

**TEMPERED STEEL;
OR, TRIED
IN THE FIRE**

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Tempered Steel; Or, Tried in the Fire by E. N. Hoare

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MR. RIDLEY'S SECRET. *Page 435.*

TEMPERED STEEL;

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BY

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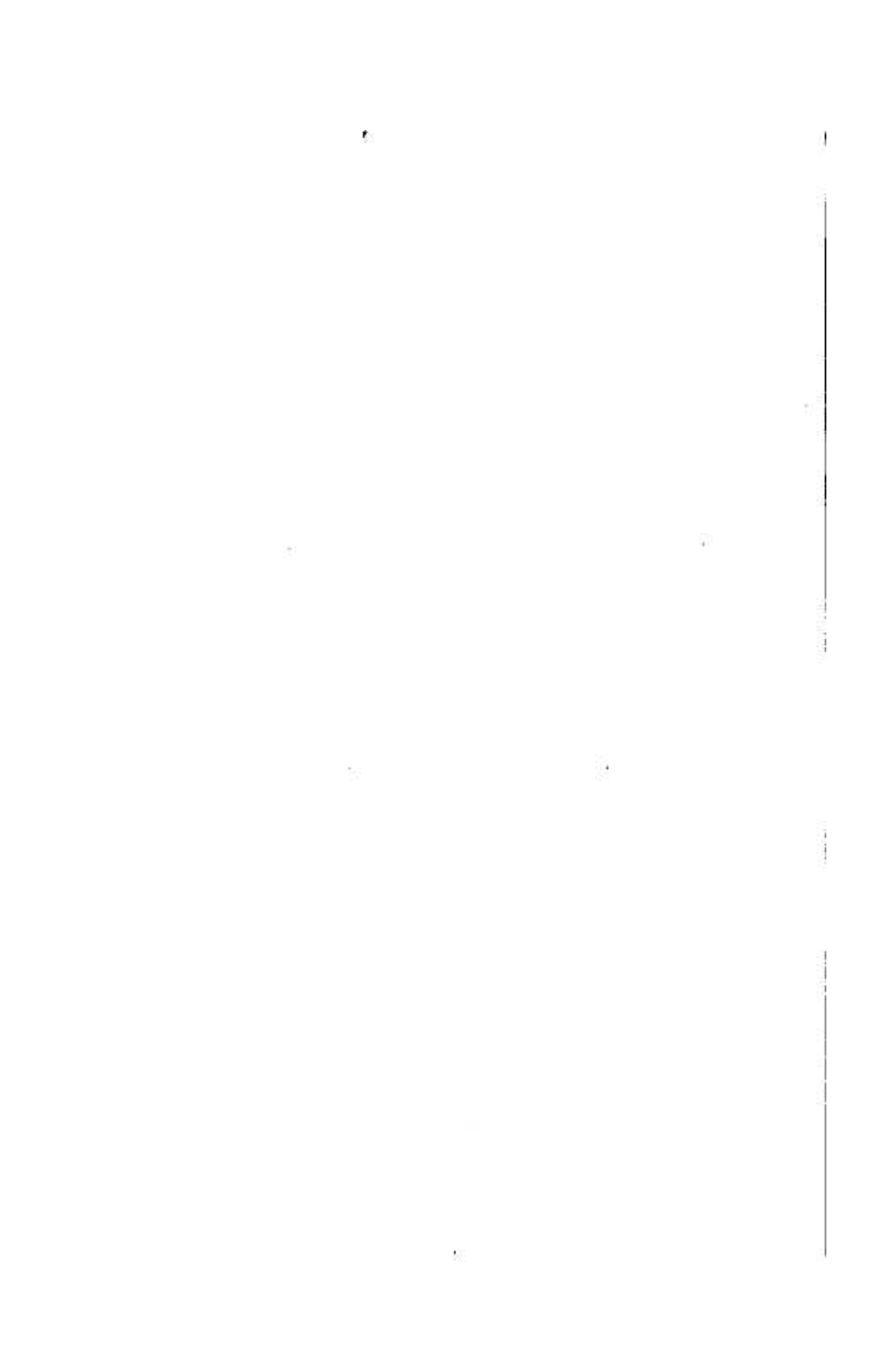
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TEMPERED STEEL.

CHAPTER I

"THREE CHEERS!"

HREE cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Cremer,—hip, hip, hurrah!"

The first hurrah went off pretty well, thanks to the vigour with which Ned Ridley, the proposer, started it. But Ned thought that, having set a good example, he had done enough; and so he left cheer number two to its fate. It was a sad collapse. A few small boys *said*, rather than shouted, "Hurrah!" Three or four very good little girls waved their handkerchiefs. The parson, the Rev. Thomas Hassard, beat with his stick on the table before him; then there was a silence, broken by a titter; then followed a succession

of timid hurrahs, amid which it would be hard to decide whether cheer number three was ever given at all. Master Ned now perceived that he had made a mistake, and, like many older if not wiser people, he immediately tried to cover it by making a second.

"One cheer more!" he shouted, waving his cap in the air, and starting off with the full force of a pair of sound sixteen-year-old lungs. A couple of Ned's friends, who had lungs like his own, joined in lustily. The lips of the small boys in the front row were seen to move; the good little girls again fluttered their dirty handkerchiefs; Mr. Hassard made the empty tea-cups dance on the table by his energetic beating. For a moment there was a good deal of noise; but then, Ned's lungs being exhausted, the cheer stopped short with an abrupt wail, like that given forth by a disconsolate organ when the careless blower has let all the wind run out. Again silence reigned supreme.

If the reader now asks what all this means, a very few words will explain the circumstances under which Ned Ridley made his unfortunate proposal. The children of Ashfield Sunday school had been having a treat, and a very pleasant afternoon they had spent in the grounds surrounding Mr. Ridley's villa. The weather was lovely, and the tea-tables