SENSATIONAL BARRING-OUT AT ST. FRANK'S

NELSON LEE

2d

MASTERING THE MASTERS!

A lively incident from the enthralling long complete school yarn inside.

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The Barring-out at St. Frank's Continues—

"Up, the Rebels!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER 1.

A School Divided!

REBELLION reigned at St. Frank's.

The great school, without a master to control it, was divided into three camps. Firstly, the rebels, who had ejected the masters, and who were wholeheartedly in favour of a barring-out; secondly, the rotters of the school and their supporters, whose aim it was to support the masters and bring them back; and, lastly, the neutral party, which did not believe in favouring either side.

As a consequence of this, St. Frank's was not entirely unlike Bedlam.

It was a cold, wild, winter's evening, and outside the pouring rain was turning to sleet. The wind was gathering in intensity, and enormous banks of storm clouds were sweeping up from the north-west.

By common consent, the boys had crowded into Big Hall. They needed space in which to move and shout. The wild weather precluded them from using the Triangle, and the lobbies and Common-rooms of the Houses were too small. And Big Hall was like pandemonium.

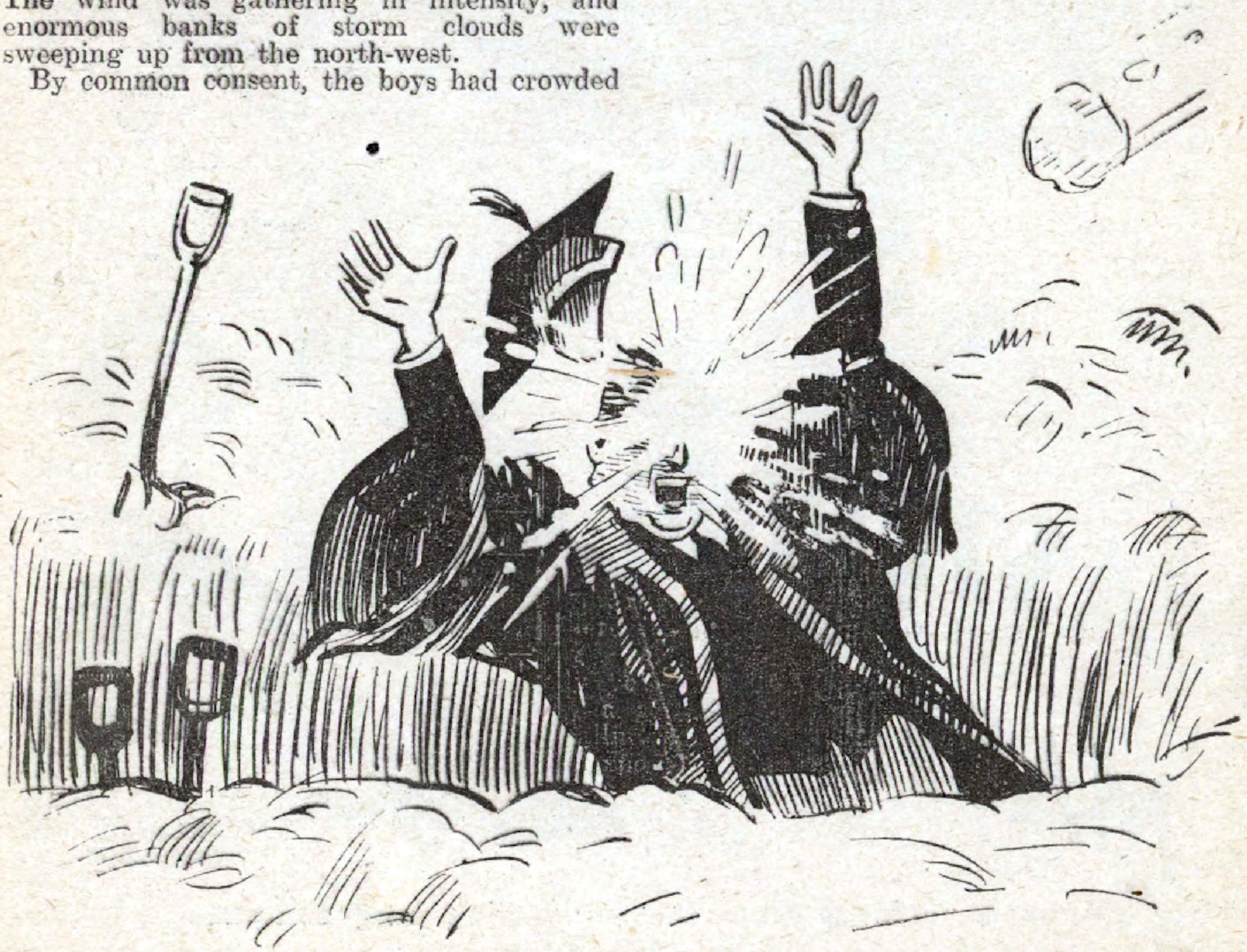
"Hurrah!"

"We've chucked those dud masters out!"

"Good egg!"

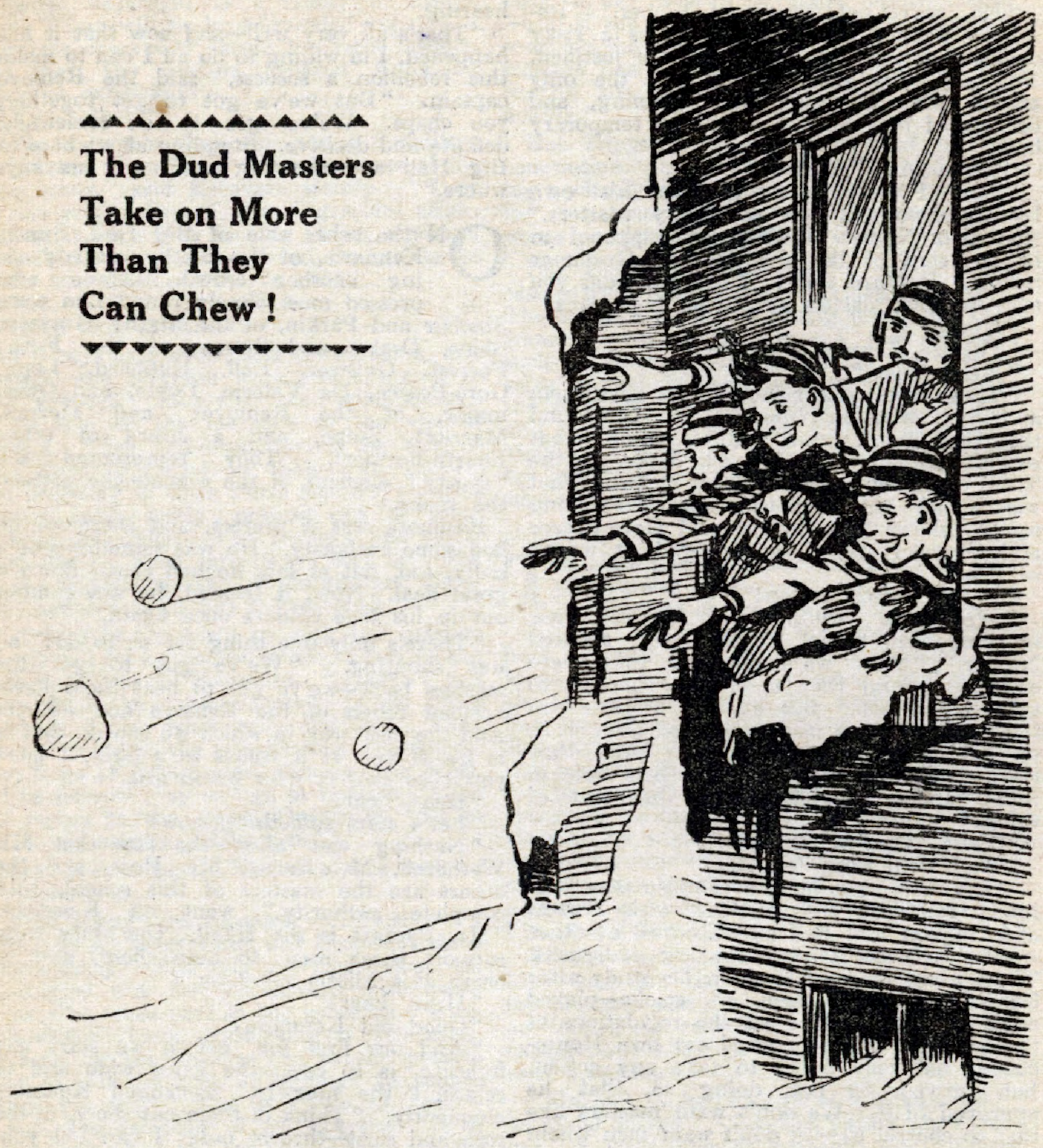
"And now we'll keep them out!"

Nipper, the captain of the Remove, saw that something would have to be done quickly if the rebels were to be kept in order. The mutinous faction was composed largely of Removites and Fourth-Formers, and all these fellows were keeping together in a big, excited bunch. On the other side of Big



—Sensational Developments This Week!

The Dud Masters Take on More Than They Can Chew!



Hall, the rotters were gathered, and they seemed but a small party by comparison. Prefects and other seniors wandered about helplessly.

"Listen to me, you chaps!" shouted Nipper, springing on to a corner of the platform. "We shan't get anywhere if we waste our time like this. We've got to decide upon some definite course of action."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Long live the rebellion!"

The Removites and Fourth-Formers surged round, and Nipper was cheered to the echo. He had taken the lead in this revolt, and the fellows were looking to him for guidance. Even such stalwarts as Kirby Keeble Parkington and Edward Oswald Handforth were ignored in this crisis. Nipper, cool-brained and reliable, was in command.

"I'm not going to say that I approved of this lightning rebellion," shouted Nipper. "But now that it's happened I'm all in favour of it. Perhaps it will turn out for the best—but we can't hope for success unless we mobilise our forces and use them effectively."

"Tell us what to do, Nipper!"

"Go it, old son!"

"There's no need for me to tell you exactly why this rebellion took place," continued Nipper, as he faced the excited throng. "You know how our masters were poisoned at a big dinner in Bannington, and how they were all taken to hospital. We shan't get them back for another two or three weeks."

"Who cares?" sang out somebody. "Aren't we having a high old time?"

"No, we're not!" retorted Nipper. "Revolting against authority is always a risky business—but in this instance we're justified. You all know that Pycraft was the only master who escaped the poisoning, and because of that he was appointed temporary head."

"Down with Pycraft!"

"And Pycraft, according to his own boasts, appointed ten temporary masters," continued Nipper. "They are supposed to be the staff of the new Halford Grammar School. But are they? I ask you—did you ever see such masters in all your born days?"

"Never!"

"They're a crowd of rotters!"

"Hear, hear!"

"These men came here, and we gave them a chance," went on Nipper. "We soon found that they didn't know a giddy thing about school routine. The biggest dunce in the Third could show them a thing or two. That wasn't bad—but when they started toadying up to fellows like Forrest and Gore-Pearce and Grayson and Kenmore—well, it wasn't so good."

"It was beastly rotten!"

"We were willing to forgive their ignorance of school regulations," shouted Nipper. "They were pleasant, they were easy-going, and they tried their hardest to tackle their job. But all the prefects can tell you that these masters shoved their work on to the prefects' shoulders. And they themselves—the masters—spent their time in idling about, gambling, and that sort of thing."

"Yah! They're all duds!"

"And we'll keep 'em out!"

"Only this evening our Form-master was found gambling and smoking with Forrest and Gulliver and Bell and a crowd of other rotters!" roared Nipper, waxing indignant. "Last night he kept them in his study after bed-time—allowed them to smoke—played cards for money. He set the regulations of the school at defiance. And our own House-master not only failed to take any action, but proved, by not doing so, that he approved of it. We don't want masters like that to control us—we don't want men whom we cannot respect."

"Hear, hear!"

"It was Handforth's idea to make a demonstration this evening," continued Nipper. "We weren't ready for rebellion, but rebellion overtook us. Handforth led the demonstration, and because of it we were ordered into Big Hall. Mr. Pycraft was helpless, and Mr. Wetherell, our own House-master, took charge. He tried to flog some of us—and the rest of you fellows objected. You know what happened after that."

"By George, yes!" yelled Handforth. "We revolted on the spot, grabbed those masters, and chucked them out and locked the gates on them!"

"Hurrah!"

"Long live the revolt!"

"Down with the duds!"

The rebels cheered lustily, and it was some moments before Nipper could get a further hearing.

"That's all very well—and now that it has happened, I'm willing to do all I can to make this rebellion a success," said the Remove captain. "But we've got to get together, you chaps. We've got to do something definite and decisive. Standing about here in Big Hall and shouting won't get us anywhere."

ON the other side of Big Hall, Simon Kenmore, of the Sixth, was addressing another crowd. Those who pressed most closely round him were Sinclair and Parkin, of the Sixth; Grayson, Shaw, Drake, and Simms, of the Fifth; Forrest, Gulliver, Bell, Hubbard, Long, Gore-Pearce, De Valerie, Doyle, and Owen major, of the Remove; and Merrell, Marriott, Snipe, and a crowd of other Fourth-Formers. They represented the "sporty" element of the school—the rotters, the snobs.

Kenmore was a prefect, and therefore he had some authority. He was something of a bully, too, but of late he had toned down a great deal. Now, it seemed, he was coming out in his true colours once again.

"There's only one thing for us to do!" he was shouting. "We've got to get the masters back—we've got to beat these hare-brained rebels of the Remove and Fourth. And the only way in which we can do that is to use force. If it comes to a fight, I hope you'll go into it with bared fists."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's start something now!"

"Nothing can alter the fact that Mr. Wetherell, Mr. Ferris, Mr. Ross, and the others are the masters of this school, with complete authority," went on Kenmore. "Mr. Pycraft is the Head. Our duty is to support these men, to help them, and to crush this idiotic rebellion."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Kenmore!"

"And our first job, before we start any fighting, is to open the gates wide and to re-admit the masters," continued Kenmore eloquently. "Think of them out there, in the rain and sleet—thrown out! I can tell you, you chaps, that there's going to be a heavy reckoning. And all boys who join in this revolt are asking for trouble with a capital T."

Many of the juniors were attracted by Kenmore's shouting, and they listened eagerly. They were beset by doubts—they were the waverers. Which side should they join? Many of them had already been carried away by Nipper's speech, and were ready enough to support the revolt. But now they were listening to Kenmore, and indecision seized them.

"It's not too late to put things right," Kenmore was saying. "You know as well as I do that these masters are sportsmen——"

"Hear, hear!"

"They're different from ordinary masters, and if we only bring them back into

the school at once, they will realise that what happened happened in a frenzy of excitement. They will be broad-minded enough to exonerate everybody except the rebel leaders. And they, the leaders," roared Kenmore, "deserve expulsion!"

"Yes, rather!"

"We know who they are—young Hamilton, Parkington, Handforth, and a few more of the same breed," said Kenmore sternly. "They are the ringleaders of this disgraceful affair. And what were they kicking about, anyway? Haven't these masters proved themselves to be the best masters we ever had?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Good luck to them!"

Such boys as Forrest, and Gore-Pearce, and Merrell, and Grayson were wholehearted in their support. They had been glad enough to approve of the methods of the ejected masters. They had been having the time of their lives; smoking in their own studies, even smoking in their Form-masters' studies; playing cards freely, getting out of prep, slacking generally. The masters had made favourites of them, and they liked it. The sudden "chucking-out" of the masters, therefore, had hit them like a bombshell.

"It was bad enough to kick the masters out—it will be a hundred times as bad to bar them out," roared Kenmore. "Haven't you thought of the consequences? If we don't re-admit them, what will happen? They won't stay out in the rain for long, remember. They'll go to Bannington, put up in a hotel, and to-morrow they will go to London. They will report to the school Governors. There will be an inquiry. And then?"

There was a hush; Kenmore was making an impression.

"And then?" he repeated ominously. "I think you all know what will happen if there is an inquiry. Not only the ringleaders will be singled out for punishment—but every fellow who takes part in the rebellion. Even if it doesn't mean expulsions, it will mean the sack for the leaders, and drastic punishment for all the rest. Floggings all round, gating generally. The stoppage of pocket-money, the banning of all liberties. Is it worth risking? I tell you, we've got to bring those masters back quickly. We've got to restore order. Let us help them—let us smash this rebellion at its birth!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the rebels!"

Nipper and Handforth and his immediate supporters were rather alarmed to see a number of Removites and Fourth-Formers pressing round Kenmore's crowd. They were being carried away by the prefect's arguments. They were joining the rotters. Before long, indeed, at least a third of the school was shouting with Kenmore. Seniors and juniors alike were won over.

"Just a minute, you asses!" roared Nipper, running along the platform so that his voice could be heard by the deserters. "Don't take **any** notice of Kenmore! He and his pals are naturally keen to bring the dud masters back. They've been having a high old time—and if the masters are brought back they'll continue their high old time. We don't want masters like that! We want men who can control the school with dignity and confidence."

But Nipper's voice was drowned by the commotion. His own supporters were yelling excitedly; Kenmore's supporters were trying to shout him down. The result was worse pandemonium than ever.

But there was one definite result. The camps were more sharply divided than ever. The rebels were still a strong force, but they were now mostly juniors. A few seniors—such as Browne and Stevens of the Fifth—were staunch in their support of the rebels; the majority, however, listened to Kenmore, and they thought of their dignity as seniors. Perhaps it would be better, after all, to vote against this revolt, and to help in the restoration of order.

THERE was that third faction, too—the neutrals.

Fenton of the Sixth—the captain of St. Frank's—was the moving spirit here. Fenton realised his responsibilities. He knew well enough why Kenmore was shouting for the re-admission of the masters, and he had no sympathy whatever for that policy. But anything in the nature of a revolt against the school's discipline was alarming to a fellow of Fenton's calibre. He felt, now, that it was time for him to say something. He was alarmed by what had happened, and he was wondering how he could subdue all this mad excitement. It wasn't good for the school—it wasn't good for the boys. Violence of any kind was definitely bad.

Fenton was popular with all the decent fellows, and now that he came to the edge of the platform and demanded silence, there was an immediate response. The rebels waited expectantly—although doubtfully; the rotters were suspicious.

"Haven't we had enough of this nonsense?" he asked quietly. "No, don't start any shouting. I want you to get into your proper places—every Form. Forget that the school is without masters, and act just as though you were coming into Big Hall in the usual way. Let us have some dignity in this meeting. The situation is gravely serious, and we must meet it calmly. Now, come along—be good fellows. Get into your proper places."

He was so cool and so calm that there was an immediate response. The rival factions only hesitated for a moment or two, and then they shuffled about Big Hall with unwilling obedience. Before long, there was complete order, and the prefects sighed with relief. They stationed themselves as they always did, and they began to feel that the trouble was half over.

Edgar Fenton, like the born leader he was, had the situation in hand.

CHAPTER 2.

Nothing Doing!

MR. HORACE PYCRAFT, thin, weedy, and hopelessly incompetent, shivered not only with cold, but with apprehension.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, what can we do?" he wailed. "The whole situation is terrible! I do not know which way to turn. I am stunned by the enormity of this catastrophe."

The other masters regarded him with contempt. Considering that he was acting as temporary headmaster, his attitude was not one to command respect.

Mr. John Wetherell, Housemaster of the Ancient House, was really in command. Big, portly, kindly-featured, Mr. Wetherell was the average boy's conception of a genial uncle. His influence over the other masters was plain to see; they looked to him for guidance.

"We must be patient, Mr. Pycraft," he said gently. "Everything will be all right before long."

"How can you say that?" bleated Mr. Pycraft. "Good heavens! Don't you realise that we have been thrown out by force? Don't you understand that a rebellion is going on within the school? Think of my position when the Governors hear of this catastrophe!"

"If we regain control, and punish the ringleaders, the Governors will have nothing but praise for you, Mr. Pycraft," retorted Mr. Wetherell. "And we shall regain control—never fear. When this first excitement has blown over, the boys will be easy to handle."

Mr. Pycraft raised his hands.

"You don't know them, sir—you don't know them!" he panted. "You think these boys are easy to handle, eh? Well, they're not! It was you who drove them to this extremity—but it is I who must face the consequences. I am staggered! I tell you, gentlemen, I am staggered!"

"It's a pity you can't do a bit more staggering, and clear out," said one of the other masters. "You don't think we want you here, do you? You've done nothing but wail and moan——"

"Don't make things worse, Padbury," interrupted Mr. Wetherell curtly. "Leave him alone."

The ejected masters were not shivering out in the wind and sleet, as some of the boys believed. They had found shelter in one of the out-buildings of the school. It was a little harness-room, leading out of a coach-house. One of them had lit a fire in the little coke stove, and the electric light was gleaming. The harness-room was fairly cosy now, and the air was blue with tobacco smoke. The masters were making the best of an awkward situation.

"But what is the good of remaining here?" asked Mr. Pycraft plaintively. "What can we do? Either we must get back into the school, or we must admit defeat and go completely away. It is sheer nonsense to sit here in this filthy harness-room. What are we waiting for?"

"We are waiting for the boys to recover their senses, and to give us an indication that the trouble is over," replied Mr. Wetherell. "Mr. Jackson is outside now, having a general look round. Perhaps he will bring us good news."

Mr. Pycraft grunted. He was opposed to this policy. His idea had been to march straight back into the school and to punish the ringleaders of the rebellion. But Mr. Wetherell was a wise man. He knew that the boys were in an ugly mood, and it was quite on the cards that he and his colleagues would be thrown out for a second time. Far better let the boys cool down. And rather than go to the village, and create a lot of sensational gossip, it was better to remain at the school.

THE rebels were much nearer to the mark in their estimation of the temporary masters than any of them believed. For these ten men, supposedly from Halford Grammar School, were not exactly what they appeared.

The portly, genial Mr. John Wetherell, for example, was none other than Mike Satella, a confidence man very well known to Scotland Yard as Millionaire Mike—an international crook with a notorious reputation. So, in throwing him out of St. Frank's, the boys had really shown astonishing commonsense. Instinctively, they had known him to be an impostor. The other nine masters were men of exactly the same breed—"Dicky" Bliss, Sam Pope, Rod Vaizey, Al Spink, Hank Purkiss, Ed Sugden, and the rest. They were all "con" men—members of Millionaire Mike's gang.

Even Mr. Horace Pycraft did not know their real identity. Mr. Pycraft, like the boys, believed that these men were the scholastic staff of the Halford Grammar School. Mr. Pycraft was astonished and startled at their general behaviour, but he was not a brilliant man; and it never occurred to him that there could have been an imposture.

For one thing, these men looked so genuine. They were well-dressed and cultured. Being confidence tricksters, their very livelihood, precarious as it was, depended upon their assumed culture. They were men who frequented Europe's greatest hotels—London, Paris, the Riviera, the trans-Atlantic liners. They plied their dishonest trade wherever rich men and women congregated.

They had come to London for the purpose of share-pushing—selling large numbers of worthless shares, and then clearing out with their booty before the storm broke. Unfortunately for them, Scotland Yard was very much on the alert, and they had not been able to make a single move.

Then, quite by chance, Millionaire Mike had overheard a conversation between Sir John Brent and Mr. John Wetherell and the other real Halford masters in the luxurious lobby of the Fitzroy Hotel. Sir John was

the chairman of the St. Frank's board of Governors, and he had been making final arrangements with Mr. Wetherell. On the instant Mike Satella had conceived his audacious idea.

Getting his men together he had put it to them, and it had been an easy matter to intercept the real Halford masters at Victoria Station and to send them home unsuspicious. Millionaire Mike had introduced himself as Sir John Brent's secretary, and he had paid the masters their month's salary, had apologised for the misunderstanding, and they had gone away in peace.

Then the confidence men had coolly arrived at St. Frank's; they had just as coolly introduced themselves to Mr. Pycraft, and they had settled down as schoolmasters.

Nipper's fist flashed out, and Bernard Forrest went crashing through the window.

But, not being schoolmasters, they had come up against several nasty snags. The boys had soon discovered that the new men were abysmally ignorant of Public school routine and procedure, and this alone had caused a lot of comment and suspicion. When the new men had definitely curried favour with the school's rotters, the other fellows had been aroused to indignation.

Forrest & Co., Grayson, Sinclair, Kenmore, and such outsiders, were allowed to do exactly as they pleased—to slack during lessons, to "cut" prep, and to live a general life of ease. They were permitted to smoke in the presence of their Form-masters, and even to play cards for money with them. When these facts got about the school, there had been greater indignation than ever—culminating in the dramatic and unexpected rebellion.

But Millionaire Mike was hopeful that things would yet come right. He hated the idea of abandoning his plan. If there was any possibility of pushing it through, he meant to do so.

There had been method in making things easy for such fellows as Claude Gore-Pearce and Bernard Forrest and the Hon. Douglas Singleton and Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne The "con" men were anxious to get on intimate terms with the boys—to become so friendly, in fact, that they would learn the closest details of their family affairs; and through the boys Millionaire Mike and his gang hoped to gain access to the parents.

The scheme, in brief, was to get thoroughly "in" with the richest fellows in the school during these two or three weeks at St. Frank's; then, when the time came for them to go, they would continue their plot elsewhere—in the homes of their schoolboy victims. The parents, having every reason to believe that the schoolmasters were thoroughly honest men, would welcome them, trust them. Millionaire Mike considered that it would be an easy task to sell whole blocks of worthless shares when the right time came. This imposture at St. Frank's was merely the preliminary work—paving the way for the big "clean up."

Mr. Pycraft was already under the gang's thumb; on their very first night at the school they had induced him to join in a game of bridge—and bridge had led to poker and other gambles. Mr. Pycraft was a

novice—and very much of a simpleton, too. He had fallen an easy victim. When he had risen from the table he had discovered, to his unutterable dismay, that he had signed IOU's to the tune of something like five hundred pounds. And he had believed, all the time, that he had been playing for mere pence!

Armed with the IOU's, Millionaire Mike had informed Mr. Pycraft, quite frankly, that he had better do as he was told—or perhaps the Governors might see those fateful little documents. Mr. Pycraft, knowing that such a disclosure would mean his immediate dismissal, was held well down. He was a mere tool in the hands of these clever crooks.

"There's nothing to worry about," said the false Mr. Wetherell, as he lit another cigarette. "The boys will soon come to their senses. But we mustn't make the mistake of precipitating anything. Our policy is to wait."

And they waited—and hoped.

EDGAR FENTON was speaking in Big Hall.

The rebels were listening reluctantly; but the stern discipline of the school was not lightly to be ignored. Fenton was the head prefect, and, moreover, he was a decent fellow. In their respect for Fenton, the rebels listened. Kenmore's crowd also listened because it had an idea that Fenton's speech would help them. The neutrals listened because there was nothing else to do.

"I'm not going to say that you boys were not goaded to the drastic action you took," said Fenton quietly, "but if you expect me to agree that you were justified, you'll be disappointed. You were not justified."

"But those masters are a crowd of duffers!" yelled Handforth.

"They may be duffers—they may be hopelessly incapable of conducting this school," replied Fenton, "but they were appointed by the Governors, and, whatever their shortcomings, it is the school's duty to keep the peace. Throwing them out by violence is not the way to keep the peace."

"We don't want peace!" yelled somebody. "We want a barring-out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not going to let these duds come back!"

"I want to urge you to drop all this nonsense," said Fenton earnestly. "You acted rashly—unthinkingly. No good can come of a barring-out."

"Cheese it, Fenton!"

"You're as bad as Kenmore!"

"Rats! We're not going to listen to you!"

The rebels were incensed by the school captain's words—words which were totally opposed to their own inclinations.

"I say it's madness to keep up this rebellion!" shouted Fenton. "I'm not ordering you in any way—you wouldn't take any notice if I did—but I'm asking you to consider carefully. I'm asking you to think."

"Good man, Fenton!" shouted Kenmore approvingly. "These silly kids need to be brought to their senses."

"Yes, rather!"

"Down with the rebellion!"

"Let's get the masters back!"

The rotters were enthusiastic in their shouts, and they were already cheering Fenton so lustily that violent disorder was liable to break out at any moment.

"Just a minute!" said Fenton. "I am not in sympathy with this section of fellows under Kenmore. I hope you understand that, Kenmore? I know quite well why you want these masters back. Your only object for suggesting peace is because you know that you'll have a soft time—an even softer time now than before. So the less you cheer me the better. Your motives are purely selfish."

The rotters were silenced.

"My object for suggesting peace is different," continued Fenton. "I want to avoid trouble—needless trouble. If the masters are acting wrongly, it won't improve matters if the school acts wrongly, too. It is our duty to grin and bear it until a dignified complaint can be laid in the right quarter."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Fenton!" sang out Parkington. "Old Pycraft is our headmaster—and what good is he? He's hand-in-glove with the new men. He won't lift a finger. If we appeal to him, he'll flog us. A barring-out is the only solution."

"Dear old fellow, you are absolutely right," said Travers, yawning. "Long live the barring-out!"

"You're a fine chap to talk!" snorted Handforth, glaring. "Why, you were thick with the masters yourself."

"I had a bit of a spree, I'll admit," said Travers, grinning. "But I'm pretty sick of them, and I've spotted their game. They're only after what they can get—and by the time they had rooked me of four or five quid I twigged them. Down with the masters!"

"That's not the way to talk, Travers!" said Fenton sharply.

"Dry up, Fenton! Travers is right!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Travers is wrong—you are all wrong!" shouted Fenton. "We've got to get St. Frank's back to normal within the next half-hour. After that, we can take our time. We'll make our complaint in the right quarter——"

"Yes, and it'll be weeks before anything is done!" interrupted Handforth wrathfully. "We shall have our own masters back before a finger is lifted! Are we going to stand the duds for another two or three weeks? Not likely! We've kicked 'em out, and I vote that we bar them out completely!"

"I'm with you, Handy!" shouted K. K. Parkington.

"Same here!"

"Sorry, Fenton, but I've got to agree with the chaps," said Nipper. "We're sick and tired of Wetherell and Padbury and all the

rest of them—sick and tired of Pycraft, too. They've brought nothing but disgrace to the school. I maintain that we were justified in kicking them out, and we shall be just as justified in defying them. On with the rebellion!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

And Nipper walked out of Big Hall, followed by crowds of enthusiastic Removites, Fourth-Formers, and Third-Formers.

CHAPTER 3.

Taking the Plunge!

EDGAR FENTON stood flushed and angry as he saw the juniors trooping out, shouting defiance and revolt. He was disappointed. He had hoped that his influence would be strong enough to prevent the rebellion.

Yet he could not altogether blame the juniors; he felt a sneaking sympathy for them. Only his high-minded sense of duty had impelled him to make a bold bid for peace. He was suspicious of the new masters, too—he felt that there was something behind all this which would not bear the light of investigation. In his heart, he could not blame the boys for point-blank refusing to submit to such a farcical authority.

The rebels, wildly excited, were surprised to find a white mantle over the Triangle when they emerged. Snow was falling thickly. It were being whirled about by a high wind, and drifts were already forming against the exposed walls.

"Hallo! Here's a change!" yelled Handforth. "It was raining when we went in—now it's snowing! Better dodge indoors, you chaps!"

They went dashing off to the Ancient House, and although none of the Fourth-Formers boarded there, they followed. Nipper reached the Ancient House steps first, and he managed to make his voice heard as he ran to the top of the steps.

"Follow me into the Lecture Hall, you chaps!" he yelled. "Come on—all of you! We've got to decide on something—and we've got to decide quickly!"

They went trooping noisily along to the Ancient House Lecture Hall. Nipper, more than any of the others, realised the necessity for definite action. Just running about the school and shouting would do no good. There had to be some organisation in this rebellion, or it would crash.

The Lecture Hall wasn't any bigger than a large class-room, and it was soon packed. At least two-thirds of the Junior School was present. The Old-Timers and the Red-Hots were there to a man, but at a time like this rivalry was completely forgotten. They were all under one banner.

"I'm not going to make a speech!" shouted Nipper, as he leapt upon the platform. "I've only got a few words to say—and I'll only take a minute."

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

Handforth was on the platform, too, and he bawled for silence.

"What's the good of packing ourselves in here?" he demanded excitedly. "We ought to be going round the school, getting the other chaps to join us. A barring-out's no good unless we're united!"

"I'll do the talking, Handy," cut in Nipper. "There's no sense in bothering about the other chaps. They had their chance to join us, and we don't want people who are half-hearted."

"No fear!"

"Nipper's right!"

"We're a strong force, and we can put up a good fight," continued Nipper. "Now I'm going to suggest that we seize the Ancient House for ourselves."

"What!"

"We're in here now, and we'll stick in here," continued Nipper. "We'll close the doors, bar the windows, and hold the fort. That's the general plan. Let the rest of the school do as it pleases—but we'll bar everybody out of this House. We've rebelled, and we'll stick to our guns. Let 'em try to get us out!"

"Hurrah!"

"But we've got to have organisation!" roared Nipper. "I want you fellows to act sensibly. Place yourselves under the command of certain leaders. Handy, you take a dozen. Travers, you take another dozen. K. K., you've got your own Red-Hots. Let's divide ourselves into parties, and go round this House, securing every door and window—and, if necessary, we'll barricade the doors and windows, too."

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on—let's get started!"

"Yes, rather!"

Within two or three minutes, strong parties of juniors were dashing about the Ancient House, seeing to the closing and locking of doors and windows. The domestic staff, getting wind of what was happening, flew into a panic, and cleared out. The juniors didn't mind.

Before fifteen minutes had elapsed, the Ancient House was entirely theirs—locked, barred and bolted.

WHILE this was going on within the Ancient House, other things were happening outside.

Fenton had soon discovered what the rebels had done, and he shrugged his shoulders rather helplessly. When boys were in that determined frame of mind, talking was of little use. They would not listen to reason, or to argument, or even to persuasion. Fenton realised, in fact, that this storm would have to blow itself out. He had done his best, and he did not accuse himself of weakness.

The other faction was nearly as noisy—the big crowd which was led by Simon Kenmore, and which included all the known snobs and rotters of the school. Cheering

and yelling, they were streaming out across the Triangle, and were flinging the gates wide open. They expected to find the ejected masters waiting outside in a cold, shivering group.

"They're not here," said Forrest, as he peered up and down the lane.

"I didn't think they would be here, you young ass," said Kenmore gruffly. "But we've opened the gates, and that ought to show them that everything is all right. I expect they've gone to the village."

"It's far more likely that they've taken the evening train for London," commented Sinclair. "They were kicked out, and they got the wind up. There's been too much waste of time; we ought to have let the masters in long ago."

They stood there in the driving snow, at a loose end.

"Well, it's no good standing here, catching pneumonia," said Kenmore. "We'd better get back indoors. I'll ring up the George Tavern and make inquiries, and if I hear nothing there I'll ring up the station. We shall be able to find out something definite."

The night was so wild that none of the fellows cared to remain out in the howling wind and the driving snow. They pelted back to the warmth of the Houses. It was one thing to agree that the masters should come back; it was quite another thing to locate the masters.

IT was unfortunate, perhaps, that Kenmore and his followers should have lost contact with Mr. Pycraft and his ten assistants. For at that very moment the masters were deciding upon action on their own account. And a better grasp of the situation would have saved them a great deal of trouble.

Mr. Kent, of the Third—alias Ed Sugden—came blundering into the warm harness-room, shaking the snow from his shoulders.

"It's all right!" he announced breathlessly. "The balloon's come down."

"May I ask what you mean, Mr. Kent?" asked Mr. Pycraft tremulously. "I was not

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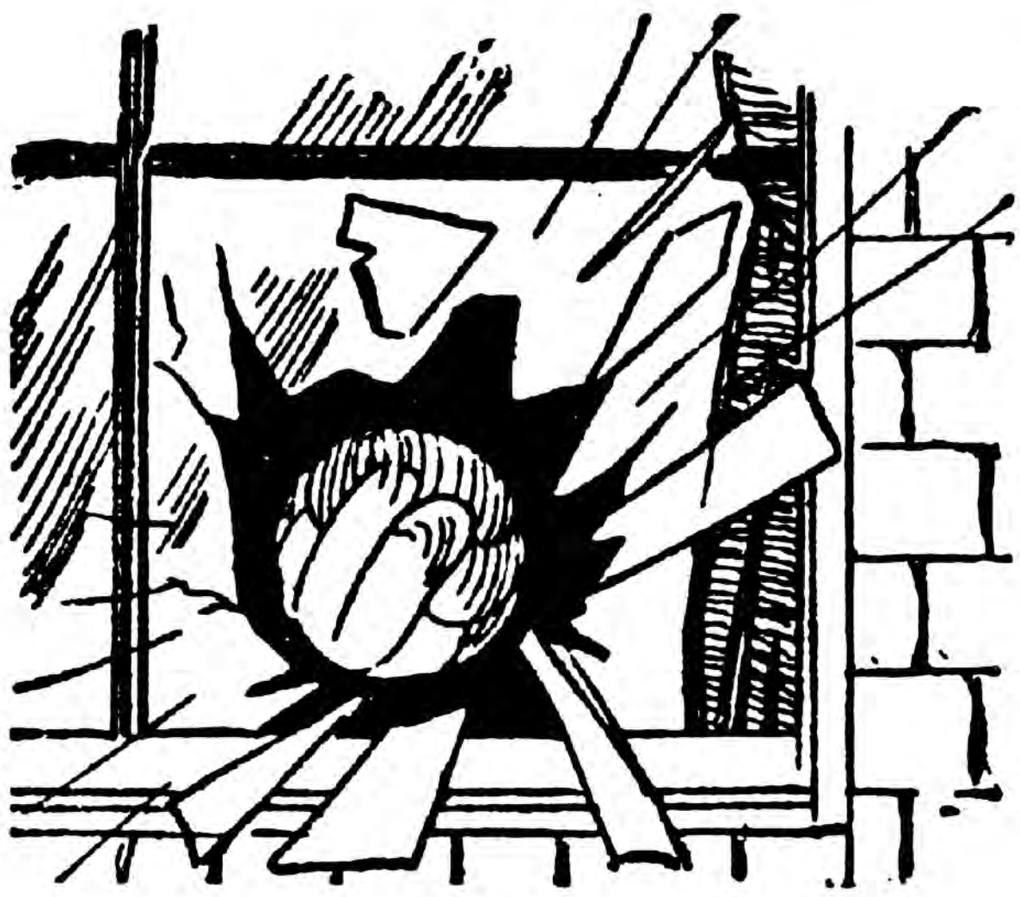

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aware that a—er—balloon figured in this appalling situation."

"Spill it, Ed," said Millionaire Mike briefly.

"I've just seen a crowd of the boys opening the gates, and I overheard them saying that the trouble is over," replied Ed Sugden. "That means that the school has decided to call the whole thing off. I thought I'd better not mix with the boys—but leave it to you, Mike."

"Good work," said Millionaire Mike, nodding.

Mr. Pycraft felt dazed. The manner in which these Halford masters addressed one another was bewildering. He did not see the warning glance which Mike Satella directed at Ed Sugden, neither did he see Ed's wink.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wetherell," said Ed. "But everything is so upside down that I'm apt to forget the formalities."

"That's all right, Mr. Kent," said Mike. "Now, gentlemen, it is our move next. Apparently, the boys have got over their excitement. We must quietly pick up the reins again."

"Quietly?" exploded Mr. Pycraft. "My dear sir, I protest! These rebellious young rascals must be punished with the utmost severity——"

"You'll pardon me, Mr. Pycraft," interrupted Mr. Wetherell coldly. "This is not the moment for drastic punishments. We don't want the boys to fly off the deep end again. Once we have got the school under normal control, we can make searching inquiries and locate the ringleaders."

They went out into the snow, and found the Ancient House blazing with lights. There was not the slightest ndication of trouble now. None of the boys was out of doors, and peace reigned. No wild shouting could be heard. The school, obviously, had cooled down.

"This snow is getting thick," said Mr. Wetherell, as he trudged through the ankle-deep carpet of whiteness. "We will go straight to my study in the Ancient House, gentlemen. We will interview the prefects there, and find out exactly what has happened."

"Listen!" said Mr. Pycraft huskily.

They were in the West Square now, and they could hear the sound of cheering from the West House. One or two voices rose above the others, and even the words could be distinguished.

"Mr. Wetherell's the best Housemaster we ever had!" came Forrest's voice. "Those silly idiots ought to be kicked for making such a fuss. The sooner the masters are back, and things are normal, the better. St. Frank's was never so well served."

"Good old Pycraft!" came another voice. "It was he who appointed these masters, wasn't it? Pycraft's got more sense in his little finger than any other Head we ever had. He knows the kind of men to appoint. Good luck to 'em!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's hope that Kenmore soon locates the masters, and tells them that everything is all right," came Forrest's voice again. "They're sportsmen!"

Such words as these were like balm to the ejected masters. Mr. Pycraft was so relieved that his knees positively sagged.

"Good heavens!" he breathed. "Did—did you hear, gentlemen?"

"The boys have come to their senses," said Mr. Wetherell genially. "I am glad to hear, Mr. Pycraft, that you are so well esteemed. There is nothing to worry about now. The boys are definitely on our side."

"I am intensely—er—gratified," mumbled Mr. Pycraft.

He was more than gratified—he was stunned by the shock of relief. As acting Head, he was responsible. He had begun to have grave doubts about these ten men—these men who had got him so completely under their thumb. One word of this appalling affair to the Governors, and his job would be gone. Perhaps the matter could be hushed up even now. Mr. Pycraft felt delirious in his relief.

The men made no sound as they plodded through the snow to the private door of the Ancient House. Mr. Wetherell slipped his key in, and the door instantly opened. The rebels, in their excitement, had missed this door.

"Ah!" said Millionaire Mike, as he and his companions stood in the warmth of the passage. "This is better. Come, gentlemen, to my study."

They shook some of the snow from their shoulders, and stamped off. Turning a corner, they came face to face with Handforth, Church, McClure, Travers, and five or six other Removites. Both parties were so startled that they halted and stared at one another.

CHAPTER 4.

The Campaign Opens!

THE schoolboys were more startled than the masters.

It was, in fact, a shock. The rebels had seized the Ancient House, and believed that it was entirely theirs. To come face to face with the masters in this way nearly knocked them off their feet. Millionaire Mike and his associates might have been a collection of ghosts, judging from the way the juniors goggled at them.

"You shouldn't be in this part of the House, boys," said Millionaire Mike, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You know perfectly well that it is out of bounds. However, in the circumstances, I will overlook the matter. And as this is hardly the moment to discuss the recent happenings, you had better go"

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"We are all glad that you boys have come to your senses," continued Mr. Wetherell, his cheeks more ruddy than ever, his manner kindly and tolerant. "I was a boy myself

once, and, remembering that, I shall advise our headmaster not to deal too harshly with the ringleaders of the recent revolt."

"But—how did you get in?" gasped Handforth.

"By the Housemaster's private door, I should think," put in Travers. "By Samson! Somebody must have overlooked that door, dear old fellows. This is rather frightfully awkward!"

"Awkward be blowed!" roared Handforth, recovering himself. "Hi, Remove! Back up, you chaps! They're in!"

It was the turn of the masters to be startled.

"Be quiet, Handforth!" snapped Mr. Pycraft angrily. "How dare you shout in that uncouth fashion? You apparently forget that this absurd revolt is over."

"Over?" yelled Handforth. "Why, it's hardly started!"

"Come, come," said Millionaire Mike firmly, but kindly. "You boys are still excited——"

"Don't you believe it!" interrupted Handforth calmly. "We're the rebels, and we've grabbed this House! We're barring you all out!"

"What!" gurgled Mr. Pycraft feebly.

"Rather!" said Handforth. "You're not supposed to be in here at all! It's like your nerve to break in!"

"Let me deal with him, Mr. Pycraft," said Mike smoothly. "My poor boy, you are evidently deluded. The rebellion is over. We did not break in, as you state. We walked in quite normally——"

"I wonder if you'll walk out normally?" murmured Travers reflectively. "Somehow, I think not."

Fortunately, Nipper arrived on the scene at that moment, with Kirby Keeble Parkington, Baines, Deeks, Buster Boots, and a few others. Nipper took in the situation immediately.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but there's a mistake," he said. "The rest of the school might be willing to admit you, but we're not. This House is ours."

"What—what nonsense is this?" demanded Mr. Pycraft furiously.

"I am sorry, sir, if you regard it as nonsense, but we fellows in this House have decided that we cannot recognise your authority—or the authority of any of these men," said Nipper, quite respectfully. "We shall have to ask you to leave at once."

"But isn't the rebellion over?" asked Sam Pope uneasily.

"It's over in the rest of the school—but not in this House," replied Nipper. "You have made a mistake, gentlemen. We don't want any misunderstandings; and it will save a lot of trouble if you leave quietly."

"Insolence!" panted Mr. Pycraft, beside himself. "Unparalleled insolence! How dare you, Hamilton? And you, Handforth! Go back to your own quarters at once!"

Nipper and Handforth stood their ground, and Mr. Pycraft swept the rest of the fellows with a blazing eye.

"Christine—Boots—Yorks—Oldfield!" he rapped out. "What are you doing out of your own House at this hour? Go! Do you hear me? Go!"

Mr. Pycraft was accustomed to seeing the Fourth-Formers cower under his glaring eye. Normally. he was their Form-master, and they always obeyed him with alacrity. But now there was a change. They returned his glare with open defiance.

"Sorry, Mr. Pycraft, but it won't work this time," said John Busterfield Boots aggressively. "We're not recognising your authority—or anybody else's here. We're on strike!"

"You'd better go, Mr. Pycraft," said Nipper, in an ominous tone.

"I shall not go!" shouted Mr. Pycraft shrilly. "I have never heard of such impertinence! Mr. Wetherell! Cannot you do something?"

Like the weakling he was, he appealed to the stronger man.

"Yes, I certainly can do something," said Millionaire Mike, his manner changing. "I'll show these young fools who is master here!"

He hurled his heavy frame forward, seized Nipper, and angrily cuffed him. At the same moment, some of the other masters grabbed a few more juniors. Being under the impression that the revolt was over, they thought that they could very easily subdue these few die-hards. Never had they made a greater mistake.

"Remove, ahoy!" bellowed Handforth. "Back up, Fourth. "Up the rebels! Out with the duds!"

His voice went booming up and down the corridors, and the response was immediate. Rebels came pouring along in dozens, excited and curious.

"They've got in!" roared Handforth. "Grab them! Somebody open the front doors!"

"Good idea!" grinned Travers. "We kicked them out, but they must be dense. I'm afraid we shall have to kick them out again."

An avalanche of humanity descended upon the startled masters. They were heavily charged, bumped over, and sent sprawling. Only for the first few minutes had the rebels hesitated; Millionaire Mike's rash action in cuffing Nipper had precipitated the battle.

Mr. Padbury, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Kent, Mr. Ross, and the others fought hard. They kicked and struggled and punched Many juniors were hurt—but the odds were all in their favour. The fight did not last long. Within two minutes the masters were held down, three or four excited rebels to each.

"Out with them!" roared Nipper. "We said we wouldn't have them back—and we won't!"

"Hurrah!"

Wildly excited, the rebels whirled the unfortunate men towards the lobby. Mr. Py-

Handforth looked out of the window—and saw nothing but one vast vista of snow out of which peeped the top of the West House. "By George!" he gasped. "We're snowbound!"

craft was honoured with the lead, and Handforth & Co. and K. K., who were carrying him, came to an abrupt halt in the wide-open doorway.

Mr. Pycraft shot out into the night as though released from a catapult. Shrieking wildly, with arms and legs waving, he turned a couple of somersaults, and landed in the thick snowdrift which had collected at the bottom of the steps. Mr. Pycraft vanished amidst a white smother.

Millionaire Mike was the next—then Mr. Ferris—then Mr. Padbury, and the others. In quick succession, they were hurled forth, and they were no longer in any doubt as to the reality of the rebellion.

Slam!

The heavy door closed, and the bolts were shot. A wild clamour of cheering sounded above the buffeting of the wind. The masters, sitting up in the deep snow, were more dazed than hurt.

"Where's the fool who said that the trouble was over?" snarled Millionaire Mike.

For years he had trained himself to act like a bluff, kindly, country squire. But there were moments when he forgot that training. This was one of those moments. He leapt to his feet—no longer with the appearance of a cultured schoolmaster, but a dangerous criminal.

"Follow me, boys!" he panted. "We'll teach these young hounds!"

He rushed at the nearest window, hoisted his heavy body upon the sill, and forced his back clean through the glass. There was a shattering crash as the window caved in, frame included.

"This is no time for gentle methods," snarled Mike Satella. "We've got to show these cubs that we're in earnest."

He forced his way through the opening, and three or four of the other men followed. Mr. Pycraft had risen to his feet, but he remained inactive—horrified by all this violence.

Figures were streaming across from the Modern House and the East House. That crash of glass had attracted attention, and

Kenmore, Grayson, Forrest and others were hurrying up to see what was in the wind.

"By gad!" yelled Forrest. "It's the masters! They're breaking into the Ancient House!"

"Taking the bull by the horns, eh?" rapped out Kenmore. "Good stuff! We'll help, you fellows! Down with the rebels!"

They did not pause to inquire what the exact position was. They could see that the Ancient House was being attacked—and that was enough. They hurled themselves at some of the other windows, and smashed them as Mr. Wetherell had done. Within a minute, dozens of them were invading the fort.

It was such a surprise attack that the rebels were momentarily beaten. A breach had been made, and the enemy was in!

"It's all right, sir—we're with you!" ejaculated Forrest, as he found himself side by side with Mr. Wetherell. "Most of the school is with you! Only these rebels are causing the trouble."

"We'll soon settle their hash, young man," said Millionaire Mike ferociously.

Forrest gave him a quick look—surprised by the man's tone and expression. Nipper, who also saw that look, compressed his lips. He saw the others—Mr. Walter Ross, alias Dicky Bliss, Sam Pope, Hank Purkiss, and the rest. They weren't schoolmasters. Their eyes were evil, their faces were those of criminals now that the masks had been thrown aside, so to speak.

"Take it calmly, you fellows!" sang out Nipper, his voice quite steady. "Nothing to worry about. We'll soon have these invaders out!"

His leadership was invaluable. Many of the rebels were inclined to be panic-stricken at this unexpected assault; but Nipper's coolness steadied them. They dashed into the battle with resolute determination.

Crash!

Nipper's fist thudded violently into Bernard Forrest's face, and the rascally leader of Study A rocked on his heels, backed against one of the shattered windows, overbalanced, and toppled out.

Like lightning, Nipper swung round and engaged with Ed Sugden, who was kicking at him viciously. Handforth came to the rescue, and between the two of them they soon had Ed floored. They tipped him up and pitched him out into the night. Other scraps were in progress everywhere. The battle was quickly over.

The rebels, strong in their determination, fought gamely. The invaders were held, beaten, and chucked out. Once the tide turned, the rest was easy. The last of the invaders was sent shooting out into the night, and the broken windows were replaced by solid rebel forces.

"Some of you get round to the other windows—guard every weak point," shouted Nipper. "We mustn't let them in again."

The die was cast now! There could be no turning back. The rebellious juniors had laid violent hands upon the masters, and had hurled them forth for a second time. The barring-out was on!

"WE'VE been trying to find you, sir," said Kenmore breathlessly.

The masters, dishevelled and snow-covered, had sought refuge in the lobby of the Modern House. They were surrounded by crowds of excited juniors and seniors.

"There has been a mistake," said Mr. Wetherell, attempting to speak with dignity. "We thought this absurd revolt was over!"

"But it isn't over!" wailed Mr. Pycraft, wringing his hands. "Good heavens! Things are worse than ever! St. Frank's is little better than a shambles!"

"You evidently don't understand, sir," said Kenmore quickly. "Not more than a third of the school has revolted—mostly juniors of the Remove and Fourth. They took possession of the Ancient House, and it's awfully unlucky that you went into that House without realising the position."

"And the rest of the school?" asked Millionaire Mike sharply.

"The rest of the school is loyal, sir—as loyal as I am," replied Kenmore. "We want you back, sir, you and your colleagues. These rebels are only a minority—and I'm sure that you can deal with them."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're awfully glad to see you back, sir!"

"Good luck to all of you!"

"Rather!"

The rotters were enthusiastic in their welcome. They cheered. They made Mike Satella and his colleagues realise that the bulk of the school, at all events, was on their side. It was a big relief.

"The whole thing is most unfortunate," said Mr. Wetherell, now fully recovered. "Mr. Pycraft, I hope you will take my advice and go to bed at once. You are not well, sir. I urge you to leave matters entirely in my hands until the morning.

"No, no, I cannot do that!" panted Mr. Pycraft. "I am the headmaster—I am responsible. I must know what is happening. Where are all the boys? What are the prefects doing?"

Guy Sinclair laughed.

"Why, the prefects are doing their usual duties, sir," he said coolly. "The boys are in their studies, or the Common-rooms. Don't you realise, sir, that the school is normal?"

"Normal?" barked Mr. Pycraft irritably. "How can you say that, Sinclair?"

"Well, nearly normal, sir," replied the Sixth-Former. "The Ancient House has been grabbed by those rebels, but they won't last long. All the other Houses are all right."

"I think we had better call a meeting of the school at once," said Mr. Wetherell smoothly. "Yes, Mr. Pycraft, that will be the best thing. If you do not feel up to addressing the boys, I will deputise for you. It is quite essential that the school should

have its confidence restored. A firm hand is needed here."

"Yes, yes, indeed," muttered Mr. Pycraft helplessly.

His own hand was trembling, like the rest of him. Mike Satella, quickly appreciating that his game was not lost, took control.

— —

CHAPTER 5.

Edgar Fenton's Plan!

THERE was a hard light in Nipper's eyes.

"Listen, you fellows," he said quietly. "I've got something to tell you—something that may surprise you."

A crowd of rebels had gathered in the Ancient House Junior Common-room. Most of them were looking untidy and dishevelled, but nobody cared. Hasty barricades had been erected—furniture had been propped against the broken windows, and the other windows had been reinforced, too. Guards were patrolling, keenly on the watch.

"I've been in favour of this rebellion from the first," went on Nipper. "Some sort of instinct told me that we were doing the right thing."

"Jiggered if I can understand you!" said Handforth, staring. "Usually you're so jolly cautious. You don't believe in direct methods. But this time you've been the biggest hothead of us all!"

"That's because I had a hunch that we were doing the right thing," replied Nipper. "As a general rule, I don't believe in laying hands on masters or prefects. Even in a barring-out, it's bad policy. It requires a whole lot of justifying. And don't forget that in every barring-out there's got to be an hour of reckoning. There'll be a big inquiry over this business—and unless we're absolutely in the right—well, we shall suffer."

"Somewhere in the region of the neck," murmured Travers, nodding.

"But we are right," insisted Nipper. "From the first I felt that we were doing the only possible thing. I don't know whether you fellows noticed it, but when Mr. Wetherell and those other masters tried to break in, they were different."

"Yes, old tulip, I noticed that," said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, odds changes and transformations! Those blighters looked positively dangerous. Like a lot of gangsters, what?"

"We know something about gangsters, too—we had a few around St. Frank's not long ago," said Nipper. "No, I'm not saying that these men are gangsters—but I am saying that they're crooks."

"What!"

"Crooks!" repeated Nipper confidently.

"But that's rot, dear old fellow," said Travers. "They may be incompetent chumps, but they're masters from Halford Grammar School——"

"Are they?" cut in Nipper. "You can tell that to the Marines!"

"What do you mean?" ejaculated Handforth excitedly.

"I'm not boasting when I say that I know more about crooks than the rest of you chaps," replied Nipper. "I haven't been Mr. Nelson Lee's assistant for nothing. With my guv'nor, I've encountered crooks of all kinds. And I'm telling you straight out now that these men are no more schoolmasters than we're Hottentots!"

"If they're not schoolmasters, what are they?" asked Tommy Watson.

"I don't know—and it doesn't matter much, anyway," replied Nipper. "But they gave themselves away when they tried to break into this House not long ago. St. Frank's is in the hands of a gang of crooks!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"It's too—too thick, old man!"

"I'll stake my reputation that I'm right," insisted Nipper. "And that makes our barring-out completely justified. You wait until all the facts come out—and you'll find that I've scored a bull's-eye. Until then we'll stick to our guns—and by doing that we'll prove that we're the only sensible chaps in the school. We shan't be punished for this barring-out—we shall be praised. We've twigged these crooks, and we're not having any of their bunkum!"

IN Big Hall at that very minute Millionaire Mike was addressing the school.

The ranks of the Remove and the Fourth were extremely thin, and there weren't many Third-Formers, either. Otherwise, Big Hall was pretty well filled.

There was a humming of excitement amongst the rotters; but all the others were ominously silent. It was only Edgar Fenton's sense of duty which impelled him to carry on—and most of the Fifth and Sixth supported him.

"We—and I am speaking for my colleagues and myself—are gratified to find that the great bulk of the school has kept its head," Mr. Wetherell was saying. "It is difficult to know exactly what caused this ridiculous rebellion, but, whatever the cause, I am convinced that the boys' grievance can be adjusted."

"All those rebels ought to be tanned, sir!" said Kenmore.

"We must be tolerant," said Mr. Wetherell kindly. "Boys—particularly junior boys—are apt to get excited. And when they are excited they do things without quite realising their nature. It has always been my policy to make friends with my boys—and I regret exceedingly that there could have been any misunderstanding in this case. I shall strive my hardest to adjust this grievance without delay. In the meantime, I want the rest of you to carry on quietly and with dignity. Let us show the mutinous faction that we, at least, know how to behave. Our example

will have the effect of subduing them—of making them realise their folly."

Millionaire Mike knew how to speak. And, as he continued to talk to the school, he gained the school's confidence. Even those fellows who had a sneaking sympathy for the rebels, and who held the rotters in contempt, were impressed. They felt that Mr. Wetherell was right. Violence was to be deprecated.

"If my colleagues and myself have carried our friendly methods too far—and you must remember that we are new to this school—we will do our best to put matters right," continued Mr. Wetherell. "We only desire peace—friendship with our boys. I am convinced that the misguided juniors in the Ancent House will soon realise the error of their ways."

He smiled his kindliest smile.

"And now I want you all to go back to your Houses, and to resume your customary mode of life," he continued. "Some of you, of course, will have to make temporary arrangements—those of you who normally board in the Ancient House. But I am sure that your respective Housemasters will do all they can to help. For the time being, I am debarred from using my own quarters, but I shall, in the meantime, take advantage of Mr. Pycraft's hospitality."

When the school trooped out of Big Hall in an orderly way, the rotters cheered lustily. The rest felt that tho rebellion was as good as over.

FENTON, after Mr. Wetherell's speech in Big Hall, went to his study and did some thinking. He was glad enough that the school was settling down—but when he thought of the rebels in the Ancient House he was worried.

He put his overcoat on, sallied out, and hammered at the Ancient House door.

"Look out, you chaps!" shouted a voice inside. "There's somebody here! Another attack!"

"Nonsense!" shouted Fenton. "I'm all alone. It's Fenton. Open this door, there's good fellows."

Shufflings and excited voices sounded, and then came Nipper's voice.

"That you, Fenton?"

"Yes—open this door, old man."

"This isn't a trick, is it?" asked Nipper. "You're not trying to put something over on us?"

"Of course not," said Fenton. "You can take my word, can't you?"

The door was opened, and Fenton was admitted.

"Well, you're a nice lot," he commented as the rebels crowded round him. "What sort of a game do you think you're playing? Haven't you any thought for the prestige of the school?"

"If you've come here to lecture us——" began Nipper.

"No, I'm not going to lecture you," interrupted Fenton. "I'm going to ask you, as nicely as I can, to chuck up this game.

Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; "Holiday Annuals," "Nature Annuals," pocket wallets and penknifes are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

AIRY.

Teacher: "Describe a fishing net."

Bright lad: "A lot of holes tied together with string, sir."

(A. Rillie, Ayrshire San., New Cummock, Scotland, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

POOR PA!

"Hallo, Johnny!" said the neighbour. "Can I see your father for a few minutes?"

The boy thought hard for a moment.

"I'm afraid you can't, sir," he replied at last. "He happens to be wrapped up in his work at present."

"I didn't know your father was so studious," commented the neighbour.

"Dad's not studious," came tho hurried reply. "He's only been papering the parlour."

A. Richardson, 234, Caledon Road, East Ham, London, E.6., has been awarded a "Nature Annual.")

THE SALESMAN.

"Any shoe-laces, needles, or studs, lady?"

"No. Go away!"

"Any umbrella-rings, teapot-spouts, pencils or pen-nibs?"

"No. Go away, or I'll call a policeman."

"'Ere y'are, lady. Whistles, sixpence each!"

***(D. Potter, "Kenilworth," Lugtrout Lane, Solihull, nr. Birmingham, has been awarded a "Holiday Annual."*)**

THE HINT!

School Inspector: "Would any boy like to ask me a question?"

Pupil: "Please, sir, what time does your train go?"

(J. Bisson, "Milton," L'Islet, St. Sampsons, Guernsey, C.I., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE GUEST'S PYJAMAS!

It was time for Billy to go home—but the rain was coming down in torrents.

"You can't go home in this downpour," remarked the host. "You'd better stay the night with us."

Billy muttered his thanks, and then disappeared completely. He turned up two hours later, dripping wet.

"Where have you been?" asked the host.

What is it going to lead to? Have you asked yourselves that? I'm admitting that the masters are not all that could be desired, but things have calmed down now. Don't you think it would be better to drop all this melodramatic stuff?"

"We're not giving in, if that's what you mean, Fenton!" said Handforth truculently. "Floggings for most of us, eh? The sack for Nipper and me and the other ringleaders! Not likely!"

"Supposing I go to Pycraft and Wetherell and suggest a truce?" asked Fenton. "I'll suggest an inquiry, too—and you can rely upon me to make things as easy as possible."

"Nothing doing!" said Nipper with determination in his face. "You may think I'm mad, Fenton, but I'm pretty certain that these so-called masters are nothing but crooks!"

Fenton was startled.

"What on earth do you mean, you young ass?" he asked.

"I mean that they're not schoolmasters at all—they're impostors of some kind," insisted Nipper. "They've succeeded in fooling Pycraft, but they haven't fooled us. What do they know about school work or school routine—nothing!"

"But your suggestion is ridiculous!" protested the head prefect.

"It may sound so—but time will prove," said Nipper. "Anyhow, the chaps here have decided to bank on my judgment. We're not going to submit to the dictation of crooks, and we're keeping on with this barring-out—until the crooks are pushed out. If the rest of the school likes to submit to them—well, that's nothing to do with us. But we maintain that we're justified in this rebellion, and we're carrying on. That's final."

Fenton did not argue; he merely nodded.

"All right; if that's your way of thinking I'll say no more," he replied quietly. "It's no good trying to persuade you, then. Good-night, you fellows—and do try to keep this revolt as quiet as possible."

"Good-night, Fenton!"

There was a hearty chorus, for the rebels liked Fenton immensely, and they liked, too, his frank way of coming to them. The door was opened, he passed out, and the door was locked and bolted again.

"By Jove!" said Fenton, as he battled through the ever-increasing blizzard. "I wonder!"

A new train of thought had been set into motion. When he got into the West House, he called a prefects' meeting at once. He and the other Ancient House seniors were all boarding temporarily in the West House, since their own quarters were denied to them.

The meeting took place in Arthur Morrow's study—he being the head prefect of the West House. The others present were Biggleswade, Wilson, Conroy major, Frinton, Stanhope, and Reynolds. They were all decent fellows. Other prefects, such as Kenmore and Sinclair and Parkin, were not

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"Home for my pyjamas," replied Billy.

(B. O'Shaughnessy, Erin Street, Kilkee, Co. Clare, Ireland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

CA' CANNY.

Scotsman (at a country station): "Third return to Inverness."

Booking Clerk: "Change at Aberdeen."

Scotsman: "Na, na, mon, I'll take my change here."

(G. Amble, Cottingham Grove, Bletchley, Bucks, has been awarded a penknife.)

FANCY THAT!

Dear old Lady (to perspiring footballer): "Isn't it rather warm to-day to play such a strenuous game?"

Player: "Yes, mum, it is."

Dear old lady: "Then why don't you use one of those football fans I have read so much about."

(J. Brewer, 103, Donald Street, Roath Park, Cardiff, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

BOW WOW.

The 'bus conductor waited patiently while the old lady read laboriously through the destination board.

"Is this a Barking 'bus?" she asked at length.

"No, ma'am," answered the conductor, with a jerk at the bell-cord, "this one purrs."

(H. Steff, 167, Rockingham Road, Kettering, has been awarded a "Holiday Annual.")

TOO BAD.

Jones: "Mr. Gray has left his umbrella again. I do believe that he would lose his head if it were loose."

Judkins: "You're right. He's always losing something. Why, he said he was going to Switzerland for his lungs."

(Joseph Moran, 51, Deane Road, Bolton, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE ORDER OF THE BOOT.

Job-hunter: "Have you an opening for a bright young man?"

Busy Manager: "Yes, but don't slam it on your way out."

(R. Allen, Tolgullow House, St. Day, nr. Truro, Cornwall. has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HE HELPED HIMSELF.

"I do hope you behaved yourself at the party, Eric, and didn't ask for a lot of cake," said his mother.

"Oh, no, mummy," replied Eric brightly. "The cake-dish was so near that I just helped myself without troubling to ask anyone."

(Miss H. Danker, 49, Waterworks, Bahru Johore, Johore, Malay States, has been awarded a "Nature Annual.")

admitted to this conference. It was strictly private.

"Well, thank goodness things have calmed down a bit," said Biggleswade, as he sprawled in the easy-chair, with his feet on the table. "It's infernally rotten, being barred out of our own House, but I'm not saying that I blame those kids."

"That's fine talk from a prefect!" said Morrow.

"We're not prefects here—we're just pals," said Biggy, grinning in his good-natured way. "And how can you blame those kids? You know as well as I do that the masters are a bunch of wash-outs!"

"That's why I've called this meeting," said Fenton quietly. "I've just been over to the Ancient House, and I've had a word with those juniors—particularly with young Nipper. And he's just put an idea into my head."

"You went and hobnobbed with those rebels?" asked Reynolds dubiously.

"I wanted to get them into a sensible frame of mind—but I can tell you they are in earnest," replied Fenton. "But this is the main point. Young Nipper is absolutely positive that the masters are a set of crooks."

The prefects roared with laughter.

"It's not so silly as it sounds," went on Fenton impatiently. "Anyhow, I've made up my mind to go to London to-morrow, and to see the Halford Grammar School Governors. I'm going to find out the truth of this."

CHAPTER 6.

Snowbound!

THE laughter was instantly quelled; the other prefects looked at Fenton in rather a startled way.

"Going up to London?" repeated Morrow.

"I am!" declared Fenton grimly. "I've half an idea that Nipper's suspicion is correct. How do we know that the new masters are not impostors? I've been thinking, you fellows—and you haven't. But I want you to think now."

They did think—for they had plenty of food for thought.

"Impostors!" ejaculated Wilson, with a whistle. "Do you mean crooks? Criminals?"

"There are one or two significant things—now that we've got on to this subject," said Fenton. "Look at Pycraft, for example. He's absolutely under the thumb of these men. How did they get him there? And why should he submit to their dictation. It only needs half an eye to see that he's frightened of them."

"That's true," admitted Morrow thoughtfully. "We've all thought it rummy from the start."

"Again, we've only heard it said that the new masters really belong to Halford Grammar School," continued Fenton. "They're strangers to us—they came to St. Frank's alone. They weren't brought by anybody in authority, such as one of our Governors. I tell you, there's something very queer about it all."

The prefects were looking really startled.

"What they don't know about school work would fill an encyclopædia," said Biggleswade. "Look at our man—Mr. Campbell. He couldn't even take the Third; the fags know twice as much as he does."

"There are other points, too," said Fenton. "The masters don't know the first thing about school routine or regulations. If you come to think it out thoroughly, you'll find that they have acted just as though they had never been in control of a school before. And you've got to admit that they were like a lot of ruffians to-night, when they tried to break into the Ancient House. No schoolmaster, with any dignity, would do a thing like that."

"But they seem such nice fellows!" protested Wilson.

"And the way they are gathering the rotters about them isn't pleasant," said Fenton. "There seems to be something behind it all—and I tell you again, I'm suspicious. Anyhow, there's one way of making sure."

"By your going to London?"

"Yes," said Fenton. "I'll slip off without telling a soul—I'll catch the early train. I don't think I shall have much trouble in getting in touch with the Halford Grammar School Governors. Then I'll soon find out if these masters are genuine or not. Until then, we've got to carry on—and we mustn't let these men know that we suspect them. While I'm away, I want you fellows to keep the school running normally."

When the prefects' meeting broke up, there was a feeling of satisfaction amongst the Sixth-Formers. Something was being done. Fenton's idea of going to London was a good one.

ST. FRANK'S went to sleep, a divided camp.

The storm inside the school was practically over—whilst the storm outside raged with ever-increasing violence and intensity.

Millionaire Mike, sitting up late with some of his colleagues, felt more and more satisfied that everything would come right on the morrow. He had sufficient confidence in his own glibness of tongue to smooth out the troubles. He might not have been so self-satisfied had he known of Edgar Fenton's shrewd proposal. For that suggested trip of his to London would, indeed, throw a nasty spanner into the works.

But the forces of Nature are always stronger than man. Throughout the night the blizzard raged—so violently that many inhabitants of St. Frank's got little or no sleep.

In the Ancient House there was a constant watch—and the rebels, in consequence, had a general idea of what was happening out-

side. The sentries took it in turns—two-hour spells. In the small hours, between two and four, Handforth & Co. were included in the watchers, and at intervals they would meet and compare notes.

"Pretty violent storm outside, Handy," commented Church, on one of these occasions. "Some of the windows are absolutely covered, from top to bottom, with snow."

"I opened the back door a little while ago," said Handforth. "By George! It was as much as I could do to get it closed again. And the snow is piled up in the back porch so high that I could hardly see over the top of it."

"Draw it mild!" protested McClure.

"It's a fact!" insisted Handforth. "We haven't had a snowfall like this for years. It's terrific."

A little later he went into the Common-room telephone-box. He was on his rounds, and it occurred to him to ask the Bannington operator the time. A little chat wouldn't do any harm, either. He might find out what the snowstorm was like in Bannington. When he put the receiver to his ear, the line was utterly dead. His joggling of the hook had no effect. The exchange did not reply. This led him to wander about the House, trying the other telephones. They were all the same. At four o'clock, when Travers relieved him, Handforth imparted the news.

"Something must have happened to our 'phones," he said. "They're all dead. I can't get the Exchange, anyhow."

"I'm not surprised, dear old fellow," said Travers. "I'll bet thousands of telephone and telegraph wires are down. Didn't you hear one of the Head's trees crash over about half an hour ago?"

"By George, no!"

"Well, something crashed—and I believe it was a tree," said Travers.

The next two hours, if anything, were even more violent than the previous two. The storm seemed to reach a demoniac pitch of intensity. The rebel guards almost forgot their duties in their excitement. They spent most of their time peering out of the windows into the pitch blackness. They could see the myriads of snowflakes whirling. And once, when they ventured to open the front door of the Ancient House, they had a shock. The snow was piled six or seven feet—a solid mass which nearly fell in upon them.

With the coming of the dawn the wind decreased slightly, but the snow still flooded down in greater flurries than before.

THE rising-bells rang out as usual in the morning.

In the West House, Modern House, and East House, things were normal. And in the Ancient House, Nipper saw that the rising-bell sounded as usual. There was no reason why the rebels should not carry on in an orderly fashion.

Handforth & Co., who were sleeping in their ordinary dormitory—only partially undressed—made straight for the window upon fully awakening. Everybody was talking about the snow.

"Better go easy," said Travers, who had come in. "You'll have the room full of snow if you open that window too quickly."

"The wind's not so bad now," said Handforth, yawning. "I'll bet there isn't much snow, after all!"

"No?" inquired Travers politely. "Take a look!"

Handforth forced the window open. It needed some forcing, too, for it opened outwards, and a vast mass of snow had to be pushed aside. Handforth took one look, and a gurgle sounded in his throat.

"My only sainted aunt!" he yelled, aghast.

He was looking out upon the West Square—and the West Square, as he usually knew it, was no more. Opposite, against the West House, the drifts were piled up so high that the lower windows were completely covered. The rear door had gone. Even on the Ancient House side, which was more or less sheltered, the snow was five and six feet deep. The roofs were choked; the wall which divided the West Square from Little Side was buried. The snow ran in an unbroken line right across the country. Hedges had gone. Trees stuck grotesquely out of the white pall. Only a few flakes were falling now, and a break or two was appearing in the heavy masses of clouds overhead.

"Why, we're—we're snowbound!" gasped Handforth. "I've never seen so much snow in all my life!"

"That's what everybody's saying," nodded Travers. "Pretty good for us, isn't it?"

"How is it good for us?"

"Well, I'd like to see the attacking force which is going to take us by surprise," grinned Travers. "Before anybody can get near the Ancient House, they've got to cut a way through the snow—and that would take them hours. If we're bottled up in this House, everybody else is bottled up in every other House! Bellton Lane is under twelve feet of snow, every telephone is cut off, and as far as the outside world is concerned we might just as well be at the North Pole."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said Church blankly. "Then—then we're absolutely isolated!"

Not only were the rebels excited, but everybody else in the school, too. The snowfall was phenomenal; it was something worth getting excited about. Edgar Fenton, indeed, was dismayed.

"I'm afraid this has put the tin hat on my plan, Morrow," he said, as he stood looking out of one of the upper windows of the West House with Arthur Morrow. "There'll be no getting to London to-day."

"Don't you think the trains will be running?"

"I don't think—I know," replied Fenton. "The Bellton cutting must be full of snow from brim to brim—and I doubt very much if the main line at Bannington, is free. It'll be days before any traffic can get going. As

for the roads, they're impossible. Some of these drifts must be twelve and fifteen feet deep."

"By Jove!" said Morrow.

They were only just beginning to realise the situation. Perhaps it was even worse than they suspected. It might easily be a week before contact with the outer world was established.

Nipper, going up to the top of the Ancient House tower with one or two other rebels, had a look over the countryside. What they saw rather staggered them. The Stowe Valley had virtually disappeared. It was difficult to distinguish any of the usual landmarks. Many cottages were completely buried. Bellton could be seen in the distance—a roof or two sticking up out of the snow. Trees were down everywhere. Telegraph and telephone posts had simply vanished.

"This is like that storm we had two or three years ago," said Nipper, taking a deep breath. "Don't you remember? One or two villages, in Kent, were cut off from the rest of the world for over a week—and they were only a mile from the main road."

"This is heaps worse," said Jimmy Potts, with a whistle. "We can't even see the Bannington Road. It's gone! It's like the Alps!"

"And we're cut off," said Nipper thoughtfully. "We're in the middle of this barring-out, and we can't expect any help from outside. The dud masters can't get any help, either. My sons, it's going to be a fight between us!"

"Just as though we were on an island, thousands of miles from land," said Tommy Watson breathlessly. "My only hat! What a prospect!"

CHAPTER 7.

Action!

MR. MIKE SATELLA was in high good-humour.

"Last night, boys, we thought we had had a bad break—but this morning we're having a lucky break," he said genially. "This snowstorm is worth a fortune to us."

"I may be dense," said Dicky Bliss, "but I'm hanged if I can see how."

He and Mr. Padbury—alias Sam Pope—were with Millionaire Mike in the West House.

"Have you been up in the tower?" asked the leader of the con men.

"No."

"Then you should go," said Mike. "The countryside is a sight worth seeing The road between here and the village is under fifteen feet of snow all the way. The main road from Bellton to Bannington is just as bad. Heaven alone knows how the cottagers

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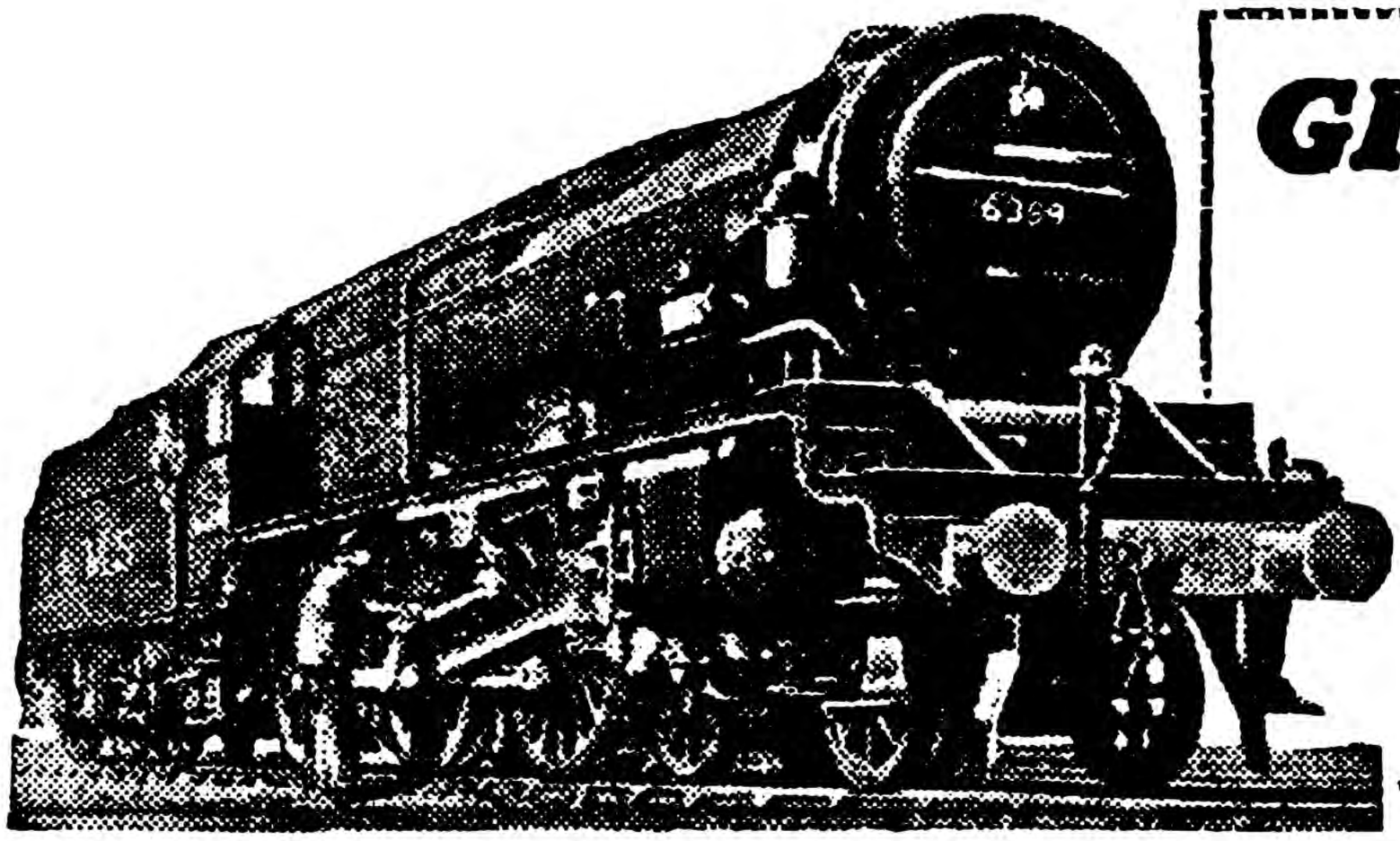

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are getting on—I should think that some of them will be in a bad way."

"We've got to think of our own worries," said Sam Pope.

"That's just where you're wrong—they're not worries," retorted Mike. "Being isolated is the best thing that could happen to us. I tell you, boys, we're cut off for at least a week. Even if there is a rapid thaw—which isn't at all probable—it will be days before any road is passable And, by the look of the sky, there's going to be some more snow, too."

"How does it help us to be isolated?" asked Bliss.

"Haven't you any sense, Dicky?" replied the other. "During this week we can get these rebel juniors entirely under control. We can take our time. What's more, the usual routine of the school will go by the board. It will have to. And that suits us to a T. We can get more firmly established in the good graces of these rich boys than ever before. We can do the solid groundwork."

"That's true," said Bliss slowly.

"We'll keep the boys busy," continued Mike. "For example, all the boys in this House will be excused lessons this morning. We'll set them to clearing snow—and they'll be as pleased as Punch. Boys would rather work hard shovelling snow than they would do lessons. We'll get them to dig passages across the Triangle—we'll make a network of cleared paths between the Houses."

"What about those rebels?"

"We'll leave them alone—we won't even cut a pathway to the Ancient House," said the leader promptly. "We'll ignore them. That will tire them out, and bring them to their senses!"

So St. Frank's started on an exciting day.

When the orders went round in the West House, there was a good deal of cheering. The fellows were glad enough to be excused lessons. Clearing pathways through the snow was great sport. As all the telephones were out of order—even the internal 'phones—communication was established by more primitive methods. Prefects, under orders from Mr. Wetherell, stood at the upper windows and shouted across to the other Houses. The boys were soon hard at work. They took it in relays, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. During the course of the morning great progress was made.

Trenches, about six feet wide, were carved out of the solid drifts, and they ran in all directions—from the West House across to the East House, with a branch trench running over to the Modern House, and so forth Communications were established between the various buildings.

The rebels watched interestedly from their upper windows, occasionally shouting encouragement.

At intervals, Nipper, or some of the other rebels, went up to the tower and had a general look round And not once during the course of the day did they see any sign of life in the Stowe Valley. The snow had brought everything to a standstill. Not a puff of smoke from the railway, not a movement along the roads. A column of smoke from one or two chimneys indicated that people in neighbouring houses and cottages were alive and doing their best.

And through binoculars it was possible to detect movements in Bellton Village. Trenches were being dug there, just as at St. Frank's. But they were confined to the High Street. It was impossible to attempt any clearance of the roads beyond the village boundaries.

It was when the afternoon light was waning that Millionaire Mike decided upon the first move with regard to the rebels. He had left them absolutely alone until now. As they were so quiet he felt that it was time to go across and have a friendly, genial word with them.

The wild gale had ceased, but the skies were still heavy and laden with snow. Even now a few flakes were drifting lazily down.

Mr. Pycraft was not at all sure that Mr. Wetherell was adopting the right policy.

"I think perhaps, Mr. Wetherell, I had better address these mutinous junior boys," he said. "I am their headmaster——"

"I really thought we understood one another, Mr. Pycraft," interrupted Millionaire Mike, a hard note creeping into his voice. "You will please understand now that I intend to deal with these boys personally."

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Pycraft feebly.

When the plausible leader of the confidence men presented himself outside the Ancient House, he was looking very kindly and fatherly. Numbers of rebels were already at the upper windows, and from various other Houses there were plenty of watchers.

"I think," said Millionaire Mike, "that a boy named Hamilton is the leader here?"

"I'm Hamilton, if you want me, Mr. Wetherell," said Nipper.

"Splendid! Won't you come down to one of the lower windows?" asked Mr. Wetherell. "I give you my word that there will be no—er—trickery. I merely wish to have a friendly talk."

There was a short delay, and then Nipper and Handforth and K. K. and a number of other juniors appeared at one of the lower windows. There was really no danger, for the trench in which Mr. Wetherell was standing was some little distance from the window, and the snow which intervened was well nigh impassable.

"Don't you think it's time you boys finished your little amusement?" asked Mike, in his smoothest manner. "Things will go along much nicer if you fall into line with the rest of us."

"Sorry, sir, but we're staying here." replied Nipper.

"You needn't be afraid of any punishments," continued Mike. "I'm a reasonable man, and I appreciate that you acted in great excitement. If you will give up this little game of yours, I will overlook everything. I cannot say fairer than that, can I?"

Some of the rebels were impressed, and they looked at Nipper expectantly. But Nipper resolutely shook his head.

"We're not surrendering, sir," he replied.

"I am being very patient," said Mike, smiling. "And I can assure you that it took me quite a long while to persuade Mr. Pycraft to agree to this general pardon. And I must point out one or two facts which you have apparently overlooked."

"Yes, sir?"

"This blizzard has made a great difference to the situation," continued Mr. Wetherell. "St. Frank's is completely cut off. We cannot be reached by telephone, telegraph, road or rail. As things look at present, we shall not establish communication with the outer world for at least a week. Where is the sense, therefore, in keeping up this farce? Far better for the school to combine its forces and do its utmost to weather this difficult period."

"Thanks all the same, sir, but we'll weather it as we are," replied Nipper, unmoved. "We have taken this stand, and we're sticking to our guns. We don't recognise your authority, or the authority of any of your colleagues. If we caved in now, the whole position would be more farcical than ever."

Millionaire Mike began to lose some of his geniality.

"I don't believe you are speaking with the voice of the majority," he said shortly.

"I'm the leader, sir, and these other fellows will follow me," replied Nipper. "We're staying here until you and your colleagues leave the school—until St. Frank's is relieved by schoolmasters who really are schoolmasters."

"And that goes for all of us!" shouted Handforth. "On with the rebellion!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer was taken up enthusiastically, and the sudden tumult caused Millionaire Mike to lose the last vestige of his temper. He had expected to talk these boys round quite easily, and he was thoroughly enraged by Nipper's cool, calm persistence.

"You young fool!" he said hotly. "You won't get another chance like this!"

"If we did as you want us to, Mr. Wetherell, we should be admitting ourselves in the wrong—and we're not in the wrong," said Nipper. "We don't recognise any of you as schoolmasters, and we resent your presence at St. Frank's."

"You infernal young brat!" shouted Mike, in a sudden outburst. "It was you who started this trouble, and you have had your one and only chance. When I do get hold of you now I'll see that you are thrashed within an inch of your life. My patience is not inexhaustible."

Kenmore, who had been standing on the Modern House steps, came running along the slippery trench with Sinclair and Forrest and several others.

With a snarl, Millionaire Mike pushed Mr. Pycraft with a thud. "That fellow's not a real scho Morrow watchin

so that he skidded and sat down on the steps
olmaster," said Fenton wrathfully, as he and
l the incident.

"Say the word, sir, and we'll get these young beggars out!" shouted Kenmore. "You've got the best part of the school behind you. We'll back you up, sir. Drive the young fools out by force!"

"Yes, by heaven, I will!" thundered Millionaire Mike. "Get as many boys as you can—bring ladders—planks—anything!"

"Good egg!" bellowed Handforth. "A battle!"

He reached down, seized a great double handful of snow, and made it into a snowball.

Whizz!

He hurled it with unerring aim, and it struck Millionaire Mike full in the face and burst into a cloud.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let him have another!"

It was the first "shot" in the battle. Within ten seconds, Parkington, Deeks, Travers and others were making snowballs and hurling them. Millionaire Mike was fairly plastered before he could brush the remnants of that first snowball from his face.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "Let's duck him in this drift!"

He leapt recklessly out of the window, and plunged into the snow, followed by Church, McClure, K. K., and a number of others.

CHAPTER 8.

No Grub!

"GOT him!" shouted Handforth exultantly.

Slithering and sliding like eels, the juniors had swarmed over the snowdrift, and they were grabbing at Millionaire Mike before the big man could retreat. He was seized by many hands.

"All hands to the pumps!" sang out Kirby Keeble Parkington. "He weighs a ton, but the higher we chuck him, the harder he'll fall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rebel party swung the startled Housemaster up into the air and released him at the best of all possible moments. He shot up, performed a semi-circle in the air, and completely disappeared into a large snow-drift.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back, you idiots!" roared Nipper. "Do you want to be captured? Once you're collared you'll never be allowed to get back in here!"

"By George!" gasped Handforth, swinging round. "They're after us!"

Kenmore and Grayson and Forrest and crowds of others were surging down the trenches from the Modern House and the East House. The rotters had been gathering their forces, and now they were dashing to the attack.

They could see that this was an excellent opportunity. If Handforth and Parkington and a few others could be collared, the rebel force would be seriously handicapped. In-

deed, the prisoners might easily be used as hostages. Certainly, they would be mercilessly flogged, and made an example of.

Whizz—whizz—whizz—whizz!

Like hail, a storm of snowballs shot down from the upper windows of the Ancient House. The rotters, swinging down two converging trenches, were momentarily checked. They hadn't reckoned on any such defence as this. But the rebels had been making snowballs very industriously for hours past; they had piles of ammunition ready.

The leaders of the attacking force, after the first check, swept on again.

Handforth, K. K., and Travers found themselves cut off, and within a moment they were fighting furiously. The rest had managed to scramble back over the snow to the lower windows.

"Keep up that barrage!" shouted Nipper, glancing at the upper windows. "Stop the rest of the those rotters from getting near. We'll deal with this other crowd!"

"Go ahead!" yelled Boots from above.

Whizz—whizz—whizz—whizz!

Another volley shot over the heads of the fighting juniors and checked the main body. Nipper, Archie, Gresham, Fullwood and half a dozen others plunged from the lower windows and dashed to the rescue of Handforth, Parkington and Travers. In a minute they were fighting furiously, and Kenmore & Co. were having a hot time.

It only lasted a few moments. Kenmore sank down into the trench, half covered with snow, his nose bleeding, his left ear thickening. Forrest was nearly knocked out by a right from Handforth; Grayson had come up against one of K. K.'s fists, and he had practically lost interest in the battle.

"Back!" yelled Nipper, when the chance offered. "Back through the windows—all of you!"

"Not likely!" bellowed Handforth. "We've hardly started the scrap yet."

Church and McClure seized him by force, and dragged him back. Another barrage of snowballs came from above, and in the confusion the rebels just succeeded in scrambling over the snow to the lower windows and getting through. Handforth was bundled in much against his will.

The situation was saved. Not one rebel had been captured, and very quickly the barricades were moved into position, and the lower windows were protected. From above the snowball barrage continued, and the attackers retreated in complete disorder.

"Hurrah!"

"Get in here if you can!"

The cheering was wildly enthusiastic and Fenton, who was watching the scene from one of the West House windows, shook his head worriedly.

"I was afraid of this, Morrow," he said "Wetherell's a fool for starting this trouble"

"I don't blame the kids," growled Morrow. "For two pins I'd go over to them myself! It's a darned pity you can't go up to London and make those inquiries. This snow has messed everything up!"

On the Modern House steps, Mr. Pycraft was standing with a smug look of satisfaction as Millionaire Mike staggered in Mike was smothered with snow from head to foot.

"Splendid, my dear sir!" said Mr. Pycraft softly. "I am glad that you handled the situation so—er—adroitly. I can see that I was mistaken in wishing to deprive you of the pleasure."

Mike Satella came to a halt and glared into Mr. Pycraft's face.

"Simpering fool!" he snarled.

He followed this up with a muttered oath, and thrust Mr. Pycraft aside with such violence that the unfortunate man skidded and sat down with a terrific jar.

"Good heavens!" babbled Mr. Pycraft. "How—how dare you, sir?"

He was shocked—not only by Mr. Wetherell's language, but by his violence. Fenton saw the incident, and he gripped Morrow's arm.

"That man's no schoolmaster," he muttered. "When he forgets the polish, he's just a plain blackguard!"

"Those kids in the Ancient House are right, then," said Morrow. "Well, I say good luck to 'em!"

THINGS became quiet after that. Dusk fell, and with it came another heavy downfall of snow.

"We shall have to be careful after this," said Nipper, as he went round amongst the rebel forces. "We shall have to keep a sharp look-out. It's war now—and we've shown those men that we're in earnest. They'll move heaven and earth to get us out—if only to prove to the rest of the school that they are the masters. They'll lose their authority completely unless they subdue us."

"Well, they'll lose their authority," said Handforth grimly. "Let 'em try to subdue us—that's all!"

"We mustn't relax for a single minute," said Nipper. "We'll put double watches all round the House—and the rest of the chaps must be ready for action. There'll probably be an attack of some sort before the evening is over."

"The sooner it comes, the better I shall like it," declared Handforth enthusiastically.

A special staff of fellows was busy in the kitchen, making tea, cutting vast dishes of bread-and butter, frying eggs, and creating havoc with the provisions generally. The rebels had been feeding royally all day long—glad enough of the opportunity of partaking of anything they fancied.

Something unpleasant occurred in the middle of tea. All the electric lights went out. The Ancient House, plunged into darkness, left the rebels confused.

"It must be the mains," gasped somebody. "A short circuit, or something, owing to the snow."

"It's not that," said Nipper, pointing. "Look out there!"

The other buildings of the school were as brilliantly illuminated as ever!

"It's only our House!" came a shout from Handforth. "How's that?"

"One of Mr. Wetherell's little dodges, I suppose," said Nipper. "I expect he's just thought of it—although I've been half anticipating it for an hour. The main switches for the school are in the West House—which is nearest to the road. The masters have cut off our juice!"

"Well, we're not dished!" shouted Handforth. "I expect there are some candles, aren't there? Let's have a look!"

After some trouble, they found a number of tapers, and with the tapers they located two or three packets of candles. Lights were soon going—but they were a poor substitute for the electricity.

"Trying to get us fed up—so that we'll surrender," grunted Nipper. "He must think we're a crowd of weaklings!"

Then came another shock, and a big one this time.

Kirby Keeble Parkington, who had gone to the store-rooms for another supply of butter and sugar, came back with two or three helpers.

"I say!" he burst out. "Do you know that our stocks of grub are nearly finished?"

"Grub!" went up a yell. "Nearly finished!"

It was a wail of dismay. The failure of the electric light was a mere trifle compared with this fresh blow.

"We all thought the store-rooms were stocked with stuff!" said Parkington. "But there's hardly anything there—no more butter and only about fourteen pounds of sugar. Precious little flour, hardly any potatoes, only one side of bacon, and no more eggs. There's not enough to last us until breakfast-time."

Nipper managed to keep the fellows calm.

"There must be some mistake," he said. "You've been looking in the wrong store-room, K. K. In a big school like this, there are always piles and piles of foodstuffs. It stands to reason——"

He broke off as an alarming thought struck him.

What was to-day? Wednesday! And he remembered that the Ancient House took in its stocks once a month—and always on a Wednesday. Fresh supplies were due in this very day—but owing to the snow, of course, they had not arrived.

Quickly seizing a candle, Nipper hurried off to the store-rooms; he explored them thoroughly, and he even went down into the cellars and examined every available cupboard there.

But his search was fruitless. It was an undeniable fact—an unhappy fact—that the rebel force was practically without food!

A FINE FAT FEAST OF FICTION NEXT WEEK, LADS!

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Order your copy in advance, lads!

CHAPTER 9.

The Raiders!

"THIS is nasty," said Nipper slowly.

"It seems like a knock-out to me," growled K. K. "We can't exist without grub."

"And we can't get any from anywhere else, either," said Fullwood, pulling a long face. "Don't forget that St. Frank's is isolated."

"What the dickens are we going to do?" growled Handforth.

Nipper looked round with a resolute eye.

"First of all, we're going easy on the little grub we've got left," he replied. "We might have to eke it out."

"What do you mean—'might'?" asked Travers. "Is there any doubt about it?"

"Well, I've remembered that this is the day when the Ancient House monthly stocks come in," said Nipper. "Haven't you seen the lorries? They come once a month, loaded with flour, and butter, and lard, and all manner of groceries."

"Is that any consolation to us?" asked Handforth. "You know jolly well the lorries didn't come to-day."

"But they came to the West House yesterday," said Nipper significantly. "The West House supplies always arrive a day before ours."

"By jingo! I say, that's an idea!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The West House is fully stocked," continued Nipper, his eyes gleaming. "It's really the only House at St. Frank's which has a full supply. Now, my sons, we've got to think this out."

"It doesn't need much thinking out," said Parkington promptly. "We shall have to raid the West House."

"This evening—now!" said Handforth.

"The sooner the better, of course," agreed Nipper.

"Why not get up a raiding party and buzz off straight away?" suggested K. K. eagerly. "We shall take 'em by surprise, and they'll be bowled off their feet before they know what we're up to."

"That part won't be so hard," agreed Nipper. "But what about getting away with the stuff? It'll be heavy—and we can't fight if we're loaded. No, this thing needs thinking out. In any case, before the raid is made, somebody ought to go over there and do some scouting. Get the exact lie of the land, so there won't be any confusion at the critical moment."

"That's true," admitted Travers. "That's good generalship, dear old fellows. Nipper's right."

"And I'll do the scouting," said Nipper briskly. "I'll go at once. K. K., you'd better take charge until I come back."

Handforth, of course, wanted to accompany him, but Nipper politely declined. It was essentially a one-man job; and, in any case, Handforth was the last fellow he would have chosen as a companion if he needed one. Handforth was too noisy.

It was easy enough for Nipper to slip out of one of the lower windows, and to flounder across the snowdrifts in the West Square. No trenches had been cut here, and the snow was deep. Nipper's progress was watched by many anxious rebels, but there seemed to be nobody over on the West House side.

The great snowdrifts came well over the lower windows, and Nipper avoided that part of the West House which was well lighted. Foot by foot, he crawled nearer, floundering helplessly now and again in the snow. At last he reached the wall, where thick masses of ivy grew. After that the job was easy. He climbed up, got on a ledge, and gently pushed open a bath-room window.

"Good egg!" breathed Travers. "He's in!"

The rebels were watching anxiously. Nipper's mission was a risky one. He was practically going into the lions' den—and if he was caught he would be "for it" and no mistake!

But Nipper was quite confident, cool and steady. He was used to this sort of thing. He felt, indeed, that he was on one of his guv'nor's detective cases.

The evening was early yet, and nobody, it seemed, was upstairs. Life in the West House was going on as though there had been no rebellion: the fellows were in their studies, or in the Common-rooms. There was no excitement here. So Nipper slid like a shadow down one of the upper passages, seeking the rear stairs.

He knew that he would have to run the gauntlet of the domestic staff; at any moment he might encounter some of the maids, and he had not much faith that they would keep quiet. The domestics were rather inclined to be angry with the rebels, for they had caused a good deal of disorganisation in their work.

Suddenly Nipper stiffened and twirled round, seeking a hiding-place. For, without warning, a door had opened, not two yards in front of him, and the corridor had become flooded with light. In that second he recognised the Housemaster's bed-room. Fortunately, there was a recess close at hand, and he squeezed himself into it.

"We'll tire them out, Dicky," came a soft, familiar voice. "They'll soon get fed up with being in the dark, and I know for a fact that their supplies of food are scanty"

"That's the best bet we've got," came Mr. Ross's voice.

Nipper's heart beat rapidly. He knew that the two men who had come from the bed-room were Mr. Wetherell and Mr. Ross And it was strange that Mr. Ross, whose name was Walter, should be referred to as "Dicky." The two men paused in the doorway

"They might last until to-morrow evening," continued Mr. Wetherell, "but as soon as they're hungry they'll give in. And it's absolutely essential to our game, Dicky, that the whole school should be in harmony. We don't want a lot of talk about this."

"Lucky for us this snow came," murmured Mr. Ross. "Anyhow, it's stopped any inquiries—and I'm not any too sure of that fool, Pycraft."

"Don't worry about him—we've got him where we want him," said Mr. Wetherell. "Our chief trouble is these boys—confound them!"

"Do you think they're smelling a rat?"

"That's what I'm worrying about," admitted Mr. Wetherell. "Do you know that the leader of the rebels is young Hamilton? Nipper, they call him. Nelson Lee's assistant."

"He's only a kid!"

"But a smart kid, at that—and don't forget that he told me plainly that he doesn't accept us as schoolmasters," came Mr. Wetherell's voice. "I believe he is beginning to twig. Once I get hold of him I'll make certain of how we stand. That boy might be dangerous to our game."

"You mean, he might get in touch with the real Halford masters?"

"Use your brains, Dicky," said the other. "How can he? We're cut off here—for four or five days, at the very least. No, I wasn't thinking of that. But if that boy can convince the rest of the school that we're—well, what we are—it'll be all U.P. So we've got to go easy."

"Darned young cubs!" growled Mr. Ross. "They're harder to handle than grown-ups!"

The two men parted; Mr. Wetherell went off down the corridor, and Mr. Ross closed the door of his room. Nipper remained in the recess, quivering with inward excitement.

He had heard enough!

That one reference to the real Halford masters had confirmed all his suspicions. These men were, in all truth, impostors! There was some plot afoot! They were crooks—and they were afraid that Nipper had "twigged" them!

THE rest of Nipper's mission had ceased to interest him, but he accomplished it successfully. Creeping down the back stairs, he managed to avoid the domestics, and he made a complete survey of the store-rooms and cellars. He found them packed. There were immense supplies of food here—everything that the rebels needed. So when he got back into the Ancient House, he carried good news.

"Never mind the grub," he said as the rebels crowded round him with their congratulations. "There's something else—even more important than the grub!"

"Nothing's more important than grub," said Fatty Little.

Nipper explained what he had overheard. His listeners were thrilled and dumbfounded.

"It proves what I've been hinting," said Nipper breathlessly. "They are not the real Halford masters. They are crooks of some kind, and they're working a big game."

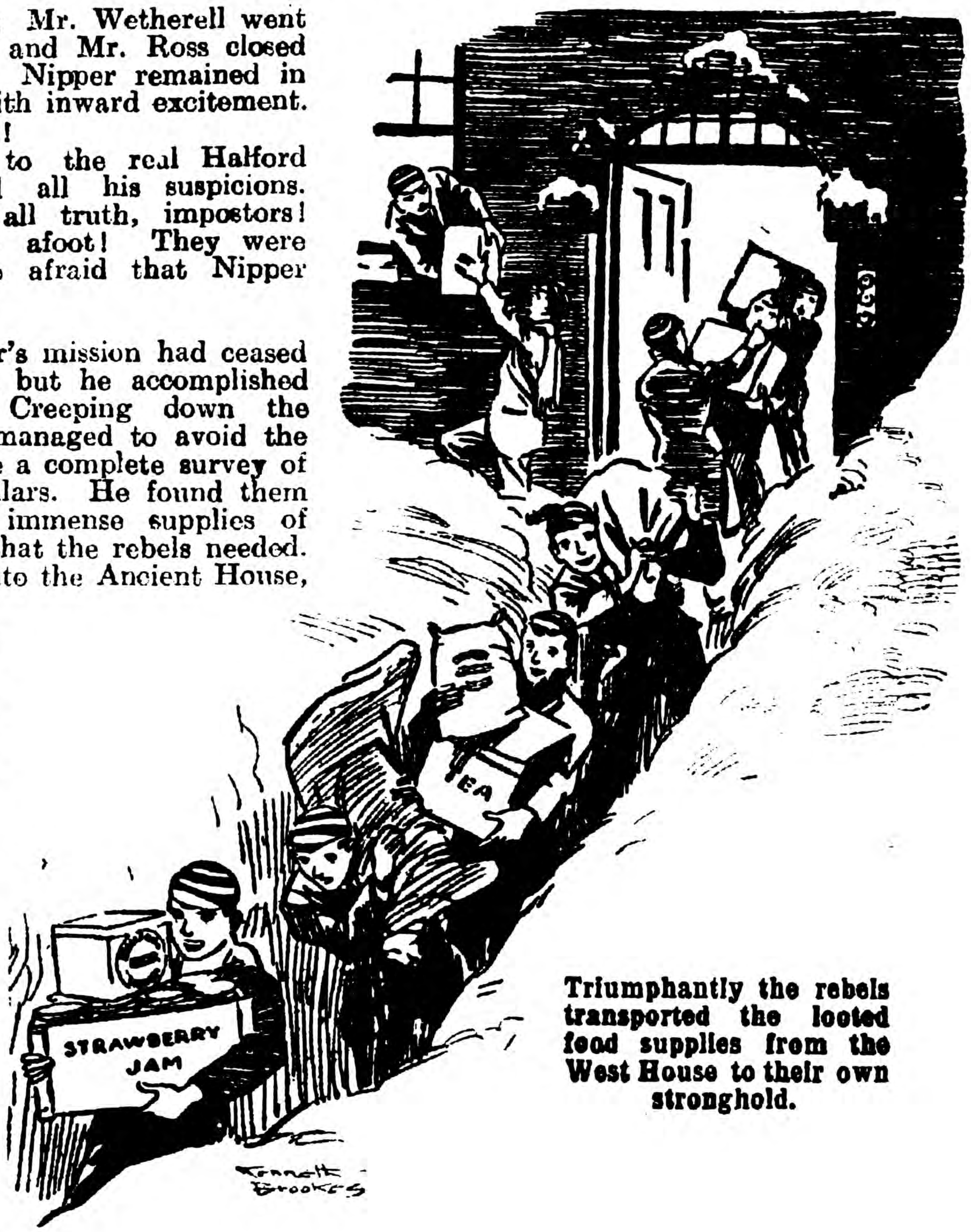
"Great Scott!"

"Can't—can't we do something?" asked Handforth eagerly. "By George! This is a tremendous discovery! We've only got to tell the rest of the school, and they'll join the barring-out!"

"That's what Wetherell fears, but he's wrong," said Nipper shrewdly. "Do you think the rest of the school would believe us, even if we did tell them? Would Kenmore believe us, or Forrest, or Gore-Pearce, or any of the rotters? They're too much in favour of these men to believe anything against them. I doubt if one fellow in twenty would do anything but laugh at us!"

"That's true," admitted Travers, nodding.

"Besides, what would be the good of telling?" went on Nipper. "We can't get away from St. Frank's. No, our best policy is to stick on here—maintain our private little barring-out—and triumph in the end. When we can get through to Bannington we'll discuss the subject again, because then we can get in touch with somebody who matters—old Wilkey, perhaps, or the police. And now let's see about capturing that grub."



Triumphantly the rebels transported the looted food supplies from the West House to their own stronghold.

The first move was to commence operations at the Ancient House rear door. Numbers of the rebels cautiously emerged and commenced clearing the snow away—forming a narrow trench straight across the square to the rear door of the West House. The distance was not great, and as the trench was narrow the work was not particularly heavy. Luckily enough, nobody in the West House became aware of these activities, and the trench was completed without mishap.

Then Nipper resorted to a brainy stratagem. About a third of the rebels arrayed themselves in the front upper windows of the Ancient House, and they set up the most fiendish commotion. They shouted, they howled, they roared, and they hooted. As a consequence of this, everybody else in the school ran helter-skelter to the Triangle to find out what all the noise was about.

Juniors and seniors came crowding out of the West House, the East House, and the Modern House, and it was quite some time

before they realised that this was apparently a silly, objectless demonstration.

But, in the meantime, a strong rebel force, with Nipper and K. K. in joint command, had rushed the rear of the West House. Nipper himself went first, at the very beginning of the noisy demonstration. He got in through a window, whipped round, and unfastened the door. The rebels swept in, charged into the domestic quarters, and startled the servants out of their wits.

"Fire!" yelled K. K. urgently. "Get out of here—everybody!"

This was no time for half-measures. It was a false alarm, of course, but there was really no panic. The maids and the cooks just bolted.

Like a pack of wolves on the track, the rebels poured into the store-rooms. They seized cases, sacks, endless sides of bacon, and everything else they could lay their hands on. Staggering under their loads, they hurried to the outer door, where relays of rebels were waiting.

Quickly the spoils were transferred—and once again the raiding-party swept in. The matron and one or two of the maidservants had come back by now, flustered and indignant. They quickly twigged what was going on. Unable to take any action themselves, they went screaming to the Housemaster, telling him of this outrageous robbery.

But by the time they located Mr. Ross, and by the time a pack of prefects and seniors arrived on the scene, the second raid had succeeded, and the fellows were back safely in the Ancient House with the second batch of cases and bags and boxes.

"Our grub!" went up a wail from Owen major of the West House. "Those chaps have been raiding us!"

"Quick! After them!"

Now that it was too late, swarms of fellows came pouring through the House from the front. They were so excited that they got jammed in the snowbound trench. They were in time to hear the rear door of the Ancient House being slammed and bolted; and from inside the Ancient House came volleys of cheering.

"Hurrah! We've won!"

"We've got grub enough to last us a month!"

It was a fact. The rebels, by their clever raid, had secured sufficient stores of food to carry on indefinitely, and in doing so they had collared practically all the rest of the school's supplies! It was a decided victory for the rebels.

THE END.

(More excitement at St. Frank's next Wednesday, lads. Pitched battles between rebels and masters—all the thrills of a barring-out. Story entitled: "The Rebels' Triumph!" Don't miss reading it.)

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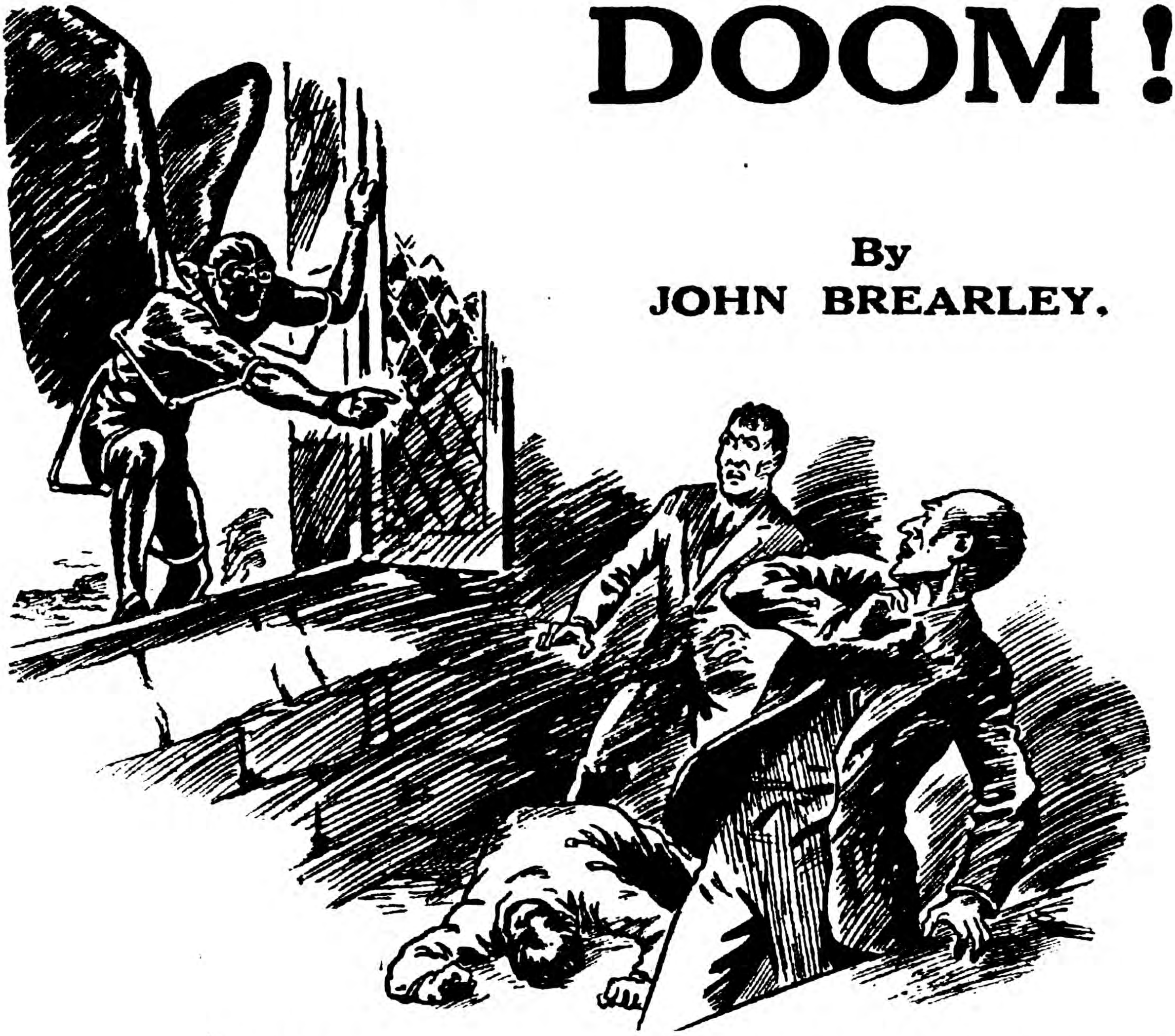
Through the Skies A Ruthless Night Hawk Swoops—

HOVERING DOOM!



By JOHN BREARLEY.

CHAPTER 1.

The Night Hawk's Vow!

"LEE, Monsieur and Lord Murdorn shall hang!"

In the soft dimness of his own private sanctum, the small incense-haunted room hung with priceless tapestries and filled with strange rich furniture, Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, stared at Nelson Lee through the drifting clouds of cigarette smoke. The time was six in the morning, and the two allies had just finished an early breakfast, for they had been up all night.

Before Nelson Lee could answer, the Night Hawk went on swiftly.

"I know your misgivings in this matter, Lee. You are afraid that if I kill Lord Murdorn, a peer of the Realm, his death will cause such a stir at Scotland Yard that there will be strong risk of their discovering my identity as the Night Hawk!"

"Yes; that is so!" admitted Nelson Lee.

"Well, I do not fear such a calamity, Lee; for I shall handle his lordship's execution with the greatest care, believe me. And in any case, for such a cur, I am prepared to take the risk!"

The Night Hawk's dark eyes glowed hotly

The struggle raging between Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk versus the Destroyers, that evil gang of racketeers from America who, for the past three weeks, had been threatening British commerce with Chicago gang-rule and blackmail, was at its height.

Starting with an outbreak of great fires, in which four wealthy firms

THE DESTROYERS—
DESTROYED!

had been wiped out, the Destroyers had followed these up with the ultimatum to other concerns: "Pay—or suffer likewise!"

In their first attempt to gouge blackmail from a huge firm, however, they had met a rebuff, for Sir James Wright of the A-A Shipping Company, had sent Roger Thurlow, the Destroyers' agent, away the day before with a message of defiance. Instantly the gang had retaliated with a double attack, designed to whip the rebel to heel.

At twelve o'clock that same night an American gliding expert had set out from Parliament Hill, Hampstead, on a silent bombing raid on the A-A wharf and warehouses at Woolwich; and a yacht-load of the Destroyers' gangsters, led by an Irish gunman named Feenhy, had endeavoured to sink the company's great freight-and-passenger ship, Atlantic Queen, off the coast of France.

And both deadly strokes might have succeeded but for the grim and ruthless intervention of the Night Hawk.

Smashing up the gang's glider within a few minutes of its ascent, Thurston Kyle had launched into a whirlwind flight across the south of England, and had arrived just in time to deal with the yacht. Already several shells had been pumped into the Atlantic Queen, but with one of the racketeers' own bombs the Night Hawk had sunk the pirate yacht in a single shattering swoop. Feenhy, Number Seven on the Council of Seven, the group of criminals who directed the Destroyers' activities, had been the last to die.

Of the original Council, only five now remained: the chief, a little foreign hunchback known as "Monsieur"; Lord Murdorn, whose Sussex castle formed the gang's headquarters; Thurlow, ex-M.P. and convict; Naponi, the Soho dope-smuggler; and a scar-faced Pole, who was apparently recruiting officer for the band in London's underworld. Their clash with Nelson Lee and his colleague was costing them dearly.

The Night Hawk's victory, however, had not been entirely complete.

He had sent one of his strange "electric guns" down to Murdorn Tower to prevent Monsieur wirelessing a fake message to the Atlantic Queen. And Monsieur had struck back viciously.

By an unfortunate stroke of luck, Lord Murdorn had come across the gun in action; and he and Monsieur, after first shooting the two gunners and the driver of its car, had hurled the bodies into the English Channel from the top of the high cliff on which the castle stood.

This was the news that had greeted the Night Hawk upon his return from the battle with the yacht, a little more than an hour ago. There and then he had sworn that Monsieur and Lord Murdorn should hang as common murderers. Full well did Nelson Lee know that his stern ally would move heaven and earth to carry out that vow.

To the Night Hawk, big criminals such as Monsieur and his Destroyers were a menace to society; and he fought them savagely and contemptuously with every weapon his scientific genius could devise.

The fact that just after Monsieur had killed the three men on the "gun," he himself had shot several of the gang did not count with him at all. For whereas his three men had been acting on the side of right and order, the Destroyers had been actively attempting to blot out valuable property—and innocent lives. According to Thurston Kyle's inexorable code, that called for one punishment only—death!

Laying his finger-tips together, Nelson Lee thought deeply for some minutes. Despite their long absence from bed, few signs of fatigue showed on the strong alert faces of the two men. A bath and a meal had restored their splendid vitality. A deep silence fell on the shadowy room until, at last, Nelson Lee spoke quietly.

"Very well, Kyle; so be it. Personally, for the sake of secrecy, I should have preferred to place Murdorn, killer though he is, out of harm's way as we did Sir Rudolph Gotchen. I cannot bring him to a legal trial without disclosing—many things. So, as long as you realise the risk I have indicated——" He shrugged, then added: "You can handle the affair alone?"

"Need you ask?" smiled Thurston Kyle coldly.

"Then I am ready for action when you want me. It is high time we struck!"

"It is!" the Night Hawk rapped. "I am determined to crush this menace without another second's delay, Lee!"

Nelson Lee nodded absently. Less impetuous perhaps, but no less resolute than Thurston Kyle, he was already mentally reviewing the state of the battle. His cool mind, far-seeing and methodical, considered everything.

"We must not forget the Destroyers consist of two parties: what is left of the Council of Seven—and the ordinary thugs in the rank-and-file!"

"That is so!" agreed Thurston Kyle.

"Well, we must wipe out both branches at one stroke if possible. A single sweeping raid. As you are aware, I think I have discovered the rendezvous of the minor members. Lascar Sam's dive, Shadwell. That, at least, is where I saw the scarred Pole and two obvious American gangsters. Where the leader goes, the others probably meet, too!"

Lee compressed his lips grimly as he continued:

"I have a particular score to settle with that scarred gentleman myself, Kyle—on the subject of torture! If you, my friend, will attend to the Council of Seven, I will attend to the others!"

CHAPTER 2.

Nelson Lee Learns Something!

A KEEN laugh answered the detective.

"Alone, Lee? Without police assistance?"

"We've agreed long ago to rule out the police, have we not?" retorted Nelson Lee.

"Yet"—Thurston Kyle's smile was quizzical—"you would not object to—unofficial—assistance, eh?"

The detective eyed his friend closely, then inclined his head.

"Frankly, I should be glad of it!" he confessed. "I have plenty of confidence in myself, Kyle, but I realise tackling such a tough gang will be a hard contract. But why do you ask? What assistance can I get?"

For some seconds the Night Hawk smoked amusedly.

"Oh, just an idea I have been toying with for some time. I have been thinking how useful it would be to recruit a——"

His words were cut short abruptly by a distant but imperative ring, and almost immediately afterwards a blood-red electric bulb gleamed in the ceiling above his head. The ringing had hardly ceased when little Snub Hawkins tapped at the door and entered.

"Visitor at the gate, sir!"

"Precisely, Snub. Go down at once and bring him to me here, please!"

"Right, sir!"

Somewhat expectantly Nelson Lee waited. He had known other "visitors" to Thurston Kyle's house before, but never one who had been expected—especially at this hour of the morning. Thurston Kyle read his thoughts with uncanny accuracy, as usual, and smiled.

"An odd time for visits, I know, Lee; but this is an odd visitor. I 'phoned him half an hour ago, just before we breakfasted!"

Nelson Lee remembered hearing his host on the telephone. But before he could answer, the door opened to admit the newcomer. One glance, and the detective lay back in his deep armchair, smiling quietly to himself.

He anticipated surprising developments. And, as Thurston Kyle had said, the visitor was an odd one.

Few people, even the kindliest, would have called him handsome; he was a giant of a man, heavy-shouldered, deep-chested, but with the trim waist and quick, light movements of an athlete. His broad, rugged face, heavy-jowled, beetle-browed, wore the amiable but pugnacious expression of a sturdy bulldog, and he swung his elbows out with the confident swagger that marks the fighting man.

At sight of Thurston Kyle in his brilliant robe, surveying him with gravely-amused eyes, some of the swagger departed. The newcomer halted, darted a look round the tapestried room and ducked his bullet head nervously. He could not see Nelson Lee, whose armchair was turned away from the door.

"'M-mornin', Mr. Kyle, sir!" breathed the giant. "Gotcher message; gotta taxi, an'——"

"Came straight here? Splendid!"

Thurston Kyle extended his hand, and the big man stepped forward to grasp it. In his armchair, Nelson Lee chuckled softly.

"Won't you say 'good-morning' to me. 'Scrapper' Huggins?" he drawled.

As though a bomb had burst, the giant, already plainly put on edge by his surroundings, whirled like lightning. For a moment, a hard, suspicious light gleamed in his china-blue eyes. Then at sight of Nelson Lee's faintly-ironical smile, his face broke into a wide grin of pleasure.

"Well, strike me blue, if it ain't Mr. Lee! Fancy you bein' here, sir. Ain't seen you since——"

"Since we had a little 'business' together, eh, Scrapper?"

"That's right, sir. It was a fair cop that time and no 'ank. But I did me nine months in the Scrubbs like a sport, now, didn't I, guv'nor?"

"You did, Scrapper. Hope you aren't qualifying for any more, though!"

"What, me, sir?" Huggins' bulldog face took on a shocked, virtuous expression. "Bless yer, no; once is enough o' that caper for Scrapper 'Uggins. Straight as a die now. Got the sweetest li'l gymnasium Whitechapel way you ever saw—and all thanks to Mr. Kyle here, sir!"

In sharp surprise Nelson Lee glanced at his ally, and the Scrapper nodded violently.

"Yessir; Mr. Kyle 'as 'elped me 'andsome, same as dozens of other pore blokes what's 'ad an unfortunit——"

"That will do, Huggins!" The Night Hawk cut in sharply, and for the first time in their alliance, Nelson Lee saw the faintest trace of embarrassment in the scientist's cold face.

"So you know him, Lee, eh? Good! Sit down, Huggins."

Nelson Lee's keen eyes studied his amazing friend narrowly. What wild, lawless scheme did the Night Hawk have up his sleeve now? Why was he, a superman who would stop at nothing to guard his secrets, taking Scrapper Huggins, ex-prize-fighter, and—on one occasion at least—housebreaker, into his confidence? Nelson Lee had nothing against Huggins personally. Save for that single slip when he had been desperate for money, the one-time boxer was clean strain right through, and obviously bore no malice against the detective for doing his duty. But——

Nelson Lee shrugged inwardly. After all, Thurston Kyle knew his own business, if any man did.

And plainly the Night Hawk had no misgivings. He seemed to trust Huggins implicitly. Leaning back in his chair, to Lee's increasing wonderment, he gave the Scrapper a brief account of the battle against the

Destroyers—or as much as he thought necessary. At the end, when Huggins could hardly breathe for excitement, he rose to his magnificent height and surveyed the boxer keenly.

"Now you understand how matters are, Huggins. Mr. Lee has undertaken a big task—to clean up the Destroyers' gangsters. It is a raid in which he should have police assistance really—but that is impossible. And the reason I have told you all this, Huggins, is: can you raise a body of men among your friends and gymnasium patrons who would take the place of the police in this raid?"

At the sudden bewildering request, Huggins gasped.

"You mean—you want a bunch o' scrappers, sir——"

"To assist us!" nodded Thurston Kyle. "Yes. They would have to be trusty men, Huggins, and"—his eyes flashed—"men who do not talk! You will organise them, and take your orders from us!"

He stroked his chin gently.

"Of course, they will incur some danger. But, Huggins, their pay will be high. And if they behave well on this occasion, there may be others on which their assistance will be required. Eh, Lee?"

Nelson Lee bowed in silence. So this was Thurston Kyle's scheme; to form a band of his own, tough fighting men who would obey orders blindly and come in useful for just such emergencies as now confronted the allies.

As for Scrapper Huggins, he could not speak for a moment. At last:

"Pay, sir—pay! Strike me 'ooray, Mr. Kyle, there's no pay needed. At five minits' notice I could lay me mitts on a dozen blokes as'd go to blazes for you, sir, and you know it. There's Sailor Peters, and Charlie Banks, whose li'l nipper you——"

"Tut!" Thurston Kyle's impatient hand silenced him. "So long as you get them, that is all I care. I am trusting you, Huggins, with grave secrets——"

"An' you know I'll keep 'em, Mr. Kyle!" There was a fine dignity in the Scrapper's manner for all his huge bulk. "We're honoured, sir. An' so long as I tell the boys it's fer you they're scrapping, why, that's all they'll ask. Same to you, Mr. Lee. You may have run ag'inst some of us now and then on business, like; but we knows you play the game arterwards, an'——"

"Very well, then!" broke in Thurston Kyle. "I will leave everything to you. Get along now and you'll be in time for your business. Collect your men as soon as possible; telephone Mr. Hawkins when you are ready. And after that—stand by your own 'phone for orders!"

After Huggins had gone, Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk discussed their plans.

"I propose to fly down to Murdorn Tower now, Lee—within a few minutes," said Kyle at length. "After what occurred last night, I imagine Monsieur will call a meeting of the Council of Seven without delay."

A deadly look crossed his handsome face.

"And I shall be close at hand, too!"

"Right!" agreed Nelson Lee. "I will remain in your laboratory at the radio cabinet to listen-in for developments; and when Huggins telephones, I shall be on hand to make my own arrangements for to-night!"

The Night Hawk laughed gaily.

"Then to it, old fellow. Snub will show you how to keep in touch with me. I foresee an exciting day—the last for the Destroyers in Britain!"

Ten minutes later, from the verandah of the laboratory, Nelson Lee watched the winged scientist glide towards the trees of the garden. For fifty yards he remained in sight; then his glittering florescined flying-suit absorbed the daylight, and he disappeared into the sky as completely as though a curtain had dropped behind him.

Smiling, Nelson Lee turned back to the laboratory, where Snub Hawkins and the radio cabinet awaited him.

The game had commenced!

CHAPTER 3.

The Figure at the Window!

THE Night Hawk was right. "Monsieur," the leader of the Destroyers, had most certainly called a meeting of the Council for that morning!

Two of them motored down swiftly, arriving at Murdorn Tower before ten o'clock: Roger Thurlow and the Italian, Naponi—both badly-frightened men. They had a third such in their leader!

News of the previous night's double-disaster had come to hand long since. The French warship, to whom the Atlantic Queen had fled for protection from the Destroyers' yacht, had wirelessed the news around, and Monsieur in his turret-station had picked the message up.

The story of the liner's escape and the sinking of his yacht with all hands, following on the discovery and murder of the three mysterious men operating the electrical instrument below the castle, had almost unnerved him. And then came the report of the destruction of Cyrus Hendricks' glider on Hampstead Heath to complete his terror. He had rallied his men forthwith.

For once the councillors dispensed with their black hoods and cowls. They met in Monsieur's turret, high above the breezy Channel. The morning was bright and clear, but just then weather failed to interest them at all.

Briefly, their hunchback chief snapped out the tale of the night's events, hiding nothing, for well he knew he had to trust his confederates. Thurlow went a little paler when the triple murder was unfolded, but the burly Naponi grinned evilly.

"Good! Dat is de way! I nevair t'ought Milor Murdorn 'ave such nerve, eh?"

Into the magnificent apartment came a giant pugilist—a new ally for the Night Hawk and Nelson Lee in their battle against the Destroyers.

"Where is Murdorn now?" growled Thurlow uneasily. "And Alexis, the Pole? Hang it, why aren't they in this?"

Monsieur gave a strangled, contemptuous croak.

"Murdorn—that coward! He is skulking out in his grounds somewhere, or drinking brandy in his room, hoping we can do without him. Well, we can, see! The Destroyers have finished with Lord Murdorn—he is too weak, huh! Too trembly. Understand?"

He accompanied the words with a searching glare. The others nodded soberly. They understood.

Something had plainly scared Monsieur thoroughly. His usual domineering assurance had gone; there was a fixed glare in his beady eyes that told of some overpowering panic, and he glanced continuously over his shoulder while he spoke. He was almost as bad as the man he condemned.

Fear is contagious. As though drawn by some unholy spell, the others lowered their voices and leaned closer towards him.

"Where is Alexis, then?" whispered Thurlow again.

"In London still. I sent him special orders—orders he must carry out to save our society!" muttered Monsieur.

Suddenly he gripped both their hands tightly, drawing his men nearer to him. To their alarm, they saw cold sweat glistening on his swarthy brow and hooked nose. He was trembling.

"My friends, we have finished with Murdorn—and with his castle. We must leave this place!" His hissing whispers thrilled them icily. "There is—Something—against us here; I swear it. Something not human!"

They would have recoiled but for his feverish grip and terrible eyes.

"You mean—the Tower is haunted?"

"I mean—oh, I don't know what I mean!" gasped Monsieur wildly. "Only that if we stay here, we are lost. I know it; some secret voice whispers it to me!"

The Englishman stared, but the superstitious Italian crouched lower in his chair, lips quivering.

"Si. Go on!"

Monsieur flung out his hands.

"Think of our disasters lately! Six men killed at Deptford, Hendricks and the yacht's crew wiped out last night. All our plans defeated! And Sir Rudolph Gotchen and Feenhy, our comrades, gone!"

His voice was hoarse.

"What does it mean? What can it mean? Only that we have some enemy—unknown—ruthless! He knows our plans; he must be—must be near us! Heavens!" he almost sobbed. "I feel he is here—now! I can feel him, I tell you—here!"

Abjectly he clung to the others, shaking with fear, while Naponi's face went livid. Thurlow alone tried to put some heart into it.

"Rot, chief! No one's here! You've had a worrying night!" he declared bluntly. "One man only has butted in on us—Nelson Lee. And he—died!" He glanced significantly to the window.

But Monsieur lurched forward crazily.

"Did he? Did he die? Perhaps his body died—perhaps it is wedged among those rocks below with the others. But—what of Nelson Lee's spirit. Could it be strong enough——"

They caught his meaning and Naponi whimpered.

"No! No!"

Thurlow snarled.

"Oh, slush! Mean to say Nelson Lee's ghost is hovering about the castle and wrecking our plans. Why, you're——"

A terrible grip of frenzy silenced him.

"Hovering! Hovering! Yes, that is the word!" The hunchback glared from one to the other, rat-like in his terror. "Listen! Yesterday, walking on the castle lawn with Murdorn, I saw—wings! A black shadow of—Something! It covered us. But when I looked up—there was nothing!"

His hands went to his eyes.

"And I heard a laugh," he muttered stonily. "I swear it—a laugh; and the shadow of the wings! Fear seized me as it has never done before. I am no coward. But I ran away then. And"—he buried his face in his arms—"I have seen those shadow-wings again this morning—this morning! Hovering!"

Thurlow and Naponi exchanged awed glances. At last the Englishman cursed and pulled a flask from his pocket.

"Here, drink this! Pull yourself together!" he jerked roughly.

The spirit had some effect. A brightness stole back into the hunchback's stricken eyes; he shuddered slightly at the fiery liquor and braced himself.

"Th-thank you! Perhaps I am overwrought! We must leave Murdorn Tower; find some other headquarters at once!"

"And I have the place, Monsieur!" breathed Naponi. "An old house on Romney Marsh; only a caretaker there. It faces a creek that leads to the sea. I use it for my business sometimes, you un'erstand. There is a motor-boat, too. Ver' handy for the Continent, no?"

Monsieur nodded his huge head eagerly.

"I knew you had that house, Number Four. I was going to suggest it. To-night ——"

"Look! Look! Look!"

An insane, hysterical shriek, quivering with maddest fear, ripped from Naponi's throat. The Italian, foaming at the lips, reeled back and crashed heavily to earth.

In terrified haste, Monsieur and Thurlow whirled to the window, freezing to statues of stark terror at the sight they saw. The expanse of cold blue sky had been blotted out, and a pair of legs, limp and dangling, hung there, swaying and bumping against the panes with a softly-horrible thud.

Slowly, jerkily—as though hands were lowering it from the turret battlements—the rest of the body dropped into view. The men in the room still crouched and stared.

And, pressed against the glass, the dead, distorted face of Lord Murdorn, framed in a noose of rope, stared fixedly back at them.

CHAPTER 4.

Wings of Doom!

FOR an eternity of terror, the dead conspirator glared in at his living confederates, themselves nearly dead, too. Then—their bulging eyes followed the sight mechanically—a long, glittering arm moved into view from above, holding a knife.

Twice the blade bit into the rope—the strands parted. Lord Murdorn, the last of his race, vanished from the window in the four hundred feet drop to the sea-lashed rocks below; the death trap of his ancestors, from which, to use his own words, "nothing ever came out."

In vain Monsieur and his companions tried to scream, to move, to break the suffocating panic that gripped them. The hunchback's mouth opened wide, but only a hoarse rattle rolled from his parched lips.

"Wings! The Wings!"

This time he saw them plainly; no shadow, but two great, sparkling pinions, weirdly beautiful. Then suddenly the window burst open violently, a gush of sea air rioted into the room, and the head and shoulders of something that looked like the spirit of doom itself appeared silently in the opening. Two eyes, protected by heavy goggles, held the destroyers in a pitiless stare.

Like rabbits fascinated by a serpent, the three cowered before the winged figure, unable to stir even when it pointed a threatening finger at each in turn, settling last of all on Monsieur. A calm, infinitely merciless voice sounded above the swish of wind and sea.

"There is another noose awaiting you, hunchback. You, too, shall hang before midnight!"

The figure vanished; the Destroyers could scarcely believe their eyes. One moment the apparition was there; the next it had gone. They had been in the shadow of death—expecting it every instant. Now the window was empty again, the Terror had vanished, leaving only the deadly threat and a cold laugh behind to echo in their beating hearts.

Thurlow, with a violent sob, collapsed in his chair; the Italian rolled into a corner, babbling soundless prayers. Monsieur, alone

of the trio, strangely enough retained his senses.

By a superhuman effort, he hurled himself at the window and closed it, hauled his companions to their feet, and thrust them through the door. Only when all three were safe in the narrow stone passage outside did he speak.

"You saw? You heard? We must leave this place to-day!"

Thurlow, shuddering, jerked his head.

"If—that—allows us to!"

"Listen!" Monsieur shook him impatiently. "We must not give way. We will retreat to Naponi's house on Romney Marsh to-night; meanwhile, we will bury ourselves in this castle somewhere—somewhere where that flying fiend cannot reach us—the basement, the dungeons!"

"But—but Milor Murdorn. Ah, by the saints, shall I ever forget?" wept Naponi.

"He has gone; no one will worry about him for to-day at least. I will tell the servants some story!" whispered Monsieur. "And I have thought of a plan of escape already."

They hung on his words feverishly.

"I will send fresh orders to Alexis. He must muster his men and bring them in cars to escort us to Naponi's house. There are but eight left. Less than a mile from here is a lane amid the Downs where the cars can wait for a few minutes. We, when the time comes, will leave Murdorn Tower by an old secret passage Murdorn showed me once. It was made by his ancestor in the English Civil War and leads into a wooded copse on the edge of the estate. From the copse to the lane below is but fifty yards, and, although that fiend Nelson Lee wounded him slightly, my servant Feodor will be able to meet us there with my car!"

"Can we do it?" muttered Thurlow.

"We must!"—fiercely. "If this winged thing is human we shall have men enough to guard us, surely, once we join up with them in the other lane. And if it is not, still we may be safe in the secret tunnel, huh?"

Drowning men clutch at straws. A faint ray of relief struggled into the faces of the other two, and they nodded. Monsieur was a good and clever leader, after all; he was at his best now the climax had arrived. He even achieved a crooked smile.

"But I am sure our enemy, after all, is human. Once let me escape from this vile castle and I'll fight him tooth and nail. I must give Alexis his new orders first, and then we will go down into safety until to-night. Come!"

They tiptoed down the passage.

NELSON LEE, on "listening-post duty" in Thurston Kyle's laboratory, slowly took off his earphones, swivelled his chair round and thoughtfully lit a pipe. Presently he asked Snub Hawkins quietly for a road map of the South Coast, and pored long and silently over the intricate ordnance chart the freckled youngster brought him, studying the routes between London and Murdorn Tower, and from the Tower to the East Sussex border.

Like a sound general, Nelson Lee was always prepared to change his plans quickly. The time had come to do so now.

In his mind's eye he could almost see the scene that had just passed at Murdorn Tower—Monsieur's fright, the awful appearance of Lord Murdorn, followed by that of the Night Hawk. One at least of Thurston Kyle's victims had paid the price.

Afterwards the detective had heard the turret door close and Monsieur's voice had become fainter but still audible. What Nelson Lee overheard then had made him think about a change of programme immediately.

For best part of an hour he sat absorbed in thought, scheming, fitting his plan together. After that he wrote a careful letter of instructions, took out his cheque-book and called Nipper.

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"Take Mr. Kyle's car, lad, and cash this cheque at my bank. Then take the money to Scrapper Huggins' gym in Whitechapel Road and give him this letter, too. He is to arm his friends as he thinks best; hire sufficient cars and meet me at the place I've mentioned. Stay with him, and phone me when everything is ready. Now hook it!"

With a grin of understanding, Nipper departed cheerily. Re-lighting his pipe, Nelson Lee settled himself once more beside Snub at the radio cabinet. The last stage of the battle against the Destroyers had commenced.

He settled down to await results, patient and imperturbable as a sphinx.

CHAPTER 6.

Ambushed!

NIGHT!

Down the darkness of the valley road that wound through the silent, massive Downs, purred three sleek Daimlers, the regular zip of their tyres on the gravel the only sound of their passing.

At fifty-yard intervals, they glided leisurely through the night so as not to attract too much attention. Yet, had they rushed along at full speed, few eyes would have followed them at that hour through the lonely countryside. The leading driver had not seen a soul during the last ten miles.

A few stars twinkled in the blue-black sky, the moon had yet to rise, and a scattered light now and then blinked from some little downland farm. That was all. For the rest, everything was wrapped in the darkness of the hills, and only the wind in the trees along the roadside disturbed the stillness.

South the cars headed towards the coast, with only their sidelights burning. At last, at a corner where a narrow lane cut in to the larger road, the first car checked, and an electric torch sent a slender beam of light

on to the signpost that marked the turning. A grunt of satisfaction came from the scar-faced man who held the torch, and with a word to his driver he climbed out.

Cautiously the remaining cars drew to a standstill; a man piled out from each for orders—two tough, hefty Americans.

"We here, boss?"

"Yess. Lissen; douse all lights excep' the rear vons and back ver' slow down zis lane—t'irty yards, you on'erstan'? Slowly. We 'ave to wait for Monsieur!"

"O.K."

The order was carried out expertly; one after another the cars vanished into the depths of the lane that skirted a great bald hill. Before a little grassy spot at the side they halted once more, and the nine passengers got out to stretch their legs—and wait.

"No smoking, youse guys!" A low growl of protest answered the whispered order, but it was obeyed. Hands in pockets, they mooched around the cars, talking in muffled voices.

And then the dark, peaceful lane seemed suddenly to swarm with fighting men!

An order snapped once. Even as the men round the cars stiffened at the sound, on all sides, lithe, swift figures surrounded them, tore into them, swamped them. It was a perfect ambush.

The first of the gang in action was Alexis, the leader. Wheeling swiftly at that single order, he found himself gripped by a tall figure with arms and hands of steel, and whirled towards the hedge. A shattering blow between the eyes woke him from his trance, turning him into a snarling wild-cat. Huggins and his men tackled the rest.

For obvious reasons, neither side dared shoot—not even the startled and desperate gangsters. For the same reason, voices were lowered; no shouts arose. In grim silence the Scrapper's men flung themselves into the attack like ghostly demons. And in grim silence the Destroyers met them.

They fought with knuckle-dusters and clubbed automatics; the attackers crashed into them, swinging loaded sticks and "coshes." Scrapper Huggins had his own pet weapon, and he went blithely in, wielding a length of rubber tyre.

"Meet Uncle Dunlop!" he chuckled softly; and carved his way into the thick of the rough-house, strong arm rising and falling. One of the Americans leapt at him, gun raised; he toppled in a heap as the rubber tyre lashed him over the head. The second Yank rushed, too—and walked into the ex-boxer's left with a force that sent him over the bonnet of a car.

In a solid, disciplined body, the Scrapper's men backed up their leader, hitting, driving, fighting like the manhandlers they were. A little Cockney, all wire and sinew, lost his cosh, but, gripping his man by the throat, rolled with him on the ground, snarling and worrying like a terrier; a brawny man with a sailor's roll, stolidly backed two men into a corner and hammered them with a length of tarred rope.

Stifled cries, oaths, the whistle and thud of bitter blows marked the battle; once a knife flickered and one of the attackers dropped with a little choke. But then superior numbers and fighting-weight told.

Outfought, surprised and leaderless, the last of the Destroyers reeled against a car, fought savagely for a moment against the ring of enemies around him, only to drop as the Scrapper's "Uncle Dunlop" licked out and socked against his jaw.

The man crumpled and fell. And with one accord, the triumphant ambushers turned to where the last fight of all was still raging a few yards away.

Nelson Lee, cold-eyed, was enjoying himself. He was not vindictive, but he remembered how the panting, sobbing man at the end of his fists would have tortured him, not many days since. Like piston-rods his arms shot in and out of the other's wavering guard, punishing Alexis to a standstill; then, more by instinct than otherwise, he felt the Pole gather himself for a desperate kick.

The kick never arrived. Nelson Lee's right, swinging up and under, took him on the point of the chin, and down he went without another sound.

"Very be-yewtiful, sir; very pretty hindeed!" purred the Scrapper's voice at Nelson Lee's shoulder. The others—Nipper, battered, but cheerful, among them—clustered round.

"Any casualties, Scrapper?" rapped Nelson Lee.

"Only two bad 'uns, sir!"

"Ah! Well, split up into two parties of six; one lot to take our cars back to London with the wounded men. The others stay here. I want all prisoners tied up and propped in their own cars as naturally as you can place 'em, Scrapper; then the rest of you pile in with them and be prepared to drive wherever I go. Hurry!"

"Not 'arf, sir. Sailor!"

"Ay, ay, cap'n!"

"Tie them perishers up lively!"

Crooning contentedly, Sailor Peters took a great coil of ropes from the hedge and sauntered towards the captives. The two injured men were assisted tenderly towards the high road by their chums and disappeared into the darkness. Nelson Lee and Nipper themselves got busy immediately with their own affairs.

Together they picked up the unconscious Pole and carried him into the narrow space between the first and second cars, where they sat him upright against a mudguard. Nipper vanished and came back a moment later with a soft leather case and a hand mirror. Whereupon Nelson Lee, having directed the lad to switch his pocket-torch on to the Pole's disfigured face, proceeded quickly to work on his own features by the light of another.

He worked rapidly but carefully, with frequent glances at the "model." Satisfied at last, he rose to his feet, just as the Scrapper put his head round the car to report every-

Skilfully Nelson Lee made himself up to represent the unconscious man before him—and thus he became Number Five on the Council of the Destroyers!

thing correct. The boxer's startled gasp as he stared from the scarred Pole on the ground to the "scarred Pole" beside him was sufficient testimony to Nelson Lee's skill.

"Blow me 'appy, sir! I almost 'it yer!"

"Glad you didn't!" chuckled Lee. "All ready, Huggins?"

"Yessir! Just 'ave a dekko, will yer?"

Passing along the captured cars, Nelson Lee smiled with satisfaction. The Destroyers, some still barely conscious but all scientifically gagged and bound, lay in the cars with only their heads showing.

Sailor Peters had done his work well. In the dark, the prisoners looked perfectly free and natural. The rest of Huggins' men, all save one who had been detailed to the driving-seat of the rear car, crouched out of sight at the feet of their captives.

"Splendid!" whispered Lee; and at that moment Nipper touched his arm. Round the corner of the lane, feeling its way along under a single headlight, crept another car. And from the dark sky above, noticed only by Nelson Lee and Nipper who were watching for it—blinked a single flash.

Nelson Lee muttered:

"To your posts, quickly!" and watched as Nipper and the Scrapper hastened to the second car.

He himself stepped forward to meet the cautious newcomer.

MONSIEUR, the hunchback, together with Naponi and Thurlow, the last of the Council of Seven, had made good their escape from Murdorn Tower. But the day had passed on terror-laden feet.

To the servants of the castle Monsieur had succeeded in explaining Lord Murdorn's "absence" quite easily, for his taciturn lordship frequently went off for long walks into the Downs. And after that the three men were busy.

With the aid of Thurlow, Monsieur had dismantled his wireless turret, Naponi crouching on guard with drawn guns. That done, and certain papers destroyed, the shaken trio had descended into the darkness of the Murdorn dungeons to skulk in the ancient and secret tunnel there. Down in those abysmal vaults they felt safe for the first time that day; for each was sure that, somewhere outside, the winged ghoul who had hanged Lord Murdorn

was still hovering about the castle, waiting to strike them, too. One of them at least—Monsieur—was under sentence of death!

Ages seemed to drag past before darkness eventually closed in on the castle that day, and the fugitives slunk into the dungeons again for the last time. Each had been bracing his nerves during the wait with Lord Murdorn's special brandy, but nevertheless the long toilsome journey through the suffocating seventeenth century passage, thick with cob-webs, damp, and half-choked with debris for most of its length, was a nightmare. Naponi's dark, heavy face was almost yellow when, at long last, Thurlow forced up a slab of stone above his head and the party emerged into the fresh air of a thickly-grown copse.

Instinctively, one and all glanced in fear to the sky. But no gliding menace greeted their ears, the night wrapped them in safety, and the obscurity and peace around them stiffened their courage. Without further delay they broke cover, prowling softly towards the high black hedge that marked a narrow lane, fifty yards away.

There, a mere shapeless blur, they found Monsieur's car waiting, with the stolid Feodor, gun in hand, at the wheel. Monsieur panted.

"A quarter-mile—only that, my friends, and we meet Alexis and safety. In with you. Drive, Feodor, drive!"

The three dived quickly into the seats and, to a man, wriggled upright instantly, drew their guns and watched the distant stars. If their uncanny foe heard the car and swooped now, they were ready.

Two minutes later, Feodor brought them to the junction of the lane and the highroad; their straining eyes glistened with joy to see three cars waiting under the hedge, the dark heads of their crews barely, but comfortingly, visible in the single headlight. And a tall man, who could only have been the faithful Alexis, stood in the road, awaiting them.

For all that, however, Thurlow, sitting beside Feodor, had his gun ready as he switched on the dashboard lights and poked his head out. A glance at the Pole's pallid scarred face, dimly seen, made him grunt with relief.

"Good boy, Alexis!"

"Congratulations, Nomber Six; you 'ave escape' alri'? Monsieur is with you?"

"We're all here!" breathed Thurlow. "Now, you know where we're heading. Take your cars on to the highroad and pull aside to let us get in front. Tell everyone to keep his gun handy—and watch the skies. If they see anything above our car, they're to shoot like blazes. Some terrible fiend on wings is hounding us—he's already got Murdorn. We're taking no chances, and we're going to drive from this accursed hole like the wind. That's all!"

The scarred Pole nodded.

"Excellent!"

He turned, said something at each car, then entered the leading one. Came a soft purr, and the column slid forward into the wider road, pulling over until Monsieur's car had glided to the van.

The hunchback put his head out.

"Now—drive!" he shrilled; and shook his fist wildly into the air.

Chuckling, he settled down with the others. Full courage was returning fast. He had slipped away from Murdorn Tower, and now, followed by his armed and reckless gang, was shooting through a dark, lonely countryside in a powerful car. Monsieur's panic vanished in a glow of triumph.

And in the car behind, Nelson Lee smiled confidently. He, whom Monsieur had seen dive to death, proposed shortly to return to life. He, too, was chuckling—at the success of his trap.

Above him, great wings beating regularly, flew the Night Hawk, invisible, implacable. Nelson Lee had laid the clever trap. Very shortly Thurston Kyle intended to spring it.

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CHAPTER 6.

The House of Death!

ON and on raced the retreating column, speeding faster as the night wore on and a pale crescent moon climbed from a bank of cloud, shedding added light upon the quiet hills.

Avoiding main roads as much as possible, they raced out of the higher Downs, slackened speed in the vicinity of Brighton, swerved clear of Lewes, then settled for a steady beat towards the Sussex border into Kent. Now and then a country policeman passed them, but probably took them for a London party returning from a jaunt; other traffic sped by heedlessly.

With every mile beneath the wheels, the spirits of the fugitives rose. They were even grateful for the late moon; it showed them a clear expanse of starry skies above and, of the Thing that had terrified them all day—nothing. Swarthiness returned to Naponi's flabby cheeks, Thurlow's grip on his gun grew less fervid and, sinking into silence, Monsieur, the Destroyers' leader, began revolving ceaseless plans for the future once more, plans that would operate as soon as the new headquarters had been settled.

Into the flatness of Romney Marsh streaked the cars—the lights of Rye twinkling in the distance across level miles of country. Soon they were following the coastline, getting lonelier as the minutes flew by. Naponi grunted at last: "We are nearly there," and leaned forward with instructions to Feodor.

A sign-post loomed up, the column swerved off the road into another that led straight for the sea. The Italian pointed excitedly.

"There—my 'ouse—to ze right, yonder!"

Eager eyes followed his outstretched arm. A short half-mile away, squatting on a little tree-clad rise, stood an old Kentish manor, dismal and gloomy under the slender moon.

But a single light gleaming in a lower room blinked a welcome to the refugees. Monsieur squirmed his narrow shoulders and sat up.

"It ees good, eh? All ees ready there!" chuckled Naponi.

Safety in sight! Other eyes besides theirs, however, had seen that light: the eyes of the famous detective in the car behind, the eyes, too, of another man who knew neither law nor mercy where rogues were concerned.

An electric flash winked briefly from Nelson Lee's car; an answering stab came from the sky. Within reach of Naponi's haven, the jaws of the trap were closing.

Thurston Kyle attacked!

Down from the stars, arms poised, sleek, strong wings extended, came the Night Hawk, shooting earthwards in a swooping, swinging dive, fierce eyes blazing. At glorious speed he whistled above Nelson Lee's car, flattened out and hurled himself at the fugitives. The Scrapper's men in the cars behind did not see the dark, flashing figure; no one, save Lee, saw him until it was too late.

In the leading car, Naponi, seated beside Monsieur, heard nothing either until—brain-shattering in its appalling surprise and terror—came a sudden gurgling shriek from the hunchback. Mad and speechless, the Italian glared upwards to see the stars hidden and the whole car covered by two black wings, so near he could have touched them. Above Monsieur's head glided the terrible face the Italian had seen that morning, and Monsieur himself, writhing and choking in the grip of two white hands, was rising irresistibly from his seat.

There was a vague roar from Thurlow, babbling in frenzy, and trying to raise his gun with a palsied hand; a lurch of the car that threw him sideways, and a crashing blow from above that crumpled Naponi. Then the stars came into view again.

But Monsieur's seat was empty. Of the hunchback and the Hawk that had seized him, no trace remained. Both had melted into nothingness.

Foaming at the mouth, Naponi pounded on Feodor's shoulder.

"Drive! Drive, curse you, drive for ze 'ouse!"

Thurlow rammed his gun into the servants' ear; the motor fairly leapt into top speed. Smiling confidently, Nelson Lee leaned out of his seat behind and his automatic flashed again and again. Monsieur's car, back tyres riddled and flat, swerved drunkenly into a ditch.

The retreat was over.

IN a flash Nelson Lee was alongside. The other cars, spurting furiously, crowded up, too. Staggering blindly out of their car, too numb even to think of their guns, Naponi and Thurlow fell into the road to find themselves surrounded by strange, stalwart men, and covered by a dozen automatics. Feodor, frantic at the loss of Monsieur, was the only one to speak, and he lurched forward, pointing at the tall figure he took to be Alexis the Pole.

"Sneaking cur! You sell us, you——"

"Stow it, matey!" Huggins silenced the man neatly and looked at Nelson Lee.

"Orders, sir?"

The detective jerked his thumb in silence, and at once three men fell out and prodded the new captives up the road towards the house. When they had gone, Lee nodded to the others.

"Scrapper, drive the cars up to the gate, and yank the other prisoners out!"

"What-ho, sir!"

At the gate, the wolfish gang, the real Alexis included, were hauled out and made to stand upright. Naponi and Thurlow were placed at their head, and under menacing guns, the squad were marched down the gloomy garden path to the door of the house.

A cool wind, blowing across the flats, made the trees round the house rustle uneasily. Inside, the light in the living-room still burned, increasing the eerie darkness of the rest of the building. A queer shadow, swinging slowly across the drawn blind, made Nelson Lee set his teeth.

A stumble and a scream from Thurlow caused the detective to hurry forward. Across the front door-step, limp and huddled as though thrown down by an impatient hand, lay a brawny man—evidently Naponi's caretaker. He was quite unconscious. And the front door was wide open, yawning into blackness.

Leaving the party outside in the stillness, Nelson Lee stepped softly into the house. For some seconds he was absent. Then the light in the room was switched off sharply, and he returned to the others once more.

His voice was cold.

"Nipper—Huggins, make these men follow me. The rest of you, back to the cars and wait!"

"Yes, sir!"

Feet pattered off into the night. Nipper and the giant pushed the prisoners forward, forward into a house whose utter silence seemed somehow filled with fear.

Mystified and frightened beyond words, Thurlow, Naponi and their men were marched down a dark passage, Nelson Lee leading. An invisible door opened before them; they were marched into a room, black and hushed as a vault; lined up along the wall. The door clicked softly.

There was a silence!

Presently, with a suddenness that made Naponi cry out. Nelson Lee's level voice cut the tension. None could see him, they heard only his freezing words.

"Destroyers, as you see, your game is finished. You have attempted to strangle the trade of a country that has never harmed you; caused spiteful damage and widespread distress to thousands of good, honest workmen. But now, you and your leaders have been beaten—outmatched from start to finish. So you are here now for punishment!"

Naponi croaked hoarsely.

"I know zat voice. It—it—saints protect me!—it is Nelson Lee!"

An unanimous shudder rippled through the gang. Nelson Lee was dead! But the voice, cool and mocking, replied:

"Yes, I am Nelson Lee; the man you thought was killed!"

In the ghastly pause that followed, he went on quietly:

"Yesterday, your two chief members, Lord Murdorn and Monsieur, crowned their efforts by the murder of three of our men. This morning, Lord Murdorn met a murderer's fate. As for your chief——"

The gang's silent dread broke in a bedlam of sound; a gasp from Thurlow, oaths, a shrill scream from Naponi and Alexis. And at its very height, Nelson Lee switched on the light, and cried:

"Destroyers, here is your chief!"

Suspended from a centre beam, an overturned chair at his feet, hung the hunchback, Monsieur, head of the Society of Destroyers!

For five minutes Nelson Lee forced the captives to stare at that grim spectacle of vengeance; five minutes, the memory of which burned into every black heart there, leaving an indelible impress of fear.

Limp, speechless, fascinated, the Destroyers cowered in their bonds, trying in vain to close their glazing eyes. One man only moved, Alexis the Pole. Reeling from the wall, his lips stiff and blue, he collapsed with a thud.

Nelson Lee switched off the light.

"We hanged Monsieur as we hanged Lord Murdorn, because they were proven murderers. You others it does not suit us to kill; nor shall we hand you to the police. But wait!" Nelson Lee's voice rang harshly. "There are other punishments!"

He touched Huggins' great arm.

"Behind this house is a creek leading to the sea. You will find a boathouse there containing a launch—Naponi's dope-running launch, tell your boys. Take these men to the creek, see they are well gagged, and afterwards, Huggins, flog them as you would flog a set of loathsome curs! Then throw them aboard the launch!"

Lifting his voice a little he went on suavely:

"And Thurlow, Naponi, everyone in the Destroyers—I advise you not to return to England again—ever! Go!"

Long after the room was empty he stood staring into the gloom. After a while, from far away, he heard the muffled thud of blows and faint animal cries of pain. The Destroyers were reaping their just deserts, and not even gags could stifle their outcries.

The noises ceased; and then, hard and distinct on the window-pane came three slow taps, followed by a soft, cold laugh. Nelson Lee braced himself and went out quietly, leaving the house to darkness and to death.

The Destroyers were—destroyed.

"YES, we all got 'ome quite safe, Mr. Kyle; so did the other boys. We gave them swabs the towsing of their lives, slammed 'em into the boat, and told 'em to 'ook it. Last I saw, the 'ole blinkin' bundle was skatin' out to sea so fast I wonder they didn't blow up!"

Scrapper Huggins sighed happily.

"Scared paralytic, they were, Mr. Lee!"

He stared straight at the detective, his blue eyes astern.

"But I never told the boys anything about what 'appened in that—that room, sir."

Both Nelson Lee and Thurston Kyle nodded slowly. It was the morning after the raid. The parties had made their way back to London by different roads, and now the Scrapper had come to report.

From the depths of his gorgeous robe, Thurston Kyle took a thick wad of notes and held them out.

"You all did splendidly, Huggins. Mr. Lee and I are very pleased indeed. This is something to share with your men. Come, no nonsense!" he cried sternly as the big man hesitated. "You earned it well!"

The Scrapper's horny fist closed over the money reluctantly.

"All right, gents; and thank yer!"

He threw back his vast shoulders nervously, retreating towards the door. There he paused.

"I—I'm glad we gave satisfaction, sirs. I hope you'll call us out ag'in. We—the boys 'ave took the liberty, like, of christenin' themselves 'Mr. Kyle's Kittens.' And, gents, any more little capers like last night, and the Kittens'll come up to scratch—laughin', gentlemen, fair laughin'!"

And Scrapper Huggins, his speech finished, dived hastily through the laboratory door, leaving grimly-smiling faces behind.

Thurston Kyle laughed softly.

"Good men, my Kittens, Lee, what? And useful! Very useful!"

THE END.

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(Introduction on page 42.)

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS

A False Alarm!

AS Eric flung himself between the struggling figures, a pair of powerful hands closed on his throat. His own fingers became enmeshed in a mass of hair.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed. "Uncle, it's me!"

From behind him the boy heard the banging of the door. The professor's assailant, he realised, had slipped away. Eric wanted to stop the train, ring the alarm, but the professor, clearly imagining he had to deal with his original foe, was almost choking the life out of him.

"You thief! You blackguardedly thief!"

AMAZING TREASURE-SEEKING QUEST BEGINS!

Expedition, led by Professor Denning and his young nephew, starts to-day.

Precious minutes were wasted before Eric could make his identity known, and by that time he was almost strangled. When at last the professor released him it was some seconds before the boy had breath even to speak. And then suddenly the sliding door was opened, there was a click, and the electric light illuminated the scene. Danny was standing there.

"Guv'nor, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Whatever have you been doing to yourself?"

He might well ask the question. The professor's collar had been ripped off, his coat had been torn and in some places slit with a knife. There was a great bruise

under one eye and blood on his lips.

"An infamous scoundrel entered the compartment while I was asleep and tried to rob me of my transcript of Eric the Red's narrative."

The professor glared round on Eric, who was almost in as woeful a state as himself.

"And what do you think you were trying to do?" he demanded. "Isn't it bad enough that I have to defend my life with my bare hands, without my own flesh and blood adding to my difficulties?"

Eric fingered his bruised chin.

"I thought I was coming to your assistance. That's all, uncle. And then you mistook me for the other chap and nearly throttled me."

The professor seated himself with a snort, and thrusting his hand into the inside pocket of his coat took out all the papers it contained. He turned these over eagerly, and then with a roar of exasperation sprang to his feet.

"My notes! They have been stolen! We shall have to go back to London and make a new transcript. Where does the train stop? We must take the first train back!"

"Best go and have a look for the bloke that done it first, guv'nor. He can't have dropped off the train. It's doing over sixty. He must be somewhere on board."

The professor turned on him with a glare.

"Don't be an idiot, Danny! There must be two hundred persons on the train. I haven't the slightest idea what my assailant was like. The procedure you are suggesting is sheer foolishness. Somebody has stolen my notes, and unless we are very careful that somebody will have the distinction of getting to the Valley of Hot Springs before ourselves."

Danny scratched his head.

"These notes you're talking about, guv'nor—do you mean the bit of paper you were reading from last night?"

"Of course that's what I mean!"

"Oh, well, they're all right, guv'nor. These are them, aren't they?"

Without even a smile Danny put his hands into his pocket and produced the piece of folded foolscap. The professor snatched it from him and glanced at him for a moment.

"Where on earth did you get this from?" he demanded.

"I took it off you, guv'nor, when I was tucking you up. I knew as how you'd lose it, and I knew that you'd blame me if it wasn't there when you wanted it."

The professor clutched at his beard and eyed Danny for some moments in silence.

"Danny, you aren't half as big a fool as you look," he said abruptly. "But the question remains—who is it who has been guilty of this outrageous assault?"

"The bloke that wants this platinum and gold you were talking about—the bloke that came with his pretty gang of boys last night to the cottage—the bloke that must have killed that Mr. Peters. And I don't mind telling you, guv'nor, he was a-trailing you this evening in Chancery Lane."

He leaned towards the professor, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"The sooner we can get to this valley of yours the better, guv'nor. This here country ain't healthy for any of us. That bloke means to have you before you leave Dundee, same as he had poor Mr. Peters!"

The Adventure Begins!

"HALF a mo', Mr. Eric!"

Danny was standing on the deck of the Ice King—a big sailing barque which was taking in stores. The twenty-four hours upon which the professor had insisted as the very limit of time which must elapse before they put to sea had already been exceeded by two days. Eric followed Danny into the cabin.

"What's the matter now?"

Danny screwed up his battered face.

"The guv'nor—he's going to work all wrong. He's rushing things too much."

"How can you say that, Danny, when we've been stuck here two days longer than we intended?"

"Why, he's never giving a thought to the other blokes."

"What on earth are you talking about, Danny?" asked the boy in astonishment. "What's the mystery?"

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle,

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny set out for the Valley of Hot Springs. Travelling to Dundee by train, Eric wakes up as they are passing through a tunnel to find his uncle struggling in the darkness with an unknown man.

(Now read on.)

Danny sank his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"Notice the crew? There was a handy lot of chaps aboard when we arrived here. Where are they now? They've all beat it except the skipper—and one other chap. Had a squint at the crowd as signed on this morning?"

Eric had been too excited to notice the crew. Indeed, it was rather hard to distinguish them from the dock labourers who were helping to fill up the holds with stores.

"A nasty crowd," opined Danny. "Slum rats, Mr. Eric—every one of them. And they ain't from these parts, either. Couldn't you get the guv'nor to sack the lot and start afresh?"

From somewhere outside came the professor's booming voice, rising above the noise of the cranes.

"I absolutely refuse to countenance any further delay. Already my programme has been seriously disarranged. We sail this evening."

Danny sighed.

"There he goes, just like an old grampus! It ain't no use arguing with him. You don't think, Mr. Eric, that if I was to go round and, privately like, put out all these sewer rats one by one that we might get another crew?"

There was a look of hope in Danny's face, but it vanished swiftly as Eric almost doubled up with laughter.

"Then the only thing will be to lock the guv'nor up in his cabin, and lose the key until we reach the place which we're going to," declared Danny emphatically. "It's my belief we've got aboard that gang that put it across Mr. Peters."

Though Eric had been impressed by that incident on the train, he scouted Danny's fears. It was impossible, he argued, for the gang who had attacked them in the cottage to have followed them up to Dundee. There hadn't been time. And, as for locking up the professor—the youngster asked Danny just what he thought his uncle would be like when they got to the end of the voyage and let him out.

But if Danny did not make a prisoner of the professor, he watched over him as if he were a small child. They left Dundee on June 1st, and from that date until the eighteenth, when the Ice King, under a gentle southerly breeze, was running along the coast of Greenland, he haunted him like a shadow.

The voyage had been uneventful, though full of interest for Eric. They had crossed the Arctic circle; they had sighted their first iceberg; they had entered the world of the midnight sun—and nothing had happened to justify Danny's anxiety. Unable to sleep, Eric, wearing a couple of sweaters over his pyjamas, leant over the rail watching the coast.

There was the land of mystery. There, among those mountains, still covered with ice and snow, which rose tumultuously from the sea, losing themselves in smoke-like clouds, was the wonderful magic valley for which they were making. The boy, lost in his romantic dreams, was startled when he felt a touch on his arm. Looking round quickly, he saw Danny beside him.

"He's on board. I've seen him, Mr. Eric."

Eric stared at him in bewilderment.

"That bloke with the big head and the grey hair that I put to sleep—that crook as came to the cottage and tried to pinch the narwhal's horn."

"You're dreaming, Danny!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, I ain't—unless you call that a dream."

He thrust out his right hand, which was covered with a handkerchief. Removing the wrap, he showed the astonished youngster a wound made clearly by some sharp, dagger-like knife.

"He was trying to get into the guv'nor's cabin from under the floor. I thought I heard a noise, and went below to have a look. He'd cut a hole thick enough for him to get through when I came on him."

Eric felt a curious, cold thrill run through him.

"But are you sure, Danny, that it's the same man?"

"I shone my torch on him before he heard me. I tell you it was him. He's grown a beard, but that don't hide his eyes or the shape of his napper. I tried to get him, but he was too quick for me. His knife would have got me if I hadn't side-stepped sharply."

"And then?" Eric stammered.

"He disappeared—scuttled like a rat for whatever hole he's been hiding in."

"Have you told the skipper?"

Danny shook his head.

"What'd be the use? We finish up aboard here to-day. I don't want the whole crew down on me. When we finish with this here ship, we finish with the crew. I'm not wanting the guv'nor to go looking for trouble before he need. I'm just going to watch him, and you've got to do the same, Mr. Eric."

There was no mistake about that hole that had been cut. Eric examined it for himself. It was quite clear that, except for Danny's interference, the man would have forced an entry into the professor's cabin and possessed himself of the secret of the Valley of Hot Springs.

The boy wanted to search the ship for himself, but from this course he was dissuaded by Danny. It would only lead the crew to realise that they were suspected, and, once they were satisfied of that, blood would run on the Ice King. That they had not resorted to violence during the voyage was clearly due to the fact that they feared the professor might destroy the clue to the valley. Once that was in their possession, what happened didn't matter. They would see to it that the professor never reached the valley.

It was not easy to mount guard over the professor, because he was in a state of great excitement that day. Towards midday, after threading her way amongst some low reefs, the Ice King entered a bay surrounded on every side by lofty mountains. Standing on a plain some fifty feet above the sea was the settlement of Holstenberg.

"I wish you and Danny wouldn't follow me about like a couple of lapdogs!" the professor protested indignantly. "There's plenty of work to be done. Have you seen to the stores? Is the luggage packed and ready? I want no delay as soon as the anchor is dropped."

"Everything's O.K., guv'nor," Danny retorted quietly. "Me and Mr. Eric are just standing by to give you a hand."

The Kevitok!

TOWARDS two o'clock, when the barque was lying safely at her anchorage, they were rowed ashore. Another boat was to follow with the stores. As soon as they set foot on Greenland, the professor began to work with feverish haste to make his arrangements. He was rushing about interviewing Greenlanders and Eskimaux, who were to accompany the expedition as guides and so forth in the kayak—a native boat—which the professor had hired.

Most of the crew of the Ice King had come ashore, and all Eric's and Danny's efforts were concentrated on keeping them from any contact with the professor. But of the man with the big head who had stowed himself away on board the Ice King, they never saw a sign.

At last came the time when the expedition started forth. Eric and Danny heaved deep sighs of relief as the kayak moved away from the shore and the crew of the Ice King were left behind.

It was when they reached Krikkertak, at the end of the fortnight, that Eric realised that they were drawing near the threshold of their adventure. The professor was standing on the edge of the ice, staring at the horizon, where the sun was setting between the mountains of the Wigat. Nearer at hand lay Disco Island, bathed in prismatic colours amidst the sea of broken ice.

"Up there lies Dronvik!" he exclaimed, pointing northwards to the mountains. "Sagdloq tells me that there's the ruins of a settlement there. That, you will remember, is where Eric the Red was living when the people of the valley carried out their raid."

Sagdloq was their chief kayaker—a pure bred Esquimo in whom the professor had implicit confidence.

"Our difficulties are about to commence, my lad. We've got to find the entrance to this valley. I have tried to pump Sagdloq, but he isn't very communicative. There's a part of the coast north of Dronvik which is apparently taboo. These Esquimaux, though they're supposed to be Christianised, are still very superstitious. What is it now, Danny?"

Danny had come up behind them, a broad grin on his face.

"From what I can make of it, guv'nor, they're holding a dance in your honour, and they sent me to ask if you're coming."

The idea of his uncle dancing made Eric laugh. To his astonishment, the professor treated the boy to an indignant stare.

"Why not, may I ask, young man? Do you imagine that you are the only person who can dance?"

With one hand clutching his beard, he walked towards the schoolhouse. Before he had gone more than a few yards he was surrounded by a gaudily-dressed crowd of Esquimaux. Danny and Eric, who felt thoroughly snubbed, followed in his wake.

The room was already filled with some seventy or eighty human beings. The women were of all ages, from twenty to eighty, and there was not one of their faces that was not disfigured by frost-bite.

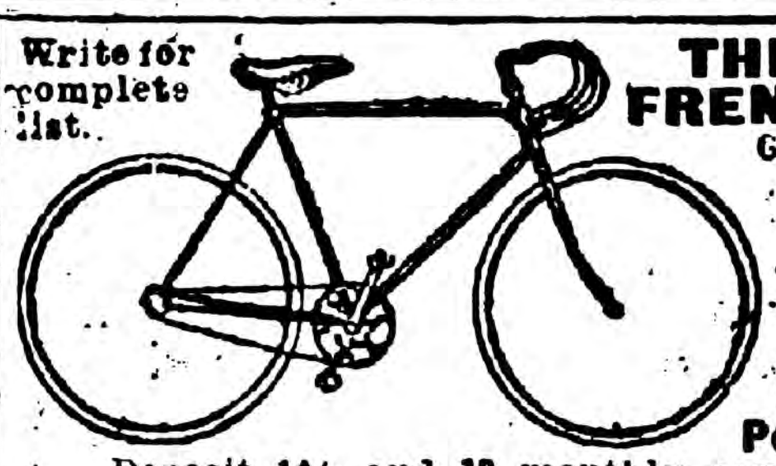
The professor seemed serenely oblivious of their looks. The band, which was a wheezy concertina, had already struck up. Seizing the first lady who presented herself, he began to whirl her round to the rhythm of a waltz.

Presently they were all dancing. Then, when the fun was at its height, there was a sudden commotion.

"A Kevitok! A Kevitok!" a voice shouted above the din.

Instantly the music ceased, the dancers stopped, and everybody crowded together in a terrified group!

(More enthralling chapters of this magnificent adventure serial next week, lads.)



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