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STICKING TO THEIR GUNS!

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

May 11, 1918.

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AT ST. FRANK'S. Specially written
by the Author of "The Barring-
Out at St. Frank's," "The Rebel
Remove," 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.

(The narrative commenced by Nipper.)

TROUBLE IN THE FAMILY—BREWSTER'S SUGGESTION—I AM VERY CURIOUS.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, of the Remove-Form in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, fanned himself somewhat laboriously.

"Phew!" he gasped. "Gimme air, for goodness' sake!"

I looked at him grimly.

"It's not a bit of good your gasping for air, Handy," I said. "We shall be cooped up here for another two hours yet; until it's dark, in fact. We're all suffering the same, so it's no good making a fuss—"

"Who's making a fuss?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"Well, you're gasping for air that you can't get, anyhow," I retorted. "We ought to be jolly thankful that we're still the Remove Revolutionary Army, and not a pack of down-trodden juniors!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Long live the revolution!"

"But we need a change of quarters—we do really!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered the last remark. And I was compelled to admit that there was much truth in what he said. A change of quarters, indeed, was absolutely vital.

There had been some exciting times at St. Frank's recently. The Ancient House section of the Remove was in revolt—and I was the leader of the rebels. This was only natural, considering my position as Form captain.

We had organised a barring-out, being fed-up with the tyranny of Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., the new Housemaster of the Ancient House. So far we had won all along the line, although Mr. Hunter had nearly forced us into an ignominious surrender. By a trick we had foiled him and were now lying low.

The Rebel Remove, in fact, had completely disappeared.

I don't mean that we had rendered ourselves invisible by some miraculous means. We had disappeared so far as Mr. Hunter was concerned. For hours search-parties had been out, but they had achieved nothing.

You see, we had taken up our quarters in the old vaults beneath the monastery ruins. These ruins were situated in a corner of the Triangle, and we had fortified them strongly, using the vaults as living and sleeping quarters.

Our main defence system had consisted of a wall of faggots, and while this was intact we had been able to resist all assaults. But Mr. Hunter had played a trump card; he had thrown petrol over the faggot wall and had burned the defences down.

An old tunnel led from the vaults to the deserted quarry on the Bannington Moor, and another attacking party had been sent along this route in order to catch us in the rear. It had been a very determined attempt to bring the rebellion to a swift end.

That it had not succeeded was no fault of Mr. Hunter's. In the nick of time I had remembered a secret chamber which opened out from the main vaults. And at the eleventh hour I had bundled the whole Re-

move into this retreat. The ruse had succeeded, for Mr. Hunter had been unable to find us.

And now our position was by no means comfortable.

As Handforth remarked, we were nearly all gasping for air. The secret chamber was large, but was of no particular height. The air soon became close, and existence was somewhat difficult.

Had it not been for the fact that the place was ventilated we couldn't have remained there. But this ventilation was just sufficient for our needs—and no more. Comfort was at a minimum.

To begin with, we were squashed closely together; no fellow had more than a square yard of room for himself. We were like sardines in a box. Fortunately we had candles and were not compelled to remain in utter darkness. The walls, in fact, were decorated with numerous candles, burning flickeringly. As long as they burned brightly there was no danger of our being suffocated.

But although we had foiled Mr. Hunter for the time being, the position was desperate. At the beginning great enthusiasm had prevailed. But the fellows had had time to think, and they began to see the difficulties which faced us.

We had entered the secret chamber soon after nine o'clock in the morning, and it was now four in the afternoon. We had no water and no grub. And we were all hungry and thirsty—particularly thirsty.

The hours of inactivity had sapped away the rebels' enthusiasm, and now they were a rather dejected crowd.

"It's no good talking!" remarked Handforth firmly. "We're in a dickens of a hole!"

Tommy Watson grunted.

"It's no good talking like that, certainly," he exclaimed. "We know that we're in a hole without you ramming it home, Handy. But, as Benny just said, we ought to be thankful that we're still a complete army, and not a crowd of juniors under Hunter's thumb."

"That's all very well," exclaimed Fullwood. "We'd better be under Hunter's thumb than in a beastly mess like this!"

Fullwood would have been howled down in a moment four hours previously had he made a remark of that sort. But now I noticed that several juniors murmured their approval. I looked round grimly.

"We're not in a beastly mess," I said quietly. "The position may be difficult, but we shall find a solution before long. It's just like Fullwood to start growling because we've had a set-back."

Fullwood sneered.

"Well, if you can suggest a way out, you'd better get on with it," he said. "I don't believe there is a way out. We shall have to end up by crawlin' to Mr. Hunter and pleading for mercy!"

"You may end up like that, but I sha'n't!" I retorted. "And I think the majority of

the chaps are with me. We're not a set of worms, I hope!"

"Enthusiasm's all right in its place, Bennett," put in Merrell. "But I must say that it's no good now. We've got to look the facts in the face. We've got no grub, and there's no prospect of getting any. We're cooped up here like herrings in a tin, and as soon as we show our faces outside we shall be collared. It strikes me that the most sensible thing to do is to surrender at once."

"Hear, hear!" said Fullwood.

And two or three others voiced their approval.

I regarded them steadily. They were not the ringleaders by any means, and would suffer only comparatively slight punishment if the barring-out fell through. That's why they were not particularly keen on suffering hardships.

"Well, I'm willing to put it to the vote," I said quietly. "How many chaps are in favour of giving in, and how many will decide to follow my lead until we gain complete victory? We've defied Hunter all along the line, and there's no reason why we shouldn't go on defying him. Before many hours have passed we shall have thought of something and the position will be greatly improved. If we give in now we shall make ourselves the laughing-stock of the whole school. If we go on, and if we find another stronghold——"

"There's a lot of 'ifs' about it!" sneered Fullwood.

"Very likely," I replied. "Nothing certain in this world, as the affair of this morning proved. I leave it to the Form to vote. I'm willing to retain command, and I'll do my utmost to lead you to complete victory. But if I do, I'm not going to have any growls and grumbles. We've got to take the rough with the smooth—and just now it's jolly rough. Now then, what do you say?"

"I vote for keeping on!" declared Handforth heartily.

"So do I!"

"Rather!"

"Same here!"

"Victory or nothing!"

"No surrender!"

It was a perfect chorus, and I felt highly satisfied as I surveyed the fellows.

"Hands up all those who vote for giving in!" I said crisply.

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell and Merrell raised their hands. Noys and Marriott half-raised theirs, but withdrew them. Everybody else remained perfectly still and looked grim.

"Oh, so there's only four of you, after all!" I exclaimed. "Now, hands up for continuing the revolution!"

It was rather unnecessary, but I derived a certain amount of pleasure from seeing the numerous hands which went up. Only four remained down, of course.

"Well, I think the majority is for sticking to our guns," I said drily.

"I've got a suggestion to make!" said

Handforth, commencing to roll up his sleeves. "I vote that we take these giddy blacklegs and chuck 'em out on their neck! They're no good, anyhow!"

Fullwood backed a few inches and trod upon Gulliver's toes.

"None of your rot!" he said hastily. "We don't want to leave the rest of you. If you're all for going on, we'll fall into line."

"Good!" I exclaimed heartily. "I'm glad that's settled. And mind you don't grumble any more. I know things seem absolutely rotten, but if you'll only trust me I'll see the thing through."

"Hear, hear!"

"Leave it to Benny!"

This was quite nice for the other fellows. They had been relieved of all responsibility. It was up to me to think out a wheeze. Well, I'll frankly admit that I was completely stumped for an idea.

It had been a very pleasant surprise for me to find that the juniors had such faith in me. I almost felt as though I didn't deserve it. For the life of me I couldn't think of a solution.

The position was bristling with difficulties.

There were many mouths to feed, and we hadn't got an ounce of food. There seemed no prospect of getting any. We dare not show our faces outside for fear of being immediately captured. To make matters worse, everybody was stony—even Sir Montie had run out of cash. So we couldn't send to the village for food.

Tubbs, the dismissed Ancient House page-boy, was with us in our misfortune. He declared that he would be able to find some food of some sort as soon as darkness came.

If matters reached a crisis, we could manage on turnips for one meal. There was a field of these edible roots quite near by, and when boys are hungry, turnips don't seem at all bad. At least they would serve in a dire emergency.

Two great problems faced me.

First of all, we had to find a new fortress where we could remain in security. That was a nice little puzzle for me to think over. Secondly, the food question loomed large. Without proper grub the fellows would surrender within twelve hours. And a second revolt would be impossible.

I was firmly determined to stick to my guns. And I finally decided to leave off racking my brain until darkness fell. Then I would venture out upon a scouting expedition and find out, if possible, how things were going.

I told the fellows that nothing could be done until darkness came, and advised them to sleep until then, since we should probably be up all the night. My suggestion was carried out.

We all had our beds with us—the mattresses and blankets, at least. And, since there was no room for them to be packed away against the walls, the mattresses had been laid flat upon the floor. This had the

effect of reducing the height of our prison, but the bedding occupied no actual room.

By lying with our backs against the walls and in various other attitudes we managed to get down somehow. It was decidedly difficult, and there were a few differences. Handforth strongly objected to McClure's foot being on his face, and when McClure shifted it he caught Hubbard a violent kick on the ear.

Incidents of this nature were common, and couldn't be avoided in such close quarters. But upon the whole we didn't manage so badly. At all events the majority of the rebels were soon fast asleep.

I didn't sleep a wink until an hour had passed, and then I dropped off soundly. I was awakened by somebody's foot thudding into my neck, and discovered that the time was eight-thirty.

I was pleasantly surprised, for the period of waiting was over. It would be quite dark outside by now, and a scouting expedition would be possible.

"Who volunteers?" I asked briskly.

Several candles had been lighted afresh, and all the fellows were awake. About three parts of them answered with one voice. Everybody was keenly anxious to get some fresh air.

"Sorry," I grinned. "We can't all go, you know. I'll take Tregellis-West and Watson."

"Look here!" snorted Handforth. "I don't see why——"

"Don't make a fuss, Handy, for goodness' sake," I interrupted. "In any case it'll be a pretty risky business. For all we know, Hunter may have scouts of his own on the prowl. We might even be collared as soon as we reach the surface—and you know what that'll mean!"

"By George!" said Handforth.

"If we're not back within an hour you'd better send out somebody to look for us," I went on. "I'll leave you in charge during my absence, De Valerie. You're second in command—see!"

Cecil de Valerie nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said calmly. "Good luck, old man!"

Sir Montie and Tommy and I donned our caps, and I opened the secret door with extreme caution. Then we slipped outside into the vault, and the door was closed again. The air in the vault was delightfully cool in comparison with the atmosphere in the secret chamber. For some moments we stood still, listening.

The place was silent and deserted.

Without speaking we felt our way across to the stone steps and then lightly ascended. We found the night quiet and mild, with light clouds in the sky. It was pitch-dark, and only a faint breeze rustled through the trees.

"Quiet as the grave!" breathed Watson.

There was certainly nobody on the watch. Mr. Hunter had no idea that we were anywhere near the old vaults, and he had not

thought it necessary to keep anybody near the spot.

We crept away like shadows, and then received a shock.

For we had hardly gone twenty paces before three dim figures loomed up ahead.

"Down!" I hissed urgently.

I was pretty sure that the figures were those of prefects—perhaps Mr. Hunter himself was one of them. We crouched low near some bushes. And then a faint voice was borne to us.

"It's no good jawing to me, you asses!" it said. "We've searched the place three times, and there's no sign of 'em. Poor chaps! I expect they've been collared!"

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montic, with relief. "That's old Brewster!"

I didn't need telling. The three figures were those of Hal Brewster and Georgie Glynn and Dave Ascott, of the River House School. These cheerful youths had visited our stronghold the previous evening and had promised to come to-night. They had evidently come, and had failed to find any sign of us.

They were very decent chaps, and I knew that I could trust them with our little secret. So I rose softly and went forward.

"Hist!" I breathed. "Here we are, Brewster!"

Brewster and Co. ran forward.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Glynn. "We thought you'd been collared!"

"We came precious near to it this morning," I said grimly. "My dear chaps, we're absolutely diddled! We're all dressed up and nowhere to go, so to speak!"

And I briefly outlined the position to the surprised Brewster and Co. They listened intently and were full of sympathy.

"I say, you're in a pretty rotten pickle!" remarked Ascott frankly. "Where the dickens are you going to shift to?"

"Well, I was thinking of the cricket pavilion," I said, without much enthusiasm. "Hang it all, we must go somewhere, and we might be able to fortify the pav. if we can find the stuff. But I don't like the idea much."

"Why not camp out in Bellton Wood?" suggested Glynn.

"Too open," I said, shaking my head. "We want to get hold of some place which we can fortify easily. But I'm hanged if I can think of any place which will be exactly suitable."

And then Hal Brewster made a suggestion. Before ten words had passed his lips I fell upon him and hugged him.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "What's the matter?"

"My dear old chap, you've got a brain in a thousand!" I said enthusiastically. "That's the very idea I've been groping for! I can't think why it didn't occur to me—it's so jolly obvious!"

"Of course it is," grinned Brewster. "You've been so busy in other ways, I suppose."

Brewster's idea filled me with absolute

glee. It had been a mere suggestion, but I knew in a second that it was IT! I don't condemn myself for not having thought of it personally—a fellow can't think of everything.

Brewster and Co. helped us even further. They promised to spend all their ready pocket-money on biscuits and other eatables, and they would leave the parcels in a certain hiding-place just inside Bellton Wood. It was a generous action, and we thanked our friendly rivals effusively.

"That's all right," said Brewster. "You're pals of ours, I suppose? I wish we could do more, but it's impossible."

They hurried off a few minutes later, as it was necessary for them to get to the village before the shops closed. They would only just manage it by running their hardest.

We went to the wall with them, and saw them start. Then I turned to my chums with a glowing face.

"Come on!" I whispered. "We shall beat Hunter—"

"Shush!" breathed Watson suddenly. "There's somebody coming!"

A dim form was walking towards us across the Triangle. We dodged behind some bushes and waited with our hearts in our mouths. And we soon saw that the form belonged to Mr. Kennedy Hunter himself!

Those few minutes were trying ones. Mr. Hunter was unconscious of our presence, and we daren't move an inch. He was smoking a cigar, and took up his stand within three yards of us! Without a doubt he was waiting for somebody, and the things we thought about him were appalling.

At last there was a sound along the wall. Somebody scrambled over, and Mr. Hunter turned swiftly.

"I'm here, Smiles," he said, in a low voice.

A figure came up, and the two shook hands.

"I don't know what's become of those infernal boys!" said Mr. Hunter, gritting his teeth. "I fancy they have run off into the woods, or they may be even camping out on the moor. By the morning, I have no doubt, they will have had enough of it."

"Are you still searching, sir?" asked Smiles.

"No. What is the use?" snapped Mr. Hunter. "I intend to leave the matter as it stands until the morning. Confound the urchins! Now, Smiles, with regard to those proofs. You've brought them, of course?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but they weren't quite ready," replied the other.

"I gave you strict orders to bring them now!" rapped out Hunter sharply. "This is altogether too bad of you, Smiles. When do you propose to bring them?"

"Well, sir, I thought about midnight—"

Mr. Hunter and his companion had strolled off while they talked, and we didn't hear any more. Not that we wanted to. What we had heard had been quite unintentional. We simply daren't move. But I must admit

that I was relieved to discover that we should have the night to ourselves.

Two minutes later it was safe for us to scoot.

"Come on, my bonny boys!" I breathed exultantly.

And we crept from our place of concealment and slipped across the Triangle to the monastery ruins. The second phase of the great barring-out was about to commence! And I was feeling more confident than ever.

CHAPTER II.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

THE GREAT STRATEGIC RETREAT—"WILLARD'S FOLLY"—THE ISLAND STRONGHOLD.

NINE o'clock boomed out solemnly from the old tower.

Dark figures flitted about the monastery ruins like shadows. I was one of those dark figures, and the others belonged to the remainder of the rebels. In short, we were commencing the great retreat.

Our barring-out had collapsed—but we were now making active preparations for a vigorous renewal. It didn't matter in the slightest where we "barred-out" so long as we did it!

We meant to defy Mr. Hunter, and our resolve was as firm as ever. By leaving the school property we were taking a bold step. But I was quite certain of one thing. Mr. Hunter would be more anxious than ever to bring the rebellion to a finish. He would not welcome the publicity which this new action on our part would bring. It would be to Mr. Hunter's interests to meet our demands promptly.

I had not told the fellows of our destination. Had I done so excitement would have been general, and some of the more enthusiastic spirits might have caused a commotion. So I merely told them to follow me without question.

My own attitude gave them a hint that everything was O.K. Sir Montie and Tommy and I were all looking contented. The others were consumed with curiosity. And they were very eager to follow my lead.

Each fellow carried his mattress and blankets. I had mine slung over my shoulder, and I marched along quickly. I led the way through a gap in the hedge on to the playing fields.

And we all streamed across Little Side in a long procession. If Mr. Hunter could have seen us then, he would have been very astonished. We did not utter a sound, and at last emerged upon the towing-path next to the River Stowe.

The rebels were more curious than ever now. But I did not satisfy their curiosity until we had marched half a mile. Then I set my bundle down and waited. The juniors came up in a crowd and collected round me.

"What's the game?" asked De Valerie.

"I'll just explain, if all you chaps will keep quiet for a bit," I said. "We couldn't talk before, because it wouldn't have been safe.

It was Brewster, of the River House, who suggested this wheeze, and it's a stunning one."

"Blessed if I can see anything stunning in it!" growled Handforth. "A fat lot of sense in coming along to this place, I must say! You ain't suggesting that we should camp out here, are you?"

"No," I replied calmly. "But there's Willard's Island."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Explain yourself, ass!"

"Willard's Island!" I repeated. "We're facing it now, and that's going to be our future home. See the idea? We're going to convert it into a new fortress. We shall be able to defy Hunter to our heart's content!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Souise me!"

"Gee whiz! It's sure some stunt!"

"You're right, Farman, old son," I agreed. "It's the stunt of the season, in fact. The island will be miles better than the monastery ruins. We shall be surrounded by water, and all attacks can be repelled with ease."

"What about grub?" asked Teddy Long anxiously.

"Well, that's a serious question, I'll admit," I replied. "But we can't do two things at once. The first consideration is to get into impregnable quarters—and that's what we're going to do now. Grub can be thought of later."

The juniors were talking excitedly. The idea of converting Willard's Island into a fortress appealed to their schoolboy natures strongly. All their enthusiasm was renewed. For Willard's Island was particularly adaptable for our purpose.

It was not merely a bare island.

From end to end it was only half a mile in extent, and only two hundred yards broad. A few trees grew at either end, but the centre was bare—except for "Willard's Folly."

Now, this place was a half-completed building. It had been erected twenty years before by a cranky chap named Willard. I don't know all the details, but the story was well known at St. Frank's and in the village.

Willard had heaps of money, and he bought the island and conceived the idea of building his own house upon it. And he had queer ideas about houses. If it hadn't been his own money financing the thing, it would never have come to anything. For this "desirable residence" was designed in the style of an old mediæval castle. At either end there were square, imposing turrets, and grim battlements faced upon the river. Built of grey granite, the place was tremendously strong, and large growths of ivy gave the place a wonderfully picturesque appearance.

In the summer time it was photographed dozens of times a week, and it was a favourite "view" for amateur painters. The island was private property, strictly speaking, but everybody had the run of it.

And "Willard's Folly," as the building was called, was exactly the place for us. It was a

miniature affair, of course, the whole ground-plan being no larger than a modern villa residence of the better class.

Owing to the sudden decease of the excellent Mr. Willard, the "castle" had never been finished. The roof had been completed, and, from an exterior point of view, there was nothing more to be done. But the interior was the same to-day as when the builders left it, twenty years before.

The rooms had not been finished; the great hall was a bare, sandy place, with no real flooring. But it was dry, and would provide splendid accommodation for the Rebel Remove.

I explained all this to the eager Removites, and they were in hearty agreement with me. The "Folly" had an added advantage in the fact that it was popularly supposed to be haunted. The simple country-folk would not come near it after dark. But the juniors didn't care a jot. A small party might have been nervous, but we were in such numbers that loneliness could never exist.

"So you see, my dear chaps, the place is A 1 from our point of view," I said. "It's a wonder we didn't think of it before. It is to the credit of a deadly rival—Brewster, of the River House—that he gave us the idea. He only suggested it casually, but I hugged him."

"He deserved it," grinned De Valerie.

"And just think of the advantages," I went on. "The turrets and battlements will be top-hole for defensive purposes. We can line the battlements and keep the enemy at bay until further orders!"

"And the whole place is surrounded by water," added Watson. "By jingo, it's simply ripping. We shall be absolute masters of the place."

"Rather!"

"Begad! It's amazin'ly fine, you know."

"There's a lot of work to be done, though," I said. "Before we start, I suggest having a few turnips——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Back to the simple life, begad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, the turnips will be better than nothing," I said, glad to see the fellows were in the best of humours. "We haven't had any grub all day, and I'm famished, for one."

"Same here!"

"Anything in an emergency," said Handforth. "Of course we shall have to pinch the turnips—but we can easily pay for all we take afterwards. It wouldn't be the thing to steal 'em."

"We'll borrow a few, then," I grinned.

"Come to think of it, I don't suppose they'll be over large at this period, so we shall have to make do with what we can find. I believe there's a field on the other side of the river."

"How are we going to get there?"

"Boats," I replied. "The boat-house is only just along the river, and we shall need half the craft in there. I'm going to send a party along at once—in your charge, Bo'sun. You're the man for that job."

"I reckon I can manage it, messmate," said Burton, nodding.

"Then there's the grub that Brewster and

Co. have got." I went on. "It's just inside Bellton Wood. Three of you will have to be told off to fetch it before long. And we shall have to provide a supply of ammunition of some sort. Oh, there's heaps to be done before we get to bed."

The Bo'sun soon started off on his mission. He took ten fellows with him, and they were soon along with the boats. We bundled our bedding in and rowed across to the island in batches. The distance wasn't far, although the river was broad at this point.

Having taken formal possession, as it were, we felt more comfortable. The Remove Revolutionary Army was occupying captured territory, and the only thing which was really worrying me was the great food problem.

I'm afraid we made terrible havoc of somebody's turnip-field. But we were prepared to make full compensation for our depredations, and certainly intended doing so later on. So our consciences were clear.

The turnips were tiny, but quite eatable, and they seemed very appetising. But regular meals of this sort were impossible. A supply of proper food was absolutely imperative, and the point was constantly worrying me. Turnips would do for once, but not for more than once.

We were not disappointed in the castle. It was dry and comfortable, considering, and would certainly provide all the shelter we needed. We only hoped that the spell of dry weather would continue.

Brewster's supply of food proved to be worth having—biscuits, for the most part. They were very welcome after the turnips, and the whole lot were rationed out. Each fellow had a decent handful, and we munched at these contentedly.

With rare thoughtfulness, the River House fellows had included seven pounds of candles in their parcels. These weren't food, of course, but Brewster had known that we should be in want of lighting materials rather urgently.

We couldn't have more than one or two burning, and these had to be carefully shaded, for we had no wish to attract unwelcome attention. But by their light Tubbs saw to the bed-making and such-like. The hall of the castle made quite a splendid dormitory. It was dry and the windows were mere narrow slits, so that the absence of frames and glass did not matter so much. I felt thankful that the bygone Mr. Willard had not had cranky ideas about wide windows.

Every rebel had his own bed—thanks to my forethought. We should have been suffering great discomforts had we neglected to bring our mattresses and blankets. Tubbs, of course, was without one, but he was allowed to use one of the vacant ones—when its owner was on watch. For several beds were always empty.

I remembered that our spirit stoves and kettles and other utensils were still in the monastery ruins, Mr. Hunter being too worried about our disappearance to have them shifted. Tommy Watson volunteered to

fetch them, and he and Hubbard and Tubbs went off on the errand. This was really important, for we might want to use the things later on.

By the time they got back everything was in readiness. The beds were made, and we were in complete possession of the island. Several boats were drawn up on the banks, and we felt amazingly secure. There was a feeling of freedom abroad which had a strengthening effect upon the fellows. In the monastery ruins we had always felt more or less cooped up. But that feeling was gone now. We were occupying an island of our own.

I had been rather worried about the ammunition question. It wasn't really so important here as it had been in our former fortress. A number of long poles were prepared under my guidance. With these we could keep off any number of invading boats. But, at the same time, I felt that something else was necessary.

We had used some patent fire extinguishers on one occasion, and this put an idea into my head. Bellton—the village—had recently been provided with a brand new fire-engine. No; I wasn't thinking of pinching that. But this new affair had replaced an old one, and the latter was still in decent working order.

There had been a serious fire on the far outskirts of the village some weeks before, and the old fire-engine had been too small to cope with the flames. Thus the new one. I knew that the discarded engine was housed in a shed just on the outskirts of the village, and that it was not likely to be requisitioned for any purpose. It was one of those hand-worked affairs, and quite efficient in its way.

There were five or six hoses, and a large pipe up which the main supply was drawn. With the river all round us, this instrument would be easily workable, for we had water in plenty.

And realising that preparedness was a great thing, I determined to fetch the fire-engine over at once. With half-a-dozen hoses, all playing their hardest, we should be able to keep a whole army at bay.

There were many expressions of approval when I suggested the idea; but, as I had expected, some objections as well.

"It's all right," said Owen major, "but how the dickens are we going to get it over here? I suppose you've overlooked that point?"

"Not at all," I replied. "It'll ride on one of the boats quite easily, once we get it aboard. It's not a very big thing, after all. The chief difficulty will be in getting it out of its shed without attracting attention—but we shall have to risk that. Anyhow, I suggest we start at once."

We did. I left De Valerie in charge of the island, and took fifteen rebels with me. We pulled over to the bank in two boats, and set off across the fields. I led the way to the old fire-engine shed from the rear, so that we should not appear on the road at all. There was a meadow at the back of the shed, and it would be easy enough to

haul the old apparatus over the grass without making any noise.

The doors of the shed were old, and the fastenings older, if possible. At all events, we had the place open within a couple of minutes. Everything was found handy, and we lost no time. We lifted the fire-engine out bodily, for I didn't want the wheels to crunch on the gravel. And, somehow or other, we got it on to the grass. Then we closed the shed again and triumphantly bore our booty away—without having attracted the slightest notice.

We undoubtedly experienced great difficulty in getting the rickety old thing across the water. On two occasions it nearly overbalanced and went to the bottom. But, after much manipulation, it was safely landed. I wasn't satisfied until it had been placed securely in position and had been tested.

Ammunition was now unnecessary. Our defences were of the very finest, for cold water has a most depressing effect upon an attacking force.

And now only one problem remained—but that was the most serious of all. Food! If it hadn't been for this worry the Remove Revolutionary Army would have been in the highest possible spirits. Even as it was, we were optimistic. The knowledge that our new position was far superior to our old caused general satisfaction.

And the majority of the fellows were too tired to worry much about grub. They would do all that in the morning! Practically everybody went to bed, acting upon my advice. But, although I knew that Mr. Hunter was taking no action to-night, I decided that a watch must be kept.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson and I kept the first watch. Everybody else went to sleep. We perched ourselves on the low battlements and sat there chatting. At the end of two hours we should be relieved by De Valerie and Griffith and Church. This watch-keeping was troublesome, but important.

"Everything is simply toppin', dear old fellows," murmured Sir Montie. "But really, I'm frightfully worried about the food. I've been rackin' my brain in the most appallin' fashion, but it's no good."

"Something will have to be done," I declared. "If it comes to it, we shall have to adopt drastic measures."

"Such as what?"

"Well, we could raid the Ancient House storeroom again," I replied. "Without any proper food to-morrow, we should be desperate enough for that by night time. And if there wasn't enough grub there, we could have a go at the College House. Anyhow, we're not going to throw up the sponge. By Cæsar! after all we've been through, it would be madness to surrender now!"

"But the chaps won't be so determined as we are, you know," said Montie. "They'll be frightfully hungry to-morrow—"

"Hallo!" whispered Watson suddenly. "What's that over there?"

He was staring intently down the river. Tregellis-West and I followed the direction of his gaze, but we could see nothing re-

markable. Two hundred yards down the stream there was another island—but this was a very tiny affair. It contained nothing but a number of high trees, and was practically never visited by a soul. It was picturesque, but nothing more, being only thirty yards in length.

"I can't see anything," I whispered at last.

"Over by the bank," said Watson intently. "I could swear I saw something moving. There you are! Just look at that!"

Tommy Watson was not wrong. A man's figure was moving close against a clump of willows. He seemed to bend down, and a moment later a small boat shot out from the bank and pulled steadily over to the tiny islet. We watched in considerable astonishment.

What was the meaning of this night mystery?

CHAPTER III.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLLOW TREE—OTTO REINHARDT AGAIN—PROMPT ACTION.

A SUDDEN suspicion occurred to me as I gazed at the mysterious boat.

"I say," I whispered softly, "I wonder if that chap's Hunter?"

"Hunter?" repeated Watson. "Rot! More likely some giddy poacher——"

"There aren't any poachers about here, you ass," I murmured. "It's just about midnight—practically on the tick—and don't you remember that Hunter was to meet that chap Smiles at twelve o'clock?"

"Yes, but not here," objected Watson.

"We don't know where," I replied. "They walked off before we could catch that. Of course I may be wrong, but I'm jolly suspicious. In fact I've a jolly good mind to slip down to the island and see what's going on."

My chums did not seem very enthusiastic. But I knew that De Valerie would be quite willing to take up the watch-keeping if I asked him. And Yakama would keep him company, Yakama being an obliging little beggar.

I had every reason to suspect Mr. Hunter of sinister doings. Originally I had merely thought that he was a particularly brutal specimen of a schoolmaster. But I now knew positively well that he was up to some shady game. What the exact nature of this was I couldn't tell.

Nelson Lee, who had been the Housemaster of the Ancient House—under the name of Mr. Alvington—had left the school on some special Secret Service work. Mr. Hunter had come down in his place.

It wasn't long before I had learned that the gov'nor was still in the neighbourhood, and that his chief quarry was Hunter himself.

There was a deal of mystery connected with the affair. Hunter was concerned in some way with a number of queer individuals who

seemed to be in occupation of the old quarry workings. At least he had met people at night in disguise.

On two occasions I and my chums had penetrated the tunnels from the old vault under the monastery, and had met with exciting adventures. Once Nelson Lee had chased a fellow along the tunnel, and had captured him. He turned out to be a German named Lieutenant Otto Reinhardt—a prisoner of war who had escaped from internment some months earlier.

The very next night Montie and Tommy and I had gone exploring. We had found an extraordinary cavern underground, where electric lights were burning and where machinery was buzzing. But, owing to a mishap, we had been captured before we could discover anything. And we had been cast into a small cell.

This chap, Otto Reinhardt, had visited us, and had carelessly left the door ajar upon leaving. So we had slipped out—only to find the German waiting for us along the tunnel. He hadn't said a word, but he had pointed towards the vault significantly. And he had winked at me!

About five minutes afterwards an amazing thought had struck me: in fact I seriously believed that Reinhardt had really been Nelson Lee in disguise. The gov'nor was impersonating the man he had captured—that's what I thought.

I couldn't be sure of it, and I hadn't troubled much. There had been such excitement since that I had had very little time to think about the matter at all. But now, in these leisure moments, I was again exerting my wits.

The fellow Smiles, who had met Hunter in the Triangle, was a stranger, but I had an idea that his voice seemed familiar. I suspected that he had been in that cavern during our visit. And I was very keen upon investigating further. A mystery always attracts me—that's only natural, I suppose—and this one was particularly interesting.

"Well, what about it?" I whispered, after a short silence.

"We can't leave this place to look after itself," objected Watson. "Besides, I don't suppose the chap's got anything to do with Hunter——"

"We can rout out De Valerie and Yakama," I murmured. "No need to tell 'em much—we can say that we believe we saw Hunter. That's true enough, anyhow. I'm rather keen on this, my sons."

Sir Montie yawned.

"Any old thing," he said languidly. "We won't desert you, Benny—we're your pals, you know."

"Oh, all right!" growled Watson.

I slipped down and awoke De Valerie and Yakama, while Tregellis-West and Watson got one of the boats ready. De Valerie was rather grumpy, but I couldn't blame him for that. Once fully awake, he was quite agreeable, and Yakama offered no objection at all.

Three minutes later my chums and I slid away from our shore and drifted silently

with the current down to the other island. The night was very black, and I had no particular fear of being seen.

The nose of our boat slipped in amongst the reeds and thudded softly against the bank. I hopped out without a sound, and made the painter fast to a jutting root, but I tied it in such a way that it could be released with one tug. Sir Montie and Tommy crept out after me. But the next second I stopped abruptly.

"Hist!" I breathed.

There had been a movement in the centre of the islet, and the sound of stealthy footsteps came to our ears. Then a figure appeared. It walked to the bank and got into a small boat which was moored there.

And the figure was that of Mr. Kennedy Hunter!

I knew that I was not mistaken; and my chums, too, saw that my surmise had been correct. What had Mr. Hunter been doing on this little island? Obviously, he hadn't visited it at this time of the night for the mere pleasure of doing so.

After he had gone I meant to have a thorough search round. We crouched low while he cast off and pulled out across the current, which was quite sluggish. We waited, watching Mr. Hunter's progress.

He was going slowly. Once he paused, as though undecided. Then, with a sudden burst of activity, he turned the boat round and came rowing back to the island.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" murmured Tommy Watson.

"Dry up, ass!" I breathed. "He's forgotten something, I expect."

The boat soon arrived. Again it was moored, and Mr. Hunter stepped out and walked up the rather steep slope to the centre of the island. There were plenty of bushes about, and I crept forward with interest.

I saw Mr. Hunter reach the stump of a big tree. At one time it must have been quite a noble specimen, but was now a gaunt trunk, with one or two bare, jutting branches. Mr. Hunter, to my astonishment, climbed up, moved about for a moment or two, and then gradually disappeared.

He had descended into the centre of the trunk, proving that it was hollow. But what on earth could be his object in doing such an extraordinary thing? I crept nearer, and not a sound came to my ears.

"Did you see?" I breathed, turning my head.

"Begad, rather!" murmured Montie. "It's amazin', old boy!"

"What's he doing in there?" asked Watson curiously.

"I'm going to find out, if possible," I said. "You chaps stay here, while I creep forward. And be ready to scoot to cover when I give you the tip."

Without making the slightest sound, I stole forward until I was within a few feet of the hollow tree-trunk. I paused, listening. Still there was no sound, and my wonderment increased. What was Mr.

Hunter doing inside this strange tree? I began to think he was not there at all. The silence was uncanny. And then, in a flash, I got a glimmering of the truth.

Perhaps there was a big hollow space beneath the ground! At all events, it was fairly obvious that Mr. Hunter was not within the trunk—unless he was keeping astonishingly silent.

I determined to decide the point.

With a quick impulse I ran lightly forward, grasped the handy branches, and hauled myself up. Then I peered down into the wide, hollow space. It was quite empty! Mr. Hunter was certainly not there.

Again I acted recklessly. I hauled out my torch, and cast the light down into the blackness. The beam played upon some roughly-hewn steps! They led straight down into the earth, and I simply gasped with astonishment. I switched the light off, but hung there, listening, and doing my utmost to collect my thoughts.

There could be only one explanation of this astounding business. The tree-trunk concealed an exit. An exit from what? Without a doubt, the mysterious cavern which I and my chums had visited the previous night! I made a rough, rapid calculation, and reckoned that some portions of the passages and tunnels would penetrate right beneath the river.

This exit, no doubt, led straight downwards—passing beneath the river bed. There was nothing really surprising in this, for the ground was hard and rocky, and there was no reason why the shaft should not be quite dry—in spite of the fact that the river ran above it.

At the same time it was sufficiently remarkable to cause me real amazement. I longed to creep down and investigate further. But just then I was warned in a decided manner.

Voices sounded, and I dropped quickly to the ground. The effect of those voices, coming up from the bowels of the earth, was rather uncanny. But I was not a nervous chap, and was now quivering with inward excitement.

I reached my chums in a moment, and hauled them behind a clump of thick bushes.

"There's a stairway or something," I breathed. "It seems to lead right down into the earth. But don't make a sound—Hunter's just coming up with somebody else."

Tommy and Montie badly wanted to ask questions, but they refrained. And we waited there tensely. It was possible to see through the bushes, and we watched. Mr. Hunter emerged first, and behind him came another figure.

"I see not t'e reason for pringing me up—"

"I wish to ask you some questions, Reinhardt—that is all," came Mr. Hunter's voice. "We can't talk in that dripping tunnel."

I quivered with excitement now. Reinhardt! So the second man was the mysterious in-

dividual who had helped us to escape the previous night. Was he Nelson Lee, or had my surmise been wrong?

To my keen disappointment the two stood at the foot of the hollow trunk and conversed in such low tones that it was impossible to hear what they were saying. But I could judge, from Mr. Hunter's tone of voice and his gesticulations, that he was suspicious of something.

He was angry, and once his voice rose almost loudly. Then came a short silence, followed by some words spoken by Reinhardt. The two again conversed, and my exasperation increased. I seriously thought about creeping nearer; but realised in time that such a move would have been fatal.

And then something astounding happened—something which took my breath away.

Without the slightest warning Mr. Hunter flung himself at his companion. The attack was so abrupt that Reinhardt was unprepared. I saw something flash, and then followed a dull, heavy thud.

Reinhardt fell headlong without a sound. He had been brutally stunned—either by the butt-end of a revolver or a stick. I half believed that the flash I had seen had been caused by the silver-mounted knob of a heavy walking stick.

I commenced jumping up, with the full intention of rushing to the attack. But Montie and Tommy grabbed me and held me down.

"Wait, dear fellow, wait!" breathed Tregilla-West.

His advice was sound, and I took it.

We all waited, and saw Mr. Hunter bending over his victim. I suppose I had been so impulsive because I suspected that the fallen man was Nelson Lee. Mr. Hunter crouched over him, breathing hard.

"Pah! I tripped you up, you dog!" I heard him mutter.

This was a nice kind of Housemaster! If anything could have strengthened my resolve to defy Mr. Hunter this incident had done so. I firmly determined at that second to rebel until Hunter was driven from St. Frank's.

By a great effort of will I remained still. Hunter fumbled in his pockets, and then produced something. I couldn't see what it was, but easily guessed that it was string. For he busied himself first with the unconscious man's feet, and then with his hands.

This gave me some satisfaction. It proved that Reinhardt was only slightly stunned. Mr. Hunter feared that he would recover his senses in a very short time. But I was wrong, after all.

Having bound his prisoner, Mr. Hunter stood upright. He hesitated a moment, and then quickly mounted into the tree-trunk and dropped inside.

"He's gone!" whispered Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"Yes, and I know why!" I muttered.

"Well, why?"

"To fetch help, of course—it's obvious."

"I can't see—"

"That's why he bound the chap," I went

on. "If he comes to while Mr. Hunter's absent he won't be able to get away. And Hunter couldn't lift him up into that tree alone, could he?"

"Begad, no!"

"So he's gone to fetch help," I went on. "By Jupiter, I've a good mind to act at once—"

I paused, rather startled by my own thoughts.

"What's the idea, Benny?" whispered Sir Montie.

"I don't know what to do—I'm worried!" I muttered, clenching my fists. "This chap may be the gov'nor, or he may be a beastly Hun! I was thinking of carrying him away—"

"Do it, old boy!" said Sir Montie promptly. "We can make sure afterwards!"

"By Caesar, I will!" I declared. "Come on!"

We ran forward hurriedly. The man was lying upon his back. And even as we bent over him his eyes flickered, and I knew that consciousness was returning. But he was still too dazed to know what was happening.

For all I knew, Mr. Hunter would return within a minute. To question the man, or to examine him, would waste precious time. I seized his feet and my chums took his shoulders.

Quickly, clumsily, we staggered down the slope to the top end of the island. One heave, and our captive was bundled over the gunwale of the boat. We followed, and I wrenched the painter free.

"Now, then, all together!" I panted.

We pushed off, and I shipped the oars and commenced rowing silently and steadily. Whether we had acted rightly or wrongly, we had done the trick. We had taken Mr. Hunter's victim away, and our strange Housemaster would be completely mystified.

And now I was anxious to examine the captive.

What would that examination reveal?

CHAPTER IV.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

THE GOV'NOR IS PLEASED—AN EXCITING CHASE
—MR MONTIE GOES DOTTY.

LIEUTENANT OTTO REINHARDT shifted uneasily as he lay at the bottom of the boat. He was just at Sir Montie's feet, his head resting against my elegant chum's knees.

As I was rowing, I could see them plainly, since I was facing them. I rowed steadily and as quietly as possible. Bearing in mind that this mysterious business was quite an affair of our own, I did not wish to return to our stronghold immediately. Accordingly I whispered to Tommy Watson, who was steering, to direct us towards the main river bank.

"That—that chap's coming round!" breathed Watson huskily.

"Yes, so I can see," I replied. "But we can't stop just here—wait until we get into the dead water."

The river was broad at this point, and near the banks the current was practically imperceptible. Reeds grew out of the water, and the whole place was somewhat marshy and in the nature of a swamp.

Once out of the main current, the boat slid noiselessly through the dark, still water. I quietly unshipped the oars and bent forward. The boat was now lying practically motionless. The darkness closed us in on every side, and Willard's Island was just a dim blotch up the river.

Even now I wasn't quite sure whether I had done right. If this fellow actually was a German I should be half sorry that I hadn't left him to the gentle mercies of Mr. Hunter. It was some consolation to know that he was bound and helpless.

"Who are you?" I whispered, bending over him.

"Fathead!" whispered Tommy Watson. "He ain't awake yet!"

But, even as Tommy spoke, the bound man's eyelids lifted, and I could dimly see his eyes searching my face. For a moment they expressed bewilderment, but then intelligence revealed itself.

"Who are you?" I repeated softly.

The man didn't answer; he merely continued to stare. I judged that he was waiting until he had regained full possession of his wits. But I was impatient—I was anxious.

And so I bent even closer, and felt the man's stubbly moustache. One touch was sufficient—it was false!"

"Great Scott!" I breathed. "You're—you're——"

"Well, go on, young 'un!" whispered our captive huskily.

"The guv'nor!" I gasped.

"And a very grateful guv'nor, too, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee, struggling into a sitting posture. "'Pon my soul, boys, you have pulled me out of a particularly ugly predicament. Bravo, lads!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "It's amazin'!"

I simply quivered with delight.

"I suspected it all along, sir," I whispered, kneeling down on the boards. "Ever since you released us from the cells in the cavern I guessed that you weren't Reinhardt! And when Hunter knocked you down I was certain of it."

"So that is why you brought me off the island, eh?" said Nelson Lee, his voice becoming steady. "Excellent, Nipper. The boot is on the other foot now—with a vengeance!"

"What do you mean, sir?" I breathed.

"My dear lad, I have pulled you and your enterprising chums out of two or three awkward holes recently," said the guv'nor. "You have now had the opportunity of returning the compliment. I should have got into very serious trouble if you had not acted with such commendable promptitude."

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

Nelson Lee raised his bound wrists to his head, and rubbed his fingers tenderly through his hair.

"I can assure you, Nipper, a blow of that description is not exactly pleasant," he replied drily. "Yes, I am hurt—my head is throbbing like an overworked petrol-engine even now. You'll find some brandy in my hip-pocket."

I fished round for it instantly, requesting Watson to cut through the guv'nor's bonds at the same time. Tommy obeyed with alacrity, and I helped Nelson Lee to a liberal dose of brandy.

"Ah, that's better!" he said, after a moment or two. "There's nothing much wrong with me, lads. It only shows the great advantage of possessing a skull as thick as a nigger's!"

The guv'nor was practically himself again by now. He seated himself in the orthodox fashion—the boat-bottom providing a somewhat undignified resting-place. I knew that he was making light of his injury, and I guessed that his head was aching in the most agonising fashion.

"Yes, boys, I must thank you very sincerely for your timely aid," he went on. "In spite of my care, Mr. Hunter got the better of me. I was half-expecting trouble, but did not think that Hunter would spring upon me so abruptly."

"What did he whack you with, sir?" asked Watson.

"Really, Watson, I don't know—but the object was quite hard enough for my liking," replied Nelson Lee. "But I am naturally curious upon one point. Why, in the name of all that's wonderful, are you young rascals wandering about the river at this unearthly hour? I thought you were strongly entrenched in the monastery ruins."

"Oh, a lot's happened since then, guv'nor," I explained. "But I'm anxious about you; I want to know heaps of things——"

"I am afraid I cannot explain much," interposed the guv'nor. "You have guessed, of course, it was I who gave you your liberty down in the old tunnels. I have been amusing myself by impersonating the excellent Herr Reinhardt, and my little deception was not questioned until— Well, perhaps I'd better not say."

"Oh, rot!" I protested. "Go on, sir!"

"I merely wish to spare your feelings, boys," smiled "Old Alvy." "To be quite frank, my little attentions in releasing you from that cave brought suspicion upon my head."

"Then—then we gave the show away?" I gasped.

"Not wholly, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Hunter learned that I had been 'careless' in leaving the cell door open, and he became uncomfortably suspicious. Tonight he taxed me severely, and I am afraid I did not satisfy him. In a nutshell, he suspects that I am not Reinhardt."

"But he doesn't know who you really are, sir?" I asked.

"Dear me, no!" replied the guv'nor.

"Hunter really knows nothing—he was only suspicious. And I don't think he will take fright and run away."

"I wish he would!" grunted Tommy Watson.

"My plans would be considerably upset if Mr. Hunter fled," said Nelson Lee gravely. "You must carry on just a little longer, boys. You won't be troubled with Mr. Hunter for much longer. His reign at St. Frank's will shortly terminate very abruptly. Good gracious, at this rate you will soon know as much about the whole mystery as I do myself!"

"Why, we don't know anything, guv'nor," I declared.

"So much the better, Nipper," said Lee. "You may save yourself the trouble of questioning me, for I really cannot answer you. You must have patience. But you have not explained your presence——"

"We're camping out on Willard's Island, sir," I put in. "Hunter won't consider our terms, and so we're holding out against him. I hope it isn't making your job any harder?"

"It really affects my task very slightly, Nipper," replied the guv'nor, to my relief. "The manner in which Mr. Hunter conducts the Ancient House is quite a minor affair. In one way your rebellion may assist me."

"Begad! How, sir?"

"Mr. Hunter is worried, and a worried man, Montie, is liable to make slips," replied Nelson Lee shrewdly. "Hunter is extremely foolish to quarrel with the Remove. But, having driven you to this stage of revolt, he naturally wishes to gain the upper hand. For him to give in would be a complete acknowledgment of weakness—and I don't think Mr. Hunter can be accused of that failing, whatever his other faults."

"Well, we're not going to knuckle under, sir," I said grimly.

Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"You'll have to fight it out for yourselves, you young rascals," he said. "On no account let the other boys know that you have seen me. I am completely ignorant of this barring-out, remember. I know nothing about it. I think you get my meaning, boys?"

"Rather, sir," I said. "But what are you going to do——"

"Hush!" interjected Lee suddenly.

We all remained quiet, and then I noticed a queer, throbbing sound. Just for a second I believed that it was caused by a passing motor-car; but, somehow, I wasn't satisfied. And then I caught a glimpse of something black coming swiftly up the river.

"By Jupiter!" I breathed. "A motor-boat!"

Nelson Lee became rigid.

"Quick, boys!" he exclaimed tensely. "Row for all you are worth! We have been dallying too long. I did not bargain for this motor-boat appearing on the scene. We shall be overtaken——"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "Look alive, old boys!"

Even as I fumbled for the oars I dimly

saw the motor-boat draw in towards the little islet. And then Mr. Hunter leapt on board. At least, a figure did so, and I naturally assumed that it was Mr. Hunter's. He had discovered the loss of his prisoner and was coming in pursuit.

"Does the motor boat belong to the—the—gang——"

"Of course it does, lad," said Lee sharply. "Here, give me the oars!"

But I wouldn't let the guv'nor take them. He wasn't exactly fit, and, besides, I knew the river intimately, having spent many hours upon its waters. And I knew that the chase was going to be a stern one.

"Round, Tommy—round!" I breathed urgently.

Watson, who was steering, stared at me.

"But—but we shall run slap into the rotters——"

"You ass!" I hissed. "We can't hope to outdistance a motor-boat against the current! My idea is to shoot round the other side of the island and then buzz down the river. While the motor-boat's coming up here we'll be scooting——"

"Oh, I see!" gasped Watson.

"An excellent plan, Nipper!" murmured the guv'nor.

We shot away rapidly, and I helped Watson to turn by means of the oars. Within a few seconds we were hidden from the motor-boat by the trees of the islet, and then we skimmed along in fine style.

My trick, however, was discovered!

Even as we shot past the end of the islet and emerged into the broad river I saw the motor-boat racing down towards us. In that instant I knew that escape was impossible. We were being overhauled hand over fist.

But I pulled at the oars desperately. Mr. Hunter had not recognised us, even though he had spotted the boat. He didn't know who we were, and he couldn't be certain that "Reinhardt" was aboard.

Within two minutes, however, we should be overhauled. And then——

"By Caesar!" I gasped excitedly. "I've got it!"

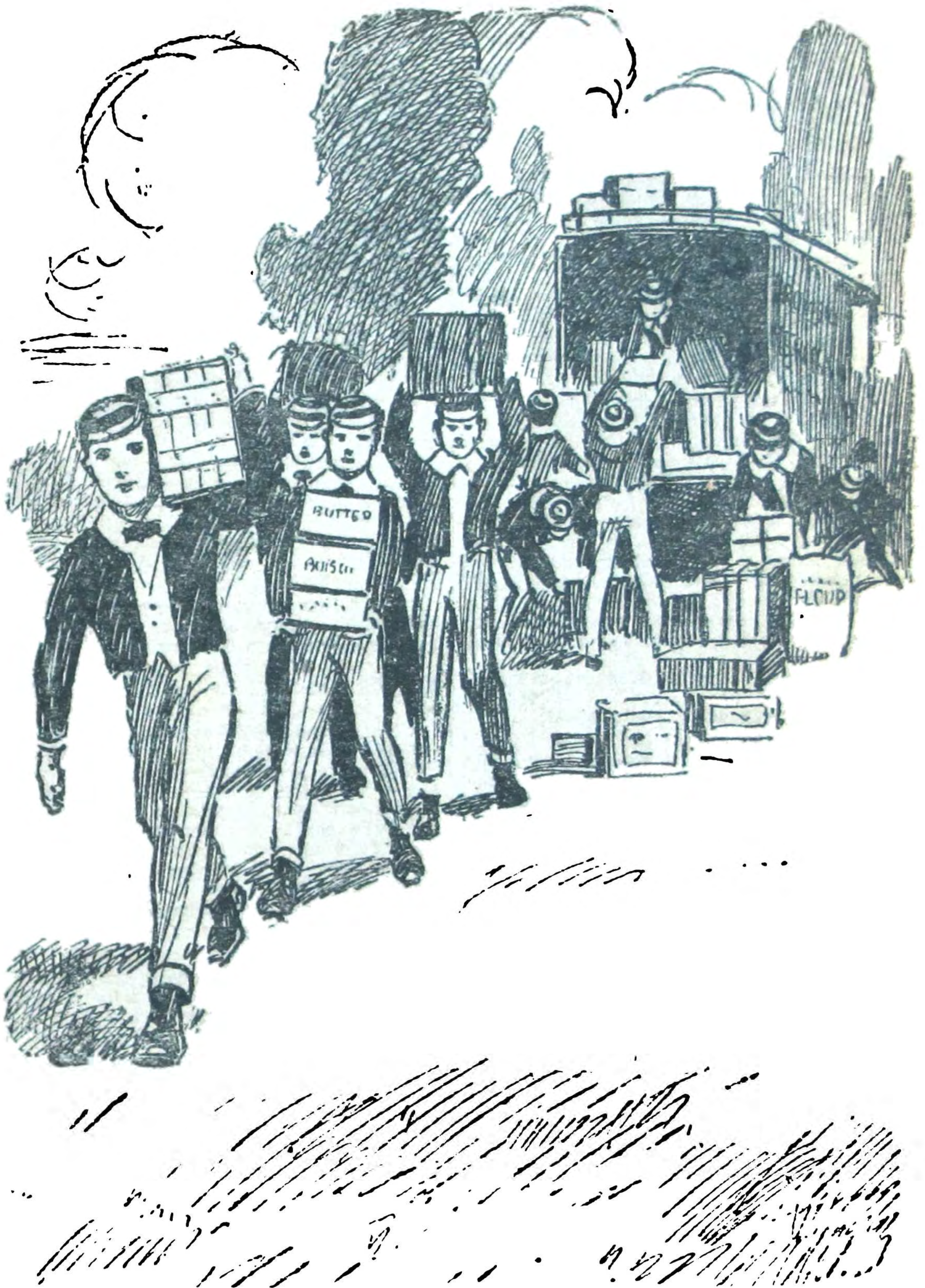
Nelson Lee gave me a sharp look. He had been ready to speak, but he checked himself. In all probability he had been about to suggest steering for the bank, for by taking to our legs we should stand a better chance of escaping.

If it had been a mere question of a scrap I should have faced the pursuers with great pleasure. But we were all anxious to get away without being positively recognised. That was the main reason for our flight.

And, although the motor-boat was coming along like a greyhound overhauling a lame poodle, I still kept straight ahead, in the very centre of the current. I took a hasty glance over my shoulder.

"A couple of points to the left, Tommy—your left I mean," I panted.

I was facing the stern, of course, and rowing with all my strength. I could see the



Nipper obtains a fortnight's supply of food for the Remove Revolutionary Army.—(See page 19)

motor-boat racing along towards us. Somebody was standing up in the well of the little vessel, and I recognised the figure of Mr. Hunter.

"You'll never do it, young 'un," said Nelson Lee quietly. "We shall have the enemy alongside within another half-minute——"

"It's all right, guv'nor," I gasped. "You wait!"

"Begad! It's amazin'—it is, really," remarked Sir Montie. "We shall be havin' a ripplin' scrap in a minute, you know—a frightful battle, begad!"

I set my teeth, and rowed harder than ever.

The boat was a light one, and I made it fairly hiss through the still water. The river was like a mill-pond here. Just ahead it narrowed, and then gave a sharp turn before the Belton bridge was sighted.

We all crouched low, in order to avoid recognition. The pursuing boat was terribly near. It raced up, overhauling us rapidly. The beat of the small engine was steady. I could see Mr. Hunter leaning forward——

"By Jupiter!" I muttered exultantly.

The others stared round, but they were too late to see what I had seen. Mr. Hunter, without warning, had pitched forward, and had tumbled into the bows. And now the tables were turned; we were speeding away from the motor-boat—for the latter was stationary, and the engine was racing to no purpose.

"Great Scott!" gasped Watson. "What's happened?"

I eased up somewhat, and grinned.

"I thought we should just do it," I said breathlessly. "This boat doesn't draw a foot of water, but that heavy motor-boat does! Have you forgotten the shallows—where old Handforth got stuck the other week?"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "What a ripplin' wheeze!"

Nelson Lee nodded approvingly. My little trick had succeeded, and there was no longer any fear of pursuit. The motor-boat was stuck fast—in the mud! It will thus be seen that my strenuous efforts had not been in vain; I was not quite so dotty as Sir Montie and Tommy had believed.

I had deliberately lured the pursuers into a trap. They didn't know the river so well as I did, and this lack of knowledge on their part had led them to disaster. My heart had been in my mouth for the first moment or two, for there had been a possibility of my falling into my own trap. But we had skimmed over the shallow portion safely. The heavier motor-boat, as we had seen, had not succeeded. She had struck the mud-bank so abruptly that Mr. Hunter had been pitched forward, and now was held fast.

As we continued our course I heard the engine racing frantically. They were trying to reverse.

"They'll never do it," I said comfortably.

"The boat rammed on to the mud at such a pace that a dozen men with a rope will be

necessary to pull her clear—unless she's lightened. I don't fancy Mr. Hunter or the others will care to swim ashore."

"I think we had better make straight back, boys," said Nelson Lee. "Steer to the other side of the river, and hug the bank. The overhanging trees will conceal us, and if they keep that engine going we certainly shan't be heard. With luck we shall get past unobserved."

This was a distinctly good idea, and we immediately put it into practice. As I've mentioned, the river was very broad here, and by pulling over to the other side and by rowing up-current, we should pass the motor-boat within a minute or two. Heavy trees lined this bank, and the darkness was pitchy. We should not be seen, and only heard if the engine was stopped. And when the enemy succeeded in getting clear of the mud—even if he could do so—he would continue headlong down the river, thinking we had gone that way.

The manœuvre was performed with great success. We got past beautifully, and five minutes later we heard the engine stop. It was probably overworked. At all events we had diddled Mr. Hunter splendidly. Nelson Lee called a halt when we sighted the dim bulk of Willard's Island.

"I will leave you here, boys," said Nelson Lee softly. "Just pull into the bank. Let me thank you again for your very timely——"

"Oh, rats, Mr.!" I interrupted. "We didn't do much, after all. Where are you going to now? When shall we see you again?"

"I am afraid both questions will have to remain unanswered, Nipper," replied Lee. "It is quite possible, however, that you will see quite a lot of me in the near future. This case is most interesting, but it is drawing to a close. As regards yourselves, you must fight out your battle with Mr. Hunter as best you can. Although I ought to be very severe with you, I wish you every success in your revolutionary campaign!"

"Good old guv'nor!" I grinned. "We'll win!"

But I was a little worried regarding Nelson Lee's future movements. I badly wanted to know the actual game. I had my suspicions, of course, but they were by no means tangible.

We set Nelson Lee ashore, and I was rather glad that we couldn't see him distinctly. He sounded himself, but he looked like Reinhardt. And it was good to hear the guv'nor's voice.

"Good-bye, boys," he whispered. "Get back to your island, and don't move from it to-night. If that motor-boat comes by, lie low."

With that he turned and walked silently away. And we pulled up to our island stronghold and hauled the boat on to the grassy bank.

De Valerie and Yakama were faithfully on the watch, and they were curious when we made our way up to them.

"Where the deuce have you been?" asked De Valerie, staring at us.

"Oh, up the river," I replied carelessly.

"What was that motor-boat?"

"I don't know whom it belonged to," I replied truthfully. "But old Hunter was in it, and we diddled him beautifully."

And I told Yakama and De Valerie of the incident—without mentioning the gov'nor, of course. They assumed that Hunter had been merely looking for us, and they were greatly delighted when they heard of my trick.

"It was the esteemed wheezy joke," murmured Yakama approvingly. "Your brain is of the most astounding quality, my wonderful Bennett. Mr. Hunter was in receipt of the stupendous and extraordinary shock. It is beautiful!"

"Oh, better than that!" grinned De Valerie. "Well, ain't you chaps going to get any sleep?"

"Yes, it's time for Handforth and McClure and Church to come up," I replied. "Just give the bounders a dig, will you? Tommy and Montie and I will stay up here until we're relieved."

"Good!" yawned De Valerie. "I'm ready for my little cot again."

He and Yakama left the battlements and descended the curious stone staircase to the "dormitory." My chums yawned widely.

"Didn't think I was tired before," said Watson sleepily. "It's the reaction, I suppose. My hat! I can do with some sleep now. What price breakfast in the morning?"

"Dear fellow, it's priceless!" said Sir Montie. "No money could buy it, because I'm frightfully afraid we shan't have any breakfast, begad! It's a sad outlook, an' I'm shockin'ly worried."

I grunted.

"Not so worried as I am," I replied. "This thing's getting on my nerves, my sons. We're an army without grub—and I'm hanged if I can see what we're going to do. I think I shall let to-morrow take care of itself and get some sleep."

I glanced at my watch.

"Twenty past one," I went on. "By jingo, we're keeping awfully bad hours. And this is the first of the month, too. We ought to be starting well, instead of badly——"

Tregellis-West suddenly gave a gasp.

"Benny boy!" he breathed. "Do—do you mean that to-morrow's the first of the month? I forget the bally dates—I do, really!"

"It's to-morrow already, in a way of speaking," I replied. "But what's the matter with you, you ass?"

I could see Montie's eyes shining triumphantly.

"The first of the month—the first of the merry old month!" he chanted. "Begad! The first of the month!"

And, to the utter amazement of Tommy Watson and myself, the usually sedate Sir Montie cast all his reserve aside, and proceeded to execute a particularly violent war-dance upon the battlements!

CHAPTER V.

(The narrative continued by Nipper.)

THE WHEEZE OF THE SEASON—GRUB IN PLENTY
—READY FOR ANYTHING.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST continued his mad capers tirelessly.

"You—you silly idiot!" said Watson in an undertone. "What the dickens do you think you're having a game at?"

"The first of the month—the first of the month!" sang Sir Montie in triumph.

"Great pip!" gasped Watson. "This giddy food question has turned his brain, Benny! I knew he was an ass, but I never thought he was weak in the upper storey! He's as crazy as a March hare!"

"Rats!" I said calmly. "Montie's thought of a wheeze. Don't you know the signs? I don't suppose it'll be much good——"

Sir Montie ceased his war-dance abruptly.

"Not much good, Benny boy?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "My dear old fellow, it's simply the wheeze of the season. We're goin' to have a rippin' breakfast. We're goin' to collar enough grub to last us for weeks!"

"Oh, he's clean off his rocker!" said Watson decidedly.

"It's frightfully hard to be accused of lunacy by my own chum, begad!" sighed Tregellis-West. "But I'm sane enough—I am, really. It's awfully bad form to praise up one's own ideas, but I deserve it. I've thought of the finest scheme for gettin' grub that could possibly be imagined."

"Well, let's hear it," I said crisply. "Don't keep us in suspense."

"This watch-keeping is absolutely petty," growled a sleepy, grumpy voice. "Why the dickens can't we all go to sleep? There's no fear of——"

"Shut up, Handy!" said McClure's voice. "You don't mind taking your fair whack, I suppose? We shall be in bed again in less than two hours."

Handforth and Co. loomed up. They were not particularly grateful for having been hauled out of bed.

"Dry up, Handy," I said. "You're interrupting."

"Interrupting what?"

"Our mutual friend Tregellis-West is about to expound a marvellous wheeze he has just thought of. He's going to find enough grub to last us for two weeks—and the first instalment will be on hand in time for breakfast!"

Handforth grunted.

"I don't hold with joking on such subjects!" he said sourly.

"Dear boy, you're frightfully flippant," protested Sir Montie. "You don't give a fellow any encouragement at all, begad! I've thought of something which is worth quids an' quids——"

"Well, choke it up, you fathead!" roared Watson.

"I positively decline to choke anythin' up," said Sir Montie, with dignity. "But really, old boys, you'll hug me. Please don't do it—you'll upset my clothes frightfully if you do. To-morrow's the first of the month!"

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Tommy. "He's a giddy parrot!"

"More like a lunatic!" grunted Handforth.

"I never thought you were all so surprisingly dense," went on Tregellis-West, with perfect serenity. "Ever since I've been at St. Frank's I've noticed that a big motor-van arrives at the Ancient House on the mornin' of the first day of the month. The same van visits the College House on the second day of the month. An' it brings provisions and groceries—the month's supplies, in fact. Ain't you beginnin' to see the scheme, old chaps?"

We all stared at Montie fascinatedly.

"This van arrives before breakfast," went on Tregellis-West. "I've seen it leavin' many a time, you know, an' it's always at the same time in the mornin'. It's sent by a big firm in Bannington, I believe, an'——"

I fell upon Sir Montie's neck fervently.

"You—you brainy boulder!" I exclaimed, hugging him. "You're worth your weight in margarine!"

"How frightfully complimentary, begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "But you're crumplin' my collar, Benny boy—— Oh, don't you start, too, Tommy——"

But his protests were useless. We hugged him until he was out of breath. Handforth stood looking on with frank astonishment.

"It strikes me you're all dotty!" he said candidly. "Blessed if I can see anything particularly startling. Supposing this grub is delivered to-morrow morning? That's going to do us a fat lot of good, ain't it?"

"Rather!" I declared. "That grub's ours, Handy!"

"How can it be ours, you ass?"

"Because we shall collar it!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Collar it?"

"Exactly."

"You're mad!" said Handforth. "How can we collar a whacking great van?"

"My dear, innocent old chump!" I said. "This motor-van will pass along the road just on the other side of the turnip-field. We shall be lying in wait for it—an ambush, in fact. That's your idea, Montie, isn't it?"

"Dear fellow, you've hit it exactly!"

"The van is an enemy," I went on. "We shall be perfectly justified in commandeering the whole supply. See?"

Handforth was provided with light at last.

"By George!" he said, breathing hard.

"By George!"

"And—and did you think of it all yourself, Montie?" asked McClure amazedly.

"I'm afraid that you're bein' sarcastic, an' I must decline to answer the question," said Tregellis-West severely.

"If you're sarcastic, Arnold McClure, I'll pitch you into the giddy river," said Handforth threateningly. "It's a stunning idea—just the sort of thing I should have thought

of myself. As a matter of fact, I did have a glimmering just before I went to sleep, but it didn't quite materialise."

I grinned.

"And never would have done, my son," I said. "But let's rejoice. If this van turns up in the morning—and I don't see any reason why it shouldn't—our food problem will be solved. Why, we shall collar tons of supplies—literally! Our position will be made as strong as——"

"Don't crow too soon!" put in Handforth, shaking his head. "There'll be a hitch. There always is a hitch when you don't want one. This grub won't be ready for delivery, or something."

"Handy, old boy, you're wonderfully optimistic—you are really!" said Sir Montie mildly. "There's really no need for all these suppositions. As a matter of fact, it's quite likely that there'll be an extra big load of supplies this month."

I nodded at once.

"Almost certain," I replied. "What about the grub you pinched from the store-room. Handy? We provisioned ourselves while we were in the monastery ruins on the general groceries for the whole House. And it's quite on the cards that there'll be an extra big delivery to-morrow. Montie, you're a wonder!"

A few minutes later we went downstairs to our beds, leaving Handforth and Co. thoroughly awake, animatedly discussing the probabilities regarding breakfast. I didn't get to sleep for some little time, for I was busily making my plans for the ambush in the morning.

Montie's scheme was first-rate in every way. It had come at the exact moment necessary. And it was one of the easiest "stunts" to work—imaginable. The van-driver couldn't possibly ignore a whole crowd of determined—and hungry—juniors.

We simply had to intercept the motor and seize the goods.

I fell asleep at last, contented in mind and full of hope for the morrow. And when I awoke I was as brisk as possible. It was full daylight, and the time was just after half-past six.

I dressed quickly and ascended to the battlements. Here I found Burton and Owen major and Farman on guard. They had been awake for about half an hour, having relieved three other fellows.

"Hallo, Benny," said Owen major. "What's all this jaw about the grub? You ain't really going to pinch the monthly supplies, are you?"

"No," I replied promptly. "It's not a question of pinching, my son. We shall commandeer the stuff."

"Souse me! That's the same thing, only it sounds better," grinned the Bo'sun. "Swab my maindeck! It's a first-rate idea, messmate. I don't fancy turnips for breakfast!"

"Of course it's not certain that we shall do the trick, but we're going to have a jolly

good try!" I said firmly. "It's a good thing it's fine this morning. Just pop down and rouse the chaps, will you? I shall have to take a large party on an affair of this sort."

"Sure," agreed Farman, nodding. "Guess it'll be a dandy hold-up. Say, Hunter's face will sure be worth dollars when that blamed van gets around the Ancient House, looted an' empty!"

"My dear chap, I sha'n't allow it to get around," I replied. "As soon as we've unloaded the supplies the van will go straight back to Bannington. We don't want Hunter messing about here before breakfast. Our position will have to be consolidated."

"My hat!" grinned Owen major. "That's a good word."

Within fifteen minutes the majority of the fellows had been roused. Those who had lately been on watch were allowed to sleep, and such fellows as Fullwood and Co. were better out of the way, and they were not disturbed.

"Now, what about this ambush?" asked Handforth briskly. "I suppose you're going to send a strong party ashore, Bennett? You'll want a decent leader for that job, and I'm open to accept——"

"Sorry, Handy," I interrupted. "As it happens, I'm going to lead the party myself. We can't afford to have any hitches, you know."

Handforth glared.

"Ain't I to be trusted?" he demanded.

"My dear chap, when it comes to a straightforward scrap you're absolutely it," I replied cheerfully. "But in these little affairs of finesse I feel more comfortable in taking charge personally. Then if anything goes wrong I can't blame anybody but myself."

"Oh, well, I call it rot——"

"I've got a nice little job for you," I went on. "I can place you in charge of a dozen fellows, Handforth—you can pick 'em out yourself. And you've got to guard the movements of the main army once the unloading has commenced."

Handforth nodded.

"Good!" he said. "You can trust me, Bennett."

He proceeded to pick his dozen men. There were several squabbles, for Handforth chose those very fellows who were not anxious to be under his leadership. In the end, however, I settled the matter personally by ordering the Removites to stop their grumbles. As Commander-in-Chief I had the power to give orders, and the fellows could not question them. This had been agreed to at the start of the rebellion.

We were ready to start in a few minutes.

"I'll leave you in sole command, De Valerie," I said briskly. "There's not much chance of an attack, but you know what to do if Hunter gets busy. The most important thing just now is breakfast—and we've got to find it!"

"There'll be trouble if you don't," said De Valerie calmly. "We can't live on turnips for long—what?"

I was well aware of this truth, and was all the more determined to accomplish the raid successfully. I led the way across to the "mainland" in the first boat, and the others followed.

The sun was shining warmly, and everybody was feeling ready for action. The juniors were genuinely hungry, and I knew that they would back me up loyally in this urgent enterprise.

I noticed with satisfaction that a waggon track led along the edge of the turnip field to the road. It would thus be an easy matter for the motor-van to lumber along to the very river itself, and this, of course, was an immense advantage. We should be able to transfer the stuff over to Willard's Island without the slightest delay.

Before seven o'clock the ambush was ready. Handforth, with his twelve men, crouched behind the hedge on one side of the road, and I occupied the ditch on the other, accompanied by fifteen enthusiastic rebels. And then we waited patiently for the arrival of the food supply.

For the first ten minutes nothing happened. We had the place quite to ourselves. Then a couple of farm labourers hove in view, and they passed along all unconscious of our watchful eyes.

An old hay waggon came next, and then the doctor's trap. Another spell of quietness settled down, and at half-past seven not a soul was in sight. The juniors were beginning to lose their enthusiasm.

Gloomy forebodings were expressed. Pessimism began to run riot—particularly on the other side of the road. Handforth was arguing fiercely with his men—a most undignified proceeding. His men, with a sad lack of military discipline, were referring to their leader in terms which were not at all respectful or complimentary.

"Can't you idiots be quiet?" I called wrathfully.

A snort came across the road.

"Do you think I'm going to be quiet when Griffith and Hubbard won't take any notice of my orders?" roared Handforth. "Ain't I the leader? I've told them to lie flat in the ditch, so that their silly backs can't be seen, and they've actually disobeyed orders!"

"You — you ass!" shouted Hubbard. "There's a pool of mud in this ditch, and I'm blessed if I'm going to lie in that to please an idiot like Handforth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall chuck up the job if I can't maintain discipline!" declared Handforth firmly. "Are you going to lie down, Hubbard, or are you not?"

"No, I'm not," roared Hubbard hotly.

"Then you'll be court-martialled and——"

"Shurrup!" came a sharp hiss. "I can hear a motor!"

Handforth ceased on the instant. The time for argument had passed, and now we were all on the alert. A motor was certainly approaching, for we could hear the steady beat of the engine.

The vehicle hove in sight round the bend.

and a series of triumphant exclamations went up. At a glance we knew that our prey was in sight. The van was unmistakable; it had been seen at St. Frank's on many an occasion.

"Don't move until I give you the word!" I called sharply.

I kept my eye upon the approaching van. It was one of those huge, covered motor lorries, and I was glad to see that the driver was quite alone. Possibly there was a boy at the back, but he wouldn't cause any trouble.

I allowed the van to get within fifty yards.

"Now!" I shouted

We burst through the hedge in batches, and stretched across the lane in a continuous line. Not another vehicle of any description was in sight, and I hoped that we should be undisturbed at our nefarious work.

The van driver stared at us in astonishment, and then jammed the brakes on. He was a big man, somewhat elderly, with a good-humoured face. I faintly remembered having seen him before—during his other visits to the school.

"Now then, young gents, what's the game?" he asked pleasantly.

I walked forward to the driver's side.

"We're the military!" I said briskly.

"Eh? You're what?"

"The Remove Revolutionary Army, and we are going to commandeer your cargo for rationing purposes. If you take it quietly you won't be hurt in the slightest, but you've got to understand that you are a prisoner of war."

The driver laughed.

"What's this—a new game?" he asked without losing his good humour. "I've heard all about your antics, you young rips. Rebellion, ain't you? Well, it ain't nothing to do with me. Jim Hardy don't want to interfere."

"You don't seem to understand," I said patiently. "You've got provisions in this van, haven't you—groceries, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yea, for the Ancient 'Ouse——"

"Good!" I interrupted. "We're going to take it—it's captured."

The driver's face gradually lost its smile.

"You young ljit!" he exclaimed warmly.

"You ain't serious."

"Quite serious, Mr. Hardy," I replied.

"You seem to be rather dull, I must say. Your cargo is captured—commandeered. And you have got to carry out our orders from this moment. If you refuse, force will be applied."

"And quick!" added Handforth darkly.

"Hear, hear!"

The driver deliberately released his brake.

"Them sort o' games don't go down with me!" he exclaimed sourly. "Huh! Pinch all my load, would you? Wot about me? Wot sort of trouble should I get into? You cheeky young varmints——"

"You won't get into any trouble, Mr. Hardy," I interrupted quickly. "You can't be expected to hold out against twenty or

thirty chaps, can you? If anybody gets into trouble, it will be us."

"Clear off, you cheeky hurchins!" roared Mr. Hardy. "I'm going to start the old van, so you'd best look out for yourselves—Why, wot—— Oh, my heye!"

The driver had suddenly found himself gripped on all sides. We had swarmed up, and we held the man tightly in his place. His legs were seized, his arms were pinned, and he could do nothing.

"If you resist you'll be bound and gagged," I said grimly. "We're serious, mind. But if you're a sensible chap, Mr. Hardy, you'll obey our orders without question. This van has got to be driven across this field to the river bank——"

"I won't do it!" roared the driver. "It's likely, ain't it? Why, it's as much as my job's worth! An' if I don't drive the old van, you're 'elpless, ain't you?"

"Not at all," I replied pleasantly. "I'm quite capable of driving an old 'bus like this. Out with that rope, Handforth. We can't stand any more of this nonsense."

Mr. Hardy, struggling and kicking, was hauled down from the driving seat. I was not surprised at his attitude. He was probably a decent sort, but it was not to be expected that he would tamely cave in to our demands.

"You—you young raskils!" he roared. "I'll——"

"Sorry, Mr. Hardy, but you've only got yourself to blame for this," I said grimly. "We sha'n't hurt you, so you needn't worry."

In spite of his protests he was made helpless. His hands and feet were bound, and he was then thrust into the empty seat on the front of the van. We were all breathless by this time, but I noticed with satisfaction that the lane was still empty.

"I say, Benny," exclaimed Handforth doubtfully. "You can't drive this van, can you? We don't want to mess things up——"

"Leave it to me," I said briskly.

I climbed swiftly into the driver's seat, had a glance at the controls, and nodded. Considering that I had driven Nelson Lee's huge racing car at break-neck speed on many occasions, this van presented no difficulties.

The engine was still ticking over, and I changed into the reverse gear and slipped the clutch in—after warning the fellows to look out for themselves. Gradually I backed the van until it lay broadside on, and then I steered the heavy vehicle through the narrow gateway on to the track which ran across the turnip field.

"By George!" said Handforth admiringly. "Ripping!"

It was a rough journey over that field, for the track was in an appalling state for motor traffic. But I tock it gently, and at last arrived at the river bank. Here I again manœuvred the van, and backed it down until the rear of it was within ten yards of the actual river bank.

"Now," I said briskly. "All hands to the pump!"

"My heye!" said Mr. Hardy. "You're a young wonder, ain't you?"

I merely grunted at him and hopped down, having stopped the engine. The driver had recovered his temper by this time; he realised that anger was useless. He wasn't hurt, and so he resigned himself to the inevitable.

A cheer had sounded from the island upon our approach. Caps were waving, and excitement reigned supreme. Sir Montie's scheme had been successful! It was a complete triumph for the Revolutionary Army.

And then the transfer of the supplies commenced. I strung a line of fellows from the van to the river bank. The goods were then passed down continuously into the boats. The boats were loaded quickly, pulled over to the island, and unloaded by the garrison. The whole work went on quickly and without the slightest hitch.

The food supplies were extremely satisfactory. There was tinned stuff of every description, and hundredweights of biscuits and cakes. In fact, with this hoard of food, we should have enough to last us ten days or a fortnight. For of course quite a lot of the cargo was useless from our point of view. Soap powder and soda and piles of other uneatable articles were left in the van. I thought it wise, however, to take a good supply of soap—although the majority of the other boys opposed me. Soap was not popular in the Remove!

But while we were busy on this task the redoubtable Handforth was having quite a little adventure. Once again Edward Oswald proved that my faith in him was not misplaced.

CHAPTER VI.

PRISONERS OF WAR—MR. HUNTER HEARS THE NEWS—A CALL TO ARMS.

McCLURE grunted.

"We seem to be out of all the the giddy fun!" he grumbled.

"We're guarding the labour battalion, you ass," said Handforth. "That's what we're here for. We're skirmishers."

"There's a fat lot of skirmishing going on. I must say!" remarked Griffith. "We might have been lending a hand with the grub. I'll bet those other chaps are gorging the tuck all the time!"

Griffith was hungry, and he didn't like being stuck out here, a hundred yards from the scene of operations. But Nipper was wise. This guarding party was very necessary. A surprise attack from the rear would have been disastrous. Nipper wanted to work unhampered.

Handforth and his twelve men were entrenched in a dry ditch behind a thick hedge. They could hear the sounds of the workers on the river bank, but could see nothing. Before them stretched a wide meadow. A footpath led across this meadow, terminating in a stile fifty yards above Willard's Island.

"We ought to spread out," said Handforth.

"It's no good—Hullo! Who's that over there? Duck, you asses—duck!"

Handforth's eyes were sharp. And he had suddenly caught sight of two or three figures breaking through the hedge from the turnip field near by. The next moment the guarding party uttered several low ejaculations.

"Hogs!" muttered Handforth grimly. "My hat! It's a good thing we were here!"

The three figures came into the meadow totally unconscious of the rebels in the ditch. They were boys from the River House School; not Brewster and Co., the decent "Hogs," but the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne and his two priggish chums, the Hon. Bertram Carstairs and the Hon. Cyril Coates.

The three "Honourables" advanced cautiously until they reached a gap in the hedge. Here they peered through for a few moments in silence.

"By gad!" exclaimed Wellborne. "The fearful rottahs! They're pinchin' a vanload of provender! An' they're campin' out on the island—look at 'em. I vote we get busy, old things!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Wellborne," said the Hon. Bertram. "We can't attack these low bounders—"

"Low bounders!" breathed Handforth sulphurously.

"I wasn't suggestin' anything of the sort, deah boy," came Wellborne's voice. "But we can hurry to St. Frank's—what? We can give the merry old tip to Mr. Huntah. He'll welcome the news, by gad!"

"Good idea," said Coates. "These beastly rotters will take an hour unloading that van—and we can have Mr. Hunter on the spot within twenty minutes. Nip their little game in the bud—eh? Let's be goin'."

The Honourables would certainly have done much harm but for the presence of Handforth and Co. If they had actually been allowed to give Mr. Hunter the tip, the bulk of the supplies would have been abandoned.

But Handforth acted promptly.

"Charge!" he hissed. "Collar the rotters!"

The rebels lost no time. They charged in a body. And Wellborne and Co., turning round abruptly, found themselves hemmed in. Escape was impossible. Within a minute they were captured.

"Release us, you low boundahs!" raved Wellborne. "By gad, I'll—"

"Low bounders, are we?" roared Handforth. "Understand, my bucks, you're prisoners of war. You're captives. And you won't be released until the word is given by the Commander-in-Chief!"

And without more ado the three alarmed prisoners were marched down to the river-side. Nipper called a halt in the unloading work to listen to Handforth's thrilling story.

"Good!" said Nipper briskly. "Tie 'em up, and leave 'em on the bank here, we'll see that they don't escape. You'd better get back to your post, Handy. You've done well."

"I don't do things by halves," said Handforth, nodding.

The hapless Hogs were tied hand and foot

and left upon the river bank. Then the guarding party went back to its post. Meanwhile the unloading proceeded apace. There were no further interruptions, and just after nine o'clock the last boatload of supplies was taken across.

"Now, Mr. Hardy, you're at liberty to go," said Nipper pleasantly. "I should advise you to go straight back to Bannington—in fact, you'll have to. We're not going to allow you to—"

"It ain't likely I should go to the school with a load like this 'ere," said Mr. Hardy sullenly. "You'll 'ave to pay for this, my young rips. I'm a-goin' to tell the police—"

"Tell Scotland Yard if you like," said Nipper briskly. "I don't fancy Mr. Hunter will do any prosecuting, though. My dear chap, we've got no grudge against you, and I don't see that you can get into any trouble. We're stoney just at present, but when you come with the supplies next month we'll give you a tip—and it'll be nothing less than a quid."

Mr. Hardy thawed.

"Mind, that's a promise, young gents," he said. "Well, I'll git back to Bannington. I reckon I'll leave my guv'nor to settle this 'ere question. You young gents will cop it in the neck, I'll warrant!"

"Don't you worry about us," said Nipper cheerfully.

Mr. Hardy took his van off at once, and Nipper and the Bo'sun and two or three other juniors surveyed the scene with great satisfaction. Tubbs, on the island, was already preparing breakfast briskly, helped by many hungry juniors.

Handforth and Co. had already been called in and were on the island. But the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne and his chums were still lying bound helplessly upon the grass. Nipper strolled over to them, and grinned.

"I think we'll let you go now," he said pleasantly. "We can't hold you prisoners indefinitely, and you haven't been able to do any harm."

"You wait!" said Wellborne fiercely, as his bonds were cut. "By gad! You wait, you uttah boundah!"

And, with that sinister threat, Wellborne beat an undignified retreat, followed, a moment or two later, by his chums. Nipper and Co. lost no time in pulling over to the island. The stronghold was provisioned, and the Remove felt ready for anything—particularly for breakfast.

And while they were partaking of that much-needed meal the Cliff House fellows hurried to St. Frank's as fast as their legs would carry them. The Hon. Aubrey and Co., curiously enough, had an exaggerated idea of the outrage which had been committed. The fate of the Ancient House supplies was a mere nothing; but Nipper and Co. had dared to lay fingers upon the august persons of the Honourables.

Wellborne and Co. were intent upon complaining; they meant to demand immediate satisfaction. The fact that Nipper and Co.

were beyond reach did not enter their calculations. And if they had known Mr. Hunter's exact character, they would certainly have walked in quite another direction.

As it happened, Mr. Hunter was crossing the Triangle with Starke as Wellborne and Co. entered the gates. This was fortunate—for two reasons. Firstly, they were able to state their case without delay; and, secondly, Christine and Co. and other College House juniors were in the offing. But for Mr. Hunter's presence, the Hogs would have met an untimely fate.

"Well? What do you boys want here?" demanded Mr. Hunter sourly.

"By gad, we've come to complain, sir!" roared the Hon. Aubrey. "Those rottahs are campin' out on Willard's Island, don't you know. An' they've—"

"Willard's Island?" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, snapping his teeth. "Then—then that explains—"

"Explains what, sir?" asked Starke curiously.

"Nothing—nothing, Starke!" snapped Mr. Hunter. "Well, I—er—I happened to be near the river last night, and I fancied I saw some figures. Now, boys, what have you to say? How do you know the Remove is camped on this island?"

"They're all there, sir—all the bally crowd!" panted the Hon. Bertram. "They've collared a vanload of supplies; but that's nothing! The frightful bounders laid hands on us—trussed us up like chickens, by Jove!"

Starke grinned.

"You don't seem to be hurt, that's one thing," he said.

"We want those rotters flogged!" shouted Wellborne furiously. "We're complainin', Mr. Huntah! We demand—"

"Tush!" snapped Mr. Hunter curtly. "Go away, you young dogs!"

Wellborne and Co. nearly fainted.

"Cut!" said Starke, glaring.

"But—but—"

Mr. Hunter and Starke turned their backs, and walked rapidly towards the school buildings. The Hon. Aubrey seemed dazed; but they woke up very rapidly when a sudden rush of College House juniors started. The elegant Honourables had never before shifted so quickly as they did at that moment.

But they had given their information, and Mr. Hunter's feelings were mixed. He was pleased to learn the news, but infuriated in the same breath. The Remove was not far off, after all. But, as Mr. Hunter was well aware, Willard's Island was a tough nut to crack. He couldn't burn down the rebels' defences this time!

But the Housemaster was grimly determined to win the day. It was a great shock to know that the rebels had obtained sufficient rations to last them over a week. Indeed, they could easily hold out for a fortnight. But such a thought was appalling. Already the news had spread abroad, and the rebellion was being talked of throughout the district.

"We must bring the young scoundrels to

heel, Starke!" said Mr. Hunter, when he reached his study. "We must make them surrender!"

"Yes, sir," said Starke, not very hopefully.

"The infernal impudence of the thing!" went on Mr. Hunter angrily. "To settle themselves upon this island was bad enough, but to seize a vanload of food is little short of criminal. Those supplies, Starke, were intended for the Ancient House. Didn't you realise that?"

"Oh, Scott!" gasped Starke. "Then—then we shall go short?"

"Undoubtedly—unless the rebels are subdued at once."

"Then we'll subdue 'em, sir!" declared Starke fiercely. "By George! The young thieves! Making us go short of our supplies!"

Starke could scarcely believe it, and his determination to help Mr. Hunter was greatly strengthened.

Without any delay the whole school was called together in Big Hall. And then Mr. Hunter appeared. He seemed calm, but inwardly he was raging furiously. This fresh stand of the boys was maddening.

"Boys, I wish to make a statement," said Mr. Hunter quietly. "The Ancient House section of the Remove Form, continuing its disgraceful behaviour, has actually had the audacity to seize Willard's Island during the night. The young rebels have also taken possession of a supply of food—"

"Hurrah!"

"Good luck to 'em!"

"Silence! Silence!" thundered Mr. Hunter furiously. "If there is one more interruption, I will detain the whole school for the next half-holiday!"

Mr. Hunter had no right to utter that threat; but there was an immediate hush. Mr. Hunter had practically stepped into the Headmaster's shoes, and he was forcing his iron rule upon the whole school.

"For these boys to continue their rebellion is absolutely scandalous," pursued Mr. Hunter. "I now call for volunteers—juniors or seniors. I intend to lead a party to the island, and the rebels shall be dislodged without a moment's delay. It is essential that discipline should be maintained in this school. Those boys who volunteer will earn my keen approval. Now, boys!"

Not a soul moved!

"What!" shouted Mr. Hunter. "I am afraid my words were not clear—"

"Yah!"

"Hun! We ain't going to volunteer!"

"Rather not!"

"Good luck to the Remove!"

There was quite a storm of cries, followed by a cheer which made the rafters ring. Mr. Hunter stood listening, with compressed lips. The general feeling of the whole school was quite clear.

Mr. Hunter turned sharply to the Sixth Form.

"Fenton," he exclaimed, "you will prepare your Form for immediate action! Every boy in the Sixth will take part in this

attack. You, as captain of the school, will lead your Form!"

Fenton turned red, but remained calm..

"You'll pardon me, sir," he said quietly; "I don't wish to have anything to do with this affair. And I fancy the Sixth, with one or two exceptions, is with me."

"Hear, hear!"

"You insolent young cub!" roared Mr. Hunter. "I order you—"

"Don't you do it, Fenton!"

"Defy him!"

"Prussian!"

But Fenton of the Sixth was a fellow with a will of his own. He looked at the other members of his Form and then walked quietly out of the Hall. Every other member of the Sixth, with the exception of Starke and Kenmore, followed him. This strong action on the part of the Sixth cast the die.

The rest of the school, cheering madly, left their racks and crowded out. In vain Mr. Hunter stormed and raved. And at last, realising that his efforts were useless, he stamped away to his own study. Mr. Hunter could scarcely believe that his orders were being deliberately flouted and set at naught.

Starke and Kenmore followed him into his study, and he glowered at them, his eyes gleaming with grim determination. Without a word he crossed to the telephone and gave a number which caused Starke and Kenmore to whistle beneath their breath.

For Mr. Hunter was ringing up the White Harp, the most disreputable inn in Bellton. Within a minute he was talking to Mr. Jonas Porlock, the landlord.

"Ah, is that you, Porlock?" asked Mr. Hunter. "I am speaking from St. Frank's—yes, Mr. Hunter. I want you to obtain, as quickly as possible, a large number of men—the roughest you can lay your hands on. . . . Yes. . . . I mean to dislodge those infernal rebels at once. . . . A dozen? . . . I suppose that'll be sufficient, if you cannot obtain more. . . . Yes, Porlock, at once—at once. Send them to Willard's Island without delay."

Mr. Hunter jammed the receiver down and turned to the two rather startled prefects.

"I have had enough of these schoolboy efforts!" he snarled. "On this occasion the Remove will find that I have got them beaten. I intend to attack with a strong force of men—men who will be paid highly to perform their work. They will not fail!"

"Isn't it—isn't it rather degrading, sir?" gasped Kenmore.

"Degrading!" snapped Mr. Hunter. "It is degrading for these wretched boys to flout my authority! I am master here, and I intend to remain so. This parcel of young ruffians shall suffer severely!"

Starke and Kenmore exchanged uneasy glances. The affair had passed out of the hands of schoolboys and masters. The lowest roughs in Bellton were being procured. And even Starke and Kenmore considered that it was just beyond the limit.

Excitement was certainly brewing!

CHAPTER VII.

*(The narrative concluded by Nipper.)*THE ENEMY IN SIGHT—AN ATTACK IN FORCE—
STICKING TO THEIR GUNS.

BREAKFAST was over.

The Rebel Remove, as a whole, was feeling satisfied and happy. The one great worry which had troubled us had vanished. The food problem was solved, and we were ready to stick to our guns until further orders.

I was almost certain that an attack would be made very shortly. Even if the news didn't leak out by other means, Wellborne and Co. would soon loosen their tongues. But we didn't care. We had no soot-bags, as we had used at the monastery ruins; but our defences were of the finest quality.

Already I had tested the pumps of the old fire engine, and had found the hoses satisfactory. This was just as well, for the pipes were now full of water, and would send forth their streams as soon as the pumps were manned.

The fellows were feeling absolutely confident—and that meant victory. The same spirit imbued us all. We felt perfectly secure in our stronghold, and this feeling of safety was most welcome.

"Montie, old son, you're the hero of the hour," I declared heartily.

"Pray don't be so absurd, old boy——"

"But it's the truth!" I insisted. "Without grub we should have been a disheartened crew; but now we're a determined army. And the worst Hunter can do will find us cheerful and ready."

"Enemy in sight!" sang out Church, on the battlements.

He was pointing over the meadow. And a moment later Mr. Hunter stalked into view. He was accompanied by Starke and Kenmore and Bates. Not another soul was in view, and I grinned.

"Nothing doing yet, anyhow," I said. "Don't make a row, you chaps! Let's hear what the Hunter bird has to say."

We waited grimly. Mr. Hunter walked down to the riverside and stood surveying us across the stretch of water.

"You young scoundrels!" he shouted angrily.

"We're willing to come back to the Ancient House if you will agree to our terms, sir," I called out. "I don't suppose this rebellion is doing the school any good. The sooner we're back the better, you know."

"You cheeky young hound!" raved Mr. Hunter. "Unless you surrender at once your punishment will be doubly severe. I warn you that this holding-out policy of yours will avail you nothing."

"I'm sorry, sir, but we can't agree to your methods," I shouted. "When you promise to treat us like boys and not like slaves, we'll surrender. We're sticking to our guns! We're down on tyranny!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with Prussianism!"

"Three groans for Hunter!"

The groans were given with extraordinary gusto. It was something novel to be able to defy the tyrant to his face. We were completely beyond his reach. He realised that, too, for his shook his fist impotently.

"Go away!" bawled Handforth. "Your face gives me a pain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Hunter shook his fist again. Then he retired behind the cover of the hedge. A minute or two later Starke and Kenmore were sighted hurrying up the river towards the boat-house. After that came a lull, and the next sign of activity came from the direction of the road.

"I say!" roared McClure from the battlements. "There's a whole crowd of boozy-looking chaps coming along here—fifteen or twenty of 'em!"

I hurried up immediately, and had a look for myself. McClure was right. A motley throng of men was marching across the meadow. I recognised most of them as being members of the rougher element in Bellton. Others were farm labourers and the like—some of them quite decent men. But they were probably being well paid for their work, and that was sufficient.

"The more the merrier!" I said grimly. "This crowd doesn't frighten me, my sons. I wouldn't care if a hundred attacked us. Now look here, we'd better discuss our plan of action."

A minute later the rebels were crowding round me.

"Don't interrupt, because I'm going to give my instructions," I said crisply.

"Bos'un, you're in charge of the shore defences. Take a dozen men, and provide them with the long poles. If any boat happens to draw near, push it off. Under no circumstances allow any boat to touch our banks."

"Leave it to me, messmate," said the Bo'sun willingly.

"Now, I want four generals," I went on. "De Valerie, Handforth, Tregellis-West, and Farman will do. Each one of you has got to take charge of a hose, and you've got to take up your positions on the four shores of the island."

"Good!" said Handforth heartily.

"Be ready to play the hoses when I give the word," I continued. "We won't show our hand until the last moment. We'll allow the attacking boats to get close, and then we'll drench 'em with water!"

"Begad! That'll cool their ardour!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rather!"

"We'll give 'em a soaking," I declared firmly. "I don't fancy there'll be more than one attack—and we're ready for a hundred, if necessary."

"Hurrah!"

Within five minutes every fellow was at his post. The rebels were not so excited as I had expected. They took the whole thing coolly and calmly, and were grimly determined to fight to the death, so to speak.

The time for action was now drawing near. Mr. Hunter fondly imagined that the island

would be at the mercy of his hired ruffians. He naturally assumed that we couldn't prevent these strong men from landing. And the strong men themselves were grinning confidently.

What was there to worry over? A mere handful of rebellious schoolboys! That's what they believed—now! Their eyes would be opened later on.

Starke and Kenmore put in an appearance again. They arrived with eight boats. Each prefect was towing three river craft, and they were pulled alongside the bank and held fast. Mr. Hunter could be seen giving definite instructions.

To my extreme delight, Mr. Hunter himself took a seat in one of the attacking boats. I saw no reason why he shouldn't be drenched as well as his men. The other juniors were grinning with delighted anticipation.

"Now for squalls, begad!" said Sir Montie languidly.

"Regular rainstorms, in fact!" grinned De Valerie. "Hunter's been huntin' for trouble for some time, an' now he'll find more than he wants!"

Only four of the boats were being used; the others doubtless being on hand in case of casualties. Mr. Hunter evidently expected resistance.

He was cute. The four boats did not charge at one spot. One remained quite still, another advanced up the river, and another went down. The last of the four pulled away steadily. The idea obviously was to attack the island simultaneously at four different points.

In this way our forces would be divided into four sections, Mr. Hunter assumed, and one or more of the raiding parties would effect a landing. Once a crowd of these men set foot on the island, our position would begin to look queer. But there was no prospect of a landing being effected.

We waited in complete silence. There was no excitement, and no rushing about. I remained at the top of one of the castle turrets. Here I could see everything perfectly, and I could direct operations with perfect ease. My voice would carry to all the different generals.

At last the fourth boat got round to the other side of the island, and one of the men in it gave a lusty shout.

"Right!" shouted Mr. Hunter. "Now, men, all together!"

It was really splendidly planned. The four boats had timed themselves to a nicety, and all reached the vicinity of the island at the same moment. I was quivering with excitement. Ten fellows were manning the handles of the old fire-engine—five each side. Another ten were standing by, ready to relieve the workers if the pumping was prolonged.

I eyed the four boats swiftly.

"Right!" I shouted, imitating Mr. Hunter's order. "Now, men, all together!"

"Hurrah!"

The rebels at the pump commenced working in earnest. Just for a moment there was a tiny period of suspense. Had I misjudged the time? The boats were nearly at the banks, and the Bo'sun had his men ready to dash forward with their poles; although, bearing in mind the hoses, they kept well back at present.

Then, simultaneously, four hissing streams of water shot out of the hose-nozzles. Handforth, in his excitement, drenched McClure and Church to the skin, and the roars of those unfortunate juniors were appalling.

To add to the confusion, Handforth slipped, and proceeded to drench himself by way of a change. But he gained control of the hose after a second, and directed the fierce stream of water with unerring aim into Mr. Hunter's boat.

The other hoses were going strong.

Hisssssss!

It was about the funniest thing I'd ever seen. The jets of water caused the utmost confusion and consternation. Within twenty seconds every boat-load was drenched to the skin. And the hoses played upon them continuously and relentlessly.

Mr. Hunter received special attention from Handforth. He was sitting in the stern of the boat, and he was simply soaked and dazed by the solid rush of water.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give it to 'em!"

"Long live the revolution!"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"Begad, it's rippin'—simply rippin'!"

Mr. Hunter was foaming at the mouth with rage. Just for a moment Handforth treated the men in the Housemaster's boat to a dose of the river water. And Mr. Hunter stood up and shook his fist.

It was a ridiculous thing to do. Handforth shifted the nozzle of his hose a trifle, and the deadly stream of water caught Mr. Hunter fairly in the waistcoat. He gave a wild cry and toppled over backwards into the river.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handforth, cease fire!" I roared.

"Rescue work to be done!"

Handforth reluctantly turned the nozzle of his hose, and Mr. Hunter was fished out of the water by his drenched henchmen. By this time all the boats were beating a hasty retreat. The men in one of them were so confused that they jumped up before the bank was reached. The next moment the boat overturned with a terrific splash, and the five occupants were hurled out into the shallow water.

After that Mr. Hunter retired. Within five minutes we were completely alone, and flushed with victory. We had proved our determination to stick to our guns! And it was generally believed by all the rebels that Mr. Hunter had had enough and would surrender unconditionally.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By **CLEMENT HALE.**

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

The First Chapters.

GEORGE GRAY, his brother JACK, and WILSON, are three members of the Berlin Rovers, a football Club in Germany. When war breaks out they are interned in a camp at Oberhemmel, but one night they manage to escape. The alarm, however, is given, and there is nothing to do but to run for it. They succeed in evading pursuit, and hide till the next morning in a turnip field. At daybreak they set out and capture three men who are driving carts to market. They bind and gag them, and set off with their waggons.

(Now read on.)

ON THE ROAD.

AFTERWARDS, when they were able to look back at what they did in cold blood, their foolhardiness amazed all the fugitives.

But their daring had its reward.

Presently they could see the camp on their left. The rain had long ceased. A watery moon shed a faint silver glow upon the earth.

Ahead of them they could see the glistening, twinkling lights of the town.

More than once on the way they passed an armed patrol, but they weren't even challenged. Curious eyes studied the waggons and their drivers, but they were allowed to pass.

So they reached the town, passed the main gate, and went on through the gay and busy streets—for Oberhemmel was gay enough—without attracting the slightest attention.

The distance from one end of the town to the other must have been about two and a half English miles. They followed the main street, and in due time emerged again upon a country road, and followed it onward—onward.

Their luck was with them now. Each found some coarse black bread, half a German sausage, and a jug of thin lager beer on his waggon. With what relish they devoured the appetising feast can be imagined! They rested their horses while they ate and drank, and then, feeling refreshed, filled with new life, hope, and vigour, they pressed onward,

ever onward, until they found their beasts flagging, and knew that the poor, dumb creatures had had enough.

So they drew up by the wayside and rested the animals, while they gave them to eat of the best the hay-carts contained.

Indeed, Jack and Wilson slept upon the hay, while George kept tireless watch. And so the long night passed, and they proceeded on their journey when the day broke.

Soon after dawn they held a council of war. They had to be careful, for it was on the cards that their victims would have been found by this time and the country roused against them.

Each cart bore a name, that of the farmer to whom it belonged, one Otto Hegel, it seemed. The name was painted upon a board in neat German characters.

They hacked the boards off and threw them away.

And so they journeyed onward, passing through several villages, until at last they saw a town in the distance, with a railway running through it.

"Wilson," said George. "I think we'd better abandon the carts here and leave the horses to rest while we push on afoot."

"Right!" agreed Wilson, with a laugh.

"I'd rather walk," said Jack.

So they petted the dumb beasts for a moment, gave them more hay to eat, and left them on the highway, while they trudged on, three happier men than they'd been for many a long day.

The town was about two miles off. In half an hour they'd reached it.

They turned into a beer garden, ordered sausage, sauerkraut, and bread, and ate their fill, George and Wilson doing the little talking necessary, and tipping the sleepy-eyed waiter liberally.

They finished their meal as speedily as possible, and then departed, lest they should already have roused suspicion.

In another half an hour they were out of the town.

The sun shone brilliantly now, and as he looked at his companions Jack burst into a laugh. Very rough-looking fellows they were in their peasants' coats and weather-beaten hats, with dirty faces and unshaven chins.

"You look like a couple of escaped con-

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victs," grinned Jack, his spirits soaring as the danger lessened.

"Well, you needn't talk, Jack," said brother George. "I wouldn't own you for a near relation at any price, if we weren't on an enemy highway. You look awful!"

Their boots were dusty, mud-caked, and broken. Their trousers were in a similar plight. They hung like bags upon them, big at the knee, without any suggestion of smartness. And their heavy cord coats, they baffle description!

They tramped on leisurely that day, hiding whenever they scented danger, and slept during the afternoon in a pleasant wood, with dry earth for their bed.

At sundown they moved on again. Through the night they walked, and food was procured in a village of a German hausfrau, who kept a little shop as a sort of pin-money business. She was kind to them, and the hot coffee she served gave them renewed courage.

They departed with her blessing ringing in their ears, and George always afterwards declared that she had guessed that they were Englishmen and pitied them.

Perhaps it was true, perhaps not; but, at any rate, she openly expressed her sympathy for the "poor English who were shut up in Germany through no fault of their own during this awful war-time, and hoped that they would be able to get back to their own country somehow."

Soon after daybreak they found themselves within view of another town. A wood near by beckoned them invitingly.

They entered it, sat down in its shade, ate their provisions, and counted their money.

"They'd still a good bit left, for Kutz had had plenty on him, and George smiled grimly as he thought how fate had decreed that Kutz, their enemy, should have been forced to help them in their flight, in spite of himself, when he would have given his soul to have delivered them into the hands of a firing party.

"I think," said George, as he stretched himself and yawned, and chose a bed in the peat at the foot of a great pine tree, "that we had better trust to the railway now, boys. There's bound to be a station near. I think we have enough money to get to Berlin or somewhere—at any rate, we can try. We'll scout first, study the time-tables, and—decide afterwards. But it will be quicker and more restful than walking, don't you think?"

"It won't be as safe as walking, my lad," growled Wilson sleepily.

"But it will be nicer," remarked Jack.

"And if we can only reach Berlin, I think we can find some friends there to help us."

"German friends, George, my boy?" asked Wilson.

"Yes."

"For my part, I'll never trust a German again as long as I live."

"But they are not all bad. Think of our gaoler at Oberhemmel, the nice man. Think of the doctor at the camp, and that woman."

Wilson shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Very well," he cried. "I'll risk it if you and Jack will. After all, we've got to get out of this cursed country somehow, and I don't know how we shall be able to do it without a friend at court."

"Then it's settled?"

"Yes."

And Wilson turned over and went to sleep.

Jack and George presently followed his example; and so they lay there, lost in the land of dreams, while the birds sang merrily about them, the squirrels came out to peep, and all nature seemed at peace, while the scent of the pines filled their lungs and strengthened them.

BOUND FOR BERLIN.

It was dusk when they awoke. They finished their rations, lit the cigars they'd bought for a few pence the night before, and then left the wood.

They passed many labourers on the road, but nobody took any notice of them, their rough appearance helping their disguise.

In the town they indulged in a frugal meal and bought a paper. It gave them scant comfort.

Belgium was being overrun. Brussels was in the hands of the Huns. The German Army was marching on Paris. Everything seemed to be favouring the arch-enemy. The streets of the town were gay with flags and bunting. The Kaiser's portrait vied with that of his son and Field-Marshal Von der Goltz for popularity. The people were war-mad, and talking in the wildest fashion about the huge indemnities they were going to impose upon the conquered lands.

To hear them talk, France was already beaten; Belgium was done for; and England would soon be beaten to her knees.

Brussels was theirs; Paris would soon be in their hands; and then—London!

No wonder the fugitives felt their hearts sink and their spirits droop.

"George—George—what do you think?" asked Jack, raising his eyes timidly to meet his brother's.

George set back his head and clenched his teeth.

"They will never take Paris," he affirmed.

"They will never beat the British Army. The French know what they are doing. The scoundrels won't even take Calais! Britain, France, and the Allies will win the war—"

"And how long will it take 'em to do it?" asked Wilson. "We've only got an army of about 380,000 men, George."

"We'll build one of millions, if necessary," answered George. "We've got the fleet, we've got Gibraltar. We'll wipe the Hun off the seas, and then—organise!"

"Man, it would take years to build up an army of the size you speak!"

"Then years it must take! And Wilson, old chap—Jack, that's all the more reason why the three of us should get back home as

(Continued overleaf.)

soon as we can. They'll need our help. I want to get into khaki and help to lick the Hun!"

So they shrank from the sight of the jubilating Germans of Hesskassel, and made their way to the railway-station, which they found readily enough without having to ask any questions.

Upon arrival there, George and Wilson went on a scouting expedition, while Jack walked in the shadows and smoked a cheap cigar.

In fifteen minutes they rejoined him.

George's face was beaming as he caught his brother's arm.

"Jack," he whispered in German, for fear of eavesdroppers, "it's all right. We've got three third-class tickets for Berlin. They couldn't tell us what time the train departs, because the lines are in the hands of the military. It's number three platform, and we shall have to go there and wait, and take our chance. But it looks all right!"

Jack walked with them through a tiled tunnel, and so they arrived at No. 3 platform, handed in their tickets, stood the close scrutiny of the official without wincing, and stepped on to the well-constructed platform.

There they sought a seat, and stretched themselves out with other tired travellers who were awaiting the arrival of the Berlin train.

Everything promised well. They'd aroused no suspicion. It really seemed as if they were on the road that led to real freedom at last.

ON BOARD THE BERLIN EXPRESS.

OF all their experiences since their escape from the internment camp at Oberhemmel that of waiting for the Berlin train tried the three friends the most. As they looked at one another they felt that their disguises were sufficient to baffle detection; yet, in spite of all, it seemed that every man who passed, every

German woman, too, eyed them with suspicion.

When, as happened once or twice, a rough-looking man of the labouring class addressed a remark to them, usually a greeting, their hearts leapt within them.

It was George who invariably replied, and he did not fail them, for his tuneful ear was quick to pick up the proper accent, and he spoke as to the manner born.

Inwardly he smiled at the grotesque spectacle they presented in their heavy countrymen's coats, their weather-stained and much worn, soft felt hats, and their heavy, mud-stained boots.

While they waited, the crowd on the platform increased slowly but surely, until there were between one and two hundred waiting.

George began to wonder whether they would ever succeed in boarding the Berlin train.

At last it steamed in, drawn by two powerful engines. Slowly it came alongside the platform, and at last came to a halt.

Their luck was with them, for out of the open doors poured a crowd of Germans, making room for the waiting travellers.

"Ten minutes' wait!" roared the guards.

For ten minutes there was rush and bustle and excitement.

The station buffet was stormed. Excited passengers bought up late editions of the evening papers, and all the talk was of the war, and the probable time it would take for the Germans to reach Paris and knock out the contemptible British Army.

At last all were aboard again, the new passengers had taken their places, and George, Jack, and Wilson had entered the Berlin train.

A shriek of the whistle, a grinding of metal, and the express steamed slowly on its way, bearing the three friends nearer and nearer, with every turn of the wheels, to safety.

(To be continued.)

THE TITLE OF NEXT WEEK'S STORY

WILL BE

"A SCRAP OF PAPER!"

It is another Magnificent Complete Tale of NIPPER and his Remove Revolutionary Army against Mr. Hunter, the Hunnish Housemaster.

When you have read it, send it on to a Soldier or Sailor—he will thank you!

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

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