MOB RULE AT ST. FRANK'S! SEE THIS WEEK'S GREAT STORY!

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The School Without A Master

The rioters did not realise the meaning of this flood of juniors until they were suddenly attacked.

An exciting incident from this week's lively story of the great rising at St. Frank's.

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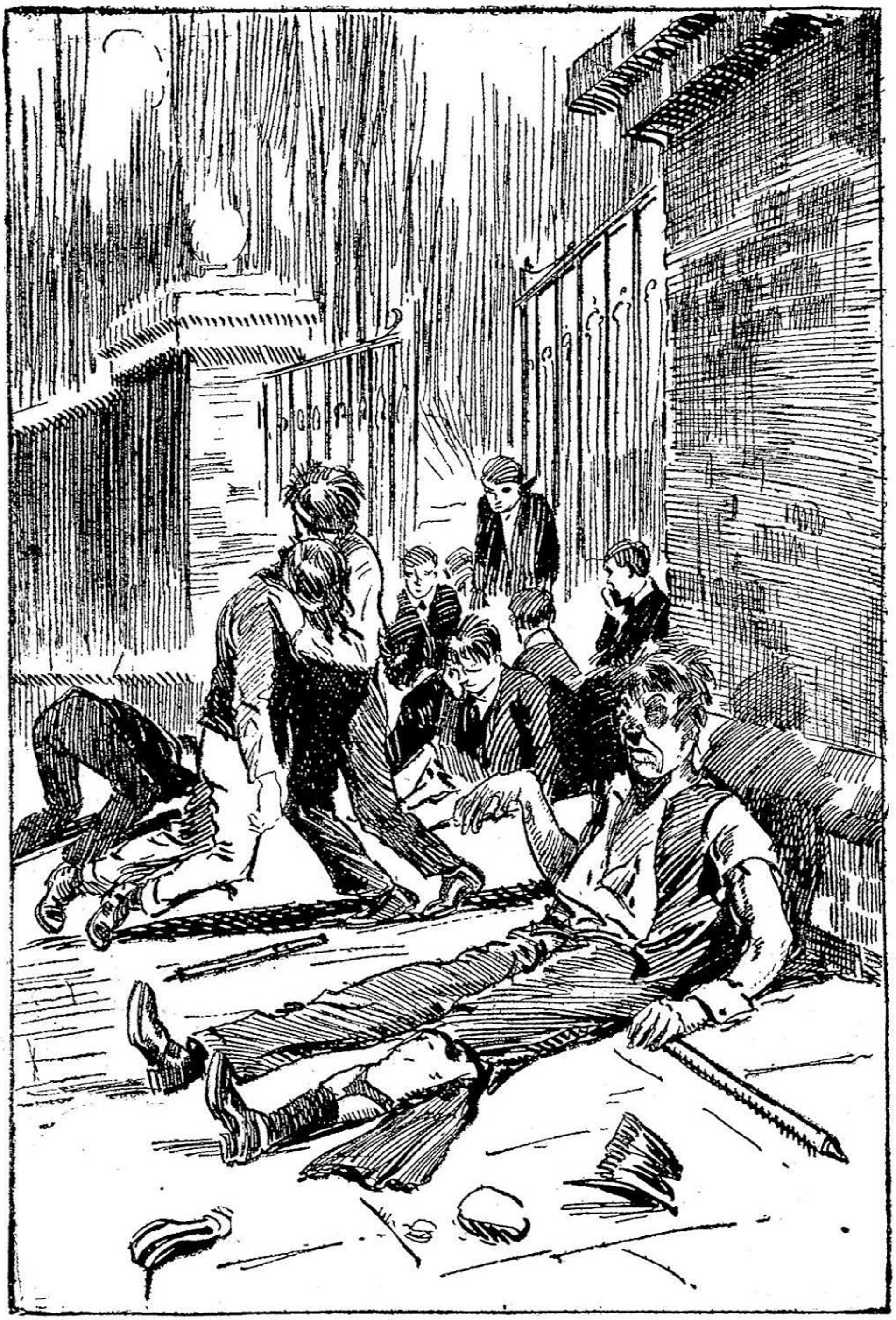


Handforth sat up dazedly, one eye blackened, his nose twice its usual size, and his left ear bleeding. There was a glassy look in his eyes, and he still clutched his cricket stump.

THE SCHOOL WITHOUT A MASTER!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The revolt of the West House against the tyranny of Guy Sinclair, its Head Prefect, was the beginning of all the trouble at St. Frank's. Then followed the dismissal of Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster of West House, as the result of an inquiry by the school governors, the sudden illness of Dr. Stafford, and the appointment of Commander Rudd as deputy Head. Had the latter taken charge of the school, the present catastrophe might have been averted. Unfortunately, Commander Rudd met with a serious accident on the day he had set out for St. Frank's, and that is how Captain Boom, the Commander's butler, came to preside over the destinies of the old school. Now Captain Boom, formerly a skipper of a windjammer in the Merchant Service, had his own ideas of how to quell the revolt of the West House. He was a plain, blunt, typical son of the sea, who depended on force to restore order. His bullying methods, applied to masters and boys alike, was the spark to the gunpowder that set everyone against him. First, the masters resigned in a body. Then the prefects, the seniors, and eventually the whole school, turned on the tactless skipper, who was finally compelled to leave St. Frank's in a hurry. And, with the beginning of this week's narrative, the school is without a master, mob rule taking the place of law and order.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

MADNESS LET LOOSE.

IRENE MANNERS came to a sudden halt, and held up her hand.

"Listen!" she said tensely.

"Oh, come on, Renie—we're in a hurry," exclaimed Marjorie Temple. "It's only some of those noisy St. Frank's fellows."

"Listen!" repeated Irene, with a frown.

The four other Moor View girls knew that imperious tone, and they dutifully listened. Irene wasn't really overbearing, but people sometimes thought she was. Actually, she was as merry-hearted as any of the other girls, and she possessed a surprising power of leadership.

It was mid-afternoon, and the girls had just reached the end of the wall which enclosed the grounds of St. Frank's College. They were on their way to the village.

"It certainly sounds rummy," said Doris Berkeley, with a surprised look in her dark eyes. "What in the world can they be up to? I've never heard such a racket! It isn't a half-holiday, either!"

"It's that rebellion in the West House!" declared Winnie Pitt. "Oh, I wonder if Reggie has got into any trouble?"

"You needn't worry about your brother, you cuckoo!" interrupted Marjorie. "He's one of those chaps who can always look after himself. Well, I must say the rebels are enjoying themselves! Why, it's dreadful! Sounds more like a lunatic asylum than a school!"

The girls could see nothing, owing to the height of the wall, so they hurried on, until they drew level with the main gateway. The gate stood wide open, and they crowded into the entrance of the famous old Triangle. And if they had been astonished before, they were now dumbfounded.

"Everybody's gone mad!" gasped Irene huskily.

"Clean off their rockers!" agreed Doris, nodding. "My hat! Look at those idiots capering round the fountain! Why doesn't somebody come along and stop it?"

The other girls were too surprised to make any comment. They just stood and stared. St. Frank's, usually so sedate and dignified, was a place of unbridled revolution.

About two dozen excited juniors were dancing round the fountain in the centre of the Triangle. It was an imitation Indian war-dance, accompanied by howls and screeches of the most hair-raising description. The fellows seemed to have gone completely off their heads with excitement and recklessness.

A crowd came tearing through Big Arch, dragging a garden roller behind them. This had been triumphantly whirled from the Head's garden, and it was now trundled across the Triangle to the accompaniment of further yells.

At one of the East House windows, a mass of bedding appeared, and it was hurled to the ground, half smothering a number of fellows below. The incident, trivial in itself, struck the rebels as being funny. Wild howls of laughter went up. It was just an indication of the school's madness.

Everything that went on seemed objectless. Seniors and juniors were behaving more like monkeys than human beings. And there wasn't a master to be seen. The prefects were equally conspicuous by their absence.

From every House came a confusion of noises—the stamping of feet, the thudding of furniture, and the wild yells of the rioters. Some idiot brought a fire-hose to one of the windows, and commenced drenching the crowds beneath. A perfect swarm rushed indoors, and a minute later the lunatic with the hose was dragged back. Discordant sounds indicated that his fate was a blood-curdling one.

"I say, we'd better clear off!" suggested Ena Handforth. "I'm not scared, but if these idiots see us, they'll drag us into the commotion! There's no telling what they'll do at a time like this!"

"You're right, Ena," agreed Irene gravely. "Can't we do something, though? Where are all the masters? Nobody seems to be attempting to restore order! Why not fetch the police?"

"That's just what these chaps would like!" interrupted Doris. "If the police came here they'd be ragged unmercifully. It would need the whole Sussex Force to do any good!"

"Yes, but I can't understand——"

"Look out!" gasped Marjorie. "They're coming!"

But she was wrong. A yelling crowd of Fourth-Formers swept along, and they took no notice of the knot of girls in the gateway. In fact, they were so excited that they didn't even see them. And a moment later a slim, girlish figure ran out from behind the West House, and sped to the gates.

"It's Mary!" exclaimed Marjorie Temple excitedly.

The newcomer halted breathlessly, after running right into the arms of the other girls. She was looking flushed and excited, and her eyes were filled with anxiety.

"Thank goodness I reached you without being stopped!" she panted. "Some of these boys are nearly crazy! Can't you hurry to the village and bring help? The whole school's gone mad!"

"But—but what's happened?" asked Irene breathlessly.

Mary Summers didn't speak for a moment—she was getting some of her breath back. She was just about the same age as the Moor View girls, and she was the niece of Mr. Beverley Stokes—the ex-Housemaster of the West House. She had been staying with her aunt and uncle for some weeks, and had many friends among the St. Frank's fellows.

"Nobody knows how it started!" she said, at last. "But it was really the fault of Commander Rudd, I suppose. He came here to-day, after being appointed by the governors. He was supposed to quell the revolt in the West House."

"He seems to have been unsuccessful," said Doris grimly.

"It's awful!" breathed Mary. "The very first thing he did was to set the Ancient House against the rebels—and the Ancient House refused to have anything to do with it. They joined the rebellion!"

"Good luck to 'em!" said Irene. "We know all about that rebellion, Mary. Why, it's as plain as anything that the West House fellows were justified. It was all Sinclair's fault——"

"That's why we were all pleased at first," interrupted Mary. "With the Ancient House in the rebellion, everybody thought that it would collapse at once—that Sinclair would get what he deserves. Uncle and Aunt were forced to leave the Ancient House—that's the second time we've been turned out. Not that I minded, because I believed in the rebellion."

"But where did you go to?" asked Marjorie.

"The only thing we could do was to escape into the Head's house," replied Mary. "You see, Uncle Barry hasn't any authority now—he's been virtually dismissed. And he's worried off his head, too."

"But what about the other masters?" asked Doris.

"I'm just coming to that," continued Mary Summers. "It was all Commander Rudd's fault. Nobody knows exactly what he did, but he must have insulted the masters dreadfully. Anyhow, they all resigned, and walked out."

"My only hat!" breathed Doris.

"Walked out!" echoed Irene. "But—but aren't there any masters here now?"

"Not one!"

"How terrible!" murmured Irene.

"They cleared out in a body," went on Mary breathlessly. "And then Commander Rudd came out and ordered the Modern House and the East House to attack the rebels. Of course, they refused—and this is the result! Everybody went mad, and the school's in a state of chaos. There's no need for the West House to continue the barring-out. There's nobody left to bar out! So all the barricades were torn down, and the whole school's in the same boat! I tell you, it's worse than it looks."

"Then it must be bad—because it looks awful!" declared Ena Handforth. "Where's Ted? He's not joining in these insane riots, I suppose?"

"Ted's all right," said Mary quietly. "He and Dick and Reggie and lots of others are in the gymnasium—trying to think of something to stop the rot. They've all kept their heads, thank goodness! But they're in a minority. There aren't ten per cent of the fellows sane."

"Why not stick up a lunatic asylum board, and settle it that way?" asked Doris.

"Oh, Doris, don't joke now!" said Irene. "There's something terrible about this! Not a master in the whole school, and everybody in revolt!"

"Of course, Reggie is feeling it badly," said Mary. "It was he and Morrow who started the rebellion, and they feel responsible. There's Dick Hamilton, too—he urged the Ancient House to join in. But they conducted the revolt in a quiet, dignified way."

"All the same, they'll get the blame for anything that happens," said Marjorie. "I think we'd better move away from here," she added. "If some of the crowds spot us, they'll swoop down, and we might be dragged into a war-dance, or something!"

"Where's this Commander Rudd, anyhow?" asked Doris.

"He's gone!" said Mary contemptuously. "He and his servant—a man named Jiggs. As soon as this trouble started they bolted. Rudd couldn't have done worse if he had deliberately come here to create disorder. It was all because he used the wrong policy. It's no good treating boys as though they were a collection of niggers or slaves!"

And just about this moment the door of the gymnasium opened, and Edward Oswald Handforth looked out. The gym. was half filled with the seniors and juniors who had kept their heads—such fellows as Fenton and Morrow, of the Sixth, William Napoleon Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth, Nipper, Tregellis-West, Pitt, and Handforth, of the Remove, Boots and Christine, of the Fourth, and Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, and Juicy Lemon, of the Third.

They were a staunch crowd, but helpless against such overwhelming numbers. However good their intentions, they stood no chance of restoring order in face of such powerful opposition.

"It's getting worse," said Handforth, as he glanced out. "Some of these idiots are chucking crockery out of the window now—— Hallo! What the—— By George! There's a crowd of girls in the gateway!"

Without waiting to see if the others were coming Handforth made a rush for the gates. He had seen Irene Manners, and he forgot all about the rebellion in his sudden excitement. For a week or two Handforth had practically overlooked Irene, having been "smitten" by the charms of Mary Summers. But at last he had realised that Mary had a decided preference for Nipper, and his own chances were nil. He was now prepared to remain staunch to the fair-haired Irene.

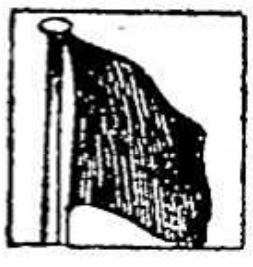
But by the time he reached the gates Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson and several others were with him. They came up with such a rush that the girls backed away. They momentarily thought that these juniors were as mad as the others.

"None of your larks!" said Doris warningly.

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, as he halted, and raised his hat. "We're not dotty, like these others. You girls had better clear off while you're safe. Nearly everybody's gone crazy here to-day."

CHAPTER II.

THE RED FLAG.



"WHAT'S going to be done?" asked Mary quietly.

She was looking straight at Dick Hamilton, more popularly known as "Nipper." And Dick shrugged his shoulders and gave a rueful laugh.

"It's all very well looking at me, but I'm no magician," he said. "I can't wave a wand and bring these lunatics to their senses. The worst of it is, they're getting

wilder every minute. One excess leads to another."

"But—but they might burn the school down!" said Doris.

"It wouldn't surprise me in the least," said Nipper grimly. "I'm not saying they will, but there's no telling when a spirit of recklessness gets hold of a crowd like this."

"I think the masters are to blame," said Ena indignantly. "They ought to have had more sense than to weakly run away!"

"Has Mr. Lee gone, too?" asked Irene.

"They've all gone," replied Nipper. "And in my opinion they did the best thing. Commander Rudd was placed in full control by the Governors, and after he'd instigated the trouble it was too late for any of the other masters to interfere."

"But they could have done something, surely?"

"There wasn't a chance," put in Reggie Pitt. "The fellows were so maddened by Rudd that they wouldn't have accepted orders from anybody. Even Mr. Lee couldn't have commanded obedience. He was jolly sensible to leave. With the authority of every master flouted the riots would have been a lot worse than they are even now."

"There's something else to think of, too," said Nipper shrewdly. "This affair is bound to get into the papers. When it's reported that no masters were present, there can't be any question of weak discipline. The whole affair will be set down as an unfortunate incident. But if all the masters were here the papers would set up a great song about the slackness of present-day authority. I believe Mr. Lee thought of that when he advised the others to leave. He had the good name of the school at heart."

"Yes, I hadn't looked at it like that before," said Irene slowly. "But that doesn't make any difference to the present position, does it? Couldn't you fellows bring the rest to their senses?"

"Not much hope of that," said Nipper. "Things are getting worse all the time. The wilder spirits are inciting the others, and lots of really decent chaps are going dotty. Just look over there!"

He pointed to the Ancient House. Hitchen and Love of the Fifth were racing down the steps with a crowd of juniors behind them. They had secured a red tablecloth and were waving it wildly. It was obviously meant to be a symbol, a kind of red flag of revolution.

Parkin of the Sixth, about the wildest spirit in the Upper School, gave a roar as he caught sight of it. He was one of the beauties that Guy Sinclair had introduced into the West House, thereby commencing the whole trouble.

"Come on, you fellows!" yelled Parkin. "We'll shove that rag at the top of the tower—on the flagstaff. Revolution! The school's gone red. We might as well have the flag flying, so that everybody else can know!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with authority!"

"Long live the red flag!"

"Three cheers for Moscow!"

"Hurrah!"

The crowd, growing in size, made a dash for the great Clock Tower. High above this rose a dignified flagstaff. It was bare of any flag at the moment, for it was only used on special occasions.

"You see?" said Nipper quietly.

"It's terrible!" whispered Mary.

"It's not going to continue!" roared Handforth aggressively. "And that rotten flag isn't going to be flown, either. These idiots may be seeing red, but the school's the same as ever. Who'll help me to dash up into the Clock Tower and tear the flag down?"

Practically all the others agreed on the spot.

"Let's fly the school colours, instead!" shouted Boots.

"It doesn't matter about the school colours, as long as the red flag isn't flying!" roared Handforth. "Come on, you chaps! There'll be some fighting, but that'll make it all the better. Thank goodness some of us are still cool!"

Considering that Handforth was wild with excitement this remark was rather empty. But his excitement was of the right sort, at all events; he was filled with intense indignation against the rioters, and loyalty to the old school. Nipper and Pitt and the others were not so noisy, but they shared Handforth's feelings to the full.

"What-ho!" shouted Archie Glenthorne, as the loyalists dashed up the Triangle. "Down with the red flag, what? Rally round, laddies, and help the good old cause. Yoicks, and all that sort of thing!"

"Better keep out of it, Archie!" panted Alf Brent. "You'll get biffed about terribly——"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But, dash it, they'll be honourable scars, old article! Archibald is about to let himself absolutely go!"

The other crowds in the Triangle assumed that these juniors were simply joining in the rebels, and no particular notice was taken of them. Without pausing, they swept up the Clock Tower steps and burst upon the roof in a flood. Fortunately, the roof was quite level, with a high parapet all round. Otherwise there might have been some grave casualties. For the confined space was already crowded, and everybody was madly reckless.

The red tablecloth had already been secured to the lines, and was now being hauled up to the top of the flagstaff. Down

below crowds of excited rioters were cheering and flinging their caps into the air. That sight of the red flag had imbued them with an even greater sense of destruction.

"Hurrah!"

"Keep it flying!"

"Down with law and order!"

Parkin was hauling on the line, and his supporters were crowding round, watching the flag rise higher and higher. They didn't realise the meaning of this flood of juniors until they were suddenly attacked.

"Down with that filthy rag!" hooted Handforth. "Take that, you rotter!"

Crash!

Edward Oswald's famous right came round, and Parkin staggered over backwards, carrying two or three other fellows with him. The next second a wild fight was in progress. But the red flag slithered down the flagstaff, and fell in a heap. It was seized upon by Nipper and Pitt and the others and ripped into shreds.

The fight continued with greater intensity than ever.

But five minutes later there was an evidence of what had happened. The crowds in the Triangle beheld a procession coming out of the Clock Tower. Parkin and his supporters came first.

Without exception, they were all in a wrecked condition.

Parkin's face was hardly recognisable. His hair was matted, his collar had vanished, and half his jacket was torn off. Doyle, Armstrong, Freeman, Marriott, Tucker, and the rest of the red flag fiends were in no better state. For the time being, at any rate, they were subdued. They only wanted to drag themselves away and die.

They were followed by the victorious loyalists.

But even these enthusiasts were nearly as scarred. Handforth, indeed, was liberally smothered in gore, and he was torn and battered in a dozen other ways. But he was as defiant as ever, and he looked perfectly happy. The light of battle gleamed in his eye.

Nipper was more or less battered, and Pitt and Grey and Fullwood shared the honours. Even Archie Glenthorne was looking more like a scarecrow than a human being. But not one member of the party looked unhappy.

"Well, we tore that rotten red flag up, anyhow," said Nipper grimly. "Can't you fellows get your senses back?" he added, appealing to the crowds which pressed round. "Let this rebellion be an orderly one——"

"Not likely!"

"We're out for blood, you ass!"

"Down with the masters!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's start something else!" roared Parkin, recovering his strength rapidly. "And why stick to the school? Let's go down to the village in a crowd, and sack the shops!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Parkin—we'll follow!"

"Those shopkeepers are a lot of rotten swindlers, anyhow!"

"Come on—let's make a rush for it!"

There was something rather terrible in the lightning-like spread of anything which savoured of destruction. In less than twenty seconds, a yelling mob had seized upon Parkin's dangerous suggestion. And others were rushing up, eager to join in this new "rag."

Matters were beginning to look grave, indeed!

CHAPTER III.

THE DIVIDED SCHOOL.

EDGAR FENTON, of the Sixth, looked at the crowds with a grim expression on his face.

"Something's got to be done," he said sharply. "We mustn't let these idiots break loose! Things are bad enough within the school grounds—but they'll be ten times as bad if they once get out."

"I'm afraid you're right," said Morrow, nodding.

"I know I'm right."

The captain of St. Frank's was intensely worried. He accepted no responsibility for this catastrophe. It was plainly the fault of the man whom the school governors had placed in a position of authority. But Fenton had joined in the earlier revolt. He had supported the Ancient House, and he felt that it was up to him to save the school from these hotheads.

He was glad to find that most of the decent fellows were still in possession of their wits. Thus, in the Ancient House, Browne of the Fifth had gathered a few sensible men round him, and was prepared to do anything to re-establish law and order.

In the Remove, Nipper was equally determined, and he had the support of Handforth & Co. and Fullwood and De Valerie. As for the Third, Willy Handforth was keeping his fags well in check. A good many of the Third Formers of other Houses were loose, but Willy promised them a warm time when he finally succeeded in rounding them up.

In all, less than one third of the school was sane.

The rest, inflamed by the general excitement, and rendered reckless by the absence of any authority, was prepared to go to any length of excess. Most of the fellows were so excited that they were willing to follow any leader—and the more destructive the errand, the greater the enthusiasm.

Even if the masters had been present, they could have done nothing. Until this

flame had died down, there was no holding the mob.

But it was possible, perhaps, to offer a check.

"Look at those fools collecting!" Fenton went on, indicating a great crowd in the centre of the Triangle. "They mean it, too! They're going to the village to sack the shops. That'll mean a job for the police—and one or two arrests! St. Frank's is going to get an awful name over this affair!"

"Can't we organise a Defence Corps?" asked Nipper keenly. "It's no good standing here and talking, Fenton."

"What's the good of a Defence Corps?" demanded Fenton curtly. "We're only a handful—and unless this excitement dies down, all the rest of us will go crazy!"

"The thing is to bottle everybody up," declared Nipper.

"A brainy scheme, Brother Hamilton, but I fail to see how we can roll it along to success," put in Browne, of the Fifth. "I am seldom at a loss, but on this occasion——"

"I don't say that we can do it, but we can try," interrupted Nipper grimly. "And even if we fail there'll be some satisfaction in knowing that we've done our best."

"Without question, this man is imbued with the right spirit," declared Browne admiringly. "Let us hearken unto his wisdom, and push the thing along. I take it, Brother Hamilton, that you are indicating a guard for each gateway? Then up spake brave Horatius——"

"A guard for each gateway! That's the idea, exactly," agreed Nipper. "Half a dozen of us—with sufficient determination—can hold the side gates. And a dozen more ought to protect the main ones. And I suggest a few more freelances out in the road—to deal with any fellows who climb the walls."

"Jove, it's a good suggestion," said Fenton briskly. "If only we can keep this insanity in the school it might cool down before there's much harm done. But once they're let loose over the countryside—then Heaven help the name of St. Frank's! We shall never be able to hold up our heads again!"

"I'll hold the main gates!" roared Handforth, suddenly appearing at the conference. "Leave it to me, Fenton! I only need a cricket stump——"

"You've got the spirit, old man, but that's not enough," put in Morrow. "There'll have to be another bunch of us to help you—and the more cricket stumps the better. We'll take the main gates, anyhow. Let's organise this quickly, or it'll be too late."

But Nipper was already hurrying round the Triangle, giving instructions. There was something rather significant about this affair. Dick Hamilton was suddenly coming right to the top. He hadn't taken a very prominent position in the earlier rebellion—and that, of course, was explained by the fact that the trouble had occurred in the West House. But with the arrival of this crisis, Nipper's well-known resource and quick-wittedness came to the fore. While the others were considering, he was acting.

In many ways, Nipper was a most remarkable fellow. He knew when to keep quiet, and he knew when to assert himself. His judgment was better, perhaps, than that of any other fellow—senior or junior—in the school. He had frequently exasperated the Remove by delaying action when the Remove thought that action was essential. But his judgment had generally been sound. And now that something had to be done on the spot, Nipper was ready. He wasted no time considering details.

"Look here, Reggie, take a bunch of chaps, and stand by the West Gate," he said crisply, as he ran up to Pitt and one or two other West House juniors. "Close the gates—lock them—and guard them."

"Trust me," said Reggie crisply.

Nipper hurried on, and gave similar instructions to Fullwood regarding the East Gate. There were two other gates at the rear of the school, and these were provided with guardians, too. There was not much danger of a general exodus over the walls—for these were too high. The main gates of the Triangle were slammed, locked, and a score of sturdy defenders took up their positions with Fenton, Morrow, Browne, Nipper and Handforth well to the fore.

And all this was being done while the mob was preparing to descend upon the village. Indeed, the mob knew nothing of these preparations—for they had all been carried out within the space of a few minutes, and without any display. The excited rioters had taken no notice of the hurrying figures.

Over half the school had collected in the Triangle, and were forming up into a kind of army. All these fellows were off their heads with excitement—and ready to indulge in any kind of violence.

The prospect of looting the village appealed to them.

Such fellows as Parkin, of the Sixth, Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, and Forrest, Gulliver and Bell, of the Remove, were the instigators of the whole movement. They kept up a ceaseless fire of incitement. Even Armstrong, the Junior Captain of the East House, was as mad and as reckless as any of the others. He was, indeed, the only junior House captain who threw in his lot with the hotheads—and he would probably pay dearly for it when the school calmed down.

"All ready, you fellows?" yelled Kenmore, of the Sixth.

"Yes!" roared the crowd. "Let's go!"

"We're going to have a proper fling this time!" shouted Parkin. "We'll show Bellton what we can do when we're roused! This'll be the rag of the century!"

"Hurrah!"
"Long live the red flag!"
"Revolution for ever!"
"Go it, ye cripples!"

The mob—for it was nothing less— turned in a body towards the main gates. All these young idiots were telling themselves that this affair was merely a rag, and quite harmless in itself. And, certainly, many public school rags verge on the danger point occasionally. But nothing had ever happened approximating to the proportions of this adventure.

Later on, of course, the most ardent red flagites would bitterly regret their actions. They would, indeed, marvel at the whole affair, and stand amazed at their own insanity.

The spirit of destruction had got hold of them, and they were temporarily out of hand. It was a case of mob law. In a way, the whole situation was understandable. All their lives these boys had obeyed rules and regulations—they had respected discipline. And now that they had got rid of the bit, they were temporarily irresponsible.

But quite a good few in that mob were well aware of their actions. Forrest, for example, was quite cool, and took a vicious delight in urging his fellows on to create havoc. Grayson, of the Fifth, was another of these—and Kenmore and Sinclair were just as guilty.

"Come on—follow up, everybody!"

"Hurrah!"

The crowds swept on, but the leaders suddenly checked and stared. A sight was confronting them which they had scarcely expected to see. The great wrought-iron gates were closed and barred, and over a score of grim-looking defenders were standing in front, all armed with cricket stumps.

"Stand back!" roared Handforth defiantly.

"What the thunder——"

"Nobody's going to leave the school grounds!" shouted Fenton. "For heaven's sake, control yourselves! Can't you realise——"

His words were drowned by a perfect howl of indignation and rage. This check only maddened the crowd the more. The leaders were hesitating—not liking the looks of those stumps, and those grimly-set jaws.

But the mob behind pressed on, and the whole crowd was sent hurtling towards the gates. The next moment the conflict was in progress.

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHT ON THE SITUATION.

IT was a swift and deadly business.

The defenders put up a valiant fight, but they could not achieve the impossible.

The mob divided itself into four or five sections, those in the rear finding it impossible to get into the fight. So they shot off to the other gates, expecting to get through with ease. But here other defenders were waiting. Not that they could do much. Totally outnumbered, the little knots of loyalists were literally swept off their feet. Gate after gate fell, and the mob swept out.

"We're not going to leave a single thing whole!" yelled Forrest, as he grabbed a couple of jam-jars. "Stand out of the way there! Down with law and order!"

The main gates were the last to go, but eventually the defending force was defeated by sheer weight of numbers. The huge gates were flung open, and the crowds surged through into the lane. It was a kind of stampede—a thudding of feet, a yelling chorus of triumphant shouts, and then the mob was off to the village.

Behind lay the wounded.

Handforth sat up dazedly, one eye blackened, his nose twice its usual size, and his left ear bleeding. There was a glassy look in his eyes, and he still clutched his cricket stump. His Eton jacket had half gone, and even his shirt-sleeve had been torn off. He cut a ludicrous figure.

Near by, Nipper was just staggering to his feet, and Fenton and Morrow were reeling about, recovering their senses. The battlefield was littered with the vanquished.

"Well, we did our best, anyhow!" muttered Fenton hopelessly. "I thought the

gates were going to hold for a time, but ——"

"I believe old Browne's dead!" said Morrow, in a dull voice.

But William Napoleon Browne stirred at that moment. He was outstretched on the gravel—a battered piece of wreckage. But his spirit was as strong as ever, and although he was badly crocked, he managed to get to his feet.

"A murky prospect, brothers, but even now we may not be too late," he said unsteadily. "We must gather ourselves together, and hold a meeting. We must decide upon a course of action. Let us bathe our wounds, anoint them, and get ready for further deeds of valour."

The advice was sound. Nothing more could be done at the moment. Practically everybody had some hurt or other to be bound or otherwise treated. And they straggled indoors to the senior day-room of the Ancient House, where surgical dressings and ointment were brought.

Willy Handforth scorned such methods. He was rather battered on his own account, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were dizzy with fighting. But he dragged them aside, and spoke to them grimly.

"We're going down to the village!" he declared. "We can't do much, of course—but we can see what's happening. Come on—we've got to be in this affair, my sons."

"But—but my ear——" began Chubby Heath.

"Never mind your ear!"

"My ankle——" said Juicy.

"You can attend to your ankle later on," snapped Willy. "I'm all over bruises and things, but this is no time to think of trifles."

And Willy & Co. set off for the village.

In the meantime, a party of gentlemen stood on the platform of Bannington Station, where the afternoon express for London was waiting. They were the masters of St. Frank's.

It seemed ages since the school had "gone red"—but actually only a brief space of time had elapsed. It was scarcely more than an hour since the masters had departed. It doesn't take long for a riot to develop. These things are brought to a head in minutes—not hours or days.

"No, Mr. Pagett, I have decided to accompany Mr. Lee."

Mr. Arthur Stockdale, the Housemaster of the Modern House, was quite firm. He and Nelson Lee remained on the platform while the other masters entered a first-class compartment. They were all there, including Mr. Crowell, Mr. Suncliffe, Mr. Goole, and even Professor Tucker and Monsieur Leblanc. There wasn't a master who had remained. In face of the new headmaster's attitude, they had been obliged to resign in a body.

"I share Mr. Lee's opinion that there was something extraordinarily remarkable about Commander Sampson Rudd," continued Mr. Stockdale. "The only way is to visit Commander Rudd's home, and make inquiries."

"There are quite enough of you, gentlemen, without us," added Nelson Lee. "You will be in London, and you will be interviewing Sir John Brent in less than two hours. If we have any news at our end, we will ring you up. It is essential that Sir John should know these facts at the earliest possible moment."

"I suggested a telegram——" began Mr. Crowell.

"That, I am afraid, would be a mistake," interrupted Lee. "Sir John would probably start for Sussex, and you would miss him. And an affair of this sort can only be fully told by word of mouth. You can be back at St. Frank's by mid-evening—and the governors can come with you. It is their duty to settle this matter now."

"But the school?" asked Mr. Goole worriedly. "What is happening in the meantime? I tremble to think——"

"We are better out of the way," interrupted Lee quietly. "With the boys in such a reckless mood, our authority would only be flouted, and the whole situation would be aggravated. By being left to themselves for a few hours, the boys may come to their senses, and a satisfactory issue may result. I do not hope for such an event, but the boys are not all wild. There are plenty of level-headed ones among them, and common-sense may prevail. In any case, sheer physical tiredness will end the catastrophe sooner or later."

There was very little time for further conversation, for the train was on the point of moving out. As soon as it had gone, the two Housemasters went outside into the station yard, and climbed into Nelson Lee's car.

They set off at once for Caistowe, and having reached this quiet seaside town, they progressed further along the coast until they reached the residence of Commander Sampson Rudd.

The door was opened by the commander's butler—a retired merchant skipper named Captain Phineas Boom. He was an old salt of the windjammer type, with red hair and a tufty beard. He was short and stocky, but he nearly toppled over backwards at the sight of the two visitors.

"Sink my rum rations!" he ejaculated, staring. "Roarin' monsoons, an' ragin' cyclones! May I never see the Southern Cross again!"

Captain Boom had no voice for ordinary conversation. He could only gasp out a few of his favourite expressions. Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale regarded him with cold grimness.

"Well, Commander Rudd," said Nelson Lee quietly, "you have apparently settled down quite comfortably again. We had no idea that you had deserted St. Frank's so promptly."

Captain Boom clutched at the wall for support.

"By grog!" he muttered hoarsely. "I didn't expect you gents this afternoon! I've only just got into port myself! It's all a mistake—an' I ain't even told the commander yet."

"Are you not Commander Rudd?" asked Mr. Stockdale sharply.

"I was convinced that something like this would confront us," said Nelson Lee. "Now, sir! We want the truth! Who are you? But wait—let me make a guess! I imagine you to be Commander Rudd's manservant."

"Sink my anchor!" moaned Captain Boom. "My name's Boom, sir—Captain Phineas Boom. Commander Rudd's upstairs—lyin' in his bunk with a twisted ankle. I did it for the best, gents—I tried to quell that mutiny, but them young varmints were too much for me——"

"Take us to Commander Rudd at once," interrupted Lee. "We will soon get to the bottom of this mix-up, Mr. Stockdale."

And in less than three minutes they were standing by the bedside of the man whom Sir John Brent had persuaded to restore St. Frank's to order. He was just the type Nelson Lee had expected in the first place—an officer of the Senior Service, a man of strength and refinement—a gentleman.

He was distressed beyond measure when he heard of his butler's escapade—for Boom had returned without saying a word to his master. It was quite apparent that the old salt was nearly scared out of his wits.

There was very little to explain. That very morning Commander Rudd had fallen headlong down his front steps, spraining his ankle so severely that he was now helpless. The slightest movement was agony to him, and he was under doctor's orders to remain in bed.

He had merely sent Captain Boom to St. Frank's to explain the situation. But one of the school governors had mistaken the old skipper for Commander Rudd, having never seen the actual man. And Captain Boom, deluded by the conceit that he could deal with the boys effectively, had accepted the mistake. His career had been short and swift—and St. Frank's was now in a state of chaos.

"Naturally, gentlemen, I accept responsibility for my servant's amazing effrontery," said the commander quietly. "You may be quite certain that he will suffer for this——"

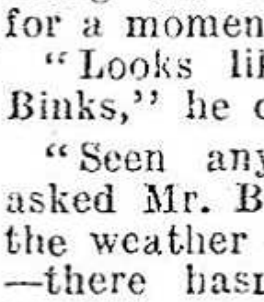
"Do not be too hard on him, commander," interrupted Nelson Lee. "The man, I believe, acted as he did in your interests—and certainly with the best intentions. The whole affair is unfortunate, but it may have been for the best."

The commander urged his visitors to remain to tea—and they consented, since Nelson Lee wanted to telephone to Sir John Brent after the arrival of the masters, giving him the full story.

And, in the meantime, the village of Bellton was experiencing the most hectic hour of its entire existence.

CHAPTER V.

THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE.



BELLTON High Street was in its usual peaceful condition just before the advent of the mob.

It was a normal February afternoon—sleepy and quiet. The village shopkeepers were doing little or no business, and one or two of them were thinking of lighting their lamps. It wasn't dark yet, but the wintry dusk was beginning to creep over the countryside. Up and down the whole High Street scarcely a soul could be seen. Indeed, the peacefulness of the place was so pronounced that it seemed high time that something came along to wake the inhabitants up.

Mr. Binks, the confectioner, came to his door, and looked up and down the street. Mr. Binks was worried. It was past the hour when the schoolboys of St. Frank's were finished lessons, and he had baked his usual amount of confectionery. By this time he was generally thronged—particularly on such a fine, crisp afternoon. But for some extraordinary reason he hadn't had a single customer.

Old Wiggins, the station-porter, came along the street off duty, and he paused for a moment outside the confectioner's.

"Looks like a sharp frost to-night, Mr. Binks," he observed wisely.

"Seen anything o' the boys, Wiggins?" asked Mr. Binks, with little enthusiasm for the weather conditions. "It's a queer thing—there hasn't been one down this afternoon."

"There's no tellin' wi' boys," said Mr. Wiggins, shaking his head. "A reg'lar rummy lot—that's what they are. Worse than wimmen, Mr. Binks. You can't tell how to take 'em."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Binks impatiently. "That may be right in some ways, Wiggins, but not when it's a question of cakes and pastry. They've never failed to visit my shop yet. It's a special afternoon, too—I always bake an extra supply of doughnuts to-day."

Mr. Wiggins looked up the road thoughtfully.

"Ah, mebbe there's somethin' special on—a big football match, like as not," he said. "Strikes me these boys spend more time playin' than they do workin'. Still, you don't need to worry, Mr. Binks. There's a reg'lar crowd comin' down the road now."

Mr. Binks leaned out, and looked.

"Extraordinary!" he muttered. "Why, there must be something the matter! I

know there's some trouble at the school—but it's only in one House. But what on earth—— Why, there are hundreds of them!"

"Don't look any too healthy!" said Mr. Wiggins, in alarm.

He stared, open-eyed. The entire end of the village street was a solid mass of running schoolboys. They came into Bellton like a flood—as though a weir had suddenly burst. They surged onwards to the accompaniment of a wild yelling and shouting.

"Bust my eyes!" gasped Mr. Wiggins. "It's a reg'lar riot!"

By this time, other shopkeepers were coming to their doors, and the excitement was spreading. It all happened so suddenly, too. One minute complete peace—and the next minute utter chaos.

There were hundreds of boys on the spot, and every one of them was out for the biggest rag of the century. In their present excited frame of mind things were distorted. An abandoned assault became a joke—a wild orgie of destruction struck them as being a harmless rag.

The first shop was a little bookseller's, and in less than a minute it was crowded out. The proprietor didn't stand a chance. He was bundled off his own premises, and in less than a minute his entire stock was being hurled out into the High Street.

The famous Bellton Riot had fairly begun.

It was destined to be one of those memorable events which would afterwards be talked about in all the tap-rooms of the countryside with bated breath. Bellton had never known anything like it before. There had been floods, there had been fires, and there had been fêtes, but never before had the village seen such breathless scenes as these.

And while it was commencing, matters were getting straightened out at St. Frank's. A good few stragglers had been roped in—fellows who had lost their enthusiasm for the "rag" at the last moment, and who had decided to stay.

All the loyalists who had helped to protect the gates were looking more presentable. But they were by no means beaten. The senior day-room of the Ancient House was fairly packed, and nobody knew exactly what could be done. It was Nipper's suggestion that they should form themselves into a vigilance committee—a body to preserve the good name of the school, and to put a stop to the wild scenes of rioting.

"We can't very well do it ourselves," Nipper was saying. "We've had one experience, and it's enough. But if only we can get some of the fellows to support us we shall be in a stronger position."

"Perhaps they'll be a bit quieter when they come back from the village," said Reggie Pitt hopefully. "Goodness knows what they're doing down there! I'm afraid they'll create an awful lot of destruction."

"Then it's up to us to repair it," growled Morrow. "I feel responsible, in a way. I was the leader of the first revolt——"

"In that case, I'm just as responsible as you are," interrupted Pitt. "But we can't shoulder the blame for these idiots. I'm hanged if I know what we're going to do about our little revolt. This affair has put a different complexion on the whole business. We haven't got time to consider it, even."

"There'll be time for it after we've got the school back to normal," said Nipper. "How many of us are there here? Not more than fifty or sixty. Until we get more help, we can't gain the upper hand."

"Some of the fellows are trickling back all the time," put in Fullwood. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to send a party of us outside--and catch these stragglers as they come in? In twos and threes they're sensible enough. It's only when they get in a mob that they go mad."

"Yes, that's a pretty decent suggestion," said Nipper thoughtfully. "The more fellows we can get, the better. Somebody ought to go down to the village, too—just to see what's happening."

"And later on we'll try and establish some sort of discipline," declared Fenton. "I've got all the prefects behind me, and we'll attempt the miracle. It'll be no good applying force—but there's just a chance that we can appeal to the better nature of these idiots."

There was some kind of order appearing out of the chaos. Still further stragglers came in—most of them quite decent fellows who had realised the foolishness of their actions before going too far.

Down in the village, only the more reckless spirits went the whole hog.

For example, when the bookshop was raided, and the stock was hurled out into the street, quite a number of seniors came to their senses. The actual sight of rioting was enough to pull them up short. Many of them hung back, and merely watched the scene.

Still more deserted the rioters when the next shop was reached—and when the roadway became strewn with stock from a little grocery establishment. It was a wicked, wanton waste of good stuff. To add to the confusion, a number of loutish village boys, led by the infamous Lumpy Bill, joined the riot, and commenced looting in real earnest.

Indeed, within ten minutes there was a complete change.

The wildest spirits were still going on at full steam—a large enough party to have the village at its mercy. But well over half the original crowd was on its way back to St. Frank's—somewhat sobered and scared. They wouldn't have anything to do with the looting.

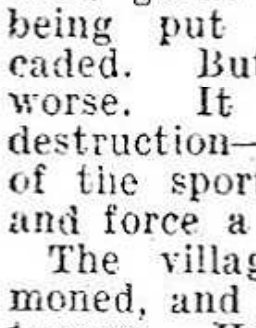
Bellton High Street continued to resemble a war area.

There was still plenty of daylight left, and the village street was littered with

every imaginable kind of merchandise. The shopkeepers themselves could do nothing. They were forced to stand helplessly by while this destruction went on.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARM OF THE LAW.



"LOOK out, you chaps!"

"Sling 'em over!"

"Good!"

The grocer's shop was fairly swarming with yelling, excited humanity. Tins of fruit, salmon, and sardines came shooting out through the open doorway. Biscuit-tins rattled out in endless numbers. Bottles smashed, and jam-jars shattered.

"We're not going to leave a single thing whole!" yelled Forrest, as he grabbed a couple of jam-jars. "Stand out of the way there! Down with law and order!"

"Hurrah!"

Bernard Forrest was several kinds of a young rascal, but he was no worse than many of the others at the present moment. He had let himself go, and was so excited that he scarcely realised what he was doing. Dozens of others were in exactly the same condition.

Up the street, the rest of the shopkeepers were making frantic attempts to protect their goods from the mob. Shutters were being put up, and doors being barricaded. But this only made the rioters worse. It incited them to even greater destruction—since it was considered all part of the sport to wrench the shutters down and force a way in.

The village policeman was hastily summoned, and he wasn't in a particularly good temper. He was on night-duty, and had to be fished out of bed—for he was due to sleep until nine p.m.

But when he came out of his little cottage, and took a look at the scene, he realised that his presence was necessary. Three or four of the angry shopkeepers were swarming round him.

"You can't do anything on your own, Sparrow," one of them was saying frantically. "You'd best get into touch with Bannington. It needs two or three dozen policemen here——"

"Don't believe it!" said P.-c. Sparrow, contemptuously. "What these young demons need is a sight of my uniform. That'll bring 'em to their senses quicker 'an anythin'. A uniform's what they need to see!"

"It won't be enough, Sparrow—an' you'd best not try it!" said one of the villagers. "If you go among them boys, they'll only pelt ye! There ain't enough police in the whole o' Sussex to stop this affair! The best thing would be to get the soldiers out!"

The constable pulled himself up and snorted.

"It's me they want to see—not the soldiers!" he retorted. "I've dealt with these things afore! One sigh, an' they'll bunk! The young varmints ought to be horsewhipped——"

"Well, if you mean to do somethin', do it!" interrupted a shopkeeper impatiently. "I'm ruined! There's none o' my stock left—all my windows are broken——"

"We're all the same!" put in another man. "I never see such a thing in the whole o' my life! Go on, Sparrow! Don't stand there tryin' to look important! Do something!"

The policeman stalked down the street, and strode into the very heart of the riot. Some of the village women held their breath as they watched from their cottage windows. They were startled at such an exhibition of bravery.

But it wasn't bravery at all. P.-c. Sparrow had such a high opinion of himself that he took it for granted that he could come to no harm. Therefore when about a dozen of the wildest spirits formed a circle round him, he felt a pang of doubt.

When they joined hands and performed a kind of war-dance, to the accompaniment of a series of yells, the doubt became a positive fear. The schoolboys didn't seem to mind him in the least. In fact, they apparently regarded his advent with joy.

"That's about enough!" he shouted, in his most important voice. "Stop it, ye young divils! Clear off back to school! Any more o' this, an' I'll arrest some of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Dicky Bird!"

"I say, let's duck him!" shouted somebody. "The pond's only down at the end of the street. Let's chuck him in and pelt him!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's the idea—grab him!"

"Down with law and order!"

P.-c. Sparrow was not merely alarmed now, but panic-stricken. It is to be feared that he made a grave blunder in tactics. Instead of standing his ground with dignity, he made a bolt for freedom—attempting to break through the ever-increasing circle.

It was a hopeless project from the start.

Before he could force his way through the first ring of boys, he went down, and about a dozen forms sprawled upon him. He scarcely knew anything else until he found himself the central figure in a procession.

He was stretched out, face downwards, and about three fellows were holding each of his legs and each of his arms. Immediately in front strode Grayson, of the Fifth, with Sparrow's helmet stuck at an acute angle on his head. Other members of the mob stood by, cheering. It was a dramatic illustration of the manner in which these young idiots were defying law and order.

"Stop it, young gents!" gurgled Sparrow pantingly. "You're all mad! If you throw me into that pond I'll make it hot——"

"Shut up, Dicky Bird—you haven't got an earthly!" yelled somebody. "We're going to give you a nice little bath."

"Here we are—chuck him in!"

"Good!"

The village pond had been reached—it was deeper than usual owing to recent heavy rains. Without even pausing, the procession went right on until they were on the edge of the muddy pool. And then, with a heave, Police-constable Sparrow was sent flying.

He entered the pond in the very centre, and disappeared head first. A yell of derision went up as he vanished into the muddy, slimy depths.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Sparrow!"

"That's how much we care for the police!"

"Come on—let's pelt him!"

"Hurrah!"

The unfortunate constable was in no real danger, since the pond was only about two feet deep. But there was at least two feet of sticky mud at the bottom, and when he managed to gain an upright position, progress was slow.

He was obliged to drag his way to the edge of the pond in a series of crawling movements. And on the bank, the yelling schoolboys stood round, pelting him with clods of grass and eggs—the latter having been rushed up from the grocer's stock.

It was just the sort of thing to make the riot worse. And, indeed, it was growing worse every moment. Having had a taste of this wanton sacking, the mob was keen upon going through the whole village in the same way.

Willy Handforth & Co., down a little lane, watched the proceedings with mingled feelings. Willy was grim and cool, but Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were thoroughly scared.

"It's—it's awful!" muttered Juicy. "They've done frightful damage already—and they might fire the whole village before they've done! Look at old Sparrow, too! It's terrible!"

"Decent chaps, too!" added Chubby. "At least, I always thought they were decent."

"You can't judge at a time like this," growled Willy. "They're not wrong 'uns—they're just weak. The idiots have allowed themselves to be led away by the excitement. They're not responsible for what they're doing. They'll be scared stiff when they realise it, later on. And a lot of them will be sorry, too."

"But what's going to be done now?" asked Chubby. "It's no good standing here and looking on. Can't we telephone the police?"

Willy looked at him with cold contempt.

"The police?" he repeated tartly.

"Yes."

"You poor, pitiful idiot!"

"Look here——"

"I'm looking, and what do I see?" asked Willy. "I hate to say it, but I see a large mass of human tissue without a brain."

"You silly rotter!" roared Chubby, turning red.

"The police!" repeated Willy, with scorn. "All you can do is to stand there and suggest ringing up the police. Why, you hopeless insect, that's the very thing we've got to avoid. If the police come here in force there'll be a terrible song about it in the papers, and St. Frank's will get an awful name."

"St. Frank's has got an awful name already!" retorted Chubby hotly. "Oh, well, I've done! If you like to see this destruction going on——"

"I don't!" growled Willy. "But I'm not going to ring up the police; I shall ring up St. Frank's."

"St. Frank's?" repeated Juicy, staring.

Willy nodded.

"It's a big school, just up the road," he explained.

"Don't I know it?" howled Juicy. "You fathead——"

"Then don't ask silly questions," retorted Willy. "I shall ring up St. Frank's because that's where we shall get the help. Nipper and my major and Fenton and Boots and those other chaps are getting up a defence corps. It ought to be organised by this time, and I'll 'phone 'em up and give 'em a chance to show what they're made of."

"But it's no good!" growled Chubby fiercely. "Your ideas are usually good, Willy, but this time you're mad. How the dickens can that handful of chaps settle this giddy riot?"

Willy snorted.

"Handful?" he repeated. "It may have been a handful when we left, but it's probably a giddy army. corps by this time. Haven't you noticed the fellows backing out of this mob? They've been going all the time, in twos and threes and fours. There's only about a third of the force here now, although they're making so much noise that they sound full strength."

"By jingo!" breathed Juicy. "I believe you're right."

"I'm glad to find there's something stirring behind that chunk of wood of yours!" growled Willy. "Let's go to old Sharpe's and use his telephone."

"He'll never let us use it," said Chubby.

"Won't he?" snorted Willy. "Who said anything about him letting us? If he likes to kick up a dust we'll tip him into one of his own dustbins and bottle him up. Anyhow, we're going to ring up!"

CHAPTER VII.

USING THE TELEPHONE.

MR. SHARPE was like a cat on hot bricks. He was the village ironmonger, and lots of the St. Frank's fellows always declared that his name was a false one; it fitted him too accurately to be real.

"Disgraceful—appalling!" he panted, as he fitted up the last shutter. "They'll be on me like a swarm of rats next. I won't have it. If they dare to touch my stock I'll demand full compensation——"

"You'll get it, Mr. Sharpe—no need to worry about that," said Williams, Dr. Brett's chauffeur, who had come to see what all the noise was about. "The school people won't let this thing stand, you know. I'll bet half of the shopkeepers will put in a claim for more goods than they've lost!"

"That's not the point!" raged the ironmonger. "What about lost business? If my stock's destroyed it'll take me weeks——" He paused, and his eyes gleamed. "I'll ring up Bannington," he added grimly. "I'll ring up the police there and tell them to send a couple of dozen men."

"That's not a bad idea," nodded the chauffeur.

"I don't see why they're necessary, though!" rapped out Mr. Sharpe. "What's become of the men here? They simply stand by and do nothing. Lazy, good-for-nothing slackers, that's all they are."

Williams glared.

"That's one for me, I suppose?" he asked aggressively. "You'd best keep a civil tongue, Mr. Sharpe. This isn't our business; we're not policemen. Why, if the village men started interferin', there'd be worse trouble than ever. The only thing we can do is to stand out of it, and be on the safe side."

"Bah!" snorted Mr. Sharpe savagely.

He went into his shop like a jack-in-the-box, and closed the door so furiously that it failed to latch. A less violent push would have secured it, but Mr. Sharpe had no idea that it wasn't latched.

He went to the telephone at the end of the shop, tore the receiver off, and drummed impatiently until the exchange girl answered.

"Police-station!" he panted.

In less than three seconds he was connected.

"Is that Inspector Jameson?" he asked. "No? Then fetch him here. I'm Mr. Sharpe, speaking from Bellton. There's a riot in the village!"

"Hang on a minute," said the sergeant on duty.

Mr. Sharpe was soon speaking to the inspector, who quite refused to believe the story at first. But Mr. Sharpe was so emphatic, and so obviously panic-stricken, that the inspector was obliged to promise help. Indeed, he became convinced that the riot was a reality.

"Then it's settled?" asked Mr. Sharpe at last. "You'll rush a dozen men here at once? Half an hour? You ought to do it quicker than that, but I suppose we shall have to be satisfied."

He hung up, and turned, his eyes filled with anxiety. He had a terrible fear that his own shop would be in a state of wreckage at the end of half an hour. The St. Frank's mob was getting nearer and nearer.

"Good gracious me!" gasped Mr. Sharpe frantically.

He nearly fell over backwards. Three of the mob had got into his shop already! They were facing him, actually inside, and had apparently been there for some time. The ironmonger's initial panic subsided when there was no sign of an attack. Besides, these boys were only fags.

"Get out of here!" he panted harshly. "How did you get in? I'll have you arrested for breaking——"

"Cheese it, Mr. Sharpe!" said Willy Handforth coldly. "You don't close your shop at half-past four, I suppose? The door was open——"

"Don't lie to me, young man. I closed it!"

"I don't care whether you closed it or not, we found it open!" retorted Willy. "So you've rung up old Jameson, have you? And he's going to send two dozen police here within half an hour. Or was it a dozen?"

"Get out of this shop!" roared Mr. Sharpe. "The property of this village has got to be protected from you young vampires. The police are coming to punish the instigators——"

"We're not in the mob!" snorted Willy. "We're helping to restore order. And we've come here to use your telephone——"

"If you imagine for a moment you can use it, let me rid you of such a delusion!" retorted the ironmonger. "I shan't order you again, young men. Get out of this shop!"

"It's no good," sighed Willy. "We've got to shove him into one of his own dustbins, after all. He doesn't know when he's well off!"

"You—you——"

"We're doing all this to help the village, and we're scorned for it!" went on Willy bitterly. "Oh, well, there's no time to waste! You take his legs, Chubby, and you go for his neck, Juicy. Now then—all together!"

The fags were in no mood to be hindered. Willy was thoroughly alarmed now that the police were virtually on the way. With a strong body of police in the village the mob would soon be scattered, and it was an absolute certainty that several St. Frank's fellows would be arrested.

Willy had no desire to see a calamity of that sort.

There was one chance, the slim possibility of the defence corps getting to the village in time to restore order. And the only means of communication was the telephone.

Willy had no difficulty in getting through to St. Frank's, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had no difficulty in holding Mr. Sharpe. They simply sat on him, and kept him flattened to the floor, face downwards.

"Hallo! Who's that?" asked Willy, as a voice answered. "That you, Nipper? Good man! Just the chap I wanted!"

"Are you in the village, Willy?" came Nipper's voice across the wires.

"Yes."

"What's the news?"

"As bad as it can be," said Willy crisply. "This beastly mob has done an awful lot of damage, and it's getting worse every minute——"

"Worse?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Yes."

"You must be wrong," said Nipper. "Over half the fellows have come back—and they're out in the Triangle now, rather scared. We've all been thinking that the riot's practically over——"

"Then you'd better start thinking all over again!" interrupted Willy grimly. "I tell you it's worse. The fellows who have straggled back are the ones who've recovered their heads. But the rest are absolutely mad. They're looting every shop, and they're turning the villagers out of their cottages!"

"I say, Willy, is this absolutely true?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Then we'll do something at once," said Nipper grimly. "We'll rush down as fast as we can come, Willy—and we'll bring every available man."

"Good!" said Willy approvingly. "I knew you'd come up to the scratch. But for goodness' sake don't be long—old Sharpe has 'phoned the police at Bannington, and they're coming here in force."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Don't let this disgrace occur, whatever you do," urged Willy. "Once the police get here, it'll mean arrest, for two or three of our chaps. They probably deserve it, but it'll give the school an awful name."

"We'll come at once—and be there first."

"You'll have to look lively, then," panted Willy. "I can hear the mob outside—they'll be breaking in here next. They'll probably make for the George Tavern, too. That's where our staffs are sheltering—all the servants from all the Houses, you know! I tell you, this affair is getting jolly serious. So buck up!"

While Willy was speaking, there came the thunderous sound of blows. He hung up quickly, and at the same moment Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon released Mr. Sharpe. Outside, swarms of the excited fellows were striving to get in. Mr. Sharpe was one of their particular enemies, and this was a fine opportunity to settle a few old scores.

"They're on me!" panted the ironmonger. "My shop! My stock! I shall be ruined——"

"Better not worry about your stock!" rapped out Willy. "Which is the back exit? Take my tip, and bunk! You wouldn't like to follow old Sparrow into the duck pond, would you?"

Mr. Sharpe gave a screech of fright, and bolted. Willy & Co. followed him—for it was hardly possible for them to control the mob without any other help.

A moment later, the doors were broken down, and then Mr. Sharpe's stock commenced its rapid flight into the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN TO SANITY.

NIPPER turned away from the telephone, and the crowded senior day-room regarded him with interest.

"Things are improving, eh?" asked Fenton.

"They're worse," replied Nipper grimly. "There aren't so many rioters, but they're doing an awful lot of damage. We've got to rush down to the village like lightning, and stop the whole thing. The Bannington police are on their way!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Good gad!"

"But—but we can't stop it!"

"There aren't enough of us here, I'll admit," said Nipper. "But what about the crowds in the Triangle? They've cooled down a bit now, and perhaps they'll see some sense. Anyhow, we've GOT to convince them."

It only took Nipper a few moments to repeat Willy's urgent message. And then, with one accord, the Vigilance Committee hurried outside, and found the Triangle even more crowded than they had expected. Well over half the original mob had returned—and were no longer a mob, but a subdued, scared collection of different groups. They were standing all over the

Triangle, talking together and discussing the situation.

The seniors were beginning to regret their wildness, and were determined to make amends for their loss of sanity. The juniors were rather scared—startled by the damage that was going on in Bellton. They considered themselves well out of the trouble.

"They're all mad!" said Griffiths. "And we were just as mad, too! Thank goodness we've got a bit of reason back!"

And this was the gist of what everybody was saying. Exactly as Nelson Lee had prophesied, the fellows were realising the futility of their reckless behaviour. The only danger was in the school now. Once the wilder spirits came back, there might easily be a recurrence of the disorderly scenes. With no masters to restrain them, the whole school would let itself go.

But this village affair could, at least, be quelled.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" shouted Nipper.

The groups turned to look at him, and drew nearer. Nipper was standing on the steps of the Ancient House, and the other members of the Vigilance Committee were all round him.

"You'd better do this, old man," suggested Morrow, turning to Fenton.

"No—leave it to young Hamilton," replied Fenton. "He seems to have a special gift for influencing fellows. He can do it better than I could."

Nipper waited until the crowds were nearer, and then he told them the latest news.

"We've formed a kind of Defence Corps," he continued. "Something's got to be done to restore order. We're just going to the village to deal with that mob. Who'll volunteer to come, too?"

The groups hung back.

"We've had enough!" growled Hubbard.

"You've had enough rioting—but what about a little good work?" asked Nipper grimly. "The police are on their way, and we want to avoid any clash, if we can. Look here! I suggest that we sweep on the village, put the mob to rout, and restore all those looted shops!"

"My idea, exactly!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"We can't make up for the ruined stock, but we can put everything shipshape, at least," went on Nipper. "And we'll tell each shopkeeper to send his bill in to the school—and guarantee full compensation. Come on—rally round, you fellows! We've got to think of the fair name of St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Nipper's right, you chaps!"

"Let's support him!"

Quite a number of the recent rioters were eager to make amends. Having returned to their senses, they felt many pangs of conscience, and were glad of an opportunity to still these inward voices.

The unfortunate constable was in no real danger, since the pond was only about two feet deep. But there was at least two feet of sticky mud at the bottom, and when he managed to gain an upright position, progress was slow.

"It's the least we can do," continued Nipper, seizing his advantage. "Those idiots down there are doing their utmost to make the name of St. Frank's stink! Are we going to let it go on? If we swoop down, and make a solid onslaught, they'll be wiped out. And we can have the village in full order by the time the police get there. Come on! Show some spirit!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll do it!"

The juniors, at least, were solid to a man.

"I'm talking to you seniors, too!" shouted Nipper. "Fenton, they'll take more notice of you—try and make them see some sense! Tell 'em that you're coming with us."

Fenton stepped forward.

"Come along, you fellows," he said earnestly. "There's been enough fooling. Let's see if we can't do some good work! It won't take us ten minutes to rout that mob if everybody puts his back to the wheel. The whole affair's disgraceful from start to finish—but we can help to make it a little creditable. St. Frank's has done the damage—so let St. Frank's repair it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fenton!"

And the seniors, too, crowded round, eager to accompany the force. Several precious minutes had been spent, but not a second had been wasted. With sanity in control

again, the school was becoming intensely eager to make amends. And, after all, this sort of thing was just as exciting as the other!

The party started off without any further delay.

Nipper and Handforth and Browne and Pitt were well to the front, and the force automatically divided itself into two sections—seniors and juniors. The juniors rushed on in advance, with the seniors following behind to make a thorough job of it.

The village was reached, and the new arrivals, although expecting to see a scene of disorder, were shocked. Bellton looked as though a cyclone had passed over it The High Street was littered with wreckage. Villagers were crouching in their doorways, frightened and nervous. And further up the street the sounds of yelling disorder went on. The mob was comparatively small, but it was doing as much damage as ever.

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth. "On 'em!"

"Come on, St. Frank's!"

"Down with disorder!"

The scared villagers, seeing this fresh crowd surge down the High Street, feared the worst. Everybody believed that this was a second mob—even more violent than the first. There was some excuse for this misapprehension, for the Defence Corps made a terrible din as it rushed to the attack.

"Good egg!" yelled one of the rioters. "Here comes the rest of the crowd!"

"Hurrah!"

"Now we'll see some fun!"

The mob, led by such rotters as Parkin and Grayson and Forrest, made the same mistake as the villagers. They thought the newcomers were friends! But it was a thought which only lasted a second or two.

"Out of this, you rotters!" bellowed Handforth, dashing into the fray.

"Rout the rotters!"

"Chuck 'em into the road, and roll 'em in the mud!"

"Hurrah!"

The mob got the surprise of its life. It had fairly settled down to turning out the ironmonger's shop. Most of the lighter articles had already been flung out, but the heavy things were never touched. The rout took place long before then.

It was swift and sudden.

Well over half the school had come to the rescue of the village, and the force was a formidable one. The actual mob didn't represent a quarter of St. Frank's. There were a good few stragglers who were dotted about, unaware of the exact position. The fight resolved itself into a tussle between the hotheads and the lovers of law and order.

The latter swept through the mob like a tidal wave sweeping up an estuary, They carried everything before them. The wild rioters were flung aside, dazed, bewildered, and beaten. Most of them fled. Those who didn't flee put up a feeble fight, and were then forced to run the gauntlet until they were clear of the village limits.

And Bellton was left in possession of the triumphant defence corps.

But not a second was wasted. Without troubling to explain to the surprised villagers, every effort was made to repair the recent damage. A dozen fellows were assigned to each shop, and they worked like mad to get the stock back into position. All the wreckage was swept away by other hands.

It was almost like a miracle.

Even within five minutes Bellton had changed its aspect. It was as though a giant broom had come along, sweeping everything clean. And Bellton watched with bated breath, their fury against St. Frank's turning to feelings of gratitude and thankfulness.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNORS.

SIR JOHN BRENT was startled.

His library was fairly invaded by a number of anxious-looking gentlemen, all of whom he knew well. They were, in fact, the majority of the Housemasters and Form masters from St. Frank's.

It was early evening, and they had been ushered in by a most surprised butler a minute earlier. Sir John regarded them with blank astonishment.

"Good gracious, gentlemen! What on earth is the meaning of this?" he asked. "What has happened?"

Sir John was the chairman of the Board of Governors, and it was he who had appointed Commander Sampson Rudd to the headmastership of St. Frank's. He had had the greatest hopes.

Indeed, that very afternoon Sir James Henson had return from the school, and had telephoned him that Commander Rudd had taken control. He had assumed that everything was going smoothly.

"The very worst has happened, Sir John," said Mr. Barnaby Goole, of the East House. "Commander Rudd, instead of quelling the revolt in the West House, has precipitated a rebellion of the entire school."

"Good heavens!" gasped Sir John, utterly amazed. "But—but, gentlemen, why are you here? What of your duties?"

"This man commenced his career at St. Frank's by ordering the Ancient House boys to attack the rebels——"

"Impossible!" interrupted Sir John. "The commander assured me that his methods—— But forgive me, Mr. Goole. I really beg your pardon. Please continue."

"He incited the Ancient House boys to pit their strength against the rebels, and very naturally the Ancient House boys refused," proceeded Mr. Goole. "In a word, they joined the revolt on the spot."

"They joined the revolt!" breathed Sir John.

"On the top of that, Commander Rudd held a meeting of all the masters, and suggested a policy of violence," said Mr. Goole, who had constituted himself spokesman. "Mr. Lee protested, and was insulted for his pains. We were by no means surprised when Mr. Lee tendered his resignation."

"But this—this is appalling!"

"Within five minutes we had all resigned," continued Mr. Goole grimly. "It was, indeed, impossible to remain at St. Frank's under this uncouth ruffian. There are no masters left in the school now, and Heaven alone knows what is happening. Rather than worry you by unsatisfactory telegrams, we have come up in person."

"Commander Rudd was appointed by you, sir, and the responsibility is yours," put in Mr. Pagett warmly. "We accept no responsibility. As gentlemen we found it impossible to accept that hooligan's dictation. It is for you to readjust matters, Sir John."

The Chairman of the Governors stared aghast.

"But—but I am at a total loss!" he ejaculated. "Frankly, gentlemen, I cannot understand you! Uncouth ruffian! Hooligan! But—but Commander Rudd is a distinguished officer of the Senior Service. He is a refined gentleman to his finger-tips."

"I am amazed at such a description of the man," retorted Mr. Goole. "We found him quite the opposite."

"Rough and unrefined to a degree," said Mr. Crowell.

"There must be some mistake, gentlemen—there must be some terrible mistake!" protested Sir John. "I was speaking with Commander Rudd yesterday, and I can assure you that he is the essence of refinement, and dignified."

"Then the man who came to St. Frank's was not Commander Rudd," interrupted Mr. Goole firmly. "But that, of course, is quite beyond our comprehension. He introduced himself as Commander Rudd, and accepted control of the school with full authority. I must confess——"

The telephone bell rang sharply.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Sir John impatiently.

He grabbed the instrument, and intended to cut the caller off on the instant. He was in no mood to be worried by an interruption. His whole mind was in a state of chaos.

"Yes? Yes?" he barked. "Who is that? I am very sorry, but I cannot possibly spare a moment. Eh? Mr. Nelson Lee? Good gracious! I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee! Yes, yes! They are all here. I am amazed by this terrible story!"

The masters remained silent while Sir John listened at the telephone. His expression suddenly became startled, and he fairly jumped.

"Impostor!" he blurted out. "The man was—was—— How utterly astounding! I am staggered, Mr. Lee!"

Mr. Goole and the other masters exchanged startled glances, and were exasperated by this one-sided conversation. They were eager to know the full facts.

"Of course, this explains the whole thing," continued Sir John, after another long pause. "The impudent rascal! Why, the case is almost serious enough to warrant an arrest! The fellow ought to be charged with criminal impersonation. H'm! With the best intentions, eh? That's all very well, Mr. Lee."

The masters were more exasperated than ever.

"Yes, of course," said Sir John. "I will make a point of coming to St. Frank's this very instant. Six-thirteen, you say? Splendid! We can catch that train with ease, and arrive at the school before eight. Yes. You can absolutely rely upon that, Mr. Lee."

A minute later he hung up, and informed the masters of the startling truth.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Goole. "Commander Rudd's butler! No wonder he made such an appalling hash of things! We must return to the school without a moment's delay. We tendered our resignations under a misapprehension."

"Naturally, gentlemen, I cannot accept these resignations," said Sir John. "With Commander Rudd helpless in bed, my plans are completely ruined. My only course is to go to the school and take control. That is, if any control is possible after what has happened. I doubt it. I very much doubt it!"

"If there is time, Sir John, would it not be as well to ring up the school?" asked Mr. Pagett. "We should at least hear something. Perhaps the boys have come to their senses——"

"Yes, there is plenty of time, and the idea is a good one," interrupted Sir John quickly. "I will book the call at once. The line is clear at this hour, and I should imagine we will get through within a minute or two."

He was right. After two minutes had elapsed the bell rang, and Sir John found himself talking to Biggleswade, of the Sixth. The ring had gone straight through to the Senior day-room of the Ancient House, and Biggleswade was the only fellow there at the moment. He was taking no part in the dash to the village because his knee had been crocked in the earlier fighting, and he could hardly walk. Biggleswade was a genial senior, but not gifted with any particular brain power.

"Sir John Brent?" he repeated when he heard the name. "Yes, this is St. Frank's, sir. Ancient House talking? You're the

Chairman of the Governors, aren't you, sir? You've rung up at a rummy time."

"Who are you, boy?" demanded Sir John grimly.

"I'm Biggleswade, of the Sixth, sir. I'm a prefect."

"Splendid!" said Sir John. "Then you will naturally be able to tell me of the position. Is St. Frank's quiet?"

"Absolutely quiet at the moment, sir," replied Biggleswade. "In fact, I'm about the only fellow left here."

Sir John, who had been momentarily relieved, nearly dropped the receiver.

"The only fellow left!" he shouted. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, things are pretty awful, sir," explained Biggleswade, in a perfectly matter-of-fact way, as though these sort of events were of daily occurrence. "The whole school's gone mad. At least, it did go mad. Some of the fellows, thank goodness, have recovered a bit."

"Good heavens!" gasped Sir John. "Has—has there been any damage?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir—not at St. Frank's, anyhow," replied the Sixth-Former. "The Triangle's rather littered with bedsteads and other pieces of furniture, and there's an awful lot of smashed crockery about. Lots of windows are broken, too. But that's all."

"All!" croaked Sir John. "Boy, tell me the worst!"

"Well, that's pretty bad, sir," admitted Biggleswade confidentially. "You see, about half the chaps thought it a bright idea to sack the village. By what I can hear, they've made a good job of it. They're properly out for blood. Most of the boys have gone clean mad, and I'm half-expecting the school to be burnt down next. You see, there's no telling once they get on the go like this."

"This—this is utterly tragic!" moaned Sir John.

"It's what they call a throw-back, sir," explained Biggleswade. "You know—a reversion to type. They say that all boys are savages, more or less; and once they get fairly loose, they go back to the time of the neolithic age. Dervishes aren't in it, sir. Of course, there's just a chance that they'll pull up before it's too late, but——"

"I can hear no more!" breathed Sir John, hanging the receiver on its hook. "Gentlemen, the whole school is in a state of revolution; the boys are rioting, and there is imminent peril of further disasters."

"I feared as much," said Mr. Pagett, with mournful satisfaction. "From the very first I maintained that there was no hope."

Sir John Brent took out his watch with a quivering hand.

"We must hurry!" he panted. "If this six-thirteen train is not an express, I shall charter a special. Come, gentlemen—come!"

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE FOR THE POLICE.

"MY only hat!" exclaimed Handforth blankly. "Look there!"

Church and McClure paused in the midst of their weary labours, and looked. They were at the end of the village High Street, helping in the task of clearing up the litter. And Handforth had suddenly paused. Now he was staring down a little side lane, and his eyes were blazing.

Bellton High Street was nearly normal again.

Except for busy gangs of St. Frank's fellows, there was no sign of the recent riot. Everybody was working with a will—and working at express speed. But Handforth had lost all interest in the affair.

Some little distance down the lane, Forrest & Co., of the Remove, were ragging a solitary young lady. The three cads were augmented by Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth. They had all escaped at the first sign of trouble, and had been lurking about ever since.

It wouldn't have mattered to Handforth who the girl was. The very fact that she was being pestered by five cads was enough for him. But the girl happened to be Irene Manners, and he saw red.

"By George!" he breathed thickly.

Irene was attempting to pass. She had, in fact, come along the footpath, and this was a short cut into the High Street. But Forrest & Co. and the two Fifth-Formers refused to let her pass by. They were trying to be funny, and generally bothering her.

Under any ordinary circumstances, Handforth would have fled on the spot. The very sight of Irene would have been sufficient for him to bolt—for he was looking a complete and utter wreck. His face was muddy and patchy, with numerous swellings and cuts. His clothing was half in shreds, and he hadn't worn a collar for over an hour. He looked an awful sight.

But here was Irene being pestered by some bounders! He simply gave one roar, and charged. Church and McClure decided to watch. Handforth was an easy match for five such cads.

Just as Edward Oswald was rushing up, Grayson grabbed Irene round the waist, and attempted to kiss her. If there had been one thing necessary to arouse Handforth to the highest pitch of fury, this was it.

"Put up your hands!" he bellowed thunderously.

"Eh?" gasped Grayson. "What the——"

Crash!

Grayson hardly felt it. He didn't know anything about that blow until about five minutes later, when he came to himself, a hundred yards away, with Shaw and the cads of the Remove bending over him.

Handforth, in fact, had delivered a knock-out, and the rest only waited to drag Gray-

son away. Handforth was deprived of any more victims. He stood before Irene, and grabbed at the place where his cap should have been.

"I—I—— Hallo, Irene!" he said sheepishly.

"Thanks, Ted," said Irene. "You couldn't have come along at a better moment. But how terribly you've been fighting! They've half-killed you!"

"I—I couldn't help it!" protested Handforth. "It's been a bit of a mix-up, you know——"

"Yes, and I think you've all been very wonderful," interrupted Irene enthusiastically. "But I am sure you don't want to waste your time talking to me, do you?" she added, a rather icy tone creeping into her voice. "There's somebody else who is waiting to attend your hurts."

She walked on, and Handforth merely gibbered. He tried to speak, but his voice had vanished. He merely stood there, mouthing. Of course, she had meant Mary Summers! He groaned inwardly. He had lost Mary now—and it seemed that Irene had dropped him, too! Life for Handforth had become dull and black. He felt as though a terrible weight had dropped upon his shoulders. He hadn't really cared about Mary at all. What an idiot he had been to neglect Irene for weeks——

She turned the corner, and Handforth groaned aloud. He didn't know that Irene paused just round the bend, and glanced back. There was a soft light in her eyes—an expression of deep sympathy for his terrible condition.

"Poor old Ted!" she murmured. "I'm not sure that I oughtn't to go back—— But no! He deserves to be taught a lesson!"

She chuckled gleefully to herself, and tripped on. And Handforth returned to Church and McClure in a dazed, haggard condition.

"Come on, Handy—the minutes are precious," panted Church. "We've got to get this litter cleared up——"

"She doesn't care tuppence!" muttered Handforth brokenly.

"Oh, my goodness!" said McClure, in a feeble voice. "Even in the midst of all this mess he's in love! Can you beat it? The chap's absolutely gone!"

Nipper came up briskly.

"You fellows finished here?" he asked. "If so, buzz along! The police are coming—they'll be here within ten minutes. We've had a message through from Bannington."

"But they're not wanted now!" said Church.

"Of course they're not—and when they arrive we want to be out of the way," said Nipper. "They've got to find everything normal. It'll be a nice little surprise—and we can trust the villagers to give us a good name. During this last half-hour we've repaired a tremendous lot of damage. Not material damage, but the other sort."

Nipper was quite right. By working like niggers, a change had been wrought which came near to a miracle. The village High Street was looking normal in every way. It was dark by now, and the shops were all open, and their windows were brightly illuminated.

There wasn't a sign of a St. Frank's fellow from one end of the village to the other by the time the police dashed up in two motor-cars. There had been a good deal of delay in Bannington—for the constables had been collected from various parts of the town. The leading car contained Inspector Jameson himself.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, as he jumped out near the Green. "There's nothing wrong here! The place seems to be asleep!"

All the other officers looked round, and up and down the High Street. The Green was only a trivial affair—a kind of widening of the main street in the centre of the village.

"Looks like a hoax, sir," said one of the constables.

"By thunder!" muttered the inspector. "If this is a hoax—— Hi, you!" he added, as two or three figures came out of the George Tavern. "Just a minute! Has there been any trouble here?"

"Trouble?" asked Mr. Binks, as he came up—after partaking of a little liquid refreshment. "Well, yes. But it's all right—we didn't need you. The St. Frank's boys saved the village."

"Saved the village?" ejaculated the inspector. "But I got a report through that they were looting the village!"

"So they were," said Mr. Binks.

"Look here, my man——"

"No need for you to 'my man' me—I'm a respectable shopkeeper," interrupted Mr. Binks coldly. "We've got nothing to say against St. Frank's. They're the finest body of boys in the Kingdom."

"Ay, that they are!" agreed one of the other villagers.

The police were staggered.

"I'll go along and see Mr. Sharpe about this!" snorted the inspector. "I'll teach him to bring me on a fool's errand!"

But he got very little satisfaction from Mr. Sharpe. The village ironmonger, too, had entirely revefsed his opinion regarding the St. Frank's boys. True, they had half-emptied his stock into the road, and a good deal of it had become damaged. But that section of the school had been routed, and the newcomers had worked like Trojans in order to repair the damage.

And on the top of all this, Mr. Sharpe had the word of Edgar Fenton, the Captain of St. Frank's, that he would receive full compensation for any breakages or damage. The ironmonger was still rather dazed. It seemed to him—and to everybody else in the village—that the recent events were a kind of nightmare, and that Beilton had just woke up, to find everything as usual.

The police gathered that there had been some trouble, but they couldn't find out the actual details—and nobody had a word to say against the school. Owing to Willy Handforth's urgent message, the situation had been saved.

Common sense, in short, was gaining.

Practically all the boys had gone back to the school—the victorious defence force as well as the hotheads. These latter were less wild than they had been. They had had quite enough of unbridled freedom for the time being.

There was a lull.

And this, after all, was owing to the inevitable call of Nature. Food was required—hungers were enormous. The unusual excitement and exercise had caused everybody to develop an extraordinary appetite. But there was no tea in the dining-halls, and everything else at St. Frank's was upside down.

When it came to a question of food, this rebellion idea wasn't so good. The school was comparatively quiet now—while the various sections were looking round for eatables.

But how long would the lull last?

The more serious fellows were inclined to believe that this stoppage was only temporary. There was bound to be another outbreak of trouble as soon as the food question was solved.

Indeed, long before six o'clock, a big party of Fourth Formers, having raided the East House stores, decided to build a bonfire in the Triangle. It was a thing that would have been impossible at any ordinary time. And it seemed quite a brilliant idea on such a cold, crisp evening.

Boxes were brought out, shavings were fetched, and a can of paraffin was poured over the lot. Before the rest of the school knew anything about it; a roaring bonfire was on the go. And then somebody suggested fetching out some chairs and forms to add to the blaze. The idea was promptly vetoed—but it was an idea that would reassert itself when the spirit of recklessness had been revived.

And down in the village many heads were shaken.

Lots of people declared that the whole school would be in ashes before the night was out. There was every reason for this prophecy—for the wilder spirits were, indeed, on the move again.

CHAPTER XI.

BARRY STOKES' SECRET.

"SOMETHING ought to be done, Barry!"

Mrs. Stokes stood at one of the windows of the Head's private residence, and looked out across the Inner Court. Over the top of the School House came the lurid reflection of the bonfire in the Triangle.

"They are playing with fire now—in more than one sense," went on Mrs. Stokes. "And we thought the boys had settled down, too! It was wonderful how they pulled things round in the village. And now this bonfire has been started. Barry, can't you help in this crisis?"

Mr. Beverley Stokes sat in an easy chair, and puffed at his pipe.

"Barry!" exclaimed his wife sharply.

"Eh?" he said, starting up.

"I've been speaking to you, dear."

"Oh, sorry," said Barry Stokes wearily. "I was thinking, Joyce—I didn't hear you. Anything fresh?"

"There's something fresh every minute," she replied. "There's this bonfire now. Couldn't you go and make them put it out? It's so easy to cause a disaster by just an ordinary bonfire. It isn't as though it were built in the meadow—it's quite close to the buildings——"

"What can I do, Joyce?" interrupted Mr. Stokes impatiently. "I'm nobody here now—I'm practically dismissed, and the boys wouldn't even look at me. I haven't got a shred of authority."

"Oh, but Barry, you're a man!" said his wife reproachfully. "Do you realise that you're the only man left in the school? Everybody else has gone—everybody has deserted the place."

"It's no good, dear," muttered the ex-Housemaster. "I should only make matters worse if I attempted to interfere. The boys would ignore me—they'd probably insult me. No, I can't do anything."

He sank back, and stared unseeingly again. His wife turned away with a little sigh—and continued to look out of the window. She wasn't worrying about Mary, because the girl was in the domestic part of the house, amusing herself by making some bread. Everyone had to fend for themselves during this critical period.

Mrs. Stokes was worried. She had never seen Barry in this mood before. All the spirit had apparently left him. Usually so lighthearted and cheery, he was now a prey to despondency and deadly bitterness. For hours he would sit in a chair, and say nothing.

He was bitter—he was almost broken. Indeed, it would have been a matter of sheer impossibility for him to control any of the boys. He was so changed that Joyce was secretly worrying over him. She was worrying more about her husband than about the fate of St. Frank's.

He sat there, brooding over the recent string of events.

It was his fault entirely—he was the cause of all this upheaval! The West House boys had revolted because of Guy Sinclair's tyranny. And Sinclair had been allowed to go on his despotic course because he—Barry Stokes—had been unable to pull him up.

And now he was dismissed. His career was ruined. And the whole thing had

arisen from a mere errand of mercy. He had done a favour to Mr. Rodney Lambert, an old friend—and this chaos was the indirect result.

"It's not like you, Barry, to talk in this fashion," said his wife, after a while. "Why can't you control the boys?"

"I tell you they wouldn't take any notice of me," he replied impatiently. "I'm nobody! I'm nothing! They'd rather obey the orders of Tubbs, the page-boy."

"Oh, but that's absurd, Barry——"

"I tell you it's the truth."

"I don't see it!" she insisted. "Didn't the Ancient House boys strike because of your dismissal? You're popular with the boys—they'd take more notice of you than of anybody. Your own boys revolted, and said they wouldn't surrender until Sinclair had been deposed, and until you were reinstated——"

"Yes, but there's all the sordid business of the night club," growled Mr. Stokes, rising to his feet, and frowning. "Why go over it again, Joyce? That's been the cause of all the trouble—right from the start. Sinclair found out that I'd visited that wretched night club on New Year's Eve, and some of his infernal friends even took a snapshot—in which I'm included."

"But you only went there to bring Mr. Lambert's son away——"

"Good Heavens, don't I know it?" muttered Mr. Stokes. "And he, the young fool, resisted and fought me. And then we were both flung out—like common drunks! I was compelled to submit to Sinclair's blackmail, or that story would have been all over the school! The young scoundrel had me in the hollow of his hand, and utterly disorganised my House with his despotic tyranny. And I had to stand by and watch!" he added thickly.

"But you're not afraid of him now——"

"No, it's too late for that," growled Barry Stokes. "But the position's no better, when you come down to actual bed-rock. If Sinclair spreads that story—as he may at any moment—I'm helpless. Didn't I give Mr. Lambert my word of honour that I wouldn't open my lips? If that story comes out, I'm in a hopeless position—I shall have to admit the truth of it, but I can't explain my reasons for being there. It'll be as black as ink against me."

"But you've asked to be released from that promise——"

"Haven't I waited week after week for that release to come?" asked Mr. Stokes tensely. "I've given up hope now! Fate's against me! I'm disgraced—dishonoured! Even if there's a full inquiry, I can do nothing! The best thing we can do,

Irene was attempting to pass. She had, in fact, come along the footpath, as this was a short cut into the High Street. But Forrest and the two Fifth-Formers refused to let her go by. They were trying to be funny, and generally bothering her.

Joyce, is to get out of here as quickly as we can. I'm a fool for staying even now. No, I've got no hope left."

He sank back into his chair again, brooding. His wife stood there watching him—without him being aware of the fact. She was startled by the dramatic change in him. For weeks he had been compelled to submit to Guy Sinclair's dictation. He had seen the disorganisation of the West House, and he had been unable to stop it. It had seemed to take all his spirit away.

Yet he had dared not defy the rascally prefect. For that wretched night club story would have been told, and, with his lips sealed by honour, he could have said nothing by way of explanation. And now that a crisis had arisen—now that the boys needed a guiding hand—he was a broken reed. His own troubles were so great that his character was entirely changed.

Mary Summers came in, looking rather floury, and wearing a neat rubber overall. She was alarmed, too.

"Uncle, there's a terrible noise going on from the garage," she exclaimed. "I believe some of the boys are trying to start your car! They're going to do dreadful damage unless they're stopped. They're shouting and yelling tremendously. I believe everything's going to start all over again."

"That's what I'm so afraid of," said Mrs. Stokes worriedly. "And it'll be worse now at night time. There's such a terrible danger of fire. Oh, I do wish it would rain heaven's hard—then the boys might be calmed. There's nothing like a downpour to——"

"What's that in your hand, Mary?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"Oh, nothing," said the girl. "Uncle, aren't you going to do something? I tell you, they're trying to start your car——"

"I can't stop them!" interrupted Barry irritably. "Why can't you drop that subject? What can I do—one man against hundreds of hare-brained boys? They're all off their heads—and who can wonder at it, left alone like this? There's no discipline left. I couldn't influence them one jot!"

"But you could, Barry!" insisted his wife.

"My dear Joyce, I don't feel up to it," he said dully. "I don't feel—— What is that you've got, Mary?" he asked irritably. "Is it a letter? Why can't you——"

"It's for you, Uncle," said Mary. "I found it in the kitchen. I expect it came this morning, and was overlooked."

She handed the letter to her uncle, and he gave it a casual, listless glance. Then, suddenly, he leapt out of his chair as though something had stung him. His face became flushed, and his eyes blazed.

"New York!" he shouted. "This is from Lambert!"

Mrs. Stokes looked rather dazed.

"Oh, Barry!" she panted. "You frighten me——"

"It's from Lambert!" he muttered tensely. "I've been waiting for this—— Ye gods! And it's been in the kitchen all day! Why on earth—— Confound it! I'm trembling all over!"

There was such a startling change in him that Mrs. Stokes and the girl were speechless. He tore the letter open with a shaky hand, and read the contents. Then he took a deep, deep breath.

"It's the release!" he exclaimed. "Joyce, don't you understand? It's from old Lambert—he tells me to speak freely. I can call myself a man again! Indeed, he has enclosed a sworn document, giving a full account of the entire affair. Thank Heaven for this!"

"I knew it would come!" said Mrs. Stokes happily.

"But—but what does it mean, uncle?" asked Mary, her eyes wide open. "I don't understand——"

"I'll explain it all later, Miss Curious," said Mr. Stokes briskly. "What's that you said? Those young rascals are monkeying with my car? By Jove! I'll tickle them up a bit!"

"Oh, Barry!" breathed his wife, looking at him strangely.

"Making bonfires, are they?" he went on grimly. "The young demons! I may be the only man left in the school, but, by gad, I'll teach them to behave! Don't worry, Joyce—we'll have everything shipshape within an hour."

He strode out with his old brisk stride. And Mrs. Stokes clasped Mary, and gently sobbed. She simply couldn't help it. But her eyes were shining with a tremendous gladness.

The sudden change in Barry was so utterly staggering that his wife was bowled over. It was a change that had come about within the space of a single minute. A bitter, despondent failure had been miraculously changed into a purposeful man of spirit and resource. He went out of the room as though the past few weeks had never existed. He went out the same cheery, quick-witted Barry Stokes of old.

And, incidentally, St. Frank's was on the brink of a shock!

CHAPTER XII.

THE ELECTRIFIED SCHOOL.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE shook his head.

"Alas, the work of genius has been undone," he said, with a sigh. "Not an hour since we were congratulating ourselves upon the fact that these youths with heated brains were sufficiently cooled. And now, behold! The accelerator has been depressed, and our unhappy brothers are speeding ahead under full throttle once again. I fear the worst."

"It's all very well to talk, Browne, but the position is serious," declared Nipper.

"These idiots have raided the larders, they've had their fill, and now they're up to mischief again. What the dickens can we do?"

"It's a problem!" said Pitt gloomily.

There were a good few juniors and seniors in the gymnasium. They had congregated there to discuss the latest phase. There had been many congratulations on the result of the village incident. That was practically over and forgotten—and the name of St. Frank's was not besmirched.

The casualties, considering the serious nature of the affair were slight. Several fellows were so badly bruised that they were completely out of action—and had, indeed, gone to bed. One or two others were cut and gashed, owing to reckless handling of dangerous articles. In their excitement they had taken all sorts of risks. These, also, had been attended to and put to bed.

But the vast majority remained perfectly sound—and as full of mischievous activity as ever.

The leaders of the loyalist movement—such fellows as Nipper and Pitt, Fenton and Morrow, and Handforth and Fullwood—had changed their clothes, washed themselves, and were again presentable. They were all showing the scars of battle, but there was plenty of vim in them.

And in spite of their hopes, the reckless element had got busy again. Once their appetites were satisfied, they broke out into unrestrained wantonness again.

They sought for fresh worlds to conquer.

But, fortunately, they confined their attentions to the school itself. And now, at this very minute, a yelling crowd surrounded the growing bonfire in the Triangle. So far that bonfire had been fed with old boxes and other waste matter from the yards.

But the excitement was increasing, and, as common sense left, recklessness stepped in. Gulliver suggested the burning of all the desks from the Form-rooms. And his suggestion was approved by many.

"Jolly good idea!" yelled Doyle. "What do we want desks for? There's not going to be any more school! We've revolted, and we're not going back again! They'll make a glorious blaze, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's drag the desks out!"

"And after that we'll burn the blackboards and maps!" shouted Hubbard. "Come on! Who cares?"

"Hurrah!"

"Long live the revolution!"

At the same time as this, a crowd of other fellows were dragging Mr. Stokes' car out of the Head's garage. Not one of them could drive, but they were determined to get the car going, and to career round the school grounds.

In another part of the school a group of enthusiasts were bent upon raiding the chemical laboratories. Two or three amateur chemists had voted it a great idea to manufacture a lot of smoke-bombs and stink-bombs. And there was even talk of making some fireworks. And the laboratories were broken into and thronged with feather-brained young idiots who were literally taking their lives in their hands. For they were about to monkey with chemicals the dangers of which they scarcely realised.

There were elements of peril on every hand.

The bonfire enthusiasts were liable to set the school on fire—the motor-car joy-riders might easily kill themselves—and the chemical experts were well on the way to blowing up the school. And there were many scores of excited fellows engaged in these various tasks. In addition, groups of other heroes were getting up all sorts of different rags.

It was rather a curious fact that the boys should choose amusements which were liable to involve destruction and havoc. And yet, after all, it was purely natural—since all boys are never happier than when playing with danger. They regard it as sheer sport.

And it was so good to have a free run of the school, without any authoritative voice to call a halt. The reckless rioting had ceased, but an even greater peril had arisen.

The ordinary vocations of the evening were never thought of. There wasn't a study occupied—there wasn't a single wireless instrument at work. Story-books were forgotten—letter-writing was neglected. Everybody was out to do something which was ordinarily forbidden.

Such fellows as Forrest & Co. took to smoking openly, and they persuaded others to follow their example. It was quite an ordinary sight to see three or four juniors strolling about, smoking cigarettes. Most of them hated smoking, but in their present state they thought it rather a brave thing to do. In a word, the whole school was doing just as it liked.

"I don't see that we can do much now," remarked Nipper, as he came back from the door. "Half the chaps we've won over to our side have gone back again. They're messing about all over the school—monkeying with chemicals and goodness knows what! It's no good trying to stop them, either,"

"Somebody's chucking a desk on the fire!" sang out Tommy Watson, from the window.

"I'm not surprised," growled Pitt. "And if we step in, they'll only get worse. What's the matter with us chaps? Are we just sensible, or haven't we got any spirit? I'm beginning to think we ought to go and join in!"

"It makes you feel like that," said Nipper, frowning. "But don't you worry, Reggie—we're about the only level-headed chaps left in the school——"

"Hallo! Here's Stokes!" put in Fullwood,

in surprise. "He's going up to those chaps round the bonfire."

"He's asking for trouble, I guess," said Clive, frowning.

They watched in considerable astonishment. Most of the juniors, in fact, had completely forgotten that Mr. Stokes was on the premises. He hadn't been seen all day, and it was generally assumed that he had left with the other masters.

"My only hat!" breathed Reggie. "There's something different about him! Yet it's the same! I haven't seen him walk with that brisk stride for weeks! He's all springy—he's just like he used to be!"

Mr. Beverley Stokes was, indeed, a transformed man. He halted near the bonfire, young beggars! Those desks cost money! Put it down before I lose my temper!"

Several enthusiasts who had triumphantly carried a desk up, set it down with a thud.

"That's the style," said Mr. Stokes, nodding. "Now, come along—all hands to the pumps! Put this thing out. Doyle, Griffith, Hart! Buzz along and fetch some fire-pails. Owen major, Canham—go and give a hand! It won't take us two minutes to settle this!"

"We're not taking any orders from you!" roared Forrest.

"Of course you are!" said Mr. Stokes smoothly. "Haven't we had enough of this picnic? Just think of the school! You'll have a lot of sparks flying about soon, and

and stood watching it for a moment. The rowdy fellows round it were stilled for a moment, and they looked at the young Housemaster rather queerly. There was something compelling in his very attitude.

"What's all this?" he asked pleasantly. "There's nobody likes a bonfire better than I do—but this isn't the place to make it, you young asses!"

The crowd shuffled rebelliously.

"You're not in authority now!" growled somebody in the background.

"Not officially," smiled Mr. Stokes, "but that's only a trifle. Hallo, what have we here? A desk? Look here, you reckless then we shan't know where we are! Hurry up with those pails!"

The fellows hardly knew what to make of Mr. Stokes' jocular tone. But, somehow, there was something so pleasant about him that scarcely anybody thought of defying him. An exhibition of harsh authority would have been fatal. Barry Stokes was dealing with these crowds with a touch of genius. And his very personality compelled obedience.

In less than five minutes the fire was out.

"Good!" said Mr. Stokes. "Now, look here, you chaps. I've got an idea. There's something I want to tell you—something I'd like to say to everybody. How about

running along to Big Hall, and getting into your usual places? I'll be along soon, and then we'll have a little heart-to-heart talk."

"Hurrah!"

"We'll go, Mr. Stokes!"

"Of course you'll go," nodded Mr. Stokes pleasantly. "Don't forget, I'm asking this as a favour. I'm not ordering you about—we're just being pally. Trot in, and I'll round up some of the others."

He strode off briskly, and the recent revellers gazed at one another in a sheepish kind of way. Without exactly knowing why, they felt very foolish. All their enthusiasm for reckless destruction had gone.

"Hold me, somebody!" murmured Reggie Pitt, from the doorway of the gymnasium. "Old Barry's doing the trick! Did you ever see anything so marvellous in all your giddy life?"

"In the course of a long and varied experience, I must confess that this leaves me feebly wagging my fins," confessed Browne. "For the first time in my life, I know exactly how a fish feels when he is waiting on the river bank, preparatory to being stowed away in the basket. An amazing exhibition of tact, brothers. Even I, with all my famous discretion, could not have bettered it."

"And they're going indoors, too!" breathed Nipper. "They're going into Big Hall."

"Water isn't strong enough!" gurgled Fullwood. "Give me brandy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BARRY STOKES, THE MAGICIAN.

ST. FRANK'S hummed with a kind of internal electrification. A bare twenty minutes had elapsed. And in that time the most startling changes had come about. And one man had caused them!

Mr. Beverley Stokes, casually interested, had wandered from one House to another, encountering groups of fellows in different places. He had spoken to them calmly and genially. And in practically every case they had abruptly ceased their activities, and had accepted his suggestion that a muster in Big Hall would be a bright idea.

Even the laboratory enthusiasts had dropped their chemicals in response to Barry Stokes' request. Not once had he given an order. There seemed to be something extraordinarily magnetic about him. Without any displayed intention of commanding obedience, he was getting it.

Mr. Stokes had always possessed a "way" with boys. During the past few weeks this power of his had lain dormant. He had gradually changed until his most enthusiastic supporters failed to recognise him as the same jovial comrade. He had never been the same as any other Housemaster. The fellows had always gone to him with their troubles and problems.

And now, within the space of an hour, he had not only regained his former magnetism, but nature seemed to be making up for lost time by imbuing him with an added supply.

There was something uncanny about the way in which he joked with the worst offenders, and compelled them to fall in with his suggestions. It was just a case of personality winning. On this fateful night, Mr. Stokes could do nothing wrong. He wandered through the school, and had his own way all the time.

Fully seventy per cent. of the fellows were amazed at themselves for going into Big Hall at all. They couldn't understand why on earth they went. They didn't want to go! They were confounded idiots for going! In fact, they were hanged if they would go!

But, all the same, they went.

That was the miracle of it. They kept telling themselves they were idiots for doing something they swore they wouldn't—but they collected in a perfectly orderly fashion, and tried to look dare-devil. They glared at one another, and fooled themselves in various ways. Most of them laughed and winked, and said that they were getting up a huge rag against old Stokes. They were just collecting here to kid him! When he came along, they were going to give him the biggest shock of his life! There'd be some fine fun!

Out of all the personnel of the great school, not five per cent. remained absent. And nearly all of these were in bed. Even the pronounced anti-Stokes fellows—Sinclair's crew, and such like—were somehow impelled to turn up. They just came along to see what was going to happen.

By the time Big Hall was full, the whole school was quiet and still. Every trace of the recent rowdiness had vanished.

The popular fiction that Mr. Stokes was to be ragged grew, and scarcely one of that huge throng realised that it was a case of fooling themselves.

For when Mr. Stokes actually stepped upon the platform there was no derisive yell, no burst of laughter—but an instantaneous cessation of murmuring. A complete, electrical silence fell on the school.

Barry Stokes had the entire platform to himself, and he lounged to the front of it with one hand in his trousers-pocket, and the other holding his lighted pipe. He wore no gown, but an ordinary sports suit. In that garb, he looked ridiculously young.

In that second, everybody had forgotten that they were booked to rag him. Mr. Stokes possessed, in a marked degree, the quality of "getting over." In just the same way as a famous actor will silence every cough in a crowded house, and almost prevent his audience from breathing, Mr.

Stokes now held the crowded hall. And yet he hadn't spoken a word.

"Well, here we are!" he remarked, at length. "Splendid! All together, and all happy, eh?"

The tension relaxed, and somebody laughed. For no known reason, lots of other fellows laughed, too.

"Isn't this a lot better than messing about outside?" asked Mr. Stokes pleasantly. "Of course, there aren't any masters here, but why should we worry? I've heard all about that affair in the village, you know," he added confidentially. "I say, some of your chaps let yourselves go a bit, didn't you? That's the result of getting too excited."

The school wondered why on earth it was listening to Mr. Stokes like this. Who was he, anyhow? Why, he hadn't even any authority over them! He was practically dismissed! Yet the school still listened. They didn't know it, but Mr. Stokes, during this hour, was able to hold them with his little finger. He had had that little finger on the school's pulse.

"Still, we don't want to say too much about that village affair, do we?" he went on, smiling. "I'd like to say a word in praise of those heroes who put the village in order. A jolly brainy piece of work! You don't realise what you've done for the old school! Instead of us having a bad name, we've got a good one. Those Bellton people will sing our praises for epochs! And I can see a few battle-scarred warriors among you, too! By Jove! That's a splendid ear you've got, Handforth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody roared with laughter, and Handforth grinned.

"We're all a bit marked, sir," he shouted.

"I don't need spectacles to see it," nodded Mr. Stokes drily. "But who cares about a little bruise or two? Now, I'll tell you what. In fact, I'll tell you why I've brought you here, and why I want to have this heart-to-heart talk. I've got rather a ripping scheme, and I want you to help me."

"What is it, sir?"

"Out with it, Barry!"

"That's the idea!" said Mr. Stokes. "We don't want any formalities to-night, do we? "And you needn't stop at 'Barry' either. Call me anything you like—I thrive on it! I was going to tell you about that scheme, wasn't I?"

"Yes, sir," chorused about fifty voices.

Mr. Stokes took a couple of puffs at his pipe, and removed it. The school waited breathlessly. And by this time they had given up all idea of fooling themselves. They knew that Barry Stokes had "got" them, and they didn't mind. They were thoroughly enjoying themselves. They all felt as though something would soon burst unless they found an outlet for their feelings.

"I've got an inkling that the masters will be back pretty shortly—and the school governors will be here, too," continued Mr. Stokes, dropping his voice to a confidential monotone. "And you can bet your boots they're in a fine old stew! They've heard all about this rioting business, and they're coming here with the idea of finding a mere heap of ruins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fact!" said Barry, winking. "They've got a foolish notion that we've all gone on the razzle, and that the school's either burnt down, or that half of you are killed! They expect to turn into the Triangle, and witness a scene of horrible disorder—a scene of absolute chaos."

"When are they coming, sir?"

"Any old time now," replied Mr. Stokes promptly. "I shouldn't be surprised if they walked in during the next half-hour. Now, here's the brainy scheme. Why not go about our usual habits and customs? My suggestion is that you should go to your studies, or common-rooms, and do just the things you've always done. No more larking about—and no more attempts to be funny. Let's all surprise the governors by being the same as ever."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's a great idea, sir!"

"You see, we'll just show them that we can carry on, masters or no masters," continued Mr. Stokes genially. "What's more, I'll ring up the George Tavern, and get all the domestic staffs back. They'll be here within ten minutes, and before you can say Jack Robinson supper will be on the go, and nobody will know there's been any disorganisation."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Barry!"

"We'll do it, sir!"

"That sounds jolly encouraging, but are you all with me?" asked Mr. Stokes. "If you give me your word that you'll quietly dismiss and go about your usual business I shall be the happiest man alive. I know I can trust you. Now, then, let's have that promise. Just shout the one word—Yes!"

"Yes!" roared the whole school, in one solid voice.

It was nearly enough to lift the roof, and was followed by a yell of laughter. Mr. Stokes was still regaining his grip on the boys—indeed, he had gained such a firm hold that only an insignificant one or two thought of rebelling. The great majority were solid.

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Stokes, as the school subsided into silence. "But half a tick! Don't be in a hurry to go. There's just one other thing I'd like to say. You West House fellows are getting the wind up, aren't you? Don't deny it—I can see it in your faces."

"We're not exactly getting the wind up, sir," shouted Reggie Pitt. "But we're wor-

dering how we stand. We were holding a barring-out, you know, and if we go back to our normal habits, we shall be in the cart."

"You think that the beaks will seize their chance and do just as they like with you, eh?" asked Mr. Stokes thoughtfully.

"Don't you believe it! Let's have no more of that barring-out stuff. Trust me!"

"We'll trust you, sir," shouted Morrow warmly. "But I'm not sure that we can trust the governors."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's what we all think, Morrow."

Mr. Stokes chuckled.

"Then the sooner you get rid of that idea, the better," he said. "Look here, I'm going to ask you to trust me. I'll give you my word of honour that everything will turn out all right. I'll promise you that your demands will be met, and that nobody will be punished. I know I'm not officially able to give that promise, but I ask you to believe that I'll wangle it."

"That's good enough for me, sir," shouted Pitt. "We'll take your word, sir."

"It's good enough for me, too!" said Morrow. "Listen, you West House chaps! From this minute we go back to the normal. We'll trust Barry Stokes to see us through!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Barry!"

Big Hall absolutely shook with the volume of the terrific cheers—which were taken up, not only by the West House fellows, but by the entire school.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STOKES' SPIRIT.

"HURRAH!"

"Three cheers for Barry Stokes!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The fellows were all find-it necessary to get rid of their suppressed emotion—and the only way was to roar. They didn't exactly know why they had any suppressed emotion. In some uncanny fashion, Mr. Stokes had opened their eyes. The most reckless spirits of all realised, with staggering amazement, what arrant fools they had been.

"We won't let you go, sir!" yelled Pitt, jumping forward. "You've resigned, but we're not going to let you leave us!"

"Never!"

"We want Barry Stokes!" somebody chanted.

It was taken up by a score of others, and in less than a minute every fellow of the West House caught it, and let it fly. It came from scores of throats, and developed into an absolute yell.

"We want Barry Stokes!"

Mrs. Stokes and Mary Summers, standing in an ante-room behind the platform, simply hugged one another and wept. There was something about that thunderous shout which brought a lump into their throats. They could scarcely realise that all the trouble was over.

Barry himself, standing at the edge of the platform so carelessly, was merely aware of the fact that his heart was thumping madly. He surged with a great and glorious triumph. But he showed no visible sign. He could hardly realise it himself.

He held up his hand, and the sounds died away as though by magic.

"It's jolly nice of you, boys, to make me feel so jolly comfortable," he said. "It'll be a wrench if I have to go, I can assure you. But there's no telling. Perhaps I shall be lucky——"

"You won't!"

Somebody at the back of Big Hall shouted out the words in a thick, passionate voice. All heads were turned, and it was seen that Guy Sinclair was standing out in the gangway, his face flushed with fury.

"Shut up, Sinclair!" roared a hundred voices.

"I won't!" panted Sinclair. "This man's a confounded fraud! He's got no authority! Why are you taking any notice of him?"

A howl of execration went up.

"You idiots!" hooted Sinclair. "I can prove all sorts of rotten things against Stokes! And if he thinks he can get me out of the Head Prefectship of the West House, he's wrong! I'm still——"

But at this moment Sinclair mysteriously vanished. There was a sort of scuffle near him, a squeal or two sounded, and there was a commotion near the rear door. Twenty seconds later, a dozen dusty juniors returned, and resumed their places.

Sinclair had been ejected—and left outside, a mere mass of wreckage.

Nobody else thought of interfering. Parkin and Kenmore had been on the point of supporting their leader—but they thought better of it. There had been something very significant in the way those juniors came back.

"Perhaps I'd better just say a word about Sinclair," remarked Mr. Stokes, confidentially. "You mustn't take any notice of what he says. You West House boys can be quite satisfied that he's shot his bolt. That's all—I don't want to say too much now. But you'll hear more about it later."

"He's not coming back into the West House!"

"Never!"

"Well, let's hurry up and get something done," said Mr. Stokes. "I'll get busy with the telephone, and you go round to your studies and common-rooms, and carry on as usual. Is that all right? Good!"

The schooi dismissed to the accompaniment of further cheers. Nobody even

thought of giving way to any further licence. It was just as though all the masters were present again. Discipline was fully restored—law and order were in full possession.

Indeed, two or three of the juniors started quite an ordinary rag in the Ancient House lobby, and they were promptly dropped upon for making too much noise. In a subtle, unaccountable way, the "Stokes' spirit" had instilled itself into the very heart of St. Frank's. The idea of rebellion was not merely scouted, but simply laughed to scorn.

The normal life of the school was resumed on the spot.

Within a quarter of an hour study lights were gleaming, and the fellows were settling down to the ordinary evening pastimes. There wasn't a trace of the former disorder.

In response to Mr. Stokes' telephone message the staffs turned up, nervous, frightened, and wary. They hardly knew what to expect, and didn't know whether they were wise in coming at all.

They received the surprise of their lives.

And when they found everything so peaceful, they slipped back into their former ruts as though nothing untowards had occurred. In a surprisingly short time time every House of St. Frank's was following its customary placid course.

The West House was perhaps the most difficult to get back into running order, for there the rebels had held sway for several days. But the fellows themselves turned to and worked with a will. All sorts of furniture had been used as barricades, and every article was returned to its proper place. All traces of the barring-out were obliterated.

The West House was trusting Mr. Stokes.

It was voluntarily giving up its advantage, and relying upon the word of this dismissed Housemaster to see it through.

There was certainly something extraordinary about Barry Stokes.

CHAPTER XV.

SOMETHING LIKE A SHOCK.

BELLTON STATION had seldom seen such activity.

As a rule, the evening train only emitted a few local shoppers from Bannington. It was the through train from London, an express as far as Bannington, but slow afterwards.

On this eventful evening a veritable throng of well-dressed gentlemen emerged from two first-class compartments. They were grave, worried-looking gentlemen, too.

The train steamed out, and left them on the platform. Mr. Spence, the stationmaster, fussed up importantly. He immediately recognised Mr. Pagett and Mr. Goole, and all the other masters.

"I am thankful you have returned, gentlemen," he said breathlessly. "It is high time—high time!"

His words were significant.

"What is the latest news?" demanded Sir John Brent, pushing forward so brusquely in his anxiety that he nearly sent the stationmaster flying. "Tell me—tell me the worst!"

Mr. Spence shook his head.

"I don't know, sir—I don't know!" he said. "I can only tell you that there have been some appalling happenings. I never dreamed that schoolboys could be so utterly reckless of law and order."

"We know that they have broken all bounds of discipline, but what else?" asked Mr. Goole quickly. "There was some rumour of a riot in the village——"

"Rumour!" echoed the stationmaster. "It was the most appalling scene imaginable. Hundreds of boys, yelling like maniacs, spreading destruction wherever they went. Practically every shop was looted and sacked. The village High Street looked like a battlefield!"

"Good heavens!" said Sir John dully. "It is even worse than we feared!"

"Terrible—terrible!" muttered Mr. Pagett.

"However, there is a little consolation," proceeded Mr. Spence, feeling far more important than he had ever felt before. "I am happy to tell you, gentlemen, that the boys themselves made amends."

"Indeed!" said Sir John, with a trace of hope.

"When the riot was at its worst, a vast body of boys swooped down from the school and routed the other mob," said the stationmaster. "And, to be perfectly frank, they performed marvels. In less than an hour the village was restored, and all the shopkeepers are exceedingly grateful. In that respect the boys behaved nobly. Bellton is proud of them."

Sir John caught his breath in.

"This is wonderful hearing, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps the situation is not so bad as we feared, gentlemen. So the boys themselves restored order? Splendid! I am immensely grateful for this piece of news!"

"We are all grateful, sir," agreed Mr. Goole.

The stationmaster shook his head. He had rubbed it on, only to smooth it off, and now he proceeded to rub it on again.

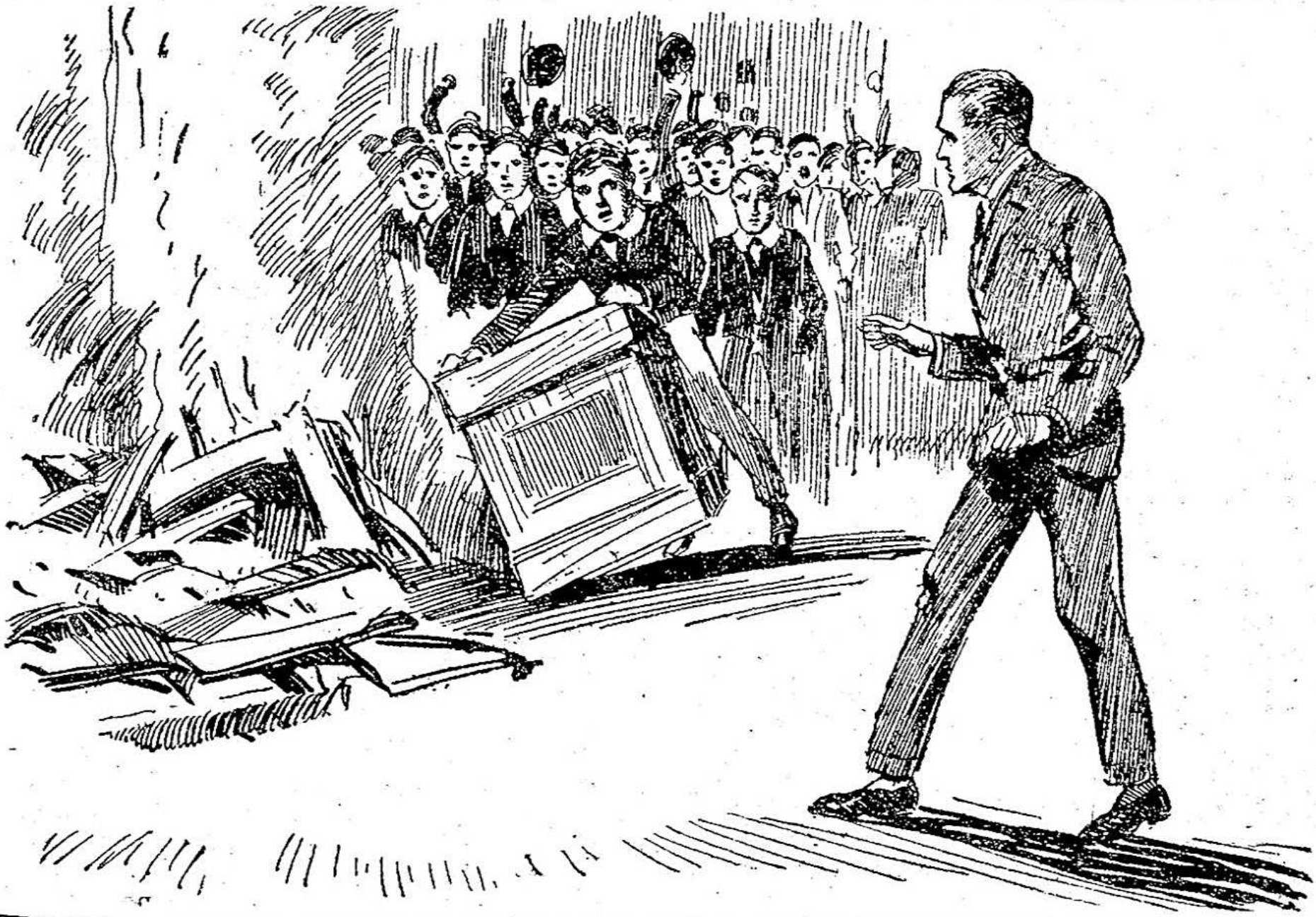
"Ah, but you must not be too optimistic!" he said gloomily. "The latest reports are not only alarming, but exceedingly grave. At this very moment the whole school may be in flames!"

"In flames?" gasped Sir John, staring into the night. "I see no glare. And yet the wood may intervene."

"It does intervene," interrupted Mr. Spence. "Even if the whole range of buildings is ablaze you'll see nothing of it till you get quite close. The wood forms a complete barrier. We have heard that an enormous bonfire has been established in the Triangle."

"Great Heaven!" said Mr. Goole, aghast.

"They are feeding it with desks and forms and every conceivable type of furniture," continued Mr. Spence, with apparent relish—this opportunity of creating a sensation was too good to be missed. "Then again, there are many other excesses in progress. It is rumoured that many of the boys are



"Look here, you reckless young beggars!" exclaimed Mr. Stokes. "Those desks cost money! Put it down before I lose my temper!"
One of the boys, who had triumphantly carried a desk up, set it down with a thud.

killed. They have fallen from the roof, they have recklessly endangered life and limb, and——"

"Come!" interrupted Sir John Brent curtly. "This is too terrible! We cannot waste another moment. Stationmaster, we telegraphed to the garage for cars to be ready. Are they here?"

"Outside, sir."

"Then, man alive, why do you keep us?" panted Sir John.

"I assumed you would care for the latest information, sir," said Mr. Spence frigidly. "Indeed, you asked for it——"

"I beg your pardon—I am agitated!" said Sir John gruffly. "Come, Mr. Paget—come, gentlemen. I am filled with grave forebodings, but it is better to know the worst!"

They all hurried out and entered the waiting cars. They had heard quite enough to convince them that they would find St. Frank's in a state of wild disorganisation.

Mr. Spence had only verified the fears which Sir John and the masters had felt all the way down. And it must be recorded that Mr. Spence had spoken in good faith; he honestly believed that the situation was as he had stated. The whole countryside was alive with the wildest rumours. It was universally believed that St. Frank's was on the verge of the greatest disaster in its history.

The two cars were open ones, and Sir John and the masters scarcely uttered a word as they passed through the village. They were not reassured by the normal appearance of Bellton, for Mr. Spence had explained that. Their fears were all centred on the school now.

Many eyes were kept directed upon the skyline, dreadful of seeing a lurid glare. But there was nothing unusual at all. At last the cars turned in at the gateway. Sir John, who was now standing up, uttered

a startled ejaculation. Josh Cuttle, the school porter, was standing there, saluting.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Sir John.

There wasn't anything particularly suggestive of revolution in Josh Cuttle's attitude. Indeed, quite the contrary. The cars came to a halt in the middle of the Triangle. Sir John Brent was still standing, and he looked round with dazed, dumbfounded amazement. Mr. Barnaby Goole, Mr. Pagett, and all the others had no words to utter.

Lights were gleaming from almost every window. There were no sounds of rioting. An echo of laughter came from the gymnasium. Two seniors emerged from the Modern House, glanced at the stationary cars, and proceeded to walk into the Ancient House.

In the West House lobby a group of juniors were lounging against the notice-board, discussing something with quiet earnestness. And this—this was the House which had been barred and barricaded!

Sir John Brent actually rubbed his eyes.

"Am—am I dreaming?" he murmured huskily.

"This is startling, indeed!" muttered Mr. Goole. "Gentlemen, what does it mean? Even the West House is normal. Have we been deliberately tricked? I have never been so amazed——"

"Wait!" panted Sir John.

Tubbs, the Ancient House page, had just come running up. He touched his cap, and grinned.

"Luggage, sir?" he asked briskly.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Sir John.

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Boy, is there any rioting here?"

"Any which, sir?" asked Tubbs, staring. "Rioting? Not that I know of, sir. The young gents are all as usual—— There you are, sir—there goes the bell. Bedtime."

Exactly the same as usual, although there wasn't a master in the entire school, the bell was clanging for the juniors to retire. And while the dumbfounded masters stood there they saw crowds of boys entering the lobbies. Study lights were switched off, and dormitory lights were switched on. Processions passed up the stairs.

"This—this is an absolute miracle!" said Sir John Brent, clutching at the side of the car. "Gentlemen, I am at a loss. We expected to find chaos—and we find the utmost order!"

"And yet—and yet there are no masters here!" said Mr. Pagett faintly. "At least, there are none on duty. What does it mean? Who—who has brought this amazing change about?"

The question was soon answered.

Fenton, of the Sixth, came out of the Ancient House, and suddenly checked—as though he had noticed the cars for the first time. He came over to them, and raised his cap.

"Good evening, sir," he said politely. "Evening, Mr. Goole! Evening, Mr. Pagett——"

"Who—who are you?" asked Sir John, breathlessly.

"I am Fenton, sir—school captain."

"Then—then will you kindly explain how this school has been miraculously restored to order?"

"That's an easy one, sir!" replied Fenton, smiling. "Now you come to mention it, it certainly is a bit of a miracle. We've got to thank Mr. Beverley Stokes.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN WHO TRIUMPHED.

"MR. BEVERLEY STOKES!" echoed Sir John.

He stared with obvious astonishment, and Mr. Goole and the others exchanged rapid glances. They knew that Mr. Stokes had been the only man left at St. Frank's.

"This is very remarkable, Fenton," said Sir John grimly. "In what way did Mr. Stokes restore order? What help did he have? I assume that he employed some assistance——"

"No, sir!"

"Oh, but that's absurd!" broke in Mr. Pagett. "You are surely not telling us, Fenton, that Mr. Stokes subdued the rioting single-handed?"

"Quite ridiculous!" said Mr. Pycraft sourly.

Fenton grew frigid.

"Mr. Stokes restored order absolutely single-handed," he replied. "He had no assistance whatever from anybody—not even from the small group of boys who were loyal to discipline. We, indeed, are the most surprised people of all."

"But how?" demanded Sir John. "In Heaven's name, how was this thing done?"

"I can't answer you, sir—simply because I don't know," replied Fenton gravely. "When everything was looming its blackest—when a huge bonfire was burning almost on this spot, and the spirit of revolution was growing, Mr. Stokes just walked round the school."

"Well?"

"He talked to the fellows quietly, sir, joked with them, and——"

"Joked with them!" echoed Mr. Goole.

"Yes, sir," said Fenton quietly. "He went round casually, and treated the whole affair as though it were a trifle. It's the greatest mystery imaginable! But, as true as I'm standing here, in less than fifteen minutes everybody in the school had col-

lected in Big Hall, and the rioting was a memory."

"Very singular!" murmured Sir John. "Very singular, indeed!"

"I can't attempt to explain it, sir," went on Fenton, waxing enthusiastic. "But Mr. Stokes stepped into the breach with the most amazing success. He imbued the whole school with the spirit of discipline. Within half an hour he was being cheered to the echo—and when he asked the fellows to go about their normal habits, they agreed on the spot. That's why you find the school as it is. In my opinion, sir, Mr. Stokes has saved St. Frank's from sheer disaster."

"And he positively did this single-handed?"

"Positively, sir!"

"Then it is more than I can comprehend," declared Sir John.

"I'm not surprised to hear that, sir," smiled Fenton. "We were on the spot—we saw it with our own eyes—and yet we can't comprehend it. I can only suppose that Mr. Stokes possesses a magnetic influence over his fellows. Honestly, sir, I felt dazed. It was the most marvellous thing I've ever seen."

"Thank you, Fenton. I am glad we had this little chat in private," said Sir John. "By the way, have you seen anything of Mr. Lee or Mr. Stockdale?"

"They both returned about ten minutes ago, sir, and, I understand, have gone to the Head's house."

"I am indebted to you, Fenton," said Sir John. "Come, gentlemen, we will go to the Headmaster's house at once."

The cars were dismissed, and all the masters accompanied Sir John to the Head's study. Not one of them felt anxious to return to his own quarters yet. They wanted to see Mr. Stokes—the man who had triumphed.

They entered the Head's house—being admitted by Phipps. And as they walked into the study, Mr. Beverley Stokes rose to his feet. He had been talking with Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale. He bowed.

"Good-evening, Sir John," he said quietly. "I have already relinquished the reins to Mr. Lee. I realise, of course, that I had no authority to assume control of the school, but I did so in the best interests of all concerned."

"Mr. Stokes, what can I say to express my admiration for your amazing achievement?" asked Sir John bluntly. "Upon my word, sir, it's absolutely wonderful! I congratulate you heartily."

"Thank you, Sir John," said Mr. Stokes. "There is just one thing I would like to mention. You'll find the West House quite normal. The barring-out is ended, and the boys are obedient to discipline."

"That is even more staggering than the other!"

"The revolt is quelled, Sir John, but I made the boys a certain promise," continued Mr. Stokes. "They have relinquished their advantage upon my word of honour that a full inquiry will be undertaken. I can only hope that you will honour that promise of mine, and keep faith with the boys."

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Stokes, you were undoubtedly justified in giving your word," declared Sir John heartily. "Yes, yes, of course! There will be a very full inquiry—a very complete inquiry."

He was so relieved—so overjoyed to find the school at peace that he was ready enough to promise anything. And there was something about Mr. Beverley Stokes that impressed him deeply—something that positively gripped him.

During that recent interview—when Mr. Stokes had given such an unsatisfactory account of the control of his House—he had left no such impression upon Sir John.

In some subtle way, the man was changed. The power which he had exercised over the boys was apparent still. Sir John felt it within him.

"Thank you, Sir John," said Mr. Stokes confidently. "Since you have promised a full inquiry, then the boys have nothing to fear—for I can assure you that you will consider them fully justified in the action they took. Good-night, sir!"

"Er—good-night, Mr. Stokes," said Sir John, extending his hand. "Good-night, sir! And thank you with all my heart and soul for what you have done. Rest assured that you have not heard the last of this."

Mr. Stokes bowed, and departed.

"Mr. Lee, what does it mean?" burst out the Chairman of the Governors.

"It's no good asking me, Sir John," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "I can only tell you that Mr. Stokes is a man with an uncanny influence over boys. I hope you will reconsider your decision regarding his resignation. St. Frank's would suffer an irretrievable loss if he were to go."

"I am sure we all feel that, sir," declared Mr. Goole.

"Oh, absolutely!" put in Mr. Pagett. "After what has happened it would be a tragedy to lose him."

"And this—and this is the man we asked to resign because he could not control boys!" ejaculated Sir John slowly. "Bless my soul! What a remarkable conflict of judgment! Obviously, we were wrong. The man is a genius."

"You have hit upon the right word, sir!" put in Mr. Stockdale heartily. "Indeed, Mr. Lee and I arrived at the same conclusion. Nobody but a genius could have accomplished the apparently impossible as Mr. Stokes has done. We came here expecting to find havoc, and we find peace. For this achievement alone, Mr. Stokes deserves undying fame."

"Needless to say, Mr. Stokes is reinstated from this moment," declared Sir John. "I fear our former inquiry was too

superficial—too inadequate. This time we shall get to the bottom of the whole affair."

And while the masters were returning to their various Houses, filled with heartfelt relief, Guy Sinclair was gloating over a parcel in the privacy of his bed-room. It had arrived that very evening—in the midst of the disorders. Naturally, it had been delayed, and had not been actually delivered until bed-time.

Sinclair was overjoyed. That parcel was from a friend of his—a young gentleman named Charteris, whom he had accompanied that eventful New Year's Eve into the notorious night club.

"A hundred!" breathed Sinclair. "Gad, I'll have him now!"

He was examining the contents of the parcel—a hundred photographs—all the same print. They were taken from that snapshot which Charteris had taken in the Smugglers' Lair—showing Mr. Stokes in the full glare of the flashlight, engaged in an apparently drunken brawl.

"He's bound to curry favour with the Governors now!" muttered Sinclair. "He'll get his job back, if he can! Well, I'm ready for him! I'll have such a revenge that he'll wish he'd never been born!"

And Guy Sinclair sat on his bed, dreaming of the way in which he would tear Mr. Beverley Stokes' reputation to shreds. No matter what the inquiry—no matter how the affair went—the Housemaster of the West House would never be able to outlive the scandal which Sinclair would flood upon the startled school!

The rebellion was over—but the climax had not yet been reached.

THE END.

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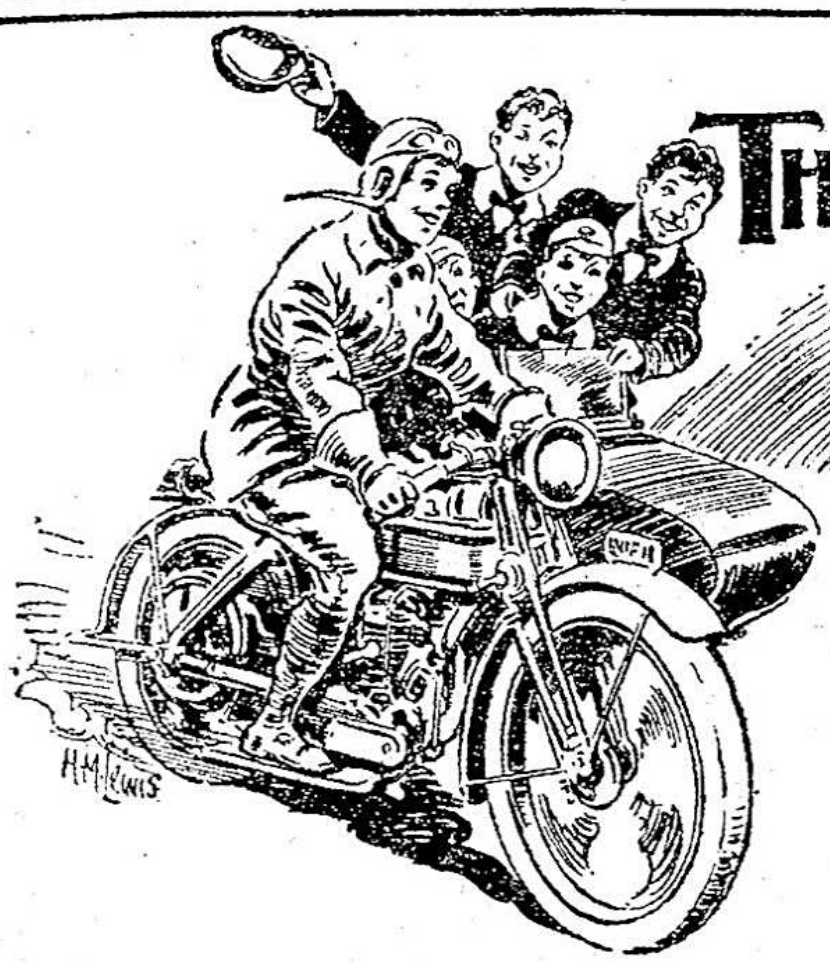

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(*Now read on.*)

CHAPTER V.

TINKER STARTLES THE INSPECTOR OF POLICE.

AN excited discussion followed the withdrawal of the police-sergeant, and Fane, Pye, and Manners bombarded Tinker and Bindley with questions which Bindley was unable to answer, and Tinker was not inclined to answer if he could have done so.

"But you and your guv'nor are sure to take it up, aren't you?" said Pye. "If there's any real mystery about the murder, these local police, especially the detectives and inspector, are bound to bungle it. I'd sooner trust our own particular copper, old Blagg, but as he's only a village constable, they'll never give him a chance. If they foozle it, as they're bound to, you'll be in it."

"You dear old fathead, you're talking through the crown of your hat," said Tinker. "You don't seem to understand our position. This isn't the guv'nor's shout at all. You see, if the local police foozle it, they'll send for help to Scotland Yard, and Scotland Yard will send along one of their best men. My guv'nor hasn't anything in the wide world to do with the police except when they're badly tangled up, and then they often come along to us for assistance. We're a private firm absolutely. This stunt has nothing at all to do with us."

"But you could take it up on your own, couldn't you, Tinker?"

"Who's going to pay us? If we started doing that we'd be kept busy without getting very fat. When it's something really puzzling and baffling, the guv'nor does butt in out of sheer love of the game, and drops pots of money over it, but he generally gets there. I'm a bit like that, too, but unless we're specially commissioned, we leave ordinary cases to the police, for it's their job, and they're paid for doing it."

"I jolly well hope this isn't an ordinary case, for I'd just love to see you on the trail, Tink, my old sleuth," said Fane.

"Somebody else at the door," said Manners. "Come in!"

It was Sergeant Siler again, still smiling blandly, and not at all excited, though a murder in such a law-abiding district ought to have excited him tremendously. Little Beilby was still buzzing about, but some interesting item on the wireless kept most of Mr. Pycroft's juniors in the Rag, and the sergeant's visit had passed almost unnoticed.

"Will Mr. Hasland kindly step down to Mr. Pycroft's room?" said Sergeant Siler.

"Then you don't want me?" asked Bindley.

"Not at present, sir. Mr. Pycroft sends compliments to Mr. Hasland, and will Mr. Hasland be good enough to step down. Allow me, sir!"

"Oh, drat Mr. Pycroft!" growled Tinker, under his breath.

He knew that Mr. Pycroft had given him away, for the sergeant held open the door for him, and raised his gloved hand to the

peak of his cap as he went out. Mr. Pycroft was indulging in a cigar, and the inspector of police was just lighting one.

"So this is the celebrated Mr. Tinker!" said the inspector. "Quite delighted to meet you."

"I thought it wiser to tell the inspector," said Mr. Pycroft. "I—er—saw no reason why I should not do so. As a matter of fact, when the sergeant mentioned one of my boys by the name of Hasland, I was—hum! —for the moment quite at sea. Memory, however, reasserted itself, and I recalled—er—that it—— Good gracious! What a ghastly affair to take place so near the school! Terrible! Terrible! And you witnessed it—er—my dear boy?"

"I'd like Mr. Tinker to tell us exactly what he did witness," said the inspector. "I am sure he will give a most useful account."

The sergeant took out his notebook and bit his pencil. To give him a fair chance, Tinker spoke slowly and clearly.

"At about thirteen minutes past eight," he said, "I was within three hundred and ten yards of the avenue gate. I had run out of petrol, and Bindley was helping me to push my motor-cycle. My batteries had run down, and the lamps were nearly out. We were keeping to the left of the road.

"I saw a car approaching slowly, probably at eight miles an hour, and was about to sound my horn, for it was very dark, when I heard three revolver shots. I saw no flashes. At that moment would be almost opposite the avenue gate. The car accelerated, skidded, made a complete circle till it was facing us again, and then plunged forward, straight at us. Bindley shouted, 'Up the bank, Tinker! Somebody has gone mad!' and we dashed across and scrambled up."

"Scrambled up," said the sergeant. "Yes, I've got that. Just a little slower, sir, if you don't mind."

"The car swerved again, just missing the cycle, swung to the left again, and hit the telegraph-pole, and turned over. That was exactly at fifteen minutes past eight."

"Amazing," said Mr. Pycroft, gazing admiringly at Tinker through his spectacles. "What—er—what an astounding memory for detail."

"If it's true," muttered the inspector. "The sergeant's caught up with you, sir," he said aloud, "but don't let me hurry you."

"We kept quiet for a few seconds," Tinker continued, "and then Bindley said: 'Gee! Here's a mess. Three punctures the poor beggar had all in a minute. I wonder if he's dead!' Then I knew that Bindley didn't know the difference between the report of a revolver and the noise made by a bursting tyre. I told him to keep away, and went to the side-car for my flash-lamp, and saw a man lying on his back in the road. He was quite warm, but stone dead.

"He had not been thrown out very heavily, for he was only a yard from the car, and he had not fallen on his head, for he was still wearing a grey velour hat and the crown was uncrushed. He was bleeding from a wound in the left temple, caused by a bullet. I covered him with my mackintosh, and used my flash-lamp to take a quick look at the car, a Doyle-Ranel two-seater, painted dark blue. Though it had been raining heavily, the hood was down. The near-side front wheel had been wrenched off, and was embedded in the hedge. The wind-screen was badly cracked, and a bullet had passed through it four inches from the left edge and seven inches from the top. A little to the right of the centre the wind-screen was spattered with blood.

"I did not notice the state of the tyre embedded in the hedge, but the other three were unpunctured. Bindley was still on the bank, asked me if the man was knocked out, and I told him he was stone dead. Bindley did not see the body, though he came close up to it. I told him to go to the garage in the Barren Tor road, and telephone to the police. When the man Horrick came from the garage, I gave him my name and left him in charge. At the avenue gate I waited for Bindley, and we came back together."

"Read that over, Siler," said the inspector.

The sergeant obeyed.

"Excellent, my dear Tinker," said Mr. Pycroft. "Full, yet splendidly concise. It shows the—er—trained mind, which is a rarity in youth. I am afraid poor Bindley's effort will fall lamentably short of that."

"I don't see why Bindley should be wanted at all, sir," said Tinker. "If he doesn't know the difference between the pop of a tyre and the bang of a revolver, what's the good of dragging him into a coroner's court, and perhaps to a murder trial later on. That's one reason why I didn't let him see the body. Bindley has absolutely nothing to tell except that he heard three bangs and saw what the car did. I've told you what I saw, though I needn't have said a word. Do you want me to sign it, inspector?"

The inspector, who was a tall, sallow-faced man, with a grey, toothbrush moustache, examined the band on his cigar.

"We're not greatly interested in the coroner's court, Mr. Tinker," he said. "Of course, I'm very much obliged to you for your very lucid statement, and I quite agree with what Mr. Pycroft has said about it. I have no doubt it is perfectly accurate, even to the time you mentioned, though it is a bit surprising to slow people like ourselves that you should have got it to the exact minute."

"'Thirteen minutes past eight, sir,'" prompted the sergeant, glancing at his notebook. "'Fifteen minutes past when the car turned over.'"

"I've allowed two minutes," said Tinker. "The telegraph wires were still twanging when I heard the school clock strike the quarter."

"I quite understand that you need give the police no information," said the inspector, "and it is quite possible that you understand little things like that better than I do. Silly to look a gift horse in the mouth, isn't it?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Well, sir, the only complaint I have against it is that it ends so abruptly."

"The inspector wants me to fill in the gap between the time Bindley left me and the man from the garage arrived, sir," he said.

"Now you're talking," said the inspector. "They'll ask you that at the inquest, won't they?"

"It depends on the sort of coroner you've got. I didn't touch anything."

"Then you did search the body?" demanded the inspector. "You wanted to see what the man had about him?"

Impelled by Tinker's strong arm, Master Beilby, who had been listening with one ear glued to the keyhole, went reeling across the carpet, and would have dived into the fire-place except for Sergeant Siler's restraining grasp.

"'When the man Horrick came from the garage, I gave him my name, and left him in charge,'" read Sergeant Siler, in response to his chief's nod. "'At the avenue gate I waited for Bindley, and we came back together.' That how's the statement ends?"

"To me," remarked Mr. Pycroft, "the termination seems perfectly suitable and—er—natural. Where is the abruptness, inspector?"

It was no mystery to Tinker what the inspector was driving at and what he wanted to know.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pycroft, as Tinker nodded.

"Of course, I had no right to, for it was no business of mine," went on Tinker. "Just force of habit. He was the wrong man."

The inspector coughed. Mr. Pycroft took off his eyeglasses and wiped them, and the sergeant bit the top of his pencil.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Housemaster again. "What a hideous—hum—suggestion!"

"It's a statement, sir, not a suggestion," said Tinker. "I agree that it's a bit hideous, for it means that some assassin or assassins were lying in wait to commit murder near the bottom of the Barren Tor road. They must have seen Bindley and myself as we rushed up the bank, for the lights of the car were full on, and only went out when she turned over, and that's why they didn't come to look at their victim. Have I startled you, inspector?"

"Very much; but I think you're a lot off the mark when you suggest that they shot the wrong man. That does startle me."

"Then I think I'll say good-night, and send Bindley down to you. Perhaps it was the right man, and then it's easy."

Tinker turned to the door, opened it suddenly and unexpectedly, and made a swift clutch. A terrified squeal rent the silence of Mr. Pycroft's private room. Impelled by Tinker's strong arm, Master Beilby, who had been listening with one ear glued to the keyhole, went reeling across the carpet, and would have dived into the fireplace except for Sergeant Siler's restraining grasp.

"What is the meaning of this, Beilby? What are you doing here?" demanded Mr. Pycroft.

"No-nothing. Only I'm nearly throttled, sir!" whimpered Beilby. "I—I was just gug-going to knock, sir, and ask you if you'd like to look at a fun-funny book I bought in Calcroft, sir, when that ugly pig——"

"Go away!" thundered Mr. Pycroft. "Go away, and keep away!"

The sergeant helped Beilby out with a push. He swerved round Tinker and went up the staircase like a kangaroo.

"Yah! Beast!" he said, grinning down at Tinker over the banisters. "If you find the tyres of that rotten motor-bike of yours full of nails to-morrow it will jolly well serve you right, and teach you to keep your dirty paws off a gentleman!"

Then Beilby took to his heels again, bursting with news, and rushed into the Rag.

"Hi, kids," he yelled, "there's been a murder, a horrible murder. Do shut up your row, and listen. There's been a murder, I tell you!"

Beilby handled the truth so carelessly at times that no one believed him. Instead of believing him, they threw him out, for he had no friends at all. In spite of this, though he occasionally met with reverses, he got on very well indeed.

"One moment, Mr. Tinker," said the inspector's voice.

"Two if you like," said Tinker.

"I gather that you don't wish your young friend Bindley to have to appear as witness? That is also Mr. Pycroft's wish—to keep the school out of it. The body is lying in the constable's cottage, and I am going down there now to meet the police-surgeon and our detective. As you've made this extraordinary statement, why refuse to tell me more? It will save us drafting a lot of questions to be put to you at the inquest."

"If I refused to tell you any more, it's the first I've heard of it," said Tinker. "I don't think the man knew where he was, and was going slow to find out. He came across Calcroft Green, not down the Barren Tor road. You know what was in his pockets, as well as I do, a few betting slips, some Treasury notes, a race-card, a cheap watch, and a bill, paid, for a pair of boots. The boots were new, and so was his hat. The raincoat he was wearing was sizes too large for him, and his trousers were splashed with mud up to the knees."

"We noticed all that."

"And no mud on his boots, which are brand new," said Tinker, "bought in a shop at Aperling only a few hours ago, like the hat, though I didn't find the bill. I didn't have much time, but it was enough to form an opinion, and I give it you for what it's worth, as you're going to cut Bindley out of it. There was a race-meeting at Floringdon this afternoon."

The inspector nodded.

"Now I know what you're going to tell me," he said, "and it's a very ingenious theory; but please go on."

"If I'm wrong it won't be very difficult for you to prove it," said Tinker. "My opinion is that the man was making a book at the races, and that the luck was against him, for even bookmakers don't always have it all their own way. Finding that he couldn't pay out, he welshed the backers and was chased, and had to throw away his bag, hat, and coat. He escaped by jumping into that car and driving off. At Aperling he bought a pair of boots to replace his muddy ones, and a new hat. The coat he had found in the car came down nearly to his heels, and covered up his muddy trousers, but after so much rain the race-course must have been like a swamp, and the condition of his boots would have attracted attention, as would the fact that he wore no hat.

"My idea is that he was making for London, and was afraid that the police would have received the number and description of the stolen car, and would be watching for it. As the danger would be greatest on the main road, he turned off and lost his way. It's my firm belief that when I saw his headlamps he was slowing down to look for a signpost, and find out where he was. That's as far as I care to go, inspector, so I leave the rest to you."

The inspector had let his cigar go out. He struck a match and relighted it, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said. "Mr. Sexton Blake has nothing to be ashamed of in his pupil. You asked if you had startled me, and you have startled me, more than you think perhaps. I'll test your theory at once, Mr. Tinker. You'll go no farther, then?"

"I'm through," said Tinker. "I've got your promise about Bindley. Take no notice about the wrong man business. Bindley's O.K., then?"

"Oh, yes!"

Leaving the inspector turning over the pages of the telephone-book, Tinker mounted the staircase whistling a tune. The noise in the Rag sounded like half a dozen dog-fights, and the study was not quite as silent as a tomb at midnight. Fane, Pye, Bindley, and Manners were exercising their youthful voices. They were pointing at Wilberforce Stott, who in his kind way had come in to help to wash up the supper-things, and chanting:

"Stott's spots are great green blots,
Great green blots, great green blots.
So break the news to mother,
Break the news to mother,
So break the news to mo-o-ther,
That soap won't wash 'em out!"

CHAPTER VI.

BEILBY'S NIGHT OUT.

WHEN the dormitory-bell rang Tinker remembered that his bag was still in the side-car unless someone had borrowed it, and he went down to get it. The inspector and Sergeant Siler had gone. The night, though damp and dark, was quite warm, and Mr. Pycroft, M.A., was standing in the porch, trying to make up his mind whether to sit down and read or step across and spend an hour with his friend Mr. Chules, the drawing-master, before going to bed.

"If you are going—er—out, Tinker," he said, "we lock up promptly at eleven, as you may not have forgotten."

"I'm only going as far as the shed to collect my pyjamas and tooth-brush, sir."

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Pycroft.

"By the way, did the inspector tell you what I had told him, sir?"

"Oh, yes. He was impressed, greatly impressed. I wish they would be kind enough to keep these horrors away from us. One of the brutal affairs that have been only too common in the newspapers of late, a race-gang feud. A fraudulent bookmaker who had attempted to cheat some of his—ha!—I was going to say some of his wretched dupes, but a dupe would scarcely have thought of such a hideous revenge. It is monstrous that in a country that—ha!—boasts of its civilisation such blood-thirsty scoundrels should be at liberty."

"I quite agree with you, sir," said Tinker, suppressing a slight start. "When the gangs are at loggerheads and at each others' throats it doesn't matter so much. The danger will come when they make the peace, for they all live by preying on the public, and they're almost too busy for that when these scraps are on."

While Tinker was getting his bag he heard Mr. Pycroft's boots go crunching across the gravel. The Housemaster had left the door wide open and the light shone from the hall. Suddenly a boy appeared on the steps, and peered about cautiously, and Tinker recognised Beilby. Having made sure that the coast was clear, Beilby put on a mackintosh, turned his cap inside-out to hide the school-badge, put it on his head, and ran towards the gate.

"Rubber soles and all complete," thought Tinker. "I wonder where that little rascal is off to at this hour of the night."

Tinker was not greatly interested in the doings of Beilby. From what Mr. Pycroft had said, the police-inspector had not only accepted Tinker's only theory as to the identity of the murdered man, but had added his own theory to it as to the reason for the murder.

"I expect the Floringdon police told him on the 'phone that there had been a case of welshing at the races, and that the welsher had got away in a stolen car," he thought. "As the last race was at five o'clock, even if he had waited for it, he must have dawdled along pretty slowly to take three hours to reach the avenue gates. The inspector's notion is that he was followed by some of the racecourse boys in another car, who got on his track, pulled ahead of him, and ambushed him. Well, it might have happened, for when those brutes have a grudge against a man, they don't hesitate at murder."

Hearing a faint murmur of voices, Tinker went as far as the gate. In the gloom of the elm avenue a light was bobbing about. He guessed that it was the police searching for the wheel-marks of the car which had conveyed the murderers to, or close to, the scene of the ambush, and in which they had made their escape after the crime.

As only a driver who knew the ins and outs of the district thoroughly would have dreamed of using the private road, they seemed to be wasting their time. Tinker was sick and tired of the whole affair; so he turned back to the house, and went upstairs.

"Is this my little cot?" he asked, as he dumped down his bag.

"No, that's where that little hog Beilby does his snoring, old man," said Pye. "There's your snoozing hutch alongside mine."

(*Continued on page 39.*)

CAREERS FOR BOYS

— By A. C. HORTH —

THE CHOICE OF A CAREER

THE CHOICE OF A CAREER.

MANY boys give little, if any, serious thought to the choice of their future career, and either of their own free will or through the influence of others, are apt to take any suitable opening that will enable them to begin to earn money. In some cases this haphazard method happens to be successful, but in a large number, the boy discovers, when it is too late to change, that his occupation is not congenial. The selection of a profession or trade is often based on few facts and with very little knowledge of the actual work to be done or the opportunities there are for advancement. Actual fitness for the work, either from the physical or mental aspect, is not sufficiently considered, and the result is that boys allow themselves to drift into occupations for which they are not adapted.

PURPOSE OF THESE ARTICLES.

The purpose of these articles is to help boys in their choice of a career, by placing before them particulars of all the ordinary trades and professions; by explaining the kind of work, the preliminary training required, if any; and by indicating the opportunities for advancement and the necessary studies required to attain proficiency.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

There are several standards by which a trade or profession can be judged, the more important being remuneration or wages; health, safety and climatic conditions; full season or short season, and the time and expense of training. Of these, the rate of pay is nearly always given prominence by those who are responsible for placing a boy in a situation, but it is not considered such an important item by boys who themselves choose their future occupation. As a general rule, it can be stated that highly-skilled work, requiring a long training, begins with a low wage and gradually improves; semi-skilled work has a higher commencing wage, but is generally considerably lower than any payment for skilled work; unskilled work provides, as a rule, higher initial wages than either skilled or semi-skilled labour, but there is little advance. If possible, the initial wages should not be considered, but what should be borne in mind, is the position that can be attained when full adult age has arrived.

INFLUENCE OF LOCALITY.

Apart from the influence of wages in the selection of a career, other conditions may be brought into consideration, one of the most common being that of locality. It is quite possible that a boy living in a district in which only one or two forms of manufacture are carried on, will be necessarily limited in his choice, but it usually happens that the inclinations of a boy placed in such a position tend towards some branch of the work which is familiar to him or in which some of his relatives or friends are engaged in. It may be necessary for the boy, when he has finished his training, to travel further afield to obtain the advancement he wishes for, but by that time he will have reached years of discretion, and be able to decide for himself.

ABILITY AND INCLINATION.

What is actually the most important consideration, and one that should be considered before everything else, is ability or adaptability. Inclination stands for something, but a sure knowledge of the possession of the ability to do a particular job is more important. Because one boy shows a certain aptitude for working out mathematical calculations, it does not follow that he is pre-eminently fitted to be an accountant, or that the boy who is especially keen on woodwork should necessarily become a carpenter, joiner, or cabinet-maker; the first boy is more likely to make a good craftsman if his inclinations lie that way, than an accountant, however clever he is at calculations.

GOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TRAINED MANUAL WORKER.

Unskilled labour is in less demand and the tendency is towards its elimination, but science and invention, while decreasing the demand for unskilled workers, are adding new occupations and finding places for new workers every day. The boy of to-day who takes full advantage of the educational facilities that are offered him, is in a position to do well for himself, providing that he enters on a career that is suitable to his particular abilities, and every boy before arriving at the age of fourteen ought to have a good idea as to the kind of work he is capable of.

NEXT ARTICLE: A general survey of the opportunities in the building trades.

"THE CALCROFT CASE"

(*Continued from page 37.*)

"Any chance of a dormitory-raid from the other side of the passage?" asked Tinker.

Fane yawned.

"They don't happen, Jack," he answered. "We've given 'em up. Nothing ever does happen. We've larruped the crowd in the other dormitory till they can't raise a kick. You remember that Greek guy Alexander who conquered the giddy earth, and then sat down and grizzled because there wasn't another earth to conquer. That's how we feel, only we don't grizzle. We've got 'em all tame."

"And, really, Fane," said Wilberforce Stott, "I consider that an ideal condition of affairs. Dormitory raids are brutal. In the last one I was struck in the face with a pillow or a bolster with terrific violence. I would not have cared so much had it been the ordinary pillow or bolster stuffed with feathers, though they can administer quite a stunning blow, but I am sure the boy who struck me so cruelly in the darkness had concealed a boot in the pillow-slip. My nose bled for quite a long time."

"M'yes! I remember," said Manners. "We couldn't find a door-key, so we put the study poker down your back. And, for the love of Mike, don't let me see your face last thing before I get into bed, or I shall dream of green spots."

Harker, the prefect on duty, came down the passage, yawning, and looked in. He had a long, brass key in his hand for switching the electric light off and on, for had the switch been an ordinary one which the juniors could manipulate, the expenditure of electric current would have been enormous. The Sixth-Form boy looked lazily up and down the dormitory, and missed the empty cot.

"All snug?" he asked.

"Just joyous, old dear," said Bindley; "but don't cut the juice off for a second, for our pal Wilberforce Stott wants to count how many green spots he has on his dial, and make a note of them. He's afraid somebody will crawl out of bed and sneak a few in the night."

"What has the kid been doing to his face, then?" asked Harker.

"He tried washing it for a change, and the wet water turned it mildewy," said Fane. "And, I say, Harker, pull both windows down a little at the top, and don't forget to turn the cat out, and put two lumps of sugar in my early tea when you bring it, and warm my slippers; and do be careful how you crease my grey trousers, or I shall really have to sack you and get another valet!"

Harker used the key, and darkness came.

"Oh, Harker, dear boy!" said the voice of Manners.

"What's the matter now?" asked the prefect, pausing.

"Just as a favour, you know, you might tell your mother to put a little more starch in my collars," said Manners. "I don't like 'em too stiff, but when she sends 'em back like bits of chewed tape, it's about time we got another laundress."

There were a few sniggers as Harker snorted and went away.

"Was it raining when you came in, Jack?" Fane inquired, as he nestled down.

"No, it seems to have passed over," answered Tinker. "Jolly dark, but quite warm."

"Well, if you wake up and fancy you hear forty million wireless-sets howling at once, don't go off the deep-end, for it will only be the housekeeper's cat singing a few," said Fane. "He's been in grand form lately, has Cornelius the cat. By-ee!"

"By-ee!"

Not a word had been said about the murder. Tinker and his four chums had agreed not to discuss the gruesome affair, and most of the other juniors knew nothing about it. As he closed his eyes, Tinker remembered Beilby, whose cot was still untenanted. He knew that Beilby was not renowned for his courage, and at Calcroft it was a serious offence to be absent after lights-out without special permission.

(*Another long instalment of this absorbing narrative next week.*)

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 32. Feb. 20, 1926

SECTION A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

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.

SECTION C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) ..... to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME) .....

(ADDRESS) .....

.....

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of the THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

My dear Leagueites,

Contrary to expectations, I have been able to publish in this issue the first article on "Careers for Boys," reference to which I made in my Chat last week. The author of these articles, Mr. A. C. Horth, has had considerable experience in the training of boys in arts and crafts, both in a professional capacity and through the medium of his pen. His work has brought him in close contact with the requirements and conditions obtaining in a great variety of trades and callings. Indeed, Mr. Horth is pre-eminently qualified to write on this subject, and I trust that the sound advice contained in these series of articles will prove to be invaluable to those of my readers who are faced with the difficult and momentous problem of choosing a career.

Books on the subject of careers have, I know, appeared in the past, and are, no doubt, still available. But conditions have changed very rapidly in the last few years, especially in skilled trades, which, for some reason or other, do not receive the attention they deserve. Mr. Horth, however, is giving special prominence to trades of every kind, though other callings will not be neglected.

The labour market, like any other market, is regulated by the inexorable law of supply and demand. It is well to recognise this fact at the outset, unless one is possessed of ample, independent means. We cannot all be lawyers, doctors, actors or even journalists. But any healthy boy of average intelligence can master a trade. You may be ambitious to attain public distinction in one or other of the arts, to make a fortune in business, or to become a Member of Parliament, but whatever may be your ultimate goal, make sure, at least, of a living by learning a trade.

In choosing a trade or calling, the boy of to-day needs more than ever an expert to advise him. That is because nowadays there are so many points to consider both as regards the conditions prevailing in any particular trade selected and the suitability of the individual for that trade. During the last five years many trades have suffered severely through the financial difficulties arising from the Great War. But we are now assured by no less an authority than Mr. McKenna that a big revival in trade generally is in sight. This will mean more work for everyone and bigger opportunities for the skilled worker.

Therefore, as Members of the St. Frank's League, I trust that you will take full advantage of the articles specially written for your benefit, that you may be prepared for the prosperous days that are shortly to come.

With very best wishes,

Your old friend,

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

More Names and Addresses of Organising Officers.

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