

No. 234.—STIRRING ACCOUNT OF ST. FRANK'S IN REVOLT!

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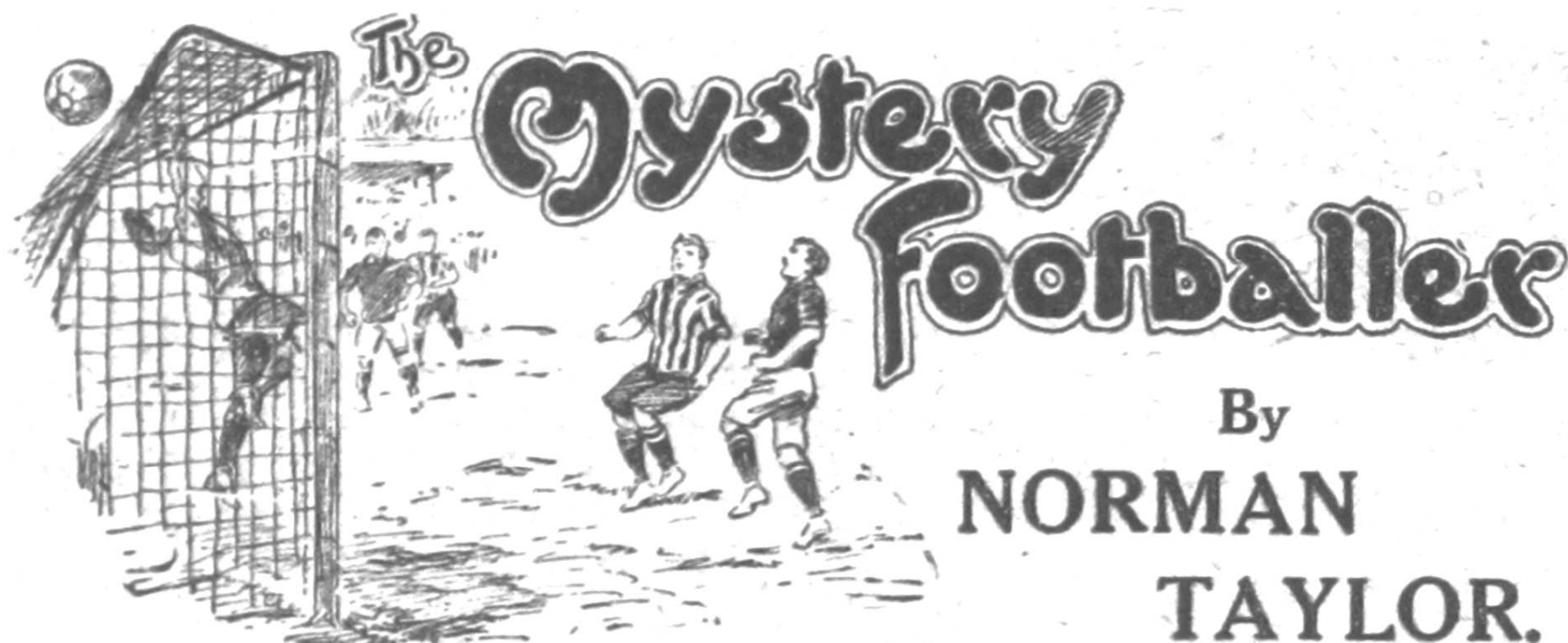


THE TYRANT GETS HIS DESERTS.

THE SIEGE OF THE WEST WING

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 Tyrant's Understudy," "The St. Frank's Rebellion," "Barring Out the Bully," etc.

November 29, 1919

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ATTACKED WITH SMOKE-BOMBS.
A dramatic incident from the opening story



The Siege of the West Wing.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

HOLDING OUT!

"FOG!" said Cecil De Valerie, with disgust.

"Yes; it's a pretty rotten morning," agreed Pitt. "Still, it doesn't make much difference to us. We're cooped up in here, and I don't care if it snows. Look at the old chestnuts."

The two juniors were at one of the windows in the Remove dormitory at St. Frank's. It was early morning, and the grey light of the November day was filtering through a dense pall of fog-like mist.

The ghostly boughs of the old chestnut trees in the Triangle were only just visible. The imposing gateway of the school was invisible. It was even impossible to catch a glimpse of the College House.

"I hate fog," said De Valerie. "I was on a steamship once, when I was quite a kid, and we were in a fog then. I remember my mater was in mortal fear of an accident, and we did bash into another ship, too."

"Very interesting," grinned Pitt. "But the west wing of the Ancient House doesn't happen to be a ship, and there's not much danger of us bashing into anything, my son. Hallo! Here's Nipper."

I approached the window, and gazed out into the mist.

"Yes, by Jove!" I said. "It's possible!"

"Eh?"

"It's quite possible," I declared.

"What's quite possible, you ass!"

"Potatoes," I said absently.

"What!" yelled Pitt.

"And greens," I added. "Oh, yes—heaps of greens——"

"He's dotty," shouted Pitt, grabbing hold of my shoulders. "What's the matter with you, you rambling ass?"

I looked at Reginald Pitt thoughtfully. "I'm not rambling, and I'm not dotty," I said. "Do we need potatoes?"

"Yes, rather!" he replied promptly. "We haven't tasted potatoes for three or four days."

"Do we need greens—cabbages, and that sort of thing?"

"You bet we do!"

"Good!" I said. "We can get heaps of 'em this morning—if we're slippy."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can catch on," declared De Valerie. "We're bottled up in this wing—barricaded on all sides—and yet you jaw about getting a supply of vegetables. It can't be done, Nipper. We've got all sorts of grub in the storeroom, but not fresh vegetables."

"Exactly," I said. "Well, there's no reason why we shouldn't have a change. I'd rather like roast beef for dinner to-day. A chap gets tired of tinned stuff always. How would roast mutton do?"

Pitt stared.

"You're off your rocker!" he said flatly.

I grinned, and patted him on the back. "Think," I said smoothly. "Think for two minutes!"

Pitt and De Valerie frowned in their efforts to concentrate their thoughts. Meanwhile, I had another look out into the Triangle. The fog was certainly thick, and there was no sign of it lifting.

The situation at St. Frank's was interesting.

The Remove was in a state of revolt, to begin with. I was the leader of the revolution—and I was rather proud of it. For we were in rebellion against the harshness and brutality of Mr. Howard Martin, the Headmaster of St. Frank's.

The man was a bully of the worst type, and he had driven the Remove into revolt. We had been rebels for three or four days, and the Head had been unable to shift us from our stronghold—although he had made several determined attempts.

He had, in fact, resorted to a few contemptible tricks to force us to surrender. But the barring-out was continuing, and there was every prospect of us winning the day.

We had held out for so long now that victory was almost assured. The Head could do nothing with us. Our position was extremely strong, and we had refused to obey the Head until he agreed to our demands—which were perfectly reasonable.

Mr. Martin was firm; he would not budge an inch.

And, as we wouldn't budge, either, a deadlock had resulted. A state of war existed, and it was by no means over. I was practically certain that we should have further trouble with Mr. Martin before the end came.

Our stronghold was the west wing of the Ancient House.

We had barred ourselves in thoroughly. Every window was secured. The upper and lower passages were barricaded so that nothing could pass. Upstairs we had our own dormitory, and below there was the kitchen and the storerooms.

The west wing was peculiarly suited to a barring-out. For we had food supplies, sleeping accommodation, and everything necessary to withstand a long siege. We were in a state of siege all the time.

Upon the whole we fed well. Fatty Little, of the Remove, was the chef, and he had done wonders in the grub line. But we had sorely missed fresh meat and fresh vegetables. There were not even any potatoes in the storeroom—for these useful articles were generally stowed away in another quarter of the building.

But this morning I thought I saw a chance of stocking our larder.

"Has it gone two minutes yet?" asked Pitt at last.

"Three!" I said. "Well?"

"I haven't thought of anything," replied Pitt. "I can't find out how we can have roast mutton or roast beef for dinner—when there's only tinned stuff to be had. You've been pulling my leg, you funny ass—"

"No. I haven't," I smiled. "Think again."

"Rats! I've got a headache through the last think!"

"Dear fellows, ain't it a shockin' mornin'?" inquired Sir Montie Tregellis-West, entering the dormitory.

"It's a lovely morning," I said promptly.

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez.

"Begad! Did I understand you to say that the mornin' was lovely, Nipper, old boy?" he inquired mildly.

"You did."

"But you were joking, surely?"

"Not a bit of it," I said. "I think it's a perfectly ripping morning. This is exactly the weather I should have chosen—if any choice had been possible. By Jove, it's simply great!"

And I gazed lovingly out into the fog.

"He's been like this for some little time," said Pitt, in a low voice. "I think the responsibility must have turned his brain a bit! He was rambling about meat and vegetables a minute or two ago—"

"Dear old boy, ain't you feelin' well?" asked Montie anxiously.

I grinned.

"Never felt better," I replied. "It's quite possible that I seem a bit mad to you—but there's a method in my madness. I don't usually like fog, but I simply adore it this morning."

"But why?"

"Because it's going to help us—I hope."

"Help us?" repeated Pitt. "How?"

"Oh, I suppose I'd better explain," I said, with a sigh. "But you don't seem to have any memories. What's to-day?"

"Thursday."

"Exactly," I said. "And what generally happens on Thursday morning?"

"How the dickens should we know?" asked Pitt.

"I suppose you've never seen the supply-van arrive at the rear quarter of the Ancient House?" I said keenly. "I suppose you've never seen beef and mutton being carted into the cold-storage room? You've never seen sacks of potatoes and baskets of cabbages——"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated De Valerie, taking a deep breath.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie.

"You—you mean we can raid that van?" asked Pitt, his eyes glittering. "Nipper, you're a born wonder! That van ought to be here by this time—it generally arrives at about seven—and it's a quarter past already."

"It's been delayed through the fog. Hallo!" I said, peering keenly through the mist. "Look at that, my sons! Feast your eyes upon it!"

Down below, on the ground, a big van was lumbering past. It was only just visible through the fog. But it was unmistakable. It was the supply van we had been referring to!

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "What shall we do, old boy?"

"Raid it!" declared Pitt.

"If we do anything at all, we've got to do it at once," I remarked. "There's no time for hesitating. My idea is simple. It's foggy, and we can creep out without being seen. Hardly a soul is out and about yet. About a dozen of us can perform the raid—and return loaded with fresh meat and other stuff. Is it worth trying?"

"Rather!"

"I should say it is!" said De Valerie.

"Are you game?"

"Yes!"

"Then we'll make a move," I said briskly. "Get some of the other chaps together and tell them what the game is. Perhaps you'll understand why I like the fog now. Without it we couldn't go on this stunt."

"Of course not," grinned Pitt. "You're not dotty, after all."

Everybody was enthusiastic.

And everybody wanted to come on the raid. This was impossible, of course, and I selected about a dozen strong fellows. There was very little risk in the enterprise.

The fog would conceal us until the last moment. Then we should make one brisk dash, seize all we could lay our hands on, and pelt back to our stronghold. Before any real chase could materialise, we should be behind our barricades again. That was the idea.

Without the fog to conceal our movements, the game would have been impossible. It was the fog which had first suggested the idea to me. I was always ready to take advantage of every opportunity.

The raiding party, with me at its head, collected downstairs in the lower corridor. The barricade here was high, but we knew how to wangle it. By the removal of two or three articles, it was possible to slip over with ease.

"Come on, my sons," I said softly. "And remember—no talking!"

"Right!" exclaimed Handforth.

"Lead on, McDuff!"

I crossed the barricade, and made my way down the passage to a fairly large window that was placed there. It opened with ease, and a moment later I was outside, in the chill mist.

The other fellows followed me closely. And in this way we passed like ghostly shadows round to the back of the Ancient House. Quite abruptly we came within sight of the supply waggon—a huge motor lorry. It was covered in, and at the moment it seemed to be deserted.

"Splendid!" I whispered. "I'll bet the driver is having a cup of tea, and spooning with one of the housemaids, or the giddy cook! Now's our chance! What a glorious piece of luck!"

It was, indeed. The van had been left to itself in the fog. And it stood there—at our mercy! It was not even necessary to make a swift dash. It was even possible that we should be able to take the goods in secret.

I climbed aboard, and parted the canvas at the rear. My gaze fell upon all manner of food articles. There were several sacks of potatoes, five or six sacks of cabbages, two or three carcasses of sheep, to mention only a few things.

"Grab hold, somebody," I said softly. I handed down enough mutton to last

us a couple of days, and two of the juniors grasped the carcass, and lost no time in hurrying away with it. There was no sense in waiting about, for we might be surprised at any moment.

A sack of potatoes was a different proposition. Several juniors found it necessary to stagger under its weight. But I felt extremely satisfied when I saw the heavy sack disappearing into the fog.

Two others took some cabbages, and this left only three of us. While I was looking round to see what could be found, there was a bellow of fury, and I turned to see the lorry-driver glaring up at me.

"What are you doing there?" demanded the man angrily.

"It's all right, old chap," I said coolly. "We've taken all we require—thanks."

"Why, you—you—"

"Good morning," I said briskly.

I leaped down, dodged the man with ease, and vanished into the fog. He came blundering after me, but he went in the wrong direction, and I grinned as I came upon Pitt and Tommy Watson waiting near the wall of the house.

"We were just coming back for you," panted Watson. "We scooted when we saw that chap—"

"That's all right," I interrupted. "The raid's been discovered—and all the better. That carman is bound to go to the Head, and it'll give Mr. Martin an appetite for breakfast when he hears what we've taken."

The whole thing was surprisingly easy. We got back into the west wing without any difficulty whatever. The fog had concealed our movements so thoroughly that it was child's play, and there was much joy and satisfaction among the ranks of the Remove.

Jimmy Little, the fat boy of St. Frank's, was in ecstasy.

"Great doughnuts!" he exclaimed. "This is simply terrific! You chaps ought to have a medal each! By chutney! I can prepare a glorious dinner for to-day—roast mutton, with boiled potatoes and cabbage! Think of it! Oh, my only hat! Just think of it, my sons!"

And Fatty Little smacked his lips in anticipation. Food was his god, and he took as much joy in preparing it as eating it.

The rest of the juniors were equally pleased, and there was general satis-

faction in the manner in which we had braved capture by venturing out into the open.

And meanwhile the Head was informed.

He was in his study, slowly pacing up and down before the fire, when Tubbs, the pageboy, entered, after timidly knocking.

"Well, boy, what is it?" snapped the Head shortly.

"If you please, sir, Richards wants to see you," said Tubbs.

"Who the deuce is Richards?" barked the Head.

"Please, sir, he's the driver of the motor-van what's outside now," said Tubbs. "He wants to make a complaint, sir—"

"I can't see him!" said the Head curtly. "Go away, Tubbs!"

"It's about them boys, sir," said Tubbs, who took secret joy in informing the Head of the Remove's victory. "They've come out of their fort, sir, and took a lot of things off the supply van—mutton and vegetables—"

"What?" roared the Head.

"Please, sir—"

"Tell the man to come to me at once," said Mr. Martin savagely.

Tubbs escaped, and he grinned all over his face as soon as he got into the passage. He lost no time in informing Mr. Richards, and that gentleman, in a state of considerable nervousness, was ushered into the Head's presence.

"Oh, so you're Richards, are you?" demanded Mr. Martin.

"Yes, sir."

"What's this I hear about those infernal boys taking some food off your van?"

"It's true, sir," said Richards nervously. "I wasn't to know, was I? This 'ere fog is so thick that you can't see a clear yard. And I hadn't left the van for more than ten minutes before—"

"You were grossly careless," snapped the Head. "Tell me what the boys took."

"Meat and vegetables, and all sorts," said Richards; and he proceeded to go into details regarding the extent of the Remove's capture. The Head listened with clenched teeth.

"That's enough—you may go!" he snapped abruptly.

The man went, and the Head glared into the fire.

"This is getting intolerable—absolutely intolerable!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "Good heavens! What will the young dogs be up to next? They seem to be masters of the situation."

The Headmaster clenched his fists.

"But not for long!" he grated. "I shall have them on their knees soon!"

And an expression came into his eyes which had not been there a moment before; an expression of triumph and malicious satisfaction. Apparently Mr. Howard Martin had thought of some means to gain his end.

What was his next move to be?

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT ALARM.

"I DON'T like it," I said thoughtfully. "Eh?" exclaimed Fatty Little, with a start.

"I don't like it at all," I repeated.

We were sitting in the kitchen—six or seven of us—partaking of supper. The day had passed quietly, and now night was upon us again. The kitchen fire was warm and cosy, and Fatty's supper first class. With considerable pride he had served up Welsh rarebit on toast, with hot cocoa to help it down.

"You—you don't like it?" asked Fatty anxiously.

"No," I replied, taking a mouthful of toast.

"You silly ass! Five minutes ago you said it was terrific—and you're eating it all the time," exclaimed Little warmly. "I'm jolly sure I don't want you to eat the stuff if you don't like it!"

I looked at the fat boy, awoke to realities, and grinned.

"I'm not talking about your grub, Fatty," I said. "This cheese-stuff is top-hole. How you make it so tasty beats me. When I said 'I didn't like it' I was referring to the general situation."

"Oh!" said Fatty. "That's nothing!"

"It's everything," I corrected. "Just consider the facts. We commandeered a

supply of fodder this morning, and the Head must have gone dotty with rage about it. Yet he did nothing—he didn't even appear."

"Well?" said Watson. "Is that a bad sign?"

"I fancy it is," I replied. "The day has been quiet—too quiet, in fact. That's just the trouble."

"Are you anxious for trouble, then?" inquired Jack Grey.

"Of course I'm not," I said. "But I know jolly well that trouble is to come—and I would prefer it to come at once. The Head's silence and inactivity means that something particularly drastic is brewing. Unless I'm very much mistaken, there'll be a lot of excitement before long."

"Another battle?" asked Watson.

"Something like that," I replied. "In any case, I've got a feeling in my bones that we sha'n't get through the night without an alarm. And it's up to us to be strictly on the alert."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West nodded.

"Dear fellow, I entirely agree with you. I do, really," he observed. "The Head seems to have a particular likin' for makin' trouble in the middle of the night. Perhaps he thinks he'll catch us nappin'."

"That's the idea, of course," I agreed. "But it won't work, my sons. We're too wide for Mr. Bully Martin. And the sooner he realises that we're not to be tricked the better it will be for everybody. Now, I shall advise the night watch to be particularly alert—and the fellows off duty had better sleep in their clothing. We might have to get busy at a second's notice."

The other fellows voted that my advice was sound, and when everything was quiet in the west wing for the night, there was a feeling in the air that excitement would come before the next sunrise.

I placed six extra fellows on watch, and the others slept almost fully clothed. I was on duty, with several other juniors, in the upper corridor. For I somehow suspected that any earnest attack would be made in that quarter.

But two hours passed, and no alarm came. Midnight boomed out, and everything was as quiet as ever. The school was asleep, to all intents and purposes.

"It seems to me that your bones felt

wrong this time, Nipper," remarked Pitt, with a yawn. "There's nothing doing at all, and it's my belief that we shall pass the night in peace."

"It's early yet," I said. "Don't be too sure."

However, by the time one o'clock arrived even I was beginning to suspect that my precautions had been needless, and that morning would come without any sign of activity from the Head.

Several of the fellows on watch were beginning to become rather sleepy when the clock was getting round towards two. But they held out gamely, for they were to be relieved at three o'clock by the next watch.

"Everything's all serene," declared Pitt. "It's my belief that the Head is beginning to knuckle under—What's the matter with you, Nipper? What's the idea of sniffing about like that?"

I had risen to my feet, and was smelling the air sharply. A moment or two earlier I had noticed a faint but pungent odour. And when I arose it became more distinct. I walked to the barricade, which barred the passage from wall to wall.

"H'm. It's rather curious," I murmured.

"Eh! What's curious?"

"Can't you smell something?" I asked. Pitt rose to his feet.

"No, I'm blessed if I can," he replied. "I can't make out what you're getting at—By jingo!"

He paused, and sniffed sharply.

"Yes, something seems to be burning," he exclaimed. "It smells like old rags or brown paper—Great Scott! Look up there! I can see smoke rolling along the ceiling!"

I gazed up, and the other juniors on watch looked up, too. Thin, wispy curls of smoke were coming along the corridor from the direction of the big staircase. And as we watched, rather startled, the smoke came in greater volumes. It increased so rapidly, in fact, that within a minute we were standing in a kind of fog. The smoke was getting thicker and thicker.

"What—what does it mean?" asked Owen major huskily.

"Something's on fire!" muttered Armstrong. "We'd better raise the alarm as soon as we can—"

"Hold on," I interrupted sharply. "Don't get into a panic. I may as well tell you that I'm suspicious."

"Suspicious!"

"Yes!"

"But—"

"The Head's capable of any trickery," I went on grimly. "The Head's in a corner, and he'll resort to every subterfuge. But if he thinks he can smoke us out, he's mistaken. We can open all the upper windows, and—"

"Great Scott!" panted Owen major abruptly. "Look—look there!"

He pointed with a quivering finger through an interstice of the barricade. But he need not have drawn our attention, for we had already seen.

A lurid, ruddy glow was appearing through the dense smoke. It seemed to come from the direction of the staircase, and the smoke itself was becoming thicker and thicker all the time. The situation, in point of fact, was decidedly alarming.

"Good heavens!" gasped Owen major. "The—the place is on fire!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We must clear out—"

"Rush to the windows—"

"Yell for help!"

"Hold on!" I shouted sharply. "You won't improve matters by getting in a panic. I'm not sure it is a fire yet. It may be a dodge of the Head's—"

"Don't be a fool!" panted Armstrong breathlessly. "Can't you see it's a fire? Do you think the Head would set the school alight to drive us out? You must be mad? If we don't escape now we shall be trapped!"

"There's no danger——" I began.

But Armstrong, casting another startled look at the ruddy glow, raced away into the dormitory, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Fire! Fire!"

"Confound the idiot!" I snapped angrily. "That's the worst of getting into a panic. He'll do no good by startling all the chaps that way! Why the dickens didn't you fellows stop him?"

"But—but I believe it is a fire, really!" exclaimed Owen major anxiously. "Armstrong is right, you know! The Head wouldn't burn the Ancient House down——"

"He is capable of any trickery," I

snapped. "And I'm not convinced, yet, that this is a genuine outbreak of fire."

"We—we can't take any chances!" exclaimed another junior. "Look! I believe the lobby is a mass of flames, and the staircase is cut off! We shall be trapped up here——"

"Rot!" I broke in. "There's the back staircase——"

"Oh, yes! I forgot that!"

"You shouldn't forget——"

"The place is on fire!" gasped Hubbard, rushing up at that moment. "Beyond the barricade, downstairs, the whole passage is a mass of flames and smoke! There's no escape down there, except by the passage window—and that'll be cut off within five minutes!"

"There you are!" said Owen major. "If we mess about here much longer we shall all be roasted alive! I'm going to clear out while there's time!"

"Same here!"

"Rather!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

Juniors were pouring out of the dormitory, half asleep and half awake, and the choking clouds of smoke and the lurid glare sufficed to make them alarmed and absolutely scared.

The shouts of those fellows who were in a panic only added to the disorder. I felt that Armstrong was to blame, for he had started the shouting. Well over half the juniors were now well out of control. A portion of the others were uncertain, while a few remained round me, willing to obey my instructions.

"Begad! What shall we do, old boy?" asked Tregellis-West. "It looks frightfully bad, you know. I'm not gettin' into a panic, but I really think we ought to make a move of some kind."

"My hat! Listen to that!" panted Grey. "Oh, this smoke!"

He coughed and spluttered, and we knew why he was suddenly alarmed. The big firebell of the Ancient House was pealing urgently, and at the same time storms of shouts and yells came from the Fifth Form and Third Form dormitories. Prefects were roaring out orders, and there was a general commotion.

"This settles it!" gasped Canham. "It's a real fire!"

"Of course it is!" said Fullwood shrilly. "Who said it wasn't? Do you think the Head would ring the alarm

bell and fetch all the other Forms out for nothin'? The place is on fire! We shall be burnt to death if we ain't quick!"

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Gulliver. "We shall be roasted alive!"

"Rot!" roared Handforth, coming up. "There's heaps of time—and if any fellow gets into a dotty panic, I'll punch his nose—— Why, what the —— You—you thundering idiots!"

Handforth was sent staggering back against the wall by a number of fellows who came charging by. And from beyond the barricade came the sounds of the other inhabitants of the Ancient House marching out of the building in perfect order, with prefects in charge.

There was no panic out there. The boys were carrying out their orders just as if they had been at ordinary fire drill. But, naturally, there was a considerable amount of excitement and alarm—particularly among the fags.

Mr. Martin himself had appeared, and was shouting at the top of his voice—ordering everybody to abandon the building. The glare from the lower hall was greater than ever, and the smoke continued to roll up in pungent, overpowering volumes. The lower part of the west wing apparently was a mass of flames.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked De Valerie, touching my arm.

"I don't know—but I'm not satisfied," I said grimly. "It started too suddenly, old son—and the Head is shouting rather too violently for my liking. There's no danger at all yet. I can't help thinking that there's trickery at work somewhere. I may be wrong——"

"Of course you're wrong," interrupted Church huskily. "There's no trickery about this. I'm going!"

"No, you're not!" snapped Handforth. "You'll wait for me, you—you funk!"

"We'd better get to the windows, anyhow," I said abruptly. "Let's get into the dormitory and have a look out into the Triangle. If only you'll keep calm we shall be all serene. There's heaps of time—and we can easily make ropes out of the bedclothes and swarm down in safety. Disorganisation is the very thing we wish to avoid."

I hurried into the dormitory, with several other fellows close behind. A few juniors were already at the windows,

but most of the others had cleared off to the lower passage.

Going to the window, I leaned out and stared into the Triangle. Smoke was pouring from several of the lower windows, and a flickering, fiery light shone through the haze round an angle of the building. The effect was certainly alarming, and I did not altogether blame the fellows for displaying a keen anxiety to be out in the open air.

But there was something about the appearance of the fire which did not satisfy me. In a vague way, I was suspicious. I had seen no actual flames yet, and there was no feeling of heat in the air. The smoke which came rolling along the passages was quite cold, and although it was helped along by a draught, the draught itself was not a heated one.

"I'm not going to clear out yet," I said grimly. "Hang it all, I can't believe the place is on fire——"

"You can't believe it?" asked Watson blankly. "But—but you can see the glare, you fathead! The fire is round at the back!"

"How do you account for the fact that we haven't felt any heat yet?" I demanded.

"Any heat?"

"Yes! I've been in one or two serious fires," I exclaimed. "And in every case a person trapped on an upper floor is soon almost overpowered by the waves of heat which rise up. There's no heat here—which is easily explained when you realise that the whole thing is a fake——"

"A—a fake?" stuttered McClure.

"Yes; a fake!" I retorted. "I'm more and more convinced of it—and those asses have gone rushing out—— Look there! They've smashed down the barricades of the lower windows, and they're getting out! Quick! We shall have to go and stop it before it's too late!"

Through the haze of smoke I had seen a number of Removites scrambling through two of the lower windows. And I knew that the rebels, once out of hand, would follow like a flock of sheep.

I rushed out of the dormitory, pelted down the back stairs, and decided to take things for granted.

"Come back, you idiots!" I yelled angrily. "It's all a fake—there's no

fire at all. If you go out there you'll be collared by the Head!"

"Oh, rot!" said Merrell. "The whole school is burnin'!"

"If you go into the Triangle, you'll be captured within a minute, and you'll probably be expelled from the school," I explained tensely. "Listen to me, you excited asses! I'm your leader, and you've got to listen! This whole affair is a trick of Martin's, and, if you follow those other panic-stricken dolts into the Triangle, you'll all be set upon and captured. And then the Head will gain complete victory, and we shall go under—our whole barring-out will be brought to an ignominious finish. It's a stratagem, and I'm not going to be duped by it. Stand by me, and you'll find that I'm right—and you'll thank me afterwards. Now then, what's the verdict? Are you going to stick by your leader, or will you walk into the trap?"

I yelled at the top of my voice, and every fellow in the lower part of the west wing heard me. Many of them had paused, half in and half out of the windows. One or two scrambled through and disappeared into the haze; but the majority turned back, and I knew that they were wavering.

"You miserable rotters!" bellowed Handforth. "Is this what you call standing by your leader? If we don't stick together we're lost. The Head's nearly gained his victory, and he will gain it if you don't recover your wits!"

"Great pancakes!" ejaculated Fatty Little suddenly. "There's something going on in the Triangle! Our chaps are being set upon——"

"What?"

It was a roar from a dozen throats.

"It's a fact!" gasped Fatty. "Look!"

I rushed to a window, and the other fellows crowded after me. And I set my teeth grimly as I beheld the sight I had been dreading. Fully twenty boys had rushed into the open during those first few moments of panic. They had collected together in a clump, and now they were fighting against a huge gang of rough-looking men. And Mr. Howard Martin was standing by, shouting orders.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Canham. "Nipper was right, after all!"

To most of the juniors the sudden discovery was like a cold douche. But I had been expecting it, and my only emotion was one of fury. I was furious

with the Head for resorting to such a low-down trick, and I was furious with the rebels for being so easily deceived.

The twenty who had escaped from the west wing were the weaker members of my band. Fullwood and Co. were there, of course, and such fellows as Teddy Long, Merrell, Marriot, Armstrong and Griffith. Not a single prominent member of the Remove had deserted the flag.

And now they realised—too late—that they had been too hasty.

They had walked blindly into the Head's well-laid trap!

The gang of roughs had been lurking behind the wall of the Ancient House, and the Removites found themselves surrounded. There were a great number of men and youths—the scum of Bellton and Bannington. Many of the men were those who had attempted to dislodge the rebels on a previous occasion. The Head had apparently paid them well to try on this fresh dodge.

"Rescue Remove!" yelled the startled juniors.

"Help! Help!"

"We've been tricked!"

The Head strode forward out of the smoke.

"Hold them tightly, men," he shouted. "Capture every boy you can; the more you capture the greater will be your reward!"

I gazed upon the scene angrily. There was no hope whatever for the captured rebels. They were completely at the mercy of the Head's hired ruffians. And within a minute every one of the twenty juniors was held tight, a prisoner.

By adopting a very old ruse, the Head had frightened a certain proportion of the rebels out of their stronghold. His scheme had only been partially successful, but that it had met with a certain amount of success there was no denying.

I realised that it was up to me to act.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT IN THE TRIANGLE.

"**T**RICKED!" gasped Owen major.

"Hopelessly!" agreed Armstrong. "What a set of asses we were not to listen to Nipper!"

We walked into this trap—simply walked into it, like a lot of frightened sheep!"

"It was your rotten fault!" exclaimed Gulliver harshly. "You went rushing about, yellin' like a madman. If you hadn't shouted so jolly hard we might have listened to Nipper——"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Armstrong crossly.

They were all bunched together in the Triangle, with a number of the Head's hired men surrounding them. The fight had been short and sharp, and the juniors knew well enough that it would be useless for them to make any attempt at escape.

Armstrong had certainly caused more noise than anybody, and he was now feeling, not only angry with himself, but extremely foolish. He was scared, too. He realised, with a cold shiver, that he was in the Head's hands, and that fearful punishment would probably fall upon him and upon those who had shared in the panic.

The only cause for satisfaction in the whole situation was that Mr. Martin's scheme had been only partially successful. His idea, of course, had been to frighten everyone of us out of our fortress during the first few moments of the alarm.

But only a small proportion of the rebels had actually fled—the remainder were still safe behind the barricades. But I didn't like the situation at all. The Remove's strong position was at stake, and I knew that the Head would make all the capital possible out of his capture.

The whole affair had been so swift that there had only been a short lapse of time since the actual commencement. Everybody was breathless, and everybody was excited. In fact, there was considerable confusion.

"Look here," I said briskly, "something's got to be done."

Handforth grunted.

"It strikes me that something has been done!" he growled. "Why, if I hadn't been jolly firm, Church and McClure would have got collared with the rest of the asses. I can't understand——"

"We shouldn't have gone, you duffer!" said Church warmly.

"Well, don't argue about it now," I broke in. "About twenty of our chaps are out in the Triangle—prisoners. Unless we do something now—this very instant—they'll be marched away out of reach."

"But what can we do?" asked Pitt.

"Go to the rescue!"

"Eh?"

"Go out to the rescue," I repeated grimly. "It's the only possible course, and there's no certainty that we shall succeed. Still, we've got to do something, and there's no time to make elaborate plans."

De Valerie looked doubtful.

"I don't want to be pessimistic, but it seems like a forlorn hope to me," he said. "We can't fight that gang of roughs with any hope of success, and we shall probably get ourselves collared——"

"It can't be helped," I interrupted. "We simply must do everything in our power to help those chaps out there. The Head's gang is only a crowd of boozing rotters, and most of them will crumple up when we start. Anyhow, I call for volunteers. Who'll come with me?"

"I will!" roared Handforth promptly; "and so will Church and McClure. And if any other fellow refuses, he'll have to settle with me later on! This way, you chaps! To the rescue!"

The leader of Study D was not the kind of fellow to waste time. He dashed out of the passage window, and leapt into the Triangle. I quickly followed him, and almost every rebel came scrambling out.

"You'd better stop behind, Pitt," I shouted, looking back.

"Rats!" snapped Pitt. "I'm coming——"

"Stay behind!" I repeated. "And keep at least a dozen fellows with you to guard the barricades. If you find your hands too full, yell for help, and we'll abandon this project altogether."

Pitt realised the soundness of my suggestion, and he at once turned back. After that I lost sight of him. The Triangle was still filled with smoke from the fake fire, and this was really in our favour.

There was a yell of cheering from the captured juniors as they saw what had happened, and the Head himself was not slow to realise the position.

"Now, my men, there is a fine chance for you!" he roared. "Capture all these boys—every one of them! If no boy escapes, I will treble your pay!"

The roughs were eager enough to obey the Head's command. They were in force, and they took it for granted that the prisoners would cause no trouble. But in this they made a great mistake.

"Hurrah!" roared Owen major excitedly. "They're coming out to rescue us! Now, then, you chaps! Fight like the dickens! It's our only chance!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, the Remove!"

The Head's men were somewhat surprised to discover that their prisoners had suddenly become imbued with tremendous activity. Only a few fellows remained passive—Teddy Long and Fullwood and one or two more of their kind.

The remainder commenced fighting afresh, and now they had quite a different proposition to tackle. For the enemy was beset by the rescue party, and the men had their hands quite full.

Within a few seconds a terrific battle was in progress.

Handforth did wonders. He simply let himself go as he had never done before. He sailed in like a heavyweight, and even the burly roughs were not able to stand up to him.

One half-drunken fellow imagined that Handforth would make an easy victim, and he planted himself in front of Handy with a leer of triumph.

"Makin' a lot of noise, ain't you?" he growled. "I'll soon make you sing a different tune, young shaver. Take that, to begin with!"

A huge fist lunged out at Handforth's face, but somehow it didn't reach its mark. Handy twisted, ducked, and then swung round his right with terrific force. His fist crashed into the man's face with a thud.

The fellow went over backwards, howling and cursing. And when he picked himself up he crawled away to the outskirts of the melee. He had had quite sufficient. And his type of courage was characteristic of the whole bunch.

One or two good, hard blows were sufficient. The men had been promised that their task would be an easy one and that the Removites would offer no stout resistance, and this pitched battle was not exactly in the programme. The gang did not fancy it in the least.

However, some of them were made of sterner stuff, and these few provided all the excitement necessary. They were dangerous, and it was hopeless for any single junior to pit himself against one of these giants.

Three or four of us were required to

deal with each man, and even then we had all our work cut out to weaken the resistance. But after a good few of the roughs had fallen out of the fighting, our task became easier.

Not that we met with complete success.

The battle had raged for, perhaps, five minutes, and there had been casualties on both sides. Fully half the rebels were suffering from black eyes, ugly bruises, and such like injuries. Handforth, in particular, was badly knocked about; but he was fighting with as much determination as ever.

And when it seemed that we should be able to rescue our unfortunate companions, a change came about in the situation. Mr. Martin appeared, after being absent for some few minutes, and he carried with him a great bundle of heavy sticks. He threw these on the ground.

"Use these, men!" he shouted. "If you hurt the young dogs, all the better! Beat them until they fall, helpless!"

There was an immediate rush for the sticks.

"Grab them!" I yelled. "Don't let —"

I was unable to say anything further at the moment, for a heavy fist had crashed into the side of my head with such force that I was knocked silly for a moment. I turned upon the brute who had struck the blow, and the next few minutes were quite interesting.

The man was a prizefighter, I believe, and matters would have gone badly with me if Sir Montie had not come to the rescue in the nick of time. He charged up splendidly, and between the two of us we were able to knock the ruffian out.

But by this time matters had become bad.

Only one or two juniors had succeeded in getting hold of the sticks. The rest were in the hands of the Head's men. And the sticks were being wielded with such effect that several juniors were already down, cruelly hit.

I came to a decision without delay.

"Retire!" I roared. "We can't keep this game up now. Every fellow who can escape, do so! We've got to beat a retreat!"

It was the only course possible. The battle had reached such a stage now that it would have been fatal to remain. It

went against the grain to retire, but it was better to do so with our numbers only slightly thinned than to fight on until we were all knocked out of time.

A good many of the juniors were retiring before my order came, and the remained obeyed me with alacrity.

And we found it was just as difficult to retire as to keep on with the battle. The worst time of all was when we were at the windows. It was impossible for the lot of us to crowd in together, and there were several fierce fights in progress near the walls of the Ancient House.

But, at last, by sheer strength, we forced our way into the windows and somehow managed to fix up the barricade. By the time this was done, almost every junior was beaten.

However, our venture had not been absolutely fruitless. Eight of the unfortunate twenty returned with us, and Mr. Martin found that he only had twelve rebels in his hands. His stratagem had not been entirely successful.

Even after we had got back into our fortress, the battle did not cease. Urged by the Head, the roughs made several fierce attempts to smash down the barricade. But now our position was better.

We were able to use pea-shooters with great effect. But the most valuable weapons of all were the bicycle-pumps, which we had used with such complete success on a former occasion.

These useful articles were filled with pepper, which was projected upon the attackers in clouds. It disorganised the attack in a moment, and the men retired sneezing, cursing, and half blinded.

And, once they had given up the attack, they made no attempt to restart it. They had had quite sufficient, and were not at all anxious to continue their battle with the rebels of St. Frank's.

It was three o'clock before things became anything like quiet. Until then we had no opportunity of breathing, or of examining our hurts. I went round on a tour of inspection, and found that my followers were in a deplorable condition.

Collars and ties had vanished, jackets were torn and ripped open, mud was everywhere. And of personal injuries there were so many that it was almost impossible to count them.

There was hardly a fellow in the whole Remove who remained untouched. The

most common complaint was a bleeding nose. Black eyes were very numerous, and quite a number of juniors had lost teeth.

But, after all, the injuries were only superficial. Nobody was actually harmed, and after a general wash and an application of ointment or court-plaster, the warriors looked very much better—and felt very much better.

"Well, I don't think you ought to grumble," I said at length. "We've lost twelve men, but the Head can't claim much of a success. We're as unbeaten as ever, and if Martin thinks we'll give in, he's made a huge mistake."

"Begad! Rather!" exclaimed Sir Montie, holding his pince-nez to his face. "We'll never surrender, old boy. This is frightfully awkward, you know. I'm really in a most appallin' quandary. I can't see properly without my bally glasses, an' yet I can't wear them!"

"Why not?" asked Watson.

"Tommy, boy, it's a shockin' catastrophe—it is, really!" said Tregellis-West, shaking his head. "One of those beastly brutes punched my nose so frightfully hard that he knocked it out of shape, begad!"

"It seems to have increased in size, old chap," grinned Somerton.

"That's just the trouble, dear fellow—my nose is so awfully big that the glasses won't hold on," complained Sir Montie. "However, there is no sense in grumblin', an' perhaps the swellin' will go down within a few hours. I sincerely hope so—I do, really!"

"When you've quite finished jawing about your nose, we'll talk about something more important," I explained. "We're face to face with the fact that Martin has collared twelve of us——"

"I don't see that it matters much," interrupted Watson bluntly.

"You ass! It matters a great deal."

"Who are they?" went on Tommy. "Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell—Merrell and Long and all that crowd. They weren't any use to us, and never would have been any use. We've less mouths to feed, and we shall have more space. If you ask me, we're well rid of the chaps!"

I shook my head.

"That's not the point," I said. "You know what a beast Martin is.

He'll make some capital out of his capture—you can be sure of that. But whatever his next move happens to be, we've got to stand firm. We're out for victory, and nothing else will do. There must be no compromise."

"Rather not," agreed Pitt. "It'll be victory or defeat—one or the other. And I'm willing to wager fifty to one that we shall win. We've got the kind of chap at our head who won't be satisfied with anything else but victory."

"Thanks," I said quietly. "If all the rest of you have as much confidence in me, we shall be safe. The only pity is that those idiots refused to listen to me when the fire alarm went. There wasn't any necessity for the Head to capture a single prisoner—I saw through the dodge from the first minute."

"Well, it's no good jawing about that now," said Watson, in his matter-of-fact way. "The Head's got his prisoners, and we shall have to wait and see what develops. And I'm going to get some sleep while I've got the chance. I ought to have been in bed hours ago."

Meanwhile, the other members of the Ancient House were not at all pleased with the events of the night. The fags were pretty powerless, but the Fifth formers had been wondering if it would not be a wise policy on their part to join the rebellion.

They had been aroused from their sleep by the shouts of fire, and by the sounding of the fire alarm. But when they got downstairs, excited and scared, they found that the whole thing was merely a trick to dupe the rebels.

The Sixth were equally angry, but the Sixth did not consider the possibility of rebellion. Chambers of the Fifth, chief agitator in the senior ranks, was quite indignant on the subject.

After returning to their dormitory, the Fifth made no attempt to sleep. Any such attempt, in fact, would have been rather hopeless. For when Chambers really got going, peace vanished.

"I don't see why we should stand it!" roared Chambers. "What do you chaps say?"

"It's certainly a bit thick," agreed Phillips.

"Jolly thick," said Bryant.

Phillips and Bryant shared Study

No. 10 with Chambers, and they generally found it advisable to echo their leader's words. He was not a fighter, but he always had a large supply of pocket-money, and Phillips and Bryant took care to remain on the best of terms with him.

"It's altogether rotten—an outrage on the Ancient House," declared Chambers warmly. "The fire alarm goes, and everybody is scared stiff."

"Yes, you did look a bit white round the gills," remarked one of the seniors.

"Oh, did I?" roared Chambers. "Well, let me tell you, Salter, that you were nearly blubbing with fright! When I said we were scared stiff, I was speaking figuratively—and the fags were scared stiff, anyhow. I call it a beastly shame that the Head should play a rotten trick of that sort. Some of those Third Form kids will be ill for weeks after this."

"They'll soon get over it," said Bryant.

"Well, I'm inclined to make a fuss," snorted Chambers. "We go downstairs, expecting to find the place in flames, and what do we see? I ask you, what do we see?"

"There was too much smoke to see much," observed Phillips.

"We go downstairs, and we find the Head playing about with a lot of fire-work arrangements," shouted Chambers. "There he was, with some of his beastly hired roughs, burning smoke bombs, and red fire and goodness knows what else. His quarrel with the Remove is no excuse for alarming the whole school. I vote——"

"That we get to sleep again," suggested Phillips, sensibly.

"No!" roared Chambers. "I vote that we join the rebellion!"

"What?"

"Why shouldn't we?" demanded Chambers warmly.

"Because it wouldn't be dignified," said Salter. "Hang it all, we can't copy the Remove, Chambers. It wouldn't be the thing you know. Besides, there's not room enough for us in the west wing——"

"I don't mean a rebellion of that sort," interrupted Chambers. "My suggestion is that we should refuse all

work to-morrow. We'll strike. We'll simply ignore all orders, and tell the Head that we won't do a stroke until the Remove is pardoned. How's that?"

"Rotten!" said Bryant. "It couldn't be done, old man. I don't often disagree with your ideas, but I must speak out now. If we ignored the Head in that way, we should only find a pile of trouble. Anyhow, I'm going to bed now, and if you want to keep on jawing, kindly do so in a whisper!"

Most of the seniors followed Bryant's example, and finding that his audience was dwindling to nothing, Chambers decided that it wouldn't be a bad idea to get back into his own bed.

But there was no denying that feeling ran high in the Fifth, and it seemed quite likely that some big trouble would develop within a very short time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HEAD'S TERMS.

FATTY LITTLE was in no way upset by the events of the night.

When breakfast time came, in the morning, he was as brisk and active as ever. In spite of his great bulk, he was one of the most nimble fellows in the Remove. And he prepared a splendid meal of fried bacon, new bread, and coffee.

His bread was quite a triumph. It was so good, in fact, that it disappeared at an astonishing rate. He had made an enormous quantity, assisted by a small army of under chefs. But by the time breakfast was over there was very little bread to be seen.

The rebels were still showing many signs of the battle. Strips of court plaster were very apparent, and many juniors were only able to see out of one eye—the other being temporarily closed for repairs.

But everybody was quite cheerful, and there was a good deal of speculation as to what would happen. The Remove did not seem to have much sympathy with the luckless dozen who had been taken prisoners.

"It was their own fault," said Owen major. "I went out with 'em at first

and I was lucky to get back—but we were all asses. And the Head can't murder them, can he? I don't see that our position is any different."

"It all depends upon what the Head does," I said. "I'm pretty sure that he'll make a move of some kind. But exactly what kind of move it'll be, I don't know. We shall have to await events."

As it turned out, we were not left long in doubt.

The first two batches of rebels had already finished breakfast, and I was enjoying a second cup of coffee when Grey came rushing down from upstairs. He was looking breathless and excited.

"You'd better come up, Nipper," he panted.

"Eh? What for?" I asked.

"The Head's on the other side of the barricade—he wants to jaw with the ringleader of the rebels," said Grey. "Come on, my son!"

I set my cup down.

"Oh, a giddy parley, eh?" I said. "Well, I've no objection. I'll listen to what the Head's got to say, but that's no guarantee that I shall agree with him. I expect he wants to make terms."

I hurried upstairs, and a considerable number of juniors came up, too. When I arrived at the barricade I found a crowd there, waiting for me. And, beyond, Mr. Howard Martin was standing looking grim and cold.

"You want to speak to me, sir?" I called, peering through a convenient space.

"I want to speak with the leader of this disgraceful revolt," said the Head.

"I'm the leader, sir," I replied. "But you're wrong when you call the revolt disgraceful. We took up this stand because we were justified——"

"Justified!" thundered the Head. "How dare you, Nipper? How dare you have the audacity to make such a wicked, false statement? There was no justification whatever for this senseless rebellion. Simply because I impose a few restrictions, you consider yourselves justified in defying me. I am your Headmaster—and it is your duty to obey me in all things. Do you think for one moment that I can ever allow you to return unpunished?"

"We sha'n't return until you accept our terms, sir," I said smoothly. "We're quite ready to hold out if you're still obdurate. We shall be able to stand it as long as you, sir, and we can't possibly consider any surrender."

The Head controlled himself with an effort.

"Oh, indeed!" he grated. "Indeed! We shall see about that, Nipper! You appear to forget that the position is greatly altered now. At a considerable sacrifice of my self-respect, I have come to offer you terms. It is a decision I determined not to come to—but I am willing to give you one last chance."

"What's that, sir?" I asked quietly. "Please understand that it's no good offering us a pardon if we'll return to the conditions we rebelled against. We're not willing to stand it, sir."

"You are impudent, boy——"

"No, sir, I am merely stating the truth," I said. "You accuse us of disgraceful conduct. You appear to forget that your own conduct has been positively outrageous——"

"How—how dare you?" roared the Head furiously. "Upon my soul! I am amazed that you should have the effrontery to insult me in this way. You will pay dearly for it later, you young cub. I intend to make an example of you, and your punishment will now be doubled."

"I believe in speaking my mind, sir," I said grimly. "Since the Remove rebelled, you have resorted to every shady trick imaginable. Finding it impossible to dislodge us by fair means, you did not hesitate to use foul. Under these circumstances, I find it impossible to enter into any discussion. When you are willing to accept the terms of the Remove, I shall be pleased to see you again."

"Rippin', old boy—rippin'," murmured Sir Montie. "That's made him squirm, begad!"

The Head was certainly breathing hard with suppressed fury.

"You are not improving matters by talking in that way, you young hound," he exclaimed harshly. "I do not intend to say many words to you. You are aware of the fact that twelve Remove boys are now captives in my hands. They are securely held in one of the

cellars, and I may as well inform you that several men are on guard, so that no escape is possible."

"Is that what you call fair treatment, sir?" I asked. "Do you think it's right to engage a crowd of common hooligans to fight with public schoolboys? Is such a thing calculated to raise the prestige of St. Frank's?"

"I am justified in using any and every means within my power to bring this present state of things to an end," exclaimed the Head sourly. "I have twelve of your number under lock and key, and I call upon you to surrender at once."

"So that you can place us under lock and key?" shouted Handforth. "We won't give in, you bully—we'll never show the white feather."

"Rather not!"

"I have already informed you that I do not mean to say much," shouted Martin. "I will give you your choice. Either you surrender at once—within the hour—and place yourselves upon my mercy, or those twelve boys will be regarded by me as the ringleaders. They will each receive a sound flogging, and will be expelled from the school immediately."

"And what if we surrender, sir?" I asked.

"In that case, boy, there will be no expulsions," exclaimed the Head. "I will guarantee that all of you will remain in the school, and I will inflict only comparatively light punishments. You will, of course, accept my full authority in all matters——"

"Then there's no need to continue the argument, sir," I broke in. "I might as well tell you now that we have no intention of surrendering, and your threats regarding your prisoners have no effect upon me. In any case, it is a shameful thing to suggest that those twelve fellows shall be flogged and regarded as the ringleaders. They are not, and they only followed my lead because they were obliged to. They had nothing whatever to do with the planning of the rebellion, and they did not even help to resist your various attacks——"

"Enough!" snapped the Head. "I have already stated my terms, and it is for you to accept them. Remember—if you refuse to give in, each and every one of those twelve boys will be ex-

pelled. And their fate will rest upon your shoulders, since it is within your power to save them."

"You—you unjust rotter!" roared Handforth furiously. "If you think you're going to force our hand by that dodge, you've made a bloomer!"

"Yah! Go away!"

"Bully!"

"Tyrant!"

A storm of groaning followed, but the Head stood through it unmoved, and did not even turn a hair. When it was possible for him to make himself heard, he spoke again.

"Well?" he asked. "What is your answer?"

"You can do your worst, sir—that's my answer," I replied grimly. "We're not making any terms of that type. You won't be able to force us into surrender by threatening to ill-use the prisoners you took by means of hired ruffianism. That's all, Mr. Martin."

I turned on my heel and walked away. And the Head, after having a little battle with himself for a few moments, snorted furiously, and vanished. When he had gone I stared at the juniors about me in a grim manner.

"He means it," I said slowly.

"He'll expel all those chaps?"

"Yes—and flog them until they can't stand," I said. "He'll flog the poor beggars to begin with. And the only way we can prevent such injustice is to admit defeat and chuck up the sponge. What shall we do?"

"Hold out, of course."

"It's a rotten position," I said. "To hold out is our only course—but it's beastly to think of those other chaps suffering for the sins of the whole Remove—or, rather, what Martin calls sins. I don't exactly know what we can do. The matter needs careful consideration."

Meanwhile, a considerable number of fellows outside had heard of the Head's decision, and there was quite a lot of excitement. Nobody knew when the next move was to come, but it was generally felt that there would not be much delay.

About twenty minutes after the Head had departed, Bryant of the Fifth made his appearance on the other side of the barricade.

"Is Nipper there?" he called.

"Yes," I said. "What's the trouble, Bryant?"

"Nothing much," said the Fifth Former. "About five minutes ago Chambers and I managed to get a word or two with some of your kids in the cellar. We had a jaw with them through one of the gratings—and we thought it just as well to give them a hint of what was coming."

"You told them they were going to be sacked?" I asked sharply.

"Yes," said Bryant. "They were a bit startled, of course, but they'd been expecting something of the kind, so it wasn't much of a shock. I asked if they had any message for you, and they said they had."

"Well, what is it?" I asked.

"They told me to tell you to hold out."

"To hold out?"

"Exactly!" said the senior. "They took a vote on the spot, and seven fellows out of the dozen were in favour of urging you to carry on. They want you to stick to your guns, and leave them to their fate. They reckon that the honour of the Remove is the only thing to think about."

"Good chaps!" I said warmly. "I didn't think they would be so staunch. It makes it all the easier for us to stand by our decision. And, if the fellows are kicked out, they'll soon be back again."

"That's what Griffith reckoned," said Bryant. "He figured it out that they'll catch it just as hot, even if the Remove surrenders. So the best thing they can do is to take their gruel quietly."

"Well, it's jolly decent of them to send such a message," I exclaimed warmly. "And thanks for bringing it, Bryant. The position is a bit difficult, but we must hope for the best. What do all the fellows say about that under-hand trick of the Head's? How do they take it?"

"Badly!" said the Fifth-Former. "Chambers is in a rare way, and he's in favour of starting a revolt in the Fifth."

"Good!"

"That's the style, Bryant!"

"Don't crow too soon!" said the senior. "I doubt if the other fellows are willing to follow Chambers's lead. Anyhow, I—Hullo! What's that? Speaking to me, Wilson?"

He turned, and looked at Wilson, of the Sixth.

"Yes, I am," said the prefect. "You know as well as I do, Bryant, that it's against the Head's orders to jaw with these young beggars. You'd better slip away now, and I won't report you. You've got to go into Big Hall at once!"

"Oh!" said Bryant. "What for?"

"I'm not supposed to know the Head's business!" snapped Wilson. "He's ordered the school to assemble, and it's got to be done. I expect those prisoners of the Head's are to be put through the mill."

Bryant went off, and Wilson followed.

"Well, Martin hasn't lost much time," I said grimly. "I'm glad to hear that the Fifth is getting ready for ructions. Somehow, I've got an idea that there'll be a big change in the situation before an hour has passed."

"Yes. Twelve chaps will be sacked!" exclaimed Watson.

"I'm not so sure about that!" I retorted. "An injustice of that kind can't happen. It simply can't! Something is bound to crop up to prevent it. Martin won't have everything his own way!"

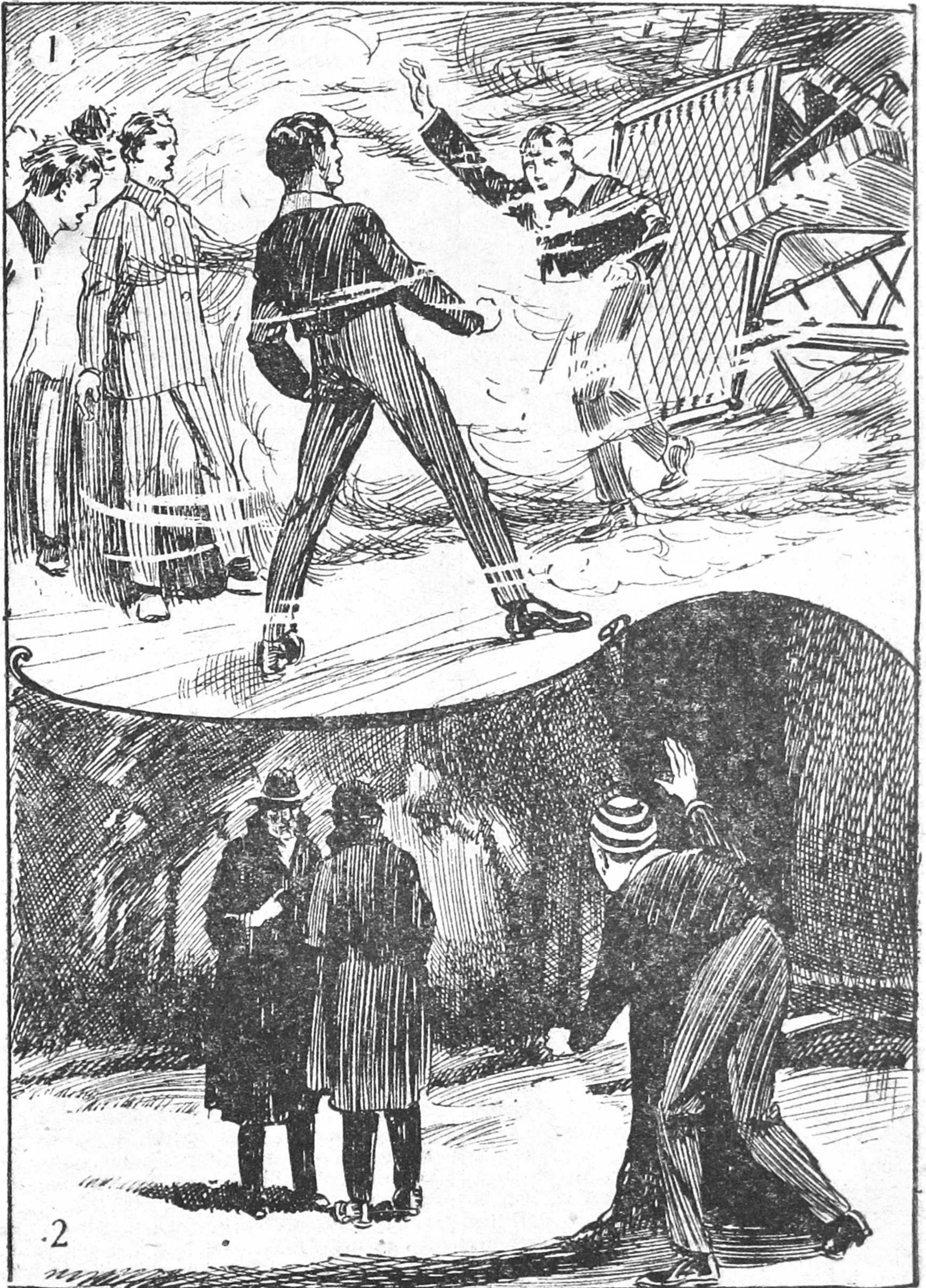
In Big Hall the school was assembling with ill grace. There was never very much time between breakfast and morning lessons, and that interval was always regarded as sacred. Any interference with it was considered the limit. And now the whole school was ordered into Big Hall, with the certainty that they would be detained there until lessons were due to commence.

The Fifth Form, already in a truculent mood, was not exactly in a humour to put up with much of Mr. Martin's nonsense, and the seniors regarded the Head very grimly as he made his appearance on the platform.

Although he was unaware of the fact, his position as Headmaster of St. Frank's was by no means as secure as it had been on the previous day. The incident of the faked fire had aroused more indignation in the school than anything. It was looked upon as a low-down, contemptible trick, a subterfuge utterly unworthy of a gentleman, and Mr. Martin's power was greatly lessened.

But he did not know this at the moment. He fondly believed that the school was greatly impressed by his firmness, and by his obvious determination to smash the Remove to smithereens.

"Boys, before commencing the very



1. "Good heavens!" gasped Owen major. "The the place is on fire!"
2. Lee! I nearly jumped from the ground, but just managed to keep myself under control.

unpleasant task I find it necessary to perform this morning, I wish to have a few words with you," said the Head grimly. "As you all know, a certain section of the junior school has had the amazing audacity to pit itself against my authority——"

"They had cause to!"

"Good luck to the Remove!"

"Three cheers for the young beggars!"

"Hurrah!"

The interruptions all came from the Fifth, and Mr. Martin looked rather startled as he stared from the platform.

"Who made those remarks?" he roared. "Mr. Pagett, surely you are capable of keeping your own boys in order while I am addressing them? I shall be greatly annoyed if there is any further interruption."

Mr. Pagett scowled.

"Silence, boys!" he ordered.

"The Remove, I repeat, has dared to rebel against the school regulations," proceeded the Head. "Not only that, but they have seized a section of the Ancient House building, and the boys are foolish enough to imagine that they will be able to gain a victory over me."

"So they will, too!" shouted Chambers defiantly.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Pagett, glaring.

"Keep your hair on!" muttered Chambers. "You're nearly as bald as old Martin, and we're fed up with the pair of you!"

"What did you say, Chambers?" snapped the Form-master.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" said Chambers.

"When you have quite finished, Mr. Pagett, I will proceed," said the Head sourly.

"It is impossible for me to keep the boys in order," rapped out Mr. Pagett. "Do you think that I can control them when there is a spirit of rebellion running riot in the whole school?"

"If that is the case, Mr. Pagett, there will soon be an alteration," said Mr. Martin. "I intend to give the school an object lesson within a few minutes which they are not likely to forget. The Remove thinks it will be victorious, but the Remove is mistaken. I have already captured twelve of the wretched boys, and it is my plan to make an example of them—here and now."

"Poor kids!" muttered Bryant.

"These boys will be flogged in the presence of you all, each in his turn," went on the Head grimly. "After that they will be expelled from this school in dire disgrace."

"Bully!"

"You'd better clear out while you're safe!"

"Three groans for the Head!"

The Fifth Form delivered the groans with amazing gusto, and the more daring spirits in the Third echoed the groans. The College House section of the Remove, which was not in the revolt, hooted and hissed louder than anybody.

The Head stood on the platform, regarding the scene with fierce eyes.

"I am interested to witness this scene!" he snapped at length. "Very shortly there will be a change. It is my intention to show you all that I am not to be treated with impertinence. I have overlooked many grave faults, but I shall not overlook them in the future. Let every boy here be warned, and let him heed my words! I will have obedience and discipline!"

The Head turned away, and the storm of hisses which arose was not exactly a very clear indication that obedience and discipline were likely to be observed. The school, in fact, was in a state of semi-revolt already.

CHAPTER V.

THE REVOLT OF THE FIFTH.

THE culprits did not look a very happy crowd as they walked upon the platform from the doorway at the rear. They were under the control of four prefects, and all the juniors displayed visible signs of the night's fighting. Even Fullwood and Co. were marked, for the cads of the Ancient House had fought hard to regain their liberty.

"These boys already know what their sentence is to be," said Mr. Martin, with a note of gloating vindictiveness in his voice. "They are to be birched severely, and they will leave the school by the first available train. I do not care to take this step, but it is necessary that drastic action should be decided upon. Leniency would be misplaced."

"May I speak, sir?" asked Fullwood boldly.

"No, boy; you may not."

"But I don't think it's right, sir! It's not fair!" said Fullwood. "We weren't the fellows who started this revolt. We should have been out of it altogether, but we were compelled to join the rebellion——"

"I wish to hear no appeals for mercy!" snapped the Head. "Your companions in the west wing have had sufficient warning, and it was within their power to release you from this grave position. But they preferred to ignore you, and the innocent, I fear, must suffer for the guilty."

"It's not fair that we should be sacked, sir!" said Fullwood. "I've been against the revolt from the very start——"

"That is enough, Fullwood!" interrupted the Head curtly. "Before the rebellion started you had ample opportunity of standing out and continuing your duties. But you preferred to join the rebels, and you must now take the consequences. Jesson, hand me my birch!"

The prefect did so with great alacrity. Nothing on earth would please him better than to see a bunch of Removites flogged and sacked, unless, perhaps, it was to see the whole Remove similarly treated.

For Jesson had no reason to love the Juniors. Only a few days earlier he had helped the Head in a piece of contemptible trickery, and Jesson's only reward had been tar and feathers. Caught in the act of trickery, the prefect had been tarred and feathered by the angry Removites, and since then he had steered very clear of the west wing of the Ancient House. He handed Mr. Martin the birch, with satisfaction plainly apparent upon his face.

"Merrell, stand forward!" ordered the Head.

Merrell started.

"Mum-me? sir," he gasped faintly.

"Yes, Merrell," said Mr. Martin. "I have decided that you shall be the first to suffer this punishment. Perhaps it will make you realise how foolish your young friends have been. Perhaps you will bear in mind that it is a very serious crime to pit yourself against your Headmaster."

"But—but I've done nothing, sir," said Merrell huskily. "If you start knocking me about, my people will bring an action——"

"Enough!" snapped the Head. "One more word, Merrell, and I will have

no mercy on you whatever! Stand forward!"

Merrell had no option but to obey. He could not very well refuse to the Head's face, and surrounded by prefects. He stepped forward, very pale and agitated. There was no mistaking the alarm in his eyes.

And as he walked forward the door at the rear of the platform opened again, and Mr. Simpson Wrott appeared. The new Housemaster of the Ancient House was looking as harsh and forbidding as ever.

There was not a fellow in that great throng who even remotely suspected that Mr. Simpson Wrott was no less a person than Nelson Lee himself, but this actually was the case.

Having been dismissed by the Head, Nelson Lee had returned to the school in another character, in order to take up his own duties! So far he had been entirely successful, and the Head had no suspicion of the truth.

Nelson Lee had done everything in his power to ease matters for the Remove, but his task had been a difficult one, for, in order to retain his position, he had been obliged to maintain a character of a detestable nature. He was harsh, overbearing, and bullying. Yet he had never treated the fellows with real harshness. His bark was far worse than his bite.

He stood looking on at the scene with an expression which betrayed none of his thoughts. If anything, he appeared to be rather pleased with the prospect, for he was rubbing his hands together slowly and softly.

Merrell, always a bit of a funk, was shivering visibly.

"Pup-please, sir, I've done nothing," he whimpered. "It—it was Nipper's idea, right from the start. I was against the revolt—I was, honestly, sir! They forced mum-me into it——"

"Silence, you wretched boy!" snapped the Head. "Your excuses do not impress me in the slightest degree. Whether guilty or innocent, you are to be flogged and expelled. Now, sir! Prepare yourself!"

Merrell did not look very prepared. He was shivering more than ever, and his fright was almost pitiful to see. Mr. Martin was going too far in his mad desire to teach the school a lesson.

The luckless juniors on the platform were not the ringleaders in the Remove rebellion. They were merely followers,

and they had had no option but to follow the lead of the other fellows.

To flog and expel them was an act of gross injustice.

The Head was merely proving that he was devoid of all sense of fairness. He had captured these boys, and he was savagely determined to make them suffer. He would vent his spite upon the unhappy prisoners.

"Now, Merrell!" rapped out Mr. Martin, swishing his birch.

Merrell cringed back.

"It—it isn't fair, sir!" he gasped. "I—I'm not one of the leaders——"

"If you do not choose to take your punishment obediently, Merrell, I shall chastise you by sheer force!" barked the Head. "As I have already told you, I intend to make you fully realise the enormity of your offence."

"But, sir, I—I—— It ain't right! You—you——"

Merrell paused, tongue-tied, pale to the lips.

"Upon my soul!" grated the Head. "You are rebellious still! I will soon teach you to be obedient, you young hound!"

He grasped Merrell by the collar, and his birch was raised.

Swish!

The instrument of punishment descended with terrific force.

"Yow-ow!" howled Merrell wildly.

"Yar-oo-oo-oh! Ow—ow—ow!"

"Silence, you little brute!" snarled Martin.

Swish! Swish!

The birch descended again and again, and the unfortunate Removite squirmed in vain. He was receiving a terrible "swishing." The Head was a strong man, and he was putting all his "beef" into his work.

"Ow—yar-oo-oh!" shrieked Merrell. "Leave me alone, you brute! Leave me—— Ow—yow—ow!"

Swish! Swish!

The junior fairly screamed with agony as Mr. Martin continued. The onlooking seniors and fags were restless already. Many members of the Fifth Form were casting angry glances at one another. The Third was bubbling with excited indignation and excitement.

"Shame!" shouted Chambers, of the Fifth. "Oh, shame!"

"Leave him alone, you cad!"

"Shame!"

"Stop it, you bully!"

"By Heaven," snarled Mr. Martin pantingly, "you shall see whether I am to be insulted in this fashion! Mr. Pagett—Mr. Suncliffe—Mr. Crowell! I shall expect you to give me the names of all the boys who have been uttering these insults."

"They'll have to name a good few!" roared Chambers.

"Hear, hear!" yelled the Fifth, almost in a body. "Shame!"

"Boo-oo-oh!"

The effect of the commotion was to make Mr. Martin more violent than ever. He swished away, and Merrell's cries were hoarse and wild. Quite possibly he was making the most of it, for he was a bit of a funk by nature. Nevertheless, Merrell was receiving an awful birching, and perhaps he was not malingering when he nearly fainted from pain.

Nelson Lee had stood by passively so far, for, in his character of Mr. Wrott, he was supposed to be entirely in sympathy with Mr. Martin and his methods. But this scene was more than flesh and blood could stand, and Nelson Lee decided that it was time for him to intervene. He strode forward, his expression grim.

"Really, Mr. Martin, I think—er—perhaps you have given the lad sufficient punishment," he suggested mildly. "It is not my place to interfere, but I certainly consider that——"

"Silence, Mr. Wrott!" snapped the Head. "You will oblige me by attending to your own affairs, and not interfering with mine!"

"But, my dear sir, I must insist upon this occasion," said Lee firmly. "You have administered a flogging which more than meets the requirements of the case. And I must add that you are displaying a brutality which can only be described as savage in the extreme——"

"How—how dare you?" panted the Head, his face purple with fury. "Are you mad, Mr. Wrott? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Not at all," replied Lee smoothly. "To be quite frank, Mr. Martin, I am beginning to suspect that you have taken leave of yours!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Wrott!"

"Go for him, sir!"

"Oh, good man!"

"Mr. Wrott, I will deal with you

later," bellowed the Head furiously. "For the present, I intend to complete my programme. And Merrell will receive a further punishment——"

"I think not," interrupted Lee sharply. "We have not quarrelled yet, Mr. Martin, but I cannot stand here and witness such inhuman behaviour——"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The Head did not wait any further. He brought his cane down again and again, and Nelson Lee set his teeth and moved forward, in order to snatch the cane away from Mr. Martin and to put an end to the brutal scene.

But Chambers, of the Fifth, acted at the same moment.

The whole school was delighted with "Mr. Wrott's" unexpected attitude, but it was generally considered that "Mr. Wrott" would be quite unable to deal with the tyrant singlehanded. Chambers, at all events, was determined to make a move. His indignation was so great that it was impossible for him to stand idle a second longer. He was just in that condition when he didn't care what happened.

"Who's with me?" he roared. "Are we going to stand by and see this brute ill-treating a junior? Who'll back me up? It's up to the Fifth to put things right—and to give Martin a taste of his own medicine!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're with you, Chambers!"

"Good man!"

"Come on, then! We'll act at once!" bellowed Chambers.

He raced forward, taking no notice of Mr. Pagett's angry orders. One or two prefects attempted to stop the Fifth Former's rush, but they were unsuccessful—chiefly because Chambers had a number of supporters.

Phillips and Bryant had naturally followed their leader, and a dozen other Fifth-Formers were with them. They were raging with hot indignation, and they rushed at the platform with a grim determination which was not to be easily checked.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Back us up!" roared Bryant.

"We're all in it!"

"Hurrah!"

The feeling of rebellion spread rapidly, and before the trio of Study 10 had reached the platform three parts of the

Fifth had broken ranks, and the seniors were charging for the platform grimly.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Pagett, horrified. "This—this is appalling! I did not imagine for a moment that the seniors would break into open revolt in this manner! Matters have reached a pass, indeed!"

"It is shocking—unprecedented!" exclaimed Mr. Suncliffe huskily.

It was only natural, perhaps, that the Third Formers should break ranks, too. The fags, however, crowded towards the platform, but made no attempt to rush it, as the seniors were doing.

The Sixth looked startled out of their usual dignity; and one or two of the prefects vainly urged the Fifth to control itself. Mr. Martin, too late, realised that he was in a position of some peril.

He released Merrell abruptly, and faced the excited school.

"What is the meaning of this?" he thundered. "Go back to your places, you infernal young ruffians!"

A perfect yell of derision went up.

"Mr. Pagett!" roared the Head. "Cannot you control——"

"On him!" yelled Chambers. "Collar the brute!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Hurrah!"

The Fifth Form was now nothing better than a mob of highly excited rebels. They cared nothing for discipline or order. And they swept upon the platform in a manner which plainly told of their intention.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped the Head, in real alarm. "We—we must retire, Mr. Wrott! The boys are beyond control——"

The Head did not wait to finish his remark. He considered it most unnecessary for him to delay another fraction of a second. For the seniors were on the platform; they were rushing at him from every side. And there was something about that rush which warned Mr. Martin that the spot was a most unhealthy one for him.

He turned, gasping audibly, and fled for the door.

"Collar him!"

"Don't let the brute escape!"

Mr. Martin was now scared out of his wits. He had raised the storm, and he would now be called upon to face its fury. The full realisation that he was

in danger struck him with the force of a thunderbolt.

He reached the door at the back of the platform, and wrenched at it violently. Nelson Lee stood by, watching with an impressive countenance. But, behind that mask of immobility, Leo was secretly pleased. Nothing better than this could have occurred.

Mr. Howard Martin would receive a lesson this time—a real lesson.

Leo was anxious for the scene to continue, but, if he remained on the spot, he would have to explain afterwards why he did not interfere. So the school-master-detective came to a quick decision.

Affecting to be in a panic, he escaped from Big Hall by a side door. The Fifth was too busy to notice "Mr. Wrott's" movements. Their quarrel was with the Head, and they already had that gentleman in their clutches.

Just as he was vanishing through the doorway, he was seized, and pulled roughly back. His gown was torn, his mortar-board was knocked off, and he was hustled forcibly into the centre of the platform.

"Boys—boys!" he gasped hoarsely. "You—you must control yourselves! Do you realise that I am your Head-master——"

"We realise that you're a tyrant and a cad!" shouted Chambers. "We don't care a snap for you any longer, Mr. Martin, and we're going to give you a sample of your own brand of medicine!"

"We'll birch the beast until he can't stand!"

"Good!"

"Hold him down over the table!"

"Hurrah!"

Everybody was shouting at once. Mr. Martin, pale to the lips, knew well enough that he was in for something of a violent character. The Fifth was in a reckless mood, and nothing could stop them now.

But the Head attempted to escape the punishment he richly deserved.

"You are all insane to carry on in this fashion!" he shouted huskily.

"Listen to me, and I will——"

"Dry up! We don't want to listen!"

"Birch the cad!"

"If you cease this disorderly conduct now, I will grant every boy a free pardon!" shouted the Head frantically.

"Furthermore, I will quash the sentence

I have passed upon the Remove boys. But you must release me——"

"We'll release you after you've been whopped—not before," snapped Bryant.

"You're going through it properly, you bully!" said Chambers, with absolute recklessness. "If you sack me afterwards—or, if you sack anybody—I'll see that all the facts are published in the newspapers. Now then, you fellows! Spreadeagle the blighter over the table!"

"Good egg!"

"All hands to the pump!"

"On the ball!"

The Fifth Formers were acting with as much wildness as any juniors. They abandoned themselves completely to the "rag." And Mr. Howard Martin, utterly helpless, was lifted up like a cork on the crest of a wave.

Screaming with rage and terror, he was carried to the table, and bumped down upon it forcibly. Then he was turned over, and a dozen fellows held him down by his legs and hands.

Chambers seized the birch, and pushed back his sleeve.

"We'll give him twenty!" he said grimly. "Twenty of the best!"

"Boys!" panted the Head. "I—I will agree to all your terms! If you release me, I will even go so far as to allow the Remove to resume its duties—— Ow—yaroooh! Ow! Good heavens! Ow—yow!"

Swish!

Chambers brought down the birch again, and the whole school roared with approval and joy as Mr. Martin squirmed and shrieked under the sting of the lash. He was partaking of his own mixture with a vengeance!

Swish! Swish!

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the stuff to give him!"

"Put your beef into it, Chambers!"

Chambers was certainly using all his strength, to judge by the fiendish yells which Mr. Martin uttered. He squirmed and howled and struggled—but he did not alter the position. The flogging proceeded.

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Pagett, rushing up. "This—this disgraceful scene must cease at once—at once! Good heavens! I have never witnessed such an outrage in all my experience! Release Mr. Martin——"

"Sorry, sir," said Bryant. "The Head deserves a whopping—and he's getting it. We don't want to quarrel with you, sir——"

"You must end this appalling affair immediately!" snapped Mr. Pagett.

The Head turned his face—a red, twisted, furious face.

"Mr. Pagett!" he gasped. "If you do not effect—Ow!—my release this instant, I shall dismiss—— Yaroo! I shall dismiss you within an hour's notice, sir! Do you hear me, Mr. Pagett? You are a fool, sir! You stand there, idle, and allow these young hooligans to—— Ow-yow-ow!"

Swish! Swish!

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Pagett. "I—I am at a loss!"

He turned helplessly, for he knew that if he attempted to rescue the Head he would be set upon personally—and probably flogged, too! The Fifth Form-master was not popular with his boys, and he knew it. He decided that it would be wiser for him to escape.

"Really, Mr. Martin, I—I can do nothing for you singlehanded," he exclaimed nervously. "I—I will do my utmost to gain assistance——"

"You fool!" raved the Head. "Order these young ruffians—— Ow-yow!"

Mr. Pagett fled from Big Hall, but he did not attempt to obtain the assistance he had promised. He had sense enough to realise that this outbreak on the part of the Fifth was a serious business.

Allowed to run its course, the revolt would probably be brief. After the seniors had got over their excitement they would calm down, and there would be nothing for the Head to do except tender his resignation.

If, on the other hand, the Fifth Formers were subjected to forcible treatment, they would undoubtedly resist, and the revolt would be fanned into an affair equally as serious as that of the Remove.

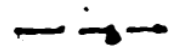
So Mr. Pagett decided to remain idle and await events. He was quite convinced that the Head would not be able to remain at St. Frank's after this terrible humiliation. And, secretly, Mr. Pagett would be glad to see the last of the tyrant.

Mr. Martin received a flogging which would leave him sore for a week, and which now left him speechless with pain and fury. He was released after Chambers had delivered the twenty

strokes, and he had gained some little idea of what a birching actually meant.

He crawled away, quite incapable of expressing his feelings. And as he sneaked out of Big Hall, doubled up with pain, he was followed by storms of jeering and hooting. The Fifth Form felt that they had performed a very necessary task.

But what were the consequences to be?



CHAPTER VI.

A NIGHT EXPEDITION.

"BEGAD! It's simply rippin', dear old boys! It is, really!" Sir Montie Tregellis-West delivered himself of that remark as he carefully polished his pince-nez.

"The Fifth ought to be awarded gold medals for this morning's work," I declared warmly. "Fancy grabbing the Head and flogging him!"

"Well, I'm not surprised," said Handforth. "The Head's been asking for trouble for weeks, and he's found a tremendous lot this morning. What a pity we weren't there to see the fun!"

"It was worth a term's pocket-money," declared Hubbard, with a grin. "My hat! You ought to have heard the Head howl! It's my belief that he'll sneak away from the school to-day."

"If so, we shall immediately surrender," I said. "We're only rebelling against Mr. Martin, and if he goes there'll be no further reason for us to keep the game up. But I fancy he'll remain."

"After being flogged by the Fifth?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Handforth. "That's impossible, you ass! Why, the Head won't be able to lift his face after this, and he'll be booed and hissed by everybody. It's impossible for him to stay on."

I shook my head.

"If I'm any judge of character, I should say that Mr. Martin will stick it," I declared. "He's mad for revenge now, and it's not likely that he'll clear from the school without getting a blow in at the Fifth. The rebellion isn't over yet, but I think the end is pretty near. There'll be a big blaze-up, and then the whole thing will fizzle out. That's my opinion, anyhow."

"Mine, too," agreed Pitt. "It's a good thing we've got our missing members back. The Fifth are responsible for that, and we shall have to thank Chambers when we get a chance. He's several kinds of an ass, but there's no doubt that he got on the right track this time."

The twelve luckless Removites, who had been booked for a flogging and expulsion, were all back in the fortress—safely behind the barricades. The rebels were intact again.

At the first rush to the platform by the Fifth the twelve prisoners had escaped. In the general excitement and commotion they had not been stopped by any masters or prefects.

Breathless and excited, they presented themselves at the upper barricade, just against the dormitory, and they had been admitted without a second's delay. And they brought with them the story of the Fifth's sudden move.

Naturally, there was a good deal of excitement, and many juniors were convinced that the rebellion would be over by the evening. They did not see how the Head could remain in the school after what had occurred.

The hours passed, however, and nothing very exciting happened. At dinner-time we learned that the Fifth had attended lessons, as usual. They had had their revolt, and were satisfied.

The seniors let it be known, however, that if the Head punished the Fifth in any way, the Fifth would resist. Chambers and his followers were determined to be absolutely defiant.

Mr. Martin had not appeared again, and there was every indication that he had decided to take his humiliation in silence. Teatime arrived at last, and the only piece of fresh news available was that the school Governors were extremely agitated over the disturbances at St. Frank's, and that General Ord-Clayton himself was due to arrive on the morrow.

Morrow of the Sixth had supplied us with that information, having heard it, he declared, from Mr. Stockdale, of the College House. The prefect advised us to chuck up the game while we had the chance—advice, needless to add, which was politely but firmly rejected.

General Ord-Clayton was the chairman of the Governors, and it was solely a

owing to his influence that Mr. Howard Martin had been appointed to the Headmastership. I was greatly pleased with the news.

"Nothing could be better," I declared. "Ord-Clayton pitchforked Martin into his job, and now the general will be able to see what the result is. He'll realise, perhaps, that it's a foolish thing to place a tyrant in charge of a big public school like St. Frank's."

"I shouldn't be surprised if the Head tries to smash us up to-night—a last despairing effort," remarked De Valerie. "I don't think he'll succeed—he's tried a good few times, anyhow."

I looked rather thoughtful.

"We mustn't be too confident," I said. "It's necessary to keep a sharp lookout continually, and be in readiness for any emergency. The Head's desperate, and he'll probably use desperate methods."

The first indication we had that something fresh was brewing came from Fatty Little. The stout junior had prepared quite an excellent tea, and everybody had enjoyed the meal. But shortly afterwards he came bustling into the dormitory, where I was about to settle down to a snooze.

"Not asleep yet?" said Fatty, with relief.

"No," I said. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm blessed if I know," replied Little. "But I thought I'd better report to the chief—which is you. The fact is, we haven't got any water."

"Haven't got any water?"

"Not a drop!"

I sat up on the bed.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You had plenty of water before tea, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, but there is none now," said Fatty. "We've only got one tap to rely on, and when I went to it a few minutes ago to draw some water for washing up, there was nothing doing. Great pancakes! What shall we do!"

"I'll come down and investigate," I said briskly.

I was soon down in the kitchen with Fatty Little. Tommy Watson and Burton were at the tap, turning it on and off. But no water came from it. The tap had never failed before.

"This looks pretty serious," I said, after a minute or two. "There's not a drop of water here, and there's only

one explanation. The pipe must have been cut. Our supply has been broken off!"

"Great pip!"

"What the dickens shall we do?"

"We must have water!"

The fellows were rather concerned.

"Do you think the Head knows anything about it?" asked Watson.

"I think the Head is responsible," I replied. "He has cut off our water supply—and it's a disaster I've been expecting for days. I haven't said anything, because I didn't want to worry anybody. But you'll easily understand that we can't hold out for twenty-four hours without water. The Head has only just remembered about this pipe, I suppose. The position is serious."

"But we can get water from somewhere else, surely," said Handforth. "Dash it all, we're not going to be beaten by a silly little thing of this sort!"

"You don't seem to realise that it's a big thing," I said. "There's no water for any of us—no water to wash in, or to drink——"

"It doesn't matter much about washing," said Teddy Long,

"I don't suppose you'll mind if you only wash once a month." I said grimly. "But that part of the question is the least serious. Think of the position. We shall have supper to-night—food, but no water."

"We can drink cocoa, I suppose?" suggested Hubbard.

"You ass!" I snapped. "How are we going to make cocoa without water? We shall go to bed feeling fairly all right—but in the morning we shall all be gasping with thirst. By dinnertime we shall be in a bad state, and when the evening comes round most of you will be ready to surrender—just for the sake of a drink."

"You're right," said Handforth, nodding his head. "I remember when we were in the African desert, during the summer holidays. It's enough to kill a chap to be without any drink. But surely there must be some way——"

"There might be, of course," I broke in. "Anyhow, I mean to get busy on the job at once. Delay might be fatal."

"But you haven't had any sleep——"

"I can't sleep now," I said briskly.

"You see, the pipe which runs into this kitchen is an isolated one, and the

Head has evidently had it pinched up at some distant point."

"Pinched up?" said Watson.

"Exactly. It's a lead pipe, and it's only necessary to hammer it flat to cut off the supply altogether," I said. "Exactly how we're going to manage I don't know—but I shall have to go scouting."

"Good!" said Pitt. "Do you want any volunteers?"

"No, thanks."

"Rotten!" said Pitt, changing his tone. "But you must have somebody with you, Nipper. We can't let you venture out alone——"

"You needn't worry about me," I interrupted. "I sha'n't come to any harm. And it'll be much safer for only one to go. If I have somebody with me, we shall probably talk—and that would be risky."

The fellows didn't like the idea, but I was quite firm.

And, five minutes later, I slipped into the passage beyond the lower barricade, and made my exit from the Ancient House by means of the small corridor window.

The evening was as black as pitch, and for a short time I could see nothing whatever. A chilly wind was whistling round the angles of the building, and the dark sky was clouded.

I didn't exactly know what to do. Water was essential, and we had to have a supply. As a commencement, I decided to investigate in the region of the kitchen—on the off-chance that I should discover the spot where the water-pipe had been either cut or hammered up.

I crept round the wall very cautiously. I was beginning to see a little more distinctly by this time, for my eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. And as I moved round the angle, I came to a halt.

A figure moved on the other side of the Triangle.

I watched closely, for I had no intention of being captured—and I wanted to see who the figure belonged to. Quite possibly it was only a Fifth Former, or a prefect, or perhaps the school-porter——"

My thoughts came to a stop abruptly.

For, as the figure passed a lighted window, I instantly recognised it. It belonged to Mr. Howard Martin. The

Head himself was quite close to me, then, and I momentarily forgot my original purpose.

Somehow or other, I had an inclination to follow the Head, for I had a vague idea that he was up to further mischief. Quite possibly he had other ideas in mind to bring us to our knees.

And to be forewarned is to be forearmed. I decided that my best policy would be to shadow Mr. Martin—for a few minutes, at all events. I wanted to satisfy myself that he was not trying on any fresh offensive.

There was a certain amount of risk in crossing the Triangle, but I decided to take it, and I reached the other side in safety, and only a hundred yards in the rear of my quarry.

The Head was striding along the lane in the direction of Bellton, and after I had progressed some little distance I slackened my speed and came to a halt. Mr. Martin, apparently, was merely going to the village, and there would be no object in my following him any longer.

I had satisfied myself on the point in question, and turned back.

Then I gave a startled gasp.

For, directly in front of me, was the tall figure of a man. I had not had the slightest notion that he was there, and he must have crept up behind me with the silence of a panther.

I was not at a loss, however.

I dodged to one side and prepared to run—without waiting to find out who the man happened to be; but a hand came out and gripped my shoulder like the jaws of a vice. I was swung round helplessly.

"Not so fast, young man—not so fast!"

I drew my breath in sharply, for I had recognised the voice in a moment. The man was Mr. Simpson Wrott—the Head's understudy!

"I—I—dash it all, sir, I'm only——"

"There is no necessity for you to make excuses, Nipper," exclaimed Mr. Wrott sourly. "I have caught you red-handed, you young rascal. Do you imagine for a moment that I shall allow you to go free again?"

"But—but how did you get here, sir?" I asked blankly.

"It is not your business to ask questions—and I shall certainly not answer them," exclaimed Mr. Wrott harshly.

"You are the ringleader of these rebels, and you will come with me. No, don't struggle, or you will be hurt!"

But I was struggling—desperately.

All my efforts, however, were in vain. I tried every trick that was known to me; I twisted, I wriggled, I even attempted one or two ju-jitsu movements—but found that they were counteracted on the instant. At the end of two minutes I was quite exhausted by my own efforts.

"Well?" said Mr. Wrott smoothly. "Have you had enough?"

I made no reply. I was feeling too bitterly disappointed and angry. And my temper was not improved when I noticed that Mr. Wrott himself was quite fresh, and not even out of breath.

"Now, Nipper—march!" he exclaimed grimly.

"I couldn't very well do anything else, for he pushed me in front of him, and in that way we progressed until we reached the Triangle. Just within the gates, my captor brought me to a halt.

"Now, my boy—get indoors!" exclaimed Mr. Wrott in a soft whisper. "Get indoors and stay there. It is very foolish of you to venture out alone. Mr. Martin is a keen man, and he is very much on the alert."

As he uttered the last words Mr. Wrott turned and walked out of the gateway again. I stared after him in blank amazement, and for a few seconds I was quite at a loss. He, Mr. Wrott was in favour of the Remove, and totally against the Head.

I had suspected it all along—but now I had proof.

And, instantly, my calmness and composure returned to me. I realised that here was a chance which might never occur again. I slipped out of the gateway, and saw the figure of the House-master striding down the lane.

I followed.

He had warned me to leave the Head alone, but he certainly would not suspect that I had turned my attention to him. I hardly knew what I expected to find by shadowing Mr. Wrott, but I thought perhaps the game would be worth while. He was a somewhat mysterious individual, and I had a fancy to investigate.

Somehow, I could only look upon him as a friend; and I felt slightly guilty

as I crept along the road near the hedge—just keeping Mr. Wrott in sight. However, I did not allow any scruples of that kind to interfere with my work.

Perhaps the Head was preparing some big move, after all; perhaps he would prefer me to be captured with the rest of the rebels. In any case, I was leaving nothing to chance.

I had a vague idea in my mind that Mr. Wrott might be on his way to meet the Head even now. And I wished to make quite certain of the point before returning to my original task.

To my mild astonishment, Mr. Wrott crossed the stile which led into the depths of the wood. And he was soon swallowed up in the blackness of the gaunt trees. All the leaves were not yet off, and the wind whistled coldly through the branches.

I was just about to cross the stile when I came to a halt, and crouched down. For I had heard a voice—and I guessed the truth.

Mr. Wrott had met somebody just within the wood.

I crept a little nearer, and then stood quite still, listening. A low voice came to my ears, but a sudden gust of wind made it impossible for me to understand what was being said.

And then came a brief period of calm. "—been here twenty minutes, old man," exclaimed a voice distinctly. "I'd like you to know that my feet are infernally cold, and that I'm nearly frozen through! Did someone detain you?"

Just for a moment I thought that I was dreaming. That voice was almost as familiar to me as my own. There was no mistaking the tones, and I knew at once that I was right. I could hardly keep myself from yelling with sudden excitement.

For the voice was that of Detective-Inspector Lennard—of Scotland Yard!

CHAPTER VII.

NEARING THE CLIMAX.

"GREAT Scott!"

I muttered the exclamation in a tone of sheer amazement.

Lennard was one of Nelson Lee's oldest friends—and one of mine. What was he doing down here? What

possible business could he have with Mr. Wrott?

It was more than I could understand, and I did not attempt to puzzle it out. I crept nearer to the stile, and then came upon a gap in the hedge. Without hesitation I slipped through that gap, and came out behind a huge oak tree. On the other side of this tree were the two men.

I half stood up, listening intently.

"Oh, I see," Lennard was saying. "Well, that makes it different, of course. I can quite understand why you have to act cautiously, Lee. It's the best way, under the circumstances."

Lee!

I nearly jumped from the ground, but just managed to keep myself under control, still listening with my ears on the stretch.

"You see, Lennard, I can't afford to take any chances," came the voice of Nelson Lee himself. "Martin is nearly at the end of his tether, and the time will soon be ripe for us to act. But, until then, I mustn't give him the slightest inkling of what is on foot."

Nelson Lee was there! My beloved gov'nor was talking to the chief-inspector! And I decided that secrecy was no longer necessary. I dashed out from behind the tree, and startled Lennard considerably.

"What the—who—by James!" exclaimed the Yard man. "It's Nipper!"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Lennard," I panted, looking round. "I—I thought I heard Mr. Lee here! But—but—"

I paused, and looked round blankly. Nelson Lee was not visible. The only other figure was that of Mr. Simpson Wrott. And even then, with such a direct clue in my possession, I did not immediately suspect the truth.

"You infernal young sweep!" exclaimed Mr. Wrott fiercely. "How dare you come here? Why did you not go indoors when I ordered you to? You followed me—you had the audacity to shadow me after I had given you back your liberty!"

"I—I—" I began breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Lennard. "You're deucedly dull this evening, Nipper."

"Hush, inspector—hush!" grated Mr. Wrott.

And then, in a flash, the truth came to me.

"The guv'nor!" I gasped. "You're—the guv'nor!"

"Of course he's the guv'nor. Didn't you know it?" grinned Lennard. "Why, young 'un, Mr. Lee has been at St. Frank's in this get-up for a good many days now. You must be slow——"

"But—but—— Oh, my goodness!" I panted. "Mr. Wrott! You're the guv'nor, after all! And—and I didn't know—— Oh, you awful swindler! Oh, you bounder, sir! Why didn't you tell me?"

Nelson Lee seized my shoulder.

"When you have quite recovered your composure, Nipper, I will have a word with you," he said grimly. "It may interest you to know that I am decidedly angry with you for daring to——"

"Oh, come off it, sir," I protested. "I am the chap to be angry! You've been here for days, and you didn't let me know! I can understand everything now. I can understand why you've treated us so jolly leniently, and—and all sorts of things. I suppose there isn't such a person as Mr. Wrott?"

"Of course not," said the Scotland Yard man.

"Since you know so much, I'd better tell you everything," explained the guv'nor, with a sigh. "Upon my soul, Nipper, your curiosity is positively astonishing. However, I must not grumble because of that—for you have proved yourself to be rather keen, and that naturally pleases me. It was undoubtedly cute of you to turn the tables on me just now by shadowing my movements. I fancied I had got rid of you in a neat manner."

I stared at Nelson Lee excitedly.

"It's a marvellous disguise, sir," I declared. "I've spoken to you scores of times within the last week; I've looked into your face, and I've listened to your voice. But I've never had the slightest suspicion. By jingo! What a ripping idea! You left St. Frank's, and you came back the very next day!"

"Deucedly good, I call it," exclaimed Lennard. "I can't understand how he manages these things, Nipper."

"I dare say you were very busy, my lad, and you did not give the matter very much thought," said Nelson Lee. "However, you know the truth now, and it doesn't matter so much—since this affair is nearly at an end."

"Why didn't you let me into the

secret, sir?" I demanded warmly. "I call it rotten of you——"

"Eh?"

"I think it's jolly mean!" I declared.

"What?"

"And it wasn't sporting, either," I concluded grimly.

"The cheeky young beggar is actually giving you a lecture, old man," said Detective-inspector Lennard. "Take my advice, and kick him off. Or, if you like, I'll do the job for you. Say the word, and I'll duck him in the ditch."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"We mustn't be hard on him, Lennard," he said softly. "Perhaps he has a certain amount of cause to be angry. He always thinks he is badly treated if I happen to make a move without his knowledge."

"But this case is different," I explained. "I've been worrying for days, sir—worrying awfully. You didn't write to me, and I wondered all sorts of things. And you were here all the time——"

"Come, come," said Lee. "That won't do, Nipper. I can bowl you out immediately on that point. Why did you worry?"

"Because you didn't write to me, sir."

"How do you know I didn't write?"

"Because—because——"

"Not because you didn't receive any communication," interrupted Lee. "For several days past no Remove boys have received letters, for the simple reason that they have been barred into the west wing. So you couldn't have worried much about me, young 'un. Furthermore, your thoughts were probably all upon your work."

"Well, that's true enough, sir," I admitted. "But I can't understand things at all. What is Mr. Lennard doing here?"

"He came because I requested him to come."

"But why, sir?"

"I have an excellent reason——"

"That's evasive, sir," I broke in. "I believe you've got something up against Mr. Martin, and if so, I think you might let me into the little secret. We've defied the bullying rotter for days now, and we mean to defy him until we gain the victory. We shall never surrender."

"Well, I don't suppose you will," said Nelson Lee. "And I must disappoint you, Nipper, in one respect. I cannot give you any further details to-night."

"You have interrupted my chat with Mr. Lennard, and I have no further time to allow you. Moreover, I do not intend to discuss the subject with you now."

"Why not?"

"Because you have quite enough to think of without that," said Lee. "Your hands are full, Nipper, and my advice for you is to keep to your own part of this affair. I can safely promise you that the end will come very swiftly now."

"To-night?" I asked eagerly.

"It might—but I don't think so," replied Nelson Lee. "It will certainly come to-morrow—probably in the evening. In the meantime, you had better get back to your stronghold, and keep on the alert."

"Are you wild with us for rebelling, sir?" I asked.

Nelson Lee patted my shoulder.

"As the Housemaster of the Ancient House it is my duty to be furious," he said. "But, at this moment, Nipper, I am a private individual. I am just myself. And, personally, I do not blame you in the slightest degree for taking matters into your own hands."

"Oh, good!" I exclaimed. "It's fine to hear you say that, sir."

"You have been very moderate in your actions throughout the rebellion," went on Lee. "The Fifth Form, this afternoon, made a false step—but I cannot altogether blame the boys. They certainly gave Mr. Martin all he deserved."

"Well, sir, I'll go back," I said briskly. "I'm feeling as bright as a lark now, because I know everything is all serene— Hold on, though, I've just thought of something."

"Well, what is it?"

"We've got no water, sir."

"No which?" asked Lennard.

"Not a drop of water—"

"Do you mean that your supply has been cut off?" said Lee.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, Martin was talking to me about that only this morning," went on the gov'nor. "I'm afraid you have a somewhat difficult proposition there, my lad. The pipe has been cut in the far part of the House, where it joins up with the main supply pipe. At all events, Mr. Martin intimated that he would cut the pipe at that point. It will be quite impossible for you to mend matters."

"I don't know what we shall do, sir," I said, rather worried. "We must have

water, or we shall be compelled to surrender—"

"Can't you fix up a hose, or something?" suggested Lennard.

"Oh, don't be funny!" I said. "You know jolly well we can't. By jingo! That's not a bad idea, though, Mr. Lennard!" I added. "I've just remembered that there is a hose— It needs thinking over."

"Well, go away, and think over it," said Lee briskly. "Don't bother us any longer, my lad. If I find that you have no water by the morning I will see what I can do in the matter. If possible, however, I should advise you to obtain a supply of some sort."

"I'll try, sir," I said.

"I'm hanged if I know what the kids are coming to," said the chief inspector, with a shake of his head. "Rebelling, and striking against authority! It's getting rather serious. Before long we shall find these youngsters getting up a union of their own, and demanding more grub or a strike!"

I didn't take much notice of Lennard's banter, and after a few more words with the gov'nor I crept away in the darkness. I was feeling light-hearted and cheerful, in spite of the problem which awaited my attention.

I decided to say nothing to the other fellows regarding my discovery. They would have to wait until the end of the rebellion before they learned "Mr. Wrott's" real identity.

Having reached the school again I scouted about for some little time, and when I finally returned to my followers, my eyes were gleaming with satisfaction, and I was feeling quite content.

"Well, any luck?" asked Pitt, as I appeared.

"Heaps," I replied.

"Found some water?"

"I think we shall be able to fix up a supply quite easily," I replied. "I've been nosing about, and I've settled on a plan. As you all probably know, there's a water tap in the Head's garden—"

"I didn't know it," said De Valerie.

"Well, there is one," I went on. "It's used during the summertime for watering the flower beds. There's generally a long hose running from it."

"That's right," said Watson, nodding. "I've seen it."

"Well, my idea is to fix that hose, and run it along to the Ancient House wall, and up into one of the barricaded windows——"

"But it'll be seen," protested Handforth.

"Not if we do the work thoroughly," I declared. "All we need is to camouflage it a bit where it is necessary. At the window, for example, there's a bush, and we can run the hose up behind the bush so that nobody can spot it. And the bulk of the pipe can be buried just under the ground. It needn't go across the Triangle, because a corner of the Head's garden comes right through the north-west corner of this wing. Anyhow, it can be wangled."

"What about the hose?" asked Watson. "It is there?"

"No."

"Then what's the good of talking, you ass?" snapped Tommy. "I thought as much! That hose is always carted indoors for the winter months, and we can't find it at a moment's notice——"

"The hose," I interrupted, "is in the woodshed. I saw it there not ten minutes ago. And it won't take us an hour to fix."

"Good!" said Pitt. "I suppose we'll do the trick after midnight?"

"We'll do it now—at once!"

"But is it safe?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "The Head's out, and even if he comes back

he won't go into the garden—and we shall have scouts posted at different quarters. Anyhow, I think it'll be easier to do the job now—when all the other fellows are making plenty of noises—than to leave it until the school is asleep."

The other juniors were quite in agreement with my argument, and before long a dozen of us had ventured out upon the mission. Water was necessary, and until we obtained a supply we could not consider ourselves secure.

The hose was fixed up without much trouble, and it proved an easy task to bury the greater part of it beneath an inch or so of soil. The only difficult part of the programme was to conceal the hose where it entered the window.

And we got over this by not using the window at all. The hose was pushed through a little grating, into a cellar. And it was so effectively concealed that it could not have been found, even if searched for.

And, after an hour's hard work, the thing was done.

We had not been disturbed, and we returned to our fortress highly satisfied—and with our water supply fully restored. Once again we were in a position to defy the Head until further orders.

But Mr. Howard Martin was practically at the end of his run.

The finish of the rebellion—and victory—was within sight!

◆THE END.

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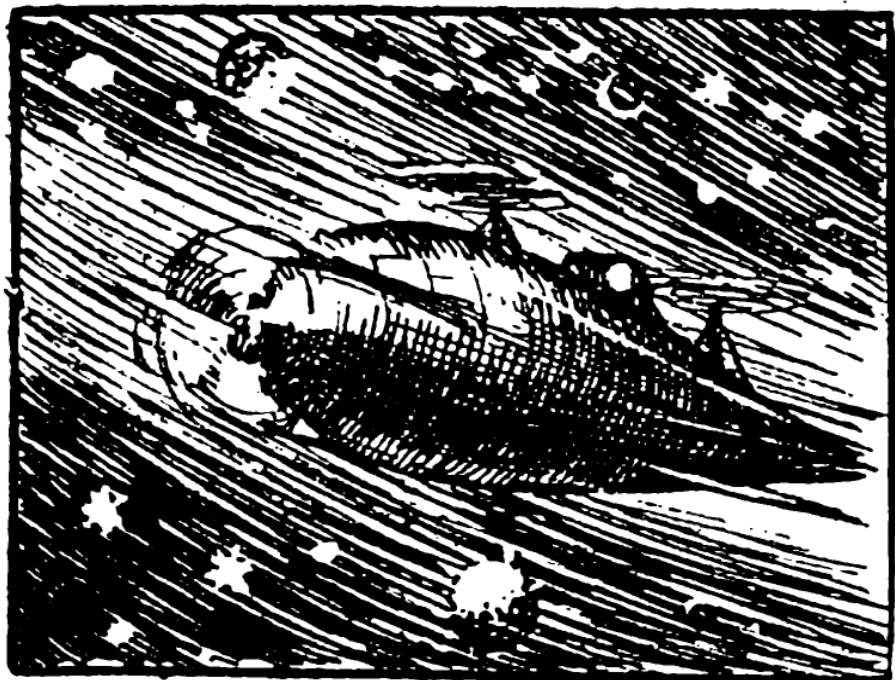
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By ROBT. W. COMRADE.

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. An accident to a propeller causes the aeronef to descend among the Venusites, Gresham and Palgrave being captured.

(Now read on.)

Frank and Mac to the Rescue.

FRANK shook Mac's arm roughly, and glared fiercely into his face. Mac coolly disengaged himself and lit a cigarette. With a cry Frank snatched it out of the Scot's mouth and flung it far into the night.

"You unfeeling brute!" he cried

hotly. "What the deuce do you care? Standing there smoking, just as if——"

"My dear Frank," smiled Mac, producing his cigarette-case and offering it to his enraged companion. "My dear Frank, I wish tae goodness you wouldna get sae excited! Tak' a cigarette. It'll dae ye a' the guid in the world. If ye'll only be patient, I'll jist explain a little idea which occurred tae me——"

Frank Hillsworth laughed.

"I'm sorry, Mac, if I spoke hurriedly," he apologised. "But I'm excited, and can't see any way to rescue—— But, there, I'm wasting time. I'll smoke, and let you do the talking."

"Weel, I consider it'll be healthier if we dae the plannin' in the dining-saloon. I dinna suppose these Venusites know we're here. Anyhow, we'll drop the searchlight-shutter and pop inside."

Which they did with all speed. Having switched on the light and closed the shutters, Mac unfolded his plan. It was a good one—one which seemed likely to succeed, though fraught with many unknown dangers.

"It would be foolish tae venture oot as we are," Mac commenced, in almost perfect English—he always spoke so when serious—"for we should be detected in a moment, and nae doot killed. Whether they have done for the professor and Gresham, I canna say. So I suggest donning those two rubber diving-dresses."

"What's the good——" began Frank.

"Every good. I suppose ye'll say the rubber dresses will make nae difference. Weel, I'll tell you how they will. Gresham brought them in case any diving was found necessary. We, however, will put them to a mair practical use. Among the various instruments in the engine-

room are several powerful electric-batteries—Gresham's inventions, I think. Now, I propose doing this. Slip into the diving-suits, with the exception of the boots and helmets, and get Abbie to fix electric-batteries on to our backs, leaving numerous live wires exposed on our arms, legs, an' bodies. We ourselves will be untouched, being, of course, insulated. And if any confounded Venusite dares tae lay his dirty hands—feelers, or whatever they are—on us, he'll not live tae remember it."

Frank jumped to his feet, and clapped Mac on the back excitedly.

"By Jove!" he cried. "That's a first-rate wheeze—a regular top-holer! I'm hanged if I should have thought of it. Man alive, we shall be able to walk through the place as if we owned it! We'd better——"

Frank stopped suddenly, and the expression of his face became blank. Mac smiled.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Oh, Mac, old man, it's a grand idea, but you've forgotten one thing."

"An' that happens to be?"

"How do you suppose we're going to scale that rotten fence? We're not flies."

"We sha'n't scale it."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. That had you used your eyes a short time ago you would have seen that the palings in certain parts are fully three feet from the ground——"

Frank jumped.

"It's a fact," Mac continued; "you needn't luke sae startled. The fence is quite secure as regards Venusites. To them it's a mere slit, through which they couldna get a leg. I dinna suppose they've got the sense tae see it, otherwise they'd have pushed Gresham and Palgrave under. After all, there's one advantage in being small."

"And while we're away we'll tell Abbie to work like the nigger he is at fixing a new suspensory-screw in place of the smashed one," said Frank, pouring out two glasses of champagne. "It won't take him very long, even by himself. I expect he's moping below, awaiting orders."

"If he gets done before we come back, we'll tell him tae hold the aeronef in readiness for immediate flight," Mac exclaimed, touching the bell.

In a moment or two Abbie stood in the saloon, listening with wide-open eyes to the dreadful news, while every now and again a "By golly!" would slip through his lips, accompanied with an expressive roll of the eyes. He didn't like it at all, but heartily acquiesced when Mac related his plan, and recovered somewhat his drooping spirits.

"I tought Massa Gresham and Massa Professor gone fo' good," he muttered. "By golly, I don't like dis ye're earf! I guess we'd better clear off'n it goo'n slick!"

"You can take it from me, Abbie, that if we manage to scrape out of this adventure with a whole skin apiece, we sha'n't give the screws an opportunity of wearing themselves out in this atmosphere," said Frank, pouring the negro out a glass of the "bubbly-water."

"Now to work," he continued, when Abbie had gulped it down. "Time's getting on, and every minute is precious. For all we know to the contrary, these beastly Venusites may be surrounding the ship, intending to bash the roof in, or something! So hurry, and we'll see what we can do."

In a moment the three of them were bustling below—Frank and Mac to don the diving-dresses, which were made of thick, pure rubber, and Abbie to attend to the necessary electric batteries. In a surprisingly short time everything was in readiness, and the two young adventurers mounted the companion, keeping at a very respectable distance from one another, for one touch of the live wires which hung about them would mean a severe shock, one likely to be long remembered.

Silently the two passed out on to the deck. For a moment they stood there in the darkness, listening. The night was dark as pitch, and the sky was still heavily overcast and forbidding. Not a breath of wind stirred, and in their heavy clothes the young men found it uncomfortably warm. In contrast to the light flannels and blazers they had been wearing, they seemed like heavy Arctic furs. Not a sound broke the stillness, and they looked at one another in surprise. Where were all the Venusites? Where was that vast army of monsters which had been shrieking and rushing about barely thirty minutes before? Could it be possible

(Continued on p. III of cover.)

that they had departed, taking the prisoners with them? Mac suggested this to Frank, but the latter sniffed at the idea.

"No fear!" he declared. "They're still lying about in the darkness. Probably they've all gone to bye-bye, intending to resume hostilities in the morning. That would be just about their style, I reckon! They don't seem to have sense enough to make a surprise attack. Come on, we'd better be shifting; it's getting late."

"Late?" echoed Mac. "Why, man, it's barely eight o'clock yet!"

"Eight o'clock? By Jove, it seems more like midnight to me!" said Frank, quietly dropping the ladder overside.

One after another they scrambled down, and presently were stealing, as quietly as possible, in the direction of the fence. Now that they had grown accustomed to their surroundings, the great, towering mass of the palings could be distinguished against the skyline. The whiteness of the vegetation, for it grew abundantly on all sides, helped them, for, in a way, it dispersed the darkness. Both of them carried in their right hands a revolver, and in their left an electric-torch. They reached the gigantic fence unmolested, and in less time than it takes to tell had crawled beneath it and were creeping along the ground in the direction of the houses. How they hoped to find their comrades amongst all the dozens of Brobdingnagian dwellings is a difficult question to answer. Possibly they never would have done had it not have been for the fact that, after half an hour's careful search, during which time they had a narrow escape, they had chanced to come upon— But I am anticipating somewhat; all this comes afterwards.

Not a sign of the inhabitants could be seen as Frank and his companion stealthily approached the giant buildings. Although each refused to admit it, they felt in their innermost hearts that they had, to use a slang expression, "bitten off more than they could chew." How could they possibly expect to discover their unfortunate fellow travellers among all these silent and forbidding houses, some of which were surrounded by trees and dense vegetation? Bushes grew everywhere; but, if serving no other purpose, they were handy for secreting themselves in an emergency. Had there been Venusites by the score shuffling about,

shrilly conversing with one another, it would have been preferable to that awful silence. It was oppressing—overpowering—and it naturally affected the searchers' nerves.

"I'm hanged if I expected to find this state of affairs," whispered Frank in Mac's ear. "It's enough to give you the creeps, this uncertainty. Besides, we can't search all these houses——"

"I dinna suppose we'll need tae," Mac rejoined. "But if after anither ten minutes we still see or hear nothing, we'll yell."

"But, if there is anybody here, that'll bring the whole horde down on us like a hundred of bricks," protested Frank.

"Can't help that. We're protected, anyway. An' I didna expect tae effect their rescue withoot a certain amount o' risk."

For another minute they walked onwards, now between two of the skyscrapers, and suddenly Mac stumbled against something. He touched the button of his torch, and directed the shaft of light to the ground. It was nothing, only a large granite-like stone; but the showing of the light had an unlooked-for effect. Almost before it was switched off a piercing cry broke on their ears, and a tremor of the earth, accompanied by a quick shuffling noise, told them that a Venusite—probably more than one—was approaching. This seemed to disprove their former idea that the creatures could see in the dark.

"Look out!" cried Frank. "Get well away from me, and let the beggar have it, if he comes near enough!"

At the sound of Frank's voice, the Venusite renewed its shout, and, in half a dozen strides, was hovering over the daring young fellows. Mac had to be swift in skipping out of the way, for one of the brute's feet came down on the exact spot where he had been standing. Suddenly the Scot felt a cold something pass over his face. He dodged and shuddered. Then, equally as sudden, the thing was withdrawn. With a loud scream, the huge bulk of the Venusite tottered, and Mac realised that Frank had "let the beggar have it." He darted a swift glance upwards, then, quick as lightning, darted to the left. Not a moment too soon! With a crash which shook the whole earth, the body

(Continued overleaf.)

of the monster thundered to the ground, and lay still, an inert mass.

"By gum, they must be made of jelly!" cried Mac, as Frank rejoined him. "I believe the thing's dead. I had no idea it would affect 'em like that. Hello, it's getting lighter!"

This was a fact. The heavy clouds were rapidly dispersing, and the sky overhead was becoming bespangled with numerous stars. Already it was possible to see for a matter of fifty yards; not clearly, of course, but anything moving would be visible. Expectantly, the chums waited for a horde of Venusites to bear down on them and avenge the death of their comrade. No such thing happened, however, and they began to regain confidence.

"Can't make head nor tail of it," murmured Frank. "Why don't they all come out? They must be here—the two armies, inhabitants and invaders. Looks as if they've made it up, or something, and are combining forces to annihilate

us. I'm all in a muddle. Fancy letting this boulder lie here unheeded. I mean to have a look at him, now I've got the opportunity."

So saying, Frank pressed the button, and the tiny shaft of light shot out. The effect of it was startling. Certainly neither Frank nor Mac had any idea of what the result of that simple action would be. With a suddenness that was disconcerting, the air became filled with the now familiar cries, and from all sides they could see the giant forms bearing down upon them. This seemed to prove that they had very indifferent eyesight. Otherwise, why should they wait until Frank revealed the light? It appeared to be incomprehensible.

"Run!" yelled Frank, suiting the action to the word and making tracks for the nearest building. "Run, and, if you get near enough, gave them a taste of our home-made electric-current!"

(To be continued.)

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