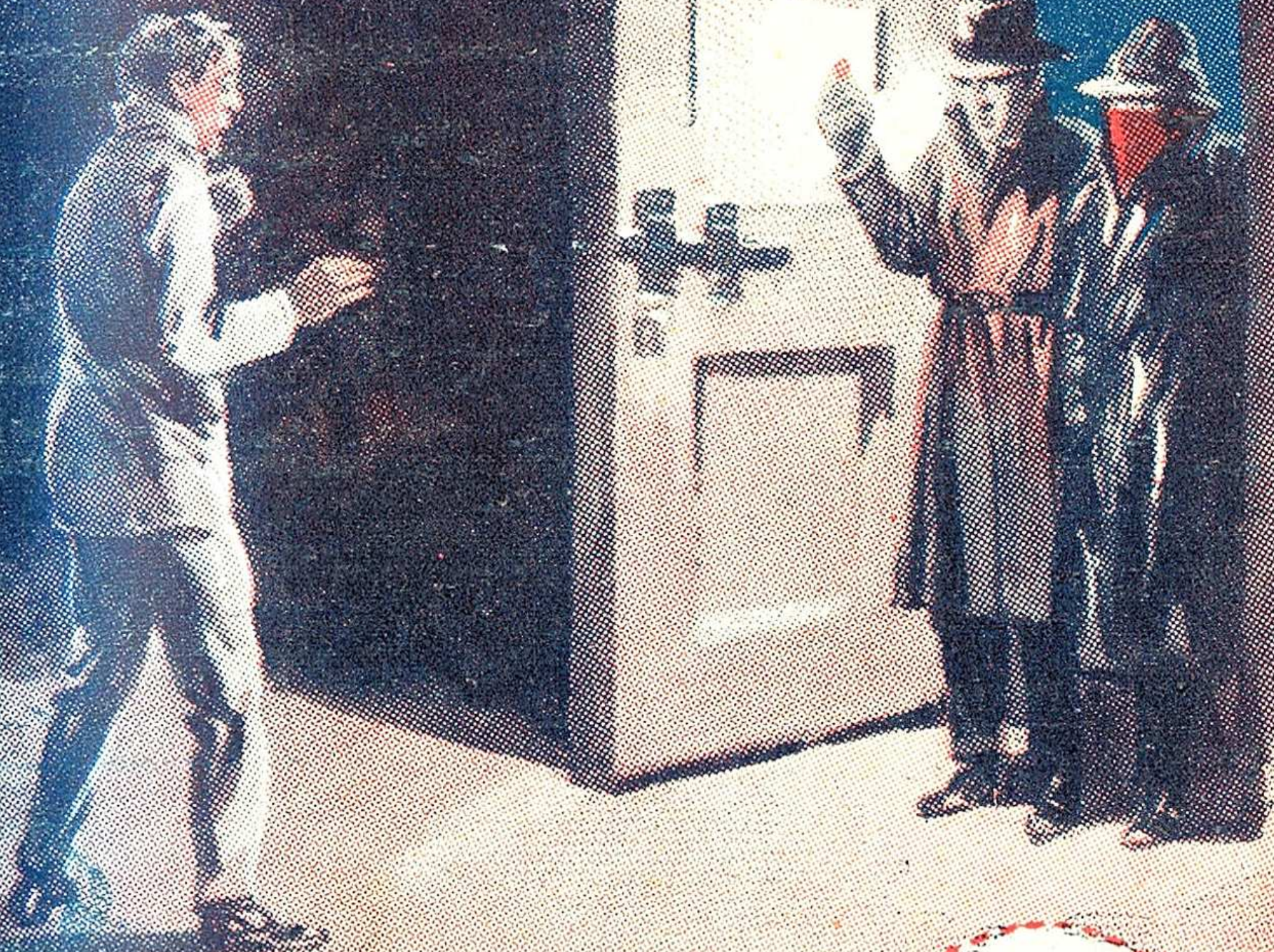


HOW A CAD TRIES TO REFORM! READ THIS WEEK'S STORY!

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THE PRISONER OF THE PRIORY

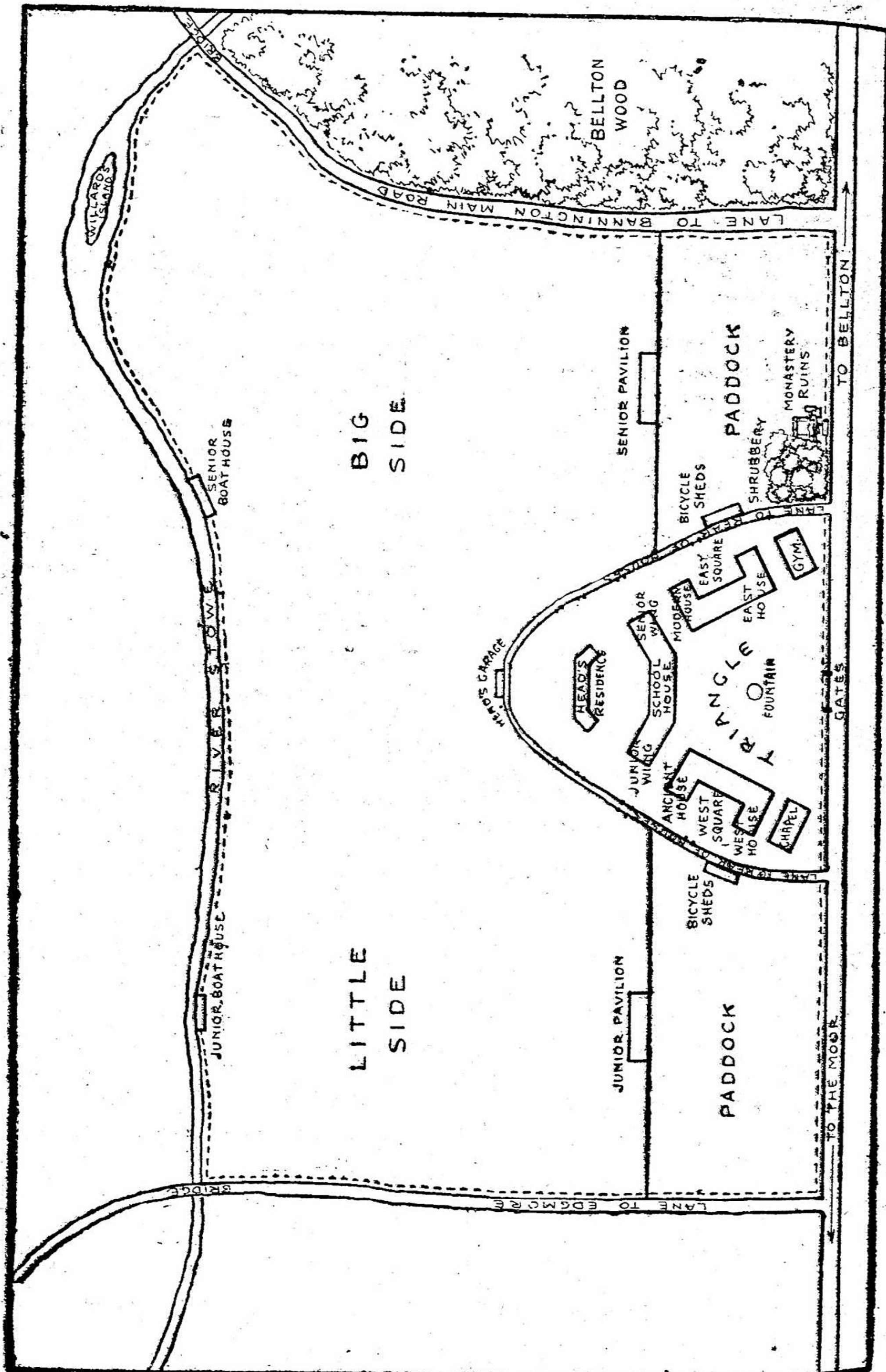
He looked at his two visitors curiously. Eustace Carey was the same, but Fullwood was unrecognisable. (See this week's story of St. Frank's.)

No. 539.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 3, 1925.

PLAN OF ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE AND GROUNDS.





THE PRISONER OF THE PRIORY

Ralph Leslie Fullwood, formerly the Leader of the Cads of Study A, finds it difficult to live down the bad reputation he has earned at St. Frank's, especially as it is generally known that Eustace Carey, his cousin, is wanted by the police; and, what is worse, Carey has thrown himself on Fullwood for protection, and is actually at St. Frank's masquerading as Stanley Clavering, a new boy, whom Carey met in Bellton Wood. A fugitive fleeing from justice, Carey had tricked Clavering into the

dungeon of some ruins and compelled the latter to change clothes with him, locking his prisoner in the dungeon. So we begin this week's story with the bogus Clavering at St. Frank's, while his unhappy victim, the real Clavering, is languishing behind the iron bars and heavy bolts of a dungeon.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE GALE BLEW IN.

"BURRRH! Blowing up for a wild night, by the look of it." Reginald Pitt, of the Remove, cast a glance at the lowering sky as he emerged from the gymnasium at St. Frank's. Rain was in the wind, although little was falling. The high trees were roaring noisily, and the gale came shouting through the West Arch on the other side of the Triangle.

"Yes, by jingo, we'd better get indoors," said Jack Grey. "It's quite early, too—plenty of time to make those repairs to our wireless. Gym's all right, but this is a night for the fireside."

The two juniors hurried across the Triangle, and entered the West House. There weren't many fellows about, although there was plenty of evidence of life in the Houses themselves. Windows were gleaming

and everything looked cosy and warm within. There was already a taste of October in the air.

The great gates were still open, although it was close upon time for locking up. A figure appeared from the lane—a youthful figure, wearing a light overcoat and a school cap, and carrying a handbag.

The cap, however, did not bear the St. Frank's colours or badge, and the newcomer was apparently a stranger. For he stood just within the gates, looking from one side of the Triangle to the other, unaware of his bearings.

He was no mere junior schoolboy, but a fellow of between seventeen and eighteen, with fair hair and a somewhat characterless face. His eyes were alight with a kind of eagerness, with anxiety intermingled.

At random, he took the path to the left, and made for the nearest doorway—which was that of the West House. He mounted

the steps, and entered the well-lighted, dignified lobby.

One of the Removites was standing against the notice-board, engrossed in the latest items of school news. This junior was remarkably skinny, all legs and arms. His face was lean, his eyes were set in deep hollows, and he had a sharp nose and projecting ears.

"I say!" exclaimed the newcomer.

The boy at the notice-board took no notice. It was more by accident than design that he turned, and caught sight of the stranger. His sandy, curly hair was like a mop, and his eyes were rather vacant.

"Where can I find the headmaster?" asked the new arrival.

"I beg your pardon?" said the curious-looking junior, who was Cornelius Trotwood, of Study L. "Did you address me, dear friend?"

The stranger stared.

"Yes, I did address you," he replied. "My name's Stanley Clavering, and I'm fresh here. I'm for the Sixth. Where can I find the Head?"

"Of course—of course," said Cornelius, nodding.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not surprised that you want to go to bed!" said the Removite. "On such a night as this——"

"You young idiot, I said nothing about going to bed!" shouted Clavering. "I want the headmaster!"

"It's raining faster, eh?" said Cornelius. "Well, we expected——"

"You confounded dummy, I said nothing about the rain!" roared the newcomer. "I want the headmaster—the headmaster!" he added, in a shout.

Cornelius backed away.

"I will admit I'm a little deaf, but there is no need to bellow at me in that unseemly fashion!" he said frigidly. "Why didn't you speak more plainly at first? You require the headmaster? Then, my dear friend, you have come to the wrong place. Dr. Stafford does not live in the West House."

"Where does he live, then?"

"You must go up the Triangle, and through the Big Arch," directed Cornelius. "You will then find yourself in the Inner Court, with the Head's private residence facing you. I trust that I have made myself clear?"

"Yes, I think so, thanks," said Clavering. "Which way do I go when I leave this door? There are so many Houses!"

The page-boy will attend to them, no doubt."

"What?"

"You were saying that you had some mud on your trousers——"

"You deaf young fool!" snapped the new senior. "I said nothing of the kind! You ought to be in a home—not in a public school! Which way do I go when I leave this door?"

"I'm sorry if you find me a bore," said Cornelius stiffly.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" groaned Clavering, turning and pointing outside. "Do I go straight across?" he thundered.

"Yes, of course," said Corney, nodding. "I can see——"

But Clavering didn't wait. He strode out, and Trotwood minor gazed after him with a frown.

"Naturally, I could see he was cross," he murmured. "Why should he tell me such a thing? A most objectionable character. I trust he is not making a long stay. One might suppose I had offended him!"

In the meantime, Stanley Clavering went right across the Triangle under the impression that Cornelius had directed him there. He found an arch all right, but it wasn't the Big Arch which led to the Head's residence. It was the East Arch, and Clavering found himself in East Square, with the Modern House on one side, and the East House on the other.

He was confused again, for there were two doorways in view—the rear doorway of each House. Once more he had to choose at random, and he took the left again. And just as he was entering the Modern House, something happened.

An object came hurtling out with excessive speed, and Clavering only just dodged it in time. The object hit the ground, rolled over and gasped. The next second another object followed, and performed similar acrobatics.

While Clavering was attempting to get clear of danger, a third object shot out. This one made a considerable roar as it hit the ground. A number of juniors appeared in the doorway, dusting themselves.

"And that's that!" said John Busterfield Boots firmly.

The three unfortunates sat up, and the last one to emerge uttered a warlike bellow.

"You wait!" he hooted. "You rotten Modern House fatheads! Just wait until you walk into the Ancient House next time!"

"Dry up, Handy!" groaned one of the other ejected Removites. "It was all your own fault. You shouldn't have said that these Fourth-Formers are lower down the scale than the Remove! They naturally got wild!"

"Are you standing up for them?" howled Handforth.

"Not exactly," growled Church. "All the same——"

"Excuse me!" said Clavering curtly. "Have I got to wait here all the night before you youngsters shift out of the way?"

Handforth turned and stared.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "Look what the gale's blown in! Who the dickens do you happen to be? And not so much of your 'youngsters'! By George, you've got a nerve!"

CHAPTER II.

FIRMLY ESTABLISHED.



FOR the time being the difference between the Fourth Form and the Remove was placed in abeyance. Buster Boots and his stalwarts emerged from the

Modern House, and joined Handforth & Co. They all stood round Clavering, examining him with interest.

"Can't be a new fellow," said Percy Bray, an angular, loose-jointed junior, with pigeon toes. "He's too old."

"Much too old!" agreed Buster gravely.

"What do you mean?" demanded Clavering, with a sharp note in his voice.

"No need to bark at me!" said Boots, with a curious stare. "New fellows don't come to St. Frank's at your age."

"How old do you think I am?" asked Clavering anxiously.

"Seventeen, at least."

"You're not far wrong," replied the new fellow, the darkness concealing the expression of relief in his eyes. "As a matter of fact, I'm booked for the Sixth Form. I was trying to find the Head."

"Then you've come the wrong way," said Handforth. "Any ass might have known that the Head wouldn't live in the East Square! No human being would live on this side of the Triangle, anyhow," he added contemptuously. "All the monkeys occupy these two Houses!"

"Look here, you Ancient House fathead!" roared the Fourth-Formers in one voice. "You Remove ass—"

"Don't start squabbling again, for Heaven's sake!" interrupted Clavering acidly. "I want to find the Head. Upon my word, I've never had so much trouble in all my life! I met a young idiot who was as deaf as a post, and he told me to go through the Big Arch. I went through it, and—"

"You didn't go through it," said Boots.

"What do you call that, then?" said Clavering pointing.

"That's the East Arch."

"Is there more than one arch here?"

"Three."

"An infernally confusing place, that's all," snapped Clavering. "How was I to know this was the East Arch? How do I go now?"

"Unless you speak a bit more civilly, you'll go on your neck!" said Handforth aggressively. "I don't care whether you're a senior or not—we're not going to be spoken to like that! And don't run St. Frank's down, either! Did you hear him, you chaps? Confusing, by George! Let's frogs-march him!"

Buster Boots grinned.

"Easy, Handy!" he said. "He's new here, and we can't adopt drastic measures just yet."

"But it's our only chance!" Handforth pointed out. "After to-night he'll be in the Sixth, and we mustn't rag a senior—"

"Oh, let him go!" said Bob Christine. "Look here, you new fellow—go back through this arch, and turn sharp to your right and walk up the Triangle to the end. You'll find the School House facing you, and Big Arch goes clean through it. The Head's front door is straight ahead."

Clavering turned without a word, and walked away.

"Rude beast!" said Buster, with contempt.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Handforth. "We've lost our chance now! If you Fourth-Form chimpanzees hadn't been so jolly meek—"

"Come on!" said Buster grimly. "He wants some more!"

Church and McClure wisely fled, and they took no notice of the frantic shouts which rang in their ears. And Boots & Co. amused themselves for some moments at Edward Oswald's expense, leaving him a mere wreck on the battlefield.

In the meantime, Stanley Clavering found Big Arch at last, and walked through. There was a powerful electric lamp set in the centre of the arch, illuminating it brilliantly. A junior was coming through—a skinny junior, all arms and legs.

"Oh, here you are!" said Clavering, pausing and glaring.

"Yes, here I am," said Trotwood.

"What the thunder did you mean by sending me across the Triangle, through the East Arch?" demanded Clavering.

"Did I?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, you ought to know," said Trotwood calmly. "Personally, I don't remember anything about it. As far as I can recollect, this is the first time I've set eyes on you. I'm not particularly impressed."

Clavering stared.

"You seem to have recovered your hearing pretty quickly?" he asked suspiciously. "Look here, you young sweep, were you fooling me?"

Trotwood grinned.

"Quite a natural little mistake, under the circumstances," he explained. "I am Trotwood major, you know. You must have met my twin brother before—he's about half-an-hour younger than I am. We look alike, but there the similarity ends. He's a frightful young duffer."

"And I suppose you're clever?"

"I leave that for others to say," replied Nicodemus calmly. "Anything I can do for you?"

"No, there isn't!"

"That's just as well, because I shouldn't do it if there was!" said Trotwood major. "I'm rather particular about doing favours. You don't strike me as being a desirable character."

He walked on, and Clavering cursed in-

wardly. All this time wasted, and he hadn't reached the head yet! But he had met several of the juniors, and he had discovered that they were full of high spirits. And he was aware that he hadn't created a particularly good impression.

It was a bad beginning, and he felt a little uneasy.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER KENMORE'S WING.



DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD, the headmaster of St. Frank's, regarded Stanley Clavering with a smiling, dignified gaze. He was sitting back in his chair, and Claver-

ing was standing on the other side of the desk, cap in hand. The Head's study was particularly cosy, with softly-shaded lights, and a crackling fire.

"I am glad you have turned up, Clavering," said Dr. Stafford. "To tell you the truth, I was getting a little anxious. I was under the impression that you were coming much earlier in the afternoon?"

Clavering cleared his throat.

"I was delayed, sir," he replied awkwardly.

"Indeed! How?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!" said the new senior. "There wasn't a connection at Bannington, so instead of waiting two hours for the local train, I walked. As a matter of fact, I got lost—I'm new to this district. I was wandering round for a long time before I found my bearings. I must have gone miles out of my way."

The Head smiled.

"A simple explanation—and one that I can easily understand," he said benevolently. "You should have taken a taxi, Clavering. But we need not press the point. You are safely here, and all is well."

"Yes, sir."

"As I informed your father by letter, you will go straight into the Sixth Form, and will board in the East House," continued Dr. Stafford. "Your Housemaster has made all arrangements for your coming. I trust you will be comfortable here, my boy. It is to be your home, I understand, for at least a year."

"Until I go up to Oxford, I think, sir."

"Exactly," said the Head. "We will do our best to endear you to our old school. Will your parents be visiting you at all?"

Clavering started.

"But—but they've gone to India, sir," he stammered.

"I know they have gone to India," replied the Head, with a curious look at the new boy. "You saw them off on the boat yesterday, didn't you?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"I mean, will your parents visit you before the end of the year?" said Dr. Stafford.

"Or are they remaining in India for the whole period?"

"For the whole time, I think, sir," replied Clavering. "Anyhow, I shan't expect them back until I see them. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'm a bit tired—that long walk—"

"Yes, yes, of course!" interrupted the Head. "Naturally, Clavering—naturally. I won't keep you any longer. At least, only a few minutes."

There were two telephones on the headmaster's desk, and he seized one of them—a private phone which connected him with all the other Houses. There was quite a network of them at St. Frank's.

"Oh, Drake, is that you?" said the Head.

"No, sir; I'm Payne, of the Sixth," came a voice over the wire.

"I beg your pardon, Payne—your voice is very much like Drake's," said the Head. "Is Kenmore handy?"

"He's here, sir, in the Senior Day Room."

"Splendid!" said the Head. "Will you send him to me at once?"

He hung up the receiver, and turned to Stanley Clavering.

"The head boy of the East House is on his way here now," he explained. "Kenmore will show you your study, Clavering, and introduce you to your Housemaster. I thought you would like it better if you were escorted to your new home."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Clavering. "It will be better—I got mixed up with the arches at first. Looks like being a wild night, sir," he added, as a gust of wind boomed against the mullioned windows.

"I am afraid so," agreed the Head. "Oh, by the way, Clavering, what about your luggage? Did you leave it at the station?"

"It's coming on, sir—I thought it would be here," replied Clavering. "It was naturally put on the local train."

"You will probably find it in your room waiting for you," said Dr. Stafford. "Perhaps I had better mention that your Housemaster has somewhat peculiar ideas on food, so you must not mind—Ah, Kenmore," he added, as the door opened. "Come in, my boy! This is Clavering, whom I mentioned to you this morning. Will you show him his room, and introduce him to his school-fellows?"

"Certainly, sir," said Simon Kenmore, the head boy of the East House. "Glad to meet you, Clavering. You'll be all right with me. Anything else, sir?"

"That is all, Kenmore. Good-night!" said the Head, smiling. "Good-night, Clavering!"

"Good-night, sir!"

They passed out, and Kenmore rather fancied that Stanley Clavering uttered a perceptible sigh of relief as they emerged into the open air. Clavering didn't speak as they started across the Inner Court. And Kenmore made no remark until they were passing through the Big Arch.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"I think so," said Clavering. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you seemed a bit glad when we left the Head's study," replied Kenmore. "Have some trouble with the old man? They're trying, at times."

"No; the Head was quite decent," said Clavering quickly. "But I'm tired—walked from Bannington—lost myself. I'll be awfully obliged if you can show me the ropes as quickly as possible. I'd like to be quiet for this evening."

"You don't want to meet the crowd, then?"

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind——"

"Please yourself," said Kenmore. "If you like to be unsociable, that's your own doing. I'll take you to your study, and then show you your bed-room. Will that be enough?"

"Plenty, thanks," said Clavering eagerly. "I shall be able to find my way about all right after that. I suppose the Housemaster will want to see me, but it doesn't matter, straight off, does it?"

"As a matter of fact, he's out—won't be back until nine," said Kenmore, as they entered the East House. "You needn't bother about him, anyhow. To-morrow will be time enough."

Five minutes later Stanley Clavering was alone in his bed-room. He had seen his study, and now Kenmore had left him—under the impression that the new fellow was a morose sort of beggar. And Clavering stood in front of the mirror, eyeing himself with gleaming triumph in his gaze.

"I'm in!" he muttered gloatingly. "In, by gad! The thing's worked like a charm! Now I can snap my fingers at everybody!"

CHAPTER IV.

FULLWOOD'S LONELY VIGIL.



MOAT HOLLOW, the grim old house at the bend of the lane, where the by-road led to Edgemore, was moaning and rattling in the gale. The high trees on all sides bent to the force of the gathering wind.

Complete darkness enshrouded the sinister, deserted pile. It was quite close to the village, and yet isolated by the enormously high wall which encircled it. And the place had an evil reputation. Twenty-four hours since, indeed, it had even acquired a ghost.

There was a figure in the grounds now—but it was quite solid. It belonged to Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of the Remove at St. Frank's. And Fullwood was in a towering rage.

"Not another minute!" he muttered savagely. "I've waited here until I'm sick, and I'm fed up. Confound him! I don't care if he gets collared now! It would be a relief to hear that the police had grabbed him!"

The former cad of Study A had crossed the drawbridge, and was now making for the high wall. For nearly two hours he had lurked in the grounds, and in the house—ever since dusk had fallen. He was awaiting the return of his cousin, Eustace Carey.

But Eustace Carey had failed to show up.

"If he hasn't got more sense than to lose himself in the wood, he doesn't deserve any help," muttered Fullwood, as he climbed the wall. "Anyhow, he can't expect me to wait half the night! I'm hanged if I'll come back now, to keep him company!"

There was every reason for Fullwood's exasperation.

He had been helping his rascally cousin a good deal since the term had commenced. Only a mere day or so, but it seemed weeks to Fullwood. And the events of the last few hours had fairly got on his nerves.

Eustace Carey was an utterly worthless young rascal of just over twenty-one—in the eyes of the law, a man. Until recently he had been an undergraduate at Oxford, but now he was a fugitive from justice, charged with assault and robbery. But for Fullwood's help, he would certainly have been in a prison cell by this time, awaiting trial.

This term there was a subtle change in the cynical Ralph Leslie Fullwood. It had commenced during the trip to the South Sea Islands, when he had formed one of Lord Dorrimore's holiday party. Cut adrift from his old associations, Fullwood had revealed surprising flashes of more decent feelings.

And when he had returned to St. Frank's he had received one shock upon another. In the first place, his old chums, Gulliver and Bell, had grated upon him to such an extent that he loathed them within a couple of hours. He believed they had changed—he suspected they had grown more caddish and blackguardly during the holidays. He was wrong. They hadn't changed at all. It was Fullwood who had changed.

Close contact with decent fellows for weeks on end had altered him without his being in the least aware of the fact. And on the very first day of term he had broken with Gulliver and Bell, and had quarrelled with every one of his former associates.

In addition to these troubles there had been Eustace Carey. The school had rung with that sordid story. Fullwood attempted to keep his relationship with Eustace Carey a secret—but Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove—had thought otherwise.

And, to Fullwood's amazement, while his old friends had sneered at him, and cut him dead, Nipper and Handforth and Pitt and the others had been more companionable than ever. And then Carey himself had appeared upon the scene—begging to be hidden.

And Fullwood, since he had had no other course, had taken his worthless cousin to Moat Hollow. And Carey had found sanctuary in the grim old building. Supplied with food by Fullwood, he had been absolutely safe; but he happened to be a

nervous weakling. He was terrified in the hours of darkness.

And those nights in Moat Hollow had been nights of horror and torture for him. He had even let himself be seen by a passing villager at one of the windows—and Moat Hollow was now haunted! Indeed, Handforth & Co. had even instituted a ghost hunt, much to Fullwood's startled alarm.

It was in consequence of this Handforthian stunt that Fullwood was now at Moat Hollow. Fearing that his cousin would be found—and such a discovery would mean the sack for Fullwood—he had rushed to the old house, and had told Carey to seek refuge in Bellton Wood. Carey had gone, scared stiff, promising to be back at dusk, when the danger was over.

He hadn't come, and it was now dark. Hence Fullwood's rage. He concluded that his cousin had lost himself in the wood and was wandering about in the darkness. And it exasperated Ralph Leslie beyond all measure.

"A pity if the idiot couldn't keep his bearings!" muttered Fullwood, as he reached the lane. "Well, I'm finished. No more hanging about for me to-night! The fool can go to the deuce!"

He trudged to the end of the lane, fighting against the buffeting wind. But he paused, and then turned towards Bellton. There was a magazine he wanted from the little news-agent's, and he might as well get it. The shops wouldn't be closed yet. It was still comparatively early.

As he walked to the shop he tried to convince himself that he didn't care a rap what happened. But he did care. There is nothing worse than uncertainty, and at that moment Fullwood was racked with doubt. The mystery of Eustace's non-return caused him keen anxiety.

And he wasn't thinking so much about Eustace, either. He had his own worries. If the Head got to know of his recent activities he would certainly be expelled. For he had been harbouring a wanted criminal. The fact that Carey was Fullwood's cousin would carry little or no weight. Perhaps Carey was in the hands of the police by this time. He was fool enough for anything.

Fullwood got his magazine, and was about to turn away from the counter of the dim little shop when he caught sight of an evening paper lying there. He bought it mechanically, for he always liked to have the latest news. Besides, he wanted to see if there was anything fresh regarding Eustace.

On his way to the door he glanced at the front columns, and certain headlines seemed to leap off the paper, and stand out. Fullwood's heart increased its beat tumultuously, for these are the words he read:

"Oxford undergraduate dies without re-

covering consciousness. Carey still eludes capture. Murder charge probable."

The shock of those few words was tremendous. Fullwood hardly remembered getting out of the shop. And when he stood outside in the blustering wind he thought he saw the whole grim truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE GENEROSITY OF ENOCH SNIPE.



"BY gad!" breathed Fullwood hoarsely.

So Roper was dead! Roper, the man whom Carey had attacked, had succumbed to his injuries! And there were rumours of a murder charge. In an instant, the whole affair had ceased to be a minor case of assault and theft, and had become a tragedy.

Fullwood knew the story. He remembered how Carey had gone to his fellow-undergraduate's rooms, had quarrelled, and during the fight Roper had crashed through the window to fall upon the paved path below.

Eustace declared that the affair was an accident. He maintained that the money he had taken—two hundred pounds in cash—was his own property, robbed from him by means of Roper's faked roulette wheel.

But Fullwood had his own suspicions. He knew that Carey hadn't told the true story—and even the papers were not to be relied upon. But here, at last, there was something tangible. Roper was dead! And that altered everything.

The police would be no longer content to merely circulate Eustace Carey's description. They would now be after him like hounds on the scent. The best brains of Scotland Yard would be employed in the hunt, and the net would be spread over the whole country.

"And what about me?" muttered Fullwood, as he walked on. "How do I stand now? Why, if I still keep Eustace in Moat Hollow, an' take him food, I shall let myself in for prison! They're bound to find the beggar sooner or later. An' I shall be arrested, too, for hinderin' the law, or somethin'. It'll mean chokey, as sure as a gun!"

Fullwood wasn't far wrong in this surmise, but the police would no doubt take the circumstances into account, and merely bind him over to keep the peace. But his career would be wrecked. Expelled from St. Frank's he would naturally be barred from the 'Varsity. And all this for the sake of Eustace—whom he didn't care a toss about! It wasn't worth it!

"But I needn't worry!" Fullwood told himself grimly. "I understand why he

hasn't come back now. He must have seen this report in some way. Perhaps the fool even went to the village to buy a paper—even he's capable of any idiocy. Or he may have overheard somebody talkin'. Anyhow, he's heard about Roper's death, and he's scooted."

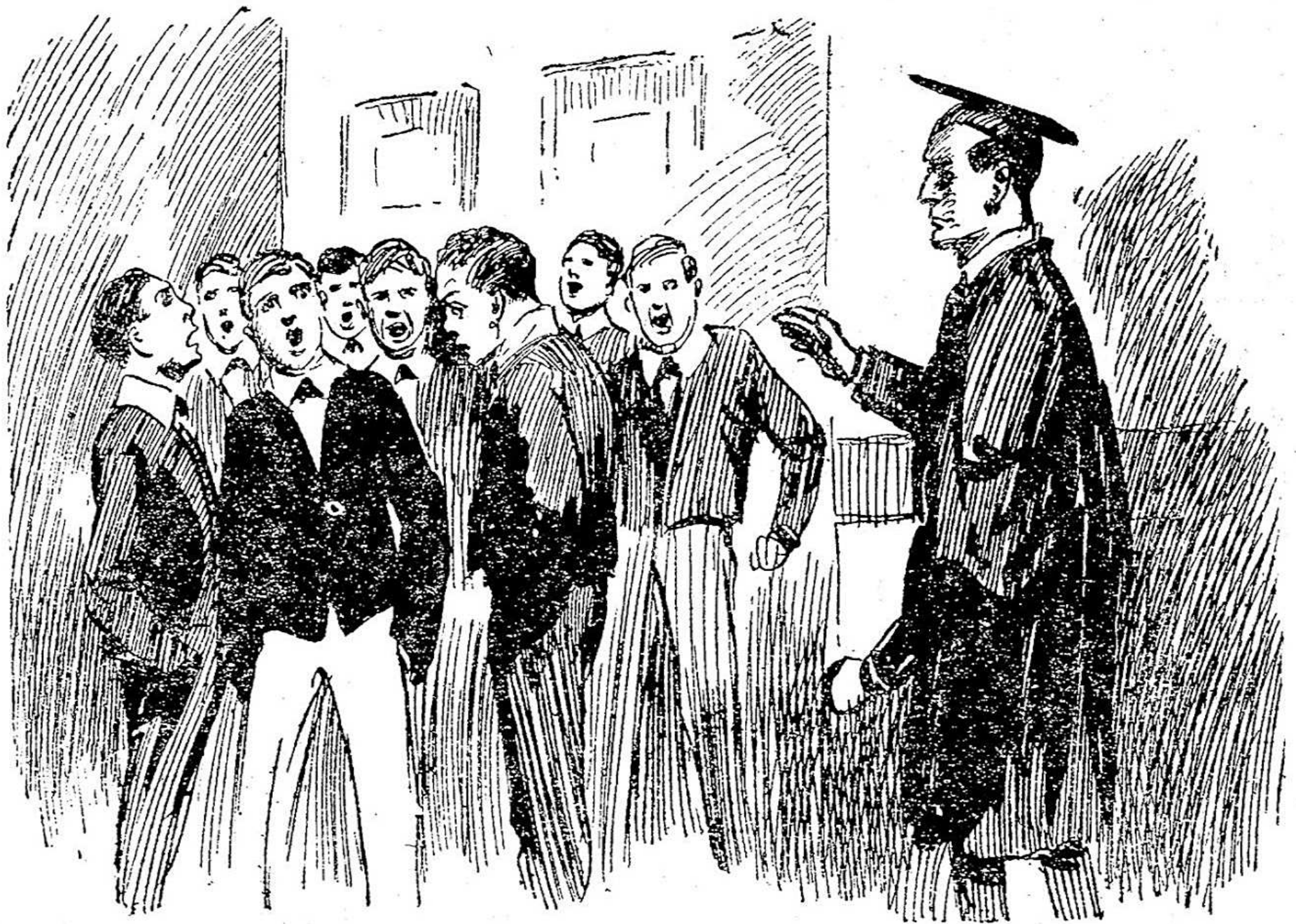
This seemed the most likely explanation to Fullwood. His cousin had flown into a panic, and had fled. Fearful that the police would now trace him to Bellton, he had gone off into the night.

As Fullwood neared St. Frank's he felt bitter. He could see further trouble ahead. How the fellows would jeer and gibe! They

and would take no notice of such ignorant exhibitions. Every decent fellow knew that Fullwood was blameless in the matter, and their opinion was worth more than the petty vindictiveness of the few.

Then his thoughts returned to Eustace. Perhaps he'd better make another visit to Moat Hollow, after all. He would go after lights-out, just to make certain. And if Eustace was there, he would tell him plainly to quit. Now that Roper had died, the situation was altered. Fullwood wouldn't have anything to do with his cur of a cousin.

He felt better when he entered the



"Stop!"

The voice thundered angrily in the midst of the roaring hymn of hate which was only just getting into its stride. The East House juniors gazed with startled surprise at Nelson Lee, and their song died on their lips.

would call him the cousin of a murderer! Just as if it was his fault! Never had any term started so miserably for Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

That, at least is what he thought. In reality, the opposite was the case. His rascally cousin was a blessing in disguise, for Fullwood was learning the true measure of sincerity in his former friends. And the antagonism of these cads was only serving to carry on the good work in Fullwood's reformation that the holiday trip had commenced.

He resolved to ignore sneers and jeers. He would assume an air of indifference,

Triangle. He had come to a definite decision, and his mind was relieved. He made his way towards the Ancient House, intending to seek the privacy of Study I. But a hail came from the doorway of the East House as he was passing along the central path.

"I say, Fullwood!" came a voice. "Is that you?"

Fullwood paused, and a figure came down the East House steps, and approached him. He was small and thin, and appeared to be slightly hunchbacked. His neck was long, and his head projected.

"What the deuce do you want?" demanded Fullwood sharply.

He gazed at the Fourth-Former with disgust. Enoch Snipe always aroused these emotions in Fullwood. Snipe's eyes protruded from his head, and they were watery, with peculiar red rims.

"Please, Fullwood, I was just going over to the Ancient House to see you," said Snipe, in a soft, whining voice. "It's lucky I spotted you, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't!"

"Oh, but Fullwood, I want to tell you something——"

"I don't want to hear it," retorted Fullwood harshly. "Get back into your House, an' mind your own business. I don't mind tellin' you that you make me sick. Why weren't you smothered at birth?"

Snipe giggled, as though amused.

"Oh, I say, you're only joking!" he ejaculated cringingly. "As a matter of fact, I want to be pals. Please, Fullwood, I'd like to be friendly with you, now that all the other chaps are cutting you dead."

"All the other chaps aren't!" said Fullwood. "Only the cads! Ninety per cent. of the fellows have got more sense than to make me the butt of my cousin's rottenness. But why am I talkin' to you at all? Get out of this before I lose my temper!"

"I'm willing to be awfully friendly, if you'll let me," said Snipe, standing there and rubbing his hands together. "I'll even come into your House, and share your study."

"Thanks awfully!"

"It'll look good for you," went on Snipe eagerly. "It'll show everybody you're not deserted. And I'll sing your praises everywhere, too. I shan't want much—only about a quid a week," he went on, his little eyes gleaming with greed. "That's all, Fullwood. And look how good it'll be for you to have a pal——"

Crash!

"I'd rather make a pal of the first worm that comes up after this rain!" interrupted Fullwood contemptuously.

Accompanying these words had been a hard punch into Enoch Snipe's face. Snipe was now sitting in the Triangle, in the centre of a puddle. He uttered no sound, except a low hiss under his breath. He was in agony, but he held himself in—and his evil little brain was already evolving revenge.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HYMN OF HATE.



FULLWOOD hadn't meant to lash out at Snipe's face in that way, for the

East House rotter hadn't any warning. Fullwood could at least have told him to put up

his hands. But that blow had been automatic.

Fullwood had hit out as instinctively as he would strike a venomous snake. There had been something about Snipe's attitude—something about his very look—which had compelled Fullwood to act. He wasn't sorry, either. His loathing for the fellow was intense.

"Don't lie there!" he growled. "Get up an' go to your hole!"

Before he could assist Snipe with the toe of his shoe an interruption came. The doorway of the East House was darkened by a number of figures. They came out, and resolved themselves into Merrell and Marriott, and a number of others. Merrell and Marriott shared Study No. 5 with Enoch Snipe, and they instantly recognised their companion.

"Hallo! What's this?" said Merrell sharply.

He glared at Fullwood with anger—a clumsy, awkward fellow, with big limbs.

"I've just given Snipe my opinion of him, that's all," said Fullwood curtly.

"You murderous rotter!" roared Marriott. "You've half-killed the chap!"

"He must take after his cousin!" shouted Munroe, flaring up.

"Let's pelt him!"

Fullwood stood there, facing the storm calmly.

"It seems to me all the worst blood of the school is concentrated into the East House!" he said deliberately. "It starts with Kenmore of the Sixth, goes down through Grayson of the Fifth, an' you beauties of the Fourth—an' ends up with Fullerton of the Third! A bright collection of first-class cads! It's just as well that you're all under one roof!"

There was a great deal of truth in this caustic remark. The East House was certainly the happy hunting-ground of the St. Frank's undesirables. As though by instinct, they had banded themselves together under the same roof. The other Houses were highly pleased with this arrangement.

But the East House listeners didn't like it at all.

"Did you hear that?" roared Merrell. "The beast's actually insulting us now! The cousin of a murderer, too!"

"What's that?" roared Armstrong, appearing out of the lobby. "Here, I'm junior leader in this House! What's the trouble?"

Armstrong, blustering and self-important, pushed his way to the fore. His recently acquired importance had already got to his head, and he was throwing his weight about forcibly. He had always made a lot of noise, but his chief characteristics were indecision and weakness of character. He was a windbag, full of bluster, and without any real ability.

"It's Fullwood!" shouted Marriott. "He's just assaulted Snipe—nearly killed the poor kid——"

"Oh, you make me sick!" interrupted Fullwood sourly. "Go back to your kennels—all

of you! I've got somethin' more important to do!"

He walked away towards the Ancient House, and a number of the Fourth-Formers made as if to follow. But Armstrong stopped them.

"Wait a minute!" he said. "No sense in getting ourselves into trouble by scragging the beast. It wouldn't do him any good, either. We'll give him something that touches him on the raw!"

"By jingo, that song?" asked Griffith.

"Yes!" grinned Armstrong. "Come on—and all together when I raise my hand!"

The East House fellows hurried on after Fullwood, and overtook him just as he was about to mount the Ancient House steps. They formed a complete circle round him, and joined hands. No attempt was made to molest him. But the entire circle broke into discordant song at a sign from Timothy Armstrong.

Fullwood gritted his teeth as he listened. It was an atrocious parody on "Who Killed Cock Robin?"—the work of numerous junior poets of the East House. Unknown to Fullwood, these young rascals had been practising the abomination for the past hour or so. They were glad of an opportunity to roar it out into Fullwood's own ears. Escape for him was impossible, for he was caught in the centre of the circle.

The voices rose loudly to the following:

"Who killed poor Roper?
I, said Eustace Carey,
With my fist strong and hairy,
I killed poor Roper!"

"Who's Carey's cousin?
I, said old Fully,
And I think it's bully,
I'm Carey's cousin."

"Who'll hound Fully out?
We, said the school,
With our rod and rule,
We'll hound Fully out."

"Is he wanted here?
No, said St. Frank's,
He'd rather rob some banks,
He's not wanted here!"

"Stop!"

The voice thundered angrily in the midst of the roaring hymn of hate—which was only just getting into its stride. The East House juniors gazed with startled surprise at Nelson Lee, and their song died on their lips.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE NECK.

THE Housemaster of the Ancient House was looking very grim indeed.

Armstrong & Co., engrossed in their caddish work, had failed to observe Nelson Lee's approach. Yet

Lee had heard every word of that parody, and he was amazed.

"You are all Mr. Goole's boys, I see!" he exclaimed grimly. "Armstrong, as head junior in the East House, I hold you responsible for this disgraceful scene. Allow Fullwood to pass out of your midst at once!"

The circle, with shaking knees, opened, and Fullwood marched out. He joined Nelson Lee on the Ancient House steps.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" he muttered.

"You have nothing to thank me for, Fullwood," said Nelson Lee quietly. "No, don't go—I wish to speak to you!"

He turned to the others just in time.

"Halt!" he said sharply, as several of them were about to flee. "I know you all, and your names shall all be reported to Mr. Goole. I shall advise your Housemaster to take this matter before the Head."

"But it's nothing, sir!" protested Armstrong. "Only a rag—"

"A rag?" thundered Nelson Lee.

"Ye-es, sir—"

"Do you dare to stand there, Armstrong, and tell me that that cruel, contemptible exhibition of hooliganism was a mere harmless rag?" exclaimed Nelson Lee acidly. "Perhaps you don't realise the blackguardly nature of your conduct?"

"We—we only sang a bit of a song, sir!"

"But your song was expressly designed to cause pain to this unfortunate boy," said Lee. "Not only that, but the words were insulting and slanderous in the last degree. How dare you set yourselves up as judges?"

The wretched group was silent.

"Whatever the misdeeds of Fullwood's cousin, you have utterly no reason to visit this vindictive spite upon his head," continued Nelson Lee scornfully. "Such a spirit is un-British, and totally unworthy of St. Frank's. Have you no sportsmanship at all? Have you no sense of justice?"

Fullwood was rather flushed as he listened to this scathing string of words. It was rather decent of Nelson Lee, he thought, to stand up for him, but he wasn't comfortable. He didn't want to be protected.

"Fullwood is one of my boys, and I will not have him subjected to these petty slanders," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I shall suggest to Mr. Goole that two hundred lines for each of you will not be too severe. Indeed, you may count yourselves lucky that the headmaster himself did not hear your contemptible efforts. You may go!"

The East House fellows slunk away miserably, and Nelson Lee led Fullwood into the Ancient House lobby.

"I am sorry that happened, Fullwood," he said quietly.

"It's all right, sir."



"I see you have the evening paper," went on Lee.

"Yes, sir."

"You have seen the latest news, then?"

"Yes, worse luck, sir!"

"It is a most unfortunate affair, Fullwood," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "It is a thousand pities that this unhappy young man should have died. I am afraid your cousin is in a bad way now. He will be wise to give himself up."

Fullwood looked at Nelson Lee sharply.

"He'll never do that, sir," he replied.

"He's too much of a cad—too much of a funk. I know him—to my cost!"

"You have no great opinion of Carey, then?"

"He's a rotter, sir—a rotter to the core!" said Fullwood bitterly. "I wasn't at all surprised when I heard of that Oxford affair. Just the sort of thing Eustace would be capable of. But it's not my fault, sir—I can't help what my cousin does. These cads here—"

He pulled himself up, breathing hard.

"Take no notice of them, my boy," interrupted Lee. "You are passing through a trying period, but time heals everything. Let us change the subject. I hear you are thinking of taking up football this term?"

"Yes, sir, I was," admitted Fullwood. "But I don't know now. I think I'd better chuck it up."

"Why?"

"Oh, all this bother, sir," growled Fullwood. "If Nipper puts me in the team, some of the other fellows might refuse to play—"

"If I know anything of Nipper, he won't tolerate that sort of thing," put in Nelson Lee quickly. "Your decision to play football pleases me, Fullwood—don't go back. I am delighted to find a big improvement in you. It seems that these troubles have had a good moral effect on you."

"Thank you, sir," muttered Fullwood sullenly.

He went off a minute afterwards, boiling. He hated to be told that he was "showing signs of improvement." The very thought of it aroused all his old stubbornness and headstrong devilment. He felt like going straight to his study and smoking. He wanted to do something to convince himself that he wasn't becoming soft. And it made him all the more angry because he knew that Nelson Lee had told the truth. He hated to admit that he was changing, although he realised that the change was for the better. It was just the obstinacy of human nature manifesting itself.

But all such thoughts were driven from his mind as he entered Study I. To his surprise, he found the light on, and somebody was sitting in the easy-chair. With the door handle still in his grip, Fullwood stood rooted.

"Eustace!" he muttered hoarsely.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STAGGERER FOR FULLWOOD.



EUSTACE CAREY—calmly sitting in this study!

For a moment, Ralph Leslie Fullwood's brain reeled. It refused to accept the fact. He thought he was seeing something that did not exist—that his mind was becoming unhinged.

Eustace Carey at St. Frank's! It was unthinkable, impossible—too insane to be true! Carey was wanted by the police more badly than ever now, and any kind of publicity would be fatal to him. Yet he was here!

"Come in," said Eustace calmly. "I've been waiting for you."

Fullwood closed the door with a slam. He turned the key in the lock, and fell back against the door. His breathing was short and sharp. He stared at Carey with startled eyes.

"What—what are you doin' here?" he asked fiercely.

"Sitting in your best chair."

"You fool!" hissed Fullwood. "You madman! If anybody sees you—"

"Don't worry," interrupted Eustace. "I've been seen by all sorts of fellows. Surprising, eh? Hope you haven't been waiting at Moat Hollow all this time? If so, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to give you all that trouble."

Gradually Fullwood recovered himself. He was no fool, and he could see that Eustace Carey was quite at his ease. For some unaccountable reason his cousin had lost all his former fears. Something had happened. Something enormously big. But what?

While Fullwood had been waiting at Moat Hollow, filled with anxiety regarding his worthless cousin, the latter had been here, actually mixing with the fellows! It was the biggest staggerer Fullwood had ever received.

"I don't know what your game is, Eustace, but you're crazy!" he said deliberately. "You're as mad as a hatter! Yes, I was waitin' for you at Moat Hollow. Have you seen the latest news?"

"Ages ago," said Eustace, yawning.

"You—you know about Roper?"

"Yes, the poor chap's dead," said Eustace carelessly. "Pretty tough luck—but it wasn't my fault. And the police are searching everywhere for Eustace Carey. Poor fools! They haven't got one chance in a million of finding him."

Fullwood really believed that his cousin was insane.

"What are you drivellin' about?" he asked tensely. "Before bed-time the whole school will be talkin' about your presence here, an' then the police will come an' take you away—"

"The school's talking about me already," interrupted Eustace. "But why should the police bother me? What have I

got to do with that sordid affair at Oxford? I'm not concerned in it."

"Not—not concerned!" panted Fullwood.

"By the way you're talkin,' anybody might think that you're not Eustace Carey!"

"I'm not Eustace Carey."

"What!"

"My name's Clavering," said the other calmly.

"Clavering?"

"Stanley Clavering, to be exact," went on Fullwood's cousin. "Not a bad name, is it? Sounds a bit toney, what? I'm in the Sixth Form, you know—East House. I've seen the Head and everything."

Fullwood swayed to a chair, and sat down.

"You're mad!" he repeated dully. "You're stark mad!"

Eustace Carey rose to his feet, and sat down at the table close to Fullwood. He dropped the careless, indifferent air, and became eager.

"No, I'm not mad, Ralph," he said softly. "Sorry if I've given you a shock. But I couldn't resist it. The fact is, I'm safe. With a new name, a new personality, I've got nothing to fear. As a matter of fact, I was rather disappointed when you recognised me."

Fullwood stared.

"What did you expect me to do?" he asked.

"Well, I look younger——" Eustace paused. "Don't I look younger?"

"Yes—years."

"Good!" said Carey. "I'll pass as a St. Frank's senior?"

"I suppose so," said Fullwood gruffly. "Now I come to look at you, you do seem different. You've got your hair in a new way, an' those clothes, too—— Gad, you don't seem much older than I do! What hokey-pokey business have you been up to, Eustace?"

"If you'll sit there, and listen quietly, I'll explain," replied Carey. "That ghost hunt was the cause of it—and I'd like to personally thank those juniors for driving me out into the wood! A chance came, and I grabbed it. Trust me to do something brainy!"

"Trust you to do somethin' criminal!" said Fullwood curtly.

Eustace frowned.

"None of that!" he said. "You'd better be careful, Ralph! After this little talk of ours we'd better be strangers, too. I shall keep over in the East House, and the less we're together, the better."

"I agree."

"You needn't agree so bitingly," growled Eustace. "Do you want to hear the yarn, or not? While I was in the wood I met somebody—Stanley Clavering, to be exact. I've put him away nice and cosily, and I'm here in his place. That's the thing in a nutshell."

Fullwood looked horrified.

"You've—you've put Stanley Clavering away?" he panted. "By gad! You—you don't meant you've killed——"

"Don't be an infernal fool!" interrupted Eustace.

"Well, that affair at Oxford——"

"Can't you give it a rest?" snarled Carey. "Haven't I told you a hundred times it was an accident? Roper tripped, and went backwards through the window. I'll admit we were wild, but I wasn't to blame for his crashing down to the paved path. In any case, he was a cheat and a swindler!"

Fullwood shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, never mind Roper," he said gruffly. "What's done can't be undone. About this chap, Stanley Clavering? Where is he? What have you done with him? It strikes me you're tying yourself into a few unholy knots, Eustace."

Eustace laughed.

"That's just where you're wrong," he retorted coolly. "Everything's clear and straightforward now. I'm breathing freely again. I'm safe!"

CHAPTER IX.

STANLEY CLAVERING'S FATE.



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was infinitely relieved. He was so relieved that only one connected thought was in his mind.

His own responsibility was

over!

Whatever happened now, he couldn't be held a party to it. Previously, he had been hand-in-glove with Eustace Carey at Moat Hollow—had deliberately assisted Carey in avoiding arrest. But that was all changed now.

Carey had taken this fresh action off his own bat. He had come to St. Frank's without Fullwood's assistance, and if anything happened to him, Fullwood couldn't be blamed. He was in the East House, and was thus obviously unconnected with his cousin. On this count, therefore, Fullwood was content.

He was getting over the shock of finding Carey in the same school with him. It was bad enough, in all conscience—but nothing like so bad as having the rotter concealed in Moat Hollow.

"Yes," Eustace was saying, "I'm safe now. And after to-night I shall stick to the East House, so you'll have nothing to worry about. In any case, I shall be gone within a week or two. I don't suppose I shall stay here more than a fortnight, at the most."

"That's the best thing you've said yet!"

"You're a mean young beast, you know, Ralph," said Carey bitterly. "I'll admit you've helped me, but you've done it with a rotten spirit. I shall want you to help me again, too—"

"I thought there was a catch in it!" said Fullwood wearily.

"Hang it, this man, Clavering, has got to be attended to!" snapped Eustace. "You can't expect me to do everything alone, can you? You're my cousin, and it's your place to lend a hand."

"Oh, go on!" growled Fullwood. "Let's hear the details."

"Well, there's nothing in it," said Carey. "I met the fellow in Bellton Wood—ran right across him before I could dodge. He was walking from Bannington—lost his way in the wood. He asked me which was the way to St. Frank's and we got talking."

"I thought I advised you to keep out of sight?"

"I know that, but I was so darned worried that I didn't know I was on the path until I got there," explained Eustace. "As it happens, it was all for the best. This Clavering man was a talkative sort—told me all his family history. And I found he was booked for the St. Frank's Sixth."

"Well?"

"It occurred to me that I could take his place, that's all," said the other coolly. "I lured him to Bellton Priory—that old ruin on the top of a hill. It was easy enough—he came like a lamb to the slaughter. He's there now—locked in one of the dungeons."

Fullwood stared at Eustace hard.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "You took the poor chap to that ruin, an' locked him in a dungeon? You infernal cad! You can't keep him there—he'll simply die! You can't imprison a fellow in a dungeon—"

"Don't be so beastly squeamish!" snapped Eustace. "I've done it—and Clavering stays there until I'm ready to go. That's where I want your help. We've got to go to-night—after lights-out—with blankets and food and light."

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Fullwood.

So it would be the same thing all over again! This hole-and-corner business, making secret night trips with food. It had been bad enough going to Moat Hollow. Now it was Bellton Priory.

"On the face of it, it sounds bad," continued Eustace, "but that's all nonsense. I put him in a big dungeon, and within a day or two we can have him nicely fixed up. It won't be like solitary confinement, because we can take it in turns and visit him—one of us at night, and one during the day. And it's only for a week or two."

"But, in Heaven's name, why?" demanded Fullwood.

"Because the fellow's got a passport—I've got it now!" said Eustace tensely. "Soon as this hue and cry is over, and as

soon as I've faked that passport up for my own use, I'll clear out. You needn't think I want to stay here, Ralph! I'm doing it because it's the only safe course. The police will never dream of looking for me in the Sixth Form at St. Frank's."

"That's true enough," admitted Fullwood. "You're safe now."

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Eustace triumphantly.

"But at any minute you might be bowled out," went on Ralph Leslie. "What about Clavering's people? Supposin' they come down? Supposin' some chaps from his old school—"

"You don't suppose I'd risk a thing like this under those conditions?" interrupted Carey. "Clavering has never been to a big public school before—he's lived in the South of France most of the time, and has had an English tutor. He hasn't got a friend or relative in England, and his people have gone to India. There's not one chance in a million of my being spotted—even if I stayed here for six months. And I mean to be gone in a fortnight!"

Fullwood was silent. He could see the force of his cousin's argument. He even realised that, in similar circumstances, he might have adopted the impersonation himself. It was just the sort of thing he had formerly been capable of. But now, somehow, it went against the grain.

"I saw the Head, and he suspected nothing," continued Eustace. "It was all plain sailing. Now I'm established in the East House, and my name's Stanley Clavering. Don't forget that, for goodness sake! And don't forget we're strangers. That's just as important. When I go, I'd better slip out through the window, so that nobody sees."

"What about to-night?" asked Fullwood bluntly. "You say you want me to help you? When?"

"Better wait until midnight, at least," replied his cousin. "We can meet outside the main gates—the same as we did once before. I don't know what we'll do about grub or blankets—"

"There's plenty at Moat Hollow."

Eustace shivered.

"Moat Hollow!" he repeated. "Gad, I'm glad I've finished with that nasty place! Another night there would have sent me mad! But I suppose we'd better get those blankets and things away. They'll do for Clavering, anyhow. And we mustn't leave any clues there, either."

And so it was settled. They were to meet at midnight outside the main gates. Clavering nipped out through the window, as he had suggested, and reached the East House without anybody being the wiser. And Fullwood was left alone with his thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

NIPPER'S DECISION.



STUDY D was warm and cosy. Handforth & Co. were at prep., and in addition to the radiators, a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate.

Handforth was sitting at the table, a far-away look was in his eye, and he was mechanically chewing the end of McClure's pet pen, and reducing it to a pulpy condition. Church and McClure were writing hard.

"I say," said Church, looking up. "This grammar gives me the pip! What's the subjective—"

"Murder," said Handforth absently.

"Eh?"

"That'll be the verdict," said Edward Oswald. "And quite right, too! The chap was chucked out of the window, and Carey ought to be shoved in the dock! I've a good mind to offer my services—"

"Are you doing your prep., or dreaming?" asked Church sarcastically. "I'm worried about this beastly grammar!"

"Grammar!" said Handforth, with a start. "Don't mention grammar to me! I hate it! If there's one subject under the sun I loathe more than anything else, it's grammar! I can't even understand why they give it to us!"

Church sighed.

"Neither can I, but if this isn't done to-night, old Crowell will jump on me to-morrow," he said. "That's the plain truth, so why go into the whys and wherefores?"

"I was thinking about Fullwood," said Handforth. "Give the grammar a rest. I think we ought to go Fullwood's study—a whole crowd of us—and cheer him up a bit. We'll just show him that we don't take any notice of his rotten cousin. Fullwood's different this term. He's almost decent."

"It's not fair to judge a man by his past," put in McClure, looking up. "Fullwood was with us on that holiday trip, and he's been a better chap ever since. It's not playing the game to remind him of last term—"

"Who's going to?" said Handforth. "He's probably got the pip to-night, after the way those East House cads went for him. I vote we get up a party and go along—"

"Great Scott, is that my pen?" asked McClure suddenly.

"Your pen?" said Handforth. "I believe it is."

He handed it over carelessly.

"What we want to do is to show him that we don't believe in that sort of thing," he went on. "Personally, I am quite prepared to give Fullwood my fist, and—"

"Look here, what about my pen?" interrupted McClure indignantly.

"My hat!" snorted Handforth. "Haven't you got anything better to do than to interrupt me over your silly pen? You've got it back—what more do you want?"

"You've chewed it all up!" roared McClure.

"A whole fuss over nothing!" retorted Handforth. "The pen wasn't worth tuppence in the first place. And if I like to chew your pens up I will! So no more about it, my son!"

Church grinned.

"Isn't that the pen you killed a spider with?" he asked, turning to McClure.

Handforth gave a violent start.

"You—you killed a spider with it?" he gasped. "With the end I was chewing? Help! I'm poisoned! I thought there was a funny taste about the rotten thing! Ugh! Why didn't you tell me, you rotter?"

"Don't get excited," said McClure coldly. "I killed the spider with a poker. Church was only kidding you."

Handforth breathed a sigh of relief, and slowly rose to his feet. Church and McClure instinctively retired towards the door. Fortunately, it opened at that moment, and Nipper looked in.

"Come and look at the door of Study I!" he said.

"Blow Study I!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to smash these fatheads! Study I?" he went on. "That's Fullwood's room. What about it?"

"Come and look," said Nipper. "Something ought to be done about it—and something will. I was just going in to tell Fullwood that he'd be wanted for our match against the Modern House on Thursday. I've decided to play him instead of Somerton. Somerton was a bit slow against the West House, and he's asked for a rest, anyhow."

"Do you think Fullwood will be good enough?" asked Church.

"I don't know—that's why I'm giving him the test," replied Nipper. "He's got to practice hard to-morrow and on Thursday morning, so I'm giving him good warning. I want to give him every chance I can—this keenness for football of his has got to be encouraged. I'm jolly glad to see it."

"But what about his door?" asked McClure.

"Come and have a look at it," replied Nipper.

He wouldn't explain, so they went out into the passage, the recent trouble forgotten. And when they walked down towards the end they found that Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent and one or two others were there.

"I mean to say, somewhere near the ragged edge, what?" Archie was protesting.

"Gdds cads and rotters! This is what one might call frightfully dirty work at the good old cross-roads."

"It's too bad!" said Brent warmly.

"A filthy trick!" declared Clive Russell, with indignation.

"What's a filthy trick?" demanded Handforth. "By George!" he added staring. "Well, I'm jiggered!"

There was a big card pinned on the door of study I. There were words daubed upon it in printed characters—executed in ordinary ink with a paintbrush:

"BEWARE!

"Enter this study at your peril! It is contaminated!"

"Who's done it?" asked Church hotly.

"Goodness knows!" replied Nipper.

"Some of those East House cads, probably, or it might have been Gulliver and Bell. They hate Fullwood like poison nowadays. Anyhow, Fully ought to be told."

"We'll tell him," said Handforth, throwing open the door.

CHAPTER XI.

PERSECUTION.



FULLWOOD sat up with a jerk. He had been reclining in the depths of his armchair, thinking over all the dramatic events which had recently been happening.

He hadn't even started his prep yet.

"Anythin' wrong?" he asked quickly.

The crowd surging in the doorway alarmed him. He had subconsciously heard voices out in the passage, but he had not connected them with his own study. And a thought instantly sprang into his mind now. In spite of all his predictions Carey had been bowled out.

"Yes, there is something wrong," said Handforth fiercely. "Come and look at this sign on your door!"

"Sign?" said Fullwood. "I don't understand."

He strode across, relieved to find that the matter was of minor importance. He stared at the daubed sign and flushed. Then with one movement he tore it down and ripped it to pieces.

"Thanks for tellin' me," he muttered. "I'm not surprised. In fact, I was expectin' somethin' of the kind."

"Have you any idea who did it?" asked Nipper.

Fullwood shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter?" he asked quietly. "I can afford to ignore these vindictive tricks. I don't know why it is, but some of the fellows are ready to tear me limb from limb just because my cousin's a hooligan."

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Well said, and all that. Dash it all, a chappie can't be responsible for another chappie, even if he is bulging with the same brand of blood. I mean to say, this sort of thing is somewhat turbid!"

"I should think it is!" exclaimed Handforth. "Don't upset yourself, Fully. We've heard the news about Roper, and it doesn't make any difference to us. Let's hope your cousin is soon pinched, that's all."

"By gad, I'd like to read that piece of news!" said Fullwood feelingly.

"Absolutely, old object!" beamed Archie. "In the meantime, let's forget the dashed thing and be merry. Kindly remember, Fullwood, old article, that Study E is wide open to you. Dash in whenever the good old fit takes you. If I'm indulging in forty of the best, wake me up, and we'll chat slightly."

"Same here!" chorussed the others.

Fullwood looked at them gratefully.

"I—I don't know what to say, you chaps!" he muttered. "Until this term I thought you were— Well, I don't know. You understand, don't you? I'm beginnin' to find things out now. It's decent of you to—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "We're looking at the thing in the true light, that's all. You weren't at Oxford with your cousin; you haven't even met your beastly relative for years, and it's caddish to persecute you for nothing. Here's my fist!"

Fullwood, much to his embarrassment, was obliged to shake hands all round. The juniors, of course, overdid it in their desire to make Fullwood feel comfortable. They only succeeded in making him feel his position more acutely.

"Now to business," said Nipper briskly. "I shall want you for practice in the morning, Fullwood, and to-morrow afternoon, too, while the Modern House chaps are playing the East House. We're up against Boots and his men on Thursday, and I want you in the forward line."

This time Fullwood flushed with pleasure.

"You mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"I'm junior skipper; I don't offer a man a place for fun," smiled Nipper. "It's up to you to put in as much practice as you can, Fully. If you put up a good show against the Modern House you might get

ANSWERS

Every Saturday. Price 2d.

a place in the junior school team for Saturday."

"By gad!" breathed Fullwood, his eyes sparkling. "You mean against the River House? I shan't hope for that, Nipper—but I'll try."

"Good enough!" said Nipper. "Cheerio!"

He marched out, and diplomatically took all the others with him. Nipper could clearly see that Fullwood was uncomfortable on account of all this sudden friendliness. Last term they wouldn't have addressed ten words to Fullwood. Now they were swarming round him, just to show him that they took no notice of the scandal concerning his cousin.

Left to himself again, Fullwood had something new to think about. Football! Not so long ago he would have sneered at the very idea of it. But now he was thrilled. He had a chance in the House team already—and there was a possibility that he might play for the school. It seemed too good to be true.

"What a blockhead I was to regard Nipper as an outsider," thought Fullwood. "And Handforth, too, and Archie. Gad! I used to look down on those chaps, an' do everythin' I could to harm them. Ralph, my son, you've been all sorts of a fool in the past. You're only just beginnin' to live!"

Then he smiled in something like his old way. Was he making an ass of himself? The old life attracted him now and again, but he always dismissed the thoughts of gambling, and betting on horses. He'd never do that sort of thing again, he decided. The game wasn't worth the candle.

Then, as he continued thinking, he frowned. Confound Carey and all his works! How could he practice football properly without a decent amount of sleep? He'd have to turn out an hour before rising-bell, or Nipper would want to know the reason why. School sports skippers were always hard task-masters.

There was that appointment with Carey at midnight. He couldn't get much sleep beforehand, and only a few hours after he returned from the Priory. That wasn't the way to excel at football. It might even spoil all his chances for the match.

"An' I'm helpless!" muttered Fullwood savagely. "He's planted firmly now, an' I can't shift him. I don't believe he'll go at the end of a fortnight, either. But he will, though!" he added fiercely. "If he refuses, I'll expose him to the Head, cousin or no cousin!"

He settled down to his prep at last, but skimmed it badly. There was bound to be trouble with Mr. Crowell in the morning, but he chanced it.

Then when bedtime came he went up at once. He had a room to himself now. For



Fullwood pulled the card down with a savage tug, and looked at it in the bright electric light.

he had not only left Study A to Gulliver and Bell, but he had deserted their bedroom also. He had prevailed upon the House-dame to let him have a bedroom to himself—there were several to spare under the new order of things. And Mrs. Poulter, who knew something of the facts, had agreed.

Fullwood reached his bedroom, and came to a halt. There were evidences of further persecution. A card was pinned on his door, daubed just the same as the other one.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNKNOWN TORMENTORS.



FULLWOOD pulled the card down with a savage tug and looked at it in the bright electric light. He was thankful that he was the first upstairs. This time the words were different:

"GENERAL NOTICE!

"Offices of the Specialised Crime Co., Ltd. Eustace Carey, President. Ralph

Leslie Fullwood, General Manager. All sorts of crimes committed at nominal charges. Walk in!"

It was a cheap, nasty form of spite. But Fullwood couldn't help smiling in a rather twisted fashion as he read the words. It occurred to him that he might have done the same thing himself not many weeks earlier. So how could he blame these others? But if anything was calculated to carry on the good work of reformation in Fullwood, this certainly was.

He entered his bed-room hastily as he heard voices and tramping feet. And his eyes glittered as he recognised the tones of Gulliver and Bell. They were well in advance—so that they could point out the notice. Well, they were dished.

Fullwood was fairly certain that his former chums were responsible for the notice, and he grinned with real pleasure as he realised how they were done. They hadn't derived any pleasure from their handiwork.

But the notion made Fullwood thoughtful. Gulliver and Bell hadn't got enough sense to do a thing of this sort on their own initiative. Bernard Forrest was the real culprit—Forrest, the new leader of Study A. He looked like being a worthy successor to Fullwood. Forrest was already revealing the traces of villainy that even Fullwood had never displayed.

Fullwood tore the card up, and put the fragments into the fireplace. He heard voices outside, but took no notice. Forrest & Co. were about the only fellows in the Ancient House who could have perpetrated such a mean trick. All the other juniors were decent. The majority of the rotters banded themselves together in the East House.

"Oh, well it's no good thinkin' about such trifles," decided Fullwood. "There's somethin' more important to worry about."

His mind, indeed, was filled with varied thoughts. Ralph Leslie had never had to think so deeply before. In the act of removing his waistcoat he caught sight of the mantelpiece. Then he compressed his lips.

Another notice! This was only a small one:

"Price list.—Burglary, two guineas. Forgery, five guineas. Manslaughter, ten guineas."

"The cads!" snapped Fullwood harshly.

He tore the thing up with a violent sweep of rage. And, outside, a violent gust of wind rattled the windows as though in sympathy with him. He went to the window, and looked out. The night was getting very wild, and rain was pelting against the panes.

"A fine night for that Priory job!" muttered Fullwood. "But we've got to go.

That poor chap might be dead by the mornin', unless we take him blankets an' food. In fact, I feel like goin' now!"

But that was impossible, so he got into bed without any loss of time. He could get two or three hours sleep, anyhow. His alarm-clock would wake him up, and he had set it for ten minutes to twelve, placing it under his pillow. The throbbing would awaken him, without disturbing anybody else.

He turned the bedclothes back, and let out an exclamation of rage. Lying on the bottom sheet was another big square of cardboard. He didn't even read it. He wrenched it to shreds with furious force, and hurled the pieces into the fireplace. Then, just as he was about to get into bed, loud voices sounded outside his door—hoarse and disguised.

"Think we'd better lock him in?" came one voice.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea," said another. "He might come out durin' the night, an' half-murder somebody. It's in the blood, you know!"

"Wouldn't it be better to bind him in his bed?"

Fullwood clenched his teeth, and strode to the door. There was a scurry of feet, and by the time he got outside nobody was within sight. And he wasn't foolish enough to give chase. He went back, pale and grim.

His persecutors little realised that they were doing their utmost to separate Fullwood from them for ever—that they were speeding up the good work which the recent summer vacation had started.

Fullwood prepared to get into bed again. Footsteps sounded outside, and this time he was ready. He crept to the door, flung it open, and lashed out.

Crash!

"What the—— I say, steady!" gasped a startled voice.

The owner of that voice was on the floor, full length on his back—for Fullwood had struck with terrific force. He stared blankly, for the prostrate one was the night prefect!

"I say, awfully sorry!" gasped Fullwood.

"And so you ought to be!" retorted the prefect, scrambling to his feet, and rubbing his left shoulder. "What did you hit me with—a sledge-hammer? What's the idea of this funny business, you young ass?"

Fullwood felt relieved when he observed that the prefect was Biggleswade. He was one of the best-natured men in the Sixth—a senior who had a great reputation as a comedian. He never lost his temper, and was the general butt of everybody's pleasantries.

"Sorry, Biggleswade," said Fullwood. "I didn't mean that for you at all! A minute ago there were some rotters outside here, ragging me. I thought I'd catch them red-handed."

David Biggleswade gave a wry smile.

"All right—under the cires., I'll overlook it," he said gruffly. "I've heard something about the goings on. You have my sympathy, Fullwood. Don't take any notice of the young beggars."

"I won't," said Fullwood gratefully. "It's decent of you to—"

"Nonsense," said the prefect. "What about your light? I'm going to switch it off, you know—"

"That's all right—I'm just ready," replied Fullwood. "Good-night, Biggleswade, thanks."

The prefect turned the light out, and took his departure. And Fullwood settled himself down to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE STORM.



ZURRRRH!

Fullwood awoke with a start. Something was vibrating in his ear dully and energetically. For the first second or two he was bewildered with sleep, and had no notion of the cause. Then the sound abruptly stopped, and he sat up.

The wind was buffeting against the Ancient House with tremendous violence—a true October gale. It seemed to Fullwood that he hadn't been asleep for more than ten minutes. He hauled out the clock to ascertain if he had set it wrong.

But the hands pointed to eleven-fifty. He had ten minutes to dress, and get down to the main gates by midnight. He had slept soundly for over two hours, and was glad of it.

He didn't risk pulling the bedclothes over him again, just for another minute. That would mean dropping off into another sleep, and he was particularly anxious to visit the Priory and look at the prisoner with his own eyes. He didn't trust Eustace Carey an inch.

He got out of bed, and gained a certain amount of comfort from the boom of the gale outside. It wouldn't be very pleasant out in the night—but it was the right kind of weather for safety. There wasn't one chance in a thousand of being heard or seen as he left the building.

He dressed himself quickly, and took his departure from the bed-room, carrying a pair of his thickest shoes. Creeping downstairs was an easy matter. The gale shouted outside, and it wasn't even necessary for him to display caution. He visited the cloak-room, and selected his mackintosh and a sou'-wester.

Then, leaving the House by his study window, he crossed the West Square and climbed the wall into the private road. Within three minutes he was in the lane opposite the main gates. To his satisfaction, there

was no rain. The wind was too high, in any case. Overhead, black masses of thick clouds were sweeping across the sky. There was a glimpse of the moon now and again.

"Thought so!" muttered Fullwood impatiently. "Not here yet!"

As he spoke, the school clock boomed out the hour of midnight. There wasn't a light showing in any of the Houses. The majestic pile of St. Frank's was asleep and quiet. And out there, in the lane, Fullwood waited. Five minutes—ten minutes. His exasperation increased.

"The fool hasn't awakened!" he told himself. "I might have guessed it! I don't know where his bed-room is, so I can't go an' rout him out! This means I've got to go to the Priory alone! Hang him!"

But at this moment a figure came scrambling over the wall near by. Fullwood experienced a sensation of relief, and a moment later his cousin was facing him.

"Good man!" murmured Eustace. "You're here on time!"

"On time!" snapped Fullwood. "I've been here nearly a quarter of an hour. What's the idea of keepin' me waitin'—"

"Don't growl," interrupted Eustace. "I got mixed up with these infernal arches and things—and then I couldn't find a way over the wall. Anyhow, I'm here now. Moat Hollow first, eh?"

"Yes, that's the plan."

They set off down the lane, Carey also wearing a mackintosh. His manner wasn't quite so jaunty as it had been in Study I. The wildness of the night was having its effect upon him.

"Gad, I'm glad I've got a decent bed to sleep in to-night!" he said fervently. "Honestly, I don't like going to Moat Hollow, even for a minute or two! That place gives me the jumps! I couldn't have slept there again for a pension! There's something rummy about it."

"There's more important subjects to talk about than Moat Hollow!" said Fullwood. "There's one thing you've forgotten, Eustace. It's all very well to talk about sharin' this work of visitin' Claverin—but have you thought about the consequences?"

"What consequences?"

"You say you mean to clear off for a fortnight?"

"About a fortnight."

"It's 'about' now!" grunted Fullwood. "After you've cleared off, what about Claverin? He can't be left there to starve—an' I'm not goin' to take charge of him—"

"Don't be a young ass," interrupted Carey. "After I've got out of the country, I don't care who knows how I wangled the thing. I can snap my fingers at everybody then. After I've gone, I shall want you to look after Claverin for two more days. That's all. Then you can set him at liberty. I'm not asking much, am I?"

Fullwood came to a halt in the lane.

"Not askin' much?" he repeated. "You're askin' me to sacrifice everythin'! My remainin' years at St. Frank's—my chance of goin' up to Oxford——"

"What do you mean?"

"You can only think of your own selfish point of view!" retorted Fullwood angrily. "After you've got out of the country you don't care! Of course not! But what about me?"

"Won't you be glad to get rid of me?" asked Carey tartly.

"Yes, by gad, I shall!" retorted his cousin. "But have you thought of Claverin? As soon as he's released he'll tell the whole yarn. Do you expect him to keep mum about my part in the affair?"

"H'm! I hadn't thought——"

"Of course you hadn't thought!" went on Fullwood bitterly. "But Claverin' will tell the whole yarn about me, I shall get the sack, an' most likely the police will grab me for helpin' a wanted criminal!"

"Look here, confound you——"

"It's true!" insisted Fullwood. "That's just what you are—in the eyes of the law! You're my cousin, but you're wanted by the police! An' where do I stand after Claverin' has got free? You'll be safe, but I'll be in the soup!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE PRIORY.



EUSTACE CAREY was not given to thinking much. For one thing, he hadn't got the necessary mechanism—excepting under great stress. Until this recent catastrophe he

had gone through life without calling upon his brain at all.

"Well, hang it, I can't look after Claverin' single-handed!" he protested. "You'll have to give a hand, Ralph——"

"There's only one way out," interrupted Fullwood thoughtfully. "Funny thing I didn't think of it before. I shall have to be disguised."

"Disguised?" repeated Carey.

"After a fashion, anyhow," said Fullwood. "A kind of mask will do—I can fix somethin' up to-morrow. I'll wear a handkerchief to-night, an' I won't speak. Of course, Claverin' will guess whom I am as soon as he gets free—he's bound to connect me with you when he finds out that I am your cousin—but he can't prove anythin'. And that's all that matters."

They walked on down the lane, and Eustace Carey was much relieved. For a moment or two he had begun to fear that Fullwood was going to back out. And the thought of paying these nightly visits to the lonely Priory alone affected Eustace's nerves.

"That'll be all right," he declared. "You'll be as safe as houses."

"No, I shan't be, but it's the only thing to be done," said Fullwood.

He didn't feel like conversation. His cousin irritated him beyond measure. He cursed himself for being a coward. Why on earth didn't he take the bull by the horns, and give information to the police? Why should he be saddled with this out and out blackguard? Why should he risk all his chances in the football because of Carey?

But these arguments, after all, were useless. As Eustace had once said, blood was thicker than water, and Fullwood couldn't act the informer. The previous term he might have done it, but not this. His moral character had undergone a change. He was becoming more thoughtful.

He knew, in his heart, that he would have to help Carey to the bitter end. So he resigned himself to the inevitable. They reached Moat Hollow, and climbed over the high wall to the accompaniment of the gale. The visit was only a brief one.

All the things that Carey had used were in one room. The blankets, the cooking utensils, and the foodstuffs. The blankets were used as wrappings, and in less than twenty minutes the pair had started off again, each with a big bundle.

"Thank goodness we've entered that place for the last time!" said Eustace, as they trudged along the Edgemore Lane with the wind following behind them. "It gives me the horrors."

"And yet you can comfortably leave Claverin' in those dungeons for a fortnight," said Fullwood. "I tell you straight, Eustace, if Claverin' isn't made comfortable I'll set him free."

"That dungeon is fifty times better than Moat Hollow any day," declared Eustace. "He may be lonely there, but it's only a temporary arrangement. For the sake of the family you've got to help me."

Fullwood knew that this was true. His own father and mother would uphold him when they learned all the facts. Once Carey was free of the country the matter would blow over. But if he got into the hands of the police the entire family would be dragged into disrepute, and would have a gaolbird as a member.

Everything would depend upon the dungeon. If Fullwood was satisfied that Claverin' would come to no harm he would keep mum. But if there was a chance of Claverin' coming to serious harm Fullwood meant to put his foot down. Another scheme would have to be thought out.

Bellton Priory was reached at last, just as a fresh rainstorm came sweeping down on the wind. The pair were in the nick of time, and reached cover before the rain started. The blankets were saved.

"Hanged if I know where I am yet!" said Carey, as he groped about. "There are some steps—— Yes, here we are," he

added. Go easy here. Better grab hold of my hand, and——"

"Go ahead—don't talk," interrupted Fullwood.

His anxiety had increased. A more wild and desolate spot than this could scarcely be imagined. It was impossible to believe that Stanley Clavering could exist here for two whole weeks.

They reached the bottom of the crumbling steps, and then went along the dank, earthy tunnel. These old ruins were not disturbed month in and month out. During the summer-time they were explored perhaps once or twice, but all the rest of the year they were left severely alone.

"Here we are," said Carey at length.

He struck a match and a candle was lighted. Fullwood took a quick glance round. The passage wasn't so damp as he had imagined. A great oaken door faced them, with the bolts shot home into the sockets. There were other doors in this passage, most of them half open.

"Better stand ready," murmured Eustace. "The beggar may make a dash for it. If he does, grab him."

He shot the bolts back, and they both entered the dungeon together. But there was nothing to be afraid of. A figure stood within, waiting. He was in the middle of the dungeon, blinking at the sudden light.

"So you've come back?" he said eagerly. "I thought you didn't mean it."

He looked at the two visitors curiously. Eustace Carey was the same, but Fullwood was unrecognisable. With his mackintosh buttoned round his neck, his sou'wester pulled over his eyes, the disguise was effective, particularly as he had a coloured silk handkerchief completely over his face. Only his eyes were revealed.

"It's all right—nothing to be afraid of," said Eustace. "This is a friend of mine—doesn't want to be known. We've brought everything, as I promised."

Stanley Clavering was by no means a weakling. He hadn't got much brain capacity, but a glance told Fullwood that he was constitutionally sound. His nerves didn't seem to be affected, either. He was attired in Eustace's clothing, and looked considerably dishevelled.

The dungeon was by no means noisesome. The floor was even, the walls were dry, and there was nothing gruesome about the place. Fullwood was relieved and satisfied.

The blankets were brought into the dungeon with their contents. Fullwood stood by without uttering a sound. Carey did all the talking. He explained the different foods, and advised Clavering to get the spirit-lamp going, in order to make some hot tea.

"We'll be back to-morrow with plenty of fresh things," he went on. "You've got

enough candles for now, but we'll bring a lot more. Don't worry, Clavering—we'll treat you properly."

"How long am I to be kept here?" asked Clavering tensely. "It's no good kicking; I can see that. You've got me, and I've got to make the best of it. But how long will it last?"

"Only a few days," replied Eustace promptly. "Then you'll be free, and you'll be glad it happened. Something to talk about, eh?"

Five minutes later the two cousins were hurrying back towards St. Frank's. And Fullwood was feeling greatly relieved in mind.

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING DEVELOPMENT.



HIS fears were settled. Stanley Clavering's prison was wretched enough, but the unfortunate senior wouldn't come to any harm. And with added comforts on the morrow his imprisonment might be made fairly endurable.

"No need to talk any more," said Fullwood, when they reached the Triangle. "We'd better get straight to bed. I've got to be up an hour before rising-bell, so I shan't get much sleep."

"What do you want to get up at that unearthly time for?"

"Footer practice."

"Ye gods!" said Eustace blankly. "You poor young ass!"

They parted without another word, for Fullwood didn't feel inclined to say "good-night." He slipped round the rear of the West House, and was soon through his study window again. Within five minutes he was comfortably in bed, thoroughly tired out, and easy in mind for the first time.

Meanwhile Eustace Carey got back into the East House. It was close upon two o'clock now, and the night was as blustery as ever. Carey crept upstairs to his bedroom, congratulating himself that nothing on earth could menace him now. And he had just come to this conclusion when, without warning, the electric-light of the upper corridor was switched on.

Carey gave a gasp, and halted. A man had just emerged from a neighbouring doorway, and was confronting him. It was, in fact, no less a person than Mr. Barnaby Goole, the Housemaster of the East House. Carey was caught red-handed.

Mr. Goole presented a somewhat startling spectacle. He was attired in a dressing-gown, and a nightcap was upon his head. He was unbelievably thin, with narrow

shoulders, a clean-shaven face, and a thin nose which was ruddy in the tip. He regarded Carey in amazement.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed coldly. "And what is this? You are not one of my boys. I have never seen you before. At least— Yes, I seem to—"

"I am Clavering, sir," stammered Eustace.

"Why, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Goole. "Clavering, of course. I had been informed of your coming, but I was unfortunately out when you arrived. Come with me, Clavering."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir—"

"Come with me, young man."

There was nothing else for it. Eustace Carey was obliged to follow Mr. Goole into the latter's bed-room. Eustace cursed his luck. This was the last thing he had anticipated. Confound the interfering old idiot for being awake at two o'clock in the morning!

The light was stronger in Mr. Goole's bed-room, and Carey experienced a curious sensation. He could see the Housemaster better now, and a chord was stirred in his memory.

"Sit down, Clavering—make yourself quite comfortable," said Mr. Goole, as he shut the door. "You will be good enough to tell me what you are doing, fully dressed, at this remarkable hour."

"I—I just went out for a breath of fresh air, sir."

"A singularly clever explanation, Clavering," retorted Mr. Goole, with biting sarcasm. "Is it your usual habit, on your first night at a new school, to take the air in the middle of a storm?"

"The—the journey, sir—I was feeling a bit seedy—"

"Come, come!" interrupted Mr. Goole. "That won't do. The truth, Clavering—I want the truth. You were breaking bounds, and that fact alone is remarkable, considering that you are a new boy— But yet I seem to remember— Queer!" he murmured, staring at Carey closely. "I'm sure I've seen— Good heavens!"

He broke off with a start, and grabbed Eustace's arm.

"Goole!" babbled Eustace. "It's—it's Barney Goole!" He stared at the Housemaster, horrified. "I—I mean—"

"Clavering!" ejaculated Mr. Goole deliberately. "So you are Stanley Clavering? Did I not have occasion to birch you more than once, Carey? You are Carey, aren't you? You were in the Fifth Form at Southcroft College, and you were a member of my House, too."

Eustace was too staggered to say a word. His limbs had all gone limp, and his previous sense of security had dissipated itself into vapour. He was like a jelly in every muscle.

"No, sir!" he gasped, when he recovered his voice. "I—I've never seen you before. It's a mistake, sir. I'm Clavering—"

"That won't do, Eustace Carey," interrupted Mr. Goole. "You pronounced my name quite smoothly just now, and you used the contraction which was familiar at Southcroft. I conclude that you didn't know I had come to St. Frank's?"

It was needless for Eustace to answer. The shock was a terrific one for him. By pure chance neither Dr. Stafford nor Kenmore had referred to the Housemaster by name, when speaking of him to Carey. If Eustace had known of Mr. Goole's presence he would have abandoned his whole scheme. But now it was too late.

"There is something mysterious about this business," continued Mr. Goole, who was now deadly calm. "You come here in the name of Stanley Clavering, a boy who has never been to a public school before. And I find that you are one of my old Southcroft boys. You are, in fact, the self-same Carey who is now badly wanted by the police for robbery and murder."

Eustace nearly choked.

"Not—not murder, sir!" he panted. "It was an accident—"

"At all events, the police are particularly anxious to make your acquaintance," interrupted Mr. Goole. "You are right, Carey—it wasn't murder. Pardon my slip. With luck you may get off with manslaughter."

"What—what are you going to do, sir?" breathed Eustace.

"Do?" repeated the Housemaster. "There is only one thing I can do. I intend to ring up the police this very minute, and hold you here until they arrive!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COMPACT.



MR. BARNABY GOOLE had dealt with the matter very coolly and decisively.

There was no mistaking the grim note in his voice.

After the first shock of surprise the whole truth had come to him. Carey was wanted by the police, and he was here masquerading as a youth of seventeen. Actually he was over twenty-one, but certainly didn't look it.

The Housemaster had instantly recognised the cunning nature of Carey's plan. He had come to St. Frank's in Clavering's personality in order to evade the law.

"Don't—don't do that, sir!" panted the wretched Eustace. "Don't give me up to the police!"



The referee rushed up furiously.
 "You young hooligan!" he shouted. "Get off the field!"

"Can you give me any reason why I shouldn't?"

"It was an accident, sir——"

"I am afraid that won't hold water, Carey," interrupted Mr. Goole coldly. "And indeed if Roper's death was an accident you have nothing to fear. It will be far better for you to face the police, and let justice take its course. If you are innocent there will be no punishment."

"Roper robbed me," said Carey fiercely. "I went to his rooms to tell him he was a cheat, and we had a row. He went for me, and I defended myself. Then he tripped on something and fell through the window—clean out, and down to the paved path. It wasn't my fault, sir——"

"It is natural that you should make the best of your own story, Carey," said the Housemaster acidly. "Personally, I have not the slightest doubt that you attacked Roper when in a drunken condition. You knocked him out of the window, and then robbed his rooms. You thoroughly deserve the full extent of punishment that the law can administer."

Mr. Goole moved across the room, and thoughtfully rubbed his chin. He was wondering how he could go down and ring up the police, and be sure of finding Carey upon his return. And Carey was thinking, too. An evil glint was appearing in his eyes.

"You'd better keep mum, Mr. Goole!" he said suddenly. "We're not master and pupil now—but man to man!"

"Man to man!" repeated Mr. Goole. "Good gad!"

"That's what I said!" panted Eustace. "And you'd better not ring up the police! If you do, I'll get you kicked out of St. Frank's! If you've got me in your grip, Goole, I've got you in mine."

The Housemaster started, and looked at Carey with a steady eye. Carey's manner had completely changed. He was openly insolent, and his eyes were burning.

"Oh!" said Mr. Goole. "You've got me in your grip?"

"What about that affair at Southcroft after I'd left?" asked Carey tensely. "I heard about it from one of the other fellows—a friend of mine. You thought I knew nothing, didn't you?"

"What do you know?" asked the Housemaster sharply.

"I know that you were the treasurer of one of the Southcroft Senior Clubs!" retorted Eustace. "I know that you took the money and used it! It was hushed up at the time——"

"Stop!" panted Mr. Goole. "I paid every penny of that money back!"

"I'm not saying you didn't," replied Eustace coolly. "But it took you a year, didn't it? And if it hadn't been for decency of the fellows concerned, you would have been exposed. I heard all about it from Rodway. He was the hardest hit of all——"

"I tell you the money was paid back——"

"All the same, if the headmaster of St. Frank's hears that yarn, you won't stay here long, will you?" asked Eustace. "You were practically kicked out of Southcroft because of that other affair. Nothing actually came out, but the Head suspected things, and you got the order of the boot. Ring up the police, and Dr. Stafford will soon know your record."

Mr. Barnaby Goole had gone deathly pale, and he sank on to the end of his bed. His very attitude was sufficient proof that Eustace Carey had spoken the truth. There was intense agony in his eyes.

At last he had secured an appointment which befitted his learning and dignity. As Housemaster of the East House at St. Frank's he had regarded himself as a fixture. The past was dead. Dr. Stafford knew nothing of it. Mr. Goole had come to St. Frank's with an unblemished record.

For years that moment of folly had haunted him. He had taken money, as Carey had stated. He had used it for his brother, who had been on the verge of ruin. But the investment had failed, and Mr. Goole had been left to face the music.

Owing to the generosity of several Southcroft seniors—fellows who knew that Mr. Goole was not really to blame—the truth had never been openly revealed. But the headmaster of Southcroft had heard rumours; had suspected, and Mr. Goole had been asked to leave. There was no stain on his character, but there were a few smudges.

He had started again as assistant master at a small school. He had risen gradually, and, at last, he had glowed with joy upon receiving his present appointment. After all his years of struggling, he had got back to his former status. Indeed, St. Frank's was the best school he had ever been at.

Mr. Goole looked up, and faced Carey.

"You threaten to expose my poor act of ill-judgment if I hand you over to the police?" he asked. "Do you suppose, Carey, that I can allow you to remain in this school?"

Eustace went close to the Housemaster.

"Listen, Mr. Goole," he said fiercely. "Why should we quarrel? If you won't say a word, neither will I! I swear that——"

"But—but——"

"Things aren't so bad as they seem," went on Carey. "I tell you that affair at Oxford was an accident. Give me a few days, anyhow! I promise to clear out as soon as I can! I'm only waiting until I can get over to France. I won't be here longer than a week, at the most!"

Mr. Goole's eyes gleamed.

"But Clavering?" he asked. "What have you done——"

"That's nothing, Mr. Goole," interrupted Carey lightly, and lying with fluency. "I arranged everything with Clavering yesterday. He's gone away for a holiday on my money, and I'm taking his place. You needn't worry about him at all."

"You have me at your mercy, and I am in a wretched state of helplessness," said Mr. Goole huskily. "It will be ruin for me if Dr. Stafford knows of that unfortunate Southcroft affair. We are both in the same boat, Carey."

"Then let's make a compact," said Eustace eagerly. "We'll each keep our mouths shut, and let things go on as they are!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REPORT OF THE INQUEST.



HANDFORTH looked up at the sky critically. "It's fine now, but it'll rain before this afternoon, mark my words!" he said solemnly. "It'll just come in time to mess up our

match against those Modern chaps."

"Don't you believe it, my son," said Nipper cheerily. "The barometer's high, and she's going higher! It's going to be a glorious afternoon."

"I tell you it'll rain!" insisted Handforth.

"All right—let it rain!" grinned Nipper. "Who cares? Football isn't cricket, my lad. We don't need to worry about the wet. Seen Fullwood?"

"Just gone off to Little Side," said Church.

"Good!" said Nipper approvingly. "He's done wonders these last two days. I've never seen a chap stick at practice like him. I didn't think he had the determination. He's improved out of all recognition!"

"Fullwood's a new man this term," agreed Handforth.

It was Thursday morning, and the October sun was shining over St. Frank's with a weakly kind of light. There was no wind, and anybody but Handforth could see that the weather would remain fine.

Nipper's praise of Fullwood was well deserved. He had practised with the one idea of improving his form. And he had progressed so much that he was already revealing flashes of real brilliancy. If he kept it up, he would become a first-class inside forward.

Most fellows in the Remove were startled. Fullwood—the old sneering cad of Study A! It seemed incredible that he could have changed so much. But one look at him on the football field was enough. He wasn't the same fellow.

For one thing, Fullwood's mind was relieved. Carey hadn't bothered him at all. It had been arranged that Eustace should visit the Priory prison by day, and Fullwood by night. Fullwood didn't much care for this order of things, but it was better than accompanying his cousin.

Clavering was still all right. He was quiet and resigned. He didn't seem to possess much spirit, and his confinement was killing

what little he had had to begin with. But he had come to no actual harm.

And Fullwood had been putting in most of his time at footer practice. It was like a tonic to him. He felt heaps better. He was determined to go "all out" in the match that afternoon.

And just before morning school he heard some news that increased his high spirits still more. The report of the inquest on Roper was published in the morning papers, and there was something in that report which brought intense relief to at least three individuals.

The doctor had declared that Roper had died of heart failure, due to shock. His injuries had not been serious. Any normal man would have recovered from them without any complications. But, according to the doctor, Roper was constitutionally abnormal. The slightest shock had been liable to kill him. If he hadn't died now, he would certainly have perished at the first unusual fall or blow.

The jury, however, had brought in a verdict of manslaughter against Eustace Carey. Not that this counted much. A coroner's jury carries practically no weight. It was certain that the police would diminish their activities. There would be no countryside search for the missing culprit.

For the inquest clearly proved that Roper's death was, indeed, an accidental one. Carey was only sought now on a charge of theft. If he was taken, the chances were that he wouldn't hear anything of the manslaughter indictment.

Carey himself was jubilant that morning. He took the news to Mr. Goole, and the Housemaster of the East House was infinitely relieved. In the privacy of his own study, he talked with Carey.

"Didn't I tell you it was an accident, sir?" asked Carey triumphantly. "You wouldn't believe me at the time—but it's proved now! As for the robbery, the money was mine all the time."

"I will admit I am easier in mind," said Mr. Goole coldly. "But you must leave St. Frank's at the earliest possible moment, Carey. I hate this intrigue and subterfuge!"

"Don't you worry," said Eustace coolly. "I'll soon be gone now."

But, after luncheon, Carey had a different story to tell Fullwood. Fullwood went to him to discuss some point regarding Clavering, and he found Eustace in a cheerful, light-hearted mood. Needless to say, Ralph Leslie had heard nothing of Mr. Goole's connection with his cousin.

"It's all right—I'm going off to the Priory almost at once," said Eustace. "I won't forget those things we talked about. Sardines, salmon, biscuits, candles—"

"Never mind about them now," interrupted Fullwood. "You've seen the report, of course?"

"Seen it?" laughed Eustace. "My dear kid, I'm as safe as houses now. The police

won't care a rap about me. I can take things at my leisure—"

"You can't stay here longer than a fortnight!"

"Can't I?" retorted the other. "As a matter of fact, I'm thinking about keeping on the spot for at least a month. I'm enjoying this life—it's something new. Gad, I never expected to be back at school again—"

"But look here," said Fullwood fiercely.

"What about Clavering?"

"Hang Clavering!"

"You can't keep him locked up in that dungeon for a month!" shouted Fullwood, with sudden fury. "A fortnight was bad enough, but a month is impossible! I won't let you do it, Eustace!"

"You infernal young idiot—"

"The poor chap will go mad!" snapped Fullwood. "Can't you see the change in him already! He won't stand it—he can't! Man alive, it'll be murder if you keep him in that place for a month! If you insist upon this, I'll go straight to the Head—"

Crash!

Eustace Carey, confident of his position, was indifferent to Fullwood's threats. He brought his fist back and delivered a blow which caught the unfortunate Ralph Leslie on the side of his head. He reeled drunkenly.

"Now get out!" snarled Carey thickly.

But Fullwood was no coward. With appalling fury he flung himself at Eustace, and a moment later they were fighting like demons.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BAD BEGINNING.



"SLAM!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood sprawled in the senior passage of the East House. The door of "Clavering's" study had just crashed to with such force that the hall shook.

Fullwood was very much of a wreck.

He was dazed, dizzy, and he felt sick. His tongue was bitten, he had any number of bruises on his arms and body, but, mercifully, his face was practically unmarked. To get up was an effort. His body felt as though steam-hammers had been pummelling him.

The fight had gone against him—and small wonder. Eustace Carey was a man—very much of a nonentity, but still a man. He was heavier than Fullwood, and bigger. His fighting ability was nil, if fair means were adhered to. But Carey had no knowledge of fair means.

During that scrap he had kicked, he had elbowed, and he had performed every foul known to fighting. And Fullwood, who had stuck to straightforward hitting, had naturally got the worst of it. Kicked in several

parts of the body, he was one mass of pain from head to foot.

He crawled away, and luckily succeeded in getting to his own bed-room without attracting much attention. He changed, and his thoughts were bitter. What about football now? How would he play in the match against the Modern House in such a condition as this?

He looked at himself in the glass, and there was no apparent injury. What excuse could he make to Nipper if he asked to be left out? He couldn't explain that he had had a fight with Clavering, of the Sixth. That would be fatal.

And if he made no mention of the fight, Nipper would hesitate before giving him another chance. Fullwood was in a quandary, but he soon made up his mind.

"I'll carry on!" he muttered grimly. "I shall be all right after the first five or ten minutes. I'm not going to be dished by that cur!"

His thoughts regarding Eustace were bitter. And Eustace's thoughts were very much the same—for Fullwood had given Eustace a very thick ear, and a decidedly swollen nose.

Fullwood had a fresh worry now. His cousin meant what he had said! He would stay at St. Frank's for a month now that he was comparatively safe. He would bask in the security of his position, and make his plans at his leisure.

And the unhappy Stanley Carey would be left to languish in the dungeons of Bellton Priory! It was not surprising that Fullwood was absent-minded and worried when the junior House teams turned out for the game.

Except for the fact that Fullwood was taking Somerton's place, the Ancient House team was the one which had beaten the West House earlier in the week. It was composed of Handforth, goalkeeper; McClure, Burton, backs; Watson, De Valerie, Church, half-backs; Hart, Tregellis-West, Nipper, Fullwood, Brent, forwards.

Buster Boots & Co. were at strength. They were out for blood, having wiped up the East House juniors—led by the blustering Armstrong—by eight goals to nil. They didn't hope to beat the Ancient House so drastically, but they were determined to win.

The Modern House team consisted of Oldfield, goalkeeper; Crowe, Denny, backs; Churchman, Bray, Yorke, half-backs; Nation, Clapson, Boots, Christine, Crooks, forwards.

"Glad to see you on the field, Fully," said John Busterfield Boots, as he clapped Fullwood on the back. "A bit of a change from last term, eh? You're surprising the natives, old man!"

Fullwood winced slightly at the impact. "I'll do my best against you chaps, anyhow," he replied.

"Anything wrong?" asked Boots. "You're not looking so good as you might. You need more exercise, my son. Exercise is the mainstay of health! You ought to go for walks——"

"Chuck it, Buster," said Handforth, bustling up. "This is no time to listen to your health talks! We're waiting to begin!"

"Go ahead," grinned Boots. "I'm ready."

The referee was Carlile, of the Sixth, a Modern House senior. He blew his whistle with an air of importance, and the teams lined up.

to-day! It was one thing to beat the East House, and another thing to beat the Ancient House.

Luck favoured them, however, in the ninth minute.

From mid-field, the ball was passed cleverly over to Billy Nation by the Modern House centre-half. Nation found himself opposed by Tom Burton, and for a moment it seemed that Burton would clear. But Billy was as quick as lightning, and he whipped round.

The next second he centred, and Boots trapped the ball, and sent in a first-time

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"Feeling fit?" asked Nipper, as he took his place by Fullwood's side.

"Fine!" replied Fullwood untruthfully.

A moment later the whistle blew, and the game had commenced. There were quite a number of exciting incidents in the first few minutes, but they all came to nothing. The youthful players received practically no encouragement from the ropes, for the on-lookers were few. Afternoon school wasn't out yet—although the footballers had been released early for the game.

It wasn't long before the players settled down to a steady struggle. Boots and his men were up against a different proposition

shot which tested Handforth severely. But the celebrated Ancient House goalie was equal to the task. With all his usual recklessness he punched out, and cleared. But Bob Christine was ready, and he seized the opportunity on the flash.

He returned the leather before Handforth could fully recover himself. It sped low, and Edward Oswald flung himself down. But the ball, slippery with mud, just eluded his grasp, and whizzed into the net.

"Goal!"

"One for us!" said Bob delightedly.

"Good man!" yelled Boots, running up.

"We've drawn first blood, and we'll make the fur fly now!"

"You silly fatheads!" howled Handforth. "That wasn't a goal at all! If the ball had been dry——"

"But it isn't dry!" chuckled Boots. "We'll give you a hotter one next time, old son. I'm afraid you're losing your form!"

But for the fact that the referee was blowing his whistle for the re-start, Handforth would have committed assault and battery upon the rival captain in the penalty area. He gave a characteristic

beaten two of the opposing halves. Unexpectedly, the Ancient House fellows were pressing harder than ever. Watson passed across the field, and Fullwood had the luck to receive the ball right at his feet.

"Go it, Fully!"

"Shoot, man!"

Unfortunately, Ralph Leslie Fullwood was thinking of other things at the moment. Much as he had tried to concentrate his attention upon the game, his mind had constantly drifted towards Eustace, and the unfortunate prisoner in the Priory. His



It was in fact, no less a person than Mr. Barnaby Goole, the Housemaster of the East House! Carey was caught red-handed.

snort as the leather was once again kicked off.

"They've got one goal—but that's all!" he said, addressing the goal-posts. "A giddy fluke! If they get another shot past me, I'll eat the net!"

The game was veering towards the other end of the field, and Handforth had nothing to do. He watched interestedly, shouting advice which nobody heard, and nobody wanted to hear.

Watson had the ball, and he had already

period of distraction was only momentary, but the opportunity was lost.

While he was still hesitating, Crowe dashed up, took the leather from Fullwood's very toe, and cleared with a mighty kick. A second goal for the Modern House nearly resulted—and would have done so but for a superhuman effort on Handforth's part.

Fullwood could have kicked himself. He had made an awful mess of that chance, and he knew that Nipper had mentally placed a black mark against him.

CHAPTER XIX.

ORDERED OFF THE FIELD.



HALF-TIME arrived, and the scores were even—one all. Nipper had equalised for the Ancient House, and after that neither side had achieved much success. The

teams were very evenly matched.

"Fullwood isn't doing so well as we expected," remarked Watson, during the brief interval. "He's made two or three bad blunders already."

Nipper nodded.

"I can't make it out," he said, frowning. "His form was four times as good this morning at practice. He's gone right off. He's awkward, clumsy, and doesn't seem to be paying any attention to the game."

"Up to his old tricks," growled Church.

"Old tricks?" said Carlile, the referee.

"Well, you know Fullwood," said Church. "He can never be relied upon—but we thought he was different this term."

"He is different, too," declared Nipper. "It's my opinion he's got something on his mind. Unless he improves, he'll have no chance of figuring in the School Eleven against the River House, on Saturday."

Carlile looked curious.

"I can't understand why you're playing Fullwood at all," he said frankly. "The chap's a young cad! I've been expecting him to foul every minute! He's never had any sense of decency."

"You don't understand, Carlile," said Nipper. "You're in the Sixth, and you don't know what's happening in the Junior School. Besides, you're in the Modern House, too. Fullwood isn't the same chap this term. He's improved out of all recognition."

"A leopard can't change his spots!" said Carlile wisely.

The subject was dropped, and Nipper didn't say anything to Fullwood. This fact, in itself, was significant, and Fullwood appreciated its meaning. Nipper was disappointed, but didn't care to speak.

Ralph Leslie clenched his teeth, and determined to improve. His aches and pains were wearing off a bit now. It had been agony to run at first, and he had only done so by sheer will-power. But towards the end of the first half he had felt himself gaining strength and power. And he had resolutely dismissed all other thoughts from his mind.

At the sound of the whistle, he went off grimly and determinedly. He would show Nipper that he wasn't useless, after all!

And Nipper certainly received a surprise.

During the first ten minutes the play was hot and fast. Twice Fullwood got through on his own, and once his efforts were crowned with success. He beat three

opponents, one after the other, and sent in a crashing shot which Oldfield didn't even see. It was the best goal of the match.

"Good old Fully!"

"Well kicked!"

"Splendid, old man!" exclaimed Nipper breathlessly. "That was a beauty!"

"Thanks!" said Fullwood, flushing.

"Keep it up, and you'll play on Saturday!"

Those words were enough to encourage Fullwood to even greater efforts. The Modern House fellows were grim now. They felt that they were losing their grip on the game. The backs were desperate, fighting with intense concentration.

Again Fullwood proved his prowess. De Valerie sent a pass out to Brent, but Fullwood trapped it en route. Without a second's pause, he swerved round in his stride, and made for goal.

Crowe rushed up like a charging elephant. This new forward was a dangerous customer! He had to be stopped!

There were a large numbers of spectators round the ropes now, for afternoon lessons were over, and great interest was being evinced in the game. And the crowds saw something which startled them.

Crowe rushed up and tackled Fullwood. He was being robbed of the ball just as he was about to shoot. And it seemed to everybody that Fullwood's foot shot out viciously as the two players met.

Crowe gave a shriek of agony, and fell headlong. He lay perfectly still, groaning. And Fullwood, continuing onwards, was abruptly pulled up by the shrill blast of the whistle.

The referee rushed up furiously.

"You young hooligan!" he shouted. "Get off the field!"

Fullwood looked at him dazedly.

"But—but I don't understand!" he stammered, turning pale.

"You kicked Crowe deliberately—one of the worst fouls I've ever seen!" thundered Carlile. "Get off the field!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE OUTCAST.



FOUL!"

"Yah, you dirty rotter!"

"Good old Carlile—you've done the right thing!"

A perfect storm of hoots and jeers went up, accompanying the shouts and catcalls. Fullwood's fellow players came crowding round him, but they were diverted by a sharp exclamation by Carlile.

"This poor chap's out!" he said, bending over the unfortunate Crowe. "Great Scott! He's stunned! Come along, some of

you—carry him off. He'd better go straight into the sanatorium!"

Crowe was certainly in a bad way. In crashing over, he had twisted his neck in some way, and was half-unconscious. His fall had been a violent one. He was gently lifted, and carried off by a number of Modern House fellows.

Fullwood still stood on the field—too bewildered and miserable to move. He was dimly aware that Boots and Nipper and many others were regarding him with fiercely angry eyes.

"What did I tell you?" shouted Carlile. "You're not playing in this game any more while I'm refereeing! Get off the field, Fullwood!"

"You were right about the leopard, Carlile!" said Church hotly.

"You'd better go, Fullwood," said Nipper, looking at him straight in the eye.

"Why should I go?" asked Fullwood thickly. "What am I ordered off the field for?"

"For fouling," retorted the referee.

"But I didn't foul!" protested Fullwood. "I didn't touch him!"

"You won't improve matters by lying!" shouted Carlile. "Do you think I didn't see? Why, it was one of the most deliberate fouls I've ever spotted. Crowe tried to tackle you, and you lashed out, and kicked him on the ankle! You tripped him, too!"

"Of course he did!"

"We all saw it!"

The Modern House fellows were furiously vehement.

"I tell you I did nothing!" insisted Fullwood desperately. "I knew Crowe was on me, so I shot for goal. I didn't kick him at all—my foot struck the ball."

"Then why did Crowe crash over like that?" asked Nipper.

"I don't know—I'm just as puzzled as you are," said Fullwood quickly. "I believe he caught his foot in something——"

"We don't want any arguments!" interrupted Carlile angrily. "Are you going off the field or not? If I was captain of your team, I'd never let you play again! I guessed what would happen as soon as I saw you in the Eleven. You ought to be horsewhipped."

Fullwood clenched his fists, and walked away. He took no notice of anybody. A storm of jeers followed him as he strode towards the school. And his heart was filled with disappointment and bitterness. So this was the end of all his hopes!

He was dazed and half-stunned by the unexpectedness of his disgrace. For it was the worst blow of all to be ordered from the field of play by the referee.

It was trebly hard to bear because he was absolutely innocent. He had done nothing. To the best of his belief, Crowe had fallen over of his own accord. Fullwood would certainly have known if he had

accidentally kicked the back. But he hadn't kicked him.

He went straight into his study, and slammed the door. And it didn't take him long to realise that there was one true explanation. From a short distance it had seemed to the other players that he had fouled. They would have taken another junior's word—but Fullwood was a dog with a bad name! That was the crux of the matter. Last term he had probably been capable of some foul tactics—he might even have gloried in them under certain circumstances. But this afternoon he had been playing the game for all he was worth.

And now he was disgraced—barred from the football field for good! The door opened and Clive Russell looked in. The Canadian boy was grave and serious. He had hurried indoors after Fullwood.

"Say, can I come in?" he asked.

Fullwood's only reply was a grunt, and Russell went in, and closed the door. He sat on the corner of the table, and looked at Fullwood queerly.

"Why did you do that, Fullwood?" he asked quietly.

"Do what?"

"Foul Crowe like that——"

"Have you come here to taunt me?" shouted Fullwood, flaring into a sudden rage. "I didn't foul Crowe! I didn't touch him!"

"There's no need to jump down my throat——"

"Then don't accuse me of something I didn't do!"

"Steady, old man," said Clive, taking Fullwood, and pushing him back into the chair. "Let's get this straight. I was watching, and I could swear that you kicked Crowe on the ankle. It may have been an accident——"

"It wasn't an accident. I didn't touch him."

"Say, is that honour bright?" asked Clive.

"Yes, it is—honour bright!"

"Then I believe you," said the Canadian boy, holding out his hand. "I guess I'm really sorry, Fullwood. I'm afraid you won't convince the others, though. I've never seen a more obvious thing in my life. There are twenty witnesses who'll go against you. What really happened?"

Fullwood looked at Clive with sullen eyes.

"I don't know," he replied. "Crowe must have caught his foot in a hole, or something. But what does it matter? I've been ordered off, and I'm chucked out of the football for good."

"It'll be tough if you don't get another chance," said Russell. "But after what happened——"

"Look here. I don't like your tone," interrupted Fullwood savagely. "I've given you my word of honour that I didn't foul, and you're still talking as though I did! I'd rather be alone, Russell!"

"All right—I'll quit," said Clive shortly.

He went out, and Fullwood cursed him for being a cad. There had been no reason for him flaring up like that again. But he couldn't help himself. He was brooding and morose. Everything was going wrong. In spite of his efforts, he had made a hopeless hash of things.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRUTH.



FULLWOOD'S cowardly foul was the sole topic of conversation at tea-time that evening. There wasn't a fellow who doubted the foul itself. It had been so obvious

—so blatant. Besides, the referee had ordered him off the field—and that was good enough in itself. If Carlile hadn't seen the foul, then nobody could have seen it!

The Modern House fellows were the more incensed. They wanted to do something violent. Crowe was still in the sanatorium, and none of the juniors were allowed to go there. Crowe was better, but no further news could be ascertained.

In the Ancient House the fellows were quietly angry. Fullwood's action was a fearful disgrace for the whole House. It was his first game in the Junior Team, and he had played his old dirty tricks! Nipper was severely criticised on all hands for having had anything to do with Fullwood.

Even those juniors who had upheld him in regard to the Eustace Carey affair were now bitterly against him. He had always been a cad, and was still a cad. That was the long and the short of it.

Handforth was headstrong, as usual. He wanted to find Fullwood, and fight him on the spot. But Fullwood wasn't to be found. He had mysteriously disappeared, and certainly wasn't in the school grounds.

"Something ought to be done about it," declared Percy Bray, in the Modern House Junior Day Room, after tea. "We can't let it stand like this. Fullwood was ordered off the field, but that's not enough."

"Not half enough," agreed Denny. "Why not go across the Triangle, and demand to have Fullwood delivered up to us?"

"We don't want to start a House row," said Buster Boots.

"Rats! They'd hand him over in a minute!" declared Clapson. "In a case like this they'd feel that it's our job to mete out justice. The cad deserves to be drummed out!"

"Let's get him here, and make him run the gauntlet!"

"I'm not so sure that it was deliberate, you know," said Bob Christine thoughtfully.

"It may have been an accidental kick——"

"Rats!"

"We distinctly saw him lash out!"

"Of course we did!"

"Just like his old games!" said Crooks.

"And the fellows have been sympathising with him because of his beastly cousin! Why, he's just as bad! He'd probably do worse than Carey if it came to it!"

The door opened, and somebody hobbled in.

"I say, look who's come!" yelled Yorke. "Here's Crowe! Good old Crowe! We thought you were crocked for a week!"

Crowe, the martyr, was surrounded by a noisy gang of Fourth-Formers. He was looking rather shaky, and he had a stick to walk with, but otherwise he seemed all right.

"Here, chuck it!" he protested. "What's all the excitement? They wanted to keep me in the Sanny, but I wasn't having any of it! Not likely! I'm sound enough, except for a sprained ankle and a twisted neck! I shall be all right in a day or two!"

"That's fine!" said Boots enthusiastically. "We thought that cad had half-killed you!"

"Which cad?"

"Fullwood."

"What about him?" asked Crowe, staring. "And how did the game go? Who won?"

"Ancient House—three two!" growled Boots. "I don't wonder at it, either, with one of our backs off the field."

"Well, the ref. ordered Fullwood off the field, so it evened things up," said Bob Christine. "We'd better give up the scragging idea now. Crowe isn't so badly crocked as we thought."

"What the dickens are you talking about?" asked Crowe. "Are you telling me that Fullwood was ordered off the field?"

"Yes, the cowardly hound!"

"But what on earth was he ordered off for?"

"For fouling you, of course."

"He never touched me!" said Crowe, in amazement.

"What!" yelled a dozen voices.

"He never touched me!" repeated Crowe.

"Great Scott! Do you mean to say that Carlile was ass enough to make a bloomer like that? It's ridiculous—it's absolutely potty!"

"But—but we all saw it!" gasped Boots.

"You must have seen double!"

"We saw him lash out and kick you a frightful cosh on the ankle!" declared Buster breathlessly. "You gave a fiendish yell and crashed over. It was as obvious as the day!"

Crowe snorted with impatience.

"If that's what you call obvious, you're all blind!" he shouted. "I tell you, Fullwood didn't touch me! He was streaking for goal, and I tried to tackle him. But I caught my heel against a lump of hard ground and ricked my ankle. Do you think I don't know? It gave me beans, and I don't remember much more——"

"You must have been mistaken——"

"You babbling ass!" howled Crowe. "Fullwood's foot was a clear six inches away from me when he kicked. We hadn't

even touched one another! It was a pure accident, and Fullwood didn't know anything about it. If I hadn't biffed myself on the head I should have explained on the spot."

Crowe's account of the affair was convincing. He wasn't saying this merely to shield Fullwood. And the Modern House juniors were staggered. With a queer sensation, they realised that a grave injustice had been done.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOOKING FOR FULLWOOD.



"HALLO! What the—"

Cecil De Valerie, of the Ancient House, uttered a startled gasp. He had just emerged out of the lobby, and was about to pass down the steps when a flood of humanity came sweeping towards him like a tidal wave.

Buster Boots & Co. poured into the Ancient House as though De Valerie hadn't been there at all. The unfortunate Cecil vanished. And when the rush was over he sat upon the steps, a mere wreck.

"What happened?" he gasped, appealing to the thin air. "My only hat! A raid! Those beastly Modern House chaps—"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne, strolling up from the West Arch and jamming his monocle into his eye. "Odds wrecks and derelicts! Laddie, when did the cyclone pass?"

"About ten seconds ago!" said De Valerie. "There's a raid, Archie. The Modern House chaps are on the war-path."

"I mean to say, how frightfully fearful!" said Archie, in alarm. "The good old Red-skin stuff, what? Hadn't something better be done? I mean, what about rallying round the defences, and so forth?"

From the interior of the Ancient House loud sounds were proceeding. They swelled even more, and Glen-thorne and De Valerie only just got off the steps in time. Then Boots & Co. came tearing out again, but this time they were accompanied by a host of Removites. De Valerie looked on in astonishment. This was a new kind of raid.

"What on earth's the matter with you maniacs?" he asked tartly.

"We're looking for Fullwood!" roared Handforth, fixing De Valerie with a suspicious stare. "What have you done with Fullwood?"

"He's not in my waistcoat-pocket!" retorted De Valerie. "What do you want him for anyhow? Not so long ago you were threatening to frogmarch him round the Triangle!"

"He's innocent!" shouted Boots.

"Innocent!"

"Yes, he didn't foul Crowe at all," explained Nipper. "Crowe's just told us what really happened, and it seems that everybody was deceived. It was all because Crowe was half stunned, and couldn't speak at the time."

"But—but I saw it with my own eyes!" ejaculated De Valerie. "Wasn't I on the field, playing centre-half? It was a deliberate kick—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Crowe. "Here's another of 'em! Fullwood played a perfectly clean game, and my fall wasn't anything to do with him at all. I should have gone over just the same if he had been yards off."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said De Valerie. "Hadn't somebody better fetch Carlile? He was the ref., you know—"

"Blow Carlile!" interrupted Boots. "We'll jolly well have somebody else for a referee next time! We want to find Fullwood, so that we can apologise to him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Where's Fullwood?"

"Poor chap, he must be feeling rotten!" said Nipper anxiously. "He played wonderful football in the second half, and then he got ordered off for a foul that he didn't commit! We've got to find him."

"Now's your chance, Handy!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Bring your famous detective ability to the fore! Get your clues, and track the chap down."

"You mind your own business, you West House fathead!" retorted Handforth darkly. "This affair isn't anything to do with you at all!"

"I admit it!" said Pitt meekly. "All the same, we're interested. Fullwood's a good chap this term, and it's hard lines for him to be wandering about with this load on his mind. Why not institute a search?"

The whole school was ransacked, but Ralph Leslie Fullwood was nowhere to be found. The fellows were seriously concerned, and full of anxiety. Nothing else mattered until they had made full amends to the unfortunate victim of the mistake. The Modern House juniors were particularly upset.

They had hooted, they had jeered, and they could imagine what Fullwood's feelings must have been like. There is no humiliation worse than that of being ordered off the football field before the eyes of a hostile crowd. And when the punishment is undeserved, the result is nothing but torture.

Clive Russell was more keen on the hunt than anybody else. He was the only fellow who had taken Fullwood's word—who had believed his account of the mishap. And Clive wanted to be the first to tell him the good news.

Nobody had seen Fullwood go out, and the anxiety increased.

"There's no telling what he might have done," said Handforth. "Ordered off the field like that, and hooted and hissed, he's probably gone off to the river——"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" said Church. "He wouldn't commit suicide!"

"Who's talking about suicide?" demanded Handforth tartly.

"Well, you said the river——"

"Can't he go along the river for a walk?"

"Not unless he wears floats!" said McClure. "But perhaps you mean he's gone for a walk along the towing-path? Why not get up three or four search-parties and go along all the lanes? We're bound to find him like that?"

"Good idea!" said Church. "Let's suggest it to Nipper."

"Wait a minute!" said Handforth tensely. "I've just thought of a corking scheme! We'll get up three or four search-parties, and go in all directions, taking different lanes!"

McClure stared.

"You fathead, that's my idea!" he roared.

"I naturally expect you to pinch my suggestions!" retorted Handforth coldly. "But we won't argue about it. We'll get busy!"

Unfortunately, they got busy too late. Nipper and Boots and the others were already setting out in various directions. Ralph Leslie Fullwood had never been so much sought after in all his life!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LITTLE SYMPATHY.



TOTALLY unaware of all this commotion, Fullwood was wandering aimlessly along the lane near Bannington Moor. He wasn't aware of his direction. He had allowed his feet to take him where they would.

His mind was too full of bitter thoughts to care how far he went, or which road he took. Something of his old nature was coming back to him. He had been squashing it out of existence of late—thrusting it back into obscurity. But now everything was favourable for a return.

He had done his best, and he had failed!

And now, not only were his former friends against him, but the whole Junior School. He had been jeered at and hooted by all. What was the use of trying any longer? He was barred from football, he was cut by one and all, and life had become drab and hopeless.

Then there was the worry of Eustace Carey. There was Stanley Clavering, at the Priory. Fullwood's life was composed of nothing else but worries just now. He



Slam!
Ralph Leslie Fullwood sprawled in the senior passage of the East House. The door of "Clavering's" study had just crashed too with such force that the hall shook.

was in just that condition when he didn't care a hang what happened. He felt reckless—desperate. He wanted to do something to put an end to all this misery.

"I'm a fool!" he told himself, again and again. "Why should I keep on like this? St. Frank's doesn't matter to me now. If I get the sack it'll be all the better. I've a good mind to ring up the police an' give them the tip about Carey. Yes, by gad, why not?"

The idea took root. That there was something treacherous in it did not bother him in the least. His feelings towards Carey were ones of hatred. It was Carey's fault that this fresh disaster had happened.

But for that fight he wouldn't have been bruised and battered—the whole course of his play that afternoon would have been different. It was all Eustace's fault!

Why not finish everything at once by exposing the rotter?

If he didn't, Eustace would only hang on, week after week. He had as good as said that he'd stay a month. And Ralph Leslie felt that he couldn't stand it. Life was intolerable already. Weeks more of it would drive him mad.

"I'll get my revenge on Eustace!" he muttered fiercely. "I'll go to the village an' ring up Inspector Jameson, of the Bannin'ton Police. He won't know who I am, but I'll give him the tip! Then I'll stand in the Triangle while Eustace is taken away in handcuffs! An' the fellows can jeer all they like! What do I care?"

Under the circumstances Fullwood's mood was not hard to understand. He had just passed through a trying ordeal—all the more trying because of his secret worries. It was cruel, indeed, that he should suffer such a blow when he had been honestly doing his utmost to make good.

His best efforts had only resulted in dire disgrace. He was scorned by the entire Junior School. He was branded as a foul player. He had been kicked off the field.

"Well, you needn't look so fierce!"

Fullwood gave a violent start. He had been standing in the road, oblivious of his surroundings. He wasn't even aware that he was in close proximity to the Moor View School. He looked up sharply, and saw nothing.

"I'm goin' dotty already!" he muttered, passing a hand over his brow.

There was a swift movement against the low wall of the girl's school, and a trim figure leapt down into the grass by the roadside. The girl was dark, and exceedingly pretty. She was slim and dainty.

"Oh, I say!" muttered Fullwood.

"I—I'm sorry——"

"What are you sorry about?" asked Winnie Pitt, smiling. "Look here, Fullwood, there's something wrong with you. What's the matter?" she added, standing in front of him and looking up earnestly.

He forced himself to smile in return.

"Nun-nothin'," he stammered. "I—I was just takin' a little stroll, Winnie. You're quite wrong. There's nothin' the matter."

"You can't kid me like that," said the girl promptly. "Come over here an' sit down on this fence. I've never seen you so seedy before. Something's happened, and you've got to tell me what it is. I won't let you go until you do!"

"Oh, but really——"

"If you make one more objection I'll raise my voice and bring Irene and Doris and the others here," threatened Winnie. "And between the lot of us you'll have to explain. What's it going to be?"

Her tone was very businesslike, and Fullwood capitulated. He accompanied her to the fence, and they both sat on the low wooden bar. Winnie was looking at her companion closely. Being Reggie Pitt's sister, she possessed a good deal of his shrewdness and quick-wittedness.

During the latter part of that summer holiday trip, which now seemed so remote, Winnie had grown to like Fullwood far better than she had ever expected. Irene

Manners and Doris Berkeley had been startled, for they had always regarded Fullwood as an utter cad.

But Winnie had maintained that Fullwood wasn't so bad when you got to know him. Perhaps it was her influence indeed which had started that subtle change in the former leader of Study A.

Only that morning Winnie had seen her brother. And she had been delighted to hear Reggie's report that Fullwood was going in for football, and practising strenuously. He had improved out of all recognition.

She had known that Nipper was going to play him that afternoon in the inter-House match, and his present dejection therefore was unaccountable. It wasn't an ordinary dejection, but something deep-rooted and grave.

"I'm waiting," said Winnie calmly.

"Waitin'?"

"Waiting for you to tell me the trouble that's on your mind," said the girl. "Is it about football? Didn't you make a good show in the match this afternoon?"

A bitter laugh was forced out of Fullwood unconsciously.

"Oh, it was a fine game!" he said, with a kind of gulp.

"Don't tell fibs to me!" said Winnie severely. "You've given yourself away, young man. Something happened at that football match, and I don't move an inch from this spot until you tell me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

NOT SO BAD, AFTER ALL.



WINNIE PITT'S sympathy was so obvious, her calm determination to find the truth so apparent, that Fullwood felt rather helpless. That bitter, sullen feeling was deserting him. He already felt rather ashamed of his decision to ring up the police. It would have been a contemptible trick, and he was trying to avoid contemptible tricks nowadays.

"I'm still waiting," said Winnie patiently.

"Oh, I say, it's nothin'," said Fullwood. "There was a bit of a row on the field, that's all. You wouldn't understand, Winnie——"

"Wouldn't I, indeed!" interrupted the girl indignantly. "Are you telling me I don't understand football? Why, I could give you more points——"

"All right—all right!" said Fullwood hastily. "Sorry!"

"And so you ought to be!" she said.

with severity. "You were playing in that match this afternoon. Who won?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't know?" she asked, her dark eyes wide open.

"No."

"But didn't you play until the final whistle?"

"No; I—I left the field——"

Fullwood paused, and Winnie seized his arm.

"You left the field before the match was over?" she asked keenly.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, because—because——"

"You don't mean to say you were ordered off?" asked Winnie. "My hat, you were! I saw you start just now. No wonder you were looking so frightfully blue. What happened? Why were you ordered off?"

Fullwood saw that further concealment was useless.

"For foul'n', of course," he replied gruffly.

"And did you foul?" she asked, aghast.

"No."

"If you didn't foul you oughtn't to have been ordered off; and if you did foul I don't want to speak to you again!" she said firmly. "But I don't believe it. I don't know any of the facts, but I won't believe that you played dirty. It was your first game for your House——"

"They were on me like a pack of wolves," interrupted Fullwood fiercely. "The whole thing was a mistake; I don't even know how it happened. Carlile ordered me off, an' the others wanted to tear me to pieces. An' I did nothin'—nothin'!" he said passionately. "It's a rotten shame! Just when I was tryin'——"

He broke off and swallowed hard.

"Sorry!" he muttered. "I—I didn't mean——"

"So that's what happened, is it?" said Winnie quietly. "I'm going straight along to Nipper, and I'm going to ask him——"

"By gad!" interrupted Fullwood, starting up. "They're after me! They're even houndin' me down out here!"

Winnie Pitt joined him in the middle of the road. A series of wild yells came from the distance. A whole crowd of juniors bore down upon the pair. Their very aspect was threatening. Winnie turned pale with indignation.

"Don't run!" she pleaded. "Stay here and face them!"

"I mean to!" replied Fullwood quietly.

He was feeling so much better that he hardly knew himself. Winnie's companionship had wrought an extraordinary change. It set him thinking; it set his heart thumping. Was it because of her that he

had come to St. Frank's with a different spirit this term? It seemed incredible.

"There he is!" roared a dozen voices.

"Grab him!"

"My hat! He's with one of the girls!"

The crowd surged onwards like an avalanche. Foremost were Handforth and Nipper and Buster Boots and Reggie Pitt. Fullwood stood back, and clenched his fists.

"Better go easy!" he said fiercely. "I won't stand——"

"You silly fathead!" roared Handforth.

"We've come to apologise!"

"To—to what?"

"My dear old Fully, we've done you a fearful wrong!" exclaimed Boots, pushing forward and grabbing Fullwood's hand. "If you've got any sense, you won't forgive us; we don't deserve it!"

"Get out of it, Boots; let's get his fist!"

Fullwood was dazed and bewildered as the juniors swarmed round, all of them apologising at once. They thumped his back and pumped his arm.

"But—but——" he began.

"We heard the truth from Crowe," explained Nipper, when he could make himself understood above the din. "He told us how he caught his foot in the grass. I'm sorry, Fully. We ought to have known better."

"Sure, you ought," agreed Clive Russell. "But I believed him."

"Yes, Clive, you did," said Fullwood gratefully. "Thanks for that, old man!"

"And you played so well in the second half that I want you in the same position for Saturday's match against the River House," said Nipper cheerfully. "Will you accept, Fully?"

Would he accept! Just for a moment everything went dim in front of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. He only knew that the cloud had passed, and that everything was all right again. His heart was full of thankfulness.

But he had a long, uphill fight before him yet.

THE END.

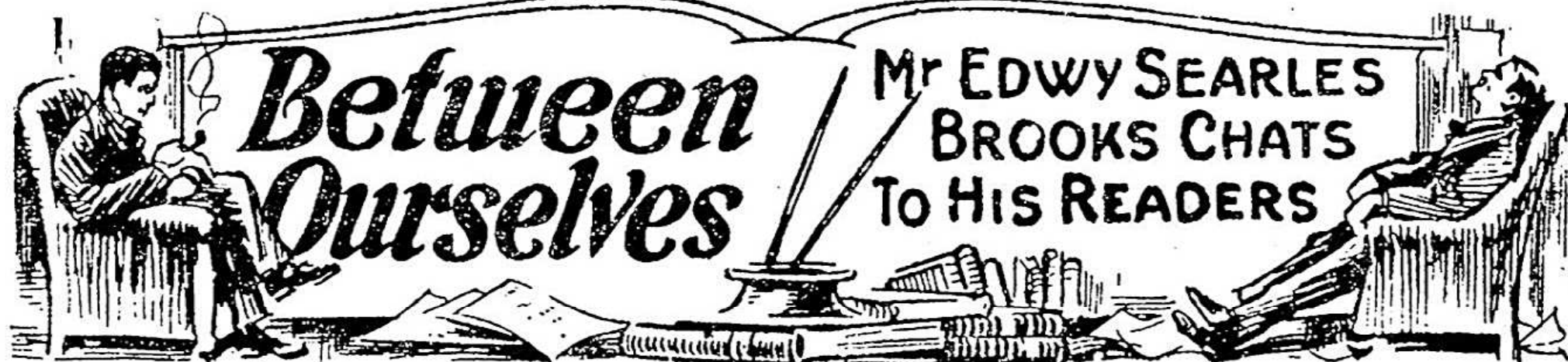
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More about the Reform of Fullwood in

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The STAMP COLLECTOR

The first of a series of articles on this fascinating hobby by the well-known authority on philately—FRED J. MELVILLE.



Between Ourselves

Mr EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But, although all letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.—E.S.B.

During the week I've come to a decision. Or, to be more exact, the Editor and I have come to a decision. From now onwards we're going to plan stories and arrange such items as the Portrait Gallery, General Map, League Magazine, etc, entirely ourselves. In other words, all you readers are left out in the cold—you won't have any voice at all!

That sounds a bit grim, doesn't it? And it's meant to be grim, too. The Editor and I are so jolly grim that our only course is to come out with a bold statement. Naturally, he's left it to me, but you can take my word for it that he's just as determined as I am. In a nutshell, we're both fed up with the present state of affairs. We're confused, too—absolutely bewildered. You may not believe it, but am I the kind of chap to spoof you?

And why this thusness? I can hear you all asking that question, so it's distinctly up to me to explain things. Well, for many months—ever since this "Between Ourselves" of mine started—you readers have been suggesting things. You've wanted longer stories—no Magazine—no serial—a big Magazine—two serials—no Portrait Gallery—a bigger Portrait Gallery—all school story, and no detective interest—all detective story, and no school interest, etc., etc., and then a few more etc.

Now you can understand, perhaps, why we're fed up. You can appreciate our grimness. You can sympathise with us in our bewilderment. With so many conflicting and contradictory suggestions—made to the Editor as well as myself—we've juggled with them during these months, and the

stories have been written according to the majority vote. Well, what's happened? Jealousy! Rank, green jealousy! In fact, the green-eyed monster has fairly haunted us. We've pleased lots of readers, but we've displeased lots of others. And these others have been jealous because THEIR suggestions weren't carried out. The discontented ones wouldn't have said a thing if the Editor and I had been solely responsible for the minor changes. But it's a different thing when these minor changes were brought about by fellow-readers. And I can tell you it's a pretty tough job to keep the whole family of readers from squabbling among themselves.

Still, we've hit upon a solution. And I've got a kind of idea that most of you will be as pleased as Punch. From now onwards I'm not asking for any suggestions with regard to the forthcoming stories—and the Editor isn't asking for any suggestions about maps and Portrait Galleries and things. We want you to write to us as often as you please, and you can grumble to your heart's content if you've got anything to grumble about. But no suggestions! It isn't that we don't want suggestions, it's purely for the sake of peace. You can trust us to give you the stories and other stuff that you'll like, can't you? My most successful yarns were those I wrote without any suggestions from readers. And I'm going back to that policy. Trust me, and I won't let you down. That's all I ask. Not so very much, is it? And let me repeat that I shall be awfully pleased to get letters.

And that reminds me that I've got a few to acknowledge: H. Mayrick (Walsall), Joseph William Maud (Otley, Yorks), R. Castings (Radford), An Aussie Flapper (Coonamble, N.S.W., Australia), M. I. Iliffe (Adelaide), Bushwhacker (Adelaide), A. Wilkinson (Gateshead), Billy (Dudley), B. Yates (Birstall), A. Staples (Harlesden), F. M. Startup (Bridlington), George Burgess (Selsey).

I'm afraid I haven't got enough space to give you a long reply, Aussie Flapper. Although your letter certainly deserves one. I'm glad your dad reads Our Paper. Another proof that grown-ups are eligible to the Circle. I'm surprised at you wishing yourself to be a boy!—E.S.B.



THE CITY OF MASKS;

*or, The Case of the
Boy King!*

**A Gripping New Tale of Detective
Adventure, introducing SEXTON
BLAKE and TINKER.**

FOR NEW READERS.

Tinker visits his former school chums at Calcroft, and on his return is attacked and captured by three men in a motor-car. Evidently, he is mistaken for somebody else, for soon after, his captors set him free. Next morning Tinker receives a visitor, who turns out to be King Peter of Carlovía, and late of Calcroft. He is returning urgently to his unruly kingdom, and offers Tinker a job. Sexton Blake has also an important mission in Carlovía, and so Tinker readily accepts the king's offer, which is not without grave risks.

(Now begin reading this rattling new yarn.)

SEXTON BLAKE opened the door, and the sergeant stiffened and saluted. "Sergeant Coggs, sir," he said gruffly. "Ordered to report, two o'clock. On the stroke. Service of King Peter, to which long life and prosperity."

Blake looked the sergeant over and summed him up. His impression was a favourable one, and Blake rarely erred in his judgment of a man.

"Strong as a bullock," he thought; "sober, faithful, but apt to shirk a job he doesn't like and stick hard to a job he does like. Come in sergeant," he said aloud. "We haven't had lunch yet, so you'd better sit down and read and have a smoke."

"Yours to command, sir," said Blimp. "Perhaps you've forgotten me, sir, but I've not forgotten you. Sort of odd man, outside-porter and errand-runner at Calcroft School, sir that's me. Didn't like being lazy, though I've got a pension. See you and the young gent there last term, sir."

"The soup is on the table, sir, if you'll excuse me," said the voice of Mrs. Bardell, "and roast lamb to follow, though the green-grocer ought not to sell such mint for mint-sauce, all so dried-up and shrivelled, as if it hadn't seen a garden for years and years, and me too busy to run out and buy some

fresh, so please excuse. And if you wish for a bottle of claret, there's none out, and will you please ask Master Tinker to open a fresh case, the nails in the lid being like spikes, and 'ammered in so hard they defies me."

"I'm sure Sergeant Coggs will do that for you, Mrs. Bardell," said Sexton Blake.

"Lead me to it, ma'am, and I'll eat it," growled the sergeant. "I can draw nails with my teeth."

There was nothing bashful about his Majesty King Peter of Carlovía. During lunch he talked to Sexton Blake and Tinker as if he had known them both all his life. Blake summed up the youngster as swiftly as he had summed up Sergeant Coggs. Peter's faults were that he was happy-go-lucky, careless and lazy. His good points were that he was generous and honest, and would stand by a friend through adversity as well as prosperity. He was so young that it was possible that a good shaking-up and more experience of life would enable him to rid himself of his shortcomings.

"Then you don't want a State entry into Kamfak," said the private detective. "What are your plans, then, sir?"

"For the sake of Mike Cassidy and all his pigs, please don't 'sir' me, Mr. Blake," pleaded his Majesty. "Peter is good enough. Well, my plans don't amount to much. I want to dodge the guard of honour that's coming. For I have a notion it will be more like a kind of escort, and instead of bossing it, I shall be a sort of glorified prisoner. I thought of sneaking over with Blimp, and turning up at the palace like a prize or surprise parcel. I fancy old Sarjo will be glad to see me."

"But you couldn't get through without passports, Peter."

"Yes, that was the snag, Mr. Blake; but Blimp and I were sure we'd work it somehow."

"Sarjo is the Prime Minister, guv'nor, or

was while Prince Paul was alive," said Tinker.

Blake nodded.

"Yes, I know that, young 'un. I've just had a chat with a man who has spent the last two years in Kamfak."

"Two years without getting shot! Why, that sounds quite hopeful!" said Tinker, with a grin. "Perhaps he lived in a bomb-proof shelter all the time. But about your prime minister, Peter, my Monarch. Do you think you can trust the old guy?"

"It's jolly hard to say if you can trust anybody in Carlovina," said Peter. "He writes nice kind letters to me, and he used to shove plenty of money into the bank for me, but as it wasn't his money he didn't lose much by that. Yes, I think he's O.K. Then there's my cousin, Prince Darro, cousin on my mother's side, that is, a sloppy sort of ass, but quite decent. When he was in England he came down to see our big footer match against Ranthorpe College. A ripping match, and played as clean as a whistle, but on the rough side, for we're always mustard against Ranthorpe, and they're cayenne pepper on beating us. It quite shocked Darro. He said football was a low, brutal, murderous game, unworthy of gentlemen, and only fit for gladiators and hired assassins."

Sexton Blake glanced at his watch.

"I want you to take a note to the Foreign Office for me, Tinker," he said, "so you can drive Peter down. And a word to you, Peter. You'll find Sir Randolph Brayling quite a decent old gentleman, and any advice he gives you will be worth listening to."

"Very good, Mr. Blake," said Peter. "And what about Blimp? He's not used to London, and if I don't take him along he may get mislaid."

"Take him, then, and let him look after the car," said the private detective. "I'll have the note ready in a few minutes, Tinker."

Soon after the two youngsters and Ex-sergeant Coggs had gone a telegram arrived for Tinker; and Sexton Blake opened it. The wire was from the Headmaster of Calcroft School.

"To Tinker, c/o Sexton Blake, Baker Street, London.—Thanks for letter received. Can only imagine extraordinary incident concerns boy Bruce-Lyon, a mistaken identity. Bruce-Lyon has appointment three p.m. Foreign Office. Please 'phone there, discover if he has arrived safely. Am anxious.—NORMAN DANEHURST."

The Headmaster had paid a reply, and Blake pencilled an answer and handed the form to the waiting boy.

"To Norman Danehurst, Calcroft School, Calcroft.—Bruce-Lyon quite safe. Tinker thanks you for wire.—SEXTON BLAKE."

Then the private detective began to pace up and down the consulting-room. At last

he consulted his watch again, and compared it with the clock, and went to the telephone.

"Is that you, Sir Randolph? Good! It's Blake speaking. Oh, yes, as I told you in my note, I'm accepting the commission. When can I have the four passports? I only want them duly signed and sealed, for I can paste on the necessary photographs and fill in the details myself. Only a precaution against accident, you see, for I don't expect to have to use them. In an hour? Right! And the letters of credit? Put me down as plain James Brown, tutor by profession, of Calcroft School, Calcroft, England."

When Tinker and his Majesty, with Blimp close at their heels, crossed over from the garage there was a stranger in the consulting-room, a pale man, clad in a sober black, his hair parted sleekly in the middle, and his eyes protected by smoked glasses. He had the kind of stoop known as a student's hump, which is supposed to be the result of much bending over books in long study.

"Which of you two young gentlemen is Master Bruce-Lyon, please?" he said, in a thin voice. "No doubt Sir Randolph Brayling has mentioned me. My name is James Brown, the tutor recommended by the Foreign Office to—hem!—to accompany Master Bruce-Lyon."

Peter looked at his new tutor with anything but affection. It seemed a poor sort of thing to be a reigning monarch if the British Foreign Office could saddle him with a tutor he had never seen before, and did not want. Tinker saw his expression of dismay and dislike, took another look at Mr. James Brown, and then dropped into a chair and laughed.

"A jolly good make-up, guv'nor," he said, with a chuckle. "You look the part a treat, and you've fairly put the wind up old Peter. I like your hair and your stoop and your voice. Shift those goggles and take the kink out of your back to reassure him, for the shock has turned him quite pale about the gills."

Mr. James Brown removed his spectacles, swept his hand over his hair, and straightened himself. The transformation was swift and astonishing. It astonished Sergeant Coggs so much that he cried: "Gawsh! If that ain't a fair corker!" and stood at salute.

"Does this really mean you're going with me to Carlovina, Mr. Blake," asked Peter, with excitement.

"Yes, that's so. You've brought your tutor with you from Calcroft School to help you to complete your studies. Mr. James Brown, M.A. I selected the name because it's an easy one to remember. So be jolly careful to remember it, and always use it."

"And what's my stunt, guv'nor?" asked Tinker. "Don't pick on anything with any work attached to it."

"You're Peter's friend and guest, a

school chum he's invited over. Stand together, you two fellows. You're very much alike, you two, only Peter is stiffer and his hair is different—very much alike. Choose a name for yourself, young 'un; something simple, like Billy Jones. The sergeant, of course, is your handy man, and we'll see how handy he is when we start packing."

Peter laughed.

"If they manage to pot the bunch of us in Kamfak it won't be such a bad bag," he said. "Blimp, you'd better get a taxi, and fetch our luggage from the station. You'll find the ticket in the pocket of my dust-coat. Get a move on you, or I'll sack you."

"Certainly, King!" growled Sergeant Coggs.

"Kneel, Billy Jones," said Peter, seizing the poker, "and when I've patted you with this you will be Sir William Jones, a gallant knight."

"Nothing doing, old bean, unless there's a pension or a salary attached to it," said Tinker. "Billy Jones is good enough for me, for I'm not hankering after titles. As long as there's a screw belonging to it, I'll be Whelk-taster to the Royal Family, or Keeper of the Golden Winkle-pin, but there must be oof."

"Greedy lout," said his Majesty. "Do you want me, sir?"

"Yes, I want to talk to you rather seriously, Peter," said Sexton Blake, "so please come in here, my lad. Tinker and I are going to Carlovian on secret service, but we are your very good friends all the same, and I have many things to ask you and many things to tell you."

Before closing the door of the inner room Blake spoke to Tinker.

"There's a map of Carlovian on my desk, young 'un," he said, "perhaps a better one than we could get from the War Office. Have a good look at it. When I've had a chat with Peter I must go to the French Embassy, and then give the Admiralty Office a call. Cut the luggage down as low as you can, and take great care of the papers that are coming along."

"I'll watch it, guv'nor," answered Tinker.

OVER THE FRONTIER.

CRACK!

At the crisp sound of a rifle-shot, Tinker ducked down behind the wind-screen and stopped the car. A wisp of smoke floated upwards from the loophole of an old stone fort built on the hill-side. Tinker had not heard the ping of a bullet, so he concluded that the cartridge was a blank one. The car behind, driven by Sexton Blake, that was jolting over the abominable road, also stopped.

"This is the Carlovian frontier, Billy Jones," said Peter, with a chuckle. "I told you they'd shoot, didn't I?"

"You did, old bean, and they did, old bean," said Tinker. "What charming people

your loving subjects must be to know! Only a dud cartridge, guv'nor," he shouted over his shoulder. "I'm stopping till something else happens, for they might squib off a few live ones."

A man in baggy blue knickerbockers and a ragged military coat emerged from the fortress, rifle on shoulder, and came down a steep path to meet them. He wore a terrifying black, shaggy beard, and his hair was like a mop.

"And you can't speak the lingo," said Tinker.

"I can't, Billy, and, as I don't want to break my teeth and dislocate my neck, I'm not going to try to speak it," answered his Majesty; "but I'll bet this johnny can talk English."

"It would improve him a lot to run a lawn-mower over him a few times," said Tinker. "Gee, did he rob a scarecrow of that uniform?"

Sexton Blake—or, rather, Mr. James Brown—had alighted.

"We are English," he said in a thin voice, "so I trust you speak English."

"Oh, yes; speak English right enough!" said the man with the rifle. "Where are your passports?"

"Here are our passports, but I am afraid they do not carry us across the frontier," said Blake. "I have here, however, a telegram from his Excellency, the Carlovian Prime Minister, Oscar Sarjo. Probably he has telegraphed to you?"

Several other men had come out of the fort, all armed with rifles. A quick glance up the steep road, with mountain peaks towering over it, showed the private detective that if anything had gone amiss, there was no hope of making a successful dash across the frontier. On the hilly road the cars would offer a splendid mark for rifles, and there would be no hesitation about shooting.

"Yes, there is a message, sir," said the man politely. "His Excellency's car has broken down. If you do not meet him on the road, he will wait for you at Livnar. You will pardon the usual formalities?"

King Peter's frontier guard proceeded to overhaul the luggage. A few articles were declared contraband, but a few English Treasury notes promptly settled that difficulty.

"You may pass, gentlemen," said the man in command; "unless you would care to witness an interesting little ceremony. We have caught a brigand, and it was our intention to hang him in the morning. For another pound note, and for your amusement, we will hang him at once. Quite a novel sight, I assure you, and it will please the young gentlemen—and quite cheap at a sovereign."

Sexton Blake, alias Mr. James Brown, M.A., lifted his hands in horror.

"Good gracious, no!" he cried. "I should faint with terror! I could not bear to see anything so hideous, and it would haunt my dreams. Accept another pound, with

pleasure, captain, but do not ask us to witness such a sight. Drive on, Mr. Jones!"

"What a country!" chuckled Tinker. "Oh, my stars, what a country! For the small sum of one quid—or a dollar apiece—you can have a man specially hanged for your entertainment! And I say, Peter, your roads are as rotten as your uniforms!"

"You needn't grouse about it, for I warned you enough," said Peter. "You'll find the roads better as you get further in. I'll kick up a jolly row about those uniforms, for they're a disgrace, and I'll have the whiskers off every soldier in my army, even if causes a mutiny!"

"Got an army, then? You didn't tell me that?"

"Four thousand strong, or weak, I don't know which," said Peter. "If you want to be a colonel, say so."

"Not for toffee, if the rest of your army resembles that sample, for I'd sooner command a regiment of dustmen. Gosh, what a road!"

The cars toiled up the hill, and then a gloomy ravine yawned below that seemed to drop into the very depths of the earth.

"Anyhow, you can't grumble about the scenery, Billy!" said his Majesty, after a pause.

"Quite good, but a bit too rocky, and I hope the brakes will stick it, for if they don't there'll be such a jolly old bump that your pals won't have the pleasure of shooting us. And this is what I left my happy home for! Where's Livnar, Old King Cole?"

"Only about fifteen miles from the frontier, where the railway comes to a full stop. I expect that wire from Sarjo about his car having broken down was all a fluke. The old juggins was afraid to face the ride. Go easy here, for there's a nasty bend."

"It's all bends, even the straight parts!" grumbled Tinker, showing Sexton Blake a warning hand.

Luckily, the brakes stood the strain well, and the road improved, and without mishap they ran into Livnar, a town of two-storeyed wooden houses and one rambling inn, where a curious crowd gathered round the cars.

The men were slight—like most mountain races—bearded and muscular, and wore baggy blue trousers, stockings of undyed wool, and grey flannel shirts. The women looked smarter in their bright-coloured shawls and short petticoats, and their dark hair hung in two plaits and was fastened with bows of gay ribbon. Though the importation and carrying of fire arms was strictly forbidden, nearly every man had a revolver at his hip in addition to a long-bladed dagger, and all were smoking thin brown cheroots, men and women alike.

The host of the inn, who had only one eye and a face that would have hanged him years before in any country except Carlovía, bowed them in, and in broken English begged to receive their esteemed commands.

"We want to see his Excellency," said

Blake, "and then get us something to eat. I think we are going on to Kamfiak."

They waited in a long, oak-pannelled room. A girl of about sixteen came in, a graceful, fair-haired girl with clear blue eyes.

"Cheerio, Celia," cried Peter. "Fit I hope?"

"Hallo, Peter," said Princess Celia, "Jolly fit and I hope you're the same."

They greeted each other as coolly as if they had only parted the day before.

"My tutor, Mr. James Brown, Celia, My sister, the Princess Celia, Mr. Brown," said Peter. "This is my school chum, Billy Jones, come on a visit to be shot. Quite a decent sort of kid in his way. Forward here, Blimp! 'Shun! Jump to it, my lad!"

Sergeant Coggs jumped to it.

"This young lady is my sister, Princess Celia, Blimp," went on Peter. "She's your mistress, and don't let that fact trickle out of your head. If I'm not about to give you orders, you'll take them from the princess. And now that I'm at it, gentlemen and lady, the moment I crossed the frontier of Carlovía things altered. Here my word is the law and I am master of life and death. If you disobey the princess, I'll hang you, Blimp, and if I get any sauce from you, Billy Jones, I won't hang you, but I'll have your head sliced off and give a special holiday to let my subjects see it done. I am the king, and the king can do no wrong."

"Isn't it too silly," said the princess to Celia. "And the silliest part about it is that it's all perfectly true."

"I'll watch that it doesn't come true in my case. I mean the part about slicing off my napper—beg pardon—my head," said Tinker. "I'm clearing out of this on the next 'bus that runs to the frontier."

The door opened and an old man with snow-white hair a flowing beard and a kind, handsome face walked in slowly. He sank on one knee before Peter and raised the young king's hand to his lips.

"Oscar Sarjo, the Prime Minister," whispered the girl; and those five whispered words told Tinker that there was no love lost between the dainty Princess Celia of Carlovía and Carlovía's Prime Minister.

"Oh, get up, my friend," said Peter. "You're getting too old to kneel on hard boards, and besides, it takes the creases out of your bags."

At this most unkingly remark to his leading minister, Sexton Blake hid a smile behind his hand, and Tinker, as he saw the laughter in Celia's blue eyes, nearly choked.

"My stars!" he said. "If Peter goes on this way he'll make a sort of comic-opera job of it. It's a comic-opera country, anyhow."

Princess Celia's face saddened and she shook her head.

"I wish it were," she said. "There's very little comic about Kamfak. It looks gay and full of laughter when all the lights are blazing and the streets are crowded. It might be always carnival time, for you see masked faces everywhere. Though there's laughter, there's hate and bitterness, and dreadful things are done. It is worse since our uncle died, for he was stern and strong and they feared him. I am afraid for Peter. Are you in the same Form at Calcroft?"

"No; I only went there last term," said Tinker evasively. "I was in Pycroft's House and your brother was in Collier's. I knew Mr. Brown jolly well, and even if he isn't very impressive to look at, he's the cleverest man I ever met."

"I hope Peter will take notice of him," said Celia; "but now that he feels himself free, it's not much good hoping."

"I'm sure he'll take notice of old Brown," said Tinker. "Brown won't stand any nonsense, even from a giddy king, miss—I mean Princess. That doesn't sound right, either. I don't understand these gadgets very well. Am I to say your Highness or your Royal Highness, or which?"

"I'm Princess Royal, so it ought to be 'your Royal Highness'; but I don't want any of that nonsense from you, as you're Peter's chum," said Celia. "I'll just call you Billy, and you call me Celia, but only in private. If you speak to me in public you must do the correct thing, or there'll be dreadful trouble. If the newspapers got to hear that the English boy visitor addressed their princess by her Christian name they'd want your head, and ask to have you deported, so do be careful, Billy."

"Gee whoosh! My poor old head is beginning to feel a bit loose on my neck, Celia," said Tinker with a grin.

Sexton Blake, Peter and the Prime Minister had moved to the further end of the long room and were talking together. Tinker looked steadily at the girl, and her clear blue eyes met his unflinchingly and Tinker knew that she could be trusted.

"Can you keep a secret, Celia?"

"I ought to be able to, Billy, for I've been keeping secrets all my life. Why do you ask me that?"

"Because I hate sailing under false colours to you."

"Is it because you know I'll find you out?"

It was a difficult thing to make Tinker flush, but he reddened and felt foolish.

"Perhaps there is a bit of that about it, Celia," he said truthfully, "for I'm jolly well sure you would find me out. You can believe me or not, but, honest injun, I hate sailing under false colours to you. I never was a scholar at Calcroft, and I never met your brother until less than a week ago. We've chummed in, and we're on your side and Peter's side all through. Our names most likely will mean nothing to you, but Mr. James Brown is Sexton Blake, the private detective, and I'm his assistant, plain Tinker, not Billy Jones."

"In my brother's employ?"

"No, but his good friends," said Tinker, lowering his voice, as the girl gave a warning frown. "We're working for the Allies, Secret Service, and trying to get at the bottom of this rot over here."

"Does he know—Sarjo?"

"I haven't a notion, unless my guv'nor has told him, or Peter has blurted it out," said Tinker.

"Then don't tell him, Billy," said the girl. "You can trust me to keep Peter quiet. I detest Sarjo. He's quiet and smooth-tongued, and he'll flatter Peter and fawn on him till Peter will think him the best in the world; but I know Sarjo better. Another time I'll tell you why, Billy. I like you better for having told me the truth, but I still think you partly did it because you felt sure I would find you out. And be careful—awfully careful—of what you say, for in Carlovina that old tag about walls having ears is as true as true."

Peter's talk with Sarjo appeared to have ruffled his temper.

"Let's hear you, Billy, old man, and you, Celia," he called out. "Here's a rotten business! I've got to make a state entry into Kamfak, and the news has to be announced and a general holiday and the town decorated, and all that bosh. That'll take a week, and for a week Sarjo wants us to go and bury ourselves in Shalvola. In the meantime, I'm not supposed to be in Carlovina at all!"

"And what does Mr. Brown say about it?" asked Tinker.

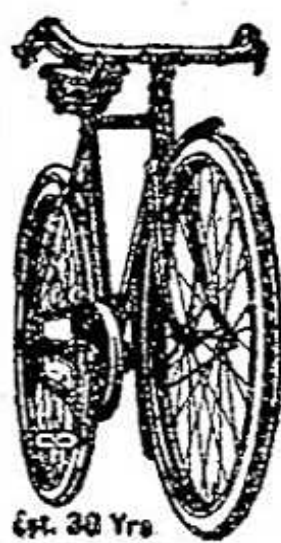
"Oh, he agrees, else I'd have told Sarjo to go and eat coke!" said his Majesty.

(To be continued.)

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THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(Please quote your membership number in all communications to the League, which should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Leagueites,—

I am glad to see that some enterprising O.O.s have already made a start with their clubs. F.M. 76 writes to tell me that his club, the Hale Branch of the S.F.L., is steadily gaining more members, and that they have now the use of a large room in the south wing of his father's house, which they have furnished not only with comfortable armchairs, a big couch, bookcases and cupboards, but a punch-ball and Sandow developer. They have sports' meetings every Saturday afternoon, and in the evenings they can indulge in indoor games in their large new club-room.

Talking of indoor games, O. O., F. M. 677 reminds me of a promise I made last year concerning the St. Frank's Table Football game, invented by Dick Goodwin. I said that I hoped to be able to get it manufactured so that my readers would be able to buy it for this coming winter season. I am happy to be able to inform my correspondent that my promise will be fulfilled, and that Goodwin's game, known as the St. Frank's Table Football Game, will be sold for 7s. 6d. at Gamages, Harrods, Selfridges, The Army and Navy Stores, Barkers, Benetfinks, Hamleys, Derry and Toms, and at all the leading stores and toyshops. As O. O., F. M. 677 will remember, this new table game is just like the real game in miniature. Neat little football boots are fitted on the first two fingers, and, thus equipped, you can dribble, pass and shoot in exactly the same way as you would on the field. I trust that every O. O. will see that his club is

supplied with one of these games, and then perhaps we can arrange a series of Inter-Club matches.

Another O. O., who has already started a S.F.L. club, is F.M. 420. He has succeeded in raising a great deal of interest among the boys of his neighbourhood in the League. Over half of his football club have joined, and now they have started a swimming section.

I hope many other O. O.s will now follow the excellent examples of F.M. 76 and F.M. 420. Then, by the time the League has reached a membership of 10,000, we shall have a number of clubs already in existence. In the meantime, I shall be interested to hear from any other O. O.'s who have started S.F.L. clubs on their own.

Only another three weeks, and then every reader will find a handsome gift enclosed in his "N.L.L." There will be no two gifts exactly alike in any two copies, and opportunities will be given only to Members of the League to exchange their gifts with one another. These gifts will be given away with the "N.L.L." for four consecutive weeks. Next week I will let you into the secret. So every reader who wants to derive full benefit from these gifts should lose no time in applying for membership of the League. Furthermore, in order to be quite sure of getting a copy of the "N.L.L." for the four weeks beginning October 24th—when these gifts will be presented—it is advisable to place a standing order with your newsagent without delay.

Your sincere friend,
THE CHIEF OFFICER.

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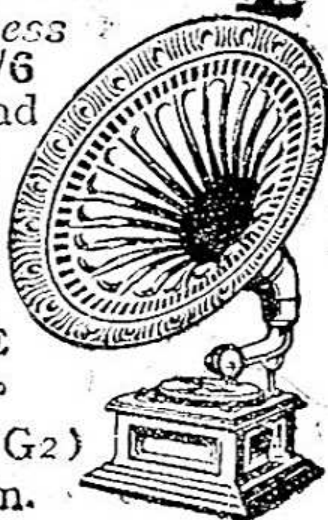
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<p>SECTION</p> <p>B</p>	<p>MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.</p> <p>I, Member No.....(give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me.....(state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.</p>
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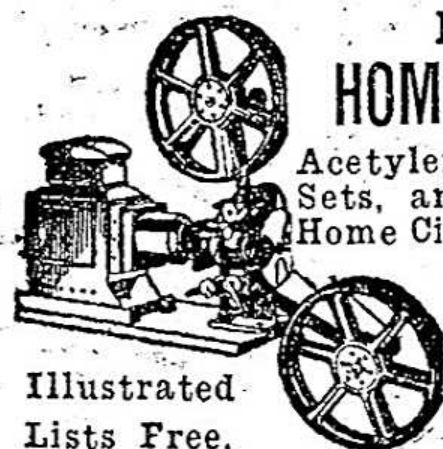
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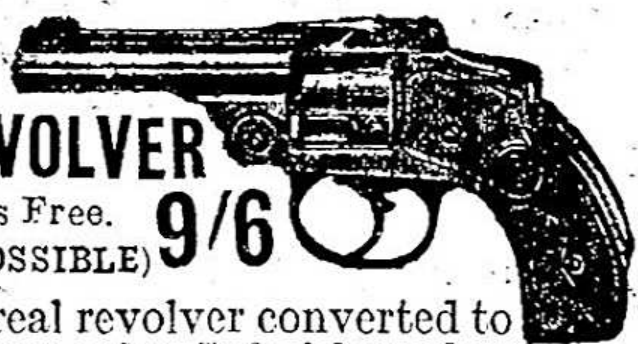
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