

could reach beneath and grasp the iron tongue. As he was about to place a block of wood under the rim to hold it upturned, his alert ear caught the sound of stealthy footsteps on the stair below. In an instant he had turned the bell noiselessly back to its place and snuffed out the candle. Then, gathering his tools in one hand he moved on tiptoe to the stairs. Imagine his terror at hearing the footsteps now but a few yards away. Escape by the staircase was impossible. There was but one thing to do, and that was to hide himself in the bell-room.

He turned quickly and thrust his tools into a niche in the wall, so as not to be hampered by them. Then noiselessly, and lithely as a cat, he climbed up the wall and pressed his body close against one of the vertical timbers of the tower. Nor was he a moment too soon. Barely had he gained a comfortable position than two forms entered the room below him. One of them carried a bucket of water and a bull's-eye lantern. The other had a bag of something in one hand and various tools in the other.

As the Prep, from the beam of which he stood so safely ensconced, noted these miscellaneous articles, a smile broadened on his face.

"Great Cæsar!" he said to himself. "I'll be darned if those Sophs aren't after the clapper, too." But he could not comprehend the purpose of the bucketful of water and the bag. However, he was not long kept in suspense.

"Well," whispered the Optimist, "here we are."

"Yes," replied the other, "but I hope it won't be for long. Let's get to work and have it done. You know there's no time to waste."

Placing the lantern so that its light should fall upon their work, the two turned to the bell. Tipping it slightly over, the Optimist grasped the tongue. Then aided by his comrade, he braced it on one side and set to work to loose the clapper. But before he had begun to force the hook open, the Pessimist touched him warningly on the arm.

Immediately the lantern shutter was closed to a fraction of an inch. For, to their sensitive ears, doubly sharpened by their rather perilous situation, was borne the echo of a light footstep ascending the lower stairway.

The Prep, leaning far out, saw the Optimist pick up the bucketful of water and poise it on the edge of the overhanging balus-