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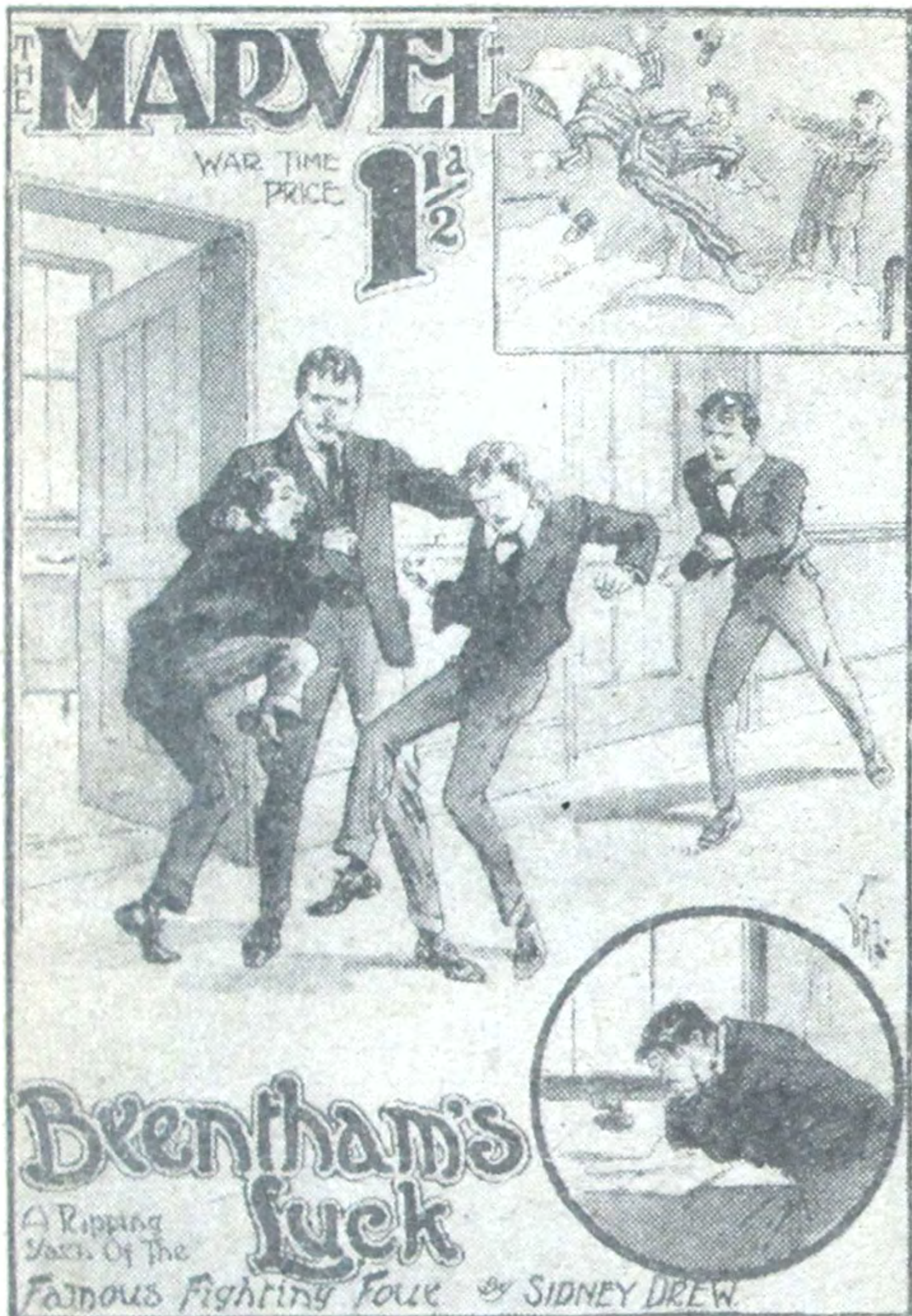


There, sitting on the floor with his back to the wall, was a strange man, fast asleep!

THE REMOVE ON STRIKE.

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "Nipper in Disgrace," "Expelled from St. Frank's," "The Boat-race Mystery," etc.

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A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER** and the Boys of St. Frank's.

By the Author of "*Nipper in Disgrace*," "*Expelled from St. Frank's*," "*The Boat-race Mystery*," etc.

(THE STORY RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH'S LATEST !

THE Remove was seething.

This was not exactly an unusual state of affairs, for the Remove seethed, on the average, two or three times a week. But this was a very particular occasion, and the Remove allowed its opinion to be heard far and wide.

Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, one of the most popular juniors in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, had been expelled. One third of the Remove openly rejoiced; another third was of the opinion that it served Tregellis-West right; and the remainder waxed indignant.

Sir Montie, of course, was the very particular chum of Tommy Watson and myself, we three having shared Study C. But to-day Study C was looking bleak, for we sadly missed our noble companion.

Upon the whole, however, Watson and I were not quite so cut-up as might be supposed. We had a very good reason not to be, as I shall presently explain.

Tregellis-West had been sacked on a most serious charge. It had been conclusively proved that he had paid many visits to the residence of a drunken bookmaker in Bannington, and that he had gambled in company with bad companions. The Headmaster and Mr. Crowell had actually caught Montie red-handed.

At least, that's what they thought.

In strict truth, poor Montie had been made the victim of a particularly despicable plot, engineered by Reginald Pitt. Watson and I were absolutely certain of this, and a good many other fellows suspected it, too. But we did not possess an atom of proof, and the Head had considered himself fully justified in sending Tregellis-West away.

We didn't exactly blame Dr. Stafford, but we did blame Pitt. The Head had been almost forced to take drastic action, but

this was only because of the very completeness of Pitt's plot.

Pitt himself had suffered nothing. For the time being his rascality was allowed to go unpunished, but this was merely because he had cunningly safeguarded himself. Sooner or later he would stumble, and would come a frightful cropper.

Fullwood and Co., Pitt's bosom pals, were doing their utmost to blacken Montie's character even worse than it appeared to be. They found a good many listeners, for the juniors were only too ready to believe the worst. Many of them had liked Montie enormously—but they were hasty.

The others, led by Tommy Watson and myself, refused to believe anything bad against Tregellis-West. Edward Oswald Handforth was one of the strongest of these. He not only declared that he believed the whole yarn to be a lot of piffle, but he threatened to punch anybody's nose who breathed a word against Sir Montie.

As a matter of fact, Handforth habitually performed a good deal of nose-punching, so this was nothing unusual for him. Sometimes he punched the wrong nose—and then there was trouble—for Handforth.

The majority of the Removites, however, had a very great respect for Handforth's fists. These members were formidable, and they possessed a four-point-seven drive. So Handforth, as a general rule, managed to get his own way.

Just at present Handforth was the captain of the Remove. It was a farce, of course, and it certainly wouldn't last for long. But while he was captain Handforth wouldn't allow anybody to forget it.

He had been elected during an excited meeting of the Remove—after Pitt, by a particularly mean trick, had engineered matters in such a way that I was forced to resign.

I made no mistake about Pitt's character. He was cunning and clever, and a formidable

enemy. The manner in which he devised his ill-natured schemes was really worthy of admiration, if they had been in a better cause.

There was one great cause for satisfaction which Tommy Watson and I were permitted to enjoy. Nelson Lee, my guv'nor—and the Housemaster of the Ancient House—had expressed his positive belief in Montie's innocence. Not only this, but he had promised that Tregellis-West would be back in the Remove within a week or two. In short, the guv'nor's plans had only to be completed, and then Reginald Pitt would come a frightful cropper.

For Pitt was involved in a deeper game than appeared on the surface. In some way or other he was connected with a gang of forgers who were operating in Bannington.

Nelson Lee shared my opinion that Sir Montie had been victimised, and the schoolmaster-detective was so positive of this that he had written to Montie's guardian, explaining the whole circumstances. And our noble chum, meanwhile, was not far distant, after all.

He was the guest of Mr. Howard Ridgeway, a novelist, who resided at the Mount, barely a mile from the school. Mr. Ridgeway was a decent sort in every respect, and he had entered into the spirit of the thing with enthusiasm. So, although Montie had got the sack, it was only a temporary expulsion, so to speak, and Tommy and I could visit him when we liked. But, naturally, Montie's presence at the Mount was kept from the other fellows.

"There's nothing to worry over," I remarked cheerfully, as Tommy and I crossed the Triangle some few minutes after lessons were over. "Trust the guv'nor, my son. He'll see that everything's O.K., and we're going to have tea with old Montie, after all."

We were just starting out for the Mount, ostensibly to take tea with Mr. Ridgeway. But our real object was to see Montie. It was quite probable that we should partake of tea at Mr. Ridgeway's fairly frequently. But there would be nothing in this to cause comment amongst the other juniors.

We were also to be introduced to Mrs. Ridgeway, who had only recently come down from London, and she, according to what Nelson Lee had told me, was making Montie so comfortable that he would, probably be reluctant to come back at all! In any case, Tregellis-West's ordeal was not likely to prove a very trying one.

While we were engaged upon this mission Edward Oswald Handforth was propounding a stunning new idea which had occurred to him. At all events Handforth described it as stunning. Church and McClure, his study mates, had private opinions of their own—which they indiscreetly gave voice to occasionally.

"It's no good talking," said Handforth firmly, as he and his chums sat down to tea in their study. "Tregellis-West has been shamefully treated. That's what I maintain. You won't deny that, I suppose?"

"Not likely!" said McClure. "Tregellis-West is one of the best, but I advise you to give it a rest——"

"Are you going in for poetry?" snapped Handforth, glaring.

McClure grinned weakly.

"How was I to know it was going to rhyme?" he asked. "As I was saying, Tregellis-West is a ripping sort, and it's a rotten shame that he should be kicked out of the school. At the same time, the evidence was jolly black against him——"

"Do you believe it?" roared Handforth.

"According to what the Head said," continued McClure. "As for believing it, I think it's a lot of tommy rot! Just as if a chap like Tregellis-West could smoke and drink and gamble! The Head ought to have had more sense!"

Handforth smiled indulgently.

"My poor little innocent, you seem to forget that Headmasters—all masters, if it comes to that—are lacking in common-sense," he explained. "They went and found Montie in that rotten show, and promptly accused him of all sorts of beastly things, just because it looked like it!"

"Disgusting!" exclaimed Church.

"It's worse than that!" said Handforth, banging the table and making the cups rattle. "It's a crying scandal—an outrage! I don't see why the dickens we should stand it."

McClure grunted.

"We can't do anything else!" he observed. "It's no good talking like that, Handy——"

"Oh, ain't it?" said Handforth grimly. "You don't know me yet! As a matter of fact I haven't had a chance of blossoming out! I'm Remove captain, and I've got a stunning idea."

"Who for—Pitt?" asked McClure.

"Pitt?" snorted Handforth. "What do I want to give it to Pitt for?"

"Didn't you say it was a stunning idea?" asked McClure innocently. "I thought you meant you were going to take a carpenter's mallet, or something, and stun him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Church.

Handforth breathed hard.

"That's right—grin!" he snorted. "Can't you chaps ever be serious? Here we are, talking about grave matters, and you're joking! I repeat, I've got a stunning idea."

"Something like the last one?" asked Church, sipping his tea.

"No, this is absolutely original," replied Edward Oswald. "At least it's partly original. You remember that beast, Hunter?"

"I shall remember him till I die," said McClure feelingly. "He was the rottenest Housemaster we've ever had—a Hun to the backbone."

"Well, the Remove refused to stand him, and Nipper organised a barring-out—that's old history," said Handforth. "Why shouldn't we do something of the same sort now?"

"A—a barring-out?" gasped McClure, staring.

"I said something of the same sort, you

ass!" retorted Handforth. "Not exactly a harring-out, but next door to it. We'll make the Head bring Tregellis-West back—or strike!"

Church and McClure gazed at their leader in a dazed fashion.

"Strike?" repeated Church faintly.

"Exactly!"

"The—the whole Remove?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" roared McClure. "You—you silly fathead! How the dickens can the Remove go on strike. We ain't the employees of a factory!"

Handforth regarded his chums pityingly.

"Did I say we were?" he asked. "We ain't employed, but we have work to do in the Form-room. My idea is to go on strike until Tregellis-West comes back. Understand? We send an ultimatum to the Head —"

"A—a which?" asked McClure.

"An ultimatum!" repeated Handforth shortly. "I'll draw it all up, and be the leader. You chaps will have to back me up. It's the wheeze of the term! Refuse to do any work until our demands are fulfilled! We shall have the Head in the hollow of our hands!"

"Shall we?" asked Church dubiously.

"He won't be able to do a thing!" declared the agitator. "You've read the papers, I suppose? Haven't you seen that chaps go on strike and get what they want? Why shouldn't we do the same——"

"But we're not discontented workers!" said McClure warmly. "We're not men who are getting more than they ever got in their lives, and demanding more still! Agitating just because there's a war on——"

"You don't seem to be able to understand!" interrupted Handforth coldly.

"That's not surprising, considering what asses you are. We ain't discontented workers, but we're discontented schoolboys! We've got a good reason, too. Tregellis-West was sacked unjustly, and it's up to us to demand that he shall be treated with every fairness. That's my idea. We'll go on strike until justice is done!"

And Handforth went on with his tea vigorously. There was silence in Study D for two or three minutes, and then Handforth emerged from his reverie with a start.

"Yes, to-morrow morning!" he exclaimed absently.

"Might come before that," said Church, who noticed that Handforth was gazing out of the window at the sky. "Still, it doesn't matter much to us, so long as it's fine on Wednesday——"

"What are you babbling about?" demanded Handforth.

"I thought you were thinking that it might rain to-morrow morning," said Church. "You were looking at the clouds——"

"What do I care about rain?" roared Handforth. "I mean that the strike will start to-morrow morning."

"Oh, are you still thinking of that potty idea?"

Handforth rose to his feet.

"Oh, so that's your opinion, is it?" he demanded grimly. "I'll trouble you to put up your hands, Walter Church. I don't allow my ideas to be called potty——"

"I meant topping, of course!" said Church hastily. "Mind you, I think it's a terrific stunt. It would be fine to lounge about all day doing nothing. But there would be frightful trouble, Handy. Be reasonable, for goodness' sake. You'd—you'd get the sack!"

"I should like to know why?"

"Why, you'd be the ringleader——"

"Certainly, but if the Remove decides to go on strike, every fellow will back me up," said Handforth. "That's where we've got the Head on toast. He can't sack the lot of us, and I don't care tuppence about a flogging. I can stand a little pain, I hope. And if I win, Tregellis-West will come back with full honours. I can tell you, I'm going to make the Remove sit up while I'm skipper!"

Church and McClure, who knew the futility of argument, refrained from comment. They decided to let Handforth go his own way and suffer as he deserved. For both Church and McClure considered that the idea of going on strike was altogether mad and incapable of realisation.

They received a big surprise.

As soon as tea was over Handforth marched into Study H, occupied by Farman and Owen major and Canham. Farman and Owen major, after nearly hurling Handforth out, consented to listen to him, and they declared that the idea was tremendous. Canham, being a somewhat nervous youth, thought differently.

Greatly inspired by his success, Handforth turned his attention to Study F, and at once gained the support of Tom Burton and Conroy minor. These juniors were, of course, all on extremely friendly terms with Sir Montie, and staunchly believed in his innocence.

In Study I, Yakama and Kemp added their strength to the movement. But Ellmore wasn't quite sure. But by this time Handforth was fairly bubbling over with eagerness; he had scarcely expected such powerful support.

Cecil De Valerie, of Study M, frankly declared that Handforth had thought of a decent idea at last; but this was a tribute which Handforth did not exactly take as a compliment. But as De Valerie was willing to join the agitation, Handforth overlooked it. The Duke of Somerton, De Valerie's study mate, asserted that a strike was exactly what he wanted, work disagreeing with him.

When Tommy Watson and I returned from the Mount, quite content with our little jaunt, we found the Remove passage fairly bubbling. And, naturally, we wanted to know what all the excitement was about.

"About time you came, too!" said Handforth severely. "The two chaps who ought to have been here from the very first! Where the dickens have you been?"

"Out," I replied. "What's the idea? Where do Tommy and I come in?"

"I suppose you want Tregellis-West back, don't you?"

I stared.

"Of course we do," I replied. "But I don't see how you're going to help, Handy. You have your uses, but there's no need for you to bother your head about Tregellis-West. He'll come back before long, don't you make any mistake."

"That's all very well," said Handforth. "We don't want any statements of that kind, Nipper. Tregellis-West has been rottenly treated, and he ought to come back into the fold!"

"Hear, hear!" I said heartily.

"And, what's more, we're going to force the Head's hand," added Handforth. "We're going to make him give Tregellis-West a free pardon."

"Are we?" I said. "That's jolly interesting. And how are we going to perform this wonderful feat, Handy? I suppose you're going to jaw at the Head until he gives in out of sheer exhaustion."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm surprised at you!" said Handforth reproachfully. "You, of all fellows—Tregellis-West's own study chum! You're smiling and cheerful, and don't seem to care whether he comes back or not!"

If Handforth had known that Tommy Watson and I had just left Montie in the most genial of tempers, he would have been able to understand better.

"I care a great deal, my dear chap," I said. "But sending a deputation to the Head won't do any good, if that's what you're thinking about. It was Pitt who got Sir Montie the sack, and we're going to make Pitt own up sooner or later."

"That's no good at all!" declared Handforth. "My idea is to strike! The whole Remove is going to refuse to do any more work until Tregellis-West comes back. How's that?"

"Rotten!" I replied promptly.

"What?" roared Handforth.

"It's mad!" I replied. "The Remove couldn't go on strike, you ass. Drop the idea, and think of something sensible."

Watson and I, of course, knowing that Nelson Lee would very soon establish Sir Montie's innocence, were quite content to let matters rest where they were. We also knew that Montie was quite comfortable and in safe hands. So the idea of a strike, such as Handforth suggested, did not appeal to us.

"Souse me!" exclaimed the Bo'sun, in surprise. "Don't you think the idea's good, messmate? Why, we're all in favour of backing up the skipper. He'll steer us——"

"As it happens, Nipper hasn't got a say in the matter," interrupted Handforth. "I'm captain of the Remove, and I'm going to call a meeting in the common-room straight away. This is a question for the whole Form to decide, and I'm willing to stand by the vote of the majority."

"Well, that's fair enough," I admitted.

"But I don't think the fellows will all agree to such a measure, Handforth. It's a bit too drastic, and I predict that you're in for a fall."

"Rot!" said Handforth tartly.

And he continued his campaign with enormous enthusiasm. Indeed, he was so full of the idea that the other juniors were excited too. If Handforth chose to lead a strike, and to take the responsibility on his own shoulders, the juniors saw no reason why they shouldn't participate. Having no lessons to do appealed strongly to almost every Removeite, and that meeting in the common-room promised to be largely attended.

Knowing all I did, I was not in favour of a strike. But I could not help admiring Handforth for his courage. And it was also good to know that he was blindly staunch to Sir Montie, in spite of the overwhelming evidence which had resulted in Montie's downfall.

It was a striking tribute to my noble chum's popularity. And I firmly resolved to back up Handforth all along the line, and Tommy Watson came to a similar decision.

The Remove meeting would be extremely interesting!

CHAPTER II.

THE DECISION OF THE REMOVE.

REGINALD PITT looked into Study A, grinning.

"Coming?" he asked. "There's a meeting in the common-room, and it promises to be interesting."

Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, the occupants of Study A, had heard all about the meeting, and were even then preparing to attend. As a matter of fact they were engaged in the genial task of manufacturing pellets of blotting-paper, soaked in ink. They considered that Handforth needed a few.

"Sha'n't be a minute!" grinned Fullwood. "Come in, you ass! We don't want the other fellows to spot what we're doing."

"Good idea!" said Pitt, nodding approvingly at the inky pile on the table. "We want to wreck this giddy meeting. It's about Tregellis-West, and Handforth's got a mad idea of starting a strike. It's about time Handforth himself was kicked out."

"Well, we shouldn't miss him much," grinned Gulliver. "By the way, Pitt, who's your next victim to be?"

Pitt's eyes gleamed.

"I sha'n't be idle for long!" he replied. "Tregellis-West knocked me out in a fight, and I paid him out for it. If Handforth isn't careful, he'll find himself in trouble."

Fullwood and Co. were fully aware of the fact that Sir Montie's disgrace had come about through the machinations of Reginald Pitt. They highly approved, since Montie had been one of their bitter enemies. In fact, Pitt had originally commenced his campaign against all the decent fellows in the Ancient House on behalf of Fullwood. The Nuts had agreed to supply Pitt with pocket-money if

he succeeded in bringing about the downfall of myself and my chums.

I had resigned the captaincy as a result of Pitt's initial efforts, but the young rascal had hesitated before trying any deep-laid plot against me. It had been easier to deceive the kind-hearted Montie.

"Well, come on," said Pitt briskly. "The meeting's started by this time, and we don't want to be late."

Fullwood and Co. were ready, and they accompanied Pitt down the Remove passage towards the common-room. Each carried a little parcel of inky missiles concealed inside his sleeves, and they chuckled as they opened the common-room door.

A considerable din greeted them.

Handforth was already mounted upon the table, with the evident intention of delivering a speech. Apparently every other fellow in the room had the same idea, for they were all talking.

Handforth's eagle eye saw the entry of Pitt and Fullwood and Co. at once, and he pointed an angry finger in their direction.

"Outside!" he roared.

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "This is a Remove meeting, ain't it?"

"Outside!" bellowed Handforth. "We don't want traitors like you here! I say, you chaps, hurl those rotters out!"

Tommy Watson and I were amongst the first to charge, and we were supported by De Valerie and the Bo'sun and a good many others.

Fullwood and Co. backed away hastily.

"Here, hold on!" shouted Gulliver in alarm.

"You'd better not touch us!" said Pitt calmly. "We've as much right here as you have, and we're not going to be turned out!"

"Your mistake!" I said sweetly. "You are!"

Pitt gritted his teeth.

"You confounded——"

He didn't get any further, for Tommy and I hurled ourselves upon him and pitched him out, neck and crop. The audacity of these cads in attending the meeting was surprising. Fullwood and Co. very foolishly gave their little game away—with disastrous results for themselves.

"Don't you touch us!" roared Fullwood. "We'll smother you with ink——"

"Oh, so that's the game, is it?" shouted De Valerie. "Grab 'em!"

"Say, this is just where we get busy!" grinned Farman. "I'll allow these galoots own a mighty fine cheek to get around this lay-out. Gee whiz! No, you don't, sonny!"

He grabbed Gulliver's arm as the latter was about to hurl his inky pellets. The next moment Gulliver gave a frantic yell, which was almost instantly smothered. Farman, ably assisted by Owen major, was doing his utmost to ram Gulliver's ink bullets down his throat. By the time Farman and Owen major had finished Gulliver closely resembled a blue-black nigger minstrel.

"Ha, ha ha!"

Fullwood and Bell were treated in a simi-

lar fashion—just as a warning to them not to try such tricks again. Not only had they dared to come to the meeting, but it had been their obvious intention to mess it up. They crawled away, sore and fuming. Pitt was with them, and he consoled himself by sneering at their discomfiture.

And while they were busily scrubbing off the ink and changing their collars, the Remove meeting progressed.

Handforth was the chief speaker. This was as it should be, considering that Handforth was captain of the Remove. But, as a matter of fact, Handforth was always chief speaker when he could get the chance. Even if other juniors were not fond of his voice he had a great affection for it himself.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, "we are gathered here——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"I was just about to remark," roared Handforth, "that I don't want any interruptions. If the Head makes a speech you don't yell at him, do you? You've got to treat me with respect——"

"Ha, ha ha!"

The Removites showed their respect by yelling.

"With respect!" bellowed Handforth. "Ain't I your captain? Besides, this is a jolly serious matter——"

"How can it be serious if it's jolly?" asked De Valerie blandly.

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Am I going to make a speech or not?" demanded Handforth, glaring round. "It seems to me that all you can think of is cheap humour. This matter, I repeat, is jolly serious—I mean deadly serious. One of our most popular companions has been rudely taken from us——"

"I object to that remark!" put in Owen major. "The Head may have taken Tre-gellis-West from us, but he didn't do it rudely. It ain't respectful to call the Head rude——"

"You—you ass!" bawled Handforth. "Can't I use a figure of speech without some noodle picking me up? Don't play the giddy ox, for goodness' sake. I've called this meeting because I think the time is ripe for action."

"Good!" said Hubbard. "Come on, you chaps. Handforth wants action, and we'll oblige him. I propose chucking him out——"

"Give him a chance!" I grinned. "I'll tell you what, Handy! It's just ten minutes to seven. We'll stand you until seven, and then consider the meeting closed. How's that?"

"I'm grieved!" said Handforth bitterly.

"I'm pained!"

"That's nothing to what you'll be soon!" remarked Watson consolingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm pained!" roared Handforth, thumping McClure's head in order to give emphasis to his remarks—McClure happening to stand just in front of him. Probably Handforth mistook McClure's head for the table in his excitement.

"Yaroooooh!" howled McClure. "You—
you babbling lunatic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"McClure seems to be pained, too!"
grinned Farman.

"Keep your fatheaded hands to yourself!"
roared McClure. "Blessed if you ain't always
thumping something——"

"How was I to know it was your head?"
demanded Handforth hotly. "If you don't
want your head thumped, you shouldn't get
in the way! Am I to be allowed to continue
this speech or not?"

"Seven minutes left!" I remarked thought-
fully.

"I thought you would have better feel-
ings!" sneered Handforth. "We're here to
come to a decision regarding Tregellis-West,
and all you can do is to gibe at me! I sub-
mit that Tregellis-West has been badly
treated and unjustly sacked. Who dares to
contradict that?"

"I do!" shouted Hubbard.

Handforth glared at him.

"Oh, do you?" he roared. "I'll punch
your nose——"

"Wasn't it proved that Tregellis-West had
been gambling?" demanded Hubbard. "I'll
admit that he was a jolly decent chap; but
even decent chaps have lapses now and again.
It's all rot saying he didn't do it. The very
fact that he's been sacked proves that he's
been playing the giddy goat. He deserved
the sack!"

A murmur of approval went up from
several juniors; but it was quite drowned by
an answering roar of indignation.

"Hold on!" shouted Handforth, as I was
about to speak. "Let me deal with Hub-
bard! Opposition was just the thing I
wanted. I'll prove to you that Tregellis-
West was the victim of a rotten trick. The
Head can't see it, but I can!"

"Good for you, Handy!" shouted Watson.

"Last week I challenged Pitt to fight,"
went on Handforth, warming to his work.
"What was the result? Fullwood and those
other cads piled on me and knocked me into
a jelly. So Pitt bowled me out in no time,
and I don't consider that I was fairly
whacked."

"Rather not!"

"It was a beastly, mean trick!"

"Well, Tregellis-West, like the brick he is,
decided to give Pitt the hiding of his life,"
shouted Handforth. "Pitt got it! He was
whacked as neatly as I've ever seen a fellow
whacked. And when he went away he swore
that he would have his revenge. Do you re-
member that, you beastly traitor?"

Hubbard shifted uneasily.

"Of course I remember it," he said. "But
you'd better not call me a traitor!"

"I called you what you are!" retorted
Handforth. "Pitt swore that he'd have
revenge on Tregellis-West, and we all know
that he's a mean, vindictive bounder, as
cunning as a sly fox and the biggest liar in
the school. You all know, as well, that Tre-
gellis-West was as straight as a die and
wouldn't tell a whopper for anything. And

yet there are still some fellows who believe
him guilty!" added Handforth, with tre-
mendous indignation. "It's sickening! I'm
ashamed of every fellow who doesn't stand
up for good old Tregellis-West!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hold on!" roared Handforth. "There's
another thing! Tregellis-West was out every
evening for eight or nine days, wasn't he?
The Head said that he frequented that rotten
gambling place, but Montie himself said that
he was spoofed into coaching a cad named
Summers. I believe him—and I'll tell you
why."

Handforth had gained the complete atten-
tion of his audience now, and there wasn't a
murmur as he paused for a moment. I
couldn't help admitting to myself that Hand-
forth was turning out to be a far more
sensible chap than I had ever given him
credit for being.

"I'll tell you why!" he repeated impres-
sively. "After Montie was sacked I made
inquiries. And where was Pitt during all
those nights that Tregellis-West was away?
That's what I ask you—where was Pitt?"

"How the dickens should we know?" said
Hubbard.

"Ah! That's the very point!" roared
Handforth. "We don't know—nobody knows!
But it's an absolute fact that Pitt went off
on his bicycle for over two hours each even-
ing. To anybody with an ounce of brains
it's as clear as crystal. Pitt went to Banning-
ton and faked up evidence to make it appear
that he was Tregellis-West. You can't diddle
me. I may be a duffer in some ways, but I'm
not a fool! I tell you, you fatheads, that
Tregellis-West is as innocent as I am. Every
fellow who isn't convinced hold up his
hand!"

There were no hands upraised whatever.
Handforth's speech had completely won over
the waverers. I was extremely pleased, and
I remarked to Watson that Handforth was
doing wonders.

"Now we can get to business," went on the
Remove captain. "Tregellis-West has been
unjustly sacked, and there's only one thing
to do. The Remove has got to show its dis-
approval. In fact we've got to demand that
Tregellis-West shall be brought back."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good man!"

"Go it!"

"On the ball, Handy!"

"A deputation to the Head would be a
farce," went on Handforth. "It's a sad
fact that the Head doesn't take enough
notice of juniors—but it is a fact. A depu-
tation would be chucked out on its neck,
and probably wallopped. So we'll adopt
stern measures—we'll apply force! That's
the word! We'll show the Head that we
disapprove of his action in sacking Tre-
gellis-West. And the way to do it is to
strike!"

"That's all very well," I put in. "But
you seem to forget, Handy, that my gvnor
—Mr Nelson Lee—believes in Montie's inno-
cence as much as we do. If you'll only have

patience for a week or two everything will come all right—perhaps sooner."

"And what about Tregellis-West in the meantime?" demanded Handforth. "He'll be suffering disgrace—and I don't see why he should. As captain of the Remove, I call upon every fellow present to rally round me and to support the first strike on record at St. Frank's!"

"The idea's all right, so far as it goes," I remarked. "But we've got to think of everything, Handy. You're a good chap, and I shouldn't like to see you sacked as well—"

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Handforth, with his usual recklessness. "I shall take all responsibility, but if it comes to a crisis every fellow in the Remove must back me up—that's all I ask. I propose that a vote is taken at once. I'm perfectly willing to stand or fall as a result of the vote. If the Remove decides against a strike, we won't have it. But the majority, in my opinion, will rally round. In that case all the other fellows—who voted against the strike—must fall into line. That's my proposition."

"Well, it's fair enough," I exclaimed. "But what about the College House fellows? They're in the Form-room with us, and half a strike wouldn't be any good. I maintain that Christine and Co. ought to be in the vote. This is a matter for the whole Form to decide, and not the Ancient House section alone."

Handforth nodded readily.

"I agree with that," he said. "Look here, we'll take the vote out in the Triangle. A dozen of you go and rout out every College House Remove chap. We've got to be there to a man—except Pitt and Fullwood and those other cads. They ain't recognised, anyhow."

"Good old Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the strike!"

There was no doubt that Handforth had aroused an enormous amount of enthusiasm. He had received far greater attention than I should have thought possible; and I knew the reason.

There was a very strong feeling in the whole Remove against Tregellis-West's expulsion, and the very idea of an organised protest won favour immediately. Tregellis-West had been a Fossil, but the Monks were every bit as concerned at his downfall as the Ancient House fellows themselves. And I fully expected them to enter the strike-party almost to a man.

There was tremendous excitement out in the Triangle shortly afterwards. It was rather a task to gather all the Monks together, but it was accomplished at last. The meeting was now being held practically in the dark, but this made no material difference.

"There's going to be a strike, my son," I remarked to Watson. "Well, it'll be a bit of excitement, anyhow. And I must say that Handy is turning up trumps. Montie

must be suffering from burning ears just now!"

"Poor old chap!" said Watson. "He'd feel jolly flattered at this tribute to his popularity, wouldn't he? But there'll be terrific ructions as soon as the strike starts. It's an unheard-of thing!"

I grinned.

"Well, it won't do any harm. If Montie's brought back at once, all the better. The gov'nor can completely establish his innocence just the same. Anyhow, I'm going to support Handy for all I'm worth!"

It was rather a novel experience for me. Since I had been at St. Frank's I had engineered all manner of "stunts," and the fellows had rallied round loyally. It was now my turn to rally round somebody else.

Christine and Co., as I expected, were enthusiastic. There were a good few nervous fellows who wavered, and who remained neutral, so to speak, but they would have to join in if the majority decided for a strike.

The count was taken amid much excitement, and the result was somewhat surprising. I had expected almost a tie, but fully three-quarters of the Remove voted heartily for the strike! The remainder, of course, could do nothing but fall into line.

This result had been obtained chiefly because of the general excitement. In calmer moments the fellows would have hesitated. But now they cast all thought of the consequences to the wind; Handforth's eloquence had won the day.

And there was no doubt that Handforth was a tremendously determined fellow once he got fairly on the warpath. He never paused to consider odds, but went straight ahead, sweeping all obstacles out of his path.

And Edward Oswald Handforth was fairly on the warpath just now!

CHAPTER III.

THE STRIKE COMMITTEE.

EVERYBODY in the Remove was feeling somewhat awed when the excitement had died down.

The College House fellows had gone back to their own quarters, having pledged themselves to stand by their rivals. And another meeting was held in the Ancient House common-room.

"This is all very well, but what about prep?" demanded Hubbard. "We can't attend this meeting all the evening—"

"Prep.?" echoed Handforth. "Don't be an ass!"

"We've got to do it, I suppose?"

"Not likely!" replied Handforth grimly.

"The strike doesn't actually start until to-morrow, but there's no need for any fellow to bother about preparation, because there'll probably be no lessons in the morning."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Unless, of course, the Head gives in at

once," went on Handforth. "That's not likely, though. He's bound to get wild and argue with us to begin with. But, having taken up this stand, we've got to remain as firm as rocks. There's one other thing I want to say."

"Only one?" asked Watson.

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Handforth. "There's just a chance that I shall be sacked—or, at least, locked in the punishment-room for a day or two. If so, I want some fellow to promise to carry on after I've gone. Who'll take on the job?"

"I will!" I said promptly.

"Good man! I thought you'd be the first to speak up," said Handforth. "And if you're shoved in the punishment-room too, Nipper, De Valerie will have to take the lead."

"Any old thing!" said De Valerie languidly.

"The Head can't sack the lot of us, and once he sees we're determined he'll begin to think seriously," went on Handforth. "My dear chaps, he absolutely can't punish us much. It's not as though we were butting against the school authority. We're not. We're simply showing our loyalty to Tregellis-West, and the Head will understand that at once. Now, look here, the next thing is to appoint a Strike Committee."

"A—a what?" asked Owen major.

"A Strike Committee," repeated Handforth firmly. "All strikers have that—and, besides, it looks better. There are all sorts of things to be decided, and our plan of campaign must be cut and dried this evening. It's no good leaving anything till the morning. Now, as chairman of the committee, I think——"

"Who appointed you chairman?" asked Watson.

"That's a fatheaded question," said Handforth, glaring. "As Remove skipper, it's my place to be chairman. The committee, in my opinion, should number six fellows, and they ought to be representative of the Remove as a whole."

About two dozen fellows immediately claimed that they were the very chaps wanted. But Handforth was firm.

"As chairman, it's up to me to appoint the committee," he said, looking round. "I want you, Nipper and Watson, to begin with. De Valerie will do for another, and Farman ought to have some decent ideas."

"That's five," I remarked.

Handforth looked round again.

"Somerton will do for the sixth," he said.

"It's not for me to grumble, old chap," said the Duke of Somerton. "I'm ready to be a member of the Strike Committee—although I'm blessed if I know what I've got to do."

"You've got to help the rest to decide upon the exact course of action," said Handforth. "As Hubbard said, 'We can't be holding meetings all the evening, and that's the reason for this committee. Whatever we arrange, the rest of the fellows have

got to abide by. That's understood. The committee has full control."

"I'm blessed if I thought you had such organising powers, Handy," I remarked. "The idea's a sound one. We can't be holding Remove meetings every minute, and that's the reason for the committee. We shall simply deal with every point as it crops up, even after the strike has started."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "And now we'll get along to headquarters."

"Headquarters?" repeated the Do'sun.

"My study," explained Handforth. "But I'm not particular. Any old study will do, if it comes to that."

Every other member of the committee was quite content that Study D should serve as the strikers' headquarters. The study would probably look the worse for wear by the time the committee had done with it.

As Handforth had remarked, our usual evening preparation was quite unnecessary, since there would almost certainly be no lessons in the morning. Every fellow in the Remove was much relieved, and the strike received a fresh impetus. The very fact that the whole scheme meant a relief from lessons had induced a great many juniors to vote in favour of it.

The committee shut itself up in Study D and got to work. There was really very little to be done, but Handforth apparently liked to make out that a meeting was essential.

"In the morning," said Handforth, "we'll go in to lessons as usual. That's my suggestion——"

"Oh, rot!" interrupted De Valerie. "If we're going to strike, we might as well do it properly—what? I propose we refuse to enter the giddy Form-room!"

"I'm against that," I put in.

"Why?"

"Well, Handforth's idea is the best," I replied. "We want to show the Head that we're not jibbing against the school authority. We simply refuse to do any work until Tregellis-West is back. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "It wouldn't look well to go shouting about the Triangle while all the rest of the school is at lessons. It would cause a lot of comment outside, too, and we don't want to offend the Head in that way."

"Then, say, what's the doggone programme?" asked Farman.

"Simply this," was Handforth's reply.

"We'll sit at our places in the Form-room, but decline to do any work whatever. Crowell will get wild, of course, and he'll go for the Head. When the Head comes I'll get up and explain that we shall remain on strike until we receive full recognition for our demands. He can't very well refuse—— Who the dickens is that?" added Handforth testily, as several thumps sounded upon the locked door. "Go away! The committee can't be bothered!"

"Rats!" came Bob Christine's voice. "Do you think we ain't going to be represented

on this committee? Like your giddy nerve?"

I grinned.

"We've forgotten all about the Monks," I said, with a chuckle. "They're in it as much as we are, Handy, and they'll have to be represented."

Handforth strode across and unlocked the door. Christine and Talmadge and Yorke marched in, looking somewhat incensed.

"Look here!" sported Christine warmly. "If you think we're going to be left out of this, you're jolly well mistaken! We want to be equally represented on this committee, so three of you chaps had better clear out!"

"You—you cheeky Monk——"

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

"Peace, children!" I broke in. "We're not going to start a House row, I suppose?"

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"Oh, let's come to some decision, for goodness' sake," I sighed. "The committee had better be nine in number, so that includes the lot of us. And if you don't like it, Handy, you'll have to lump it!"

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"All right—have your own way!" he said. "It seems to me that my word ain't any good. The Strike Committee is now sitting, and we've got to come to certain decisions."

"I've been standing up ever since I came in!" exclaimed Talmadge. "I'm not selfish, but you might let me have one of those chairs, Handy. You can't use 'em both at once!"

Handforth, who had been thumping the backs of two chairs alternately, did not deign to make any reply. There were several

FOR YOU AND ME!

Another Rippling Rhyme.

For you and me the brave boys go to face a grim and ruthless foe, to fight in darkness, heat, or snow— *for You and Me!*

They break off all their cherished ties, they say, perhaps, their last good-byes, to suffer under foreign skies— *for You and Me!*

They leave the safe and peaceful grind; they go, their country's need in mind, and leave the homes they love behind— *for You and Me!*

We're free to count in peace our hoard, our packages in bank vaults stored, because our men took up the sword— *for You and Me!*

For You and Me!

Are we so small that we would dodge the country's call to HELP the boys who fight and fall for You and Me? Oh, let us to the Tank Bank go, and buy the BONDS that BOMB the foe, for the sake of the dear, brave boys who go for You and Me!

WALT MASON.

P.S.—If there isn't a Tank Bank handy go to the Post Office, to a Stockbroker, or to a Bank! And if you don't want War Bonds, buy War Savings Certificates—as many as you can and as soon as you can.

I don't see any reason why the committee shouldn't number eight or nine——"

"Too many!" said Handforth firmly. "If Christine wants to come in, some other chap will have to resign."

"That's all right," said Watson. "We don't mind a bit, Handy. In fact the meeting will get along more smoothly if you resign——"

Handforth glared.

"You—you ass!" he roared. "Do you think I'm going to resign?"

"Well, you suggested it——"

"You silly fathead!"

"I don't know about that!" said Christine. "I'm inclined to agree with Watson. It was your idea, Handy, and you can't deny it. And I suppose you'll admit that the meeting will get on more peacefully if you clear out?"

grins, and the committee settled down to business.

"What decisions have you come to?" asked Christine.

"Well, it's rather difficult to outline our programme," replied Handforth. "But the Remove is going to strike work to-morrow morning. We must be jolly careful, too. No disrespect is to be shown to the Head, and all the ordinary school rules have got to be obeyed. We're simply barring lessons—see?"

"And suppose we're all caned?" suggested Yorke hopefully.

"You're always supposing something idiotic!" snapped Handforth. "Crowell can't cane the lot of us, can he? He'd be exhausted before he got through half the Remove! And caning us wouldn't do us any good, anyhow." Handforth grinned.

"You seem to forget that a body of strikers have everything their own way. We shall make our demand, and won't be satisfied until we get it!"

"Like the Pears' soap boy?" grinned Watson.

"As for our plans afterwards, we can't come to any decision," went on Handforth, ignoring Watson's remark. "It all depends upon how the strike progresses. Personally, I reckon we shall be victorious all along the line."

"Let us hope you're a true prophet, Handy," I said fervently.

But like the Scotchman, I "had ma boots."

CHAPTER IV.

THE REMOVE ON STRIKE.

MR. CROWELL, the master of the Remove, eyed his Form somewhat curiously.

As Handforth dramatically put it, the hour had come. Morning lessons were about to commence, and there was an excellent reason for Mr. Crowell's inquiring glances.

The Remove was labouring under some suppressed excitement. The Form-master had no difficulty in coming to that conclusion, for the signs were very distinct.

As a matter of fact, there had been a revulsion of feeling amongst the juniors—but not amongst them all. The more weak-kneed, so to speak, were suffering from cold feet—to use one of Farman's expressive terms. The strike did not appeal to them half so much this morning as it had done the previous night. The moment of crisis was at hand, and a good many fellows faked it.

But both Handforth and I had expected something of this nature. It was only a repetition of what had occurred at the time of the historic barring-out. Every fellow had been enthusiastic at the beginning, but the courage of many oozed away when the barring-out was fairly on the go.

It was the same in this case.

The Remove strike was a trivial affair in comparison with the barring-out, but serious enough for all that. It was an event which had never before occurred at St. Frank's. And there being no precedent, we could not tell how the Head would deal with it.

But not a single fellow was allowed to back out. The Remove had pledged itself, and there was nothing now but to go forward. Only six fellows were excluded from the strike. These were Pitt, Fullwood, Gulliver, Bell, Marriott, and Merrell. Under no circumstances should we allow them to join in, and they, on their part, were quite determined to keep out. They had no wish to have Tregellis-West brought back, seeing that they had plotted to get rid of him.

Mr. Crowell sat down at his desk and coughed.

"I observe that you are suffering from some unusual excitement, boys!" he exclaimed, looking over the Form critically. "Is it possible that you are concerned over the expulsion of Tregellis-West?"

There was silence.

"Because if so, I must strongly condemn any feeling of sympathy," went on Mr. Crowell. "I do not think you will accuse me of being a harsh man, but I really must declare that Tregellis-West's conduct was of the most disgraceful nature, and expulsion was the only punishment possible——"

"He was innocent, sir!" shouted somebody.

"The boy who made that remark will stand up!" rapped out Mr. Crowell.

Tommy Watson stood up defiantly.

"I cannot altogether blame you for your opinion, Watson," said Mr. Crowell kindly. "Tregellis-West was one of your chums, was he not? But, really, my lad, it is preposterous to believe in Tregellis-West's innocence when he was positively caught red-handed."

"He wasn't, sir!" declared Watson hotly.

"Be silent!" ordered Mr. Crowell. "It so happens, Watson, that I was with the Headmaster when Tregellis-West was discovered. In order to dispel any doubts, I will tell you that Tregellis-West was discovered sitting at a table with cards before him, and piles of money on every side. He recked of spirits——"

"And no wonder!" I shouted indignantly, jumping up. "He was in a beastly atmosphere, and those rotters spilt some whisky on his coat. He was kept there by force, sir, and before long Tregellis-West's innocence will be established!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Three cheers for Tregellis-West!"

Mr. Crowell listened with shocked amazement as the Remove stood up and cheered to the echo. The Form-master rapped his desk angrily.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Take your seats, boys! How—how dare you!"

"We believe that Tregellis-West has been unjustly treated, sir!" roared Handforth. "I don't want to be disrespectful, sir, but I must say that I am surprised that a man of your common-sense should be so easily spoofed!"

Mr. Crowell fairly shook.

"You — you impertinent rascal!" he shouted. "Handforth, you will take five hundred lines."

Handforth grinned.

"I don't mind, sir!" he said defiantly.

"You can make it a thousand if you like!"

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Crowell.

"It shall be a thousand, Handforth—and you may consider yourself lucky that I do not take you to the Headmaster for a flogging. Enough of this nonsense! We will commence lessons at once."

Mr. Crowell regarded his class angrily.

"And let me hear no more about Tregellis-West!" he added, in a cold voice.

"The wretched boy has left St. Frank's for ever, and it is far better that you should forget him. He sinned, and has received his punishment. That is sufficient."

Mr. Crowell spoke with finality. He could not have chosen any words better calculated to incite the Removites to strike. The ripple of indignation which ran through the Form strengthened all the waverers in a moment. Mr. Crowell's words sounded harsh, but he was labouring under a misapprehension—having refused to believe that Montie had been the victim of a plot.

"Silence!" said Mr. Crowell, as several fellows continued whispering. "Get your books out——"

Handforth stood up again.

"I wish to say, sir——"

"Sit down, Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell, now thoroughly angered.

"I'm the captain of the Remove, sir," said Handforth firmly, "and I wish to inform you that the whole Form, barring Pitt and Fullwood and two or three others, is on strike. We're quite determined, sir, and mean no disrespect to yourself. But the Remove is on strike!"

Mr. Crowell breathed hard.

"How dare you, Handforth!" he shouted. "One more word and I will take you to the Headmaster——"

"I'm sorry, sir, but that won't make any difference," interrupted Handforth, with deadly calmness. "The Remove has decided to do no further work until Tregellis-West is brought back."

"Hear, hear!"

"Long live the strike!"

"Down with injustice!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Crowell gazed at the excited Form dazedly.

"You—you unruly young rebels!" he thundered, finding his voice. "This exhibition is positively disgraceful. What nonsense have you been saying, Handforth?"

"No nonsense at all, sir," replied Handforth. "The Remove is on strike, and the strike will continue until our demands are met. That's all I've got to say, sir."

"Come with me at once, Handforth," snapped Mr. Crowell furiously.

There was an immediate uproar.

"Don't go, Handy!"

"Stay where you are!"

"Hurrah!"

"We all back Handforth up, sir," I shouted. "If you take him to the Head for a flogging, you'll have to take the lot of us! We all stand or fall together!"

Mr. Crowell was thunderstruck by this exhibition. Feeling that he was incapable of dealing with the situation, he swept out of the Form-room and slammed the door behind him.

The uproar increased at once.

"Well, we've done it!" said Handforth breathlessly. "The plunge has been taken, by George!"

"It's been taken by everybody!" grinned De Valerie.

"Well, Crowell shouldn't be so jolly bitter against an innocent chap!" snorted Handforth. "If the Head tries any of his tricks, we'll show him that we're in earnest!"

"Rather!"

"There's one thing I want to say!" I exclaimed. "You were rather cheeky to old Crowell, Handy, and we ought to avoid that. He was jolly irritating, I know, but——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Cave!"

The door had just opened, and Mr. Crowell returned, followed, not by the Head, but by Nelson Lee. Mr. Crowell had evidently considered that this was a matter for the Housemaster to deal with. I couldn't help grinning. I wondered how the gov'nor would deal with the problem.

"I say, this is rotten," muttered De Valerie, in dismay.

I understood why the fellows were looking so concerned. Nelson Lee's popularity at St. Frank's was enormous, and the majority of the fellows would have done anything to avoid displeasing him. And now they would find it necessary to defy him, or else cave in.

"Now, boys, Mr. Crowell has told me that a serious rebellion has broken out in this Form-room," said the gov'nor, eyeing me severely.

"Wrong, sir!" I said, jumping up. "I'm not the ringleader this time, although I heartily agree with the strike!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I can quite believe you, Nipper!" he said grimly. "You can be trusted to join in any sensational movement. I have come here to punish the principal offenders——"

"Then you'll have to punish us all, sir!" exclaimed Handforth. "I take the credit for starting the strike, but all the other fellows are with me heart and soul! But please don't think that we mean any disrespect to you, sir."

"I certainly do not think that, Handforth," agreed the gov'nor calmly. "You mentioned just now that you take the credit for the strike. The credit, Handforth? I fail to see anything creditable in being the ringleader of a strike movement. The very idea, indeed, is farcical, and I urge you to drop this nonsense at once."

The Remove looked uncomfortable. Nelson Lee was talking to them so smoothly and kindly that they found it difficult to maintain their ordinary attitude. Fierce anger on his part would have fired the strikers tremendously, but this calm reception took the wind out of their sails.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir, but we don't consider that it is nonsense," said Handforth doggedly. "We mean no disrespect, but the Remove has pledged itself to remain on strike until Tregellis-West comes back. He has been unjustly treated, sir, and I ain't afraid to say so. Tregellis-West is one of the best fellows in the world, and utterly incapable of doing anything rotten! That's what

"I say, sir, and that's what I stick to, and it's a crying shame that he should have been sacked! And if you like to cane me for cheek, I don't mind a bit!"

Handforth paused rather breathlessly, and the Remove looked on expecting terrific ructions. But Nelson Lee remained quite calm.

"You need have no fear, Handforth, I shall not flog you," he said quietly. "On the contrary, my boy, I greatly admire your courage for speaking out so boldly. You are displaying a staunchness to the unfortunate Tregellis-West which I find it impossible to deprecate. At the same time, Handforth, all idea of a strike is preposterous."

Handforth flushed with pleasure.

"You're jolly good, sir," he said. "But you're making it awfully hard for us. We—we only want to show the Head that we don't approve of his action in sacking Tregellis-West."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the gov'nor drily. "The Remove does not approve—eh? My dear boys, you need have no fear regarding Tregellis-West. I can safely promise you that he will return to St. Frank's, with full honours, as soon as his innocence is proved—"

"He was guilty, sir!" shouted Pitt.

Nelson Lee turned sharply.

"I have no doubt, Pitt, that you have a very excellent reason for making that remark!" he exclaimed curtly. "Make no mistake, however. The boys who plotted against Tregellis-West will receive condign punishment when their guilt is proved."

"Tregellis-West was caught red-handed, sir," shouted Pitt. "The Head sacked him—and that's good enough! Tregellis-West only got all he deserved!"

"Others will get all they deserve in due course!" said Nelson Lee smoothly. "But am I to understand, Pitt, that you do not associate yourself with this—this so-called strike?"

"I've got nothing to do with it, sir," declared Pitt promptly.

"In that case, Pitt, you will hold your tongue!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Further, you will write me five hundred lines for addressing me in an impertinent tone!"

"I don't see why—" began Pitt hotly.

Nelson Lee's eyes flashed.

"One more word, Pitt—just one word—and I will cane you severely without a moment's delay!" he exclaimed angrily. "It may interest you to know—and I am sure it will interest all the other boys in this room—that I am convinced of Tregellis-West's innocence!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

The gov'nor held his hand up sharply.

"This is no time to give vent to your feelings, boys," he said, in the silence which instantly followed. "Tregellis-West, I repeat, will return before long—"

"We want him to return at once, sir!" said Handforth firmly.

"That is unfortunately impossible—"

"Then the strike will continue, sir," declared Handforth. "No disrespect to you, sir. I'm awfully pained, because you'll think that I'm cheeky. I ain't sir. I wouldn't cheek you for anything; and I'll punch the nose of any fellow who does!"

Nelson Lee restrained a smile.

"I understand, Handforth," he said. "And I am satisfied that the Remove is not deliberately impertinent to me. But this strike, as you choose to call it, cannot continue. Be sensible, boys, and have patience. If you will promise to drop this nonsense, I will overlook what has already occurred."

"That's splendid of you, sir," said Handforth, flushing. "I—I don't like to answer you back. But we're firm, sir. Unless Tregellis-West comes back at once the strike goes on. And—and I'd rather you reported us to the Head, sir!" he added earnestly. "The Head believes that Tregellis-West is guilty, and you don't."

But for Handforth's obstinacy, I'm pretty sure that all the other fellows would have caved in. Nelson Lee had treated us with astonishing leniency, and it seemed rather rotten to defy him. That's why Handforth was trying to make it clear that the Remove had no intention of defying Nelson Lee. Our quarrel was with the Head. Handforth's doggedness was really praiseworthy, in a way, and it proved that he was capable of sticking to his guns. And since he was the recognised leader of the strike, the other fellows had to abide by what he said. He was the spokesman for the lot.

"Very well, Handforth," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Being capable of appreciating your meaning, I will not punish you. But I shall at once inform the Headmaster as to this state of affairs, and he, no doubt, will deal with the situation as he thinks fit."

And Nelson Lee walked out of the room without another word. In one way he sympathised with the fellows, but he could not countenance the strike. It was in direct defiance of all school authority, and was, indeed, a matter for the Head to deal with personally.

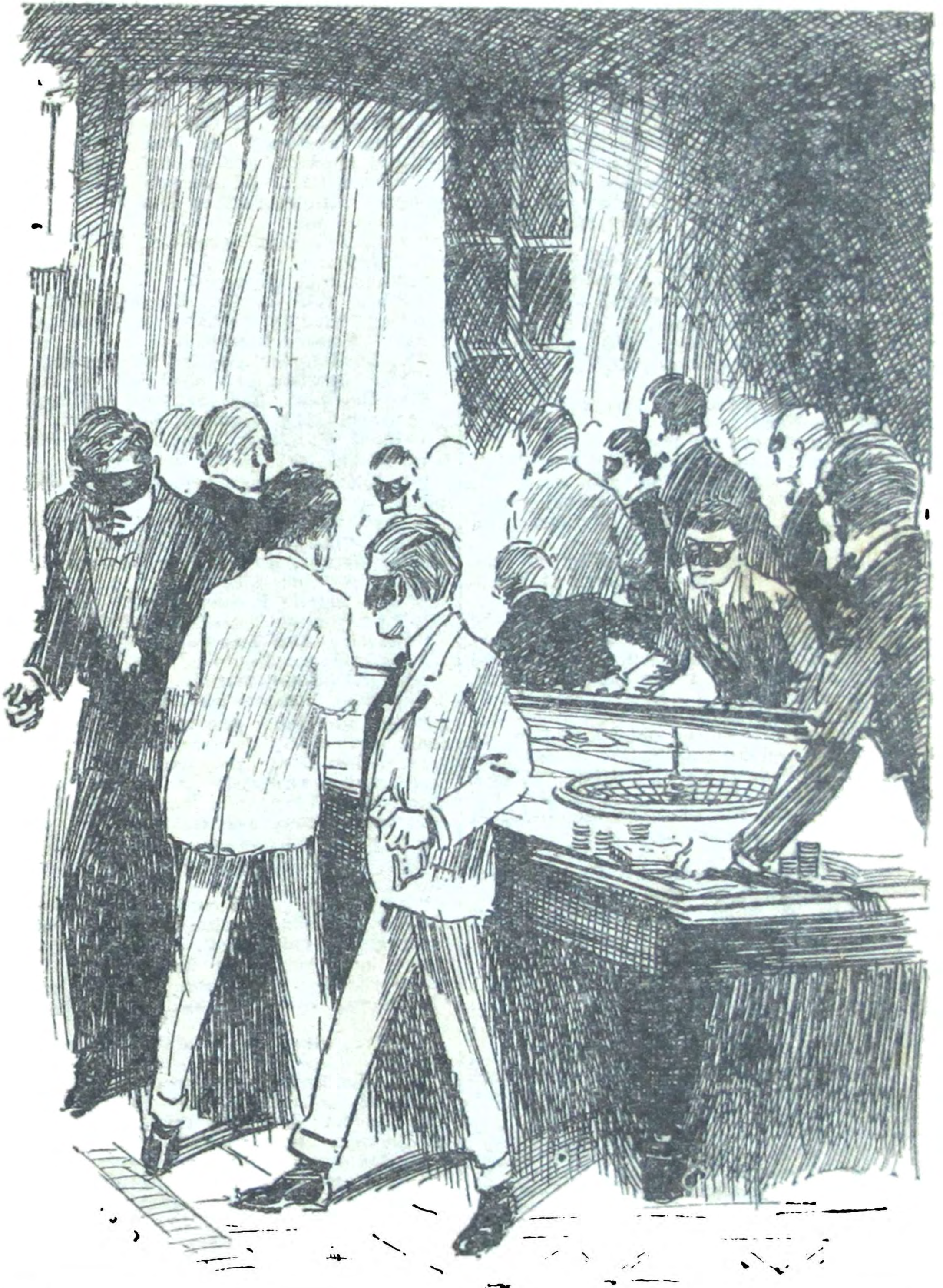
Mr. Crowell regarded his Form severely after Nelson Lee had gone.

"You are very foolish, boys," he said. "I am shocked by this exhibition of unruliness, and amazed that your Housemaster should have consented to overlook such a disgraceful outbreak. You have only yourselves to thank for any consequences which will now result."

"Guess we're ready to stand the racket, sir," said Farman calmly.

Mr. Crowell busied himself with his desk. It was extraordinary that such a state of affairs should exist. At this hour the Remove ought to have been busily at lessons, but they were sitting in their places idle, and, it must be confessed, somewhat apprehensive.

Handforth and Watson and I, though, were not particularly alarmed. We were quite ready to stick to our position, now that we had firmly adopted it.



Nelson Lee's little ruse worked. The boys immediately took it for granted the police were making a raid.
"Police!" shouted one of them. "We're collared!"—(See page 17.)

The Head appeared very shortly, a heavy frown upon his lined face. He came into the Form-room with a swish of his gown, and every eye noticed that a formidable-looking cane was in his grasp. It was evidently Dr. Stafford's intention to quell the rebellion by means of corporal punishment.

"Mr. Lee has informed me that there is trouble of some kind in this Form-room," said the Head grimly. "He mentioned something about a strike, but I positively refuse to credit that any boys can be so insane——"

"I'm sorry, sir!" said Handforth, jumping up. "But the Remove is on strike already."

The Head gazed at Handforth angrily.

"How dare you interrupt me?" he exclaimed. "Sit down, Handforth, and do not speak again until I address you."

Handforth sat down.

"Who is the leader of this affair?" demanded the Head.

Handforth jumped up again.

"I am, sir!" he admitted. "You didn't exactly address me, sir, but you asked the question. I wouldn't dream of cheeking you, sir—— Leggo my coat-tail, McClure, you ass!"

McClure, who had been guilty of the action, turned very red, and glared at Handforth murderously.

"No, I do not believe that you would be deliberately impertinent, Handforth," said Dr. Stafford. "I am not a harsh man, and I intend to give you a fair hearing. Now, my boy, speak up."

Handforth cleared his throat.

"The Remove is of the opinion—fellows of both Houses—that Tregellis-West was unjustly sacked," he declared boldly. "A plot was faked up to incriminate him, sir, and you didn't have the sense to see—— I—I mean, you—you were spoofed, sir!"

The Head frowned.

"What do you mean by that absurd word, Handforth?" he asked coldly.

"Spoofed, sir?" asked Handforth, rather confused. "Why—why, diddled, sir!"

"Diddled!" thundered the Head.

A subdued titter ran through the Form.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Handforth. "Tricked—dished!"

"And are you suggesting, Handforth, that I was dished?" asked the Head grimly.

"Not—not exactly that, sir!" stammered Handforth, who was still rather muddled.

"That is to say, sir, you were spoofed—I—I mean tricked. You believed that Tregellis-West was guilty when it's as plain as my face that he was innocent!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head curtly.

"You will oblige me, Handforth, by explaining how Tregellis-West's innocence is as plain as your—ahem!—face! I shall be most interested!"

Another titter ran through the Form-room.

"Why, it's obvious, sir," said Handforth weakly. "Tregellis-West wasn't the kind of chap to gamble and smoke. He's as straight as a die!" he added defiantly. "And, what's more, I ain't afraid to say so, sir. The Re-

move means to remain on strike until he comes back!"

"Your so-called proof, Handforth, is no proof whatever," said the Head coldly. "It is idle to talk about Tregellis-West's past record, which, I must acknowledge, was beyond reproach. It was proved to the hilt that the wretched boy was guilty of disgraceful conduct, and prompt expulsion was my only course. I hope you will cease this nonsense without further delay."

I jumped up.

"May I ask a question, sir?" I said respectfully.

"What is it, Nipper?"

"When you caught Tregellis-West red-handed, did you actually see him playing cards?" I asked keenly.

The Headmaster snapped his fingers.

"The question is absurd!" he replied. "Tregellis-West had warning of my approach, and the gambling had ceased when I entered the room. But the boy had no time to get away from the table."

"Didn't he protest his innocence, sir?" I asked.

"That was only natural," replied the Head. "Any boy, whether caught red-handed or not, does not profess guilt. But enough of this idle talk. The Remove will continue its lessons without delay."

"We can't, sir," said Handforth.

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Because we haven't started yet, sir," replied Handforth blandly.

The Head compressed his lips.

"I do not think you mean to be impertinent, Handforth," he said. "But you are a very foolish boy. You have confessed that you are the ringleader in this preposterous enterprise. Very well. You will get on with your lessons from this minute."

"And will Tregellis-West be sent for, sir?"

"No. Tregellis-West will not!" rapped out the Head curtly.

"All right, sir, we'll continue the strike!" shouted Handforth, all his boldness returning at this rebuff. "We'll remain on strike until you agree to our terms! Our terms are that an innocent fellow should be vindicated. Now then, you chaps, back me up!"

"We're with you, Handy!" went up a roar.

The Head fairly quivered. He fondly imagined, I believe, that he had quelled the disorder; and this renewal of the outbreak rather startled him.

"I can see that I have been too lenient!" he exclaimed angrily. "Handforth, I have had enough of your insolence. You will stand out here at once, and receive a severe caning."

"I don't think so, sir," said Handforth calmly. "In fact, I'm sure I shan't! 'Tain't likely!"

"Stand out here at once!" thundered Dr. Stafford, white with fury.

I jumped up promptly.

"If you cane Handforth, sir, you'll have to cane me!" I shouted. "We're all in the

boat, and we sink or swim together! Handforth can't be caned without us all sharing his punishment."

"Hear, hear!"

"You'll have to cane me, too, sir," said De Valerie.

"Count me in!" remarked the duke.

"All of us, souse me!" yelled the Bo'sun excitedly.

Handforth looked round with flushed face, and strong approval in his eyes. He was certainly being backed up powerfully.

The Head was nonplussed. He could not very well cane Handforth under the circumstances. So he adopted the only dignified course which lay open.

"Since you all admit guilt, you shall all be punished!" he exclaimed. "Every boy in this room will receive five hundred lines!"

"We ain't in the strike, sir!" roared Fullwood and Co. indignantly.

"Very well. You other boys will get on with your lessons," said the Head. "Mr. Crowell, you will set the non-strikers their usual work, and the others will write out their lines. I shall announce Handforth's punishment later on!"

And Dr. Stafford swished out of the room.

"Yah! Blacklegs!" shouted Hubbard, glaring at Fullwood and Co.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Crowell. "Pitt! Cease making grimaces this instant! Get out your lesson-books at once——"

"All of us, sir?" asked Teddy Long.

"No; only those boys who are taking no part in this disgraceful affair," replied the Form-master. "All the others will write their lines——"

Handforth grinned.

"Sorry, sir," he said calmly. "It can't be done!"

"Take your seat, Handforth!" raved Mr. Crowell.

"I only wanted to point out, sir, that we're on strike," said Handforth. "We can't very well do lines if we're on strike, can we? It's all work—and the Remove has pledged itself not to do another stroke until Tregellis-West comes back!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with work!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Three cheers for the strike!"

Mr. Crowell had exhausted his anger by this time. He had enough common-sense to realise that the Remove was out of hand. And he took prompt action.

"The Form will dismiss!" he shouted curtly. "I refuse to stand here and be submitted to this disgraceful treatment. Dismiss!"

The fellows crowded out of their places excitedly, and surged out into the passage. Pitt and Fullwood and Co. went with them towards the door; but Mr. Crowell's eagle eye was upon them.

"Pitt!" he shouted sharply.

Pitt looked round sheepishly.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

"Are you one of the strikers?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then you will return to your place at once!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "This order also applies to Fullwood, Gulliver, Bell, Marriott, and Merrell. Are there any others who choose to ignore the rebellion?"

Nobody spoke up, and Pitt and the Nuts, with black looks, were compelled to return to their places. There were, after all, decided disadvantages in not standing in with the rest of the Remove. Lessons proceeded in the Form-room—and it was really the smallest class Mr. Crowell had ever taken, and the most discontented.

The strikers, meanwhile, gathered in the Triangle. I wasn't exactly surprised at this result, for I had been expecting something of the sort. Handforth was openly jubilant, but I shook my head sagely.

What was the next move to be?

CHAPTER V.

NELSON LEE MAKES INVESTIGATIONS.

"THE whole thing is most alarming, Mr. Lee!" declared Dr. Stafford, polishing his glasses vigorously. "Really I don't know what the boys are coming to! A strike! The very thought is staggering!"

"I am hardly inclined to agree with you, Dr. Stafford——"

"But, my dear sir, think of the notoriety!" exclaimed the Head. "A strike at a school of such fame as St. Frank's! I must adopt strong measures at once!"

The Head, after leaving the Form-room, had gone straight to Nelson Lee's study. And now the worthy old gentleman was decidedly upset.

"In my opinion, there is no cause for worry," said Nelson Lee. "The strike, after all, is only a minor affair. I should not take it at all seriously, if I were you. Indeed, it is an exhibition of a spirit which I am somewhat inclined to admire."

Dr. Stafford shook his head.

"But my authority has been flouted—flouted, sir!" he exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "Upon my soul! I even found it necessary to flee from the Form-room—I had to take an ignominious departure!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I can quite understand why you are disturbed, my dear sir," he remarked. "A strike of this nature—for it is certainly a strike—is a difficult matter to deal with. The boys have banded themselves together, and it is quite possible that they will cause a deal of trouble unless they are satisfied——"

"Good gracious! You are not suggesting that I should give in?" asked the Head, aghast.

"Well, no," replied Lee. "That would not do at all. I think, however, that any drastic punishment would be a mistake. When the boys are imbued with such a spirit as this they are awkward customers to deal

with and quite reckless. My advice is quite simple—if you care to take it."

"I shall be most glad to hear any suggestion, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "But, candidly, I cannot allow this strike to continue and maintain my dignity. I have only had one encounter with the boys, but I feel that I got decidedly the worst of it! It won't do, Mr. Lee—it won't do at all!"

"Considering that the strike is really in a worthy cause, I hesitate to advise severe measures," said Nelson Lee. "On the contrary, I should ignore the strike completely. Let the boys do what they will—and I warrant you that they will grow tired of the game very rapidly. Meanwhile——"

"But, my dear Mr. Lee, I really cannot consent to such a proposal!" protested the Head. "The boys must be punished——"

"But how?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Ah, now you puzzle me. I am quite at a loss to understand how I can punish the boys adequately," exclaimed the Head. "There are so many of them, and I do not wish to appear harsh or cruel. They are protesting against Tregellis-West's expulsion——"

"Exactly!" interrupted Lee. "And that is why I advise you to let the boys go their own way for a few days. The strike will fizzle out, and no discredit can fall upon yourself. Drastic measures, in my opinion, only tend to make matters worse and to increase the difficulties. Affected indifference, on the other hand, will completely take the wind out of the strikers' sails."

"Dear me! I am inclined to believe you are right," said Dr. Stafford. "Force, as you intimate, would probably lead to violent scenes, and that is what I wish to avoid. Naturally, I shall not think of giving way. Tregellis-West sinned, and he shall not return to this school again."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That is a point upon which we have agreed to differ," he said smoothly. "You will regret having been so hasty, Dr. Stafford, when I have established the lad's innocence. I hope to attain that object by the end of next week, at latest."

"I hope you will, Mr. Lee—I sincerely hope so!" declared the Head. "But you must remember that I caught Tregellis-West in the act, and I shall need a good deal of convincing that he was not guilty. In fact there can be no two ways of looking at it, in my opinion."

The Head took his departure a few moments later, having decided to ignore the strike. Mr. Crowell was instructed accordingly, and the only boys who attended lessons were Pitt and Fullwood and Co.

Nelson Lee, in his study, sat thinking over the whole affair. He fully understood that the energetic Handforth was the actual promoter, and he did not believe that I had suggested the strike. In that, of course, the gov'nor was quite correct.

He knew that Reginald Pitt had conspired to get poor old Sir Montie kicked out. The gov'nor hadn't told me at the time, but he

had actually seen Pitt in Bannington on two or three nights. But Nelson Lee was giving Pitt a free hand for the time being—and for a very excellent reason.

Pitt was connected in some way with a gang of rascals who were running a gambling house on the outskirts of Bannington. And Nelson Lee felt quite sure that Pitt carried much information to his questionable associates.

The detective had no wish for those men to discover that he was interested in them. But they would surely discover this if Pitt was exposed, for Nelson Lee's evidence had been actually obtained within the gambling-house itself.

To expose Pitt, therefore, would be to acknowledge that he had gained entry into the house—and that was not to be thought of. For the place was of a far more sinister character than appeared on the surface.

In short, Nelson Lee had obtained plenty of information which led him to suspect that the gambling-house was merely a blind. Actually, it was the den of some exceptionally clever counterfeiters. A great deal of forged currency had been uttered recently, and the police were unable to trace it to its source.

Nelson Lee had been more successful. And all he required now was to obtain the concrete proof which the police would demand before a raid could be made.

And this was why the gov'nor was content to give Pitt a free hand, and why he allowed poor old Montie to be under a cloud. It wouldn't last for long, and then Montie would be vindicated—and Pitt would receive his deserts.

Nelson Lee was determined to make an attempt to obtain his proof that very night. He had already visited the gambling-house once, and he meant to go again. On that previous occasion he had asked for the password for this night, and had received it—"Business as usual." So far he had merely looked round; to-night, if he had an opportunity, he would take action.

So, while the Remove was congratulating itself upon the success of the strike, Nelson Lee was actively working to prove Tregellis-West's innocence—for it was all one affair.

Nelson Lee did not set out upon his mission until late. I knew nothing about it, and the gov'nor and I had quite a row afterwards. I wanted to know why the dickens he didn't take me with him—and he wanted to know what good I should have been, anyhow.

I was allowed to go to bed in supreme ignorance of his plans, and while I was listening to Handforth in the Remove dormitory, the gov'nor was getting ready. Handforth, flushed with his success, practically talked himself to sleep; at all events, he gave it up abruptly.

This, upon second thoughts, was probably due to the fact that several fellows had stealthily reached for their boots. Handforth, seeing them, had sense enough to know that they weren't going to put their

boots on in bed, and he had dark suspicions as to their intended use. So Handforth broke off in the middle of a very choice speech, and said "Good-night." His escape had been a narrow one.

Nelson Lee, during this little interlude, was making preparations in his own study. He carefully disguised himself, using the same make-up as that adopted upon a previous occasion.

By the time he had finished he looked fully fifty-five, with a grey-brown beard and somewhat shabby clothing. In the pockets were letters and cards to prove that his name was John Mason, and that he resided in Guildford; also, that he was a commercial traveller by profession. It was a wise precaution, and cost nothing.

He would wear a cloth mask—in keeping with all the other habitués of the gambling-house—and if the mask was pulled off a stranger would be revealed. He had adopted this method previously, but everything had gone smoothly.

It was just eleven o'clock when Nelson Lee set off for Bannington. The night was dark and rather chilly, the early October air having a feel of wind and rain about it.

The gambling-house was known as the Hermitage, and was situated on the outskirts of the town. It was not necessary for Nelson Lee to cycle through Bannington itself.

He left his machine in a dry ditch, completely concealed by ferns, some little way from the house. Then he lit a cigarette and walked briskly along the dark road until he came to the Hermitage. He turned in at the gate, and then paused for a moment to don a light cloth mask of black material.

There was a small side door, and Nelson Lee tapped upon it lightly and in a manner which constituted a signal. The door opened almost at once, and Lee was confronted by a powerfully built man, whose name was Field.

"Business as usual," said Nelson Lee.

"Right, sir!"

Lee passed within. He knew his way, and opened a door at the end of the passage—a door which appeared quite an ordinary one, but which was, in reality, made of heavy steel.

Beyond, Lee found himself in another passage, but this, in direct contrast to the other, was brilliantly illuminated. The detective parted some heavy curtains and strode into the roulette room. It was not quite so well patronised as on the previous occasion, but there were a good many people there.

Amongst them Nelson Lee noticed several boys—all masked. But he satisfied himself that they did not belong to St. Frank's. He judged that they were breaking bounds from Bannington Grammar School. Or, possibly, they had come from Dr. Hogge's Academy, in Bellton.

Most of the visitors were collected round the roulette table, and all were intent upon the "game." Nelson Lee didn't care a straw about it. Gambling, in any form, never at-

tracted him—especially such foolish gambling as this.

The detective had a definite object in mind.

He had not merely come to look round, for he could not expect to gain much information that way. And he knew very well that it would be madness to prowl about the house. Indeed, there was only one apparent exit from the roulette-room, and that was through the curtains and the steel door.

Yet there was certainly another exit somewhere. The owners of this place would never allow themselves to remain in such a trap. In case of a raid by the police the visitors and the owners of the table would be caught red-handed, without any chance of escape. Another exit, therefore, certainly existed.

Lee wished to discover it. His main object was to gain some positive information with regard to the forgeries. If he could only get left behind after all the other patrons had gone he might be able to discover a good deal. And he could only hope to accomplish this by adopting a trick.

A favourable opportunity occurred at once. Three of the boys he had noticed were standing near the curtained doorway. Nelson Lee took up his stand near them. He waited until some little excitement at the roulette-table had drawn everybody's attention. Then he turned abruptly to the curtains, as though he had just heard something, and parted them.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

The three boys heard him—as he had intended.

"What's up?" asked one sharply.

"Isn't it the police?" gasped Lee, in terrified tones. "We're caught—run—run!"

The ruse worked. The boys, being nervous of capture, immediately took it for granted that the police were making a raid.

"Police!" shouted one of them. "We're collared!"

"Police!"

The effect was instantaneous. Everybody round the roulette-table dashed about in a panic. And the croupier jumped up.

"Keep calm—keep calm!" he hissed. "This way!"

Lee, who was watching closely, saw the man press something under the edge of the table. Instantly the room was plunged into darkness, and then a square of light came from the opposite side of the room, revealing a doorway which had hitherto been concealed.

"This way!" exclaimed the croupier sharply.

The visitors dashed for the door and tumbled through. And Nelson Lee saw that the roulette-table was sinking into the floor itself. Within fifteen seconds it had gone and the floor slid into place again.

The detective had accomplished the first part of his programme. And now he walked quickly over to a big recess, which was hung with tapestry curtains. He slipped behind and waited. He intended remaining there until the alarm was quite over—until every habitué had taken his departure.

And Lee had not acted a moment too soon.

For the lights went up almost at once and the croupier came back. The door-keeper was present, too, in addition to many visitors.

"A false alarm!" snapped the door-keeper. "Some fool must have—"

"It was those infernal boys!" rapped out the croupier. "We shall have to bar them if they get up to those tricks again!"

The confusion lasted for another five minutes. By this time everybody had returned, leading Nelson Lee to assume that they had merely passed into a secret room. From there, probably, they would have made their exit singly.

But everybody was upset and their nerves were on edge. Eight or nine departed at once, and soon after the rest followed their example. The croupier announced the gambling rooms closed for the night. Nelson Lee was left undisturbed.

The croupier and the door-keeper came back after everything had been locked up.

"Not so good to-night, Field," said the croupier. "Still, we haven't done so badly. I gave those boys a word of warning, but they swore blind that it was a man who had given the alarm."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the other. "I'll tell you what, Sales, we shall have to be more strict—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Sales. "What's that bulge in that curtain over there?"

Nelson Lee clenched his teeth.

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Field. "I'm hanged if you're not getting nervous, old man. As I was saying, we shall have to be more careful. The police are quiet just now, but it's quite on the cards that they'll get busy before long, and we've got another issue of notes ready for distribution."

"We're quite safe, so long as we don't make any slips," said Sales, lighting a cigarette. "What about that ten-shilling issue? The engraving was first-class, and I'd defy a Treasury expert himself to detect—"

He paused abruptly, staring at the curtains.

"Imagination again," laughed Field.

"I tell you there's somebody behind there," whispered Sales, pulling out a revolver. "I was a fool not to look at first. Stand ready!"

Nelson Lee, who had imagined that the men would not trouble, knew that discovery was coming. But during the few minutes which had just passed he had improved his position.

Sales and Field strode over, and the curtains were wrenched aside.

"By thunder!" said Sales sharply.

There, sitting on the floor with his back against the wall, was a strange man, fast asleep. At least, he appeared to be fast asleep, for he was breathing regularly. His mask had half slipped down, and there was an expression of complete repose upon his

features. Sales and Field regarded him searchingly, and their momentary alarm was quelled.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed the croupier.

"Shamming, perhaps," muttered the other. "Hi! I say, are you awake?"

Nelson Lee merely shifted his head slightly, so that it rested in an easier position. His mouth gaped somewhat, and gentle snores sounded in the still air of the room.

"Fast asleep!" muttered Sales. "Some silly fool who felt tired, and came here for a nap, I suppose. Anyhow, he's not dangerous, Field. But we'd better search his pockets."

Very carefully they took out the letters and a card-case and a pocket-book. For several minutes they were interested.

"Some commercial traveller," remarked Sales. "Introduced by one of our regular patrons, I suppose. He must have got missed in that general scuffle."

The papers were returned to the various pockets, and then Sales gently shook Lee's shoulder. The detective did not "awaken" for some few minutes, and then he blinked up dazedly.

"All right, Jim!" he muttered, yawning. "No need to get up yet— Why, what the— Hallo! Where the thunder have I got to?"

He stared at Sales and Field vaguely, and then a light of understanding dawned in his eyes. The two men, who were watching Lee closely, were perfectly satisfied. The acting, indeed, was superb.

"Why, I'm in that roulette place!" explained Lee, jumping up hastily. "What's wrong?"

"I think you must have mistaken the place for a bedroom, my friend," said Sales pleasantly. "We don't mind you taking a nap, but you might have the decency to do it on one of the lounges!"

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Lee, with a display of nervousness. "Those boys worried me, and—"

"That's all right!" said Sales, taking Lee's arm. "All the others have gone. You'd better follow them."

Lee was led towards the exit, and he expressed his apologies all the way. In fact, he didn't let the other men get a word in, and was set down as being a harmless fool. But as the door closed behind his back Nelson Lee took a very deep breath.

"By James!" he murmured. "A narrow shave—and I didn't think the trick was coming off, either. I deserve a pat on the back for getting out of a tight corner so easily!"

The detective had been unable to accomplish his full purpose. Nevertheless he was very satisfied with his night's work. He was one distinct step nearer to ultimate victory.

For he now knew positively that Field and Sales were the crooks who were engaged upon issuing the false currency. The detective made up his mind to hasten his plans as much as possible.

CHATER VI.

TEDDY LONG'S HUNGER-STRIKE.

HANDFORTH shook his head. "I don't exactly like it," he declared. "The Head's done nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"There's no satisfying some chaps," remarked McClure. "What the dickens did you want, anyhow? Were you hoping that you'd be flogged, you fathead?"

"Are you calling me a fathead?" roared Handforth.

"Oh, no!" replied McClure. "Not at all! I was just addressing one of those chestnut trees!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the result of asking unnecessary questions, Handy," I said cheerfully. "But McClure's quite right. What have you got to grumble at? Hasn't the strike been a success?"

"Well, it has—and it hasn't," replied Handforth.

"That's as clear as mud!" remarked Watson.

"Can't you let me speak?" bawled Handforth. "I'm not satisfied, I tell you. Why hasn't the Head knuckled under? Why hasn't he promised us that Tregellis-West is coming back?"

"Better go and ask him," advised Church.

"You—you ass——"

"Well, you seem to be thirsting for information," snapped Church. "What's the good of asking us those silly questions? Personally, I'm quite content to let things go on as they are. I'm going for a picnic down the river this morning——"

"Oh, are you?" said Handforth. "Not if I don't want you to, my son. The time has come when we've got to bring more pressure to bear on the Head. It's no good striking unless we keep the game up."

Handforth was delivering his views on the Ancient House steps. It was morning, and by all rights, the Remove ought to have been at lessons. And all the juniors were considerably surprised at the Headmaster's inactivity. Nothing had been done and no punishment had been inflicted.

Watson and I were there, and we were just as puzzled as the rest. Before long, though, I meant to go to Nelson Lee's study and ask him his opinion.

A diversion occurred, however, and it was brought about by Teddy Long, of the Remove. Long belied his name, for he was short and fat, and was constantly bemoaning the fact that the school food rations were not sufficient for healthy boys. But Teddy Long was about the only grumbler. All the other fellows were quite content.

"I say, you chaps, I've got an idea," exclaimed Long, hustling out of the Ancient House and looking important. "I reckon you ought to adopt it, it's so jolly good!"

"We're more likely to bury it!" snapped Handforth. "We don't want any of your ideas, Long. Buzz off, and don't interrupt!"

"Oh, I say!" protested the sneak of the

Remove. "That ain't fair, Handy. Haven't I backed you up over this strike?"

"You knew you jolly well had to," retorted Handforth. "And I don't suppose you mind missing lessons. Now, as I was saying," went on Handforth, "we've got to show the Head we don't mean to stand still. See? He hasn't made any move, so it's up to us."

"That's where my idea comes in," put in Teddy Long. "If you'll follow my example, Handy, you'll have the Head knuckling-under before to-morrow morning."

"Oh, take him away!" snapped Handforth testily.

"Might as well give him a chance first," said Church. "His idea may be a good one. The age of miracles has passed, I know, but strange things do happen sometimes!"

"Well, buck up, then!" growled Handforth.

Long looked important.

"It all depends upon whether you chaps are willing to make a sacrifice," he said. "I am, so you ought to be willing to follow my example. But I feel that it's a matter of duty——"

"Fat lot you care about duty!" said De Valerie.

"I should hope I'm loyal to the Form," said Long, in an injured tone. "We want Tregellis-West to come back, and the Head doesn't seem to care a toss about our strike——"

"I shall strike if you don't get to the point—with my fist!" said Handforth darkly.

"What's your idea, you silly ass?"

"Well, why shouldn't we hunger-strike?" asked Long eagerly.

Everybody stared.

"Hun-hunger-strike?" gasped McClure.

"Why not?"

"You—you funny idiot!" roared Handforth. "If you try any more of those fat-headed jokes on me——"

"But—but it ain't a joke!" protested Long hastily.

"You don't mean it, do you?" yelled Watson.

"Of course I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody yelled, including myself. The very idea of Teddy Long, the glutton of the Remove, going on hunger-strike was a scream. He was about the last fellow in the Form to think of going without his meals. He always ate his own share, and was quite willing to demolish anybody else's in addition.

"I don't see anything to laugh at!" he protested indignantly.

"Don't you?" yelled Owen major. "We do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I'm serious!" shouted Long. "I'm—I'm willing to sacrifice myself for Tregellis-West's sake, but I don't see why I should go on hunger-strike alone. It wouldn't be fair!"

"Dry up, you little ass!" said Handforth tartly.

"But think what an effect it would have!" exclaimed Long eagerly. "Why, the Head would give in to us at once. Don't you remember how the giddy suffragettes used to go on strike? They were released from prison in next to no time. Well, it would be just the same here. If the whole Remove refused to eat any grub and went without its meals, the Head would see that we were in earnest."

"Oh, dry up!" I put in. "I can see you going without your meals, Long—I don't think! When dinner time comes you'll be the first to arrive in the dining-hall."

"I should hope I'm capable of a little sacrifice!" said Long, with disdain. "But, of course, it's too much to expect you chaps to make a sacrifice, too."

Handforth grinned.

"You're a little ass, that's what you are," he said candidly. "But if you go on hunger-strike, Long, I'm perfectly willing to follow your example. What do you other chaps say?"

"Oh, rather!" I agreed. "I'll hunger-strike as long as Long does, anyhow. And so will every other fellow!"

"Count on us," chuckled De Valerie.

We knew that we were safe in giving that promise. Long was always the first in at meal times. He was still full from the effects of breakfast and probably felt like hunger-striking—suffering, no doubt, from a slight attack of biliousness. But when dinner time came round his resolution would fade like mist before the sun.

"All right!" he said confidently. "You've promised, mind. I shall jolly well hold you to it—every one of you! There'll be no backing out, or you'll prove yourselves to be no good!"

Teddy Long walked off, and he was followed by a yell of laughter. Ten minutes later Christine and Co. and a good few others arrived on the scene, grinning hugely.

"Heard the latest?" asked Christine. "Long's going on hunger-strike, and we're going to follow his example. Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's stale news," I remarked. "If Long sticks to his word, we shall go hungry at dinner time, but there's not much fear."

Before the morning was out Long had extracted a promise from every fellow in the Remove. Exactly why he was doing it remained a mystery. And the mystery was still further deepened when dinner time came round and Long still boasted that he was going on hunger-strike. Some of the fellows, in fact, began to grow uneasy; but I wasn't. When Teddy Long saw his dinner before him he would soon attack it.

But we were destined to receive a staggering surprise.

When we went in to dinner Mr. Crowell took his seat at the head of the table as usual. He was looking severe and cold. Fullwood and Co. and Pitt were in shocking tempers; they had been in class all the morning, and they didn't like it at all.

Grace being over, Mr. Crowell gave the signal for the boys to commence. The first

course was roast mutton, with two vegetables, and it was a most popular dinner in the Remove.

"This is where we watch Long hunger-striking!" murmured Handforth, grinning. "Just you watch him!"

Teddy Long had a big plateful of dinner before him. His knife and fork were in his hands, and there was an expression on his face which told of a severe mental struggle. Was it possible that Long was actually thinking of sticking to his boast?

He looked up and down the table with a sickly kind of smile. And he saw numbers of grinning faces. The next moment we all received the surprise, for Teddy Long, after another violent struggle, succeeded in fighting down the desire which filled him.

He laid his knife and fork upon the table, and his eyes were gleaming with determination. Then he pushed his plate away and lay back in his chair—apparently in order to get out of the zone of appetising odour which arose.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth, staring.

"He—he ain't eating!" muttered Tommy Watson. "I say, Long, you beast, get on with your dinner!"

Long looked up the table.

"Ain't we hunger-striking?" he demanded, in a hissing whisper. "Don't forget your promises, you rotters! Hi, Hubbard, you're eating!"

Hubbard paused with his fork midway between his plate and his mouth. He wasn't actually eating, but he was just about to commence. And now there was an extremely startled expression in his eyes. Hubbard was hungry.

"What's the game, you fat ass?" he demanded gruffly.

"We're hunger-striking——"

"Look here, ain't you going to eat?" asked Handforth, in alarm. "Why, you little rotter, we thought you'd forget all about that rot once you had your dinner in front of you!"

"I'm not so weak as you are!" said Long, with a sniff. "When I make a resolution I stick to it. I'm not going to eat anything until Tregellis-West comes back!"

The Remove fellows gazed at one another in dismay. They had never believed for a moment that Long had been serious. If they had suspected the appalling truth they would never have pledged their word.

"What is the matter, boys?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply. "Is there something wrong with the food?"

"I—I don't think so, sir!" said De Valerie.

"Then why are you not eating?"

"We're—we're waiting for Long, sir!" said Hubbard indignantly.

"Indeed!" Mr. Crowell lifted his eyebrows. "It is not usual, is it, for you to wait for Long before you commence? Get on with your dinner, boys, and——"

"They can't, sir!" exclaimed Long quickly. "I—I don't want mine, and so they ain't

going to eat theirs. We're—we're hunger-striking, sir!"

"Oh, you little rotter!"

"You—you spoofer!"

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"Is this some more of your nonsense, boys?" he asked curtly. "What is this absurd talk about hunger-striking?"

"Are you going to eat, Long?" hissed Handforth furiously.

"No, I ain't!"

Teddy Long spoke with decision, and every other fellow glared at him as though they would like to shrivel him up on the spot. Handforth, after nearly exploding, jumped to his feet.

"May I explain, sir?" he asked firmly.

"I am waiting, Handforth."

"We're hunger-striking, sir," said the Remove captain. "We've decided to go without all food until the Headmaster gives in to our demands. It's a strike of the whole Form, sir."

Handforth having discovered that there was actually to be no dinner, saw no reason why he should not make the best of the disaster before Teddy Long could start crowing. As for the rest of us, we were dismayed. I eyed my dinner with a sad and longing gaze, and wondered if I should be justified in ignoring the pledge.

"Are you trying to be humorous, Handforth?" demanded Mr. Crowell angrily. "Eat your dinner, and do not be so absurd!"

"We're going without dinner, sir! We're going without food of any kind. We positively refuse to be fed. If the Head likes to promise that Tregellis-West will come back, we'll feed with pleasure."

"Very great pleasure!" I murmured fervently.

Mr. Crowell started.

"Do you seriously mean what you are saying, Handforth?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!"

"My dear boys, do not carry this thing to such an absurd length!" said Mr. Crowell gravely. "Absence from the Form-room will not do you much harm, but you are young and healthy, and must take your food. Let there be an end to this absurdity."

"Rather!" whispered De Valcrie. "Rats to Long!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Didn't we give our words?" demanded Handforth, glaring. "We're not going to have a little beast like Long sneering at us, I suppose?" He turned to Mr. Crowell. "Sorry, sir, but we can't eat anything—until the Head gives in!" he added. "I hope the Head will see that we are really determined, sir!"

Handforth was as hungry as anybody, but he was obstinate. Long's attitude, amazing as it was, could not be ignored. In a foolish moment we had placed ourselves in an awkward position, and we could eat nothing until Long set the example. If we did he

would have the laugh over us for all time. And the very thought of Long triumphing steeled our hearts.

Mr. Crowell was seriously concerned. But he did not report the matter to Nelson Lee or the Head, as I expected. He probably concluded that this mad idea was a flash in the pan, and the loss of one dinner would not do us any particular harm.

But the position was appalling.

What if Long persisted? The prospect was awful to contemplate. Since he had started off well it was quite likely that he would keep it up. But it was altogether astounding. None of the Removites could understand it at all.

When dinner was over—that is, when we left the table—there was an immediate rush for Long. And he received the storm of indignation calmly.

"If you didn't want to hunger-strike you shouldn't have promised! I've got more determination than you have, thank goodness!"

"You—you ain't going to keep it up, are you?" gasped McClure.

"Yes, rather!"

"Until supper time?"

"Until the Head gives in!" said Long firmly. "I don't mind if it goes on until next week. I'm prepared to sacrifice myself for Tregellis-West's sake!"

"You—you little fathead!" I shouted impatiently. "You never cared a straw for Tregellis-West before to-day. I'll bet Pitt put you up to this, just to get his own back on us."

"Rats!" grinned Pitt, who was near by. "I had my dinner all right, and so did my pals have theirs. Starvation will do you a bit of good, you lazy slackers!"

Pitt regretted that remark a moment later, for he was seized and bumped severely.

Out in the Triangle the Remove gathered in little knots, excitedly discussing the situation. Christine and Co., of the College House, came over smiling. They fed in their own House, of course, and had partaken of dinner as usual, never thinking it possible that Long would keep his word. Their dismay was genuine, for, as Handforth pointed out, they would have to fall in line with the other fellows.

And for the rest of that day there was much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, but the teeth, unhappily, did not gnash on to anything solid!

Teddy Long, to the general consternation of all, announced that he would have no tea, and Handforth saw that he didn't get any, either! There was an urgent meeting of the Strike Committee, and pickets were placed in the Remove passage and outside Mrs. Hake's tuck-shop.

Handforth, now that the hunger-strike was an absolute fact, was entering into it with his usual determination. And every Remove fellow was now troubled with only one thought—

How long would it last?

CHAPTER VII.

HUNGER STRIKING MADE EASY REGINALD
PITT'S BOAST!

MORNING dawned hungrily for the Remove.

We had gone to bed supperless, and the groanings in the dormitory had been serious. Not a junior had touched a morsel of food since the breakfast meal, and that seemed years since.

Occasionally I had been compelled to go without grub while engaged on a criminal case with the gov'nor. So it didn't come so hard to me as it did to the other fellows.

As soon as the rising bell went everybody was awake. And many homicidal glares were bestowed upon Teddy Long, who seemed, marvellously enough, fat and contented.

"I suppose you've finished with that rot to-day, haven't you?" demanded Tommy Watson fiercely.

"Rather not!" said Long. "I'm going to keep it up until the Head knuckles under. And if you chaps don't follow my lead, you'll

"Look here, my son, I've got a word to say to you!" said Owen major, standing over Long's bed. "If you don't have any breakfast this morning we'll boil you in oil!"

"Guess that's just the start," remarked Parman. "I allow I ain't a pig when it comes to eatin', but food kinder agrees with me a heap. Say, pards, I'm sure empty as a barrel. Guess my insides are touchin'!"

"I expect Long'll have breakfast this morning, measmates," said the Ho'sun hopefully. "By hokey! If he doesn't we'll make him wish he hadn't started the game!"

"Oh, you can threaten all you like!" said Long disdainfully. "You jolly well ought to be ashamed of yourselves! You haven't heard me grumbling, have you? Not likely! I've got more pluck!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "That's about the limit! I say, you chaps, we mustn't say another word. I'm blessed if I'm going to have Long crowing over me, anyhow! I'm going to suffer in silence," he added heroically. "And I daresay the Head'll give in all the quicker—that's one comfort."

Watson and I were dressed before the other fellows, and as we were passing out of the dormitory Handforth called to us and made us promise that we wouldn't eat. We gave our word, and that, of course, was sufficient.

"I say, it can't last," said Tommy seriously, as we descended the stairs. "It's— it's awful. What about when we go to the Messut this afternoon? Ain't we to have tea with Mortie?"

"Not unless Long gives way," I replied. "It's no good, old son, we've got to stick it now—Hullo, Tubby! What's the worried frown about?"

Tubby, the page, was standing in the centre of the lobby, looking unusually serious. He smiled as we approached him.

"I dunno, Master Nipper," he replied. "That is, it's a mystery, an' Mrs. Poulter suspects me, I believe. An' I ain't seen a sign o' the stuff."

"That's awkward," I observed. "But we should be able to understand a lot better, Tubby, if you'd explain what the stuff happens to be."

"Why, food, sir——"

"Don't talk about it!" groaned Watson. "The very word makes me feel faint. Food! What is it? I've forgotten what grub tastes like!"

Tubby grinned.

"I've 'eard about the 'unger-strike, Master Watson," he said. "My! But you ain't 'arf plucky——"

"Plucky!" I interrupted. "We deserve to have our breasts plastered with medals! Have you ever been on a hunger-strike, Tubby?"

"Never, Master Nipper."

"Then don't try it!" I said grimly. "It's awful!"

"An' you're doin' it all for Master Tregellis-West's sake," said the page-boy. "I wish 'e'd come back, that I do! I don't believe Master Tregellis-West ever did anythin' wicked—'e wasn't the sort! One o' the nicest young gents in the school, 'e was."

"Exactly, Tubby," I agreed. "And it won't be so very long before you see him back again. Tregellis-West's like a bad penny—he'll turn up once more. But what's that you were saying about grub?"

"Why, Mrs. Poulter 'as found that a lot o' 'er stores 'ave gone, Master Nipper," replied Tubby. "She thinks some o' the servants must 'ave pinched it."

Tommy Watson gave a jump.

"How long has it been missing?" he demanded excitedly.

"Since the day before yesterday, sir."

"Oh, then it ain't any of the fellows," said Watson. "The strike didn't start till yesterday. I thought that somebody had been collaring the grub—some of our chaps, I mean."

Tubby went his way, and Watson and I strolled out into the Triangle. There was a very thoughtful expression upon my face.

"We've hit upon a clue!" I said calmly. "Tommy, my son, we're going to have breakfast this morning! That little cad, Long, has been spooning us!"

"How do you mean?" gasped Watson.

"The grub has been missing since the day before yesterday," I replied. "It's easy. Long pinched that grub, and laid it in store somewhere. That's why he started the hunger-strike—because he knew he'd be able to gorge on the quiet, in any case."

"The—the artful little toad!" exclaimed Watson forcibly.

"I'll bet I'm right," I went on. "And I'll bet something else, too. It was Pitt who put Long up to it—I expect it was Pitt who pinched the stuff. He's having his meals, and so it doesn't affect him. Long doesn't mind, because he's getting enough

to fill his tummy between mealtimes! What a cunning beast Pitt is!"

"But—but how can we prove it?" asked Watson, with hope gleaming in his eyes. "Oh, my only hat! I could eat boot-leather, fried in blacking!"

"Well, I don't know that I'm so hungry as all that!" I grinned. "Still, I've got a jolly good 'twist' on me, I can tell you! We've got to watch Teddy Long——"

"But we watched him yesterday," protested Watson. "Everybody was watched, in fact. We were all keeping an eye upon one another!"

I shook my head.

"We only guarded the tuck-shop and the other places where grub is likely to be," I said. "Nobody thought of watching any of the box-rooms upstairs. And that's where Long's got his secret store, I'll bet. Come on!"

As it happened, we met with a piece of very great luck. Just as we reached the top of the stairs we spotted Teddy Long sauntering carelessly along the upper corridor. Handforth was within sight—probably seeing that Teddy Long didn't slip downstairs. Handforth didn't suspect that there was any grub on the upper floor. As a matter of fact, there oughtn't to have been any.

Long turned the corner of the passage, and Watson and I sped noiselessly forward, much to Handforth's astonishment. He wanted to know what the game was, but we didn't think it necessary to tell him.

Long was just mounting the stairs which led to the old Ancient House tower—an apartment which was not visited once in a blue moon.

"Come on!" I said grimly.

We simply raced up, Handforth close behind us. Teddy Long evidently heard us coming, for he appeared at the old door, with a sickly white face and alarm in his eyes.

"Hallo, you chaps?" he mumbled, swallowing something with a gulp. "I—I was just looking at the view——"

"Yes, the view afforded by a pile of grub, I suppose?" I interrupted.

"What?" roared Handforth.

"Oh, don't—don't be an ass!" gasped Long in alarm. "You—you can't come in here! I—I've got—got something private——"

"I can quite believe it!" I said. "Out of the way, you little rotter!"

We charged into the tower. One glance was sufficient. Up one corner lay quite a respectable pile of food—tins of biscuits, sardines, canned beef, apricots, pots of jam, and all sorts of other good things.

Over in another corner a collection of empty tins told their own story. Teddy Long, far from hunger-striking, must have been gorging himself to an enormous degree. And he had had the utter nerve to set us an example as a hunger-striker!

"I—I just found these!" he exclaimed weakly. "Looks as though some—somebody has been having a feed! I—I was just going to tell you fellows——"

"You—you little spoofer!" roared Handforth furiously. "My hat! Gimme some of those biscuits, for goodness' sake."

From that moment the hunger-strike was at an end. We had only submitted to it because it was quite impossible to allow Teddy Long to crow over us. Long, by the way, was more suitable for the hospital than the breakfast-table by the time the Remove had done with him. He was bumped until he was sore.

Watson suggested bumping Pitt as well, but this wouldn't have been quite fair, for it was only a suspicion on our part; we hadn't a shred of evidence.

The ordinary strike, of course, continued. The Remove did no work, and didn't intend to until the Head gave way.

Meanwhile, Reginald Pitt was rather alarmed at Handforth's activity. There was every evidence that Handforth meant to adopt fresh measures almost at once.

"It's no good!" said Pitt, addressing Fullwood and Co. in Study A. "Handforth is getting too hot, and he'll have to go!"

"I suppose you'll get him sacked?" suggested Fullwood sarcastically.

Pitt nodded.

"Exactly!" he replied calmly. "Handforth is an ass, but he's a dangerous ass. And within three days he'll follow Tregellis-West. That's a promise!"

And there was something in Reginald Pitt's tone which sounded terribly convincing. It was quite evident that he had a cunning plot in his mind—or, at all events, the germ of one.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

WILL BE ENTITLED

"POOR OLD HANDFORTH!"

It will be another Magnificent Tale of St. Frank's, introducing NIPPER and Co. and the "Serpent."

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GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL!**The Chums of Littleminster School.****A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.****By ARTHUR S. HARDY.***The First Chapters.*

BASIL HOOD is a new boy at Littleminster School.
On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

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

*(Now read on.)***THE LOST COIN.**

NOR had his intuition been at fault, for hardly had he left the dormitory than a figure moved from out the shadows where it had been hiding, and pulling the curtains of the cubicle wide, passed beyond.

It was Myers.

The big boy's lips were curved in a crafty smile. His eyes blazed with triumph.

Through that curtain he had been watching, and seizing the handle of the drawer which Basil had opened, he pulled.

His feverishly eager fingers thrust the contents of the drawer aside, and felt and raked until the coin was found.

With a low laugh of triumph he hastily put the drawer in order and passed out of the cubicle.

In spite of Basil he had got his coin back. It was his. He had a perfect right to it. Now let the fag do and say what he liked, and be hanged to him.

Myers, creeping stealthily, left the dormitory and made for the stairs. He began to descend them.

Suddenly a voice cried out aloud:

"Myers, what the deuce are you doing there? You have no right in that dormitory."

Ah! A cry of fear rang from the spy's lips, and starting back in alarm, he let the coin fall from his hand.

It struck the stairs and rolled clinking away.

From stair to stair it rolled, jingle, jingle, jingle, until it hit the landing below. Even then Myers could hear it running, running as a coin will do, until it seemed to strike the skirting of the woodwork that ran along the passage, and stopped.

Below on the stairs a shadow lurked.

"Come, sir," said the stern voice. "I await your answer."

Myers forced a smile.

"I—er— I— Is that you, Mr. Evans?" he faltered.

"Yes. You haven't answered my question—"

"I—er—thought I saw young Hood go up just now," answered Myers, pulling himself together. "And—he sauced me to-day. I meant to take it out of him, and—he—he—wasn't there."

"H'm. Now let me tell you that I'll not stand any more of this bullying of the smaller boys. There's been too much of it lately, and you are a particular offender, Myers. You'll write me out five hundred lines for this to-morrow. I'll set you the sentence in the morning."

"But, sir—"

"Silence. What was that you dropped just now?"

"A—a coin, sir. A two-shilling piece I think."

"Go downstairs," commanded the master. Sheepishly, inwardly fuming, and not a little afraid, Myers slunk past Mr. Evans, and went down to the corridor below.

"Can—can I look for it, sir?" he asked.

The master switched the light on. "I'll give you a minute," said he.

Whereupon Myers began to pry and grope about, but in spite of the brilliancy of the illumination and the bare floor of the corridor, he could find no sign or trace of the missing coin.

While he searched the master eyed him doubtfully, glancing the while about him to see if he could find the silver piece.

But it had vanished. Wherever it may have gone to, it was not to be found, and Mr. Evans shut the light off.

"That will do. Go down to the hall," he commanded, and Myers, cursing his bad luck, hurried sullenly on.

So he had recovered the wretched coin, only to lose it again.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

It was rotten luck. Still, Basil had it no longer, which was a consolation. But he was sorry that Mr. Evans had caught him upstairs alone like that. The incident would be recorded against him, and if anything went wrong might work to his detriment.

Very silent and sullen he sat during the evening's meal, and not all the chipping and chaffing of Digby, Chalfont, and the rest could rouse him.

He was glad when the wretched meal was over and they were free once more. Then he went up to his room, but not to work.

He could not concentrate on his studies. All the while he was thinking of that coin, wondering whether anyone had found it, or if he would be able to retrieve it when the opportunity offered.

"What's the matter with you, old sport?" asked Digby, looking up from his labours and eyeing Myers critically.

"Oh, shut up!" snarled the irascible bully.

"All right. Keep your wool on!" snapped Digby, and said no more.

That night Myers could not sleep. When all was silent he stole out and made his way to the corridor into which he felt certain the lost coin had rolled. He switched on the electric light, at the risk of being discovered, and searched and searched for an hour, but without result.

In the morning he was up long before the school bell rang, and in the daylight he searched again, went up and down the stairs, poking and prying everywhere, but, as before, the result was failure.

The coin had vanished completely. It was possible, of course, that one of the Fourth-form boys had found it. In that event he felt sure that he would be able to get it again. Most of them knew of it, for it had been a habit with him to show it—a Queen Anne coin—to the boys with pride.

There was also a chance of its being found by one or other of the servants when they swept or cleaned the corridor.

That morning Myers sought out the surly porter, gave him a shilling, and told him of his loss.

"Just make inquiries, will you?" said he. "And if any of 'em find the coin, I'll pay 'em handsomely to get it back again."

"All right, sir," answered the porter, pocketing the shilling. But as Myers went away, he hissed, with a frown, "Give it you, not likely, stingy beast! I know a game worth two of that."

But he passed the word, and careful search was made. Without avail, however, for, whatever had happened to the missing coin, it was not to be found either in the corridor or on the stairs.

It had mysteriously disappeared.

That afternoon, while Challis was busy at his studies, Basil entered his room, and was received with the usual kindly smile.

"Hallo, young 'un," said John, his eyes brightening. "Anything up?"

"I wanted to know if there's anything I could do for you, and—"

"Nothing, thanks."

"Are—are you going to play in the big match, Challis?"

John sat back in his chair and bit the end of his pen reflectively. It struck the lag that there was a change in him. His face was kindlier, happier in expression than of yore. It was as if something had awakened in him, and it dated from the time he had paid that visit home.

"Yes, I shall play," said he.

"How fine!"

"Grainger came to see me yesterday about it, and we had a long talk. I—I don't think I'm good enough, young 'un, but he's keen, and I'll do it to please him."

Basil beamed.

"Crums, Fawcett and Raymond will be pleased," said he.

Challis darted a keen look at him. Hallo! Were there some others at Littleminster who interested themselves in his doings, then?

"I've written home for some things," said John, "and I only hope they won't bully me if I fail, that's all."

Basil stepped forward, his pale face kindling.

"Don't fail, John, please," he pleaded. "Because they all want you to, I know. The brutes, they're counting on it!"

A slight shadow passed across Challis's face, but was chased away by another smile. Decidedly the boy had changed. His brooding, ugly moods were transient now.

"I'll do my best," said he.

"And there's another thing I want to ask you, John."

"Hallo! What's that?"

"You know Myers used to wear a rare coin on his watch chain."

Challis nodded, frowning.

"Well, I found a coin the other day. It's upstairs in a drawer in my cubicle. I wonder would you be able to identify it if I showed it you?"

"I could. I know the coin well," answered Challis. "I've heard Myers boast about it. There aren't many of the sort about. But why have you got it, kid?"

"I won't tell you now. If it's the one, I may."

Challis rose.

"Shall I come up with you, or will you go and fetch it?" he asked.

"Come with me, please."

Challis accompanied Basil up to the dormitory above, and Basil opened the drawer. A puzzled expression swept across his face.

Hallo! His things were in a strange disarray, he noticed, and yet he could have sworn he left them all neatly placed.

And the paper lining of the drawer was crumpled up.

Dismayed, he lifted the paper and placed his hand in the corner where he had put the coin. It wasn't there.

"It's gone!" he cried.

Challis studied Basil critically.

"Sure that's the right drawer?" he asked.

(Continued overleaf.)

"Yes, oh, yes! The left-hand one. I know I put it there."

But to make sure he searched all the others, with a like result.

The coin had gone.

"It's been stolen," said he. "Stolen, and Myers must have stolen it."

"He couldn't very well steal it, if it belonged to him, young 'un," remarked Challis. "Besides, if it belonged to him, why didn't you hand it back?"

Basil, much troubled, dropped on to his bed. He looked up into John's eyes more distressed than he cared to admit or show.

Then he made up his mind to tell John everything.

"John," said he, "I found it on the river bank just where our punt was moored that day—and I'm certain that Myers is the one who cut us adrift. When I found the coin there he set on me like a madman, and if Grainger hadn't come along, I believe he would have thrown me into the river—"

"What?"

The veins in Challis's face seemed to suddenly swell, he clenched his hands, and gazed sternly down on the bag.

"That's a pretty serious charge to make, young 'un," he muttered.

"I know, but I believe he did it, and—"

Challis looked out of the open window, where the clouds were speeding swiftly upon the bosom of a keen wind. For a long minute he remained silent, thinking hard.

"And the coin's gone?" said he at length.

"Yes."

Challis took a turn up and down the cubicle. Finally he stopped, and laid both hands gently on Basil's shoulders.

"I don't like Myers," he cried. "Never did. And I believe him capable of almost anything. But I don't want you to get the wrong side of him, young 'un. Take my advice and say no more about this."

"But if he cut the punt adrift, John—"

Challis shrugged his broad shoulders.

"What matter now," said he. "That is all past and done with. He won't do it again. Be on your guard against him, and you'll be safe enough. If he threatens you, come and tell me. But as the coin's gone, forget all about it. He may have dropped it on the river bank just before you found it, you know."

"No. It was almost black. It used to be bright enough when he wore it."

"Never mind. I'm glad you told me about it, Basil. But we won't make any mischief. It isn't worth it."

Challis's confidence, his manly indifference, gave Basil fresh heart.

He felt somehow as if Myers had lost his importance in the scheme of things at Littleminster. And his regard for John grew and grew.

The next morning at breakfast he heard a lot of the Fourth eagerly discussing the forthcoming trial match, and jeering at the part Challis was destined to play in it. Even Fawcett and Raymond, Robinson and Giles, were among the jeerers.

Basil bridled up.

"A lot you know about it. Challis will do as well as any of the sixteen," he fumed. "You mark my words."

"Rot," said Giles. "He can't stand up against decent bowling, and when he goes to the wicket, clad in his dirty old tweed, won't he get it hot?"

Basil's face fell. The picture conjured up of Challis walking out to the pitch, clad in his rough clothes, with the pads standing boldly out against the dull colouring of the dismal tweeds, was not a pleasing one. Littleminster, like all other big schools, was proud of its traditions, and woe to the boy who flouted them.

His faith in his champion remained, but he said no more.

A MAN SHORT.

WITH all these undercurrents of feeling, mostly directed against John Challis—though Grainger and those who stood up for the boy were not left entirely alone—the day of the big trial match arrived.

And what a day it was, ideal for cricket, a blazing hot day that made the wearers of flannels rejoice.

All through the morning suppressed whispers ran the round of the school rooms. The preoccupation of the boys did not pass unnoticed by the masters, but they, like Brer Rabbit, lay low and said nothing.

Slight mistakes were glossed over. No punishment was meted out even to those who asked for it, and deserved it.

Then came the end of toil, the dinner hour, and tongues were let loose and the prospects of the match openly discussed.

Basil, listening anxiously, and glancing across the hall to where Challis sat, blissfully unconscious of the excitement he was creating, prayed that his hero might not fail.

Great Scott, if he did, what then? Who would there be to say one good word for him? Ponsonby, Ryder, Chalfont, Digby, Myers, and the rest of John's cronies chuckled gaily because the hour of the cad's discomfiture was at hand.

Not one word could Basil hear in favour of the big boy, he had learned to love. Myers loudly decried him.

"Now we shall see!" he shouted. "Wait till Challis goes in to bat, and by George, you see, I'll bet he doesn't pass his duck!"

(To be continued.)