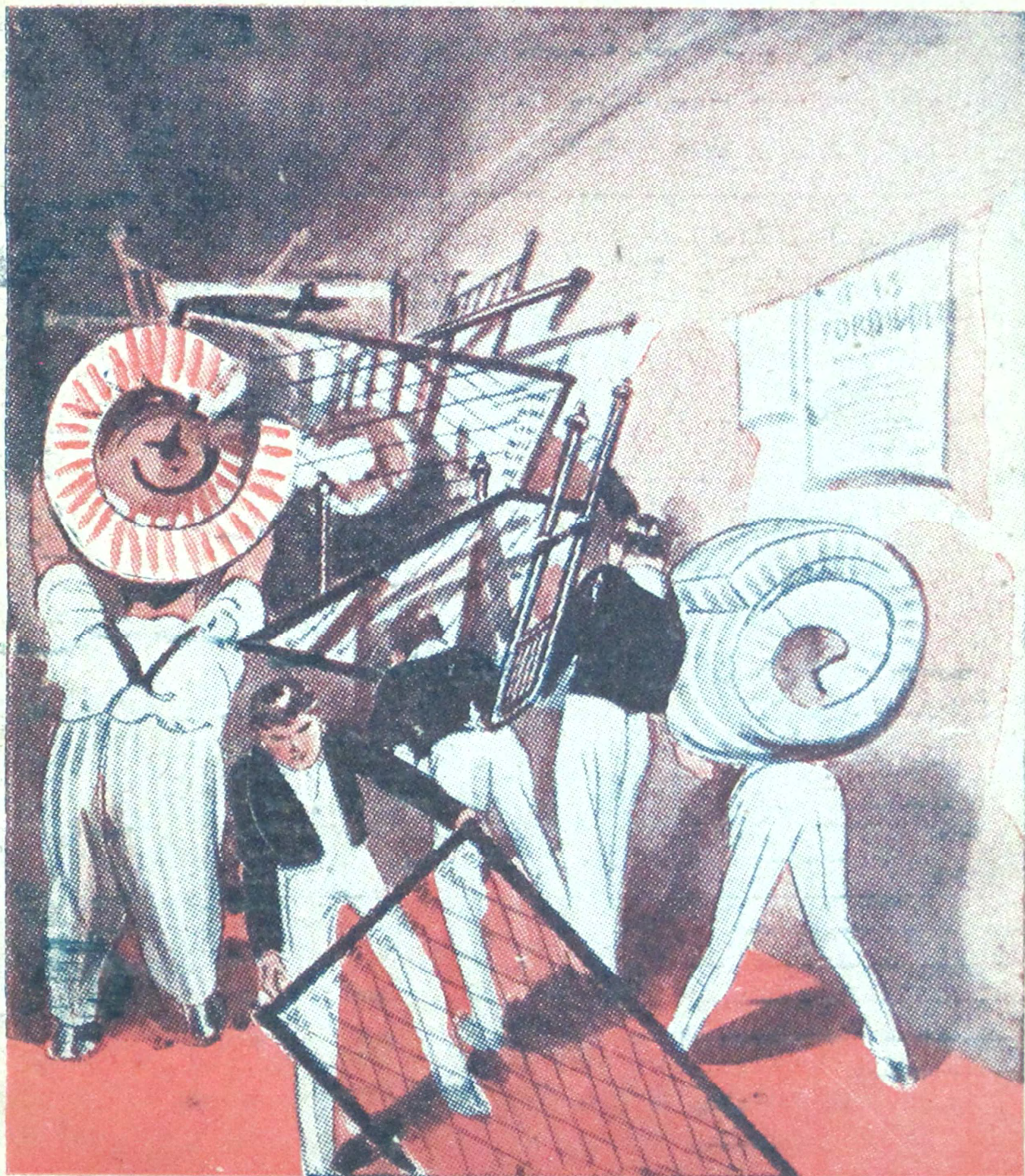


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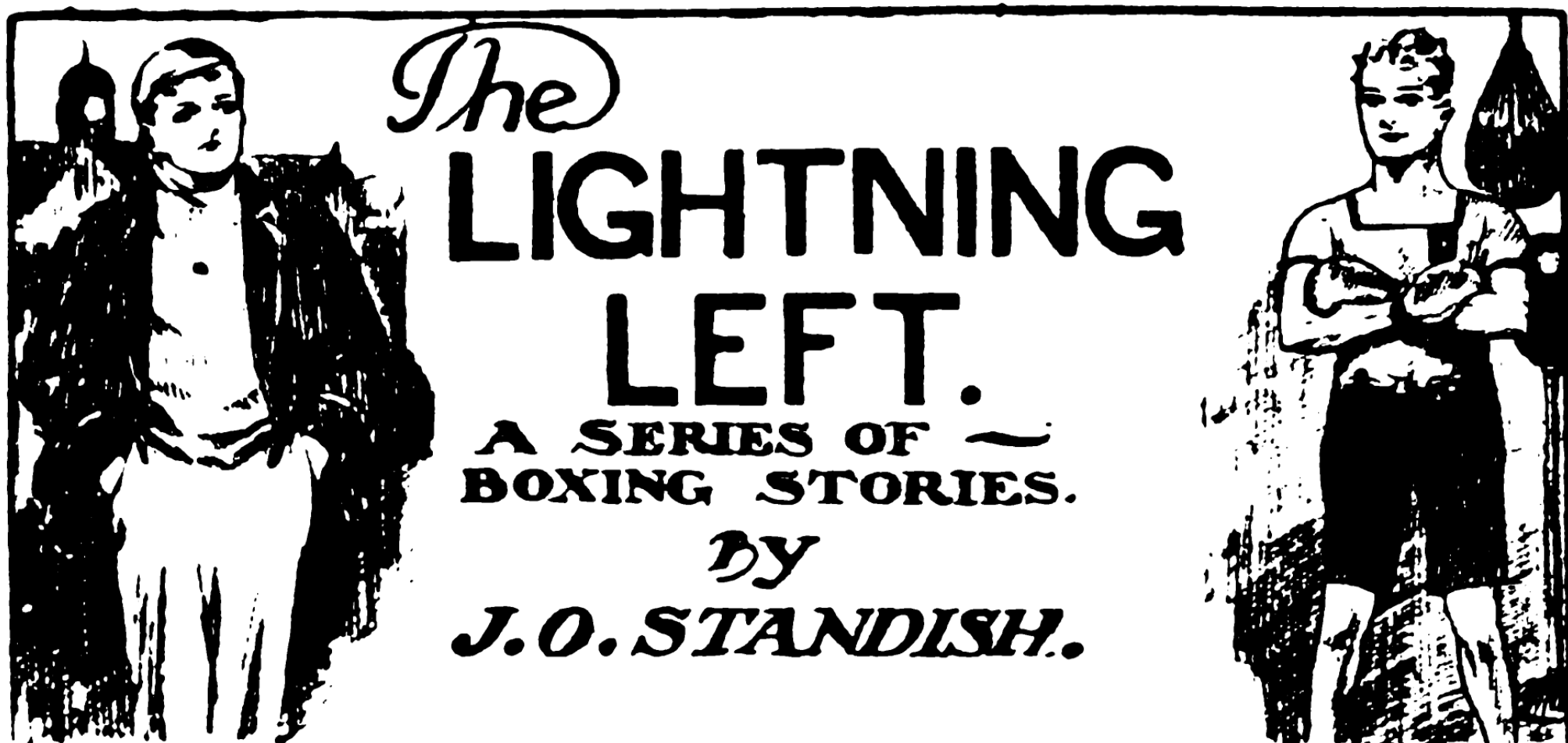


BARRICADING THE DORMITORY.

The St. Frank's Rebellion

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 "Back to the Old Home," "The Sack for Nelson Lee," "The Tyrant's Understudy," etc. Nov. 15, 1919.

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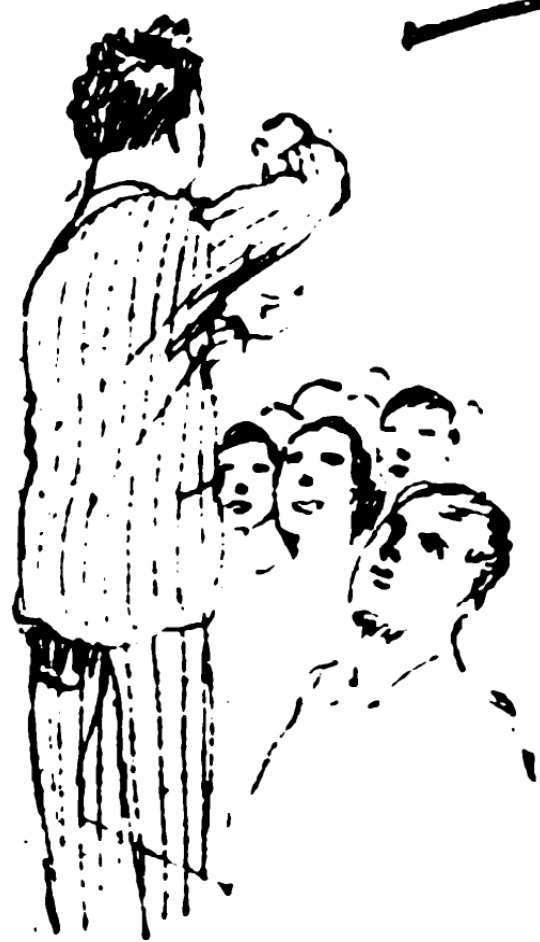
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE DORMITORY MEETING.

BOOM!

The old clock at St. Frank's rolled out the single stroke of one o'clock. Everything was still and quiet. The great school lay in darkness, except for the weak light cast by a somewhat watery moon.

Both the Ancient House and the College House were slumbering. At all events, they should have been slumbering at that hour. But in the Remove dormitory of the Ancient House, remarkable to relate, not a single junior slept.

The scene was a strange one.

Two candles burned on a ledge, and they cast a flickering light over the upper portion of the dormitory. And one Removeite was addressing all the others—who, for the most part, were in their pyjamas.

The November night was cold, but the Remove dormitory was supplied with hot-water radiators, and the long apartment was comfortably warm. The fellows were able to stand about in their night attire, and feel quite all right. It was a fairly recent innovation, and the juniors appreciated it.

But just now a matter of great importance was on hand.

The fellow who was addressing all the others was the one and only Nipper, the captain of the Remove—in other words, myself. And I was in grim earnest. The juniors who listened to me were in grim

earnest. Not a smile found a place on any countenance just then.

To put it mildly, I was acting the part of an agitator—a strike leader. I was urging on the crowd to take the law into their own hands. Not that they needed much urging.

Matters were so bad in the Ancient House that the Remove was ready and eager to break out into open rebellion at the given word. A vote had already been taken, in fact, and the Form had been solid for revolt.

And why?

As it happened, I was just going over all the points to the fellows, so that they should be under no mistaken impression concerning the right or wrong of the case. I maintained that we should be justified in striking against the reign of tyranny which had been set up at St. Frank's.

"It's this way, my sons," I said grimly. "Things have been going from bad to worse for days past, and at last we have reached a point when we can't possibly stand the strain any longer. It's up to us to act!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Shut up," I went on. "Don't interrupt, you asses! The beginning of all the trouble was when we came back to St. Frank's, after spending a few weeks in London. We arrived here to find that dear old Dr. Stafford had been dismissed, and that another Head had been appointed in his place."

"This is news, I suppose?" asked Hubbard tartly.

"I'm going over all the facts," I replied. "When we are contemplating a serious step like this, it's just as well that we should remember all the facts. Dr. Stafford was sacked by General Ord-Clayton, the chairman of the Board of Governors. The general, as you all know, is a fiery, hot-tempered, unreasonable old idiot who ought to know better!"

"He ought to be boiled in oil!" said Tommy Watson grimly. "He sacked the Head because of that fire in the College House, weeks ago. Dr. Stafford was held responsible, and——"

"Exactly," I said. "Dr. Stafford was treated shamefully—and before long, you mark my words, we'll have him back here. When we revolt our chief demand will be for the reinstatement of our dear old Head!"

"Good!"

"But we needn't discuss Dr. Stafford just now," I proceeded. "We have to deal with Mr. Howard Martin, the tyrant who was appointed in Dr. Stafford's place. From the moment of Martin's arrival he has acted the bully and the cad. And the major part of his venom has been directed against the Remove."

"The beast!"

"All our liberties have been taken from us," I went on. "No study teas; prep. in the Form-room, under the eye of a master; bed half-an-hour earlier than usual; no supper—that's only a few of the restrictions we're suffering. Life, as we're living it now, isn't worth a dump. We can't go on like it, and we don't intend to. Something is going to be done at last."

"Good egg!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Mr. Nelson Lee, our beloved House-master, was sacked at a moment's notice," I continued, warming to my subject. "He would have gone, in any case, because he simply couldn't live in the same house as Martin. But the Head drove him out, and appointed a freak named Simpson Wrott——"

"Who's just as bad as Martin himself," said Owen major.

"When it comes to harshness—yes," I agreed. "Mr. Wrott is barking all the time; but his bark seems to be a lot worse than his bite. Don't forget how he left us a lot of grub last night; don't forget how he caught us red-handed, eating the stuff. He gave us

ten lines each—after threatening to half-murder the lot of us. There's something rummy about Mr. Wrott!"

"Begad! You are quite right, dear old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "In point of fact, I am not at all sorry he came. It is my opinion that he secretly wants to help us—but he pretends to be harsh, for reasons of his own."

"Perhaps there's something in that," I agreed.

Sir Montie was very near the mark, as it happened.

Although I didn't know at the time, Mr. Simpson Wrott was none other than Nelson Lee himself! The gov'nor, having cleared out in his own character, had returned to St. Frank's—to fill his own shoes! He had come as Mr. Martin's understudy, and the Head had no suspicion of the truth.

Nelson Lee was secretly doing all in his power to make things easy for us. But, in order to keep in Mr. Martin's good books, he had to affect a harsh, over-bearing manner.

"With regard to Mr. Wrott," I went on, "we haven't got much against him. It's the Head we're fighting. The Head is a bully and a rotter. Just consider what he has done to Handforth and Church and McClure."

"The heartless cad!" said Pitt hotly.

"Those three chaps attempted a jape last night," I continued. "It was a silly game to try, I'll admit, but that's nothing. The Head came along, and caught Handforth and Co. out of their beds. What did he do? He took the three chaps into an attic, and locked them there for the night!"

"Shame!"

"He ought to be kicked!"

"He locked Handy and Church and McClure in an attic," I said. "They'd got nothing on but pyjamas, and the attic is cold and bare, without even a blanket. It's enough to kill some fellows!"

"So it is!"

"I tell you, the time has come for us to take matters into our own hands," I declared. "We can't stand the Head's harsh treatment any longer. It's more than flesh and blood can stand. That's why we're holding this meeting now, at one o'clock in the morning. We're quiet here, and we can discuss matters without fear of interruption!"

"Good!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Speech, old man!"

"I'm making a speech, you noisy asses!" I said warningly. "Can't you keep quiet? We've got to come to some decision regarding how we shall go on. In this dormitory we're solid for revolt, but we don't know anything about the other fellows. I think we ought to be very careful——"

"But we can't ask any of the other chaps to-night!" protested Hart. "My idea was that we should rebel, and gain supporters afterwards. They'll flock to us in droves once we're really on the go."

"I believe you're right there. Very well, then. We've got to come to some positive decision. Have you realised what a rebellion means? Have you realised all that it entails?"

"It means going on strike!" said Griffith.

"Does it?" I replied grimly. "It means much more than that, my son. To begin with, we've got to have good defences—otherwise we shall go under. We've got to have grub, or we shall be starved out. These things must all be thought of, and prepared for."

"We had a barring-out once before," said Watson. "We lived in the old vault, underneath the monastery ruins. Couldn't we try that stunt again. It served us then, so why not now?"

I shook my head.

"My dear Tommy, your memory's at fault," I said.

"It isn't. I jolly well know we lived in the vault——"

"I'm not referring to that," I said briskly. "You forget to mention that we lived there in August, or September—during the hot weather. How would you like to live there now—in the winter-time?"

"My hat! I'd forgotten that!"

"Of course you'd forgotten it," I said.

"It only shows that-everything must be thought of. This time we've got to bar out in the school itself. We've got to lock ourselves in one quarter of the building—and hold it. We've got to hold it tight against all attacks."

"Great pip!"

"That's a real barring-out," I went on grimly. "We seize the building, and bar everybody out of it—do you follow

me? In this case we simply must choose a place where we can live comfortably, and where there's plenty of food. Therefore I suggest that we take command of the west wing of the Ancient House."

"My only hat!"

"It can't be done!"

"Of course not!"

"It can be done—and it's going to be done!" I declared. "We've started on this rebellion now, and we're not going to back out of it tamely. Just think of the position. The west wing comprises this dormitory and a few box rooms and the attics above. We're in a kind of backwater here, as you know. It is peculiarly fitted for our purpose, when you come to consider it."

"How do you mean?"

"Explain, you ass!"

"Well, we've only got to barricade the end of this corridor, and we're shut off from the rest of the House upstairs. At the end of the corridor is a rear staircase, leading below. And where does it lead to?"

"One of the kitchens!" said Pitt.

"Exactly," I agreed. "Immediately beneath the Remove dormitory is a kitchen which isn't often used—but, still, it's a kitchen. In that same part of the building—this part, to be exact—is the largest store-room in the Ancient House. It contains flour, biscuits, tinned meats, tinned fish, tinned milk, and every blessed food you can think of. There's enough to last us a month, if necessary. And all we've got to do to make ourselves secure is to barricade the corridor outside this door, and the passage downstairs. Once that's done, we shall be in sole charge of this wing. We shall have sleeping accommodation, grub, fires, and everything we need for a siege. How's that?"

The Removites stared at me blankly.

"It's great!" declared Pitt, enthusiastically.

"Begad! I call it wonderful—I do, really!" said Sir Montie. "It only shows what a really astonishin' chap Nipper is. He has a marvellous brain for organisin' things. Without him we should have been helpless!"

"We should!" agreed De Valerie. "Nipper, you're a wonder! That idea of yours is absolutely a brain wave!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's marvellous!"

"And he thought of it all in a minute!" said Pitt admiringly.

"Oh, no, I didn't!" I put in. "You needn't think I'm such a marvel as all that. It may interest you to know that I've been thinking of this scheme for three days past."

"Oh!"

"I visited the kitchen, I visited the passage against the store-room, and I examined the whole position," I continued. "In short, I satisfied myself that it would be easy to conduct a barring-out here. All we've got to do now is to work with all our might and main."

"Now—to-night?"

"Yes, to-night," I said. "We've got six or seven hours straight off, and it's not likely that we shall have any more interruptions. We shall have to be jolly careful to begin with. If we're interrupted in the middle of the barricading job, well, it'll be all up with us."

"Of course."

"It won't take long," said Watson. "Only two barricades to fix up—one in the corridor, and one in the passage below—"

I sighed.

"It only shows how you don't think of things," I exclaimed. "What about the back door?"

"Eh?"

"What about the windows?"

"My hat!"

"The doors and the windows must be secured," I went on. "But the most important thing is to get up our barricades. We can attend to the windows and other things afterwards. We're going to bolt ourselves in this wing of the Ancient House, and we're going to defy the Head to do his worst!"

"Hurrah!"

"We won't have any more of his rotten tyranny," I declared. "And now, let's finish with jawing. We've got to get to work in earnest. The first thing to do is to block up the end of this corridor here."

"How's it going to be done?" asked Watson blankly.

"We've got no material for building a wall," said Owen major. "And it's no good setting up a barricade that can be knocked down by somebody's fist, is it? What's to be done?"

I pointed to the beds.

"At a pinch, we can do with half these beds," I said. "We can easily squeeze two into each. Besides, they'll never all be used at the same time—half of us will have to be on watch continually. So we can take half the beds and fix them up as barricades."

"Ripping idea!"

"How you think of it all is amazin'!" said Sir Montie.

"It's a good thing there's somebody who can think," I said grimly. "Well, let's get to work. There's no more time for argument, and we know exactly what we've got to do. Wait a minute, though. If we all start working at once there'll be confusion. We've got to work in gangs."

"Gangs?"

"Exactly," I said. "I want four lieutenants—Pitt, De Valerie, Hart, and Grey. You'll each have a number of fellows under you. Now, don't get squabbling. As long as we work in harmony we shall be all right."

Things were soon arranged, and there was no jealousy regarding the working parties. In less than ten minutes everything was arranged. We were all dressed, and ready for work in earnest.

"Now, then, get to it," I said briskly.

"Good!"

"On the ball!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"We're fighting for liberty!"

The beds were soon dismantled, and then they were carried to the door, and stacked there. We only used half of them, for we found that we should not need more. They were strong and serviceable.

And when I took measurements out in the corridor I made a lucky discovery. At a certain narrow place, near the end of the passage, the beds would jamb tight between the walls.

And soon afterwards we were fixing up the barricade in earnest. Some fellows were rather nervous to begin with, for they knew that if discovery came now it would be all up with our schemes, and we should never have another chance of planning a barring-out.

Everything, in fact, depended upon our initial efforts.

Success or failure—which would it be?

CHAPTER II.

READY FOR ACTION!

LUCK seemed to be with us, for the precious minutes passed, and there was no sign whatever of our being disturbed. Once we had the barricades up, we should be able to hold the fort against any numbers.

The most important matter of all was the upper corridor. And this we tackled with a will. I found it necessary to constantly remind the fellows that silence was absolutely necessary.

"There's no sense in messing up the whole game because we're a bit careless," I whispered. "Just a jerk of one of those bedsteads, and there'll be a bump which will shake the whole floor—and somebody will come along to investigate. So for goodness sake be careful."

"Don't you worry," said Owen major. "We're all right."

"Can't I lend a hand?" asked Fatty Little eagerly.

I shook my head.

"The best thing you can do for the moment, Fatty, is to keep in the dormitory, and sit tight," I said. "I'll find plenty of jobs for you when the barricades are up. That's the most important thing."

"I—I was thinking——"

"Well?"

"After a bit of work like this we shall be hungry," went on the fat boy.

"I—I might be preparing some grub, you know——"

"You hungry fathead!" I broke in. "We sha'n't have any time for grub until early morning. I was thinking that you might be the best man to fill the post of cook—but we can decide that afterwards."

"Oh, good!" said Fatty. "I can cook anything."

"Why not put the fat boulder in the lower passage?" suggested Pitt. "He'd serve well as a barricade, without any other defences!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went on with their work, and Fatty tried to comfort himself in the dormitory. Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, and one or two others of their calibre, preferred to remain idle. They weren't against the rebellion, but they had no inclination to work.

Not that I cared—they were more useful sitting still than attempting to help. There were plenty of fellows eager and anxious to provide all the labour necessary. And the main barricade in the upper corridor grew rapidly.

The iron bedsteads were the first articles to be jammed tightly between the walls. We were unable to hammer, and so we placed the bedsteads in position and forced them tight by sheer pressure.

And the defences, when completed, were quite formidable. They nearly reached to the corridor ceiling, and there wasn't room enough for a cat to crawl in. I surveyed the work with great satisfaction.

"Fine!" I said. "And now we'll go downstairs and block up the passage. We can easily make these defences stronger in the morning—after the discovery. We can hammer to our heart's content, without fear. Five or six of you had better remain here on guard. You're in charge, Watson."

"Yes, but I want to come downstairs——"

"If you're going to object, we sha'n't be able to carry on," I interrupted grimly. "Orders must be obeyed, Tommy, and we can't have any arguments."

"Oh, all right," said Watson. "Keep your hair on! I'll stay on guard."

A large party of us went down the rear stairs, and we lost no time in examining the position. We were afraid to turn on the electric light at first, and worked by the illumination of a small electric torch.

The passage downstairs was much narrower than the upper corridor, and we decided that our best plan would be to block it up with furniture from the kitchen—one or two heavy tables, chairs, and such like—anything, in fact, as a temporary defence. Big improvements would be made on the morrow.

I was not breathing freely yet. There were five windows and a door to be seen to, and they were likely to prove difficult. In fact, I was afraid they would be the hardest proposition of all.

For it must be remembered that we could not make any noise—for fear of being interrupted and discovered. And to make the windows properly secure, it was necessary to place bars right across the glass.

"It can't be done," declared Pitt, shaking his head. "We've got nails, and we're going to hammer—and a good many boards, too. But it's impossible not to make a terrific knocking noise."

I sighed.

"Haven't you ever heard of certain small articles known as screws?" I asked patiently. "Haven't you ever heard of a screw-driver?"

"My hat!" grinned Pitt. "I'm a bit dense to-night."

"Screws will do the trick," I said briskly. "You see the advantage of us having possession of the store room. There are heaps of screws there—all sizes—and we can fix the boards on without making a sound. But it'll be pretty hard work, and it'll mean all hands to the pump. We'd better divide into parties, and take one window each."

"Good!" said De Valerie. "That's the style."

Boards were found in plenty right down in the basement—or, rather, the cellar. There were many old packing cases, and we could knock those up with only a small amount of noise—and there was not much fear of that noise being heard upstairs.

An hour later the boards were ready, and then commenced the task of fixing them across the windows. This was done thoroughly, two big screws being placed at each end of every board.

Unfortunately, there were only two screwdrivers to be found, so the work did not proceed as swiftly as I would have liked. However, just as the clock was booming out the hour of four, the windows were finished.

The back door had been treated in the same way.

We were barricaded in!

The west wing of the Ancient House was ours. We couldn't get out, and nobody could get in. We didn't want to get out—because it was our task to hold the fort until we gained our victory.

We had certainly decided to remain besieged until we had won. If necessary, we could hold out for three weeks. And I was quite sure the Head would give in before then. He would positively refuse to parley with us to begin with, of course—but when he found that we were determined, he would have no alternative but to submit.

"The news of this barring-cut will get all over the place," I said, talking to a knot of Removites. "The Head will have to settle the affair as quickly as possible—or he'll have the Governors buzzing down here on his track. As long as we remain firm we shall be all right. So, whatever happens, keep smiling."

"Rely on us, old man," said Pitt.

"We won't throw up the sponge!"

"Begad! Rather not!"

"We're out for victory!" yawned Grey.

"That's how I feel," I remarked, smiling. "We're all sleepy, as a matter of fact. But I don't suppose we shall get much sleep yet awhile. Some of you can take a nap if you like—but I shall require at least a dozen fellows to remain on guard. We mustn't be taken by surprise."

"Well, let's go round and see everything is all serene," suggested Watson. "There's nothing like being certain."

I agreed, and a small party of us went the rounds. We commenced with the ground floor. The back door was locked and bolted—and barred. The kitchen window would have withstood a battering ram.

The two passage windows were fully protected, and the small store-room window was quite all right of itself—for it was provided with strong iron bars. There were cellars, a scullery, and other apartments, but they all led nowhere. The only exits to the outer world, so to speak, were the rear door and the passage.

The passage was well protected. For six or seven feet it was barricaded almost to the ceiling. Tables and chairs, stools and other oddments had been jammed tightly between the walls. Left unguarded, a comparatively small force could have broken through within a short time.

But we had no intention of leaving the barricades unguarded. And with a crowd of defenders at the rear, it would be a difficult task for Mr. Martin to force a way through. Our safety depended upon the holding of our stronghold.

Everything downstairs was secure; so we continued our way up the rear staircase to the other floor. The dormitory windows were boarded up, too—for we realized that even short ladders could be used to effect an entry. The

corridor was blocked up most effectively by bedsteads, and a small army could not have forced its way past.

With regard to the attic windows, we did nothing. Only high ladders could reach them, and we could easily deal with any possible attackers in such a position. There was a skylight at the top of the attic stairs, however, leading on to a flat roof. This would certainly need attention.

But it was most improbable that Mr. Martin would attempt an entry that way to begin with; so I decided to leave the skylight until to-morrow. In any case, it was impossible for us to risk discovery by fixing the skylight before dawn.

We were not anxious for a night alarm. Now that the vital work had been accomplished I wanted my followers to get as much rest as possible. For, after their hard work they were inclined to be somewhat grumpy and irritable.

But I easily excused this. One is always liable to be grumpy after a night of hard work with no sleep. So I collected the whole crowd in the dormitory, and had a few words with them.

"My sons, we're bottled up now," I said smoothly. "The barring-out has commenced, and it's going through to victory. The die is cast, and it's too late for us to think of drawing back. If any of you fellows regret——"

"Rats!" said Pitt. "Nobody regrets anything."

"That's good," I went on. "Now, I've got a suggestion to make. You all know that three of our number are missing—namely Handforth, Church, and McClure. We've been too busy to think of them until now——"

"Poor chaps," said Hart. "They're freezing in the attic."

"Exactly," I said. "And the unfortunate thing is that the attic isn't in this wing. Handforth and Co. are isolated from us, and if we allow things to continue as they are now, Study D will be out of this rebellion altogether."

"I don't think!" said De Valerie. "Handforth will be the first chap to rush to our flag, as soon as he gets his liberty——"

"If he's able to," I put in grimly. "Don't forget the Head's nature. He'll guess that Handforth and Co. will want to join us—and he'll probably keep the poor chaps locked up for days."

"That's true enough," admitted Pitt. "They won't have much chance."

"Well, now that we've finished the most important work. I see no reason why we should not attempt a rescue," I continued. "I sha'n't feel comfortable until those three chaps are with us—and if we can have them with us at the start, it'll be all the better. I want two volunteers——"

"I'm one," said Watson promptly.

"Begad! An' here's another, old boy!"

"I'm game!"

"Same here, Nipper!"

"I only want two, thanks," I smiled. "I'll take Tommy and Montie. We're going to rescue the prisoners. But before we go I should like to say a few more words. I want to talk to you seriously."

"Go ahead, general!"

"Well, this is going to be a grim business," I declared. "The Head won't give in to our demands easily—he'll fight like the dickens before he surrenders. It's up to us to prove that we're not rebelling for the mere sake of causing a fuss. We've taken this step because our liberties have been interfered with, and because life was becoming unbearable."

"Hear, hear!"

"We only want a solemn assurance that all the restrictions will be removed, and that nobody will be punished for taking part in the barring-out," I went on. "We've got to behave ourselves properly. The Head musn't have the slightest excuse for picking any fellow out for insulting language and behaviour. When he barks at us, don't yell at him—don't insult him."

"That's asking a lot," said Owen major. "Knowing that he can't get to us, we shall naturally feel a bit daring——"

"That's what I'm pointing out," I said. "You'll feel like pointing out a few home truths. But don't do it. Leave the talking to me—and I'll confine myself to the actual business. If there's any insulting talk done, let the Head do it. We want everybody to know that we're conducting the barring-out in a gentlemanly way."

"You're right, old man—absolutely right," declared the Duke of Somerton. "And we'll back you up all along. The best thing is to talk as little as possible."

Tell the Head what we want, and then let him do the yelling."

I was glad to find that the other fellows agreed. I thought more than they did, and I knew how easy it was for a crowd of revolting juniors to shout thoughtless insults which would lead to great trouble later on. We were out to put down the bullying—not to make ourselves notorious as rebels.

"Now, half of you can get to bed," I went on briskly. "Take my advice, and sleep in your togs—because you might be called to your action station at a moment's notice. The rest of you will guard the various defences, and cope with any attack which may develop."

"He talks like a giddy colonel in war time!" grinned Hart.

"This is war time," I declared. "We've declared war, but the enemy isn't aware of it yet. When he does become aware of it there'll be trouble—and don't think anything else. Before long we shall be in the thick of it, and you'd better realise at once that we shall need all our wits and strength to hold the fort."

"Good!" said Griffith. "That's just what we want—a battle! It'll be rotten if the Head gives in without even a fight. A barring-out is no good at all if it's a tame washout."

"That's not the proper way to look at it—although I confess I feel the same," I said. "We want our liberty—not battles. Still, we shall probably get enough trouble before we do gain the victory. Montie and Tommy and I are going off now to find Handforth and Co., and I expect we shall return in about twenty minutes time. Be on the lookout."

"Hold on!" said Armstrong. "How will you get out? We're barricaded in, and if you pull down all those things—"

"You weren't with us when we made that upper barricade," I interrupted. "We left a small space at the bottom, blocked only by a rolled up mattress. When that's pulled away, there's an exit. It's just as well to remember these little things in time."

"But isn't it dangerous?" asked Armstrong.

"Not a bit," I replied. "The attackers won't know the place is there—and even if they find it out it'll be no

use to them, because we can prevent anybody crawling through without the slightest trouble. Now then, my sons, let's get off."

"We're waitin', dear old boy."

I was rather anxious, for the time was going on, and before long some of the servants would be getting down. At all costs, we should have to rescue Handforth and Co. before the school awakened for the day's happenings. It was likely to be an eventful day in St. Frank's history!

The mattress was pulled out, and Tommy and Montie and I crawled through silently. We were wearing no boots, and we padded softly down the corridor to the other attic stairway—on the other side of the building.

The whole school was still and silent. Not a sound broke the quiet of the night. And we crept up the stairs like shadows. We were not quite certain which attic Handforth and Co. occupied, but there were only two, so we should not lose much time in finding out.

I had my electric torch with me, and when we reached the tiny landing, I switched the light on. An open doorway yawned before us. Next to it a door was closed. The apartment beyond was occupied by the prisoners.

"Locked, of course," I whispered, as I tried the handle. "And this lock is a thundering strong one, too."

"What shall we do?" breathed Tommy. "We can't force the door, I suppose? It'll make too much noise—"

"Yes, I'm afraid it will," I agreed. "But I didn't come unprepared. We can't force the lock in the ordinary way—but we might be able to wangle it. What price these?"

I displayed half-a-dozen keys I had brought with me.

"Begad! You think of everythin', dear old fellow," said Sir Montie admiringly.

"If they won't fit, we shall have to think of some other wheeze," I said. "Still, we've got a chance of succeeding. There's no telling what we can do until we try. Hold this torch, Tommy."

He took it, and I fitted the keys into the lock one after another. The first three were no good whatever. The fourth half turned, and then jammed. I could not even get it out again.

"What's wrong?" whispered Sir Montie.

"It's turned the wards half over, and then jammed," I said. "The best thing we can do is to force it the rest of the way—if such a thing is possible. We'll have a shot, anyhow."

I took one of the other keys, and slipped it through the hole of the key already in the lock. With this leverage I was able to put tremendous pressure on the key. It bent slightly in my hand; then something grated harshly, and a snap sounded. The key had broken in the lock.

But the door swung open when I turned the handle.

"Good!" I murmured. "It's busted the lock—but that doesn't matter a toss. I hope we've come to the right number!"

As a matter of fact, I was rather doubtful. There had been no sound from within the attic, and it was almost certain that Handforth and Co. were awake—for they were without blankets, and wore nothing but pyjamas. It was hardly possible that they had dropped off to sleep under such cold conditions.

"I believe we've come to the wrong room," I whispered.

I took the torch from Watson, opened the door, and peered in, flashing the beam across the floor of the attic. Then I uttered a low whistle, and stared in considerable astonishment.

"Well, my only hat!" I exclaimed.

"What's the matter, old boy?" asked Sir Montie.

"Look!"

We all entered the room, and Tommy and Montie stared, too, when they saw what had caused me such surprise. In the far corner of the attic was something which looked like a big bundle of blankets, at first sight.

Then three heads were visible. And it was then obvious that Handforth and Church and McClure were sleeping soundly and warmly, covered with quite a respectable quantity of large blankets.

"The Head had pity on 'em, after all, then," I murmured. "I didn't think he was such a merciful sort of chap. You stay by the door, Tommy, and give us the tip if you hear any suspicious sound."

Sir Montie and I advanced, and a moment later we were shaking Handforth and McClure were the first to awaken,

and McClure were the first to awaken, and they blinked up at me in bewilderment.

"Hallo! Who's that?" mumbled Church. "What the dickens—I say! Where are we? I'm blessed if I can—Oh, yes! In that giddy attic!"

"Attic!" said McClure dully. "I—I—"

"Wake up, my sons," I broke in softly. "Give Handy a punch, and—"

"Don't talk so much," growled Handforth, turning over. "Why the dickens can't you chaps keep quiet—Hallo! What the thunder—well, I'm blowed!"

Handforth sat up, and it was some moments before he and his chums were thoroughly awake. Then they remembered that they had been placed in the attic by Mr. Martin.

"He said you were to stop here without any blankets," I remarked. "Where did you get these from?"

"They dropped from the ceiling," said Church.

"Eh?"

"They dropped, you know—down from that trap door—"

"I didn't ask you to be funny," I broke in.

"It's true, you ass," said Handforth.

"We hadn't been here ten minutes before a pile of blankets dropped on to us. Did you do it?"

"No!"

"I thought as much," said Handforth. "I wouldn't mind betting a quid it was Mr. Wrott! He's not such a bad chap as we thought—and he must have crept up into the other attic, got through the trap door, and piled these blankets down on to us. We should have frozen without them."

"Well, we needn't go into that now," I interrupted. "We're in a hurry. The Remove has revolted, and we're in the middle of a barring-out."

"A—a which?" gasped Handforth.

"A rebellion!"

"Rot!" said Church. "If you expect us to believe that yarn, you're mistaken. You wouldn't dare to start anything like that against the Head—"

"We have dared, and the revolt is in full swing," I said grimly. "We thought you chaps would like to be in with us—that's why we've risked everything to come here and rescue you. The Remove is determined to fight against the Head's tyranny, and the battle will

be commencing in an hour or two. Are you game?"

Handforth's eyes glittered.

"Game!" he roared. "Why, it's the best thing you could have done! We're with you to the last breath!"

"You needn't yell!" I said warningly.

"But it's worth yelling about," said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I thought of a barring-out myself, but I wasn't sure about the rest of you. And you always seem to look upon my ideas as potty."

"That's because they generally are potty," I said briskly. "Well, come on—don't waste any more time here. We should look a bit sick if we were pulled up before we got back to our stronghold."

Handforth and Co. lost no time in following us. We succeeded in getting through the barricade without causing any alarm. The chums of Study D were dumbfounded when they saw the preparations we had made.

"It was jolly good of you to fetch us out of that attic," said McClure warmly. "It's worth a term's pocket money to be in an affair like this. What's the time? When will the fun begin?"

"You'd better get that idea out of your head at once," I said sharply. "There won't be any fun, McClure. This is a very serious business, and we shall need all our wits to gain the victory we're after."

McClure grinned.

"Well, the Head can't sack the lot of us—and as long as we stick together we shall be all serene," he said. "Personally, I'm as keen as mustard on this business, and it's a certainty that we shall——"

Reginald Pitt rushed up.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "The alarm will be given in two minutes!"

"By jingo!"

"Warren's up—he's in the Triangle," said Pitt. "And, what's more, he's having a look at the barricaded windows!"

I hurried to one of the dormitory windows, with several fellows at my heels. The lower sash was already up, and I leaned out curiously. The dormitory was in darkness, except for a single candle.

It was still dark out in the open, of course. But the gleam of a lantern

showed near the Ancient House wall. And we saw the portly figure of Warren, the school porter. Warren was about to commence his early morning duties.

But he had been attracted by the fact that something was wrong with the lower windows. And he was holding his lantern up close to the glass, and staring at the boards which were screwed across.

"My heye!" we heard him mutter. "What's the meanin' of these 'ere? I never seed anything like this before!"

One of the juniors gave a slight cough—quite unintentionally, I believe—and Warren's gaze turned upwards. He stared at the dormitory window in real amazement, and took a step or two backwards.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "If some o' them young ribs ain't awake, I reckon a miracle must have 'appened."

"Cheerio, Warren, old bean," said Pitt lightly. "How goes it? How do you like getting out of your snug little bed at this hour of the morning?"

Warren gasped.

"Which I don't understand, young gent," he said. "You ain't supposed to be up yet! The risin'-bell don't ring yet—not for another hower! And what's the meanin' o' these 'ere boards——"

"You'd better get about your business, old son, and leave us to ourselves," I broke in. "There's nothing for you to worry about, anyhow. You'll find out the truth soon enough."

Warren shook his head, and moved off muttering to himself. He evidently didn't like the look of things, and as he vanished round the angle of the building I turned to the juniors who were crowding round me.

"We'd better look slippery now," I said. "The trouble will begin in less than half-an-hour, unless I'm greatly mistaken. To your action stations, my merry rebels!"

CHAPTER III.

DEFYING THE TYRANT.

CLANG—clang!

The rising-bell rang out with an extraordinary amount of noise. It seemed so to us, at all events. It was because we were all awake, listening for it. Contrary to my

anticipations, there had been no alarm so far.

Warren had apparently considered that our early rising was none of his business; or he had thought it wiser not to report matters to the Headmaster. Warren had a great respect for Mr. Howard Martin. He was also anxious to keep his post as porter at St. Frank's. He apparently considered that it would be better for him to know nothing about the affair.

"We sha'n't be long now, anyhow," I said. "The other chaps will be getting up—the Third and the Fifth. As soon as they come into the corridor they'll see the barricade, and then there'll be a terrific noise. My hat! Won't there be a pile of excitement before long!"

"Rather!"

"And a pile of trouble, too," said Watson bluntly.

I took good care that all our positions were guarded. The Remove was distributed evenly; so many fellows at each barricade. It would be impossible for the Head to break through unless he brought an enormous force against us. And he certainly had no such force available at a moment's notice.

The trouble commenced almost immediately afterwards. Wilson, of the Sixth, came marching down the corridor in his dressing gown. He was up earlier than usual, and he was on his way to the bath-room. It was daylight by now, although the morning was bleak and raw. Wilson paused as he was about to turn into the main corridor. He stared at the barricade in sheer astonishment.

I was on the other side of it, with a number of supporters—for I was pretty sure that we should have our first interview with the Head at this spot. The barricade was provided with a number of holes and slits, through which we could see quite easily. Wilson continued to stare.

"What the deuce——" he began.

Then he broke off, and moved forward, his intention being to examine the obstruction at closer quarters. It was certainly surprising to find a conglomerated mass of bedsteads and bedding piled up in the passage, wall to wall.

"Good morning, Wilson!" said Hart cheerfully.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Wilson. "Who's that behind there? What on earth's the meaning of this? What have you kids been up to? There'll be a most unholy row if the Head comes along and sees——"

"Prepare yourself for some news," I interrupted calmly. "It will interest you to know, Wilson, that the Remove has gone on strike. The Remove is fed up with Mr. Martin's tyranny, and it's not going to stand any more of it!"

"You—you must be mad!" gasped the prefect.

"Not at all—we're sensible!"

"Why, you young idiots! You'll be half killed for this!" exclaimed Wilson angrily. "Stop this nonsense at once, and don't be such a set of young fools! You'd better clear away this stuff before any of the masters come along!"

"You're naturally astonished," I said. "But we've done this thing thoroughly, Wilson, and we're not giving in. We're barring-out everybody from this section of the building—and we shall never surrender. We sha'n't come out until the Head agrees to all our proposals."

The prefect was at a loss for words.

"But—but you don't realise what you're doing," he gasped, at last. "The ringleaders will be sacked on the spot! You can't hope to defy the Head! You'll be beaten within a couple of hours. Take my advice, and chuck the thing up now."

"Too late," I said grimly. "We've decided."

Wilson continued to stare for a few moments, and then marched off.

"He's going to report," I said. "We shall have the Head here within five minutes now. Stick to your guns, and be ready to defend the fortress. We shall be in the thick of the fight before long."

But it was not Mr. Martin who came. Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed before voices were heard, and then Wilson came into view, with Mr. Crowell beside him. The master of the Remove was only half-dressed, and his face was grave and troubled.

"You must be mistaken, Wilson," he was saying. "I really cannot believe—Good gracious! This—this is extraordinary! Upon my soul!"

He surveyed the barricade blankly.

"Boys!" he shouted, after a moment.

"Are you there? Nipper! Tregellis-West! Pitt! Can you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," shouted a dozen juniors.

"Remove this obstruction at once," shouted Mr. Crowell angrily. "How dare you act in such an insane manner? I'm amazed—I am shocked! I cannot understand what has possessed you!"

"I don't want to offend you, sir, but we can't obey your orders," I said quietly.

"What!"

"We've no quarrel with you, sir, and it'll upset me quite a lot if we have to defy your orders," I went on. "We're only up against the Head, sir, and I want you to understand at once that we're still true to you. You've been a brick, sir, and we all respect you!"

"Yes, rather."

"Three cheers for Mr. Crowell!"

"Hurrah!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "I cannot allow this! It is preposterous for you to say that you respect me when you act in this outrageous manner. You have evidently taken leave of your senses, and I may say at once that the ringleaders will be punished with the utmost severity. Do you realise that you are setting all authority at defiance? It is disgraceful—outrageous!"

"Our very object in barring-out is to set the Head's authority at defiance, sir," I said. "He's a bully and a tyrant, and we wouldn't be British boys if we submitted to his brutal methods!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll stick to our guns until we win!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the tyrant!"

Mr. Crowell fairly turned pale.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed helplessly.

"I—I'm at a loss. What can we do, Wilson? The foolish boys are evidently determined. The affair is disastrous—quite disastrous. I am staggered."

"Well, sir, the kids have made it plain that they're not up against you, but only against the Head," said Wilson. "And, strictly speaking, the Head's brought this on himself. I'm not surprised——"

"Wilson, I am amazed that you should talk in such a manner," interjected Mr. Crowell sharply. "The Headmaster may have been somewhat harsh, but that

is no excuse for these boys to set all authority at defiance. Hum! I—I really don't know what to do."

"We'd much rather you went away, sir," shouted Pitt. "We don't want to offend you in the least—we want to deal with the Head—not with you. Our quarrel is with him."

"Perhaps you are right, Pitt—I certainly see your point," said Mr. Crowell. "Very well, you shall deal with the Head. But I warn you at once that you will be dealt with very drastically. Take my advice, and cease this nonsense forthwith. I will do my utmost to keep the matter from Mr. Martin's ears."

"That's jolly good of you, sir," I said earnestly. "But we've started on the rebellion now, and we're going through with it. We've rebelled against Mr. Martin—but that's all."

Mr. Crowell nodded.

"Then I will leave it for Mr. Martin to deal with," he said. "He has certainly brought this on himself, and—Ahem! Come, Wilson!"

They marched off, leaving everybody excited.

"Crowell's all right," I declared. "He knows jolly well we're justified, but he doesn't like to say so. I only hope that he won't come here again. It's rotten for us to disobey him—because he's a good sort!"

After that the news got about rapidly. Wilson told some other members of the Sixth, and then the Fifth learned about it, and the Third was rapidly in the know. A crowd of fellows thronged the corridor beyond the barricade. They were curious and excited.

"I say, you young asses!" shouted Chambers of the Fifth. "I suppose you know you'll be hung, drawn, and quartered for this? You'll be slaughtered right and left. The Head will go stark mad."

"Let him," I said grimly. "Perhaps he'll go so mad that he'll have to be taken away. We shall be well rid of him."

"Well, there's something in that," said Chambers, nodding. "It's like your cheek to go out on strike—but I must say that I'm with you. You have my sympathy—and you'll need more than mine before long. I sha'n't much care to see half-a-dozen of you being packed off home."

"You won't see that!" shouted Handforth. "We're out to win—and if you had any pluck you'd come and join us. Now, then, you chaps out there! Are you going to stand the Head's tyranny, or will you join us in our fight for freedom?"

"By gad!" said Chambers. "The young beggars mean it! We'll see how they go on, and if they last out the day we might consider joining in. We've had enough of the Head——"

"Cave!"

Somebody gave the warning, and the crowd vanished from the landing like magic. Mr. Howard Martin came striding along. His hair was ruffled, he was obviously unwashed, and he was attired in his dressing-gown. His face was simply purple with fury as he surveyed the defences.

"Good heavens!" he snarled. "This—this is positively amazing! I cannot believe that the boys could be so bereft of reason! They have dared to defy me, Mr. Crowell—openly! It is absolutely terrible!"

"It is certainly serious," admitted Mr. Crowell.

"Boys!" thundered the Head. "I will give you one minute to take these obstructions away! One minute, remember. The ringleaders will be publicly flogged, and every other boy will be detained for the period of four weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a yell of defiance.

"Upon my soul!" gasped the Head. "Did—did you hear, Mr. Crowell?"

"I could scarcely do otherwise," said Mr. Crowell.

"We don't want you to get angry, sir," I shouted. "I may as well tell you that I'm the leader in this rebellion——"

"Oh, indeed!" snapped the Head. "I am glad you have admitted that fact, Nipper. A rebellion, eh? Very well! I shall make an example of you by administering a flogging and expelling you forthwith from the school——"

"We're all in it, sir!" shouted De Valerie. "Nipper's no more to blame than we are. We stand or fall together—and you can't sack the lot of us!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Martin. "How dare you address me in that insolent fashion? I order you to surrender immediately. If you dare to defy me for one moment longer I will remove you by force!"

"It's all very well to talk like that, sir," I said firmly. "But we happen to be in a position where we can talk on equal terms with you. If you prove yourself to be reasonable and just we will obey your order, and we will surrender at once. But you must listen to our terms first."

"Your—your terms!" thundered the Head.

"That's what I said, sir."

"Your insolence is unparalleled!" stormed Mr. Martin. "You infernal young hound! You shall pay dearly for this impertinence! Do you think for one moment that I will consent to listen to terms from a pack of rebellious young dogs——"

"You won't improve matters by abusing us, sir," I interrupted. "All we want is justice. We want our liberties restored—we want the school to be run as it was run by Dr. Stafford. And nobody in the Remove is to be punished for this rebellion. We don't deserve punishment, because we have only rebelled against a tyranny which it was impossible to bear. That's the plain truth, sir, and I don't mind saying it. Give us back our liberties, and we'll surrender at once."

The Head laughed harshly.

"Never, in the whole course of my experience, have I heard such astounding insolence," he shouted. "Once again I order you to submit. If you do not do so I will take such steps that will compel you to give in. Do not imagine for one moment that this insane rebellion can continue. You have taken leave of your senses, and I can only say that I am aghast!"

"We're not giving in, sir!"

"Never!"

"Were out for liberty and justice!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with bullying!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Three cheers for Dr. Stafford!" yelled somebody.

"Hip, hip——"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer rang out with tremendous vigour.

"Three cheers for Mr. Nelson Lee!"

"Hold on!" I shouted. "Don't get too excited, you asses! I believe in cheering, but you mustn't let yourselves go. We shall never give in, and it's up."

to Mr. Martin to accede to our demands."

"Hurrah!"

The noise was considerable, and for a time the Head roared and raved at us in vain. When he made himself heard he was shouting in the same strain as before. He might as well have saved his breath, for we took no notice of it.

"I will wait till you have calmed yourselves!" he bellowed. "I will give you thirty minutes, and not a second longer. In half-an-hour I will come back, and if these mad obstructions are not removed, I will take measures to remove them by force. Take care how you defy me!"

He turned on his heels and strode away. He was followed by a yell of derision, and a storm of hisses broke out. The Removites were reckless now. The rebellion had started in real earnest, and the juniors didn't care what happened.

"Well, we're in for it now," said Owen major, taking a deep breath. "By jingo! There's going to be plenty of excitement before long. He is going to take the defences by force, eh?"

"Not while we've got any strength!" I said grimly.

"Begad! We shall have to hold the fort with all our energy, you know—we shall, really!" said Sir Montie. "Dear fellows, we must get ready for battle. It's goin' to be a frightfully excitin' fight, too!"

And Tregellis-West was probably right

CHAPTER IV.

A PLAN OF ACTION.

"SOMETHING must be done, Mr. Wrott—something swift and drastic," declared the Head, pacing his study with agitated strides. "This—this rebellion is altogether startling—it is unprecedented!"

Mr. Simpson Wrott nodded.

"The boys are mad, sir," he agreed. "It is a shocking affair—truly shocking. It is all the worse because there is no visible solution to the problem. The Remove have the upper hand——"

"What?" roared the Head. "Are you insane, Mr. Wrott?"

"Ahem! I—I am sorry if my words

offend you, sir," said Mr. Wrott apologetically. "I really wish to convey my opinion. How is it possible for us to make the young dogs surrender?"

"I will force them——"

"But they have barred themselves into a most secure portion of the school," said Mr. Wrott softly. "Do you realise that, sir? They have beds, food—and, in fact, everything necessary for a long siege. They will be able to beat off any ordinary attack. It is appalling, sir, quite appalling. I fail to see how we can cope with the disgraceful situation."

"You are a fool, Mr. Wrott!" raved the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wrott meekly.

"You had better say no more!" roared Mr. Martin.

"No, sir."

"Don't keep on saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,'—like an infernal parrot!" shouted the Head fiercely. "This rebellion is utterly preposterous, and the boys will not dare to defy me for long. Where is Mr. Stockdale? Where is Mr. Crowell? Where is Mr. Pagett? Why don't the fools come?"

Mr. Wrott thought it wisest to say nothing. The Head had called a meeting of masters in the study, and Mr. Wrott only had arrived so far. Mr. Martin would have been considerably astonished if he could have known that the sour-looking "Mr. Wrott" was none other than Nelson Lee.

Lee had returned to St. Frank's for two reasons. He was almost sure that the Head was not all that he pretended to be—there was some mystery concerning him—and Lee was determined to get at the truth. Mr. Martin, in fact, had dismissed Nelson Lee because he feared him.

And the famous schoolmaster-detective had returned to St. Frank's in disguise—to fill his own place! It gave him great pleasure to "diddle" the Head in such a manner. It was quite a good joke.

At the same time Nelson Lee was doing his utmost to lighten the burden of the boys. He pretended to be harsh, but he was really lenient. His manner was violent and alarming—a mere pose—but his actual punishments were absurdly light. So far, the Head had not tumbled to the game.

Lee was not surprised at the action the Remove had taken. He had prob-

ably anticipated something of the sort—for he knew that the juniors would not submit to an intolerable tyranny for long.

His policy, however, was to be "down" on the rebellion. He affected to share the Head's views, and his condemnation of the boys was positively violent. But Lee secretly admired the Remove for its pluck.

"Ah! You have condescended to come, then!" snapped the Head.

Mr. Stockdale entered the study, followed by Mr. Pagett, Mr. Crowell, Mr. Suncliffe, and two other masters.

"I do not understand, sir," said the Housemaster of the College House. "You requested me to attend here——"

"That is enough, Mr. Stockdale," snapped the Head. "I do not wish to argue. We are faced with an appalling situation. Do you realise that the Remove has actually defied all authority? Do you realise that the Remove has defied me to my face? Are you aware of these facts?"

"The whole school is aware of them," said Mr. Stockdale.

"I am inclined to believe that you, Mr. Crowell, are partially responsible for this astounding rebellion," continued the Head harshly.

Mr. Crowell started.

"I, sir?" he exclaimed. "Really, I——"

"You have treated the boys too easily—too softly," said the Head. "They require harshness——"

"I disagree, sir," said Mr. Crowell coldly. "When it is necessary, I am always severe. But I do not see the justice in being harsh and cruel with the boys on all occasions."

"You are quite right, Mr. Crowell," declared Mr. Stockdale. "That, in fact, is the secret of the whole business."

"What!" snapped the Head. "What did you say, Mr. Stockdale?"

"I said the boys have revolted solely on account of the harshness and injustice meted out to them since your appointment to the Headmastership, sir," said Mr. Stockdale boldly. "I am not afraid of telling you to your face that the juniors have been treated abominably!"

Mr. Martin clutched at his desk.

"Upon my soul!" he gasped. "How—how dare you, sir?"

"I do not consider it daring——"

"Stop!" thundered the Head. "Stop, sir, before you go too far! Have a care, Mr. Stockdale! A few more words from you, sir, and you will be dismissed as summarily as Lee was dismissed! I will have no nonsense from my undermasters!"

Mr. Stockdale's eyes flashed.

"It is quite possible that I shall not wait to be dismissed, Mr. Martin," he said angrily. "And let me tell you this. If I go from this school, every other master will leave with me!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Mr. Crowell.

"We will certainly support you, Mr. Stockdale," said Mr. Pagett warmly.

The Head choked back something, and his lips twitched feverishly. He probably realised that he would be wiser to moderate his tone. He would be in a sorry plight indeed if all the masters walked out in a body.

"We—we will say no more on the subject," he said thickly. "I have called you together, gentlemen, to discuss this—this appalling situation. The Ancient House section of the Remove Form has appropriated the west wing of the building, and the boys are defying all authority."

"The position is grave, sir," said Mr. Pagett. "I must be allowed to mention that no such situation ever arose while Dr. Stafford ruled. It therefore seems obvious that the boys are objecting to your administration——"

"Enough, sir!" snarled the Head. "I will show these young brutes that it will not pay them to revolt against me—me, their Headmaster! I have formulated new rules, and the boys will adhere to them."

"Ahem! They seem to be doing the opposite just now," murmured Nelson Lee.

"Perhaps, so, Mr. Wrott—perhaps so!" barked the Head. "They will not resist much longer, however. I intend to break their mutinous spirit with an iron hand. And the ringleaders shall be sent from the school in dire disgrace."

Mr. Stockdale shook his head.

"I cannot say that I entirely agree with such a proposition, sir," he said. "No doubt the boys are wilful, and should be punished. But, seeing that they have a certain amount of justifica-

tion, I should seriously consider meeting them to a certain degree——"

"Meeting them!" shouted the Head savagely. "Good heavens! Are you suggesting that I should parley with them?"

"I am, sir," said Mr. Stockdale.

"Then you must be insane——"

"On the contrary, I think I am most sensible," snapped Mr. Stockdale. "Please let me tell you, Mr. Martin, that I am not in the habit of being characterised as insane; furthermore, I am not prepared to put up with such treatment from you. You asked for my opinion, and I declare that the boys' demands should be met to a certain degree——"

"I positively refuse to even consider such a proposal," shouted Mr. Martin violently. "They have defied me, and never shall I agree to listen to a single grievance. I have asked you all to come here because I wish to find out some means of driving the rebels from their stronghold."

"I am afraid we cannot do much in that direction, sir," said Mr. Pagett. "The young rascals are in a peculiarly secure position. They have organised their rebellion with remarkable astuteness. You must admit that. So far as I can see, force will be the only method of bringing them to their knees. And then, again, we come to a stumbling block. How can force be applied when they have barricaded themselves in so thoroughly."

"It is a difficult problem—an extremely ticklish matter," murmured Nelson Lee, with an affected scowl. "The wretched young dogs are laughing at us, for we are powerless——"

"Nonsense, Mr. Wrott—nonsense," barked the Head. "We are very far from powerless. I intend to take action immediately. You will please call the school together in Big Hall, gentlemen. I intend to address the boys at once. Lose no time."

The other masters were only too glad to get out of the Head's study: they were already exasperated beyond endurance. Mr. Martin's overbearing attitude was quite unbearable.

It was not yet time for breakfast, the hour, indeed, being quite early. Most of the fellows were down, and groups of juniors were gathered all over the Tri-

angle, excitedly discussing the astonishing situation.

Christine and Co., of the College House, were particularly interested. Bob Christine himself was addressing an animated group of juniors, and his speech was not exactly an uninterrupted one.

"The question is, what shall we do?" Christine was saying. "We're members of the Remove, don't forget, and it's up to us to take some action. We sympathise with the Ancient House chaps, of course. That's taken for granted."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"He's the chap to show the Head a thing or two!"

"Rather!"

"And what we've got to do is to let the rebels know that we're supporting them—morally, at all events," went on Christine. "Everybody must agree that it was jolly plucky of the bounders to start a barring-out——"

"Hear, hear!"

"If we'd been placed in the same position, we might have done the same thing," went on Christine. "But we haven't got the facilities in the College House. Things aren't arranged the same."

"Besides, we're a smaller crowd," said Talmadge. "We only represent just over a third of the Remove, and we wouldn't be strong enough to start a rebellion. I think we ought to go in with the other chaps."

"Revolt, do you mean?"

"Yes!" said Talmadge.

"But we can't do it, you ass!"

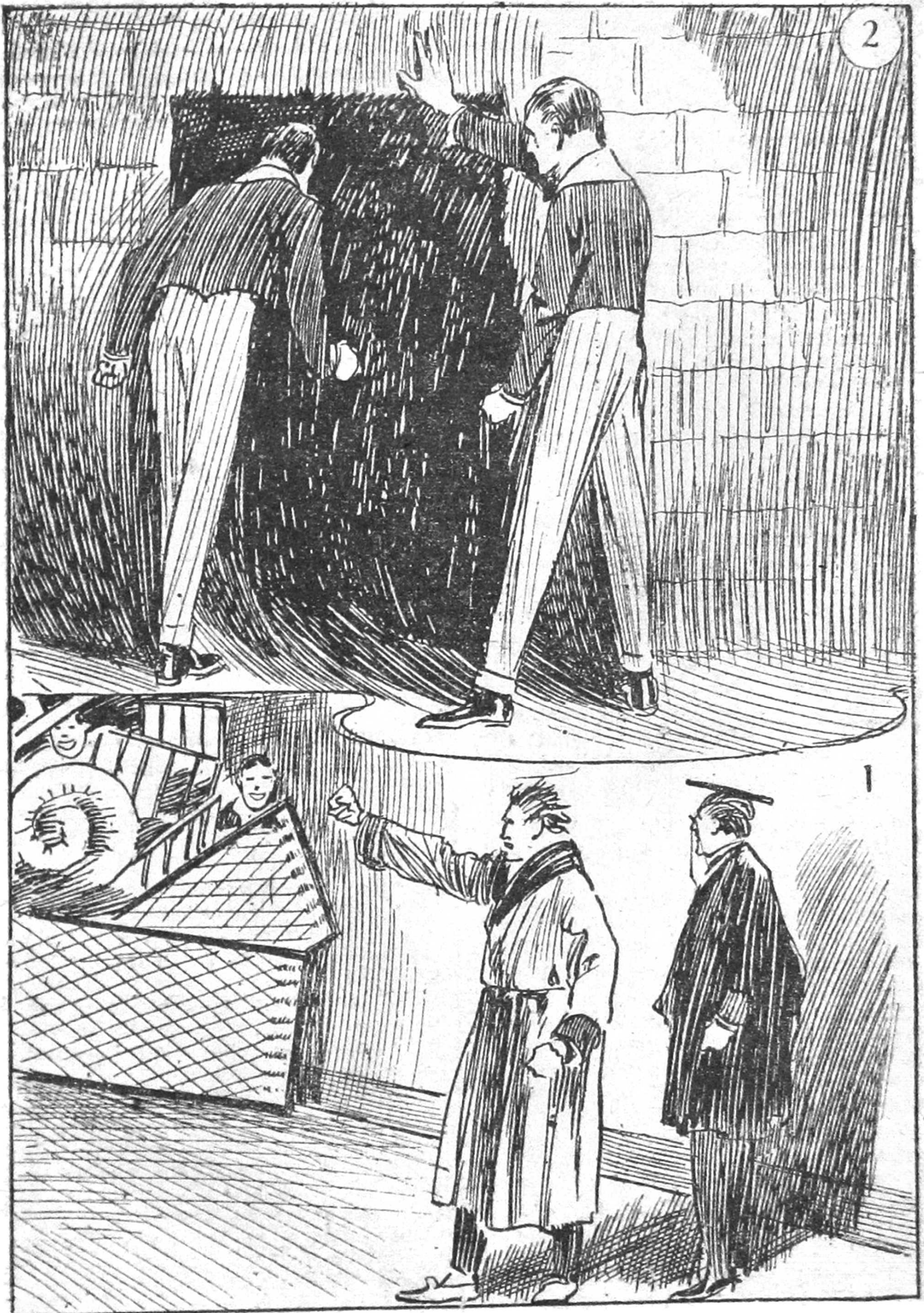
"Yes we can," said Tommy obstinately. "We can go in a body to Nipper's stronghold and ask for admittance. Dash it all, the Remove might as well stand together in a case of this sort. We're all in the swim."

Christine shook his head.

"It's a good idea, but the time isn't ripe for us to put it into execution," he said. "It wouldn't be wise for us to take such a step now. Let's see how Nipper and his crowd get on first. If they need support, we'll rally round and back them up."

"We ought to back them up at once," declared Talmadge. "There's no sense in delay, Christy."

"Yes, there is," said Christine. "We might be more useful outside. Supposing



1. "Boys," thundered the Head, "I will give you one minute to take these obstructions away!"

2. To the surprise of both of us, a square section of the wall moved back.

those Ancient House chaps get into a bit of a difficulty? Supposing they want supplies of some kind? They might be able to give us the tip, and we'll lend a hand. I tell you it'll be better for us to wait awhile."

"Perhaps you're right," said Yorke. "At the same time, I should like to——"

"Now, then, you kids!" exclaimed Morrow, hurrying up. "You're wanted in Big Hall—at once. Buzz in."

"It's not time for prayers yet, Morrow," said Christine.

"You won't have any prayers," said the prefect grimly. "The Head's going to make a speech, and you've got to listen to it."

"Oh, rats!"

"We don't want to hear the rotter spout!"

"It's not a question of what you want—you've got to do it. The Head's in a particularly shocking temper."

The juniors thought it wiser to go indoors without question. They were not rebels—yet, and heavy punishment would follow if they dared to disobey the Headmaster's order.

And, five minutes later, Big Hall was crowded. The Remove ranks were extremely thin, for only a minor portion of the boys were present. The rest were occupying the west wing of the Ancient House.

There was considerable talk in the Big Hall, but the masters and prefects did not attempt to stop it. They were partly in sympathy with the Remove, and they considered that Mr. Martin was going to work in quite the wrong way. But it was useless to argue with him, or offer advice.

The Head appeared on the raised platform, and there was an immediate hush. It was plain to see that he was in a furious temper, for his brow was black, and his eyes glittering dangerously.

"Boys, there is no necessity for me to go into any details regarding the extremely serious situation which has arisen," he exclaimed harshly. "You are all aware of the fact that the major portion of the Remove Form has had the astounding audacity to barricade themselves into the west wing of the Ancient House——"

"Good luck to 'em!" shouted somebody.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

The Head danced and gesticulated.

"Silence!" he roared. "How—how dare you interrupt me in this disgraceful manner? Who uttered those rebellious words?"

Silence.

"Mr. Crowell, the voices came from your section of the hall," raved the Head.

"Who were the boys that spoke?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir," said Mr. Crowell, although he probably knew. "Boys, you must not interrupt. Be silent, please."

"Do you expect the young dogs to take notice of such talk?" shouted Mr. Martin savagely. "The next boy who interrupts will be flogged——"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Get back to where you came from!"

It was impossible to detect the fellows who gave voice to the calls. Two, at least, came from the ranks of the Fifth. And the Head, pale with rage, glared round him helplessly.

"I shall remember this disgraceful scene!" he said thickly. "It seems that a wave of revolt is passing through the school. It is the natural result of years of inefficient administration——"

"It's the result of a week of tyranny, you mean!"

"Oh, good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence!" bellowed the Head. "My patience is being tried beyond endurance! If there is one more interruption the whole school—the whole school, remember—will be detained for three half-holidays!"

The threat was effective: nobody spoke.

"I intend to stamp out this rebellious spirit at once, without a moment's delay," went on Mr. Martin, after a moment. "The Remove, under the guidance of Nipper, has broken into open revolt. The young hounds have barred themselves into a section of the building, and they refuse to surrender. Such a state of affairs is almost without parallel in the history of British public schools!"

Still there was silence.

"I am determined to have no further nonsense," continued the Head. "I have called you together here because

I want you to thoroughly understand that these rebels must not be supported in any way. Any boy, senior or junior, who openly sympathises with the misguided band will be instantly punished."

"You'll have to punish the whole school, then!" yelled somebody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We all sympathise!"

"Rather!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "I will prove to you that my words are not idle! The whole school is detained for the next three half-holidays——"

"Oh!"

"Shame!"

"We won't be detained! We'll all revolt!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Head fairly shook with anger. But he realised that St. Frank's, as a whole, was in a dangerous mood. The majority of the boys were on the verge of breaking out into rebellion—following the example of the Remove. And Mr. Martin hastily sought to relieve the situation.

"If you will all be silent, I will cancel that punishment," he shouted. "I am firmly determined to bring the Remove to its knees, and I realise that the only argument to be used is—force. The young rascals must be routed out of their stronghold forthwith!"

"Who by, sir?" asked Fenton, of the Sixth.

"By the Sixth Form and Fifth Form," said the Head grimly.

"Oh!" said Fenton.

"I order the Fifth and Sixth Forms to proceed at once to the west wing of the Ancient House," continued the Head. "You will attack the barricades at all points; you will pull the obstructions down; you will drive the juniors out. Go, and obey my orders."

The Fifth and Sixth looked at one another uncertainly. Some of the seniors were rather unsettled, but others were determined. They shook their heads, and remained in their places. And the wobblers gained courage, and stood their ground, too. Mr. Martin watched with growing impatience.

"Do you hear me, boys?" he shouted.

"Yes, sir," said Morrow.

"Then go at once——"

"We're not prepared to fight against

the Remove fellows, sir—some of them our own minors," said Conroy major. "We're at St. Frank's for our education, not to settle your quarrels, sir."

"Oh, good!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Conroy major, I am amazed that you should dare to address me in that manner," said the Head harshly. "I will deal with you later. For the present, you will go with the remainder of the Sixth Form to the west wing——"

"No!"

"We won't go!"

"We're not doing your dirty work!"

"Rather not!"

"Good luck to the Remove!"

And the Fifth and Sixth, as though it had been pre-arranged, walked out of Big Hall in a body. The Head raved until he was purple—but it made no difference. The seniors had revolted on their own account! They were not rebels in the same sense as the Remove—but they refused to obey the Head's orders.

Christine and Co. and the Third yelled themselves hoarse. They streamed out of the hall without waiting to be dismissed. And Mr. Howard Martin, fairly choking with helpless fury, roared in vain.

The situation was decidedly acute.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT.

"THREE cheers for the Sixth!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hip—hip——"

"Hurrah!"

"Now three cheers for the Fifth!"

"Hip—hip——"

"Hurrah!"

The noise was deafening. The rebels let themselves go with a vengeance. It was just breakfast-time, and the news had come through that the seniors had refused to take any hand in the Head's quarrel with the Remove.

"Jolly decent," said Pitt enthusiastically. "If the seniors had sided against us we should have been in a bad way. Good old Sixth! Good old Fifth! They're with us!"

"I knew they would be," I said.

"There's no need for all this fuss, my sons. We're backed by the whole school, and if the Head isn't careful he'll have every fellow in St. Frank's revolting."

"All the better if they do revolt," said Watson.

"Of course," I agreed. "It would bring the rotter to his knees in a minute. But we can't hope for that—yet. The school hasn't rebelled. The seniors have only declared their intention of remaining out of the fight. We're safe for the time being—so we can have some grub!"

Breakfast was a happy-go-lucky meal. Only half of us could partake of the food at one time, the other half remaining on guard. Fatty Little was in his element. He was the chief cook, having appointed himself to that position.

His fat face was glowing with pleasure, and his fat hands were flowery and active. He had made a big batch of bread, and it was served hot for breakfast, with plenty of butter.

The bread wasn't quite light, and Handforth declared that it contained a few nails, tin-tacks, and other oddments, but it went down all right. Fatty was certainly a good cook.

The coffee was quite up to the mark, to judge by the requests for more. Little himself had eaten until he could eat no more—and that's saying quite a lot. His capacity was stupendous.

"I don't mind if we go on revolting all the giddy term," he said happily. "This is the first time I've had enough grub since I came to St. Frank's! I hope we shall go on with this game for weeks and weeks and weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, Fatty," I said. "This revolt won't last much longer than three or four days. It might end within a few hours, in fact. There's no telling."

"Hours!" gasped Little. "Great pancakes! But—but it can't end to-day. Nipper! I'm going to cook dinner, and—and all sorts of things! If the Head agrees to our demands, make some more demands!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That wouldn't be playing the game, my infar," I said. "But you needn't look scared. I don't suppose we shall come to a settlement to-day. The Head's a hard nut to crack, and he won't give in tamely."

"He's failed so far, anyhow," said Handforth. "What can he do? Nothing—absolutely nothing! I'll bet he had a double-barrelled shock when he went to that attic and found me missing!"

"What about us?" asked McClure.

"Oh, you!" said Handforth. "You and Church don't count. I was the chief prisoner, and the Head must be raving about losing me."

"Why should he rave?" asked Hart.

"Why?" repeated Handforth. "Because he knows that I'm a dangerous chap!"

"Well, everybody knows that," said Hart. "Strictly speaking, you ought to be in a padded cell——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" howled Handforth. "I mean I'm dangerous to the Head! I'm one of the leaders of the rebellion, and the Head knows his job's a lot more difficult with me against him!"

"Oh!" said Pitt. "That's a bit of news. I'm always glad to learn something fresh. It's the first time I knew you were a leader. I thought you could only punch chaps' noses——"

"Well, I can do that all right!" exclaimed Handforth grimly.

Biff!

"Yaroooh!" roared Pitt, holding his nose. "You—you burbling jackass——"

"Peace, my sons, peace!" I interrupted. "We don't want any quarrelling in the ranks. If you're not careful, Handy, you'll be committed to three hours' C.B.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The idiot ought to have been left in that attic!" snapped Pitt. "Supposing we send him to the Head with a formal note, explaining our terms? Handforth is a great chap for bearding lions in their den!"

"I'm game," said Handforth.

"Good!" said Pitt. "Get the note ready, Nipper. Once Handy goes with it, he'll never get back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Christine's at the kitchen window," called Watson, from the end of the passage. "He's with a whole crowd of Monks too."

We went to the kitchen window to investigate. Behind the barricading boards, Christine and Co. were standing in a crowd. They were shouting words

of encouragement, and some of the fellows were asking to be admitted.

"We want to join you," yelled Clapson.

"We're all in the Remove," said Oldfield. "Our place is with you in there."

"Jolly good of you," I replied, through the boards. "But we're quite O.K., thanks. Take my advice, and stay out of this as long as you can. We're out for victory, but we may not get it. The Head won't play any games with you, my sons—he'll be afraid to. You stick tight, and wait. You're more useful to us out there, just at present."

"That's what I say," declared Christine.

"Then listen to your Uncle Christy, and take heed," I said. "There's no telling how things'll go—and the rebellion's only just started. It's my opinion that we shall have a big fight. Hallo! Jesson's coming this way!"

"Rats to Jesson!" said Christine, turning.

The prefect strode up grimly.

"Clear away from here, you kids!" he ordered. "The Head's ordered that there is to be no fraternising with the enemy——"

"Go and eat coke!" said Yorke politely.

"You young sweep——"

"You're not one of our prefects," said Christine. "We don't take orders from you, Jesson. I'd advise you to mind your own business!"

The unpopular prefect scowled.

"No cheek!" he snapped. "Mr. Martin has invested me with full powers over all juniors, and you've got to obey my orders. Clear off!"

"Rats!"

"We don't care anything for you, Jesson!"

"Rather not!"

Jesson shrugged his shoulders.

"All right—do as you like," he said grimly. "But if the Head comes out here and sees you, there'll be a good deal of trouble. So don't say I haven't warned you. It seems to me you're all catching the rebelling spirit!"

And the prefect walked off briskly.

There was not much to fear of Mr. Martin coming on the scene at that moment, however. For Mr. Martin was in his own study, talking earnestly with Nelson Lee. The Head would not have

been talking earnestly with Nelson Lee if he had known that gentleman's real character. He only knew him as Mr. Wrott.

"It is apparent that force will not be successful, Mr. Wrott," said the Head pacing his study agitatedly. "The other boys will not only refuse to obey my commands, but they are quite in sympathy with the mutinous young scoundrels who are now in possession of the west wing. We must think of something else, Mr. Wrott—some subtle scheme to make the boys give in."

"Exactly, sir—exactly," he said, rubbing his hands together. "The infernal young brats have defied you in the most disgraceful manner, and it is time that something drastic was decided upon. But I must confess myself at a loss. I am unable to suggest any plan——"

"I have a plan," interrupted the Head grimly. "I will go to the boys and listen to their demands. Such a thing is totally against my principles, but something must be done. And, although I shall pretend to consider the young dogs' proposals, I shall be really tricking them."

"How, sir?" asked Lee interestedly.

"How?" said the Head. "I will make them a promise. I will tell them that if they give in quietly there will be no punishments, and negotiations will be started regarding the various demands. The boys will give in—and then we shall have them absolutely at our mercy."

"But your promise——"

"Bah! I am not concerned over that," snapped the Head. "A promise to such rebels is not valid. I am fully justified in going to any extreme in order to bring about the finish of this rebellion."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Quite so, sir—quite so," he agreed. "H'm! Highly amusing! The scamps will receive a somewhat unpleasant surprise after they have removed their barricade. An excellent idea, sir—a remarkably astute solution to the problem."

The Head nodded.

"I thought you would agree in that respect, Mr. Wrott," he said. "Once the boys are under my control again they will receive drastic punishment—and Nipper and several other ring-leaders will be expelled on the spot."

"Good!" murmured Mr. Wrott. "Splendid, sir—excellent!"

"I shall visit the upper corridor—now, at once," went on the Head. "Perhaps you had better not come with me, Mr. Wrott—I intend to meet the boys in a humble spirit, as it were. They will think that victory is theirs."

Mr. Wrott chuckled again, and the two men passed out of the study together. The Head made his way up stairs, but Nelson Lee did not accompany him. He went briskly along the passages until he arrived at the west wing of the Ancient House—on the ground floor.

He halted when he arrived at the barricade across the passage. The Head, at the same moment, was at the upper barricade.

Nelson Lee heard excited voices as he appeared.

"Look out! Here's old Rotten Wrott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him a groan!"

"Silence, you young brats!" roared Nelson Lee. "Do not dare to treat me with disrespect—"

"Dry up, you fellows," said Handforth. "Mr. Wrott's all right in the main. The first chap who groans will get my fist on his nose."

"Wonderful—wonderful!" exclaimed Lee. "I am gratified, Handforth, to find that you are somewhat discerning. But let me tell you that I will stand no nonsense. And you will be well advised to stick to your guns. Ahem!"

"What, sir?"

"To surrender!" barked Mr. Wrott. "Listen to no promises, and do not heed soft words. Harsh words are the only kind that you require. Mr. Martin is now addressing your leaders in the upper corridor—and his words will be of the utmost importance. Do not forget Mr. Martin's character, and plan your actions accordingly. You must realise that your position is serious, and you're in a tight corner. The impudence of your procedure is appalling! Huh!"

And Nelson Lee, with a snort, turned on his heel and strode away. He had already observed that Sir Montie Tregellis-West had removed his eye-glass and was polishing it—a sure sign that Sir Montie was thinking.

"Begad!" exclaimed the swell of the Ancient House. "Did you hear what

Mr. Wrott said, dear fellows?" His words were remarkable—they were, really."

"He talked a lot of rot," said Hubbard.

"But pray consider, old boy," said Sir Montie. "Do not heed soft words, and do not listen to any promises! Begad! I really think I'd better hurry upstairs an' see what is doin'!"

Tregellis-West lost no time, but went up the little back stairway to the upper corridor, where he found a large crowd of excited juniors gathered near the barricade. On the other side Mr. Martin was talking.

"I have realised, boys, that you have the upper hand," the Head was saying in mild tones. "The position is quite intolerable, and I cannot allow it to continue for a moment longer. I want you all to surrender——"

"Never, sir!"

"We're out for victory!"

"And you will receive victory—since you are so determined upon it," said the Head from the other side of the barricade. "If you will come quietly out now, no single boy will be punished. Furthermore, your demands will be listened to reasonably and sympathetically."

"Oh!"

"That's different, sir!"

"You say that nobody will be punished, sir?" I asked grimly. "You promise that the rebellion will be completely overlooked."

"Yes, Nipper, that is so," replied Mr. Martin grimly. "I have decided to be absolutely lenient. And, what is more to the point, when you have all resumed your normal duties, I will meet a deputation of the Remove, and will discuss all the grievances with a view to settling them forthwith."

"But will you promise to settle them, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, Nipper, I will—most decidedly," said the Head. "You have gained your victory—completely and absolutely. And you will oblige me by refraining from gloating over it—for I can assure you that this interview is not giving me much pleasure. What is your answer?"

"Well, sir, I think we'll just have a minute's consultation," I said. "We

realise that you have made a big concession, and——"

"Just a minute, old boy!"

Sir Montie was tugging at my sleeve.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Pray listen for a moment," whispered Tregelliz-West. "I urge you not to take any notice of Mr. Martin's promises."

"Oh, that's a bit thick, Montie," I protested. "Even the Head wouldn't be such a dishonourable rotter as to make promises and break them as soon as we've given in. He daren't do such a thing."

"I am frightfully afraid that he means to trick us," said Sir Montie. "Listen!"

And he briefly explained how "Mr. Wrott" had hinted at the Head's intentions—how he had told the fellows to pay no heed to soft words. I listened grimly, and when Montie had done I knew the truth.

"There's no getting away from the fact, Mr. Wrott is on our side," I declared. "He knew the Head's game, and he went down there and gave you fellows a word of warning. Good for Mr. Wrott!"

"But what shall we do?" asked Pitt quickly.

"Listen—and you'll hear," I replied, in a grim voice.

I returned to the barricade, feeling cold and angry. The Head had resorted to a dirty, despicable trick—if Mr. Wrott's warning was to be believed. And I would soon settle the question definitely.

"Well?" said the Head sharply.

"Before the Remove surrenders, sir, we want your assurance that nobody will be punished, and that all our demands will be met," I said. "We want——"

"I have already made those promises, Nipper," snapped Mr. Martin.

"Yes, sir by word of mouth," I replied. "We want you to set down those terms in writing. We want your promise in black and white. As soon as we receive it, we will surrender."

The Head stamped his foot with rage.

"Infernal impudence!" he roared.

"I will not write a line, confound you! Is my word not sufficient?"

"I'm afraid we cannot accept it, sir."

"You dog!" bellowed the Head.

"Are you daring to suggest that I should

make a promise I have no intention of fulfilling?"

"I suggest, sir, that if you seriously intend to fulfil it, you will not object to setting it down in writing," I replied quietly. "We only require it as a safeguard, and we shall certainly refuse to give in until we get that written promise."

The Head nearly choked.

"I will not write a line—never!" he raved. "You have my promise by word of mouth, and it is sufficient. No boy will be punished, and your demands will be met. Now, what is your answer?"

"We stand firm, sir," I replied curtly.

"What!"

"We remain as we are now—rebels," I replied. "Good-morning, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

"Long live the revolution!"

"Hurrah!"

And the Headmaster, fairly gnashing his teeth with rage, stood helplessly by while the Remove roared its approval of my decision.

Mr. Martin's trick had failed!

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY.

NIGHT had arrived, and the position was unchanged.

The Remove had calmed down somewhat since morning, but it was just as determined to carry on the rebellion until final victory was gained. The Head's very attitude proved that his promise had been hollow and treacherous.

Since that interview, Mr. Howard Martin had not shown himself. And we were all quite certain that Mr. Wrott was the cause of the failure. He had given us the tip in the most obvious manner, and we were grateful to him.

But Mr. Wrott, too, kept out of the way. We had not seen anything of him since the morning, and everything had been quiet—except, of course, for various demonstrations on the part of the other fellows, out in the Triangle.

The west wing of the Ancient House,

had been placed out of bounds, and nobody was allowed anywhere near it. But this did not prevent some daring spirits from venturing to the barricaded windows, in order to whisper words of support and sympathy.

It was now night—after ten p.m., in fact. The school had gone to bed, and it certainly seemed that we were to be left quite to ourselves. The Head was in a quandary—he did not know what to do, or which way to turn.

The bulk of the rebels had seized the opportunity of having a good, sound sleep. Some of the fellows had been in bed since the morning. These got up in the late evening, refreshed and brisk. And the guards of the day took their places in the beds. Everything, in fact, was going swimmingly.

Sir Montie and I had managed to obtain several hours sleep in the afternoon and evening, and now we were quite alert. I was determined to be on guard throughout the night—for, in my opinion, it was the most dangerous period.

"If the Head means to strike, he'll strike during the quiet hours of the night," I said. "He'll do it while all the rest of the school is asleep, and I mean to do a bit of scouting work almost at once."

"Venture outside, do you mean?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'm game, of course—I'm quite willin' to take any old risk," said Sir Montie. "But how do you propose to get out, dear fellow? The Head might be watchin', an' it'll be dangerous to remove some of the barricades——"

"Exactly," I agreed. "We're not going out that way."

"Really, old boy, I fail to understand," said Tregellis-West. "We are barricaded everywhere, and it is impossible to find an exit——"

"It's not impossible," I interrupted. "What has become of your memory, Montie? Don't you recollect that secret stairway leading from the old tower down to the very basement?"

"Begad!"

Sir Montie gazed at me in wonder.

"But, old boy, you're quite wrong," he went on. "You have overlooked the fact that the tower is not situated in this wing——"

"I haven't overlooked it," I inter-

rupted. "The exit, down in the basement, is situated on the other side of the barricade—that is, outside our own domain. So, if we get in that stairway, we shall emerge in the enemy's country."

Sir Montie scratched his head.

"But the tower," he began. "I can't see——"

"Oh, I'd better explain," I interrupted. "The further exit to the stairway is in the tower itself—but there's another exit—a doorway—in the dormitory corridor. Hardly a soul knows about it, but it's there right enough. All we've got to do is to slip in, and steal down the stairs."

"Oh, good!" said Sir Montie. "I certainly overlooked that fact, dear old boy. But pray tell me why you are thinkin' about gettin' out?"

"So that we can do some scouting," I replied. "I've got half an idea that the Head means to attempt trickery to-night. It's just the thing he would do. And we want to be absolutely on our guard. I shall leave De Valerie in sole charge while I'm away."

I wasted no further time, but made my preparations.

De Valerie had known nothing of the secret stairway, and he was greatly surprised when he heard. But he was also enthusiastic regarding the idea, and he urged me to be cautious.

"Don't you worry, my son," I said briskly. "We sha'n't allow ourselves to be collared easily. We shall probably be back within half-an-hour. Don't tell the others, or they might get jawing."

So, without further ado, we hurried away. The secret panel was situated nearly opposite the dormitory doorway, and it was an easy matter for Montie and I to slip through into the narrow passage.

We closed the panel, and I switched on my electric torch. The place was stuffy and dusty, and I grinned as I noticed Sir Montie's rueful expression. His jacket was already smothered with grime.

"That's all right, Montie," I grinned. "It'll brush off."

"Pray do not be absurd, old boy," said Tregellis-West. "This suit will be utterly ruined by the time I get back. Never mind. I am the last fellow in the world to grumble."

"Well, take my advice, and talk as little as possible," I said. "These panels

aren't very thick, and we don't want anybody to hear our sweet voices. We're on a risky expedition, so we must be careful."

"Dear fellow, I quite agree."

We proceeded down the narrow stairs slowly. They were steep and treacherous, and a fall would have had nasty results for either of us. But at length we arrived at the foot of the stairway, and stood in the basement.

This door opened out into the foot of the passage beyond our barricade. So we were able to get out of our fortress in secret, without removing a single board.

We found the passage in darkness. A window was just near by, and this was not barred or fastened. It was quite an easy matter for us to slip out like a pair of shadows into the lesser gloom of the Triangle.

Everything was quite still and silent—except for the gentle rustling of the chill November wind in the branches of the old chestnuts. The place seemed to be deserted and forlorn.

"Not a soul about," whispered Sir Montie.

"There's no telling," I replied. "There might be a dozen people awake and comparatively near to us, Montie. We must pretend we're a couple of scouts in the enemy's territory. And we must move just as cautiously."

"Lead the way, dear fellow. I'm with you."

We went all round the Triangle, round the Head's garden, and, in fact, made a detour round the school. But we did not see a sign of anything suspicious, and were at last forced to the conclusion that everything was actually quiet. If any attack was to come, it would be from within the school.

And so, at last, we returned.

We got back into the passage without incident, and quietly stole into the secret stairway. Our intention was to return to the dormitory passage without delay.

"Well, we've had a scout round, and we've drawn blank," I said. "It doesn't matter so much—in fact, it's all the better. It shows that there's not much possibility of our being disturbed before the morning."

"It's really remarkable——" Sir Montie paused, and kicked against a projection in the wall, about a foot from the floor.

"Pray throw your light here, old boy," he said.

"What have you found?" I asked curiously.

We examined the spot, and it seemed to us that the stonework was not quite so even at that point. Before the stairway actually commenced there was a short, narrow passage. One wall consisted of panelling, and the other of brickwork. And Montie and I were greatly interested.

"There seems to be something unusual about this spot, certainly," I agreed. "That chunk of bricks seems to be out of place, somehow. And yet it looks solid enough, Montie——. Great Scott!"

"Begad!"

I had pressed on the projecting brick with considerable force, and, to the surprise of both of us, a square section of the wall moved back, revealing a dark, earthy-smelling cavity.

"What-ho!" I murmured. "This is interesting, my son. There's no end to these surprises. This is probably another tunnel, leading in quite a different direction. I vote we explore it now, while we're on the job."

"But it's quite remarkable, dear boy."

"Well, it's not very surprising," I said. "This part of the school used to be an abbey, or a castle, hundreds of years ago. It's only natural to suppose that the cellars are honeycombed with secret passages. But we needn't discuss the ancient history of St. Frank's. Let's get busy."

I bent down, and led the way through the opening, flashing my torch before me. And I was not surprised to find that a tunnel stretched before me—low, with rough, stone walls, and a damp, earthen floor.

The air was far from being pure, but it was quite breatheable. And Montie and I proceeded along the tunnel curiously. We continued our way for several hundred yards, and there was no sign of any stoppage.

I judged that the end of the tunnel was situated somewhere among the old monastery ruins—for that was the most reasonable assumption.

But I turned out to be wrong.

For, after proceeding for another hundred yards, we came upon a mouldy old door. It was literally mouldy and mildewed, but the mechanism seemed to be fairly well preserved.

It was some moments before I could force back the bolts, but at last the door creaked open, and a wave of pure, fresh air swept upon us. But we were not in the open. We had emerged into a low, stone building, with one side vacant.

I recognised the spot at once.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I murmured. "We've come out in that old stone summer-house, Montie. We're right in a corner of the Head's private garden!"

"Is that so!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "Dear me! This is most remarkable! Quite interestin', dear old boy."

"We seem to have had our trouble for nothing," I said. "There's not much to be gained by staying here, Montie."

"Admitted!" murmured Tregellis-West. "I really think, dear boy, we'd better retrace our steps—Begad!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I heard something—a voice," whispered Montie.

We both listened intently, and Montie proved to be correct. For not one voice, but two voices were audible. And the sound of footfalls accompanied them. The voices grew louder and more distinct.

And one of them belonged to Mr. Howard Martin!

"We had better sit down in the summer-house, yonder," the Head was saying. "We shall be quite private there, Briggs. Rather cold, perhaps, but we cannot be too careful. I do not wish to take you into the school itself—for reasons which you will well understand."

"Right you are, guv'nor," said the other voice. "I've got the idea."

Sir Montie gripped my arm.

"They're comin' here, old boy," he murmured. "What a really remarkable piece of luck. If a thing happened like this in a story I should say it was ridiculous. Real life is always stranger than fiction, begad!"

"It's a coincidence, that's all," I said. "We'll nip back behind this doorway, and stop there. We shall be able to hear every word that's spoken. We can leave the door just unfastened."

"But it'll be risky——"

"No, it won't," I interrupted. "It's as black as pitch in here, and they won't dare to strike a light. Stand still, and don't even breathe."

"That's rather a tall order, old fellow, but I'll do my best," said Montie.

We succeeded in getting back into the tunnel without making any noise. And when the Head entered the summer-house, accompanied by the mysterious Mr. Briggs, there was nothing whatever to tell them that two venturesome enemies were very close at hand.

"This is much better," said the Head. "No, we needn't sit down—the stonework is rather damp, I believe. Now, look here, Briggs, I've brought you here because I want to talk to you quietly and seriously. To begin with, your business with me is absolutely private. I am paying you well, and your men will be paid well. I do not want any word of to-night's happenings to be spread abroad."

"You can be easy on that point, guv'nor," said Mr. Briggs. "Me an' my mates won't say a bloomin' word. We've got good money, and you've promised to give us some more. So we sha'n't get gassin'. This business is privit, an' we won't forget it. But I don't quite understand what the game exactly is."

"You'll understand in a moment, my man," said Mr. Martin. "I've already told you that a considerable number of junior boys have rebelled against the school authorities. They have, in fact, engineered a miniature revolution of their own, and at the present moment they are securely barred into the west wing of the Ancient House. They intend to defy me until I give in to their demands, and that, of course, will be never."

"It wouldn't do for you to give in to the young varmint, sir," said Mr. Briggs. "Them young hounds need a good thrashin'. Talkin' ain't no use."

"That's why I have engaged you, Briggs," said the Head. "The matter is really very simple. You are to be here with all your men at one-forty-five exactly. And at two o'clock you will smash down the barricades which the boys have set up. These rebellious youngsters are to be captured."

"It'll be easy, sir," said Mr. Briggs. "Why, I've got twenty men at least—all ready an' willing. It'll be kid's play to get the upper 'and of a parcel of cheeky schoolboys!"

"Don't you be too sure, Briggs," said the Head. "It won't be an easy task, but you will certainly succeed. The boys have taken a great many precautions.

but I have no doubt that we shall catch them napping to-night. And once the barricades are broken down the rest will be easy."

"Leave it to us, guv'nor. We'll do the trick."

"The attack is to be a surprise one. You must give the boys no warning of your approach," continued the Head. "But I can give you further details later on, Briggs. Where are your men at the present time?"

"Out in the lane, sir."

"Are they all good, reliable men?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to call 'em reliable, sir, but they're just the blokes for this job," said Mr. Briggs. "I got 'em together in Bannington mostly. Rough young chaps with no work, and willin' to earn a half-quid easy."

"Well, you will bring them all to the Ancient House doorway at one-forty-five," said the Head. "I will have some refreshments in readiness for you—"

"Beer, sir?" asked Mr. Briggs eagerly.

"Beer or spirits—whichever you like."

"You're the kind of gent a feller don't often meet," said Mr. Briggs enthusiastically. "When I tell the boys about that beer they'll be ready to face machine guns! But I don't reckon we shall have much trouble in routin' out them kids. They won't be able to lift a finger agin us."

The Head nodded.

"Well, my man, I think I have told you all that is necessary at the moment," he said. "If possible, I want this affair to be secret. I should like even the school servants to be in ignorance of it. So your main aim, when you attack, is to be as quiet as possible."

While speaking, the pair were moving out of the summer-house, and Montie and I were not able to catch Mr. Briggs' reply. But we had heard more than sufficient—and we were both tense with excitement and satisfaction.

"Talk about luck!" I breathed. "Did you ever know such a stroke in your life before? We came to this place by sheer chance, and the Head and this ruffian walk in and let us hear all their plans."

"Dear fellow, we shall wake up soon—we shall, really," said Sir Montie. "It is too good to be actually true."

"Luck generally favours the winning side," I exclaimed. "And this time we'll teach the Head that his rotten tricks

won't pay him. Think of it, Montie, think of the depths to which the Head has descended! He's hired a gang of Bannington roughs to fight against us! I never dreamed of such a thing."

"It's frightfully low down, old boy," agreed Montie.

"But we'll beat the Head at his own game," I said grimly. "Now that we're warned we can take precautions. And when that attack begins we shall be ready for it!"

CHAPTER VII.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

GOOD fortune was undoubtedly with us that night.

We had discovered the Head's plans by a pure stroke of luck. But it was not exactly extraordinary: for it was only natural that the Head should take his hired ruffian into a quiet, secluded spot, away from the school. And the summer house fitted exactly. That Montie and I should have been there at such an opportune moment, however, was remarkably fortunate.

"We'd better be getting back, old boy," breathed Sir Montie.

"Look here," I said briskly. "I've been thinking. We shall want ammunition of some kind."

"Ammunition?"

"Exactly," I said. "There's no sense in letting the matter stand as it is. We can't fight this gang with our bare fists—we should go under within five minutes. There's going to be a battle at two o'clock, and our only chance of winning is to have weapons that will beat off the Head's crowd."

"But what kind of weapons?" asked Sir Montie.

"I don't know—the matter needs a good deal of thinking about," I said. "Fortunately, we've a good deal of time at our disposal—nearly three hours, in fact. And we can make active preparations during that time. My suggestion is this: you hurry back to the fort, and give the warning to those fellows who are awake. Don't rouse the others until I come—"

"But aren't you coming with me?"

"No."

"Dear fellow, pray tell me what the idea is?" said Montie.

"I'm going to venture out again—in search of weapons and ammunition," I said grimly. "We've got to take action now, and I might as well see what I can do now I'm here. You go in and give the warning, and I'll follow in about half-an-hour."

"You are quite determined on this?"

"Quite!"

"Then it's no use arguing," said Montie, with a sigh. "But, really, old boy, I shall be frightfully nervous until you come in. I don't like the idea of your bein' out here alone."

"That's all right," I said crisply. "You buzz along."

Sir Montie went, without further protest, and I left the secret door slightly ajar, and stole away through the Head's garden. To tell the honest truth, I was decidedly worried.

I knew very well that the Head was set upon making a grim, determined effort to finish the rebellion in one fell swoop, so to speak. He meant to drive us out of our fortress by sheer force.

And we should need all our wits about us to repel the attack. Our bare hands would be useless—we should require some kind of ammunition. And this, in itself, was a problem.

We could not very well use anything which would do the attackers bodily harm. We should have to think of something which would beat them off harmlessly. And it was rather a knotty point to tackle.

However, I thought it would be just as well to scout about in search of defensive weapons. And I stole out of the Head's garden at length, and made off in the direction of the domestic out-buildings.

Possibly I should find something there which would help me.

I kept my eyes open wide, and my ears were on the stretch. As far as I could judge I was quite alone, and I had no fear of being captured. Possibly I was too confident. But I certainly took every precaution.

I was just turning a corner of the dark building when I heard a slight sound behind me. I turned on the instant. A big form was actually on the point of springing at me as I twisted round.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

I dodged, but I was a second too late.

A hand clutched at my shoulder, and the fingers closed tightly over my jacket. The next second I was yanked round and held firm, with my hands behind my back. And I saw that my captor was the Head himself!

"So I have caught you, eh?" snarled Mr. Martin. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Confound you, boy, answer me!"

I didn't say a word. It was dark, and the Head hadn't recognised me. I wriggled and twisted with all my strength and agility. But my struggles were in vain. Try as I would, I could not get away from the fierce grip.

"Hold still, you young brat!" snarled the Head, panting heavily. "Let me see your face! Why, what——"

The Head uttered a perfect snort of triumph.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "You are Nipper—Nipper!"

"Yes, I am!" I replied. "You've collared me, Mr. Martin, and I've got to give you credit for it. I didn't think you were smart enough to creep up behind me in that way!"

"You impudent puppy!" grated the Head. "I'm amazed that you should address your Headmaster in such terms. You are the leader of this rebellion, and you are in my power. Let me tell you that your supporters will soon be in a similar position. And you, my lad, will be sent from this school by the first train in the morning—after being publicly flogged and expelled."

I had nothing to say. For I realised that the Head had the upper hand. I was his prisoner now, and there was very little prospect of my getting away. He was a powerful man, and it was quite useless for me to struggle further.

But I was intensely glad that Montie knew of the impending danger. My noble chum's misgivings had been justified, after all. I should have done well had I taken his advice.

But I had not the slightest notion that the Head was prowling about. I had assumed that he had gone straight into the house after parting with Mr. Briggs. Which only proves that it is always foolish to be over confident.

My own fate was quite sealed. I should be expelled on the morrow—there was no doubt about that whatever. But I did not alarm myself unduly, for I was confident that I should be able to re-

turn to the old school after Mr. Martin had received the deserts he deserved.

My absence would be a blow for the Remove, no doubt, but I was not foolish enough to suppose that I was indispensable. There were other fellows who would be able to carry on.

De Valerie, or Pitt, would probably take the leadership. And my fate would only urge the Remove on to greater efforts. It would certainly not have the effect of taking the heart out of the rebels. They would be steelled to stouter resistance.

"You will be wise, and you will walk quietly," barked the Head. "I intend to take you indoors, Nipper, and I shall lock you in the cellar until the morning. If you attempt to escape now, your flogging will be all the more severe."

I didn't say a word, but marched off with the Head meekly and resignedly. I sobbed broken-heartedly—in fact, I snivelled in the most realistic manner. And the Head was quite deceived.

"So you are repenting now?" he exclaimed pleasantly. "Your repentance has come too late, my young friend. Snivelling will not help you. I did not think you were such a cowardly young baby!"

Of course I was as grimly determined as ever, but I decided upon a last, forlorn chance. As I had anticipated, the Head had relaxed his grip somewhat—believing that I was resigned.

And then, in a second, I became active.

With a sudden wrench I tore myself away, twisted round, and dashed off. The Head gave a snarl of fury and tore after me. And then I met with a most abominable piece of luck.

My foot caught against a stone, and I sprawled over. By the time I was on my feet again, the Head had caught me—and he was holding me firm. I felt sick at heart—and my hopes fled.

But still I struggled wildly and furiously.

"Hold still, hang you!" shouted Mr. Martin. "You got away once, but you will not get away a second time—"

And then a really astonishing thing happened.

A form dashed up out of the darkness. It blundered right upon us, and two fists struck out at random. One hit

the Head, and the other bowled me clean over backwards.

I seized my chance on the moment.

Up I scrambled and dashed off. And I heard the voice of Mr. Wrott! But I didn't wait to hear what he said, or what the Head said. I was free—and I streaked away for the old stone summer house with lightning speed.

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee was bending over the Head.

"Dear me! I sincerely trust you are not hurt, sir?" he asked pantingly.

"Hurt!" raved the Head, jumping up, purple with rage. "You fool! You dolt! You idiotic madman—"

"Really, sir—"

"What do you mean by interfering?" roared the Head fiercely.

"But I wasn't interfering, my dear sir," protested Lee, in a mild voice. "I saw you struggling in the darkness with someone I naturally took to be an assailant—a tramp, maybe. And I immediately dashed to your rescue—"

"My rescue!" bellowed the Head. "You raving idiot! I was struggling with Nipper—I had just captured the young ruffian! And you come along and allow him to escape. Mr. Wrott, you are absolutely a fool!"

Nelson Lee bowed.

"I am deeply sorry if I have offended you, sir," he muttered, looking flustered. "I—I—that is to say—really, sir, I hardly know how to express myself. My regret is sincere. Nipper! If I'd only known that fact to begin with! But I saw you struggling in the darkness—"

"Don't stand gabbling there!" snarled the Head. "Help me to find the brat! He went off in the direction of the Triangle, and we might still be in time to recapture him. I will tell you what I think of you later on!"

Nelson Lee thought Mr. Martin had already said quite sufficient, but he did not object. It was not Lee's policy to fall out with the Head.

And while they were vainly searching, I got back into the tunnel, and was quite safe. I paused for a breather when I arrived within the building. I had had a remarkably narrow escape and I had Mr. Wrott to thank for it.

The gov'nor had maintained his character so well as Mr. Wrott, so perfectly that even I had no suspicion then that Nelson Lee was so near at hand.

But I did know that he was responsible for my escape.

"Wrott did the trick for me," I told myself grimly. "He bowled the pair of us over on purpose—and deliberately allowed me to get away. Good old Wrott! He's got a pretty violent bark, but he's one of the best. He's a bit of a mystery, too, and I shall have to give more attention to him."

But, for the moment my chief aim was to get back to my supporters. And when I arrived in the dormitory corridor I was welcomed warmly by Sir Montie.

"Dear fellow, I'm frightfully glad to see you back safely," he said. "I haven't told anybody yet—I thought it better to wait until you came back."

"You're lucky to see me now," I said, taking a deep breath. "You'll be rather surprised to hear that I was collared by the Head not ten minutes ago."

"Good gracious!" said Sir Montie. "You are jokin', surely?"

I explained what had occurred—and several other juniors listened to my story. And they all agreed that my liberty had been gained for me by the timely intervention of the somewhat mysterious new Housemaster.

"But all's well that ends well," I exclaimed. "I'm here, and the Head's raving about me. He can't follow, because he doesn't know how I got in."

And now I've got something else to tell you—something far more important."

"More important?" said Pitt.

"Yes. We shall be attacked at two o'clock precisely."

"In the night?"

"Yes!—or, to be more exact, in the early morning."

"My, only hat!"

"We shall be attacked by a gang of twenty roughs——"

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "You don't expect us to believe that yarn, I suppose?"

But the fellows did believe it after I had explained everything, and there was a considerable amount of excitement. The rebels became active, too. Grim preparations had to be made.

And we set about the task with a will.

The attack was due to commence in a little over two hours, and we had very little time at our disposal. There was every prospect of a great deal of excitement before the morning.

Needless to say, we were quite successful in resisting Mr. Martin's hired roughs. But that battle was a memorable one, and it cannot be described in full here. It forms part of another episode.

The St. Frank's barring-out was by no means over!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

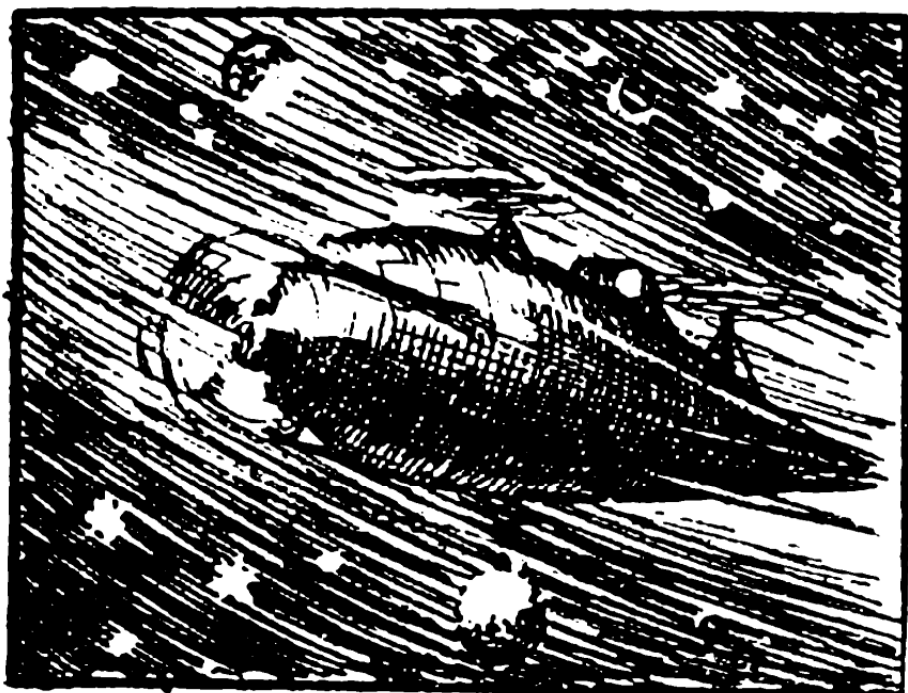
I wonder how many of my readers discovered the identity of Mr. Wrott before he disclosed himself as NELSON LEE to Dr. Brett in last week's story? No doubt some astute readers smelled a rat much earlier in the narrative. All will agree, I think, that the popular Housemaster deserves some praise for his ingenuity, and all are glad, I am sure, to know that he is back again at St. Frank's.

Much as you have enjoyed the story just concluded, none should miss the account of the progress of the revolt in next week's number, called "**BARRING OUT THE BULLY.**" Unless justified, of course, rebellion against authority is strongly to be deprecated. But you, my chums, who have been following the events at St. Frank's during the last few weeks, will readily sympathise with the drastic action the Remove have thought fit to take.

Before concluding these remarks, I shall be glad if those of my chums who are desirous of disposing of back numbers of "The Nelson Lee Library" will communicate with me.

THE EDITOR:

MAGNIFICENT STORY OF ADVENTURE AMONG THE PLANETS



IN TRACKLESS SPACE.

A Thrilling Account of a Wonderful Voyage to the Moon, Venus, and Mars, and of a Flying Machine known as the "Solar Monarch," the Most Marvellous Invention of the Age.

By ROBT. W. COMRADE.

Author of "The Stowaway's Quest," "Scorned by the School," etc.

INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM, inventor of the Solar Monarch, an airship designed to travel through space, decides to put his theories to the test by making a journey to the moon and other planets. He is accompanied by

FRANK HILLSWORTH and MACDONALD GUTHRIE, both wealthy young adventurers; PROFESSOR PALGRAVE, a renowned scientist; and ABBIE, a burly negro, who acts as cook and engineer. The airship is secretly constructed in England. At last everything is in readiness to start. The adventurers are aboard, and as Gresham pulls a lever the Solar Monarch shoots up into space. The moon is reached in a week, the projectile attaining a speed of 2,000 miles an hour. The surface of the moon appears destitute of life, but the explorers learn, after many exciting adventures, that the dark fissures and caves are inhabited by strange monsters. They return to the Solar Monarch, and set off for Venus. In this world of whiteness the adventurers encounter many extraordinary beings and fresh scenes, such as have never before been seen by the inhabitants of our Mother Earth.

(Now read on.)

Gigantic Geysers—A Venusian Naval Attack.

"How is that?" asked Palgrave. "The utmost the Solar Monarch can do is two hundred."

"Ah, there is a vast amount of difference between this vessel and an aeroplane. The latter are light and made

for speed, and have only one or two passengers to carry. Yes, if anything, I am under-estimating it at three hundred miles an hour."

Having satisfied themselves that no damage had been done they returned to the engine-room, and turning up their sleeves, they set to work with a will.

The damaged parts were removed and new ones substituted, for the airship carried spare parts.

In a couple of hours the job was completed, and Abbie tested the engine.

It ran beautifully—sweetly, and with a nod from Gresham he started up the other, and slipped the clutch in.

With a low hum the fans whirled round, but the ship remained motionless. Abbie accelerated, and the screws shrieked in answer. Still the Solar Monarch refused to budge. Gresham set his teeth.

"Race them," he muttered. "Get every revolution out of them you possibly can. If you risk overheating, no matter. We must get out now that the snow is disturbed."

Abbie did as ordered, and as the others waited with more anxiety than they cared to show, the aeronef swayed gently from side to side. Then slowly—oh, so slowly, commenced rising from her icy bed, the fans making a truly awful row.

Never had they been so taxed before. But it was a splendid test, and the good ship answered right nobly to the urgent call.

"She's lifting," cried Gresham, in exultation. "She's lifting! For a moment I imagined we should be buried here for ever. But it's not to be, my friends. We are destined to reach old England again. We should never have survived such amazing adventures if such had not been the case!"

"Hurrah! The light!" exclaimed Frank, as the vessel rose above the edge of the pit, and let a ray of welcome sunlight into the engine-room.

"Now start the propellor," ordered Gresham, and a moment later, at a height of thirty feet, the heavily laden Solar Monarch was speeding swiftly down the mountain side; Abbie, easing off the engines a trifle, thus causing them to drop slightly and so keep at an average distance from the ground.

Soon the temperature grew denser, and at last, as they flew over the last of the snow, Abbie brought the aeronef to rest, some two miles lower down, in the centre of a delightful creamy plateau, round which grew luxuriant trees and vegetation.

"Now to clear away the snow on deck," cried the professor gaily, snatching up a shovel and mounting the stairway like any eager schoolboy.

Truth to tell, they were one and all feeling extremely lighthearted and gay. Who would not, after having safely passed through an experience such as has just been related?

With some difficulty the conning-tower door was opened, and a great pile of snow came tumbling down, invading the conning-tower itself.

A couple of hours hard and strenuous labour worked wonders. In that time the deck had been entirely cleared, and had been swabbed down by Abbie, and that cheerful coloured gentleman had commenced preparing a much-needed meal.

To everybody's great delight the snow on the curved plates fore and aft had partially melted and slipped off before half an hour had passed.

Although it was tea-time they were all so hungry that a luncheon-tea was provided, and it was not until the meal was over that they had time to admire the glorious view.

Far below them could be seen the rippling sea, with the dense vegetation growing almost to the water's edge; and up above the endless snow, finally culminating with a dark, circular path--the crater.

"Gum! Wouldn't some of our English painters give their heads to be here for a few days," exclaimed Frank. "Talk about mountain scenery!"

"When I look at the Solar Monarch I can hardly realise what she has passed

through during the last few hours," said the scientist, strolling across the plateau and filling his pipe. "Twice she has been almost gone, and twice she has managed to scrape through with a whole skin. It's well nigh incredible."

"Nevertheless, it is a fact," put in Gresham, looking at the airship with some show of pride. "Now I suggest flying across this lake or ocean, see what is on the other side of it, and then leave for the planet of Mars."

The others agreed to this proposal eagerly, for they were anxious to explore the little red planet. Accordingly, some half an hour later, had you been there, you would have seen the magnificent little vessel dazzling in the evening sunlight, speeding over the milk-like ocean at the rate of seventy miles per hour, with the four adventurers collected, muffled and warm, on the tiny deck.

The stretch of water turned out to be surprisingly small, for in fifty minutes they again sighted land.

Here everything appeared to be the same as before--plentiful vegetation, animals by the score, and thousands of flying creatures.

Gresham had decided that Venus was very sparsely populated. So far they had seen only one city, and half the inhabitants of that had been devoured before their very eyes.

Taking it altogether, the planet seemed a most undesirable place to live in.

They were flying some three hundred feet from the ground, looking out for fresh and unusual sights when, all at once, the suspensory screws gave a shriller shriek, and the Solar Monarch climbed rapidly to a higher altitude.

"What in the name of--" began Gresham; then he paused, and looking ahead, remarked: "Bravo, Abbie, you've got more sense than we have, after all! So intent were we on the ground beneath that we forgot to keep an eye ahead."

By this time the others had seen the cause of the sudden rise. About a mile in front were several gigantic geysers--geysers the like of which they had never seen or dreamed of.

The water from them, fully ninety feet in circumference, was projected up into the air for a mile or more, and as Gresham looked at the lakes into which the

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

water fell he saw that they were boiling furiously, while great clouds of steamy vapour partially obscured the whole scene. In a moment or two they were flying over them, and could feel the damp heat arising from the water, and now they could distinguish a peculiar, scented odour clinging about them. This water was sweet enough, evidently.

"By Jove, Mac, you can't miss such a chance as this!" cried Frank. "Out with your camera, man, and take a snapshot!"

Mac dashed into the conning-tower, annoyed with himself for having overlooked such an important matter. In a few minutes he had secured several excellent plates.

"There's sae mony o' these startlin' things that it takes one 'a' his time to luke at 'em, let alone photograph them," he explained, by way of an excuse for his forgetfulness. "It fair take ma breath awa' when I set ma eyes on yon geysers!"

And he nodded to the spouting water, which was now a mile or so astern. They travelled rapidly onwards, and, at about seven o'clock, just as it was getting dark, they sighted another city. This resembled the other in every respect, except that here everybody was working at fever-heat. It was a curious spectacle to look down upon, and when the Solar Monarch had reached the centre of the city Abbie caused her to remain stationary. Here was a scene well worth snapshotting, and Mac gleefully took a number of excellent photos.

The inhabitants of this city were precisely similar to the inhabitants of the previous one, one Venusite being an exact replica of the other; but these citizens took no more than passing notice of the strange aerial craft. Just one glance skywards, a shrill cry amongst themselves, and they continued their work. And it was this very work that both puzzled and interested the on-lookers.

The city was built on the seashore, and the inhabitants were engaged in building a huge fence, 100 feet in height, right along the beach. What could it mean?

"There's only one explanation," said Frank, "and that is that these fellows are fearing an attack from the sea. What make of attackers they'll prove to be I can't, of course, specify. But from the manner in which they're working, I should say the thing was really

urgent. Either that, or they differ exceedingly as regards work from the average human being."

The others laughed. Gresham was just about to make a remark when a sudden cry from below made him pause. His companions glanced downwards, and perceived that the Venusites were one and all gazing out to sea. Following this direction, they saw the cause of their consternation. Appearing on the horizon were dozens of vessels, and the strange part of it was, they appeared to be very similar to Earth ships.

"All things considered, Venus and her inhabitants are somewhat similar to Mother Earth and hers," remarked Palgrave. "Practically the same forests and oceans, towns, and people. The only real difference is colour, size, and civilisation. From what I can see, Venus is somewhere about as far advanced as we were several thousand years ago."

"Those boats are making remarkable headway," put in Frank. "See how they have progressed during the last two or three minutes."

The craft were certainly coming onwards at a good, spanking pace, but even when observed through glasses no oars were visible. They were huge things, oblong shaped, with shallow sides; in each some fifty Venusites were collected. There were fully twenty of these ships, so that the inhabitants of the city—numbering, perhaps, five or six hundred—had a thousand or more assailants to contend against.

"I can't make out how the deuce they are being propelled," observed Frank. "There are no oars, and I should hardly think they had engines fitted."

"The matter is a simple one to decide," said the inventor, crossing to the speaking-tube.

A minute later they were hovering over the foremost of the oncoming fleet, the occupants gazing up at them with their vacant-looking eyes and faces almost expressing fear and surprise. Undoubtedly they felt something of this sort, for numerous cries passed to and fro. They were bigger than any Venusites the explorers had yet seen—huge, fierce-looking fellows.

Gresham reckoned they were inhabitants of the forest, making an attack on the townsfolk, such as a horde of African negroes might molest a quiet European settlement. But even at close quarters it was impossible to tell how

(Continued overleaf.)

the vessels propelled themselves. Nothing in the way of oars or paddles were visible, yet they were rushing along at close on thirty knots an hour.

"Weel, it's a mystery," exclaimed Mac. "There's nae— Half a tick, though! Luke at the watter round aboot the boats!"

"Well, what of it?" said Frank.

"Mon, canna ye see that 'tis still? What does that signify? It signifies that the watter's goin' with the ships. There must be a swift current."

"Jove, I believe you've hit it! You can see now that on a certain part of the beach the water is higher and rougher. That's where they'll effect a landing, for certain."

They did. One after another, the vessels grounded and discharged their loads. It could now be seen that for their length and breadth they were absurdly shallow. They were flat-bottomed, and Gresham wouldn't have given them two minutes to live in the

Channel on a fresh day. They were fine-weather craft, pure and simple, and had no oars. How their owners intended getting back was more than Gresham could imagine. The way in which they had come was wonderful enough.

At last the whole of the attacking army had landed, and they were now performing all kinds of seemingly senseless action on the beach. They were a formidable army to contend against, but they had no weapons. Evidently they fought a hand-to-hand battle.

"Do we take a hand in this?" asked Frank eagerly.

"That all depends!" answered Gresham. "We may, and we may not. Before we do anything, we'll see how the fight progresses. But if they're going to do it by daylight, they'll have to look sharp. The sun has already set. Ah, look below! They've already commenced!"

(To be continued.)

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