

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT TO ALL READERS INSIDE!

THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

2^d



Schoolboys Imprisoned By Ruthless Terrorists !—Gripping Long Thriller —

THE CASTLE



CHAPTER 1.

The Awakening.

“UG-UG-UG! Gurrerrrh!”

The sound, fearsome enough in all truth, was really only a yawn; but it was a most prodigious yawn, and it emerged from the wide-open mouth of Edward Oswald Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove.

The burly junior opened his eyes, but the light was dim; and his eyes, in any case, were full of heavy sleep. At any rate, he was satisfied that it was quite early in the morning, and it was good to know that the rising bell was not ringing. He turned over in bed luxuriously, preparing to have another snooze.

But there seemed to be something wrong.

For one thing, the bed was not so springy as it should have been. The springs did not give at all. And the blanket, in some way, was next to Handforth's chin—instead of the sheet. It seemed very much rougher than usual. Still, what did it matter? He rolled over on to his back and leisurely opened his eyes.

It was very strange. Instead of the white ceiling of the little dormitory, he could see some great black rafters high above—enormous beams. Of course, they weren't there really. Just one of those tricks of the imagination.

“I say, Churchy!” mumbled Handforth, with another mighty yawn.

He half-turned over and looked at Churchy's bed. Curiously enough, Churchy's bed wasn't there. He was gazing across a

—Starring Nelson Lee, Nipper And The Boys Of St. Frank's !

OF DOOM!



The Castle of Doom—the secret headquarters of the ruthless Fellowship of Fear, hidden away in the mountains of Bavaria. Here Nelson Lee, detective, and his schoolboy companions, lie captive—doomed prisoners of the Terrorists they have tried so pluckily to bring to justice! But, desperate though their position is, Nelson Lee & Co. are not downhearted. “While there’s life there’s hope!” is their motto.

long, gloomy chamber, with a stone wall at the far end.

“Rats! I must be dreaming,” muttered Handforth, sitting up abruptly and shaking himself.

He looked round again. His head was throbbing strangely, and he saw, to his startled astonishment, that he was fully dressed, minus a collar and necktie. There weren’t any real bedclothes, only a couple of

shaggy blankets. And he wasn't in a bed at all, but lying on the floor level. There seemed to be a sort of mattress.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth.

He knew that he was awake now. But, for the life of him, he couldn't understand what had happened. Instead of being in the dormitory of the Ancient House of St. Frank's, he was—Where was he?

It was a great stone chamber, lofty, barren. The windows were mere slits, and the depth of them proved, startlingly enough, how extraordinarily thick the wall was. This explained the lack of light in the apartment. Dimly he could see a great door on the opposite side, and it was arched at the top, running to a point—like a door inside a church, or an old castle. The door was heavily studded with great metal knobs.

"It's—it's impossible!" said Handforth loudly.

"What-ho!" came a sleepy voice from near-by. "Good old Phipps with the tea juice, what? Laddie, kindly slip it across. The young master is ready and waiting."

"Archie!" exclaimed Handforth, turning round. "What the dickens—"

He broke off. Archie Glenthorne, dressed just as himself, and looking very dishevelled, was sitting up on a mattress, surrounded by rough blankets. The elegant junior was evidently under the impression—as Handforth had been—that he was in his own dormitory at St. Frank's.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated suddenly, as he stiffened. "What's happened? I mean, where are we?"

"That's what I like to know," said Handforth.

"Odds sights and scarecrows!" ejaculated Archie. "Is that you, Handy? I must say that you look most disgustingly dirty."

"What about yourself?" retorted Handforth. "And look at these other mattresses and things. There's about a dozen of us here! I can't think clearly. Something's happened, but I don't know what it is. I seem to have a vague recollection of something pretty startling—"

"Odds reminders and jolts!" broke in Archie. "Weren't we in the Triangle at St. Frank's? Don't you remember those blighting searchlights and chappies all dressed up in rummy clothes? And now we're in a foul dungeon of sorts, including a door with knobs on."

"The fellowship!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

The very recollection made him leap to his feet. He was stiff, but he took no notice. He staggered to the nearest slit-like window. Before he had taken a good look outside, Archie had joined him. There was just room enough for the two to stare out. The slit was wider on the inner side of the wall than the outer; it narrowed down until it was scarcely more than a crevice, and it was covered with thick glass.

But it was clear glass, and the juniors could see out fairly distinctly. They gazed upon a remarkable vista. They could see a long,

winding valley with steep hillsides, thick with pine trees. In places, here and there, a winding road could be identified; and, far off, in the dim distance, right down at the bottom of the valley, the red roofs of a village or town could just be distinguished.

Nearer at hand a jutting portion of a building obstructed the view; and Handforth and Archie could see a turreted wall, and bulging out from a corner of it a round tower with a squat spire. They stared for some moments, and then they looked at one another, their eyes wide with bewilderment.

"It beats me!" said Handforth at length.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie helplessly. "I mean to say, the whole thing's impossible. We must be dreaming, old tulip! This place is a dashed medieval castle—and it's not in England at all! You never find pine-clad hills like that in England."

A sound made them look round. Somebody else was moving. A big figure was sitting up on one of the mattresses—a man. He was holding his head and running his fingers through his hair. He stopped suddenly, wincing, as though his fingers had encountered a badly-bruised part of his scalp.

"Ye gods and little fishes! The Head himself!" muttered Handforth.

It was perfectly true. The man who was sitting up on the mattress was none other than Mr. James Kingswood—affectionately known as "Fighting Jim," the headmaster of St. Frank's College. He, like the boys, was much dishevelled. The very sight of him gave Handforth's memory a big jar, and his eyes suddenly blazed.

"I remember now!" he muttered tensely. "The fellowship. That's right. They raided St. Frank's, didn't they?"

"Did they?" asked Archie. "I'm trying to figure out how we got to this place. I don't remember anything. Weren't we gassed, or something, in the Triangle?"

"Yes, that's it," said Handforth eagerly. "I say, Mr. Kingswood! Are you awake, sir?"

He hurried across the room. As he did so he noted that there were ten occupants all told, including Mr. Kingswood, Archie, and himself. There was one other man—Phipps, apparently. Phipps was Archie Glenthorne's valet, and it was bewildering that he should be here. The others were Nipper, Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Church, McClure, and Willy Handforth. Mr. Kingswood had staggered to his feet, and he was looking at the boys half-dazedly.

"Thank Heaven you are still alive and well!" were his first words. "But don't ask me where we are, boys. Everything seems so topsy-turvy that I am in a maze."

"I'm glad of that, sir," said Handforth.

"You're glad of it?"

"I mean, we're no worse than you are, sir," explained Handforth. "I was beginning to think that I was going dotty, or something. But my mind's clearer now. Don't you remember that affair at St. Frank's, sir? When was it? Last night?"

"The great raid by the Fellowship of Fear," muttered Mr. Kingswood with a sudden start. "Yes, yes, that's right. Scores of robed figures suddenly appeared at the school and formed a cordon round it. They brought searchlights and machine-guns, and forced us to come out into the open air."

"And then, when we were all out, the rotters ordered you to stand forward with Phipps, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "Then they told you to order us chaps— That's right—the Secret Eight!"

"The Secret Eight?" repeated the headmaster wearily.

"That's what we called ourselves, sir," replied Handforth. "It was the Secret Six at first—Church and McClure and me—Nipper and his two chums, of Study C. That made the six. We were the chaps who were in the secret—about the fellowship, and Mr. Lee being at the school. Then young Willy, my minor, had to be brought into the secret, so we became the Secret Seven. After that there was Archie Glenthorne—"

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Mr. Kingswood. "But do you know why Archie Glenthorne was admitted into the secret circle? You did not know, did you, that he discovered that Phipps was none other than Mr. Lee, in disguise?"

Handforth's eyes opened wider.

"You—you mean that Mr. Lee is here now, sir?" he asked.

"Yes—he was captured with the rest of us."

"Why, then everything's all right," said Handforth brightly. "Mr. Lee can get us out of this hole, I'll bet!"

"I'm glad to know that you have such confidence in Mr. Lee's powers," said the headmaster. "It makes me feel rather ashamed of myself, Handforth—for, I must confess, I was inclined to be very despondent. You must not forget that we have been captured by the Fellowship of Fear, and our position is by no means enviable."

IT was the truth. The occupants of this stone chamber had been seized and carried off into captivity by the Fellowship of Fear.

It was a grim organisation of terrorists; fanatics who were determined to cause a world upheaval. They had instituted a relentless attack upon schoolmasters, for it was one of their aims to introduce their evil teachings into the great schools of England. No doubt they had been using the same tactics in Germany and in France and in Italy. The movement was widespread, there were branches in every country, and the whole organisation was bewildering in its size. The ramifications of the fellowship extended from one end of Europe to the other.

When Mr. Kingswood, Head of St. Frank's, had been menaced by the terrorists, Nelson Lee had entered the fight with a determination to smash the fellowship. He had worked hard, and, by his brilliance, he had obtained possession of a vital code book.

That was the cause of the present wholesale kidnapping.

Nelson Lee had decoded the book, and he had learned the inner secrets of the society; he had known of the central headquarters, the names of the "Big Five" of the fellowship. In some way the enemy had learned of this, and they had known that they were booked for exposure—unless they acted drastically.

So the fellowship had brought off one of the most spectacular raids in history; hundreds of men had concentrated on St. Frank's, they had surrounded the school, and Nelson Lee, Mr. Kingswood, and the eight boys in the secret had been kidnapped. Thus, the secret was still preserved. These were the only people who could have given the fellowship away. And now they were captives.

"But I can't remember, sir," said Handforth, scratching his head. "We were gassed, weren't we? What happened after that? I suppose you're just as much in the dark as we are?"

"Not quite," replied Mr. Kingswood, who was now more himself. "I think we must have been taken aboard a motor-boat—which was probably waiting on the river, near the school. At any rate, I awakened to find myself at sea."

"Great Scott, sir."

"Mr. Lee and Nipper had awakened," continued the Head. "I think we were less affected by the gas than you boys—for we had taken care not to breathe much of the vapour into our lungs. We even succeeded in getting the better of one of our guards, and it was any odds that we might have escaped. But it was not to be. The beggars overpowered us again."

"Where was this, sir—at sea?"

"Yes; and next to the motor-boat there was a great seaplane, or flying-boat," replied Mr. Kingswood. "I am beginning to understand now. They knocked me on the head. I think—at any rate, there is an enormous bruise. The last I saw of Mr. Lee was when he fell overboard, and Nipper dived after him. But they are both here, so they must have been rescued—and probably gassed again. After that we were, no doubt, transferred to the flying-boat, and brought here."

"Absolutely! But where's 'here,' sir?" asked Archie.

"We are in the Bavarian Alps."

"Good gad!"

"In Holtz Castle, the ancestral home of Baron von Holtz."

"But—but how can you be sure of this, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I will admit that it is a guess—but I think I am right," replied the headmaster. "For Mr. Lee discovered that Holtz Castle is the central headquarters of the Fellowship of Fear. And the very appearance of this place is significant. I cannot understand how the flying-boat landed us—but that does not matter. Perhaps we were dropped by parachute."

It was only a chance shot of the headmaster's, but it happened to be right. After being transferred to the flying-boat, the prisoners had been flown above the clouds until they reached this desolate spot in the Bavarian mountains. They had, indeed, been dropped by parachute, and had been picked up by fellowship men and brought straight into Holtz Castle.

It was a grim awakening.

Ten of them—two men and eight school-boys—imprisoned in this mighty fortress! When Mr. Kingswood realised the full truth, he felt that even Nelson Lee, with all his cleverness, could not get them out of the wood.

Holtz Castle was one of the most formidable strongholds in the world. It stood perched on a mass of precipitous rock. On three sides of it there were sheer precipices. On the fourth side there was also a steep precipice, exactly the same as on the other sides; but here there was one difference. Across a chasm were the rocks of the upper side of the hill, along which wound the narrow road. The only way of communication was by means of the massive drawbridge.

When this drawbridge was in the "down" position, the road continued right into the castle courtyard, and the chasm was not apparent. But with the drawbridge raised the castle was cut completely off, perched on its rock, the only approach from the "mainland" being across the drawbridge over that yawning gap.

As Mr. Kingswood thought of the hazards, his heart nearly failed him.

Even supposing they tricked some of their guards, and got out of this apartment, what then? How could they hope to escape from the castle, with its labyrinths of passages and corridors? How could they hope to get across to that mountain road? For it went without saying that the drawbridge would never be down—unless there were ample guards on hand. And even assuming, by some wild stretch of the imagination, that they could escape, there was only that one solitary, winding road. Before they could progress far along it, they would be pursued and overtaken. They would be recaptured. The whole position was hopeless.

Fighting Jim shook himself.

"I must not allow such thoughts to enter my head," he muttered almost fiercely.

"Beg pardon, sir?" asked Handforth.

"They call me Fighting Jim, don't they?" demanded the Head.

"Why, yes, sir—we all call you that," replied Handforth, in wonder. "And with jolly good reason, too! Didn't you win the Amateur Championship—"

"No matter how I fought in the ring. Handforth. I've got to fight harder than I have ever fought in all my life—now," said the athletic young headmaster. "We're not going to let these infernal rogues hold us here, are we?"

"Not likely, sir!" said Handforth stoutly.

"Perish the poisonous thought," said Archie Glenthorne.

"As we are the first to come to our senses, we'd better see what we can do with the others," continued Mr. Kingswood briskly. "Come along, boys! No need to be too formal now, you know. We are companions in misfortune. Forget that I am your headmaster."

Mr. Kingswood himself went straight across to Nelson Lee—who really looked a queer mixture of himself and Phipps. For, when Nelson Lee had been captured, he had been impersonating Archie Glenthorne's invaluable valet. Phipps, by the way, also did duty as the headmaster's butler, and it was for this reason Lee had adopted the guise.

But since that hectic hour, he had been immersed in seawater, and he had engaged in a fight; and, taking all in all, his disguise had somewhat slipped.

But it did not matter now—he was Nelson Lee himself, and there was no longer any necessity for him to adopt subterfuge. The Head, by shaking him vigorously, and by slapping him on the back, and by adopting various other methods of first aid, succeeded in making the detective open his eyes.

Handforth, at the same time, was busy with Nipper. Archie applied himself to young Willy.

They all responded to treatment. For, by now, the effects of the gas had nearly worn off. It had not been poisonous gas—but merely stupefying. The victims had been sleeping heavily. But Nelson Lee and Nipper had been "under" more than the others, for they had received a dose of gas at a much later hour, and its effect had not entirely left them.

During this first-aid work the captives had not been disturbed.

For all they knew, they might be in the castle alone. They did not hear the sound of a footstep, or a voice, or anything to indicate that the castle was inhabited. Not even the distant barking of a dog, or the crowing of a cock. They seemed to be shut off from the world.

And, indeed, that is just what they were—shut off. Prisoners in a grim fortress, surrounded by miles of Baron von Holtz's private estate.

And their friends in England—police—the Secret Service—the Army—the Navy—knew nothing of their whereabouts. Not for centuries had there been such a wide-spread search as was now in progress for the kidnapped ten.

But they had vanished as mysteriously as any of the other fellowship victims. It was known that they had been carried into the Channel by motor-boat—it was also known that the motor-boat had been destroyed by fire.

But none knew what had happened to the victims after that. Not a trace remained. They had disappeared as surely as though the sea had opened and swallowed them up.

CHAPTER 2.

In Durance Vile.

NELSON LEE, having removed the last traces of his impersonation, was now quite himself.

"Well, boys, we're in a nasty mess," he said calmly. "It's no good getting excited about it—and it would be just as foolish to get despondent."

"You don't think they'll kill us, sir?" asked Church.

"If they meant to kill us, they would have

"I say, sir, why not pretend to be asleep?" suggested McClure. "Nobody has come to have a look at us yet—and if we go back to our mattresses and pretend to be asleep, we might be able to take the enemy by surprise."

"By George! Why didn't I think of that?" asked Handforth. "It's a corking idea, Mac! We could spring on 'em, and knock 'em cold, and then dash out of the castle."

"A very praiseworthy idea—but it wouldn't work," replied Nelson Lee. "Our friends,



The first hound charged straight at Nelson Lee and bowled him over. But quick as lightning, Lee had it by the throat. The next moment the second hound was upon the plucky detective, and he knew he was hopelessly outmatched!

killed us long before now," replied Lee. "No, the fellowship is ruthless—it is extreme—but it does not go in for needless murder. We were kidnapped because we knew too much—because we could have shattered the whole organisation. By bringing us here, the fellowship has made certain of its own safety."

"But that means that we shall be kept here for good, sir," said Nipper. "I mean, they daren't let us escape."

"'For good' is a long time, young 'un," replied Lee. "No doubt this crazy organisation is intent upon keeping us prisoners for some months—perhaps years."

"They won't keep me here for years, sir!" said Handforth aggressively. "What rot!"

"I like your spirit—and I think it is one which we all share," said Lee, with a half-smile. "Exactly, Handforth—'what rot'! We are not going to allow these people to do just as they like, are we?"

the enemy, are well aware of our present condition. They know that we are very wide awake."

"But how do they, sir?" asked Nipper, staring.

"There is a tiny spy-hole in that door," replied Lee grimly. "Three times within the last five minutes an eye has been applied to that spy-hole."

"My only hat!"

Nipper and Handforth hurried across to the door, and, sure enough, there was the tiny hole. Lee's keen eyes had spotted it before anybody else. Nipper was about to peep through when he heard the faint sound of approaching footsteps. They seemed vague and far away. Yet the turning of a key in the door proved that it was the door's thickness which had so deadened the sounds.

"Look out!" muttered Handforth, instinctively clenching his fists.

None of them knew what to expect. Handforth, who always jumped to the melodramatic, was anticipating a regiment of grotesquely robed figures, all armed to the teeth, ready to seize the prisoners and drag them forcibly away.

When the door opened a solitary figure appeared.

He was a man of middle age, clearly of the servant class, dressed in loose-fitting trousers and a picturesque pleated coat of dark green cloth. The dress, in fact, was a kind of informal livery. The man was unarmed, and quite alone.

"You all awake?" he asked, with a pronounced accent.

"Yes," replied Lee.

"You not awake long," said the man. "We let you sleep long time. Hungry, yes? I tell my master you need food."

While speaking, he was looking over the prisoners keenly, noting that they had all made a complete recovery. Even Lee and Nipper, who had suffered more than the others, in consequence of their ducking in the Channel, were apparently hale.

"You good, strong boys," said the man, with a sly grin. "You make good workets for my master. He like them strong—and young."

"And who is your master?" asked Kingwood bluntly.

"You see him soon," replied the man. "He come."

He turned and walked out; and Handforth, who had been making frantic signs—all to no avail—groaned aloud.

"Why didn't we jump on the blighter?" he hissed. "We had a good chance there! He was all alone, and——"

"We have an equally good chance of escaping through the doorway," broke in Lee dryly. "Remarkably careless of the man to leave it unlocked, wasn't it?"

Handforth stared at the door and gaped.

"Why, it isn't even closed!" he gasped.

He rushed to the door, tore it open, and found himself staring into a wide, gloomy arched corridor. The man had vanished.

"We can escape!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly.

"Cheese it, Handy," said Nipper. "Do you think these people would give us a chance like this? The fact that the door has been left unlocked proves that there's no way of escape for us."

At the same time, the action of the man was peculiar, and it aroused the interest of all the prisoners. Generally, when innocent people were held captive in a grim old castle, they were thrown into a dungeon, and when the enemy came near, the enemy was armed to the teeth. At least, according to all the best thrillers.

What was happening now was something new.

"It's just a trick, of course," said Nipper, as he went out into the corridor. "Shall we chance it, guv'nor? I mean, any harm in us going along the passage?"

"I suppose not," replied Lee, frowning.

Even he began to think melodramatically, so to speak. He wondered if there were hidden traps in the flooring, which would open and let them through. But with an impatient shrug he dismissed such nonsense, and walked out with the boys.

The corridor had windows exactly like the room they had just left—wide slits on the inner surface of the wall, narrowing to mere crevices on the outer surfaces. Walking down the corridor, they came, presently, to an open doorway on the same side as the room they had just vacated. They looked into it and saw a long, rough table, reminiscent of a monk's refectory, with solid, squarely-built chairs. The floor was of stone, and there was little or no comfort. The table was set with a few rough plates and some dull-looking forks and spoons—but no knives. At the farther end of the room a fire was blazing cheerfully—the only spot of comfort in the place.

The room was entirely empty of humans or animals. In another wall a door stood partially open.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Tommy Watson.

"Pricelessly rummy," remarked Archie. "At the same time, laddies, I must observe that the good old fire looks remarkably alluring. What about gathering round the hob?"

"Bother the hob," said Handforth. "I want to know what this all means! Where are the fellowship rotters?"

Lee and Nipper had passed the doorway and were already at the end of the corridor. A man was standing there—not the same man who had spoken to them a few minutes earlier. He was younger, but dressed the same, and on his face there was a lurking expression of amusement. Lee understood why.

For the end of the corridor was completely barred by an enormous iron gate. It was of picturesque design, wrought with much skill, and although evidently of great antiquity—dating, no doubt, from the Middle Ages—it was as serviceable to-day as when it had been first erected.

There was not sufficient room for a cat to squeeze through the ornamentally shaped bars. There was no fastening, apparently, on the inner side, and no way of reaching the outer fastenings. But Lee did not doubt that those fastenings were of great solidity—probably iron bolts, as thick as a man's arm, shooting into sockets a foot long.

"You see?" said the detective, turning to the boys.

"Great Scott! We should need a ton of dynamite to shift that gate!" said Mr. Kingwood with a wry face. "What's on the other side?" he added, turning to the man who stood there.

The man shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and said something in a Slavonic dialect which even Lee, who was familiar with many languages, did not understand.

"It doesn't matter," said Lee. "Beyond this gate, no doubt, is the main part of the

castle—which we are not allowed to use. Let's see what lies in the other direction."

They had got back to the open doorway of the "dining-room," when Handforth and some of the other boys emerged.

"Any discoveries?" asked Lee.

"Rather, sir," said Handforth. "There's a kind of kitchen through this room—with a whacking great sink, with water laid on, and everything."

"That's a nasty blow," said Mr. Kingswood. "Evidently we shall be obliged to do our own washing-up. Well, we can take it in turns."

"And out of the kitchen there's another room—a kind of bath-room, with an enormous stone bath, level with the floor, big enough to drown an elephant," went on Handforth. "One of those queer, old-fashioned affairs. Towels and soap and everything."

"Quite a self-contained flat," said Lee, with a touch of grin in his voice. "Anything else?"

"That's all, sir—except that there are no doors in any of the other walls," replied Handforth. "And all the windows are just the same as these—narrow slits."

"Well, let's see what this direction reveals," said Lee.

They passed the "bed-room," and found that the corridor took a sharp turn a few yards farther on. The walls were of solid stone, with an occasional narrow window. And this corridor, after taking the sharp angle, seemed to go on endlessly. It was quite wide and airy—so airy that a cold draught sent a chill into the marrow of the explorers. There were no doors of any kind, and when they reached the end they came to the sister gate of the one at the other section. It was of exactly the same wrought iron design, and it had no doubt been built by the same skilled craftsmen, dead for hundreds of years. Beyond this gate was a great lofty chamber, barren, dusty, and showing signs that it had not been used for countless years. Just visible in the gloom, set deeply in black recesses, were heavy iron-studded doors.

"What a frost!" said Handforth, disappointed.

"We can't expect to escape from durance vile so early in the game," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "Now we can understand why there are no armed guards knocking about. There's not one chance in ten million of escape from this prison. It is infinitely safer than any cell in Dartmoor."

"By Jove, Mr. Lee, you're right!" said Fighting Jim. "Massive stone walls, solid-arched ceilings—also of stone—stone floors, and windows through which a rat could scarcely squeeze. There are only two exits, and they are both guarded by wrought iron gates of stupendous strength. What an extraordinary situation! I wonder why it was originally built in this way?"

"In medieval days there were many grim tyrants—lords of life and death," replied Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "In Bavaria and

Saxony in particular, the feudal barons were little kings in their own right. It was very much the same in Italy, and to a lesser degree in England. Here in these Bavarian mountains, the barons knew no law but their own. I've no doubt that this floor of the castle was built and set aside for the especial use of enemies whom the reigning baron had no desire to kill. The castle proper is in another wing altogether. It is quite likely that there are other floors—above this and below this—similarly equipped. But in these modern days they are shut up and left as mere show places."

"We have seen for ourselves that the accommodation here is meagre—and hastily improvised," said Mr. Kingswood. "The mattresses and blankets, for example, could have been carried into that room in five minutes. And the chairs and tables in the other room the same. I'm afraid our host has very crude ideas as to hospitality."

"In the circumstances, we are lucky enough to get mattresses to lie on, blankets to cover us, and a fire in our dining-room," replied Lee grimly. "Personally, Jim, I'm quite astonished. We are most lucky. Don't forget that we are in the hands of a ruthless terrorist organisation."

As there was nothing further to see, they retraced their steps, and the boys were all silent. Their hopes had been dashed to the ground. This round of their "quarters" had impressed them deeply. They felt more imprisoned, more shut off from the world, than if they had been locked up in a black cellar. The very sight of the pine-clad hills, and the distant landscape—so near and yet so far—only accentuated their own utter helplessness.

"Things might be worse," murmured Handforth, who was never "down" for long. "What about when the blighters bring our grub? They'll have to open the gate then, won't they? We've only got to await our chance, and make a rush."

"That's all," said Church.

"Easy!" added McClure with a sniff.

"Well, why not?"

"Because, you fathead, that's just the time when they will have men on guard," said Church. "You can bet your boots they're not going to give us any opportunity of getting past those gates. And even if we did get past them, where should we be?"

"In the other part of the castle," replied Handforth brightly.

"Yes. And what then? You don't suppose we could get out into the open, do you?"

"We'd have a jolly good shot at it," replied Handforth.

"I'm afraid you are too optimistic, young 'un," said Nelson Lee, who had been listening to the talk as they walked. "The castle is perched on a high crag, with sheer precipices on every side. True, a drawbridge connects with the mountain road, but it is certain that the drawbridge will be always raised."

"But how do you know this, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"This is Holtz Castle, unless I am greatly mistaken, and the peculiarities of Holtz Castle are known far and wide," replied Lee. "It is one of the most famous fortresses in Bavaria—and the present Baron von Holtz has the reputation of being a true member of his line. He was one of the hardest and most ruthless generals in the late war—and, in fact, one of the most successful of the German commanders."

They had reached the turn of the corridor by this time and they were now within sight of the other iron gate—for this other corridor, off which the rooms led, was very much shorter.

A clang of metal sounded, and the boys, hurrying forward, were in time to see the gate swing forward. But the only man who came through was the middle-aged servant, carrying an enormous tray. A moment later, however, he was followed by another man with a similar tray.

"Look!" whispered Handforth. "No guards at all!"

Lee himself was curious about this, and he walked forward to have a closer look. He was soon satisfied. Another man, on the other side, was leisurely closing the gate—but beyond him, at a spot thirty feet away, a solitary figure sat behind a wicked-looking object which was unmistakably a machine-gun. This man was very much at attention, and the gun's muzzle was trained straight on the gateway.

"Very interesting—and very effective," commented Lee. "You see, boys? There is no necessity for a strong armed force here. That one man, sitting behind his machine-gun, is all that is necessary. If any of us attempted to rush the gate, we should be ruthlessly mown down. At least, that is the impression they wish us to receive. Very clever. It would be far too risky to take any chance."

The middle-aged man was approaching.

"Your meal, it is ready," he said shortly.

"We will come," replied Lee. "May we know who you are, and what position you occupy?"

"I am Ivan," said the man. "I serve my master and obey his orders. My task is to attend you."

It was all very strange. After awakening, they had expected everything to be so different. This treatment, which, after all, was lenient, was astonishing after their previous experiences of the fellowship's methods.

Passing into the dining-room, they found a substantial meal set forth on the bare wooden top of the long table. It consisted of a hot meat stew in which cabbage predominated. There were plentiful supplies of hot potatoes, a blackish-looking bread, and cold sausages filled another dish. An immense jug of hot coffee occupied one end of the table.

"Well, well! Luxury!" said Mr. Kingswood, as he sat down. "We evidently have to serve ourselves, so let's get busy. Upon

my word! This coffee smells distinctly good."

They found that they were ravenously hungry, and the stew proved to be not only hot and savoury, but most palatable. The coffee, too, was excellent. The rough and ready method of its serving was a matter of small account.

After the meal they all felt better, and for the first time somebody thought of looking at a watch. As several of them wore watches, and they all gave the same time, there was no doubt as to their accuracy. The hour was half-past-one, in the middle of the day.

"I'm just beginning to realise how things stand now," said Nipper, as he went over to the big fire. "The fact that our watches aren't run down proves that we haven't been away from St. Frank's for twenty-four hours. We wound them up last night when we went to bed."

"Last night!" echoed Tommy Watson. "It seems ages ago."

"Don't forget that we were kidnapped in the early hours of the morning—then we were drugged and brought straight here," said Nipper. "We must have arrived at about dawn, and after that we slept until noon, or just after."

There was no doubt that this was a correct estimate of the position. And now that the meal was over the boys began to wonder what they should do with the afternoon. The sudden realisation that they could not move beyond the confines of their prison startled them.

Ivan appeared soon afterwards, and, surprisingly enough, he brought a supply of strong looking cigars for Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood. He also informed them that they could occupy themselves for a while in carrying the dirty dishes into the kitchen and washing them up. After that he retired.

"Well, I must say that our captors are treating us quite well," said Fighting Jim as he lit one of the cigars. "This thing is pungent, but none the less welcome. I've been dying for a smoke ever since I woke up. I wonder what will happen next?"

It wasn't long before the enemy made a move. The boys insisted upon doing all the washing up, and they had scarcely finished when they heard a sharp, decisive footstep on the stone flags of the corridor. Lee and Fighting Jim, who were talking by the fire, turned round to see a man of massive proportions entering the room.

At the very first glance Lee knew that this man was a personality. He was fully six feet in height, broad in proportion, and his florid face was clean shaven and full of strength of character. Only his eyes, alert and quick, were abnormal. His head was almost square, and his iron-grey hair shot up stiffly after the fashion of a clothes' brush. He was dressed in a loose-fitting lounge-suit of heavy tweed, and looked a typical country gentleman.

This man was Baron von Holtz, lord of this little domain—and, incidentally, the Terrestrial Master of the Fellowship of Fear.

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee Says "No."

FOR a moment or two there was a complete silence. The boys, who were standing near the kitchen entrance, looked at the newcomer eagerly. At the first glance they could see that he was different from any of the other men they had seen. In fact, he had such an air of refinement that they began to have wild hopes that something had happened to turn the tide of fortune.

"Introductions, I imagine, are superfluous," said the big man, his English perfect. "I

deal of Mr. Lee's activities. I am not a man who takes needless chances." He shrugged. "It is a pity. I do not, as a rule, wage warfare against schoolboys. They are the innocent victims of this unhappy situation."

"As their headmaster, I think I have a right to ask how long you intend to detain them," went on Mr. Kingswood. "They were seized violently, drugged, subjected to grave risks——"

"That we both know," interrupted the baron gently. "Unfortunately, the question you put to me is difficult to answer. I am afraid that they will be detained for a very long period. If our hopes of success are fulfilled, their detention may not extend beyond the year 1938—that is to say, five years. But it is possible——"

"Five years!" echoed the Head, aghast. "Man alive! Are you standing there, calmly

GRAND SERIES OF ST. FRANK'S STORIES STARTS NEXT WEEK!

**The True Story of Nipper's First Arrival At St. Frank's—
Told By Nipper Himself!**

Amazing !

Sensational !

Dramatic !

See Page 43 Of This Issue!

could have hoped, Mr. Nelson Lee, to have met you in happier circumstances. And I regret, Mr. James Kingswood, that it is your stubbornness which has led up to this present situation."

"You certainly made no mistake, baron, when you engineered our capture," replied Nelson Lee. "The task was accomplished most effectively by your operatives."

"You know me?" asked the baron bluntly.

"You are too modest, Marshal von Holtz," said Lee. "During the war, we had no greater general than yourself fighting against us. It is with regret that I comment upon your present lamentable campaign."

The baron laughed.

"It is only lamentable, in your eyes, my friend, because you do not know of the evils it will eventually eradicate," he replied. "I was forgetting, for the moment, that you succeeded in reading the secret code book of one of my section commanders. That man has paid the penalty for his gross incompetence. You, because of the knowledge you gained, have been brought here."

"And was it necessary to seize a number of schoolboys, too?" asked Mr. Kingswood, his anger rising as he noticed the calm complacency of the baron. "Why should they be made to suffer?"

"I regret the necessity for holding the schoolboys in captivity," replied Von Holtz. "But I was informed that they knew a great

proposing to hold these boys in captivity for five solid years?"

"It is but a short time," replied the baron, his eyes gleaming with a light which was akin to madness. "You two men and these eight boys are the only people in the world, beyond my own trusted lieutenants, who know that I am the Terrestrial Master of the Fellowship of Fear. Until my great plans materialise, I dare not allow any of you to leave this castle. Yet I am no murderer. Many men, perhaps, burdened by so many undesirables, would kill them out of hand. But that is not my way. I shall keep you here—and later, perhaps, the boys will become useful citizens of the great World Fellowship."

He looked round the room deprecatingly.

"You must allow me to apologise for the meagre accommodation," he continued. "I had very little notice of your coming. Within a few days I will have more comfortable furniture installed, and you shall all have good beds to sleep on. I would inform you, however, that this part of the castle is the limit of your freedom. You have every facility for eating, sleeping, and washing. The long corridor will serve you as an excellent exercise ground. Later on to-day I will see that books are sent into you—as time may hang heavily upon your hands. I will even procure school books from England so that you, Mr.

Kingswood, will be enabled to instruct your pupils."

They listened in a mixture of bewilderment and incredulity. The baron was so calm, so deliberate. The whole thing seemed fantastic. He was telling them that they were doomed to remain prisoners in this corner of Holtz Castle for years!

"I am relying upon your good sense, of course," went on the baron. "If you should be foolish enough to make any attempt to escape I cannot be answerable for the consequences. If any of you are killed in such a mad act, your blood will be upon your own head. While you accept your captivity with a good grace you will be sufficiently fed and well cared for. I think, Mr. Lee, that I am treating you all in a very fair manner. Please do not overlook the fact that my operatives could have killed you without difficulty."

Nelson Lee looked at him steadily.

"What, exactly, is your game?" he demanded.

"Game? You think I have some hidden motive?" said the baron, with a laugh. "Well, perhaps you are right. If you will come with me, Mr. Lee, I will satisfy your curiosity."

Nelson Lee had no option but to go. For, at a word from the baron, four big men, obviously ex-soldiers, strode smartly into the room. They closed round Nelson Lee like an escort, and at a word from the baron they marched the detective away. Lee had far too much sense to attempt any resistance.

"Guv'nor!" exclaimed Nipper anxiously.

"Tut-tut! Do not get into a panic," said Von Holtz. "Mr. Lee will return unharmed. You already know that I am not a man of violence."

But Nipper felt wildly uneasy. It came to him, then, that something dreadful was mapped out for Lee. The baron, for all his gentlemanly bearing and his smooth voice, was a man who sent involuntary shudders down Nipper's spine. There was something elusively devilish about him—and Mr. Kingswood, at least, had already arrived at the conclusion that the man was mad. But it was that form of madness which is so akin to sanity that in all outward respects he was normal. At the big gate one of the servants thrust it open. The escort marched through, followed by the baron. And all the time the man with the machine-gun remained alert.

The gate clanged, and Lee was taken along a wider, loftier corridor, and presently a great hall was reached, where massive stairs, with exquisitely carved banisters, led up to a wide balcony.

In this hall a great fire was blazing. They marched across to an arched doorway. Here the escort halted and parted, two standing on either side.

"If you will be good enough to come in, Mr. Lee," said the baron politely.

He opened the door, and Lee found himself in a comfortably furnished library, with book-lined walls, with cheerful windows, and

another roaring fire. There was a soft carpet on the floor, and many easy-chairs.

"While we are alone, I trust you will not attempt to take any liberties," said the baron. "I am a big man, Mr. Lee, and I am also armed. If you are foolish enough to attack me, one shot from my pistol—whether I miss you or not—will bring the guard into the room."

"I will try to behave," said Nelson Lee solemnly.

He was rather enjoying this singular episode, which, in spite of its grim reality, he could not help regarding as a comedy.

"We will sit in these big chairs," said the baron, with a wave of his hand. "You will smoke? Good! I do not intend to bore you with a recital of my ambitions. I will merely say that the Fellowship of Fear is my own conception; I am assisted by increasing numbers of loyal and devout adherents. This movement, which, I regret, is an underground movement at present, will one day burst upon the world like a new light."

"It is a pity, baron, that you are obliged to walk in the paths of the criminal in order to attain your ends," commented Lee gravely. "And what are these ends at best? Your fellowship advocates an upheaval of every law of civilisation."

"Ah!" exclaimed the baron, bending forward, his eyes again full of that strange fire. "Can you tell me what great movement has ever started openly? What of Christianity itself? Was it not an underground movement in the days of the Romans? Were not its adherents burnt at the stake and thrown to the lions? Every great movement for the good of humanity has started as something evil, something to be crushed underfoot. It is my aim to break down every barrier of nationality, of colour, and to make the world one vast fellowship. Civilisation as we know it to-day is rotten to the core. It cannot be swept aside in a day, or in a month, or in a year. But with the fellowship growing in membership daily, its teachings will grow like a rolling snowball, and sweep the world."

"You are playing with fire, Baron von Holtz," said Lee quietly. "What you are aiming at is an ideal. It is the dream of fanaticism, and can only lead to terrible bloodshed, devastation and disaster. Your fellowship, in spite of what you say, is using the methods of the barbarians. Men are subjected to terrorism, they are driven to suicide, they are violently seized and held in captivity——"

"Enough!" snarled the baron, his whole face distorted with rage. "These things are inevitable. Before we reach the millennium we must pass through periods of darkness and violence and death. Out of that chaos the new world will emerge."

Nelson Lee realised the hopelessness of argument. This man was obviously mad; he was assisted by hundreds—perhaps thousands—of similar fanatics. And they were used by the criminal classes of all countries to

further their own ends. The leaders of the fellowship believed in their own doctrines; but the rank and file were out plainly for loot.

It was the Ku Klux Klan all over again. That famous secret society had been started in the United States, soon after the Civil War, to put down lawlessness; but the criminals had taken advantage of the organisation and had started a reign of terror—until the Ku Klux Klan itself earned an evil, unenviable reputation.

"Why have you brought those schoolboys here?" asked Lee bluntly.

"Because, my friend, they are potential citizens of the future," replied the baron, his eyes aflame. "Here, in my own castle, I intend to instruct them. Cut off from their relatives, their friends, they will live under my constant vigilance. In the years to come they will be the new leaders of the fellowship movement. It is to the youth of the world that I must call. That is why I have devoted my attentions to schoolmasters in particular—urging them to adopt the teachings of the fellowship."

Lee had suspected this all along—and, inwardly, he was alarmed. This fanatic was in deadly earnest. He was seizing this opportunity to get a number of schoolboys under his direct control. If he had his way with them they would languish in this castle until they became grown men—and, strong-willed though they might be, they must inevitably succumb to his insistent teaching.

"That brings me to another point," continued the baron, before Lee could make any comment. "I have brought you here, Mr. Lee, because I wish you to write some letters at my dictation. They are to be addressed to Dr. Westlake and several other schoolmasters who were being held in captivity at the old deserted prison on Bannington Moor. Those schoolmasters were foolish enough to ignore the instructions of the fellowship. They have been removed to an old country manor in the heart of the Surrey hills—Maxley Manor, to be exact. You see, I do not hesitate to tell you this, as you are no longer a danger."

"What are these letters you speak of?" asked Lee.

"They are to be quite brief," said Von Holtz calmly. "You will advise them to embrace the doctrines of the fellowship—to give their sacred word that if they are returned to their schools, they will teach according to the fellowship's instructions. All these men can be returned without any danger to us, since they have never known the locations of their prisons, or the identity of their captors. You will further inform them that if they refuse, their continued obstinacy will be the cause of acute torture to yourself, Mr. Kingswood, and eight boys—torture which will ultimately end in madness and death. You will ask them to spare you all from this ordeal by obeying the orders."

And so, in that moment, Lee understood the underlying motive of his capture. As he

had said, it would have been easy enough for the fellowship to kill their victims. But by holding them captive they could be used as hostages—as a lever to force a number of unhappy schoolmasters to throw their principles overboard.

Lee thought quickly. The whole world was ringing with the disappearance of the eight boys and the two men. Without question, the imprisoned schoolmasters would be allowed to see the newspapers. What could they do, on receipt of Lee's letters, but succumb to the fellowship's demands? If they refused they would bring torture and death to the innocent victims. They would be in an appalling predicament.

"Very ingenious, baron," said the detective. "I congratulate you upon this clever little scheme. But I am afraid you are going to be disappointed. I shall write no such letters; I shall not be the cause of compelling those unhappy gentlemen to make such a drastic decision. Either they have our torture on their conscience, or they teach their boys doctrines which are quite against their principles. Oh, no! I'm afraid there's nothing doing."

The baron was quite unperturbed.

"I was expecting you to make that reply, Mr. Lee," he said. "To-morrow, at this same hour, you may prove more reasonable. Or perhaps the next day—or the day after. I am in no hurry. We will see."

He rose abruptly to his feet, and brought an enormous hammer down on an ornamental gong. The clang echoed and re-echoed throughout the book-lined apartment, and the door opened and the escort marched in.

"Take him," said the baron in German. "You have your instructions."

There was a vast difference in Lee's treatment now. The tiger was showing his fangs. Two of the men sprang forward and clamped some heavy steel manacles round Lee's arms, pinioning his arms cruelly behind him, and in such a position that he could not move them without agony. The instrument employed was evidently some form of medieval invention which had been borrowed from the castle museum.

The detective was marched smartly across the hall, but now, instead of being taken back to his fellow captives, he was escorted down a narrower corridor, and then through an arched doorway and down a flight of steep, winding stone stairs.

As they descended, the two men in advance switched on their electric torches, and they went deeper and deeper into the depths. This, no doubt, was a way into the castle dungeons.

Presently they came upon a passage so narrow that they were obliged to walk in single file. It was cold and dank, with the smell of a graveyard. The escort halted at last in front of a low metal-studded door. It was standing wide open, and the key was sticking out of the lock. Without a word Lee was thrust into the doorway, and here there was a slight pause while the clamps were removed from his arms. Then he was pushed

violently forward, and the door was slammed. Lee heard the key turned in the lock; he heard the tramping of footsteps as the escort took its departure.

"Solitary confinement," muttered Lee. "Well, thank goodness they didn't leave that infernal instrument on my arms."

But his position was appalling enough.

He found that the "dungeon" was so shaped that while it was impossible for him to stand in an upright position, owing to the lowness of the roof, it was equally impossible for him to lie down. He was compelled to adopt a crouching attitude, and from this there was no relief. For when he felt carefully about him, he found that the walls, which pressed so closely around him, were festooned with sharply-pointed prongs.

A hideous torture chamber indeed!

For here he could neither recline nor sleep. He could not rest his body either one way or the other. The door itself was spiked in the same way. And its lock was of the utmost solidity. Pressure upon it was impossible owing to the spikes.

The detective could only avoid the prongs by remaining in the half-crouching attitude he now adopted. And he knew that he would be suffering the most appalling tortures from cramp before a single hour had passed. And he knew that he was doomed to remain here for twenty-four—then to be removed and taken to the baron's library, to be once again urged to write the necessary letters.

"I'm afraid, Baron von Holtz, that you have made an exceedingly bad blunder," murmured Nelson Lee complacently. "For in locking me up in this hell-hole you have given me the one chance I needed."

The detective was fairly throbbing with eagerness. Just as he had worked "black magic" at the old Moor Prison, so he would work it here!

He had been searched since he had arrived in Holtz Castle—searched whilst he lay unconscious. But he knew that the searchers had overlooked that cunningly devised "skin pocket" of his which had also been overlooked by the searchers at the Moor Prison.

In that pocket, which was apparently a part of his own flesh, he carried a number of incredibly fine steel instruments—instruments which he had devised and constructed with his own hands, some of them occupying months in the making. They included files, drills, and amazingly slim but strong pick-locks.

He set to work on the task of conquering the lock of his prison door with unbounded relish.

CHAPTER 4.

The Guardians of the Night.

THE afternoon passed flaggingly for the prisoners.

Nipper was jumpy and restless.

Nobody had come near them since that midday meal. Nelson Lee had not returned, and no word of him had been sent.

The boys, for the most part, wandered about the rooms and corridors, talking endlessly on the subject of escape. Handforth, in particular, evolved the most desperate and impossible plans. Archie Glenthorne, philosophic as ever, retired to the bed-room and calmly went to sleep. Perhaps he was the most sensible of them all.

Nothing happened at the usual tea hour. But when the day was ending, and the twilight was making itself manifest, Ivan reappeared with another tray. It contained liberal quantities of roughly-cut bread-and-butter and a large kettle of thick, highly-sweetened chocolate.

"Why has Mr. Lee not come back?" asked Nipper at once.

Ivan shrugged.

"No?" he said, with a queer look of sly cunning on his face. "But Mr. Lee is with my master."

"He's not!" snapped Nipper. "I can tell by the look on your face that you're lying! What's happened to Mr. Lee?"

"I know nothing," replied Ivan.

He went out again, leaving them to their meal—evidently supper. Nipper was now thoroughly alarmed, and at first he did not want to eat. They heard the clanging of the wrought iron gate, and they knew that they would not be visited again until the next morning. Mr. Kingswood persuaded Nipper to sit down with the others.

"I suppose you're right, sir," said Nipper. "But I feel it in my bones that that devil has done something awful to the gov'nor. Why did he take him away? He's using him somehow."

"I am just as anxious as you," said Fighting Jim quietly. "But in our present position we can do nothing. We can only wait."

None of the boys realised, by his calm exterior, how he was suffering. For Fighting Jim was a man of action, and he, too, believed that Nelson Lee was in sore straits.

A new discovery was made—by Handforth—soon after the meal was over. The corridor was nearly dark now, and he moved towards the iron gate. A low growl attracted his attention; and when he arrived at the gate and peered through, he saw two enormous shaggy forms moving restlessly up and down on the other side of the bars. They were Alsatian wolfhounds of ferocious aspect.

"Great Scott!" muttered Handforth in some awe.

He ventured a little nearer, and one of the powerful dogs made a rush at the gate, snapping and snarling like a wolf.

"You brutes!" panted Handforth, backing away.

Church and McClure, who were looking for him, heard his voice, and they joined him. The other fellows were coming, too.

"What's the trouble?" asked Church.

"Trouble enough," retorted Handforth grimly. "No need to discuss any further plans of escape, my sons. Look behind this gate! Wolves! Wolves as big as tigers!"

"Rats!"

But when Church and McClure took a closer look in the gloom they were very startled. Then the others came, and Mr. Kingswood advised them all to keep well clear of the gate. There was not a great deal of space between the bars, but the dogs were

with Tregellis-West and Watson. "I'd give quids to know what's happened to him. I can't help thinking that he's in some awful trouble——"

"Look out! Something happening," murmured Sir Montie.

The dogs had loped away, and the flickering light of a big lantern had made itself apparent. For footsteps sounded smartly on the flagstones, and almost at once a party of armed guards appeared, with Baron von Holtz himself at their rear.

The men stood at attention, with levelled weapons, as the baron pulled the great lever



Kingswood stood rigid at the top of the tower, the mirror in his hand, sending the flashing sun rays across the valley. Would those flashes be seen and understood by anyone in the distant town? Would they bring help to the prisoners in time?

evidently familiar with the gate, and they knew just where they could strike effectively.

"They are Alsatian wolfhounds," said the headmaster quietly. "I suspect that they are half-wild—deliberately allowed to get into that state. No, boys, there's no possibility of escape. We must resign ourselves to our position."

They noted that the man with the machine-gun had gone. During the hours of darkness, no doubt, the baron felt that the machine-gunner could be dispensed with, since he was only there to protect the exit when the gate was opened. The gate was not to be opened again until the morning. The dogs were sufficient guard.

"This means that the gov'nor isn't coming back to-night," muttered Nipper, as he stood

which automatically released the foot-long bolts. The Alsations were frisking round the baron almost playfully, their tails wagging. This proved one thing, at least. The dogs were not actually savage. They had evidently been trained to exhibit their savagery to strangers—to people who were imprisoned behind the wrought iron gate.

"I trust, my friends, that your evening meal was satisfactory?" asked the baron, when he was inside and the gate had been reclosed. "You must not expect luxuries, but——"

"We're not worrying about the food," interrupted Mr. Kingswood curtly. "We would like to know what you have done with Mr. Nelson Lee. Why is he not here with the rest of us?"

"Mr. Lee is otherwise engaged."

"What does that mean—exactly?" demanded Nipper. "What have you done with him? Why has he been separated from us?"

"Well! Am I supposed to answer the impertinent questions of my captives?" said the baron amusedly. "No, my child! I can assure you that you are wasting your breath. Mr. Lee is alive—and well. I trust he will continue to retain his excellent health."

He laughed softly, and there was something in that laugh which sent shivers down the spines of his hearers. Nipper, at least, did not doubt that Lee was being subjected to some kind of torture. Otherwise, why had the baron made such a definite reference to his health?

"You—you brute!" burst out Handforth recklessly. "You can't fool us! You've put Mr. Lee into a torture chamber, or something! But we'll get the better of you one of these days——"

"I am a reasonable man, and I am allowing for your excitement in these unusual circumstances," said the baron, in his quiet voice. "Therefore, boy, I will overlook your insult. But do not let it occur again. After to-day, those of you who insult me shall be thrashed. I have my own methods of thrashing. So be warned."

In spite of his quietness, his voice was charged with a grim threat. The prisoners stood silent, helpless. Handforth might have been foolish enough to attack the baron; he had already clenched his fists, and his body had become rigid. But Church and McClure, knowing that the guards on the other side of the gate were ready with their guns, took a tight hold on Handforth, and held him back.

"Easy, old man," whispered Church. "What's the good? We're like the poor serfs used to be in the Middle Ages. Up here, in these mountains, we're lost. If two or three of us get killed, who's to know? Don't give the blighter the satisfaction of killing us."

"Perhaps you're right," muttered Handforth.

The baron was smiling again.

"Now that we understand one another, let me add that the second gate, at the end of the far corridor, is similarly guarded by two savage wolf-hounds. I should advise you not to attempt anything silly, as these dogs are killers. Furthermore, guards are within earshot and will immediately come if there is any sound of disturbance. That is all. In the morning you will have your breakfast brought to you—and after that your course of instruction will begin."

"Our course of instruction?" repeated Mr. Kingswood.

"I am addressing the boys, mainly," replied the baron. "It is not advisable that they should be left idle. You will be given certain lesson-books, my friend, and you will act in your capacity of schoolmaster—and will take your boys for certain fixed hours during the day."

Fighting Jim looked hard at the baron.

"You mean—fellowship doctrines?" he asked.

"What else?"

"Then you can make other plans, for I shall refuse to teach my boys any such harmful——"

"Tut-tut! You are in no position, Mr. Kingswood, to refuse this or refuse that," interrupted Von Holtz. "You will do as you are told—or suffer the consequences. Those consequences, I may add, will be serious. While you obey orders, and give me no trouble, you will be treated well. But if you defy me——"

He broke off, and he shrugged. The unuttered threat was more effective than any amount of words. He said no more. With a last look round he turned on his heel and the gate was opened for him. Evidently he had made this visit to see how his prisoners were accepting their fate. Furthermore, he wanted to make sure that his orders had been strictly carried out.

The metal clanged, the bolts were shot home, and the tramping sound followed. Then, at length, silence. With the departure of the guard, the lights had gone, too, and as the day had faded completely, the prisoners were left in total darkness. They could faintly hear the occasional movements of the guarding wolfhounds.

"Well, it's no good standing here," said Mr. Kingswood, at length. "Better get into our bed-room, boys. Supper is over, and we're not allowed to have any lights. Nothing left to do except sleep."

"A bright and brainy scheme, sir," observed Archie.

"You're taking it philosophically, sir," said Nipper, striving hard to hide the anxiety in his voice. "If the gov'nor was here with us it wouldn't be so bad. If only that square-headed old rotter had told us what he had done with Mr. Lee. It's this uncertainty——"

"You'll only get yourself into a sleepless condition by talking in that way," broke in Mr. Kingswood, laying a hand on Nipper's shoulder. "It's no earthly good, lad. There's no reason to fear that Mr. Lee is in any danger. Perhaps we shall know more in the morning."

"You're right, sir," said Nipper. "I ought to be boiled for worrying at all. I ought to have more faith in the gov'nor. But I don't see why we should go to bed yet. Why not go for a long walk down the big corridor, and keep it up, to and fro, for about an hour?"

"Odds rot and nonsense," protested Archie. "I mean to say, what a perfectly poisonous suggestion."

"Exercise, my lad," explained Nipper. "It'll make us tired."

"But, dash it, I'm tired already."

"Then a good walk will make you tireder, you slacking ass!"

Most of them fell in eagerly with Nipper's suggestion. They were not a bit sleepy, and

a long walk up and down the "exercise ground" seemed to be the best way of working off some of their surplus energy, and getting them into a fit condition for sleep.

When they arrived, at length, at the distant gate, they saw, in the semi-darkness, two other shaggy forms prowling about beyond the ironwork. So the baron was right. There were wolfhounds here, too.

"It seems a needless precaution," remarked Church. "There's not a chance in a million that we could break the gates down. We haven't a weapon of any kind between the lot of us—and not even a light."

"Those beastly dogs are put there more for effect than anything else," said Nipper. "Of course, if one of us did manage to get out, the dogs would practically tear him to pieces before help could come. But what's the good of wasting our breath? We're

but he's a glorious old boy, really. Dogs need understanding, that's all."

"Try to understand these brutes, then," said his brother.

And while the boys were walking, Willy carefully approached the nearer gate and whistled softly to the great animals. At first they took no notice. He could only just see them faintly in the semi-darkness.

He was glad that he was alone. He could not even hear the voices of the others now, for they had turned the bend in the corridor, and were a good way off. No guard was visible, but a faint reflection of light from beyond a stone angle, some twenty yards on the other side of the gate, indicated that a man was on duty in that direction. It was evident, in fact, that the guards themselves were not inclined to trust the great hounds.

Who Is Mr. Alvington?

The boys of St. Frank's little guess the real identity of their new Housemaster—

Can You Guess?

Whether you can or not, don't miss next week's absorbing story of St. Frank's.

bottled up here for good, by the look of things."

He was despondent—and with very good reason. Even Handforth, who was usually so crazily optimistic, gave up hope and resigned himself to captivity. He had exhausted his inventive genius; he had suggested so many hopeless ideas of escape that even his active brain refused to work any more.

"Let's get to bed," he grunted disconsolately.

There was one prisoner who had not accepted the theory that the Alsatians were untamable. And that prisoner, needless to say, was Willy Handforth, of the St. Frank's Third Form.

Willy had a "way" with animals. There was no mistake about this; even Willy himself could not quite understand it, or explain it. But animals took to him by instinct, and the most savage brutes would make friends with him, whilst attacking all others. Even wild beasts of the forest had been tamed by Willy's mere presence. He seemed to possess an affinity with all the lower creatures—and Edward Oswald always attributed this to the undoubted fact that Willy himself was a young beast.

"Wolfhounds aren't naturally savage," said Willy, just before the others went on their exercise walk. "What about Mr. Lee's own Alsatian, Wolf? He's savage with crooks,

Again Willy whistled—a soft, peculiar, encouraging whistle.

"Come on, old chaps!" he called softly. "No need to be afraid of me. Let's get together! Good boy—good boy! Come on!"

Thus he persisted, and perhaps it was that mysterious instinct, rather than the tone of his voice, which at length caused one of the dogs to leave the pile of straw on which he was lying, and come across to the gate. He did so slowly, his ears cocked, his eyes gleaming luminously in the gloom.

"That's better," whispered Willy. "I'm your pal, don't forget. Let's pat your head, old man. Might as well give you a scratch, too. You'll be a queer sort of dog if you don't like being scratched."

Willy's hand was small, and he managed to get it sideways between two of the wrought-iron bars. He did this fearlessly, crouching down low, so that he was on a level with the dog. The latter, coming nearer, sniffed suspiciously at first, but he made no attempt to snap or snarl.

And soon, astonishingly enough, the dog rubbed his great muzzle against Willy's hand, and in a moment Willy was scratching him under the chin, fondling his ears and making himself friendly. It was really an astounding exhibition of Willy's mysterious power over animals. Perhaps it was his very fearlessness which won the friendship of such creatures. They must have known instinct-

ively that he was their friend—and that he was in no fear of them.

Presently the other dog came over, jealous, as dogs invariably are. He pushed his companion aside, and rubbed his cold nose against Willy's hand. Then he licked Willy's hand, and playfully took the whole hand into his mouth. Willy could faintly see the enormous animal's tail wagging to and fro with obvious delight.

"That's better!" said Willy cheerfully. "No reason why we should be enemies, is there? Good boys! It's a pity you can't pull the bolts of this giddy door and let us out."

He had no thought of escape. There was no ulterior motive in his action. Being a lover of animals, he merely wanted to get on good terms with the dogs. Furthermore, it would be rather a feather in his cap to show his brother just how things stood. Handforth was always sceptical of Willy's powers.

Having made himself thoroughly friendly, and having established an understanding, as it were, between them, he withdrew his hand, said a few parting words to the dogs, and strolled away.

As it happened the others were returning at that moment, their intention being to seek their mattresses without any further delay.

"Hallo! What the dickens have you been doing?" asked Handforth, as he recognised the smallish figure of his minor. "I wondered

where you were, Willy. Why didn't you come for a walk?"

"I've been making friends with the dogs," replied Willy.

"Don't make me laugh!"

"We're getting on famously now," continued Willy calmly. "I've scratched their ears, and they've licked my hand, and everything is understood. They're my pals, and I'm their pal."

"You don't expect us to believe that?" asked Handforth incredulously.

Mr. Kingswood took Willy by the shoulder.

"You haven't really tried to make friends with the dogs?" he asked sharply. "You mustn't do it, my boy. It's dangerous. With one clamp of their jaws they could bite your hand off."

Willy laughed.

"So could any big dog, sir—if it liked," he replied. "So could a horse. But they don't, do they? Animals are safe enough if you only understand them. If you'll stay here and make no noise, I'll just show you how friendly I am with the beggars."

He did so—to the Head's amazement. He went to the gate again, called to the dogs, and they came running to him. Even in that gloom they could see the shaggy figures against the bars, and they could hear the dogs' whines of welcome and greeting.

"Well I'll be sugared!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"THE CALL OF THE SEA"



In this week's GEM Martin Clifford writes a ripping story of a boy who wanted to go to sea but was sent to school at St. Jim's instead! Good as St. Jim's was, it did not satisfy this boy with a craving for the sea. Time and again he attempted to run away—time and again Tom Merry and Co. got on his trail and brought him back—but nothing could break his spirit! His father had been a sailor—the call of the sea was in his blood! Get a copy of the GEM to-day and read this grand long yarn. Don't delay—order your copy now!

Ask for the

G E M

Now on Sale 2d.

"Astounding!" murmured Mr. Kingswood.

He approached nearer, in order to obtain a closer look; but as soon as the dogs became aware of his proximity they backed away, snarling. It was a clear proof that they were as savage as Mr. Kingswood had first believed them to be. Only Willy possessed this remarkable power over them.

"It's all right, sir—it won't take me long to convince them that you're my friends, and then they'll be as gentle with you as they are with me," said Willy. "Not that it really makes any difference. The dogs will only be on duty at night."

"But wait a minute," said Handforth eagerly. "Come in here, all of you."

They went into the great gloomy sleeping chamber.

"Can't we take advantage of Willy's power over the dogs?" asked Handforth. "There might be some way of escape——"

"Don't be an ass, Ted," interrupted Willy impatiently. "I may be able to get friendly with the beggars, but I can't perform miracles. I can't make them unbolt the gate, can I?"

"Your brother is quite right, Handforth," said Mr. Kingswood. "It's no good getting these fantastic hopes. We'd better turn in."

They took a last look out of the slit-like windows, and, miles away, in the clear evening air, they could see the faint, twinkling lights of Holtzhausen, the township which nestled miles away at the lower end of the valley.

"So near and yet so far," murmured Tommy Watson, with a sigh. "There are police in that town—telephones, telegraphs, wireless! All sorts of ways in which we could tell people in England that we're safe, and prisoners in Holtz Castle. But what's the good? We might as well be a thousand miles away."

CHAPTER 5.

Nelson Lee on the Job.

CLICK!

Something inside the massive lock of the dungeon door answered to the persuasive thrusts of Nelson Lee's tiny but powerful instrument.

Hours had passed since Lee had been thrown into that devil-dungeon. The detective was satisfied that none of his captors would come near him until noon the next day—perhaps not until later. So he worked freely, and he knew that the hour was now mid-evening.

He was in intense agony, for his crouching position had given him such painful cramp that at times he was obliged to cease his labours and twist and turn about in order to obtain a slight measure of relief.

It must be realised that Lee was constantly buoyed by the hope that at any minute he would gain his liberty. He had supreme confidence in those masterly tools of his, and in his own skill to use them.

Without these tools, without such hope, his plight would have been forlorn, indeed. He was enabled to carry on, to fight gamely, to work with his tiny drills and pick-locks until the perspiration dripped down his face and soaked his collar. He had known from the first that his task would be formidable. Perhaps impossible. But there was always the chance of victory.

He believed that the dungeon door was secured by means of the lock alone. There might be bolts, but, if so, he had not heard them being shot into their sockets. If there were bolts, he would have to persevere with his drills, and with other delicate tools which were specially designed for the conquering of bolts. In that case, he would be at work until long after dawn.

Unhampered by his unnatural crouching position he could have progressed faster. But there was no pluckier man living than Nelson Lee, no man with a stronger will. He was not thinking of himself alone. There were eight schoolboys imprisoned in this castle—doomed to remain here, if the fanatical baron had his way, for years. And Lee felt responsible for the boys. To escape from this torture dungeon was essential. It just had to be done.

Click-click!

This time the sound was louder, and Lee distinctly felt some spring, or catch, give way. And to his unbounded joy he felt the door move slightly outwards. A current of cold, dank air swept into his face.

"By James!" he muttered hoarsely.

He had succeeded! The lock was beaten; the door was open. He almost fell out, and such was his cramp that he stumbled, crashed to the hard floor, and lay there for several minutes in excruciating agony.

But at length he pulled himself to his feet, and the joy of standing upright, at his full height, was almost beyond belief. His first move, now, was to carefully store his delicate tools—packing them away, once again, in that hidden skin-pocket of his. He was willing to swear that his captors would detect no damage to the lock—unless they examined it at close quarters, with minute care. Lee had bored two tiny drill holes, and through these he had inserted his patent pick-locks, manipulating them with that skill, with that touch, which he alone knew.

He closed the door, and, as he had expected, the key was hanging close at hand, on a big hook. He had no means of seeing, as the darkness was pitchy, but after feeling about for some minutes he located the key, placed it in the lock, turned it, and then rehung it on its hook. He chuckled as he did so. It was the Moor Prison experience all over again—but this time the possibilities were a thousandfold more dramatic.

Lee's memory was of the best. On his way to this dungeon he had taken note of every yard of the distance; he had memorised every slope, every turn of the passage, and he had counted every step. Now that he

had secured his liberty he went forward confidently.

The passage was extremely narrow, and it was black, and the silence was like that of a tomb. He had been left down here, in the dungeons, without any guard. Why, indeed, should a guard be necessary? Von Holtz had naturally assumed that Lee, like many another prisoner before him, would be safe enough in that torture hole.

Reaching the end of the passage at last, Lee came to a winding stairway, with stone steps, which led upwards. So accurate were his calculations, that his foot touched the first step five yards beyond the spot where he had first commenced feeling for it. He knew there was a door at the top of this stairway, but he was prepared to spend another hour or two with his tools, if necessary. The hour was not yet late; he had met with greater success than he had anticipated.

To his intense satisfaction the door was not locked. It was not even closed. He passed through into another corridor, and now his condition was vastly improved, for there were tiny windows here, and through them the faint starlight was admitted. After the stygian blackness of the underground passage, it seemed to Lee that he was walking in comparative light.

Caution was his watchword now. His aim was to locate the boys. He believed them to be on this same floor. But locating them, alone, would not be sufficient. And he knew that escape from the castle was next-door to impossible. He must think of some other plan—some strategic move which would place the prisoners in a position of advantage. And this was no mean ambition.

The part of the castle in which he now roamed was empty—uninhabited. By peering through the narrow windows he gained a fairly accurate idea as to his position. In one place he saw, jutting out black against the skyline, an immense round tower, rising upwards menacingly. This was the great central tower of the castle.

With his directions memorised, he silently traversed another corridor, and then came to an enormous door which was set in a deep stone recess. When he opened this door he discovered, beyond, a circular stairway mounting upwards.

This was the tower.

The door, he found, was provided with massive bolts on the inner side, and the door itself was nearly eight inches in thickness. There was no stairway leading downwards, but just a solid wall. The narrow stairs led up, and the same slit-like windows in the walls were very much deeper than any others he had seen. The tower walls, in fact, were seven or eight feet thick. That enormously bulky tower was virtually solid, containing nothing but this single stairway leading to the top. And when, at length, Lee arrived at the top he found there a turret room of considerable size—and, above it, reached by a tiny stairway, a flat roof. It was good to stand up there, in the open air, and to see

the twinkling lights of Holtzhausen in the distance. The view from this lofty eminence was very much better than the view obtained by the boys lower down. Lee could see the whole town—and in the crystal atmosphere he could even detect the snake-like luminosity of a moving train.

Closer at hand—immediately below him, in fact, lights were gleaming from some of the lower windows of the castle—and they were in the main wing. The baron, evidently, had not yet gone to bed. Lee was in no hurry. He made himself comfortable against the battlements, and with a cool air fanning his brow, he gave himself up to a half-hour of intense thinking.

He arrived at some sort of plan.

This tower would serve excellently as a refuge. There was only one entrance—and that was guarded by a massive door which would defy any battering ram. As it was quite impossible for the captives to escape from the castle, the next best thing was for them to seize a portion of the castle, and to hold a kind of glorified barring-out. The very commotion of such an affair might attract attention. Lee had another idea, too—one which gave him much hope.

But that was for the morrow. There was plenty to be done to-night. The very task of getting the captives here might be insuperable. Food was scarcely to be thought of. Well, it didn't matter. They could last out for four or five days, if needs be, and if help did not arrive by the end of that time it would never arrive.

The detective, now feeling more his own self, descended the tower stairs and stole out into the darkened hall of the deserted wing. He passed down another corridor after opening a big communicating door. And now he knew, at once, that he was in the inhabited part of the castle. The very smell of the air was different. In places he saw lamps hanging from brackets, and one or two coarse mats lay in front of doors.

He opened one or two of the doors and soon made some interesting discoveries—discoveries he had not even hoped for, or reckoned upon. In one cupboard, or store-room, he was struck by the pungent odour which assailed his nostrils. It was a sourish, fishy smell, and soon, by feeling, he learned that there were some big barrels here. There were shelves, too, filled with bottles and jars. But it was the barrels which attracted him. He crouched low, sniffing at them inquisitively. Two, he was convinced, were filled with salted herrings—which are much used on the Continent. Another barrel, much bigger, was, he believed, packed with sauerkraut—or, to be more exact, the hard, white cabbage, tightly packed and salted, from which sauerkraut is made.

"Food!" thought Lee gloatingly. "This is a great stroke of luck."

He did not linger. Pressing on, he came nearer and nearer to the iron gate which would lead him into the prisoners' quarters. He did not forget the man with the machine-

gun, or the other guards. The most ticklish part of his task lay ahead of him.

He explored one or two other rooms on the way, and he made another lucky discovery in one of the small stone cupboards which opened out from a secondary hall. Feeling carefully round, the first thing his fingers encountered was the cold steel barrel of a rifle. His heart leapt. Never in his wildest moments had he hoped to obtain possession of a weapon.

He felt it carefully, and found that it was a magazine rifle of a famous make familiar to him. The magazine was full, and the weapon was apparently in good order. He did not trouble to seek further, although he guessed that this cupboard was a small arsenal. It would come in handy later. That one weapon was all he needed at the moment.

Padding on again, he became aware of the fact that a faint light was glowing round an angle of the passage. He could hear, too, steady breathing. The absence of conversation told him that there was only one man on guard—or, if there were others, they were remarkably silent. Like a shadow, he crept to the angle of the wall, and, taking a chance, peered round.

He was looking into an arched hallway, gloomy and shadowy, but at the far end a big fire glowed warmly in an old-fashioned open grate. On the carved mantelpiece overhead stood a lighted lantern. And sitting in front of the fire, smoking, was a heavily-built man in the loose trousers and green pleated jacket of the baron's retainers. Next to his chair stood a rifle.

"This ought to be easy," thought Lee.

He did not hesitate for long. It might be foolhardy to wait on the offchance of the man falling asleep. Perhaps he would be joined by a companion soon—and then the two of them would remain on duty throughout the night. Nelson Lee believed in acting while he had the opportunity. A lost opportunity might never be regained.

With the utter, unbelievable silence of a Red Indian tracker he crept forward, edging along the wall so that his back was always against it, and so that he would approach the chair from the rear. This was no time for humane thoughts. He would have to act drastically.

At any second the man might turn and see him—and shout the alarm. But Nelson Lee's cleverness won the day. He got within striking distance, then, with calm deliberation, he swung his rifle, and brought the stock of it with stunning force against the man's head.

Thud!

The sound was almost inaudible. The man himself sagged down in his chair and did not even fall out of it. In a flash, Lee was round, and his first action was to grab the automatic pistol from the holster at the man's waist. He spun round, ready to deal with any other enemies. But no sounds reached his ears save the gentle crackling of the fire. He quickly examined his victim, and was soon

satisfied and relieved—to find that the man was only stunned. His skull had not been fractured by that blow.

Working rapidly, Lee ripped off his own clothing, stripped the guard of his outer garb, and donned it. With his own clothing he bound the man tightly, gagged him, and then heaved him across his shoulders—a comparatively easy task, as he was able to prop the man in the chair and thus gain a leverage.

He carried the man up one of the dark corridors to a narrow, cellar-like cavity he had previously found. Inside, he struck a match—one of the guard's matches—and by the aid of this light he carried his prisoner to a deep recess at the far end. He left him there, withdrew, locked the door, and took the key.

He was now glowing with very confident hope. For it seemed to him that that man was the only guard left on duty for the night. Well, there was no sense in delaying matters. He would act boldly, and at once.

Returning to the arched hallway, he found it still empty. Taking the lantern he moved forward, and walked down an arched corridor, and the gleams from his lantern played upon the wrought-iron gate just ahead. And then, for the first time, he saw something else—and the sight gave him pause.

There was a recess in this passage, and he was first attracted by the sight of something yellowish, straw. Then he saw a movement, and four greenish points of light shot out at him like miniature searchlights. It was the first Lee knew of the Alsatian wolfhounds. He began to understand why only one man had been left on guard. These brutes were the real guardians of the gate!

Nelson Lee's heart thudded faster as he realised the chance he had unwittingly taken. If he had made the slightest unfamiliar noise during his encounter with the guard, these two dogs would have flown at him. As it was, they had remained in their bed, and even now they mistook him for the guard himself. It was a good thing he had changed clothes with the man. The only thing was to walk on confidently—and this he did.

He had almost reached the gate, and was holding his lamp aloft, in order to discover the method by which it could be unbolted, when one of the dogs gave a sudden snarl. Lee glanced round. Both animals were on their feet, their ears were low, their backs were ridged. And they were showing their fangs malevolently.

"Quiet—quiet!" murmured Lee, in German. "Lie down, you rascals!"

But by this time the dogs had something other than their eyesight to instruct them. They had obtained Lee's scent. They knew he was a stranger. And then, with one accord, they hurled themselves at him, and he was obliged to drop the lamp. It fell with a clatter to the stone floor, but did not go out—falling, remarkably enough, in an upright position. But there was no time for Lee to pull back the safety catch of his automatic. In any case, if he had fired it, he

would have brought the whole castle household about his ears.

Crash!

The foremost hound had charged at his chest, and Lee was bowled over like a nine-pin. Quick as lightning he reached his hands up and grasped the dog's throat. He was on his back now, fighting for his very life. Both dogs were attempting to get their fearsome fangs at Lee's own throat, and the fight was appalling in its ferocity.

CHAPTER 6.

The Moonlight "Flit."

WILLY HANDFORTH sat up sharply. He did not know what had awakened him at first. Faint starlight was glimmering through the narrow windows, intensifying the utter blackness of the corners of the room. All about him he could hear the steady breathing of his fellow unfortunates. They were all soundly asleep.

From somewhere outside came a sound, and this time Willy jumped. It was the unmistakable snarling of the wolfhounds. There had been no actual barking—no great commotion. Willy could hear a strange kind of shuffling, too, and the snarling increased.

He flung the blankets aside, and like a rabbit he ran to the door—which stood wide open—and reached the corridor.

"Great Scott!" he gasped.

He could see the lantern burning on the floor—and the figure of a man struggling desperately with the two great dogs. The man had managed to take each of them by the throat, and for the moment was holding them off. But it was obviously a losing battle, and he could not last many more seconds.

Willy ran to the gate, and then he nearly shouted in his astonishment and joy. For he recognised the man who was fighting for his life.

"Mr. Lee!" whispered Willy breathlessly.

But at the same moment he knew that Lee was not in a position to answer. Willy's arrival on the scene was like a stroke of providence. He saw, in a flash, that here was his big chance. He whistled softly to the dogs, and then commenced calling.

Even he did not know the actual words he used. Perhaps he did not use any recognisable words at all. It was the tone of his voice which did the trick. First one dog, and then the other leapt back from the attack. They stood with bared fangs and ridged backs, dividing their attention between Lee and the schoolboy behind the gate. Lee did not move an inch. He knew that this was touch and go. If Willy failed the dogs would attack him again. If he made the slightest move the dogs would forget Willy and go for him once more.

"I'm surprised at you!" said Willy coaxingly. "Don't you know a friend of mine

when you see one?" He made curious soothing noises. "That's better! Come on, old chaps! Don't forget that I'm your pal."

It was an extraordinary exhibition of Willy's power over animals. That first display had been remarkable enough, but this was amazing. The dogs, with their ears



As the leader of the Fellowship of Fear mounted the Nelson Lee sent a shot whistling past his ear. the next bullet wi

flattened in sheepish shame, approached the gate. The ridges on their backs went down and their tails began to wag slowly.

"That's better," said Willy encouragingly. "Come here, old chaps. Come along! Mr. Lee, you'd better work that bolt!" he added casually. "I don't think they'll attack you again. They know they've made a mistake. Let me get at 'em, and I'll soon have them tamed."

Nelson Lee, very dishevelled, was on his feet. He knew, by what he had previously

seen, just where the operating lever was situated—a clear two yards from the gate itself—so that by no possibility could it be reached by a prisoner within. At Lee's touch the bolts, of enormous length, slid out of their great sockets and the gate swung outwards. In a flash Willy was through, and fearlessly he ran at the two dogs and fondled them. Their evidences of delight were obvious.

"Now, come here!" said Willy sternly. "Mr. Lee, you'd better come, too. They're friendly enough, really."

Curiously enough, the dogs were no longer savage. When Nelson Lee patted them they wagged their tails and showed every sign of friendliness. But Lee was under no misapprehension. It was Willy's presence, alone,



steps, he came suddenly upon the barricade. Crack! Stop!" cried the detective. "If you come nearer be for your heart!"

which had brought about this change of temper.

"Are you hurt, sir?" asked Willy anxiously, after a while.

"A scratch or two, but the wounds are of no account," replied Lee. "No need to have them cauterised, for these dogs are healthy enough. I'm lucky to have escaped with my life. You saved me, young 'un. I shan't forget."

"But I did nothing, sir!" protested Willy.

"What I want to know is how you got here. What does it all mean?"

"It means that we might have a chance of escape—not immediately, but we will at least get out of this part of the castle," replied Lee. "Do you know if there were two men on guard here, or only one?"

"One, I think, sir, and these dogs."

"Good!"

"What's become of that one man, sir?"

"I'm afraid I had to knock him on the head, and borrow his clothes," replied Lee, his eyes blazing. "The chances are that no alarm has been given, and that the rest of the castle will remain quiet for the whole night. We have the night to ourselves."

Willy spoke gently to the dogs, and they went back to their straw beds and laid down. As a precautionary measure, Willy remained with them—since he was the only one of the party who could, with certainty, prevent them from making an outcry.

Lee entered the sleeping chamber, carrying the lantern with him. He closed the door, and Mr. Kingswood at once sat up. The headmaster had not been sleeping too soundly, but he had had one or two erratic naps.

"Why have you come back?" he asked. "It is not yet eleven— Why, what on earth— Lee!"

"Not so loud," warned the detective.

"But, man alive, I don't understand—"

"Guv'nor!" exclaimed another voice.

Nipper fairly leapt off his mattress and rushed at Lee. After that it was only a moment or two before the other captives were awake and gathering round in a wildly excited mob. Lee had some difficulty in making them keep their voices low.

Briefly, he told them of his escape, making nothing of his wonderful work, and scarcely referring to the tortures of his confinement. The main point, as he said, was that he was free.

"Our task, now, is to do a moonlight flit," he went on earnestly. "We can't escape from the castle—that's quite out of the question."

"But—but what's the good of clearing out of this part of the castle and getting into another?" asked Handforth blankly. "We shan't really be any better off, sir."

"I think we shall," replied the detective. "Now listen, Jim—all you boys, too. My plan is to get into the big central tower of the castle, and bar ourselves in. It is a fortress complete in itself, and we can defy the enemy, if needs be, for days—perhaps weeks. At the tower top there is an open battlement and an immense vista. If we are lucky we might be able to signal—to attract the attention of honest people in Holtzhausen."

"By Jove! So that's the plan?" exclaimed Mr. Kingswood eagerly. "It's wonderful, Mr. Lee! If only we can get word of our plight to the townspeople, they'll talk. The police will get to know—they'll telegraph to England."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "And in these special circumstances, the German

Government will be compelled to take action. Even Baron von Holtz, with all his local power, will be able to do nothing if a regiment of soldiers is instructed to attack his stronghold. But that's looking rather a long way ahead, and we mustn't be too optimistic. Let us confine ourselves to-night to action. There is much to be done."

He gave them definite instructions. Each boy gathered up his blankets and pillow. Laden with these, they all filed out, with Lee at their head. Willy was left with the Alsations, to prevent them from wandering off, and, perhaps, unwittingly giving the alarm. Lee felt that as long as there was no unusual noise, the whole task could be accomplished without interruption or discovery. It was clear enough that the captives had been left alone for the night.

Under Lee's guidance, the party went straight to the tower. No attempt was made to carry the things to the summit. They were bundled just inside. Then they went back, found everything quiet, and this time the mattresses were fetched. Again the journey was uninterrupted and successful. The mattresses were bundled in like the blankets and pillows.

"There's just a chance we might be able to get some food," whispered Nelson Lee. "Come with me, boys."

They went to the big store-room which Lee had previously discovered. Lee and Kingswood, between them, carried the heavy barrels. The boys seized hold of giant jars of pickles. Another discovery, in the shape of two sacks of oatmeal, was particularly appreciated—to say nothing of another sack which contained potato flour.

"This is no time for picking and choosing," said Lee. "We're lucky enough to have food of any description. We might be compelled to stand a siege for many days, and we shall be lucky to have our appetites satisfied at all."

"What about water?" asked Fighting Jim.

"Plenty of that at the top of the tower," explained Lee. "I noticed a depression in the stonework, where there is a great pool of water, caught from the last rains. It might not be particularly tasty, but it will serve. There's enough to last at least a week, and by then we shall either be rescued, or it is any odds there'll be more rain."

They all entered into the "moonlight flit" with zest and enthusiasm. The very fact that there was something to do encouraged them. Moreover, it was a definite move against the enemy—and there was a chance of complete success at the end.

The boys all realised that they had Lee to thank for this wonderful change in their fortunes. But none of them quite understood what a remarkable feat Lee had accomplished.

They made a final journey back to the original wing—Lee and Kingswood alone. The boys were instructed to spend their time in carrying the mattresses up to the turret-room at the summit. Nelson Lee and Fighting Jim took hold of a few plates and cups,

and they filled their pockets with forks and spoons. Then, leaving everything in perfect order, they passed through the gateway and closed the gate securely. The dogs, during all this time, had remained perfectly docile under Willy's charge.

Willy now spoke to them carefully, soothingly, telling them to lie down and keep quiet. Whether they would do so really did not matter, for long before the dogs could give any widespread alarm, the three would be behind that massive tower door.

They hurried there at once, and it was Lee who closed the door and shot the enormous bolts—bolts which had stood the test of centuries of time. They only had the one lantern, for a quick search had failed to reveal any others—or any fuel for this one. Still, they were lucky enough to have got the one.

"Well, we're in," said Mr. Kingswood breathlessly, as he gazed upon the closed door. "I can scarcely believe that it has happened—and all within an hour or two! This door ought to be strong enough to withstand any amount of ramming. You're sure there's no other way in?"

"No other door," replied Lee. "There is a bare chance that there might be a secret entry, but I don't think we need take that seriously. Secret passages, and such like, are not always so conveniently placed. I think we'd better strengthen this door if we can," he added. "I believe there's a way in which it can be done."

Half-way up the spiral staircase age had caused parts of the inner wall to crumble. Some of the heavy stone blocks were loose, and in the construction of the tower a number of immense timbers had been used. Two of these timbers, at least, were so loosened that they were no longer serving any useful purpose. Working hard until the perspiration poured from them, Lee and Mr. Kingswood and a party of the boys freed the two timbers and managed to get them down. It was a hard struggle. But once they were down they were jammed tightly between the lower part of the stairway and the door itself. It was now barricaded until it was like a solid part of the tower itself, and it would defy all the efforts of the enemy to open it.

"Well, boys, I think we can call it a night," said Lee, as he wiped the sweat and grime from his forehead. "Well done! We've barred the enemy out, and we can look upon this part of the castle as our own domain."

"It's almost too good to be true, sir," said Handforth. "By George! Do you think there'll be a fight to-morrow? I mean, will they try to dislodge us?"

"Better get to sleep," replied Lee evasively. "I want you boys to lie down on your mattresses again and carry on as though nothing had happened."

"Archie's asleep already, guv'nor," grinned Nipper. "It's marvellous how that chap can detach himself and go off to sleep."

Lee was certain that the morrow would bring hectic fighting. Baron von Holtz

would certainly not take this blow lying down—and he would move heaven and earth to dislodge the rebellious captives. For his safety was at stake—to say nothing of the future of the Fellowship of Fear.

But the great detective was calm and cool. Not only was there food in this tower, but an examination of the dark cupboard—in which he had found the rifle—had revealed a dozen other rifles and a plentiful store of ammunition. The rifles and ammunition were now in the tower, and their presence gave Nelson Lee a sense of comforting security.

CHAPTER 7.

The Discovery.

IVAN, the retainer, came on duty soon after daylight the following morning. He had had his orders from the baron overnight, and when he went to the prisoners' quarters he was surprised, but not alarmed, to find the wolfhounds alone. The two dogs, looking very sleepy, sat up and yawned upon his approach.

"Zo! Where is Otto?" muttered Ivan in German, as he looked back at the dead fire and the empty chair. "Strange! He had orders not to leave his post until Paul came."

Paul was evidently the retainer who had been told off to man the machine-gun. For Paul himself appeared a minute later, carrying the gun.

He set it down, made himself comfortable, and filled his pipe.

"These Englishers, they give us much trouble," he grunted.

Ivan shrugged.

"We obey orders, that is all," he replied. "Have you seen Otto this morning? It is strange that he was not at his post."

"If the baron learns of it, Otto will be in hot water," said Paul. "He is the fool to leave his post before we came. Not that it matters. There is no escape for the Englishers."

Another man came, and he snapped leashes on to the two wolfhounds and took them away. Everything was being done in accordance with previously made plans.

Ivan, walking heavily, approached the sleeping-room after he had passed through the gateway—and after the gate had been closed upon him by Paul. Ivan received a surprise. The bed-room was empty. Not even a mattress or a blanket remained.

"Himmel!" he ejaculated in wonder. "The mad Englishers, they take their beds into the other room!"

It struck him as being an extraordinary proceeding, but, as yet, he had no inkling of the real truth. He went into the living-room, and found it empty, also. Everything was quiet and peaceful. There was no sign of disorder, and the table and chairs were in their usual positions, but there were no beds.

"Ach, but this is impossible," muttered Ivan, with growing alarm.

He walked quickly into the inner room, and a shout escaped him as he saw that this, too, was deserted. There was no sign of the prisoners whatever!

"Der Teufel!" shouted Ivan, in wild consternation.

He ran round in circles, so great was his bewilderment. He rushed back to the bedroom and looked round blankly. The thing was impossible! The gate had been locked, exactly the same as last night—the dogs had been out there, on guard—

He rushed down the corridor and gazed at the long passage which culminated in the second iron gate. But this, too, was deserted.

"Paul—Paul!" he shouted hoarsely, running back. "Quick! The Englisher prisoners—they have gone!"

Paul leapt to his feet and ran to the gate. "You are the fool!" he retorted. "How can they have gone?"

"Open!" commanded Ivan. "Come with me—and look!"

Paul opened the gate, and three minutes later they both rushed out, locked the gate behind them, and then went flying to their master's private quarters. In this part of the house, which was warm and light and comfortable, it was difficult to believe that there could be such barren, gloomy old chambers farther away. Holtz Castle, in the main inhabited wing, was a fine, charming old-world home.

The baron had not yet come down. Ivan himself went lumbering up the richly carpeted stairs. The baron's valet, greatly agitated, informed Ivan that his master could not be disturbed. But Ivan swept these protests aside and, in his excitement, actually went charging into his master's sleeping chamber.

"Dog!" snarled Von Holtz. "What is the meaning of this?"

He was only half dressed, and he swung round upon Ivan with such ferocity that the man fell back.

"Forgive me, master," panted Ivan. "But I come to tell you that the prisoners have gone."

"Gone!" shouted Von Holtz, aghast.

"In the night, Herr Baron, they go!" gasped the other. "We cannot find Otto, the man who should have been on guard. But the gate was locked and the dogs were there—"

"Fool, you must be wrong," broke in the baron harshly. "What you tell me is fantastic. There is no escape from that prison. For centuries it has been used— Out of my way! I will go myself and see!"

Half dressed as he was, he hurried out, fairly ran down the stairs, and was soon rushing away to the uninhabited wing. Here he found quite a number of men gathered together, talking excitedly. They fell aside as their master appeared; he passed through into the "prison," and a quick examination showed him that Ivan's story was only too true. The absence of the mattresses was an extraordinary feature. Why had the prisoners

taken their bedding with them? And where were the prisoners now?

"Gott in Himmel!" swore Von Holtz. "Otto is responsible! Otto must have let them out—"

"But no, master!" gasped Ivan. "Otto is as faithful as I. He would not betray—"

"Der schweinhund!" grated the baron. "He has betrayed me. Who else could have released the prisoners? Search! Search! Every man is to search!"

And in less than a minute a widespread hunt was in progress. Men went racing into long deserted chambers and corridors; they went from floor to floor, searching, but finding nothing. Baron von Holtz himself was in a towering rage. This amazing disappearance had startled him beyond measure. He took it for granted that the prisoners must have had outside help.

Reports came to him of a curious nature.

He learned, to his amazement, that several barrels of salt herring and cabbage were missing. It seemed incredible.

"But why—why?" he demanded hotly. "Why should these boys take food? I provided them with food, did I not? There must be some mistake. Do not bother me with such trifles."

But the next "trifle" was more significant. The missing Otto was found.

Some of the searchers, happening to open the cellar-like cupboard, had heard sounds from the rear. Otto, very dazed and stiff, had been dragged out and his bonds removed. Just as he was, he was taken to Von Holtz.

"Traitor! Dog!" snapped the baron. "What have you to say? Why did you release the captives?"

"Master, I know nothing!" panted the unfortunate man. "I was on guard, and without warning, somebody struck me from behind. I heard nothing—saw nothing. I remembered no more until I awoke in darkness, my head throbbing—"

Again and again he repeated his story—until, in fact, he convinced his master he had been victimised. It was somebody else

A Book-length Yarn for 4d. ONLY!



The Schoolboy Hypnotist

Meet Henry Christopher Crum. He's the most amazing new boy who has ever entered Greyfriars School, and the fellows soon discover that he has a forceful personality. He makes lordly prefects do his bidding, and even a dignified governor of the school finds himself under Crum's orders. He is a born hypnotist! Read of his astounding adventures at Greyfriars in this magnificent book-length yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. Get a copy to-day.

Ask for No. 189 of

**SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
LIBRARY** - Now on Sale - **4^d.**

who had allowed the prisoners to escape. But whom? None of the servants would do such a thing. There were men on duty outside, but they were well paid, they were faithful, and they were all staunch and trusted members of the Fellowship of Fear.

The deeper Von Holtz investigated, the deeper became the mystery.

"The drawbridge was up all night," he muttered, as he paced up and down. "They could not have escaped. The fact that they took their beds—food—proves that they made no attempt to escape. They are still in the castle. How is it that you dolts cannot find them? Himmel! There yet remains Lee!"

He had suddenly remembered the imprisoned detective. Lee could not have escaped, anyway! Lee was down there in that torture hole—from which only a magician could have escaped. And Baron von Holtz knew well enough that magicians do not exist in real life.

"Come!" he commanded. "We will fetch Herr Lee. He will serve us. We will take him with us, and he will shout to his boys, and they will answer. This mystery must be fathomed."

With three men, all heavily armed, he went down into the dungeons. Perhaps, deep in his heart, he had an inkling of the truth—and the real reason for this visit was to reassure himself that Lee was still a prisoner.

When, at length, they reached the dungeon, everything was as it had been left. The door was locked, the key hung on its hook.

"Now we will see!" muttered Von Holtz. "Let me!"

And the Terrestrial Master of the Fellowship of Fear thrust the key in the lock and turned it. He swung the door wide open.

"I come earlier than I intended, Herr Lee," he said. "I have a special need for your services—Der Teufel! The dungeon is empty! Empty! Empty!"

His voice rose almost to a scream, and in it there was a note of fear. His men, muttering fearfully, cast the light of their lanterns into the empty dungeon. They even examined the door and the lock; and their faces became pale with unnamable terror.

"You are right, Herr Baron!" muttered one of them. "This Englander, Lee, is the devil himself! No mortal man could have escaped from this dungeon! See! The door is intact. The lock is unharmed."

"Silence, dogs!" snarled Von Holtz. "There can be only one explanation. The door was not properly locked last night."

To satisfy himself he closed it and turned the key. And he soon found that it was impossible to turn the key completely unless the door was closed. So that ruled out the possibility of his men having blundered.

The cold, unassailable fact remained that Nelson Lee, from within his prison, had unlocked the door and had escaped! Yet he had had no tools of any kind, no light and no weapons—

"Mein Gott!" whispered Von Holtz hoarsely.

He remembered a report which had come to him some days earlier—a report from Count Michel Petrass, one of the "Big Five" of the fellowship who was stationed in London. Petrass had reported the strange case of Boris Venner—known as "No. 1"—the late Master of the Southern Section in England. Venner had sworn that Lee had escaped unaided from a cell, and had performed acts of black magic in the old Moor Prison. It was at that time that Lee had gained possession of the vital code-book—which had directly led up to all this excitement.

"Mein Gott!" repeated Von Holtz. "We punished Venner for his carelessness—and it seems we punished him unjustly. For this man, Lee, is indeed a worker of black magic."

He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes. And, indeed, the whole thing certainly did seem utterly incredible. The other prisoners had vanished from their quarters, and Lee had vanished from his dungeon.

How?

There was no explanation. The baron, breathing hard with alarm, hurried up to the daylight. The escape of Lee had filled him with very real consternation. He was beginning to think that all his captives had, by some miracle, escaped from the castle completely. He knew that this was impossible, but in his present state of mind, he was ready to credit anything.

More men reported that the search had failed. The castle had been combed from end to end. There was only one spot which had not been explored—and that was unlikely enough.

"The great tower, Herr Baron," said one of the retainers. "But it matters not, for the heavy door is locked, and thus they could not have gained admittance."

"Locked doors seem to be no hindrance to Lee!" snapped Von Holtz. "Fools! Do you not understand? It was Lee who helped the escape. Lee came up from the dungeon in the night, he struck Otto on the head, and took Otto's clothing. It was Lee who opened the great gate—"

"But the dogs, master?" asked Ivan. "The dogs would give the alarm. They would attack, too. Yet this morning they were docile—"

"The dogs shall be killed! They are useless!" snarled Von Holtz. "I have been told that they were savage—that they would attack any stranger. Pah! Rabbits would have served as well."

He was suddenly struck by a thought.

"You say that the door of the great tower is locked?" he asked. "But no! It is not so. There are bolts on the inner side, but—Come! Perhaps this is the explanation."

He went rushing away, and when he arrived at the tower door, he ordered his men to smash it down. It was easier said

than done. They hammered upon it, they charged at it, but it was like the solid stone wall. Von Holtz was thoroughly excited now, for he happened to know that this door had been unfastened. The very fact that it was bolted on the inner side proved that the prisoners had retired to this tower and were determined to hold it against all attack. It was the one certainty.

Confirmation came unexpectedly some minutes later. For a breathless man arrived in the castle from the grounds; and he reported that he had seen figures at the battlements of the tower.

"Zo!" said Von Holtz. "They are here! Here, in the tower! We have but to drive them out, and they will once again be at my mercy. Fools! They shall suffer dearly for giving me all this trouble. And what good has it done? Nothing!"

But there, Baron von Holtz was wrong.

CHAPTER 8.

The Signal.

UP in the turret-room breakfast was in full swing.

Not many of the boys had slept with any soundness. They were far too excited, and they were glad enough when daylight came, and when it was time for them to prepare breakfast. Everybody was on tenterhooks as to what would happen below when the baron discovered his loss.

"I'd have given quids to have seen his ugly mug when he made the discovery," said Handforth, grinning. "By George! What a shock it must have been."

"Perhaps they haven't made the discovery yet," said Church. "It's still early, you know. Anyhow, there's been no sound of an alarm."

"Who cares?" asked Handforth. "What about brekker? I'm famished. We've only got oatmeal, haven't we? Nothing to cook with—no fire, or anything."

"We're jolly lucky to have cats at all, my sons," said Nipper. "We can thank the gov'nor for that."

The casks were opened, and, at first, the boys turned away in disgust. The salted cabbage, in particular, was highly odoriferous; but Nelson Lee pointed out that all cabbage smelt that way. He sampled the shredded cabbage, pronounced it to be perfectly wholesome, and advised the boys to tuck in.

"It's not cooked, of course," he said. "But I dare say you've eaten this very same stuff disguised as hors-d'œuvre—uncooked, just as it is here. It's perfectly wholesome and filling. As for the herring, that's never cooked. Soaked in water, it becomes quite palatable."

However, most of the boys contented themselves with oatmeal and water for this morning. They would have to become far hun-

grier to delve into the mysteries of the herring and the cabbage.

Nelson Lee was keeping his eye on the daylight. It promised to be a fine morning, and the sun was already getting up over the neighbouring mountains. Owing to those mountains, the sun was late in getting up—but when it did top the snow-capped peaks, its rays were dazzling in their intensity.

"Splendid!" muttered Lee.

"We all like to see the sun, of course," said Mr. Kingswood, who was with him. "But I must confess I don't quite see why you are so pleased."

"Then I'll show you," replied the detective.

He took from the wall, in a deep crevice, a small framed mirror, and Mr. Kingswood looked at it in wonder.

"I saw you unhook that from the bathroom last night," he said. "I was puzzled at the time—and, in fact, I thought you were rather vain. But evidently you are not really interested in your own reflection."

Lee laughed.

"The reflection of the sun is very much better," he replied. "That is why I was so anxious for the morning to be cloudless, Jim. Just take note of the sun's position, will you?"

They were on the very summit of the tower, hidden from the grounds below by the battlements. And Kingswood noticed that the sun, in its easterly position, was coming up over the mountain tops in fairly close proximity to Holtzhausen.

"Well?" he asked.

"This mirror will reflect the sun—and we are in such a position, at this hour of the day, that the flash will be visible in the town," replied Lee. "You're familiar with the heliograph method of signalling, aren't you? As I am now proposing to do, the sun's rays are reflected by mirrors—and the ordinary dot-and-dash code is invariably used. And the Morse code is international, Jim."

"But it's a long way to the town," said Mr. Kingswood.

"Fifteen miles perhaps—it may be further," replied Lee. "Distances are very deceptive in the clear mountain air. But it may interest you to know that a range of one hundred and ninety miles has been reached by means of heliograph. So our hopes are not entirely groundless."

"By Heaven!" muttered Fighting Jim, his eyes burning. "You think of everything! I'll wager you thought of this last night!"

"It was one of the very first things that came into my mind," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "You see, there would be no earthly sense in us capturing the tower unless we had a means of communicating with the outer world. We can't use telephones or telegraphs, and ordinary hand-signalling would be worse than useless—for such signalling could only be seen by men in the confines of the Holtz Castle estate. But by a heliograph—Well, need I go on?"

"You're wonderful," said Mr. Kingswood admiringly.

Then and there, Nelson Lee got to work.

He settled himself comfortably on the roof, and, judging the angle of the mirror, he used it so that the sun's rays were reflected directly upon the town. Then, by shifting the mirror quickly to and fro—by jerking it in a dot-and-dash fashion—he signalled his message.

"Help! St. Frank's party imprisoned here. Bring help."

He repeated it two or three times, watched eagerly by Mr. Kingswood.

"Do you expect any reply?" asked the Head.

"There might be a heliograph message later, when the sun is in a good position for sending a reply," replied Lee. "It might be possible now. But I'm prepared to wait hours. The whole morning may elapse before these signals are even noticed—and hours longer before they are read. We cannot tell. Our only hope is the whole of Europe is on the qui-vive for the missing boys. Any strange signals, therefore, might receive immediate attention from the police. That short message is quite sufficient. The very words—St. Frank's—will be clue enough."

Again he sent the message. He repeated it with monotonous regularity—spelling out the words in dot-and-dash—and, of course, using German. After a while, Mr. Kingswood relieved him. The Head soon got the hang of the operation, and although his heliographing may not have been so perfect as Lee's, it was effective.

It was not long before the boys became aware of what was happening, and their excitement knew no bounds. They realised, then, just why Lee had taken the steps he had.

There was a chance of outside help!

"It's all over bar shouting," said Handforth contentedly. "They're bound to see those signals in the town, and then we shall have the police up here."

"Mustn't be too optimistic, Handy," said Nipper. "Von Holtz is a powerful man in these parts, and it's any odds that the police are scared of him. What can they do if they do come up? If Von Holtz likes to be really nasty he can keep the drawbridge up, and defy invaders for weeks."

"By George! Then we shall have some excitement," said Handforth. "He's bound to give in, in the long run—and don't forget, as soon as he's smashed, it means our rescue and the complete smash-up of the fellowship. Mr. Lee will have scored a tremendous victory."

Most of the other boys were equally enthusiastic. They could not see how the plan could fail. They even became reckless, and noisily shouted to one another on the tower top. Not that it really mattered now, for the enemy was well aware of the truth—as the resounding crashes and thuds from the bottom of the tower told. Two boys were there now, on the watch, ready to report in

case there should be any sign of the baron's men breaking through.

Immediately below the tower there was a great cobbled courtyard, and while Mr. Kingswood was busy with the mirror, Lee kept a watch on the courtyard. Once or twice, men had appeared in view, staring upwards; but they had soon retired to cover.

Crack!

Something which sounded like an infuriated hornet sang past Nelson Lee's head, and he saw a wisp of smoke at one of the upper windows of the nearest wing. In a flash, Lee seized a rifle, and fired.

Crack!

A shout of alarm went up, and Lee did not know whether he had hit the mark or not; but the enemy now knew, beyond doubt, that the prisoners were armed, and ready to answer any fire.

"Things are going to get hot soon," said the detective, as he crouched low under the protection of the battlements. "You boys had better get down—and stay down."

"Is it safe for you up here, sir?" asked Watson breathlessly.

"Safe as long as we keep behind the walls," replied Lee. "We can look upon this as a trench—and if we expose ourselves, even for a moment, we might get plugged. Fortunately, with the sun in its present position, we can keep on with the signalling."

Church came racing up from the interior of the tower.

"They're making desperate efforts to smash the door down, sir," he reported. "They've got a steam-roller on the other side, by the sound of it. There's a terrific noise going on, and the door's beginning to shake a bit."

"Jim, you carry on with the signalling," said Lee quickly. "I'd better go down at once. That doorway's the only entrance, and we must protect it at all costs."

"Go ahead," replied Fighting Jim. "I'm all right."

A rifle was left with him, in case of emergency, and Lee warned him not to approach the battlements under any circumstances. It was a bit risky, even, to continue the signalling—but Mr. Kingswood was game.

Lee hurried down, and he took all the boys with him. As they went pell-mell down the circular stairs they heard the thunderous bangs from below. And when, at length, they reached the door itself, they were relieved. The door was apparently as immovable as ever.

For the moment, the attacks had ceased. Faintly, the sound of voices could be heard. But they were so dim and vague that it was impossible to distinguish any particular word.

"Quiet, boys," said Lee.

He bent under one of the barricading beams, and placed his ear flat against the surface of the door. The voices were just a tiny bit clearer, but he could still make nothing of what was being said. And then one word came to him out of all the jargon of others. It was shouted by Von Holtz, and it was repeated.

And the word was "dynamite."

Lee was startled. He had thought of the possibility, but had dismissed it. For such an explosion would necessarily mean a double risk—the risk of wrecking the tower completely, and other parts of the castle—and the risk of attracting unwelcome attention. Lee had not thought it likely that Von Holtz would deliberately damage his ancestral castle in that way.

But the man was evidently desperate.

"Come, boys—upstairs!" said Lee sharply. "They're going to use dynamite."

"Crumbs!"

"That'll kill us all, sir!"

"Not necessarily," replied Lee. "The charge will probably be just sufficient to blow a hole in the door. There is a risk, of course, that the tower will be damaged—but it is such a solid structure that I doubt if a two-ton bomb would entirely wreck it. At all events, there is one thing we must do—and quickly."

He was glad that the old walls, half-way up, had crumbled with decay. The tower itself was not greatly weakened; and the beams had already been removed. Lee set the example by heaving at the loosened stones. Under his guidance, the boys worked hard, and they built a massive stone barrier right across the stairway, with loopholes, here and there, for the use of firearms. This stone barrier grew rapidly, and Lee saw to it that it was made strongly.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the massive door, Baron von Holtz was taking his own measures. All efforts, so far, had failed. At his orders, his men had carried in an enormous tree trunk, and this, manned by two dozen mighty retainers, had been thrust again and again at the door. The door shook and quivered, and in some places it splintered. But it remained whole, and at last the men were obliged, by sheer exhaustion, to desist.

"Dynamite!" shouted Von Holtz suddenly. "It is the only certain way. Go, men! Bring dynamite!"

"But, master!" protested one of the men. "If we use dynamite there is a danger of wrecking the castle. People on the hillsides, below, will hear. The echoes are strange in the valley, and can be heard for miles. There will be inquiries——"

"Protest further, fool, and I'll cut out your tongue!" snarled Von Holtz. "Bring dynamite! Bring dynamite! What if people talk? Am I not Baron von Holtz? In my own castle I do as I please! These Engländer dogs must be crushed—or we shall be crushed."

He did not know of the heliographing—or he might have been even more desperate. One or two of his men had noticed strange flashes from the tower-top, but they had not understood—and had not even reported. If Von Holtz had known of those flashes he would have guessed the rest. And his alarm would have been acute.

Dynamite was brought—several sticks, for it was used, occasionally, for blasting pur-

poses higher in the mountains when an avalanche occurred—when it was thought advisable to shift dangerous accumulations of rock. There had been no blasting for some years now, but Von Holtz found a supply of dynamite in the castle's magazine.

The charge was placed at the bottom of the door, the long fuses were ignited, and then dozens of great mattresses were hastily flung against the door, to deaden the explosion and to confine the shock to the door itself.

The baron and his men retired to a great distance; in fact, they made for one of the outer doors, and stood in a neighbouring courtyard to await the explosion.

It came at last.

Boooooom-ooooom!

The very ground shook, and some of the men shouted in terror, half expecting a part of the castle to tumble in ruins. But nothing like that happened. A number of doors were burst open, and they crashed back noisily. Air came rushing out like a gale, and then, after the first shock, dense smoke rolled forth.

In the tower itself, the boys were not much affected. A rush of air came shooting up the stairway, but it expended itself before it got half-way up, and the massive tower scarcely shook at all. But everybody was on tenter-hooks. This meant that the door had been broken in—and their refuge, far from being impregnable, now had to be held at the point of the gun.

"Better keep back, boys," advised Lee, as clouds of pungent smoke came rolling up the stairway. Leave this to me. Some of you should go to the top to see if everything is all right there. You've done very well so far, and I am pleased with you."

Lee was half-expecting that the enemy would hurl explosives at the tower-top, hoping to gain success in that way. Every possibility had to be thought of and guarded against. For there was now no doubt that the Baron von Holtz was determined, at all costs, to gain the upper hand quickly. He was not prepared to wait or to take things leisurely. This day looked like being the most hectic of all.

It happened that Willy Handforth was the first to reach the battlements, and he found Mr. Kingswood-busy at his signalling, taking no notice of the commotion.

"Easy, young 'un!" warned the Head. "Don't go near those outer walls. The beggars will pick you off if you do."

"It's safe enough on this side, sir," replied Willy, as he cautiously approached the battlements. "It faces the open valley, and there's nothing but a great precipice below. It's out of range of any rifle."

This was true enough. Danger only existed on two "sides" of the tower—where they faced the castle. In the other direction there was nothing but sheer space, dropping away to the gully far, far beneath.

Willy ventured to lean over and stare at the town far away. The air was so crystal clear that he could see the red roofs distinctly. And then suddenly he grew rigid.

"Mr. Kingswood!" he ejaculated sharply. "Sir!"

"What is it?" demanded the Head.

"Come here, sir—quick!"

Mr. Kingswood joined him. The next moment he caught his breath in with a sharp hiss. For, far away, in the very heart of Holtzhausen, he saw a tiny, flashing point of light.

"They've seen!" gloated Fighting Jim. "They've seen—and they're answering."

CHAPTER 9.

Touch and Go.

BARON VON HOLTZ was one of the first to enter the smoke-laden atmosphere of the castle. Whatever his fanaticism, whatever his brutality, he was no coward. During the Great War he had faced death fearlessly on many an occasion, and had, indeed, been one of the most successful commanders of the German forces.

Now he led his men back into the castle, and he was the first to approach the wrecked door. His satisfaction was intense as he beheld the splintered, sagging timbers. The upper part of the door still held, but all the lower section was shattered to fragments, and there was a great gap through which it was possible to walk.

"Come!" he said shortly.

Gun in hand, he advanced. Several of his men followed, but they did not seem to relish the task. However, to object would be to incur their master's wrath—and in his present mood, and in this acute situation, he was likely to turn his gun on them.

Fighting their way through the pungent fumes, they mounted the stairs.

"At the top, no doubt, they will make a stand," exclaimed the baron, as they advanced. "We must be ready—and must fight. Remember, there are only two men—the rest are boys. Pah! It should be easy!"

But less than half-way up, as he turned a bend of the circular stairway, he checked. He was just in advance of the others. The air was clear here, and the baron was suddenly faced by a barrier of stone, which blocked the stairway completely.

"No, Von Holtz," said a calm, clear voice. "I shouldn't advise you to advance any farther. It might be dangerous."

"Schweinhund!" shouted Von Holtz. "You are Lee, yes?"

Nelson Lee, behind the stone barricade, brought Von Holtz into range of his rifle.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm afraid, Von Holtz, that your plans have badly miscarried. There is no admission this way."

"Dumkopf!" raged Von Holtz. "Do you think you can defy me and my men? I have a hundred here!"

"And, single-handed, I can hold this stairway against you all," replied Lee calmly. "At the present moment, baron, my rifle is pointing directly at your heart. I should advise you to retire. I am in a very excited condition, and my finger is unsteady."

Even the burly soldier winced.

"You would not dare!" he panted. "I will have you out of this within an hour——"

Crack!

A bullet whistled right past his ear and pinged into the wall behind him. The men nearly fell down the stairs in their sudden fright.

"I was afraid of it," said Lee with regret. "That finger of mine trembled a bit too much. It's a good thing I wasn't aiming."

Von Holtz breathed hard. He knew quite well that Lee had fired deliberately—that he had aimed to miss. And it was a warning he could not safely ignore.

"We shall see!" he muttered savagely.

Fuming with impotence and rage, he went back. There was no sense in taking any further chances. And

when he thought of the situation he was freshly alarmed. Dynamite was useless here—for nobody could get near enough to Lee to put the explosive in position. That barricade, with a single rifle behind it, was ten times more effective than the solid door.

"What's going to happen now, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, who was with the detective. "He's only gone down to work out something in reply. And I'll bet he won't give us much rest."

"As little as possible," agreed Nelson Lee grimly. "We must never forget, young 'un, that we are not merely attempting to free ourselves from Holtz Castle; this is the central headquarters of the Fellowship of Fear, and the baron has, I have no doubt, many deadly weapons at his hand."

"Well, we're ready——" began Nipper.

And then there was a chorus of excited shouts. A number of fellows came running down from the turret-room; and foremost among them was Willy Handforth.

"What is it?" asked Lee sharply.

"They're answering, sir—signals from Holtzhausen!" exclaimed Willy. "Mr. Kingswood would like you to go up——"

"You'd better go, guv'nor," broke in Nipper. "It may be important. We can look after this barricade. After what's happened, Von Holtz isn't likely to make any move for some minutes."

Have you ever heard of Richard Bennett? The Remove Form at St. Frank's hadn't—but they very soon found that he was a youth to be reckoned with! He made them

SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE, and next week's St. Frank's story will do the same for you!

"Right!" said Lee. "I'll trust you."

He hastened away, and when he joined Fighting Jim on the battlements he found the athletic young Head signalling quickly if shakily.

"You'd better take it," he said, handing the mirror to Lee. "They signalled just now. I couldn't understand it properly, but I believe the question was 'Where are you?' I'm replying that we are prisoners—"

"Good," said Lee. "Let me finish."

He started again and Morsed the message: "Prisoners main tower. Desperate plight. Send help." And, sure enough, a flashing point of light appeared immediately afterwards, and the one word was heartening, for it was "Coming."

"Well, that's that," said Nelson Lee with a half-smile.

"By Jove, Mr. Lee, you've done wonders!" said Fighting Jim, as he clasped Lee's hand. "This heliograph idea was brilliant, for it has enabled us to span the miles without telephones or telegraphs. What do you suppose these people in the town will do?"

"It is impossible to say," answered Nelson Lee. "But all we can do is to wait. And, meanwhile, we must keep Von Holtz and his men back at all costs. So far they don't know that we have got in touch with the outside world. It's rank carelessness on their part—and if the baron himself had been out-of-doors he would have 'twigged' long ago. They might send a few police up here to make inquiries—and that, in itself, would give Von Holtz pause. But it's far more likely they'll take more drastic steps, for you must remember that the whole of Europe is hunting for the missing schoolboys; the outcry against the Fellowship of Fear is general. I hope they get into immediate touch with England."

Lee did not waste any further time. There was nothing more for him to do up here now. Already the situation was completely changed. Less than an hour ago they had been cut off completely from outside help. Now, by means of the sun, they had communicated their dramatic message.

Lee hurried down to the barricade, and found everything quiet. Handforth and the others talked excitedly when they heard the news. Things were beginning to look bright at last. Not one of the boys fully realised how near to complete success the baron's plans had been. Only by the unbounded enterprise and energy of Nelson Lee had the party been saved thus far.

THE baron received the disastrous news when he was emerging from the broken doorway after his defeat on the stairs. One of the men from outside—a man who had come from some distance—reported that he had seen strange flashings from the tower battlements.

"Flashings?" repeated Von Holtz impatiently. "Is this a time to bother me with trifles? Do not forget there are boys up there, and they were perhaps playing some absurd trick—"

"But, master, the flashes were regular," insisted the man. "There were short flashes and long flashes."

"Gott in Himmel!" ejaculated the baron, his face turning haggard. "Morse code! Then they have been signalling!" The shock was all the greater because of its unexpectedness. "But how? They have no lamp or searchlight with which to make flashing signals."

"Master, they took the mirror from the bath-room," said Ivan.

And then, of course, it was all explained. Von Holtz, grey with anxiety and apprehension, cursed his men roundly, and paced impatiently up and down. He knew that if the St. Frank's party was rescued he would be ruined. For the boys could tell so much that there would be no doubt as to his connection with the Fellowship of Fear. Under no circumstances must the prisoners be found in his castle.

"There is only one thing to do," he muttered. "We must get them out—yes, and hide them. Then, if searchers come, I shall laugh at the whole story. A servant playing a joke—nothing else. But unless I get them out quickly it will be too late. I dare not attempt to delay possible visitors, for that would make them suspicious."

He was ready, then, to kill every member of the party. His very safety and the life of his fellowship was at stake. He seriously missed the presence of intelligent assistance—men such as Count Petrass and Boris Venner. But for weeks he had lived alone, in order to cut himself completely away—outwardly—from the fellowship movement. By means of his secret wireless he had been in constant touch with his various branches, and regularly sent forth instructions.

"There is only one way," he said at length. "The poison gas."

"But, master, that will mean death," protested one of the others.

"No, fool!" snarled the baron. "It will drive them to the open air—to the battlements, and there we can trap them."

He gave rapid orders. Far down the valley, in a mountain hut, there was a supply of deadly poison gas. It was stored there for a definite purpose—to be used months hence, when the fellowship was ready to bring off a big coup. One cylinder would be sufficient. Men were dispatched to fetch it without delay.

But even the fetching of it occupied two full hours, and meanwhile the baron made his final preparations, and the besieged party kept a close watch on the stairway and from the battlements. The lull made Nelson Lee suspicious; for he was certain that mischief was brewing.

"I don't like it, Jim," he said confidentially to Mr. Kingswood. "It would be a thousand pities if we failed at the last hour."

"But how can we fail now? Will the baron use more explosives?"

"That's a possibility, although I doubt if he will again use that method," replied Lee. "If only we can hold out——"

He broke off suddenly and held up a warning finger.

"Listen!" he muttered. "What's that?"

They were on duty behind the stone barricade, their rifles ready. There had been no sound from below. The boys, up in the turret-room, were preparing a meal, for it was now getting towards midday, and they were all hungry. They felt that there was no reason to conserve the stores, and they could pick and choose. As a result, they were preparing a meal mainly consisting of potato cakes and pickles.

"I don't hear anything," said Mr. Kingswood, puzzled.

But then he started. He did hear something. A low, mysterious hissing, like an escape from a steam locomotive, only much more subdued.

"Look there!" muttered Lee suddenly.

A vile-looking, yellowish cloud of vapour was wreathing round the bend of the stairway, creeping up towards the barricade. Obviously, a cylinder of gas had been opened just round the bend, and the draught was now carrying the gas upwards, and it was getting thicker and thicker every moment.

"So that's the game!" muttered Fighting Jim. "They're going to render us all senseless by that stupefying gas of theirs. But it's a mad idea. We can reach the open air——"

"Not so mad," broke in Lee sharply. "For we shall be compelled to abandon the barricade, and——"

He broke off and coughed suddenly, and at the same second he uttered a cry of pain. For a tiny wisp of the gas had caught him—and then he knew the deadly truth.

"Back—Jim—back!" he croaked hoarsely. "This is not the gas we have already sampled—but deadly poison gas! One full breath of it would mean death!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Kingswood.

Only in the nick of time did he stagger backwards, avoiding a curling puff of the vapour. Like mad they raced up the stairs, and when they reached the top Lee slammed the door which led into the turret-room and called urgently to the boys to come forward with scraps of torn shirts, and anything else that could be used as packing. The cracks round the door were hastily filled up.

"It's poison gas, boys—vile, death-dealing stuff which will annihilate us all unless we're careful," said Lee grimly. "Even a much diluted whiff of it will bring unconsciousness—and, later, pneumonia and blindness. It's ghastly. It has a way of penetrating the most minute cracks and crevices, and——"

"I can smell something rummy now, sir," muttered Handforth.

They were all standing in the turret-room. Food was forgotten. They were beginning to feel a painful smarting of the eyes and a chokiness in their throats. Then Nipper

pointed sharply, and the mystery was explained. The packing they had thrust under the door crevice some minutes earlier had gone!

"Outside—to the roof!" shouted Lee. "It's our only chance!"

Everything was swimming before his eyes. He could not understand how that packing had become dislodged, for he had seen to it personally. And then, as they were all crowding up the narrow stairway which led to the battlements, they saw the door crash open with mighty force. A burst of dense, yellowish fog poured in, threatening to engulf them. And with it came grotesque figures, armed with automatic pistols. They were Von Holtz and his men—wearing gas masks. One of them, no doubt, had crept to the door, and had poked the packing away—a cunning move, designed to gas the prisoners unawares.

Only in the nick of time did they escape—Lee going up the stairs last, holding his breath, and stumbling out into the open with tightly closed eyes. He just managed to slam the heavy door, and then he stumbled forward. The others were reeling about.

Then suddenly a low drone was heard. Directly overhead a powerful aeroplane was flying! It was swooping down low, and its cabin door stood wide open, and a man stood there. A significant fact was that the machine carried the unmistakable circles of the British Royal Air Force!

WATCH FOR THIS COVER!



OUT NEXT WEDNESDAY!

All the boys were wildly waving, and the man in the doorway, holding on tightly with one hand, waved back. It was one of the fastest scout machines in the world—a new type with an enclosed cabin, and it had evidently been sent over by the British authorities in reply to telegraphed messages from Holtzhausen. And the machine had come to do some scouting—to make sure that the report was authentic.

With a zooming roar the 'plane sped off down the valley, for the pilot and observer could now be under no misapprehension. They had seen the lost party with their own eyes—and they must have known that the situation was desperate.

Even now, however, it seemed that help would arrive too late.

For, with a crashing of splintering woodwork, the upper door gave way, and the enemy burst through, accompanied by further clouds of that deadly gas—which, at last, was finding its natural outlet.

"Back—back!" panted Lee. "No, boys—this way!"

There was one spot in which they could seek safety—where they would be quite clear of the vicious vapour, if only the wind held in its present direction.

But this entailed certain capture.

Crouching back, dizzy and half blinded, they were able to put up scarcely any fight. Nelson Lee and Kingswood tried hard, but they were rapidly overpowered. Within three minutes they were all held by the masked men. And by this time, mercifully, the rest of the vapour had poured out and had become dissipated. At last Von Holtz was able to remove his own gas mask, and he tore it off with a great exclamation of triumph.

"Zo, my friends!" he said, his eyes burning madly. "You have given me much trouble, yes! But your plans have failed, and you are again my prisoners. When help comes you will have gone. We, in Holtz Castle, will have no knowledge of you——"

"Master, it is too late for that!" exclaimed Paul hoarsely. "An aeroplane came over not five minutes ago, and the men aboard her saw everything!"

"Look!" called out another man, pointing.

Far away, in the distance, they could see some tiny flashes on the pine-clad hillside. The road wound its way along there, and this was a spot where the sunshine slanted right down. Von Holtz was an old soldier, and he knew exactly what that sight meant. A strong column of soldiers marching towards the castle—and the flashes were caused by the sunlight glinting on the bayonets!

In that moment he knew, in all truth, that it was too late. He had regained the position—he had recaptured his prisoners—only to find that they had got the better of him. For during their brief spell of liberty they had communicated their position to the world—and the world was answering.

"Then they shall die!" vowed Von Holtz, his rage bursting forth like that of a maniac. Since we cannot get them away, they shall

suffer the full penalty. Seize the boys first!" he went on, pointing. "Take them, one by one, and fling them over the battlements!"

His men recoiled. He was pointing to the battlements beyond which lay a sheer drop of a thousand feet to the rocky gorge.

His men exchanged frightened glances. With soldiers marching on the castle, it would be madness to commit this senseless series of murders. They would be hopelessly involved, and their lives would pay the forfeit.

"No, master, we will not obey," said one of the men stubbornly. "It is too late. Let them live. If we kill them as you say, it will bring disaster upon us all——"

Crack!

The baron's automatic spat viciously, and the unfortunate man who had been protesting crumpled to the roof, clutching at his shoulder. He had been badly winged—although not fatally. That act of ruthlessness was enough for the others.

With one accord they hurled themselves at Von Holtz, and he, leaping back, misjudged his distance. He struck against the low battlement just where there was a deep gap. With a wild scream of fear he tried to clutch at the higher stonework, but failed. He toppled over backwards—and vanished. His screams came up for some seconds, growing fainter and fainter as he fell sheer—Then silence.

With one accord the men turned and raced down through the tower. And Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood and the St. Frank's boys were alone.

VON HOLTZ was killed instantly. The castle was surrounded and captured. The men had been sensible in refusing to take any hand in the baron's last desperate plan. They were able to plead that they only obeyed their master's orders. And, later, they all disavowed all knowledge of the Fellowship of Fear—and their connection with the fellowship, in fact, was never proved.

But Nelson Lee's intensive search of the castle, aided by the German police, led to the discovery of documents which implicated men in every European capital. Acting upon this information, the Fellowship of Fear was smashed to destruction. Hundreds of men were arrested and thousands of others fled. As a menace to society, the fellowship was at an end.

The St. Frank's fellows, of course, went back in triumph, to be given a great welcome at the old school. And Nipper, for the time being, at least, kept his old place as captain of the Remove—whilst Nelson Lee occupied himself with the final rounding-up of the once dangerous Fellowship of Fear.

THE END.

(A magnificent series of St. Frank's stories starts next Wednesday. Don't miss the first grand yarn: "NIPPER—NEW BOY!" It's a wow! Order YOUR "Nelson Lee" now.)

Concluding Chapters Of Our Fine Story Of The Great War !

The GREEN BUTTON!



Monty Merriman, British Secret Service Agent, and Captain Seton escape from a German prison camp and attempt to reach the frontier. Unfortunately, Seton falls into the enemy's hands again. Monty, meanwhile, reaches the railway, with the help of another Secret Service agent, and arranges to board the next train.

The Prisoner!

MONTY had more food, and stowed yet more away in his pockets. He was planning things rapidly, desperately now. He meant to rescue Seton if he could, but if that were denied him he would go north, and get the memorised formula out of Germany to England, at all costs. This train offered him a wonderful way of escape, and he was determined to grasp it.

Five minutes after Denton had gone to communicate with the other members of Monty's secret organisation, Monty himself left the hut. He peered round the doorpost

and saw the armed sentry pacing along the wall beside the line. He had his back turned towards the hut, so Monty darted out and away to the dense shadows under a line of trucks.

The sidings ran almost up to the station. He made his progress secretly by means of crawling along under the trucks, between the metals.

He could not move so fast that way, but he was more certain of avoiding notice. He drew nearer and nearer to the station, where the passenger train stood. The express had come right across Germany, and still had a hundred or more miles to go. This halt was

for the purpose of changing engines, making connections, and giving the military a chance to search the train.

Monty wanted to board the train after the military had done their searching. It wasn't going to be easy. He knew that, without shirking the issue. He crawled on his way, and it seemed like ages. He was afraid the train would start off before he could reach it. How he would board it unseen he did not know. He would have to be guided by circumstances as they arose.

And one circumstance arose on which he had not bargained. There was an engine on the end of the truck beneath which he was crawling. The signal must have dropped, for the engine shrieked, wheezed, and began to move. An axle struck Monty's head and flung him down on his face.

That undoubtedly saved his life. The trucks rumbled over him, and all he could do was to lie still. But it ruined his chances of reaching the station, unseen, as he thought.

But suddenly he had an idea. He reached up at the iron under-carriage of the last truck. One hand grasped a coupling-iron, the other found a bar of the axle supports. He lifted himself clear of the ground and was carried along with the train.

Turning his head, he waited until he saw that the goods train was passing through the station on a line immediately beside the waiting express.

Then Monty let himself drop. He crashed down on the tarred sleepers and lay still, hoping he had fallen clear of the wheels. In a flash the last truck had passed on, and he was safe—for a time.

He had to roll sideways, over a rail, and lay still in the shadow beneath the running-board of the express. He listened and gazed all about him. The opposite platform was deserted and the lights were dimmed. He had not been seen as yet.

Monty scrambled under the express to the platform side, and cautiously poked his head up between the running-board and the platform. He saw the military boarding the train for the search at the guard's van end.

He bobbed down again and waited. He heard the men's feet after a time as they passed down the corridor and into the next carriage by the connecting, telescopic passage. The guard's van would not be entered by the soldiers again.

Another peep told Monty that the guard was out on the platform conversing with the station-master. It was a chance. Monty went to the far side of the van, clawed up to the door. The window was open and not barred. He dared not risk opening the door in case the click of the heavy latch should betray him, so he squeezed through the open window, thanking his lucky stars that his arduous life kept him slim.

The van was piled high with luggage and goods of all sorts. He crawled hastily to the far corner and dug a hiding-place for himself behind several sacks of merchandise. He had no idea what was in the sack, and didn't care. He got a hole behind them large

enough for him to crouch in. He hauled a trunk on the top of the aperture and lay still, waiting.

In all his adventures he had hardly noticed the passage of time. He had entered the town in broad daylight, with Dick Seton disguised as a woman. Now it was night, and much had happened.

He had no idea where Dick was. Denton had voiced the opinion that he would travel with Kahn on this train for the north. That might prove correct or false. Monty had no means as yet of learning the truth. He had to be guided by circumstances as they arose, and that was what Monty did not care a lot about. He liked to lay his plans well beforehand, if he could.

Eventually the whistle sounded, men shouted, the engine shrieked, and the train moved out of the station. The guard leapt on the running-board, stood there till the train was clear of the platform, then came into the van, closing the door behind him. The lights sped past the windows, and then came blackness outside, and only a faint glimmer in the van from the light in the roof.

The guard had his back turned towards the piled merchandise. He was busy making up his time sheets. Monty knew that he must be ready to act before the express passed Smither's signal-box at Kopfe, twenty miles to the north. What he had to do must be done at once.

Cautiously he slid the trunk aside. It slithered and bumped. The guard turned his head, but saw nothing suspicious. He went back to his time sheets, cursing under his breath at porters who stowed luggage so that the bumping of the train disturbed it all.

But the hole was free for Monty now. He levered himself up over the sacks. For a second he poised there, then he jumped down. His feet padded on the floor once, and he leapt again, coming down on the guard's back, one hand clapped over the man's mouth to stifle his cries.

It was quick and accurate. He brought his clenched fist down on the man's head and dazed him, dragged him to the floor, turned him on his back, knelt on him, still half-choking him by the pressure of one hand on mouth and nostrils. Then he drove his fist to the jaw in one swift, terrific blow, and the guard was senseless.

The thundering of the train hid all noise. Monty worked rapidly, tying the man's hands and feet and gagging him, then hauled him over the piled luggage to the hole that had concealed him, and slid the trunk in position over the aperture.

On the hook in a corner hung the guard's big overcoat and a peaked cap. With that Monty had to be content. The night was cold enough, so that no one would question the coat. He put it on, and hoped no one would see his feet and legs below it. The peaked cap fitted him well.

And, thus disguised, he ventured into the corridor and moved up the swaying train.

The passengers were settling down to sleep through the night, and paid no heed to the

guard, who leisurely went along the corridor.

Monty peered into every compartment, but every time his heart sank. Not until he was almost in the front of the train did he find what he had hoped to find.

Dick Seton was on the train!

Monty walked slowly past the compartment. He saw Dick in the far corner, white-faced and stern. By the corridor side sat two armed privates, their guns between their knees. Opposite Dick sat Heinrich Kahn himself, laughing and taunting his prisoner, showing him, in the palm of his fat hand, a green button!

Monty passed on. Dick Seton had glanced straight at him, but had given no sign of recognition.

It was a difficult task Monty had before him. Two armed privates and Heinrich Kahn to get past before he could rescue Dick Seton and get him off the train!

Could he do it?

He was determined to try.

One for Heinrich.

MONTY dared not pause at the doorway of the compartment in which Dick Seton sat facing Heinrich Kahn. Monty was impersonating the guard, who might easily have been known personally to many of the passengers, and would for certain be familiar with other officials who might be on the train.

There never had been a disguise more fraught with danger for Monty. But he had found Dick. That was something. But with Kahn seated opposite his prisoner, and two armed privates by the door on the corridor side, there seemed precious little chance of a rescue.

Monty went on his way along the swaying corridor, to the end of the train. Owing to the late hour, the passengers were sleepy and little inclined to bother their heads about the guard. And two railway men at the end were already fast asleep.

Such little details helped considerably, and Monty retraced his steps towards the guard's van at the end of the train. He was doubly cautious now, and his brain was working rapidly. He adopted the swing of a man accustomed to swaying trains, and tried his utmost to appear as casual as a guard would be.

But he was purposely setting himself out to take stock of the situation. His pace slackened as he approached the compartment in which sat Dick Seton with his armed gaolers, and he turned his head so that, as he passed, he could observe all there was to be seen without appearing to be too inquisitive.

His keen eyes noted several facts. Firstly, both the armed privates—seated one on each side of the corridor door, with their rifles, bayonets fixed, steadied between their knees—were very weary. Their eyelids drooped heavily and their heads were inclined to nod. But for the presence of Herr Lieutenant Heinrich Kahn they would have given them-

selves up to slumber with very little inducement.

Kahn was still talking, and Monty heard a few words.

"If you will not reveal the formula, or its whereabouts, to us, you will never have the chance to tell your own people. The fact that you do not worry about being recaptured can only mean that your companion—the mystery man of the British Secret Service—has been told the secret. Therefore, we must run him to earth, as well. He will find it impossible to get out of Germany."

"It isn't safe to say that things are impossible for him!" retorted Dick coldly. "He has fooled you more than once."

A cruel glint came into Kahn's blue eyes.

"He has tricked us—Ja! But he will not always trick us. I have met him several times. I know him to be a clever spy, although I do not know his name. Still, we shall catch him in the end—and then—the end for him!"

He made an expressive gesture with his hands that could only mean one thing for Monty if he were caught—a blank wall and firing party—and that without any waste of time.

Monty wasn't worrying about that, however. He ran that risk every day of his life while on enemy territory, and there were many more men in the same position.

What caused Monty more perturbation than his own possible capture was the fact which he had looked for and observed, that Dick Seton was handcuffed! That complicated matters somewhat.

Who had the key to the bracelets? He studied the two armed privates. They were only privates, and not over intelligent at that. It was extremely doubtful that Kahn would trust them to do anything more than mere guarding. It seemed almost certain that the key of the handcuffs would be found on Kahn himself.

Monty dared not delay his walk along the train. He continued on to the guard's van and sat down to think. The real guard had recovered consciousness and was wriggling about in his prison behind the stacks of baggage. His bonds were too well secured to permit him moving his hands or feet, but he plunged this way and that in an effort to give the alarm. Fortunately, the gag prevented him shouting.

Monty went over as near his corner as he could.

"I should keep quiet, if I were you," he said, in excellent German. "I am really desperate and shall not hesitate to kill you if you thwart me in my plans. You understand?"

The man could hear if he could not shout, and there was something so cool, resolute and determined in Monty's rather refined accents that he realised it would be safer to cause no trouble. The frantic struggles ceased, and save for the thundering of carriage wheels on the metals, there was not a sound at which Monty need be alarmed.

He sat down on a trunk and thought matters out. The train was now travelling at top speed through the night, and at that rate the twenty miles to the signal-box at Kopfe would soon be covered. Something had to be done at once.

He peered out of the window and saw that a thick wood bordered the line on either side. This was where the telephone wires would be tapped, and the new instructions sent through to the various agents of the British Secret Service.

Monty might have had further instructions sent if he could have been absolutely sure Dick would be aboard the train. It was too late to worry about that, however. He had to do the best he could—and that was precious little.

He racked his brains for some way of rescuing Dick. He had to make his plans and carry them out in a quarter of an hour. The train had already covered about three miles from the station, gathering speed. Now she was careering at sixty miles per hour northwards. The remainder of the twenty miles to Kopfe would rattle away under the thundering wheels in all too short a time.

Monty thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of his borrowed overcoat. Then a smile spread over his face, for his fingers had come into contact with a revolver. He drew it out and found that it was loaded. There were too many reasons why the guard of a continental express, in wartime, should be in possession of arms for Monty to waste time worrying why the weapon was there.

He had it, now, and it gave him ideas. He brightened up, and thought out the details of a plan—a daring plan—that had come to him in a flash.

He knew Germany well, and he had a rough and ready plan of the country through which the train was speeding, stored up in his active brain.

Once more he turned to the window and studied the dark landscape as best he could. As far as he could remember, Kopfe was a wild and desolate region of rocky wastes and patches of pine woods.

Time was the all important factor in his scheme. If he acted a minute too soon, or a minute too late, he might fail. He rose to his feet, and paced to and fro across the van. When the bound and gagged man behind the pile of baggage dared to move he growled a warning that was sufficient to quieten him again.

Monty was cold and calculating. He dared not fail this time. It meant too much to England! He had passed the word that one of them, if not both, would be on the rocks at dawn.

Only the members of his organisation would know what those words meant, but he had given the signal that so many were awaiting, and he had to stand by it. One thing only was in his favour, and that was rather doubtful. The train was speeding at top speed in the direction he wished to travel—northwards. But it was taking Heinrich Kahn that way as well.

And now, he had to wait until they were close to Kopfe. He was not at all sure how to tell when they were nearing Kopfe, and he paced the van in a fever of doubt and anxiety, until he recalled that he had asked for the distant signal to be set at danger, thereby forcing the driver of the express to reduce speed at that spot.

He heard eventually the shriek of the engine's whistle, and felt the first vibration of the applied brakes. The danger signal had been seen. It would take some time for the train to reduce speed to a crawl, but long before that he had to be well away with Dick Seton. What he had made up his mind to do had to be done at once.

He examined the revolver, then, pulling the guard's peaked cap well down over his eyes, he set out along the corridor. His eyes missed nothing that mattered. He noticed where the passengers were all sound asleep and where they were wide awake, where the doors were, the quickest way to leave the train—he missed nothing.

His brain was as cool as ice, and his pulse beat normally. He had embarked on the most dangerous and reckless incident of his wild career, and he just had to win through.

His hand was in his overcoat pocket, grasping the revolver. He came to the compartment and calmly slid back the door. The two armed sentries glanced up, but thinking he was the guard, made no other movement. Kahn glowered at him.

"Thought I said we were not to be disturbed?" he snapped.

Dick looked full in Monty's eyes. Whether he guessed or not, it was hard to say. Certainly Monty did not stop to argue about it.

"Pardon, Herr Lieutenant," he said. "There is an Englishman on the train!"

Kahn stiffened and his hand went to the revolver-holster at his belt.

"Where?"

Monty whipped out the gun. He did not shoot Kahn, although he might have done. If he had it would have gained him nothing, for the armed privates were within two feet of him.

He fired, and the bullet shattered the light in the roof of the compartment, plunging them all in darkness.

"After him!" roared Kahn.

Monty had fled at once, of course. He could picture what was taking place in the compartment. Kahn had flung himself on Dick Seton to prevent his escape, and the two soldiers had come out in pursuit of him.

So far the plan was working. One soldier tried to level his rifle and fire along the corridor at the bogus guard, but there was neither time nor space for such a manoeuvre. The bullet splintered a window, and as he had to stop to fire he lost time, and hindered his own companion.

The next instant Monty had reached the end of that carriage where the switches were. He reached up, and with a click shut off all the lights, not in the whole of the train, but only along the length of that particular carriage.

In the darkness scared passengers darted out into the corridor, colliding with the two soldiers who were so anxious to catch the bogus guard. Meanwhile, Monty had opened a door on the near side, clambered out on to the running-board, and closed it again. The noise he made passed unnoticed in the general confusion and din.

Crouching low, he clawed his way along the carriage towards the window of Kahn's compartment, while the two soldiers struggled clear of the medley of frightened passengers and went dashing along the train to the engine end.

"The communication cord!" shrieked a lady.

But Kahn ventured to come out into the corridor.

"Don't stop the train!" he bellowed.

his progress seemed terribly difficult and to take ages, while actually he was not more than two or three minutes reaching the door of the compartment where Kahn stood over Seton in the darkness.

What sort of confusion reigned along the whole length of the train Monty could not tell, but he felt sure it was terrific. Raising his head cautiously to peer into the compartment, he saw Seton huddled up in the corner on his side, and Kahn stood over him with one hand gripping his shoulder.

Then someone found the electric switches, and the lights went on again all along that carriage, but Kahn's compartment remained in total darkness because Monty had shattered the bulb with a bullet.

The sudden light in the corridor, however, caused Kahn to turn his head, rather dazed

THRILLS BY THE SCORE!

The Year of 1943—Civilisation threatened by Yellow Peril!

War impending between the White and Yellow Races—

"PERIL FROM THE EAST!"

By STANTON HOPE.

A Hundred Per Cent Thrill-Story In Next Week's NELSON LEE!

"Anything but that! I command it! The train is not to be stopped!"

He did not want that cursed Englander to escape by jumping off a train that was slackening speed. It had not yet occurred to him that what he dreaded was already happening. The brakes had been applied, and the speed was being reduced so gradually that he had not yet appreciated the fact.

Monty was outside, and only a few feet from him, clawing along the running-board, hanging on to door handles and rails, with the chilling wind tearing at him and shrieking past his ears. His peaked cap flew from his head. The overcoat filled and bellied out like a balloon, so that he was forced to hang on like grim death.

It was a handicap he had not bargained for, and he struggled to rid himself of it. It was not easy, crouching low to avoid observation from the windows above, to get one arm free of the coat, then change hand-grips on the supporting rail, shake the other arm free, and send the great-coat flying from him, flapping round the carriage wheels and being torn to shreds on the permanent way.

Losing the coat saved his life, for he could not have withstood the wrenching of the air-filled garment much longer. But he lost his revolver with it, however. It had been in one of the pockets.

Maybe that would not matter. Monty rarely trusted to weapons alone to get him out of a fix. He continued on his way, and

and bewildered. The movement was slight enough, but Monty profited by it. He straightened, and, with one quick, deft movement, opened the door. The wind pressure was enormous, despite the fact that the train was slackening speed, but Monty leapt into the compartment.

The rush of cool air startled Kahn. Dick was gasping with amazement, but was quick-witted enough not to cry out. Kahn darted forward to thrust Monty off the train before he could fairly gain a footing.

The whole thing took place in the shadows, for only the light from the corridor could dispel the gloom in the compartment. Monty was at a distinct disadvantage, but he had banked on Dick helping, and he was not disappointed.

Dick seemed to crumple up in his corner, then up came his feet, and he lashed out like a bucking mule. His boots thudded against Kahn's belt, and shot him to the far end of the compartment. His bullet head banged against the door-post, and he recoiled.

But those few seconds respite were all that Monty required. His feet were firm on the floor, and he followed up the advantage Dick had given him by leaping on Heinrich Kahn, driving his clenched fist square to the hard jaw with such terrific force that the German crumpled, sagged, and went down in a heap.

"The handcuff key!" panted Monty.

"The breast-pocket!" said Dick.

Monty found it in an instant and released Dick.

"The train's slowing down," gasped Dick.

"I know. I fixed it. Get ready to jump!" retorted Monty.

He paused to close the corridor door and jammed it with a piece of strap he tore by main force from the window on the other side. Then he turned to the open door and put his head out.

"Embankment—bushes. Have to chance it. Come on!"

He went first, leaping clear of the grating wheels. The rush of air took his breath away, but he was scarcely conscious of what he was doing or what was likely to happen to him. He came down in the middle of a bush that clawed at him with thorns.

Another body came down within six yards of him, and his own hurts mattered little beside his anxiety for Dick. He scrambled clear and hastened to where Dick was fighting to free himself from a clump of brambles.

"Hurt?" he queried.

"Only scratches," said Dick. "Gosh, Monty, but you fooled me in that guard's rig-out."

"You never guessed?"

"Not till you came in and spoke. Then I knew. But—look! The train's stopping!"

"Before it ought to." Kahn's recovered too soon and has pulled the emergency cord. Keep close to me!"

Monty was climbing up the embankment to the permanent way again. Dick was aghast, but he had had enough experience of Monty's ideas not to waste time in arguing. He guessed that Monty had reasons for all he did.

The engine was hissing furiously as the head of steam was allowed to escape. The train had been stopped with a suddenness that could only mean that someone had pulled the communication cord. The distant signal at danger along by the Kopfe signal-box could never have brought the train to a standstill just there.

But if it was rather unfortunate it was a possibility for which Monty was prepared. Instead of dashing away across-country, as he might have done, he returned to the line, and before the scared passengers, or even Kahn and his two men, could leap down to the cinder track, Monty and Dick were on the line at the end of the train and climbing up the iron steps set in the rear of the coach, to the roof.

The night was pitch black, which helped them considerably. The lights from the train streamed out on either side, illuminating the track, while above all was in darkness.

Side by side Monty and Dick lay low and wriggled forward along the length of the train. It was not easy to negotiate the distances between the coaches as they came to them without being observed, but somehow they managed it. Monty did not call a halt until they were lying flat on their

faces on the roof of the second coach from the engine.

Monty and Dick lay still, hardly daring to breathe, while search was made for them.

But no one thought of looking on the roofs of the coaches. In fact, the general opinion was naturally that the Englishers had got away across-country. Only fools would have remained anywhere near the railway after all that had happened.

Eventually, the passengers were ordered aboard once more. The compartment doors slammed, the guard blew his whistle, the engine shrieked, and the train continued on its way, taking with it the men for whom Kahn was still scouring the countryside.

They had to hang on as best they could. But for that they would have been comfortable enough, and, owing to the noise of the train, speeding to make up for lost time as far as possible, they were able to talk together.

"If anyone had told me, I'd have said it was utterly impossible for you to get me out of that compartment," observed Dick.

Monty only chuckled grimly.

"I've been in this game long enough," he retorted, "to know that the impossible is often easier to accomplish than what seems quite simple."

"I don't quite get that," said Dick, puzzled.

"Well, I've got you out of an impossible situation," said Monty. "You think we've escaped. But we haven't. We're only safe for a time." He was suddenly very serious. "Listen, Dick—by dawn both—or one of us—must be on the rocks at Cap Blauwe, which is a matter of ten miles west of Danzig on the shores of the Baltic. This train is rushing that way at sixty per hour, and therefore it is helping us. But we've got to get off it, without being seen, and that won't be so easy. If we can't both escape, then one must go, and you get first chance. Memorise these facts."

He spoke in whispers, and Dick listened intently until he had finished.

"At dawn," Dick said eventually. "Cap Blauwe—on the rocks. I understand. But how do you propose to leave this train? Where do we jump off?"

"That's the trouble," said Monty. "I had no time to plan any more than this. I had to wait to see just what happened. I have no idea what to do next!"

The Buttons!

DICK was nonplussed for some time. He had grown into the habit of taking the cue from Monty. So far Monty had never been at a loss, but it was obvious that he could not have foreseen their present predicament and had had no time to plan a way out.

On the other hand, they dared not remain where they were until the train stopped in a station. Somewhere, and somehow, they

would have to leave the train, and, naturally, Dick left it to Monty to make the decision.

"Hang on to my legs," said Monty. "I've got to find out where we are—if I can."

Dick clung to his ankles, and Monty rose to a standing position on the top of the speeding train. So far the blackness of night had helped them considerably. It still went a long way to conceal them, but it was also a handicap in other ways.

Monty tried to peer through the darkness, and the smoke and flying cinders from the powerful locomotive half blinded him. He thought he saw the lights of a village to the east, and the dim outlines of a mountain low on the horizon, but he could not be sure.

He turned the other way, but the countryside was flat and featureless, and in the darkness it was impossible to make out any recognisable landmarks.

Then Dick shouted, and clawed at Monty.

"Down!" he cried.

Monty staggered and fell. He would have slithered off the roof of the coach had not Dick clung desperately to his legs. He sprawled on the sloping roof with his head close to the edge, and before he could realise what was happening the train roared under a road bridge.

Monty managed to wriggle back to Dick's side.

"I didn't see it in the darkness," he muttered.

"It would have killed you," said Dick. "Any idea where we are?"

"Unfortunately, no. And time's getting on. We ought to be nearing the coast by now. Wait a minute. What's that ahead of us?"

He would not risk standing bolt upright again. He rose to his knees and peered forward. It seemed to him that in the distance ahead a dull line cut across the railway track at right angles. At times it glowed a dull white in the gloom. At times it seemed to be vaguely dark, then swayed uncertainly as if its outline was irregular.

Then it dawned in upon him what it was he was looking at.

"A river!" he exclaimed. "If I only knew what river!"

He crouched down again beside Dick, and they discussed the matter. Monty reckoned it was the Blauwe River—wide and deep where the railway crossed it, but further down degenerating into a furious-running stream, dashing over rocks and through deep gorges, and over falls in a cloud of spray, until it ran into the Baltic close to the rocks of Cap Blauwe, the spot for which they were both making.

"So you see," Monty went on, "we can't expect to make our way down the river by boat, but it might help us to get off this train. We've got to get clear within the next ten minutes."

"As soon as that?" queried Dick.

"Yes, as soon as that. In half an hour this train will run into Danzig. And in less than two hours it will be dawn. Before the

sun begins to show, one of us, if not both, must be down on the rocks at Cap Blauwe."

"And how do you propose to leave the train?"

"She's got to slacken speed as she goes over the river. Then we dive off."

Dick began to feel doubtful.

"Easy to talk—but how can you get her to slacken speed?"

"You follow me—and leave the talking to me. You'll see. This way."

The train was still thundering along at top speed, swaying along the gleaming metals, roaring through stations, and under bridges, and over bridges. As they had reached the low levels along the coast, they went over more bridges than they went under, which was very much safer for the two on the roof of the coach.

Now they began to creep forward. It wasn't easy, for they had little enough to cling to. Monty led the way to the front end of their coach. He wriggled over till he was face downwards, then got his legs down over the edge to the iron steps on the end of the coach. He clambered down to the coupling irons, straddled the distance and climbed up the steps on the foremost coach.

Dick quickly followed him across. Monty hauled him up on to the roof of the first coach of the train, and they set out once more, heading towards the engine.

When they reached the end of the coach they could see below them the heaped coal in the tender, and beyond, the cab of the engine, dimly lit by the red glow from the firebox. The driver was huddled in one corner, steadily gazing through the windscreen. The fireman stood more casually, wiping his hands on a piece of waste, but his back was turned to the tender.

"It's got to be done smartly," said Monty. "Follow me, as soon and as quickly as ever you can. We'll be over the river in five minutes. Come on!"

Monty rose to his feet, and stood swaying there for a minute, well braced against the rushing wind. He was judging his distance.

Then he leapt forward, and came down in a heap on the coal in the tender. He cut himself, bruised his face, and tore his clothes, but he hung on, and prevented himself rolling off.

Dick gasped at the daring of the feat, and wondered if he dared venture. He stood upright, but the tearing wind made him doubt his own abilities. He was afraid he would fail and only be leaping to his death. That would help no one.

Then his pride came to his aid. If Monty could do it, so could he. Gritting his teeth, he eyed the distance, and leapt. But by the time he landed in a dazed heap Monty had gathered himself to his feet and was clawing his way forward over the coal.

He did not trouble about who saw or heard him now. He moved with amazing rapidity, half leaping over the mounds, stood poised above the cab for a second, then leapt down to the running board in the red glow of the

furnace, and there was something in his hand that looked suspiciously like a revolver.

"Slow down!" he yelled, in German. He had to shout to make himself heard above the thunder of the wheels. "Slow down, or I'll shoot!"

The driver spun round, saw him standing there, and raised his hands above his head.

"Slow down, d'you hear?" yelled Monty. "Shut off steam—smartly—or I'll fire!"

The driver gasped, cursed, then turned to his lever. Monty's eyes never left the driver. Monty knew something about locomotives, and he wanted to be sure that the driver was doing what he wanted him to do.

The fireman thought he saw his chance, and, taking the opportunity presented by Monty's interest in what the driver was doing, he reached out stealthily for a heavy spanner. He gripped it, and was about to swing it in the air when Dick shouted at him from the top of the coal in the tender:

"Put it down! I've got you covered!"

It was too dark outside the cab to see anything except the dim outline of Dick's figure as he crouched on the coal in a posture that looked as if he held a gun levelled at the fireman's heart. The sight was convincing enough, for the man dropped the spanner with a clatter on the running-board.

The driver was casting apprehensive glances over his shoulder at Monty. The steam was escaping with a roaring hiss, and the brakes were grating on the wheels. The speed was being reduced steadily, and the line of the river was coming nearer and nearer.

Then the engine thundered out on the bridge that spanned the river. Dick waited for the word. Monty stood stock still until the engine was in the very middle of the bridge. Not until then did he shout.

"Dive for it!"

With a bound he was out of the cab and up on the coals of the tender beside Dick. They poised there for a moment, then leapt together. Their hurtling bodies missed the bridge girders by inches, then down they dropped like plummetts to the swirling water beneath.

It was really a horrible moment for them both, but the rush of air gave them little time for thinking. The water seemed to be dashing up to meet them.

The next instant they had plunged in and were going down, down, into the icy depths.

They came to the surface together, and then the swift current began to whisk them under the bridge. The train had come to a standstill, and it was easy enough to guess at the row that was going on there.

They managed to keep their heads above the surface, and the swift-running river whisked them out from under the bridge and carried them away down-stream like corks swirling down a gully.

"Make for the western shore," said Monty.

Dick didn't reply, but began swimming strongly for the western bank. It was not easy to cut across the current, but they

managed it at length, and scrambled out of the water more than a mile and a half from the railway bridge. The point was, now they had to find some means of getting to Blauwe—the rocky cape where one, if not both, had to be on the shore at dawn.

"As near as I can tell," growled Monty, "we have twenty miles to go and less than an hour to dawn."

"Can't walk it," declared Dick.

"Then we'll ride. Looks like a village up on the hillside, there. We'll borrow a car."

They approached the clustered houses with great caution, and kept well in the black shadows of the hedgerows until they came to the village. Monty would not risk speaking now, making his communications by means of signs or touch.

He drew Dick into the shadow of a doorway, within ten yards of the hostelry. The road was flooded with light from the big bay window on the first floor, and, glancing up, they caught a momentary glimpse of an officer struggling into his tunic and yawning his head off.

"Kahn has 'phoned," whispered Monty. "There must be a military camp near here. They will be searching for us presently."

They suddenly crouched low as a private opened the door of the inn, and went rushing round to the yard in a tearing hurry.

"We'd better clear," muttered Dick hoarsely.

Monty moved slightly, then hesitated.

"Wait," he said in a whisper.

The regular throb of a powerful motor fell upon their ears, and the private appeared at the wheel of an enormous car. He drove it out of the yard and round to the door of the inn, then he alighted, leaving the engine running, and stood stiffly at attention on the step of the hostelry.

"Follow!" snapped Monty.

He left the shadows like a stone from a catapult, and Dick was close behind. The private soldier heard the beat of his feet and spun round, but he was a second too late. Monty's fist crashed full in his face, and he shot backwards into the arms of the officer for whom he was waiting. The pair went down in a heap, and the next moment Monty was in the car at the wheel, while Dick was crawling over the rear hood.

They were off with a burst, leaving angry men behind, who fired recklessly after them.

Monty had shut off the lights. It was risky, but necessary. He had only a foggy idea of the road to take, but his sense of direction kept him true enough, heading for the coast parallel with the line of the Blauwe River.

He let her out with a vengeance. He did not know the road, but he knew what that car was capable of, and he got every ounce of speed from her there was to get.

His driving was a revelation. Already the first faint streaks of dawn were beginning to show in the east.

Monty steered the car round a sweeping bend, then he saw that the road ran down-

(Continued on page 44.)

All About Next Week's Magnificent New Programme!

MY DEAR CHUMS,
—This issue of "Nelson Lee" contains the final story in the present series, dealing with the detective's great fight with the Fellowship of Fear. I think you will agree that this series is one of the best ever written by Mr. E. S.

Brooks, and this week's story, which winds it up, is the bumper story of the lot. Here is an interesting fact: Since the series started my postbag has increased in size by nearly fifty per cent. I have been literally flooded out by letters from readers praising this series for the excitement and the genuine thrills of it, and also for the enormously added interest which the active participation of the St. Frank's boys have given to the adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

The Keynote—More St. Frank's Stories!

This last consideration has been perhaps the keynote of this particular volume of letters, and from that I have no difficulty in judging that the great majority of my readers want more St. Frank's stories—want them, in fact, every week! Am I right, chums? Nelson Lee, Nipper, and the boys of St. Frank's—that seems to be the almost unanimous desire of the great body of my readers.

I know well that no Editor ever had a more loyal body of readers than I, and I can assure all my chums that I am the last man to disappoint them, once I am able to judge definitely which way their desires point. I am certain then of your approval when I say that I have prepared a splendid series of St. Frank's stories—of course, by E. S. Brooks—to begin in next week's "Nelson Lee."

A Very Special Series.

There is something very special about this new series, however. I have had the idea of it in mind for some time now, and it was suggested to me by the large number of letters in my weekly postbag in which endless questions are asked by interested readers on the subject of the early days of Nelson Lee and Nipper at St. Frank's. The demand from my readers for information upon a thousand and one points of detail concerning those early days has been growing more and more insistent—and I decided to take some definite steps to satisfy it. Here are one or two examples taken at random from readers' letters, to show the trend of their queries:



Letters to the Editor
should be addressed
to NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"What made Nelson Lee and Nipper go to St. Frank's in the first place? Was Nipper at school there before he joined the detective, or after? Can you tell me something of the circumstances? I should so like to know."
—F. G. (Walthamstow.)

"What I want to know is how and why did Nelson Lee become mixed up with St. Frank's at all? We are told nothing of the early days. I suppose they are lost in the mists of antiquity! Anyway, can't you publish something in the good old paper to satisfy the readers who have no knowledge of what happened in the early days, though it is their dearest wish to be enlightened? I know I have the most burning curiosity on the subject, and I am sure there are thousands of others in the same boat. Get a move on, Mr. Editor, do!"—R. K. (Norwich.)

He's impatient, this Norfolk reader, you see!

Here's one more extract, from a reader in Bedford, whose initials are A. J.

"I long for some stories of the early days of Nelson Lee, when he and Nipper first came to St. Frank's. I much prefer the St. Frank's yarns to any other kind, good though the detective-adventure stories have been of their type. What we all—my chums and I—long for are tales of the old days at St. Frank's—these are the only ones, in my opinion, of the true Nelson Lee brand."

Well, there you have it! A sort of "general strafe" in favour of a return to the old St. Frank's days, when Nelson Lee was a Housemaster and Nipper a pupil at the famous school!

The great series which starts in next week's "Nelson Lee" will not only fully satisfy the writers of the above letters, and all who think as they do, but it will have a special appeal to every "Nelson Lee" reader new or old.

Who is Richard Bennett?

Now, I suppose it is time that I let the cat fairly out of the bag! The title of next week's great St. Frank's story is "Nipper—New Boy!" and in it Nipper, in his own words, gives the true and authentic story of his first arrival as a pupil at St. Frank's. How is that for a scoop? He reveals that his entry to St. Frank's was made under an assumed name, the reason for which he explains fully. His narrative bristles throughout with facts of enormous interest

to every "Nelson Lee" reader. No one, of either sex, who reads, or who ever has read, "Nelson Lee," should miss on any account whatever this amazing personal narrative story of Nipper and Nelson Lee's early adventures at St. Frank's.

I rely on all my loyal chums at present reading this chat to broadcast the news of this great new departure to all and sundry. The news is well worth spreading! The whole paper is being reorganised. A new series of St. Frank's stories of very special interest is being inaugurated, together with other new features, including a serial written

by one of the leading authors of the day.

Take it from me, you can look forward to a real Bumper Number next week!

And one last word: Don't forget to order next week's "Nelson Lee" from your news-agent to-day.

Don't leave it to chance, or you won't find a copy left, for "Nelson Lee," with its new programme of St. Frank's stories and other new features, is going to make a noise in the world! See you next week.

THE EDITOR.

P.S. Write to me and let me know what you think of our new programme.

THE GREEN BUTTON!

(Continued from page 42.)

hill in a long straight line. Beside the road were low bushes that stretched away in the dim light of very early dawn.

With a grinding of brakes, Monty brought the car to a standstill.

The next moment they were out of it and racing away amongst the bushes. They could hear the thunder of waves on the rocks now. Ahead of them was the brink of the low cliff. They were within a hundred yards of their destination—where the low bluff ran out into the grey waters of the Baltic. One, if not both of them, had to be on the rocks by dawn.

And it was now dawn!

They reached the cliff-top and went scrambling down to the rocky shore below.

A quarter of a mile from the shore the water was swirling oddly. A long, black shape rose from the waves—a conning-tower opened. It was a submarine.

"We'll swim for it!" said Monty.

Together they entered the water and struck out boldly. But by the time they reached the submarine, Dick was nearly all in.

But he got there. Strong hands hauled Dick aboard the submarine, and carried him

below. For a moment Monty stood on the iron deck, then he, too, went below. The hatch closed with a metallic bang, the motors hummed, and the submarine dived below the waves.

* * *

It was many years later, after the Armistice, that Monty and Kahn met; they met as friends, and joked about Green Buttons. For, after all, they were both brave men who risked much for their countries, and they respected one another.

But before the war ended Monty had many adventures, and was in many tight corners, but he was never in greater danger or pulled off a greater coup than in the adventure of the Green Button.

THE END.

Brilliant serial of thrilling adventure and motor-racing starts in next week's bumper number. Make certain of reading the first chapters of

"OPEN THROTTLE!"

Order your copy right away.

GROSE'S

8, New Bridge Street,
London, E.C.4.

**PUNCH BALL
AND DRUM**

**COMPLETE WITH
REAL LEATHER BALL 15/-**

Send for
complete List
Post Free.

EASILY FITTED TO ANY DOOR.

GEO. GROSE & CO., 8, New Bridge St, LONDON, E. C. 4.

300 STAMPS for 6d. (Abroad 1/-) including Airpost, Barbados, Old India, Nigeria, New South Wales, Gold Coast, etc.—W. A. WHITE, Engine Lane, LYE, Stourbridge.

BE TALL. Your Height increased in 14 days, or Money Back. Complete Course, 5/-. Booklet free privately.—**STEBBING SYSTEM**, 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.

507 STAMPS FREE! MOZAMBIQUE, CO., PERSIA, UKRAINE, ETC., 2d. postage, ask approvals. (Abroad 6d P.O.)—E. EASTICK, 59, Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth.

BLUSHING, Shyness, "Nerves," Self-consciousness, Worry Habit, Unreasonable Fears, etc., cured or money back! Complete course 5/-. Details.—L. A. Stebbing, 28, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.

INCREASED my height to 6ft. 3ins.!! T.H., age 16½, to 6ft.1 T.F., 21, from 5ft.5 to 5ft. 10! **ROSS SYSTEM IS GENUINE.** Fee £2 2s. Details stamp.—P. Ross, Height Specialist, Scarborough.

All applications for Advertisement Spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum, 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.

New Series No. 161

S.G.

February 18th, 1933.