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Vengeance," "The Clue of the Fancy
Vest," etc., etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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

CHAPTER I.

(Told by Nipper.)

IN WHICH MR. KENNEDY HUNTER, M.A., DESCENDS UPON ST. FRANK'S—AND, INCIDENTALLY, INTO A DITCH.

NELSON LEE laughed softly. "My dear Nipper, there is not the slightest reason in the world for you to look so miserable," he said, gently patting me upon the shoulder. "Good gracious! One might think I intended leaving St. Frank's for good—whereas, in all probability, I shall be 'Mr. Alvington' again within three or four weeks."

I shook my head dubiously.

"That's all very well, guv'nor," I replied. "If you weren't going to be away for long, a new Housemaster wouldn't have been appointed in your place. You can't kid me, you know!"

"Is it so impossible to do that?" smiled Nelson Lee banteringly. "But, seriously, I should not attempt to 'kid' you, Nipper—as you aptly express it."

"But you are doing so, sir," I protested. "What about this Secret Service work?"

"Well, what about it?"

"You won't tell me a giddy thing," I complained. "I feel in the cold, guv'nor—absolutely left outside, in fact. It's simply rotten to stick here at St. Frank's while you go off on some dangerous work. I sha'n't have a minute's peace until you come back."

The guv'nor laughed outright.

"Nonsense, young 'un!" he said briskly. "And, if it will please you, I can give you an assurance that my work promises no

danger. There might be some little excitement, but there is no prospect of personal peril. Everything will go on here as usual—exactly as usual, Nipper!"

Although Nelson Lee didn't know it, that observation of his was about as far wide of the mark as anything could possibly be! But I didn't know—then. I was destined to live—and learn.

Morning lessons were over in the Remove, and I was talking to "Mr. Alvington" in his study in the Ancient House. My bosom chums, Sir Lancelot Montgomery Fregellia-West and Tommy Watson, were with me; but they were standing silently over by the door. Although in the secret, they could never quite overcome the natural awe in which all juniors held the Housemaster.

With me, of course, it was different. At St. Frank's I was "Dick Bennett," of the Remove; but in the privacy of Nelson Lee's study I was Nipper, and he was just the guv'nor.

And now a change was to come about. Only that morning Nelson Lee had told me that he was going away for a period. He had accepted some special work on behalf of the Government. I didn't know what it was, and the guv'nor couldn't tell me. Ordinarily, of course, he had no secrets from me; but this was something different.

I wasn't particularly curious; but I didn't want Nelson Lee to go. True, his absence wouldn't be for long, and we should have another Housemaster meanwhile. The juniors were already making wild guesses as to the possible behaviour of the newcomer. Being only a temporary man, so to speak, it was

generally concluded that he would be more of a figurehead than anything else.

"Everything will go on as usual, gov'nor?" I repeated. "That's rot, of course. Things can't go on as usual if you're not here—not with me, anyhow. And who is this chap—this Mr. Hunter?"

"You will find out for yourself before long, my lad," replied Nelson Lee. "Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., was, until recently, the principal of a fairly big school near London. He has been specially appointed by the governors, and I hope he will meet with your approval."

The gov'nor glanced at his watch.

"But I must be going in a minute or two, my boys," he went on. "I can't leave you my future address, Nipper, because I am not quite sure of it myself. But you may rest assured that I shall communicate with you occasionally—just to satisfy your anxieties," he added with a twinkle.

Well, after that we bade the gov'nor good-bye. Sir Montie and Tommy, of course, just shook hands with Nelson Lee, wished him a happy time, and then gracefully retired. I shook hands with the gov'nor about fifteen times, until at last his own arm ached as much as mine.

He took his departure from St. Frank's while everybody was at dinner; for when I came to look for him again, Tubbs, the page-boy, informed me that the "Housemaster 'ad gorn." Tubbs seemed quite upset about it. And, to tell the truth, the inmates of the Ancient House generally were feeling somewhat gloomy.

Nelson Lee was easily the most popular Housemaster St. Frank's had ever had; and the Fosalls felt that they had suffered a personal loss. There was some consolation in the knowledge, however, that "Old Alvy" would be back before very long.

There was much discussion, of course, regarding the cause of Nelson Lee's sudden departure, but only Sir Montie and Tommy and I knew the real truth—and even we were in the dark! Dr. Stafford, the Head, knew all about it, naturally; but he was the only other person in the whole of St. Frank's who did.

Afternoon lessons were rather tiresome. I felt gloomy and restless, but realised, in the middle of the French lesson, that worrying was useless. Monsieur Leblanc, the French master, found me very inattentive; but he didn't mind. I was miles ahead of the Remove in my French. Without boasting, I think I can say that I was miles ahead of the majority of Sixth Formers, too.

To tell the truth, I had been thinking of other matters. Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., the new Housemaster, was due to arrive at Bellton by the evening train. And I schemed a scheme in my own head—and grinned with anticipation.

I wanted to get rid of the "lonesome" feeling which had descended upon me; and, in addition, I didn't see why the new Housemaster shouldn't receive a decent welcome. First impressions are generally lasting, I've heard, and it would be diplomatic to give Mr. Hunter a rousing welcome.

Perhaps you'll wonder why the Remove didn't give Nelson Lee an enthusiastic send-off. The fact was, he wanted to leave the school as unostentatiously as possible. Handforth and Co., of Study D, had a splendid programme all mapped out, but it had been abandoned. And Handforth, in consequence, was very much hurt.

Therefore, as soon as the Remove was dismissed I got busy.

"I've got a wheeze, my sons," I said briskly, as I marched out into the Triangle with Tregellin-West and Watson.

"Anything exciting, dear fellow?" inquired Sir Montie.

"Not exactly exciting," I replied, "but it'll be entertaining, anyhow. Aboy there, Bo'sun! Reverse engines!"

Tom Burton, son of a retired sea-captain, and known in the Remove as "The Bo'sun," turned smilingly as he heard my hail.

"Want me, messmate?" he asked, in his hearty, jovial voice.

"I want you, and I want Handforth and McClure and Church," I replied. "In addition, I want Farman and Yakama and De Valerie."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez.

"Begad! Is it goin' to be a meetin'?" he inquired politely.

"A little pow-wow," I said. "Just rush the fellows together, Tommy."

Handforth and Co. were near by, and within a minute De Valerie joined us. The Bo'sun routed out Justin B. Farman and Sessue Yakama from the lobby. The nine juniors eyed me curiously.

"What's the fatheaded idea?" demanded Handforth.

"There isn't one."

"Then what are we standing here for like idiots?"

"There's only one chap who's standing like that," I grinned. "You speak for yourself, Handy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"If you're trying to be funny, I'll clear off!" he roared.

"Oh, don't be an ass now, Handy!" I said. "You can't help it sometimes, I know; but there's a certain amount of sense in that napper of yours. I want the benefit of your noble brains."

"If you're not rotting—"

"My dear chap, I'm fearfully serious," I said, winking to the others. "You asked what the fatheaded idea was. There isn't one—because the idea is a top-holer. This evening, by the six-forty train, Mr. Hunter will arrive."

"Ho ho!" said McClure sarcastically. "We didn't know that, did we?"

"Say, quit blowin' hot air, Bennett," remarked Farman. "I'll allow you're the real goods when it comes to notions—"

"Well, this notion is of the first quality," I interrupted. "In a nutshell, it's this: why shouldn't we go to the giddy station in a body, and meet the honourable new Housemaster? Savvy? Make him understand, right?"

off the reel, that the Remove is the genuine, Al, wilt-edged Form at St. Frank's?"

The fellows regarded me thoughtfully.

"It ain't so bad," said Handforth. "It's my idea, of course——"

"Yours?" I exclaimed, staring.

"Well, I wanted to give Alvy a send off, didn't I?" demanded Handforth. "This is the same thing, only reversed. I'm game, anyhow. We'll cheer him when he steps out of the carriage, and all that rot. Make him feel happy. Then, when we get into scrapes afterwards, he won't come down heavy."

The Removites grinned.

"Begad, there's that about it!" remarked Sir Montie. "It's a rippin' wheeze, Benny boy. Noblesse oblige, you know. Mr. Hunter bein' a Housemaster, it's only right that we should show him proper respect—what?"

"Scuse me! The man's a stranger!" objected the Bo'sun. "He might not like a crowd of fellows——"

"My dear old mariner," I interjected, "that's the very idea of it. Mr. Hunter's a stranger—and the wheeze is to make him feel at home as soon as ever he sets foot upon the station platform."

Cecil De Valerie nodded.

"Sheer rot, of course," he observed; "but it's diplomatic, Bennett. I'm willin' to waste the evenin'. I was goin' down to the nets; but that can wait. We don't get new Housemasters every day."

All the other fellows agreed; and it was arranged that we should meet in the Triangle after tea. Sir Montie and Tommy and I adjourned to Study C and partook of a hearty meal. We were more cheerful now.

When we emerged into the Triangle, soon after six, we found that Owen major and Hubbard and one or two others had joined the party. The more the merrier, and I didn't mind a bit. When Pullwood and Co. suggested coming, however, I put my foot down. I knew very well that the rascally Nuts were thinking of spoiling our plan. Their amiable intention, probably, was to boo and hiss—so that we should all get into a scrape. Pullwood was very fertile in caddish ideas.

We numbered fourteen strong when we turned out of the gates. The road was dusty, and the evening sun shone with unusual brilliance. The day had been perfect, and the evening was calm and delightful.

Arriving at the station, we learned that the train wasn't due for fifteen minutes. So I got the chaps together and gave them final instructions. Being skipper of the Remove (Ancient House side), it was my duty to lead.

"The idea is to stand in a semicircle just outside the station," I said. "As soon as Hunter appears we'll lift our caps and give him a cheer. Not too loud, mind—just a subdued, welcoming——"

"Rot!" said Handforth warmly. "I'm going to yell!"

I sighed.

"Blessed if you don't always want to overdo a thing, Handforth," I said patiently. "Yelling would be simply rotten. Hunter would think he was being mobbed or something. The whole idea would be messed up."

"Begad, you're right, Benny!" said Trevellick West. "Handy's too violent—he is, really. We don't want a frightful din, you know."

The other fellows nodded agreement, and Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Have your own way," he said bitterly. "I'm always squashed, I notice. Pity I came with you—I might as well be a beasty little fag, for all the notice I get. It's sickening."

"Well, you shouldn't be such an ass——"

"What did you say, Arnold McClure?" demanded Handforth darkly.

McClure grinned nervously.

"Oh, don't rot now, Handy, old man," he said, backing away. "I—I dare say——"

"Shut up, you asses!" I said tartly. "Blessed if you ain't always squabbling. Life in Study D must be simply awful. Now look here, we're going to greet Mr. Hunter quietly and decently——"

"Supposing he doesn't like it?" asked Owen major.

"Oh, my hat!" I exclaimed. "What a lot of fatheads you are! If the Hunter bird doesn't like it, he'll have to do the other thing. I'll leave it at that—we'll just give him a welcome."

As a matter of fact I had another idea in my mind, but it was just a little too "nervy" even for me. If Hunter turned out to be a really decent sport I might adopt it; but it would be best to wait.

The train steamed in at last, and several Removites wanted to rush on to the platform. I stopped them, however, for that would have spoilt the effect completely. And we waited outside. Several small villagers, of both sexes, stood at a respectful distance, looking on with great wonder.

"Look out!" I breathed suddenly. "Here he comes!"

The fellows were all lined up ready. We formed a half-circle completely round the old station porch, and I dare say we looked quite imposing. A gentleman emerged from the booking-office, and Handforth threw his cap into the air.

"Welcome to——" he began enthusiastically.

"Shut up, you idiot!" I blazed. "That's old Thomson, the grocer!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth, diving for his cap.

There was a cackle from the others. Handforth, as usual, was terrifically impulsive and he had nearly made a blunder. Directly following Mr. Thomann, however, came Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A.

He carried an attaché case the initials "K. H." were clearly visible. This, of course, was good enough. We all looked at the new Housemaster with respectful curiosity.

He was a smallish man; thin, with bowed shoulders. He looked fragile, and almost weakly. His face was clean shaven, but a good many wrinkles lined his high forehead and somewhat hollow cheeks. He wore glasses, and stood gazing at us with genuine astonishment.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed gently. "What—er—does this mean?"

"Have we the honour of addressing Mr. Hunter, sir?" I asked politely.

"That is my name, boys——"

"Welcome to St. Frank's!" roared Handforth, throwing his cap into the air for a second time—and not to be subdued. "Hurrah! Three cheers!"

After that we couldn't keep silent, for it would have been fatal to allow Handforth to do all the shouting. We all raised our caps, and waved them with great enthusiasm. Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., watched us with surprised amusement.

He did not speak until we had quite finished.

"My dear boys, this is very kind and thoughtful of you," he exclaimed, in a voice which was soft and extremely gentle. "I am sure I am honoured by this unexpected reception. Am I right in assuming that you are members of the Ancient House?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "We're Remove chaps—er—boys, sir!"

"Excellent—excellent!" beamed Mr. Hunter genially. "Thank you, boys—thank you, indeed. I am most gratified."

We all beamed in response, and the new Housemaster, who was obviously a very harmless individual, walked almost daintily towards the station fly—which was standing a few yards off, waiting for a fare.

Mr. Hunter acknowledged the old driver's salute, and climbed into the vehicle. And it was then that I decided to put my little idea into operation. Seeing that Mr. Hunter was so genial, there was no reason why things shouldn't be carried a little further. All the fellows agreed with me that the newcomer was the right sort.

"Come on, you chaps!" I whispered hurriedly. "Lend a hand!"

"Begad, what are you going to do, dear fellow?"

"We'll take the giddy horse out and pull the fly up to St. Frank's ourselves!" I said crisply. "Rather sporting—eh? It'll just be the finishing touch."

"By George!" grinned De Valerie. "I'm game!"

Handforth didn't wait to state his opinion; he dashed at the horse with all his customary impulsiveness. The old driver was quite helpless; he just sat on his box while we got busy. The horse, which seemed to be about three hundred years old, more or less, was quite indifferent.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Hunter, starting up. "What are you doing——"

"It's all right, sir!" I gasped. "Sit still, sir!"

The Housemaster jumped to our game, and subsided into the uncomfortable cushions with a smile. He wisely realised that protests would be useless. The chaps were well away, and nothing could stop them.

Farman did practically all the work. He had been used to horses since he was able to toddle, and the way he unfastened the

harness was a revelation. Between the lot of us the horse was out of the shafts in less than a minute.

"What's the game, young gents?" protested the driver, climbing down from the box gingerly. "This 'ere won't do, you know. The master will 'old me responsible if anythink 'appens——"

"Don't you worry, Jake!" shouted McClure. "We sha'n't hurt your giddy old fly. It might fall to pieces, of course. But that'll be through old age!"

"Sich awful goin's-on!" muttered old Jake dazedly.

He found his wits in time to look after the horse, which was straying about quite carelessly in search of grass. Meanwhile, Handforth and Co. and the Bo'sun and two or three others grabbed one shaft, and the rest of us hauled on to the other.

"By George! Now we're off!" gasped De Valerie.

And we were! The fly ran easier than we had anticipated, and we shot away at fine speed. Mr. Hunter found it necessary to cling on to the side of the vehicle somewhat desperately—for it was swaying from side to side in a manner which could not possibly have been comfortable.

The Removites were thoroughly excited by now, however, and the way in which we careered through the village caused a terrific sensation. People rushed to their doors to witness the spectacle.

We mounted the bridge over the Stowe in splendid style, rushing it with such speed that we roared over in no time. Then down the dip towards the curve. If Mr. Hunter wasn't pleased, he ought to have been. For by this time every fellow at the shafts was smothered with dust from head to foot. But even Sir Montie was quite oblivious of this, and he was hauling away with as much vigour as anybody.

"Whoa!" I roared suddenly. "Near side, you chaps—near side!"

We were bowling along in the middle of the road, and I had just spotted a motor-car approaching. It wasn't exactly in sight, because of the bend. But I had seen the top of it over the hedge.

"This way!" bawled Handforth excitedly.

The silly fathead commenced pulling the shafts over to the off-side, and Church and McClure dutifully followed his example. That simply did it! The sudden wrench took the fly across the road with a giddy swerve. I yelled, and De Valerie and the Bo'sun yelled. But in the confusion brought about by Handforth's blundering disaster occurred.

The fly couldn't stand such treatment. Its own momentum took it careering across the road. The off-side wheels plunged down the bank, and the next second the vehicle came to a sickening stop in the ditch.

Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., shot from the interior of the fly like a stone from a catapult. He flew through the air, and landed in a huge patch of weeds on all fours. He rolled over, gasping and spluttering.

CHAPTER II.

(Nipper continues.)

IN WHICH THE REMOVE IS DELIGHTED, SURPRISED, DAZED, AND FURIOUS IN TURN.

THERE was a moment of horrified silence.

Then the motor-car turned the bend and roared past. The rotter in charge of it didn't even stop to see if any damage had been done. Handforth and Co. had been knocked flat, but nobody seemed to be particularly hurt.

"Begad," gasped Sir Montie huskily, "is—is Mr. Hunter killed?"

The new Housemaster, in spite of his somewhat violent fall, was already upon his feet. I gazed at him wonderingly. He would be furious, of course—and with excellent cause. Our plan had come a frightful cropper.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter breathlessly. "How—how disturbing!"

After what I had been expecting, this was astonishingly mild. But the new Housemaster had not quite recovered himself yet. There was a rush of fellows, and Mr. Hunter was surrounded. A dozen hands helped to brush him down.

"Are you hurt, sir?" I asked anxiously.

"Merely a bruise or two, my boy—nothing that matters."

"It was quite an accident, sir!" gasped Handforth nervously—probably stricken with a guilty twinge of his conscience. "Somebody pulled the wrong way, you know. It was all the fault of that beastly motor-car!"

Mr. Hunter nodded.

"It is most unfortunate!" he exclaimed softly. "Your little plan has quite misfired—eh? However, we must not grumble. We all seem to have escaped very lightly. It was quite an excusable mishap—quite!"

"Begad! It's rippin' of you, sir—it is really!" said Sir Montie enthusiastically. "Three cheers for Mr. Hunter, dear fellows!"

The cheers were given with a will—for now we had something to shout about. Under the most trying conditions Mr. Hunter had proved himself to be a thorough sport. Many men would have been furious, and punishment would have been meted out to us liberally. For a man doesn't care to be pitched out of a fly into a ditch—even accidentally. He is liable to become short-tempered.

"May—may we continue the journey, sir?" I asked.

"You may do as you wish, my boy, but I shall certainly finish the trip to St. Frank's on foot," replied Mr. Hunter, in his soft voice. "Thank you—thank you, that will do quite nicely."

He was brushed down by this time, and, grasping his attache-case, he walked delicately up the road in the direction of St. Frank's. As he turned the bend a whistle went up from nearly everybody.

"Shiver my bowsprit!" murmured the Bo'sun. "He's a good 'un, messmates!"

"Sure!" agreed Farman. "I guess there ain't no flies on that feller. Say, I'd sure hate myself if I checked Mr. Hunter. Guess he's about the dandiest galoot that ever struck this township!"

De Valerie nodded.

"Quite decent," he agreed. "He only kept his temper with difficulty, though."

"Rats!" said Watson. "He was as serene as anything, ass!"

"Just as you like," said De Valerie, shrugging his shoulders. "But I'll swear I saw an ugly kind of glint in his eye. It was only for a tick, but it was there."

"You're sure to say that!" sneered Handforth. "Just like you, De Valerie. Why, Hunter's the tamest bird I've ever spotted!"

I didn't say anything; but I, too, had noticed that glint which De Valerie referred to. But it was only natural that Mr. Hunter should have been momentarily angry. He would have been a queer chap if he hadn't displayed some kind of annoyance.

While we were discussing the situation—that is, to say, while a terrific argument was in progress between Handforth and Co. and the rest—old Jake, the cabby, came along with the horse.

I had wisely advised the chaps to haul the fly out of the ditch beforehand, and it was now standing beside the road quite unharmed. A collection was made, and Jake was the richer by six shillings, which, to his mind, was ample compensation for the inconvenience he had suffered. In addition, I paid him the usual fare he would have charged Mr. Hunter.

After that we all wended our way to St. Frank's. Practically the whole Ancient House was aware of the facts within an hour, and there was much chuckling and many expressions of wonder.

The fact is, the whole House was delighted—particularly the Remove. A Housemaster, I may as well explain, can make the lives of his boys genial or otherwise. He has sole control over his own House; he is, in fact, the lord of his own domain. It is possible to appeal to the Headmaster in exceptional cases, of course. But at St. Frank's it was considered *infra dig* to approach Dr. Stafford on any matters concerning household management.

The Housemaster was IT. This was as it should be, for no self-respecting gentleman would consent to be in such a responsible position if he were under somebody else's orders. The Head always allowed his Housemasters to conduct their own sections in their own way. It was really the only proper course.

And much depended upon Mr. Hunter. A harsh man could make the whole House miserable; a good-tempered man caused general satisfaction. Nelson Lee, in his character of Mr. Alvington, had been just about the ideal. Everybody at St. Frank's acknowledged that he reached the high-water mark in Housemasters.

In the Remove common-room, soon after dark, the juniors collected together. The

general verdict was that Mr. Hunter would prove a worthy successor to "Old Alvy." He had started jolly well, at all events.

"One of the best!" declared Owen major enthusiastically.

"Rather!"

"A regular top-holer, begad!" said Sir Montie. "A rippin' sport!"

"It's a wonder you weren't all reported to the Head," remarked Armstrong. "Hunter must be a jolly easy-going old stick, that's all I can say."

"Oh, he's a brick!" said Conroy minor.

And his opinion was the general opinion. The Remove was highly satisfied with the new Housemaster. They pictured themselves having an extremely easy time for the next few weeks. Nelson Lee, of course, had ruled the Ancient House smoothly, but his rule had been stern at times. The fellows assumed that they would be able to take advantage of Mr. Hunter's meekness.

Fullwood and Co. were in high feather. They were grinning with delight, fondly imagining that smoking parties and card parties would be the order of the day—as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, in fact.

And then Starke came into the common-room.

Starke of the Sixth was a prefect, and about the biggest bully in the Ancient House. The fact that he was smiling when he entered the common-room was proof positive that trouble was brewing for somebody or other.

"Now then, stop this din!" he said pleasantly.

The din continued for some few moments. It was a sore point with Starke that the juniors did not extend to him the respect which was his due as a prefect. The juniors only quieted down because they were curious to hear who was going to "get it in the neck!"

"Who were the young idiots who met Mr. Hunter at the station?" asked Starke.

"There ain't any here," I replied calmly.

"You'd better inquire somewhere else, Starke. In the Sixth, perhaps."

Starke growled.

"None of your cheek!" he said sharply.

"I want to know the names of the boys who played that trick on Mr. Hunter."

"There wasn't any trick——"

"Don't tell lies to me, Watson!" snapped Starke. "I know thundering well that you tipped that fly over on purpose. And every boy who took part in the affair will do five hundred lines!"

The Remove gasped.

"Five hundred lines!" roared Handforth indignantly. "It was an accident, Starke! You don't think we tipped Hunter out on purpose, I suppose? And, anyhow, we ain't going to take your fathheaded orders——"

"They're Mr. Hunter's orders," said Starke easily. "And if you don't do the lines there'll be trouble—understand?"

He left the common-room, and there was an excited buzz at once.

"Shut up, you fellows!" I cut in. "This

thing's got to be sifted out. It looks to me as though Starke has worked this thing himself—just the sort of thing he would do. Why, Mr. Hunter told us that the affair was an accident, and that everything was quite O.K. He couldn't have ordered us to write lines——"

"Of course not!" declared Handforth warmly. "I ain't going to do mine, anyhow!"

"Rather not!"

"Well let Starke rip!"

"Rats to him!"

"That's all very well," I said. "Starke's a prefect, and he's got authority. He's a necessary evil, so to speak. We should only put ourselves in the wrong by ignoring him."

"You thundering ass!" roared Watson. "You ain't going to do the lines, are you?"

"No; but I think somebody ought to go to Mr. Hunter," I replied firmly. "Suppose we organise a deputation? Three or four of us will go along to the Housemaster and ask him all about it. It'll be a fine show-up for Starke, and Hunter may even deprive him of his prefectship."

"By George! That's a splendid idea!" said De Valerie.

I had struck the right note. Everybody was convinced that Starke had taken advantage of the situation to enforce his authority, and the prospect of seeing Starke sat upon by Mr. Hunter was very attractive.

"Well, we don't want to hang about," I said crisply. "A thing like this must be done at once, or not at all. Who'll come with me to Hunter's study? Two chaps will do—just enough to represent the crowd?"

"I'm with you, Bennett," said De Valerie easily.

The others looked rather uncertain.

"Begad! I'll be the other one——"

"No, not you, Montie," I cut in. "We're in the same study, and I want the deputation to represent three different studies. You'll do, Bo'sun!"

"Souise me! I'm your man, shipmate!" said Tom Burton promptly.

"Good!"

And the deputation sallied forth from the common-room and marched straight towards the study which had grown familiar to me as the gov'nor's private sanctum. Mr. Hunter, of course, was now in possession.

We tapped upon the door, but there was no answer. I tried the handle, and then made a grimace.

"Not here!" I exclaimed. "Rotten!"

"Hold on!" whispered De Valerie. "He's comin', I think!"

Mr. Hunter turned the head of the passage as De Valerie spoke, and he gazed at us inquiringly over the tops of his glasses.

"You wish to speak to me, boys?" he asked beamingly.

"Please, sir," I replied.

He opened the door, switched the light on, and walked into the study. We followed respectfully behind. The Housemaster seated himself in the chair before the desk and waited.

"We wish to ask you about a—a punishment, sir," I began. "Starke has given five hundred lines to all the fellows who met you at the station."

"Who is Starke, may I ask?"

"Why, a perfect——"

"Ah, quite so!" nodded Mr. Hunter.

"And this is a deputation, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Exactly—exactly. Pray proceed."

"Well, the fellows have got an idea that Starke was acting without your authority, sir," I said quietly. "We don't believe that you gave us five hundred lines on account of the accident. We believe that it was a trick of Starke's."

Mr. Hunter nodded smilingly.

"Pray continue," he said.

"That's all, sir."

"Oh, that is all?" beamed the Housemaster. "As you have told me yourselves, Starke is prefect. He is in authority. I believe? I have already interviewed the prefects, and have given certain orders. I wish to know your names, my boys?"

We gave them.

"Well, De Valerie, Bennett and Burton, I think it will be necessary for you to write an additional two hundred and fifty lines," said Mr. Hunter mildly. "That is all. You may go."

We stared at the Housemaster dazedly. The Bo'sun and De Valerie walked towards the door and passed out. But I remained. Mr. Hunter's attitude was more than I could understand.

"Does that mean the original imposition is to stand, sir—for all the fellows who met you at the station?" I asked steadily.

"I am busy, Bennett," said Mr. Hunter, smiling at me. "You may go."

"But—but I can't understand it, sir!" I protested blankly.

"Really? I am afraid your comprehension must be somewhat dull, Bennett," beamed Mr. Hunter. "Let me see, the imposition was five hundred lines, was it not? De Valerie and Burton are to do an additional amount. You, my boy, will doubtless have time to write one thousand lines——"

"A—a thousand lines?" I gasped blankly.

"You may go, Bennett."

All in a second my blood boiled. I don't exactly know why, but the very sight of the Housemaster lying back in his chair and eyeing me in such a benevolent fashion stung me to the point of exasperation.

"You—er—you ain't serious, sir?" I asked huskily.

Mr. Hunter rose from his chair, walked silently to the door and opened it. There was no mistaking his meaning. I felt like saying a thousand other things, but couldn't manage to utter a word.

So I passed out of the study, and the door closed noiselessly behind me. De Valerie and the Bo'sun were waiting in the passage. They regarded me with different expressions. Burton was looking quite blank, but there

was a curious grin about the corners of De Valerie's mouth.

"Kippin' sport—what?" he said coolly. "Easy-goin' old stick? One of the very best? By George! It's rather humorous, ain't it?"

I found my voice then.

"It's simply amazing!" I panted. "Hang it all, I can't believe it! He gave us those lines because we tipped him out of the carriage. And—and he told us that it was an unavoidable accident—— Ye gods and little codfish!"

Still somewhat dazed I walked along the passage with the other two, and we arrived at the common-room. A chorus of voices immediately greeted us—for, naturally, a certain number of fellows were rather anxious.

"Well, what's the verdict?" sang out Handforth.

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" demanded Watson. "What's wrong, Benny, you ass? Blessed if you don't all look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"Tell 'em, De Valerie," I said weakly.

Cecil De Valerie grinned.

"My dear kids, prepare yourselves for a double-sized shock," he said coolly. "The Hunter bird is a fake—a giddy fraud. It only shows that a chap mustn't judge by appearances. An' he's a frightful liar, too!"

"What do you mean, you idiot?" roared Handforth.

"Our little deputation was a failure—a ghastly failure, I may say," replied De Valerie. "The Bo'sun and I have been honoured with fresh attentions, an' the original imposition stands. You've got to do five hundred lines, an' we're condemned to do seven hundred and fifty."

"I've got a thousand!" I grunted.

A prefect hail of voices broke out.

"But what for?" bawled Handforth, above the din. "What the dickens have we got the impot. for?"

"Why, for tipping Hunter out of the fly, of course," I replied furiously. "Of all the mean, contemptible tricks, I reckon this is about the worst! And he looks such a genial old bounder, too—the smooth-tongued Hun! I—I— Oh, rats! There ain't words in the English language strong enough to express what I feel!"

It was some few minutes before the Remove thoroughly understood the situation. And then indignation ran riot, particularly among those fellows who had received the enormously unjust punishment.

It was almost unbelievable. The Remove seethed with fury. What sort of Housemaster was this? Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., was not only unique, but his methods were beyond mere human comprehension.

A more genial-mannered man than the new Housemaster could not be imagined. And yet—and yet—— Well, our feelings can't be described.

If Mr. Hunter had started in this way, how would he finish?

CHAPTER III.

(Nipper continues.)

I SEE SOMETHING AMAZING—AND THEN RECEIVE AN EXTRA NASTY SHOCK.

S CRATCH—scratch!

That's just to make it clearly understood that Sir Montie Tregellis-West and I were slogging sullenly at our lines in Study C. I'm not implying that our pens were rotten—they didn't scratch at all, as a matter of fact—but that's the best way to describe it.

We felt as though we'd like to tear holes in the impot. paper. If ever any lines were irksome, these were. If I had broken certain school rules and had deserved an imposition, I should have written the lines with great cheeriness.

But I knew well enough that this punishment was disgracefully unjust. And my pen, as I wrote, seemed to jib at every word.

It was surprising how popular opinion had changed in the Remove. Only a short while before Mr. Hunter had been everything that was splendid, now he was reviled by one and all.

It was the very appearance of the man which was so deceptive. De Valerie had been right on the mark when he said that Mr. Hunter was a fake and a fraud. The newcomer's smile, as I now knew to my cost, was a sham. His geniality was only on the surface; his kindly, gentle voice was a lure for the unwary.

If Mr. Hunter had been a harsh, domineering bounder it wouldn't have been half so bad. Everybody in the Remove felt that they had been swindled. And the utter caddishness of it! To say nothing at the time—except that everything was all right, and then to drop down heavily like this.

I boiled when I thought of it.

"Oh, the awful humbug!" I ejaculated, having completed a page. "A thousand rotten lines! I shall never get 'em done. Montie!"

"Dear fellow, that's all rot, you know," said Tregellis-West, who was as serene as ever. "An' pray don't glare at me so aggressively, Benny. Begad! You might think I'd given you the horrid lines."

"I feel mad with everybody, Montie!" I growled. "Why the dickens did the guv'nor go away? And where's Tommy? Why doesn't the ass do his lines? And set your glasses on straight, for goodness' sake!"

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez and grinned.

"Begad! You are shockin'ly touchy, Benny—you are, really!" he said. "But I mustn't grumble at you, dear old boy. You've got double the lines that I have—Oh, here's Tommy!"

Watson, in fact, was very much in evidence. He burst into Study C with such violence that he nearly sent my chair flying—to say nothing of me. As it was, he merely jogged my elbow, and caused a blob

of ink to fly off on to a clean sheet of paper.

"You clumsy ass!" I roared irritably.

"Rats to that!" panted Tommy Watson, his eyes gleaming. "I want you chaps right away——"

"Well, you can't have us," I snapped. "What about your lines? Why the dickens don't you come and do them?"

"They'll do later on," said Watson excitedly. "Look here! Chuck those pens down and listen to me. I've just had the straight tip, right from the horse's mouth, so to speak, that Bob Christine and Talmadge are on their way up from the village with a supply of tuck! I was thinking of an ambush——"

I jumped to my feet instantly.

"Good!" I exclaimed, forgetting the lines and Mr. Hunter in a moment. "We owe Christine and Co. a raid, don't we? Are you sure of this, Tommy?"

"Positive," he replied. "Yorke and Clapson came into the gym. a minute or two ago, and the silly asses were talking loudly—they thought the place was empty. And I heard 'em saying that Christine and Talmadge would be along with the grub in half an hour. Tinned fruit, and that sort of stuff mostly——"

"Begad! Did they spot you, dear boy?" asked Montie anxiously.

"You dummy! Do you think I should be so fatheaded?" demanded Watson. "I overheard the information by sheer accident; but that wasn't any reason why I should let the Monks know. I dodged behind the cupboard, and they went out two minutes afterwards."

"Good enough!" I declared. "We'll lay in wait for the bounders. No, we sha'n't want anybody else. It'll be a surprise attack, and we shall be away with the spoils before the asses know what's happened."

We sallied out of the study straight away. As a matter of fact our cupboard was rather bare—and this was a good opportunity of filling it. In such times of stress as these it wasn't possible to buy the usual kinds of tuck; but fancy goods, such as potted fish and tinned fruits and biscuits, were allowable.

On the face of it, it seemed to be sheer robbery to pinch the stuff from Christine and Co. But there was a keen rivalry between the juniors of the two Houses at St. Frank's. Grub-raids were every-day occurrences, in a manner of speaking. Sometimes we succeeded in gaining a haul, and occasionally Christine and Co. returned the compliment. Upon the whole, it worked out fairly evenly in the long run. And this state of affairs certainly added to the excitement of life.

Only a day or two before Sir Montie and Tommy and I had been completely dished by the Monks on our way up from the village with a decent load of good things. We were therefore very keen to exact a reprisal.

Reaching the Triangle, we found everything dark and still. The sky was slightly

clouded and there was no moon. The shaded light above the big gateway cast quite a brilliant patch upon the ground. It wasn't likely that the two laden Monks would enter by the orthodox means; it was far more probable that they would scale the wall at the point where it was low, in the darkness.

To be on the safe side, however, I stationed Tommy and Montie at this spot, and crouched behind a buttress of the wall near the gateway itself. In the event of Christine and Talmadge entering that way, I could spring on them, and keep them busy until my chums arrived. The same thing applied the other way, of course.

We waited, and I was rather glad that the Triangle remained deserted. As a rule, one or two Monks were generally hanging about on an occasion of this sort—in case of eventualities. But they probably assumed that we were so busy with our precious Housemaster that we hadn't time to think of House raids.

Five minutes passed, and then a gentle footstep sounded upon the gravel. It came from the direction of the side door in the Ancient House. And a moment or two later Mr. Hunter hove in sight.

I glared at him fiercely, and felt like saying a few things. He paused just before reaching the gateway, and took a quick glance round. It was very gloomy in the Triangle, but my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness by this time; furthermore, my sight is particularly acute. The guv'nor has often remarked upon my astonishingly clear vision. It's training, I suppose.

Anyhow, I could see Mr. Hunter with a fair amount of distinctness. He was dressed in a long black overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat—totally different attire from that in which he had arrived.

And, as I watched, I caught my breath in. To my utter amazement, this astounding Housemaster took something dark from his pocket, and I saw him adjust it round his chin! To be quite exact, he had donned a false beard!

"Great Scott!" I murmured blankly.

I couldn't quite believe my eyes. Why, in the name of all that was astonishing, had Mr. Hunter performed this action? What possible reason could he have for donning a disguise?

He pulled his hat over his eyes, and passed briskly out of the gates. And I scarcely knew what to think. The man was providing so many surprises, with such rapidity, that I couldn't quite keep pace with him.

One thought filled my brain, however. I determined, on the instant, to follow Mr. Hunter. It wouldn't be spying, for there was a very excellent reason for my action. To tell the truth, my natural detective instincts were aroused.

I vaguely began to suspect that all was not as it should be with Mr. Kennedy Hunter. No respectable Housemaster could

possibly have a good reason for stealing out of the school grounds wearing a disguise.

Almost before I knew it I was shadowing him. The projected raid upon Christine and Co. was forgotten. In my keenness I even overlooked the fact that Sir Montie and Tommy were crouching a little further along the wall. My whole attention was given to the new Housemaster.

He had not turned in the direction of the village, but was making his way up the road towards Bannington Moor. This bleak stretch of open land lay a comparatively short distance away.

Very soon, however, Mr. Hunter turned from the road, and took the footpath which skirted Bellton Wood. Now, this was surprising enough in itself to give me much food for thought. Some fellows wouldn't have noticed anything strange, perhaps—but I did.

Mr. Hunter was a total stranger to the district, to the best of my belief—and yet he had turned into this footpath unerringly, in spite of the deep gloom. It was quite obvious, in fact, that Mr. Hunter was by no means a complete stranger.

This struck me as being significant. I don't know why, and I couldn't even satisfy myself as to the cause of my suspicions, but I was quite convinced that something was radically wrong.

Mr. Hunter walked on with rapid strides. He did not glance back once. He was quite satisfied that he was alone; but at the same time I think I can say that my own movements were so silent that I gave him no indication of my close attention.

A stile was negotiated by my quarry just at the point where the wood bore sharply round to the right. And then I heard Mr. Hunter's footfalls cease, and voices were audible. I came to a standstill, and listened.

"...trifle late, but it couldn't be helped," Mr. Hunter was saying. "Eh? ... Yes, of course; ... will go at once."

I couldn't catch all that was said, but I heard the two men walk onwards. The sound of their footfalls grew fainter, and I hastened to the stile. I fancied, once, that a faint sound came from the rear, but a glance round revealed nothing, and all was still.

I was keen as mustard now. Reaching the stile, I could faintly see the figures of Mr. Hunter and his companion walking towards the rocky gully which led down upon the moor. I followed with great care, crouching low as I walked.

It was only by straining my eyes that I kept the pair in sight. I quickened my pace, and shortened the distance which divided me from the others. Once I stumbled, and I was forced to take my gaze from the quarry. And when I looked again there was utterly no sign of human beings.

In that moment, so it seemed, Mr. Hunter and his companion had vanished. Of course they had passed beyond a boulder or something. But I had lost them, and I hastened forward rather anxiously.

And then, distinctly, I heard a sound from behind.

I twisted round, and just caught a vision of a dark form quite near by. Just for a moment my heart almost stopped beating. I wasn't frightened, but the shock was a nasty one.

The form had crept up with a silence which was well-nigh uncanny. And now, as I attempted to turn completely, my arms were gripped as in a vice. I was flung down, flat upon my face—helpless!

CHAPTER IV.

(Nipper continues.)

WAS IT THE GUV'NOR?—THE AMAZING MR. HUNTER THOROUGHLY ENJOYS HIMSELF.

I STRUGGLED desperately.

But I might as well have tried to fight against a dozen. I was held down so securely that all my efforts were futile. The grip was still upon my arms, and a hard knee was pressed into the small of my back.

I had recovered from the momentary shock. There was nothing uncanny about this assailant. He was real flesh and blood—and wiry muscle! Yet, although I was held so securely, my captor was not hurting me in the least.

"Let me go!" I panted furiously. "Who the dickens are you? What's the idea of this? Let me go!"

A beery kind of chuckle sounded.

"None o' your larks, you young warmint!" exclaimed a coarse, uneducated voice. "Thought you was all on your little own, didn't you? Stop that strugglin', you igit! You won't git away—not if you twist from now till next Friday!"

"What's the game?" I asked amazedly.

"It ain't for the likes o' you to ask no questions," said the voice above me. "An' it ain't no use askin', 'cos I don't choose to answer. See, matey? Thought you was follerin' them gents nicely, didn't you? Well, they've gorn now—gorn where you won't find 'em!"

"You—you ruffian!" I snorted furiously.

But I was more angered at the thought of losing Mr. Hunter than anything else. For the life of me I couldn't be furious with this strange, rough-talking individual. His voice was singularly pleasant, somehow. He spoke in a bantering kind of way, and I pictured the fellow as being a jovial, likeable sort.

The whole position was extraordinary. Not for one second had I caught a glimpse of my captor. And, although I tried again and again, he wouldn't allow me to look round.

"Dash it all, let me get up!" I said pantingly. "You've got me, and I know it. There's no sense in keeping this farce up—"

"That's a nice soft tongue o' yours, kiddie," said the voice. "But it ain't goin' to work no tricks on me. An' let me give

you just a friendly word o' warnin'. This business ain't for the likes o' you to interfere with."

"Which business?"

"You ain't dense!" said the man. "You know wot I means. It's a man's game—not a bloomin' boy's. You've got to understand that fair an' square, my young shaver. Don't interfere in wot don't concern yer—Master Nipper!"

I gave a loud gasp.

"Surprised yer—eh?" came a mocking kind of whisper. "Don't interfere—Master Nipper. That's plain enough, ain't it?"

Quite suddenly I was picked up bodily. Right ahead there was a steep, grassy slope. The next moment I was sent rolling downwards giddily. I wasn't hurt in the slightest, but it was some few moments before I could gain my feet. And then, when I gazed dazedly about me, I saw that I was utterly and absolutely alone.

My queer assailant had vanished!

I ran round like a lost sheep for several minutes, and then came to a breathless standstill. To tell the truth, my thoughts wanted sorting out badly. It takes a good bit to bewilder me, but I was simply fuddled up now.

Nipper!

The man had called me by my own name! That in itself was quite sufficient to set my brain reeling. I pinched myself until I gasped. I wasn't dreaming. The whole affair, in spite of its astounding unreality, was real enough. And I was more startled than I can say.

One fact struck me with much force. The Voice—I can't call him a man, because I never actually saw him—the Voice was friendly. He wasn't an enemy—I could swear to that. Although he had had me completely at his mercy, he hadn't so much as caused me a second's pain. He had simply prevented me from following Mr. Hunter and the other man—and that, of course, was the sole object of his attack.

He had, indeed, told me so in so many words. I wasn't to interfere—it was a man's game and not a boy's. Who could the fellow be? Who—

"Great Scotland Yard!" I gasped aloud.

A thought had occurred to me which left me almost faint. The guv'nor! Had the Voice been Nelson Lee? I hadn't seen him at all—and he had called me Nipper! So far as I knew, there wasn't anybody who knew my real identity except the guv'nor and my own friends.

The speech of the stranger had been coarse and uncouth; but I knew from former experience that Nelson Lee was a past-master in the art of disguising his voice. It was the easiest matter in the world for him to speak in a totally changed voice, and in a bewildering variety of different ways.

But Nelson Lee had gone away on Secret Service work! If that was the case, why was he here?

Was it possible? I attempted to reason things out, but couldn't satisfy myself in the slightest degree. In fact, I gave the

whole thing up in despair. It was too much for me. I was practically at a standstill so far as my thoughts were concerned.

And so I wended my way back along the footpath to St. Frank's. I wanted to unburden myself to Sir Montie and Tommy—to gain the benefit of their opinions. During my walk I did not meet a soul. I went very slowly, thinking deeply, and I dare say I paused once or twice, almost without knowing it.

At all events, when I arrived at the gates I found them locked. I had wandered from the footpath soon after starting along it. This will give an indication of my fuddled thoughts. As an excuse for such conduct, however, I must explain that the darkness was intense, and, having left the footpath, I didn't trouble to find it again. It's rather necessary to explain this, because I have every reason to believe that Mr. Hunter came back along the footpath during my walk.

Events seemed to point to this, anyhow, for as I was creeping over the wall I heard a slight sound from behind me. And then a soft, gentle voice made itself heard—a voice which was hateful, in spite of its silkiness.

"Who is that?" came the inquiry.

I nearly fell off the top of the wall; but then my wits returned, and I decided to slip down without a sound. Hunter couldn't have recognised me in the darkness. But my little game was spoilt, for a bony grip suddenly closed over the ankle which was still hanging over the road side of the wall.

"There is no necessity for hurry, surely?" said Mr. Hunter smoothly. "Boys will be boys, I suppose. Ah, it is Bennett, I see!"

The Housemaster had struck an automatic lighter with his other hand, and the tiny flame revealed my features.

"Just getting in, sir," I said easily. "The gates were locked, and I didn't want to rouse out old Warren."

"Quite so—quite so!" smiled Mr. Hunter. "The gates were locked half an hour earlier, by my orders—as they always will be in future."

I nearly said something disrespectful. The meanness of it! To cause the gates to be locked earlier than usual without giving the chaps a warning! Of course dozens of chaps would arrive late, and would doubtless receive punishment. Mr. Hunter was certainly a masterpiece in the art of petty meanness.

"I thought I wasn't late, sir," I said, speaking civilly with difficulty. "I shall know another time, sir."

"Of course you will, Bennett," came the gentle remark. "There, there—you may as well get indoors, lad. But I really must deliver a mild reprimand for this habit of climbing over the wall. You will remember, Bennett, won't you?"

"Ain't you going to give me lines, sir?" I asked bitterly. "I've got plenty to go on with, but—"

Mr. Hunter laughed softly.

"No, my lad, I shall not give you lines,"

he exclaimed with a joyful chuckle. "Get indoors as quickly as you can, you young rascal!"

I found myself wavering as I slid down the other side of the wall, and hopped across the triangle. Was Mr. Hunter such a rotter after all? He had spoken to me with the kindest good-nature. And I had to admit that it was decent of him to let me off without any punishment—for climbing over the school wall was a serious minor offence.

But then I remembered the snaky, crawly way in which the Housemaster had crept up. He couldn't have had much of an interview with the other man, and I again found myself wondering what the dickens it could all mean.

The Ancient House was quiet. The burst of indignation had subsided somewhat—probably because so many fellows were busy at lines. So far, the lag Forms and the seniors hadn't been affected by Mr. Hunter's methods. He seemed to be reserving all his spite for the Remove. But then, of course, he hadn't had a chance yet.

I strode into Study O slowly and thoughtfully. Vaguely I heard two indignant exclamations, and then earthquakes seemed to happen. I was grabbed, shaken, and dumped down with terrific force into the armchair. Then I awoke to the realisation that Sir Montie and Tommy had fallen upon me.

"You asses!" I gasped. "What's the silly game?"

"Begad! It's surprisin', Benny," said Sir Montie, in a pained voice. "I wouldn't have believed it of you—I wouldn't, really!"

"Wouldn't have believed what, you fat-headed dummy?" I roared.

"Leavin' pals in the lurch—after makin' arrangements," said Sir Montie sadly.

"Great guns!" I gasped, sitting up suddenly.

I stared at my chums in consternation. Then I saw that they were both looking decidedly the worse for wear. Tommy Watson was the ungrateful possessor of a left eye which was gradually turning blue-black. His right ear was extremely red and pulled up. Tregellis-West's elegant nose showed obvious signs of having been violently punched very recently.

"Yes, you can stare!" said Watson fiercely. "Look at us! Ain't you ashamed of yourself? A fine sort of leader you are, ain't you?"

"Did—did you collar the grub?" I asked faintly.

Tommy attempted to speak, but indignation choked him. Sir Montie shook his head with great solemnity.

"Did we collar the grub, Benny?" he repeated. "Begad, do we look it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, you don't!"

Tommy Watson thrust his fist within an inch of my nose.

"I've never had a fight with you yet, Benny, but if you ain't careful there'll be slaughter done in a minute or two!" he said violently. "I dare say I should get

whacked, but I'd have the pleasure of punching your face sideways, anyhow! You—you traitor! You deserter!"

I stood up, with deep concern.

"I'm awfully sorry, you chaps," I said. "I suppose things went wrong?"

"My only topper!" roared Watson. "What the dickens did you expect? We collared Christine and Talmadge beautifully and kept them busy for you to arrive. We waited—waited like a general for reinforcements which never arrived. And we went under."

"But you were equally matched——"

"Rot! Clapson and Yorke came up, and we were knocked flying," shouted Watson. "If only you'd been there we could have done the trick easily. We've lost the grub and we're sore all over—all because you deserted us. What have you got to say for yourself, you—you Bolshevik!"

"Begad! Draw it mild, Tommy!" murmured Sir Montie. "That's a frightful thing to call him, you know. Prussians are bad enough, but——"

I grinned.

"I deserve it," I said calmly. "After all, the Bolsheviks deserted, didn't they? The fact is, my dear chaps, I forgot all about the raid."

Tregellis-West and Watson stared at me dumbly.

"You—you forgot it?" breathed Watson at last, in a faint voice.

"You see——"

"No, I don't see!" roared Tommy, in a sudden outburst. "You forgot! Oh, crumbs! And you were waiting there against the wall, a dozen yards away from us! You forgot!"

He repeated the words dazedly, as though they were past belief.

"When you've heard what I've got to say, you'll understand," I declared. "Five minutes after we'd taken up our stand Hunter appeared. I watched him with interest, and I was nearly knocked over when I saw him shove on a false beard. After that he went outside, and I followed him—that's why I wasn't on hand. In the excitement I completely forgot you chaps."

My chums regarded me pityingly.

"I suppose you think that'll wash?" asked Watson, with biting sarcasm.

"It's the truth, anyhow!"

"Tommy, old boy, there's only one thing to account for it," said Sir Montie. "It's sad, but we mustn't be hard on him. The dear fellow must have fallen asleep while he was waitin'. An' he's been dreamin' ever since. What a pity we didn't look behind that buttress an' wake him up!"

"Is that right?" demanded Watson hotly. "Were you asleep?"

I snorted.

"I'm telling you what happened, and all you can do is to ridicule it!" I said tartly. "Blow you! I'm blessed if I'll tell you any more."

Within a minute, however, I was relating to my wondering chums all that had taken place. I couldn't help noticing the expres-

sions of disbelief in their eyes, although they did their utmost to credit my statements.

"It's surprisin'—in fact, it's amazin', begad!" said Sir Montie, when I had finished. "I've had some dreams myself, Benny, but I never hope to equal this one. House-masters with false beards—meetin's with strangers—unknown voices—collarin' you from behind——"

"It wasn't a dream!" I roared.

"Well, it sounds like one—that's all I can say," snapped Watson.

It took me ten solid minutes to convince my incredulous chums that the whole affair had actually happened. And then, of course, they were hugely concerned. We discussed the matter for some little time, and came to the conclusion, finally, that talking wouldn't be any good. The best policy was to wait, and be on the look-out for further events.

"Oh, and there's something else!" I exclaimed. "Hunter couldn't have stayed long with his pal, because he caught me beautifully as I was slipping over the wall. Oh, he was as mild as milk. Butter wouldn't have melted in his mouth. But I've got an idea that there's trouble to follow!"

"Didn't he give you lines?"

"No. He said he wasn't going to."

"Oh, well then, it's all right," said Tommy Watson. "The rotter reckoned you'd got enough lines as it is, I suppose. But I didn't think it was locking-up time yet."

"There's going to be a fresh hubbub before long," I remarked. "Hunter has given orders for the gates to be closed half an hour earlier—goodness knows what for! He'll find himself in a mess if he isn't careful."

Montie and Tommy were every bit as puzzled as myself regarding the identity of the man who had captured me; but we all had a keen idea that he had been Nelson Lee. The whole thing was a complete mystery.

My chums forgave me for deserting them. And before long we settled ourselves down to writing lines—I still had about seven hundred of mine to polish off. But before we had fairly got started—prep. being cast aside—there came a tap at the door, and Tubbs appeared.

Tubbs was the Ancient House page-boy. He was usually one of the cheeriest of mortals, with a smile that wouldn't come off. Just at present, however, there was an expression of preternatural gloom upon his highly coloured features.

"Well, 'tubby, what's wrong?" I asked, looking up.

"If you please, Master Bennett, you're wanted."

"Oh! Who by?"

"Mr. Hunter told me to fetch you, sir."

I gazed from Tubbs to my chums with a fixed expression.

"More trouble!" I grunted. "What the dickens can it be this time? Surely he isn't going to jaw me for climbing over the wall? The matter was finished with at the time."



Sundry shrieks and screams arose from the servants' hall. The awful apparition which had suddenly appeared caused terror among the female members of the staff.—(See pag. 21)

"Better run along and see, dear old boy," advised Tregellis-West.

"I will," I replied. "And what's the matter with you, Tubby? It's the influence of the genial Mr. Hunter, I suppose? I haven't seen you looking so miserable for weeks. Have you got a dozen extra pair of boots to clean in the morning?"

"I wish I 'ad, Master Bennett," said Tubbs gloomily. "I've got to go!"

"Go! Go where?"

"Why, I've got the sack!"

We all regarded Tubbs with concern. He was a very minor member of the Ancient House personnel; but, for all that, Tubbs was liked generally. He was always obliging, and kept his temper under the most trying conditions. The College House page-boy was a regular little beast—according to Christine and Co.—and we prided ourselves upon having the genuine article.

"Rot!" I said sharply. "You've got hold of it wrong, Tubby. Hunter couldn't have sacked you—on the very day of his arrival. It ain't sense!"

"I dunno about sense, Master Bennett, but it's true enough," said Tubbs mournfully.

"An' I always do the best I can, too. Mr. Alvington was a real gent, 'e was. Told me I did my work well, an' raised my wages. An' now Mr. 'Unter has told me to go—straight away, too."

"What, without notice?" asked Watson warmly.

"'E give me a full month's pay, an' dismissed me," said Tubbs almost tearfully. "It's cruel 'ard luck, that's what it is. I've got to go to-morrow, young gents. An' my pa and ma live right up at Walthamstow!"

"The giddy Hun!" I exclaimed. "Hard lines, Tubby! But don't you worry yourself, old son. It'll only be a holiday. As soon as Mr. Alvington comes back you'll be reinstated."

"Oh, Master Bennett, do you think so?" said Tubbs eagerly.

"I'll tell Old Alvy as soon as he returns. You can take it from me, Tubbs, that your job's as safe as houses. And I shouldn't advise you to go, either."

"But I've got to, Master Bennett."

"Can't you stay in the village?"

"Oh! I see what you mean, sir," went on the page-boy. "My huncle lives in the village, an' I can stay with him—if you think I shall be able to get my job back again. But I shall have to be lookin' arter a new place—"

"Rot! You stay with your uncle, and leave the rest to us," I said genially. "Thank goodness, Hunter ain't here for good!"

Tubbs was so grateful that he kept me listening for two full minutes while he thanked me. The gloom had vanished from his face, and he went away cheerful. It was rather queer why he should take so much notice of a mere Removite; but he knew that I was very "pally" with Mr. Alvington.

I had nearly forgotten Mr. Hunter's order

in the discussion of Tubbs' affairs. But now I walked briskly to the Housemaster's study. Mr. Hunter was sitting at his desk, and he smiled pleasantly as I entered.

"Ah, Bennett, I want you for a minute or two," he said softly. "Come over here, my boy."

He rose from his chair and picked up a businesslike-looking cane.

I compressed my lips and regarded him squarely.

"Are you going to cane me, sir?" I asked quietly.

"Yes, Bennett, I must inform you, with sincere regret, that I find it necessary to inflict four strokes," said Mr. Hunter, with the most engaging smile. "You will please hold out your hand."

I kept my hands by my side.

"Can't I know why I'm being caned, sir?" I asked, inwardly fuming.

Mr. Hunter smilingly shook his head.

"Juniors must not ask those questions, Bennett," was his silky reply. "Four strokes, I said, didn't I? Really, I am afraid that I shall have to increase the punishment to six. Now, my boy!"

I was nearly on the point of bursting out with righteous indignation. But I pulled myself up in time. What was the good of creating a scene? What should I gain by it? Merely more punishment! Mr. Hunter was in sole command of the Ancient House, and there was no appeal. It would have been sheer idiocy to defy him alone. But I was storing all these little things up!

I held out my hand steadily.

Swish!

The six cuts were delivered in rapid succession. I was pained and surprised. Mr. Hunter looked an extremely fragile man; but I now found, to my cost, that he could "lay it on" with amazing force. In reality he was as strong as a horse. In every way the new Housemaster was a fraud—he looked exactly what he wasn't!

"That will do, Bennett!" he said, panting slightly. "You may go."

I went—nearly dotty with fury. Four cuts because I had merely climbed over the wall—at least, I guessed as much—and two additional cuts because I had dared to ask a question!

Mr. Hunter, in spite of his gentle voice and manners, was a Prussian. But he was worse than a Prussian, because he pretended to be a kindly gentleman. My hands were tingling with agony when I returned to Study C, and I was nearly foaming at the mouth with rage.

This was the first "whopping" I had had at St. Frank's. Not that I minded a little pain. It was the gross injustice of the thing which made me frantic. The amazing brutality of Mr. Hunter was almost past belief.

His chief characteristic, apparently, was to administer punishment without giving any reason for so doing. If Mr. Crowell caned a chap, he told the chap why. But Mr. Hunter smiled and beamed—and acted the Hun.

It was only his first evening at St. Frank's,

and already he had aroused the Remove to a pitch of indignation which hadn't been witnessed within the old walls for years.

What would his next move be?

CHAPTER V.

THE ARRIVAL OF BATES—HANDFORTH AND CO. ARE DRASTIC—NEARLY THE LIMIT.

NIPPER, as he has shown in his own narrative, was justly angered by the extraordinarily harsh methods of the new Housemaster, Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A. The whole Remove, in fact, was in a state of nervous tension.

The other Forms hadn't been affected very much by the newcomer. This was merely because Mr. Hunter hadn't had a chance to put his peculiar ways into practice. The alteration of the locking-up hour, certainly, had caused general dissatisfaction in the Ancient House—but it was, after all, a minor matter.

The dismissal of Tubbs, the cheery page-boy, was generally regarded as "rotten." Tubbs was well liked, and the fellows had grown used to him and his ways. And why had Mr. Hunter sacked Tubbs? What was the reason for such an act?

The Ancient House was soon to learn.

The next morning, before lessons, a good many juniors were sunning themselves in the Triangle. It was a glorious morning, and lessons seemed almost a sin. It was essentially a day for cricket, or rowing on the river. Lessons were unavoidable, however, and the juniors had to content themselves with a short spell in the sunshine beforehand.

Three Removites were lounging by the gates. Two were listening, and the other was talking. With this particular trio this state of affairs generally existed; and it is perhaps unnecessary to add that the juniors were Handforth, Church, and McClure.

"It's no good talking," said Handforth firmly. "Something's got to be done!"

"If it's no good talking, why do you do such a lot of it?" demanded Church.

"I don't want any of your rot, Church," said Handforth, leaning against the imposing gate-post. "Something's got to be done, I say—and it's Bennett's place to get busy. Hunter's a rotter, and Bennett, as Form-skipper, ought to shove him in his place!"

"You ass!" roared McClure. "How do you suppose Bennett's going to jib against the Housemaster?"

"It's not for us to puzzle over that," said Handforth airily. "That's Bennett's job. What's the good of being a leader if he can't lead? I reckon—Hullo! Who's this lanky-looking merchant?"

The merchant in question was a tall, loose-limbed young fellow of about seventeen. He had just appeared round the bend, and he was striding along briskly in the dust of the lane. His attire was smart; but it was that type of smartness which generally characterises a butcher's assistant in his Sunday

best. The stranger's suit was well-cut, but aggressive in the bright colour of the blue material; his boots were brown, and a check cap reposed upon the side of his head.

Handforth and Co. eyed him interestedly. Strangers were not common in Bellon. This flashy specimen paused as he reached the school gates, and nodded familiarly to the three Removites. His face was very red, and his eyes were of the "piggy" variety. Altogether, he didn't seem to be a favourable person.

"This 'ere place St. Frank's, kid?" he asked, looking at Handforth.

Edward Oswald nearly fell down.

"Who are you calling 'kid'?" he said warmly.

"Sorry! Didn't know you was a dook," grinned the other. "Besides, I know this is St. Frank's. Ain't a bad-lookin' place, neither. I reckon I shall git on all right ere. Mr. 'Unter's 'ere, ain't he?"

Handforth and Co. stared.

"What's the silly game?" demanded Church. "You're not coming in here, I can tell you!"

"Oh, ain't I?" said the newcomer. "I'm Bates, I am—Jim Bates. This 'ere show is going to be my little 'appy 'ome for the future—"

"You're—you're a new fellow?" gasped Handforth, holding on to the gate-post for support. "Oh, my only Sunday tile! Which—which House?"

"Ancient 'Ouse, mate."

"Mate!" said Handforth faintly. "Mind what you're calling me, you low bounder! Hold me up, McClure, for goodness' sake! He—he's coming into the Ancient House! What's the school coming to?"

"Which Form are you booked for?" demanded Church huskily.

"Form?" repeated Bates. "Why, no Form at all, silly. I'm the new page!"

Handforth and Co. jumped, and a wave of relief passed over them.

"The new page!" roared Handforth, recovering himself rapidly. "You—you cheeky idiot! I—I thought—Look here, Bates or Flgs, or whatever your fatheaded name is, page-boys ain't supposed to talk familiarly with the chaps. You've got to call us 'sir.' 'Tain't likely we're going to stand any rot!"

"That so, shaver?" said Bates coolly.

Handforth glared, and commenced to roll up his sleeves. Handforth wasn't a snob by any means. Under no circumstances would he have told Tubbs to call him "sir." But with this hulking youth it was different. Bates was so aggressively familiar that it was necessary to put him in his place.

"You're the page-boy, you say?" exclaimed Handforth darkly.

"That's so, matey."

"Well, you'd better be careful—that's all I can say," roared Handforth, his voice rising until it resembled a megaphone.

Bates grinned.

"If that's all you can say, I s'pose you're done, then?" he asked.

"I don't want any of your rotten check!"

lawled Handforth. "For two pias I'll shove you in your place! Nice thing, I must say! A page-boy calling me matey!"

"Oh, dry up, Handy!" muttered McClure. "He's new to it, I expect. He doesn't know the rules yet. Mr. Hunter will show him the ropes."

Bates nodded.

"I desay you're right," he agreed. "But it won't take me long to learn things, young shavers. Strikes me you're a bit big for your boots, ain't you? Why, you're only junior kids, arter all! Clear off, you young himps—I don't like your faces!"

Church and McClure, who had been inclined to tolerance, now became as highly incensed as the somewhat excitable Handforth. The juniors possessed no false dignity—but this was altogether too much!

For a mere page-boy to address scholars in such a fashion was beyond the limit of endurance. In spite of McClure's broad hint, which had been given with entire good-nature, Bates had deliberately called the trio "young shavers," "kids," and "young himps" in succession! Moreover, he had offered a direct and palpable insult.

It wasn't likely that Handforth and Co. would stand it.

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "You don't like our faces, eh? By George! Collar him, you chaps! He needs a lesson—and he'll get it, too!"

"Rather!" roared McClure furiously. "Call the chaps!"

"Rot! We can handle the idiot ourselves!" declared Handforth, who never counted odds. "All hands to the pump!"

Bates backed away, quite startled.

"Now then, young gents," he said hastily, with a change of tone, "you wouldn't hurt—Hil! Whoa! Whatter you up to—"

It was quite obvious what Handforth and Co. were up to. The three juniors were strong. Handforth, as a matter of fact, was quite as large as many Sixth-Formers. He and his two chums grabbed the new page-boy with determination. Bates went over like a ninepin, and he hit the ground with more force than comfort.

"Kush him to the fountain!" panted Handforth grimly.

"My hat! That's the idea!"

The other juniors, lounging about the Triangle in odd numbers, were provided with the unusual spectacle of Handforth and Co. frog-marching an entire stranger into the precincts of the school. A considerable amount of noise accompanied the procedure, and there was an immediate rush of fellows.

Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were almost the first on the scene. The Bo'sun and many others crowded round.

"Great Scott!" shouted Nipper. "What the dickens are you up to, Handy?"

"Shurrup!" gasped Handforth. "Lend a hand with this cheeky cad!"

Nipper and Co. did not interfere. Not that they were afraid to do so, but Handforth was well known. He was liable to

make ghastly mistakes at times. Several other juniors of a more excitable temperament, however, lent their aid.

Bates yelled desperately, but it was useless. Handforth was very determined, and a few seconds later the party arrived at the fountain.

"Now!" roared Handforth. "One—two—three!"

Bates soared through the air, kicking and yelling. Then, since gravity would not allow him to soar far, he descended into the fountain pool with a mighty splash. For a second he disappeared completely, and then floundered to the surface.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bates staggered out of the pool, his little eyes glittering with hatred. He shook his fist at Handforth violently.

"I'll make you sit up for this, you young 'ound!" he shouted. "I'll make you pay! A set of ugly young monkeys—that's what you are! A crowd of gutter-brats with swelled heads—the whole lot of you!"

Bates lumbered off across the Triangle, leaving a wet trail behind him. All the juniors were angry now; their grins had vanished. To say the least, it was not pleasant to be characterised as gutter-brats with swelled heads.

"Who the dickens is the chap?" demanded Nipper warmly.

Handforth brushed himself down with great calmness.

"I ain't a chap to interfere—you know that!" he exclaimed grimly. "But when I'm called a young imp by a cheeky page-boy, I don't stand it! That hulking rotter is Bates, the new page-boy for the Ancient House."

There was an indignant roar at once. Handforth and Co. were surrounded, and the story was soon told. Everybody agreed that Handforth had been fully justified in giving Bates a ducking.

"The chap absolutely asked for it," declared Nipper. "It was drastic, Handforth, but necessary. By the look of it, Bates won't be exactly popular in the Ancient House. A few lessons like the one he's just had, though, will do him good!"

This was the general verdict.

Although the juniors were compelled to put up with Mr. Hunter, they had no intention of putting up with any nonsense from Bates! A page-boy was a different proposition, as Farman remarked.

It was only natural that Handforth should be exceedingly pleased with himself. He had performed a public duty, and he let everybody know it. To judge from his remarks, one would be led to suppose that he had performed the feat single-handed—that he picked Bates up like a feather, and had deposited him in the fountain.

For once in a way nobody disputed Handforth's statements. Everybody agreed that he had acted in the only possible manner. And the fellows felt more satisfied when they trooped into the Remove Form-room. They felt that the day had commenced well.

Mr. Crowell made no mention of the incident; although the juniors strongly sus-

pected that he knew all about it. The Form-master, however, was a sport; he was liked by all his boys. Occasionally he found it necessary to be stern, but he was a fair man, and knew how to control juniors.

By the time the second lesson had commenced the fellows had practically forgotten Bates and his troubles. Handforth and Co., however, were soon to receive a painful reminder.

The lesson was proceeding smoothly when Mr. Hunter came softly into the room. The new Housemaster always moved with extreme lightness, and it was not until he spoke that boys were aware of his presence.

"Ah! I see that the boys are very well behaved, Mr. Crowell," exclaimed Mr. Hunter pleasantly.

"I hope so, sir," replied Mr. Crowell somewhat stully.

The Remove looked up from its work, and De Valerie murmured something to Nipper about a snake. Nipper understood perfectly, but didn't make any remark—it was too risky! Mr. Hunter was eyeing the class with beaming good-nature. It was rather significant that he held a cane in his hand.

"Three of your boys, I believe, are named Handforth, Church, and McClure?" asked Dr. Hunter smoothly.

Mr. Crowell assented, and Handforth and Co. shivered uneasily in their seats.

"Those three boys will please stand out before the class," proceeded the new Housemaster. "It is with great regret that I perform this slight punishment. The boys, however, are well deserving of a severe flogging."

"What have we done, sir?" asked Handforth amazedly.

He received no reply, but was silkily ordered to hold out his hand. He received four stinging cuts; and Church and McClure were well satisfied with two each. Presumably Handforth had been caned more severely because he had dared to ask a question.

The trio went back to their seats in a bewildered state, and Mr. Hunter retired. As the door closed behind him the Form-master gazed rather severely at the smarting three. Mr. Crowell detested interruptions.

"Why has Mr. Hunter caned you, boys?" he asked sternly.

"Blessed if I know, sir!" burst out Handforth. "We haven't done a thing—we haven't broke a single rule! Oh, the awful Prussian—"

"Handforth!" snapped Mr. Crowell sharply. "You will write me a hundred lines for referring to your Housemaster in such an outrageous manner. I sympathise with you, my boy, but I simply cannot allow such expressions to be used—no matter what my own personal opinion may be."

The Remove grinned, fully understanding. Mr. Crowell had made it quite plain that he, too, considered that Mr. Hunter's methods

were akin to those of a Prussian. All the boys realised, however, that it was against all authority for Handforth to state his views so bluntly.

The lesson did not proceed so smoothly as before. The Ancient House boys carried on an excited discussion in subdued whispers, and Mr. Crowell found it necessary to inflict lines rather frequently.

The Remove was not to be subdued, however. Why had Handforth and Co. been caned? There could be one reason, and one reason only. It was because of the fountain incident. The juniors simply boiled. For the Housemaster to take sides with the page-boy was outrageous.

Handforth and Co. had been drastic, perhaps; but, in common fairness, it was only right that they should have been permitted a hearing. It was obvious that Mr. Hunter had heard Bates' side of the affair only; he had given Handforth and Co. no opportunity to state theirs. And that was grossly unfair.

When the Remove was dismissed, at last, there were a great many discussions. The fact that Bates, resplendent in a new uniform, stalked about with a triumphant grin upon his face did not tend to improve the boys' tempers.

Bates, in fact, swaggered about in the most insufferable manner. And he was left severely alone. The Removes had no wish to share the fate of Handforth and Church and McClure.

The Remove was not the only Form affected by Mr. Hunter's extraordinary rule. And a certain incident was destined to lead to a really big crisis. The fellows concerned were Chambers and Phillips and Bryant, of the Fifth.

These three youths occupied Study No. 10, in the Fifth Form passage—these studies being numbered, and not lettered like the Remove. Chambers and Co. were rather apt to consider themselves a "fast" trio. They weren't actually so, but they certainly indulged in a smoking-party now and again.

It was not until afternoon lessons were over that Chambers and his chums discussed a certain matter in the comparative privacy of the gymnasium. There was nothing particularly secret about it, and it was certainly of no importance; but it couldn't very well be talked of in the open. And, trivial though it was, quite a lot of excitement was to follow in its train.

Chambers was a somewhat dictatorial youth, but he was blessed with a large supply of pocket-money. Bryant and Phillips had no particular liking for Chambers, but they were his staunch chums, nevertheless. Study No. 10 was generally a land flowing with milk and honey; and Phillips and Bryant, accordingly, stuck to Chambers like glue, and overlooked many of his palpable faults. If Chambers' supply of money suddenly ceased, it was most probable that his loyal chums would lie themselves elsewhere.

"I've got a job for you chaps," said Chambers briskly, as the three entered the gymnasium. "Nobody here," he added, looking round. "Good! We don't want any of those fatheaded juniors nosing about."

Phillips and Bryant did not look very happy. Chambers' "jobs" were generally of a nature which involved a certain amount of risk, and he never undertook them himself. This was where his chums came in; it was one of the penalties they had to endure.

"A job?" repeated Bryant carelessly.

"Yes; I'll just explain——"

"The fact is, Chambers, old man, I sha'n't have any time this evening," said Bryant, consulting his watch in order to appear at ease. "I dare say Phillips will do what you want."

"Oh, rot!" said Phillips promptly. "To tell the truth, I was going to spend the evening in the lab. Sorry, Chambers. I should get one of the juniors to do your job, if I were you."

Chambers grinned—he was used to this sort of thing.

"Any more excuses?" he asked pleasantly. "I only want you to run down to the village just after tea. I've run out of cigarettes, and I don't suppose you chaps have got any. What about a little smoking party to-night? We might have cards, too."

"Bit risky," said Bryant, shaking his head. "Hunter's hot stuff, by what I can hear. He'd fill the smoke in the passage——"

"Boah!" said Chambers. "I'm not proposing to hold the party in our study, anyhow. There's No. 24, at the end—empty. It's generally locked, but there's some furniture in there, and we can have quite a cosy time. You can get the fags, Bryant—Now, don't object," he added testily. "Blessed if you ain't always grumbling! Didn't I lend you a quid only on Tuesday? I'm not a hard-fisted chap, and if you run short again you've only got to mention it."

"Oh, all right!" growled Bryant. "I'll go."

The one redeeming feature about Chambers was his undoubted generosity. He was quite ready to lend his chums any little sums they required, and he very conveniently overlooked half of them. Being always well supplied, he didn't bother.

"Well, that's settled—— Hallo! Who the thunder's that?"

Chambers gazed at one of the windows fixedly. The top of a head had appeared for a moment, but there was no sign of it now. Chambers tiptoed to the window noiselessly and peeped out. This side of the gym. was hidden from the Triangle, and was quite secluded. And there, crouching beneath the window, was Bates, the new page-boy.

"By jingo!" breathed Chambers wrathfully.

He dashed for the door, and the others followed. But by the time they had reached the corner of the gym. Bates was making

tracks across the Triangle. Chambers breathed hard, and glared.

"I've heard about that spying brute!" he exclaimed. "Of all the sauce!"

"I say, we'd better go easy," remarked Phillips uneasily. "Perhaps it would be as well to postpone that little smoking-party——"

"Rot!" said Chambers. "I don't suppose the idiot heard anything."

And the trio sauntered into the Ancient House to dinner. Chambers was always averse to dropping a thing once it had been arranged. It would have been prudent, under the circumstances, to follow Phillips's advice. But Chambers was apt to consider that nobody's advice was any good except his own.

Accordingly, he and his study-mates adjourned to the deserted Study No. 24 as soon as they had finished their preparation. The apartment was small and somewhat musty, for it had had no occupants this term. However, it was tucked away at the very end of the passage, and was scarcely ever visited. The passage, in fact, was a "dead" one, and not a thoroughfare.

"This is all right," said Chambers, after the door had been locked and the electric light switched on. "Hallo! I didn't know the curtains were drawn. All the better—the light won't be seen from outside. "You got those cigs, didn't you, Bryant?"

"Yes—three packets," replied Bryant. "They were rather expensive, Chambers—eighteenpence for twenty—but it's best to get good 'uns."

The three foolish seniors made themselves comfortable in the study and lit their cigarettes. Chambers produced a pack of cards, and laid them on the table. He wasn't fond of gambling, but thought it "sporty" to do the thing thoroughly.

"What's it to be?" he asked. "Nap or banker——"

"I really do not think it will be necessary to play at all, my boys!"

The voice was soft and smooth, and the effect upon the Fifth Formers was surprising. Chambers simply sat perfectly still; Bryant jumped nearly a foot into the air; and Phillips dropped his lighted cigarette down his waistcoat in his agitation, and his contortions as he attempted to rescue it were astonishing.

Mr. Hunter quietly emerged from behind the closed curtains. He regarded the seniors severely, and they were too utterly astounded to do anything for the moment. They could only stare dazedly. Chambers, indeed, was so thunderstruck that he allowed his cigarette to remain between his lips.

"You will please remove that disgusting thing, Chambers," said Mr. Hunter mildly.

Chambers started, and hastily threw the cigarette down. At the same time he recovered his wits somewhat, and realised the full enormity of this proceeding.

He was almost staggered. That a House-

master could descend to such depths of cad-
diness as this was bewildering. In a
second Chambers realised that the hated
Bates must have informed Mr. Hunter; and
the latter, impossible though it seemed,
had deliberately concealed himself behind
the curtains, in order to catch the Fifth
Formers red-handed!

The sneaking, spying manner of this act
was absolutely and utterly beyond belief.

"How—how did you know, sir?" gasped
Chambers weakly.

"I am sad to see senior boys indulging in
such disgusting habits," said Mr. Hunter,
with a note of regret in his voice.

"You wouldn't have seen it, sir, if you
had been sleeping!" exclaimed Chambers,
suddenly becoming angry. "Great Scott!
Mr. Alvington wouldn't have spied on us
in this fashion——"

"That will do, Chambers," interrupted
Mr. Hunter. "You will all follow me at
once!"

The Fifth Formers, although nearly burst-
ing with rage, could do nothing but obey the
order. They were marched straight to the
Head's study. Mr. Hunter informed Dr.
Stafford, in pained tones, that he had dis-
covered Chambers and Co. smoking and gam-
bling. This was really untrue, for Mr. Hun-
ter had not discovered them, neither had
they been gambling.

And, although the seniors hotly protested,
their word was not accepted against that of
Mr. Hunter. Such a thing couldn't be ex-
pected. And they were forthwith caned with
great severity.

They emerged from the Head's study on
the verge of lunacy!

CHAPTER VI.

THE INDIGNATION MEETING—BATES RECEIVES
IT IN THE NECK—UNHOLY JOY IN THE REMOVE.

"RAINING," remarked Hubbard, of the
Remove.

It was quite dark, and Hubbard
and two or three other juniors were
standing in the doorway of the Ancient
House. After a sunny day, rain was now
descending heavily, and it hissed upon the
triangle in a steady downpour.

"Raining hard," repeated Hubbard, as
nobody said anything.

"I suppose you're telling us news?" said
Owen major sarcastically. "We ain't got
ears, have we?"

"The rain will do the most wondrous
good, my esteemed schoolfellows," said
Yakama, the Japanese boy. "But I am of
the great hope that there will be no liquid
from the skies on the honourable morrow.
Is it not the beautiful cricket-match in the
afternoon?"

"That's what I was thinking of," said
Hubbard. "It looks——"

"Jappy, here?" said somebody behind.

"What is it, worthy Bo'sun?" asked
Yakama, turning.

"You're wanted, messmate," said Burton
briskly. "There's a meeting in the skipper's
cabin, and I've got orders to muster the crew.
You'd better come below at once!"

"It is as you desire, Bo'sun," said Yakama.
Burton was in the habit of using ship's
terms, even at St. Frank's. But as everybody
knew what he meant, it didn't matter.
Yakama, for example, was quite aware that
he was wanted in Study C—Nipper being
the skipper.

When they arrived at that famous apart-
ment they found it considerably crowded.
Its rightful occupants were entertaining quite
a number of visitors. Handforth and Co.
were there, and Farman and Conroy minor
and De Valerie—in fact, all the leading lights
of the Ancient House Remove were present.

"Now we're all together," said Nipper, in
business-like tones, as Yakama and the
Bo'sun entered. "Shut the door, cap'n."

Burton grinned, and closed it.

"This is a meeting," went on Nipper,
rather unnecessarily. "I think, gentlemen,
that we are representative of the Remove as
a whole. Something's got to be done, and
done without delay."

"Hear, hear!"

"Don't interrupt, Handforth!" said
Nipper severely.

"I shall say 'Hear, hear!' if I like!"
roared Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I
don't see why you should be speaking at
all, Bennett. I'm the chap——"

"There's no need for you to see these
things," interrupted Nipper. "All you've
got to do is to dry up. If you've got any
suggestions to make, make 'em afterwards."

Handforth snorted, and subsided with an
effort.

"We've simply got to do something about
Bates," said Nipper firmly.

"Bates!" yelled Watson. "What about
Hunter?"

"My dear ass, we can't exactly go for
Hunter, but it'll be comparatively easy to
squash Bates," replied Nipper. "He's just
about the limit in page-boys. If we don't
put our foot down now, we might as well
knuckle under. Handforth and Co. were caned
this morning because of his rotten speaking,
and three Fifth Form chaps got it in the
neck only about an hour ago."

"Say, them galoots sure deserved thrashin'
some," remarked Farman.

"Of course, they were smoking, and
making asses of themselves, and it was only
right to put it down," said Nipper. "Still,
that doesn't alter the fact. According to
Chambers, Bates overheard him jawing to
the others in the gym., and he must have
run to Hunter at once. It seems to me that
our precious new Housemaster has brought
Bates here for the especial purpose of spy-
ing on us. Were not going to stand that,
I suppose?"

"Rather not!"

"Begad! I shouldn't think so, Benny boy."

"Well, then, we've got to bring the chopper down," said Nipper grimly. "We've got to make Bates understand that spying and sneaking doesn't pay. He'll be running to Hunter twenty times a day before long, and life won't be worth living. Of course Hunter's the real culprit, but we can't go for him."

"Why not?" demanded Handforth. "I don't see why we shouldn't get up a secret society business, and collar Hunter in the dark, or something. He's a rotten Prussian—otherwise he wouldn't take any notice of Bates. It's best to go to the fountain-head in these matters," he added sagely.

"I dare say it is," replied Nipper. "But it can't be done, my son—not at present, at all events. Now, what's the best thing to do with Bates? We don't want to be violent to start with. I suggest that we get him in here, and tell him, straight out, that we won't stand any nonsense. We'll give him fair warning——"

"Rot!" shouted Tommy Watson. "His hide's too thick to take any notice of a jawing. He ought to be rolled in the mud, or something like that."

"Hear, hear!" said Handforth heartily.

Nipper sighed.

"It's all very well to talk like that," he exclaimed, "but rolling him in the mud would—— What's up with you, De Valerie?"

The Rotter had turned to the window, and now he winked.

"I heard something," he said softly.

"Stand aside, you chaps!"

With a sudden jerk, De Valerie caused the blind to fly up. The window was partially open at the bottom, and for a second the features of Bates, the page-boy, were visible. Then they vanished, and an angry roar went up.

De Valerie flung up the window and gazed out. Rain was still descending, although not so heavily now. A few faint footfalls sounded, but they died away. De Valerie closed the window, and turned with a grin.

"Spyin' again," he remarked. "Gettin' serious, ain't it? The chap was actually listenin' at the window—in the rain! It's a jolly good thing we hadn't come to any arrangement——what?"

"Let's rush after him!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "By George! We'll slaughter the awful rotter!"

But Nipper pointed out the futility of giving chase. Bates had got clear away by this time, and a search would almost certainly be futile. This fresh evidence of the page-boy's sneaking habits, however, aroused the Removites to a pitch of indignation which demanded satisfaction.

The fellows couldn't quite realise that Hunter had only arrived the previous evening, and that this was Bates' first day in the school. The pair seemed to have been

at St. Frank's for weeks—judging by the storm of fury which had been aroused. And it was utterly incongruous that a mere page-boy should be in league with the House-master.

The thing didn't sit; it was all wrong. But there was no denying the fact that Bates was acting in the capacity of a spy—with the especial object of reporting events to Mr. Hunter. It was only too clear that Mr. Hunter had deliberately imported Bates into St. Frank's—he had probably arranged the whole thing beforehand.

And unless the juniors acted promptly, and plucked the nettle, it would grow too strong for them. Nipper therefore conducted the meeting in Study C seriously and with great gravity.

Exactly an hour later Master Bates emerged from the servants' door in the Ancient House, and hurried across the muddy Triangle to the porter's lodge. He didn't care for the trip, for rain was again descending heavily. But he had been dispatched by one of the housemaids, who was anxious to have a message sent to Warren.

Bates reached the vicinity of the porter's lodge. And then, as though from the very earth itself, several black forms appeared. They sprang upon the page-boy relentlessly.

"My goodness!" gasped Bates, with a shriek.

He had no opportunity to give a further cry. The black forms closed round him and grasped him. In a moment he was held secure, and a thick woollen bag was thrust over his head.

"Got him!" murmured a gruff voice in exultant tones. "Now we'll make the howling rotter sit up!"

"Sit down, you mean!" murmured another voice.

Bates heard nothing, for his ears were muffled by the bag. He was a big fellow, but he was sadly lacking in pluck. Just at present he was so frightened that he simply shivered and shook. And his captors found it an easy matter to bind his hands behind his back and to secure his ankles.

"Ready?" breathed one of the black forms. "Good! Let him have it!"

Bates was suddenly tripped. He went down with a squelch, alighting in a puddle of water. And then, slowly and deliberately, the hateful page-boy was rolled over and over in the thick mud of the Triangle.

At the end of three minutes Bates was smothered from head to foot. Mud clung to him everywhere. By this time he was half-fainting with terror. And then the punishment came to its final phase.

The black forms produced a small panful of a horrid mixture—mainly consisting of paint and soot and treacle. With a huge brush this frightful concoction was applied. The bag had been removed, and the page-boy's face and head and neck was liberally plastered with the mixture.

"The deed is done!" murmured a breathless voice. "Now, you chaps—cut!"

The forms faded away, and Bates' somewhat dull understanding arrived at the conclusion that the outrage had been committed by schoolboys. But their identity? It was absolutely impossible to say! There was not the slightest clue which could lead to the exposure of the culprits. The fellows were learning a thing or two—they had become wary!

Bates spluttered and gasped; and, finding himself alone, he attempted to get to his feet. The venture was a success, for he found that his ankles were so secured that it was still possible for him to bobble along. Five minutes later sundry shrieks and screams arose from the servants' hall. The awful apparition which had suddenly appeared caused momentary terror among the feminine members of the staff.

Meanwhile, four breathless members of the Fifth Form were congratulating themselves in Study No. 10, in the Fifth Form passage.

"Ripping!" said Chambers pantingly. "The trick worked without a hitch, my sons. The end can't possibly find out who did it—and he's well paid for interfering with us. That wheeze of mine worked splendidly—I shall have to give Mary another five bob to-morrow."

Bryant and Phillips and the other Fifth Formers grinned.

"Mary's a ripplin' girl," declared Phillips. "She sent Bates on his errand just at the right time. My hat! It was lovely. I suppose you chucked that pail away, Bryant?"

"Of course, I did, you ass! I reckon—*Bhush!*"

Chambers and Co. became quite grave. A prefect had just looked in to ask Phillips a question, and he saw nothing to excite his suspicions.

And while the Fifth Formers were congratulating themselves, the Remove was in an unholy state of joy. The news had leaked out, via Teddy Long—who generally found things out in the shortest possible space of time.

The outrage upon the page-boy was discussed with bated breath. Handforth was nearly off his head with glee. Like Tommy Watson, he had been in favour of rolling Bates in the mud. And now, entirely without the knowledge of the Remove, the deed had been accomplished.

The meeting in Study C had passed a resolution that Bates should be spoken to like a Dutch uncle; but more drastic measures had been taken, even while the Remove's decision was being arrived at.

Who was responsible?

There weren't many fellows who couldn't form a shrewd guess. But they breathed no word. For once in a way Chambers and Co. were regarded by the Removites as heroes of the first order.

Joy reigned supreme. For Bates had been squashed, and no punishment could possibly descend upon the Remove.

But the Remove was even now blissfully ignorant of the weird sense of justice which filled the breast of Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A.!

CHAPTER VII.

(Nipper concludes.)

IN WHICH MR. HUNTER BRINGS DOWN THE HATCHET—THE SHOULDERING FIRE.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST met me on the stairs as I came down the next morning—that is, the morning following the glorious "outrage" upon Bates.

"Letter for you, Benny, old boy," said Montie languidly.

"For me?" I said. "Let's see it, Montie."

He turned, and descended to the lobby with me. There was something rather mysterious in his manner, and he looked round with rather unnecessary caution. Then he leaned over towards me.

"The fact is, dear fellow," he whispered, "I believe it's from Old Alvy!"

"What!" I shouted. "Let's have a look at it, you ass!"

He passed the letter across, and a glance told me that it was, indeed, from my esteemed gov'nor. It was addressed to "Dick Bennett," of course, and the handwriting was not Nelson Lee's. The gov'nor had written it, but in a disguised flat.

How did I know? Well, the capital letters were written in a special way; the gov'nor and I had invented a system of symbols, and it was quite possible for us to know all sorts of things while other people were ignorant. It was far more probable that the letter itself would contain more information than the address on the envelope.

Sir Montie and I passed out into the Triangle, and we found a secluded spot under the leafy chestnuts. The rain had ceased during the night, and the whole countryside was gleaming brilliantly green in the glow of the sunshine.

I tore open the letter and read it. Sir Montie politely stood aloof, but I gruffly told him not to be potty, and to look over my shoulder.

"It's frightfully rude, Benny," murmured Sir Montie apologetically. "Still, as you've given me permission, dear boy—"

"Don't interrupt, you dummy!" I cut in, frowning.

I couldn't quite understand the letter. It was written in a scrawly handwriting like that of a schoolboy, and I should never have dreamed that it was from Nelson Lee, had it not been for the private signs. One of these was a peculiar twist to the first character written—and that meant "everything is all right."

But why had the gov'nor taken these precautions? Why hadn't he written to me openly? It seemed very significant when I remembered the incident of the other evening. Was Nelson Lee afraid that my letter would be intercepted by somebody? By Mr.

Hunter? At all events, he was taking no chances.

The letter was short, and simply ran:

"My Dear Dick.—Sorry I haven't been able to see you. Or, rather, I'm sorry you haven't been able to see me. But you needn't worry your head about that rotten watch. It's a bad 'un, and you won't do any good by trying to look into the works. Just leave it to me, my son. Before long I shall see you, I expect, and then we'll have a little jaw. I hope I didn't hurt you the other evening when we had that wrestling-bout.—Yours as ever,

"PETE."

There was no address and no date, but I saw by the postmark that it had been sent from Bannington the previous evening. This proved conclusively that the gov'nor was in the district. But the letter itself was something of an enigma. In the signature was another private sign which meant: "Carry on!"

"Begad! It's rather queer, ain't it?" asked Montie. "I suppose 'Pete' means Peter Alvin'ton?"

"It means the gov'nor," I replied. "There are thousands of 'Petes,' and there's nothing in that. But I'm rather fogged—Hullo, Tommy; just have a squint at this."

Watson had strolled up, and he read the letter with interest. When he had finished his brow was puckered.

"Blessed if I can make head or tail of it," he said. "Who the dickens is Pete? And what's that rot about a wrestling-bout?"

"This letter is from Old Alvy," I said grimly. "He ain't far off, Tommy, and that reference to a wrestling-bout simply means that it was the gov'nor himself who collared me the other night. Just read the letter again. He's sorry I haven't been able to see him. That means to say that he's seen me—"

"But what's that silly reference to a watch?" asked Watson. "I thought yours kept jolly good time? And it's a fatheaded thing to mess about with the works, anyhow. I did that with mine once, and the watchmaker told me that it couldn't be repaired!"

I grinned.

"You innocent old fathead!" I remarked cheerfully.

"Begad! I'm fearfully afraid that I'm in the same boat, old fellow," remarked Tregellis-West. "I can follow that bit about the wrestlin' match, an' that other bit about old Alvy seein' you, but you bein' unable to see him—I can understand all that. But I'm frightfully dense. I can't possibly follow all that reference to a rotten watch—I can't, really!"

I must admit that I had been puzzled myself; but even while Sir Montie was talking I had jumped to the truth. And I chuckled to myself when I realised the subtle way in which the gov'nor had put things.

"Why, it's as simple as the giddy alphabet!" I grinned.

"Oh, of course!" snorted Watson. "These fatheaded things always are simple! We ain't so jolly cute as you are, Benny; we don't pretend to be sleuth-hounds! Just elucidate, my son—that's the right word, ain't it?"

"Well, look here," I exclaimed, in a low voice. "This thing's pretty smart, you know. I'm not to worry my head about the watch, it's a bad 'un, and I sha'n't do any good by trying to look into the works—I've got to leave it to the gov'nor. That's what he says, isn't it?"

"Somethin' like that, old fellow."

"Well, use your brain-boxes," I said. "What's a watch?"

Sir Montie and Tommy gazed at me in wonderment.

"Begad! You ain't so frightfully ignorant as all that, Benny," protested Tregellis-West. "A watch is what you see the time by—"

"You—you idiot!" I roared. "I mean a watch is called by different names, isn't it?"

"Yes, when it won't go!" remarked Watson. "I've called mine a few!"

"Oh, it's no good trying to shove sense into your nappers," I growled. "A watch is often referred to as a timekeeper, or a Waterbury, or a chronometer. And there are half-hunters and hunters. Hunters, as you know, have a complete case—"

"Hunter!" breathed Sir Montie, groping vaguely for enlightenment. "Begad, I'm beginnin' to see things—I am, really!"

"Then—then that reference to a watch is really a reference to Mr. Hunter?" asked Watson, staring at me.

"It can't be anything else," I replied. "And just look at the information it gives us! I'm not to worry my head, and it's no good trying to look into the works—which means that we mustn't interfere with this shady game of Hunter's, whatever it is. And the watch, mind you—meaning Hunter, is a bad 'un!"

"Great pip!" muttered Watson. "Ain't it jolly deep? I should never have fathomed it out alone, I can tell you. I always was bad at puzzles."

Personally, I had no doubt that my explanation was the true one. And I felt more comfortable. For one thing, I knew that Hunter was a bad lot, and for another, it was clear that Nelson Lee himself was still near by.

Could it be possible that the Secret Service work he had undertaken was actually connected with Hunter himself?

It wasn't possible for me to consider the matter any longer at present, for the breakfast-bell was ringing; and my chums and I marched indoors. The Remove, as a whole, was in a surprisingly good temper.

Bates had not been seen this morning, and a certain expression of joy upon Warren's rugged face indicated that the porter, too, shared the general feeling of satisfaction. Bates had been treated severely, but he wasn't really hurt.

And the cream of the whole joke was that

nobody could be punished. The page-boy could not possibly name his assailants, and even Mr. Hunter couldn't inflict punishment upon the whole House.

The new Housemaster was looking as beamingly genial as ever in the dining-hall. A stranger would have declared that Mr. Hunter was a delightful companion and an ideal schoolmaster.

I noticed that Chambers and Co., of the Fifth, looked completely careless and at ease. They displayed no signs of triumph. Indeed, Chambers had been heard to remark, while Mr. Hunter was passing, that it was a mean trick to roll a page-boy in the mud. Chambers was rather deep in his way.

The Remove's contentment lasted until morning lessons were nearly due to commence. I was on the steps of the Ancient House, discussing cricket with several other fellows. It would be a half-holiday that day, and I had arranged with Bob Christine to meet my team on Little Side. Cricket had only just commenced—hadn't commenced at all, to be more exact. The match, although important, was not a proper fixture. It was more or less of a practice game, and I was very eager to show Bob Christine that he and his team would be left miles behind during the forthcoming season. Curiously enough, he had exactly the same idea—only reversed.

It was nearly time for lessons. I became dimly aware of a hubbub in the lobby, but didn't take much notice. Then Handforth came rushing out with wild eyes and a face which was red with indignation and fury.

"We—we ain't going to stand this!" he bawled almost incoherently. "It's absolutely Hunnish!"

Something was evidently very wrong, and we entered the lobby to make investigation. The scene there was simply past description. Removites were shouting, yelling, and gesticulating wildly.

And the cause was a short notice on the board. I pushed my way through the crowd and gazed upon it. And as I read the words I nearly had a fit. For the announcement was simply this:

"NOTICE.

"From this day onwards, and until further notice, the practice of partaking of tea in junior studies is to be discontinued, and is strictly prohibited. All juniors, in future, will attend tea in the dining-hall.

"KENNEDY HUNTER, Housemaster."

The uproar was appalling.

"Why this is simply rank interference!" I shouted wildly. "It's the Remove which will suffer, of course—the Remove's the only junior Form which is allowed tea in the studies—"

"We ain't going to stand it!" raved Handforth. "We'll jib at this!"

"I should say so!"

"Rather!"

"The rotten Prussian!"

The fellows were growing frantic, and it

was fortunate, perhaps, that the bell rang for morning lessons at that moment. Otherwise the Removites would have got themselves into very serious trouble.

It was only with difficulty that the Ancient House fellows were marshalled into the Form-room. Mr. Crowell found the class-room in a state of amazing uproar when he arrived, and even his presence did not completely bring silence. His expression was very grim.

"I can well understand your indignation, my boys," he said quietly. "But you must attend your lessons now. Be assured that you have my entire sympathy. I will do my utmost to remove the ban—"

"Three cheers for Crowsfeet!" bawled Handforth excitedly.

The whole Remove stood up and howled themselves hoarse—that is, the Ancient House section of it. Christine and Co. joined in out of sheer sympathy, and made as much noise as the Fossils themselves.

Mr. Crowell was quite taken aback, but he could not possibly be displeased. He lifted his hand for silence.

"Really, boys, you must not give way to your emotions in this manner," he protested. "Upon my soul! The whole school is ringing with your voices—"

Quite abruptly a dead, utter silence fell upon the Remove. Mr. Kennedy Hunter had just entered, and if looks could kill, the Housemaster would have been annihilated in a second. The glares he received were openly defiant.

But Mr. Hunter didn't seem to see anything. He just beamed at us in that way which was now becoming more hateful than a frown. And he turned to Mr. Crowell, who was momentarily nonplussed.

"Is it customary for you to conduct your class in this way, Mr. Crowell?" asked the Hun mildly.

"The boys were rather excited, sir," said Mr. Crowell, in a choking voice. "If you have any complaint to make, I will administer the necessary punishment."

"Good old Crowell!" came a subdued and husky whisper.

"It is regarding a question of punishment that I came to this room," said Mr. Hunter sweetly. "I daresay you are aware of the fact that Bates, the page-boy, was grossly assaulted last night. I have conclusive evidence that some members of the Remove Form were responsible for the outrage!"

"Oh!" came a gasp from the Remove.

"Conclusive evidence!" I breathed. "Ye gods!"

The Remove was so thunderstruck that dead silence reigned now. The fellows listened with bated breath. I remembered that Bates had listened outside the study window during our meeting; he had heard Tommy Watson suggesting that the page-boy should be rolled in the mud. Bates had repeated this to Mr. Hunter, and the latter had arrived at the conclusion that the Remove was responsible!

The evidence was not even sound; there had been no rise whatever as to the identity of the attackers. This was the first time that Mr. Hunter had given a specific reason for inflicting punishment—and he was all at sea!

Mr. Crowell almost quivered with anger.

"I think you are mistaken, sir," he said, restraining himself with difficulty. "I cannot believe that any members of my Form—"

"Really, I am not interested in what you believe, Mr. Crowell," said Hunter softly. "You will oblige me by allowing me to conduct this affair in my own way. I now commend those boys who took part in the affair to stand out."

I stood up promptly.

"I can give you proof, sir, that all the Remove fellows were in the House when Bates was jumped on," I said quietly. "It was raining, and nobody was outside. The Remove had nothing to do with—"

"Enough, you will stand out here," interrupted Mr. Hunter pleasantly.

For that interruption I received two stinging cuts with the cane, and was ordered to go back to my seat. One or two bold spirits ventured to hiss, but nearly everybody fumed in silence.

"I am satisfied that some Remove boys are guilty," said Mr. Hunter, with a smile of kindly gentility. "Since the culprits will not confess, I am reluctantly compelled to punish every Ancient House member of this Form. Mr. Crowell, you will kindly detain all your boys, belonging to this House, during the afternoon. Furthermore, they are to receive no tea to-day, and all hounds will be limited to the school property."

Mr. Hunter beamed upon us again, and retired.

The hatchet had fallen—and there was no appeal!

The first phase of the Hunter regime was over, and it could not be denied that Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., had had everything his own way. The Remove was in a state bordering upon insanity. Even Mr. Crowell shared our rage.

To appeal to the Head was not to be thought of; Dr. Stafford could not take sides with the boys against the Housemaster himself. We should have to fight the battle ourselves—and that a battle was coming was absolutely obvious.

The first cricket-match of the season was squashed! The Ancient House team were doomed to grind away at lemons all the afternoon, and the Remove was practically stunned.

Things could not possibly continue for long as they were now going. A limit would be reached very shortly—that was inevitable.

And then?

Well, already some of the fellows were whispering ominously about a revolt. But much was to happen at St. Frank's before matters reached such a grave stage.

And what of the mystery surrounding Mr. Hunter? I must admit that I was sorely puzzled; but I was becoming convinced that Mr. Hunter was a criminal, and that sinister things were occurring.

So much for the first episode. The second episode was even more exciting, as I shall set down later on. And, as for the events which followed—well, I won't even hint at them!

THE END.

"HUNTER THE HUN!"

IS THE TITLE OF

NEXT WEEK'S MAGNIFICENT STORY.

It deals with the further extraordinary happenings at St. Frank's College following on the arrival of the new Housemaster, Mr. Hunter.

ORDER AT ONCE—

"HUNTER THE HUN!"

Out on Wednesday. War-Time Price—THREE-HALFPENCE.

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By **CLEMENT HALE.**

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

The Chief Characters in this Story are:

GEORGE GRAY and his brother **JACK**, who are the English Staff of the Berlin Racers, a football club in Germany. When war breaks out they are sent to an outdoor prisoners' camp at Oberkessel. Von der Kutz is the Governor's name. He is a just but arrogant man, and he refuses to build shelters for the prisoners. George notices one evening that the sky is becoming overcast.

(Now read on.)

THE CLOUD IN THE WEST.

THE sight of the lowering clouds, which hung like a pall of evil across the western sky, stirred George Gray to the very depths.

He was not what one would term an imaginative man, nor was there much of romance in his composition. Until he had come face to face with the evil that had stalked unheeded, if not exactly unseen, throughout the great empires of Europe, he had been blind to the fatalities and failings of human nature, had declared that a really bad man and woman did not exist. He'd found excuses for everybody, believed that everything happened for the best in this best of all possible worlds; but now his faith had been profoundly shaken, upheaved, if not destroyed.

The thoughts that flashed across his mind as he swung along the broad, straight road which led from the town to the internment camp made the blood recede from his cheeks, leaving them ashen.

If the rain came! If the rain came—what then?

His glance strayed to the big, wired enclosure, about which the armed sentries in field-grey paced so regularly. Once again its exposed and unsheltered position made itself felt. It had been pleasant to be there in the open after the confined life in the prison. And he saw his comrades striding up and down, or standing talking in groups, a few of them busy washing and cleaning up at the tap as he drew nearer, and they all seemed to be cheerful enough.

The autumn warmth continued. Yes, that was all very well now; but if the clouds gathered and burst and the rain came, if

the temperature fell some ten degrees—what then?

During the few hours he'd been absent nothing had altered.

No attempt to build huts or erect tents had been made. The sentry boxes were the only shelters of their kind to be seen in all the length and width of the landscape. He noticed how the ground sloped where the camp was, how a gully ran through it. Why, the water would gather and run there like a rivulet if the rain came.

The breeze fanned George's cheek. His stretched nostrils drew in a breath of the coolish air. It seemed to bring a dampness with it.

George turned to one of the escort:

"When are they going to put up huts and shelters for us?" he demanded.

The man scowled at him.

"Silence!" he growled, and George said no more.

As he reached the camp and passed the wires a shaft of warming sunlight fell upon him and the clouds seemed to disperse. His mind grew easier, and his spirits rose, for here were his comrades ready to give him a welcoming cheer, swarming round with excited faces, their eyes dancing with delight, their mouths wide open, their lips curved in smiles.

"George! George!" cried Jack, leaping towards his brother as George was ordered to pass by the officer in command of the escort, and paced through the double line of armed men.

"It's all right, Jack; they let me off with a caution this time, old fellow," said the burly footballer.

"Bully for you, boy," smiled Wilson.

Ahlott made a dive at him.

"Boys," he said, "it's one to us this time, whatever the Huns may think, so up with our hero and let's chair him round the camp."

George had dropped the football he'd brought back with him. He gave it a kick that sent it rolling, and then protested laughingly as they hoisted him up.

"We've got the ball back, boys," he said. "And Kutz will know better than to play the fool another time. Hi! Steady there! Don't pull me to pieces, you duffers!"

(Continued overleaf.)

And so they formed in a procession, the bearers, with George upon their shoulders, in the middle. Singing and cheering and shouting, they made a complete circuit of the wires. Their voices rang echoing far, and the sentries looked on in amazement. Could nothing tame or cow these Britishers? Were they all mad? And had the Huns to face such men as these in the Western fields of war? If so, the taking of Paris and Calais might be delayed.

Some of them scowled; others, according to their dispositions, showed their rifles and indulged in threatening antics; whilst a few, good-humoured and kindlier men, these, stood and grinned, finding something to admire in the unconquerable spirit of the unhappy prisoners.

That day a better ration of food was given the interned men, and some of the luggage that had arrived was brought down to the camp.

The boxes, bags, and trunks were piled in the middle of the field, and great joy was expressed by the lucky possessors as the lids were opened and the contents were examined.

Here something must be said in favour of Fritz. Though he had detained for the use of the Fatherland such things as field-glasses, opera-glasses, and cameras, any instrument that contained a lens, in fact, he had delivered clothing, underwear, and boots entire.

Some of the men even had football things and football boots. These were produced with shouts of delight.

That afternoon another game of football was played, and towards dusk a pile of material was dumped down beside the road from Oberhemmel.

The prisoners crowded to look. There were many posts, baulks of timber, struts, and joists, iron clamps, bolts, screws, nuts, and much heavy planking and match boarding.

George glanced again at the sombre western sky. The clouds were thickening. The wind blew fitfully, and was colder.

"What is the timber for?" he asked, through the barricade of entangled wires, of a sentry who was staring at the assembled prisoners out of a set and sullen face, the butt-end of his rifle resting on the ground.

The sentry grinned.

"It's for your camp," he explained, "to make huts or shelters with."

"Then why hasn't it been brought inside the wires?" demanded George. "We might have been able to rig up some sort of a temporary shelter."

The German shrugged.

"It will be done in good time, when men can be spared for the labour."

George looked at the piles of material, then glanced thence to the distant sky, lowering and threatening.

In good time! And who was to expedite the work? Did the new commandant at the prison, Von der Klutz, need a disaster to teach him his imperative duty to the prisoners he had so wilfully turned out into the open to take their chance; or was it that in his eyes prisoners did not count a straw?

He turned moodily away, and a fitful breeze, with a touch of cold in it, sweeping over the open, struck a chill to his bones.

Again his forebodings came back to him. He felt that something awful was going to happen.

RAIN!

It was decidedly colder when the groups of prisoners threw themselves down to sleep that night.

They crept down into the hollows and huddled closer for warmth.

The clothes which had arrived so opportunely that day were shared, and served as extra covering for the lucky ones who were able to obtain a loan of them. Lots were cast for the privilege, and the unselfishness of their owners served, as usual, to lighten the burden all had in common to bear.

Most of the men were off to sleep in a trice. George Gray was not one of these lucky ones. He closed his eyes tightly, but sleep would not come to him. He counted flocks of imaginary sheep, he figured up to a hundred over and over again, and tried the many devices which are supposed to woo the fickle goddess into a relenting humour, but without success.

The thought of the coming rain was in his mind, and nothing could rid him of the deadly depression which had gripped hold of him.

From side to side he tossed, and at last sat bolt upright as the wind came sighing over the open ground, cold and damp, from the rainy quarter.

And at last, with a cry, George sprang to his feet. Something touched his face, something cold, and his fingers strayed to it.

Ah, as he thought—rain! So it had come, then.

He stood erect, staring about him. The lights of the distant town glimmered through the darkness. Overhead hung the black pall of cloud. Around him was the open waste of ground where nothing could be seen.

Near the barbed-wire entanglement or barricade lights could be seen bobbing along. The sentries were being relieved, and guttural commands rang from the darkness.

Another drop of rain, and another, and then with a musical and restless patter the fall began.

(To be continued.)