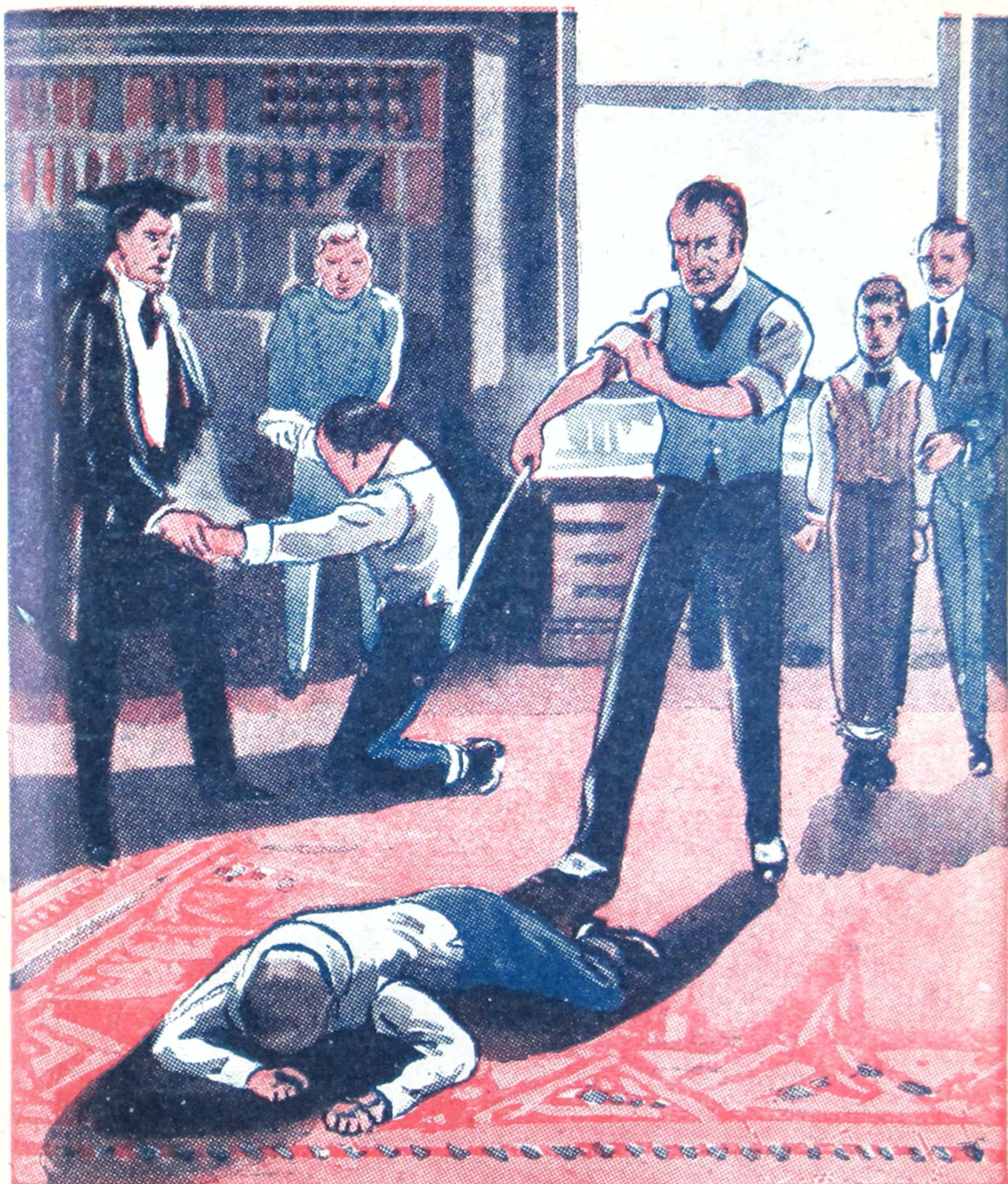


No. 155.—ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT "BARRING-OUT" STORY!

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TURNING THE TABLES!

A Tale of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER. Specially written by the Author of "A Scrap of Paper," "The Rebel Remove," etc., etc.

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"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.

(The narrative related throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

THE UPPER HAND—FLOGGED LIKE DOGS—
DISHEARTENED.

TRICKED!

That was the position of the Remove in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Mr. Kennedy Hunter, by means of a device which even a Prussian would have been ashamed of, had gained the upper hand.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and myself—the recognised leaders of the Remove—were in Mr. Hunter's study. It was evening, and the remainder of the Remove knew nothing of our predicament.

But the other fellows were tricked just as much as we were. That cheering fact would probably be made known to them in due course. For the present I was chiefly interested in the fate which awaited my chums and myself.

Mr. Hunter could not expel us from the school, that was certain. At the most we should receive a flogging. But I was quite convinced that it would be the most painful business which had ever been perpetrated at St. Frank's.

Quite recently Mr. Hunter had been at war with the Remove. The great barring-out had been a huge success, and would be set down in St. Frank's history as a complete triumph for the Remove.

But, owing to the basest of base treachery, Mr. Hunter had gained the upper hand again. After promising that no punishment should be inflicted, he had deliberately repudiated his statement. In addition, Mr. Hunter had tricked the Remove into surrender by writing

and signing a declaration to the effect that no boy should suffer, and that all our demands should be met.

As commander-in-chief of the rebels, I had accepted the written guarantee, fully satisfied that everything was in order. What reason had I to think otherwise? It was not until later on that Mr. Hunter's true baseness came home to me. The stratagem he had employed was utterly despicable.

He had given us that paper, and we had returned to the Ancient House willingly and cheerfully. For several hours there had been no suspicion of treachery. Mr. Hunter had kept his word in every detail.

But after I had come in from cricket practice with my chums, I learned that Mr. Hunter required us in his study. In short, he denied all knowledge of the signed document, and defied me to produce any such paper!

It was then that I had made the discovery. The precious guarantee, which made it impossible for Mr. Hunter to back out of his agreement, was absolutely blank! There could be only one explanation—the ink had been of the "invisible" variety. I knew now why Mr. Hunter had delayed action until night.

The ink probably took several hours to fade away. Thus, when I examined the paper, there was no writing visible upon its surface. From first to last it had been a Hunnish dodge.

And now we three were in Mr. Hunter's study, awaiting punishment. Mr. Trapps was there too—the new Remove Form-master. Bates, the page-boy, stood by the door, and Starke and Kenmore, of the Sixth, were near by. There was also a man in the apartment who was in no way connected with the school

— Mr. Smiles. This questionable gentleman was an associate of Hunter's, however, and I had every reason to suspect him of being a bad lot.

I was so thunderstruck by the realisation of my helplessness that I was unable to express the wild anger which filled me. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were in a similar state.

I didn't blame myself for what had occurred. Although I knew that Mr. Hunter was a very able liar, I had never believed him capable of such a trick as this. I had taken the precaution to make him write his guarantee of good faith—and it had turned out to be a mere scrap of paper!

I knew well enough why Mr. Trapps and the others were in the room. It was because Mr. Hunter feared that we should become violent, and he meant to flog us mercilessly. The gloating expression upon his face almost made me mad. I had returned after discovering the trick of the ink in a semi-dazed condition.

"As I told you, Bennett, your story was a mere fabrication," said Mr. Hunter pleasantly. "I wrote no guarantee, and made no promise. You have deliberately flouted me for days past, and you shall be punished."

"You—you Prussian!" roared Tommy Watson violently.

"For those words, Watson, you will receive four extra cuts with the birch!" said Mr. Hunter calmly. "I should advise you to remain silent."

"You—you——"

"Shut up, Tommy—it's no good!" I said bitterly. "Mr. Hunter has played this low trick, and it's no good growling. We shall have to take our gruel. But, by George, we'll have our turn later on!"

"Begad, rather!" said Sir Montie quietly.

Mr. Hunter smiled.

"I do not know why I allow you to insult me in this fashion," he exclaimed. "I can assure you that you are doing yourselves no good. You will understand that the punishment which will now be inflicted is your penalty for defying my authority. You were the ringleaders in the late barring-out, and it is only meet that you should suffer the heaviest punishment. The remainder of the Remove, I can assure you, will not be let off lightly."

Tommy Watson breathed hard.

"You can do what you like with me!" he shouted recklessly. "I don't care—I'm going to say what I think! You—you Hun! Didn't you come across to the island where we were barring-out, waving a white flag? And didn't you promise, in the hearing of the whole Remove, that we shouldn't be punished?"

Mr. Hunter waved his hand.

"Kindly seize that boy, Mr. Trapps," he said testily. "I really don't know what Watson is talking about. I made no promise of any description, and did not even approach the island he refers to——"

"You—you liar!" I shouted furiously.

"Easy, Bennett!" muttered Starke, of the Sixth.

"I know jolly well that you're going to half-skin us, you brute," I went on; "so I may as well follow Watson's example, and tell you what I think of you!"

"Dear boy, it's a hopeless task!" said Tregellis-West. "There ain't words in the English language which can express our contempt and loathing. Begad! I'd rather have a Prussian for a Housemaster—I would, really!"

Mr. Hunter lost his temper.

"Starke—Kenmore—Bates!" he shouted. "Seize these unruly young scoundrels at once! This is getting beyond all bounds!"

Tommy Watson had already been grasped by Mr. Trapps. The two prefects and Bates advanced towards Montie and me. I set my teeth firmly. The whole proceeding was a foul disgrace to the fair name of St. Frank's, and I felt justified in resisting.

"Go for 'em, Tommy!" I shouted hoarsely.

Tommy needed no second bidding. We were maddened, and Watson succeeded in wrenching himself away from Mr. Trapps's grasp. Sir Montie was already hitting Bates right and left.

A second later the most terrific struggle was going on in Mr. Hunter's study. Starke went down with bleeding nose, and my knuckles tingled from the blow. My chums were fighting with the strength of desperation. We all had a wild idea that we might possibly be able to escape.

Mr. Hunter joined in the scramble—but wished he hadn't. He attempted to grasp me from behind. I swung round like lightning, and my fist thudded upon the tyrant's face with such force that he staggered back, tripped against a chair, and went flying headlong.

"Hurrah!" gasped Watson frantically.

"Make for the door—— Ow!"

Kenmore, without compunction, had brought down a heavy round ruler upon Watson's head. Bully though Kenmore was, I think he misjudged his strength in the excitement. Poor Tommy was quite dazed, and he sank to the floor, dizzy and sick.

If we had had any chance of escaping, that chance had now gone for good. Mr. Hunter and Mr. Trapps succeeded in seizing me, and Montie, fighting gamely, was collared by Starke and Kenmore and Mr. Smiles. Bates was sitting upon Watson's chest.

"You young demons!" snarled Mr. Hunter.

"By Heaven, you shall pay dearly for this disgraceful scene! Come, Mr. Trapps, we will flog the brats without delay!"

My chums and I were panting heavily. But, once firmly grasped, we couldn't gain our freedom once more. To make matters quite certain, Mr. Hunter even resorted to the expedient of binding our ankles and wrists with handkerchiefs.

Starke and Kenmore were beginning to look scared—and Mr. Hunter noticed it. He waved his hand impatiently.

"You may go now, boys!" he exclaimed.

"Say nothing of this affair outside these walls. I shall require you later on——"

"I say, sir!" stammered Kenmore. "Do——"

do you think it's quite the thing to flog these youngsters while they're bound—"

"I want no criticism from you, Kenmore!" snapped Mr. Hunter sharply. "Go at once! And if you breathe a word of this affair to any other boys, it will be the worse for you. I should not hesitate to flog you as I am about to flog these wretched boys before me. Take warning!"

Starke and Kenmore left the study, looking quite scared. But they were rotters of the first order, and I knew that they secretly gloated over our disfigurement. Kenmore perhaps had a few decent feelings.

Well, after that the flogging commenced.

I was the first to suffer. Mr. Trapps and Bates held me across the heavy desk while Mr. Hunter removed his coat and seized a wicked-looking birch. My feelings were altogether too awful to be described. The only consolation in this affair was the anticipation of what would happen to Hunter afterwards. This was his birthday, so to speak; we should have ours later on!

"Now hold the young ruffian tightly!" said Mr. Hunter between his teeth.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The birch rose and fell monotonously. Mr. Hunter was possessed of considerable strength, and I gasped at every blow. But it was an inward gasp, for I was endeavouring to remain silent during this brutal punishment.

The pain was awful, and I began to feel sick and faint after a while. I thought that Mr. Hunter was never going to stop. But at last, when my senses were reeling, Mr. Hunter stepped back, breathing heavily.

"I think you will now realise, Bennett, that I am not to be trifled with!" he panted viciously.

"You—you inhuman brute!" I gasped faintly.

Swish—swish!

Two more cuts whistled round my legs, and I staggered over to a chair and sank into it. I was quite certain that my back was covered with livid weals, and I should be sore for a week.

But I was too racked with pain to think clearly or to do anything. I had never received such a terrible thrashing in my life before, and I devoutly hoped that I should never experience a second.

Watson came next, and I watched him being birched dully, without seeming to care. He did not receive such a dose as I had been subjected to—mainly because he half-fainted with the pain.

Sir Montie was as strong as a young ox, however, and he did not utter a murmur while the punishment was being inflicted. When, at last, Mr. Hunter had completely finished, he was nearly as exhausted as we were.

"Let this be a lesson to you!" he gasped. "Doubtless you will profit by it!"

"It will make the young rascals realise that you are master," said Mr. Trapps pleasantly. "What is your intention now, Mr. Hunter? I should not advise you to let the boys join their schoolfellows. This punish-

ment has been somewhat—ahem!—severe, and there are probably marks upon their backs. It would never do for the other juniors to see—"

"I am well aware of that, Trapps," said Mr. Hunter, panting heavily. "You need have no fear. These wretched youths will not be allowed to rejoin their schoolfellows for many a day. Some time ago I confined them within the old tower, but they managed to escape. That, indeed, marked the commencement of the rebellion. On this occasion they shall have no opportunity of escaping."

I listened, scarcely comprehending. But I had suspected from the start that Mr. Hunter would not content himself by merely flogging us. We had been in his hands once before, and he had kept us upon bread and water—prisoners. On this occasion he would certainly go to similar lengths.

I wondered vaguely where he would place us this time, but was too racked with pain to care. I only wanted to lie down in comfort. For once all the spirit was knocked out of me.

After half an hour had passed I was feeling slightly better, and my chums were also recovering some of their colour. During this interval Mr. Hunter had been talking with Trapps and Smiles.

Bates had departed as soon as the flogging had come to an end. But now the door opened, and this extraordinary "page-boy" returned. He was, of course, in Mr. Hunter's confidence in many matters, and his position at St. Frank's was a mere blind.

"It's all ready, sir," he exclaimed shortly.

"Ah, Bates, you have been quick!" said Mr. Hunter. "We may as well take these boys down at once. One at a time, of course."

We were still secured by the handkerchiefs, but my ankles were released, and I was curtly ordered to walk out of the study. Resistance would merely have meant further torture, and I didn't feel up to suffering any more.

I walked out with Mr. Hunter and Mr. Trapps, leaving the others in the study. My footsteps were rather unsteady, but I was rapidly regaining my normal strength. The effects of the flogging were passing, leaving my back so tender that the slightest touch caused agony.

It was useless shouting for help. I should merely have been silenced at once, and yells of all sorts were quite common in the Ancient House; nobody would take any notice unless I kept up my cries for a long while—which wouldn't have been possible. Besides, this part of the House was private, and shut off from the main building.

As I had half suspected, our destination was the cellar. There were several of these beneath the Ancient House, but this one could only be reached by a strong door in this private section.

We descended the stairs, and passed along a stone passage, where a single electric light glowed overhead.

At the end of the passage there was a massive door. It was quite new, the oaken

panels being unpolished. It was rough, but tremendously strong, and I knew that Mr. Hunter had been busily preparing this prison for us during the barring-out.

We passed through into the cellar, and found that it was quite small. The floor was of stone, the walls were of stone, and the very ceiling was of the same material. There was not even a grating, and at the first glance I knew that escape was out of the question.

The place was dry, however, and a pile of blankets against one wall were evidently intended to serve as a bed. But there were no mattresses, and our sleeping accommodation was comfortless.

I was left in the cellar in the darkness, but presently Sir Montie was brought down. Five minutes later Watson was thrust into the cellar, and we heard the door close. Two bolts were shot, and the key was turned in the heavy lock.

Then there was the sound of another key turning, and it seemed as though some smaller bolts were being pushed back. I was just wondering what it could mean, when a small square of light appeared in the door. I then knew that one of the panels was hinged, so that it would be possible to converse with us without coming into the cellar.

Mr. Hunter's face appeared at the aperture.

"I am sorry, boys, that this treatment has been necessary," he said smoothly. "So long as you remain passive no harm will befall you. You have only yourselves to thank for this unfortunate state of affairs. Food and drink will be brought to you in the morning."

The panel closed, and it was relocked. After that came complete silence. I felt before me in the darkness, and my fingers came in contact with something solid. A sharp cry echoed in the cellar.

"Bead! Pray be careful, dear old boy!" came a gasp. "I'm not a cake, but my back's frightfully raw just at present."

"Horry, Montie," I said, raising my hand to his shoulder. "We're in a pretty pickle this time, and no mistake! I'm blessed if I know what we're going to do to get out of this hole—"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Tommy Watson. "Where are those blankets? I don't care what happens—I only want to lie down and get some ease!"

And Watson's words were in agreement with our own inclinations. We merely wanted to rest. Bore, weary, and disheartened, we dropped upon the blankets and attempted to sleep.

I hardly dared think of the future.

CHAPTER II.

RAWK TERRORISM—HANDFORTH AND DE VALERIE GET BUSY—BUT REGRET IT.

MEANWHILE there was considerable discussion in the Remove regarding our disappearance. De Valerie was the first to notice that we were missing. He went along to Study C to ask me something about the cricket.

But when he arrived Study C was dark and deserted.

De Valerie, who was a persistent sort of a chap, immediately started upon a search, expecting to find us in some other study. But his efforts were in vain. He even went over to the College House, but nobody, of course, had seen us over there.

"Seen anything of Bennett?" asked De Valerie, going into the common room.

"Can't make out what's become of him," said Owen major. "I understood that he was going to call a meeting of the cricket eleven."

"That's what I thought," said De Valerie. "He must have gone off somewhere with Tregellis-West and Watson. He'll turn up before long, I expect—it's gettin' near supper-time."

And De Valerie strolled out and went to his own study.

And then the Remove received a surprise. Mr. Trapps, accompanied by Starke and Kenmore and two or three other prefects, rounded up the Removites, and marched them upstairs to the dormitory. Nobody could make it out at first; but when the dormitory was reached De Valerie thought it about time to speak.

"What's the idea of this, sir?" he asked.

"The idea of what, boy?" asked Mr. Trapps curtly.

"Why, it's not bedtime yet, sir—"

"You are mistaken, De Valerie," cut in the new Form-master. "Mr. Hunter has made fresh arrangements, and the hour for retirement—so far as the Remove is concerned—has been altered."

"But we haven't had supper, sir!" shouted Handforth warmly.

"That is sufficient!" snapped Mr. Trapps. "In future the Remove will receive no supper. I shall return within five minutes in order to turn the lights out, and shall expect every boy to be in his bed."

Mr. Trapps walked out of the dormitory, and closed the door behind him. The amazed Removites heard the sound of bolts being shot home.

"What the dickens does this mean?" gasped Handforth.

"Shiver my main deck!" exclaimed Tom Burton. "It beats me, meemates. I thought the skipper wasn't going to serve out any punishment!"

"It's queer, Ro'sen—thunderin' queer," said De Valerie thoughtfully. "It looks to me as though somethin's gone wrong with the works—what? Don't forget that Bennett and his pals were kept prisoners by Mr. Hunter before we started the barrin'-out. It looks as though there's been treachery!"

"Treachery!" gasped several fellows.

"We ain't going to stand it!" roared Handforth violently. "By George! I'm not going to bed without my supper!"

"You'll have to, by the look of it," said De Valerie, who was the only fellow who remained calm. "This is a surprise—what? I'm concerned about those Study C chaps. They've been spirited away!"

It was some few minutes before the Remove

could fully grasp the nature of this disaster. But the storm soon burst, and the dormitory was filled with excited shouts and indignant exclamations.

Nobody thought of undressing, and Mr. Trapps's order was completely ignored. Five minutes passed, and then the door opened abruptly. The Form-master frowned with anger as he surveyed the fully dressed juniors.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded harshly. "You young rascals! Why are you not in your beds? Every boy in this room will take five hundred lines. And, as a further punishment, you shall undress in the dark!"

He took a small key and inserted it into the patent switch. The next moment the dormitory was plunged into darkness. Without another word Mr. Trapps retired, and the bolts were once more heard being shot into their sockets.

The lights could not be switched on again without the aid of a special key, and the fellows were momentarily thunderstruck by the amazing nature of this development. But then a chorus of angry cries went up.

The Remove realised, in fact, that it had been tricked. Just as Sir Montie and Tommy and I had found out earlier, the other fellows now knew that Mr. Hunter had committed an act of base treachery.

"We won't stand it!" declared Handforth, his voice shrill with excitement and anger. "We barred out once, and we'll jolly well do it again! Who votes for going back to the island? We can all get out of the window—just the same as we did originally."

"What about Bennett?" asked Hubbard.

"Oh, I'll take the lead this time——"

"No; you jolly well won't!" said a dozen fellows in one breath. "We don't want any of your rot, Handforth!"

"Why, you—you——"

Handforth paused, at a loss for words. And just then a series of gasps came from the window. Several juniors had pulled the blind aside, with the intention of looking out into the Triangle.

But it was seen at once that no exit by the window was possible. Outside, crossing the window at six-inch intervals, were heavy iron bars! The other two windows were treated in exactly the same way.

Mr. Hunter had made it impossible for the fellows to escape from the dormitory a second time! Not only were the windows barred, but the door was locked and bolted! The Removites were prisoners within their own dormitory.

"Well, this is a nice game!" said De Valerie, taking a deep breath. "I wouldn't mind bettin' a quid that poor old Benny and his pals are up in that tower again. Hunter's proved himself to be a Prussian now—what?"

"But what about that signed document?" roared Handforth.

"My dear chap, Hunter's ignoring it—there's nothin' else to think," said De Valerie. "It's just about the limit, but

what can we do? We're prisoners in the dorm. until to-morrow, anyhow."

"Great pip!"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

The Remove was bewildered and enraged. But nothing could be done. Without a doubt, Mr. Hunter had gone back upon his word. The evidence was positively clear upon that point.

And acting upon De Valerie's advice, the juniors very sensibly got into bed without delay. The majority of them were soon asleep, forgetting all their troubles. But others, such as De Valerie and the Bo'sun, lay awake for some time. They would certainly have made investigations in the region of the tower if any exit from the dormitory had been possible.

An hour before the rising-bell was due to ring the juniors awoke, to find Mr. Hunter and Mr. Trapps within the dormitory. The sun was shining into the windows, but it had an early morning look.

"Now, boys, you must dress yourselves at once," said Mr. Hunter sharply. "Mr. Trapps will remain in the dormitory until you are ready to descend. He will then give you an hour of lessons before breakfast."

Handforth jumped up, fully awake in a second.

"Look here, sir, what about that promise of yours?" he asked hotly.

"What promise, Handforth?"

"Why, didn't you say that nobody would be punished——"

"I made no such statement, Handforth," interjected Mr. Hunter coldly.

"Oh!"

It was a general gasp of dismay and anger.

"Why, you signed a blessed document!" roared Handforth recklessly. "You must be forgetting, sir——"

"Tut, tut!" snapped Mr. Hunter. "It is quite obvious to me that you boys have concocted this story amongst yourselves. Bennett mentioned something about a document, and he even produced a plain sheet of paper, but the whole thing is ridiculous. I intend to punish the Remove severely."

"May we know where Bennett and Tregellis-West and Walson are, sir?" asked De Valerie quietly.

"Those three wretched youths are already suffering punishment," replied Mr. Hunter grimly. "No, you need ask no questions. Kindly see that the boys create no uproar, Mr. Trapps," he added, walking towards the door.

The Remove tumbled out of bed in a state of chaotic thought. The manner in which Mr. Hunter had disclaimed all knowledge of his promises took the fellows' breath away. And Mr. Trapps's cold glance was sufficiently grim to put a stop to any disorder.

But by the time the fellows were in their Form-room they had got over their first consternation. Its place was filled by an overwhelming rage.

The position was even worse than it had been before the barring-out!

After telling themselves that they had

won the day, the Removites suddenly realised that just the opposite was the case. And Mr. Hunter's base action created a feeling of rage which was wellnigh uncontrollable.

Yet, at the same time, the fellows knew that they were helpless.

I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but I am quite sure that the Remove felt my loss. Without me at the helm the juniors were all at sea. De Valerie, possibly, would have made a good leader; but he did not enjoy a quarter of my influence in the Remove.

For the fellows to rise up and storm out of the Form-room was out of the question. It requires extraordinary provocation to rouse a body of junior schoolboys to that pitch. And just at present the Remove was feeling very helpless and dazed.

And Mr. Trapps revealed his true character quite plainly this morning. The previous afternoon he had been merely acting a part. The Remove now found that he was an excellent henchman of Mr. Hunter's—the latter's methods were Mr. Trapps's methods.

Before the class was dismissed five fellows had been caned, and as many more had received drastic impositions. Undoubtedly the juniors had been rather inattentive, but what else could be expected? Mr. Trapps made no allowances, and he proved himself to be harsh and tyrannous.

The Remove was released at last, and Handforth and Co. went straight to their study to talk matters over in the few minutes before breakfast. But when they arrived at the Remove passage they received a shock.

The big door leading from the lobby was locked—the passage was shut!

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "What's the meaning of this?"

"Look!" said McClure, pointing. "There's something on the door!"

Handforth needed no telling. A small piece of paper was affixed to the door panel by means of drawing pins. And the words upon it stated all junior studies were henceforth closed!

"Gee whiz! This is dandy!" exclaimed Farman, with a whistle. "Say, boys, we're getting it good an' thick now! Mr. Hunter is sure some goer once he gets real started. I guess this stunt is about the limit!"

"It's disgraceful!" roared Handforth. "I'm not going to stand it, for one——"

"Handforth, you will go to the dining-hall at once and take your seat at the table!" exclaimed the unpleasant voice of Mr. Trapps from behind. "Wait there until the other boys join you."

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Handforth. "I was only——"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Trapps.

Just for a moment it looked as though Handforth was about to resist, but there was something dangerous about Mr. Trapps's eyes, and Handforth choked back the words which were in his throat and walked away.

"And let me hear no grumbles," said the Form-Master, cycling the other juniors

grimly. "Mr. Hunter has his own methods of inflicting punishment—and the closing of junior studies is one of them."

At breakfast the Remove made further discoveries. The fare was much plainer than usual, and there was not so much of it. The indignation grew, but what could the juniors do against Mr. Hunter and their own Form-Master?

Morning lessons were started earlier than usual, so the fellows were not permitted much time for grumbling. They found out, however, that drastic restrictions had been laid down.

Cricket was forbidden, and no Removites were allowed to go beyond the bounds of the Triangle. When the Remove was not at lessons Warren was on duty at the gates, and he had orders to prevent all members of the Remove from passing out.

Life in the Ancient House, in fact, was wellnigh unbearable. The conditions were far more severe than they had been before the barring-out.

It must not be supposed that the remainder of the school took no interest in these affairs. As a matter of fact, the College House and the seniors of the Ancient House were thoroughly disgusted with Mr. Hunter. And there would certainly have been grave trouble if the Housemaster had attempted any of his tyranny with the seniors.

He left them severely alone, however, and so they had no cause for grumbling. The Ancient House Remove was thus left to bear its own troubles. All the boys in the College House were under the control of their own Housemaster, Mr. Stockdale, who had openly quarrelled with Hunter.

The Third-Form had quite enough to do submitting to Mr. Sunccliffe's treatment. He was nothing like so bad as Mr. Trapps, but the lags were allowed no opportunity of gathering their forces together.

Instead of a rebellious feeling arising, quite the opposite took place. The Removites were disheartened and wretched. Nobody had sufficient spirit left to work up a feeling of revolt—with the exception, perhaps, of De Valerie and Handforth. The juniors were weighed down by the load of punishment, and the most they did was to grumble amongst themselves.

Many wrote letters home, complaining bitterly. But even the writers themselves had little faith in this expedient. The people at home would not understand, and, in any case, they could do nothing. It wasn't likely that they would take their boys away from a famous school such as St. Frank's.

In the event of the parents writing, their complaints would certainly be addressed to the Headmaster. Dr. Stafford was away, and these letters, therefore, would be opened by Mr. Hunter. Doubtless Mr. Hunter was prepared for such an event and would smooth matters over.

It was generally realised that the Remove would have to fight its own battle or tamely submit. Of course it couldn't last long—

that was one consolation. Mr. Hunter would never have acted in this manner had he held a permanent post at the school.

He knew that he would soon be going, and I daresay he felt that he might as well "take it out" of the Remove as much as possible before he went. And, as for fighting, the Remove didn't feel much like it. A settled feeling of despondency had overtaken the juniors.

As I mentioned, however, Handforth and De Valerie were exceptions. They had able supporters in the person of the Bo'sun and Farman and Yakama and two or three others. But these boys were not leaders. They were not capable of taking command of a crowd of reckless juniors.

After morning lessons Handforth and De Valerie stood chatting on the Ancient House steps. A crowd of others were near by, listening without much enthusiasm. Handforth was talking big, and this was nothing unusual.

"I don't see why we shouldn't get up another barring-out," he exclaimed decidedly. "Personally, I'm not the chap to take things lying down. What do you say, De Valerie?"

"My dear chap, I'm with you," said De Valerie promptly. "If we only plan things carefully we ought to be able to get busy after dark. But it won't be any good going back to the island——"

"Why not?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, all the grub's been taken away, for one thing, and we should starve," replied De Valerie. "And it's quite possible that Mr. Hunter has taken all the boats away—he's capable of it, you know."

"The—the awful beast!" growled McClure. De Valerie nodded.

"We all know that," he said. "But we sha'n't do any good by calling Hunter names. We've got to think of something quite different to what's been done before. It wouldn't be a bad wheeze to go straight home—every one of us. We've got every excuse."

"By George!" said Handforth. "That's not a bad idea——"

"How the dickens do you think I'm going to get home?" snorted McClure. "My people live up in Scotland, and the fare costs quids! I've only got three bob!"

De Valerie sighed.

"That's the difficulty," he said. "We haven't got enough money to take us home. But I really shouldn't advise you to think of that wheeze seriously. It's like running away—what?"

"Well, there's that about it," said Handforth. "But, dash it all, we can't stick this awful treatment. I vote we rise in a body—just the same as we did before. We'll try to get the Fifth in with us," he added enthusiastically. "And the Sixth too, if they'll come—a revolt of the whole giddy House!"

"Quite so—quite so!" exclaimed a gentle voice from the doorway.

The juniors turned abruptly and saw Mr. Hunter standing there.

"A revolt of the whole House—eh?" repeated the Housemaster. "Very pretty, Handforth. I am sorry to see that you are attempting to stir up trouble. Come with me to my study at once. You will accompany Handforth, De Valerie."

The other juniors melted away hurriedly, and Handforth and De Valerie couldn't defy Mr. Hunter by themselves. They entered the House, and emerged ten minutes later with somewhat pale faces.

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Handforth painfully.

"Did you get it hot?" asked McClure.

Handforth glared.

"You ass! Ain't Hunter a Prussian?" he asked. "Did you think he'd lay it on with a straw? We were whopped frightfully—eight cuts each. Oh, my hat! I sha'n't be able to touch anything for a week!"

Handforth and De Valerie displayed their palms to the sympathetic onlookers. They were red and swollen, and bore evident signs of having been slashed with vicious force.

After this drastic treatment even Handforth and De Valerie did not attempt to talk of revolt again. Mr. Hunter went about gloating openly. And it was noticed that both he and Mr. Trapps were constantly dodging about. The juniors were scarcely ever able to be alone for ten minutes at a time.

And the Remove was subdued. Gloom had settled over the entire crowd. It was the reaction, of course. And Mr. Hunter mistook this reaction for complete submission.

But the Remove hadn't finished yet!

CHAPTER III.

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT—A BARE CHANCE—THE MESSENGER RAT.

SIR MONTIE and Tommy and I had spent the day in the cellar. It had been a trying time for us, for we had had no glimpse of daylight. Complete darkness had shut us in the whole time.

At about nine o'clock in the morning Bates had appeared at the aperture in the door. He had lowered a bag to the floor, and had closed the panel again without speaking. Investigation showed that the bag contained some dry bread and a bottle of water. There was just about enough to satisfy Tommy Watson.

We shared the food equally, and were hungrier than ever. And at midday the same performance was repeated. Mr. Hunter evidently had decided to half starve us. By so doing he hoped to break our spirit utterly and completely. The same thing applied to the darkness. Being confined in a dark cellar day after day, night after night, is calculated to reduce the strongest fellow to a pitiable state of nervousness and submission.

So far, however, we had not undergone the torture sufficiently to bring about this result. As the day advanced, indeed, we became far more spirited than we had been in the morning.

I believe I was partially responsible for this. Watson was frankly pessimistic, and Montie indifferent. But I managed to instil some "go" into my chums. There was certainly no prospect of escape, but it was just as well to be on the alert.

Thus, nearly twenty-four hours after the flogging had been inflicted, we were leaning against one of the walls of the cellar, chatting almost cheerfully. It wasn't any good being downhearted.

"My dear chaps, we've got to look on the best side of things," I exclaimed. "Bad as our position is, it might have been worse. I've been in predicaments ten times as bad as this, and I've managed to scrape out whole. It all depends upon circumstances."

"You're a cheerin' fellow, Benny, but really I can't quite fall in with your mood," exclaimed Sir Montie. "What can we do? When we were locked in that tower we escaped through the ceilin'. But it's all brick here—nothin' but bare stone."

"There's the door," I said thoughtfully.

"Oh, rot!" said Watson gruffly. "The door's made of solid oak, and we should want a ton of dynamite to bust it down!"

"Somebody may come in," I explained. "You never know your luck. If we could only get out of this cellar——"

"Shurrup!" hissed Watson. "There's somebody at the door now!"

The panel opened, and a square of light appeared from the passage outside. Bates stood there, and he looked in at us with an unpleasant grin.

"Mr. 'Unter's told me to say that you won't get any supper to-night," he explained. "But you'll be allowed to come out of the cellar an' take some exercise in this passage. See? Mr. Trapps will be down in 'arf a minute to let you out—one at a time."

Bates was quite right. Mr. Trapps soon appeared, and then, singly, we were permitted to leave the cellar. In spite of my hopes we were not provided with the slightest opportunity of making a rush.

In some of the other cellars we found utensils for washing, and so forth. After a brisk wash and towelling I felt altogether better, and was somewhat surprised that Mr. Hunter had even allowed this privilege. He could scarcely have done anything less, however.

The interval was welcome, and by the time we were left to ourselves again we felt altogether better in spirits. I would not allow my chums to become gloomy.

"I'm going to examine this cellar from end to end," I said briskly. "It'll give us something to do, and there's no telling what we may find."

"How the dickens can you examine it in the darkness?" asked Watson.

"I can't—but I've got my torch," I replied. "It's a good thing I always make

a point of carrying it about with me. The battery's rather weak though, and if I used it continuously it wouldn't last long."

"Then what's the good of talking?" asked Tommy impatiently.

"I've got something else," I replied. "In one of those other cellars I saw a couple of candles lying on a ledge, and I pocketed 'em whilst Trapps wasn't looking. They'll come in handy."

"Begad! You're frightfully smart, Benny," said Sir Montie admiringly.

"Rats! I only kept my eyes open," I said, striking a match and applying the flame to the wick of one of the candles. "That's better, my sons. We can see where we are now."

I stuck the candle on a little projecting piece of stone—a kind of shelf jutting out of the wall.

It was surprising how the light rendered us more cheerful. Actually we had nothing to hope for; there was no prospect of escape. But as I pointed out, there was no telling what might turn up.

I spent an hour in going over the cellar, but there wasn't a crevice which we could use to our advantage. There were one or two holes in the stonework near the floor, and we had excellent reason to know that these were used by unpleasant four-footed visitors.

For in addition to our other troubles, we were pestered with rats in the cellar. Two or three had walked in during the morning, with the evident intention of searching round for crumbs. But we had chased them out. While we were moving about or talking, there was no sign of the rats; they only ventured to appear when everything was quiet.

Near the ceiling there were two minute gratings—or, at least, holes in the stonework. These had been provided for the purpose of admitting air to the cellar. I remembered seeing their outlets in the exterior wall, just at the corner of the Triangle.

Watson had suggested shouting for help down these ventilating shafts. But our voices wouldn't have carried, and I knew very well that such a move would have been useless.

Having spent that hour in examining the cellar, I was forced to admit that no escape was possible. My own spirits came perilously near to flagging, and I thought it just as well that we should get to sleep. There was nothing else to be done, except talk—and we were tired of that.

We all lay awake on our blankets. For half an hour everything was quiet, and my chums were just dozing off. But then, abruptly, I started up, catching my breath in sharply.

For some little time I had been listening to an unmistakable nibbling, but had taken no particular notice of it. But now I breathed quickly and excitedly, and thumped Montie and Tommy with unnecessary violence.

"Great Scott!" I shouted. "A wheeze, my sons—a wheeze!"

"Mind where you're shoving your silly hands!" snorted Watson. "That's the second time you've punched my left ear—"

"I've thought of a terrific idea!" I went on, quivering with excitement. "If we can't get out of this hole ourselves, we might be able to send a message out for help!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie mildly. "Is that the wheeze?"

"Yes."

"I hate to be rude, dear old boy, but I must say that I can't see anythin' frightfully startlin' in that idea. You don't suppose that Bates will take a message for us, do you?"

"I wasn't thinking of Bates!" I retorted. "We can get another messenger to take our appeal—a messenger who will deposit it in the Triangle."

"Explain yourself, you ass!" roared Tommy Watson.

"Well, these rats—"

"Rats!" gasped Tregellis-West.

"Exactly!" I replied. "We can persuade one of them to take our message—"

"Great pip!" panted Tommy Watson, in a startled voice. "He's—he's gone dotty, Montie! It must be this rotten cellar! Keep calm, Benny, for goodness' sake!"

I grinned in the darkness.

"No, I'm not dotty," I said calmly. "It's just a scheme of mine, that's all. The odds are about even, I should say. It might fail, and it might succeed. There's no telling until we try it."

"Try what?"

"Why, sending one of these rats with a message—"

"You're mad—clean off your rocker!" shouted Watson angrily. "How the merry dickens are you going to get a rat to take a message? I suppose you'll ask it nicely, and promise it a penny if it goes?" he added sarcastically.

I grinned again.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be much good," I replied. "You needn't try to be funny, my dear chaps. This is a genuine wheeze, and I'm not so dotty as you seem to imagine. If we can only catch one of these rats—"

"Dear boy, it's very nice of you to try to cheer us up," said Sir Montie; "but, really, we ought to be getting to sleep—"

"When are you idiots going to get hold of the fact that I'm serious?" I demanded warmly. "We've got to catch one of these rats, I say, and then tie a message to one of its legs. See the wheeze?"

Watson snorted.

"No, I'm fliggered if I do!" he retorted. "And nobody else could see it, either. What's the good of tying a message to a rat? The beastly thing would only take it down to its den. And that would do us a fat lot of good—I don't think!"

I punched in the darkness, and hit something solid.

"If you'll only listen—" I began.

"Ow!" roared Watson painfully. "Oh, corks! You—you silly cuckoo!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Keep your silly hands to yourself!" snorted Tommy. "You thumped my back—and it's still half-raw from the effects of last night! If you ain't careful I'll jump on yours!"

I shivered at the thought. Our backs were intensely sore, although we were in no actual pain—unless our backs were touched. I had carelessly thumped Watson rather heavily; but I didn't feel penitent.

"You shouldn't be such a sarcastic ass," I said tartly. "I've got a ripping wheeze, and you simply sneer at it. I know jolly well the odds are against us, but while there's life there's hope, you know."

"Begad, we'd better let Benny explain, Tommy boy," remarked Tregellis-West thoughtfully. "He's a wonderful chap for amazin' ideas—he is, really. Who knows? There may be somethin' in this suggestion—somethin' deep. Benny's frightfully deep, you know. I must admit that I'm flounderin'—"

"Well, you needn't flounder for long," I interrupted briskly. "Just listen to me, and don't jaw so much."

Sir Montie sighed.

"Dear fellow, I stand corrected," he murmured, "although, as a matter of fact, I'm sittin'. But get on with the wheeze. I'm frightfully interested."

"It's a great pity you chaps can't learn to use the few wits nature has blessed you with," I said acidly. "I've always got to explain things to you—things you ought to know without any detailing on my part. As I said before, we've got to collar one of these rats. It'll be a bit of a job, I dare say, but we've got plenty of time, and patience is a great virtue."

"But what's the good—" began Watson explosively.

"Dry up!" I interrupted. "You don't think I'm ass enough to send the rat back into its own hole, do you?"

"Then what are you going to do with it?" demanded Watson. "Shove it through the keyhole?"

"Sarcasm again!" I snorted. "No, you growling ass. I'm going to start the rat on a journey down one of those ventilating-shafts. There's only one exit—and that's into the Triangle. What's going to happen then? Why, if we tie the note on loosely, it'll fall off before the rat's covered twenty yards, and it's quite on the cards that one of the fellows will pick up our dramatic appeal for help in the morning. Now don't you understand?"

There was a short silence.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie at last. "There's somethin' in the idea, old man."

"I hadn't thought of the giddy ventilating-shaft," came Watson's voice. "My only Aunt Jane! If we can only collar one of those rats, we might be able to do the trick."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you for the last five minutes," I said. "Of course, it's only a bare chance, and I warn you not to count on it too much. But it'll give us something to do, and luck generally favours the good!"

"Yes; but look here," said Watson doubtfully. "Supposing we do capture a rat? And supposing we tie a message to one of its feet? How shall we know that the paper won't slip off—"

"Oh, I know all about that," I interrupted. "If the thing's only secured loosely it's just as likely to come off in the ventilating-shaft as it is in the Triangle? My dear chaps, we shall have to chance that, and the odds are in our favour, in any case. It's more likely that the message will jerk loose when the rat begins to run rapidly, and it can't do that until it gets into the open."

"But we haven't caught the rat yet," said Sir Montie practically.

I struck a match.

"We're going to try that game now," I replied. "Chuck that candle over, Tommy. There are one or two preparations to make. It'll be a trying job, but we mustn't be in too much of a hurry. Time doesn't count with us under these circumstances, and if we keep awake until after midnight we shall still get plenty of sleep. It's only just about ten now."

Of course I didn't kid myself that the plan would be successful. There was just a bare possibility of accomplishing our object; and the game was certainly worth trying. But the first thing was to catch our rat, and this was by no means an easy task.

Our preparations were simple. I found a piece of silver wrapping-paper in my pocket; it wasn't lead-foil, but prepared paper, something after the style of tea-wrapping paper.

On the white side of this I wrote:

"Tregellis-West and Watson and I have been confined by Hunter in a cellar beneath the private section of the Ancient House. If this is picked up, please inform Mr. Stockdale at once.

"DICK BENNETT."

I couldn't get any more on the piece of paper, although I wanted to go into fuller details. I screwed it up into a neat little silver ball, realising that this would attract more attention than an ordinary piece of paper. The fags, especially, would notice such an article lying on the grounds.

Sir Montie supplied me with a tiny rubber band, and the idea was to secure the message to the rat in this fashion. The paper ball would undoubtedly fall off within a short time.

The next thing was to induce one of our four-footed visitors to walk into our little trap. Our only course was to capture one by stealth. There was a tiny crust of bread left—having been discarded by the fastidious Sir Montie because it happened to fall in the dust. This bait was placed some little distance from the rat-hole, and my chums and I

squatted round in a semicircle, each holding a folded blanket in readiness.

"I'm going to put the candle out now," I said. "If either of you hear a rat nibbling, chuck the blanket at the sound. I'll have my torch ready to flash out at the precise moment."

"It's hopeless!" grunted Watson. "We shall never do the trick."

As a matter of fact, I was rather sceptical myself; but, as I pointed out, we could try the game on, at least. And so we sat perfectly still, waiting. I had warned my chums not to breathe a sound.

I fully expected to sit in that tense position for an hour or two. My gratification was great, therefore, when an unmistakable nibbling sounded after barely fifteen minutes had elapsed.

Something whizzed through the air, and Tregellis-West uttered a yell. I pressed the switch of my torch and acted promptly. Montie's aim had been true, for a large rat wriggled from beneath the blanket and streaked across to its hole.

Both Watson and I flung our blankets at the same second, but I was handicapped by the light, and missed. Watson was cute; he hurled his blanket straight at the hole, and not at the rat. And he was just a shade quicker than the visitor. The frightened animal swerved and dodged round the cellar. There was certainly no other exit now that Watson's blanket was barring the hole.

"Better be careful!" I panted. "Rats are dangerous customers when they're cornered. Stuff your blanket into that hole, Tommy."

Watson did so. The rat was crouching over in a far corner, waiting. Its little eyes gleamed viciously in the electric-light from my torch. There was a lull in the hostilities, and I breathed quickly.

"Well, we've got the boulder trapped, anyhow," I exclaimed. "It'll be a ticklish business now, I can tell you. We'll all chuck our blankets at once and smother the beast."

I lit one of the candles, and allowed it to burn up brightly. The rat, meanwhile, remained still. It was quite aware of the fact that its exit was blocked up, and that we were filled with evil designs.

The whole thing was rather dangerous, I daresay, but we didn't think of that at the time. We merely took ordinary precautions. Our blankets, flung simultaneously, descended upon the crouching rat in a heap.

"Look out!" I roared.

While speaking I flung myself forward upon the heap of blankets. By a great piece of good luck my hands fell on the rat as it was wriggling its way clear—only the blanket, of course, protected us from bites and scratches. I gripped fiercely, and held the prisoner in a firm clasp.

"By Jupiter!" I gasped. "It's easy, my sons. Bring that ball of paper, Montie—and look sharp!"

Exactly how we fastened the message to the rat is difficult to describe. We had an appalling amount of trouble, for the little

animal was full of vigorous life. But at last we managed to get one of its rear legs out of the blankets' folds. The rubber band was quickly slipped over, and then I carried the whole collection—blankets, rat, and message—over to one of the ventilating-shafts.

More by luck than anything else the little messenger was despatched on its travels. I could just reach the hole, and by continual shuffling I pushed the rat out of the blanket into the space.

When it freed itself I don't know; but I'm quite sure that I continued the shuffling process for fully three minutes after the rat had slipped away. But there was no sign of the ball of silver paper, and our hopes ran high.

"Well, we did the trick," I panted breathlessly. "Phew! I'm perspiring tremendously. What a struggle, eh?"

"I was expecting the brute to hop out of the blanket every minute!" exclaimed Watson. "But it's no good, Benny. I'll bet anything that message is lying in the shaft, within a yard of us."

"We'll soon settle that point," I replied briskly.

Montie hoisted me up, and I flashed my torch down the narrow space. The shaft was quite clear, as far as I could see. The ball of paper had certainly been carried away by the rat.

"Well, that's that," I said cheerfully. "I'm not going to let my imagination run loose, because I should probably be disappointed. But there's no telling, my dear chaps. It's rather a forlorn hope, but forlorn hopes have come off many a time."

"There's nothing like being optimistic," yawned Sir Montie.

"And now," I went on, "we'll see about catching the next."

"The next?" repeated Watson blankly.

"Of course," I replied crisply. "We mustn't rely on that one rat alone. We'll catch as many as we can, and send as many messages as we can. They simply can't all fail. But we may have frightened the bounders off."

Sir Montie and Tommy were rather reluctant at first, but they saw the wisdom of my decision, and we were soon waiting for another little visitor to fall into our trap. And while we were doing this Nelson Lee, my esteemed guv'nor, was having a little adventure which was to mean everything to us.

I'll just tell you all about it.

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE TO THE RESCUE—RELEASED—
I AM VERY GRIM.

NELSON LEE dropped lightly over the wall which separated the school grounds from the lane. St. Frank's was quiet, for the hour was very late; indeed, eleven o'clock would soon be striking.

Under ordinary circumstances Nelson Lee would have been occupying his position as

"Mr. Alvington," the Housemaster of the Ancient House. But the circumstances which prevailed at present, however, could scarcely be called ordinary. Nelson Lee had left St. Frank's upon some important work in connection with the Secret Service.

I had soon discovered that he was still in the neighbourhood, and that his chief attentions were directed against Mr. Hunter. There had been all sorts of queer happenings just recently.

Nelson Lee had adopted several different disguises in succession, and he always seemed to be dodging about in the neighbourhood of the school. I wasn't aware of the real truth of the matter—and, consequently, I was in a fog. But I did know that there existed a mysterious underground cavern quite close to the school. I had visited it more than once, accompanied by Tregellis-West and Watson, and so I can speak with authority.

But the guv'nor's game was somewhat mystifying. I didn't exactly know how far he had progressed with his case, and when matters would reach a head. But I instinctively felt that we shouldn't have long to wait now.

On this particular night Nelson Lee was bent upon some task in connection with his secret work. I don't know what, because certain events happened which side-tracked him in a totally different direction.

He crossed the Triangle softly, and stole like a shadow towards the wall of the Ancient House. It was really an amazingly lucky thing that Nelson Lee should be on the spot at this time. But yet it was only a matter of luck. There was nothing extraordinary about it.

His work was connected with Mr. Hunter, and it was therefore only natural that he should be somewhere about. I won't deny, however, that fortune favoured us in the most gratifying manner.

For as Nelson Lee crept cautiously round the Ancient House wall in the direction of Mr. Hunter's study, he suddenly became aware of a curious shuffling noise near the base of the brickwork.

The sound proceeded from a spot several feet ahead. Nelson Lee paused, straining his ears and eyes. And he saw something dart out from a small grating and streak across the Triangle.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "Merely a rat."

At the same time, Nelson Lee was somewhat surprised to see the little animal; he was not aware that rats dodged in and out of the Ancient House in this manner. And there was something else, too.

As the rat streaked away a curious little rustle accompanied its movements, and Lee caught a glimpse of something silvery in the gloom. The black form of the rat vanished into the darkness, but the small, silvery object remained.

"H'm!" murmured the detective. "That's rather queer."

He stepped over quietly, and extended his

Angers to the gleaming little ball on the ground.

"A piece of silver paper," he told himself, as he mechanically straightened it out. "And yet I can't quite see how the rat—By Junes! What's this, by all that's wonderful?"

He could dimly see some writing upon the paper, but the gloom was too thick to allow him to distinguish the words. So he placed the paper in his pocket, and quietly recrossed the Triangle and scaled the wall.

Here, out of vision, he flashed the powerful light from his electric torch upon the silver paper. Of course the guv'nor read my message, and when he had finished he whistled softly to himself.

"Upon my soul!" he murmured. "What an amazing dodge! But I must admit that Nipper is cute. At the same time my own appearance on the scene was most opportune. I fancied Hunter had been up to some base trick or other."

Nelson Lee was very grim as he re-read the message. For a Housemaster to imprison three juniors in a cellar was a criminal act, and Lee was particularly incensed at this treatment.

"I must certainly lend the young rascals a helping hand," he decided. "But it would be foolish for me to commence operations at present. Hunter has not retired, and it is distinctly possible that several other masters are still up."

The finding of our appeal for help caused Nelson Lee to alter his plans completely. Instead of pursuing his original object, he turned and walked rapidly to the village. He halted at the George Inn, and entered that highly respectable tavern by a private door.

Two hours later Nelson Lee emerged. The whole village was fast asleep by this time, and the night was quiet and still. High clouds obscured the stars, and there was no moon.

As the schoolmaster-detective walked down the village street his feet caused no noise whatever, for he was wearing rubber-soled shoes. In his pockets one or two steel instruments were reposing—articles which would have aroused dark suspicions in the mind of the village constable, could he have seen them.

Arriving at St. Frank's, Nelson Lee repeated his previous performance, and finally came to a halt before the window of a store-room in the rear of the Ancient House. For five minutes he worked silently, and then the window opened.

Lee slipped through, and took his electric torch from his pocket. Before switching it on he placed a metal cap over the bulb—in the centre of which there was merely a pin-hole. As a result the light which streamed forth was now only a tiny beam. But it was quite sufficient for immediate purposes.

Walking softly, Nelson Lee proceeded down a passage. Naturally, he knew every inch of the Ancient House, and the position of the cellar was quite clear in his mind. Upon

arrival, however, a slight difficulty presented itself.

The door had been fitted with a latch, and it was locked.

"A nuisance, but I was half-expecting it," murmured the detective. "We'll soon see what can be done."

The lock was quite a modern one, but Nelson Lee conquered it within seven minutes. And he left no sign behind him; the mechanism was unharmed in the slightest degree. Most locks, after all, are quite simple in construction and action.

Softly opening the door, Lee listened for a few moments, and then descended the steps. He found himself in a short passage. And the first thing he noticed particularly was a staringly new door. The old door, he remembered, had been somewhat dilapidated. But this thing was heavy, and there were top and bottom bolts, to say nothing of a huge lock. The key to the latter was hanging on a nail close by, and Nelson Lee nodded approvingly. This meant much less trouble.

He inserted the key and turned it; then he shot back the bolts softly and pushed open the door. At the same second he uncapped his torch, and the full beam blazed into the cellar. The light revealed three forms lying upon blankets. One of these forms sat up abruptly and blinked at the light.

Needless to say, I was the blinker.

"Who's that?" I demanded gruffly. "Can't you let us sleep—"

"My dear Nipper, please don't talk so loud," came the unmistakable voice of the dear old guv'nor. "I am pleased to see—"

"Great pip!" I gasped. "Is it—is it you, sir?"

The light switched round, and fell upon the features of Nelson Lee. He was smiling somewhat amusedly, although I detected a grim glint in his eyes.

"How—what— Oh, for!" I panted. "This is a surprise, and no mistake! How on earth did you know that we were here, guv'nor?"

"Your unique message, Nipper, was quite precise—"

"Do—do you mean to tell me that you picked up that piece of silver paper?" I asked wonderingly.

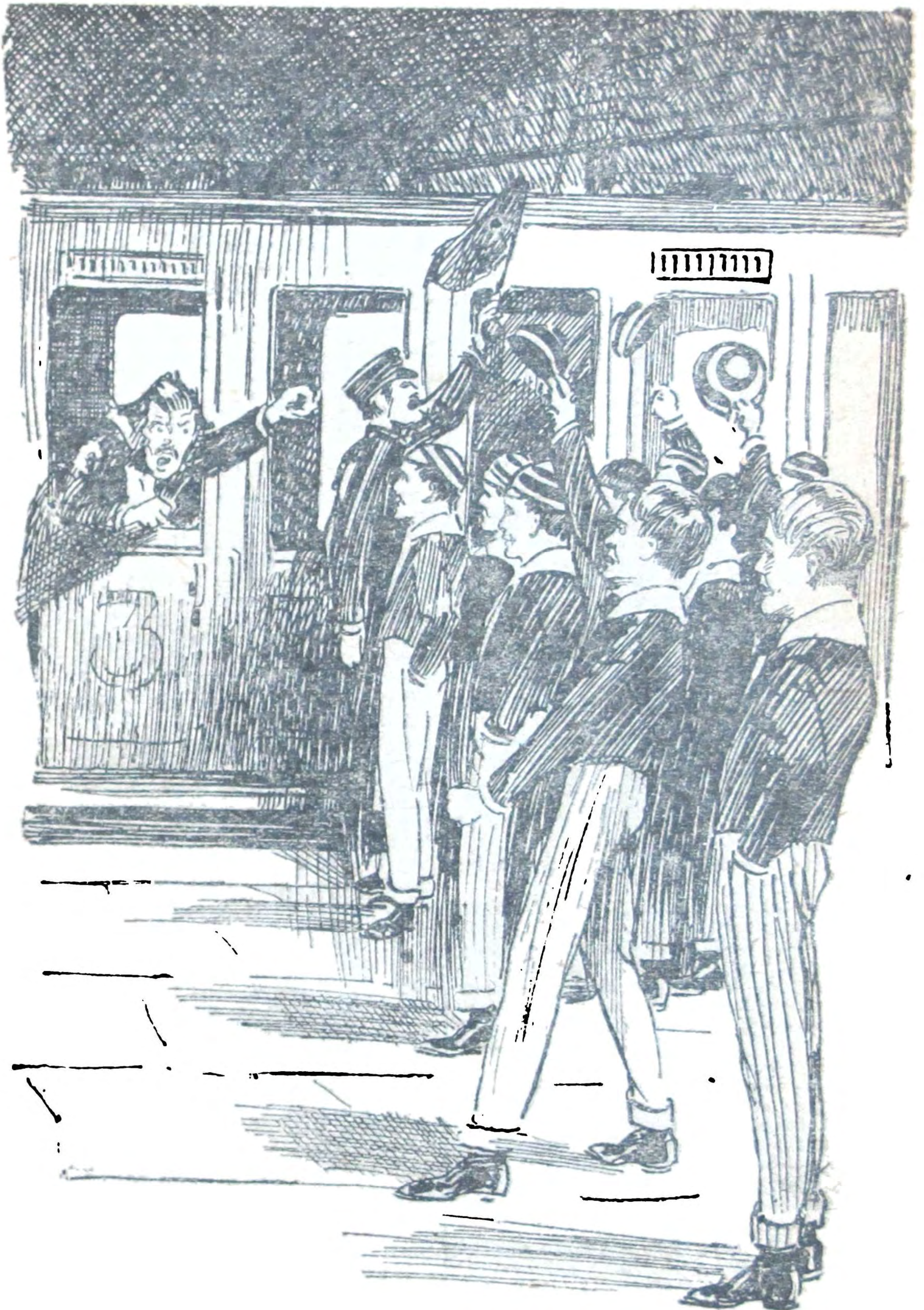
"Your little messenger practically delivered it at my feet," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "Talk about luck! This is about the—"

"Pray don't talk in your sleep, Benny boy!" came a mumble from one of the blankets. "You are disturbin' me shockin'ly!"

"Wake up, you arse!" I hissed. "We're rescued!"

Sir Montie and Tommy sat up and blinked. A full minute elapsed before they grasped the joyful fact that the man behind the torch was Nelson Lee, and that our imprisonment was at an end. It really seemed too good to be true.



Mr. Hunter's ally raved helplessly; his voice was drowned amidst shouts and groans. In the middle of it all the guard came up.—(See page 24.)

"Begad! It's like a fairy-tale—it is, really," declared Sir Montie mildly. "We send out our message, an' the wizard appears in no time. It's surprisin'; in fact I'm quite amazed!"

"And distinctly complimentary, Montie," smiled Nelson Lee. "But, really, I have not acted the part of a wizard. You have to thank chance for this happy rescue. It was merely a piece of unusually good luck which led me to the wall of the Ancient House at that crucial moment."

"What were you doing there, sir?" I asked keenly.

"Curiosity again, Nipper!" reproved the guv'nor. "It won't do—you mustn't ask me questions, young 'un. You ought to be jolly thankful that I have got you out of this hole. I must acknowledge that Mr. Hunter does not appear to be an ideal Housemaster."

"He's a Prussian, sir!" I declared.

"Upon my soul, you're not far wrong, lad," said Nelson Lee. "But the longer we remain here the greater the risk we run. Just explain how you worked this wonderful trick, and I will then give you some useful advice."

It didn't take us long to acquaint Nelson Lee with all the facts concerning the rat episode. It is quite unnecessary for me to add that we dealt eloquently with the incidents regarding the flogging and our confinement in the cellar.

The guv'nor listened grimly, nodding now and again.

"You have been having a rough time of it, boys," he said at length. "I can safely inform you that Mr. Hunter is nearly at the end of his tether, and will shortly be leaving St. Frank's to take up new duties far less responsible."

"Breaking stones in a quarry, for instance?" I asked.

"Exactly, Nipper, exactly," replied Nelson Lee. "I was wondering if you would catch my meaning. Your news about the signed document and the invisible ink does not surprise me in the least. It was a particularly Hunnish trick—and, if it comes to that, particularly Hunter-ish, too. We must expect such things from a man of your Housemaster's character."

"But I'm blessed if I can understand——"

"And I'm afraid you won't understand, Watson," interrupted Lee. "You are well aware of the fact that Mr. Hunter is a rascal—I am revealing no secret by making that statement. And now for that advice I mentioned. Go straight up to your dormitory and get into bed."

"And what about the morning, sir?" I asked.

"In the morning, Nipper, your presence in the dormitory will naturally give the excellent Mr. Hunter a powerful shock," said the guv'nor calmly. "Well, so much the better. He cannot possibly drag you back into this imprisonment, and he will know

that you have not been talking—for I advise you to say as little as possible about this disgraceful affair."

"That's all very well, sir," I protested. "Hunter will only get hold of us again, and then we shall be worse off——"

"It is my opinion, that Mr. Hunter will not dare to repeat this performance," said Nelson Lee, interrupting. "To make matters safe, you had better confide in somebody you can trust—such as Burton. If you mysteriously disappear during the course of tomorrow, Burton will know that Mr. Hunter is the cause. He must at once communicate with Mr. Kent, who is staying at the George Inn."

"I suppose that's you, sir?" I put in.

"Your imaginative powers, my dear Nipper, are quite remarkable," smiled the guv'nor. "If Mr. Hunter acts drastically in the morning, you will not suffer for long. But, as I mentioned, I don't think Mr. Hunter will molest you. Now, boys, get upstairs as quickly as possible."

"And what about you, sir?" asked Sir Montie.

"I intend to leave the school premises without delay, Montie," replied Nelson Lee. "I am feeling quite pleased with myself, for I have performed some useful work. You have my sympathy, boys, but I urge you to provoke Mr. Hunter as little as possible. Believe me, you won't find it necessary to endure him much longer."

"That's a blessing, sir," said Watson thankfully.

We all left the cellar, thrilling with excitement and satisfaction—at least, Montie and Tommy and I were. In our wildest hopes we had not dared to dream of such a prompt release as this. And it did me good to see the guv'nor again.

It wasn't to be expected, however, that I should take his advice literally. I'm not a vindictive chap, but my back was sore, and I hadn't touched any decent food for thirty hours and more. My chums were in the same boat, and we all felt that something ought to be done.

The very thought of allowing Mr. Hunter to go unpunished dismayed me. He had acted the part of an inhuman brute, and I badly wanted to give him a taste—a liberal taste—of his own unpalatable medicine.

Naturally I did not mention these thoughts to Nelson Lee. He hadn't been birched, and several square meals had entered his tummy during the course of the day; it wasn't to be supposed that he would understand the matter as we did.

I did not merely think of the present. I could picture untold hardships on the morrow. With Mr. Trapps and Mr. Hunter riding rough-shod over the Remove, life would be unbearable. And a great joy filled me as I thought of certain sinister ideas. Revenge is sweet—and I meant to have some!

The cellar was closed and relocked, and

Nelson Lee hung the key upon a nail. Then he turned to us seriously.

"You had better leave me down here, lads. I will make my exit at once—as soon as you have gone upstairs. Mr. Hunter will receive a surprise when he finds the cellar empty in the morning."

I nodded.

"He'll receive a surprise before that!" I told myself—but thought it unnecessary to say the words aloud.

Without delay we bade Nelson Lee good-night and crept cautiously upstairs. The prospect of getting into bed did not appeal to me in the least. By the time we reached the upper landing my plans were formulated.

"Great pip!" muttered Watson, as he reached the dormitory door. "What the dickens— Just hold your light steady, Bennett!"

We all gazed at the dormitory door in astonishment. It was fitted with two heavy bolts, and they were shot home to their sockets.

"I'm not surprised," I whispered. "This is really a sign of weakness. Hunter's afraid of a second revolt, and he's taken precautions. The poor old Remove's imprisoned in its own giddy dormitory!"

"Well, we shall soon be between the merry old sheets," murmured Sir Montie languidly. "What a rippin' prospect. I do hope Handforth won't wake up. I don't feel up to answerin' a thousand questions."

I regarded my chums steadily.

"Do you think you're going to bed?" I asked.

"No," replied Watson—"I know it!"

"Then you know wrong, my son," I said grimly. "There's work to be done before we go to bed, and don't you forget it! Hunter's been searching for trouble for a long while—and now he's going to find piles of it!"

CHAPTER V.

MR. HUNTER GETS A SHOCK—THE REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNAL—SENTENCED.

MR. KENNEDY HUNTER, M.A., was in bed.

That he was asleep was perfectly obvious; his snores quivered steadily upon the still air of his bedroom, and they were regular and even. From the outer darkness of the apartment a tiny beam of light shone, and finally focussed itself upon the sleeping man's features.

Asleep, Mr. Hunter looked almost genial. There was nothing about his cast of countenance to suggest his real character.

The light wavered for a moment, and then snapped out. The blind was up, and the faint starlight shone in at the window. Dim, shapeless forms moved silently about the bed.

There was a faint shuffle as one of the intruders stumbled over Mr. Hunter's slippers. The Housemaster turned, and then

awoke. He did not know why he had awakened, but there was a curious optical illusion which caused him to become wide awake in a moment. As he lay upon his side in bed he gazed at the window. And, clearly outlined against the night sky, a dim form was visible: it appeared to be cloaked something like an old monk.

"Queer—infernally queer!" thought Mr. Hunter raising his head from the pillow.

The form was still there, and, curiously enough, it actually seemed to move. Mr. Hunter closed his eyes for a moment, hoping to destroy the illusion. For, somehow, he was becoming uneasy.

"Seize the traitor!" came a low, deep voice.

Mr. Hunter started violently.

He sat up, his pulse throbbing with unusual rapidity. He knew well enough that he wasn't dreaming. And the cloaked form had resolved itself into two—no, three! Good Heavens! There were five or six round his bed?

"Who—what—?" gasped Mr. Hunter, thoroughly startled.

"Seize him, comrades!" came the voice again.

Before Mr. Hunter could spring out of bed—before he could even utter another cry—the pillow was jammed over his face, and he was forced downwards. Heavy weights thudded upon his legs, and he was helpless.

The rest was a nightmare. The pillow-case, or something which felt like it, was suddenly pulled over his head and drawn tight at the neck. Mr. Hunter succeeded in giving vent to a sound which was the beginning of a yell for help; but it was stifled almost at the outset.

A scarf was bound round his mouth—over the pillow-slip—and his wrists were bound behind his back. Then, clad only in his pyjamas, he was hauled out of bed and forced to stand at the foot. He only made one attempt to get away—and that was too painful to bear repetition.

Blindfolded and helpless, he was led towards the door, and the cool air of the passage struck chill as he was forced outside. Mr. Hunter's mind was in a whirl. He could not possibly imagine what this astounding assault meant, or who were the perpetrators of it.

Out in the passage panic seized the startled man, and he forgot his former experience and attempted to get away. Strong hands gripped him, however, and forced his back against the wall. And while he was held there a piece of stout cord was attached to his ankles. He could now only progress with short footsteps—any attempt to take a long stride caused the cord to bite into his bare ankles in the most painful manner.

In this dire predicament, surrounded by foes, Mr. Hunter was compelled to descend the stairs. He had a frightened idea that he was about to be taken into the open. The prospect of crossing the Triangle with bare feet and in pyjamas nearly caused Mr. Hunter to break down.

But he was led along a corridor, and there

was a halt. A dim whisper of voices sounded, but they were muffled by the scarf and by the pillow-slip.

"Locked!" he managed to distinguish. "Trousers . . . here we are . . ."

The faint sound of a turning key came to the bewildered Housemaster's ears, and he suddenly realised, with a cold shiver, that it was the upper cellar door which was being unlocked.

He was immediately compelled to descend the steps, and then came the unmistakable sounds of bolts being shot back, and another key turned. He was propelled forward and left standing alone. A match scratched, and then the interior of the pillow-slip became diffused with yellow light.

The next act was even more disconcerting. His wrists were bound with greater security, and his ankles shared the same fate. And then the scarf was removed, and the pillow-slip followed.

Mr. Hunter gazed about him with startled eyes. He saw a candle burning in the cellar. His companions were extraordinary beings. Each wore a black cloak which reached the ground, and it was impossible to recognise them, for their heads and shoulders were encased in hoods. Only the eyes gleamed from behind the little slits.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" gasped Mr. Hunter weakly.

"Wretch!" exclaimed one of the figures in a deep, unrecognisable voice. "Thou art in the hands of the Avenging Tribunal!"

"Good—good gracious me!" stuttered Mr. Hunter.

"It is the intention of the Tribunal to try the case without delay," went on the deep voice. "Prepare thyself for the ordeal, thou base traitor! This is no nightmare, although it seemeth as one—"

"Cease this mad foolery!" snarled Mr. Hunter desperately.

"It is the Tribunal's wish that thou shouldst be given a fair and satisfactory trial," went on the speaker. "I am the Chief of the Supreme Court, and you must now answer for your base acts."

"Hear, hear!" came another voice.

"It is well that members of the Tribunal should not interject such remarks," went on the Chief sharply, turning his head. "I prithee be silent, comrades. It is for the detestable Mr. Hunter to answer the charges."

The Housemaster began to think that he was on the verge of insanity.

"Is this some—some practical joke?" he panted, between his teeth. "I have never been so shamefully treated—"

"Thou art not the man to say such words!" put in the Chief curtly. "Thou speakest of shameful treatment, and yet thy sins are the greatest of all in that respect. The Tribunal is about to administer punishment. What is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander—do not overlook that fact!"

"Good!" said one of the conspirators heartily.

"The crime under discussion is one concerning three unfortunate boys bearing the names of Tregellis-West and Watson and Bennett," continued the Chief of the Tribunal steadily. "These ill-fated youths were handled shamefully—"

"By heavens!" roared Mr. Hunter, light suddenly dawning upon him. "This is a trick—you are boys! You shall pay for this infamous outrage, and—"

"The infamous outrage has already been committed—you committed it yourself," interrupted the Chief. "By base treachery the Remove was tricked, and the three boys mentioned previously were subjected to vile treatment. But the tables are now turned, thou son of wickedness!"

"Why not get to business?" asked a member of the Tribunal impatiently. "Cut all this rot, for goodness' sake! My hand's simply aching to get to work with the birch. By George! We'll make this boulder smart!"

The Chief waved his hand.

"The charge against the prisoner is serious!" he exclaimed. "Thou art accused, shivering wretch, of penning a guarantee with ink which was of a worthless nature. Furthermore, it was thy brutal treachery which caused Tregellis-West and Watson and Bennett to enter thy study. They were flogged like dogs, and cast into this very cellar—where they were compelled to lie in utter darkness, fed only upon meagre crusts of bread and dribbles of water. What hast thou to say in answer to these charges, prisoner?"

Mr. Hunter had nothing to say; he was so furious that the words choked in his throat. He wanted to say so much that in the end he only succeeded in making inarticulate sounds.

"Thou art unwell?" asked the Chief.

"You—you—" Speech returned to Mr. Hunter. "I intend to sift this affair to the bottom, and everybody here shall be punished in the most severe manner. This outrage is insufferable—"

"Yet thou art destined to suffer, in spite of thy protests!" said the Tribunal's Chief, in a grim voice. "And thy threats are hollow. What hast thou to say in reply to the charges? I ask for thy answer."

Mr. Hunter only glared.

"It is well," continued the Chief. "There is no need for further delay. Prepare thyself, traitor, for a painful ordeal. And remember that what thou art receiving is merely a repetition of the treatment which was meted out to Bennett and his unfortunate chums. The tables are turned, and it is thou who wilt realise it most fully. Retribution is about to fall upon thy unworthy head!"

"And somewhere else, too!" said a member of the Tribunal.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was only a soft chuckle, but the Chief turned abruptly.

"Cease this unseemly mirth, comrades!" he rapped out. "This is no occasion for laughter. And retribution will not fall upon

the prisoner's person—the birch will perform that excellent office."

Mr. Hunter started violently.

"You—you don't mean to tell me that you intend to birch me?" he screamed.

"If it pleases thee, I will not offer the information," said the Chief. "But thou hast guessed correctly. Thou shalt taste what this birch is like, in order that thou shalt be convinced of its pain-giving qualities. The Tribunal will now adjourn in order to settle the exact nature of thy punishment."

The Tribunal collected together and whispered. Mr. Hunter stood in the centre of the cellar, feeling as though he were in the midst of a particularly bad dream. He wished with all his heart that he had not treated his victims so severely. The very thought of reprisals made his flesh creep. And his consternation was all the greater when he remembered that his pyjamas were absurdly thin.

He wanted to shout threats and orders, but he realised the futility of such a proceeding. The "Tribunal" had the upper hand, and any ravings on Mr. Hunter's part would probably mean a few extra cuts with the birch. Wisdom, therefore, advised the unfortunate man to remain silent.

"The sentence is settled," said the Chief softly.

He looked at Mr. Hunter squarely, and the latter attempted to recognise the voice and the eyes. But he failed. It was impossible to determine the identity of these conspirators.

"The sentence is that thou shalt be subjected to the same number of cuts as thou administered to the unfortunate Bennett," continued the Chief sternly. "After that thou wilt be incarcerated in this dark dungeon for the period of eight-and-forty hours, and thy sustenance during that time shall consist of stale bread and plain water. It is the Tribunal's intention to show thee what these punishments are like. Thou wilt appreciate their full baseness!"

Mr. Kennedy Hunter stared dazedly. His tongue clung to the roof of his mouth, and choking sounds came from his throat. The full horror of his position came to him like a flood.

Not only was he to receive a cruel birching, but he would also be imprisoned in the cellar and fed upon bread and water! In short, he was being treated to some of his own medicine. It was peculiarly fitting that Mr. Hunter should receive this punishment.

The tables were turned with a vengeance!

And Mr. Hunter was bewildered. How had the prisoners gained their freedom? Who were these "figures"? The Housemaster could not answer the questions, and the immediate prospect was not conducive to settled thought.

"Seize the prisoner!" exclaimed the Chief grimly.

Mr. Hunter was seized; he couldn't help himself. Tightly bound, he was held firmly across the back of one of the Tribunal members, who knelt upon the floor for the occa-

sion. A birch swished ominously through the air.

"Stop!" panted Mr. Hunter, terrified. "I—I will make no inquiry concerning this affair—Bennett and Tregellis-West and Watson shall receive no further punishment—I will make amends—"

"Thy promises are as hollow as thy threats!" interjected the Chief scornfully. "Art thou foolish enough to imagine that we credit those soft words? Thou art a man whose promises cannot be accepted."

"I will guarantee—"

"Silence, wretch!" snapped one of the conspirators. "Let's get on with this birching business!"

Mr. Hunter knew that his efforts were useless. And, before he could protest further, the flogging commenced.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The birch descended with cutting force, but even now it was not wielded with all the strength which Mr. Hunter himself had displayed. The Chief bore in mind the fact that the prisoner was very lightly clad.

There was nothing vicious about this punishment. It was a severe flogging, but nothing more. Its object was to convince Mr. Hunter that brutality did not pay. And certainly the Housemaster was convinced!

He received precisely the same number of cuts as had been administered to "Bennett," of the Remove. And then, gasping and panting, he was allowed to roll upon the blankets. Several times Mr. Hunter had yelled with pain, but this display only created contempt amongst the Tribunal's members.

At the finish Mr. Hunter was racked with pain, and he felt too dazed to think clearly. His bonds were removed and he was left prostrate upon the blankets. Then, without making any further remarks, the Tribunal streamed out of the cellar.

Mr. Hunter heard the door close; he heard the bolts shot home, and the key was turned sharply in the lock. And he lay there in the darkness, breathing heavily and sore in every joint.

And his punishment had only just commenced.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRIBUNAL PERFORMS OTHER USEFUL WORK—STARKE AND KENMORE CATCH IT!

THE tribunal chuckled.

"By George!" said one member. "Wasn't it rippin'—what? Hunter won't be in such a hurry to use the birch another time."

The conspirators were standing in the passage just outside the cellar. The electric light had been switched on, for no gleam of it could penetrate beyond the upper door. And the cloaked figures proceeded to relieve themselves of their boots.

One by one they were revealed. The first to unmask was the Chief—in other words,

myself. It's been guessed, long ago, of course, that I was that grim individual. The others proved to be Tregellis-West and Watson, Handforth and De Valerie, and the Bo'sun and Yakama.

The seven of us were feeling highly elated. Our scheme had worked with great success from start to finish. Mr. Hunter had been punished with fitting severity, and there was something joyful in the knowledge that he had been treated in the same manner as he had treated us.

He undoubtedly suspected us—that is to say, he guessed at our identities. But he could not be certain. Handforth, perhaps, had made one or two unwise remarks, but he had, upon the whole, restrained himself wonderfully—for Handforth. The few words he had spoken were well disguised in a deep growling voice. This wasn't at all difficult for Handforth, whose voice was always powerful.

"Shiver my maindeck!" chuckled Burton. "It was fine, wasn't it? But what are we going to do now, messmates? How are we going to keep Hunter down in the hold? He'll be released by Bates——"

"No, he won't," I put in promptly. "This door is fitted with a heavy lock, and the key is supposed to hang on this nail. We'll take it with us, and Bates won't be able to get in. Besides, the door at the top of the steps is locked, too, and I've got the key."

We had, of course, brought Mr. Hunter's clothes down with him, and had left them in the cellar. There had been a slight delay whilst bringing the prisoner down, for we had found the top door securely locked. But the key had been fished out from Mr. Hunter's trousers, and it now reposed in my own pocket.

"Well, we'd better be getting up to bed," I said crisply. "We shall be able to make further plans in the morning. And mind you don't breathe a word to any of the other fellows," I added. "This is a strict secret."

"Your esteemed remarks are of the unnecessary character," said Yakama. "It is not our absurd wish to spread the honourable story. But I am of the extreme worry, Bennett. I fail to comprehend how the preposterous Mr. Hunter will be released without further trouble ensuing."

"Leave that to me, Jappy," I said. "We've got Hunter on toast now, and we're jolly well going to keep him."

"Rather!"

All my companions were firm upon that point. De Valerie and the others had been hugely surprised when awakened from sleep, but they had entered into my scheme heartily and eagerly.

Our cloaks and other apparel had been easily borrowed from the "property" room of the Fifth-Form Amateur Dramatic Society. The Fifth would probably have been indignant had they known of our designs, but the Fifth was soundly asleep.

I knew well enough that Nelson Lee would have disapproved of the whole proceeding.

But there were times when it was necessary to act upon my own initiative—and this was one of those times. The gov'nor hadn't been birched, and I had! To punish Hunter in a similar fashion was a sheer joy.

"Look here," said Handforth firmly. "I don't see why we shouldn't continue this game. There's no need to get to bed yet."

"How can we continue it?" asked Watson.

"Well, there's Bates——"

"We don't want to interfere with Bates," I put in. "He's a rotter, I know, but he's only been carrying out Hunter's orders. And we can't very well imprison him in the cellar too. Our quarrel is with Hunter——"

"Well, what about Starke and Kenmore?" demanded Handforth. "Haven't they done some rotten things? The rest of the Sixth refused to carry out Hunter's orders, but Starke and Kenmore took a special delight in leading attacks against the Remove during the barring-out."

"Begad! You're right, Handy," said Sir Montie thoughtfully.

I nodded. There was certainly something in Handforth's remark. Starke and Kenmore of the Sixth—both prefects—had helped Mr. Hunter to collar us when we were trapped in his study. They were natural enemies, and had shown themselves to be rotters of the first quality.

"They could do with a flogging," I remarked slowly. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to treat them to a dose of the birch."

"Of course," said Handforth. "No need to shove them down in this cellar. We can just give them a good whopping and frighten them. A taste of the birch would do them piles of good. We've been standing their rot for months."

"I'll leave it to the vote," I said shortly.

That settled it, for everybody was in favour of punishing Starke and Kenmore. So we donned our cloaks and cowls once more and left the cellar. No difficulties presented themselves in this fresh enterprise. The Sixth did not sleep in a dormitory. They occupied small bedrooms, two fellows being in each. Starke and Kenmore, as I was well aware, shared the same room.

It would be perfectly easy to collar them in their sleep, and to administer punishment at our leisure. Our chief quarrel was with Mr. Hunter, but the two prefects undoubtedly deserved punishment. The very fact that they had associated with Mr. Hunter was sufficient to warrant a birching.

"Leave all the talking to me," I said softly. "I may get mixed up with the 'thou's' and 'thy's,' but that's only a detail. And we don't want the rotters to guess things. As long as our identities are hidden it's all serene."

We halted before the door of a bedroom, and I flashed my light upon the number. It was the apartment occupied by Starke and Kenmore, and I turned the handle softly and entered.

The others followed, and the door was closed.

Starke and Kenmore were fast asleep in

their beds. I couldn't help grinning slightly as I gazed upon their unconscious forms. The blind was up, and the faint starlight provided just sufficient light for us to see the various objects in the room.

We had already decided upon our plan of action. Tregellis-West and Watson and I went over Starke, and the others attended to Kenmore. Above all, we wished to avoid any commotion. There were other bedrooms all round, and we had no wish for a crowd of Sixth-Formers to storm in and unmask us.

It was therefore necessary to deal drastically with the victims at once. At the given word a cord was flung round Starke's chest and drawn tight, holding him down upon the bed.

Before he was fully awake his pillow was jerked away and forced down upon his face. And while Montie and Tommy held him in this helpless position, I flung back the bed-clothes and bound his ankles. After some little trouble his wrists were secured behind his back. To accomplish this we had to twist him upon his face.

The last operation consisted of binding a towel securely round his mouth. He only succeeded in giving one gasp—really a preliminary to a roar of fury and alarm. But he was helpless—and frightened.

The other members of the Tribunal had dealt with Kenmore in exactly the same fashion, although their task had been easier. Kenmore, after one glimpse of the four cowed forms, fell into a state bordering upon terror, and he was easy to handle. Moreover, there were four conspirators attacking him.

The two prefects sat upon their beds. They could not utter a word, but their eyes were busy. They saw seven mysterious figures, but it was utterly impossible for them to recognise any one of us.

"Thou art in the hands of the Avenging Tribunal!" I exclaimed solemnly. "What hast thou to say for yourselves?"

Being gagged, Starke and Kenmore had nothing to say.

"It is the order of the Tribunal that punishment shall be inflicted promptly and drastically," I continued. "Thy sins include bullying and kow-towing to the insufferable Prussian who rules the Ancient House."

Starke began to wriggle convulsively. His eyes were blazing with fury, and I believe he guessed the identity of his persecutors. But like Mr. Hunter, it was nothing more than a guess.

"What shall the sentence be, comrades?" I asked gruffly.

"Death!" rumbled Handforth.

I grinned behind my mask, and Starke and Kenmore ceased their struggles and sat perfectly still. Handforth had managed to put a very sinister tone into that one word.

"It is not our intention to inflict such drastic punishment," I exclaimed. "Death, comrades, is too swift for such bullies as these. Is it not meet that they should be allowed to taste of their own medicine?"

Starke gurgled desperately.

"Such movements will avail thee nothing," I went on. "Comrades, we will administer the first punishment. Turn the victim's face downwards upon the bed. Starke, thou wretch, punishment is about to descend upon thee!"

Starke shivered. It might have been with fright, or with fury; I'm not sure which. He was turned over and laid upon the bed, being held down firmly by four pairs of willing hands. De Valerie and the Bo'sun were keeping their eyes upon Kenmore, in case of mishaps.

"Get to work, executioner!" said Handforth dramatically.

I lost no time in doing so. The birch rose and fell steadily, and Starke writhed under the stinging punishment.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

I did not lay it on with the force which Mr. Hunter had received. This was not altogether on account of any humane feelings on my part. A birch, properly applied, causes a certain amount of noise, and the other Sixth-Form bedrooms were perilously near at hand. The punishment, accordingly, was not severe.

At the same time I made up for this by delivering an extra number of strokes. Starke was very sore by the time I had finished, and I was certain that the lesson had done him a lot of good.

Kenmore's turn came next. He was treated precisely the same, but did not receive so many swishes as his leader, for, after all, Kenmore was generally led into his bullying outbursts by Starke.

"The Tribunal is satisfied," I exclaimed breathlessly. "Let there be no more of thy brutal treatment of junior members of this noble school. Heed the warning of the Avenging Tribunal and mend thy habits. We go now, but who can tell when we may return? Remember, thou wretches!"

Starke and Kenmore were certainly likely to remember that flogging for some time to come. And although they would be crying with fury, they couldn't possibly attach the blame to any particular junior or number of juniors.

"Comrades, we will away!" I said shortly.

The cords round the prisoners' wrists were loosened somewhat. Within five minutes they would be able to free themselves, but not before. We stole softly out of the bedroom and crept down the corridor.

Within five minutes we were in our respective beds, and there were many chuckles. The conspirators felt highly pleased with themselves. I was fully expecting Starke to come tearing into the dormitory. But he did nothing of the kind, so I concluded that he was feeling too sore for action.

"You chaps asleep?" I asked softly, after a while.

"No fear!" declared Handforth. "I've just been thinking. This wheeze of yours, Benny, is tip-top. It's a wonder I didn't

think of it myself—I expect I should have done later on."

"Well, what about it?" I asked, grinning.

"I don't see why we shouldn't carry it further," replied Handforth. "It's no good having a Tribunal if we don't make use of our powers, I suppose? Trapps could do with a jolly decent whopping——"

"Trapps is going to have his whack in the morning!" I said grimly. "I've already decided what to do with Mr. Trapps."

"What's that?" asked De Valerie.

"Wait till the morning, my sons," I replied. "For the present, I've got a better idea. It's just struck me. Are you chaps game to get up again?"

"Rather!"

"Well, hurry up about it," I said briskly. "We're going to interview Mr. Hunter in the cellar. I don't see why we shouldn't force him to write and sign that document over again—a guarantee that the Remove sha'n't be punished, and that all our rights shall be restored."

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montle.

"It'll be particularly rich," I went on enthusiastically. "Hunter gave us that written guarantee before, but he knew that it would fade out in a couple of hours. So he didn't care a jot what he put. But we took it in good faith, and we've got every right to have the document in proper order."

"But you can't force him to write——"

"Oh, yes, we can—or, at least, the birch can," I said grimly. "Strictly speaking, that guarantee is ours, and since the first one was a fake, we'll make Hunter write and sign the genuine article."

"By George!" said Handforth. "We'll have him on toast then—we'll have him as firm as a giddy rock!"

The other members of the Tribunal were quite as enthusiastic as myself. They had all been somewhat worried over the problem of Mr. Hunter; for they knew very well that we couldn't keep him in the cellar indefinitely.

If we could only force him to write a guarantee that no punishment should follow, we could release him on the following day. We shouldn't insist upon keeping him locked up for forty-eight hours.

Mr. Hunter had worded that guarantee himself, and I had memorised it pretty thoroughly. He couldn't grumble if we made him write it all over again—at least, he wouldn't have any actual right to grumble.

It was very necessary, however, to gain some hold on him. And then, if he tried any more of his tricks, there was always the knowledge that Nelson Lee was ready to take a hand. Only Montie and Tommy and I knew that as yet, but I decided to confide in the Bo'sun in the morning.

Without delay we dressed ourselves afresh and left the dormitory. Nobody else had awakened, and everything was quiet. At the door of the cellar I called a halt and looked at my companions seriously.

"He'll be violent, I expect," I said.

"But there are seven of us, and he won't

be able to do much. Leave the jawing to me, but don't be gentle with him if he attempts any tricks."

With that we descended the cellar steps, and I produced my electric torch. The heavy door was unlocked and unbolted. The beam of light entering the cellar revealed Mr. Hunter in the centre of the low apartment. He was fully dressed, and he glared searchingly past the light.

"Who is that?" he asked, with a catch in his voice. "Is it you, Trapps? Or Bates——"

"Thou art mistaken, Prussian brute!" I said sternly. "The Tribunal has returned to demand further satisfaction. It is in thy power to grant our wishes without violence—nay, they are more than wishes; they are orders."

"You—you infernal ruffians!" roared Mr. Hunter violently. "If you dare to touch me again——"

"It is no question of daring," I interrupted. "Make no blunder, Mr. Hunter. We are not weakly, and any resistance on your part will be sternly suppressed. We have a task for you to perform."

"How—how dare you?" panted Mr. Hunter, at a loss for anything else to say.

"If thou wilt cast thy memory back, thou wilt remember that a certain document was signed," I went on. "That document was a foul piece of trickery, for the ink proved to be water. We now command you to write that guarantee afresh. You will be given paper and pen——"

"You are mad!" snarled Mr. Hunter. "I will write nothing—nothing at all. I am not to be intimidated by this foolish behaviour. I know who you are—you are members of the Remove Form!"

"Your words cause great amusement," I said mockingly. "Comrades, this wretch is determined to cause trouble. Seize him, and we will administer ten slashes with the birch!"

The cloaked forms sprang round me, and grasped Mr. Hunter firmly. He bellowed and raved, but he could do nothing against the rush of strong fellows. Within a minute he was held helpless.

"If you dare to touch me with that birch again," he panted, "I will punish you in such a manner that you will remember it for the remainder of your lives!"

"Hollow words!" I exclaimed. "Thou canst punish nobody, since the Avenging Tribunal is a secret organisation. I will give thee one chance to submit. Wilt thou write the guarantee or not?"

"Confound you, no!" snarled Mr. Hunter. Swish—swish!

I applied the birch heavily. Mr. Hunter was clothed now, and, moreover, I wished to make him smart. He undoubtedly did so, for his back was already sore from the previous flogging. He writhed and twisted, uttering gasps and yelps of pain.

"Stop—stop!" he gasped. "I will—I will write!"

I stopped at once.

"It is as well that thy senses have returned," I exclaimed grimly. "Write from my dictation—No, no, that pen will not satisfy the Tribunal. You must write with this one!"

Mr. Hunter had got out his own fountain pen; but we were not to be caught napping twice. I handed him Sir Montie's "Waterman" and a plain sheet of paper. It was stiff, and he could easily use the floor as a temporary desk; he was already upon his knees, held by numerous hands.

"Write!" I commanded.

Mr. Hunter nearly choked, but he prepared to obey the order.

"I hereby guarantee that no boy belonging to the Ancient House Remove Form shall receive any punishment whatsoever," I dictated, calling to mind the wording of the original document. "I permit them to return to the school with their full liberties restored——"

"I—I refuse to write another word!" panted Mr. Hunter desperately.

I swished the birch in the air, and our victim gave a convulsive wriggle. Then he jumped as he received a slash across the back.

"Continue!", he muttered, between his teeth.

"Full liberties restored," I repeated. "Cricket will be allowed as usual, and the playing fields are placed within bounds. Juniors will be allowed to take tea in their own studies. Should there be a further revolt, this guarantee automatically becomes null and void, but it will hold good so long as the Remove adheres to the school rules. I do, however, grant permission to the Remove to rid the school of Mr. Trapps in any manner they choose to apply. I further acknowledge that I attempted to trick the Remove by means of a base dodge, but now express my regret for having done so—yes, write that!" I commanded—"every word of it!"

I thought for a moment that Mr. Hunter was about to refuse, but he knew very well that we were in earnest. He finished the document and signed it. I was on the look out for any trickery—such as a disguised signature. But Mr. Hunter had enough sense to sign his name in the usual manner.

"It is well!" I said, taking the paper from him. "Thou wilt be released from captivity on the morrow, and bear this document in mind. At the first sign of violence the paper shall be sent to the Board of Governors."

We were all feeling rather contemptuous now. If Hunter had been a man he would have refused to write a line. But, similar to most tyrants, he was an arrant coward, and the prospect of further physical pain appalled him. He was reduced to submission by the application of the birch.

Without further delay we retired from the cellar, leaving Mr. Kennedy Hunter nearly foaming at the mouth with helpless rage

and impotence. But we had triumphed, and we returned to the dormitory in high glee.

We had gained the upper hand, and Mr. Hunter knew it. I felt quite convinced that when he was released on the morrow he would be subdued. He knew that disaster had overtaken his scheme—that Tregellis-West and Watson and I had escaped.

And in the morning we should deal with Mr. Trapps.

I had quite a novel idea for the dismissal of that cheerful gentleman.

CHAPTER VII.

FREEDOM ONCE MORE—MR. TRAPPS IS GIVEN THE ORDER OF THE BOOT.

CLANG—CLANG!

The rising-bell boomed out lustily, and I sat up in bed, yawning. Many other fellows were sitting up, too, and they were more wideawake than usual.

"Hallo! What's the meaning of this?" asked Owen major. "That's the rising-bell, ain't it? I thought we were going to be lugged out an hour before?"

"Hunter's overslept himself, I expect," I said cheerfully.

Owen major stared at me blankly.

"Bennett!" he yelled, jumping out of bed. "How the—what the merry dickens! Well, I'm jiggered!"

The whole Remove was fully awake in less than a couple of seconds.

"Where have you been?" demanded McClure. "And Tregellis-West and Watson, too! What's been happening since last night?"

"Say, I'm real puzzled," declared Farman. "I guess I don't know a darned thing! Gee! It's good to see you galoots again. Sure!"

"All sorts of things have happened during the night," I replied calmly. "I don't suppose you'll see Mr. Hunter until this afternoon. And when he does appear again he'll be very subdued."

"Rather!" declared Handforth, with a generous wink.

"Hallo, what's the game?" asked Fullwood. "What was that wink for, Handforth? Have you fellows been up to some of your tricks?"

"Certain things have happened," I repeated. "I'm not going to say any more, but you'll understand before long. Now, with regard to Trapps, I've got an idea. We're all together now, and I may as well explain things at once."

Needless to say, I didn't explain the incidents of the night. I merely outlined my scheme for dealing with Mr. Trapps. A good many fellows were half frightened, but the majority enthusiastically decided to back me up.

"He's a rotter, anyhow," declared Handforth. "It'll show him that we don't mean to stand his sort at St. Frank's. And Hunter can't do anything—not while we've got that guarantee."

"But that thing's useless!" snorted McClure.

"No, it isn't," I said calmly, giving Handforth a warning look. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Hunter very kindly rewrote the guarantee, and I've got it safely tucked away."

"Let's have a look at it," said Church doubtfully.

"You'll have to take my word," I replied. "I'm going to give it to Mr. Stockdale, sealed in an envelope, and I'm going to ask him to put it in his safe. He won't know what it is, but it'll be secure enough there."

"Yes, but I can't understand——"

Owen major paused abruptly as the door opened. Mr. Trapps entered, frowning with anxiety and anger.

"You lazy young scoundrels!" he raved. "Why are you not down in your Form-room? Mr. Hunter is apparently away, and I assumed that he was dealing with you. Get up at once. Handforth, take two hundred lines for grinning!"

"Why, I—— Yes, sir!" said Handforth meekly.

"Nice morning, sir," I remarked, in a casual manner.

Mr. Trapps spun round, and stared at me.

"Why——" He paused. "Good heavens! What are you boys doing here? Has Mr. Hunter allowed you to——"

"Come out of that cellar, sir?" I said smoothly.

"I must inquire into this!" snapped Mr. Trapps, who was completely taken aback. "I can understand why the dormitory door was unbolted now. Get up at once and go to your Form-room immediately."

"But it'll be breakfast-time, sir——"

"Don't dare to argue with me, Griffith!" roared Mr. Trapps harshly. "Take five hundred lines for impertinence. If you are not all down in the class-room within ten minutes, the whole Form will be detained during the next half-holiday!"

Mr. Trapps swept out of the room, and the Removites gazed at one another with rising wrath. I grinned. Things couldn't have been better. This harshness on Mr. Trapps's part was working the juniors up to a pitch of recklessness which was highly necessary to the successful accomplishment of my scheme.

"Of all the nerve!" exclaimed Griffith indignantly. "I'm blessed if I'm going to do his five hundred rotten lines! And what about breakfast? Does he think we're going to miss brekker?"

"My dear chap, you needn't do the lines, and we sha'n't miss breakfast," I replied. "You know what my plan is, and we shall be able to return in heaps of time for grub. Be as meek as possible—until the right moment."

"That's the ticket!" said Handforth, nodding. "I was meek just now, when Trapps gave me two hundred lines, but it was an effort. By George! I felt like dotting him one on the nose!"

I grinned.

"The best thing is to go down to the class-room quietly," I said. "I want you, De Valerie, to come on a little mission with me. We shall turn up in the Form-room about

five minutes after the other chaps. And then things will get busy."

"Rather!"

"Trapps will get it in the neck!"

"The order of the giddy boot!"

The fellows attired themselves quickly, but De Valerie and I were out of the dormitory before anybody else. I'm afraid we washed very hastily, but consoled ourselves with the thought that we'd have plenty of time later on.

Having gained the upper hand of Hunter, it wasn't likely that we should stand any nonsense from Mr. Trapps. We didn't recognise him as our Form-master. He was an outsider in every respect; from a scholastic point of view he knew practically nothing, and it was quite evident that he had been brought to St. Frank's by Mr. Hunter solely on account of his harsh methods.

Mr. Hunter had determined to grind the Remove under his heel. The Remove, naturally, wasn't standing it. The juniors had had very little spirit left in them the previous night. But this morning they were as reckless as ever. Possibly my return had something to do with it, for I automatically took charge of things.

Excitement prevailed, and when De Valerie and I entered the Form-room we found Mr. Trapps glaring with irritation and anger. I glanced at the clock, and saw that we had forty minutes before the breakfast-gong would sound.

"Bennett—De Valerie!" rapped out Mr. Trapps. "Why are you late? Did I not order you to be here within ten minutes?"

"We were delayed, sir," I said calmly.

"Very well; you will now receive a severe caning," said Mr. Trapps harshly. "In addition, I intend to keep the Remove in the class-room until the dinner-hour. You young hounds! You shall receive no breakfast this morning!"

"Oh!"

It was a gasp of sheer indignation.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Trapps. "If I hear another sound in this class I will deprive you of dinner——"

He got no further. This foolish talk on his part—for the threats could only have been idle—fired the Remove suddenly. The juniors left their places and swarmed round Mr. Trapps in a yelling crowd.

He was grasped by many hands and whirled out of the Form-room into the passage. I couldn't help remembering that Mr. Hunter had experienced a similar adventure the previous week. But our intentions respecting Mr. Trapps were quite different.

"Out with him!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

Mr. Trapps, yelling frantically, was swept out into the sunny Triangle. Many College House juniors were there, and they regarded the proceedings with open amazement. They certainly concluded that another revolt was in progress.

But they were wrong.

This wasn't a revolt at all. We were merely giving Mr. Trapps the order of the

boot. We had decided that he wasn't to be stood, and it was my intention to show him, as plainly as possible, that St. Frank's was too hot to hold him.

Christine and Co., of the College House, entered into the spirit of the thing. Mr. Trapps was their Form-master as well as ours, since they belonged to the Remove. And they were glad of an opportunity to join in the fun.

"What's the idea?" asked Christine excitedly.

"Mr. Trapps is going on a journey!" I gasped. "He doesn't want to, but that's only a detail!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All hands to the pump!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

Mr. Trapps was carried on the flood to the gates. Here, very fortunately, Warren's hand-cart was standing in readiness. As it happened, De Valerie and I had placed it there before entering the Form-room; our plans had been made well in advance.

"On with him!" I roared. "There isn't any time to spare."

"Hurrah!"

The alarmed Form-master was plumped into the hand-cart with more force than comfort, and held down. Ropes were thrown round him and drawn tight. And it was all accomplished so quickly that Mr. Trapps could scarcely catch his breath.

"Boys—boys!" he gasped frantically. "Are you mad?"

"Not quite, sir," I replied. "We're just about to give you a little ride—a free journey to the village."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Trapps turned pale.

"You—you wouldn't dare——" he gasped. "I implore you, boys, to release me! There shall be no punishment——"

"Same old tale!" shouted Handforth. "Tighten up the ropes!"

There was a commotion on the outskirts of the crowd and Starke came striding through. He gazed in amazement at the unfortunate Mr. Trapps.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted. "You young sweeps! Release Mr. Trapps at once!"

"You're not on in this act, Starke," I interrupted sharply. "If you'll take my advice you'll beat a retreat before you're hurt. We're not standing any nonsense from Mr. Trapps, and you can bet your boots we shall deal with you pretty severely if you ride the high horse."

Starke stared at me.

"I'll bet a quid it was you who flogged——" He paused abruptly. "Are you going to release Mr. Trapps?" he demanded.

"No," I replied calmly. "I've got other plans in view."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you do not release me, Starke, I will have you hounded from the school!" raved Mr. Trapps.

Starke scowled.

"It seems to me that it's happening to

you," he said sourly. "Go ahead, kids! Jolly good riddance to bad rubbish!"

And Starke, who had been incensed by the absurd threat, stalked away. He was probably prompted by the threatening attitude of the Removites. I honestly believe that Starke only escaped a ragging by bare seconds.

Mr. Trapps raved incoherently. But as nobody took any notice of him, it didn't matter. I noticed several Sixth-Formers watching from the Ancient House, but they wisely decided to remain at a distance.

"Now then!" I shouted. "Let her go!"

Willing hands grasped the little cart, and it started off towards the village with a clatter and a rush. Warren, with a very red face, was peeping from behind the curtain in his lodge. I detected a grin upon his features, for the porter had tasted some of Mr. Trapps's harsh medicine on two or three occasions.

"Buck up—we shall only just do it!" I shouted, after glancing at my watch. "If we miss the train we shall be in a proper hole!"

The hand-cart whizzed on, swaying from side to side. Some fellows were pushing, and others were pulling. On more than one occasion the whole contrivance was on the verge of upsetting. Mr. Trapps by this time was pale with terror. He clung to the sides of the cart desperately, probably feeling that the ropes were not strong enough to hold him in.

In the centre of a yelling crowd, the cart swept through the village. People stared in amazement, tradesmen stood at their doors and gasped, and at last the procession arrived at the station yard.

The signal, I noticed, was down, and a rumble in the distance warned me that the early train was already approaching.

"Look sharp!" I exclaimed briskly. "Not a second to spare!"

I slashed through the bonds which bound Mr. Trapps to the cart. He was allowed no opportunity of escaping. Seized by many hands, he was whirled through on to the platform just as the train steamed in.

"In with him!" roared a dozen voices.

I wrenched open the door of an empty compartment as the train stopped. Mr. Trapps was bundled through the doorway, and the door was closed with a slam. A yelling crowd surged outside on the platform.

The late Form-master picked himself up, boiling with fury. He knew now why he had been brought through the village in such an undignified manner. And the realisation made him almost insane with anger.

"You—you young villains——"

"We've given you the kick-out, Mr. Trapps," I said calmly. "If you ever show your face at St. Frank's again you'll get something worse!"

"Rather!"

"Go back to where you came from!"

"We don't stick Huns at St. Frank's!"

Mr. Trapps swore violently.

"I shall return within an hour!" he raved.

"I know that you are the ringleader in this

affair, Bennett, and you shall be expelled from the school!"

"Yah!" howled a score of voices. "Booh!"

Mr. Hunter's ally raved helplessly; his voice was drowned amidst the shouts and groans. In the middle of it all the guard came stalking along the platform, and he looked at us sternly.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"No need for you to interfere," I said, hastily putting half-a-crown into the guard's ready hand. "This gentleman is going on a journey, and he doesn't quite like the idea. You may have trouble with him at the next station, but that won't matter."

The guard pocketed the tip, and looked at Mr. Trapps severely.

"You're a fine-lookin' beauty, ain't you?" he exclaimed, eyeing the dilapidated gentleman with a critical tilt of his head. "Ought to be ashamed of yourself, kickin' up all this fuss!"

"These—these young ruffians have——"

"That's enough!" snapped the guard.

He waved his flag, and took care to remain near the door until the train was in motion. He wasn't interested in our affair, but he probably guessed that we should deal with him drastically if he made any attempt to release the foaming Mr. Trapps.

"Hurrah!"

"Good riddance!"

The juniors waved their hands ironically.

"Hope you have a safe journey!" bellowed Handforth.

"Good-bye-ee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The last we saw of Mr. Trapps was a tumbled head sticking out of the window. He had been ejected from St. Frank's forcibly, and I was pretty sure that he would never dare to show his face near the school again. Mr. Trapps had had enough of the Remove to last him all his life!

"Well, that's a good job done!" I exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "Our troubles are ended, my sons. We've turned the tables, and Hunter's treachery hasn't helped him a little bit."

We all streamed out of the station and marched in a body towards St. Frank's, eager for breakfast.

With Mr. Trapps gone we had no Form-master, for Mr. Crowell had positively decided to remain under Mr. Stockdale's roof until Hunter had gone. But I had other ideas in my mind, and I meant to carry them out at once.

Mr. Trapps had been dealt with, and Mr. Hunter was subdued. So far as I could see no further trouble could arise. The whole Form thought the same as I did, and we were justified in believing that all the excitement was at an end.

But was it?

As a matter of absolute fact there was more peril and excitement in store for us than ever before. Strange and remarkable events were to take place at St. Frank's before we finally rid the school of its tyrant!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S MAGNIFICENT STORY

WILL BE ENTITLED

"At the End of His Tether."

In it Mr. Hunter, the Hunnish House-master, finds his reign of terror at St. Frank's at an end. NIPPER and Co., as usual, play an exciting part.

When you have finished

"At the End of His Tether"

Send your Copy out to a pal at the Front.

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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. Luck favours them, and they drive to a market-town, where they leave the waggons. They then take tickets for Berlin. They arrive safely in Berlin and take rooms at an apartment house. They are sure their landlady does not suspect them, and she seems honest. Meanwhile an influential German named Beckmann promises to try to get them through to Holland.

(Now read on.)

RECAPTURED.

THOUGH they knew it not, their landlady, in spite of her apparent stupidity and air of innocence, had suspected them from the first.

She had set some of her other lodgers to spy upon the three strangers. Her son had come home wounded from the war, and, having left hospital, was slowly recovering under her roof. He had been shot through the shoulder and the arm. He was a short, thick-set, crop-headed lout, with piggish eyes, and straw-coloured hair and eyelashes.

The three friends had seen him and avoided him, and imagined that he had not set eyes on them.

Such was not the case.

Playing the part of sleuthhound, Hans Lamsbach dogged their steps when they went abroad at night, followed them to Beckmann's house, and watched there until they came out again.

He was lurking in the area of the big house when Wilson, George, and Jack left it the night before the proposed motor jaunt to Hanover. He shrank close against the wall, holding his breath, and pricking up his ears to listen.

George looked up and down the street. It was empty. There was not a soul about.

"Good-night, Herr Beckmann," said he, in English, in a whisper that only just reached the ears of the spy, and could not have been overheard by anyone passing in the street. "We shall never be able to repay you for the kindness you have shown us. What time shall we start in the morning?"

"S'sh!" answered the German, finger to lips, and in the national tongue. "The motor will be here at eight o'clock sharp. Don't be late."

Laughingly they told him they would be prompt to time, and left.

The spy followed them a minute later, rubbing his hands.

"Ah, they are cursed English spies. Mother was right," he muttered. "So. That fat German swine is going to motor them to safety, heh? We'll see. I'll soon put a stop to that!"

George, Jack, and Wilson slept like so many tops that night. In the morning they rose at six, and breakfasted happily without a moment's fear. They believed they were safe.

At a few minutes to eight they reached Beckmann's house. The car stood outside, and he was filling up the petrol tank. He intended to drive them himself.

Motioning to them to be silent and get in, he finished his job, then sprang behind the steering-wheel.

But before he could move an officer and a platoon of armed soldiers seemed to spring out of the ground. They came out of the areas and flowed out of the doors. The car was surrounded. Rifles were pointed. The wounded lout with the straw-coloured hair was with them.

"Those are the men!" he snarled.

The officer advanced.

"You are my prisoners!" he growled, whilst a crowd began to collect. "I arrest you as English spies. Herr Beckmann, you, too, must come with me."

The three friends stared at one another aghast. Wilhelm Beckmann flushed and shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Boys," groaned George, in utter misery, "it's all up! We're lost!"

(Continued overleaf.)

RUHLEBEN.

THE three friends knew that the game was up. So did Wilhelm Beckmann, who was willing to take risks to help them.

But the spy, Hans Lamsbach, who had brought the guard to the spot, grinned in his triumph. He congratulated himself upon the short work he'd made of the Englishmen, and he hoped that the German who had so far forgotten his duty to his country as to connive at the escape of the three dangerous aliens would be suitably punished, while he himself met with his just reward.

The grinning Prussian soldiers enjoyed the discomfiture of the Britishers hugely, and it seemed to George Gray that their fingers were itching to touch the triggers of their rifles.

Beckmann submitted with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"I am sorry, my friends," said he. "I had hoped to get you safely away from German soil, though I would have insisted upon your parole. I did my best. I have failed. Do not make it worse for me by offering resistance."

George Gray stepped down from the car.

"We surrender," said he, in his best German, and the guard closed round them, whilst a hooting, yelling and excited crowd assembled like magic.

It was really wonderful where they came from, but come they did, and while some of them spat upon the British prisoners, others urged the guard to shoot them down.

The man who spat at George Gray was sorry for it, for George, with a smashing right-hander, struck him full in the face and felled him like a shot.

The man he hit down—a fat and middle-aged German—rose with murder in his heart. He rushed at George, but one of the soldiers interfered.

He put a stop to any further trouble by driving the butt of his rifle into George's back, doubling the footballer up, and then uppercutting the zealous Berliner with the same part of the deadly weapon.

The German went down for the second time, and lay where he had fallen.

The crack of the blow suggested to George that his jaw might have been broken, and he certainly hoped so.

The prisoners were now told to get into the car. A German officer took the wheel. Four German soldiers, with bayonets fixed, crowded after him. Beckmann was a prisoner too, and so they drove through the streets to a Government building, where the case was promptly heard.

The prisoners were swiftly examined, and put up no defence.

They admitted their identity, and were

ordered to be taken to Ruhleben camp and interned there.

Herr Wilhelm Beckmann was ordered to be imprisoned prior to his case being dealt with in another court.

"I reserve my defence," he said, raising his head proudly. "I meant no harm. They were old friends."

Then as George, Jack, and Wilson were marched off under guard, he smiled and nodded at them.

"Be of good heart," said he. "And let us trust that the war will soon be over."

"Silence!" thundered the President of the Court, and ere any of the Britishers could make reply, they were hurried away.

The rest of that morning they spent in the cells. They were hungry, but no food was brought them. In the afternoon they were removed, placed in a closed-in motor vehicle, and driven away, heavily guarded.

First they heard the bustle and noise of the busy streets. Then the sounds about them changed, and they could tell that they were passing through the open country.

At length the motor stopped, and they were sternly told to alight. This they did, to find soldiers swarming around them. Ahead they could see the great grand-stands of the Ruhleben racecourse, and many temporary buildings, etc., whose uses were presently to be made known to them. Close by were the gates, trebly guarded.

It was a grey, cold day, with lowering clouds and high wind. It seemed as if the summer had gone for good, and that winter was at hand, although the autumn was not over yet.

The internment camp at Ruhleben was well protected, and obviously it would be a hard job for any prisoner to escape therefrom.

George's heart sank as he looked ahead of him. It had seemed yesterday as if there really was an outside chance of their getting away, but now that chance had gone.

They and some other prisoners, whom they saw now for the first time, were roughly ordered forward. On they swung with the swinging pace set them by their guards. The soldiers hemmed them in.

As they passed into the camp the thronging prisoners there, eager to see the new arrivals, rushed forward, and many an expectant glance was shot at them, for they might prove to be old friends.

Suddenly a cheer broke out.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Rule Britannia. Britain for ever. Are we down-hearted? No."

The prisoners of Ruhleben camp intended to give the newcomers a hearty welcome at any rate.

(To be continued.)