



"Great Heavens!" gasped the Head. "What—what is it?"

BARRING OUT THE BULLY

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 "The Sack for Nelson Lee," "The Tyrant's Understudy," "The St. Frank's Rebellion," etc.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE REBELS OF ST. FRANK'S.

ELEVEN—twelve!

Midnight boomed out solemnly from the old clock-tower at St. Frank's. The great school lay dark and silent under the chill sky of the November night. Everything was quiet and asleep.

At least, one might have supposed so. No passer-by, for instance, would have suspected that a goodly number of junior boys were in sole possession of the west wing of the Ancient House. True, it was their customary place of abode at night-time, for the Remove dormitory was situated in the west wing.

But they had got possession of it in quite another sense.

It was not temporary possession. The Remove had seized that part of the building, and were grimly holding it against all attackers. In short, they had seized the west wing by force, and were defying the Headmaster.

And I am proud to set down that I was the original instigator of the whole rebellion. It doesn't seem much of a thing to be proud of, on the face of it, but this was a very peculiar kind of revolt.

Mr. Howard Martin, the Headmaster of St. Frank's, was an absolute tyrant. He was a bully of the worst type, and under his iron rule life had not been worth living. He had made a particular "set" against the Remove.

And the Remove, becoming exasperated and fed up, had taken matters into its own hands. The net result was a rebellion. That state of affairs had existed for well over twenty-four hours already, and the Head had been unable to shift the rebels from their stronghold. He had made efforts to do so, certainly, but they had fallen through; and now, at midnight, it seemed that everything was quiet. There was no hint or sign of a coming attack.

But appearances are sometimes deceptive, and I, for one, was well aware of the fact that Mr. Martin was contemplating an assault. He was preparing to take the west wing by storm, and to rout us out.

It was very fortunate that I knew of the plan, for I should be able to take steps accordingly. We were very secure in our fortress, and only a very violent attack could possibly hope to succeed.

Mr. Howard Martin had not been at St. Frank's long, and he was filling the shoes of Dr. Stafford, who, in the opinion of the whole school, had been relieved of his duties in a most unjust manner.

However, we were not thinking of Dr. Stafford just then. Our troubles concerned Mr. Martin, his successor. This harsh gentleman had proceeded to wield the lash as soon as he arrived in the school. His methods were brutal. His rules and regulations were tyrannous.

The Remove, after standing an appalling amount of injustice, had determined to end it all by breaking into revolt.

I had suggested the scheme, and I was satisfied that there was nothing dishonourable in it. We were fighting against a system which was brutal, and we were justified. We had made our preparations at night, and in the morning Mr. Howard Martin had found himself defied.

In full possession of the west wing, we had a splendid position. On the upper floor there was the dormitory—our own sleeping quarters. Immediately below this was a kitchen and some store rooms, the latter being loaded with foodstuffs of every kind.

Thus we had sleeping accommodation and enough food to last us for a clear fortnight. The only exits to the wing were securely barred. Heavy barricades blocked the upper corridor and the lower passage, and every ground-floor window was boarded across in the most thorough manner. We were taking no chances; we could not afford to.

Our very success depended upon holding out until the Head was forced to give in, and it certainly seemed as though we should be able to carry out our project.

The Head had been dumbfounded at first, and he had done everything in his power to shift us from our stronghold. But the Fifth and Sixth, knowing well enough that we were justified in our cause, had refused to take any part in an attack, and Mr. Martin, after resorting to a ruse which had failed, was now contemplating a different form of activity.

He had decided to rout us out at all costs, for he was as grimly determined not to give in as we were. This, of course, was easy to understand, for surrender on the Head's part meant an admission of weakness, and Mr. Martin was not the kind of man to give in tamely.

By pure chance I had learned, an hour or so earlier, that the Head was planning an attack on our stronghold at 2.0 a.m. I knew that the attack would be a very severe one, and for a particular reason.

He had hired a number of rough characters from Belton and Bannington, and his scheme was to get us routed out in one swift onslaught. Provided the attack was a surprise one, and well carried out, it was distinctly probable that it would succeed.

Happily, however, I had overheard the

Head giving a few orders to the leader of the gang, which was due to arrive at two o'clock. Thus I should be able to take all precautions necessary.

The majority of the rebels were sleeping soundly, secure in the belief that nothing would disturb them during the night. They were positive that the Head would take no action until the morning, and the Removites were glad of a good sleep, for they had had very little since the barring-out had commenced.

I was very tired myself, but I did not show it. As commander-in-chief of the whole force, it was my duty to remain on the alert—more particularly when there was danger in the air.

I was on guard in the upper corridor, and with me were De Valerie, Reginald Pitt, Hart, and Tommy Watson. Tregellis-West was in charge of a party which guarded the lower passage, and other juniors were watching the various boarded windows. I was most particular in my methods, and kept every possible entrance under close guard. I should give the Head no opportunity of taking us by surprise.

"What I'm worried about," I said thoughtfully, "is ammunition. As you fellows know, there's going to be some excitement at about two o'clock. The chaps who are asleep don't know a thing yet, and there's no reason why they should be disturbed. But we must have ammunition."

"I don't see that it's really necessary," remarked Hart. "Our barricades are all strong, and the enemy can push as hard as they like, but they won't shift us."

I shook my head.

"You seem to forget that the enemy will be able to pull the obstructions down from the other side. It's highly necessary that we should have something to drive them off. We must have weapons of some kind."

"Pea-shooters!" suggested Pitt.

"You ass!" said De Valerie. "This isn't a jape."

"The idea is a good one, all the same," I said. "As a matter of fact, I've got two dozen pea-shooters in readiness, to say nothing of an unlimited supply of good, hard peas. A sudden volley of those little beggars is liable to make a chap squirm a bit. But pea-shooters and peas won't be sufficient. We must have something better, something more effective."

"Yes; but what?" asked Watson.

"That's what we've got to decide," I said. "Use your brains, my sons, and help me in this problem. Your heads aren't bladders, and they've got something better than wind in them, so buck up and— By Jove!"

"Thought of something?" asked Pitt.

"Wind," I said abstractedly.

"Eh?"

"Bicycle pumps," I muttered.

"Gone dotty?" asked Watson, staring.

"What the dickens do you mean—wind and bicycle pumps? Talk sense, for goodness' sake!"

"I am talking sense," I replied briskly. "Comparing your heads to bladders put an idea into my mind. Out in the bike-shed there are at least twenty good pumps, and a pump makes a first-class squirter."

"But what do we want squirters for?" asked Watson blankly.

"To use as weapons."

"As which?"

"Weapons!" I repeated grimly.

"But if we cosh any fellow over the head with a bicycle pump it'll smash up!" protested Watson. "Bicycle pumps are only made of celluloid, and they crack in no time if you start knocking them about."

"Oh, you hopeless duffer!" I interrupted. "I don't mean weapons of that kind. Didn't I say we'll use them as squirters? A good pump, filled with liquid, will send out a spirt almost as powerful as a garden syringe."

"That's true enough," admitted Hart. "But I'm afraid water won't stop a crowd of roughs!"

"We've got a barrel of treacle downstairs, in the store-room," I said briskly. "Mix that treacle with water until it's of a medium consistency, and it's not a very nice concoction to receive in your face. That sticky stuff will keep a crowd back as effectively as anything. I've got another idea, too; but I'll tell you more about that later. Those pumps will come in useful in many ways."

"Exactly!" agreed De Valerie. "But you've forgotten something!"

"What's that?"

"We haven't got the pumps here! They're in the bike-shed!"

"I hadn't forgotten it," I said. "Three or four of us will have to steal out immediately and raid the shed. We can get out by the pantry window. It'll

be easy enough to unscrew two of the boards."

"But old Martin might have some of his rotten hired men on guard," put in Hart, shaking his head. "I'm afraid the game wouldn't be worth the candle, Nipper. What if you got captured? We should be without a leader."

I nodded.

"We've got to have those pumps," I declared. "Everything depends upon our success in beating off the attack. If I'm collared—well, you'll have to carry on without me. I'm ready to take the risk."

"Good man!" said De Valerie. "But I've got a suggestion to make. If you'll leave this affair in my hands, Nipper, I'll do my best to carry it through. I shall only want one volunteer. Two of us on this job will be sufficient."

"I'm game!" said Hart promptly.

"That's the style!" exclaimed De Valerie. "If we're captured, we sha'n't be much loss. We'll be martyrs to the cause. Now, don't start objecting, because we're determined to go, and we're just as determined that you sha'n't go, Nipper. The commanding officer can't afford to risk capture."

"It's decent of you—jolly decent! I wouldn't let you go if I couldn't rely on you. Get off as soon as you can, and if you're captured sing out at the top of your voices. Then we shall know the worst."

De Valerie and Hart lost no time in making preparations. They descended to the lower part of the building, and two of the boards in the pantry were quietly removed—in total darkness, of course.

Then the pair set off to run the gauntlet to the bicycle shed. A number of other fellows had been aroused, and active preparations were afoot. I superintended the removal of the treacle from the barrel in the store-room. Fortunately, we had plenty of pails and other vessels.

These were half filled with water from the kitchen tap, and then treacle was added. The mixture was not too thick and not too thin, and, squirted from bicycle lamps, it was calculated to cause the maximum amount of discomfort.

"It's going to be a battle," I explained, "but we can't use weapons that will cause any serious harm. We're not out to do any damage to anybody, even though they are a lot of hired roughs."

Our chief aim is to keep the barricades intact, and all we need is a system of defence which will keep the rotters off without doing any harm."

"Well, this ought to make them sweet-tempered, begad!" smiled Sir Montie. "Treacle is just the stuff, you know. It is, really. It's frightfully sweet, at all events. I've got some of the shockin' mess over my bally jacket!"

"You'll have worse troubles than that, old son," I said cheerfully. "What about the daring adventurers outside? Any sign of 'em?"

"Not yet," said Pitt.

He was near the pantry door, and another fellow was at the pantry window. They were in readiness to resist any surprise attack, if one should come. De Valerie and Hart had ventured out into the gloom, and nothing further had been seen or heard of them.

Just when I was beginning to get rather anxious, however, there was a murmur from Pitt. He beckoned to me.

"Owen major reports that he had sighted mysterious forms approaching," whispered Pitt. "We'd better have a look."

I passed into the pantry with Pitt, and we stole to the window. Outside in the Triangle everything was black and still. There was certainly no sign of any impending attack.

Owen major was at the window, and he pointed over in the direction of the gymnasium.

"I saw two figures——" he began.

But at that moment he paused, for some slight sounds came from outside, and along the wall edged a pair of dim forms. It was impossible to tell who they were, so we prepared ourselves for any emergency.

The forms came to the window.

"You there, Owen?" whispered a voice.

"Oh, it's you, then?" I said softly. "Good!"

"Who'd you think it was?" asked Hart—"the enemy?"

"Well, we can't be too careful," I replied. "How did you get on?"

"Great!" whispered De Valerie. "We bagged every giddy pump there was. There's not one left in the shed!"

"Good!"

They scrambled into the pantry, and the barricading boards were screwed in position again. After that we retired

into the big passage and examined the booty. There were pumps of every size and description, and the majority of them were in excellent condition.

"We'll have a little demonstration," I said briskly. "The rubber connections won't be necessary. The liquid can be squirted straight out of the pump. Stand down the other end of the passage, Tommy, and see if I can reach you with the mixture!"

Tommy Watson grinned.

"Oh, certainly!" he said. "I don't think!"

The other fellows grinned, but nobody volunteered to test the effects of the sweet concoction. The pump filled easily, and it projected a miniature column of water and treacle far down the passage.

With seven or eight of those weapons working at each barricade, we should not have much difficulty in keeping off the attackers. The pea-shooters, too, would be useful. A swiftly projected pea is not a pleasant article to receive in the face.

The clock had already struck one, and I saw to the work vigorously. Special parties were placed at every vulnerable point. I was in charge of the barricade in the upper corridor—this, in my opinion, being the most likely point of attack. The corridor was filled with bedsteads and bedding, and once these obstructions were pulled down there would be nothing to prevent a break through.

And so, in readiness, we waited.

With nerves on the stretch, and with ears listening for the slightest sound, we stood in our positions. The Head, no doubt, would believe that we were asleep and off our guard, and he would lead his attack stealthily.

Well, we should be in readiness.

Mr. Martin thought that he would catch us napping; but he would receive a big surprise when the actual moment came. I had not embarked upon this rebellion with the intention of allowing my supporters to be beaten. We were out for victory, and nothing else would suit us.

"Quarter to!" whispered Pitt, as the school clock boomed out solemnly. "Perhaps the bounders won't begin until later——"

"Hist!" I breathed. "Didn't you hear something?"

Everybody remained perfectly silent. And the intense stillness was broken by

the sounds of stealthy footsteps on the stairs—a good many footsteps. And now and again a whispered order.

The attack was almost due to commence!

CHAPTER II.

THE ATTACK.

“WHERE’S Nipper?”

Cecil De Valerie asked that question in the softest whisper.

He came up in the rear, and I slipped noiselessly away from the vicinity of the barricade, and caught hold of him in the darkness.

“What’s the matter?” I asked sharply. “What are you doing up here?”

“We heard sounds two minutes ago,” breathed De Valerie. “I thought I’d better come up and report——”

“The best thing you can do, my son, is to get back to your action station,” I interrupted tensely. “There’s a crowd sweeping up the stairs now—so it’s pretty obvious that the Head means to attack us at two points simultaneously—up here and in the lower passage.”

“My only hat!”

“We shall need all our wits about us to resist the attack,” I went on. “Don’t forget to resort to drastic measures if necessary. And your motto is to be ‘no surrender.’ Fight as you’ve never fought before.”

De Valerie nodded, and silently departed. I returned to my own station, and found the other guards in a considerable state of excitement. Tommy Watson pulled my sleeve as I came up, and put his mouth to my ear.

“Martin’s up here himself,” he breathed. “I just heard him whispering.”

“That means that we’re to receive the brunt of the attack,” I said. “All the better. We’ve got all the best men up here.”

That period of waiting was decidedly nerve trying. We were afraid to speak, and afraid to move, and we were in total darkness. Hubbard was standing ready by the electric light switch. When I sang out the order he would turn the light on in a flash, and we should get busy.

I listened intently and heard the Head’s whispered voice.

“Go carefully now, men,” he said under his breath. “The obstructions are just in front of you. Pull them down as quietly as you can to begin with. If the boys come out, use all your strength. Break through in one tremendous effort. If the barricade is removed within five minutes I will double your pay.”

“Right you are, guv’nor!”

“Leave it to us, sir.”

The voices were rather hoarse and beery, and I easily guessed that Mr. Martin had “doped” his helpers well with beer and spirits before leading them to the attack. And at that moment came the sound of the barricade being touched.

The period of waiting was over.

“Right, Hubby!” I shouted. “Up with the lights!”

Click!

The corridor became flooded with electric light, and several hoarse gasps sounded from behind the barricade. Through the spaces we could see a motley crowd of rough looking men and youths. The Head stood behind, well in the rear, and his face was glowering with rage.

“So the young brats are ready!” he roared. “Very well! Go ahead, men! Pull down those obstructions——”

“Hold on!” I shouted. “Listen to me, you chaps! You’ve been hired to dig us out of this part of the building, but you’ve got no quarrel against us. If you’re foolish enough to attack, we shall resist!”

“Stow yer lip, you young cub!” roared a beery voice. “At ’em mates!”

Half-a-dozen of the men rushed at the barricade, and within a few seconds they succeeded in pulling down one of the bedsteads. During those seconds our peashooters were being filled, and the pumps charged.

“Fire!” I roared.

Hiss-ss!

A shower of peas rattled against the faces of the enemy. Two or three of the men staggered back, cursing. Others ducked their heads and continued. Then the pumps got to work. Out of every crevice in the barricade squirted a stream of sticky liquid. It spurted over the faces of the attackers; it got into their eyes; it tangled their hair. They were momentarily blinded.

“Gug-gug-groooh!”

"You young 'ounds—gug-gug-gug!"

The attackers roared with dismay and consternation. And the defenders yelled with triumph—and never for a second did they relax their efforts. The rain of peas continued, and the spurts of treacle poured out continuously. It was a stout defence.

"Give it to 'em!"

"Let the rotters have it hot!"

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth. "Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

"Are we going to surrender?"

"No!"

"Are we going to beat the rotters off?"

"No—Yes!" shouted the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of the gravity of the situation, a good many fellows were laughing with sheer excitement. It was undoubtedly an extraordinary situation. And for the moment Mr. Martin's hired ruffians were held in check.

It was the same downstairs.

De Valerie and his men were having a stiff time, but there was no danger of the defences being broken. The crowd of roughs there was not such a large one, and the juniors had no difficulty. The peas and the treacle did the rest. The attackers were driven off with comparative ease.

It was in the upper corridor that the chief attack was concentrated. Mr. Martin, in his excitement and rage, rushed forward until he was within the zone of fire. He was determined to smash down the barricades.

"Put some energy into it, you fools!" he shouted. "You're not going to be beaten by these infernal schoolboys! Use your strength——"

"Ave a go yourself, guv'nor," snapped one of the men. "See 'ow you like a pint of sticky mess in your eye!"

"The stuff can't hurt you," roared the Head. "Why don't you—Groooh! You! Gug-gug-garoo!"

The Head sat down abruptly in the corridor. Several juniors had taken the opportunity to concentrate their fire upon Mr. Martin. The result was disastrous—for the bully of St. Frank's!

Peas rattled upon his head and face in dozens; squirts of treacle smothered his face until he was hardly recognisable. He attempted to pick himself up, but

another storm of "bullets" beat him down again.

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do you like that, Mr. Tyrant Martin?" yelled Watson.

Mr. Martin forgot his dignity, and crawled out of range on all fours. When he rose to his feet behind the crowd, he was nearly insane with fury. And he egged his men on in violent terms.

The fellows certainly did their best. They advanced again and again, but were beaten back by the hail of peas and the streams of sticky liquid. Several of the men retired altogether.

"Keep it up!" I shouted grimly.

"We're winning!"

"Rats!" bawled Handforth. "We've won!"

"Of course we have!"

"We haven't won yet," I declared. "These rotters will make another charge in a minute—you see. And we shall have to be well prepared for it. Have you got those spare pumps ready, Hart?"

"Yes," replied Augustus Hart.

"Charged?"

"They're full up," said Hart. "At the word from you we'll come into action. We're the relief party!"

I nodded with satisfaction. Hart and half-a-dozen others had done nothing so far. They were waiting in the rear, and they would be used if the present system of defence failed.

And, as I feared, it seemed likely to fail—and for a very obvious reason. The attackers had been beaten first—but they soon found that the peas were fairly harmless, and that the treacle was similarly harmless.

The peas stung somewhat, but the men were tough. The treacle, provided the attackers kept their heads down, did no harm whatever. And, once the men were smothered, it mattered little whether they received further doses.

So the roughs charged with lowered heads, and several of them succeeded in getting right up to the barricade. Then they commenced to tear down the obstructions. Once through, the position would be grave.

"Let 'em have it!" I roared. "Fire!"

The order was quite unnecessary, for the fellows were working overtime. Peas were dispatched in scores every minute;

the treacle was used up at a surprising rate—and the corridor, in consequence, was already in a shocking condition. But we didn't care about this.

"They're beating us!" gasped Pitt, after a few moments longer. "They're breaking down the barrier, and we can't stop 'em!"

"We've got to stop them!" I snapped grimly.

I examined the position with care. Half the attackers were right close to the barricade, working furiously to pull down the bedsteads and other articles. Others were standing back clearing their eyes of treacle.

The roughs were attacking in series, as it were. When some of the men became too sticky to go on they retired, and their places were occupied by the fellows who had been having a breather.

Thus, a continuous assault was being made—and the effect was disconcerting. Piece by piece, the barricade was being torn down—and the inevitable result of such an onslaught would be that we should meet with disaster.

I made up my mind in three seconds.

"Stand back, you chaps!" I shouted.

"Stand back?" gasped Griffith. "Why we're being whacked——"

"Stand back!" I repeated. "Make way for the relief force!"

"Good!" yelled Hart. "We're here."

"Then let it go—for all you're worth!" I exclaimed briskly.

Hart and his men came to the fore, their weapons—bicycle pumps—at the ready. They were only a handful, but they were destined to turn the scale in our favour. They applied their weapons vigorously.

And the result was remarkable.

"Press on, men—press your attack!" shouted Mr. Martin. "You'll have that barricade down within three minutes if you use your energy!"

"Leave it to us, sir!" shouted one of the men. "We're gettin' the better of the young dogs!"

"Good, Briggs—good!" said the Head.

"Within two minutes we'll be through, sir," panted Briggs, who was the leader of the gang. "We'll—shu-shu-shush—A-tish-choo!"

Mr. Briggs sneezed violently. His companions sneezed violently. And quite a number of the defenders sneezed also.

The meaning of this change was obvious.

The pumps, held by Hart and Co., contained pepper!

And this powder was sent out in clouds through the barricade. The majority of the pepper filled the corridor like a fog, beyond the defences. The attackers found themselves gasping and choking in the grip of the stuff.

They breathed it down in clouds; it entered their eyes, totally blinding them for the time being. And pepper, when taken in such quantities, is a decidedly painful proposition.

I had only resorted to it as a last measure.

Hart and his men did not cease their efforts. As soon as the pumps were empty, full ones were brought—there was a huge canister of pepper available. I had discovered it in the store-room, and realised its value at once.

"A-tish-choo!"

"Oh my hat!" gasped Handforth. "It's—it's—choo!"

"Keep up the attack, men!" roared Mr. Martin. "You are winning——"

"Stow yer lip!" snarled one of the men. "Come an' try—A-a-a-tish-choo! Cuss these kids! Grooh! A-a-a-tish-choo!"

"We can't stand it, mates," gasped another man. "I'm fair blind!"

"A-tish-choo!"

The men were absolutely helpless, and they reeled away from the barricade, with smarting eyes and stinging throats. Mr. Martin's orders were unheeded, and the crowd charged down the corridor.

"And if you come again, you'll get it worse!" I yelled. "We've got enough pepper here to keep back an army!"

"You young dog!" bellowed the Head. "I'll teach you that you cannot play these tricks upon me, confound you! Briggs! Order your men——"

Briggs swore violently.

"We didn't come 'ere to be blinded!" he snapped. "I ain't goin' to keep this game on, for one—an' I know these blokes won't have no more of it. You can deal with them young cubs yerself!"

"I will double your money——"

"Yus, an' we'll be blinded!" roared one of the men. "Go to blazes!"

"We've done with you—we're goin' 'ome!"

"Yus, come on, mates!"

And the whole crowd of men, still half-blinded, staggered down the stairs into the open-air. Mr. Martin raved in vain. His faithless army would not stand by him. He was deserted completely.

And a perfect roar of triumph went up from the rebels.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"We've gained the day!"

"Three cheers for the revolution!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll never give in—we're out for victory!"

"Begad! Rather!"

"I guess we're havin' a real dandy time!" grinned Farnan. "Say, the way we beat off them galoots was real bully!"

"We'd better not crow too soon," I said warningly. "We're victorious at present, and I think we shall be left alone for the rest of the night. But we mustn't be too certain—and we mustn't relax our efforts."

"Wise words, O mighty Nipper," grinned Pitt.

Meanwhile, the situation in the lower passage was almost identical with our own. The gang of roughs down there had been a much smaller one, and the pepper ruse had not really been necessary. But De Valerie had decided upon it, nevertheless. And the result was entirely satisfactory.

The attacks were beaten off, and the gang fled into the open long before the fight was finished upstairs.

When I went down to see how things were getting on, I found the passage quiet, and De Valerie looking pleased with himself.

"Everything O.K. here," he said. "Armstrong just came down from your barricade and told us that the situation is good. Was he right?"

"Yes," I replied. "We've beaten the blighters off—but as I told the chaps just now, we mustn't be careless. The Head's in a towering rage, and he's defeated. And a man in that condition is dangerous. We shall probably have further trouble before the morning—so we mustn't relax our vigilance."

"Of course not," agreed De Valerie. "We'll keep on the alert all night."

"We've beaten the bully this time, anyhow," ejaculated Grey, with satisfaction. "I reckon it's a complete triumph for the rebel Remove!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"And if there are any more attacks, we'll deal with them in the same way!" declared Watson. "The Head's an ass if he thinks that he can smash the rebellion by hiring a crowd of Bannington roughs!"

"We'll never surrender," said De Valerie grimly. "And this little episode ought to convince the Head that we're in earnest, and that we mean to use every effort to maintain our position. There's only one method of getting us to throw up the sponge."

"And what's that?"

"The Head's got to give way," declared De Valerie. "As soon as he submits to our terms, we'll return to normal duties. And he'll have to submit, sooner or later. It's the only course."

I nodded.

"Perhaps so," I said. "But the Head won't submit yet. He won't give in until every resource has failed. You've got to realise, my sons, that this is going to be a tremendously stiff fight. And if we mean to win, we shall have to keep up our courage and determination."

And the other rebels knew that I was speaking the truth.

We had won so far, but how long would the game last?

CHAPTER III.

RATHER MYSTERIOUS.

MR. HOWARD MARTIN was in a fine fury.

Sticky and uncomfortable, his temper had already been tried to the utmost. But he felt like letting himself really go when his paid roughs gave up the fight and retreated into the open air.

The Head strode out into the Triangle, his brow black.

Briggs and the other men were standing in a group against the Ancient House steps. The majority of them were blowing their noses, and they were apparently engaged in a sneezing competition.

The noise they made, in fact, was so considerable that a good many fellows

were at the dormitory windows, above—Third Formers and seniors. There were faces even at some of the windows of the College House.

"What's the trouble down there?" sang out Chambers of the Fifth.

"Go back to bed, you infernal young busybody!" shouted the Head furiously.

"Go back to bed at once!"

"I was only asking——"

"Another word, boy, and I will come up there and cane you!" bawled the Head. "Go in—everybody! Close all those windows! By Heaven! If my orders are not obeyed I will make some of you smart!"

Most of the windows were closed down hurriedly, and there were no further inquiries from Chambers. The Head approached his hired gang, and regarded the men with sour contempt.

"Well?" he snapped. "Are you ready?"

"Ready to go home—yes!" said Briggs coarsely.

"You fool!" exclaimed Mr. Martin. "You must attack those barricades again——"

"Not likely, guv'nor," said Briggs. "These chaps have had enough o' them blamed kids. We've finished for to-night!"

The Head stamped his foot.

"Finished!" he exclaimed harshly. "You must be mad! I engaged you to rout those confounded boys out of their stronghold—and you must carry out your agreement. Come, no nonsense. Get back inside!"

Several of the men growled audibly.

"Go and bury yourself!" snapped one of them.

"Y'see?" said Mr. Briggs. "They won't 'ave no more of it, Mr. Martin. You jest spoke about an agreement. It strikes me, you didn't tell me what there was to be done. You said we simply 'ad to dig out a parcel of naughty schoolboys——"

"I told you the truth," snapped the Head.

"Mebbe," agreed Mr. Briggs. "But you forgot to mention that the boys would use treacle an' peas an' that blamed pepper. We didn't come here for that game, guv'nor, an' we ain't 'avin' any more of it."

"You cowardly hounds," raved the

Head. "Do you call yourselves men? Are you going to be beaten by those confounded brats——"

"Look here, guv'nor, talkin' won't do no good," interrupted Mr. Briggs grimly.

"We agreed to come here, an' you've given us 'arf our money. We want the other 'arf—an' then we'll clear!"

"You dolt!" he snarled. "Do you imagine for one moment that I will pay you a farthing? I was a fool to give you anything at all!"

"Look here, Mr. Martin——"

"I refuse to hear anything," exclaimed the Head sharply. "You have failed miserably in this affair, and now you have the utter audacity to demand more money!"

"You agreed——"

"I agreed upon nothing!" roared the Head. "The money I was to pay was only available if the rebels were captured. You have failed, and you ought to think yourselves very lucky that you have got half the arranged sum. Why don't you pull yourselves together, and earn your pay in full? Make another effort——"

"It's no good, guv'nor—we've finished," said Mr. Briggs. "An' wot's more, we don't leave this 'ere place until we get that other money."

"Then I regret to inform you that you must remain for a very long time!" shouted Mr. Martin thickly. "You will not get another penny from me——"

"Oh, won't we?" roared Briggs. "Just you pay up, or you'll find yourself in trouble—you blamed swindler."

"What!" gasped the Head.

"Let's break the bloomin' winders!" yelled one of the men furiously. "Why, if he won't pay, we'll smash up the whole darned school. Grab them stones, mates. There's plenty lyin' about!"

There was a rush for the stones, and the Head panted with alarm.

"Control yourselves, you madmen!" he shouted.

"Will you pay us?"

"Confound you no——"

"Then pelt the old rotter with stones!" roared one of the roughs.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Three or four stones whistled past Mr. Martin's head, and he fairly shook with fear. His precious men were turning upon him—and it was exactly what he deserved. Having hired the scum of

Bannington, he could not very well expect them to be gentle in their methods.

"Stop!" he gasped thickly. "I—I will pay!"

"Old on, mates!" sang out Mr. Briggs. "The old bloke is goin' to pay up. You don't want to get excited!"

The roughs dropped their stones, and gathered in a crowd, and Mr. Briggs received on behalf of the others the remainder of the promised sum. And it was only then that the men consented to take their departure.

They went off, shouting and laughing in derision. And the Head was not very gratified as he heard those sounds. He had paid his money, and there was nothing whatever to show for it.

Needless to say, I was at one of the dormitory windows during the discussion, and many other fellow were there, too. We saw the men go off, and we knew there was no trickery about that. I heaved a sigh of relief as I turned to Sir Montie and Tommy, who were beside me.

"Good!" I said. "We're all right now."

"Rather, old boy," agreed Sir Montie. "There's no fear of another attack to-night. It's a frightfully good victory for the Remove."

"Hurrah!"

"Three groans for the Head!"

The groans were executed with much realism, and Mr. Martin, standing down in the Triangle, gnashed his teeth with rage. He strode away to his own house, muttering fiercely to himself.

He was not the only master who was awake, however.

The time was between two and three in the morning, but Mr. Simpson Wrott was active.

He was fully dressed, and had apparently been wideawake for some time. And he stood in the shadow of the trees in the Triangle.

Mr. Simpson Wrott was the new Housemaster of the Ancient House. Mr. Martin was pleased with him on the whole, for he treated the boys roughly, and bullied them at every turn.

But the Head was not aware of the fact that Mr. Wrott's punishments were generally of the lightest variety. His bark was terrible, but his bite was not to be feared. And the Head, so far, was not aware of the fact that Mr. Wrott's sympathies were entirely with the boys.

There was an excellent reason for this.

Even I was unaware of it at the time, but the surly Mr. Wrott was none other than Nelson Lee himself—in disguise. The gov'nor was acting his part with superb skill, and nobody in the whole school had the slightest suspicion of the actual truth.

Nelson Lee had been sacked by Mr. Howard Martin—he had been dismissed as summarily as a slovenly boot boy. And the famous schoolmaster-detective was not the kind of man to take such treatment lying down.

Instead of defying the Head openly, he had left the school—with apparent meekness. But he had returned a few days later—in the character of Mr. Wrott. And there was an excellent reason for his surprising tactics.

Lee had good cause to believe that Mr. Howard Martin was not the gentleman he affected to be. He was a bully and a cad, but most of the fellows thought that Mr. Martin was honourable in other respects.

Nelson Lee thought otherwise. He had, in fact, certain grave suspicions concerning the Head, and he decided that the only method of investigating the matter was to be on the spot—in a character other than his own.

And so he had come to St. Frank's as "Mr. Wrott." The Head believed him to be a rather foolish person, ready to follow his lead in everything. And Lee allowed Martin to maintain this view. It suited his purpose.

Nelson Lee had known full well that Mr. Martin had intended routing out the rebels late that night.

And Lee had been waiting—in readiness. I learned, some little time afterwards, that the gov'nor's plan was to frustrate the Head if the barricades had been pulled down.

As "Mr. Wrott," Lee would have blundered on the scene, and would have given us an opportunity of retrieving the position. Fortunately, his good services in this direction had not been required.

But there was other work for the gov'nor that night.

He had been about to enter the Ancient House, in order to return to his bedroom, when he changed his mind.

For he became aware of something which altered his plan.

Mr. Howard Martin had appeared. And now the Head was attired in an overcoat, muffler, and a cap was pulled

over his brow. It was evident that Mr. Martin was determined to venture afar. "Ah, this looks rather interesting," murmured Nelson Lee. "I should not be at all surprised if the excellent Mr. Martin is making another visit to Bellton Abbey. I must certainly follow this up."

The Head strode out of the private gateway, and walked briskly down the lane. Nelson Lee had no difficulty in following. The famous investigator was a past-master in the art of shadowing, and there was no possibility of Mr. Martin discovering the truth.

As Lee had surmised, the Head was indeed making tracks for the old ruins of Bellton Abbey—an isolated place situated some distance from the school, and reached by means of several foot-paths.

Only a night or so earlier Nelson Lee had tracked the Head in a similar manner. And he had made the somewhat astonishing discovery that a stranger was concealed in a dungeon far below the ruins.

Lee had his own suspicions as to who this stranger was, and why he was there. He was also determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. For, he was assured, as soon as he could establish his facts, Mr. Martin's reign at St. Frank's would come to a most abrupt termination.

On a former occasion Lee had heard the mysterious stranger, but had not seen him. And, upon investigating the tunnel, he had found nothing whatever. The unknown man was in a place of concealment.

To-night, if possible, Lee intended to go a step further.

His task of following the Head was all the easier because he knew where Mr. Martin was bound for. And when the old abbey came within view, Nelson Lee slackened his pace.

He halted a few steps further on, and saw Mr. Martin vanish amid the ruins. This time Nelson Lee did not attempt to follow. He stood quite still, in the shadow of some bushes, waiting.

"There is no object in my venturing further," he told himself. "I might just as well wait here, in perfect security, until Mr. Martin returns. After that there are some interesting possibilities."

The affair was rather mysterious, and it was for this reason that it appealed to Lee all the more.

His wait was not a very long one. After twenty minutes had elapsed, the Head reappeared, and he strode away down the footpath, entirely oblivious of the fact that his movements had been watched.

He vanished completely, and Nelson Lee made quite sure that the Head had really gone before he took any action on his own account. Then he moved cautiously forward and entered the ruins.

He found an old stairway, and proceeded down this until he reached a damp tunnel. An electric torch aided his progress now, and as he walked along he found that the tunnel became dry further down.

But it ended abruptly—and blankly.

A solid wall faced the detective, and there was no sign whatever of a doorway. Stonework surrounded him. The arched roof overhead was solid; the floor was composed of the earth itself.

But Nelson Lee knew that there was a doorway of some kind, and he resolved to test the matter at once.

"Are you there?" he shouted loudly.

And his voice, strangely enough, was exactly similar to that of Mr. Howard Martin. He did not have to wait long for a verification of his suspicions. For an answer came out of the very walls.

"Of course I'm here," said the muffled voice. "What have you come back for?"

"Open the door, and I will tell you," shouted Lee.

And his electric torch, shedding its light upon the dull walls, revealed the fact that a portion of the stonework moved backwards. A black space appeared, and it grew wider and wider.

Nelson Lee entered.

But as to what took place in that secret dungeon—well, I'm afraid I can't record that just now. The affair was decidedly mysterious.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER REBEL.

BREAKFAST was a great success in the rebel stronghold.

Fatty Little, as chief cook, was in his element, and he certainly prepared some remarkable dishes. He was justly proud of himself, and the

majority of the juniors were perfectly satisfied with his efforts.

"You'll do, Fatty," I declared approvingly. "As long as we've got the grub, you'll be able to keep us alive for weeks to come. These preserved eggs are ripping—and you cook the bacon to a turn."

The fat boy of St. Frank's beamed.

"Well, I've had a bit of experience at cooking, you know," he said. "It's a hobby of mine. Anything connected with grub interests me."

"As long as we have decent food, and manage to keep off the attacks, we shall be all serene," said Pitt comfortably.

"The Head seems to have given it up as a bad job—for the time being, anyhow."

"He'll have to give it up altogether before long," I said grimly. "A thing like this can't be kept secret, and it'll get to the ears of the Governors soon. They simply can't allow this state of affairs to exist—and then there'll be a big inquiry and everything will be all serene. So all we've got to do is to hold out. It's simply a siege, and while we hang on tight we shall be O.K."

"Of course we shall—we all know that," said Handforth. "What's the good of telling us stale things of that sort? Which reminds me that these biscuits are jolly stale."

"Well, it's no good grumbling——"

"Why can't we have bread?" demanded Handforth. "There's a ton of flour in the store-room, and heaps of those preserved eggs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you grinning at, you asses," roared Handforth.

"You don't use eggs to make bread," said Fatty Little, grinning.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "How the dickens are you going to make it light without eggs?"

"Well, you can use yeast, or baking-powder," said Fatty, who had a thorough knowledge of his subject. "We don't happen to have the yeast, but there's a tin of powder, and I mean to make a big batch of bread for tea."

"Pity you didn't make some for breakfast," said Handforth. "These biscuits are like dog cakes."

"That's all the more reason you should enjoy them," grinned Pitt.

Handforth rose to his feet.

"Are you calling me a dog?" he roared, rolling up his sleeves.

"Peace, my sons—peace!" I said soothingly. "We don't want to get into any squabbles. We've got to be all amiable and patient. As soon as we start rowing, there'll be trouble. And don't grumble at the food, Handy."

"I wasn't grumbling——"

"Well, it sounded like it," I said. "You ought to be jolly pleased that you've got some first-rate grub to pack into your tummy. I reckon that Fatty has been doing wonders."

Jimmy Little beamed more extensively than ever.

"Just wait until dinner-time," he said. "I'm going to open some tins of meat, and prepare a hot dinner. We haven't got any potatoes, but biscuits won't go so bad with a lot of gravy. And I'll make a pudding to finish with."

"What kind of a pudding?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"A plum duff."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "Plum duffs are as stale as the dickens. We're always having 'em. I'll tell you what, I'll make a currant pudding——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll make a currant pudding which will surprise you!" roared Handforth defiantly. "It'll absolutely surprise you!"

"Yes, I bet it will!" grinned Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And kill us, too—probably," added Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you can jolly well keep out of it, Handy," said Fatty Little warmly. "Cooking is my department, and I'm not going to have you butting in. Great pancakes! If everybody wanted to cook——"

"What's the matter with pancakes?" interrupted Watson. "You mentioned 'em just now, Fatty. Why shouldn't we have pancakes for dinner?"

"Because Fatty couldn't make 'em," said Hubbard.

"Oh, couldn't he?" roared Little. "I'll show you whether I can make pancakes! We'll have 'em for dinner."

"Oh, good!"

"And I vote for currant pudding," said Handforth. "Look here, I'll tell you what. Give me a corner of the kitchen, Fatty, and I'll make that pudding on my

own. And if I don't make a success of it I'll eat my hat."

"We'll make you eat the pudding!" I chuckled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was very enthusiastic, and as soon as the breakfast things were washed up, he set about making his currant pudding. Church and McClure, his faithful study mates, attempted to evade their leader, but Handforth was not to be tricked. He pressed his chums into his service, and they were kept busy. In fact, many of the fellows declared that Church and McClure made the pudding, and that Handforth's share in the crime was nil.

Fatty Little's life was not worth living that morning. It was really a wonder he succeeded in preparing any dinner at all. For when Handforth was not roaring at the top of his voice, he was punching Church and McClure.

Pieces of duff and any amount of currants were thrown about the kitchen wholesale. And those fellows who happened to look into the kitchen during operations were quite determined to have nothing to do with Handforth's concoction.

"Dash it all, there's a limit, you know," remarked Owen major. "I'm blessed if I'm going to eat his beastly currant pudding—after the currants have been used to wipe the floor with!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He actually picked 'em off the floor with a shovel!" said Owen major warmly.

But even Handforth was not quite so bad as that. He had shovelled some currants up, but they had been used as fuel for the fire. Owen major was under a mistaken impression that those currants had been incorporated in the pudding.

Considerable interest was evinced among the fellows when dinner-time was nearly due. There had been no activity during the morning; we had not even caught a single glimpse of the Head.

The rest of St. Frank's continued the even tenor of its way. Lessons proceeded as usual with the other Forms. But there was a feeling of unrest in the school which could not be mistaken.

The gong sounded its welcome note, calling the rebels to dinner, and it said much for Fatty Little's organisation, that the gong sounded almost exactly at the same moment as the big bell rang

for the ordinary dinner in the big dining-hall.

The first course was excellent in every way. The meat was prepared in a special manner of Fatty's own—a kind of a hot hash, with plenty of gravy. Unfortunately, we had no potatoes, but the biscuits were available in plenty, and these were all right when soaked in the gravy.

And after that came some very excellent pancakes. Fatty had been working like a Trojan all the morning, assisted by half-a-dozen willing helpers.

Handforth's currant pudding made its appearance amid much curiosity.

He produced it from a large cloth, and it was not a very good sign when the pudding fell upon the large dish with dire results—to the dish. It cracked in pieces, and there was a yell of laughter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Isn't it light?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "It was McClure's fault, the silly idiot!"

"Mine!" howled McClure.

"What did you want to drop the pudding like that for?" demanded Handy. "You know jolly well that the pudding is a solid article——"

"This one looks like lead!" remarked Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has anybody got a hacksaw?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you can sneer all you like!" snapped Handforth. "You won't sneer after you've tasted this pudding!"

"We shall crawl away and die!" said De Valerie.

Handforth snorted, and at last he managed to get the pudding safely upon another dish. Its appearance was not appetising. It was drab in colour, and it had a somewhat solid appearance which did not speak well for its edibility. And when Handforth proceeded to carve there was fresh laughter.

The amateur chef used a huge carving knife, and he found it necessary to apply all his strength in order to force the blade through the pudding. And when he removed the slice it came out in a thick slab.

"Who wants a piece?" asked Handforth briskly.

There were no answers, and Handy looked surprised.

"Hold out your plate," he exclaimed.

"We're having pancakes, thanks," said Grey smoothly. "We can't manage two courses, you know, Handy, and I always prefer pancakes to cannon-balls."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny ass!" sneered Handforth. "You needn't have any pudding if you don't want it. I don't care a jot. There's all the more for Church and McClure and I!"

Church and McClure started.

"Eh?" said Church blankly.

"Hold your tongue, my son!"

"I—er—I— The fact is, Handy, I'm having pancakes, thanks," said Church. "I—I don't think I could manage any of that pudding to-day."

"Same here," said McClure hastily.

Handforth laid down his knife.

"I don't want to cause any trouble," he said deliberately. "It would give me great pain to start punching noses here. But if you fellows think you're going to scorn this pudding of mine, you're mistaken! Will you take a piece quietly, or shall I ram it down your throats? Just say the word!"

"Really, Handy——"

"Throw slices of the pudding at their giddy heads," advised Tommy Watson. "One piece will be enough, Handy. They'll be stunned for hours——"

"You silly ass!" howled Handforth. "Buck up, Arnold McClure. I suppose you know I'm waiting for your plate?" And yours, too, Walter Church!"

Handforth's chums looked at one another rather hopelessly. They knew there was no getting out of the ordeal, and at last they gave in. Handforth triumphantly placed huge slices of his famous pudding upon their plates.

He also helped himself, and took several huge bites. The other juniors watched him with interest—and Church and McClure with anxiety. But Handforth, except for a somewhat sickly smile, seemed in no danger.

"It's ripping!" he said warmly. "Just taste it!"

Church and McClure tasted it. They didn't like it, and when asked to describe what its flavour was, they were completely at a loss. As McClure said, it was like nothing else on earth.

But, in order to save trouble, they

consumed their portions. The other juniors were not exactly surprised, an hour later, to find the chums of Study D looking decidedly bad.

"Anything the matter, Handy?" I inquired, coming across Handforth at the bottom of the stairs, sitting in a doubled-up position.

"No, not at all!" gasped Handforth, jumping to his feet, and clutching at the balustrade for support. "I feel—ow!—ripping, thanks. Ow! Oh, my hat!"

He doubled up again, and his face was pale and drawn.

"It's that pudding!" I said grimly.

"Pudding!" echoed Handforth. "Oh, don't rot! I'm going to punch Fatty's nose before long!"

"What for?"

"For giving us that awful meat concoction of his!" said Handforth, with difficulty. "It's—ow!—it's made me feel horribly bad!"

"You just said you were all right!" I grinned. "Take my advice, and get into bed. The best thing you can do is to sleep it off, old son. Indigestion is a painful complaint, and——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Handforth.

He dragged himself upstairs, and a roar of laughter from up above told me that the other juniors were not exactly sympathetic towards the sufferer. Church and McClure were already up there, writhing.

And while the unfortunates were doing their best to get over their agony, a most interesting little drama was taking place in the Triangle. Tommy Watson informed me that the Head was there, and I was rather interested.

"It might mean another attack," I said briskly. "We'd better keep our eyes skinned, Tommy. Let's get to a window."

"That's what I thought," said Watson.

We marched away to the dormitory window, and leaned out over the sill. Mr. Martin was out there, in the Triangle. He was talking to Jesson, of the Sixth. Jesson was a prefect, and one of the most unpopular fellows in the school. He was something of a bully, and it was generally thought that he would do his utmost to keep in the good graces of Mr. Martin.

We could hear the conversation between the pair quite easily. An argument seemed to be in progress. A crowd of Third-Formers were standing at a respectable distance, watching the proceedings with interest.

"You know very well, Jesson, that I strongly object to fancy attire of any sort," the Head was saying. "It is your duty to set the younger boys a good example, and not a bad one."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Jesson, in a humble voice, "but I didn't think I should offend you with this waistcoat."

"You do offend me, Jesson—you offend my vision, and I must request you to remove the garment," declared Mr. Martin. "I had occasion to remonstrate with one of the junior boys on the same subject, but I did not think I should find it necessary to point out such a gross fault in a senior."

"Very well, sir," said Jesson respectfully. "I'll remove the waistcoat between now and tea-time——"

"You will remove it at once, Jesson," snapped the Head.

"But I'm just off to the village, sir——"

"Your plans do not interest me, boy," interrupted Mr. Martin. "You'll go indoors this instant, and remove that atrocity!"

"The which, sir?"

"The atrocity!"

"That's rather strong, sir," protested Jesson, with some warmth. "I've always considered this waistcoat to be very quiet and tasteful. I don't see any reason why you should talk about it in that way!"

The Head frowned.

"It is not my intention to argue with you, Jesson," he said sourly. "Neither does it interest me to hear your own views with regard to the abomination you are at present wearing. I have already ordered you to go indoors, and unless you do so at once I shall be compelled to adopt severe measures."

Jesson's eyes gleamed.

"It's not usual for a prefect to be threatened in that way, sir," he said sharply. "I don't like being ordered about in front of these kids——"

"I don't care what you like!" shouted the Head hotly. "Do as I say, Jesson, or you will be sorry. You infernal young dog! If you dare to answer me

back again I will bring this cane across your shoulders!"

The Head whisked his walking cane threateningly.

"My hat!" breathed Watson. "It looks like trouble."

"Good old Jesson!" said Pitt. "I don't often say a good word for him, but he's showing the right spirit now. If I was in his shoes I'd take that cane away from the Head and snap it in two."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "Just look at that!"

Everybody was looking without my advice. For that little argument between the Head and Jesson promised to end in something very different. The prefect had already lost his temper, and Mr. Martin's threat appeared to incense him more.

"You'd better not try those games on, sir!" he exclaimed, after a short pause.

"Please don't forget that I'm a prefect—and not a kid. I'm not in the habit of being hit with a cane!"

"Oh, indeed!" barked the Head.

"Perhaps I shall make a habit of hitting you with a cane, Jesson! You appear to forget that I am your Headmaster, and you'd better realise that I will have no nonsense from you. Go indoors at once, you insubordinate young scoundrel!"

Jesson clenched his fists.

"You'd better be careful, sir!" he shouted thickly.

"Careful!" raved the Head. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am not willing to stand much more of your browbeating and bullying!" shouted Jesson fiercely.

"I'm just about fed up with your confounded tyranny, Mr. Martin! I don't care a snap for you!"

"Hurrah!" roared several Removites.

"Good old Jesson!"

"Go for him!"

"Down with the tyrant!"

Those shouts seemed to enrage Mr. Martin more than anything else. He raised his cane and brought it down sharply.

Swish!

It landed upon Jesson's shoulders with a thwack, and Jesson staggered. For a moment he stood quite still, pale with anger. His eyes were blazing, and his hands quivered. He was at the end of his patience.

"You—you rotter!" he shouted violently.

Crash!

Jesson's fist lunged out. Mr. Martin attempted to dodge, and he succeeded in partially missing the blow. But it caught him on the shoulder. He reeled, and fell in a heap to the ground.

"Hurrah!" yelled the Removites.

"Oh, good man!"

"Go for him, Jessy!"

Jesson bent over the fallen Headmaster. But he pulled himself back, suddenly realising the enormity of his offence. And the prefect stood there, pale and shaking. His eyes gleamed with anxiety.

He had knocked down the Head!

"You—you dangerous young reprobate!" snarled Mr. Martin savagely. "By Heaven! You shall suffer for this outburst, Jesson!"

"You brought it on yourself, sir——"

"Enough! Not another word, sir!" stormed the Head. "I am absolutely amazed that you, a prefect, should dare to strike your Headmaster. Your crime is beyond redemption, Jesson, and I can only take one course."

"And what's that, sir?" asked Jesson.

"You are expelled!"

Jesson staggered, and an audible murmur arose from the watching Third Formers.

"Don't you go, Jesson!" shouted one of the rebels. "Defy the beast—just the same as we've done. We'll take you in."

"Rather!"

"Come on, Jessy!"

"You are quite welcome, old man!"

Jesson looked up at the windows, and his flushed face took on a grim expression. I was certain that the prefect would join the rebel Removites—and I was not exactly pleased with the prospect.

Jesson was a blustering sort of fellow, and if he came among us he would probably cause trouble. Furthermore, he had knocked the Head down, and there was really no excuse for that.

However, under the special circumstances, I was quite willing to admit him into the circle. I couldn't very well refuse after the other fellows had invited him. And, after all, he was now on our side, against the tyrant.

"Go indoors at once, boy, and pack your things!" snapped the Head curtly.

"You will leave this school by the first

available train, and I will write to your father, explaining that you are a black-guardly young scoundrel——"

"Stop!" snapped Jesson fiercely.

"What! What did you say?"

"You can write to my father what you like, but I'm not going away from this school!" roared the prefect. "I don't recognise your authority——"

"You—you——"

"I don't regard you as my Headmaster," shouted Jesson. "You're an outsider, and you can go to the dickens!"

"Good—good heavens!" gasped the Head. "I have never been so insulted——"

But Jesson was walking away. He strode briskly into the Ancient House, leaving the Head speechless in the Triangle. The instant he arrived in the lobby, Jesson broke into a run and pelted upstairs.

He raced across the landing, and halted against the barricade, glancing anxiously over his shoulder.

"I say, you kids!" he panted huskily.

I was already waiting behind the barricade, for I anticipated this move. I had been certain that Jesson would come to the barricade.

"What's the matter, Jesson?" I asked briskly.

"Let me in, for goodness sake!" gasped the senior. "I've been sacked, and I've defied the Head——"

"I know," I interrupted. "I heard everything from the window, Jesson."

"Then let me in, quick!" said Jesson hoarsely. "The Head might be coming up, and I shall be collared."

"Right-ho!" I said briskly.

Low down in the barricade a rolled-up mattress was jammed against one wall. This could be removed easily, and it was then possible for a fairly large fellow to squirm his way through.

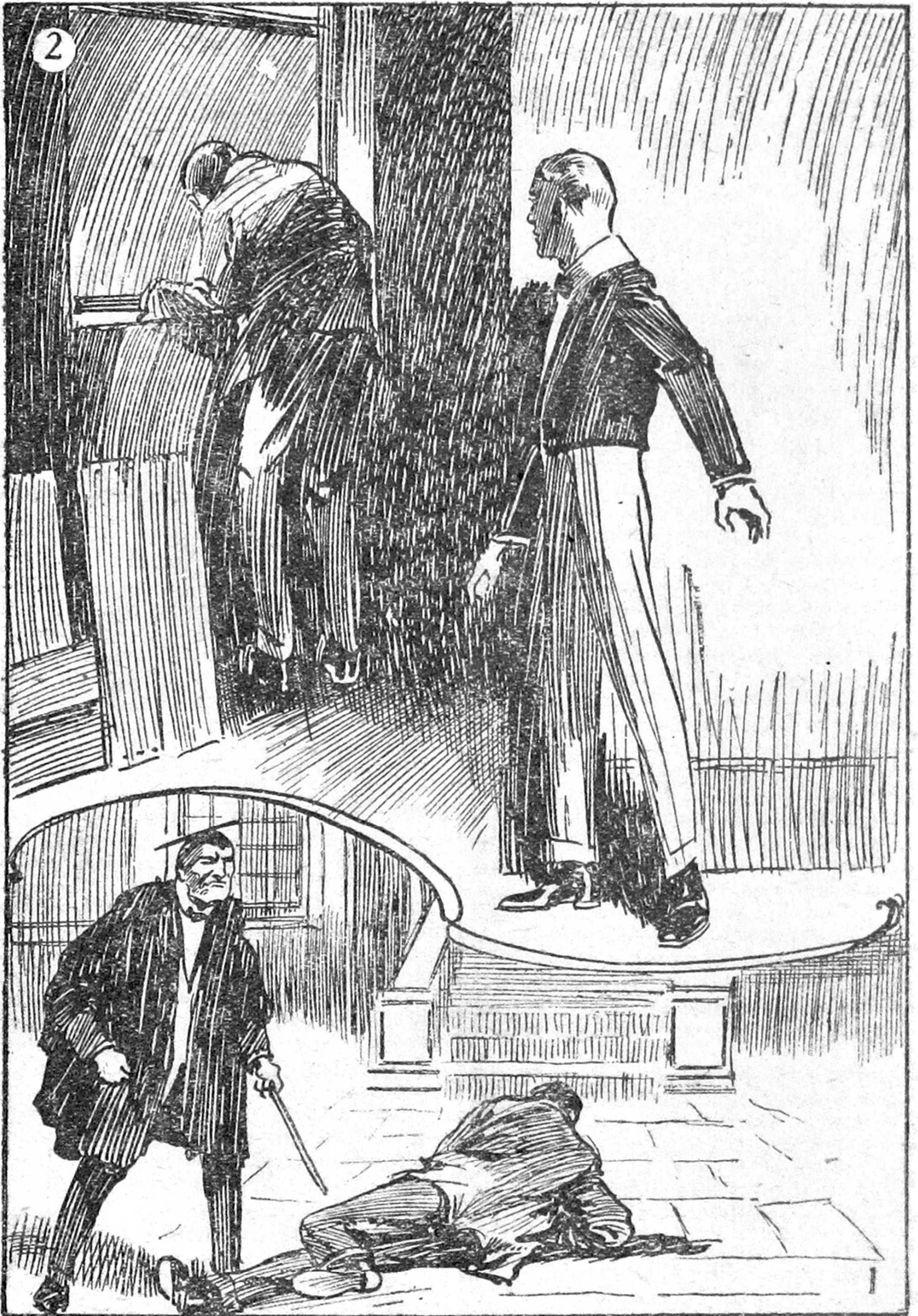
The mattress was pulled out rapidly.

"You'll have to crawl through," I explained. "You can manage it, Jesson. Buck up, if you want to join us."

"Thanks awfully!" gasped Jesson.

A moment later he was through, and only just in the nick of time. For Mr. Martin, panting heavily, appeared in the corridor. His face was as black as thunder as he saw what had happened.

Jesson, of the Sixth, had joined the rebellion!



1. The Head and Jesson act a part for the benefit of the Remove.
2. Its sequel. A traitor at work.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAITOR.

MR. MARTIN strode up to the barricade.

"You young fool!" he shouted, "You are insane, Jesson, to associate yourself with those insubordinate brats!"

"They're the only fellows who had any sense," snapped Jesson. "They got fed up with your tyranny days ago. If the rest of the boys in this school had any wit, they'd pitch you out neck and crop!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the talk, Jessy!"

"I can only take it that you are mad, Jesson," exclaimed the Head. "Do you realise that you are a member of the College House? Do you realise that you are mixing yourself with these infernal Ancient House rebels——"

"I realise all that, sir," interrupted Jesson; "and I realise that I've done the best thing. I'm not going to be sacked from the school by you, and if you attempt to break down these barricades, I'll help to defend them, with the rest of the fellows!"

"That's the stuff to give him, Jesson!"

"Pile it on, old man!"

"I'm not doing this because I like it," proceeded the prefect. "But I don't see the fun of being expelled for—for nothing. I'll admit I struck you, Mr. Martin, but not before you slashed out at me. So that makes it even. And I'll sink or swim with these chaps."

The Head nodded grimly.

"Very well!" he snarled. "We will see—we will see, Jesson! You will have cause to regret your madness before long."

And Mr. Martin strode away, followed by a yell of contemptuous laughter. The Head was beaten, and he could do nothing.

Jesson turned to me, his face flushed. He was decidedly dishevelled and untidy, and he looked hot. He held out his hand.

"Thanks, Nipper!" he said earnestly. "You're a brick!"

"That's all serene," I grinned. "You've joined the Liberty Party now—we're out for liberty, you know. You're quite welcome, Jesson; but

you'll have to behave yourself, and accept my leadership."

Jesson smiled.

"I've been a bit of a rotter at times, I know," he confessed frankly. "That's all over now, isn't it? We'll sink all differences in the common cause. I'm one of you, and I'll forget that I'm a Sixth Former."

"That's the idea," I said, pleased with his attitude. "I may as well tell you straight out, that if you try any high-and-mighty games, you'll be squashed. I'm the leader of this crowd, Jesson, and——"

"You don't want me to throw my weight about because I'm a senior?" said Jesson, nodding. "All right; I understand. And you can accept my word that I'll obey orders in all things. I came here of my own accord, and I consider myself a junior."

"Good for you, Jessy!"

"That's the right spirit!"

"Rather!"

The juniors were very pleased with the prefect's attitude. I was rather sceptical. I half feared that Jesson would begin to assert himself after an hour or so had passed—after the novelty had worn off.

But I was wrong.

Evening came, and Jesson's manners were perfect. He was cheerful and jokey, and made himself extremely agreeable. He made no attempt to "boss" the juniors, and nobody had a complaint to make.

Before the evening was out Jesson was accepted as one of the rebels. He was proving himself to be willing and eager to help. He even offered to help in washing up the tea-things; and after that he wanted to be placed on guard, exactly similar to the other rebels.

I met him in this respect, and appointed him to a window in the lower passage, with two juniors. Each of the windows was constantly guarded by three fellows, and the barricades by half a dozen.

This was the normal guard. Never, for an instant, was an opening left unguarded. There were plenty of us to do the work, and it was just as well to be on the safe side.

That night it was my turn to be off duty until two o'clock in the morning. Then I should turn out, with a number

of others, to relieve the "watch." Those fellows who had been on duty would be free to seek their beds.

I went to bed soon after eight o'clock, with the others. I preferred to keep the watch during the critical hours of the night, for some of the juniors were more than inclined to drop off to sleep in odd corners, if everything was quiet. They did not realise the importance of being vigilant.

Before dropping off to sleep, I set my alarm for two o'clock. My "alarm" was my own brain. I was capable of waking up almost to a minute—a handy little habit the gov'nor had got me into.

And, for some unknown reason, I awoke at ten minutes to one—over an hour before the watch was due to be changed. I glanced at my ticker curiously, and wondered what had disturbed me.

Everything was perfectly still.

The other juniors in the dormitory were sound asleep. A few whispered voices, outside the door, told me that the barricade guards were alert and watchful. Everything seemed to be peaceful.

Yet, somehow, I was uneasy. Perhaps the remembrance of the previous night disturbed me somewhat. The Head had attacked then, and there was a chance that he would attack again.

At all events, I found it impossible to sleep again. So I quietly slipped out of bed, and dressed myself. Then I crept out of the dormitory, and glanced at the fellows who were on watch.

Three of them were wide awake, but the other three were dozing.

"Everything O.K.?" I whispered.

The juniors looked round.

"Hallo!" said Grey. "What are you doing here? It isn't two o'clock yet."

"It hasn't struck one, even," said Armstrong.

"I woke up for some reason," I explained. "I'm going to have a look round in a minute. Have you fellows heard any sign of trouble brewing?"

"Not a sound," said Grey. "I reckon the Head will leave us severely alone to-night. Last night's experience was enough for him, I should imagine. I shouldn't think it's possible for him to keep up the game much longer, should you?"

"There's no telling," I replied.

"We're all right for another ten days, anyhow. And we've simply got to win in the finish."

Jack Grey nodded.

"Oh, we shall win all right!" he said. "But it's my belief the Head will cave in before to-morrow evening. Christine of the College House told us just before bed-time that this affair is reported in the local papers."

"Well, I expected that," I said grimly.

"It's bound to get to the ears of the Governors before to-morrow," said Grey. "They'll be buzzing down, I expect; and then there'll soon be a settlement. I vote we add something else to our demands if the Governors come."

"What's that?"

"We'll refuse to submit until Martin is pushed out and Dr. Stafford is reinstated," said Jack Grey. "What do you think?"

"I think it's a first-class idea," I said promptly; "and if the Governors do come down, we'll certainly press that point. We'll also make a demand that Mr. Leo shall be reinstated, too."

"Yes, rather," said Griffith.

"But we needn't continue the subject now," I went on. "We haven't won yet, and I've got a kind of idea in my head that we shall have some trouble before the night's out. So be on the alert, and give the warning at the first sign of alarm."

I really was uneasy, and I passed downstairs, hoping that everything would be all right. The main passage, below, was quiet and deserted, although three fellows were on the watch at the end window. Other juniors occupied the kitchen, and there was certainly not the slightest indication that trouble was brewing.

"What are you doing here?" asked Pitt, in the passage. "It's not time for you yet."

I explained matters again.

"So I'm just having a look round," I added. "By the way, where's Jesson? I thought he was on guard down here?"

"So he is," said Pitt. "As far as I know, he's in that little passage at the back, keeping watch on the window with Owen major and Canham."

"All right," I said. "I'll go and have a look at them."

I moved down the passage noiselessly, for I was wearing slippers. It was rather dim down there, for the only light was that cast from the wider passage behind me. There were one or two recesses on either side, as I walked along, and as I passed one of these I came to an abrupt halt.

A distinct snore had sounded.

I stood still, listening. The snore was repeated, and I knew at once that somebody was in that recess, sleeping. I felt rather grim as I pulled out my electric torch and flashed it on.

"Well, my hat!" I muttered.

Within the recess were Owen major and Canham. The two juniors were covered by a thick rug, and they were sound asleep. Strictly speaking, they ought to have been on guard.

And this was how they were carrying out their duty!

I was about to give them a good shake, when I decided to wait for a minute or two. Jesson was probably responsible. The juniors, no doubt, had yawned extensively, and Jesson had taken pity on them.

I decided to have a word with him on the subject.

So I switched off my torch, and walked along until I came to the bend. Then, again, I paused—and, this time, with a start. For I distinctly heard voices. Perhaps there were some other juniors with Jesson.

I glanced cautiously round the corner of the wall.

The passage beyond was short, with a fairly large window at the end. It was slightly moonlight outside, and the window itself, with its protecting boards, was distinctly outlined.

Something else was outlined, too—the figure of Jesson, of the Sixth!

Perhaps there was nothing very startling in this, but there was something startling in the occupation which was employing Jesson's time. Screw-driver in hand, he was removing the screws from the boards; in short, he was taking down the barricade!

It was quite startling to me, and for a second I did not guess the actual truth. Then, as I stood still, I heard quite sufficient to convince me of what was going on.

"It's all right, sir; I sha'n't be long now," breathed Jesson softly.

"You had better not talk, my boy," came the Head's voice.

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" whispered Jesson. "The kids who were with me are sound asleep, and the others are too far away to hear me. I did the trick nicely. The two youngsters were sleepy, so I advised them to go and have a nap, just on the quiet."

"Quite a smart little dodge, Jesson!" came the Head's voice.

I clenched my fists fiercely.

The truth was borne in upon me with a rush, as I stood there almost helpless with rage for a moment or two. Jesson was a traitor within the camp, and it was obvious that he had been a traitor from the very start.

"Talking about smart dodges, sir, this ruse of yours is simply a stunner!" whispered Jesson, with a chuckle. "The kids swallowed that quarrel of ours whole; they thought it was all genuine, instead of being faked up for their benefit."

"I must confess that I was somewhat pleased with myself, Jesson!" chuckled the Head.

"You have reason to be, sir," went on Jesson. "These young fools haven't the faintest idea that it was a fake quarrel. And within three minutes I'll have these boards all down, and you can lead your force of men in. We'll be able to capture the whole crowd with ease."

"Splendid, Jesson—splendid!"

"Over half the fellows are asleep, and the other half will be too dazed and confused to offer the slightest resistance," went on Jesson. "When it's all over, sir, I think we shall have reason to pat ourselves on the back."

"Most decidedly, my boy!" said Mr. Martin pleasantly.

Only for another moment did I stand idle.

The truth flooded my mind, and I was filled with a great and overpowering rage. We had been tricked, and it was almost too late to avert disaster. I really believe I lost control of myself for the moment.

At all events, I suddenly sprang into activity.

"Help!" I yelled, at the top of my voice. "Rescue, Remove! Help—help!"

And as I shouted, I hurled myself forward to the attack.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SENTENCE.

JESSON twirled round, gasping.
 "Good heavens!" he panted.
 "We—we——"

He got no further, for I was upon him. I hit out right and left, absolutely reckless of the consequences. My fists crashed into Jesson's face, and he staggered back, howling.

"You confounded rotter!" I shouted thickly. "You treacherous cad! I know what your game is now, and if you get out of this affair with your whole skin, you'll be lucky!"

"You mad little fool!" gasped Jesson.
 "I—— Yaroo!"

Jesson staggered back again, yelling. He was far bigger than I, but I was so furious that he was no match for me. And outside the window, I was dimly aware of quick movements.

There were several boards already missing from the window, and it would be quite an easy matter for anybody to gain an entry. And it was clear to me now that the Headmaster was outside with a whole army of men, the same men, possibly, who had attempted to storm the fortress a night before.

I could see the whole scheme.

Jesson and the Head had planned it together. Jesson had pretended to fall out with the Head, and he had sought refuge in our camp. We, having given him shelter, believed that he was on our side. But I had been foolish to trust him, and I knew it now.

The Sixth Former had been a traitor from the first minute. His part in the affair was absolutely despicable and contemptuous. I did not think that even Jesson could sink to such depths.

He had got into our stronghold, and, after we had taken him under our wing, as it were, he was ready and willing to admit the enemy.

His crime was absolutely black, and, if possible, I intended to teach him a lesson that he would not forget in a hurry. My greatest fear at the moment was that he would succeed in escaping.

But my shout for assistance had been heard.

Pitt came rushing along, with several other fellows, and they charged into the passage one on top of the other.

"What's the matter here?" shouted Pitt anxiously.

"It's an attack!" I yelled. "Quick! Come and help me to collar Jesson! He's a rotten traitor, and I caught him in the act of admitting the enemy!"

"Great Scott!"

"The cad!"

"The howling rotter!"

"Collar him!"

Jesson was captured so that escape was impossible. He was held by four juniors, and his struggles were futile.

"Take him away and lock him in the small cellar!" I panted. "We haven't got time to deal with him now, so we'll put him in a safe place. He'll never escape from that cellar."

"We'll lock and bolt the door on him," said Pitt grimly.

Shouting and struggling, Jesson was carried away. He was very sorry now, probably, that he had taken such a cad-dish part in the affair. But it was too late to be sorry. I was determined to make an example of him which would cause something like a sensation at St. Frank's.

Meanwhile, there was grim business to attend to.

At least five of the Head's hired attackers were in the act of forcing their way through the window. Three were actually in the passage, and others were piling in. The barricade had been forced!

And I was there alone, except for Tregellis-West and two other juniors. Pitt and the rest were dealing with Jesson, and my yells for help had evidently not been heard upstairs.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "Things look bad, dear boy—they do, really! We shall have to buck up—Yow! Oh, you shockin' ruffian!"

Montie found himself struggling with one of the invaders. The enemy was actually within the gates, and the situation was appalling. Unless we used every effort within our power, we should be beaten.

And there was no time now for special devices. There was no time for pea-shooters or pepper-squirters. It was a question of sheer fighting—strength against strength. The weaker would go under.

The commotion was considerable. Everybody was yelling and shouting. Pitt took care to raise his voice to the highest pitch, as he and the other juniors

led Jesson away to the cellar, and a number of fellows came pelting down from upstairs, the majority of them from their beds.

For the guards had not dared to leave their posts. It was an alarm, and their duty was to remain on the watch, whatever happened. And it was owing to the delay in the arrival of reinforcements that disaster nearly came.

I was fighting furiously, but I was not superhuman, and it was impossible for me to stem the tide with only a handful of fellows to help me. Fighting furiously, we were forced back without a pause.

And the Head's men were now piling through the window in a continuous stream. The force was increasing with every minute that passed. Pitt and his men turned in time to cause a slight check, but that was all.

The fight was a grim one.

And I must say that the juniors went into the battle with a determination which surprised me. They showed tremendous fight, and battled against the heavy odds with a fierceness which was bound to tell.

The majority of the attackers were powerful men, but they had little knowledge of boxing, and although their brute strength enabled them to force us back, they only did so at considerable cost.

The men received blows continuously, and this had the effect of enraging them. One or two juniors received swipes which nearly stunned them, and certainly put them out of action for the rest of the battle.

"Keep it up!" I gasped, wiping a smear of blood from my lips. "Don't give in, you chumps! We'll beat 'em yet!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" yelled Pitt. "We're not done yet!"

"There's plenty of fight in the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

The boys and the men surged in the passage in a confused mass. The light was poor, and this added to our difficulty. Also, the confined nature of the battleground was against us. We had no room to spread ourselves, no space to fight properly. If we could have surrounded the invaders, it would have been better.

And all the while, the Head was urging his men on from the window, where he was safe.

"Just one big effort, men!" he shouted. "It won't take you long, and then you'll have the boys beaten."

"We'll settle the young brats, sir!" shouted one of the men.

"They're a darned obstinate crowd, though!" snapped another man. "By thunder, I've got two black eyes already!"

The excitement continued without a stop, and when we had been forced back until we were almost opposite the kitchen door, the tide began to turn. Other juniors had come down, and our ranks were greatly swelled.

The effect of this was soon apparent.

The advance was stopped, and the invaders found it impossible to proceed further. But they were still a dangerous force, and I knew that we should have all our work cut out to hurl them back into their own territory.

"We're winning!" I shouted. "Stick to it, you fellows!"

"We're all right!" roared Handforth, who had just come down. "By George, this is just what I was longing for—a scrap! I was dreaming about it ten minutes ago, and I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle!"

"Don't dream about it," panted De Valerie—"get busy!"

"That's what I am doing!" roared Handforth. "Take that, you rotter!"

"Yarooooh!" howled McClure.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Is that you?"

"Yes, it is me!" hooted McClure. "What the dickens do you mean by showing your silly fist in my eye?"

"Sorry!" said Handy. "I thought you were one of the enemy!"

"You—you dotty lunatic!"

Handforth sailed in with all his strength. He was a great fighting man, and he never counted the odds at all. He charged into three hulking ruffians with perfect confidence, and his fists got terribly busy.

Smash! Bang! Crash!

His blows were rained all round, and not one of them missed. True, a few of his blows hit the wrong fellows, but that was only a detail with Handforth, and some of the other fellows followed his example.

They charged blindly, regardless of the consequences to themselves. I had been doing the same all the time. I had been fighting with all my strength, and I was still fighting. Battered and worn, I was nearly done, however, and I knew that I should have to rely upon others to carry on the work.

Handforth found himself face to face with a giant of a man who looked like a prizefighter. His fists were as big as boxing-gloves, and he caught Handforth in the chest with a left which lifted the leader of Study D right off his feet.

But Handforth was not disconcerted.

"Take that, you hulking brute!" he bellowed.

And he delivered a return punch, and put all the weight of his body behind it. The huge man staggered, and the next second he had collapsed upon his back. Two of his companions tripped over him, and for a moment there was tremendous confusion.

And it was here that we seized our advantage.

We made one terrific rush, and the invaders were forced back by sheer strength. Fatty Little had appeared upon the scene by this time, and he was of great help. It was not so much his fists that were handy, but his bulk.

He simply threw himself forward into the crowd, and something was bound to go. Fatty was an enormous weight, and when he charged, there was no doubt about it. He shifted three of the roughs at least six feet.

And from that moment victory was assured.

"Clear 'em out!" I yelled. "They're backing already!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're winning!"

"Keep it up, you beggars!"

The juniors were keeping it up, and although many of them were suffering from black eyes and bleeding noses, they did not attempt to back out of the final struggle. They knew only too well that everything depended upon this battle.

The climax came in a rather unexpected way.

Two of the invaders happened to smash against one another in the confined part of the passage. They came to blows, and a moment later they were engaged in a free fight.

The other men, finding themselves

badly pressed, decided that the game was hopeless, and they retreated in confusion and disorder. Helter-skelter, they piled through the window into the rear yard.

And once the majority of them had backed out, there was nothing for the others to do but to follow suit. They were, in fact, pitched out neck and crop, and the two beauties who were fighting between themselves shared the fate of the others.

"You dolts!" roared the Head. "Charge again!"

"We've done enough charging for one night!" snarled one of the men. "It's no good, guv'nor! These kids are hot stuff; they don't mean to be took! I've finished with the game, and you won't see me no more!"

"Nor me, neither!"

"We're just about fed up!"

The Head roared and shouted in vain. And while he was engaged in this occupation, several juniors were hastily screwing the boards into position again. When all was safe and secure, I breathed a sigh of relief.

"My goodness!" I panted. "It was exciting, but we got the better of the rotters! It's another victory for the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"How many casualties?" I asked.

"Dozens!" groaned Watson. "McClure is half dead, I believe, and both Handy's eyes are closing up."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with my eyes!"

"McClure was knocked down by Handy," put in Church. "My hat, it was a pretty big swipe, too!"

But all the damage, upon examination, proved to be superficial. The bulk of the fellows were suffering from bruises, black eyes, thick ears, and so forth, but there was no real damage done to anybody.

"Well, I reckon we're jolly lucky!" I said, at last. "If I hadn't spotted Jesson at his rotten game, we should have been taken by surprise and beaten. We ought to celebrate this."

"We will," declared De Valerie—"by punishing Jesson!"

"Yes, that's the idea!" I agreed. "But, first of all, we'll see that everything is all secure, and that the guards are at the posts. Then the remainder of us will put Jesson on trial."

"Good idea!"

"We'll sentence him as a traitor deserves!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But I don't understand," put in Merrell. "I thought Jesson was one of us!"

"You'll understand soon, if you're with us at the trial," I said grimly. "We're going to do the thing thoroughly, and we're going to sentence Jesson as he deserves to be sentenced!"

It did not take very long to make ourselves tidy. Sponges were needed, and a certain amount of court-plaster. But, on the whole, we looked only slightly war worn. The enemy had come off the worst.

When all was ready, I went round to the various points, and saw that everything was in order. For the second time the Head had failed, and he was probably getting tired of the game.

Jesson had been the Head's tool on this occasion; but Jesson was a senior, and he had enough sense of his own to know that he had performed a particularly vile and contemptible trick.

"The trial will be held at once," I said, after I had descended to the lower passage again. "Everything is all serene upstairs, and if there is any alarm the fellows will yell. We're all wide awake now, so there's not much danger of another attack. We can devote our attentions to Jesson."

"Where shall we hold the trial?" asked Handforth.

"In the kitchen."

"Oh, good!"

The kitchen was soon converted into a criminal court. The jury sat all round the table: the judge—myself—occupied a chair in an elevated position. It stood on the top of a small side-table, to be exact.

Chairs were placed for counsel and for the prisoner. And Jesson was released from the cellar, and brought in. He was held firmly until he was placed in his chair. Then he was released.

The College House prefect looked about him rather nervously.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"The prisoner must not speak unless he is addressed," I said sternly. "Cyril Jesson, you will regard yourself as the prisoner at the bar——"

"Don't talk kiddish rot!" snapped

Jesson. "If you don't let me go, there'll be trouble——"

"Silence!" I ordered.

"It's a lucky thing for you I wasn't given another five minutes," said Jesson. "You were nearly beaten, you little fools! I tricked you nicely!"

"It is evident that you do not realise the enormity of your offence," I exclaimed coldly. "Jesson, you will remain silent. Before calling any witnesses, I will make a brief statement on the case."

"That's not usual," put in Handforth.

"Eh?"

"It isn't the custom for the judge to make statements," said Handforth, shaking his head. "You ought to keep silent, my son, until it's time to pass sentence, if the jury finds the prisoner guilty——"

"Oh, we shall find him guilty," said one of the jurymen.

"We're not conducting this case according to the ordinary rules of a criminal court," I said. "We're making our own rules, Handy; and one of them will be that you are to dry up, if you're not careful."

"Yes, dry up, Handy," said Owen major. "I'd like to say something. That awful cad told Canham and I——"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "Your evidence will come later, Owen. You will be called into the witness-box at the right time. At the present moment, Cyril Jesson stands before us accused of treachery in the first degree."

"Hear, hear!"

"You young idiot——" began Jesson.

"Silence!" I ordered sternly. "Every interruption on your part, prisoner at the bar, will mean an added punishment. Now, gentlemen of the jury," I went on. "you all know how Jesson quarrelled with the Head in the Triangle this afternoon. You all knew how he was sacked——"

"That's what I can't understand," said Noys. "If he was sacked like that, how did the Head plan this game with him?"

"I will explain," I replied. "At that time I, too, was deceived by the cleverness of Jesson's and the Head's acting. I thought that Jesson was really expelled, and that he came to us for protection and aid."

"You poor little idiots!" sneered Jesson.

"We were idiots; I'll admit it," I replied. "We ought to have known better than to trust a cad of your kind, Jesson. However, we did trust you, and we even placed you on watch, with two fellows. We accepted you as a rebel, and we had no suspicion of your duplicity. I shall now require Owen major to enter the witness-box, and tell the gentlemen of the jury what happened between the hours of eleven and twelve."

Owen major entered the witness-box.

"It was this way, you chaps," he said. "I suppose Canham and I are to blame a bit, and I don't mind admitting it; but how were we to know that Jesson was such a treacherous beast?"

"Tell us what happened, you ass," said Handforth.

"Give me a chance," exclaimed Owen. "Soon after eleven, I think, Canham yawned rather badly——"

"Rats!" said Canham. "It was you who yawned, you bounder."

"I didn't yawn until after you——"

"Yes, you did——"

"Look here——"

"Oh, my hat!" I exclaimed. "Shut up, you fatheads! How can we conduct this case properly if you keep wrangling? It doesn't matter who yawned first. There's no crime in yawning, anyhow. Proceed, Owen major."

"Well, Canham yawned, and I yawned," said Owen.

"We shall all yawn soon," put in Tommy Watson.

"Jesson asked us if we were tired," continued the witness. "We said we were all right, and that we should be relieved at two o'clock. But just before midnight I began to doze a bit, and Canham was sleepy, too."

"Well?"

"Jesson told us that he could guard the window all right," said Owen. "He said he was strong enough without us, and he promised to yell if there was an alarm. So Canham and I thought it would be all serene if we had a bit of a nap on the q.t. We went into a recess, and dozed off."

"You went sound asleep, you mean," I said grimly. "You ought to be kicked for deserting your post like that, you bounders. But we'll overlook it this once. Well, go ahead, Owen."

"That's all there is," said Owen

major. "Canham and I went off, leaving Jesson in charge of the window."

"All right, you can stand down," I said. "We needn't take Canham's evidence, because it'll be the same as yours. Now, we have an interesting position. Jesson was left alone by the window—as he had planned."

"The beastly cad!" exclaimed Hart warmly.

"For some reason, I awoke before my usual time," I went on. "I got up, dressed, and went round on a tour of inspection. And when I got to the back passage, I found the prisoner unscrewing the boards and talking to the Head."

"The traitor!"

"The rotten bounder!"

"I heard quite sufficient to make it clear to me that Jesson had played a dirty trick upon us," I said. "He was talking to the Head in a joking kind of way, and appeared to think that the whole thing was quite rich——"

"Oh, so you were spying, eh?" sneered Jesson.

"You're the only spy among us," I retorted sharply. "And you stand there, in the dock, accused of a grave crime. You plotted with Mr. Martin, and you arranged the mock quarrel, so that the Remove would be hoodwinked."

"Yes; and you were hoodwinked," said Jesson sourly.

"You appealed to us for shelter," I went on. "You came to the barricade, begging to be admitted. What did we do? I ask you, Jesson, what did we do?"

"You acted like the fools you are," said Jesson.

"We accepted your word," I declared. "We believed that you were a fugitive from the Head, and that you were defying him. We took you in——"

"And I took you in," grinned Jesson contemptuously.

"We took you in, and treated you as one of ourselves," I said. "We gave you shelter, and we trusted you. We allowed you to have the freedom of the whole west wing. And what did you do in return for our trust and kindness?"

"The cad turned on us," said Handforth warmly.

"Exactly!" I said. "He attempted to give us all away to the Head; he did his utmost to admit the enemy into our

stronghold. I am doubtful if the prisoner realises the full nature of his great crime."

"Cut this foolery short," snapped Jesson. "You're a pack of young donkeys. You're defying the school authority, and it was my duty, as a prefect, to——"

"Do nothing," I broke in. "Your power as a prefect is only available in the College House," I continued. "You have no authority over us, Jesson. And yet you considered it your duty to play a low-down trick——"

"Hang you!" rapped out Jesson. "Why don't you get it over?"

"We'll get it over soon enough," I exclaimed. "Gentlemen of the jury, is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" said the jury, in one voice.

"Good!" shouted Handforth. "And what's the sentence?"

"That the prisoner be boiled in oil, and afterwards birched," said Owen major. "I vote we make an example——"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "You seem to forget that I'm the judge, Owen major. It is my duty to pass sentence upon the prisoner. And I hereby solemnly announce that the sentence of the court is that——"

"Well?"

"Is that the prisoner shall be tarred and feathered!" I said deliberately.

CHAPTER VII.

TAR AND FEATHERS.

"**T**AR and feathers!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Are you serious, Nipper?"

"Of course, I'm serious," I declared, as the juniors put the question. "I sentence Cyril Jesson to be tarred and feathered!"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"Couldn't be better!" said Handforth.

"It's the finest punishment a rotter of his sort could have."

"Hear, hear!"

Jesson, looking pale and alarmed, laughed nervously.

"Don't be such young fools," he said. "All this is pretty good, as a joke, but you've carried it far enough——"

"You won't find much joke about it, Jesson," I interrupted. "This sentence is a serious one, and it is going to be put into effect at once. Do you understand? You are to be tarred and feathered——now!"

Jesson turned quite pale.

"You mad young idiots!" he snapped. "You'd better not—— Oh, but you haven't got any tar. I might have known you were only bluffing. The sooner you let me go the better."

"Yes; what about some tar, Nipper?" asked Canham.

"I hadn't forgotten it," I replied.

"Down in the cellar, in one corner, is a small barrel. It contains tar, as I found out yesterday. There is sufficient there to tar a dozen fellows. There are heaps of pillows upstairs, and we have all the materials for the sentence."

"Hurrah!"

"Let's do it, now!"

"Collar him!"

Jesson jumped up.

"You'd better stand back," he roared. "If any of you touch me—— Look out! Why, I'll—I'll—— Leggo, Handforth! I'll—I'll——"

But the prefect was unable to proceed further.

He was seized, and his struggles were of no avail. Everybody was thoroughly satisfied with the sentence I had named. The prisoner was to be tarred and feathered! It would be a fitting punishment for the traitor!

Fortunately, we had the materials on hand; otherwise, I should not have mentioned such a punishment. Jesson was taken out into the passage, and down into the cellar. He was now thoroughly frightened.

"Look here, Nipper, don't go on with this——this rot," he pleaded. "I'm sorry I played that trick——"

"It's too late to be sorry," I interjected. "Strip!"

"Eh?"

"Strip!" I ordered. "Take all your clothes off!"

"I won't!" roared Jesson. "I refuse——"

"All right; just as you wish," I said. "If you won't strip, we shall strip you. Take your choice."

"But look here——"

"I'll give you three seconds to commence," I said grimly.

Jesson saw that I was in earnest, and he did not attempt to argue further. He commenced undressing. His face was paler than ever, and he was shaking visibly as he took his coat and vest off.

"You'll half kill me" he said huskily. "It's a shocking thing to tar and feather a chap! You don't seem to realise——"

"We realise that you deserve a punishment of extraordinary severity," I said.

"You can't get out of this, Jesson. You've committed your crime, and now you've got to take the consequences. Take your trucks off!"

"I—I——"

"Oh, my hat!" roared Handforth. "Shall we strip the cad, Nipper?"

"It's all right. I'll—I'll undress," said Jesson hastily.

He tore off his clothes, and then he was ordered to don a bathing costume. I had pity on him to that extent, at all events. His condition would be quite bad enough even with the bathing costume on.

He gave a gasp of relief as he donned the costume. Surrounded by juniors as he was, he had enough sense to remain passive. At the first sign of refusal to carry out orders, force would be applied. Jesson knew it, and he wisely decided that it was better for him to submit.

But he was filled with an inward rage, and he glowered at us in a manner which was not exactly amiable. However, he was powerless. He could do nothing but obey orders.

"Now, Jesson," I said. "You will stand still—perfectly still. Have you got that whitewash brush, Tommy?"

"Here it is," said Watson.

"Good! Hand it over."

I seized the brush, and two or three other fellows obligingly poured a quantity of tar into a big pan. I soaked the brush, and then applied it to Jesson's legs. He started as the brush touched him, and his face went purple with fury.

"If you don't leave me alone I'll smash you!" he shouted thickly. "You young cads! I'll—I'll—gug-gug-grooch!"

I had flicked the brush upwards, and Jesson's face underwent a change. The lower part of it was blackened, and a

quantity of tar had entered his mouth. His appearance was quite ludicrous.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled, and Jesson gurgled. But he did not attempt resistance again. He was thoroughly tarred—so thoroughly, in fact, that by the time I had finished he was looking like a nigger.

He was black from head to foot, and he did not look at all comfortable. He was probably feeling awful. And it would take hours and hours—and a large number of hot baths—to remove that tar.

"Now for the feathers," I said briskly.

"Here they are, old son," said Hart. "Stand clear!"

He was carrying two big pillows. He slit them open with his penknife, and shook out the feathers upon the floor. It was surprising what a pile of feathers came from those two pillows.

"Now, Jesson, kindly roll yourself in those feathers," I said smoothly. "If you don't, you'll be rolled in by force—and we sha'n't be gentle. You'd better buck up about it, too!"

"I'll get even with you for this!" panted Jesson shakily.

He threw himself into the feathers—since there was nothing else to be done. After a few rolls his appearance was extraordinary. White from head to foot, he looked like some weird and wonderful specimen from the Zoo. Feathers smothered him everywhere.

He was perfectly clothed in the things. His face and head were obliterated, and he could hardly see. The feathers were small, and they stuck to the tar in the most perfect manner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You look fine, Jessy—ripping!" grinned Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we'll get rid of him," I said. "What he does after this is his affair. He's been tarred and feathered, and the sentence of the court has been carried out. Bring him along to the barricade!"

"He can bring himself along, thanks," grinned Hart. "I won't touch him!"

Jesson was only too anxious to get away. He passed out of the cellar in the midst of a chuckling crowd. And when we arrived at the barricade, in the passage, I gave a few orders.

"Remove some of the obstructions," I said. "Jesson's got to get out, and

this is the simplest way. We can easily build the barricade again. All hands to the pump!"

Several juniors became active, and a space was soon cleared.

"Now, Jesson," I said. "You can clear off—and remember, that if you try any more of the same tricks, we'll give you something even worse than tar and feathers. You can shift as soon as you like!"

Jesson climbed over the barricade without a word. He left his trade mark on everything he touched. But the feathers clung to him lovingly, and his appearance was not altered when he stood on the other side of the defences.

"You infernal young dogs!" he snarled savagely. "You'll pay for this before long! By Heaven! You'll pay for it!"

"It's an easy matter for you to utter threats, you snivelling cur," I said. "Clear off while you're still safe. You think you can say what you like, now that you're on that side of the barricade——"

"Mark my words," panted Jesson. "I'll make you suffer for this outrage!" "Get your pea-shooters ready," I said briskly. "Fire!"

There were no pea-shooters ready, but Jesson did not know this. He turned and fled, helter-skelter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's done," I said comfortably. "I don't think we were unduly hard on the cad, do you?"

"He ought to have been chased through the village like that," exclaimed Handforth. "He ought to have been exposed to public view. As it is, he'll crawl away, and nobody will ever know."

"Won't they," I said. "It'll take Jesson all to-morrow to clear that tar off—and the whole school will know of the affair. I'll see to that. I'd like to see the Head's face when he gets to know of the incident."

The Head, as it happened, knew already.

Jesson was pretty certain that Mr. Martin was in his study. He would not have retired to his bedroom yet. And Jesson was sure of this when he saw a light gleaming in the Head's study.

Jesson soon made up his mind.

"I'll go to the Head!" he muttered savagely. "I'll show him what those young demons have done! He'll make it all the hotter for them later on!"

The prefect hurried away through the dark passages, leaving a trail over every yard of ground. He was not aware of the fact that a cardboard placard was reposing on his back, held in position by a length of string from his neck. But the card was there.

And Jesson's decision was exactly what we wanted.

He rushed along until he came to the Head's study. A light gleamed under the door, and Jesson did not wait to knock. He burst in like a whirlwind, and stood upon the carpet inside.

Mr. Martin glanced up—and gasped.

"What, what! Good gracious!" he exclaimed faintly.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Wrott.

The latter gentleman—Nelson Lee—was in the study also. He had been called there by the Head, to discuss the situation. Lee guessed the truth in a moment, and he could hardly repress a smile. Secretly, he was very pleased, for he knew that Jesson thoroughly deserved this fate.

"Great Heavens!" gasped Mr. Martin. "What—what is it?"

"It's me, sir—me!" hooted Jesson.

"Upon my soul!"

"Those infernal kids did this!" roared Jesson.

"I do not understand. Great goodness!" panted the Head, the truth suddenly dawning upon him. "Are you Jesson?"

"Yes, I am!" howled Jesson. "Look at this, sir!"

The Head rose in his chair, and his brow was black.

"I am looking, Jesson," he said grimly. "What on earth has happened to you? What are all those white pieces of fluff——"

"I fancy the boy has been tarred and feathered, sir," put in Lee mildly.

"Dear me! What a shocking state he is in! This is appalling, sir—quite appalling! Who can be responsible?"

The Head pursed his lips.

"Tar and feathers!" he repeated. "Good Heavens! What a terrible outrage! What a frightful——"

"What are you going to do, sir?" demanded Jesson wildly. "Those kids did this! They made me strip, they made me get into a bathing-suit, and then they painted me all over with tar, and rolled me in feathers!"

"It is simply terrible," said the Head. "Never, in the whole course of my career, have I met with a case like this. What do you think of it, Mr. Wrott? Is it not shocking?"

"It is certainly bad, sir—very bad," said Lee mildly.

"You had better visit the bathroom at once, Jesson," went on the Head. "I will question you further when you are more presentable. It is obvious, in any case, that these rebels are absolutely abandoned."

"They ought to be expelled, sir—all the crowd," panted Jesson.

"You may be sure that the ringleaders will be expelled when the time comes, Jesson," said Mr. Martin grimly.

"Nipper was the fellow who ordered me to be tarred and feathered, sir——"

"I might have guessed as much," said the Head, compressing his lips. "Nipper, it appears, is the leader in all these acts of hooliganism!"

"The lad is a wonder, sir," murmured "Mr. Wrott." "It is really amazing how he maintains order and discipline among his followers. I am afraid we shall find it very difficult to beat these boys, so long as Nipper is in control."

The Head laughed harshly.

"We will beat them, never fear," he exclaimed. "I have been frustrated several times, but I have a scheme in mind which simply cannot fail. Do you understand, Mr. Wrott? It positively cannot fail."

"That is most interesting, sir," said Lee. "And—and will you put this plan of yours into execution to-night?"

"No, Mr. Wrott, not to-night," replied the Head, rubbing his hands. "I shall leave it until to-morrow. I will give the rebels cause to think that I have given up the game as a bad job—and then—but why are you waiting, Jesson?" broke off the Head. "Go at once, sir—go to the bathroom—good gracious! You have made the carpet in a shocking mess! Go, you young fool!"

Jesson turned, and the Head stared.

"One moment, boy," he said sharply. "What is that on your back?"

"Feathers, I suppose, sir," snapped Jesson sarcastically.

"There is something else," said the Head. "Come here, Jesson. That's right. Now turn round. Dear me! A placard of some—some——"

Mr. Martin's words died away. He was reading the notice which was hung upon Jesson's back. The piece of cardboard was not very large, and the writing upon it was crudely done.

But the words were very distinct:

"TAKE WARNING! IT WILL BE THE HEAD NEXT TIME!"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Martin. "Is—is it possible—is it conceivable—that these wretched boys have dared to threaten me? Do they mean to imply that they would—ahem!—tar and feather me?"

"One would certainly suppose so," said Lee smoothly.

"And they would, too!" declared Jesson, with a certain amount of relish.

"If they ever get hold of you, sir, they'll roll you in tar and feathers—like they did me. They're absolutely reckless, and they don't care what they do. They've got enough nerve for anything, the confounded little dogs!"

Mr. Martin was rather pale.

"I must be careful, Jesson," he exclaimed. "Good Heavens! To think that the boys would dare to touch me—but you may go, Jesson. Get into a bath at once."

Jesson went, and the Head turned to Nelson Lee.

"This—this is startling, Mr. Wrott," he exclaimed nervously. "I really must be very cautious in future! It would be appalling—ghastly—if those boys were to treat me as they have treated Jesson!"

"They are capable of it, sir—quite capable," said Lee, nodding grimly.

The Head paced his study.

"I will take care to avoid close contact with the rebels," he said, after a moment or two. "They nearly got hold of me to-night! Good gracious! I shudder to think of what might have happened——!"

"But I understand you to say, sir, that you mean to defeat the boys fairly, soon?" asked Lee. "I hope——"

"I intend to have the Remove under

my full control again within forty-eight hours," declared the Head. "I will bring these rebels to their knees, Mr. Wrott! I have had enough of this foolery, and the farce must end."

Mr. Martin spoke grimly, but Nelson Lee wondered how much success would attend the Head's new efforts. Some-

how, the disguised detective had an idea that the rebel Remove would not be beaten at all!

Time, however, would show.

The rebellion was still in full swing, but there were indications that it would shortly come to an end. But who would win?

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

From time to time I have had numerous inquiries from admirers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY asking me to republish some of the St. Frank's stories in "The Boys' Friend 4d. Library." I will take this opportunity of explaining why I have been unable to fulfil such a plausible suggestion. In the first place, stories reprinted in the 4d. Libraries have never appeared in complete form before. Secondly, each of the Nelson Lee yarns comprises about 26,000 words, and the length required for the 4d. Libraries is 60,000 words. It may be argued that this difficulty could be overcome by joining a series of three Nelson Lee yarns into one, but the result would be patchy and far from satisfactory. After all, in what better book-form could our stories be published than in the present, where each number is complete in itself.

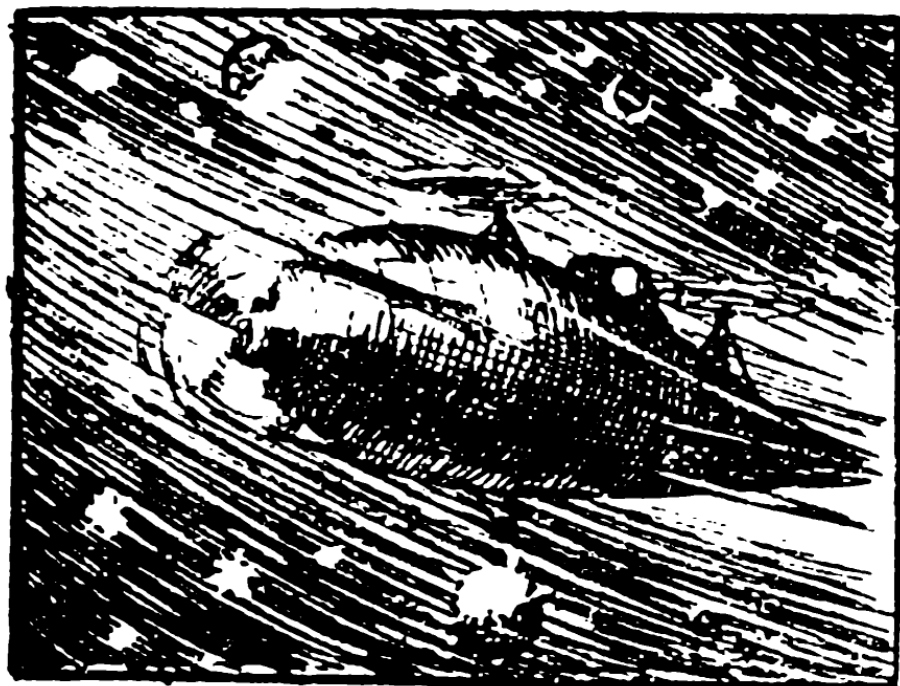
As regards our serial, "In Trackless Space," you will be glad to know that this capital adventure story of the planets will be republished at a future date in "The Boys' Friend 4d. Library." One of my chums rang me up on the 'phone yesterday to say that this story was the best he had ever read.

The Bully of St. Frank's has sunk lower than ever in the estimation of the school by the low and unprecedented methods he adopted to overcome the barring-out of the Remove. We could all wish that he had met with the same punishment as the traitor Jesson. What is the latest scheme he is discussing with his unsuspected assistant, Mr. Wrott? This will form one of the features of next week's story, which will be called "THE SIEGE OF THE WEST WING."

You must not fail to read it, my chums, and when you have finished it lend your "NELSON LEE" to a friend, and he will be for ever indebted to you.

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. In the following chapter our heroes are spectators of a Venusian battle.

(Now read on.)

The Capture of Professor Palgrave and Gresham.

HALF the attacking army had dashed up to the palings and were endeavouring to scale them. As Frank watched, it seemed almost impossible that their frail-looking legs did not snap like carrots under the enormous weight of their

bodies and gigantic heads. But they did not; the Venusites' legs were strong enough, and in a few moments they were swarming over the fence like ants. Having climbed one another's backs the topmost ones stretched out their long arms and grasped the top edge. After that the rest was a simple matter. In ten minutes the whole body of invaders were within the stockade.

And the part which seemed utterly inexplicable was the fact that the inhabitants of the city, after having taken all the trouble to erect the fence, stood by in a body and watched their enemies dropping into their midst unmoved. Had they chosen they could have killed scores of the other Venusites, catching them as they dropped. But they didn't seem at all anxious to commence the fight; they simply stood there and waited.

"Well, of all the idiotic things," remarked Frank in disgust. "I reckon this takes the cake! The fools must have known the fence wasn't impregnable; yet they build it and then don't move a finger to preserve themselves."

"It certainly seems a peculiar method of procedure," said the professor. "But it is doubtless the way in which these strange people always conduct their battles. It does, of course, appear absurd from our point of view, but after all, it is highly interesting. How quickly it is getting dark to be sure!"

Palgrave looked up into the sky, now rapidly darkening, and saw that it was becoming obscured by clouds. "Some rain coming, probably," he said. The others did not hear him. They were too engrossed in what was going on below to pay attention.

As the professor finished speaking a

hair-stiffening cry arose and the attackers, having collected in a compact body, bore down upon their smaller foes. In a moment pandemonium reigned. Each Venusite seemed to be fighting for his own life; and before long it could be seen that the inhabitants of the city were getting absolutely wiped up: being two against one. In a very short time there would be not one left. Already a score or more lay dead or dying on the ground.

"We can't let this continue," cried the inventor. "Not one of these scoundrels are as much as hurt yet! Frank, if you don't mind, fetch a few of the small bombs from the store-room—live ones, I mean, not dummies."

Frank dashed below and was back in a remarkably short space of time. Mac, who was leaning overside, was calling out how the fight progressed, and his words caused the others to hurry feverishly.

"Quick," gasped Frank. "Get the fuse alight! We'll teach the brutes! I bet this'll make 'em move if nothing else will!"

With steady aim Gresham threw a bomb into the thick of the invaders. It struck with a deafening crash, and a dozen Venusites fell to the ground to arise no more. Their companions paused for a moment in their work of slaughter—it was nothing else now—and seemed nonplussed. In that moment Gresham hurled another bomb. Again that roar and blinding flash of light, and again a number of the gigantic creatures fell, shattered and lifeless. It seemed a terrible thing to do, this killing of people of another world, but the occupants of the airship were British, and as Britons love to see fair play; and the work that had been going on below them was nothing but wholesale murder. Had Gresham refrained from killing those few attackers, all the remaining citizens, numbering fully five hundred, would have met with that same fate as their unfortunate companions.

As it was, the invaders broke and fled, after one glance at the airship, hovering overhead like an avenging angel. Again a bomb was dropped, but this time on to a clear piece of ground. It was intended to frighten, and this it certainly did, for the Venusites scrambled over the walls in half the time they had previously taken.

"After all," smiled Gresham, "these creatures differ very little from human beings. As the professor said, they have towns like we have, they fight like we do, and when they meet an unknown force they turn tail and flee——"

"Like we don't do," put in Frank.

"Oh, yes we do, Frank. You must remember that these creatures are probably the savages of Venus. The same on Earth, we are not all Englishmen——"

"Thank goodness for that," interrupted Mac. "Wi'cot a few Scots auld Mither Earth would be nowhere! All the greatest men that ever lived were Scots——"

"Quite so, Mac," smiled Palgrave. "That's your opinion. I daresay, ours differ considerably from it. Hello! it looks to me like another storm."

They gazed at the sky. It was now nearly dark and the sky was rapidly assuming that same deadly blackness as the day before. Suddenly, as they still watched, the whole arc was rent asunder, and a terrible blaze of light flashed across the sky. At the same moment "The Solar Monarch" quivered from stem to stern, and the occupants of the deck felt their skins creeping and tingling; for a moment they danced spasmodically. Then the lightning ceased, causing the rapidly darkening night to appear blacker than ever. Never had such a flash been seen by human eyes. It had lasted for fully fifteen seconds and so great was its power that it caused a strong current to pass through the ship.

"We don't want any more of that sort," gasped the professor shaking his fingers. "By George, I should——"

But his words were drowned in the appalling thunder-clap which roared out from the sky. For two minutes it echoed and reverberated, and when it ceased the explorers were almost deaf. Amazing as it may seem, during the last three or four minutes the whole landscape had darkened to such an extent that it was impossible to see one another or the ground beneath. And the peculiarity of the storm was that, unlike the one of yesterday, it was unaccompanied by wind or rain. The air was still and tranquil and Frank, through singing ears, could plainly hear the shrill cries of the Venusites.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

Evidently they disliked the storm as much as anybody.

"Do you think we're safe up here," inquired Frank. "I mean, is there any likelihood of the ship being struck by——"

As he spoke another brilliant flash illuminated the surroundings, and without any warning the lightning struck "The Solar Monarch." The whole deck quivered and the current that passed through it caused its occupants to fall to the plates, writhing. A crash came from overhead and something struck Mac's head. Then the lightning died out, and Gresham scrambled to his feet, followed by the others. All were unhurt, but never in all their after lives did they forget that moment. They were stiff in every joint and had the greatest difficulty in standing upright.

At first Frank thought this was the effect of the shock, then he realised that the whole deck was swaying from side to side in a most unaccountable manner. Also it appeared as if the vessel was sinking. He called out for a light, but Gresham and the professor were already attending to that. In a few moments the powerful searchlight blazed out and Gresham played it upon the deck and hull of the aeronef. Then he uttered a cry.

"See! We're sinking, and there's the cause of it!"

He pointed to the forward suspensory screw. Abbie had stopped it completely, and for this reason—one of the gigantic blades had snapped off like a carrot and now lay on the deck. Evidently this was the lightning's work. The whole vessel was sloping most uncomfortably, and nothing could save her from falling—although her downward flight was scarcely perceptible.

"Good Heavens," cried Gresham in alarm. "We shall drop right into the enemies' hands if we're not careful! I'd better switch the light off—it'll give the game away."

"Talk about luck," groaned Mac. "As sure as we scrape clear o' one difficulty we pitch head-first into another!"

"It is hard lines," whispered Frank in his ear. "But if we get out of it I sha'n't mind. It will be a bit of excitement."

"I reckon you're greedy," returned the Scot, as another flash hissed out,

this time less vivid. "Here you've been livin' on excitement for the past few days and now ye talk about wantin' mair!"

"I've got used to it by now," grinned Frank, who seemed to take matters easily. Hello, Abbie's started the other engine. What's that for, I wonder?"

The night was black as pitch, but when the last lightning flash had blazed out Abbie had seen that he was dropping exactly on to the fence itself. Unless this was altered the aeronef would possibly alight on the fence, then turn a somersault to the ground beneath. Seeing that it was too late to retreat, he started up the motor and caused the propellor to revolve. Thus, instead of alighting inside the fence as desired, "The Solar Monarch" came to rest right in the midst of the invaders. What this would mean the explorers could not guess, but certain it was that the Venusites could not have pleasant feelings towards them.

Whether these strange creatures could see in the dark it is difficult to say—impossible to say—but the fact remains that as soon as the airship landed the air became filled with strange shufflings and shrill cries. Gresham raised the searchlight shutter with a snap. There, in the full brilliance, were scores of Venusites advancing on the puny Earth-beings. Seen from that position they looked a stupendous height and Gresham wondered whether he would be living in an hour hence. Frank plucked at Mac's sleeve.

"Follow me," he whispered. "I'm going to fetch some bombs. They may come in useful."

The two crept into the conning-tower and then made their way below. They found Abbie sitting disconsolately in the engine-room. Frank cheered him up as much as possible, and, passing to the store-room, gingerly placed a couple of the deadly bombs into his coat pocket. Mac followed suit, and the pair re-ascended the companion. They stepped on to the deck, then paused.

"By jingo, look there!" cried Frank. Mac turned his eyes in the direction indicated, then started. Frank had turned the light round and was projecting the glare upon the city fence. And there, not three hundred yards from

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)

them, they could see Gresham and Palgrave being hustled along in the midst of their gigantic captors, who, by comparison, seemed more grotesque than ever, with their enormous heads, smaller bodies, and thin sticks of legs, which latter appeared to be in imminent peril of snapping at every step.

"What brutes," exclaimed Frank desperately. "What in the name of all that's hopeless shall we do?" "What can we do? It's suicidal to venture after them, yet we must make an effort to save them. Poor old Gresham! Fancy them being collared while we were below."

"Well, it's a guid thing we're free," said Mac seriously. "There is some chance anyhow. Couldn't we keep the beggars off wi' these little toys?" indicating the explosives.

"Possibly, but it would be a risky proceeding. You must remember the awful

size of these fellows. They're—oh, crumbs, that's finished it!"

The cause of this last boyish remark was not hard to find. Looking at the towering fence, Mac could see the professor and Gresham being hoisted over at the end of a rope like sacks of potatoes. As Frank had said, "That finished it." How could they hope to scale that huge hundred-foot fence? It was impossible at first sight.

"We're done now, anyway," groaned Frank. "Poor old chaps! I'm afraid we've seen the last of them! We haven't though! No, by Heaven!" He stamped his foot excitedly. "I mean to get at 'em somehow. Think of it, Mac. Think what it would be like without the professor—without dear old Gresham! We must rescue them. Do you hear, man, we must!"

(To be continued.)

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