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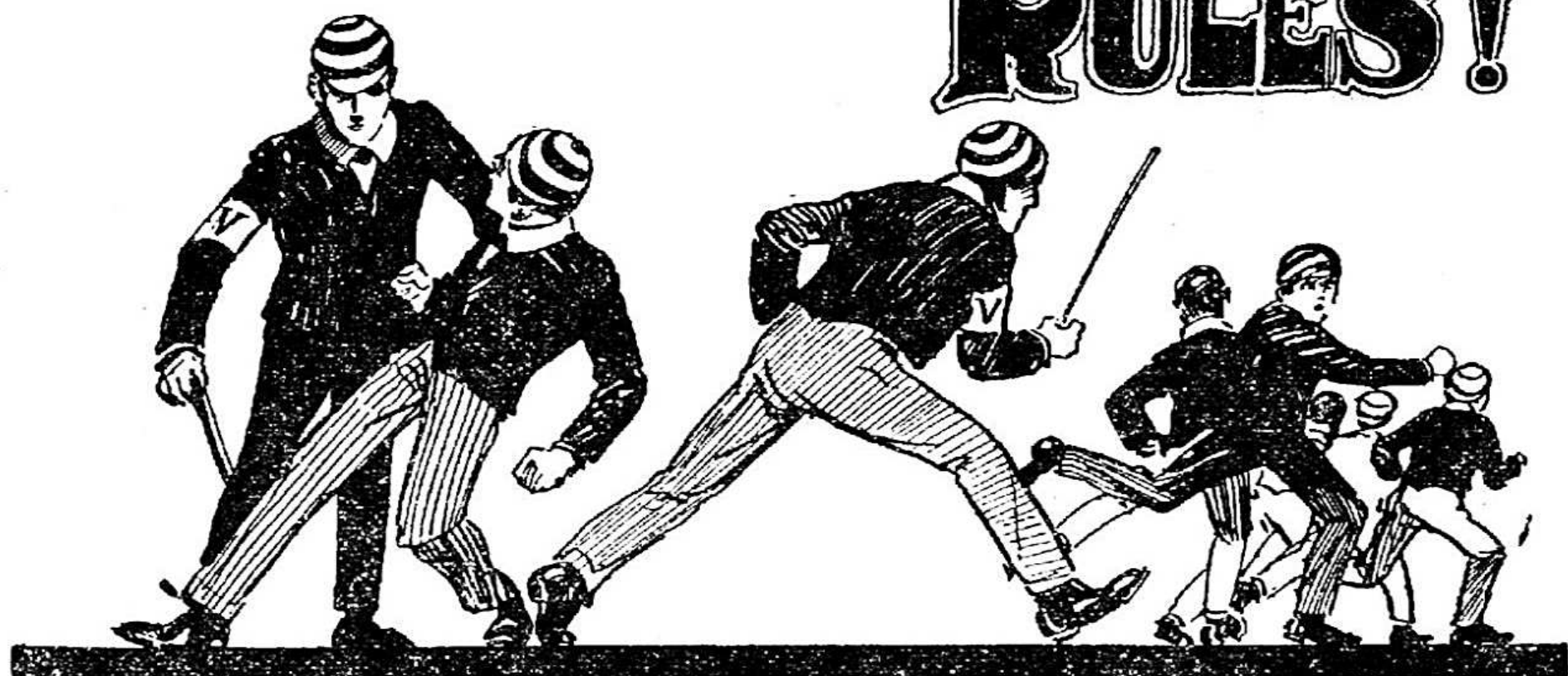
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THE SCHOOL WITHOUT RULES!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's have a lively time in this rollicking long complete story. No rules and no punishments at the school. The cads take full advantage of it—until the Vigilance Committee step into the lime-light, and then things really begin to hum!

CHAPTER 1.

ON THEIR HONOUR.

"STOP!" commanded Handforth sternly. His voice was so imperative that Church pulled up with a jerk. He looked round, and saw that Handforth was wearing a very severe expression.

"What's the matter?" asked Church, staring.

"What were you going to do?" demanded Handforth.

"To fetch that ball, of course."

"Then don't!" retorted Handforth curtly.

Church looked at McClure, then he looked at Irene Manners, then he looked at Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers. After that he gave a long stare at Edward Oswald Handforth.

"Mad!" he said briefly.

The famous chums of Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, were standing just inside Big Arch, and the three Moor View girls had been chatting with them.

A slight shower had come on, and they were sheltering in the archway. Irene, tossing a hockey ball up and down, had let it fall, and it had rolled through into Inner Court. The girls were on their way back to their own school after some hockey practice.

"Why don't you want Church to fetch that ball, Ted?" asked Irene curiously. "I suppose you know I asked him to get it for me?"

"I'm sorry!" said Handforth firmly. "At any ordinary time, Irene, I'd have fetched it myself, but Inner Court is out of bounds, and that ball's got to stop there until we get permission from a master."

"But—but you howling ass, it's only a couple of yards past the end of the Arch!" said Church indignantly. "You're not going to say that I shall be out of bounds if I take one stride into Inner Court, and one stride back?"

"I can't help it—you've got to let that ball stay there!" replied Handforth inexorably.

"You rotter! If you dare to set one foot out of bounds like that, you'll be dishonouring yourself!"

Church reeled into McClure's arms.

"Water!" he said feebly. "No, brandy! Water's not strong enough to revive me. Oh, my hat! What the dickens will he say next?"

Handforth gazed at him witheringly.

"When you've done acting the goat perhaps you'll explain the reason for this exhibition?" he asked. "I'm going to ask you a plain question, and I shall expect a plain answer. Is Inner Court out of bounds, or is it not out of bounds?"

"Well, strictly speaking, I suppose——"

"No strictly speaking!" interrupted Handforth. "Is it out of bounds—yes, or no?"

"Yes, you chump!" said Church exasperated.

"And is everybody at St. Frank's pledged, on his honour, to stick to all the rules and regulations?"

"Of course he is, but——"

"There you are, then," said Handforth, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Irene, but that ball will have to stay there. I'm not going to let Church dishonour himself for any ass—even for you!"

"Isn't he wonderful at compliments?" murmured Doris, with a chuckle.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I didn't mean——"

"That's all right, Ted," smiled Irene. "It's a good thing we understand you. But don't you think it's rather going to extremes to obey the rules so strictly? Surely there's no harm in fetching that ball?"

"No harm at all," put in McClure, grinning. "Why, before this new order came in Handy would have cheerfully gone right up to the Head's front steps to fetch a hockey ball for you, Irene!"

"But that was different!" put in Handforth quickly. "Under the old system, if I had been spotted I should have been hustled out, or given fifty lines, or something. But there aren't any punishments nowadays. And every chap is placed on his honour to stick to the rules. So if either of you idiots go and fetch that ball, you'll have to account to me afterwards."

It was just like Handforth to carry things to absurd extremities. He was perfectly right, of course—but in this instance there could have been no question of dishonour if Church had recovered the ball. Inner Court was out of bounds, true enough, but it was a recognised thing that fellows could venture there with impunity if they kept to the School House side, and behaved sedately.

But Handforth's attitude was merely one example of the adoption of the Honour System at St. Frank's. Although the other boys were not so extreme, they were, nevertheless, affected in just the same way. Among all the decent fellows—seniors and juniors—the experiment was proving to be a remarkable success.

Professor Grant Hudson, of Hayle University, U.S.A., an eminent American psychologist, was the Headmaster's guest just

now, and it was he who had first mooted this honour scheme. Indeed, he was prolonging his visit, at the Head's invitation, in order to study the results at first hand.

It was rather a revolutionary innovation for a great British public school, and at first Dr. Stafford had been very opposed to it. However, as the Governors were perfectly willing to risk the test, he had at last permitted it.

And now the Old School had been under the new system for nearly a week. There was nothing complicated in it. Indeed, its simplicity was obvious. Every boy in the school was placed on his honour to behave decently and rationally. In a way, St. Frank's was now without any rules.

A school without rules!

It seemed incredible—indeed, ridiculous. None of the boys were obliged to get up when the rising bell clanged out, or to attend lessons, or to turn up for calling-over, or to do the hundred and one other things that they were ordinarily supposed to do. They could ignore them all, and no punishments would result. They were simply on their honour to do the right thing. It was left to them.

That was the long and the short of it.

The boys, from the smallest fag to the most lordly Sixth-Former, knew the rules and regulations by heart. These latter were no longer enforced. And so, it was perfectly true to describe St. Frank's as a school without any rules. But although they were not enforced, every boy knew well enough that he was on his honour to heed them.

Professor Hudson maintained that every decent boy would strive his hardest to uphold the honour of the school. The others—those who knew not the meaning of honour—weren't worthy of St. Frank's in any case. So, in the professor's opinion, the system was bound to work for the general good.

At first, the Head had received a violent shock. For the whole school had temporarily lost its head over the sudden independence. With every boy his own master, St. Frank's had lost its balance. And during the first day of the experiment it had seemed that nothing but a drastic return to the old order of things would effect a cure.

However, several days had gone by since then, and Dr. Stafford was compelled to admit that his first impression had been wrong. Professor Hudson was more than delighted with the way things were going.

For it was now becoming manifest that the great majority of the boys were adhering to the school rules with a tenacity that they had never before exhibited. Consultations with the Housemasters and Form-masters had elicited the gratifying facts that the greater majority of boys were better behaved, better disciplined, and far more anxious to heed the rules—those rules that could be totally ignored if they so desired.

And the reason, of course, was clear.

Every fellow with a keen sense of honour respected his pledge. Formerly, if a rule was broken, he could admit his offence, and receive

a nominal punishment. But now it was different. If he committed an offence there was no punishment—he had only to answer to his own conscience. And to break a rule meant to dishonour himself. And even in the small things, the effect was the same. Hundreds of minor misdemeanours that were daily committed under the old standards were now conspicuous by their absence. It simply wasn't done. When the fellows were on their honour, they had to think twice before doing this, or doing that. But Edward Oswald Handforth was probably the only fellow who carried the matter to such needless extremes. But then, Handforth had always been an extremist, and this sort of thing was expected of him.

Satisfactory as the general situation was, however, there was one disturbing feature. While the Upper School was carrying on normally, the Lower School was troubled by a minority of juniors who set the old rules and regulations at defiance, and who frankly boasted that they were out to enjoy themselves.

Why should they trouble to attend class, or go to bed at the right hour, or get up when the rising bell clanged? They weren't obliged to do these things—there weren't any punishments if they didn't—and so they took full advantage of their unusual liberty. They not only took advantage of it, but they abused it.

For they were on their honour just as much as the others. Only they apparently possessed no sense of honour. Otherwise, they couldn't have stilled their consciences.

This was the type of fellow that the Headmaster had been afraid of—the element that would probably cause the experiment to be a complete failure. But the Head did not know that certain undercurrents were already at work—particularly in the Junior School.

The bulk were conforming splendidly to the novel system—but what of the rotters, and what of the weaklings. And there is a certain proportion of suchlike boys in every great public school, much as their presence is undesirable. And while human nature is what it is, there will always be this minority.

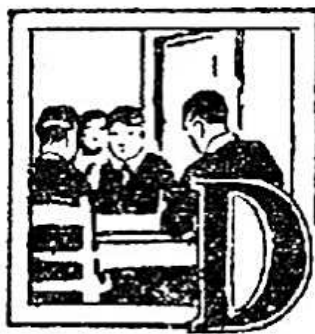
St. Frank's, perhaps, was more fortunate than some schools. But yet any great college, when placed on its honour, would probably rise nobly to the occasion. The spirit of honour is embedded firmly in the warp and woof of the public schoolboy's texture.

At St. Frank's, the deliberately dishonourable fellows were led by Bernard Forrest, of Study A, and they did not number more than a mere handful. The thoughtlessly dishonourable—that is to say, those who were disregarding the rules by reason of their weakness—included such irresponsibles as Teddy Long and Arthur Hubbard, of the Remove, and Frederick Marriott and Enoch Snipe, of the Fourth. These latter simply hadn't enough brains to appreciate their responsibility. But Forrest & Co., of course, were viciously and openly setting themselves out to make the most of their freedom.

But these few boys had to be dealt with.

And how? That was the problem which was worrying the headmaster at the moment. With all punishments abandoned, how could they be controlled? They had no idea of the first essential of honour, and so they would inevitably run wild, and bring disgrace upon themselves and upon the school.

Dr. Stafford didn't know that the problem was being grappled with by able hands, and that measures were even then being formulated under his very nose!



CHAPTER 2.

THE REMOVE DECIDES TO ACT!

DICK HAMILTON, the popular captain of the Remove, paused in the Ancient House lobby as he encountered Willy Handforth, of the Third.

"Ah, just the man I wanted to see!" said Dick.

Willy nodded.

"Take a good look, because I'm in a hurry," he said briskly. "Satisfied?"

"Don't be a young ass," frowned Dick. "Where's your major?"

"Do you expect me to produce him from under my arm, or something?" asked the cheery skipper of the Third. "Why should you come to me with your riddles? How should I know where my major is? Besides, what's the idea of asking anybody?"

"I want to find him, of course."

"Nothing easier," said Willy calmly. "If you want to find my major, you've only got to stand quite still, and listen."

"You silly young sweep—"

"Fact!" asserted Willy. "It doesn't matter what part of the school you're in, you've only got to stand still and listen, and you'll locate him. Why go to the trouble of searching everywhere, and asking people?"

"We'll test this!" grinned Dick Hamilton. "Just to prove that you're wrong!"

They stood there, perfectly still, and Willy's face was instantly illuminated by triumphant smiles. Dick Hamilton had the grace to give a start.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I can hear him!"

"That's the first step," nodded Willy. "Now you've got to trace where the noise comes from. My dear chap, I've done this scores of times! He's outside somewhere—up the Triangle, I should imagine. Let's listen again."

They moved towards the outer door, and stood still.

"It's no good you arguing, Walter Church, I've made up my mind!" came Handforth's voice. "If you go another step, I'll slaughter you!"

Willy turned, and shrugged his shoulders. "Elementary, my dear Watson!" he observed. "Big Arch."

"I believe you knew all the time!" said Dick Hamilton indignantly.

"Honest Injun, I didn't!" declared Willy. "I just came out of the cloakroom, and I haven't been out of doors for half an hour. But I'm always finding Ted like that, you know. You try it next time. It never fails."

Willy passed on, and Dick went outside and found that the rain had stopped. It was just about tea-time, and the dusk of the November day was drawing in rapidly. Dick went under the shelter of Big Arch, and doffed his cap to the girls.

"By Jove, I didn't know you were here!" he said as he shook hands. "What about some tea with us? You mustn't say you can't stop——"

"We've been saying it for the last ten minutes," interrupted Mary. "In fact, we ought to have gone long ago. Sorry, Dick, but we faithfully promised Miss Bond that we would be in by a quarter-past five, and we didn't really mean to call here at all."

"In that case, I'll let you off," said Dick reluctantly. "You can't break your word to your headmistress. But may I inquire the idea of standing in this draughty spot?"

"Irene's hockey ball has rolled into Inner Court," said Doris sweetly. "Perhaps you'll fetch it, Dick?"

"Certainly," replied Dick promptly.

He ran through the Arch, and Handforth let out a roar.

"Stop!" he thundered.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick. "What on earth——"

"You mustn't fetch that ball!" said Handforth curtly. "You know jolly well that Inner Court is out of bounds!"

Dick Hamilton shook his head sadly.

"You can't help it, poor chap!" he said pityingly.

He recovered the ball, and handed it to Irene. And all the girls broke into a peal of laughter as they observed the expression on Handforth's face.

"You deliberately broke bounds!" said Edward Oswald fiercely. "You've dishonoured yourself, Richard Hamilton!"

"That's all right, old man," said Dick soothingly. "I'm happy to possess a sense of proportion, you know, and I don't think I shall lose any sleep over this frightful crime. If I don't do anything more dishonourable than that in my life, I shall be sprouting wings before I'm fifty."

But Handforth was shocked.

"That doesn't make any difference," he argued. "We're all on our honour, and I'm surprised at you for looking at a sacred trust so lightly. And you the junior captain! Dick Hamilton, I've a good mind to smash you!"

"Then we shall both be smashed," said Dick, grinning.

"Do you think I'm afraid——"

"Chuck it, you chump!" said Dick, patting Handy on the back. "When will you learn to treat trifles as trifles? I came out here to find you—to tell you that you'll be

wanted in Study C at six o'clock sharp—Going, Mary?"

"We must," said Mary Summers. "It's struck five already."

The girls said good-bye, and hurried off. And Dick Hamilton went indoors with Handforth & Co. The mighty leader of Study D was still looking severe.

"What's that you were saying just before the girls went?" he asked. "Some rot about me coming to Study C at six."

"It's an important meeting, and you'll be wanted," replied Dick.

"And what if I say I won't come?" asked Handforth coldly.

"In that case, I expect you'll stay away," replied the skipper. "Perhaps it'll be better, on the whole," he added thoughtfully. "This meeting is only for the important fellows in the Form."

Handforth started.

"Why, you rotter, are you trying to keep me out of an important meeting?" he demanded indignantly.

"You said you won't come, so we'll leave it at that," replied Dick, with a nod. "Right you are, Handy—we shan't expect you at six. It's just as well to understand these things."

He hurried off, and Handforth gave a roar.

"Hi!" he shouted. "If you think you can shut me out——"

"You fathead, he was only kidding you!" grinned Church.

"Kidding me?" gasped Handforth.

"Of course he was," said McClure. "My hat! Isn't it easy to pull some chaps' legs? Let's go and have tea, and get it over well before six. I've heard rumours of this meeting all day, and we don't want to miss it."

They went to Study D, and Handforth closed the door, while Church and McClure briskly set about the necessary preparations.

"Rumours?" said Handforth absently. "You've heard rumours, Mac? That's rummy! I haven't heard anything."

"What you don't hear, old man, would fill a free library," said Church, as he poked up the fire. "Still, we needn't argue about it. If you want to make yourself useful, come here and toast the scones."

Handforth grumbled, but he agreed—only to have the scones wrenched out of his keeping by McClure, who had fastidious objections to the scones being pushed against the sooty bars of the grate.

In order to be on the safe side, Handforth hustled his chums over tea, and then hustled them into Study C a clear ten minutes before the appointed time. Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were just clearing away their own tea-things.

"Well, we're here!" said Handforth briskly.

"You're a minute late," grinned Watson, glancing at the clock.

"Late?" said Church. "I thought we were ten minutes too soon!"



"Out of bed, you rotters!" said Handforth curtly, then he turned to the other members of the Vigilance Committee. "Officers, seize Arthur Hubbard and hold him in an inverted position while I make use of this cane!"

"So you are, for the meeting," replied Tommy. "But Dick said that you might be expected at ten-to. It's nine minutes-to now. It's about time you learned to be punctual!"

"You funny ass!" said Handforth tartly. "Anyhow, we're here before the others. Now, what's the meeting about? If you want a speech, I'm ready to oblige with anything you like. I'm feeling in form—"

"Then you'd better feel out of it!" interrupted Dick. "I'd better tell you at once, Handforth, that this is going to be a perfectly serious meeting, and we don't want any noise or nonsense."

There would probably have been a great deal of noise and nonsense on the spot, only Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, of the West House, happened to blow in at that moment. They were soon followed by Cecil de Valerie, Fullwood, Russell, Adams, Levi, Singleton, and one or two others. By the time they had finished coming, Study C was considerably overcrowded.

"All here?" asked Dick, at last. "You'll have to stand, most of you, because there aren't enough chairs. We're here on business, anyhow, so we can put up with a few discomforts."

"What's the meeting for?" asked De Valerie.

"Isn't it obvious?" said Reggie Pitt. "We've got to decide what to do with

Forrest and Gulliver and Hubbard and those chaps. They haven't got any idea of honour, and we've got to drive it into them. Is that the wheeze, Dick?"

"It's not a bad guess," replied Dick Hamilton, nodding.

"Why, there's nothing new in this!" said Handforth indignantly. "We've been keeping those chaps in order for days—"

"Yes, in a sort of way, we have," agreed Dick. "But only in a sort of way. I'm going to propose something more definite. An official body, organised by the Form, with fixed duties and definite powers. We've got to do this thing properly, and we're here to map out the plan of campaign."



CHAPTER 3.

ADAMS SAYS A MOUTHFUL!

HANDFORTH looked eager and excited.

"By George, that's a good idea!" he said approvingly. "As a matter

of fact, I was going to suggest something of the same sort myself. A detective force, eh? I'll be the commanding officer, and you fellows can take your orders from me! We'll keep our eyes on those dishonourable rotters, and make them toe the line. I'm pretty

keen on detective work, so it's only right that I should be the C.O. Now, I propose —"

"Hold on!" interrupted Dick. "Have we come here to hear you gassing, Handy?"

"You ass! I'm suggesting an idea——"

"Then, if it's all the same to you, you can suggest your ideas later on," said the captain firmly. "There's going to be action this evening—not talk. My proposal is to form a committee. We fellows in this room will be quite sufficient. There's no need to have too many in the affair."

"A Secret Society, eh?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"No!" snapped Dick. "What's the good of a Secret Society? This committee's got to be open, and it's got to announce its policy to the whole Form. It's only fair to warn these rotters what might happen to them if they keep up their games. The Remove has got to take this blight in both hands and grapple with it."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie Glenthorne. "A dashed fruity suggestion, laddie. But when it comes to a question of blight, to say nothing of blighters, it's a frightful sort of problem, as it were. Still, you've got the brains, Dick, old horse, so carry on."

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"Yes, it's time something was done," he agreed thoughtfully. "A certain number of fellows are dishonouring themselves every day, and doing their best to bring dishonour on the Form. Only to-day those cads of Study A missed afternoon lessons altogether. And Hubbard didn't crawl in until the second lesson was well on the way. We've got to stop that sort of thing."

"What about this morning?" asked Handforth indignantly. "At least half a dozen chaps had the nerve to come downstairs nearly an hour after breakfast was over—and they were late for morning school, too. They missed prayers altogether."

"And some of them broke a lot of other rules to-day, too," nodded Russell.

"Say, they're a bunch of cheap skates, anyway," said Adams.

"Yes, but cheap skates or not, they're in the Remove, and they've got to be dealt with," said Dick Hamilton. "We can't let these bounders bring disgrace on the Form, can we? There aren't any official punishments now, and I propose that we should form a committee to deal out swishings and things when necessary."

"That's the idea," agreed Pitt. "Every time they break a rule, we'll hand out the punishment in just the same way as the masters used to. But what can we call this committee?"

"How about the Rule Enforcement Society?" asked De Valerie.

"Not so bad," said Dick. "Not so good, either."

"What about the Band of Honour, then?" said Pitt.

"Gee!" broke in Ulysses Spencer Adams. "Say, boys, I've got a crackerjack of an

idea! We'll form a Vigilance Committee! And each guy in the committee will be a Vigilante! Isn't that the camel's elbow?"

Dick Hamilton slapped the table.

"Vigilance Committee!" he said heartily. "That's the very thing, and it describes the idea in one breath. And each fellow, as you say, Adams, will be a Vigilante. What could be more appropriate?"

"It sounds dotty to me!" said Handforth tartly.

"Why, out in the United States, they've had these Vigilance Committees by the hundred," said Adams. "They've got them now, too, I guess. If any State is overrun with crooks, and a city is shot up occasionally, the citizens get busy and form a Vigilance Committee. And every Vigilante in that city has got to hold himself ready to chase around at the first call. Gee! We've got an American idea right here in St. Frank's with the Honour System—and I guess it's sure good that we should have another American idea to enforce it."

"Too many American ideas!" said Handforth disapprovingly.

"This one is a corker," said Dick Hamilton. "In other words, Adams, you've said a mouthful. The Remove Vigilance Committee is in force from this moment. Now we've got to fix up the details."

The American boy was very pleased at the adoption of his suggestion—which was, indeed, an excellent one. Adams was very proud of the fact that St. Frank's was experimenting with an idea that could be truthfully described as trans-Atlantic. And he was very anxious for his countryman to triumph. He wanted Professor Hudson to know that St. Frank's could be trusted on its honour.

And a determined band of Vigilantes seemed likely to solve the problem. There was something rather thrilling in the very thought of it. Nobody was compelled by the school authority to obey the rules—but the delinquents would soon fall foul of the Vigilantes!

"It's a stunning idea!" declared Reggie Pitt. "We've got to appoint the officers, and fix the rules and the scale of punishments, and things like that."

"Yes, let's talk it over."

"Hear, hear!"

"And we're all Vigilantes, eh?" asked Handforth eagerly. "That means to say that we chaps will have special powers?"

"Exactly," said Dick Hamilton. "But you'd better understand, old son, that these special powers will be rigid and fixed."

"What do you mean—rigid and fixed?"

"Well, it won't be a special power of any Vigilante to punch a fellow on the nose, for example," explained Dick. "So if you catch one of these blots on the school's honour disregarding a rule, you'll have to keep yourself in check, Handy. You'll just inflict the proscribed punishment, and no more."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth warmly.

"I second Dick's motion!" said Fullwood.

"Carried!" declared Reggie Pitt promptly. "Handy, you're squashed!"

"I mean to say, blots, what?" said Archie, with a thoughtful frown. "A dashed priceless expression, Dick, old bird! Blots on the school's honour, as it were. Smudges on the sacred escutcheon, what? It wouldn't be such a dashed bad idea to call these blighters Smudges or Blots, what?"

"We're full of brains to-night," said Dick Hamilton, nodding. "Blots is the very word. Every fellow who disregards a school rule and deliberately defies the recognised authority is putting a blot on his own honour, and a bigger blot on the school's. Therefore, these fellows are Blots."

"Carried unanimously!" declared Pitt. "Blots they are!"

"This is getting interesting," grinned Fullwood. "It'll be a kind of warfare between the Vigilantes and the Blots, by the look of it."

"Exactly," agreed the skipper. "Our job will be to erase these Blots as quickly as we can—until the Junior School, at least, shows a clean sheet. And I think it might be a good idea to keep the thing to ourselves for this evening, and spring a surprise on the school to-morrow morning."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, with a grim expression. "Lots of chaps will neglect the rising-bell. I vote that we Vigilantes sweep down on them, biff them out of bed, generally smash them up, and boot them downstairs!"

Dick Hamilton looked at him pityingly.

"In that case, you can vote alone!" he said. "Don't you understand, you ram-headed ass, that this Vigilance Committee is being expressly formed to take the place of the masters? You can't imagine a master smashing a chap up, and booting him downstairs, can you?"

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded Handforth.

"We shall use stern methods of disciplinary correction," replied Dick firmly. "The Vigilance Committee has got to be a dignified institution. That's the only way in which it can be a success."

"Sure!" agreed Adams. "You said it, Dick! I guess we don't need any rough stuff on this outfit. It's an honest-to-goodness scheme, and I'm waiting to hear you guys hand out the book of rules. Oh, boy! This is sure going to be the real dope. Get busy on the ideas, Dick. Shoot, boy!"

There were several other fellows who indulged in "shooting," too, and by the time

that important meeting broke up, the Remove Vigilance Committee was an established body.

As Dick Hamilton had said, it was the committee's duty to see that the school rules were respected. There was nothing of the joke about this scheme. Every Vigilante took his work seriously—and there seemed little doubt that the "Blots" would soon be booked for a very rude awakening.

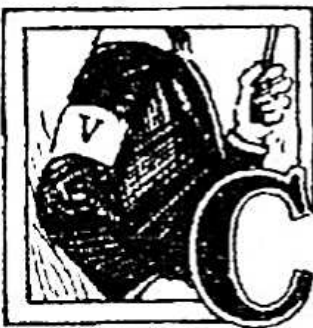
Very little was said that night, although the rest of the Remove had a shrewd idea that something was in the wind. Handforth was very mysterious, and when he was in this condition it meant that an important motion had been carried by the chiefs of the Form. It was always difficult for Edward Oswald to keep a secret—and even when he managed to hold his tongue in check, he generally gave something away by his manner.

Dick Hamilton had a long talk with John Busterfield Boots, the captain of the Fourth Form, before bed-time. And so the Fourth

Form Vigilance Committee came into being that night, too. For Boots and his immediate followers were greatly worried. There were even more Blots in the Fourth than there were in the Remove—and this Vigilance Committee idea came as a gift from the gods. The leaders of the Fourth Form were excited and eager about it.

Except for one or two late arrivals, there was nothing

particularly big that night to attend to. A few juniors had gone off to the local cinema, and had come back, quite openly and brazenly, after ten o'clock. They did not realise that this was the last time they could do such a thing with impunity.



CHAPTER 4.

THE VIGILANTES AT WORK! LANG-CLANG-CLANG.

The rising-bell sounded in the Ancient House as usual, for no alterations had been made in any of the school customs. The fellows knew what the rising-bell meant, and they were on their honour to obey it. Failure to do so meant no punishment, but it had been noticed during this last week that the majority of the boys were keener than ever to get up with alacrity.

It was the minority that had to be dealt with.

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"Now, then, you chaps—out of it!" said Handforth, as he rolled out of his own bed. "None of this laziness!"

He yanked the bedclothes off McClure, and then reached out, and stripped Church of his coverings. The two juniors sat up, glaring.

"Gimme those blankets and things!" said Church sleepily.

"Time to get up, my lad," retorted Handforth.

"But the second bell hasn't gone yet——"

"Never mind the second bell," interrupted Edward Oswald. "Do you want to dishonour your name? Do you want to be a Blot? I'm surprised at you! I'm surprised at both of you!"

"You—you hopeless idiot!" roared McClure. "It's only dishonourable if we ignore the second bell."

"Have you forgotten that you're a Vigilante?" demanded Handforth coldly.

"Eh?" said Mac, with a start. "Yes, by jingo! That's right! It's up to us to turn out, Churchy! We've got to prepare for action this morning. The Vigilance Committee has got to start work in earnest!"

There was no further demur, and Handforth & Co. washed and dressed in record time. But even then they were not the first members of the Remove to be out and about. In the corridor, they ran across Dick Hamilton and Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

"Ready?" asked Handforth. "Good! We'll go round the bed-rooms and tickle up any fellows who look like being Blots. I vote we go into Forrest's dormitory to start with."

"One of these days you'll let that impulsive nature of yours lead you into a terrible muddle, Handy," smiled Dick. "We can't do any Vigilance work yet. Everybody is allowed a full half hour to get up, even under the old rules. We must wait until the second bell has gone, and then give them another twenty minutes. We only want to punish the real Blots—the rotters who are deliberately taking advantage of the Honour System to defy the rules."

And Handforth, in spite of his impatience, was compelled to wait.

Hubbard and Long were startled when the door of their dormitory opened abruptly, and four grim-looking fellows marched in. The full time limit had been allowed—and any junior still in bed at this hour, under normal conditions, would have been hustled out by a prefect with the cane.

And Hubbard and Long were not merely ordinary laggards, but they were still in bed. They had made no attempt whatever to get up. But now they sat up in bed, and stared. There was something impressive in the appearance of these new arrivals.

"What's the idea of this?" asked Hubbard blankly.

The four Vigilantes were Handforth & Co. and Clive Russell. They were all looking grim, and each one wore an armlet. The armlet was wide and deep, and there was a big "V" on the outside of it.

"Out of those beds, you rotters!" said Handforth curtly. "You know well enough that you ought to have been down by this time——"

"What's it got to do with you?" snapped Hubbard. "We're our own masters nowadays, and we can get up when we please."

"That's just where you make a little mistake," retorted Handforth. "The Remove Vigilance Committee is at work, and every fellow who deliberately breaks a rule is going to be punished according to the committee's schedule. Officers, seize Arthur Hubbard, and hold him in an inverted position while I make use of this cane!"

"You—you fatheads!" roared Hubbard, in alarm. "What's all this rot about a Vigilance Committee, or whatever you call it? We're not going to take any notice of your silly orders, Handforth!"

"Not likely!" bleated Teddy Long fearfully.

Handforth frowned.

"Do your duty, officers!" he said briefly.

He apparently included himself in the order, for he assisted his companions in hauling Hubbard out of bed. The scared junior was soon standing in the middle of the room, in his pyjamas.

"Failure to heed the rising-bell—six swishes with the cane," said Handforth curtly. "That's Rule No. 5 of the Vigilance Committee. Where's the cane? Church, hand over the swisher!"

"Lemme go!" howled Hubbard wildly. "I'm not going to let you chaps swish me! I've got a right to do as I please! You can't touch me! If you lay a finger on me——"

They not only laid a finger on him, but turned him face downwards on the bed, and there he was securely held.

"I'd like to warn you, before I inflict this punishment, that it will be delivered every morning—unless you obey the school rules, and turn out within the prescribed time," said Handforth impressively. "And this order is a fixed and solemn decree of the Remove Vigilance Committee. Every fellow wearing an armlet is a fully accredited and duly appointed Vigilante. Therefore, resistance is useless, and arguing is worse. Arthur Hubbard, you are hereby sentenced to six hard swishes with the cane. If I had my way, I'd make it a punch in the eye, but that's where you're lucky!"

Swish!

"Stop!" howled Hubbard. "Ow! I'll get up with the rising-bell to-morrow morning, you rotters! Lemme alone——"

Swish!

Slowly and deliberately the six cuts were delivered, and Hubbard writhed and yelled in vain. The caning was administered on a tender spot, and Teddy Long crouched in his bed, all hunched up, and too utterly terrified to make any break for freedom. And he probably knew that any such break would be frustrated, even if he made it.

"That's settled one Blot," said Handforth grimly. "Now for the other!"

Teddy Long gave a terrific screech of alarm. In fact, his cries were so fearsome—even before he was touched—that Fenton of the Sixth looked in, accompanied by William Napoleon Browne, the Fifth Form skipper.

"Murder, I fear, Brother Fenton," said Browne gravely.

"What's all this noise?" demanded the Captain of St. Frank's.

"Save me!" howled Teddy Long. "These—these rotters are going to swish me!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Fenton. "Have you made all this row without being touched?"

Handforth turned and frowned.

"I'll trouble you, Edgar Fenton, to clear out and mind your own business," he said curtly. "I don't want to be rude, but I'd like to tell you that you're shoving your nose where it's not wanted. This is a Remove affair!"

Fenton, who understood Handforth, grinned.

"Just getting these young sluggards out of bed, eh?" he said. "More power to your elbow, old man! They need tickling up, the disgraceful scamps. These are the fellows who are bringing St. Frank's into disrepute."

"They're Blots!" said Russell firmly. "The Remove Vigilance Committee has decided to call all the fellows of this type by that name. They're blotting the school's honour, and they've got to be dealt with drastically."

"By all appearances, this is a highly diverting entertainment," said Browne, with approval. "The Remove Vigilance Committee strikes me as being one of those bright spots in a drab and mediocre world. But for the fact that my own Form is already well controlled by an iron hand—to wit, my own—I would adopt this scheme with a yelp of enthusiasm."

"Help!" moaned Long. "They're going to swish me, I tell you!"

"Good!" said Fenton. "Go ahead. We'll watch."

Teddy's last hope vanished. Fenton was the head prefect—and he was ready to stand by and watch this assault! He did, too. And as the six strokes were sent hissing down upon Teddy's anatomy, the sneak of the Remove managed to maintain a stoical silence. He managed this because Church and McClure pushed his head firmly into a pillow. Otherwise, Teddy's stoicism would have been a dubious quantity.

The Vigilantes retired, and the two unhappy Blots were left to themselves.

"Oh!" moaned Long, as he staggered about. "I'm hurt! Those rotters have made me smart until I'm all dizzy. I shan't get up now!" he added viciously. "I'm going to bed again—"

"You silly young idiot!" snapped Hubbard. "If you do that, they'll come in and give you another dose—and they'll probably make it ten next time! These chaps are out for blood! Our game is rumbled!"

"But—but they're only Remove fellows, the same as us!" muttered Long.

"Yes, but the rotters have formed them-

selves into a committee, and I expect Hamilton is at the head of it," said Hubbard. "And it's no good expecting a prefect or a master to help us, because they'll approve of this giddy committee! We're dished! Unless we stick to the rules, the same as the rest, we shall be dropped on."

"Oh, my goodness!" said Teddy Long miserably.

He absentmindedly sat down on the edge of his bed, and then leapt a clean yard into the air, howling wildly. It was a certain proof that the Vigilantes had administered the punishment effectively.

Further along the corridor, there were other unhappy sufferers. Forrest and Gulliver and Bell, for example, had all received a swishing at the hands of six Vigilantes. They were fuming with rage, and full of apprehension for the possible developments of this unexpected innovation. For Forrest & Co. had been in the habit of doing very much as they pleased with impunity. They had about as much idea of honour as a trio of tadpoles—as Handforth caustically put it—and they had been particularly active at night. This was one reason for their sluggishness in the morning.

"The silly fools!" said Forrest harshly. "They can get up to these tricks if they like—but they're not going to prevent me from doing as I like."

"What about our arrangement to go to that roulette club again to-night?" asked Bell, as he dressed himself with extreme care.

"We're going—and those Vigilantes can boil themselves!" snapped Forrest. "That cad, Fullwood, was one of the chaps who held us down," he added viciously. "By gad, I hate him more than ever! I'll make him suffer, too!"

But all the Blots were talking in very much the same strain, in various dormitories, and in every House. They were startled and alarmed to find that while they were safe from any official interference, they were now faced with an even more drastic form of punishment!



CHAPTER 5.

MAKING THEM SIT UP!

Y the time breakfast was over, the entire Junior School was talking about the exploits of the Vigilantes.

They had sprung a surprise on the school, and every would-be Blot was now in a state of nervous tension. A number of fellows had got into the habit of dawdling into the classrooms just as they pleased—sometimes half an hour late, and sometimes they wouldn't turn up at all. These misguided youths regarded the policy as an expression of their independence. They were their own masters, so why shouldn't they do as they pleased? The fact that they were on their honour to

behave as though the rules were still in force, carried no weight with them.

But this morning these fellows were thinking—hard.

Some of them had got up at the right hour, but they had heard the reports of what had happened to the sluggards. And if a Blot got six swishes from the Vigilantes for being up late, how many swishes would they get for neglecting to go into lessons? It was a problem, and not many of the juniors felt like putting it to the test.

In fact, the Vigilance Committee had created such an impression of awe throughout the Junior School that when morning lessons began there wasn't a single absentee. This was an unexpected triumph, and even the Vigilantes themselves were astonished. They had not realised the full extent of the terror they had instilled into the vicious and the weak.

Handforth was quite upset. The punishment for playing truant was ten swishes and five hundred lines. And the Vigilance Committee meant to enforce this punishment, too—just as though they were authorised masters. They felt that it was up to them to make the Honour System a complete success. Before they had done, they would have these Blots fully alive to the St. Frank's Code!

It happened to be Armistice Day, too, and some of the juniors were talking about getting up some celebrations for the evening. Why not have a big display of fireworks, as they had on Guy Fawkes's Day? Why not have a real good time?

But directly after morning lessons, when rumours of these plans reached Dick Hamilton's ears, he called a meeting of the Vigilance Committee, and it was promptly decided to put down any attempt to hold a celebration. Nobody had forgotten what had happened on Guy Fawkes Day! And the Vigilantes were determined that there should be no repetition of that unfortunate affair.

Within half an hour notices were posted up in the Ancient House and the West House:

"NOTICE!

"Under no circumstances will any parties be allowed to insult Armistice Day by rowdy behaviour. Every member of the Remove must be within gates at the appointed hour this evening, and not a single firework must be discharged. Any defiance of these rulings will be dealt with promptly and strongly.

"By Order,

"REMOVE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE."

So it was becoming more and more evident that this new power at St. Frank's was no myth. It was an active force, and one that meant to apply its strength with whole-hearted efficiency. After all, Armistice Day was hardly the occasion for rowdyism, and St. Frank's celebrated it quietly and peacefully—by order of the Vigilantes!

And throughout the day, in many other directions, the Blots were taken in hand, and

dealt with fairly and squarely. The punishment for any given offence was exactly the same in all cases. And when lessons were over, the school was beginning to realise that a very different attitude must be adopted, if things were to go on peacefully. The only possible way to have perfect harmony was for every fellow to obey the rules strictly and rigidly.

So the school without any rules became a school with very stern rules!

And these very stern rules were enforced by the boys themselves! St. Frank's was on its honour, and the Vigilantes were pledged to rope in all the Blots who were trying to besmirch the Old School's fair name.

"It's a huge success, this committee idea," declared Handforth, just before tea. "I hear that the Fourth-Formers have been busy all day, too. They were full of Blots over there, but the beggars have been scared into submission already. It only shows there's nothing like drastic measures. I've always said it, and now I'm proved to be right."

"Good old Ted!" said Willy, who happened to be passing.

"Yes, and you could do with a Vigilance Committee in your Form!" said his major darkly.

"Don't you believe it," replied Willy. "I've got the Third well in hand, thanks. But, look here, Ted, don't you be so sure about your success. Mark my words, it's only a flash in the pan."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "What do you know, anyhow?"

"Not much, but what there is of it is good," replied Willy coolly. "And you Vigilantes had better look out."

"You young chump, we've got these Blots scared stiff!"

"Of course you have—it's only what might have been expected," replied Willy. "You've taken them by storm, and they're sort of paralysed. They've been doing their tricks openly, don't forget. But now that they know what to expect, they'll try to dodge you. Within two or three days you'll have to be busier than ever. So don't kid yourself that all the dishonourable bounders are laid low."

"There's something in what he says, Handy," declared Fullwood, who had heard Willy's wise warning. "And I think we had better be particularly careful to-night. Some of the chaps might get busy after lights-out—when we're supposed to be in bed, and asleep. They'll be safe from the Vigilantes then, and they've got nothing to fear from the masters, because there aren't any punishments."

Handforth looked grim.

"We'll deal with the beggars," he said firmly. "If necessary, we'll sit up half the night, and go out searching for them."

Church grinned.

"That would be a fine idea, wouldn't it?" he asked. "Why, as far as the rules and regulations are concerned, we should be just as bad as the Blots!"

"By George! I hadn't thought of that!"



Fullwood dragged Forrest across the floor and bundled the trussed junior into the empty cupboard. "I think you'll do there!" Fullwood said with a grin. "I'll lock you in, just to make sure!" He was determined to stop Forrest going to the village gambling club that night.

"The Vigilantes can only operate in legal hours, and within bounds—that's one of the strict rulings, as you ought to know," said Church. "Well, let's go along to Study D and have some tea."

Fullwood had gone to his own study in the meantime, and he found Clive Russell, his study mate, looking rather excited. The Canadian junior had made no attempt to prepare the meal.

"I say, Ralph, do you mind if I buzz off?" he asked eagerly. "I've just been getting ready. I'm due for tea at the River House School at half-past five. I had an invitation over the 'phone!"

"It didn't include me, by any chance?"

"Well, no," said Clive. "You see, they've got a couple of Canadian fellows there, and they're having some other Canadian friends down, so they invited me. A sort of Armistice Day affair, you know. Nobody but Canadians admitted, sort of thing."

"Good man! Go and enjoy yourself," replied Fullwood heartily. "And don't forget you're a Vigilante," he added, raising a warning finger. "So no larks—and be back in time for calling-over."

"I don't promise that," replied Clive. "I'm going to ask Mr. Stokes for a permit until bed-time—so I shall be all set. See you later, Ralph, old man."

He went off, and Fullwood thought no more about that little party until bed-time. In fact, he had been having rather a busy time, for the Vigilantes had found several jobs to be done. And when the bell clanged out, notifying that it was time to go to bed, the Remove Committee congratulated itself upon a highly successful day. Not that their duties were yet over.

Handforth and a party of fellow Vigilantes—Church, McClure, De Valerie and Somerton—went on a tour of inspection. The idea was to see that everybody had come up to bed, in obedience to the summons. Any laggards would be dealt with promptly.

Handforth looked into Fullwood's room casually, expecting to find it empty—for both Fullwood and Russell were "V's" themselves. But Fullwood was there, and he was looking rather worried. He had made no attempt to get undressed.

"Russell's on the job, I suppose?" asked Handforth.

"I don't think so," said Fullwood uncomfortably.

"But he's a Vigilante——"

"Yes, I know; but he went out this evening, and had a pass until bed-time," replied Fullwood. "I can't understand it. I waited for him until the last minute, but he didn't turn up."

"What!" said Handforth grimly. "By George! Did you hear that, you chaps? Russell's a Vigilante, and he's had the nerve to stay out beyond the limit of his pass! When he comes in, we'll drop on him and deliver six swishes before he can open his mouth!"

"And that, I suppose, is your idea of a fair trial?" asked De Valerie.

"There can't be any question of a fair trial," retorted Handforth. "He's failed in his duties, and he'll have to be discharged from the committee. What's more, he's a Blot. I thought better of that Canadian chap!"

"Don't talk rot!" growled Fullwood. "He's probably been delayed—might have had an accident, or something. Anyhow, I'm jolly sure he wouldn't deliberately exceed his pass without a perfect excuse."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Church and McClure. "Russell's all right."

"That's all very well," said Handforth. "But this is a very black case. It's past bed-time, and Russell isn't here. I'll make it my business to punish him to the full limit as soon as he arrives. And it's your duty, Fullwood, as a Vigilante, to report the exact hour and the exact minute."

Fullwood grunted.

"You needn't be afraid—I'll make a report," he replied. "But I'm sure that Russell isn't to blame. In any case, he'll probably be in within a minute or two."

And Handforth and his men went out on further official business.

"Well, let's forget him," suggested Somerton gently. "There seems to be a bit of trouble further along the corridor."

"Trouble?" said Handforth briskly. "Come on!"

He hurried down the passage, and found a couple of Vigilantes arguing with Bernard Forrest and his two cronies. One glance was sufficient for Handforth. Forrest & Co. were fully dressed, and it was clear that they had made no attempt to prepare for bed.

"You can all buzz off!" Forrest was saying. "You can mind your own business, and I'll mind mine. So the sooner you get away from that door, the better."

Handforth pushed his way forward.

"What's this?" he said sharply. "Are you trying to tell the Vigilantes what they're to do and what they're not to do?" he asked.

"I don't care a snap for the Vigilantes," replied Forrest sneeringly. "You've got no authority to impose your rotten rules on anybody. I'm going to do as I please—and you and your comic opera playmates can go to the dickens!"

"Why, you—you——"

"We're our own masters now, and if I like to go out of doors now, or at any other hour of the night, I'm going!" continued Forrest savagely. "So you needn't think you can intimidate me with your tomfoolery."

This sort of talk was decidedly rash, and Gulliver and Bell were alarmed. But Forrest was thoroughly angry. And he was the owner of a quick temper. At such times he was inclined to let himself go—and it generally happened that the results were disastrous to himself.

"Tomfoolery!" gasped Handforth. "Comic opera playmates! By George! Did you hear him, you fellows? This—this smudge! This blob! This giddy Blot! Talking to us as though we were a lot of infants!"

"Ten swishes!" said De Valerie firmly.

"Ten fiddlesticks!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to give this rotter the hiding of his life!"

"You'll get out of my bed-room!" shouted Forrest hotly. "If you don't want to be compared to infants, you shouldn't act like infants! All this kiddish stuff about Vigilantes makes me sick! By what right do you come here and tell us what we shall do?"

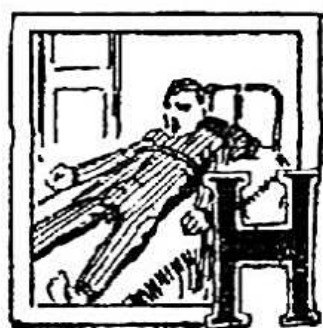
"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

"If you like to have funny ideas about your honour, you can have them—but we're entitled to have ours, too!" went on Forrest, with a snort. "I don't admit your authority, and I'm not going to be bullied by anybody. You can clear out of this room as soon as you like!"

This was sheer idiocy, and Forrest would have realised it had he been in a calmer mood.

"And—and you think you'll be allowed to break bounds?" ejaculated Handforth.

"I can do as I like!"



CHAPTER 6.

FORREST & CO. DON'T GO!

HANDFORTH was looking thoughtful and worried.

"I don't like that about Russell," he said, as they paused out in the corridor.

"Why didn't the beggar get back? I heard he went to a sort of Canadian celebration, or something. I expect he forgot all about the time."

"It's no good making conjectures, old man," put in De Valerie. "He had a pass, and that permitted him to be out until bed-time—not that a pass is necessary in these days," he added drily.

"Yes, it is," retorted Handforth. "We're all on our honour to be within the school grounds by locking-up. And if a fellow wants to stay out later, and still remain honourable, he's got to get a pass just the same as he used to. That stands to reason. Well, Russell got his pass—and he's still out!"

"And go off gambling, I suppose?" shouted Handforth fiercely. "By George! The Vigilantes have been insulted! This is no ordinary case, you chaps! We've got to deal with it specially!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Fullwood, who had joined them. "The best thing we can do is to tie them up, so that they can't escape after we've gone. We don't want to watch them all night."

Fullwood had some very keen suspicions. And so had Handforth & Co. They knew that Forrest was in the habit of visiting a kind of miniature casino in Bannington—a place where there was a roulette table, and where gambling went on largely. Lately the cads of Study A had got into the habit of visiting this place more or less openly.

If Forrest expected that he would be allowed to go off to-night, he was an optimist. The Vigilantes were grim; it took them about three minutes to come to a decision, after a whispered consultation.

In the meantime, Gulliver and Bell were growing more and more alarmed.

"You idiot!" whispered Bell anxiously. "You've only goaded them! They'll probably do something drastic now! If you think I want a swishing, you're mistaken."

"Yes, why the dickens couldn't you hold your tongue?" said Gulliver rebelliously. "We ought to have got undressed, as I first said, and pretended that we were going to sleep. Then the cads would have gone in no time."

"I can't help that!" snapped Forrest, who was already beginning to regret his anger. "These chaps make me sick and tired! I should like to know whose authority they've got for this confounded inquisition? It's a bit thick when they come and interfere with our liberty like this."

"Thick or not, they're going to do it!" muttered Bell.

The Vigilantes came into the room, and closed the door behind them.

"Undress!" said Handforth firmly.

"What?"

"You heard what I said!" snapped Handforth.

"I'll undress when I please!" snarled Forrest.

"You mean you'll undress when we please!" said Handforth. "We'll give you just ten seconds. Either you start undressing within that time, or we'll tear your clothes off for you. The same applies to you other Blots!" he added, glaring at Gulliver and Bell.

The speed with which they divested themselves of their garments was an eye-opener. But Bernard Forrest refused. He was seized by grim hands, and he resisted. It made no difference. In spite of his frantic struggles, he was forcibly undressed. Then he was bundled into his bed, and held there. Gulliver and Bell had already got into their own beds. They were wondering what was going to happen. Strictly speaking, the Vigilantes could deliver no punishment, since they had not committed a breach of the rules. It seemed that there was some other idea in the wind.

The door opened, and Fullwood appeared—having gone off a few minutes earlier. He entered, carrying some strong rope.

"Good man!" said Handforth, with satisfaction. "You're just here in time. We'll deal with Forrest first—he's more trouble than a dozen!"

"If you tie those ropes round me," panted Forrest, "I'll—I'll——"

"You'll do nothing," interrupted Handforth. "The sooner you understand that we're here for business, the better it'll be for you. The Vigilance Committee has decreed that you shan't leave your beds to-night. So we're going to tuck you away cosily and leave you safe."

All Forrest's ravings were useless. The bed-clothes were already stripped off, and Forrest, in his

pyjamas, was spreadeagled on the bed, face upwards. While two or three of the Vigilantes held him, others were busy with the ropes. A slip-knot was passed round Forrest's left ankle, and then secured to the corresponding bed-post, with a good portion of slack.

His other ankle was tethered in the same way. Then a rope was fastened round his shoulders, secured, and then carried up to the head of the bed, passing underneath the pillow.

"That's fine!" said Handforth, grinning. "If he can get out of this, he'll be a marvel. Let's have the bed-clothes, and we'll make him snug."

A moment later, Bernard Forrest had every appearance of being comfortably at rest in bed. His hands had been tied, too—each one separately, but to the same piece of rope, and this went underneath the bed, and up again.

His position was curious.

While he could move about in bed with perfect comfort, and obtain as much repose as he wished, it was a sheer impossibility for

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him to get out. He could not even get his hands together, owing to that rope which passed underneath the bed. And if he sat up he merely tightened the slack cord which passed round his chest. And if he attempted to raise his feet he would only tighten the slip-knot round his ankles, and give himself some unnecessary pain.

During this period Forrest had cooled down, and there was an evil glitter in his eyes as he lay there.

"I suppose you think this is clever?" he asked thickly.

"Jolly clever!" agreed Handforth. "It was my idea!"

"You—you awful fibber!" snorted Church. "I suggested it——"

"We don't want to argue!" said Handforth coldly. "Study D thought of the idea, anyhow, and that's just the same thing. This Blot is safely here for the night now, and we'd better get busy on his pals."

Within ten minutes Gulliver and Bell were treated in exactly the same way as their leader. They were all looking comfortable and easy when the Vigilantes were ready to go. But Bernard Forrest was white with rage.

"Good-night, my sons!" said Handforth sweetly. "Happy dreams!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chuckling softly, the juniors trooped out of the bed-room, switching off the light as they went. Bernard Forrest & Co. were foiled.



CHAPTER 7.

UNEXPECTED ALLIES!

AROLD GRAYSON, of the Fifth, blew on his hands impatiently.

"This is what comes of making an arrangement with those infernal Remove kids!" he said in a savage voice. "They're twenty minutes late already, and not a sign of the young brutes! Do they expect us to freeze out here?"

Grayson and Shaw were in the Triangle, concealed close against one of the buttresses of the Ancient House—a rendezvous which had been previously arranged. The November night was bitterly cold, for a keen wind was coming off the sea, and there was a touch of frost in the air, too.

"Perhaps those idiotic Vigilantes have been busy!" said Shaw. "You know what they've been doing all day, don't you? I think we ought to go and make a few inquiries. There's no sense in sticking here like this."

"I'll go—alone," muttered Grayson. "If we both go we may miss the young fools, and then they'll clear off to Bannington without us."

Grayson and Shaw belonged to the East House. They were the rascals of the Fifth, and although William Napoleon Browne

could control them during the daylight hours, his power was at an end now.

The pair had made an arrangement with Forrest & Co., Forrest having offered to introduce them to the roulette club. The pair couldn't go alone, for they did not even know where the place was. Hence their wait in the cold night air.

"I'm fed-up with this!" growled Shaw. "I don't believe there is any casino, as they say. It's all a yarn! They've sucked us in!"

"If they have, they'll reckon with me!" muttered Grayson.

"Why aren't they here?" went on Shaw. "The appointment was definite enough. And yet there hasn't been a sign of them. If we knew where the place was, I'd go, wouldn't you?"

"Don't ask mad questions!" said Grayson irritably. "Do you think we'd hold ourselves at the beck and call of these beastly Removites if we knew where this place was? And even if we found it we couldn't get in. We're in a nice mess, by the look of things. Burrhhh! This wind is enough to give us pneumonia! Confound the young blighters!"

Grayson decided to wait no longer.

Leaving Shaw on guard, he crept cautiously round towards the rear of the Ancient House. He knew that Forrest & Co. had arranged to get out by means of a small passage window. And, to Grayson's satisfaction, he found that the window was unlatched. He gently swung it outwards until it was fully open. Then he crept through.

Caution was very necessary. It didn't matter so much about being seen by a master—since masters, nowadays, were more or less innocuous. They could be practically ignored. But Grayson was really afraid of the Remove juniors. The thoughts of that Vigilance Committee worried him.

However, he succeeded in getting upstairs without any untoward incident. Once or twice, while creeping down the upper passage, he thought he heard whispers and shufflings, but everything seemed safe. And then at last he reached Forrest's bed-room, and he slipped in like a shadow.

All was dark.

"Hey!" he whispered cautiously. "Anybody here?"

"Thank goodness!" came Forrest's voice. "I was hoping that you'd come up, Grayson, old man. I thought we might expect you. Switch on the light, for goodness' sake. Thanks!"

Grayson stared at the beds.

"What's the idea of this?" he asked harshly. "Didn't you fellows arrange to come with me? And here you are, in bed! Of all the confounded——"

"Steady on!" growled Forrest. "Pull these bed-clothes back!"

"I'm hanged if I will!"

"Confound you, I can't move!" snapped Bernard. "Don't you understand?"

The Fifth Former at last received a glimmering of the truth, and he yanked the quilt



Fullwood pointed accusingly at the sheaf of banknotes which Clive Russell held. "Did you make that money by gambling at the club in the village?" he asked accusingly. Clive turned red—then he stuffed the notes in his pocket and walked out of the study. That was the beginning of the breach between the two old chums.

and blankets from Forrest's form. Then he stared. The nature of the Removites' predicament was apparent.

"O-ho!" breathed Grayson. "So this is the game!"

"Yes, and a measly game, too!" said Forrest savagely. "This is what those lovely Vigilantes did for us! Cut these ropes, old man. Then keep watch at the door, and we'll dress ourselves in two jiffies!"

"Right!" said Grayson.

His irritation had gone, for, of course, it was now clear that Forrest & Co. had not deliberately neglected the appointment.

To cut through the ropes was a minute's work.

And then the three Removites rapidly got dressed, while Grayson stood by the door, listening intently. But there was no sign of an alarm. The House seemed to be quiet and still. And at last the young rascals were ready.

"Everything's quiet!" murmured Grayson, turning from the door. "All fixed?"

"Yes, but I'm not sure about going out that way," replied Forrest. "If those infernal idiots are on the watch, or anything, they'll pounce on us again, and tie us up worse than before."

"Let's get out of the window!" suggested Bell.

"Hang it all, there's no need for such melodramatic gymnastics!" said Grayson irritably. "We've wasted enough time as it is. I came along the corridor, and everything was dead silent. If they try to stop us, we can smash them, can't we? Not that these two chaps are much good!" he added, with a pitying glance at Gulliver and Bell.

"Here, I say!" protested Gulliver feebly.

"Oh, we'll chance it!" growled Forrest, with a sudden air of decision.

Switching off the light, they silently opened the door and crept out, one after the other. That there was sufficient reason for their fears became evident almost at once. For voices could be distinctly heard further up the corridor—low and excited. Obviously, the Vigilantes were still active!

The would-be roysterers halted in alarm.

There was something infinitely exasperating about this situation. By the headmaster's own ruling, they were not obliged to abide by any of the school regulations, since they were on their honour to behave respectably, and to uphold the high traditions of St. Frank's. If they preferred to have their own ideas on the point, they alone were answerable. And yet these Vigilantes were enforcing the rules with a greater stringency than they had ever been enforced before! It was enough to make any "sportsman" gnash his teeth!

But they had already learned the folly of flouting the "V's."

Much as they hated that inquisitorial committee, they were obliged to acknowledge it as a powerful force. So now, instead of ignoring it as they would have liked, they paused in fear and trembling.

It seemed ages before the voices died away and all became quiet again. Then, on tiptoe, the young rascals padded towards the staircase. They were using far more caution than the old days had called for.

And at last, with relief, they reached the open passage window, and slipped out into the night. They found Shaw waiting, anxious and irritable, and decidedly chilled.

"Oh, so you've come?" he asked gruffly. "About time! It's like your nerve to keep us waiting—"

"They couldn't help it," interrupted Grayson. "Those beastly Vigilantes tied them into their beds, and I had to cut them free. These kids are getting a darned lot too powerful, if you ask me. Thank goodness we haven't got any of those crack-brained Vigilantes in the Fifth!"

"The Fifth wouldn't stand 'em!" retorted Shaw.

"Don't you be so jolly certain," growled Forrest. "If old Browne finds out you've been breaking bounds to-night, he'll start a Vigilance Committee of his own. It's a bit thick, when you come to think of it. We've got to be more careful than ever."

Grayson looked at his watch.

"Well, we can't hang about here, talking," he said impatiently. "You're going to introduce us to that club, Forrest, and we'd better get off."

"It isn't exactly a club," said Bernard. "It's a private house, just on the outskirts of Bannington, and I believe it's run by a couple of bookies who were warned off the course for something or other. They're just doing this to fill in time until they can get back to their old jobs. You know what these racing chaps are—always on the make."

"Yes, and they'll rook us, unless we're careful," said Shaw.

"No fear," denied Forrest. "Snagg is pretty thick with them, and he's given us his word that everything's all square. Besides, haven't I won quids at that roulette table? I tell you, it's money for nothing—as long as you keep your head, and work by a system."

"I've heard of these systems before," said Grayson tartly. "They work all right for a day or two, and then spring a leak. Still, I'm game to have a shot at it if you kids can introduce us to the place."

"I'll trouble you not to call us kids!" said Forrest coldly.

"Just as you like, my touchy young spark!" said Grayson, with a chuckle. "Well, are we going, or do you intend to stand here jawing all night?"

They moved off in the gloom of the chilly night.



CHAPTER 8.

BERNARD FORREST'S BAD-
LUCK.

ALPH LESLIE FULL-
WOOD stood perfectly
still.

He was just on the point of getting into bed, and he fancied he had heard a creak out in the corridor. He was alert on the instant, and an expression of relief crept into his eyes.

"At last!" he muttered. "Good!"

The first thought that jumped into his head was that Clive Russell had returned. Fullwood was very worried about the Canadian junior. Clive had definitely promised to get back by bed-time, and it was totally unlike him to break his word. It looked very much as though he had taken advantage of the new conditions to stay out late—rendered forgetful and lax, perhaps, by the influence of the Armistice Day party.

"I'll skin him!" murmured Fullwood sternly. "And he's a Vigilante, too!"

He softly opened his door, and peeped out. Just for a second, he caught a glimpse of a fully-dressed figure, and it disappeared into a dormitory on the other side of the corridor, a little further up.

"Hallo!" muttered Fullwood, astonished. "Forrest's room!"

He could not conceive Clive Russell entering that apartment, and his disappointment over the discovery that Russell was not the prowler was overshadowed by his sudden surprise. Who had just entered Forrest & Co.'s dormitory? The cads of Study A were all roped up—at least, Fullwood thought so—and he immediately jumped to the conclusion that somebody had gone in there to free them.

It was a matter that needed investigation, particularly as he, Fullwood, was a Vigilante, and sworn to certain duties. It was a fixed rule that a Vigilante should, at any hour of the day or night, inquire into any suspicious circumstance on the spot, and then give the recognised signal for help, if he needed it.

Fullwood padded along the corridor, and then paused. Perhaps it would be better to wait for a minute or two, and see what happened. And on the other side of the closed door Bernard Forrest stood, his heart in his mouth. He had heard a door open, he had seen a gleam of light, and he wondered if he had been spotted.

This was the result of forgetfulness!

Just as the cads had been on the point of starting out, Forrest had discovered that he had left all his money in his other pockets. In his haste to get out, and with Grayson egging him on all the time, he had overlooked the fact that he was donning a different suit. So he had been obliged to come back to fetch his money. The others had promised to wait for him out in the lane—with a proviso that if he was longer than five minutes they would cycle on without him, but would go slow, so that he could overtake them.

Forrest had not anticipated any trouble.

He was so accustomed to creeping about during forbidden hours that he had little fear of betraying his presence. And now, by sheer ill-luck, one of those confounded Vigilantes had opened his door! Forrest had trodden on a loose board, and he raved at himself for having done so. For he knew that loose board well—it was an old enemy—and he had been deliberately trying to avoid it when he had stepped upon it. He bitterly reflected that if he had attempted to locate the beastly thing he would have been unsuccessful.

For a full minute he stood just against his door, listening.

But there was no sound—not the slightest indication of an alarm. Reassured, he felt his way across the dormitory to his other clothes, and secured the money. Then he went back to the door, and softly opened it.

"Good!" he breathed. "I'm safe!"

The corridor was quiet and still. He edged out, closed his door, and then a form loomed up in front of him—the figure of a junior in pyjamas. Forrest stood stock still, too surprised to bolt.

"What's the game?" came Fullwood's voice, low and accusing.

"Get out of my way!" snarled Forrest, as he recognised the tone.

In that flash, he was filled with a tremendous rage. Somehow, during the last few days, his animosity against Fullwood had increased. Perhaps this was because Fullwood knew of that wretched gambling den, and because Fullwood had more than enough sense, nowadays, to leave such places strictly alone. At one time, Ralph Leslie had been almost as bad as Forrest was himself, but he had had his lesson, and he had learned it. Forrest was infuriated by the fact that he had never been able to drag the reformed junior back into his old habits. There was something rather deadening in Fullwood's unbreakable armour. And when Forrest found himself confronted by this one Removite, of all Removites, he literally "saw red."

And the position was only made the more interesting by the fact that Fullwood kept exasperatingly cool.

"I'll get out of your way when it suits me," he replied, in a soft voice. "So you've got free, have you? Just going off to indulge in some of that silly gambling? Isn't it about time you learned some sense?"

"Mind your own confounded business!" panted Forrest thickly.

"This is my business."

"You liar!" snapped Bernard. "I'm not answerable to you—"

"As a Vigilante, it is my business to put a stop to all games that might bring dishonour on the school," interrupted Fullwood. "So it's my duty to prevent you from leaving this building. And I'm going to do it!"

"By calling your beastly pals, I suppose?" sneered Forrest.

"No, you rat, I'll do the job singlehanded!" retorted Ralph Leslie icily. "Just now you

called me a liar, didn't you? You'll have to pay for that, Forrest. Put up your hands!"

"I'll see you hanged first!" said Forrest passionately.

"I've warned you—"

"I don't care a toss for your rotten warnings!"

"Don't you?" panted Fullwood, his own anger rising. "We'll see about that!"

He fairly leapt upon Bernard Forrest, and hooked one arm round his neck. He didn't mean to do any fighting out here, in the corridor. But there was an excellent place for a scrap near at hand.

Forrest, expecting a fight on the spot, was taken by surprise. Before he knew it, he was whirled across the corridor, and fairly dragged into Fullwood's dormitory. He reeled in, suddenly released, and Fullwood quietly closed the door, and switched on the light.

"Now, then!" he said calmly. "This is where you'll stay!"

"You—you—"

"It's no good raving at me, because I've got a hard heart," continued Fullwood. "I'm going to smash you for calling me a liar, Forrest, but I'll probably reserve that pleasure until to-morrow. There's no need to make any disturbance just now. But you're in this room, and here you'll stay!"

Forrest breathed hard.

"You—you fool!" he panted. "Do you think you can keep me here?"

"I don't think it—I know it!"

"Try!" snarled Forrest, beside himself.

If his rage had been great before, it was now almost uncontrollable. He had a momentary vision of his two chums, and those Fifth Form fellows, waiting out in the lane for him. His five minutes of grace had gone already, and they would probably assume that he had met with disaster. Grayson, indeed, had hinted that he might meet the Vigilantes, and be kept in. But Forrest had had to go back. What was the good of visiting a roulette club without any money? And what was the good of expecting Grayson or Shaw to lend him money? He had mooted the subject, but the Fifth Formers had jumped to the conclusion that he was broke, and was trying on a dodge. So there had been no alternative but to risk the return. And this was the result!

He glared at Fullwood balefully. Ralph Leslie was standing with his back to the door, and his very coolness only served to render his prisoner trebly infuriated. To stay here, held a captive by just one Vigilante, was too ridiculous for words.

"Get away from that door!" panted Forrest hoarsely.

Fullwood turned, and twisted the key in the lock. Then he took the key, and dropped it into the breast-pocket of his pyjamas.

"I've already told you that you're staying here," he replied calmly.

Bernard Forrest couldn't control himself any longer. He simply hurled himself at Fullwood—a very rash thing to do. For

Fullwood was an excellent boxer, and he was in tip-top condition these days. Quick as a flash, he brought his left round, and Forrest ran right on to it.

Crash!

He met that fist with his chin, and came to a full stop with such abruptness that there was something ludicrous in his attitude. He sank to the floor, his knees sagging, and rolled over.

"Well, I warned you," said Fullwood gruffly.

A glance told him that Forrest was only suffering from the effects of a mild knock-out. He was a bit dazed, and he was now at a disadvantage. Fullwood lost no time in seizing his chance.

"I think we'll put you where you'll be safe," he said grimly. "No need to disturb the other fellows, but, as a Vigilante, it's my duty to make sure that you'll be safely indoors for the night."

Bending down, he rolled Forrest over, and quickly tied his hands behind him by means of a scarf. Then he took the cord from his dressing-gown, bound his victim's ankles, and ended up by dragging Forrest across the room and bundling him into a cupboard.

"I think you'll do there," he said, grinning. "I'll lock you in, and you'll probably have an uncomfortable couple of hours. I'll have a nap in the meantime, and if you wake me up I might get a bit rough."

Forrest was recovering rapidly.

"You—you dirty rotter!" he gasped. "Wait! Just you wait! I'll be even for this, confound your beastly hide! I'll make you suffer—"

"Sorry, but it doesn't interest me," said Fullwood serenely.

He closed the cupboard, and turned the key in the lock. Then he took the door key from the pocket of his pyjamas, and a moment later he was examining Forrest's dormitory. One glance was sufficient. There was no sign of Bernard's cronies.

"After all the trouble we took, too," murmured Fullwood regretfully, as he examined the cut ropes. "They must have had some help. The other two beggars must have gone down first. Well, anyhow, I've bottled up the leader of the gang."

He realised that it was quite hopeless to institute any search for the missing cads. By this time they were obviously out of doors, and the Vigilantes had no authority to break bounds, even if they were engaged upon honourable service. After all, two wrongs did not make a right.

Besides, Handforth was asleep now, and if he got to hear anything about the failure of his plan, he would disturb the whole Ancient House. Far better to keep hold of Forrest, and be satisfied with a partial capture.

So Ralph Leslie Fullwood returned to his bed-room, switched off the light, and calmly climbed into bed—his thoughts now reverting

back to the problem of Clive Russell's inexplicable absence.

And Bernard Forrest, in the cupboard, was nearly crazy with rage.



CHAPTER 9.

THE WHEEL OF CHANCE!

AROLD GRAYSON closed the front of his hunter watch with a snap.

"I'm not waiting any longer!" he said de-

cisively.

"Oh, hang it, he'll only be a minute!" protested Gulliver, in alarm. "We promised to wait five minutes, didn't we?"

"Yes, and we've waited nearly a quarter of an hour!" retorted the rascal of the Fifth. "The silly young idiot has run into those Vigilantes, I expect, and they've kept him there. Either that, or he hasn't got any money."

"That's about the truth of it," sneered Shaw. "He tried to borrow some off us, and failed, so he'll probably spin a yarn tomorrow that he was kept indoors. That kid's capable of anything!"

"Cheese it!" said Bell sourly. "Forrest's got more money than the two of you put together. He's worth quids and quids—isn't he, Gully?"

"Of course he is," said Gulliver, with a grunt. "And it'll be a dirty trick if we go off without him. He's the chap who promised to introduce you Fifth Form bounders, and I'm hanged if I'm going to start without him."

"Same here," said Bell, nodding.

Grayson and Shaw glanced at one another. This meant, of course, that they couldn't start, either, for they didn't know where that roulette club was. They were looking very grim.

"Oh, so you're going to adopt that tone, are you?" said Grayson aggressively. "Look here, young Gulliver, unless you agree to start at once, I'll knock your front teeth down your throat!"

"Here, I say!" protested Gulliver, backing away.

"I mean it!" snapped Grayson. "Forrest distinctly advised us to go on if he was longer than five minutes, and he said that you fellows would take care of the introductions. So are you going, or shall I loosen those ugly teeth of yours?"

Gulliver was a rank coward, and he knuckled under.

"Oh, all right," he muttered. "But it's a dirty trick!"

And so they started without any further delay—which was just as well. For there wasn't one chance in a thousand of Bernard Forrest joining them that night. The two Fifth Formers were in a state of uncertainty. They had an uncomfortable idea that they were being tricked—that there wasn't any

such place as this roulette club, and that the Removites had been having a game with them.

Gulliver and Bell were just as useful as Forrest himself, so far as the introduction was concerned, since they were equally well known.

Very little was said during the cycle ride. The Removites made the pace as slow as possible, in order to give Forrest a chance to overtake them. But when at last they reached their destination, there was still no sign of the leader of Study A.

"Here we are!" murmured Gulliver, as he jumped off his machine. "I say, let's wait for a minute or two, Grayson. There's no particular hurry—"

"Is this the house?" interrupted Grayson suspiciously.

"Yes."

The two Fifth Formers had every reason to be dubious. They were just on the outskirts of Bannington, where a number of high-class residences straggled out into the open country. The particular house they were looking at was a modern villa of the better class—a big, double-fronted house with a

well-kept garden, and with an electric light gleaming in the spacious porch. It looked like the home of a well-to-do professional man, or a retired merchant.

"I say, are you sure about this?" asked Grayson, with doubt apparent in his tone. "You haven't made any mistake about the house, I suppose?"

"What do you take us for?" growled Bell.

"I wouldn't like to say!" retorted Grayson. "But we needn't harp on that now. I've got an idea that you kids are trying to fool us—"

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Gulliver irritably. "We'd better go in and get it over. Why the dickens doesn't Forrest come?" he added, looking back along the road.

They opened the gate and went in. Arriving at the front door, Gulliver knocked, and the door was almost immediately opened by a man in a kind of uniform, who looked a cross between a butler and a footman.

"Good-evening, young gents," he nodded, as he obviously recognised the Removites. "Hallo! Master Forrest's not here?"

"He—he couldn't come," said Gulliver. "These other chaps are friends of ours. Quite O.K., Withers. They can be trusted all right."

The man nodded.

"Well, here's Mr. Snagg, so you'd best speak to him," he said.

A man in evening-dress had appeared—a dapper-looking individual, scrupulously neat, with a genial face which was disarming in

its honesty. But appearances cannot always be relied upon. Mr. Snagg was several kinds of a trickster.

"Welcome!" he smiled, as he shook hands. "So young Forrest couldn't get here? Or is he afraid of losing some money—after winning such a lot? Friends of yours, eh?" he went on, as he greeted the Fifth Formers. "Splendid! The right sort are always welcome. We only need sportsmen here."

"You'll find these chaps sporty enough," said Gulliver.

Grayson and Shaw were reassured. Their doubts vanished. And they were filled with curiosity. There was evidently a large amount of truth in everything that the juniors had said. Leaving their overcoats and caps in the hall, in charge of Withers, they were conducted towards the rear.

"Now remember," said Mr. Snagg, pausing, "that everything here is strictly square. This is a private house, and there's not the slightest fear of any interference from the police. At the same time, it's better to be cautious."

"You can trust us," said Grayson. "It would mean expulsion for a St. Frank's chap if he was found in a place like this. You can rely upon us not to talk about it."

Mr. Snagg nodded.

"That's the main reason you're admitted so easily," he said calmly. "Still, the less you talk the better. I'm responsible for allowing

you boys here, so I'm trusting you to play the game."

He opened a door as he spoke, and the St. Frank's fellows found themselves within the rural casino. Gulliver and Bell felt rather superior as they showed their Fifth Form companions round.

"There's the roulette table," murmured Bell, nodding.

"By gad!" said Grayson.

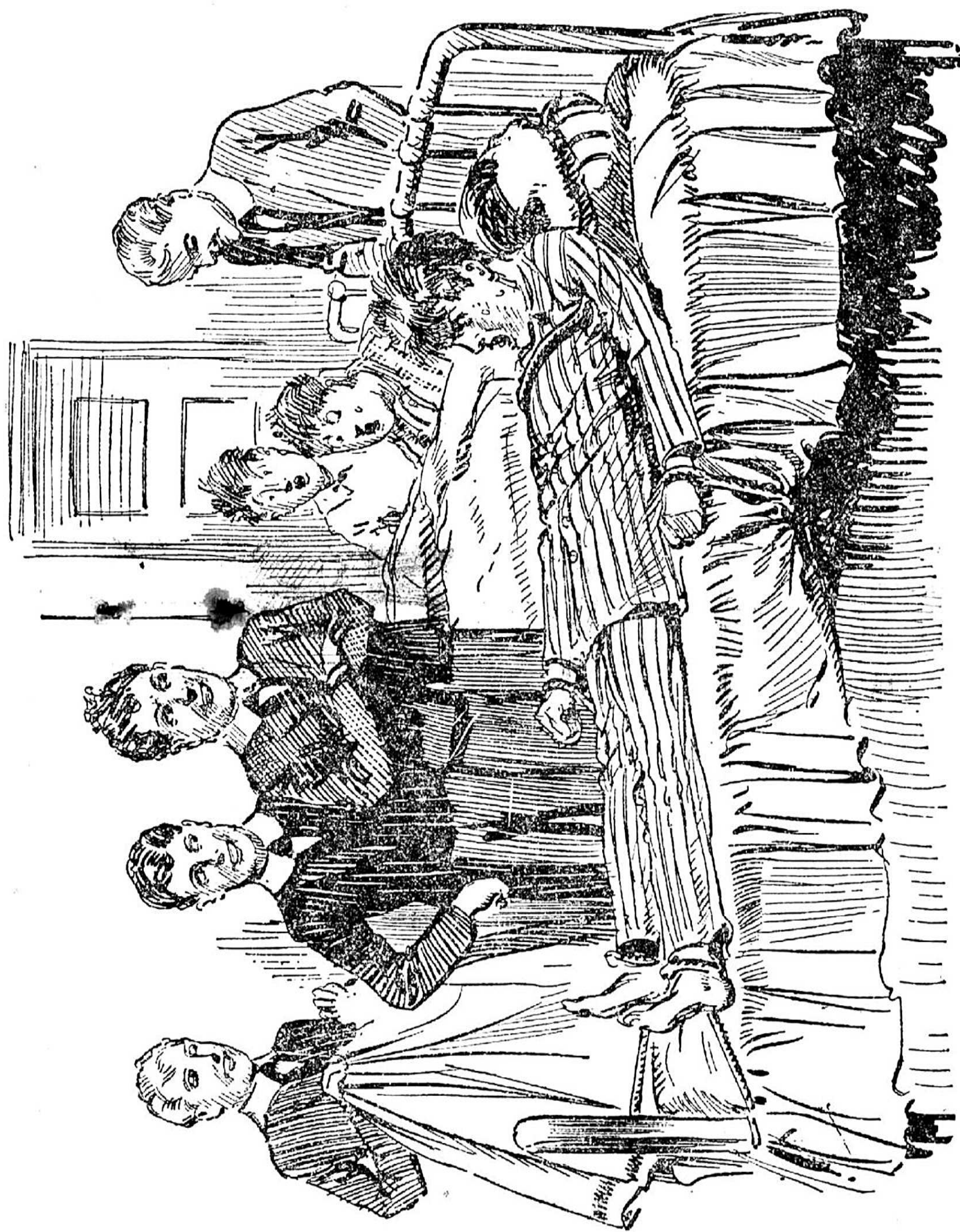
He felt rather awed. There was something mysterious about this place. The roulette table was much more imposing than Grayson had pictured. It was like a photograph he had once seen of a roulette table at Monte Carlo. It was a full-sized affair, and all sorts of people were sitting round it, intent upon the game. The croupier and the other attendants of the club were all wearing black masks which entirely concealed the upper portions of their faces.

Some of the habitués were masked in similar fashion—being unwilling, no doubt, to have their identities known to their companions. One had to be careful in a provincial town like Bannington. The rest of the guests were of a nondescript order—racing men, probably, questionable com-

DON'T FORGET!

TOM MIX

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Forrest was spreadeagled on the bed, then the schoolboy Vigilantes bound him hand and foot ; Gulliver and Bell were very soon treated in the same way. "That's fine !" said Handforth. "If you can get out of that, Forrest, you'll be a marvel !"

mercial travellers, and such like. And they were not necessarily crooked. After all, they were men, and if they preferred to amuse themselves in this way, it was their own business. Many of them, doubtless, were as honest as the average person. But their common sense was conspicuous by its absence.

It was quite different for the St. Frank's fellows. They were boys, and they were only admitted because they had money to lose.

"I say, this is great!" murmured Grayson excitedly.

"Do you believe us now?" sneered Gulliver.

"Sorry, Gully!" said Shaw. "We take back all we said. There's no mistake about it—this place is the real goods."

"Forrest found it—and he's not here," muttered Bell uncomfortably.

"Never mind—there are plenty of other nights," said Grayson. "I'm going to have a smack at this, my lads! I've always wanted to play roulette!"

There were other forms of gambling going on, too—and such games as poker and bridge were being played in the other rooms. And the majority of the visitors were men of excellent character. For them, after all, there was nothing very terrible in coming to this club. Even if they were caught in a raid by the police, it would only mean a fine for them. So they weren't taking much risk. But the St. Frank's fellows were deliberately courting the sack.

Gulliver and Bell knew the ropes, and although they were worried about Forrest's non-appearance, they soon forgot him.

They only had comparatively small stakes to play with—for Forrest was really the moneyed man of the trio—and they were necessarily cautious. It was just the irony of fate, perhaps, that they should win.

With their three-shilling and five-shilling stakes, they quietly raked in something like thirty-five shillings profit between them by the time they finished. Luck had certainly been with them. But what did the club owners care? While Gulliver and Bell were winning thirty-five shillings, Grayson and Shaw had lost between six and seven pounds. And as long as the St. Frank's fellows carried on like this, they wouldn't be denied admittance! Business was business!

However, Grayson and Shaw were not discouraged. They had lost the bulk of their money, but they had gained the roulette fever. And, like many another, they were convinced that they had only to come here again to recover their losses.



Forrest was spreadeagled on the bed, then the Bell were very soon treated in the same way. Forre

This fact, apparently, was sufficient to put Grayson into a good humour. The Fifth Former had previously lost four pounds odd, but he had forgotten this.

"It's ripping sport, I'll admit," said Shaw. "But, by gad, it's expensive! I'm over two quid down!"

"That's nothing," said Grayson. "I've lost double that—but you can't judge anything by a first visit. We'll get it all back during the week. By the way, how did you Remove chaps get on?"

"We're in!" replied Gulliver, grinning.

"Good luck to you!" said Grayson.

They were cycling home, and just riding out of the town. It was nearly one-fifteen now—for the "club" always made a point of closing its doors at one a.m. This was quite late enough for a town like Bannington.

Gulliver and Bell were feeling so contented at the success of their play that they had ceased to worry about their leader. In any



CHAPTER 10.

MAKING THINGS WORSE!

"HUNDERING good!" said Grayson approvingly. "That last spin was a corker. I backed the right colour, and got ten bob of

my money back."



es bound him hand and foot ; Gulliver and
id Handforth. "If you can get out of that,
el !"

case, they would soon know what had happened to him, for he obviously wouldn't venture out now. He knew that the place closed at one o'clock.

St. Frank's was reached without any incident, and Grayson and Shaw, after a murmured "good-night," veered off to their own House. And the juniors, having put their bicycles away, made cautiously towards the Ancient House. Even though they were "their own masters," it was necessary to exercise great caution at one-thirty in the morning.

There was not much fear of an encounter with the Vigilantes now, for the juniors were all naturally in bed and asleep. Still, old habits clung, and Gulliver and Bell had a feeling all the time that discovery would mean the sack. They reached their bed-room without the slightest trouble, however, and breathed a sigh of relief as they closed the door.

"Good egg!" murmured Bell gloatingly. "Safe!"

"Don't turn that light on, you ass!" muttered Gulliver. "Switch it out, blow you! Somebody in one of the other Houses might spot it and get inquisitive. We can get undressed in the dark, can't we?"

"There's a moon," whispered Bell.

"All the more reason to switch that light off."

"I say, Forrest isn't here," went on Bell, in rather a curious voice. "What the dickens can have happened to him? He came indoors for that money of his, and from that minute he vanished."

"Rummy!" said Gulliver, as he undressed. "If the Vigilantes had collared him, they would have roped him in his bed again, wouldn't they? I—I say, feel in his pocket to see if he ever got back here. If his wallet's in his other clothes, it'll prove——"

"It's not here," said Bell, who had been fumbling. "That means he came in all right, but never got out again. At least, he didn't come anywhere near us. It's a jolly mysterious business, if you ask me."

As it happened, they were not to be left in uncertainty for long. For Ralph Leslie Fullwood was wakeful. He had heard the school clock chime the half-hour, and he had also heard stealthy movements out in the corridor. Sitting up in bed at that moment, he had smiled rather grimly to himself.

"Those Study A. rotters," he murmured. "Coming back after their razzle. I expect they turn everybody out of that beastly club before one. Anyhow, it's safe to get rid of this disturbing beggar."

Fullwood had obtained a few naps during the past hour or so. He had continually dozed off, only to be awakened by thudding sounds within the cupboard, and by Forrest's muffled, thick-voiced threats.

Fullwood got out of bed now, and opened the cupboard door.

"Come along, sweetheart!" he said genially.

Bernard Forrest was huddled in the bottom of the cupboard, cramped and enraged, but by no means hurt. His bonds had not been tied tightly, and as he had been fully dressed, he had not felt the cold. Indeed, the cupboard had proved rather stuffy and close.

"What are you going to do, hang you?" he snapped fiercely.

"Return you with compliments to your pals," replied Fullwood. "They've just come back, I believe—and as it's too late for you to go on the razzle now, you might as well get into bed, and sleep like a good little boy."

"I'll get even for this!" breathed Forrest. "You think you've dished me, Fullwood, but—by gad!—I'll make you pay!"

Fullwood bent down and removed the dressing-gown cord from Forrest's ankles. Then he pulled the fuming Removite to his feet.

"You've got such a sweet, tuneful voice, honey!" he said soothingly. "Whenever I hear it it reminds me of the dear old pig-sty

at home! It's nice to have these reminders of the old farm!"

Forrest was too infuriated to make any lucid response. He breathed heavily and hoarsely, and allowed himself to be propelled across the room to the door. In fact, he was so utterly boiling that he hardly knew where he was going. His hands were still tied behind him, so he could not do much in the way of resistance.

Fullwood opened the door, pushed his victim out into the corridor, and then guided him across to his own bed-room. He helped him in.

"Anybody at home?" he asked softly.

"Who—who's that?" came Gulliver's startled voice.

"Good!" said Fullwood. "Your dear little playmates are back, Forrest. As a Vigilante, I must make a report of this to-morrow, and the chances are that the aforesaid playmates will catch it in the neck. I'll trouble you for my scarf, if you don't mind. Thanks!"

He deftly untied it, and then, chuckling, backed out of the room, and closed the door. He went back to bed contented—at least, he was feeling contented over his treatment of Bernard Forrest. But he was very worried about Clive Russell.

Forrest, in his own room, gave vent to a fearsome snarl which positively scared his pals.

"What's wrong, Forrest?" asked Gulliver eagerly. "Why the dickens didn't you come out? We waited ages for you——"

"Don't talk to me!" said Forrest, his voice quivering with the intensity of his fury. "I'll get even! I'll make him wish he'd never been born, the—the dirty, confounded mongrel!"

"My hat!" said Bell. "You're in a sweet temper, aren't you?"

"Temper!" raved Forrest. "I'm mad, I tell you!"

"You sound like it!" said Gulliver tartly. "But what's the use of railing? It was your own fault for forgetting your money. We told you what would happen if you came indoors again——"

"Don't you start on me!" interrupted Forrest. "I'll give you fair warning! If you say much, I'll smash the pair of you to mangled blubber!"

"I say, go easy!" protested Bell. "We've done nothing, you ass!"

"I can't help that!" hissed Forrest. "I feel like it!"

"Then you'd better feel like something else, and explain what's been happening," growled Gulliver. "Where's the sense of jumping down *our* throats?"

It was only by a supreme effort that Bernard Forrest prevented himself from shouting at the top of his voice. He was just in that condition when his anger was ready to gain the upper hand. If he had been a girl, he would have promptly gone off into a fit of hysterics. Somehow, it made him all the more wild to find his chums back, and apparently in the best of spirits.

"What's happened, old man?" asked Bell gently. "I say, we're awfully sorry, you know. We waited for you——"

"It was that beast, Fullwood!" muttered Bernard, steadying his voice with difficulty. "I came in all right, but he collared me. He bound me up, and shoved me in his bed-room cupboard. And there I've been all this time! Bound up, mark you, bunged in that rotten cupboard—like a bundle of old clothes!"

There was a moment's silence.

"But Fullwood didn't do this—alone?" asked Gulliver, at length.

"Yes, he did!" breathed Forrest. "That's what makes it fifty times as bad! He took me by surprise—hailed me into his room, and then played some of his old dirty tricks on me! Oh, I'll make him smart!"

"What do you mean—dirty tricks?" asked Bell curiously.

Bernard Forrest took a deep, deep breath.

"Well, first of all he dragged me into his bed-room before I could guess what he was doing—caught me round the neck, and half-strangled me," he said. "Then he tripped me up, and as I was falling, he caught me a terrific swipe on the side of the head."

"I say, what a cad!" said Gulliver indignantly.

"Then he kicked me in the ribs until I could hardly breathe," went on Forrest imaginatively. "The filthiest work you could imagine! What the dickens could I do, when I was lying there, half dead with pain? He tied me up, and shoved me in his cupboard."

Forrest felt that it was rather up to him to tell a story which would show him in a better light than the actual truth. He couldn't very well admit that a Removite, single-handed, had got the better of him by fair methods. His highly garbled account of the incident was the result—but he did not know that Gulliver and Bell discounted eighty per cent of it.

"Rotten luck!" said Bell, with pretended sympathy. "I should smash the rotter to-morrow if I were you. No wonder you didn't come out. I say, we went to that place, you know. Grayson and Shaw lost seven or eight quid between them."

"Glad to hear it!" said Forrest, with genuine pleasure.

He always liked to hear of other people's misfortunes, and at the moment the news about the Fifth Formers was really a tit-bit.

"We didn't do so badly," remarked Gulliver. "We won over thirty bob!"

Forrest grunted.

"Just like your confounded luck!" he

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snapped. "I knew we should be O.K. to-night—and if I'd put my stakes on, instead of your silly little bobs, I should have cleaned up a tenner! By gad! I've something to store up against Fullwood, the hound!"

Bernard Forrest was hardly a pleasant companion, and his cronies wisely allowed the conversation to dwindle away. Besides, it was nearly two o'clock, and they couldn't ignore the rising-bell in the morning. At least, if they did, they would soon have a band of Vigilantes on the job, administering swishes!



CHAPTER 11.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

FULLWOOD was nearly dressed when the door of his bed-room broke open, and Edward Oswald Handforth strode in, with Church and McClure in attendance. All three were wearing the official armlets of the Vigilantes.

"You're late!" said Handforth severely.

"Rats!" retorted Fullwood. "There's five minutes yet—"

"Not for you, my lad—you're on the Vigilance Committee," interrupted Handforth firmly. "Why haven't you been round, looking after some of these Blots? We've just dealt with five cases, and—"

"I didn't get to sleep till late," interrupted Fullwood. "I've got a report to make, too, about Gulliver and Bell. They went out last night, after all. I think they ought to be given an extra swishing for it."

"There you are—we thought there was something squiffy about that yarn of theirs!" said Church, with a nod. "We've just been and hauled them out, Fully— And we've swished them for sticking in bed too long."

"It won't do 'em any good," said Fullwood. "They're hardened."

Handforth sniffed.

"They'll be hardened before we've done with 'em!" he agreed. "We'll make their skins like leather! But what's that you're saying about Gulliver and Bell going out? Let's have the full report!"

"If it's all the same to you, I'll make my report to the chief."

"Who do you think I am?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"Don't ask me. I'm not good at guesses!" replied Fullwood, with a grin. "Riddles are my weak point."

"Why, you—you—"

"Dick Hamilton is the chief of the committee, and every ordinary Vigilante is required to make reports to the chief only," said Fullwood. "So don't start any of your bossing stuff here, Handy."

"Yes, go easy, old man," urged McClure.

"If you want a black eye, Arnold McClure—"

"I don't, so that's settled!" interrupted McClure tartly. "We found those three rotters unbound this morning, Fully, and Forrest

spun a yarn that he'd worked his ropes loose during the night."

"That was a lie," replied Fullwood. "Somebody helped them to escape. I collared Forrest, but I couldn't prevent his pals from going out."

And he briefly described what had happened to Forrest, reserving his full report for Dick Hamilton. He knew that he would get no peace until he had satisfied Handforth's curiosity.

"The committee needn't bother about Forrest—he's had his gruel," concluded Ralph Leslie. "But the other two fellows need a good lesson. The Vigilantes ought to get busy on my report. By the way, have you seen anything of Russell this morning?"

"Never mind about Russell," said Handforth grimly. "Come on, you fellows—we've got to see about Gulliver and Bell—"

"Can't you answer a civil question?" demanded Fullwood indignantly.

"We haven't seen him," put in McClure. "It's jolly rummy, too. I hope the ass didn't do anything silly last night."

"Silly?" said Fullwood, with a start.

"Well, you know—anything doggish!" explained Mac. "Some of the chaps—even the most decent ones—are off their balance a bit, because of this new freedom."

They went out, leaving Fullwood very worried. He finished his dressing, and hurried downstairs for news. He could hear sundry yells of anguish, and he recognised the voices of Gulliver and Bell. Handforth was evidently losing no time—although it was strictly a job for the full committee. However, a preliminary punishment wouldn't do the two young rascals any harm.

In the lobby, Dick Hamilton was talking with Reggie Pitt, Archie Glenethorne, Tregellis-West, and De Valerie. And his voice was so serious that Fullwood did not interrupt him.

"That's the most difficult aspect of the disease," Dick was saying. "It's only natural that outsiders like Forrest and Grayson and Snipe would take advantage of the Honour System. We can deal with fellows like them. It's the others that we're in difficulties with."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "I mean to say, a somewhat frightful problem, laddie."

"Yes, it's a delicate business," agreed Reggie Pitt.

"Oh, what ho! A frightfully frightful sort of task, as it were," said Archie. "Here we have these priceless chappies—absolutely sound and fruity, so to speak—positively skidding off the asphalt. Side-slipping, dash it, into the good old ditch. The point is, can't we rally round and shove out a helpful hand?"

"Some of the chaps will need a fist!" declared Pitt.

"That's just it," nodded Dick. "Decent chaps, mind you—honourable and thoroughly sound in every way. And yet they're slipping—doing all sorts of questionable things without quite realising the seriousness of it. There's Clapson, of the Fourth—a decent

enough chap, if ever there was one—going off last night, and getting mixed up with a beastly gang of Bannington sharpers. He's sorry now, of course—and I don't suppose he'll be such an ass again. But how many more are there doing the same sort of rot?"

"And Clapson asked for a pass, didn't he?" asked Watson.

"Yes—and promised to be in by calling-over," said Dick Hamilton. "He's not the only one who's slipped a bit. And we shall have to go gently with these chaps—or they'll only misunderstand us, and go wrong."

Fullwood listened with growing uneasiness.

Clapson! One of the best chaps in the Fourth! If Clapson could go out and mix with a crowd of Bannington roughs, why couldn't Clive Russell do something equally silly? There was the concrete fact—Russell hadn't turned up the previous evening, and he appeared to be still absent.

At that very moment, however, Russell himself was in Study 1, looking bright and cheerful, and not at all as though he had been guilty of questionable conduct. There was no mystery about his absence.

That was the fatal point.

If there had been anything strange in connection with his non-return, everybody would have spoken about it. But none of the fellows gave Russell a thought, and thus Fullwood had nothing whatever to guide him—except his own unjustified suspicions. But, after what Dick Hamilton and the others had just been saying, Fullwood had a certain amount

of excuse for being concerned. And there were other circumstances working in a cunning way, too.

Clive Russell had been at the River House School all night. Long before the expiry of his "pass" he had telephoned his House-master, and had received permission to stay until the morning. Clive had never dreamed that his study chum would think anything wrong about him.

Fullwood found somebody who knew something at last—Teddy Long, the Know-All of the Remove.

"Russell?" he repeated, in answer to Fullwood's query. "Why, yes, he went to his study not five minutes ago."

"By Jove, did he?" ejaculated Fullwood eagerly. "Good man!"

He hurried off to Study 1, and entered. And the very first thing he saw gave him a turn. Russell was standing near the table, with a great sheaf of currency notes in his hand!

A suspicion—an unworthy suspicion—flooded into his mind. Where had Clive got all that money from? Fullwood knew, for a certainty, that the Canadian junior had possessed only three pounds the previous evening. The chums of Study 1 had never had any secrets, and finances were always open with them.

Last night three pounds—this morning over twenty, by the look of it!

"Hallo, Ralph!" said Russell, looking round. "Been busy on the Vigilance stuff?"

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Why, what on earth——" He stared. "What are you looking at me like that for?"

"How much money have you got there?" demanded Fullwood sharply.

"How much?" repeated the surprised Clive. "Yes!"

"Well, twenty-three quid, if you're anxious to know."

"Twenty-three quid!" gasped Fullwood. "Where did you get it from?"

His tone was so peremptory that Clive was rather hurt. He hadn't seen Fullwood like this before—at least, not since he had turned over a new leaf, and had become so decent.

"You're pretty brusque, aren't you?" he asked quietly.

"Look here, Clive, I don't want to jump to conclusions, but that money looks—well, funny," said Fullwood grimly. "Especially as you were out all night."

"Out all night!" ejaculated Clive, aghast.

His astonishment was genuine, and Fullwood misunderstood the expression of blankness on his face.

"You couldn't expect to keep it from me, could you?" asked Fullwood harshly. "I waited up for you for hours, and I know you were out all night. What were you doing? How did you manage to change your three pounds into twenty-three?"

Clive Russell was staggered—with every good reason.

"Look here," he said angrily. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking all sorts of things!" retorted Fullwood, the accusation in his glance only too obvious. "You didn't make all that money by gambling, I suppose?" he added, almost unconsciously blurting out his unworthy suspicion.

Clive Russell went red.

"Gambling?" he repeated. "You'd like to know, wouldn't you? But it might be a good idea if you minded your own business!"

He stuffed the money into his pocket, brushed past Fullwood, and walked out. He closed the door with a violent slam.

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Fullwood wretchedly.

He didn't know that Ralph Leslie had a certain amount of justification on his side—that he was ready enough, too, to apologise humbly, and put everything square. It only needed a word of explanation from Russell to effect this happy clearing of the air.

But Russell went off, too angry to seek any peace. Ralph had questioned his honour, and he didn't want to speak to him again—not yet, anyhow. He was so bitterly hurt that he went out into the Triangle, and mooched about by himself.

In the meantime, Fullwood stood in Study 1, utterly dumbfounded.

"Gambling!" he breathed. "Clive—of all chaps! I wouldn't have believed it—I always thought he was as straight as a die. And I'm a fine kind of rotter to criticise him, too," he added miserably.

The fact that he had once been keen on gambling only increased his anxiety. For he knew how the fever could get hold of a fellow. He knew how it had got hold of him—and he wasn't weak-minded, or easy-going, either.

The evidence struck Fullwood as being conclusive. There was the long line of it. Russell had gone out the previous evening. He had failed to return by bed-time. And here he was this morning, with over twenty pounds in his possession. And he had started guiltily—he had told him, Fullwood, to mind his own business. He had virtually admitted that——

Gambling! But twenty pounds needed winning! Was it possible that Clive had been to that roulette club? He knew about it, because Fullwood had told him. In fact, he was one of the very few fellows in the Remove who did know about it! This thought of Fullwood's was only one of a sequence, and, at the moment, it struck him as being a possible bull's-eye. If he had paused to consider all the possibilities, he would never have taken the action which now occurred to him.

"Those Study A cads!" he muttered. "Forrest wasn't at that club, last night, but Gulliver and Bell were! And if Clive was there, too, they couldn't have helped seeing him. By Jove, I'll get the truth out of them if I have to smash them up first!"

He rushed off to Study A, still following his foolish train of thought. He broke in, and found Forrest & Co. smoking, and fiercely discussing the swishing they had received a short time earlier.

"Vigilantes!" gasped Bell, throwing his cigarette into the fire.

Bernard Forrest went pale at the sight of his enemy.

"Well?" he snarled. "What do you want?"

"I don't want you!" retorted Fullwood. "Gulliver, was Russell at that rotten club of yours last night?"

"Club?" faltered Gulliver.

"Yes!"

"Wha-what club?"

"You know what club, confound you!" snapped Fullwood. "I want to know if Russell was there? If you don't answer me truthfully, I'll pulverise you!"



CHAPTER 12.

FORREST'S CUNNING.

CLIVE RUSSELL was still hot as he strode down the Remove passage. He had been cut to the quick by Fullwood's assumption that he had been gambling—that he had obtained that money by false methods.

The suggestion, indeed, hurt him so deeply that he felt like going back and driving his fist into Fullwood's face. The Canadian junior was one of the sunniest tempered fellows imaginable. As a rule, it took a lot to anger him. But if any one questioned his honour, he was fired up in a second. And for his own chum to have such ideas—well, Clive's brain simply reeled.

"But—but I don't understand——"

"Of course you do," interrupted Forrest, with a sudden sneer. "Why don't you tell this cad the truth about his marvellous Canadian chum? His honourable pal! Why try to shield the confounded hypocrite?"

Fullwood caught his breath in, and Gulliver stared.

"What—what do you mean?" asked the latter feebly.

"Don't be a fool!" said Forrest. "I wasn't at that club last night—and Fullwood knows why, the beast! But you were, Gully—and so were you, Bell. Was Russell there or not?"

"Nunno!" gasped Gulliver. "I—I didn't see——"

"Why the thunder should you shield the worm?" sneered Forrest, giving Gulliver a meaning look. "Didn't you tell me that the Canadian chap was pretty well dotty over the roulette?"

"Oh, yes!" said Gulliver breathlessly. "But—but I didn't want to sneak, you know. Russell was losing money like water for a bit——"

"Losing, was he?" said Fullwood fiercely.

"Yes, but he won an awful lot afterwards!" said Gulliver, hardly realising what he was talking about. "I—I lost sight of him——"

"He went out with some other fellows," put in Bell, catching the idea. "A couple of his own Canadian breed, I think—anyhow, they looked rough, Colonial rotters. I expect they led him into the place, the poor little innocent!"

"Satisfied?" sneered Forrest.

"You're sure he was there?" asked Fullwood miserably.

"Sure?" jeered Bernard. "What do you think these chaps are—blind bats? I've always had my suspicions against Russell. What is he, anyhow? His father was only a rotten steward until he found some pearls in the Pacific——"

"That's a lie!" shouted Fullwood. "His father was a big merchant in Canada, and he lost his business, and only became a steward because he was starving——"

"Well, anyway, I'm not interested in the cad," said Forrest curtly. "He's a low down nobody, and you can't wonder that he takes to gambling as a fish takes to water!"

Fullwood snorted.

"I'm glad you've mentioned your own breed!" he retorted. "Low-down nobodies! You take to gambling like fish, don't you?"

He went out, and wandered down the passage rather hopelessly. The evidence seemed conclusive. There were witnesses who had seen Clive Russell there! If Fullwood had had better sense, he would have discounted the evidence of those liars.

But it struck him as being so natural—so spontaneous. And Bell's mention of two Canadian companions had clinched it. Clive had gone off to meet some Canadian friends—with the express intention, too, of having a jolly evening! Those friends of his had led him away—for Fullwood knew, at least, that

Clive would never have gone to the roulette club alone.

Everything seemed to fit in so perfectly!

In Study A, Forrest's eyes were glittering. "Good!" he murmured. "You fooled him beautifully—although you were on the point of ruining the whole thing, you idiots!"

"Ruining what?" asked Gulliver blankly. "I—I don't understand this, you know! Russell wasn't there. Why did you want me to say that he was, Forrest? I thought you were up against Fullwood—not Russell!"

"So I am," replied Forrest. "But if I can strike at the cad through his beastly Canadian pal, why shouldn't I?"

"Jiggered if I can see it," confessed Bell.

"There's nothing to see yet," replied Bernard. "But I've got a vague idea—a kind of half-formed plan. It'll help a tremendous lot if we can create bad feeling between Fullwood and Russell. By gad! I wonder if—I wonder—— Ye gods and little fishes! What a brain-wave!"

He stood there, red with inward excitement.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Gulliver curiously.

Forrest came to himself.

"Nothing," he replied coolly. "But something just occurred to me. We'll do our best to make Fullwood believe that Russell was gambling last night. But leave it to me—don't you fellows interfere. They'll smell a rat if we press the thing too energetically. We've got to go jolly carefully if we're to get Fullwood where I want him."

"And where do you want him?" asked Bell.

"In that club!" hissed Forrest.

"You silly ass, you'll never get him there!" ejaculated Gulliver.

"Shan't I? We'll see about that!" breathed Forrest tensely. "It all depends—it may not be to-night, or to-morrow night—but, sooner or later, I'll work it! And I've got an idea already."

"Take my advice, and chuck it up," said Gulliver. "You don't want another affair like last night, I suppose? And why didn't you go for Fullwood with a cricket-stump or something? You say he half-strangled you last night, and kicked you, and locked you in his cupboard. Why didn't you go for him baldheaded, and get your revenge while you had the chance?"

Forrest sat down, and lighted another cigarette.

"I haven't lost the chance," he replied softly. "And I don't take my revenge like that, either. I want something a bit more spicy—something more lasting. I don't hanker after a skin-deep revenge, my lads! Before I've done with Ralph Fullwood, he'll wish he'd never seen me!"

There was something so vindictive—so utterly vicious—in his tone, that his companions were half-frightened.

"Go easy, you know," murmured Bell nervously.



In swift and scientific fashion, the Remove Vigilantes swept down on Willy and the other Third Formers. "Got 'em!" murmured Dick Hamilton, when the last was secured. "Now we'll take 'em back to bed and spank the lot of 'em!"

"You're right!" nodded Bernard Forrest. "That's just what I'm reckoning on. I'm going very easy—until I'm ready to strike!"

polite, old cheese, I must remark that that statement savours of the fib-like order!" he replied firmly. "I mean to say, dash it! In other words, dash it, I mean to say! Here we have a perfectly priceless cove, staring glassily into the middle distance, with a face as long as a wireless-mast. And this same worthy cove trots out the good old information that it's nothing! Somewhat scaly, what?"

The Canadian junior shook himself.

"The fact is, I'm wild," he said. "I may not look it, Archie, but I guess I'm pretty well furious. And it's a private matter, if you don't mind."

Archie beamed.

"Oh, well, there you are!" he said promptly. "If it's a private matter, we'll say no more about it. But remember that you are absolutely at liberty to discharge the old mind when you please. Archie will rally round with sundry assortments of sympathy and what not. It's absolutely up to you, old corn-cob!"

"When I feel like unburdening myself, I'll remember that your manly breast is waiting for my sobbing head!" replied Clive Russell, with a grin. "As a matter of fact, I'm a silly juggins to be even angry. The whole



CHAPTER 13.

WIDENING THE RIFT!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE came to a halt, and screwed his monocle firmly into his eye.

"What-ho!" he said severely. "I mean to say, this won't do, old chestnut! This absolutely won't do! I mean to say, what's the exact idea of walking about with a face like a dashed crab-apple?"

He was standing just behind the chapel, where he had strolled in order to enjoy the crisp sunshine of the November morning. And there, unexpectedly, he had come across Clive Russell.

The Canadian boy was leaning back against one of the old buttresses, his hands driven into his trousers pockets, and his expression one of misery. He turned and looked at Archie, and tried to smile.

"It's nothing, Archie, old man," he said.

"Without wishing to be absolutely im-

thing's so darned silly. By the way, how do you like the look of this?"

He produced his "wad" of notes, and flourished it.

"Good gad!" said Archie, staring. "Odd: pieces of eight! Wealth, old maple-leaf! Signs of prosperity, and all that sort of rot! I mean to say, a somewhat large dose, isn't it?"

"Twenty quid," said Clive. "That means about a hundred dollars in real Canadian money——"

"Twenty of the best?" interrupted Archie. "My dear old sportsman, I'm disappointed. I thought at first that you were simply rolling in the stuff. Twenty, dash it, is a mere slice. I had an idea that you were dashing about with slabs of the good old material!"

"Twenty is a pretty big dose for me, anyhow," smiled Clive. "I received it this morning, you know. An unexpected present from my father. Not a bad little pile, is it? I just happened to mention in one of my letters that I was keen on one of those home film cameras. You know—one of those natty things you can take your own films with, and then show them on a home projector with your own screen. I thought it would be rather nice for the study, these long evenings."

"Absolutely topping, laddie!" agreed Archie. "I trust, when you have acquired this dashed apparatus, that you will do the honours with Archie, and shove him in a dashed film. I mean to say, I've always had a hankering to appear in the good old movies. The silver screen, what? Absolutely the stuff for Archie."

Clive nodded.

"I shan't forget," he replied, with a chuckle. "You see, there's one of those patent outfits for sale in Helmsford—I spotted it when we went there for the footer last week. And, as a matter of fact, I paid a pound deposit, just on the off-chance. It is second-hand, of course—but it's a real beauty! I had no idea my father would be such a brick."

"I've always maintained, laddie, that paters are positively the best invention that a chappie ever made use of," replied Archie. "Whenever a cove is in need of something special—an extra large walletful of the crisp stuff—the old pater dashes into the breach, and there you are."

He strolled off, feeling that if he remained, Clive Russell would speak of that "private" matter, which he had desired to be silent about. And Archie had a perfect horror of butting into anything which didn't concern him.

Clive put the money back into his pocket, and walked round into the West Square. He came face to face with Ralph Leslie Fullwood—who, as a matter of fact, had been looking for him.

Russell stiffened—but, inwardly, he was prepared to forgive his chum if the latter would apologise. Clive was the last fellow in the world to keep up a quarrel. And he

had just been arguing with himself that Fullwood had probably got hold of the wrong end of the stick. In some way he must have heard a false story.

"Well?" said Fullwood quietly. "I've heard!"

"Oh!" said Clive. "And what have you heard?"

"About you."

"About me?"

"Yes!"

"That's very interesting," said Clive. "And will it be telling any secrets if you say what you've heard?"

"I don't see why you should keep up this high-and-mighty spirit," said Fullwood bitterly. "I've heard quite enough—and I don't like the way you treat the whole thing off-handedly. You went out gambling last night!"

Clive stiffened again.

"I went out gambling?" he repeated. "Did I?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Who told you that piece of fiction?"

"I only wish it were fiction!" retorted Ralph Leslie. "But what's the good of keeping it up? I know you only had three quid last night, and this morning you've got over twenty. That speaks for itself, even if I didn't have any other evidence."

"I don't care about your other evidence," snapped Russell. "How do you know where I got that money? Couldn't I have had it sent to me by my pater?"

"Twenty pounds?" repeated Fullwood incredulously.

"Well? Is that a fortune?"

"You've never had more than a fiver—even on your birthday!" replied Fullwood quietly. "So you can't tell me that your father has sent you a sum like twenty pounds now, when it isn't your birthday at all. No, Clive, that won't do. Besides, I know where you *did* get the money!"

"You know?"

"Yes, I do!"

"And it wasn't from my father?"

"Don't try to get out of it——"

"I'm not," interrupted the Canadian boy, between his teeth. "In fact, I shall be very glad to hear where I got this twenty quid. It seems that I must have come by it dishonestly, by the way you talk."

Fullwood suddenly changed his manner.

"It wasn't dishonest, but it was silly," he said earnestly. "Hang it, Clive, why the dickens can't you say you're sorry, and have done with it? You went out with those Canadian friends of yours last night, you broke bounds—in spite of your being a Vigilante—and you went to that rotten gambling place. Those friends of yours led you away, didn't they? I wish you'd be open and honest about it. I hate these misunderstandings."

Clive raised his eyebrows.

"You hate them?" he repeated. "I thought you liked them!"

"Look here——"

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"By the way you're talking, it's pretty evident that you've been deliberately misunderstanding the whole position from the very start," continued Russell angrily. "I'm not a fellow to keep anything up, but I'm hanged if I'll have these accusations levelled against me by you or anybody else!"

"Chuck it, Clive!" urged Fullwood miserably. "Why on earth did you go to that rotten place? You knew what it was. We'd talked about it, and you were just as wild about it as I was. Why did you let those friends of yours take you there?"

Clive looked at him curiously.

"Who told you I went there?" he asked, as quietly as possible.

"Well, I heard—from somebody who was there, too."

"That's interesting," said Clive, keeping calm with difficulty. "Somebody saw me in that roulette club, and told you?"

"Yes—two chaps," replied Fullwood. "We don't want to make any mystery about it," he added awkwardly. "Gulliver and Bell, to be exact—"

"What!" shouted Clive hotly.

His eyes simply blazed with fury, and he started back.

"Gulliver and Bell!" he panted. "And they—they told you that they saw me in that gambling den? They told you that, did they?"

"Yes—they both saw you—"

"And you *believed* them?" ejaculated Clive, aghast.

"Oh, what's the good of denying it?"

"No good, I suppose," snapped Clive passionately. "If you can believe anything those cads say, I've finished with you. Great Scott! What's the matter with you, Ralph? Are you mad? Have you gone off your chump? Do you think I can keep my temper when you tell me that you'll believe any lies that those rotters choose to tell?"

Fullwood looked grim.

"If they're lies, where did you get that money?" he demanded fiercely.

"Where did I get it?" said Clive. "That's my business! I won it at roulette, didn't I?"

I suppose Gulliver and Bell told you that they saw me at the table?"

"Yes, they did."

"They did?" gasped Clive. "They saw me winning that money? Well, my only hat! The game's up!" he added, with a snort. "I must have been in a dream last night, because I don't seem to remember winning any money at roulette. But you know best—you've had it from two perfectly truthful and honourable eye-witnesses that I was at the roulette table. So why deny it?"

"There's no reason for this sneering——"

"I don't want to hear any more, or say any more!" interrupted Clive Russell savagely. "You've chosen to believe those cads without even asking me a question. You didn't come to me and say they'd been lying, and that you wanted to know the truth. No, you believed them. All right—you can take it for the truth. Do you think I care?"

He stamped off, boiling with rage.



CHAPTER 14.

MORE TROUBLE!

WITH his heart full of wounded pride, Clive Russell sought to put as great a distance between himself and Ralph Leslie Fullwood as possible. It cut him deeply to think that his chum could take the word of Gulliver and Bell, and believe their dirty lies.

He was staggered.

He had been absent during the night expressly with his Housemaster's permission. He had spent a perfectly innocent evening at the River House School. And the money which had caused most of the trouble had arrived by registered letter that morning—a present from his own father, as he had told Fullwood in the plainest of plain language. And yet Fullwood didn't believe it.

Five minutes of calm talk would have cleared the air completely, and would have put an end to that bitter quarrel. But Clive swore that he wouldn't say a single word to enlighten his study mate. If Fullwood could think such things, he could go on thinking them!

And Fullwood, for his part, mistook Clive's defiance for guilt. Hadn't he done the same sort of thing himself? Hadn't he tried to bluff out a situation when he was cornered? And he made the mistake of assuming that Clive was doing the same.

Near the Ancient House steps, the Canadian boy ran into Archie Glenthorpe again, and an idea occurred to him.

"I say, Archie—about that money," he exclaimed abruptly.

"Money, old jelly? Which money?"

"You remember I told you about that twenty pounds from my father?"

"Oh, ah!" said Archie. "Twenty of the

crispest, what? Absolutely! Shoved along by the good old dad for the purpose of opening up a dashed film studio? The St. Frank's movie factory, what? Clive Russell, Pres."

"That's it," said Clive, who wasn't feeling in much of a humour for Archie's light-hearted fun. "Well, I want you to forget it."

"Forget it, laddie?"

"Yes."

"Who—me?"

"Yes, you."

"Absolutely," said Archie stoutly. "But I mean, forget it? I'll admit the old memory department is dashed defective; but how the good old dickens can I forget it when you keep reminding me about it?"

"I don't mean forget it really—but keep it quiet, that's all," explained Clive. "If anybody asks you anything about that twenty pounds, pretend you don't know. Please do this as a favour. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not a bit," said the genial ass of the Remove. "But it might be somewhat frightfully awkward if some inquisitive bloke edges up and does the cross-examination stuff. I mean to say, a leading question and where, as it were, is Archie? Skidded sideways into the soup, dash it!"

"I don't suppose anybody will ask you, but I just want to be on the safe side," replied Clive.

He went indoors, leaving Archie shaking his head wonderingly. Clive knew that the elegant junior would respect his wish. And Clive had a very special reason for his action. Archie was the only fellow he had told about that money, and he did not want Fullwood to learn the truth. It suited his present mood to keep up the misunderstanding. He was wounded deeply. Why should he go out of his way to explain the facts?

Fullwood had assumed him guilty, with only the evidence of that unexpected money and the lies of Gulliver and Bell to go upon. It was for Fullwood to "come round" without hearing a single word of the real truth. It was for Fullwood to admit that he had acted like a rotter. Clive vowed that he would never explain a single, solitary fact. Let Fullwood believe what he jolly well pleased!

And who could blame Clive Russell for his attitude?

The whole affair was nothing but a school-boy tiff, although it was rather more serious than most. For Ralph Leslie Fullwood had definitely accused his Canadian chum of an outrageous breach of honour. And Clive could not easily forgive it.

And as the day wore on, his feelings grew even more bitter. He nursed his grievance all the morning. When morning lessons were over, he had not the slightest desire to effect any reconciliation. He had lost all interest in the Vigilance Committee, and he only dimly realised that the Remove was rapidly being knocked into shape. That morning there had not been a single absentee from lessons—for the "Blots" knew well enough

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that they would have to pay dearly later on. By order of the Vigilance Committee, a truant was liable to receive four swishes on the hand, and four elsewhere.

Directly after lessons were over, Clive went to his study. He had been making plans all the morning, and now he lost no time. The little room was empty, and he seized a pile of his books and walked across the passage to Study H. This room was occupied by Ulysses Spencer Adams, the American boy.

"Do you mind if I barge into this study, Adams?" asked Clive bluntly.

"Sure thing!" said Adams. "Go ahead!"

"I mean—I want to come here with all my things, and stay."

"Gee whizz! I thought you two guys of Study I were looking peeved!" said Adams. "Aw, gee, that's the bunk! Best go back and patch things up—"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not patching up anything."

"Say, that's fierce!" remarked Adams, with concern. "You don't need to act like a coupla boneheads. For the love of Mike, cut out this quarrelling stuff. You fellers are big friends, aren't you?"

"We were," replied Clive. "But, if it's all the same to you, Adams, I don't want to discuss it. Do you mind if I come into this study, that's all I want to know?"

"Can you beat that?" said the American boy, pained. "Fullwood's sure a regular feller—and I guess you're a crackerjack, too."

Still, I'm not the guy to butt in where I'm not wanted. Come right along, kiddo, and park yourself in this dump. You're sure welcome!"

"Thanks!" said Russell. "You're a brick!"

Clive went off to fetch the rest of his things. He was feeling savagely contented. He wasn't going to stop in the same room as Fullwood! He didn't want to breathe the same air as a fellow who accused him of such beastly things! This was all very unfortunate, for Russell and Fullwood were, at heart, the closest of friends.

In Study I, Fullwood was collecting his own belongings.

"You needn't trouble," said Clive curtly.

"I'm clearing out of here," said Fullwood.

"I've got a feeling that you don't want me to be with you—"

"You needn't trouble!" repeated Clive, in the same tone. "I've already fixed up to shift into Study H. So you can have this room to yourself—and you're welcome to it!"

Fullwood flushed.

"Confound it, Clive, why can't you be sensible?" he burst out. "If you'd only admit the thing, instead of trying to bluff me—"

"I'll admit nothing!" shouted Clive.

"You've got a rotten, suspicious mind! I don't wonder at it, though!" he went on, with fierce anger. "I don't forget that you used to be pretty keen on roulette and such-like things at one time of day!"

Fullwood recoiled as though he had been struck.

"Thanks!" he muttered. "I'm glad you reminded me! I'm a nice kind of chap to condemn you, aren't I?"

He turned on his heel and stalked out.

"Ralph!" shouted Clive, with a sudden gulp. "I—I didn't mean—"

But Fullwood had gone, and Clive bit his lip.

"That was a rotten, dirty thing to say!" he muttered miserably. "Oh, hang it! Why the dickens can't he act sensibly, instead of—?" He broke off, realising that he was weakening in the most palpable manner. "But it's his job to apologise!" he went on grimly. "He started this quarrel, and he's got to settle it. I won't speak to him again until he's climbed down."

Curiously enough, Fullwood had come to exactly the same decision.

That taunt of Clive's had hurt him, and he decided, then and there, that it would be far better for them to keep well apart.

So the breach, instead of showing any sign of becoming healed, was rapidly growing wider. The chums of Study 1 were drifting farther and farther apart.

In the meantime, of course, the affairs of the school were going on just the same as ever. St. Frank's did not halt in its everyday life just because Clive Russell and Ralph Leslie Fullwood were having a quarrel. And all the masters, from the Head downwards, were more and more pleased at the evidences of normality. Although the school was on its honour—although nobody was forced to obey any rule or regulation by fear of punishment—those rules and regulations were being strictly adhered to.

The Vigilance Committee, in fact, were doing wonders.

They achieved their greatest success in the Fourth and the Remove. Until their inception, the Fourth Formers had been particularly lax—even worse than the Removites. But now they were growing very careful, indeed.

That night, for example, there wasn't a single fellow late upstairs. The bell for bed was answered promptly.

Calling-over had been successful, without a single absentee. The juniors were beginning to realise that the punishments meted out by the Vigilantes were even worse than the punishments which had hitherto been administered by the authorities.

The boys themselves were seeing that the St. Frank's code of honour was rigidly maintained.

everybody's going to bed in the ordinary way. It's all rubbish!"

Church grinned as he started undressing.

"There's no pleasing some chaps," he said. "The Vigilantes are a huge success. They've practically brought order to the Junior School, and you're not satisfied! I believe you really want the fellows to break the rules."

"Yes, just so as he can swish them!" chuckled McClure.

This was a true shot, and Handforth evaded it.

"Well, I don't believe all I see!" he said gruffly. "The rotters are trying to spoof us, that's all. They've just waited until we've been our rounds, and now they'll start their tricks."

"What tricks?"

"All sorts of tricks," replied Handforth vaguely. "You know what they are—breaking bounds, and going to pubs and things. Look what happened last night. I'm going to keep my eyes on those Study A cads."

"But, my dear old chump, Dick Hamilton and Tregellis-West are watching," said Church. "They've got their suspicions about Forrest & Co., and they're keeping a vigil in one of the recesses. That's what the Vigilantes are for—to keep vigils."

"Yes, and while they're watching in the passage, those cads will get out of the window!" said Handforth tartly. "Anyhow, I'm going to make another round of the dormitories, and make sure that everything's ship-shape. As chief of the Vigilance Committee, it's my duty."

"But Hamilton's the chief, you ass!"

Edward Oswald waved a hand.

"I'll grant he's the nominal chief—but I'm the real one!" he replied firmly. "So it's up to me to take a last look round. No, I don't want you fellows with me—you'll only make a noise. If there's any sign of trouble, though, I shall expect you to turn out. At the first indication, come straight along, and help me."

"How we shall know if there's any trouble?" asked Mac.

"As Vigilantes, it's your job to know!" replied Handforth tartly.

He went out of the bed-room, and crept along the corridor. It was after lights-out, and the Remove was supposed to be sound asleep. There was a movement nearby, and two figures loomed up.

"Who goes there?" came a murmur.

"Me, of course!" said Handforth, with a sniff.

"Oh, it's only old Handy!" murmured Dick Hamilton. "You shouldn't say 'me, of course,' old man—the right answer is 'friend.' And then I'll say, 'pass, friend,' in the proper way."

"We don't want to mess about with all that rot!" retorted Handforth. "I've decided to go round the bed-rooms, and make sure that everything's ship-shape."

"Begad!" said the other Vigilante. "In that case, Dick, old boy, it's no good sayin' anythin'. If Handforth has decided, there's



CHAPTER 15.

HANDFORTH'S DISCOVERY.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave a grunt of disgust.

"It's all rot!" he said sourly. "What's the good

of a Vigilance Committee if there's nothing for it to do? We've been all round, and

nothin' for us to do but let him get on with it—there isn't, really."

"He'll only disturb everybody——" began Dick.

But Handforth had gone. And he kept his word, too. He went from bed-room to bed-room, and he was not a popular visitor. For in most cases he awoke the juniors just after they had dropped off to sleep.

When he came to Fullwood's bed-room, he received his first shock. Ralph Leslie was wide awake, and fully dressed. In fact, he had been sitting on the edge of his bed in the dark, and he had been alone.

"What's this?" asked Handforth suspiciously. "By George! Are you planning to break bounds, or something, you fathead?"

"Chuck it, Handy," said Fullwood miserably. "I—I forgot about getting undressed. I've been sitting here, thinking."

"Thinking!" said Handforth. "In the dark?"

"One doesn't need electric light to think by!" retorted Fullwood tartly.

"You've got to explain better than that," said Handforth. "Don't forget that you're a Vigilante——"

"I'm not on duty at bed-time, and you know it!" broke in Fullwood, with impatience. "My last spell was at tea-time. Can't I have a little peace now, without you barging in?"

"You've got to explain why you're not undressed!" replied Handforth firmly.

"And there's another thing. Where's Russell? He was away last night, and he's away to-night. There's something rummy going on in this dormitory, my lad."

"There'll be something rummier going on soon!" snapped Fullwood. "I'll give you ten seconds to get out. If you're so jolly anxious about Russell, you'll find him three doors up. He's changed into Adams' bed-room."

"What on earth for?"

"Can't we have a quarrel now without you butting in?" demanded Fullwood. "Russell and I don't speak to one another—and if you weren't blind, you'd have seen it ages ago! I was sitting here, thinking about it—so if you want to do me a kindness, you'll buzz off."

Handforth looked very concerned.

"Here, I say!" he said, with a worried frown. "This won't do! I thought you two fellows were such jolly good pals? What's the trouble? Tell me about it, and I'll soon patch things up for you."

Although Handforth was always having squabbles with his own chums, he hated to see any other study disunited. And he had a great idea of himself as a peacemaker. He promptly decided to repair this rift on the spot.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, and looked stern.

"Now, then—out with it!" he said briefly.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Fullwood. "I've already told you that I want to be left alone. You can't do anything, Handy—and even if you could, I wouldn't accept your help. I can't explain anything, but Russell and I have had a row, and there's an end of it. So if you'll just kiss me good-night, and evaporate, I shall be awfully obliged."

Handforth started.

"Kiss you good-night?" he repeated, aghast.

"Just an expression, you chump," said Fullwood, with a faint grin. "I didn't mean it literally. I don't want to die so young!"

"You—you silly ass!" snorted Handforth. "I'm going to patch up this quarrel between you and Clive Russell. You needn't try to put me off. I've made up my mind, and——"

"Oh, well, in that case, I'd better humour you," said Fullwood, with a resigned air. "You want me to go to Clive's bed-room, eh?"

"Yes, I do!" said Edward Oswald.

"Oh, all right, let's be going, then."

Fullwood rose to his feet, and went to the door. Handforth was eager and pleased. He had expected to have a bigger wrestle than this. Fullwood politely held the door open for him, and Handforth passed out. Then

Fullwood closed the door, and locked it—but he thoughtfully remained on the inside.

"Hi, what the——" began Handforth.

"Leave it till to-morrow, old chap!" came Fullwood's voice, through the door. "Sorry, but I can't be bothered to-night."

"Why, you—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "You've dished me!"

"Here, steady!" said Dick Hamilton, hurrying up. "Don't make all this noise out in the corridor."

"I'll make as much noise as I please!" stormed Handforth. "Fullwood and Russell have had a quarrel, and it's so serious that they won't sleep in the same room! And when I offer to put things right, Fullwood locks me out!"

"I always said that Fully was a brainy chap," declared Dick.

Handforth growled, and strode along to Adams' room. He broke in, switched on the light, and found that Adams was fast asleep. Clive Russell was in bed, too, and he was snoring peacefully. Rather a strange snore, since it had only started upon Handforth's entry.

"I say, Russell," murmured Edward Oswald.

Clive's snore became more pronounced.

MORE TO COME !

You haven't had all the Free Gifts yet—there's more to come. Tom Mix, for instance, will be in every copy of next week's issue—

..... MAKE SURE OF YOURS !

"Russell, blow you!"

Still the Canadian boy slumbered noisily.

"Are you going to snore all the time I'm talking to you?" demanded Handforth indignantly. "I've come here to patch up your quarrel with Fullwood. I don't know what it's about, but you've got to tell me. Come on—no messing about!"

He bent over Clive's form, shook him, pummelled him, but it made no difference. Clive remained as inanimate as a log, except for the fact that his snores grew worse.

"All right!" said Handforth coldly. "You don't deserve any sympathy! If you can sleep as heavily as this in a strange bed-room, you can jolly well go and eat coke! A fat lot you care about Fullwood, anyhow!"

He went out with a snort, with a vague suspicion that Russell had been fooling him. Any other fellow would have known it for a certainty. He was just about to turn back, when he stiffened, listening. From the direction of the Third Form passage he heard whisperings and scufflings. His brow grew stern.

"By George!" he murmured. "Those giddy fags are on the move! This is a job for the Vigilantes!"



CHAPTER 16.

ROUGH ON THE THIRD.

LISTENING intently, Handforth made sure of his first suspicions.

There could be no mistaking those sounds from the Third Form passage. The fags were up and about—and, of course, by this time they should have been fast asleep. Without a moment's delay, Handforth sped back to his own bed-room, and jerked his chums out of bed.

"Come on—work!" he snapped.

"Look here——" began Church indignantly.

"Those giddy Third Form kids are creeping about," went on Handforth. "The Vigilance Committee must act at once. Turn out, you fatheads!"

Church and McClure knew the futility of arguing. They felt that their leader had discovered a mare's nest, as usual—but they changed their views soon afterwards, when they went out into the corridor. Dick Hamilton met them, and there were several other Vigilantes there, too.

"Quiet, you chaps!" whispered Dick. "The fags are up to something, and we've got to put a stop to it. But don't let them get wind of us. We've got to pounce, and teach them a lesson."

"My hat!" breathed Church. "We thought it was Handy's spoof!"

"No, he's right for once," murmured Dick. "Those Third-Formers ought to be sound asleep at this time, and it's like their nerve to be up and about. Come on—we'll lay in wait, and jump on them at the right moment, and bundle them back to bed."

This was real work for the Vigilance Com-

mittee—unexpected, too. For the Removites had not believed that the fags would get up to any of their tricks.

Within a minute, everything was quiet again.

The Vigilantes were distributed in various places along the Remove corridor—in doorways, recesses, and similar hiding-places. Judging by the sounds, the fags were coming in this direction.

Handforth had received the warning, no doubt, because of some slight squabble, for the voices were no longer apparent.

At last, Dick Hamilton gave the sign.

"Now!" he exclaimed tensely.

Instantly the passage became alive with the alert "V's."

"Cave!" gasped the voice of Chubby Heath.

"Quick, you chaps! Bunk!"

"Stand your ground, you fatheads!" hissed Willy Handforth.

But before he could get any further, the Removites were upon them.

Willy Handforth found himself in the grip of his major, with Church assisting. Before the leader of the Third could utter a sound, he was pushed face-downwards to the floor, and held there. All round him, his companions in misfortune were being dealt with in the same drastic fashion.

"The young beggars! We'll teach them to break the rules like this! Back to bed with 'em, and don't forget to spank them first. But not here. We don't want any masters down on us."

Some more scuffles, a few additional gasps and grunts, and the corridor was empty again. Willy and his henchmen were bundled into their dormitory, and the door was closed. And then followed a very painful episode.

While each fag was held by strong, willing hands, he was subjected to a brisk and humiliating spanking. Then, and not until then, were they allowed to speak. Tossed into bed, they writhed and squirmed.

"You're a fine set!" said Willy Handforth fiercely.

"Sorry, my lad, but duty is duty," replied his major.

"Clever, aren't you?" interrupted Willy, leaping out of bed, and facing all his tormentors. "Who d'you think we are, then? You—you brainy geniuses, what's the idea of one Vigilance Committee pouncing on another Vigilance Committee?"

"What?" gasped his major.

"Vigilance Committee?" repeated Dick Hamilton, with a start.

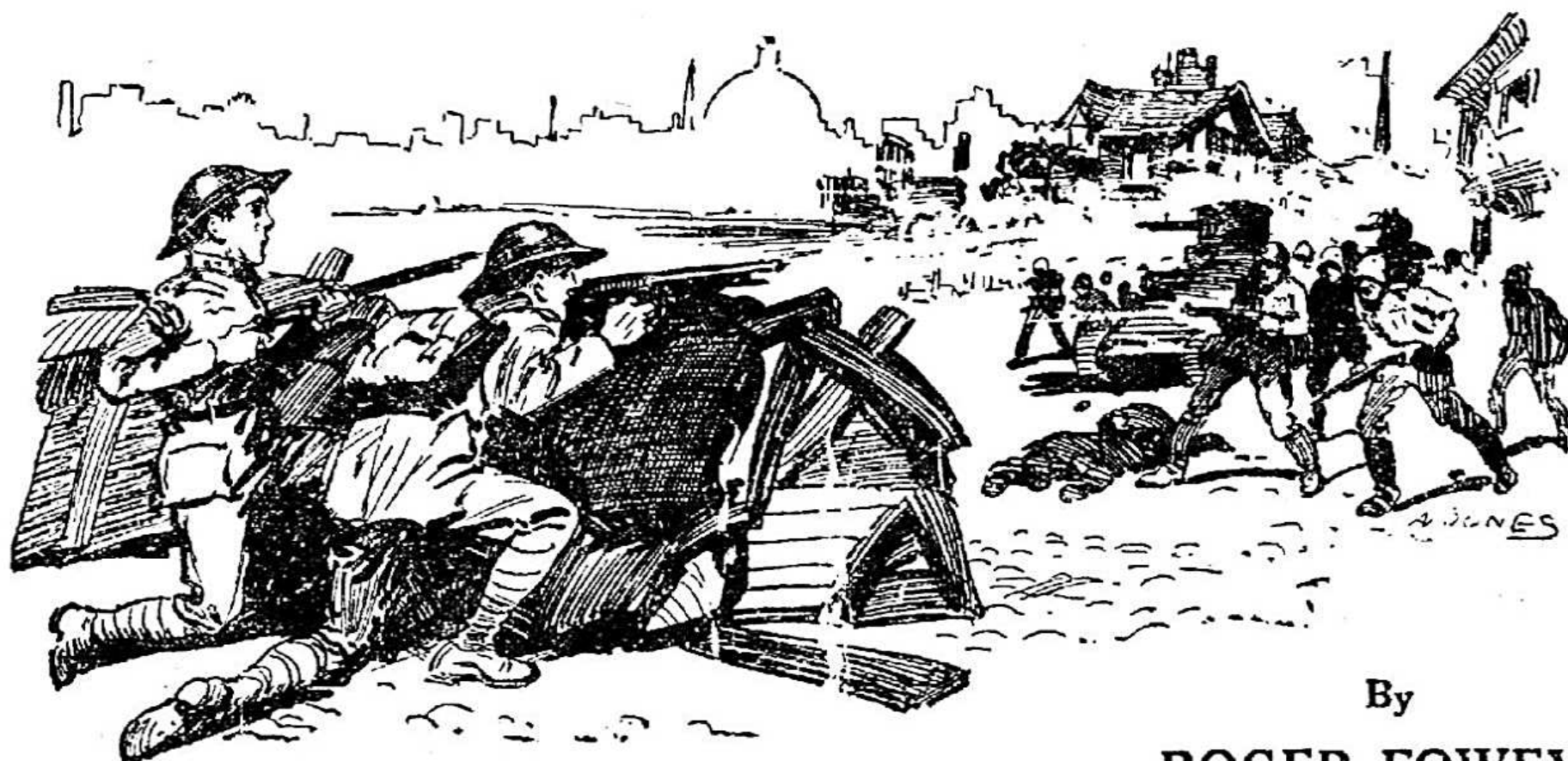
"I don't blame you," said Willy bitterly. "It's Ted's fault! I bet he started this affair. But I'd like you to know that you've messed up the first big capture of the Third Form Vigilantes! We no sooner get on the job than you wreck everything!"

"It's a bit thick!" complained Chubby Heath mournfully.

"I say, we didn't know!" said Dick Hamilton, with real regret. "We thought you——"

"Well, you shouldn't think—it's not fair to your poor, creaky brains!" interrupted

(Continued on page 42.)

*Our Thrilling War Serial!**Just Started!***SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!**

By

ROGER FOWEY**WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.**

When Germany declares a war of revenge on England and France Tom Lee and his chum, Jack Bennett are in the Form-room at Cliff House School. From the windows they see German war vessels massing preparatory to landing an invading army. The enemy shell the school, and while the rest of the boys are getting away, the chums discover that a master in the school is a spy, and that his real name is Stutz; this information is given them by a wounded Secret Service man named Bates. The two join up with Buster Kirk, another Fourth Former whose brother has been killed; the trio don their cadet's uniform and set out to find Brigadier Gordon, whose name has been given them by Bates.

They see the first effort to land repulsed

(Now read this week's exciting chapters.)

by British soldiers, and then they hurry off to where Brigadier Gordon's headquarters are in Denge Village, overlooking the Channel. They report to him, and he suggests that they should assist in the defence of the village. Other enemy attempts to land elsewhere have been frustrated, but Denge is between two fires. If the village can hold out until the arrival of reinforcements, the invasion may be checked entirely. The village roads are barricaded and British troops get into position. On the village green, the three run up against Bill Jennifer of the Tank Corps—the son of the woman who kept the village tuck-shop. Bill is trying to repair an old tank, a war relic. The chums assist him, in the hope of using it against the Germans.

BILL JENNIFER was a wiry, tough young fellow, and what he didn't know about a tank's engine did not seem to be worth knowing. With Jack's assistance he got the magneto off the lorry's engine, while he sent Buster and Tom off to a garage not far away, with instructions to bring all the petrol and oil they could lay their hands on.

The old tank squatting astride the green looked as though it would never move again. All the paint was worn off it—and what hadn't been worn off was covered with the initials and names of visitors to the little village.

Luckily, the two doors had always been kept fast shut, so that no one had had any chance to damage the engine. Somehow, Bill had got the doors open, and when Jack entered the tank with him, the boy saw that Bill had already done a lot of work.

The place was smothered in oil, tools were scattered about the steel flooring beneath the

long starting-handle, amidst the opened boxes of a dozen new sparking plugs.

"It's just a stroke o' luck that lorry happened to have a six-cylinder engine," Bill Jennifer exclaimed, and his voice rang hollowly in the tank when he spoke. "Otherwise I'd ha' been —"

His voice broke off. Outside the tank there sounded an abrupt, cataclysmic explosion. Both of them clutched the side of the tank as the whole thing rocked, while through the open door by which they had entered, dirt and stones and fragments of uprooted grass came flailing in a stinging shower.

"That was a shell!" Bill grunted, and Jack twisted to the doorway to look out. The lorry, which had been lying on its side, was now up-ended; even as he saw it, the great vehicle toppled over and crashed down in a shower of dust and debris. A big shell from one of the German vessels at sea had landed on the road just in front of the lorry. Jack was white when

he turned round to where Bill was peering under his arm.

"If we'd been half a minute longer out there we—"

"We'd ha' copped it proper," said Bill cheerfully. "Made a mess o' that lorry, ain't—Hullo, what's the matter wi' your mates!"

Buster and Tom were tearing up the road as hard as they could move. Jack guessed they had seen the shell burst and had come to see if he had been hit. He jumped out of the tank, and waved them back. They saw him, hesitated, grinned broadly, and then returned to the garage. Presently, they reappeared carrying petrol tins and cans of oil.

While the four of them worked, they heard the swift rattle of rifle-fire from around the village, the stirring whirr of machine-guns formed a background for the detonations of field-guns, which fired point-blank from among the buildings. Every little while, a shell screamed overhead; now and again, one burst in the road.

It was when the man from the Tank Corps was screwing home the last of the new sparking-plugs, while Jack filled the petrol tank at the rear of the tank, that they heard a sudden change in the noise of battle all about them.

The doors on both sides of the tank were open now, and looking out of one, all four could see straight up the street to the Dungeness end of the village. There was a barricade here, and they saw a grey wave of German soldiers sweep over it; bombs burst and bayonets flashed as they leaped at the machine-gunners in the narrow trench behind the sandbags.

For nearly half a minute the fight raged about the barricade, then the German horde subdued the defenders and came sweeping forward down the street.

Clearly the sunlight showed their grey uniforms, and the steel helmets that sat well down the nape of the neck. The exultant yell of the enemy came to the ears of the chums—and then, from out a side turning barely a hundred yards ahead of them, two Britishers dashed.

One man carried a Lewis gun, and his companion bore panniers full of bullet-drums. The gunner flung himself full length, slithering a yard as he poked his weapon forward. A second later, and his mate was at his side, while a deadly hail of bullets streamed from the coughing weapon.

Germans dropped like corn before a scythe; some plunged for the shelter of buildings. Drum after drum the machine-gun poured into the enemy ranks—and those Huns who had sought refuge between the cottages and the shops found themselves driven out by khaki-clad men who were there in support of the barricade. As the Germans reached the street, they once again came within range of that deadly machine-gun, which was speedily augmented by others.

In a couple of minutes the enemy were cleared out, and the barricade was manned again.

"Touch an' go—that!" muttered Bill Jennifer quietly. "There must be a lot of Germans out there if they could afford to rush that trench. Come on now, all of you on that starting handle with me—turn low at first, 'cause the oil's thick!"

The starting handle was a big affair, swinging in bearings at both ends. Turning it was heavy work at first, and for a couple of minutes they all swung on it.

"Right! Now I'll switch on an' we'll see if she starts!"

Once again they swung the handle, and this time they put all their weight and strength in it.

"She'll take it!" exclaimed Bill exultantly, as the engine coughed. "Try her again—all together! Yes, she'll have it! She—she's going!"

The mighty engine woke to life with a sudden furious roar; it spluttered for a space, and then settled to a steady thunderous purr.

"Sound as a bell!" exclaimed Bill. "Now we'll show 'em—we'll give 'em Germans. I've got to go round her wi' an oil-can, then we'll be ready! She's an old female tank, an' she don't carry nothin' but machine guns—we want half a dozen of 'em, boys! Scout round an' get what you can find. You'll soon— Hey, gunner!"

He stuck his head through the doorway to bawl to a soldier who was passing. It was an artillery man, his uniform all torn and dust-smirched. He stopped as Bill called to him, and came to the tank, staring at it curiously.

"Doin' anythin', mate?" asked Bill. "We're goin' to take this tank out soon's we got some machine-guns—know where we can find any?"

The artilleryman looked at them, and a sudden light came to his eyes.

"You bet I can!" he exclaimed. "Jerry's just knocked my gun to bits—got room for me in there?"

"We have—if we can get the guns and the ammo!" answered Bill. "These chap's will go with you!"

The gunner set off at a trot—Tom and Jack, with Buster, at his heels. Just around the corner from the green was the village drill-hall; the place was deserted when the gunner led the way in. He went straight across the floor to a small hall on the far side, and the chums gasped when he shoved open the door.

The place was stacked from floor to ceiling with arms and ammunition—emergency supplies with which every place on the south-coast had been equipped against invasion. They loaded Buster up with six machine-guns, which was as many as he could carry; the gunner showed them sets of double-panniers, each carrying sixteen filled drums of bullets—nearly eight hundred rounds in all. Each of them staggered away with four of these double-panniers; altogether they made four journeys to and from the hall, getting something not far short of thirty thousand rounds of ammunition into the tank.

By the time they had everything aboard and the guns installed in the solid steel mountings, Bill Jennifer announced that he was ready. He and the gunner spent a few minutes showing the boys exactly how the Lewis guns worked—and they were very easy to understand. The round bullet-drums, each carrying forty-seven shots—clipped above the gun; you fired until the drum was empty, and then snapped on another.

Bill closed the doors and locked them, after they had cleaned the periscopes. Jack and Buster took their stations at one side of the tank; the gunner and Tom went at the other side. Bill Jennifer sat in the worn driving seat, with a machine gun jabbing out before him.

"Everybody all right?" he yelled through the hot, almost complete darkness—the accumulators were not working, so there were no lights in the neon gas tubes in the roof.

A moment later, the engine accelerated; it seemed to strain for a moment, and then the tank clanked forward off the grass to the road!

Jack peering through the periscope which commanded the sights of his machine-gun, found his range of vision surprisingly wide. He heard Buster shouting something to him as the old tank lurched to the road, but the booming roar of the engine drowned the chubby Fourth Former's words.

It was strange to look out from the darkness to the bright light of the early-afternoon sunshine as the tank lumbered slowly and heavily up the road. Jack could hear the clank and whirr of the tractors, and suddenly, above the roar all about him, he caught the faint distant crash of a shell. It had hit one side of the road, barely a dozen yards from the tank.

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Jack's first sight of the burst was a leaping tongue of red flame, and then his periscope was obscured by flying bricks and upturned earth. He heard shell-fragments and debris smashing on the armour plating, even as he instinctively ducked away.

When he recovered himself and looked out again, he saw that the whole front of a cottage had disappeared. The sunlight streamed through dust and writhing smoke, to show the papered walls of the front rooms; he saw a couple of pictures swinging, watched a cabinet pitch to the floor, and then the side of the cottage collapsed and the roof dropped with slow deliberation, hiding everything with red tiles and brick-dust.

Jack remembered that cottage; it was the one in which the head gardener at the school lived. Now, the pretty front garden was obscured by debris, and the creeper-covered front of the cottage was wiped away.

The tank lumbered on, then seemed to crash to a halt. Jack looked forward, to see that Bill Jennifer had leaned to one side of his seat and opened an observation slot at the front, while the sound of the engine was throttled to a powerful, healthy purr.

A voice sounded from outside the tank:

"Good man—whoever you are! You going out with this lot? That's the stuff! We'll soon wipe those Jerries up if you give us a hand. There's

a building round here cutting off the field of fire of one of my guns—you might go out that way and smash the thing down for me!"

"Right you are, sir!" came Jennifer's voice. "I was just wondering which would be the best way out o' the village. This old tank's unofficial, but you might send a message to the Brigadier an' let him know we're gettin' into action!"

The observation slot slammed shut, and the tank rumbled on. At the front, Jack saw an artillery officer hurrying, he beckoned them down a narrow turning between two buildings and the tank swivelled to follow. Fifty yards down the lane, a field-gun was blazing shells; to one side of it showed the red-brick shape of a sturdy-looking outhouse.

The officer waved his hand towards it, and grinned. Jack could see that, if the outhouse were knocked down, the field-gun would be able to shoot at whatever lay beyond the building. Faintly, he heard the artillerymen cheering as they saw the tank; they dragged their gun to one side, and the old war-relic ambled on.

It went straight for the building. Jack didn't know what would happen. He held his breath, peering out of the forward periscope. He saw the wall of the building solid and sturdy—and then it was crumpling like paper as the nose of the tank stabbed at it. The machine butted

forward and went on in a cloud of dust. Jack felt the floor tilting; he heard a terrific grind and smashing, bricks clanged on the armour plating, and then the building was a mere heap of dust-hazed rubble with the tank lumbering to the grass beyond, shaking bricks and tiles and woodwork off its back as it reached the grass.

Jack saw a small tree waver and crash down as the tank's tractor clawed over its roots, and then there was a sudden, smashing, shattering roar from the other side of the tank as Tom got into action with his machine-gun.

Plainly, Jack heard Buster shout exultantly; by the faint light he saw the fat boy's face strangely pale and tense as he cuddled to the stock of his weapon, then the gun was quivering in his hands as he pressed the trigger and the black drum atop it spun round viciously.

Jack squinted through the periscope and along the sights of his own weapon. Ahead of him was coarse-grassed, rolling land that sloped down to the sea; in every fold in the ground were the grey figures of the enemy—and even as he saw them he became conscious of the fact that bullets were drumming an ever-increasing tattoo on the plating of the tank.

Jack saw a knot of Germans dart from the shelter of a hollow and rush forward. He dipped the barrel of his machine-gun, and his finger slipped round the trigger as he jammed the wooden stock to his shoulder—he pressed the trigger!

He felt the wonderful little gun spout its death-stream as he laid the sights on the group. He saw them break, and wither through the faint, bluish haze that welled from the barrel of the weapon, then they were gone.

The tank lifted as it topped a deep ditch. Jack clutched at the leather-covered hand-holds near his gun as the machine tipped and dropped forward—right into a nest of Germans!

He saw them break away. He watched one of them swivel a machine-gun and the man seemed to fire point-blank at him. Something jarred the muzzle of the weapon Jack was using, then the boy was blazing in reply—shooting through the spouting bullets from the other weapon. He saw the German gunner pitch backwards and lie still.

Jack made a snapping change of his now empty drum for another loaded with bullets, and as he brought it into action he saw four Germans kneeling behind bushes and slinging bombs at the tank as fast as they could pull the pins. It was Buster who wiped them out.

And now, all around, Germans were running wildly from the advance of the tank. Faint and distant through the uproar all about him Jack could hear cheering from the village, and then he bent to the grim work of speeding the fleeing enemy.

Bill Jennifer was a master craftsman in the handling of his cumbrous vehicle. He wheeled and twisted it to enflame the Huns, bringing the guns of his crew to bear where targets were best.

Over the whistling grass and chalk-streaked earth the tank lumbered, a steel giant of vengeance—unassailable and mighty. The very sight of it sent the German infantrymen flying, for they knew its power and its invulnerability. Within three minutes of its appearance from the debris of the wrecked outbuilding, the attack on the seaward side of the village was broken, and Bill headed the machine down the slope to the sandy shore beyond Dungeness Head.

He dropped the tank into a long hollow which almost concealed it from the sea, and Jack wondered where they were going. He saw in a few moments. Looking out, he glimpsed soldiers still disembarking from flat-bottomed boats similar to those used in the attack on the school.

In the centre of the line, a gun was being

dragged from off one boat; behind was another gun waiting to be taken off, and on the shore were two which had already been hauled to dry land.

"Let 'em have it!" Jennifer bawled, above the roar of the engine.

Instantly, the four machine-guns answered his call, sweeping the shore and the boats as the tank lumbered down at them. For a few seconds, the two guns on the sand were cut off by a shoulder of low cliff; when Jack sighted them again, he saw the guns had been swung round, and behind the bullet-proof shields the two crews were working madly to bring the weapons into action against the advancing tank.

Jack sprayed the shields with bullets. He heard the roar of the tank's engine increase as they bore down—if those guns were fired, their shells must pierce the tank at such short range!

Four drums Jack emptied at the guns, then he saw the muzzle of one of the weapons being depressed. The tank whisked round on one tractor, lumbering sideways and then lurching on—just out of line of the tapering, threatening muzzle.

Once again the muzzle shifted. Behind the sight-opening in the gun's shield, Jack saw German gunners working at the breech—he saw a shell slipped home! He sighted carefully through the opening, then pressed the trigger. A man at the back of the gun staggered and fell—another leaped to his place—and then the tank was on them.

The gun was fired just as they reached one side of the weapon. The shell screamed high overhead as the tank nosed the weapon over. Gunners ran in all directions, as the tank clambered cumbrously over the gun, crushing the wreckage to the sand, and then toppling over the other weapon.

The work was done, and the tank was grinding the fragments to twisted metal as the low cliff behind the guns was suddenly split by the impact of a big shell from one of the ships at sea.

Another came an instant later, as Bill Jennifer swung the tank round. A third roared home before them; they ploughed through its smoke, dropped heavily into the hole it had made, and then clambered out of it on the rock-strewn sides of the cavity.

It seemed to Jack that every gun on the enemy ships was turned on them then. The gunners fired without heed to such of their own infantrymen as might be disembarking from the flat-bottomed boats. Shells crashed to shore and sea, to sand and cliff; the tank was plastered with flying steel.

A dozen times it shuddered to the tremendous concussions all about it; the whole front of Jack's weapon was shorn off by a shell splinter; his periscope was obscured by smoke and flame and sand.

At the front of the tank, he could see Bill Jennifer straining in his seat, both hands on the steering-levers as he peered forward.

Near Jack, Buster Kirk was still firing at dim-seen shapes—Buster knew that at any moment they might be hit, but he was going to make these invaders pay dearly for killing his brother, before he himself was killed.

And then, very suddenly, the tank pivoted on one tractor, scuttled heavily into the gully from out which it had come, and gained shelter from the mighty guns of the ships, just as a gargantuan shell gouged a tremendous hole on the spot on which the tank had just turned.

Jennifer ran the tank another fifty yards, into a deep depression, then he stopped it and throttled down the engine.

"Ev'rybody all right?" Jennifer asked, as he turned in his seat.

The bent figures in the fighting sponsons turned at his words, and he went on:

"Have a look round, gunner, an' see we ain't copped a packet anywhere, will you!"

The gunner made a swift investigation. But the tank was still undamaged, and he reported everything all right.

"Crums, that was hot work!" Jack heard Buster grunt. "Warm in here, Jack. This'll get some o' my fat down! I'll be thin as a lath when we get out o' this Turkish bath!"

"We ain't finished yet," Jennifer called to him. "Them Germans down below there won't shift much for a while, they dunno how many more tanks there are about, see? They'll want a few guns with 'em before they land any more men. We'll see if we can't do a bit o' good the other side o' the village now! Load up, an' hang on!"

The tank ground forward again. Its appearance had absolutely checked the German attack on the seaward and on the Dungeness Head sides of Denge Village. If they could get to the other end and hold up the attack there, then the village might yet hang out until reinforcements arrived. That done, it would be only a matter of hours before the invaders were completely defeated.

Although Bill Jennifer spoke cheerfully, he had a horrible fear that the big guns of the German ships might seek the tank out as it lumbered back towards the village.

If they had done so, the tank must have been blasted out of existence in no time at all. As it was, however, an interruption came from the sea, in the shape of more destroyers, following up those which the chums had noticed coming from the direction of Portsmouth.

Just as the tank won clear these nippy vessels got into action, and they gave the German ships as much as they could manage for quite a while.

But it was with his heart in his mouth that Jennifer took the tank into the open and made for the village again.

Jack got a clear view of Denge as they climbed the slope. Long-range shells had now wreaked havoc in the pretty little English village. Shattered roofs were everywhere. He could see columns of smoke lifting to the blue sky—the funeral pyres of war-wrecked homes.

Half the square tower of the village church was shorn away, with tangled roots of ivy dangling listlessly about the black, empty gap. But, even as Jack saw it, that gap was suddenly lit by the flutter of two white signalling flags. Jack could not see the man who held them, but he could read the message spelled by the shifting white:

"E-N-E-M-Y H-O-L-D F-A-R
E-N-D V-I-L-L-A-G-E E-N-T-E-R
S-T-R-E-E-T A-N-D A-T-T-A-C-K."

"See that?" Jack clawed his way past the roaring engine, and touched Jennifer's shoulder.

"Somebody signalling—couldn't see what. Did you read it?" the Tank Corps man roared at him.

"Yes, it said that the enemy have got the far end of the village. You're to enter the street and attack!"

"I got you!" exclaimed Jennifer. "My gosh, they're in the village then—what price my old dad's tuck shop now, eh? I bet there's Germans in it, scoffin' the grub! Open that slot an' wave your handkerchief—let that signaller know you've got the message!"

Clinging to Jennifer's shoulder, Jack obeyed, and the white fabric of his handkerchief told the distant signaller that they understood. With a flirt of his white flags he acknowledged Jack's signal, and then the tank went on.

They re-entered the village by the way they had left it. In the little lane beyond the field-

gun—still blazing away! Jack saw Brigadier Gordon standing with his staff. He hurried forward as Bill stopped the tank and opened the slot at the front.

"Splendid—splendid!" the Brigadier exclaimed. "You've been worth a battalion of men, but the enemy are too heavy for us at the other end of the village. We're just holding them. Go straight down the street and clear them out for us; I'll have mopping-up parties behind you! England won't forget what you've done to-day, lads! Carry on!"

Jack saw him salute as he stepped back, and the boy was thrilling to the brigadier's words. The compliment was worth enduring the thick air within the tank, heavy with cordite and the reek from the roaring engine. He remembered the Brigadier's words to them some time before: "Well, I hope you'll be as good as some of the old ones that fought at Mons!"

Somehow, Jack felt that they were keeping up the tradition, for it seemed to him that the Battle of Denge might go down on the roll of fame just as had the Battle of Mons! There was nearly as much depending on it.

The tank rolled on, then turned the corner into the main street. Jack peered ahead.

The buildings on either side were shattered and torn by shell-fire, and the brick walls had been scoured by bullets. Here and there men lay crumpled—forn figures merging to the dust of the familiar road.

He saw the white front of the local police-station—just a cottage it was. Behind the gatepost, Constable Hazlett was kneeling. He was in uniform, but his official head-gear had been replaced by a steel helmet.

Over his blue tunic was slung a bandolier looted from some artilleryman, and his chin was cuddled down to the stock of a service rifle. There was blood on his face from jaw to ear. A corner of the red roof of his little cottage had been shorn completely away—the whole picture of the policeman with his rifle, and the shattered building behind, was typical of what had been happening since German guns had begun to batter at the shores of Old England.

Hazlett was shooting up the street, trying to pick off snipers who had taken to the roofs of buildings captured by the Germans.

The street just beyond the green was barricaded—furniture and mattresses, sandbags and parts of a waggon were all heaped together with soldiers firing through the interstices. When they saw the tank approaching, the defenders in the centre ran to one side, while the machine-guns at either end redoubled their fire.

Jack gripped the stock of his own gun, and steadied, as the front of the tank lifted to the barricade. They crashed through, and then he saw the barricade that the Huns had captured, barely a hundred yards ahead.

A veritable hail of bullets spanged and slithered on the plating of the tank. Its tractors rode over the wreck of a field-gun lying on its side in the road; they lurched into a shell-hole and lumbered out of it, then the four machine-guns on the tank erupted as the crew sighted the Germans beyond the barricade. Jack had replaced his own damaged gun by the spare one they had brought from the hall, and he used it to good purpose.

The tank went over the low obstruction, crushing it. Back of them came cheering Britishers, to assault the Huns with bomb and bayonet. They rushed into the captured buildings, and as the tank lumbered on, they drove the enemy out.

Burst after burst of bullets Jack sent into the windows of the cottages. He caught a machine-gun crew at the broken front of the tuck-shop, and he emptied a drum into them as they passed.

Then they were clear, with their guns spraying

(Continued on next page.)

SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By
ROGER FOWEY.

(Continued from previous page.)

lead all around—with grey figures racing for shelter—with khaki-clad men tearing at the heel of the tank.

Jennifer sighted a column of German reinforcements coming up from the shore and he headed the tank for them, yelling as he drove. The four sighted the Hun troops together, and they sheared the grey ranks with a tearing volley.

The tank went on, her guns blazing madly. Bullets slicked from the smoking muzzles as they poured drum after drum into the reinforcements.

At last Bill Jennifer checked the tank and began to swing her round to return. They were then over a quarter of a mile from the village.

It was as the tank turned that the engine coughed. It spluttered—accelerated violently—spluttered once again—then stopped dead!

The tank was squarely across the road to the village. After the deafening clamour of the guns and the engine, the silence was tomb-like. The only sound that came to Jack's ears was the ringing snap of bullets on the armour plating.

He was half deafened by the tumult in which

they had been riding. Faint and distant, Bill Jennifer's words came:

"We've run out o' petrol—we're stuck! We can't get back!"

The gunner grinned.

"Don't matter, we can still shoot!" he said grimly. "We—Hullo! Gosh, the drum I've just put on my gun is the last I've got!"

"I've used all mine, too!" came Tom's voice, and he stared blankly at his companions.

"Crumbs! I was just going to ask you chaps for some more ammunition!" Buster exclaimed.

Jack looked at the drums in the rack at his side. There were only two left; empties clattered about his feet as he moved, where he had flung them after removing them from the gun.

Their ammunition was as good as exhausted! They had no petrol and the tank could not get back! They were in the heart of enemy territory—helpless!

Out at sea, one of the enemy troopships sighted them from its position before the old school. It loosed a shell which crashed to the side of the road, smothering the tank in a curtain of dirt and steel fragments.

"We're done!" gasped Bill Jennifer. "They can see us from those ships—they'll batter us all to bits!"

(Can the chums escape from the helpless tank? Will they risk a dash through the enemy back to the British soldiers in the village? Learn the solution to their desperate problem in next week's thrilling chapters. You can make sure of reading them by ordering your copy of "The Nelson Lee Library" in advance—and don't forget that every issue next week will contain a life-like coloured figure of Tom Mix!)

THE LEAGUE FORM

Owing to pressure on space, THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE Form has been held over. It appeared in last week's issue, and will be published again next Wednesday.

"The School Without Rules!"

(Continued from page 36.)

Willy, his voice full of scorn. "We'd been setting a trap for that young rotter, Fullerton, of the East House, and you come along and kybosh the whole bag of tricks!"

"Fullerton!" echoed Dick. "But he's not here!"

"Not now, of course!" snapped Willy. "We Vigilantes had had secret information that Fullerton was going to fix up a ladder outside the window of Forrest & Co.'s bed-room at eleven o'clock sharp—"

"What!" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Yes, you can pant for breath!" growled his minor.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth. "And if we hadn't interfered, these fags would have stopped the game! What a giddy frost! But, of course, we'll catch the rotters

when they come back! Out on the razzle every night, by the look of it!"

However, there was some compensation in the small hours.

Forrest & Co., in spite of the precautions of the Vigilance Committee, had got away on their nightly spree. And when they returned, they fondly imagined that they had completely dished the "V's." They soon discovered their error!

For a determined band of the Vigilantes awaited them. They numbered six, and Willy Handforth had insisted upon being one of the half-dozen. As to the exact punishment which befell Forrest & Co., it is hardly necessary to go into details.

But even after they had got into bed, they found it difficult to obtain any real rest. Indeed, the only possible way in which they could sleep that night was to turn face downwards!

THE END.

(Another long complete yarn next Wednesday: "THE CADS OF ST. FRANK'S!" and a magnificent coloured stand-up figure of TOM MIX.)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

(ALL LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Lond., E.C.4.)

FACTS THAT COUNT.

YOU all know how it is in life, no matter what work you have got in hand. A certain time comes along for doing a special job, and the fellow who makes a success of it is the man who comes down firm and heavy on that right, identical psychological moment and gets busy. He is of the DO IT NOW brigade. Good luck to him!

Well, we have now reached this sort of time in the wonderful progress of the St. Frank's League. With all the extra publicity the League has obtained, and with the Free Gifts making people talk, this is the moment to rush up those extra introductions which are wanted before the weight sweeps up to the five-thousand mark. It jolly soon will be there at the rate things are going, and when that point is gained we shall jump into the Silver Medal stage. The Silver Medal will be awarded to all members who have qualified for this higher award. I know all loyal "Nelson Leeites" will appreciate the necessity of running up the score needed so as to hasten the "release" of the Silver Medals, as the film merchants put it.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

D. Cramp, 67, Lorne Road, Leicester, wishes to correspond with readers in South Africa who are interested in stamps.

J. Smith, 38, Brooksbys Walk, Homerton, London, E.9, wishes to correspond with Leagueites anywhere for the purpose of forming a club.

David Orrell, 850, Old Kent Road, London, S.E. 15, wishes to communicate with all readers interested in book-keeping.

T. G. Lynch, 39, Selbourne Street, South Shields, Durham, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

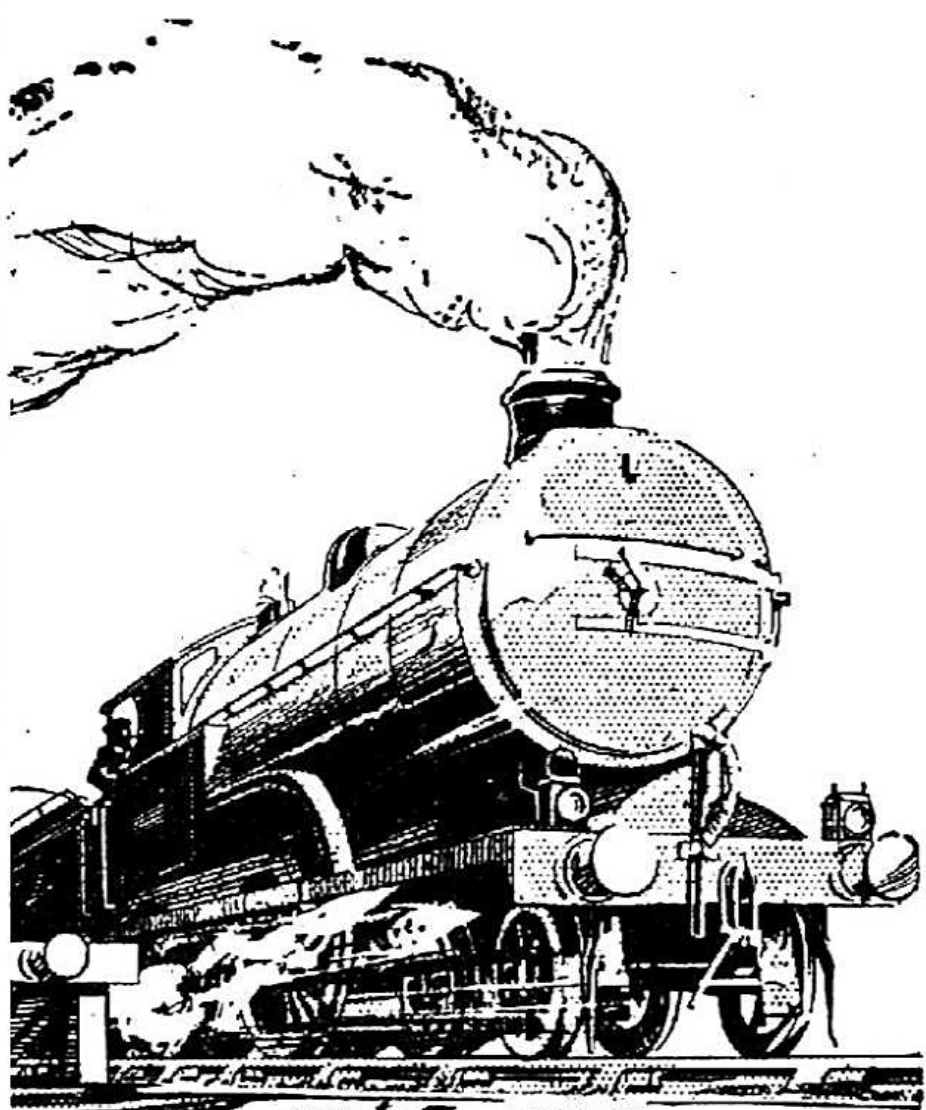
Charles H. Dalton, 80, Blatchington Road, Hove, Sussex, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere. All letters answered.

Ernest Gilchrist, 68, Hargwyne Street, Brixton, London, S.W.9, wishes to correspond with readers overseas, especially with one in Australia who lives on a ranch.

Member 1204, Post Office Stores, Woodville Road, Old Guildford, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Great Britain or anywhere in the Empire.

E. C. Davies, 56, Splott Road, Splott, Cardiff, wishes to hear from readers overseas.

Gerard Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool, wishes to hear from readers in his district who are willing to support his club.



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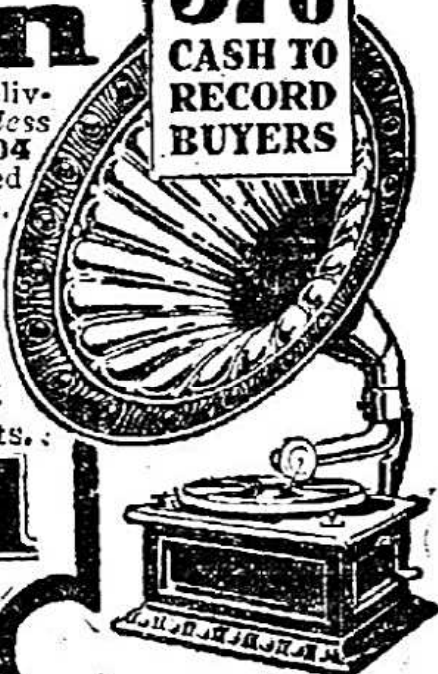
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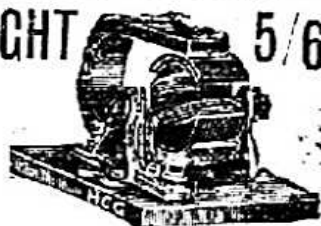
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