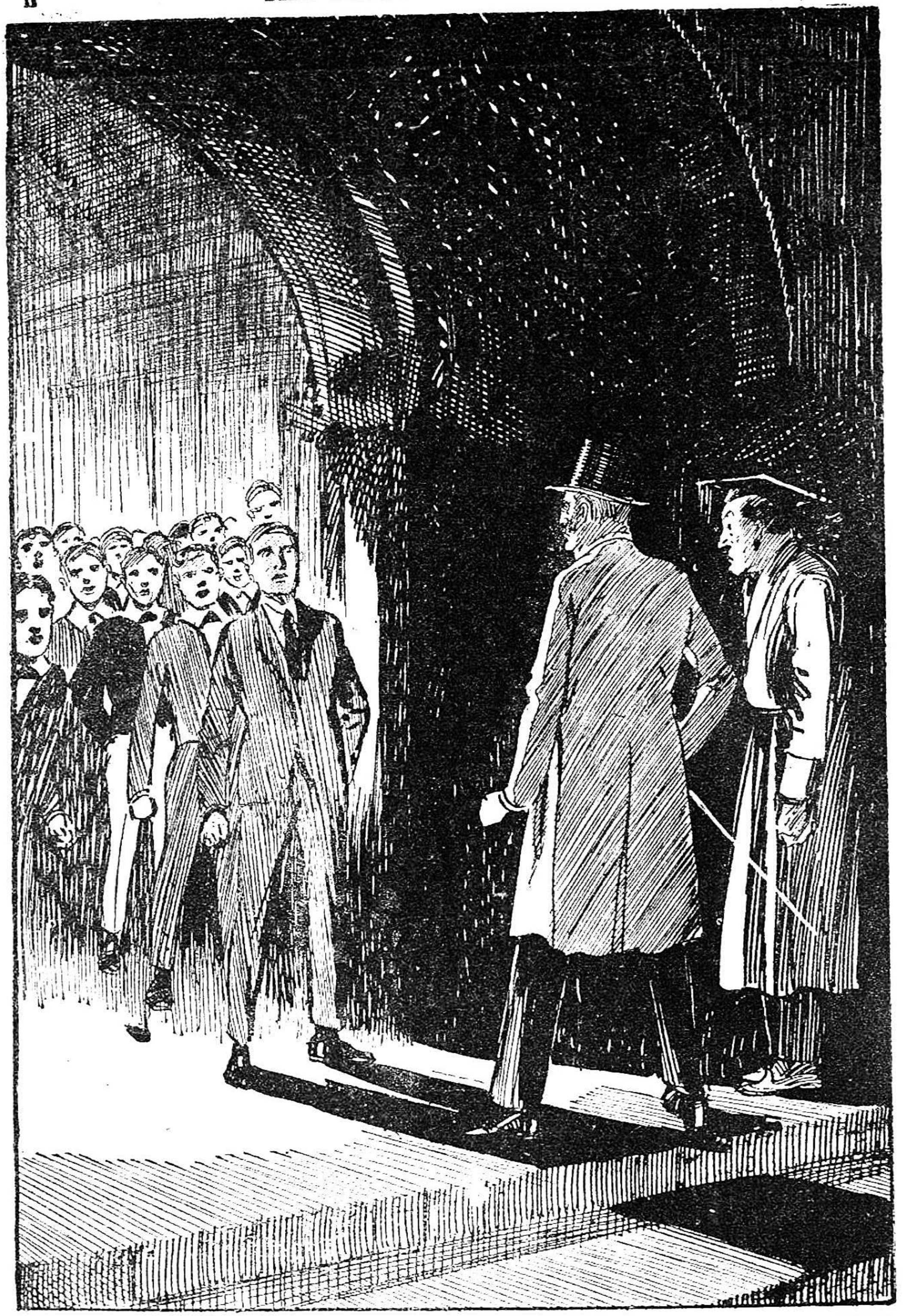
SEE THIS WEEK'S STORY!



With a loud splintering and crackling, the great doors of the West House collapsed under the terrific bombardment. From this week's thrilling story :—

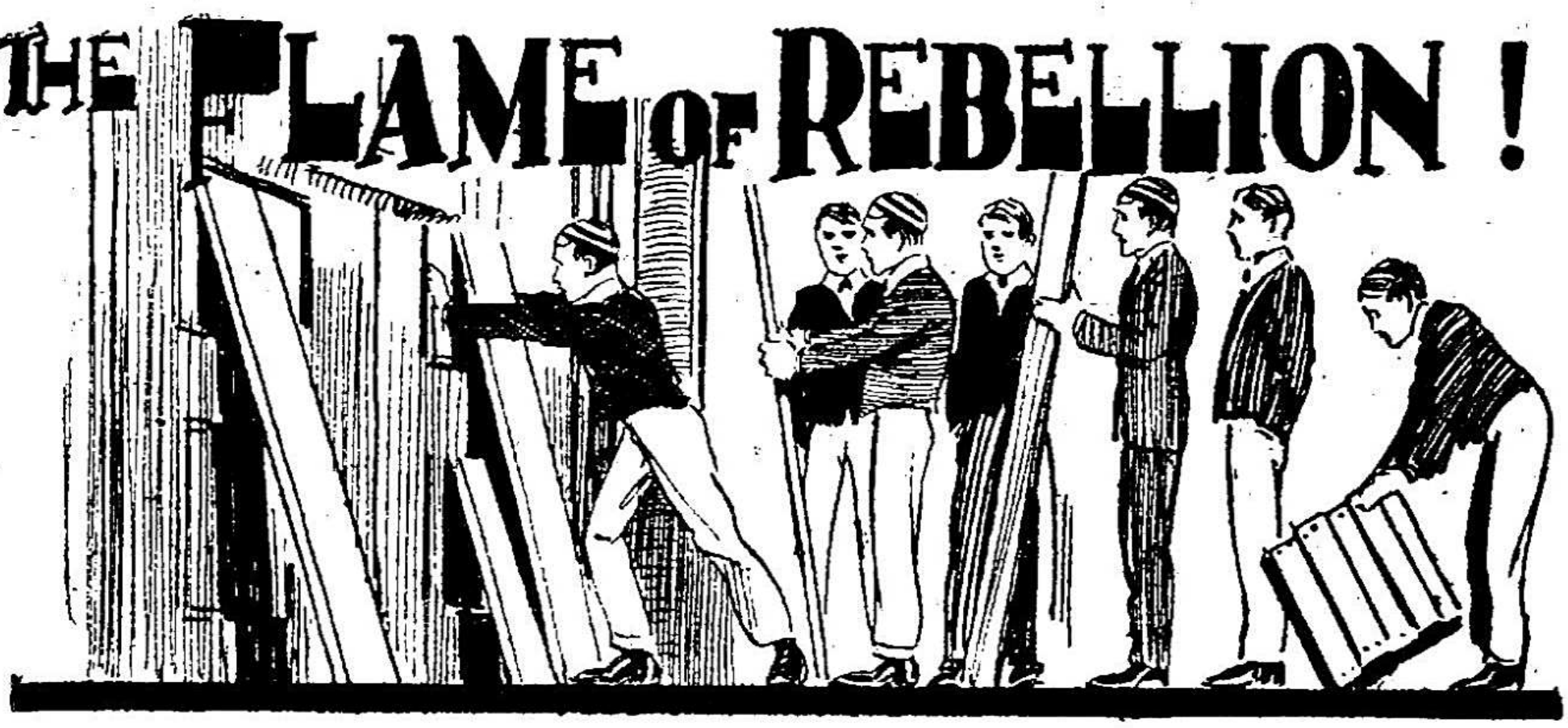
THE FLAME OF REBELLION!

No. 557 OUT ON WEDNESDAY February 6, 1926.



The light from the lobby streamed out, leaving the figures of Dr. Stafford and Mr. Pagett silhouetted against the light. From every quarter the crowds pressed breathlessly round--coming as close as they dare.

THE FLAME OF REBELLION!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A revolt has broken out in the West House at St. Frank's, and Guy Sinclair and his followers have been thrown out by Arthur Morrow, the leader of the rebellion. It is the result of Sinclair's continued persecutions and despotic rule as prefect that the members of his House have at last turned against him. By a form of blackmail, Sinclair had forced Mr. Stokes, his Housemaster, to appoint him prefect, and for the same reason he had been allowed to do practically what he liked. Being a cad and a bully, he made full use of his powers to inflict unfair punishments upon juniors and fags. Protests to Mr. Stokes were of no avail, since the Housemaster was compelled reluctantly to support his prefect. The only redress, therefore, was to take the law into their own hands, and in this week's stirring narrative you will read how the West House wages war against the tyranny of Guy Sinclair.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

STARTLING NEWS.

"WHERE'S Douglas?" asked McClure, nibbling his pen-holder.

"I haven't seen him," said Handforth impatiently. "Don't bother me. I'm trying to get the hang of these rotten Latin verbs. Old Crowell ought to be made to speak nothing but Latin for a year!"

"Yes; but where's Douglas?" asked McClure.

"How should I know where he is, you chump?"

"I mean the town!" snorted McClure.

"Which town?"

"Douglas."

"You ignorant fathead!" said Handforth pityingly. "You sit there, and you don't know where Douglas is! Why, the tiniest kid in the Third knows that Douglas is the capital of the Isle of Wight!"

Handforth & Co. were at prep. in Study D in the Ancient House. Church looked up from his own geography with a chuckle.

"You're learning things!" he said. "It's the first time I knew that Douglas was in the Isle of Wight. You must be thinking of Cowes."

Handforth stared.

"Why on earth should I think of cows?" he asked blankly. "We ran into a herd of 'em the other day on Holt's farm, but——"

"I mean Cowes, the town!" said Church. "Cowes is in the Isle of Wight. But I always thought that Douglas was the Manx place."

"The which place?"

"Douglas is in the Isle of Man, you hopeless duffer!" said Church tartly. "And Mac isn't any better for asking such a question."

Handforth snorted.

"Oh, well, what does it matter?" he asked. "The Isle of Man is very much the same as the Isle of Wight! Fancy making a quibble about that! One happens to be off the South coast, and the other off the East—that's all."

"I dare say you're right," admitted Church. "But, it's a funny thing—old Crowell has always told us that the Isle of Man is in the Irish Sea. And that's off the West coast. Still, we won't argue."

"The West coast!" said Handforth thoughtfully. "That reminds me of the West House. I wonder how those chaps are getting on over there? Things were pretty lively when we left, just before calling-over."

"I don't suppose it'll come to anything," said McClure, shaking his head. "There was a lot of talk about a rebellion, and all that stuff, but you know what it is. I expect it'll fizzle out."

Handforth gave a gloomy nod.

"Of course it'll fizzle out," he said, with a snort. "They want me over there! How can they expect to have a barring-out without a proper leader? Even when I offered to lend a hand they scorned me! I wonder why true talent is always turned down?"

"I wonder!" said McClure. "Now, if the Isle of Man is in the Irish Sea, how is it that the people are Manx?"

"Everybody knows that," said Handforth absently. "It's because they haven't got any tails."

"Tails!" gasped McClure.

"Of course!"

"But I was talking about people!"

"People?" repeated Edward Oswald. "Oh, I thought you meant the cats! You silly fathead, can't you let me think, without babbling about Manx cats? I've a jolly good mind to transfer into the West House! It's a question of duty. My conscience won't let me rest unless I go and help those poor beggars! How can they get on without me?"

"I dare say they struggle through somehow," said Church sarcastically. "They've managed up till now——"

"Yes, and look at the result!" interrupted Handforth, with a sniff. "That beast, Sinclair, is like that chap in 'The Mikado'—Lord High Everything Else. He's the boss of the whole place. Reggie Pitt and his lot have been living like Roman martyrs for weeks past. Morning, noon, and night, it's been the Spanish Inquisition!"

"How can it be the Spanish Inquisition in Rome?" asked McClure.

"Can't I use a figure of speech now?" roared Handforth. "Besides, I'm right, anyhow—Rome's in Spain, isn't it? The ignorance of you chaps is simply colossal! It's a wonder you're not sent down into the Third!"

"Well, let's get on with the prep.—we shall never finish if we argue like this," growled Church. "My hat, who invented Latin? I'd like to have the chap here for two minutes! I'd reel out some of these verbs to him, and he'd expire in two minutes!"

For five minutes peace reigned once more in Study D. Nothing disturbed the stillness except the scratch of pens. Church and McClure were working industriously, and Handforth seemed to be doing the same. As a matter of fact, he was drawing all sorts of weird faces on the flyleaf of McClure's dictionary. It was purely unconscious, for he was deep in thought.

Handforth had a grudge. He was proud of being in the Ancient House—with him it was Ancient House every time. The other Houses at St. Frank's were mere dust-heaps by comparison. Unfortunately, however, the Ancient House was in a condition of utterly disgusting peace. There hadn't been a row there for weeks. The prefects were all that could be desired, and the usual routine followed its placid course without a single ripple.

But next door, in the West House, things were very different.

There were not only ripples, but actual waves. Guy Sinclair, of the Sixth, was the head prefect—and the boys of Stokes' had been living a life of misery ever since the beginning of term.

For Sinclair had made himself a despot. He had never been a prefect before, and suddenly, at one jump, he had transferred from the East House and had been made Head Boy under Mr. Beverley Stokes. The responsibility of his position had got into his head, and he had instituted a tyranny.

It was entirely his own fault. Sinclair was a gay sort of fellow—one of the "bloods" of the Senior School. His main idea had been to have a soft time, and he had started out with this sole intention. A club had been formed, and most of the rotters had joined Sinclair in the West House, and had indulged in card-parties practically every night. For Sinclair seemed to do just as he pleased in the West House.

After a few days, however, the new head prefect's mean character had revealed itself in various ways. He had overworked his fags, he had practised petty spite upon such fellows as Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and Singleton. Because they were decent fellows, he was down upon them.

One thing had led to another, until the Junior School was ripe for revolt. Even the seniors were worked up to such a pitch that they were utterly reckless. Sinclair had vindictively attempted to stop football; and had instituted a system of extracting money from his victims.

And on this very night the elements of a crisis had arisen. Sinclair had even been pounced upon by Willy Handforth & Co., and smothered in treacle and feathers. This was a punishment for twisting Dicky Jones' arm until his shoulder had been dislocated. The offence was a grave one, and the whole West House had been in a ferment.

For some time, Handforth had hoped that a revolt would occur. But at calling-over nothing had happened, and the chums of Study D had come away with mixed feelings. Church and McClure, being peaceful fellows, were rather glad. But Handforth, being a fighter, felt swindled.

"Yes, I shall have to do it," said Handforth, pushing McClure's dictionary aside, and getting to his feet. "I'll go straight along to Mr. Lee now, and ask for a transfer. As soon as I get in the West House there'll be trouble!"

"I believe it," said McClure, looking up.

"Trouble!" repeated Handforth. "The first I shall do will be to challenge Sinclair to a fight."

"You can't do that, you ass," said McClure. "You can't fight the head prefect. It's against the rules and regulations——"

"Rules and regulations!" sneered Handforth. "Who cares about rules and regulations? I shall go straight to Sinclair's study, twist his nose, and knock him flat! If he doesn't fight me after that——"

"Hi!" roared McClure. "What's all this?"

"Don't interrupt——"

"Look at my new dictionary!" howled McClure excitedly. "What are all these ghastly faces on the flyleaf?"

"Eh? Those?" said Handforth, glancing at the dictionary. "I suppose I did 'em—I'm thinking of becoming an artist one day. It's all right, Mac, old man—you needn't thank me. Only too willing."

"Willing?" hooted McClure. "You've ruined it!"

"I'm going straight to Mr. Lee to get that transfer," said Handforth, brushing the other subject aside with supreme indifference. "Of course, he may cut up rusty. But that won't make any difference. I shall point out that this House is too dead for a fellow with a lot of spirit in him."

"I thought you always backed our House against all the others?" asked Church severely. "Handy, I'm surprised at you! I'm disappointed! I didn't think you were so fickle."

"Fickle?" asked Handforth, with a start.

"Just because of a scrap next door, you want to desert your own House!" went on Church indignantly. "How do you think the Ancient House will get on without you? Have you given a thought to that?"

"H'm! Now you come to mention it, I hadn't," admitted Handforth seriously. "Of course, it will be a bit rough on the chaps here. Nipper might be able to scrape along without me, but I doubt it. He's supposed to be the junior leader, but that's only a pretence. I'm the real man."

"Then you can't even dream of transferring next door," said Church finally. "It wouldn't be cricket. Besides, I don't believe that bunkum about leading a revolt. You can't fool Mac and me."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"If you don't answer my question, Walter Church, I'll biff you over backwards!" snorted Handforth, turning red. "None of these giddy insinuations! You needn't think I'm referring to Mary Summers—because I'm not! I haven't even thought of her——"

"Come off it!" grinned Church. "We both know that you're dead nuts on Mary. I'm not surprised—she's a ripping girl, and you're fascinated by any pretty girl, from Wembley waitresses downwards—or upwards. It's a bit rough on poor old Irene!"

"By George!" said Handforth thickly.

He rose deliberately to his feet, tore off his jacket, and ominously rolled up his sleeves. Church backed hastily towards the door, which opened violently at that moment, and caught him a fearful crack on the back of the head. Ralph Leslie Fullwood burst in.

"Heard the news?" he shouted.

"Never mind the news!" roared Handforth. "Close that door! Don't let Church escape——"

"The West House has revolted!" Fullwood panted excitedly. "The chaps have chucked Sinclair out, and they've barred the doors! It's a mutiny!"

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING LIKE A SENSATION.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was usually a calm, cool sort of fellow. It took a great deal to fluster him. In the past he had been celebrated for his cool cynicism. But more recently he had developed a strain of real decency which nobody had previously credited. In fact he was really one of the best.

And to see him burst in like this, hot with excitement, was a most unusual occurrence and a vivid verification of his words. It was very seldom that Fullwood was so worked up.

"Mutiny!" gasped Church, staring. "You're rotting!"

"I'm not! It's an absolute fact!"

Handforth stared at Fullwood dazedly.

"Mutiny!" he breathed. "You—you mean that those West House chaps have started a barring-out?"

"Yes!"

"Then I've been swindled!" hooted Handforth. "There's a mistake somewhere! I was going to transfer to the West House specially to start that barring-out! The silly fatheads have ruined themselves now! They can't hope to win without me!"

"But—but is this official, Fully?" asked McClure, staring. "My only hat! A barring-out! And we're not in it! At other times the whole Remove has been involved. But

now it's only the West House. Good luck to 'em!"

"Let's go out and give 'em a cheer!" suggested Church.

"Everybody's rushing out," said Fullwood. "That's why I came and told you chaps. Sinclair's been kicked out, and all his pals were piled on top of him. There was a whole heap of rubbish on the West House steps, I hear."

"Rubbish?"

"Sinclair and his pals," grinned Fullwood. "Of course, Forrest & Co. are among 'em. They've been pushed out with the rest."

"Then they're not coming back here!" snorted Handforth. "We got rid of those beasts the other week, and they needn't think they can get back! Let's go outside and see what's happening!"

They ran out into the corridor, and found other fellows hurrying towards the lobby. It wasn't very late. There was over half-an-hour before supper, and the news from West House had taken everybody by surprise. There had been talk of a revolt in the air all the evening, but nobody had really believed it.

"Out of the way, Archie," said Handforth, as he bustled down the passage. "You'd better keep out of this, you know. Mind your big feet, Russell."

"There's no hurry," growled Clive Russell, as Handforth clumped on one of his feet. "This revolt is a big affair, I guess. Those West House chaps are in it up to their necks."

"Absolutely," said Archie Glenthorne. "Laddies, it seems to me that this is one of those cheery occasions when it's up to us to rally round. I mean to say, comrades in distress, what? Dash it, we're all in the Remove!"

"Yes, but we'll keep out of it as long as we can, Archie," said Fullwood. "This isn't a Form grievance—it's purely a House affair. If we join the revolt we shall be absolutely in the wrong. But those West House fellows have got plenty of justification."

"All the same, old article, I dare say we could give a few lively cheers, and so forth," said Archie. "Nothing like encouragement, I mean. I'm dashed if I don't ask Phipps for a few suggestions. Brain waves absolutely ooze out of the chap's jolly old forehead. You can see them radiating."

But Archie was talking mainly to himself, for the others were not inclined to accommodate themselves to his leisurely pace. They were dashing out into the Triangle in a continuous stream. Over on the other side it was just the same. Fellows were pouring out of the Modern House and the East House.

The old Triangle was full. Seniors and juniors were clumped together, staring at the West House—as though there had been an outbreak of fire, or something equally sensational. Indeed, a mutiny was about the most sensational thing of all.

"It's a swindle," said Handforth disgustedly. "There isn't a mutiny at all!"

"We can't tell yet——" began Church.

"Do you call this a barring-out?" demanded Handforth. "Where are the barricades? Where are the sentries on duty? They ought to have hose-pipes ready, and every window ought to be full of defenders! I don't believe there's a rebellion at all!"

"The revolt only started five minutes ago," said McClure. "You can't expect miracles, Handy. Give 'em time! Hallo! There's a bit of excitement over by the fountain."

They ran up, and found a crowd of fellows gathering round Bernard Forrest. Gulliver and Bell were near by, and all three were looking scared.

"The fools!" Forrest was saying. "They'll get the sack for this! They kicked us out, and they've barred the doors!"

"It's true, then?" asked Handforth.

"Of course, it's true."

"It's a real rebellion?"

"Sinclair will have something to say about this!" snorted Forrest. "By gad! I wouldn't have believed it! The Fifth and Sixth as well, mark you! They were all in it—even Morrow!"

"Morrow was leading 'em!" said Gulliver.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Church. "Then it IS serious. There's never been a barring-out where the seniors have joined in! The whole House, eh? Junior School and Senior School! I say, this is something like a sensation!"

"There's somebody at one of the windows!" yelled a voice.

"Hurrah!"

"Keep it up, you chaps!"

"Speech—speech!"

There was a rush towards the West House. A figure had appeared at one of the upper windows. But the crowd was considerably disappointed when the figure turned out to be merely one of the maid-servants. She had heard the commotion in the Triangle, and wondered what it was all about.

There seemed to be no indication that anything was radically wrong. It was an established fact that all the West House doors were closed and locked, but there was no sound of rioting from within.

But the rebellion was very real.

Just inside the lobby, behind the locked door, a crowd of West House fellows were discussing the situation. Many of them were scared. They had acted on the impulse of the moment—under stress of great excitement. And they were already regretting the rashness of their attitude.

But there were two who remained calm—Reggie Pitt, of the Remove, and Arthur Morrow, of the Sixth. They had both realised what this revolt meant, and they had urged their fellows on with open eyes.

"We oughtn't to have done it," said Stanhope, of the Sixth. "There'll be an un-

holy shindy about this, and some of us will get sacked——"

"Nobody will get sacked!" interrupted Morrow curtly. "If we keep our heads, and run this rebellion without any excess, we shall have the support of the whole school. So all of you had better be careful. I can trust Pitt to look after the juniors—and I'll be responsible for the rest of us."

"Thanks, Morrow," said Pitt. "You can rely on me."

"I know that," replied Morrow, nodding. "And I think I can be certain that you juniors won't get cold feet."

"Cold feet!" snorted Jack Grey. "We've been in a rebellion before, and we've had experience! If we were just barring-out on a flimsy grievance, it would be a different thing. But it isn't flimsy. Sinclair's the worst cad under the sun, and we simply won't stick him any longer."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Reggie. "We've put up with the beggar since the beginning of the term, but there's a limit. And you can count on us to keep the flag flying, Morrow. But I'm a bit dubious about your lot."

"Look here, confound you——" began Bryant warmly.

"He's right, Bryant," interrupted Morrow. "You and Stanhope have been grumbling already. It won't do. You fellows helped us to pitch Sinclair out, and you've got to stick to your guns."

"We were too excited," growled Bryant. "There's no telling what will be the end of this affair! There's Stokes. What about him? Who's going to explain things when he comes along?"

"Not you!" retorted Morrow curtly. "And let me tell you this! If Mr. Stokes refuses to see eye to eye with us, well—— Well, Mr. Stokes will have to leave, too!"

"Indeed!"

Mr. Beverley Stokes himself spoke from the top of the stairs. There was an instant silence, and all eyes were fixed upon the Housemaster as he slowly descended.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSEMASTER'S DILEMMA.

THERE was a feeling of tension in the air as Mr. Stokes came down into the lobby. His expression was grave, and his face was rather pale. It was not the Housemaster's way to be emotional. But every senior and every junior knew that their Housemaster was aware of the position.

All the rebels were present. The lobby, indeed, was packed, for after the ejection of the unwanted, nobody had known exactly what to do. The arrival of the Housemaster only made the tension more acute.

"You were saying, Morrow, that I shall have to leave unless I see eye to eye with you?" asked Mr. Stokes quietly. "May I be allowed to hear more on this interesting subject?"

"I didn't know you were coming down, sir," said Morrow gruffly.

"I'm sorry if I unintentionally played the part of an eavesdropper," said the young Housemaster. "Let us do away with this pretence, Morrow. You have, I believe, thrown Sinclair out, and bolted the door on him."

"Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain?"

"Half a minute, sir," broke in Pitt. "We're all in it, you know—the whole House. Morrow is no more responsible than the rest of us. Kenmore's been chucked out, too—to say nothing of Parkin and all the rest of the set."

Mr. Stokes took no notice of the junior captain.

"I am waiting, Morrow," he said quietly.

"There's not much explanation needed, is there, sir?" asked Morrow. "It's quite simple. We've had as much of Sinclair as we can stand. We've kicked him out, and we're determined that he shall stay out."

"Oh!" said Mr. Stokes. "You're determined?"

"Absolutely, sir!"

"It isn't like you, Morrow, to assume this aggressive tone," said Mr. Stokes. "As far as I can see, Sinclair has gone a little too far, and you have all given way to excitement. Before the matter becomes really serious, hadn't you better regain a little sanity? This is a time when common sense is essential."

"We know that, sir," agreed Morrow. "That's why we've kicked Sinclair out. We're not galley-slaves, you know. We're not willing to stand an unlimited amount of Sinclair's nonsense. When he dislocated young Jones's shoulder, we thought it about time to give him the boot."

"That story has been exaggerated——"

"It hasn't, sir!" broke in Pitt hotly. "Ring up Dr. Brett! We took Dicky Jones down to him, and the doctor attended to his shoulder. Sinclair deserves to be horsewhipped for that cowardly assault! Anyhow, we're giving him no more chance in this House."

"Not likely!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The cad's been hoofed out for good!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with tyranny!"

A chorus of yells came from juniors and seniors alike—for the majority were ready to carry this affair through to the very limit. Only a few were half-hearted—and even these would soon recover their spirit.

Mr. Beverley Stokes was under no misapprehension. He had had a good deal of experience of boys, and he could see that this mutiny was an ugly affair. Not merely a storm in a teacup—but a carefully con-

sidered rebellion. The fellows were not likely to knuckle under.

And, secretly, the Housemaster was in full sympathy with them.

He knew—far better than any member of his House—what an unscrupulous young blackguard Guy Sinclair really was. And he would be the happiest one of all to see the last of the head prefect.

But Mr. Stokes was in a dilemma.

Sinclair had a hold over him, and unless he knuckled under to the Sixth-Former's demands, there was a prospect of dismissal and disgrace.

Mr. Stokes stood there, frowning. Every fibre within him quivered at the thought of Sinclair. He was filled with joy to realise that his boys had kicked out the tyrant—with all his satellites. He admired their spirit. Yet he dared not reveal the slightest trace of approval.

As a man, he wanted to tell them precisely how pleased he was—but as a Housemaster it was his duty to disapprove. It was an act against the school discipline, and therefore bad.

There was another reason why Mr. Stokes could find no immediate words. From the very start of the term he had known of Sinclair's despotic dictatorship, but he had been compelled to remain discreetly in the background, apparently oblivious of the gathering storm. For Sinclair was in a position to bring disaster to the young Housemaster and his wife.

During the holidays Mr. Stokes had visited one of the worst night-clubs in London—not on pleasure bent, but for the sake of an old family friend named Mr. Rodney Lambert. The latter's son had gone to the night-club in a half-intoxicated condition, and Mr. Stokes had kindly consented to fetch him away.

But as it happened Sinclair was in the place, too. He and his rowdy companions had witnessed Mr. Stokes' arrival, and had seen a fierce altercation between the Housemaster and young Lambert. It had resulted in a fight, and Sinclair's pals had even taken a flashlight snapshot of the scene. After that both Mr. Stokes and Lambert junior had been thrown out.

A perfectly innocent affair, but liable to be gravely misunderstood. And that photograph was deadly, too. On the very first day of term Sinclair had lounged into Mr. Stokes' study, and had demanded the head prefectship of the West House.

In a way it was a mild form of blackmail. For Sinclair threatened to spread that night club story unless the Housemaster agreed. Mr. Stokes was in an unfortunate position, since he had given his promise to the Lamberts that he would breathe no word of the incident to a soul.

So defiance of Sinclair would have been risky. Had that story got about, the Head would have heard. Inevitably the Head would have asked Mr. Stokes to explain. But with his lips sealed by that promise Mr. Stokes could only have maintained silence, and this silence alone would have condemned him.

Therefore in order to keep his word of honour he had been compelled to submit to Guy Sinclair's dictation. But in the meantime he had made frantic attempts to get in touch with the Lamberts, both of whom were abroad. Even now he was expecting to obtain his release by any post. Once he was freed from that promise of his he would know exactly what to do.

The Housemaster was merely biding his time. With the privilege of speech, his first step would be to tell the headmaster everything, for he knew that Dr. Stafford would accept his word regarding the night club affair. Sinclair, of course, would be helpless, and would be expelled on the spot.

And now this rebellion had occurred.

From Mr. Stokes' point of view it was a thousand pities. He sympathised with the House, but at the same time he was hoping that they would stick Sinclair for another few days. The period of waiting could not be much longer. This mutiny would mean an inquiry, and an inquiry would mean a sifting of the facts. And Mr. Stokes' lips were still sealed.

Unable to give the true reason for his recent slackness, the Head would naturally accuse him of incompetence. Dismissal might follow.

For a moment Mr. Stokes thought about going to the Head and explaining everything. But he put the thought aside. It wouldn't be fair. For he would have to accuse Sinclair of blackmail, and could produce no actual proof. In addition, he would condemn himself, for he would have to admit the night club incident without providing any explanation.

His dilemma was certainly a knotty one.

There was only one possible way out for him, and that was to assume an anger he didn't feel, and to force the boys to resume the normal discipline. Sinclair would have to come back.

It went against the grain to adopt such a course, but it was the only safe way. And Barry Stokes promised himself that he would make up in full later on, when he was released from his promise. Then he would explain the facts to his boys, and they would understand. At present they were puzzled. Many of them were openly hostile, believing him to be Sinclair's friend. Others were still uncertain, unable to come to any definite conclusion.

"I am sorry I have kept you waiting, boys," said Mr. Stokes at length. "I have been thinking. This behaviour on your part is foolish, dangerous. I want you to trust me."

Reggie Pitt looked at him curiously.

"We've got no grudge against you, sir," he said. "There's something we don't understand, but that's nothing. It's Sinclair we're up against, sir, not you. You mustn't ask us to let Sinclair come back. There's a limit, sir."

"I agree with Pitt," said Morrow steadily.

"Come, boys, this attitude is out of place," said the Housemaster. "I have asked you to trust me, and I hope you know that I would not willingly expose you to any unfair treatment. I am a fairly easy-going man, and I have not always insisted upon exacting discipline. But on this occasion I must be firm. You have outraged the rules of the school, and I have no alternative."

"What does that mean, sir?" asked Morrow.

"It means that you must cease this nonsense at once," replied Mr. Stokes, managing to instil a curtness into his tone which he did not feel. "You must remember that Sinclair is your head prefect. Open these doors at once and allow Sinclair and his companions to return. Do that, and I will forget the entire incident."

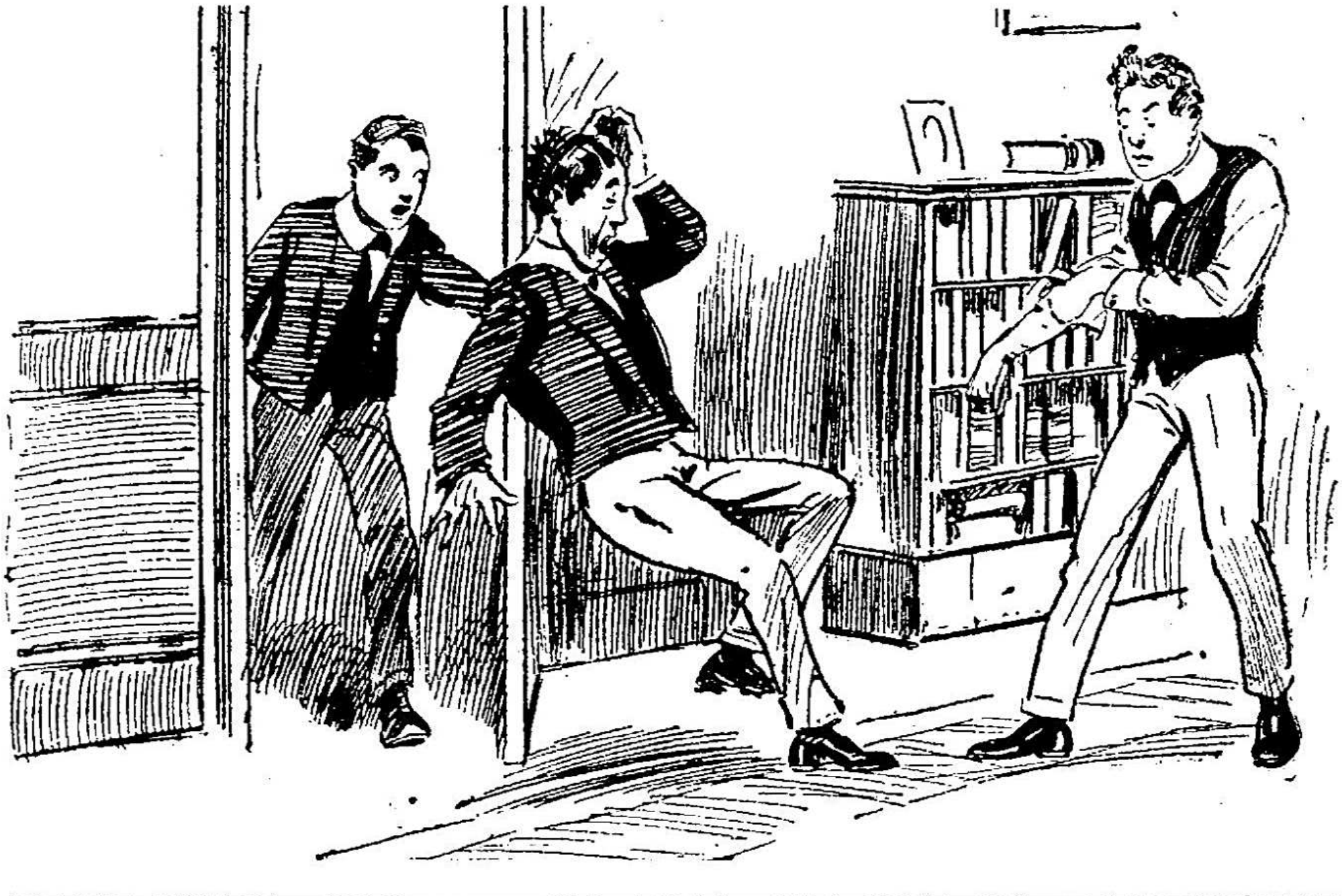
"And what if we don't do it, sir?"

"In that case, Morrow, the affair will naturally reach the headmaster's ears, and then, I am afraid, it will be beyond my jurisdiction," replied Mr. Stokes quietly. "For your own sakes cease this foolery at once!"

CHAPTER IV.

MUTINY IN EARNEST.

FOR a moment Mr. Stokes was hopeful. His emotions indeed were rather complex. In one way, he was anxious to see the boys stand up for their rights, and insist upon Sinclair being removed for good. But from another point of view, he was anxious to see the end of this rebellion. Indeed, it could scarcely be called a rebellion yet, as it was only the beginning of one. Unless it was nipped in the bud now there would be no calculating the outcome.



"The West House has revolted!" panted Fullwood excitedly. "The chaps have chucked Sinclair out, and they've barred the doors! It's a mutiny!"

A certain proportion of the fellows were impressed, and were ready to obey orders. But Morrow and Pitt, the leaders of the seniors and juniors respectively, were not such weaklings. They knew that they had justice on their side; they knew that they had done the right thing. And it would

require more than Barry Stokes' eloquence to shift them.

"You've made a mistake, sir," said Morrow grimly. "There's no foolery here. We pitched Sinclair out because he's unfit to mix with decent fellows, and the House demands that he shall be permanently removed from the head prefectship."

"Hear, hear! Good for you, Morrow!"

"We'll back you up, old man!"

"There's one concession we'll make, sir," put in Pitt. "At least, I'm proposing it, and I expect the others will agree. We'll let Sinclair come back, and the others, too, on condition that you deprive Sinclair of his power. Make Morrow head prefect again, and we'll call it quits."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Morrow!"

"Morrow's the man we want!"

Pitt's suggestion was a brainwave. The very idea of Morrow returning to the head prefectship aroused a perfect storm of enthusiasm. For nearly half a minute the lobby echoed with cheering, and during the course of it the fellows became proportionately excited.

"Pitt's right!" shouted Nick Trotwood.

"Rather!" agreed Singleton warmly. "We'll stand Sinclair if he's only an ordinary senior. In fact, it'll be all the better; we can get our own back."

"We don't want to lose him until we've put him through the mill," said Johnny Onions nodding. "That's a ripping idea of Pitt's. Chuck Sinclair out of the head prefectship and reinstate Morrow!"

"It's up to Mr. Stokes!" yelled Owen major excitedly. "He's the Housemaster, and he can change these appointments just as he likes. Come on, sir; we've shown you the way to settle the thing."

Mr. Stokes bit his lip. He had really needed no telling, for this very solution had suggested itself to him long since. But in the peculiar circumstances it was an impossible one. If Mr. Stokes deposed Sinclair the latter would spread that night club story broadcast. The Housemaster's only move was to affect anger.

"I require no dictation from any of you!" he said hotly. "Even if I had considered the suggestion you make I should now refuse to adopt it. Under no circumstances can I allow this high-handed attitude. I am your Housemaster, and you will obey my orders. Sinclair remains head prefect, and you will open those doors and admit him. That is final!"

A yell of indignation went up.

"We won't do it, sir!"

"Never!"

"Down with Sinclair!"

"You'd better think again, sir!" shouted Morrow, above the din. "The fellows are in no mood for this kind of thing!"

"Their mood is of no interest to me, Morrow!" retorted Mr. Stokes. "Am I to be obeyed or am I to be flouted? I shall not give my orders a second time!"

"Yah! You're as bad as Sinclair!"

"You're Sinclair's echo!"

"Come on, let's chuck Stokes out, too!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Stokes had feared this outburst, and it hurt him to the quick. While sympathising with his boys, he was compelled to stand here listening to their vituperation. Never before had he been in such a false position.

"It's no good, sir, they'll never let Sinclair come back," said Pitt quickly. "Why not reinstate Morrow——"

"Silence, Pitt!"

"But look here, sir——"

"Not another word!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we didn't want to let things come to this," said Reggie Pitt grimly. "You've got half an hour to leave—with Mrs. Stokes and the rest of your household!"

The Housemaster stared.

"Half an hour to leave!" he echoed.

"Not a minute longer, sir!" retorted Pitt. "We gave you an opportunity of settling this rebellion peacefully, and you've refused it. One thing is absolutely certain—we won't have Sinclair back as head prefect."

"But, confound your impudence, I have ordered——"

"Sorry, sir, but your orders aren't good enough."

"Pitt!" shouted Mr. Stokes. "This is rank mutiny."

"It is, sir, and I'm with Pitt all along!" broke in Morrow. "It may not be a very dignified proceeding for a fellow of my age, but justice is justice. I started this affair, and I'm going through with it. From this minute we'll take charge of the West House ourselves. Please escort Mrs. Stokes and the household staff off the premises within half an hour. If anybody remains after that period I can't be responsible for what happens."

"In other words, we shall be thrown off?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"I am afraid so, sir."

"There is nothing like plain speaking!" snapped the Housemaster. "Fortunately I have not allowed this appalling affair to deprive me of my commonsense. I can do nothing but submit. You are in full force, and I am at your mercy."

He turned on his heel and strode off, pushing through the crowd, his ears burning with the sound of hissing and hooting. That sound was a strange one for Mr. Stokes. He had always been second only to Nelson Lee in popularity, and to hear his own boys hooting him was akin to the pain of a physical blow.

At the same time he rather enjoyed it. They were revealing the spirit he admired, the spirit that rebelled against tyranny. He knew only too well that he had cut a poor figure, and that he deserved this condemnation. So he accepted the inevitable with a good grace.

"Well, that's done it," said Grey breathlessly. "We've given old Stokes the order of the boot now. I say, do you think he'll go?"

"If he doesn't go we'll turn him out by force!" roared Chambers of the Fifth.

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not backing out now!"

"Listen, you fellows!" shouted Morrow. "We've been forced into this. We couldn't accept Stokes' orders without a humiliating surrender. And that would have meant making ourselves the laughing stock of the school. We've got to go ahead, and there's strength in unity. If any of you fellows want to back out, say so at once."

There was a complete silence.

"Speak up!" went on Morrow. "We don't want any half-hearted rebels in this camp! Anybody who wants to stand out of it, can leave at once. We only require whole-hearted support."

Still there was no answer

"All right, then—you're all in the rebellion?" asked Morrow. "There's nothing I'd like better. But remember—no growling or grumbling if things go against us. We're in the right, and that's good enough for me."

He turned to Pitt.

"Reggie, you'd better take your crowd, and prepare a system of guards for the doors and windows. I'll go and see about the servants."

"I was just going to suggest the same thing," nodded Pitt briskly. "There'll be the dickens of a hullabaloo over this business presently, and they'll probably make an attempt to force us out. So we'd better make some preparations."

"We'll bar everybody out, eh?" shouted Owen major.

"It's the only way," said Pitt. "And remember—no confusion. Until we've instituted a proper system of discipline, we've got to work together. So it's all hands to the pumps to get barricades and the defence works ready."

The lobby thronged with excitement.

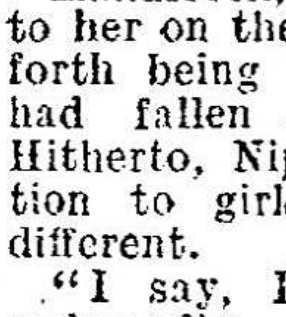
It was a real barring-out now, and no mistake! Mr. Stokes had refused to accept the loophole, and a serious rebellion was inevitable. In less than five minutes the whole West House was humming with activity.

Windows were being locked, temporary barricades were being prepared, and in the domestic quarters the servants were being hustled out. For the fellows were determined to have the House entirely to themselves.

It was their show, and they were going to run it!

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT BARRING-OUT.



REGGIE PITT came to a sudden halt in the Junior passage.

He was hurrying round to see that all the fellows were at their posts. There was something calm and determined about this rebellion. It wasn't merely a wild riot, which would expend its energy within a few hours. The West House had suffered under Guy Sinclair for so long that even the weaker fellows were instilled with a spirit of dogged grit. They had made a mutual vow. No surrender until Sinclair was dismissed from the head prefectship!

Pitt came to a halt, and flushed.

Immediately in front of him was Mary Summers—Mr. Beverley Stokes' pretty niece. She was an attractive girl of fifteen, with any amount of high spirits, and she had been staying with her aunt and uncle for some little time. Indeed, she had become a great favourite at St. Frank's.

Handforth, of course, had lost his heart to her on the first day of her arrival—Handforth being somewhat fickle. Even Nipper had fallen a victim to Mary's charms. Hitherto, Nipper had paid little or no attention to girls—but Mary, in his eyes, was different.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," said Pitt awkwardly.

Mary came closer, flushed and excited.

"What are you sorry about?" she asked.

"Hasn't Mr. Stokes—— I mean, haven't you heard——"

"Oh, you mean about us being turned out?" asked Mary. "Uncle told me that we've got half-an-hour to pack our grips. It's only about ten minutes now, isn't it? Well, we're nearly ready."

"Hang it all, I don't know what to say!" muttered Pitt. "It's pretty ghastly, ordering you out of the House like this——"

"Don't be silly!" interrupted Mary, with a laugh. "I'm jolly pleased about the whole business. Good luck to the rebellion!"

Pitt gasped.

"But—— But don't you mind being pitched out?" he asked blankly.

"I just love it!" she replied enthusiastically. "Why, if you'd allowed that awful Sinclair to come back, I shouldn't have thought anything of any of you. You've done the right thing."

"Did you tell your uncle that?" asked Pitt, recovering.

"Of course I did."

"My only hat! What did he say?"

"He hardly said anything," replied Mary, frowning. "Do you know, I believe he agreed with me. In fact, I believe he agreed with you fellows, too. There's something rummy about my uncle. I've got half an idea that Sinclair has forced him——"

"I've had that idea, too," admitted Pitt. "Yet it seems so queer. What on earth could Sinclair know against your uncle? He's one of the straightest masters St. Frank's has ever had—one of the best, too. We hate turning him out, but we've got to stand by our principles."

"Jolly good luck to you," agreed Mary heartily. "You can take it from me that Uncle Barry sympathises with you at heart. He's only against this rebellion because you've gone against discipline. You needn't worry about Aunt Joyce or me."

"But where are you going?"

"Next door," replied the girl. "Uncle rang up Mr. Lee, and told him a few of the facts, and there's plenty of room in the Ancient House. So we're going there until the trouble's over. I hope you win!"

"We shall win," said Pitt simply. "We've GOT to."

"By jingo, that's the spirit!" said Mary warmly. "What a beastly shame it is that I'm not a boy—so that I could join in! Still, I may get a chance to do something before it's all over. I think it's ripping of you to pitch Sinclair out, and refuse to let him come back."

Reggie Pitt was enormously relieved—and so were the others. It was one thing to kick Sinclair out, and to order Mr. Stokes to leave. But Mrs. Stokes and Mary Summers were involved, too—and that was another matter.

They were both content to leave the West House in the hands of the rebels. Even Mrs. Stokes revealed, quite plainly, that she was a willing sufferer. This sort of spirit gave the rebels an enormous amount of encouragement.

The domestic staff was not so content.

There were all sorts of grumbles, and two or three of the kitchen maids positively refused to leave. For a time the rebels were nonplussed, for they couldn't very well force the girls to go. It was Mrs. Stokes who came to the rescue, and quietly talked to them.

And sure enough, at the end of the half hour, the West House was entirely inhabited by schoolboys. Everybody else had left. The doors and windows were barred and guarded, and the whole House seethed with intense excitement.

The juniors were particularly animated. There was something fine in the knowledge that Morrow and Chambers and the other seniors were backing them up. In the past there had been a few disturbances in the Junior School, but on these occasions the seniors had regarded the whole affair with lofty indifference.

This was the first time they had actively joined in. And the juniors were consequently heartened and emboldened. And on the top of all this was the certain knowledge that they were thoroughly justified in their mutiny. Guy Sinclair was utterly unfit to have an atom of control. And since the House couldn't get rid of him by gentle methods, they had adopted violent ones. If any searching inquiry was made, there could be only one result.

So the whole House gave themselves up to the task of the defences with an enthusiasm which was good to see. Acting upon the advice of Morrow and Pitt, the fellows were restraining themselves very creditably. There were no scenes of wanton destruction. Barricades were hastily erected, but no furniture was wrecked in the process.

"It's no good slacking down now," said Pitt, as he helped energetically with the work at the rear door. "The Head's bound to get wind of the rebellion soon— he probably knows about it already—and the first thing he'll do will be to order us out."

"But we shall refuse to quit," said Farman.

"Of course we shall refuse to quit," agreed Pitt. "And that'll mean an attempt to pitch us out by force. And it may develop within the next half hour—so we can't afford to risk——"

"You're wanted at once," interrupted Dick Goodwin, running up.

"What! Trouble already?"

"No, not exactly," said the Lancashire boy "But some of the chaps have found old Pagett in his bed-room."

"Old Pagett!" grinned Pitt. "But I thought we'd cleared the House?"

"Pagett had a headache, or something, and he was having a nap," said Goodwin. "Now he refuses to go. By gum! When Singleton told him to clear out, he nearly had a fit. You'd better come and attend to him. Morrow's busy in the front, somewhere."

Pitt hurried up the rear stairs, in search of Mr. William Pagett. The Fifth Form master was one of those who lived in the West House, and in the excitement he had been overlooked. Reggie Pitt found him in his bedroom, with several juniors collected round the open door. Fortunately, one or two seniors had just come up.

"Rebellion? Mutiny?" roared Mr. Pagett. "Rubbish! What arrant nonsense is this? I shall report you to Mr. Stokes!"

"Sorry, sir, but we shall have to ask you to leave," said Pitt.

"What! Another!" thundered Mr. Pagett. "That's the third time I've been told to leave! Pitt! How dare you?"

"But you don't seem to understand, sir, that everybody else has gone—including Mr. Stokes," said Reggie. "All the fellows of

this House have revolted, and there'll be no peace until Sinclair is officially dismissed from the head prefectship. Purely for your own sake, sir, you'd better leave."

"I absolutely refuse to leave!" roared Mr. Pagett furiously. "Upon my soul! I have never heard such insolence in the whole of my life!"

"No intention of being insolent, sir," said Pitt. "But if you don't go peacefully, I'm afraid we shall have to use force."

Mr. Pagett nearly choked. He was a gentleman of moods. Nine of his moods out of ten were irritable ones, and it only required a very small excuse for him to lose his temper.

"Chambers!" he bellowed, catching sight of the elegant Cuthbert. "Are you associated with this appalling affair?"

Chambers was rather startled.

"I—er—well, yes, sir," he blurted out. "We're all in it, you know. It's a House rag. Or not exactly a rag—a kind of revolt, as it were, sir. You'll have to go, sir."

"This—this is beyond all endurance!" stormed Mr. Pagett. "I not only refuse to go, but if any of you dare to touch me——"

"I say, you fellows!" shouted Pitt, looking down the corridor. "Just a minute here! Looks like trouble, and we need help."

The Fifth Form master turned pale.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "You—you actually mean to lay hands on me? Very well! Very well! We shall see! Some of you will suffer dearly for this gross act of insubordination! It is the most flagrant piece of insolence in my entire experience."

Fairly bubbling with fury, Mr. Pagett stalked out of the room, and strode down the corridor. By the time he got downstairs, he gained an insight into the grave nature of the situation. His eyes were opened to the full truth. He realised that this barring-out was a reality.

Within three minutes he was allowed to pass out through the front doorway. And the door closed behind him, and the bolts were shot home.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING SERIOUS.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, the genial skipper of the Fifth, leaned against the stonework of the Ancient House steps, and gazed with a kindly eye at the excited throng in the Triangle.

"It does my old heart good, Brother Horace, to witness the simple pleasures of the multitude," he observed. "Unless I am vastly mistaken, a human bombshell will presently explode, and create a sensation of the first water."

"Who's the bombshell?" asked Horace Stevens.

"You have surely heard that the Head is expected back at any moment?" asked Browne. "It seems that our reverend chieftain, unaware of the approaching crisis, thought it a somewhat ripe idea to visit sundry prominent citizens of Helmford. A public dinner, I believe. And now Brother Stafford is sitting next to his chauffeur, urging the poor fellow to depress the accelerator further and further. Life and limb are matters of no consequence in such a crisis as this. Be prepared to see the Head's limousine skid into the Triangle on two wheels. At this very moment the poor old gent is bewailing the fact that the age of aerial taxicabs has not yet arrived."

"I say, is this true?" asked Stevens. "Is the Head really out to-night?"

Browne looked pained.

"Having briefly explained the situation, I thought perhaps your mentality would grasp the thing with a little more pep," he sighed. "However, I have no objection to repeating my former remarks with full detail——"

"That's all right!" interrupted Stevens hastily. "I think I've got the idea, old man—the Head's expected at any minute?"

"Exactly!" said Browne. "And with the Head's arrival we shall witness some choice—— But stay! Surely the door of the West House is opening? Surely a figure is being pushed into the cold and murky night? And surely—horror upon horror!—the figure is none other than Brother Pagett himself?"

"My only hat! They've kicked old Pagett out!" grinned Stevens.

Browne groaned.

"Alas! That our Form-master should sink to such depths!" he said, in a hollow voice. "This is the final indignity, Brother Horace! However, knowing the gentleman as we do, we can safely take it that he asked for this little bit of trouble in a very loud voice. Who are we to blame these children for indulging him?"

"Children!" echoed Stevens. "The Fifth and Sixth are involved, too, my lad. Old Morrow is up to his eyes in it."

"It has always been one of my pet theories that Brother Morrow would one day do something big for his country," said Browne, nodding. "I have only one regret, Brother Horace. We of the Ancient House are debarred from this choice entertainment. Much as I respect our own House, I am inclined to be jealous. I am a man of peace generally, but on such occasions as these the fighting blood of the Brownes surges up and inspires me with valour. Who knows? Perhaps we may yet join in the battle."

There was a bit of a stir on the other side of the Triangle. Near the gates, some of the fellows were on the watch for the first sign of the headmaster's car. Everybody knew that Dr. Stafford was away, and

everybody was determined to be in the Triangle when he returned.

It was getting close to bed-time, too, and there was anxiety in the air. It would be a proper swindle if the Head delayed his return until after the bell had gone.

Sensation upon sensation had followed one another in close succession. There was no longer any doubt regarding the reality of the revolt. Not only had Mr. and Mrs. Stokes been ejected, but the household staff as well. The barring-out was developing rapidly. And the crowds in the Triangle were feverishly excited over the possibilities.

"If the Head cuts up rusty, we'll join the barring-out, too!" declared Handforth firmly. "I've a jolly good mind to go and meet him. It would save an awful lot of trouble if I could get him alone for five minutes."

"I suppose you mean it would increase the trouble?" asked Church.

"It's a pretty good idea!" went on Handforth musingly. "Where's my bike? I'll go along the road, meet the Head's car, and ride back the rest of the way with him. I'll explain what's happened, and by the time we get here everything will be settled."

"Good!" said McClure. "That's great, Handy!"

"I can easily persuade the Head that Sinclair's no good, and he'll just step out of his car and give the rebels their demands," went on Handforth. "By George! I'll go straight off at once——"

"Wonderful!" interrupted Church. "Go to it, old man!"

"You'll do the trick," said McClure, nodding.

Handforth regarded his chums suspiciously.

"Want to get rid of me, I suppose?" he asked, with a snort. "All right, you rotters, I won't go now! I'll stay here, and get a transfer into the West House. I'll join the rebels!"

"If you're going to join the rebels, how can you square the Head?"

"Now I come to think of it, I don't want to square the Head," retorted Handforth. "My hat! What's the good of that? I want to get some excitement out of this rebellion—and it's like your potty ideas to suggest settling it! Don't let me hear any more about that scheme to meet the Head!"

"But it was your idea, you ass!" roared Church.

"If you're going to start arguing——" Handforth broke off, and stared excitedly at the gates. "By George! He's here!" he added. "It's the Head! Now we shall see some fireworks."

A buzz went through the entire Triangle. Somebody at the gates had given the warning, and a pathway was hastily cleared. A moment later the gleaming headlights of the Head's car turned in from the lane. The well-appointed limousine glided noiselessly through the gateway.

Complete silence reigned among the crowds—for the presence of Dr. Malcolm Stafford gave rise to a certain amount of awe. Out of sheer respect for the Head, too, the fellows cooled down.

The car-lights revealed the crowds with dazzling brilliancy. And Dr. Stafford—who had been hastily recalled from Helmford by telephone—sat forward in his seat with an expression of amazement and anger on his lined old face. He had been a prey to uneasy fears during the whole journey, and the crowded Triangle did nothing to comfort him.

He ordered the car to a halt, and was just stepping out when Mr. Pagett ran up. The Fifth Form-master was in a state of excitement, and he did not cut a very dignified figure in his dressing-gown.

"I am glad you have returned, sir—very glad," he panted. "A terrible thing has happened! The boys of the West House have revolted!"

"Is this true, Mr. Pagett?" asked the Head tensely.

"True!" shouted the Form-master. "Good gracious, sir, I was literally ejected from the building! Even the servants have been turned out!"

The Head looked very grave.

"I had been hoping that the earlier report was exaggerated," he exclaimed. "This news is indeed appalling, Mr. Pagett. Are the boys actually in open rebellion? Have they committed any acts of violence? I am staggered at the whole incident. It was the very last thing I expected. In the name of Heaven, why have the boys defied authority in this way?"

"It is beyond my comprehension, sir," panted Mr. Pagett. "But there is no doubt regarding the reality of the disgraceful business. The boys have locked themselves in, and I understand they are barring every window and door. The whole school is upside down, sir."

The Head considered for a moment, and then glanced round the Triangle. There was evidently no revolt here. All the boys were serious and tense—there was scarcely a sound to be heard. The fellows were waiting—throbbing with eagerness to see what would happen.

"You had better come with me, Mr. Pagett," said the Head curtly.

He marched straight to the West House, and hammered sharply upon the door with the head of his umbrella. Dr. Stafford was in evening-dress, with a light dress-coat thrown over it. He had left St. Frank's to spend an enjoyable evening. There had been no warning—no hint of coming disaster.

Rap! Rap! Rap!

Again the Head hammered upon the door. And after a brief delay the bolts were shot back, and the door was flung open. The light from the lobby streamed out, leaving the figures of Dr. Stafford and Mr. Pagett silhouetted against the light. From every

quarter the crowds pressed breathlessly round—coming as close as they dare.

The West House lobby was crowded with rebels, most of them hot and dishevelled. In the foreground, like a group of officers, stood Morrow, Phillips, Pitt, and one or two more. They stood in such a way that no entrance was possible. The Head seized upon Morrow at once—Morrow being the eldest.

"Will you explain this to me, Morrow?" asked Dr. Stafford quietly.

The Sixth-Former looked uncomfortable.

"There's no disrespect aimed at you, sir," he said quickly. "It's only a House quarrel. We've kicked Sinclair out——"

"Has this House revolted against authority, or not?"

"Well, yes, sir, I'm afraid it has."

"I am amazed that you should stand there and make such an admission," said the Head angrily. "There shall be a searching inquiry into the whole unfortunate case, and the culprits will be dealt with drastically. Let this nonsense cease. I demand an instant surrender."

Usually, such words from the headmaster would have had the necessary effect. There were very few fellows—or bodies of fellows—who would dare to defy the orders of Dr. Stafford.

But Morrow was no weakling, and he had a feeling, too, that he had the backing of the entire House.

"We are perfectly willing to surrender, sir, if Sinclair is permanently removed from the prefectship of this House——"

"Conditions!" shouted the Head. "How dare you, Morrow! Good heavens! How dare you stand there and attempt to make conditions? Not another word! You will surrender this very instant!"

"It can't be done, sir," put in Pitt respectfully. "We're all behind Morrow, you know. We won't give in until Sinclair——"

"Silence, sir!" thundered the Head. "Morrow, I need hardly tell you that your association with this—this orgy will result in expulsion for you."

"Shut the door, you chaps!" roared somebody from the rear. "The Head won't listen to us! Bar him out!"

"Hurrah! Down with tyranny!"

There was a sudden rush, and the door was crashed to with a slam. Dr. Stafford and Mr. Pagett backed away, aghast. They listened in a stunned condition as they heard the bolts being shot into place.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH MEANS BUSINESS.

MR. PAGETT breathed hard.

"There you are, sir!" he panted. "Perhaps you will now realise the serious nature of this——"

"Please, Mr. Pagett!" interrupted the Head. "I am momentarily dazed. This revolt is far more serious than I suspected. I must consider matters before I take any steps. Good heavens! What a catastrophe!"

The Head realised that his dignity had not been enhanced by the incident. The door had been closed in his face, and hundreds of other boys were looking on all the time. In a way, Dr. Stafford had asked for it—for he had refused to listen to any sort of explanation from the mutineers.

He strode off through Big Arch, across the inner court, to his own private residence. Mr. Pagett did not accompany him immediately—for even Mr. Pagett was beginning to feel nervous.

As soon as Dr. Stafford had gone, the Triangle broke out into a tumult of excited voices. There was a certain amount of cheering among the fags, and the Remove and Fourth were full of praise for the rebels. The seniors shook their heads and looked grave.

"That's done it!" said Handforth tensely. "By George! That's done it! You saw what happened, you chaps? Those West House fellows refused to surrender, and closed the door in the Head's face! That means the rebellion goes on!"

"It must go on—unless the ringleaders are asking for the sack," replied Church. "I say, it's pretty bad. I mean, a rebellion like this might go on for days——"

"Bad!" interrupted Handforth. "Good, you mean! I'm not going to be left out of it, either. You chaps have put me off up till now, but you can go and eat coke—I mean to see Mr. Lee, and get a transfer."

His chums stared blankly.

"But—but you haven't got any excuse for revolting, you ass!" gasped McClure. "Everything's peaceful in our House——"

"That's why I'm going over into the West House," replied Handforth. "No—you needn't come with me! I don't want you poaching on my preserves! This is my stunt!"

"But you'll get gated for the whole term if you ask Mr. Lee anything like that!" yelled Church. "You're mad! The only thing you can do is to go over to the West House, and say nothing about it to anybody."

Handforth looked at him pityingly.

"Yes, and then get into trouble!" he snorted. "But if I fix up my transfer, I shall have Mr. Lee's permission—and that'll make all the difference. You can leave it to me. I know what I'm doing!"

Handforth hurried indoors before his chum could say anything further. They looked at one another with mute despair. There was never any limit to Handforth's crazy ideas—but this was surely the craziest of all.

He didn't seem to realise the impossible nature of his request. No sane Housemaster would let one of his boys transfer into another House that was in a state of

rebellion. But Edward Oswald seemed to think that it was a perfectly reasonable suggestion.

He was so sure of it that he bounced into Nelson Lee's study like a jack-in-the-box. He had remembered to give a preliminary knock on the door, but he followed it so swiftly that Nelson Lee scarcely heard it.

"Spare a minute, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"You should enter my study more decorously, Handforth," said the House-master-detective with a frown. "However, under the exceptional circumstances, I will forgive you. It is an exciting evening."

"Rather, sir," said Handforth. "I'd like a favour, if you can manage it, sir. I want to transfer into the West House."

Nelson Lee looked at him sharply.

"You want to do what, Handforth?" he asked.

"Transfer into the West House, sir."

"This is no time for joking——"

"I'm not joking, sir," interrupted Handforth warmly. "My hat! Do you think I came here to make jokes? If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd like to transfer straight away, so that I can go across this evening."

This time Nelson Lee looked at Handforth very strangely.

"If this is not a joke, young 'un, I take it that you are quite serious?" he asked. "You have deliberately come to me with the request that I should grant you a transfer into the West House?"

"Exactly, sir."

"I presume you know that Mr. Stokes is not there now?"

"That doesn't matter, sir—I don't mind."

"I presume you also know that the West House is in revolt?"

"My hat! Who doesn't know that?" asked Handforth tartly. "Sorry, sir! I mean, even Trotwood junior must know all about it—and he's as deaf as a post! That's the very reason I want to transfer."

"In order to become a rebel, eh?"

"Well, the fact is, sir, I'm a bit sorry for those chaps," said Handforth confidentially. "Things look like going against them unless I buck up and lend a hand. So I thought it would be rather a good idea to dodge across and take the leadership."

"That's very thoughtful of you, Handforth."

"Oh, that's just my way, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "I don't like to think of those chaps going under. Sinclair's an awful beast, you know, and I don't blame Jean for biffing him out. It's a good thing for him I wasn't over there earlier—or he'd have been in the sanny by now! So it's all fixed, sir? Thanks awfully!"

"Just a minute, Handforth," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I appreciate your consideration for these unfortunate West House boys, but I hardly think it necessary for you to bother yourself about the leadership."

"But that's the most important thing of all, sir," insisted Handforth. "What's the good of me going over there if I don't take the reins? I've got some marvellous ideas. I'm thinking about stirring up a rebellion in all the other Houses, too."

"Indeed?"

"Well, we might as well be all in it, sir," said Handforth. "It's a bit one-sided with only the West House in. You see, if I'm over there, I can organise the attack, too. I'm jolly glad to find that you look at the thing in a reasonable light, I was half afraid you'd be obstinate."

Nelson Lee, in spite of his astonishment at Handforth's effrontery, could hardly help being amused. Edward Oswald was perfectly serious—that was the humorous part of the situation. He hadn't the faintest notion that his request was little short of impudent.

"Your fears were well founded, Handforth," said Nelson Lee drily. "I am not only inclined to be obstinate, but positively adamant. In other words, you had better not discuss this matter any further."

Handforth started.

"Here, I say, sir!" he protested. "You don't mean to say you're going to refuse? Once I'm over in the West House, I'll bring this rebellion to a head, and it'll all be over in no time."

"I am sorry——"

"You can't be as unreasonable as all that!" went on Handforth anxiously. "My plan is to lead the West House until we've dished both old Stokes and the Head. I—I mean, we'll bring the mutiny to a glorious finish—with complete victory for the rebels! You want peace quickly, don't you? Then let me——"

"I am sorry to interrupt you, Handforth, but you are evidently labouring under the stress of excitement," said Nelson Lee briskly. "Were you any other junior, I would punish you severely for this suggestion. But I happen to know your peculiarities—your grotesque mentality. And under those circumstances, I will overlook the offence and let you go. That is all."

Handforth stared in blank dismay.

"But just a minute, sir——" he began.

"That is all, Handforth."

"If you'll only listen——"

"Handforth, you may go!"

There was something so final about Nelson Lee's tone that even Handforth recognised the danger signal. He was on the point of an indignant outburst when he pulled himself together, and snorted.

Then, with grim features, he strode out of the study.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. STOKES CUTS A POOR FIGURE.

"GROTESQUE mentality!" murmured Handforth thickly.

"Eh?"

Edward Oswald looked up and started. He had spoken his thoughts aloud, and found that Church and McClure were with him. In fact, they had been waiting in the corridor, debating the point regarding their leader's interview. McClure was convinced that Handforth would come out with his hands tucked under his arms. But Church was just as positive that Handforth would have to take all his meals standing up for a day or two.

They had been quite astonished to see Edward Oswald leave the Housemaster's study in a perfectly normal condition. He was certainly thoughtful and preoccupied, but he wasn't in pain.

"Grotesque mentality?" repeated Church. "Are you referring to your own?"

Handforth started again.

"My own!" he gasped. "How did you know?"

"Everybody knows it."

"Mr. Lee told me that I've got a grotesque mentality!" said Handforth hoarsely. "He says I'm peculiar, too! Did you ever hear such rot?"

Church and McClure maintained a discreet silence.

"There's no accounting for these masters," went on Handforth bitterly. "You go to them with a perfectly reasonable request, and they turn you down! I don't know what things are coming to! I've a good mind to ignore old Lee, and join the rebels in spite of him!"

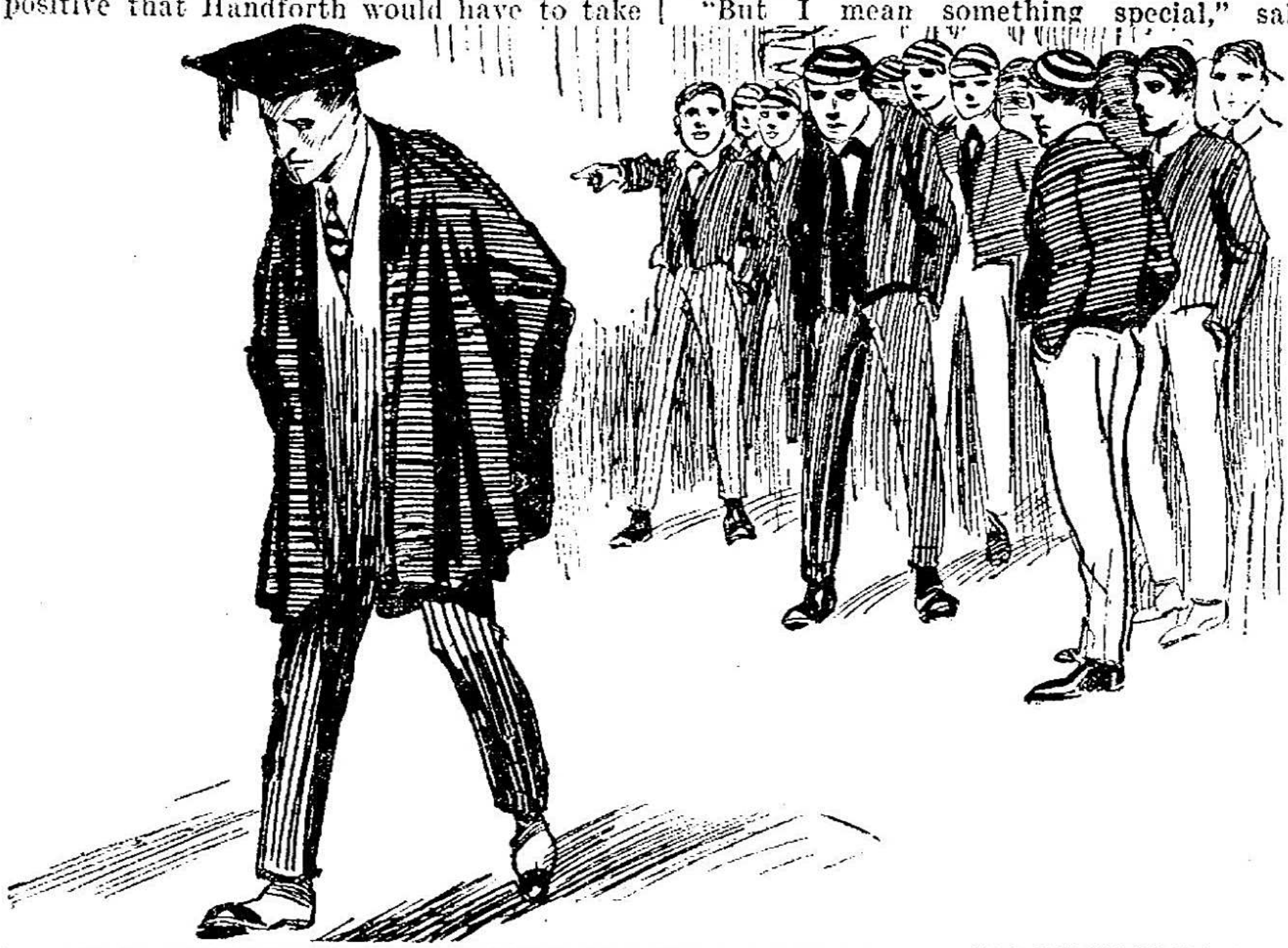
"Why not start a secret society, or something exciting like that?" asked Church brilliantly.

"A secret society?" sneered Handforth. "If you can't think of a better idea than that, Walter Church——"

"But I mean something special," said Church hastily. "You know—a kind of Rescue League. As soon as the rebels need help, this secret society will rally round and lend a hand. We can't do anything openly, or we shall be dropped on. But if we went to work secretly——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth breathlessly. "That's a terrific idea, my lad! A giddy brainwave! A secret society to help the rebels! We'll get up something novel — something that's never been attempted before. I've always told you chaps to rely on me for ideas!"

"You silly ass, it was my suggestion——" began Church.



Mr. Stokes turned on his heel, and strode off, pushing through the crowd, his ears buzzing with the sound of hissing and hooting.

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "You merely said something that put the scheme into my head. Let's go along to Study D and plan the details. Before bed-time we'll have the society in full working order!"

Church and McClure sighed, and accompanied their impulsive leader. Church had only made the suggestion in a facetious moment—never dreaming that Handforth would seize upon it so avidly.

In the meantime, events were progressing rapidly.

The West House was thoroughly barred and barricaded by now, and all the rebels were on the alert. Mr. Stokes had refused to dismiss Sinclair, and the Head had refused to listen to them. These rebuffs only served to strengthen the rebels' determination.

Guy Sinclair had not been seen for some time. In fact, he and Kenmore had gone over to the East House, and were keeping quiet. All the ejected ones, in fact, were more or less nervous. They knew what to expect if all the facts came out at an inquiry.

Dr. Stafford, in his own study, allowed himself a little time to cool down. He was anxious in addition to being angry. Any tumult that disturbed the even life of St. Frank's worried him. Even a House rag caused him appreciable concern for days on end.

But this revolt of the West House was something stupendously bigger—something that had been sprung upon him with the abruptness of an explosion. He wasn't prepared for it. And it took him some little time to calm himself. But once calm, he was grimly cold.

On other famous occasions there had been rebellions—but generally when Dr. Stafford was absent from St. Frank's. And there had always been an abundance of danger signals in advance—signs and portents of coming strife.

But this West House affair had struck the Head like a blow.

Obviously, his first move was to send for Mr. Beverley Stokes. The Housemaster, indeed, was about the only man who could offer any sort of explanation. The Head was shocked to realise that Mr. Stokes had been virtually thrown out of his own House—his wife and guest with him.

When Mr. Stokes arrived he was looking pale, but calm. For he knew only too well that he would be unable to give any satisfactory explanation. His tongue was tied in two ways. In the first place, he could say nothing regarding Sinclair's recent hold over him. And in the second place, he could never openly admit that he had allowed Sinclair's irregularities to continue with his tacit consent. The interview promised to be difficult.

"Mr. Stokes, I should be glad of your remarks on this very extraordinary situation," said Dr. Stafford, weighing his words slowly. "If you have any explanation to offer, I shall be relieved to hear it."

Mr. Stokes shook his head.

"I can only tell you, sir, that Sinclair has made himself very unpopular," he replied. "It is a Housemaster's rule, as you know, to interfere as little as possible with his head prefect. Perhaps I left too much to Sinclair. At all events, my boys appear to have turned bitterly against him."

"Sinclair?" repeated the Head, frowning. "I thought Sinclair belonged to the East House?"

"He transferred into the West House at the beginning of term, sir."

"With your consent, of course?"

"Naturally."

"And you appointed **him** head prefect at once?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was not that an **unusual** course, Mr. Stokes?" asked the Head, in surprise. "And what of Morrow? Why was Morrow deposed?"

"For no particular reason, sir," said Mr. Stokes awkwardly. "At least, there was a reason, of course."

"I should be glad to hear it."

"Well, I am a man who dislikes getting into ruts," said Mr. Stokes, seeking a plausible—but truthful—excuse. "I had nothing whatever against Morrow. Indeed, I regret making the change, not that it is of any use saying that now. Sinclair, I fear, has been a failure."

"It is all very puzzling, Mr. Stokes," said the Head, frowning. "If Sinclair was progressing so badly, why did you not pull him up? In Heaven's name, man, why did you not assert your authority before matters got to such a stage?"

"I am sorry—I cannot explain."

"Really, Mr. Stokes, this interview is very trying," said the Head sharply. "As Housemaster, you are responsible for the conduct of the West House. You are equally responsible for the conduct of your head prefect. How has Sinclair failed? Has he been lax in discipline?"

"Rather the contrary, I believe, sir."

"You mean he has been too severe?"

"In some cases, yes."

"Then why did you allow it, Mr. Stokes?" demanded Dr. Stafford. "It is all the more extraordinary, since I have every reason to believe that you are immensely popular with your boys—that you have always maintained an ideal balance. Did you have no warning of this disgraceful mutiny?"

"Very little, sir."

"Then you had some?"

"After Sinclair had been thrown out, I went to the boys, and tried to calm them," replied Mr. Stokes. "They all refused to allow Sinclair back—and threatened a serious mutiny unless Sinclair was dismissed from the head prefectship. I think you will agree with me, sir, that I could not allow such dictation from my own boys."

"Yes, yes—of course."

"My only course was to give an unqualified refusal, and to order the boys to

re-admit all the ejected ones," said the Housemaster. "Unfortunately, the excitement was so great that my orders were flouted. I was virtually ordered to leave, and felt that I had better do so at once. It would have been a pity to invite actual violence."

"You think the boys would have laid hands upon you?"

"I am afraid there is no doubt on that point," replied Mr. Stokes.

"You referred just now to 'all the ejected ones,' Mr. Stokes," said the Head. "Am I to understand that other boys were thrown out, in addition to Sinclair?"

"Yes, sir—eight altogether. The other seven were all friends of Sinclair's—indeed, boys he had brought into the West House with him at the beginning of term," said Mr. Stokes. "They were all regarded as intruders, and ejected at the same time."

The Head rose to his feet, and paced up and down. He was puzzled and worried. And Mr. Beverley Stokes was filled with a keen anxiety—intermixed with burning rage against the rascally Sinclair.

"Well, Mr. Stokes, I must confess that this conversation has been most unsatisfactory," said the Head, at length. "It is, you will understand, merely a preliminary inquiry. We shall have to delve much deeper than this. I understand that you do not accuse Sinclair of lax methods?"

"No, sir. If anything, he was too severe."

"In what particular way?"

"There is no specific example that I can quote at the moment," replied Mr. Stokes quietly. "He has been rather too free with his impositions, perhaps—he has introduced one or two new methods, too. And in certain cases he has revived ancient rules which are practically obolete."

"I must frankly tell you, Mr. Stokes, that it seems to me that Sinclair has been most painstaking, and thorough," declared the Head grimly. "And because of his keen sense of discipline he has made himself unpopular. However, it is not my wish to discuss the matter further. Please be handy in case I wish to consult you later on."

This was a sign of dismissal, and Mr. Beverley Stokes bowed, and departed. And he instinctively knew that the Head was already antagonistic towards him.

CHAPTER IX.

SINCLAIR ON THE CARPET.

GUY SINCLAIR turned pale.

"The Head wants me?" he said nervously. "Look here, young Griffith, you'd better not try any of your jokes——"

"I tell you, the Head wants you!" repeated Griffith, of the East House.

"How do you know?"

"Fenton came out into the Triangle, and told half-a-dozen of us to look for you," replied Griffith. "You'd better go, you know. It'll look pretty bad to the Head if you ignore——"

"Get out," roared Sinclair.

He and Kenmore were in Sinclair's old study in the East House—the one that Sinclair had abandoned at the beginning of term. They had naturally gone there for refuge after their ejection.

"Young brat!" snarled Sinclair, as Griffith vanished.

"It's no good cursing the kid," said Kenmore nervously. "He's right, too. You'd better go, Sinclair. I shouldn't imagine the Head's in a particularly sweet temper this evening. This looks like trouble."

"If Stokes has been putting the blame on to me, I'll make him suffer for it!" panted Sinclair. "I'll pay him—— Oh, well, it's no good delaying, I suppose," he added. "Might as well get it over."

Sinclair flung himself out of the study with an air of bravado. He had never said anything to his friends about his hold over Mr. Stokes. That was a subject to be kept strictly private—otherwise it lost all its value.

Somehow, Sinclair felt that he was in for expulsion. There couldn't very well be any other result. But he swore to himself that Mr. Stokes would sink with him.

At the same time, he wasn't going under without a fight. It might be possible to hoodwink the Head, and spin him a plausible yarn. After all, Mr. Stokes had no idea of what had actually gone on in the West House, and the rebels would never have sneaked. It was just possible that the Head would know none of the real facts—and Sinclair wasn't going to supply any. His best policy would be to assume an injured air. He would pretend to be amazed at the recent events.

When he arrived in the headmaster's study he was feeling a little more sure of himself—particularly as Dr. Stafford gave him a friendly glance.

"You needn't stand, Sinclair," said the Head, indicating a chair. "Sit down. I trust you are not hurt?"

Sinclair was agreeably astonished. He had not expected the Head to show any concern regarding his recent violent ejection.

"Well, I am a bit, sir," he said promptly. "But I don't want to make a fuss over a few knocks and bruises. I don't bear the youngsters any grudge. They were so excited that they hardly knew what they were doing."

He had struck the right note. The Head was already forming the opinion that Sinclair wasn't to blame for the rebellion.

"I would like to hear your account of this unfortunate crisis in the West House," said the Head. "There can be no doubt,

Sinclair, that the revolt was caused, not by a certain section, but by the whole House. And it seems that your methods have been blamed for the trouble. Can you explain why you should have aroused such animosity?"

"It's more than I can understand, sir," replied Sinclair confidently. "I only came into the West House at the beginning of term, and I found things very slack. There was practically no discipline at all."

"Indeed!" said the Head, with a start.

"I'm not blaming Morrow, sir—or Mr. Stokes, either," went on Sinclair, gaining confidence every moment. "I don't suppose they knew the true state of affairs. Everybody knows that Mr. Stokes is easy-going—and Morrow is too soft to make a good head prefect. I soon found that there was a looseness and a laxity about the whole House. I spoke to Mr. Stokes about it once or twice, but he didn't seem to like my interference."

"Well?"

"From the very first I tried to maintain discipline," continued Sinclair. "It's just possible I was a bit too severe, sir. I don't mind taking the blame if it's due to me But I had to do something drastic to make the fellows understand. Even the seniors had drifted into an easy-going slackness that set a bad example to the whole House."

The Head nodded.

"Of course, Sinclair, there is no doubt that you are the cause of all the trouble," he said. "I am not blaming you—until I have reason to blame you. But when a head prefect is thrown out of his own House as you have been thrown out there must be a reason for it. I have heard a rumour that you have been ill-treating some of the younger juniors——"

"Dash it all, sir, you're not taking any notice of rumours, I suppose?" asked Sinclair indignantly. "Those lies have been circulating for weeks. That's all a fellow gets after he's done his best to put some spirit into his House! I found things in a bad way, so I tried to pull them together. The only way was to be strict—to enforce a stern discipline."

"I am bound to agree with you there, Sinclair."

"Somehow, my efforts were resented, sir," said Sinclair gruffly. "Loose methods had been in operation so long that none of the fellows liked my firmness. Even the seniors were bitter against me. It got so bad that my impositions were flouted, and I was compelled to adopt a drastic method of detention. But even this was ignored."

"Did you not appeal to Mr. Stokes for support?"

"It wouldn't have been any good, sir," said Sinclair, shaking his head. "You see, Mr. Stokes is as soft as putty—he lets the fellows do very much as they like. Anybody can get round Mr. Stokes. I thought it better not to bother him. And in the end some of the juniors openly defied me—and then the seniors joined in. That was the start of the mutiny."

Dr. Stafford frowned.

"These boys must be brought to their senses," he said grimly. "It is an outrageous thing when a head prefect cannot maintain discipline without this sort of disgrace. You may be quite sure, Sinclair, that the affair will be thoroughly sifted, and you shall be given every opportunity to exonerate yourself from blame. By what I have already heard, however, I do not think that will be a difficult task."

"Thank you, sir," said Sinclair.

Inwardly he was gloating. He had already succeeded in throwing dust into the Head's eyes. He had whitewashed himself cunningly, and he could see that Dr. Stafford was sympathetic. It was Mr. Stokes who was getting most of the blame—and Mr. Stokes, after all, was the responsible man. As Housemaster, it was his plain duty to support his head prefect in all matters of discipline. And Sinclair had contrived to convey the impression that Mr. Stokes had failed.

His rascally task had been made all the easier by Mr. Stokes' own unsatisfactory explanation of the revolt. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Head should listen to Sinclair's lies with sympathetic ears.

"Of course, you will understand that a much fuller inquiry will be held later," said Dr. Stafford. "For the moment, we must confine ourselves to the more urgent matter—the quelling of this unfortunate revolt. If possible, Sinclair, I want to bring the boys to their senses to-night."

"Rather, sir," agreed Sinclair. "It's pretty bad for the school, even as it is—and it'll be a lot worse if the newspapers get hold of the yarn. We shall have the Governors bothering——"

"It is not your place, Sinclair, to discuss that aspect of the affair," interrupted the Head curtly. "We must get these boys to give up their insane behaviour at once. Arguing with them appears to be useless."

"They'll only consent to surrender on condition that I'm dismissed from the head prefectship, sir," said Sinclair, a new idea coming to him. "Well, I don't want to be a stumbling block, sir. I'll resign at once if you like, and return to the East House. I should think that ought to do the trick, without any risk of further violence."

It was a cunning suggestion. For it immediately placed Sinclair in a higher position in the Head's eyes. For the sake of peace, he was willing to belittle himself. From Sinclair's point of view, no better solution could have been adopted—for he was secretly scared about this revolt, and was more scared at the thought of a search-

ing inquiry. Far better to resign, and let the matter drop.

But the Head did not see things in the same light.

"I admire your courage, Sinclair, but I cannot consent to such a course," he said grimly. "Certainly not! That would be a complete admission of weakness. Those boys must surrender unconditionally—or be forced to abandon this madness."

"I'm afraid they won't surrender, sir."

"Then force is the only course," said the Head. "Are you willing to help me, Sinclair?"

"I'll be only too pleased to do anything, sir."

"Then be good enough to bring Cuttle to me at once," said Dr. Stafford. "There will be no dilly-dallying to-night! Those boys are going to be brought to their senses sharply and drastically. I hate to adopt such methods, Sinclair, but desperate ills need desperate remedies."

Sinclair looked rather excited.

"You're going to have the West House stormed?" he asked eagerly. "You're going to get those rebels out by force?"

"Exactly!" retorted the Head. "Please bring Cuttle here at once."

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF THE ATTACK.

ST. FRANK'S was quiet and peaceful.

It was after the hour of bed-time—indeed, it was after lights-out. In the Ancient House, all windows were dark—but there was scarcely one which did not reveal figures leaning out. Nobody thought of sleep. There was a universal feeling that something exciting was going to happen in the West House.

On the other side of the Triangle, the Modern House and the East House were not so lucky. They were rather isolated from the centre of the trouble, and most of the fellows, after a lot of talk, settled themselves for the night.

In the West House there were plenty of lighted windows, for nobody thought of sleep there. Most of the rebels were anxious. The absence of any drastic move by the Head worried them. It was felt that he was preparing some mine which he would presently explode.

Inactivity was the worst possible breeder of "nerves," so both Morrow and Reggie Pitt kept their men on the move, adding to the defence work and strengthening the barricades.

"We needn't think that the night's going to pass without an attack," said Pitt. "We've refused to give in, so they'll try to force us out. Our only hope of victory is to stand firm and hold the fort."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're all ready for a scrap, Reggie."

"No surrender!"

The rebels were full of high spirits, and it only needed a show of activity on the part of the enemy to encourage them even more. A night of complete peace, however, would leave them nervous and weakened by the morrow.

If Dr. Stafford had only considered this point he would have been wise. To make any kind of attack now was really a mistake. But the Head was not skilled in this sort of business, and it was only natural that he should fall into an error of tactics.

"I'm afraid that we shall pass the night without a single thing happening," said Morrow anxiously. "That's our worst trouble, Pitt. If the Head's cute he'll let us stew in our own juice until to-morrow. Some of these chaps will be nervous wrecks by then."

"Most of them, I'm afraid," admitted Reggie. "They can't stand suspense. But a show of activity would make all the difference, especially if it ended in a victory for us. That's what we need—something to give the fellows some encouragement. They think too much when there's nothing to do."

"Yes, and they'll be ready to tamely give in by the morning," growled Morrow. "Things aren't going as I would have liked, Pitt. Still, we're in the right over this rebellion, and I've got nothing to regret."

Some of the other seniors, however, were already feeling very sorry for themselves. They considered that they had been pitchforked into the affair in the excitement of the moment, and a few of them were talking about surrendering independently, in order to escape punishment.

And if these signs were apparent now, what would the morrow bring, after a night of suspense?

The Head was certainly ill-advised in his decision to make an attack.

Apparently it was going to be a grim affair. Old Josh Cuttle, the school porter, was in Dr. Stafford's study, receiving his instructions.

"There must be no mistake, Cuttle," the Head was saying. "Get all the men you can, every groom and every gardener. But let them be our own men. Do not employ any outsiders in this affair. And concentrate upon one section of the West House. I merely require you to break through. Once you have done that your work will be over."

Cuttle nodded.

"It was as good as done, sir," he said gloomily. "These boys was a set of young varmints, and there was trouble in the air. Why was there? Because old Josh was

getting ready to put it across 'em. Leave it to me, sir!"

"I hate taking this course, Cuttle, but the situation is an impossible one, and we must end it with no delay," continued the Head grimly. "I expect you and your men to use your own discretion later. The less said the better."

"Boys was always boys!" growled the porter. "And boys was always full of mischief."

He went off with a kind of melancholy joy. Josh Cuttle generally got on very well with the fellows, but he always considered that they were treated too leniently. And any kind of trouble pleased him, anyhow. Josh was only really miserable when everything was going smoothly.

As soon as he had gone the Head held a consultation with Nelson Lee, Mr. Stockdale, and Mr. Goole. Mr. Stokes was the only Housemaster absent, and under the circumstances his presence might have been embarrassing.

"I am not altogether pleased with the plans you are making, doctor," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Would it not be better to leave matters over until to-morrow? By that time the boys may have a different spirit. A night of suspense will wear them down considerably."

But Dr. Stafford was in no mood to take advice.

"I am sorry, Mr. Lee, but my mind is made up," he replied. "Under no circumstances will I allow these insubordinate boys to retain their hold over the West House until to-morrow. Good gracious me! The whole position is intolerable. It must be dealt with promptly!"

"But have you considered what the result will be if Cuttle and his men fail to break down the barriers?" asked Lee.

"Such a thing is out of the question."

"I dislike opposing you, Doctor, but I am very much afraid that you have underestimated the determination of the boys," said Lee quietly. "This attack will only excite them, and an abortive assault would only strengthen their spirits and redouble their determination."

Lee's words were well considered, and Dr. Stafford would have been wise had he heeded them. But he never dreamed that the rebels could hold out against a determined attack. His plan was to drag them out of the West House, and distribute them throughout the other Houses, where they would be able to do no further mischief. Then a full inquiry would be held.

"It is the only course I can take," declared the Head. "The ringleaders—Morrow and Pitt, I believe—will naturally be expelled summarily. The rest will be punished in accordance with their measure of guilt."

"I entirely agree with you, sir," said Mr. Barnaby Goole, of the East House. "Have no dealings with rebellious schoolboys. Punish them severely and drastically. That has always been my policy."

"Really, Mr. Lee, it is the only way," said Mr. Stockdale. "I am bound to say that I approve of the Head's plan. Good heavens! Unless a rebellion like this is nipped in the bud it may develop and grow."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Since you are all against me I suppose I'd better surrender," he smiled. "At the same time, I shall take the liberty of sticking to my own opinion. It would be splendid to defeat this rebellion at once; but if the boys repel the attack the position will be far worse. I maintain that a policy of inaction would be the better course."

For a moment Dr. Stafford hesitated. He had very good reason to value Nelson Lee's advice.

"A policy of inaction?" he repeated slowly. "No, Mr. Lee, I cannot say that I agree. One might almost think that you have sympathetic leanings towards these young rascals."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am by no means sure that the matter is not much deeper than you believe," replied Nelson Lee. "Both Pitt and Morrow are level-headed boys, and they would never lead such a rebellion unless they had—in their own estimation—full and complete justification. As a schoolmaster, I must naturally condemn any kind of insubordination. But as a man I am inclined to believe that these boys have a case."

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated the Head. "You really think that they were justified in ejecting their head prefect?"

"Sinclair is not a truthful boy, neither is he a boy I would trust," replied Lee quietly. "However, it is hardly fair for me to give my opinions. After all, Sinclair does not belong to my House, and the matter is beyond my own jurisdiction. But I should certainly think very carefully before precipitating a more serious calamity."

Dr. Stafford compressed his lips.

"I believe I see your point of view, Mr. Lee, but I cannot agree with it," he said firmly. "No, this revolt must be brought under control without any delay. Your fears regarding the possibility of failure are quite unfounded in my opinion. Cuttle must go straight ahead."

Thus it came about that half an hour later Edward Oswald Handforth clutched at Church's sleeve. The heroes of Study D were at the window of their dormitory, leaning out, watching the lighted windows of the West House, on the other side of the square.

It was quite late now, and everybody should have been asleep. But many of the Ancient House windows were still tenanted. Other fellows had grown weary of the waiting, and had got into bed.

"It's no good, Handy," Church had been saying. "The whole thing's a swindle. There's going to be no attack——"

"And I say there is!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "What's more, we've got to hold ourselves ready to rush to the rescue. We're all in the Remove, and——"

At this point he broke off and clutched at Church's sleeve.

"There you are!" he hissed. "Look down there! No, not that way, you ass! There—under the arch!"

Church and McClure felt their hearts beating more rapidly. In the shadows of the West Arch a number of figures had appeared. Lanterns were being carried; there was a ladder, and a glimpse or two of pickaxes and other heavy implements.

If these signs didn't mean an attack, what did they mean?

CHAPTER XI.

HARD PRESSED.

"ANYTHING to report?"

Reggie Pitt paused and asked the question in the upper corridor of the West House. Two juniors were stationed at the end window, and they were both alert and watchful. The hour was now growing late.

"No, everything seems to be quiet," said Owen major. "We haven't seen a sign of anybody. I say, do you think there's going to be any trouble to-night?"

"Can't tell," replied Pitt. "We've got to be prepared for any emergency, though. Just because things are quiet at the moment it's no good slackening down and going to sleep. We've got to hang tight or we're lost. Once kicked out, and we shall end up in fiasco."

"End up in the sack, you mean," said Doyle. "My hat! About half of us will be expelled if we show any sign of weakness. The only thing is to fight on until we get our own way."

"We shall do it, too," declared Reggie, nodding. "We've got a first-class case, and if there's a proper inquiry Sinclair's character will be exposed, and even the Head will realise that we took the only course. Remember we're not fighting against the school discipline, but against Sinclair. Every master has got to be treated with respect."

"Well, I wish something would happen!"

"Some of you will suffer dearly for this gross act of insubordination! It is the most flagrant piece of insolence in my entire experience."

Fairly bubbling with fury, Mr. Pagett stalked out of the room, and strode down the corridor.

growled Owen major. "This waiting is getting on my nerves. We shall be like washed out rags in the morning."

"If nothing happens during the next half-hour we'll adopt a new plan," said Pitt. "Morrow's getting out a system of watches now, and we'll take it in turns—sleeping and watching. In that way we shall still be pretty fresh to-morrow."

"What about food?" asked Doyle. "I'm feeling a bit peckish——"

"You needn't worry about food," interrupted Pitt. "It's a jolly lucky thing we've got Fatty Little in this House. He's down in the kitchens now, lording it over half a dozen fags. In about ten minutes you'll have hot coffee and sandwiches brought round."

"Good egg!" said Doyle and Owen major.

"Later on you'll be relieved, and can go to bed in your own dormitory," went on Pitt. "We want to make as few alterations from the usual routine as possible——"

"Hallo! What's that?" broke in Doyle sharply.

They all listened intently.

"There seems to be some excitement downstairs!" muttered Owen major. "My hat! Some of the chaps are shouting out that an attack—— Come on! Let's rush down——"

"You'll stay where you are!" interrupted Pitt grimly. "You fellows are guarding this window, and if you leave your posts while on duty you'll be shot at dawn. Stay here, and be ready to give the alarm!"

Reggie hurried off, much to the disgust of Owen major and Doyle, who were compelled to cool their heels at this perfectly peaceful window. Even if there was an attack there was little or no chance of it developing in this quarter.

Downstairs, Pitt ran into Morrow and Chambers. The pair were just hurrying up, but they paused for a moment.

"Better come with us," said Morrow briskly. "Signs of activity in the Square. About a dozen men with lanterns and things. We'd better take observations from the upper windows."

"Good!" said Pitt. "Something doing at last. I was half afraid we were going to be dished."

They all went upstairs together.

"You bloodthirsty young sweep!" growled Chambers. "If you're anxious for a scrap, I'm not!"

"It's not that," said Pitt. "It needs a fight to bring some of you half-hearted ones up to the scratch! It'll put some ginger into you. There's nothing like a good old shindy to stir a chap's blood!"

Cuthbert Chambers snorted.

"Like your nerve!" he said loftily. "If you think I'm half-hearted——"

"Here we are!" interrupted Pitt crisply. "Better not show ourselves too much—we don't want the enemy to know that we're on the alert. By Jove! Just look at the Ancient House over there! Everybody's wide awake!"

They had entered one of the senior dormitories which overlooked the entire Square from the corner. The room was in the main building—not in the wing. So they were able to take in the whole Square, including the face of the West House wing, and the rear door.

There was a certain amount of moonlight, and the February night was unusually mild and placid. Practically every upper window of the Ancient House was occupied by three or four forms—all leaning out, and all deeply interested in the proceedings. The Ancient House had gone to bed at the usual hour—but there was no method of making the Ancient House go to sleep.

Down in the Square a number of figures were moving about with a stealthiness which was somewhat comical under the circumstances. The attacking party must have known that they were observed—but they preferred to fool themselves that they were not.

There were well over a dozen men—grooms, gardeners, and other male servants attached to the school. Even the page-boys had been pressed into service, and there was a general air of subdued excitement.

"Time for us to get busy," murmured Pitt. "There's nothing much to worry about here, though. They're concentrating on the rear door. There's only one party, so we can give it our undivided attention."

"The rear door, eh?" said Chambers. "Then what's that ladder for? It seems to me they're going to attack one of the upper windows——"

"They'd never do anything silly like that," interrupted Morrow, shaking his head. "Just one of us could keep the whole gang at bay if they came singly up that ladder. They're going to use it as a battering-ram."

"Just my opinion," agreed Pitt. "There's nothing better than a strong ladder for a battering-ram—they can get a good grip on the rungs. A dose of cold water is about the mark, eh? Simple and swift."

Morrow hesitated.

"I didn't want to turn the fire-hoses on until things got serious," he muttered. "Still, there's no sense in hesitating. One dose will probably do the trick——"

"My hat! We'd better look sharp, too!" said Pitt quickly. "They're getting ready. Come on! They'll smash that door down in two jiffs unless we're careful."

They hurried away from the window, and at the same moment a long yell went up from the Ancient House. The fellows had kept quiet until now, but it had cost them a big effort. And when the attackers raised the ladder and rushed it towards the door, the Ancient House let itself go.

"Look out, over there!"

"Buck up with your defences, Pitt!"

"Wake up, West House!"

There was a note of anxiety in these shouts, for the sympathies of the Ancient House were entirely with the rebels. Handforth was leaning out of his window so far that he was in danger of toppling out. It required all of Church and McClure's energies to keep him from dashing across the Square to the help of the rebels.

Matters developed at lightning speed.

Crash!

The first thrust of the ladder was a powerful one. The heavy battering-ram splintered the door like matchwood, and went clean through. In the rear lobby excitement prevailed. A swarm of rebels were waiting to repel the invaders. They were armed with cricket-stumps, and were in deadly earnest.

No barricades had been placed here—and for a very good reason. A litter of chairs

and tables would be of little or no use against a determined assault—and they would only impede the defenders. It was better to have a clear field—an open space, where fighting could be done.

Morrow himself came down and took command.

"I don't suppose they'll get in—but if they do we've got to chuck them out again," he said grimly. "Fight to the bitter end, you fellows! Once they make a breach, we're finished! So stick it!"

"Hurrah!"

"They'll never get in here, Morrow!"

"Not likely!"

Crash!

Again the ladder smashed against the door, and it burst completely open with a thundering, splintering roar. The ladder came right in, carried on by the rush of the attackers.

And that moment something else occurred. From two of the upper windows two hissing streams of water shot down upon the rear steps. The unfortunate Cuttle and his men were caught in the full flood, and they disappeared in a smother of hissing, blinding spray.

CHAPTER XII.

ANCIENT HOUSE TO THE RESCUE.

HANDFORTH gave a hoarse cry.

"They're in!" he gasped desperately. "Oh, corks! Look! The beggars have busted the door down!"

At every window of the Ancient House the fellows were leaning excitedly out, watching the progress of the battle. Those seniors and juniors who slept in other parts of the House, had come to these overlooking windows. Every available inch of space was packed.

"Oh, the asses!" shouted Nipper, in despair. "What the dickens is the matter with them? In two minutes they'll be whacked——"

Shwissssh—hiss!

He was interrupted by a roar from two fire-hoses—one from either side of the West House rear door. The attackers were actually on the point of bursting into the rebels' stronghold. But that twin stream of water created havoc.

Cuttle and his men were knocked down like ninepins. And as they struggled to rise, fighting against the blinding flood of cold water, they were knocked down again and again.

"Hurrah!"

"They've checked them!"

"Stick it, West House!"

"By Jove," breathed Nipper, "I was just on the point of jumping down—and calling the rest of you chaps to follow me! We couldn't let the West House be whacked in front of our eyes! That was a smart dodge to turn the hoses on at the last minute!"

"Jumping down, dear old boy?" repeated Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad, wouldn't that have been a frightfully dangerous thing to do?"

"It's no distance," replied Nipper. "That's the best of these low buildings. Any normal chap could leap from these upper windows, and come to no harm. But it would be a bit of a job to get back——"

"Let's go and help 'em!" roared Handforth from a neighbouring window.

"Not yet, old man," shouted Nipper. "Pitt's crowd seems capable of looking after itself. We don't want to butt in unless things get critical. Those hoses will do the trick——"

"Hallo! They've stopped!" sang out Tommy Watson.

The Ancient House watched breathlessly. All the attackers had withdrawn, and were grouped at a safe distance, a wet and sorry collection. Further in the background—discreetly out of sight—stood Dr. Stafford and one or two other masters. The Head was boiling with fury.

"They shall suffer for this!" he panted. "Not content with barring themselves in, they have actually had the audacity to use the fire-hoses! The ringleaders shall be flogged and expelled!"

In the West House itself a wave of consternation had set in. It started upstairs, where Reggie Pitt was superintending the operation of the hose-pipes. Without the slightest warning, the water supply had failed. Yet nobody within the House had touched any taps.

"This is serious!" said Pitt, grasping the truth at once. "They've cut off the main supply! There's an underground cock near the road, you know. The beggars have cut us off! Jack, rush down and tell Morrow!"

"Hadn't you better come, too?" gasped Jack Grey. "We shall need all the hands——"

"All right!" panted Reggie. "You dash round the House, and collect the rest of the chaps. Things look pretty bad."

The crisis had come unexpectedly. The cutting off of the water supply made all the difference, for the rebels' chief weapon of defence had been taken away from them. The fight would resolve itself into a hand-to-hand struggle for the doorway.

And the situation developed with great rapidity. Pitt and Grey had hardly left the upper window before a figure came running round the end of the West House. He was waving his arms.

"All right!" he bellowed. "It's off!"

Josh Cuttle, drenched to the skin, waved his men on to the attack.

"Them boys was at our mercy!" he shouted. "Why was they at our mercy?

Because there was no more water! Foller me an' sling 'em out!"

"We'll sling 'em out all right!" shouted one of the gardeners.

"Let me get at 'em!" roared another.

The men were just in the right mood for the work. Wet through, they couldn't very well get in a worse condition. And they were all enraged by their treatment. Every man rushed forward with the intention of throwing the mutineers out by sheer force.

The Head, with compressed lips, turned aside.

"Come, gentlemen," he said quietly. "There is no further need for us to remain. Indeed, the whole situation is undignified and degrading. Are you there, Sinclair?"

"Yes, sir," said Sinclair, stepping forward.

"You will find me in my study," continued the Head. "When these wretched boys have been ejected come and report to me. In the meantime, I will send a number of other prefects to assist you."

"Right you are, sir," said Sinclair joyously.

He was feeling very pleased with himself. The rebellion was practically over, and it was a ten to one chance that the Head would hush it up as far as possible, and hold no rigorous inquiry.

In the West House a tremendous struggle was in progress. The rear lobby was packed with struggling, fighting figures. The attackers swept in with overwhelming force, and so great was their rush that for a moment the defenders were hurled back.

From the opposite windows nothing could be seen but a glimpse of struggling forms. The Ancient House watched breathlessly. And then came a sign that the odds were going against the rebels. Junior after junior came hurtling through the doorway, forcibly ejected by the enemy. The fight still raged within, but it seemed that only one result was inevitable.

Handforth gave a wild sort of whoop.

"Ancient House to the rescue!" he bellowed. "Come on, you chaps! Let's jump for it. Rescue! We'll chuck these men into the middle of next week!"

"Hurrah!"

"Up the Remove!"

Sinclair, who heard the shouts, rushed across the Square.

"You stay where you are!" he roared. "We want no interference——"

"Sinclair!" howled Handforth. "Jump on him!"

About a dozen juniors took the leap together, and thudded recklessly to the ground. Only by backing hastily away did Sinclair save himself from being buried. And those leaping figures provided a signal for the rest. All along the Ancient House the windows were crammed with eager fellows, and they jumped, or fell out, in dozens. Nobody had undressed on this eventful night, although many were collarless.

Even the Fifth-Formers, under the urging of William Napoleon Browne, joined in the excitement. And there was a stampeding rush across the Square to the West House.

After that, matters became rather strenuous.

The rebels, hard pressed and nearly on the point of defeat, received the most joyous surprise of their lives when the rescuers from the Ancient House plunged into the fight. But Cuttle's men were by no means pleased. One after another they were seized, hauled out, and pitched headlong across the gravel.

The whole situation was reversed.

Instead of the attackers maintaining the upper hand, the rebels recovered the position. With the able assistance of their Ancient House allies, they ejected the last of the invaders, and established the stronghold once again.

"Thanks awfully, you chaps!" panted Morrow gratefully.

"Only too pleased!" said Nipper breathlessly. "For two pins, we'd stay over here, and help——"

"We don't want any pins!" snorted Handforth. "We're staying anyhow!"

"Better not, old man," said Nipper. "After all, this isn't our circus, and we're always handy in case of need."

"By Jove, that's a comforting thought," said Reggie Pitt, wiping a smear from his face. "It's worth quids to know that you fellows are just across the Square, ready to chip in during a crisis."

"That's just the idea," agreed Nipper, nodding. "We'd better dodge back now. This isn't our revolt. Don't forget—any time you need us!"

The Ancient House crowd, highly pleased, dashed back across the Square, and returned to their bedrooms. A number of thoughtful seniors had knotted some blankets and sheets from almost every window, and the returning force swarmed up with ease. Within ten minutes, there was no sign of their having participated in the scrap.

But the West House door was closed again—and heavily barricaded from the other side. Nipper decided to institute a watch in the Ancient House. He would place somebody at one of the windows throughout the night—in order to give the rebels a tip in case of a surprise.

Exactly as Nelson Lee had feared, the headmaster's attack had failed—and the rebels were more determined than ever to maintain their defiance. The very knowledge that the Ancient House was ready to back them up acted like a stimulant. Even the weaklings were turned into enthusiasts.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SERIOUS SITUATION.

DR. STAFFORD paced up and down his study nervously. Now and again he glanced at the clock. On the other side of the room, Mr. Stockdale sat in an easy chair, looking very uncomfortable.

"Why does nobody come?" exclaimed the Head curtly. "Surely those wretched boys have been turned out by this time?"

"I will go and see——" began Mr. Stockdale.

"Disaster, sir—utter disaster!" panted the Fifth Form master. "The attack has failed—the West House is more firmly entrenched than ever! It was the Ancient House boys who turned the tables at the last moment!"

The Head stared incredulously.

"The attack has failed!" he echoed huskily. "Impossible! You are mistaken, Mr. Pagett! There were over a dozen men ——"

"Nevertheless, they have been routed," interrupted Mr. Pagett, rather nettled by the Headmaster's attitude. "In my opinion, it was an unwise policy to attack at all! That sort of thing should have been

"No, no—certainly not!" interrupted the Head. "You have already offered twice, Mr. Stockdale. It will be better if we do not appear publicly. The whole school is awake—every window is filled with searching eyes! And the moonlight—— Upon my soul! I am intensely worried."

"There's somebody coming now!" said Mr. Stockdale, starting up.

The door burst open, and Mr. Pagett came in, closely followed by Sinclair. Kenmore and Parkin and one or two others hovered about outside.

"Well, Mr. Pagett?" rapped out the Head.

left until the daylight. As it is, these infernal boys are crowing over their triumph!"

"Disastrous—disastrous!" muttered the Head. "Good gracious! It would have been better if I had taken Mr. Lee's advice—— But you said something about the Ancient House, Mr. Pagett?"

Mr. Pagett described the recent happenings—for he had been watching from an obscure corner of the West Square, and had seen everything.

"Surely, sir, something further must be done without any delay?" he concluded. "You can, at least, go into the Ancient House, and punish those young rascals! I

will deal with my own boys. Mr. Crowell will attend to the Remove. But I think a personal visit on your part——"

"No, Mr. Pagett—no!" interrupted the Head quietly.

He sat down at his desk, and fidgetted with his watch-chain.

"It would be most unwise to take any official notice of this latest incident," he went on. "Why, in their present mood, the boys of the Ancient House may revolt, too! That would be a calamity too dreadful to think of! We must confine this outbreak to the West House alone."

"And those others are to escape punishment?"

"For the time being, yes," replied Dr. Stafford. "I was foolish—foolish! I had no idea that the rebellion was so deeply rooted. Somebody must give orders to Cuttle to cease hostilities at once."

Mr. Pagett snorted.

"Cuttle requires no orders, sir!" he said tartly. "All the men have fled—they have given up the fight in disgust. And small blame to them! What could a mere dozen do against a veritable horde of wild schoolboys? I cannot imagine savages being more violent."

"I fear the whole affair is too serious for my personal intervention," went on the Head. "I shall communicate with the Governors themselves at once. I will not take the responsibility. Sinclair, you and all the other boys who were ejected will remain in the East House for the time being. Report to Mr. Goole at once."

"Very good, sir," said Sinclair.

He went off, by no means overjoyed. The rebellion was stronger than ever, and now the Governors themselves were being brought into the affair! That meant a very searching inquiry—a full and complete investigation. Guy Sinclair was not pleased in the least.

Hostilities, however, were over.

The headmaster had imagined that he could quell this uprising by one swift, strong blow. But for the intervention of the Ancient House, that blow would have succeeded. But it was perfectly obvious that the Ancient House was ready to join in the rebellion with the flimsiest excuse. There was a far deeper feeling among the juniors than the Head had realised.

And it set him thinking, too. The boys would never show such defiance of authority unless they had been worked up to a high pitch of excitement—of indignation.

From every point of view, it was better to leave matters in abeyance until the Governors arrived on the scene. It was idle to pretend that the matter could now be swiftly settled. And it was equally idle to hope that the Governors could be kept in ignorance.

The sooner they knew the better—and the Head would be only too glad of leaving the settlement to them. Once he called the Governors in, they would take full command, and he felt that it was his duty to cause no delay. In the meantime, the West House was rejoicing.

There had been very few casualties. A few bruises and scratches, but nothing more serious. By now they had been attended to, and the guards had been doubled. There wasn't a window or door without its keeper, and at the upper windows, facing all sides, were sentries.

"We shall have to snatch just what sleep we can to-night—food, too," declared Reggie Pitt, as he discussed the situation with Morrow and one or two other leaders. "I rather fancy there'll be no further attack, but we've got to be ready. Thank goodness those Ancient House chaps rallied round."

"Yes, it was a pretty narrow shave," said Morrow, nodding. "They've promised to stand by in future, too. In fact, I believe they're on the watch, so that they can come over when they're wanted."

"Thundering decent of them," said Chambers.

"It's given the chaps just the encouragement they needed," nodded Reggie. "Some of them were beginning to waver, but they're tremendously bucked now. Good old Nipper! He's promised us full support."

"Yet it's not their quarrel, strictly speaking," said Morrow thoughtfully. "In fact, they took a big risk in helping us at all. We've got the best possible excuse for revolting—but those Ancient House chaps haven't got a leg to stand on."

"Plenty of legs!" declared Pitt. "What about a strike? Don't hundreds of other workers—who aren't even affected—come out in sympathy. Well, that's what the Ancient House did. And how do you suppose the beaks could punish the whole giddy House? That's where they're safe."

Morrow nodded.

"We're winning, but I wish it would finish up quickly," he said, with a frown. "I had no idea it would develop into a serious affair of this sort. I'm not regretting anything, mind—and I'll stand by you fellows to the bitter end. But it's a bigger thing than I bargained for."

"Well, we've all found that out," agreed Pitt. "But I don't see why there should be any fuss or delay. We simply want Sinclair dismissed from the head prefectship, and we're satisfied. We'll all surrender quietly—and take punishment, too, so long as nobody's expelled."

"I fancy there'll be a lot more trouble before we get our own way," said Morrow slowly. "There's no telling what's going to develop!"

They were prophetic words!

CHAPTER XIV.

SENSATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH awoke with a start.

The rising bell was clanging, and the unwelcome note echoed in his ears, and drove the last fragment of sleep from his brain. Church and McClure were just stirring in their own beds, and the wintry sunshine was beginning to peep through the window.

"Rats!" said Handforth, yawning.

"Eh?" said Church, stretching himself.

"Rats!"

"What's the matter, fathead!" demanded Church.

"I've been dreaming!" growled Handforth in disgust. "I thought there was a revolt on! I dreamt we'd been fighting, and helping the West House to repel a giddy attack! And there goes the rising bell, just the same as ever!"

He sat up, and glared at his chums.

"Might as well be in prison!" he went on. "It's the same old grind—morning after morning, week after week! Convicts have to get up when a bell rings—so do we! That's the worst of these dreams—they make a chap realise what slavery school life is!"

"It seems to me you're still dreaming!" said Church tartly. "The West House HAS revolted. And if it comes to that, we DID give them a hand to repel an attack. Wake up, you duffer!"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he breathed. "Then—then it was real? I thought I'd been dreaming, you know. I thought—— Get out!" he added, with a roar. "Who told you to push your face in here?"

His minor was at the door, looking very severe.

"Thought so!" he said sourly. "I should have fallen down in a faint if you chaps had been dressing! Lazy beggars!"

"Get out of here!" roared Handforth.

Willy wasn't idle. He entered the dormitory. It was one of Willy's habits to go about in the early morning, digging others out.

"Heard the latest?" he asked. "The Governors are expected down here this morning. They're going to take the whole thing in hand."

"How do you know?" demanded his major.

"I heard it from Nipper."

"How does Nipper know?"

"Nipper heard it from Browne—and Browne got it from Fenton—and Fenton learned all about it from Crowell," said Willy calmly. "Is that enough, or shall I go through the whole list? Anyhow, the Governors are expected any minute. You can bet they're on the first giddy train."

Commander Rudd was in uniform, and his appearance alone was enormously impressive. He towered above Sir John Brent and General Milton like a giant.

Handforth leapt out of bed, and commenced dressing.

"Let's get down, and have a chat with the rebels!" he suggested briskly. "I've a jolly good mind to go straight over there, and join 'em. If it hadn't been for us, they'd have been whacked last night. All because I wasn't leading 'em, of course!"

"I shouldn't trouble, if I were you," said Willy, shaking his head. "I had an idea this rebellion was started with the object of winning. If you butt in, you'll have the whole West House in a turmoil within an hour. And by the way—do you usually shove McClure's clothes on?"

"My clothes!" said McClure, bobbing up.

"Not my business, of course," said Willy, strolling out. "But I always like to save people trouble. You're nearly fully dressed, and——"

He vanished into the corridor, and his voice changed to a whistle. Handforth stared down at himself, and went red with indignation.

"My hat! They're your beastly togs, Mac!" he snorted. "You silly ass, what's the idea of playing a dotty trick like this?"

"That's what I want to know!" said McClure hotly. "Look what you've done.

You're two sizes bigger than I am, and you've ripped the seam of my bags. There's a button off, too——"

"I can't help your silly buttons!" said Handforth impatiently. "Why the dickens couldn't you tell me sooner?"

He relentlessly tore McClure's clothing off, and there were one or two ominous rents during the process. McClure stood looking on with a helpless expression of horror on his face. He knew that it would only make matters worse if he protested. Handforth was always like this when he got excited.

Instead of going to his own pile of clothing he had grabbed the first. And there was no excuse for any confusion. However, he got dressed at last, and was so anxious to get downstairs that he forgot all about washing. He dashed out into the Triangle without a hat, and with his hair unbrushed. He made a beeline for the West Arch, and plunged through. A moment later he was gazing up at Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, who were leaning out of one of the upper windows.

"Let me in!" said Handforth briskly. "Chuck a rope down, or something."

"What for?"

"I've decided to join the rebellion," said Handforth.

"It's the human gramophone again," remarked Pitt, eyeing Handforth with curiosity. "He keeps saying the same thing over and over again. Sorry, Handy—nothing doing. This rebellion is a quiet one. We don't want internal strife."

"If you don't let me in I'll break in!" roared Handforth.

"And then we'll break out," said Reggie. "We'll break out into such violence that you'll wonder where you've got to. Besides, how can you think of joining the rebellion? What about Mary?"

"Mary?" repeated Handforth.

"Mary Summers," grinned Pitt. "She's in the Ancient House now, just where you've wanted her for weeks. Of course, Nipper's there, too, and Nipper's liable to cut you out in no time. If I were you, old man, I'd stick to Irene."

"Blow Irene!" howled Handforth. "I—I mean, mind your own giddy business. To hear you talk anybody might think that I'm a chap who runs after the girls. I don't care a snap for 'em!"

"I suppose you know that Irene's pining away?" asked Grey severely. "She's practically a shadow. You haven't met her at the stile for weeks, you haven't gone for moonlight rambles——"

"By George!" gurgled Handforth. "If I could get at you I'd slaughter you. And don't you talk about Irene like that, either. She's not the sort of girl to go for moonlight rambles with any chap. She's better than Mary any day. Nipper can have Mary, for all I care!"

"He's going back to his old love," grinned Pitt. "It's a good sign. The chap's getting constant in his old age——"

"You funny ass!" yelled Handforth. "You're taking advantage of me because I can't get at you——"

"Handforth!"

Edward Oswald turned, and found Mr. Crowell regarding him with a cold eye.

"Handforth, it is strictly forbidden for any boy to hold any conversation with these rebels," said Mr. Crowell curtly. "Go indoors at once, and do not let me see you talking to them again."

"But—but I was just going to join them, sir!" protested Handforth.

"This is no time for joking, Handforth!" retorted Mr. Crowell angrily. "And what is the idea of appearing in this disgraceful condition? Have you washed yourself this morning, Handforth?"

"Washed myself?" echoed Handforth, with a start.

"Good gracious, boy, have you even brushed your hair?"

"I—I forgot all about it, sir!" confessed Handforth. "I'll go straight in and have a wash. I can join the rebels later. They can't get on without me, sir. They pretend to treat it as a joke——"

"If you refer to the subject again I shall treat it quite seriously and cane you!" interrupted Mr. Crowell. "And remember what I said about speaking with these rebels. It is strictly forbidden."

Mr. Crowell walked away, without acknowledging the cheery greetings from the West House fellows. Mr. Crowell was a strict disciplinarian, and he considered that there could be no excuse for any rebellion. He was very angry with those members of his Form who belonged to the West House.

By the time breakfast was over the whole school knew that the Head had communicated with the Governors. The school also knew that the West House fellows had consolidated their position, and were more strongly entrenched than ever.

The story had spread to the village, and the entire countryside was talking about the rebellion at St. Frank's.

Except for the West House, the great school continued its usual routine. There was no difference whatever. Lessons started at the customary hour, and except for a number of vacant places in each Form-room, there was nothing to indicate that a revolt was in progress.

Before the fellows had fairly settled down to morning school four of the Governors arrived—Sir John Brent, the chairman, Mr. Alexander Stevens, General Milton, and Sir James Henson. They hadn't been on the premises five minutes before every Form-room knew of the fact.

The Governors were looking very serious after Dr. Stafford had explained the position

to them. Sir John Brent naturally took command, and he was thankful that his own son—Alfred Brent—was an Ancient House boy, and not in the rebel force. Not that Sir John gave much thought to his son in this crisis.

"By what I can see, doctor, there has been appalling laxity on the part of Mr. Stokes," he said at length. "Even assuming that Sinclair was to blame for most of the trouble, the responsibility lies with Mr. Stokes."

"I agree—I agree," said the Head. "Greatly as I respect Mr. Stokes, I feel that he has blundered. I doubt if there is a more popular master at St. Frank's, with the exception perhaps of Mr. Lee. But he appointed Sinclair as head prefect, and it was his plain duty to see that there were no excesses——"

"We must hear Mr. Stokes' account of the affair," declared Sir John.

Five minutes later Barry Stokes was in the presence of the Governors, fully aware of the fact that he was "on the carpet." And he instinctively felt that they were already against him. There could be no misunderstanding the cold, searching looks that greeted him upon his arrival.

And in a way the Governors were justified. They had a right to expect a full explanation from Mr. Stokes regarding the conduct of his House. And he was not in a position to give any satisfactory report.

He had hoped against hope that he would receive that vital letter from Mr. Rodney Lambert, that letter which would release him from his promise. But it had not come. And until it did arrive his lips were sealed. He could of course tell the full story of Sinclair's petty blackmail, but it would probably do more harm than good, since he would be unable to justify his visit to the night club.

He could do no more than repeat his earlier statements, and he was aware that they sounded weak and inconclusive. He could not even explain why he had dismissed Morrow at a moment's notice, or why he had brought Sinclair from another House to fill Morrow's place. Still less could he explain his apparent ignorance of the growing discontent which had ultimately led up to the revolt.

The Governors held a very brief consultation, and their report was unanimous.

"Without proceeding any further in this inquiry, Mr. Stokes, we feel that your only course is to submit your resignation," said Sir John Brent quietly. "If you have any reason for protesting——"

"Not at all," interrupted Mr. Stokes, with compressed lips. "Indeed, I realise that there is no other course. You shall have my resignation, gentlemen, without any delay."

He went out without another word—bitter and rather stunned. So it had come to dismissal, after all. For that was what it meant—he was sacked! No matter what they discovered regarding Sinclair, they would still hold that the Housemaster was mainly responsible. Mr. Beverley Stokes was relieved of his post in circumstances that could only be described as questionable. The young Housemaster realised that this would be an irretrievable blow to his career.

After he had gone there was an awkward silence for a few moments.

"The whole thing is incomprehensible," said General Milton at last. "Why on earth did the man allow this discontent to get to a head? Surely, Dr. Stafford, you must have noticed some signs of the brewing trouble?"

"I noticed nothing," replied the Head. "You cannot expect me to hear of these things if no reports are made to me. I cannot be constantly prying into the affairs of my Housemasters. I leave the conduct of their establishments in their own hands."

"But what of last night, Doctor?" asked Sir James. "I understand there was a disgraceful fight? It was an error on your part to precipitate such a disaster."

"My only object was to bring the rebellion to a finish without any unnecessary delay," retorted the Head coldly. "Perhaps, gentlemen, you consider that I am mainly responsible for the entire upheaval?"

"Well, Doctor, you are the headmaster," said Sir James. "And although Mr. Stokes is the chief culprit, you cannot very well escape your own share of responsibility. We look to you to maintain discipline."

"Undoubtedly," agreed General Milton, nodding.

Dr. Stafford rose to his feet, pale and trembling.

"Perhaps you require my resignation, too?" he asked tensely.

"No, no—certainly not," said Sir John with haste. "Pray don't jump to conclusions, Doctor. At the same time, you are the headmaster, and we naturally assume that you keep your finger on the pulse of the school. You surely appreciate that we look to you to keep full control. These boys have rebelled, and——"

"And I am to blame?" shouted the Head hotly. "Be perfectly frank, gentlemen—say what is in your minds. If you think that I am incapable of controlling this school——"

"Calm yourself, sir," interrupted Sir John anxiously.

The Head had gone white to the lips, and his emotion was so pronounced that all the Governors were on their feet.

"I cannot remain calm while you deliberately accuse me of incompetence!" shouted Dr. Stafford thickly. "I am prepared to

accept the responsibility, and I have no hesitation in resigning my post if—if——"

He broke off abruptly, his voice choking in his throat. The Governors stared in acute alarm. Dr. Stafford's face lost its pallor and became red—almost purple. He stood there fighting for breath, clutching at the desk. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he became limp, and collapsed into a heap on the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOVERNORS IN COMMAND.

IT was a dramatic moment.

Under the stress of his indignation and excitement the Head had apparently burst a blood-vessel. It was indeed a minor stroke, and the four Governors were like helpless, frightened children.

But only for a moment. Sir John Brent leapt to Dr. Stafford's assistance, and the others followed his example. Within a minute the Head was lifted into an easy chair, and brandy was being forced between his trembling lips. To Sir John's immense relief the Head opened his eyes.

"Thank you—thank you!" he muttered shakily. "I am better! Forgive me, gentlemen, for—for—— I don't seem to remember——"

"Make no attempt to strain yourself, Doctor," said Sir John gently. "You are unwell. The strain has been too great. I fear we upset you—quite unintentionally, as I hope you will realise."

Mr. Stevens was already at the telephone, calling for the doctor. And the other Governors were glad when Dr. Stafford lay back in the chair and closed his eyes.

Exactly half an hour later Dr. Brett had made a brief examination, and was ready with his report. In Dr. Stafford's bedroom—where the Head had been carried—he drew Sir John Brent aside.

"I am thankful to say that the seizure is not likely to have any permanent effects," he said softly. "At the same time, there is only one course that I can advise. Dr. Stafford must not be disturbed by any reference to the school events. He needs complete rest. Absolute rest. The sooner he is removed from the school the better. A thorough change is essential."

"But this rebellion!" protested Sir John. "This inquiry——"

"I cannot be answerable for the consequences if Dr. Stafford's mind is disturbed by these grave matters," interrupted the practitioner. "His recovery will probably be rapid if he is allowed to recuperate in peace. You need not, of course, accept my word, Sir John. Call in a specialist, by all means—indeed, I shall take that course on my own initiative. But I insist upon absolute quietness for the patient. I positively forbid you to discuss any business matter. Such a course might be fatal."

The chairman of the Governors stroked his chin.

"This is serious, Dr. Brett," he said concernedly. "I realise, of course, that the headmaster is incapacitated. The sooner he leaves the better. Perhaps by the end of term he may be well enough to take up his duties again."

"Before then, I hope," said the doctor. "Two weeks' complete rest will be sufficient, I am sure. I know Dr. Stafford well. He is a conscientious man, and he will overstrain himself if he is allowed to take up his duties again immediately. Absolute rest is the only cure."

"In the meantime, St. Frank's is left without a controlling hand," said Sir John, biting his lip. "This is a serious position—a most awkward predicament. To make matters worse, Mr. Stokes is virtually dismissed, and the West House is in revolt! An appalling situation, indeed!"

And while the Governors were striving to arrive at some solution, the school was learning of the two sensational developments. During the interval, in mid-morning, the rumours got about.

Mr. Stokes sacked! The Head dying!

These were the two stories that ran through the school like greased lightning. However, the second report was soon modified. And it was definitely known that Dr. Stafford had had a stroke, and was going away for a rest.

In the meantime, the Governors were in command!

"It's the limit!" said Nipper hotly. "I'll bet the Governors brought on the Head's seizure! They probably bullied him——"

"Steady!" growled Alf Brent.

"Oh! Sir John Brent's your pater, isn't he?" said Nipper. "I don't suppose he'd do any bullying, Alf—he's a good sort. But I wouldn't answer for the others. I haven't got a very high opinion of the Governors!"

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "With all due respects to you, Alf, old scarecrow, these Governor chappies are a dashed mouldy lot. I mean to say, old fogies, and so forth, what? Why, good gad! Didn't you see the blighters roll up? Relics out of the bally ark! Absolutely!"

"It's more than we'll stand!" snorted Handforth excitedly. "Stokes sacked, too! He's not our Housemaster, but the man's a brick! Why should he be kicked out like this? Let's revolt in sympathy!"

"When will you give it a rest, old man?" asked Nipper. "We'll revolt quickly enough if the occasion demands action. But we don't want to go into anything too hurriedly. Let's see what the rebels have got to say."

A number of Remove fellows hurried to the West House, and were soon shouting

their news to the crowded windows. The rebels had quite a lot to say—and they said it loudly.

"That's done it!" roared Singleton, in a fine fury. "Did you hear that, Pitt? They've sacked old Stokes! Kicked him out! And not a word about Sinclair! I'll bet the toad's whitewashed himself!"

"Just what he would do," shouted Pitt, from the other window. "Well, this makes our position all the stronger."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"No return to normal until Mr. Stokes is reinstated, and until Sinclair is biffed out!" went on Pitt grimly. "They're our conditions!"

"But Stokes upheld Sinclair, you know," said Bryant.

"That's nothing," growled Morrow. "There's something queer about that—but I'm not losing faith in old Barry! As good a Housemaster as any chap can wish for! We want Sinclair sacked—not Stokes!"

"Hurrah! Down with Sinclair!"

"We want Barry Stokes!" roared the West House. "We want Barry Stokes! We want Barry Stokes!"

The fellows took up the cry like a song, and yelled it out at the top of their voices. There could be no mistaking the feelings of the rebels. And it was perfectly obvious that the big trouble had only just started. For Mr. Beverley Stokes had been dismissed, and the Governors were not likely to reinstate him at the behest of the mutineers.

And as the mutineers were determined to stick to their guns, it seemed that a deadlock was staring everybody in the face.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IRON COMMANDER.

SIR JOHN BRENT paced up and down with nervous strides. He and the other Governors were in the headmaster's study, and they were in council. It was well after the lunch hour—although the four harassed gentlemen had given no thought to food.

Indeed, they felt rather helpless. Mr. Stokes was dismissed—although, of course, he would not actually leave the school for about a week, or perhaps more. For all his household belongings were still in the West House. At the same time, Mr. Stokes could only be regarded as a spectator from now onwards. Officially, he had already gone.

And with the Head upstairs, incapable of attending to any business, the Governors found themselves in an unenviable position. They either had to control the school themselves, or find somebody else to do it.

They were quite satisfied that the rebels were not going to be easily defeated. And their insistent demand for the return of Mr. Stokes—plainly heard by the Governors—had not created a happy impression. There was every indication that the West House was in a mood to give a lot of trouble.

"One thing, gentlemen, is certain," growled Sir John. "We must get somebody here at once—without delay. And we must get somebody who can deal with this peculiar situation. A strong man—a strict disciplinarian."

"Can you suggest anybody, Sir John?" asked General Milton. "No ordinary schoolmaster will do. Even Dr. Stafford, with all his experience of St. Frank's, was unable to cope with the rebellion. What chance would a stranger have? And yet we must have a schoolmaster."

One of the other Governors grunted.

"Far better bring a policeman here!" he said fiercely. "Schoolmasters are no good. They don't know how to deal with mutiny. It needs a man of iron determination—a soldier or a sailor——"

"A sailor!" exclaimed General Milton, with a start. "Upon my soul! I wonder—I wonder——"

"If you have any suggestion, general, we shall be glad of it," said Sir John.

"I was thinking of Commander Rudd," said General Milton tensely.

"Commander Rudd?" repeated Sir James Henson.

"Surely you have heard of him?" asked the general. "In some quarters he is known as the Iron Commander. He made himself very famous some years ago in a situation very akin to this one. He quelled a serious mutiny on a big naval training ship. Commander Sampson Rudd is a man of the very type we need. But, of course, it would perhaps be out of place——"

He paused and looked keen.

"Gad! The man only lives a few miles away, too," he went on, starting up. "Only a mile or two beyond Caistowe. That's a big thing, Sir John, we could get to him well within the hour. He has retired, and is living quietly on the coast——"

"I know the man you mean," interrupted Sir John slowly. "I am considering, general. By James, I'm not at all sure that you haven't hit the right nail on the head. Commander Rudd has dealt with boys all his life. Curiously enough, I was reading an article on the man only a few weeks ago. He is no harsh tyrant, but a man of iron strength—an absolute genius in controlling boys. His character, of course, is one of impeachable integrity. His record is one long list of honour."

The other Governors were quite excited.

"But do you think he would agree to help us?" asked Sir James dubiously.

"I don't know—we could only try," replied the chairman. "Obviously a naval commander is not the type of man we desire to be headmaster of St. Frank's; but the circumstances are very exceptional, and we must do something drastic. I am convinced that he could smash this mutiny and restore the school to the normal within a week. It is well worth trying, gentlemen."

"You don't think he would take liberties?" asked the general. "There is no fear of a scandal arising——"

"There will be a far more serious scandal unless this revolt is squashed with all possible speed," interrupted Sir John grimly. "That, gentlemen, is the vital point. This rebellion MUST be subdued. Commander Rudd is no hooligan. As I have told you, he is an officer and a gentleman. Yes, by Heaven, we'll approach him. We'll approach him this very hour. General Milton, will you come with me?"

"Certainly, Sir John," said the general promptly.

And within ten minutes they were off, leaving the other two Governors in control of St. Frank's—not that they were capable of controlling anything. In their utter helplessness, caused by the Head's unexpected illness, the Governors were desperate.

Sir John Brent's car sped through Bellton, glided on to Caistowe, and then beyond to a tiny seaconst village, and finally to a small but stately mansion which stood in its own scrupulously kept grounds. A tall mast in front of the house, with its stay-lines humming in the wind, indicated the seafaring nature of its owner.

To the great relief of the visitors, Commander Sampson Rudd was at home.

As soon as the door was opened one could almost feel the tang of the sea in the air. Even the footman smacked of an old salt, and the butler had the stamp of a retired merchant skipper. The spacious hall was lined with curios from all parts of the world, obviously collected in the course of the commander's travels. He had only taken command of a training ship after many years of active service.

The visitors were ushered into the commander's own sanctum, which, appropriately enough, he called his state-room. It was even more reminiscent of the sea than the hall.

Commander Rudd himself was not so old as Sir John had expected. Indeed, although over sixty, he appeared to be in the prime of life—a tall, broad man, as upright as a post, with immense shoulders. He was in uniform, and his appearance alone was enormously impressive. He towered above Sir John Brent and General Milton like a giant.

He was clean-shaven, and his hair was iron-grey. There was something strong and stern about his face; but when he smiled his eyes twinkled, and he revealed the secret of his success. He was a man of iron determination, but he had a sense of humour.

"This is an unexpected honour, gentlemen," he said in a deep voice.

"A mutual honour, I can assure you, commander," said Sir John. "We have come to you in the guise of suppliants. We want you to do us a very great service."

"I am at your command."

But the retired naval man looked rather serious when he heard the nature of Sir John Brent's request.

"We realise, of course, that a public school such as St. Frank's will be novel ground for your particular genius," concluded Sir John anxiously. "But we urge you to accept this commission, Commander Rudd. Will you help us in our extremity, and restore St. Frank's to order?"

Commander Rudd's eyes gleamed.

"Since you make such an urgent appeal of it, Sir John, I can do nothing but emerge from my retirement and come to your rescue," he replied. "Yes, I'll accept. I'll come to your school and smash this mutiny!"

"By James, I believe you will!" said Sir John with enthusiasm. "If there is any man in the world who can do it, you are that man. When will it be possible for you to take the helm?"

"I will be at St. Frank's to-morrow, in the forenoon," replied Commander Rudd. "Naturally, there are a few matters I must deal with before I can leave. But I will not fail you in the morning."

Sir John Brent and General Milton returned to St. Frank's that afternoon with feelings of triumph. They felt that the battle was already over. And what a surprise in store for the rebels.

But even Sir John Brent was not prepared for the unexpected—and in this life it is generally the unexpected that happens.

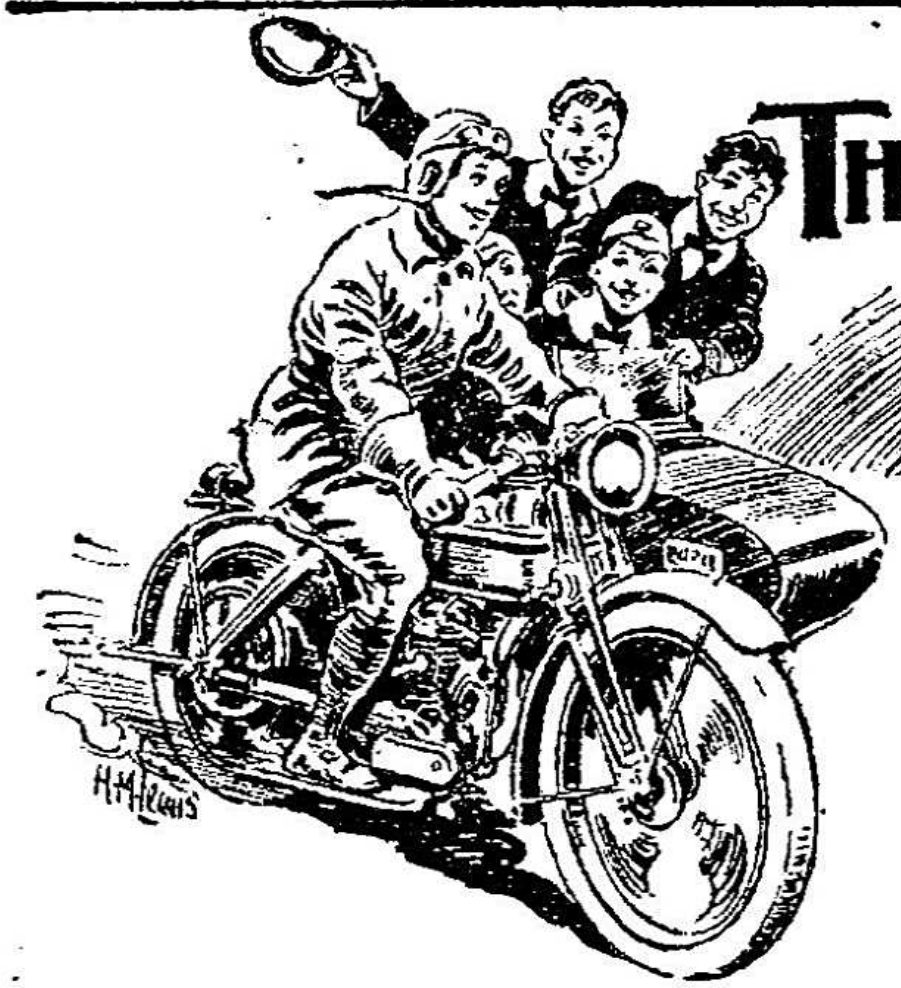
THE END.

The Story of the Deputy Head at St. Frank's will appear Next Week, under the title of:—

"THE IRON COMMANDER!"

Order Your Copy in Good Time!

First Instalment of a Grand New Serial.



THE CALCROFT CASE.

Another Clever Story of Sexton Blake, Tinker and the Boys of Calcroft School.

By

SIDNEY DREW

CHAPTER I.

AN OUTRAGED LION.

"A PRETTY bit of stuff, chaps," said Fane of Pycroft's House. "Quite tophole in all respects."

"As you're not quite potty, though nearly so, I suppose you mean the horse, not the microbe on it?" remarked Pye.

Roath of the Fifth had just cantered past the three juniors on a beautiful bay horse. It was the horse not the rider, of course, that had excited Fane's admiration, though Roath was not a bad-looking youngster, and rode well.

"And all made out of frozen beef and mutton from Peru or the Argentine, or some giddy place like that," added Manners. "Yachts and Rolls-Royces, swagger horses in London and Paris, and now Rillsedge, and the training stables, and all the shooting and trout-fishing from Danny's Mill up to Hazegate. That kid will be a millionaire."

"Millionaires," said Fane. "Why, Calcroft School is beginning to swarm with 'em. I wonder what it feels like to be one?"

Manners sighed deeply.

"You can search me, old top," he said, "for I haven't got the millionaire feeling. You can't very well raise it on ninepence and a three-halfpenny stamp, minus the gum, and that's about as much wealth as I can raise just now. I haven't spoken to Roath yet since he took over Wingrave's study, for I don't take much interest in our lodgers; but as the bounder might lend me a gee-gee to ride now and then, I've a good mind to give him the glad eye."

"I'd sooner give him a black eye," said Fane. "Wingrave's study was a jolly useful place till Roath came along and bagged it. This system of chucking lodgers at us is too rotten. They don't really belong to our House, but are just outsiders, and they're usually Fifth Form guys from Greybolt's House. As they generally have more louts at Greybolt's than they can pack in, why can't they build another wing, instead of chucking their outcasts at us?"

Pycroft's was a junior House, but as it was a rambling, roomy place with frequently a study and sleeping accommodation to spare, boys from other Houses were sent there, always seniors, who attended their own class-rooms and returned to Pycroft's to study and sleep. And Martin Roath who had just ridden past was one of them.

The three juniors turned into the private road that ran through an avenue of ancient elms to the bridge spanning the River Calder and the school gates, where the two Calcroft lions, carved in stone, grinned across at each other from their lofty pillars. One of the lions was wearing an old and battered tall hat, which imparted a rakish appearance to that noble beast. The humorist who had climbed up and decorated the lion with the hat had also tied a tomato tin to its tail.

"If Pycroft sees that little lot he'll go off the deep-end with rage," said Fane, with a grin. "He just loves those lions, and thinks them the finest bit of sculpture on the map. If they weren't cemented down tight, I believe he'd take 'em to bed with him. I don't mind the hat so much, for it gives the old chap quite a jovial air; but the tomato tin at the end of his wagger is

a bit of an insult. Besides, it ain't historic, for tomato tins weren't invented when that guy was carved."

"Neither were tall hats, kid," said Manners. "What does it matter, any old how? I don't know who took all the trouble to shin up there to play such a silly jape, but—— Here! Who are you barging into? Why can't you sound your hooter, lout?"

Manners clenched his fist to smite the offender, but seeing that it was only Master Wilberforce Stott who had come sauntering blindly along with thick rubber-soled boots on his ample feet and his spectacled nose held close to the pages of an open book he dropped his threatening arm.

"I am so dreadfully sorry, Manners," said Wilberforce Stott. "This is such an interesting volume that really—it is all about gargoyles, and is even more alluring because it gives descriptions and illustrations of many of the Calcroft gargoyles."

"The which?" asked Pye. "What the thump are gargoyles? Anything to do with hair-oils?"

The juniors rather liked Wilberforce, for though he was a learned and prosy youth, he was perfectly harmless and good-natured.

"For the love of Mike don't start him off, you idiot!" said Fane. "Haven't you got more sense?"

But Wilberforce had already started.

"A gargoyle has nothing to do with oil of any description, Manners," he began, "though it has to do with water, for a gargoyle in its simplest and crudest form is merely a projecting water-spout. The masons and builders of olden days, however, were not satisfied with anything so common or ugly as a plain waterspout. They carved these stone spouts into strange and fantastic shapes of birds and demons and animals, and often into terrifying human faces.

"If you would only use your eyes, Manners, you would discover several wonderful examples in our own cloisters, though, alas, much worn and corroded by time and weather! The chief sculptor was Erasmus Potter, who flourished in the early years of Henry VIII, though, of course, the original cloisters are centuries older than that, and date back to Anglo-Saxon times."

Quite unconscious of the fact that Fane's head reposed on Pye's left shoulder and Pye's on Fane's right shoulder, and that both the juniors were apparently fast asleep, Wilberforce Stott took breath and got going again.

"Though Erasmus Potter seemed to specialise in carving animals," Wilberforce continued, "I cannot agree with Mr. Pycroft that Potter carved our Calcroft lions. They are exquisite examples of the sculptor's art, but in my humble opinion, Manners, the lions were carved long before Erasmus was born. Still, whoever designed them, they are so entrancingly beautiful that they fascinate me every time I gaze up at them."

"I wish somebody would carve a statue of you, Stott," said Manners. "I could spend hours of my life shying bricks at it."

"Tell 'im to bring my coffee and shaving-water at eight o'clock, Pye," murmured Fane, with a snore.

"All serene; but don't snore down the back of my collar," said Pye, "'cos it tickles. Wake me when Stott dries up."

Wilberforce did not dry up, but he looked up to fascinate himself again by fixing his spectacled gaze on the entrancingly beautiful Calcroft lions. Being meek and gentle by nature, Wilberforce was not easily roused to wrath, but when he saw the old tall hat and the tomato tin he jumped.

"Oh, monstrous, abominable, outrageous!" he cried. "Really, if—if I knew the wretched boy who did that I—I could almost strike him."

"Enough to make the old lion roar, isn't it?" grinned Manners. "I didn't do it, Wilb, so don't punch me. Kids, Wilb is angry."

"Give him a gargoyle—I mean, a gargle for it," said Fane, lifting his tired head from Pye's shoulder. "Do be careful, Wilb, or you'll be falling on your precious face and making that look like a gargoyle. You might be a jolly sight handsomer, but as we're getting used to your dial we don't want it altered."

Wilberforce, hot with indignation, was climbing the gate to remove the insulting hat and tomato tin. He reached the tin first and made a grab at it.

"Look out!" yelled Manners, who saw something coming.

He charged madly against Pye and Fane, using his shoulder with such effect that he sent them staggering out of the way, and a spluttering wail of woe and anguish burst from the lips of Wilberforce Stott. For, as Wilberforce tugged and snapped the string, he tilted the tin, and the tin happened to contain more than air. Down came a mixture of water and green ink over Stott's upturned face. It filled his sleeve and hair and trickled down his neck.

"Ooooh! Horrors!" screamed Wilberforce, and came down with a run. "Oh, dear! Spa-a-oo—— How—how despicable!"

Fane, Pye and Manners gazed at Stott and roared with mirth. He had never been exactly beautiful, and though he had always been green, he had never been so green before. But in a righteous cause he was not easily daunted. Having wiped his mouth and his spectacles and thrown down his saturated cap, he started to climb the gate a second time.

"You'd have got some of that juice if I hadn't been watching out, kids," said

Manners "I had it in my bones that that old can wasn't empty. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Bravo, Wilb., my plucky one! Never say 'die,' even if it's green dye. Sandpaper will fetch it off, old bean."

The Calcroft lions were lions rampant, standing on their hind legs as if about to spring at each other. They were nearly eight feet high, but Wilberforce was tall and lanky. He had succeeded in reaching the brim of the hat when Fane shouted up a warning.

"Don't touch it, you mugwump," he cried. "I'm nearly as kind to you as a Dutch uncle. It's sure to be another booby-trap."

"Get out of the way and we'll find some rocks and knock it off," said Pye.

"Yes, if there's a decent rock to be found," added Manners. "This new gravel they've chucked over the quadrangle and rolled in isn't much bigger than peas. I'll weigh out that stamp without any gum on for a stone half the size of a crab-apple."

Wilberforce Stott, to his sorrow, had fallen into many booby-traps since his arrival at Calcroft school.

"Really, Fane," he said, "it is quite good of you to warn me and more than possible that what you say is correct. This awful green stuff blurs my spectacles, but I fancy I see something resembling white tissue-paper under the hat."

"You might find a stone or two in the ditch across the bridge, Pye," suggested Fane.

"So might you, old bean," said Pye, "but I've got a bone in my leg and I'm not chasing any rocks for you to shy."

Most of the Calcroft boys were in the playing fields, and while Wilberforce was still hesitating and Fane and Manners were beating round in search of stones, Mr. Pycroft, the Housemaster, crossed the bridge, accompanied by his friend Mr. Chules, the drawing-master.

Mr. Pycroft, M.A., was tall and lean, and walked with a quick, jerky stride. He wore his mortar-board, gown and glasses, and Mr. Chules, being plump and short in the leg, had almost to trot to keep up with his speedier friend.

"Shin down quick, Wilberforce," said Pye. "Pycroft and Chules, you juggins! Shin down and beat it."

Unfortunately, like Stott, Mr. Pycroft had a fondness for the Calcroft lions, and rarely passed through the gateway in daylight without glancing up at these masterpieces in stone. And naturally, when he did glance up, he saw his pupil Wilberforce Stott and the dilapidated old tall hat. Even through the green dye it was not difficult to recognise Wilberforce.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pycroft, pausing.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Chules. "What on earth is the boy doing?"

"I am going to discover, my dear Chules," said Mr. Pycroft grimly. "Stott, how dare you? Remove that hat at once!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I trust you do not imagine I placed the hat there," said Wilberforce. "As a matter of fact, I was wildly indignant when I discovered the lion disfigured in such a ridiculous way. There was an abominable tin can fastened to its tail. I removed that, and it was filled with some disgusting green fluid which poured over me quite unexpectedly."

"Remove that disgraceful hat immediately, Stott," said Mr. Pycroft.

"I am eager to do so, most eager, sir, but I dread some other misfortune," said Wilberforce. "I am suspicious that——"

"Do not—er—do not presume to argue with me, sir," thundered the Housemaster. "Remove the hateful thing and throw it down."

"Stand ready to catch the guy if it goes off with a bang, chaps," grinned Fane. "Wilb doesn't like bangs."

Wilberforce clenched his teeth, shut his eyes, reached up, seized the hat by its apology for a brim and raised it. There was no explosion except that made by the exhaust of a motor-cycle that was being driven up the slope of the bridge.

Down on Wilberforce's head plopped a bag of flour. It was a thin bag and it burst wide open. Wilberforce reeled and nearly came down, but saved himself by hugging the lion.

CHAPTER II.

TINKER DECIDES TO STAY THE NIGHT.

A GOOD deal of the flour remained for the time being with Stott, sliding under his spectacles and down his face and back, but not all of it, for at that moment a gust of wind that shook the elms blew across the quadrangle towards the river. The wind whirled a white snowstorm from Stott's head and shoulders and from the feet of the lion over the gate, and for a second or two Mr. Pycroft and Mr. Chules were lost to view in the white smother.

"A-a-a-a-atchew!" sneezed Wilberforce. "Ooh! How--a-a-atchew—a-a-atrocious!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pycroft's voice from the mist. "Wha-what a vil-a-a-villainous trick—a-a-a-atchew—Chules."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Two little Santa Clauses who've just tumbled off the dear old Christmas tree," sniggered Fane. "Keep out of the way of it or they'll be taking us for three millers. They've got the sneezes badly, ain't 'um? What-ho! Enter the ghost."

Leaving Mr. Chules wiping his eyes and sneezing, Mr. Pycroft strode in, so nicely floured that he looked ready to be popped

into the oven to bake. Stott had dropped the hat and was knocking the dust out of himself by hitting himself where he could reach with his large, bony hands. The three juniors did not even smile.

"Fane—er—do you—have you any idea who is the author of this—ha!—this most ingenious and entertaining trick?"

"To—a-a-atchew!—to add to the indignity of it, my dear Pycroft," said Mr. Chules, "the flour is mouldy. I have—ugh!—tasted it."

During a fit of sneezing, Mr. Chules had dropped his own velour hat, for the drawing-master did not wear a mortar-board and gown, and by mistake had picked the discarded topper that had caused so much trouble. As the Housemaster spoke to Fane, Pye's face suddenly brightened and he winked at the owner of the motor-cycle, who had dismounted outside the gate.

"None at all, sir," answered Fane. "We noticed it as we came in. Stott saw it, too, and was quite angry about it, and went up to——"

"And really, sir," interrupted Wilberforce sadly, "I do not think it was quite fair of you to compel me to remove the hat when I was endeavouring to explain why I hesitated to do so. Thanks to Fane's timely warning, I had arrived at the conclusion that it was what is known at Calcroft as a booby-trap. I protest, sir, that your command, which to my grief I obeyed, was unfair and——"

"Descend, boy," said Pycroft sternly. "Descend and wash and cleanse yourself. Good gracious! Your audacity in daring—ha!—in venturing to question my fairness and justice is intolerable. Come, Chules, my dear fellow, and let us rid ourselves of this pestiferous flour."

Mr. Pycroft, his be-floured gown fluttering in the breeze and his be-floured mortar-board on the back of his head, set his long legs going briskly in the direction of the ancient, ivy-grown house over which he presided. Quite unaware that the head-gear was not his own, Mr. Chules put on the dilapidated hat that fitted his big round head only where it touched it, and trotted after Mr. Pycroft, and still protesting that he had been unfairly treated, the wreck of Master Wilberforce Stott descended.

"Wearing the flour of a blameless life, both of 'em, as some giddy poet says," grinned Pye. "And that topper doesn't suit old Chules a bit, does it? Being an artist bloke who believes in beauty, you'd think he'd know better."

"Never mind Chules and Pycroft, look who's there, you blind bats," said Pye, pointing to the motor-cyclist.

"Tinker!" yelled Fane and Manners, with one voice, and in an instant the woes of Wilberforce Stott and the two masters were forgotten.

"Easy a bit, my merry men, before you pat holes in my back and wring my hand off!" said the newcomer. "Here's the fat gentleman's hat. Take it with you if you're making a move, old doughnut, or somebody will be making a football of it."

"Here, take Chules his giddy tile, Wilb," said Manners. "And have a look at yourself in the mirror, for you're worth looking at. You remind me of a cross between a flour-barrel and a chunk of tennis-lawn. If the green won't come off with soap and water, try sandpaper."

Wilberforce Stott limped wearily away, and Fane, Pye, and Manners bombarded Tinker with questions, for Tinker was not only a very welcome person, but a celebrity in his way, as he happened to be assistant to Mr. Sexton Blake of Baker Street, London, the private detective of world-wide fame.

"Oh, go easy!" pleaded Tinker. "One at a time, and I'll tell you. I was down on business, chasing a borrowed motor-car, but I got a message from the guv'nor this morning to say he'd found it. I was at Wainbury, and as that's only thirty miles away, I thought I'd come round as I was beating it for home and give you a chi-ike. And I never thought my pal Bindley was such a complete ass."

"What's got you this time?" asked Fane. "Nobody has mentioned Bindley. Besides, if you take Bindley for an ass, you're jolly well mistaken."

"Well, his name was written in ink inside the band of that old topper," said Tinker. "I happened to pick the thing up, and I ripped out the band and slung it over the bridge into the river, just before the fat gent collared the hat. I thought I might be doing Bindley a bit of good. Where am I going to put the 'bus, for I expect you guys are going to give me some tea?"

"You can have our last crust," said Fane, "and that's about all you'll get. How's the grub-cupboard, Pye?"

"Pretty mouldy. Funds are in an awful state, Tinker," he added. "I think there's a bit of plum-jam left, mostly stones, and half a loaf about as stale as sawdust. You've come at a rotten time, old son. We're all expecting letters from home, but the postman seems to have a grudge against us and won't bring us anything."

Tinker laughed.

"Pack into the old mouse-trap," he said, "and I'll jolly soon raise something for tea. Perhaps we'd better feed in the town, if it isn't out of bounds. I rather like Mr. Pycroft, and I think he likes me, but after that flouring, he mightn't be so pleased to see me till his temper has simmered down."

"Gosh, fancy anybody liking old Pycroft!" said Manners. "You don't know him, my lad. I do think he tries to be pretty fair and all that, and he'll take a fellow's word for anything; but, my stars, when he really goes off the deep end, he's worse than a terror. And look here, kids, this game won't do at all. We may be poverty-stricken

and all that, but we can't let Tinker treat us to tea when he comes to see us. Let's go to the tuck-shop and tell the old, old tale. Surely the three of us can get five bobs' worth of tick till Saturday."

"Oh, don't talk such rot!" said Tinker. "Pack in before I chuck you in neck-and-crop, and we'll go marketing."

It was a roomy side-car, but it was rather a tight fit when Bindley, who had sighted them from the study window, came tearing across the quadrangle, yelling threats of murder if they did not wait for him. Bindley came without his cap, a dark-eyed, handsome, untidy-looking boy, kind to a fault, and yet the toughest fighter and hardest-hitter in the whole junior school.

"Where the thump have you been hiding?" asked Fane, when Sexton Blake's assistant and Bindley had greeted each other.

"Writing home to try and raise the wind, old top," said Bindley.

"Didn't you crown the lion with one of your old toppers and tie a tin to his tail?"

"Not on this earth," said Bindley. "I had an old topper, but I filled it with water and tried to drop it on the housekeeper's cat out of the study window the other night, when he was giving a sing-song. Of course, I missed old Cornelius by half a mile, for you never can hit the cunning beast. Right away, Tinker, and you shift up a bit, Pye, if you don't want me to walk on your left ear."

As the combination turned into the road, Tinker sounded his horn to warn a horseman who was riding towards Calcroft Town.

"A ripping good horse, that!" said Tinker. "I see the guy on his back is sporting the Calcroft badge. Who is he?"

"A wash-out," said Manners; "a lodger. He's one of the chaps who get our goat. We're broke to the wide, wide world, and he's a giddy millionaire, or his people are. If I thought old Organstein would lend anything on horses, we'd take the gee-gee away from that chap and pawn it."

Down on Wilberforce's head plopped a bag of flour. It was a thin bag and it burst wide open. Wilberforce reeled and nearly came down.

"What's his name?"

"Roath," answered Fane. "He's got Wingrave's study, which we bagged when Wingrave cleared out. It's just opposite our study, and was useful to pop into when some lout was chasing you with a cricket-stump."

As the combination ran down the hill into the quaint, red-roofed town, with the masts and funnels of ships poking up amongst the houses, half a dozen Calcroftian juniors, who were coming up on foot, recognised Fane, Bindley, Pye, and Manners, and shouted a few unflattering remarks and asked unflattering questions.

"Yah, look at the guy with a parcel of Pycroft's monkeys! Are you taking 'em to the Zoo, old man, or only to buy 'em some monkey-nuts?"

"Hit 'em up against the horse-trough and spill 'em in it!" shouted another junior,

"Give the bounders a wash, for the love of Mike!"

"And watch that old mangle of a bike of yours when you get off, or they'll pinch it!" roared a third junior.

Tinker chuckled as he stopped before the door of a confectioner's shop.

"Those kids seem to have you ticked off," he said.

"Some of Windover's prize beauties," said Fane. "If you'd pulled up, and we'd pretended to get out, you wouldn't have seen 'em for dust, for they know how to use their legs when we're on the warpath. Pycroft's is still cock-house at Calcroft, we're watching that."

It was quite useless to argue with Tinker. Even threats of violence would not stop him from spending his money. When the car turned back towards Calcroft School Pye was nursing a large, square cardboard box.

"And if you smash it, or crush it, or rattle it too much, my lad," said Fane, "we'll dig a nice grave to fit you, and charge nothing for your funeral expenses. But I wish you hadn't, Tinker. Why the petrol-tank can't you turn up when we've got a few halfpence to rattle together?"

"When he's gone, the spondulicks will roll in," said Bindley. "It's generally the way, but I'm not too hopeful, for they may not."

On a previous brief visit to Calcroft, some wag had run off Tinker's petrol, so he was rather doubtful about leaving the machine in the long shed where anybody could get at it.

"Don't you worry about that," said Fane. "Shove it up at one end of the shed, and we'll fix that. Who's got a bit of chalk?"

Manners obliged with a piece of bagatelle chalk borrowed from the common-room of Pycroft's House, better known as the Rag. On the wall, above Tinker's combination, he chalked:

"Anyone touching or fooling with this gridiron will get it good and hard from Bindley, Pye, Manners, and Fane, so—safety first!"

"That'll larn 'em, Tinker," said Pye. "Isn't old Fane getting nice and polite, to stick his name last? He must have been reading one of those books that tell you how to behave in polite society. Come on, my merry lads, and follow the man with the tuck! I wonder what would happen if we knocked at Pycroft's door and offered him a bath-bun?"

"Nothing nice, for I expect he's had all the flour he wants for one day," said Tinker. "I suppose I'd better give him my chin-chins. You toddle along and prepare the feast, and I'll come up to you, for I haven't forgotten the way."

Tinker tapped at Mr. Pycroft's highly-polished mahogany door. He heard the Housemaster's voice bid him enter, and as Tinker went in the boy he had seen on horseback came out, still wearing riding-boots and breeches and carrying his cap and switch in his hand.

"Not forgotten me, I hope, sir?" said Tinker.

Mr Pycroft, who had put on another gown and mortar-board, looked both pleased and startled as he recognised the visitor.

"Good—er—gracious! Of course I have not forgotten you, my dear boy!" he said. "I—er—trust, however, that it is only a friendly visit, Mr. Tinker? The lamentable case, though it—er—though it gave me the great pleasure of knowing you and your highly-talented employer, Mr. Sexton Blake, is not one I can recall with any satisfaction. Surely there is nothing the matter?"

"Nothing at all, sir," answered Tinker. "I ran over to look up the boys who knew who I really was when I stayed here as a scholar."

"Ah, yes, to be sure!" said the Housemaster, much relieved. "I am very glad to see you again, and I—er—hope Mr. Blake is in vigorous health."

"The guv'nor's amazingly well, sir, as usual, or he was when I left him," said Tinker.

Tinker left Mr. Pycroft and went up the staircase to the study where the table that had threatened to be as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard was loaded with good things. Tinker glanced out of the window. Beyond the river and the Calcroft Woods rose Barren Tor. The upper shoulder of the great shaggy hill was hidden by black, threatening clouds.

"Looks like being a pelter," he said. "There's a lot of rain and wind coming over Barren Tor. If there's going to be a soaker and a head wind all the way I shan't be too keen on riding back to London to-night. Can you give me a shake-down?"

"You can have a whole little white cot to yourself, Tinker," said Bindley. "Young Conder was monkeying on the horizontal bars yesterday and managed to fall off with a bump. He sprained his shoulder, and got carted off to the sanitorium, so that leaves a spare snoring-hutch for you. I'll get hold of one of the maids when we've had grub and get her to fix up some bedclothes."

"Oh, botheration to the fire!" grumbled Pye. "I thought the kettle was going to boil, and now it's gone off again. I think they must soak all the firewood in the river before they send it up, for it's always wet."

No magnet attracted steel more surely than nice things to eat attracted Master Beilby of Pycroft's House. He poked his mean little face round the study door and his greedy eyes widened and his mouth opened hungrily at the gorgeous sight. Then he saw Pye, who seemed to be trying to stand on his left ear in the fender, and was blowing at the stubborn fire till his cheeks threatened to crack.

"Oh, I say," piped Beilby in his shrill voice, "do let me lend you my spirit-lamp.

Methylated spirit's awfully dear, you know, and it uses a lot; but I don't mind that, and it will boil your old kettle in a jiffy. Do let me fetch it for you!"

"Get out!" howled Fane, Pye, Manners, and Bindley, and hurled things.

Beilby was used to making quick retreats. The things the juniors hurled at him only struck the closed door.

"I hope the stuff will jolly well choke you!" Beilby shouted through the keyhole. "Yah! You ugly lot of gluttons. Who have you been and robbed, for I know you never paid for it? Keep your mouldy stuff, and may it strangle you."

Then as the rain came rattling against the study window the welcome steam gushed from the mouth of the kettle.

"I guess I'll have that empty bed, boys," said Tinker. "What time do you go to prep?"

"Six-thirty to eight to-night, worse luck," said Fane, "and then we're free till ten, when we pack up for shut-eye. There's a sort of supper in the dining-hall, bread and cheese and slices of cold roast camel for those who want it, but you've brought so much tuck that we can cut it out. You'll have to monkey round and amuse yourself while we're at prep, Tinker."

"Perhaps you fellows had better not call me Tinker except in private," said Sexton Blake's assistant. "I was Jack Hasland when I was pretending to be a scholar here, wasn't I? Most of 'em will remember me by that name, so I'll stick to it."

As the juniors and their visitor gathered round the table, Beilby removed his hungry eye from the keyhole and put his hungrier lips to it.

"I hope the first mouthful will choke the whole bunch of you!" was his kind wish. "I hope it will throttle you!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SMASH.

DURING tea Fane explained to Tinker that Calcroft School was the slowest place on earth, and Bindley, Manners, and Pye were inclined to agree with him.

"You see, we've tamed all the kids in this House," Fane explained. "Over-tamed them, I'm afraid, for they never seem to kick. We've had a few cheerful rags with Windover's across the Quad, but those little beggars won't face up to us now. They'll yell things they think funny at us when they're sure we can't get near them, but they just leg it for home if they see us coming after them."

"Gee! These cream-buns have real cream in 'em!" said Pye. "And I'll swear it's whitewash they put in those they sell at our tuckshop. If it isn't whitewash it tastes like it!"

"I think it's something cheaper than whitewash," said Manners. "The tuckshop has been going to the dogs lately. If I have a ginger-beer I always ask for a glass bottle, for the stone bottles are only half full. Who's at the door now? If it's that little rat Beilby again I'll murder him. Where's that giddy cricket-stump?"

When Manners opened the door and revealed Master Wilberforce Stott standing on the threshold there was a roar of laughter.

"I think it most unkind of you to laugh at my misfortunes," said Wilberforce. "I cannot remove the horrible stuff except in patches. I have tried hot water and soap and washing-soda and also petrol, turpentine, and paraffin I look dreadful, I am quite aware of that. I look——"

"Exactly like a giddy gargoyle," grinned Fane. "Sandpaper might do it, as we told you at first, Wilb, and if that fails, go to the carpenter's shop and get a nice sharp plane and try that. But don't be downhearted, my lad, about a few green patches on your rosebud complexion. You got 'em in a good cause, you know. Squat down on the rug and have some tea and cake. I don't think you remember Jack Hasland. This spotted merchant is Wilberforce Stott, Jack. He got his medals—those spots—for gallantly yanking off a tomato tin some base guy had tied to the lion's tail."

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Stott," said Tinker. "I was just in time to see you take off the lion's hat."

"Don't start him talking, for the love of Mike, Jack!" said Pye, placing sandwiches and cake on a plate for Wilberforce. "You can't stop him if he once starts. When he gets his jaw going and he likes the subject, Wilb is perpetual motion."

As there was a shortage of crockery and no teacup available, Wilberforce was handed his tea in a jar which had once contained marmalade.

"If I wanted the 'phone, do you think I could have it long enough to get a call through to London?" Tinker inquired.

"You ought to at prep. easily enough, Tin—h'm—quite easily, Jack," said Bindley. "It's all quiet then. You know where it is, down in the hall to the left of Pycroft's private room. If you're 'phoning home, tell 'em to expect you when they see you."

"So you're feeding that big-footed, bat-eared lout now, are you?" shouted Beilby, who could not keep away from the keyhole. "And who's the pudden-faced pal you've got with you? By the look of it, it must have been buried a long time before you dug it up. How goes it, mouldy?"

(*Continued on page iii of cover.*)

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 30. Feb. 6, 1926

SECTION A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) ..... to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

.....

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of the THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

"THE CALCROFT CASE"

(*Continued from page 39.*)

"The little cherub is addressing you, Jack, I fancy," said Fane. "There is a certain mouldy and gorgonzola-cheesey look about Wilb's features, but he can only see the back of Wilberforce's head. Methinks he referred to you as a pudden-faced and mouldy dug-up."

"Pray take no notice of him, Mr. Hasland, for really Beilby is beneath contempt," said Wilberforce. "And do be most cautious of him. If he entices you into any transaction of buying, selling, or exchanging, he will cheat you, as he cheats everybody."

"I'll watch he doesn't," said Tinker. "How about washing up?"

"Oh, old Wilb will give us a hand!" said Pye. "If it wasn't for the beastly rain we'd shove the pots away as they are till morning and go out. You'll find it jolly stale, old sport, for as we told you, there's absolutely nothing doing. The whole school isn't as lively as a cemetery."

Beilby had faded away when Wilberforce went to the lavatory for a pail of hot water, and there was not a soul in the corridor. As Stott was returning, one of the closed doors opened, and Martin Roath stepped out.

"Got such a thing as a match?" he asked. "Great Scotland! What's happened to your face, kid?"

"If you refer to the green spots, I have been unfortunate to spill some dye over myself," said Wilberforce, eyeing the cigarette in the Fifth-Former's hand. "I have matches, but as I detest tobacco, I do not feel justified in giving you one to light a cigarette."

"Don't give me any of your sermons, Spotty, but lend me a match quick!" said Roath. "What has it got to do with you if I like to smoke a fag? I don't ask you to pay for my cigarettes, do I? Hand over that box, and no more rot!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Stott firmly. "No doubt you Fifth Form fellows consider yourself to be grown-up men, but I consider you far too young to indulge in a habit which many well-known doctors assure us is injurious to the taste, sight, and hearing. Cigarettes contain nicotine, which is a deadly poison, and the only use I have for it is for the destruction of green fly, caterpillars, and wood-lice, and other noxious insects which attack my plants and vegetables. Therefore, Roath, I find myself unable to supply you with a match."

Roath could see the top of the matchbox sticking out of Stott's waistcoat-pocket. He grasped the box, jerked it out, struck a match, lighted his cigarette, and then shook the rest of the matches into the pail of hot water.

"Pardon me for saying it, Roath," said Wilberforce, his gentle and forgiving spirit roused by this outrage, "but you are nothing but a common cad!"

Roath pounced on Wilberforce, and turning that amazed youth upside down, he plunged Stott's head into the pail, and then sliding back into the study that had once been Wingrave's, he shut the door.

Removing his dripping face from the pail, with matches decorating his hair, Wilberforce sat in the puddle of warm water that had slopped over and gasped for breath.

Fancying that Stott, who was rather absent-minded at times, had started reading the book about gargoyles and had forgotten all about the washing-up, Manners came out to look for him.

"Come here, for the love of Mike, chaps!" shouted Manners. "What do you think the fathead is doing? He's squatting down here, trying to soak off those green blobs in our washing-up water!"

(*To be continued next week.*)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

A further list of names and addresses of Organising Officers.

260. W. E. Jones, Haddays Row, St. Ive Cross, Nr. Liskeard, Cornwall; 261. Roy Snell, Holly Villas, Kimberworth, Rotherham; 262. Sam Fine, 195, Rathgar Road, Dublin; 263. H. R. Jobbins, 35, Fife Road, Canning Town, E.16; 264. S. Prescott 89, Archer Road, Redditch, Worcs; 265. Charles W. Gardner, 11, Heron Road, St. Margaret's, Twickenham; 266. Max Futrofsky, 62, Grafton Street, Tottenham Court Road, W.1; 267. Sidney Lewis, 75. Anselm Road, Fulham, S.W.6; 268. Cyril Walker, 4, Simons Road, Market Drayton, Salop; 269. W. J. Wilmshurst, 6, Albany Road, Manor Park, E.12; 270. William Newton, Earlsdon, Newland Park, Hull; 271. Harry Newton, Earlsdon, Newland Park, Hull; 272. B. Saffron, 5, Harley Street, Bow, E.3; 273. Albert Lawrence, 41, Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham; 274. William B. Nash, 108, Harris Street, St. Helen's, Lancs; 275. F. W. Thomas, Jnr., 108, Burnthwaite Road, Fulham, S.W. 6; 276. Ivor Joll, Downgate, Callington, Cornwall; 277. Master R. Castings, 20, Highurst Street, Radford, Nottingham; 278. Ernest Short, 110, Old Bethnal Green Road, E.2; 279. Jack Owen, 7, Downing Street, Smethwick, Birmingham; 280. Master M. Addis, 19, Melbourne Grove, East Dulwich, S.E.; 281. Master Felix Burke, 63, Marle Hill Parade, Cheltenham; 282. Bentley Robinson, 45, Bolling Hall Road, Bradford, Yorks; 283. T. R. Ward, 93, Turnpike Lane, Hornsey, N.8; 284. Leslie Mercantorio, 37, Robsart Street, Brixton, S.W.9; 285. Cyril Iveson, 12, Florence Mount, Harehills, Leeds, Yorks; 286. Alfred Robert Lodge 162, Wadham Road, Bootle, Liverpool; 287. Ronald Paul Baldwin, 2, Staunton Road. Coleford. Glos:

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Co. (Canada), Limited.

No. 557. D/R **February 6, 1926.**