

POWERFUL YARN
OF
SCHOOLBOY LIFE—

“CAUGHT IN THE MESHES!” —LONG COMPLETE STORY
IN
THIS WEEK'S ISSUE.

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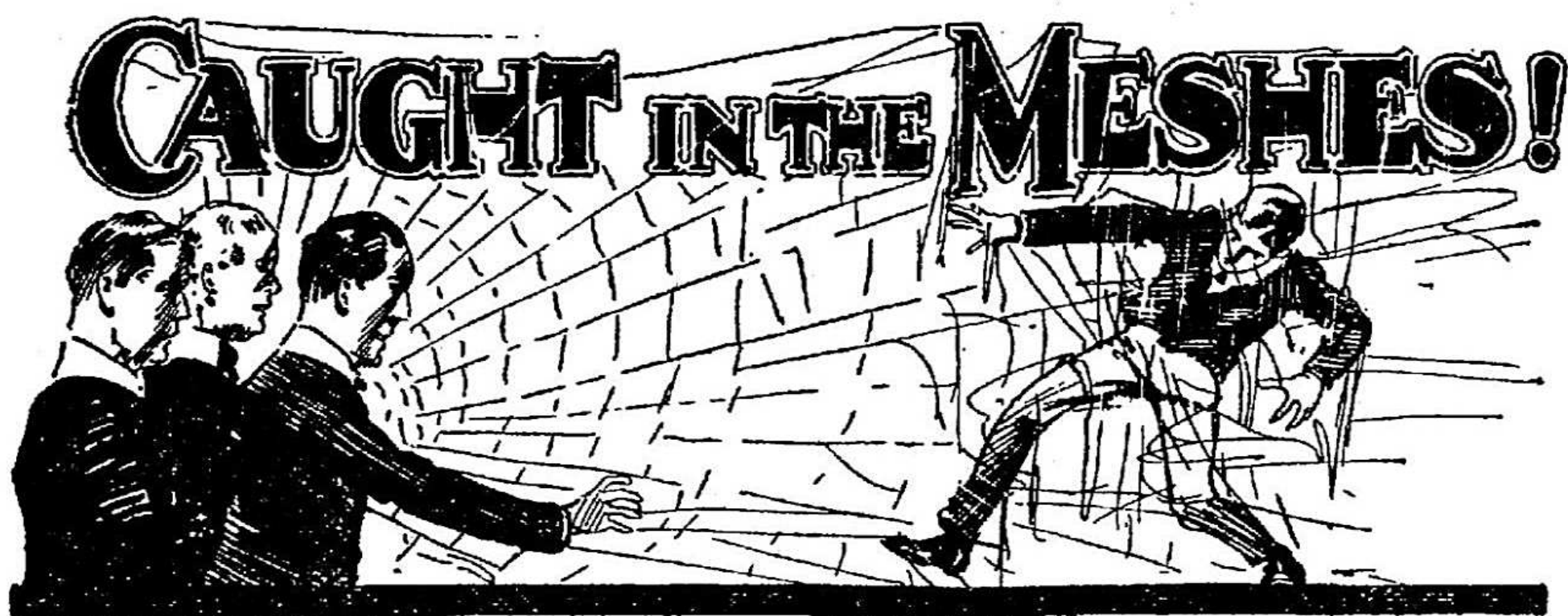
This Splendid
Coloured
Stand-up
Figure of
CHARLIE
CHAPLIN
Given Away
this Week!



CHARLIE CHAPLIN



"Into the dormitory with him!" came a grim voice. "We'll teach the rotter to break bounds at night." Clive Russell recognised the tones of Edward Oswald Handforth. A pillow was pressed over the Canadian junior's face to stifle his shouts, and he was unceremoniously bundled back into the dormitory.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Cads at it again! Another rousing long complete story of the Honour System at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

IN THE SMALL HOURS!

CLIVE RUSSELL started, and listened intently.

"Good!" he muttered. "At last!" The Canadian junior was sitting on the edge of his bed in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. The school clock had boomed out the hour of one a.m. some ten minutes earlier. And a high, blustery wind was whistling and moaning round the grey old walls of the school buildings.

Clive was looking anxious, and he rose from the bed, went to the door of the bed-room, and softly opened it. And after a few moments he closed the door again, and turned back.

"Must have been the wind," he said disappointedly.

He had thought that somebody was coming, for he had heard a creak resembling the sound of a footstep on a loose board in the corridor. But the half-gale was playing many tricks that November night.

"He can't be long now," Russell told himself. "It'll be half-past one soon, and I believe they turn everybody out of that beastly gambling place at one o'clock. He must be home before long."

Clive Russell was waiting for his chum of Study I—Ralph Leslie Fullwood. Recently, the pair had had a bitter quarrel, and were still on such bad terms that they would pass one another with averted eyes, and with the air of strangers.

But Clive meant to put an end to all that as soon as Fullwood came in. And now he

was waiting. Sleep was impossible. He had told himself that everything could wait until the morrow. That was all right in theory, but in practice it wouldn't work. Sleep was out of the question.

Clive Russell was in Fullwood's dormitory even now, although, strictly speaking, his own bed was further along the corridor, in Adams' room. Clive had transferred there at the beginning of the quarrel. But now he was back. It didn't matter to him that his old bed had no sheets upon it. The House-matron could put things right in the morning.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

The four strokes of the quarter-past chimed out above the roaring of the wind, and Clive was rather surprised. He had thought that the time was later. After all, even if Fullwood had started out from Bannington soon after one, he couldn't be in before half-past, at the earliest.

So Clive settled himself to another wait.

He hadn't troubled to undress—for he himself had been meeting with some peculiar adventures that night, and hadn't been indoors for long. There was no reason why he should stay here, in the bed-room, he argued. Perhaps it would be better to go down to a lower window, and wait there—a window which had been purposely left unlatched. Then he would be able to see Fullwood as he came in.

Not so very long since, Clive had definitely made up his mind to go straight to sleep, but once alone in Fullwood's bed-room, he had just sat there, thinking. He hadn't even

turned on the electric light, and the room was only dimly illuminated by the occasional rays of the moon, as it peeped fitfully out from behind the scudding clouds.

Clive went to the door, opened it, and slipped through into the corridor. He crept along noiselessly, and had almost reached the head of the stairs, when a sudden movement came from a deep recess. Clive halted, startled. Perhaps it was only his imagination. One sees all sorts of peculiar things in the dead of night. Ordinary objects are unreal—

"Now!" muttered a tense voice.

Three dim figures separated themselves from the general blackness, and hurled themselves upon him. Clive Russell was so surprised that he had no opportunity of defending himself. He went down with a thud, and his attackers sprawled all over him to such purpose that he had no opportunity of crying out, or using his fists.

"Quick—into his own dormitory!" said a grim voice. "Got the cane? We'll swish the beggar until he can't sit down for a week!"

Clive struggled indignantly. He recognised the tones of Edward Oswald Handforth, and it needed no wild guess to arrive at the conclusion that the other two fellows were Church and McClure. The famous chums of Study D were obviously on the warpath.

"I say!" he managed to gasp. "You've made a blunder—"

"Squash him!" commanded Handforth. "Shove that pillow over his face."

Church had already received a glimpse of the truth.

"Half a minute!" he gasped. "This chap isn't—"

"Don't argue!" hissed Edward Oswald. "Gag him, and obey my orders!"

Church decided that it would be much quicker and safer to go ahead. So he pressed a pillow over Clive's face, and the next moment the Canadian junior found himself being hurried along the corridor. He was half-dragged, half-carried, and at length he was bundled unceremoniously on the floor, and a door was closed.

"Good egg!" said Handforth briskly. "Lights!"

A switch snapped, and Clive sat up, blinking.

"Thanks awfully!" he said sarcastically. "Are you satisfied?"

Edward Oswald Handforth stared.

"Why, it's Russell!" he ejaculated in astonishment.

"Marvellous!" said Church, with an expression of amazement. "I say, Mac, didn't we always say that Handy was a wonderful detective? How does he know that this chap is Russell?"

"It beats me!" said McClure, shaking his head.

Handforth frowned.

"You silly fatheads!" he snorted. "Can't I see it's Russell?"

"I could have told you he was Russell a minute ago, out in the corridor, but you

wouldn't listen," said Church. "I hope you'll go to bed now, and give up this silly business. Mac and I need some sleep, even if you don't."

Handforth glared at Russell indignantly and angrily.

"You'd better get up!" he said, with a sniff. "You ass, you've spoofed us! We thought you were Forrest!"

"I'm frightfully sorry!" said Clive. "I'd like to oblige, but, not being a magician, I can't change myself into Forrest just to please you."

"You needn't be funny!" retorted Handforth, frowning.

"Nothing pleases you!" said Clive tartly. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to let me go now? Or are you going to give some sort of explanation? Wouldn't it be a good idea to look before you leap—to make certain before you pounce? Why, you might bowl over a master at the rate you're going!"

McClure gave a weak smile.

"My dear chap, we've told him this twenty times," he said wearily. "We've pointed out that the night time is set aside for sleeping. We've argued until we're hoarse. But what's the use?"

"No use at all!" said Handforth coldly. "We're all members of the Vigilance Committee, and it's our plain duty to wait up until Forrest comes in. As a conscientious Vigilante, I mean to punish Forrest with the utmost severity for breaking bounds after lights-out."

"But I thought Dick Hamilton decided that Forrest's punishment could wait until to-morrow?" asked Clive. "Dick's the captain, and if his decision isn't good enough, it's a pity. I guess you'd better go back to bed, Handy, and get some beauty sleep. You need it more than anybody I know!"

Handforth completely missed the insult.

"It's no good leaving these things until the morning," he said, with a certain amount of hard logic. "In the morning, we shall be fresh and chirpy. We shan't feel so wild with Forrest, and it'll simply mean that he'll get off lightly. There's no time like the present."

"I dare say there's something in what you say," admitted Clive, nodding. "If you collar Forrest now you'll probably mangle him to a jelly, and he deserves it, too. But aren't the Vigilantes supposed to keep to certain regulation punishments? I didn't know that one chap could just please himself, and perform an act of lynching with impunity?"

"There's an exception to every rule," replied Handforth coolly.

Church grunted.

"You can use up all your arguments as soon as you like, Russell—and Handy will end up in every case by telling you that there's an exception to the rule. So you might just as well save your breath. Mac and I have been through it."

St. Frank's was not normal just now. The entire school was on its honour—an experi-

ment suggested by Professor Grant Hudson, of Hale University, U.S.A., who was at present a guest under the headmaster's roof.

Every form of punishment was abolished during the period of this test. The fellows could do exactly as they pleased without risk of being dropped on. They could get up at any hour they chose, they could miss lessons, they could break bounds with impunity, and "get away with it." In a word, the headmaster had put them strictly on their honour to obey the rules without any compulsion.

And the great majority of the fellows had responded nobly.

Under this present system, St. Frank's was far more orderly and well-behaved than it had ever been before. The effect upon the Junior School was particularly noticeable. Many fellows had hitherto committed minor breaches without compunction, knowing that they could easily square things, if they were caught, by performing some light imposition or other.

But now it was different. They were on their honour not to break any rules, so if they broke them they could not place things on an even footing by doing an impot. It was dishonourable to ignore the slightest regulation, and so all the decent fellows were practically falling over themselves to keep the record clean.

But there are black sheep in every fold, and St. Frank's was no exception. A certain number of fellows, notably Forrest and Gulliver and Bell, of the Ancient House, and other shady young rascals in the East House, had taken a delight in abusing their new freedom.

This small minority of dishonourable fellows—named "Blots" by the others, since they were attempting to smudge the school's record—had occasioned the Head a good deal of worry at first. For it had seemed that the experiment would fail because of the caddishness of an insignificant few.

But then the Vigilance Committee had been formed.

In every House the Vigilantes had become active. Since the school authority inflicted no punishments, the Vigilantes took it upon themselves to step into the breach. Only their punishments were much more drastic!

The effect of the Vigilantes' operations had been instantaneous.

Within twenty-four hours of their formation, rule-breaking had become the most unpopular pastime at St. Frank's. And now the various Vigilance Committees had the position thoroughly in hand.

St. Frank's was honourably proving itself equal to the test.

Only one or two isolated die-hards remained to be dealt with. On this particular night, for example, Forrest & Co., of Study A, had broken bounds. Dick Hamilton had suggested putting them on trial on the morrow, and the Ancient House Vigilance Committee had approved. But Hand-

forth, it seemed, was determined to deliver a drastic punishment at once, while the iron was hot.



CHAPTER 2.

WAITING FOR FULLWOOD!

LIVE RUSSELL started up as the half-hour chimed out.

"I can't stay here!" he said gruffly. "It's half

after one! Fullwood ought to be back by this time. I was just going downstairs to see if there was any sign of him when you grabbed me."

"Well, it serves you right," said Handforth. "You ought to be in bed!"

"You ass! What about you?" retorted Clive.

"I'm a Vigilante," said Handforth loftily.

"If it comes to that, so am I."

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Yes, I suppose you are—but there are different grades of Vigilantes, my son," he added, trying to make himself right with his usual effrontery. "You're only an ordinary sort of chap, and I'm a leader. By rights, I ought to be chief of the 'V's.' But it's just like Dick Hamilton to collar all the fat for himself."

"At least, he's got the brains!" said Church. "He sleeps when he ought to be sleeping, and leaves official business until the right hour."

"Is that a sneer at me?" demanded Handforth.

"It's a complaint!" replied Church feelingly.

"I shall do exactly as I like, Walter Church!"

"My dear chap, we're not trying to stop you!" said McClure. "Go ahead! Of course you can do as you like. But why should we be made to do as you like, too? That's the point we're arguing about."

Edward Oswald waved his hand.

"How many times have I told you not to argue?" he said sternly. "It only means a lot of wasted breath and ragged tempers. But it's always the same—I give good advice, and nobody takes any notice of it."

"And you never argue?" asked Church faintly.

"Never!"

"And the poor chap means it, too!" said McClure, in wonder. "You mustn't grin like that, Russell. He actually thinks that he never argues—"

"You chaps are the ones who do all the arguing!" interrupted Handforth wrathfully.

"As soon as I make a sensible suggestion, you jib at it. You haven't got any sense of duty, or any feeling of honour for the school, or anything! I'm ashamed of both of you!"

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Church.

"We're sacrificing our sleep to-night so that we can punish Forrest and his precious pals when they come in," continued Hand-

forth." "A creditable object! And yet you chaps jeer at it! Is that what you call doing your duty? Aren't you afraid to look me in the face?"

His chums not merely looked him in the face, but glared.

"Oh, you're a hopeless case!" said Church thickly. "We keep on telling you that the Vigilance Committee will deal with those cads to-morrow. And you think nothing of sitting up half the night, just to satisfy your own craving for violence! Mac and I want to sleep!"

"Of course we do," complained McClure. "Not that it's any good chewing the rag about it. Let's hope those rotters soon turn up, so that we can get the whole affair over and done with."

"And there's Fullwood, too," said Handforth, completely ignoring the complaints of his chums. "Fullwood was tricked, or something, wasn't he? Led astray, or something? Fooled into a trap, or something?"

"Yes," said Church, "or something."
"Oh, don't start again, for goodness' sake!" put in Clive hastily. "Fullwood went to that beastly roulette club, as far as I know. He went there to look for me."

"That was a brainy thing to do, while you were here!" said Handforth.

"Yes, but you know as well as I do that those cads got up an elaborate hoax to lure poor old Fully into a mess," said Clive, with a worried frown. "They grabbed me, locked me in a box-room, and then made Fullwood believe that I'd broken bounds, and gone out on the spree!"

Handforth nodded.
"Yes, that's one good point to remember," he said firmly. "That'll mean an extra biff on the nose for Forrest!"

"You're not going to biff him on the nose, are you?" asked Clive.

"Why not?"
"Aren't the Vigilantes supposed to administer punishments in the orthodox way—with a cane?"

Handforth smiled indulgently.
"That's one reason why I'm sitting up to-night," he explained calmly. "If Forrest & Co. are left until to-morrow, they'll just get an ordinary swishing, with a dose of Coventry as a side-line, perhaps. And what's the good of that? I mean to take them, one after the other, and alter their faces completely!"

"Oh!" said Church. "So that's why you've kept us out of bed, and made us sit up like this?"

"I'll make you sit up still more if you grumble!" threatened Handforth. "It's no good caning Forrest. I'm going to fight him. He's played a dirty trick on Fullwood, and he deserves a thundering good hiding. By the time I've finished with him, he'll hardly know whether he's a human being or a hundredweight of sausage meat!"

"Oh, well, that's your affair," said Clive. "I'm pretty wild with Forrest—Gulliver and Bell don't count—but my anxiety about Full-

wood is keener than my anger. I want to know what's happened to him."

"Why, you ass, you know, don't you?"
"I know that he went to that roulette club, thinking I was there," replied the Canadian boy. "But why has he been away all this time? He went there hours ago! As soon as he found I wasn't there, why didn't he get home?"

"It's a bit rummy," agreed Handforth, frowning. "As far as I can see, Forrest's idea was to trick Fullwood into playing roulette, or something. It would be a bit awful if he succeeded, wouldn't it? Perhaps that's why Fully hasn't come back—perhaps he's got caught in that rotten gambling set!"

"I don't like to think of it!" muttered Clive.

"Perhaps he's been playing roulette all the time," said Handforth grimly.

"Yes, and perhaps he's been bound up, and shoved behind a hedge!" put in Church. "If those rotters can bind up Russell, why can't they bind Fullwood? It's not fair to jump to hasty conclusions. Personally, I've got heaps of faith in Fullwood, and I believe he's O.K."

"Same here," said McClure. "Fullwood's all right."

Clive Russell was glad to hear these expressions of confidence. He was certain of Fullwood, too. But he badly wanted to know the full facts. Suspicions were never satisfactory—conjectures were equally worrying. In fact, the whole position was tantalising.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood had been very completely trapped. Owing to his recent quarrel with Clive, he had been in a receptive state of mind. The cads of Study A had done everything in their power to prolong the misunderstanding between the two juniors.

Clive had received twenty pounds from his father as a special present, and Fullwood thought that it was winning money, obtained at the roulette table. And Clive, who resented such an accusation, had huffily maintained his aloofness. And so the pair had drifted apart, Russell too angry to explain, and Fullwood nursing all sorts of false ideas about his chum.

Thinking that Clive had gone to the club again, Fullwood had consented to accompany Bernard Forrest, his intention being to drag Clive away. But it had been a trap, for Clive had never gone there.

And Fullwood was still absent! And the time was well after one-thirty in the morning! What was the explanation of his long absence?

"Yes, Russell, my son, you can make your mind easy about Fullwood," said Handforth benevolently. "Just you go back to bed, and leave this matter entirely in my hands. When Fullwood comes back, we'll tell him that we know all the facts, and that we're not going to punish him for breaking bounds. After all, he was only doing his duty as a Vigilante. But Forrest is going to be smashed——"

"Yes, we know all about that," interrupted Clive. "You're going to make him into hash. It's a good idea, but I've got to agree with Church and McClure, that it would be better to leave it till the morning."

"Then you're a silly fathead!" said Handforth gruffly.

"I'm not going to argue," smiled Clive. "You're looking a bit too dangerous, Handy. All I advise is that you should be careful. The Vigilance Committee is a fine institution, but it isn't really supposed to promote boxing bouts in the middle of the night. And there might be some noise."

"Noise!" said Church bitterly. "If Handforth starts on those cads when they come in, it'll be like pandemonium! Mac and I daren't go to bed, either!"

Handforth gave him an approving glance.

"I'm glad to notice this spirit," he said.

"We're afraid to go to bed, because we've got to look after Handy, and keep him out of mischief," continued Church coolly. "The poor fathead thinks that we're frightened of him, or something—that we're losing our sleep because he's ordered us to. But that's just one of his delusions. He doesn't actually know it, but Mac and I are his keepers."

Handforth grew red with indignation.

"Are you talking about me?" he asked blankly.

"Oh, sorry!" said Church. "I forgot that you could hear. Not that it matters much—lunatics have all got bad memories. You'll soon forget that I've told the truth about you, Handy. You can always rely upon Mac and me to lead you back to your padded cell after every escape!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure, grinning.

Handforth assumed an air of pitying tolerance. And Church and McClure relaxed their tensed muscles, for they had instinctively prepared for an onslaught. One could never tell with Handforth. Sometimes he would go off the deep end and create havoc, and sometimes he would take his chums' banter with lofty indifference.

"If I thought it would do you any good, I'd put you across my knee and slap you!" he said witheringly. "But you're not worth the trouble, and we can't expect too much from the half-witted. Follow me outside! We've got to get to our posts. Don't forget that we're on the watch."

Church chuckled.

"That's a good one!" he remarked. "We've spent about twenty minutes in this room, and we're supposed to be on the watch. You're not a Vigilante at all, Handy—you're just a joke!"



CHAPTER 3.

FULLWOOD'S INDECISION.

FIGURE leaned against the stile in Bellton Lane, just where the wood stretched away towards the downs. The moon-

light was slanting down through the restless

branches of the trees on the opposite side of the road, and the keen north-easterly wind possessed an icy chill.

But the figure by the stile stood motionless.

He wore no cap, and his overcoat was unbuttoned. Close by, a bicycle had been tossed carelessly against the hedge.

The figure shifted at last, and sat down on the stile. And the moonbeams fell upon the face of Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of the St. Frank's Remove

For Fullwood was a resolute junior generally, with calm eyes and a rather firm look about his mouth. And he made a point of being scrupulously neat, and was regarded as one of the best dressed fellows in the Lower School.

And now—what a difference!

There was nothing calm about his eyes. They had a wild look, an expression of unutterable misery, too. His mouth was drawn up, his lips tightly compressed, as though he was keeping himself in hand with an effort. And his whole appearance was dishevelled.

"I daren't go in!" he muttered. "I don't know what to do. I'm not fit to meet those chaps again, and as for Clive—yes, there's old Clive! How on earth can I tell him the truth? He'll finish with me after this, and I shall deserve it."

His mutterings were hoarse and rather broken. He got up from the stile and paced up and down, unconscious of the fact that he was chilled through and through. His state of mind was such that he did not even notice his physical discomforts. He was within a few hundred yards of St. Frank's, and he dared not go inside.

He had started out for Bannington with the firm intention of getting straight back to the school, seeking out Clive Russell, and confessing what he had done. But now that he was so near to St. Frank's, he hesitated. He was appalled at what Clive would think—at what the other juniors would do.

It seemed to his fevered mind that he had just been passing through a nightmare. It couldn't be real. It was so outrageous, so ridiculously fantastic. And yet he knew very well that it was all true. There would be no merciful awakening for him.

He had to face the music, and he trembled before the ordeal.

"I can't think clearly!" he murmured, as he sat down on the stile again and held his head in his hands. "What happened? That's what I can't understand! What made me be such a weak, pitiful fool? I thought I had done with all that sort of thing, and now I've simply proved that I'm still an outsider and a cad."

He looked up, his eyes blazing.

"Or Forrest's proved it!" he said fiercely. "Forrest set out to prove that I couldn't be trusted in a gambling-den! He said that I should be unable to withstand the temptation! A few hours ago I should have laughed at him. I should have called him an idiot.

But he was right. That's the awful thing I've got to face. He was right!"

Fullwood's tone had become scathing. His self-condemnation was absolute. During the past half-hour he had called himself every despicable name under the sun; he had reviled himself until he had used up every such expression he knew. And even now his self-contempt was growing.

He tried to think of the sequence of events. In a dazed sort of way he attempted to remember just that point when he had walked over the brink. But he couldn't bring it to mind.

Bernard Forrest had led him to believe that Clive Russell had gone to that gambling club, on the outskirts of Bannington, a private house run by ex-racing men, where roulette was indulged in. Forrest, who had had his knife deeply into Fullwood, had made him believe that Clive had gone to this place.

And Fullwood, like an idiot, had gone. He could remember all that part of it very clearly. Forrest and his precious chums had introduced him, and had made him believe that Clive Russell would soon show up—that he had gone off to meet some other shady acquaintances. And Forrest had made a show of twenty pounds—money that really belonged to Clive.

Fullwood groaned as he thought of it.

What a dolt he had been! He remembered grabbing that money and wrenching it away from Forrest. And Forrest had been angry about it.

"My hat!" breathed Fullwood. "Was I blind or dotty—or what? Why couldn't I have seen that the cunning rotter was only acting? Why couldn't I have had enough sense to know that he wanted me to grab that money?"

In a way, Fullwood's condemnation of himself was not quite fair. He should have given Bernard Forrest some credit—or discredit—for making his plans so perfectly. It was easy to talk now that it was all over; it was easy to see what he should have done. There is nothing so simple as to be wise after the event.

At the actual time, Fullwood had guessed nothing, and, on the whole, he could not be blamed. For Bernard Forrest's unscrupulous plot had been cunning to a degree.

Waiting in that roulette-room for Clive—as he had thought—Fullwood had had leisure to watch the spinning wheel, to look at the gamblers, and to take an interest in the game.

It had been Forrest's contention that Ralph Leslie could not resist the fatal fascination of these surroundings. For in the past Fullwood had been a very pronounced "goer." He had considered himself to be a real sportsman, and all the decent fellows in the Remove had held him in contempt.

But for a long time past Fullwood had changed. He now took a keen interest in football, in honest, healthy sports. And his companionship with Clive Russell had helped

him greatly. There was Reggie Pitt's sister, too—Winnie. This cheery girl of the Moor View School had done a lot towards bringing about Fullwood's reformation.

And now, in the space of an hour, he had gone back—he had undone all the good work of the past months!

For Bernard Forrest's contention had proved right! Left alone in the presence of that fatal wheel, the unfortunate Fullwood had succumbed! He had very soon forgotten his mission in the place. He had fallen under the spell of the clicking roulette-wheel, although he couldn't remember anything of that now. He couldn't recall exactly when he had started playing.

But he had played, and he had won heavily for a time. Then he had commenced losing, and when he had finally got up from the table, with a dull sense of realisation coming to him, he had found himself broke. And this was not the worst. For that money of Clive's was no more!

Twenty pounds—gone!

Clive's money all gambled away! Stolen and gambled! For Fullwood harshly told himself that he had stolen that money. Forrest had taken it from Clive's desk, and had placed it in his—Fullwood's—keeping. And it had all gone on the roulette table.

It had only been an hour of weakness. Ralph Leslie was himself again now—at least, he was no longer imbued with the gambling fever. He knew what he had done, and his repentance was pitiful. But the problem before him left him appalled. What could he do?

How could he explain to Clive? There was that quarrel, too—that quarrel in which he had been the only one to blame. Clive would only be acting rightly if he never spoke to him again.

"They'll all cut me now," muttered Fullwood miserably. "And why shouldn't they? What's the use of trying to kid myself that I've got any will-power? Why, a child of ten would show more resolution! What's the good of me if I can't stand next to a roulette table without going back on every resolve I've made? As weak as a rat! I've got no more will-power than a cross-eyed rabbit! And it makes me all the more miserable because Forrest was right. Oh, the cunning hound! He said I should knuckle under, and I did!"

He got up from the stile again, and his fists were clenched.

"Forrest!" he shouted hoarsely. "He's the fox who led me into this! Oh, the cad! The unutterable mongrel! But for him I shouldn't have gone——" He pulled himself up, and his lip curled. "But I'm only a coward!" he added contemptuously. "Just a weak, miserable funk! Forrest isn't to blame; I'm the fool! None but a weakling would have given in like that. I deserve everything, and it'll serve me right if they all finish with me for good!"

He picked his bicycle out of the hedge and trudged wearily onwards towards the



"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle. "Do I observe marks of battle and frightfulness!" The cads of the Remove bore unmistakable signs of their recent encounter with Fullwood. They were freely decorated with sundry bruises and black eyes!

school. He was thinking about that twenty pounds again, and he was in fresh agonies of mind.

How could he pay the money back? He had only recently had a big tip from his father, and that money had gone with Clive's. He couldn't ask his people for a sum like twenty pounds—at least, not without giving a reason. And he couldn't very well tell his father the truth!

He could only promise Clive to pay the money back by weekly instalments, and that would mean dragging the wretched affair on throughout the term. Well, perhaps it was a kind of retribution.

When he got to the school he didn't trouble to put his bicycle away. He just lifted it over the gate of the private drive and left it there against one of the hedges. Then he forced his way against the strong wind into the West Square, and went to that lower window, the latch of which was faked so that it looked fastened, but was really loose.

Now that he was on the point of getting indoors he felt stronger. Yes, he would go to Clive, and tell him everything in one fell

swoop. It would be better to get it over quickly. And he felt, too, that it would be good to listen to the Canadian boy's angry, contemptuous words. Fullwood was just in that mood when he wanted to hear somebody slanging him. It would do him good; it would make him understand, more than ever, that he was unfit for decent society.

And thus he climbed through the window, his mind made up.



CHAPTER 4.

NOT WHAT HE EXPECTED!
H!"

Fullwood uttered a gasp as he found three shadowy figures looming up at the head of the stairs. He had just come up, and his thoughts were far away. And then those figures had apparently materialised out of nothing.

"On him!" came a voice.

"No fear!" said another voice. "Steady, Handy! We don't want to make another bloomer. Perhaps it isn't Forrest at all."

Fullwood stiffened. Handforth & Co. Vigilantes! And they were waiting for him, waiting to administer the recognised punishment for— No, this must be wrong, though. Church had mentioned Forrest's name.

"It's me," said Fullwood quietly.

"By George! Fully!" said Handforth, pushing forward. "Good man! So you've got back all right, eh? Did those cads tie you up, or something?"

"Tell us what happened!" said McClure eagerly.

Fullwood felt another pang. Obviously these fellows suspected nothing. Their tones were too cordial. They didn't know!

"No, they didn't tie me up," said Fullwood huskily. "They made me think that Russell had gone to that rotten hole of a roulette club."

"Yes, I know," said Handforth, nodding. "We heard about it from these chaps, didn't we? Church and McClure stumbled upon it in the fog one night. So Forrest made you think that Russell had gone there, did he, the beast? And, of course, you found out that it was all a trick?"

"Yes," said Fullwood.

"Some of the chaps were talking about you succumbing to temptation, and all that sort of rot," went on Handforth scoffingly. "They thought you might be drawn into the game, or some silly piffle like that. Of course, we know you better than that, Fully."

"Rather!" said Church and McClure.

Fullwood held on to the balustrade tightly.

"That's—that's very decent of you," he muttered huskily. "But—but—"

"The best thing you can do, old son, is to go along to Russell," said Handforth gently. "You two chaps have had a row, haven't you? Well, now's the time to patch it up, and be pals again. Go along, make it up like good little boys, and tuck yourselves up for the night."

Fullwood felt rather dizzy.

"Yes, but—but you don't understand!" he panted. "You see—"

"We understand perfectly!" interrupted Handforth, patting him on the back. "You were dished by those rotters! Russell wasn't there at all, and you've spent a beastly time looking for him—worried and uncertain. Well, Russell's in your bed-room now, so you can make your mind easy. He'll explain everything."

"I—I tell you—"

"Good!" said Handforth. "Trot along!"

"But—but—"

"Good-night, Fully!" said Church. "Have kindly thoughts for us, won't you? There's no bed for us yet—not with Handy in one of these energetic moods. I expect we shall turn in just when the rising-bell goes."

"That's it," said McClure gloomily. "We'll undress, get into bed, turn over once, and then get up again."

Fullwood couldn't find any words. The Study D trio hadn't even questioned him;

they had taken it for granted that he had deported himself honourably all the time he had been out. They scoffed at the very suggestion that he could have gone back to the old game—yet he had, and they wouldn't even consider such a possibility!

"Oh, just a tick!" said Handforth, as Fullwood remained silent. "What about Forrest and his pals? Do you know when they'll be in?"

This was a question which Fullwood could answer with ease.

"They oughtn't to be long," he replied. "I think they'll come along soon. But, I say, look here, you know. I—I've got something to tell you—"

"Write me a postcard about it," said Handforth crisply.

"Yes, but—"

"Chain it up and keep it till to-morrow, old man," interrupted Edward Oswald. "We've got to wait here for Forrest. They may be in at any minute, and we don't want to give them any warning by standing here jawing. So long! See you to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" said Church hopelessly. "To-morrow's here!"

"Rats!" retorted Handforth. "To-morrow never comes!"

Fullwood reeled off rather dazedly with those words of Handforth's buzzing through his mind. How he wished they were actually true in everyday life! There would be a to-morrow for him, sure enough! And he was in deadly fear of it. He was even more afraid of the immediate hour.

So Clive Russell was waiting up; he was not in his own bed-room, but in his—Fullwood's—dormitory. That meant that they would be quite alone. Fullwood almost funk'd the ordeal.

He was still bewildered by the attitude of Handforth & Co. Handforth, of all fellows! Handforth, who always demanded to know everything, in that dictatorial way of his! And he had sneered at the idea of Fullwood doing anything discreditable!

It wasn't what Fullwood had expected.

He got to his dormitory, softly opened the door, and went in. There was a movement from one of the beds, and Fullwood paused. But he didn't switch on the light. He shrank from such a thing. He didn't want to be seen so boldly. The bed-room was filled with a soft radiance from the moon outside, for the blind was not drawn.

"Who—who is that?" came Clive Russell's voice.

"Clive!" muttered Fullwood. "It's—it's me—"

The other junior ran across the bed-room and clasped Fullwood's hand.

"Ralph, old man!" muttered Clive gladly. "Gee, I'm glad!"

Fullwood felt like choking. The Canadian boy's very tone revealed the fact that he had already forgiven and forgotten. They were chums again! It made Fullwood's task a hundred times more difficult.

If Clive had been angry, if he had bitterly

accused his companion of this, that, and the other, Fullwood could have told what he had to say. But how could he tell anything now? And yet it had to be done!

"No, no!" said Ralph Leslie quickly. "Don't switch the light on, Clive! I—I'd rather be in the dark, if you don't mind—"

"Why, surely," said Clive readily. "That's all right, Ralph. I want to know what's been happening. But first of all I'll tell you what those rotters did to me."

Fullwood's relief was tremendous. While Clive talked and explained things, he had an opportunity of pulling himself together, and composing his thoughts. He listened carefully, and made a pretence of undressing in a normal way. But he didn't hear very much of his chum's story. He only gathered the bare facts that Clive had been held a prisoner.

"Of course, Forrest's object was to trap you in that gambling den—that beastly night club!" concluded Clive. "He wanted you to sink back into your old habits, and have a regular night out. By Jove, it only shows what a fool he is! He doesn't know the stuff you're made of, Ralph!"

"He does!" breathed Fullwood hoarsely.

"What's that?"

"You—you don't understand—"

"I understand that we've been a couple of prize idiots!" said Clive gruffly. "After all, I was a bit of a rotter to keep quiet about that twenty pounds. You know my pater sent it, don't you? It was Forrest who led you to believe that I'd been out on the spree. He only did it to make us keep up the quarrel, so that he could lead you on. Well, I guess I'm glad that it's all over. Things are all square again, Ralph."

"I—I don't deserve—"

"Cut that out!" interrupted Clive uncomfortably. "We don't want to have any talk about deserving, or anything like that. That squabble is over. Finished. Concluded. See?"

Fullwood gripped his chum's arm.

"You're a decent chap, Clive," he muttered. "I was a fool to ever have any suspicions against you. I deserve to be kicked. I only played into Forrest's hands, although I was too idiotically blind to see it. But listen to me, old man. You don't understand. I'm not worth your friendship now—even if I ever was. I want to tell you the truth."

Clive laughed.

"But, my dear chap, I know the truth," he replied lightly. "You suspected me of low-down things, and I resented your attitude. It was my fault for being so obstinate. So don't say anything more about it."

Fullwood remained silent—simply because he had no words. Clive thought that his worry was only connected with that ridiculous quarrel? Clive had no suspicion what Fullwood was really trying to say.

And by now Ralph Leslie had himself in hand. Somehow, his chum's presence steadied him, and made it possible for him to grip himself firmly. At last he was ready to come out with the full truth—to explain how he had been fascinated by the roulette-wheel, how he had started playing, and how he had lost every penny of Clive's money in addition to his own.

But Clive was now making it impossible!



CHAPTER 5.

FAITH.

"I feels a bit rummy without any sheets, but it doesn't matter for once," said Clive cheerfully, as he got into bed. "You see, I didn't change back into this dormitory until after lights-out, and the matron hasn't had a chance to make the bed properly. But what does it matter? We're together again!"

Clive was supremely happy over this fact. He thought nothing of Fullwood's restrained manner, and his husky tones. He took it for granted that Fullwood was merely upset about the suspicions he had nursed.

"I'm glad you're back here, Clive," said Fullwood quietly. "But I don't think you'll make any arrangements to stay with me. You—you see, everything isn't as you think. I thought awful things about you, and went to that gambling club to rescue you. My hat!" he added, taking a deep breath. "I don't think you were the fellow who needed rescuing."

"I thought we were going to dismiss all this—"

"It can't be dismissed," interrupted Fullwood. "There's that matter of your money, Clive."

"That twenty pounds?"

"Yes. The fact is—"

"For goodness' sake don't spoil everything by talking about that money now!" interrupted Clive. "Just imagine! That fool of a Forrest had the absolute nerve to suggest that you might become hypnotised by that silly roulette wheel, and start gambling!"

Clive's tone was full of contempt, and Fullwood breathed hard.

"Listen, old man," he said desperately. "I want to tell you—"

"I can guess," said Clive, nodding. "Naturally, you simply felt disgusted in the place, didn't you? Forrest ought to be boiled in oil for making such dirty, caddish insinuations. I should think we know you better than that, Ralph, old chap! We ought to by this time, anyhow."

And Clive laughed with complete serenity. In fact, his tones were such that Fullwood suffered a hundred agonies. His task was now so tremendously difficult. Why did Clive

take up this attitude? Why couldn't he help a bit, instead of making the thing so hard?

"Supposing—supposing I did gamble?" asked Fullwood, his voice trembling slightly. "What would you think of me, then, Clive? Supposing that cursed wheel *did* get hold of me?"

"That's a good one!" grinned Clive. "Chuck it, you ass! We're not supposing anything so dotty!"

"But, Clive, you've got to listen——"

"While you tell me that you played roulette?" chuckled the Canadian boy. "Not likely! You're not the sort of fellow to fall into Forrest's clutches in that Simple Simon way. So cut out the humour, and get into bed. Great guns! That's two o'clock going!"

"I don't care what the time is!" said Fullwood fiercely. "When will you listen to me?"

"To-morrow," murmured Clive.

"But I want to explain——"

"Dry up! It's two o'clock!"

"I know, but——"

"We shan't get any sleep if you keep jawing!" said Clive, pulling the blankets over him. "We're pals, and everything's O.K. The rest can wait until to-morrow. So that's that!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood tried to speak again, but his voice failed him. Indeed, he didn't know what to say. He was mentally numbed. This exhibition of faith on Clive's part robbed him of all power to make his confession.

And if he had been miserable before, he was wretched to the point of distraction now. Clive wouldn't believe a word against him! He was guilty—blackly guilty—but even when he admitted it, his chum only laughed at him. What could be done in such a situation? Fullwood simply didn't know. He couldn't frame his thoughts, let alone his words. He was only aware of a dull, deadening sensation of unhappiness. It seemed to him that a huge weight was lodged in his chest, and now and again it seemed to rise up and nearly choke him. If Clive had only been scornful and suspicious, it would have been comparatively easy!

And while Fullwood got into bed, and lay there staring up at the ceiling, further activity was afoot outside. The Vigilantes of Study D were on the watch. At least, two of them were. There was something rather humorous in the situation when Church and McClure discovered that Handforth was asleep.

They were all three crouching in one of the recesses in the wide part of the corridor, and Church had thoughtfully brought the quilts off their beds. Even if they were on the watch, there was no reason why they should shiver at their posts. And a faint noise had made itself apparent from below.

"Here they are!" murmured Church suddenly.

"Thank goodness!" whispered McClure, with relief. "Two o'clock, by jingo! Here's a time to roll home! Well, we shall be able to get to bed now—as soon as the slaughter has been duly committed!"

"I say!" breathed Church, his voice fairly shaking with indignation. "He's asleep! Great jumping cats! Imagine it! After all he's been saying—after all his giddy high-sounding talk—he's dropped off to sleep!"

Handforth was hunched up with his back against the wall, and his head had fallen down on his chest, his face being buried in the folds of the quilt. The fact that he hadn't been snoring—his usual custom when he was asleep—had given his chums no inkling of the real truth. But they knew it now.

"Handy!" muttered Church, shaking him. "Wake up, you rotter!"

Handforth stirred, and gave a start.

"Hallo!" he said. "Who's that? What's happened to my bed? It's jolly hard—Eh? Why, what the——"

"I suppose you'll deny that you were asleep?" asked Mac sourly.

"I—I—— Well, the fact is, I thought it would be a good idea for us to take a little doze, in turns," said Handforth, with amazing effrontery. "Your turn now, Churchy!"

"Why, you fearful bounder!" gasped Church. "You go to sleep on duty, and then you calmly try to bluff it off! You—a Vigilante—asleep at your post! There's only one punishment for this sort of thing!"

"He's got to be shot at dawn!" said McClure grimly.

"We'll court-martial him first, of course——"

"Dry up!" growled Handforth. "I knew you fellows were awake, so why should I worry? I'll admit I was a bit slack, perhaps, but as leader I've got privileges. What's the time?"

"Past two, and——"

"Sssh!" hissed Handforth. "I heard something!"

"By jingo, yes," said McClure. "I remember now! We heard a sound downstairs, too—— They're coming up! Let's be ready."

It only took them a moment to fling their quilts aside, and stand tensely alert. There could be no question this time! The truants were back!

"I've got an idea!" breathed McClure. "Let's put one of the quilts across the corridor. They'll stumble over it, and we shall get 'em beautifully."

"That's a good wheeze!" admitted Handforth.

The quilt was quickly flung into position. There was no mistaking the sounds now. Two or three people were ascending the

stairs, cautiously and carefully. The cads of Study A, without a doubt.

They came along the corridor feeling their way by sliding their hands along the wall. They grew nearer. They came opposite. And then there was a stumbling sound, a thud, and a gasp.

"Hang!" came Forrest's voice. "There's something——"

"Now!" snapped Handforth. "On 'em!"

"Bunk!" gasped Bell frantically. "Bunk! There's—there's somebody——"

But any further lucid conversation was impossible.

Three very determined attackers were on the job, and three very spiritless victims were being dealt with. Handforth was naturally aggressive, and Church and McClure were determined to take it out of these cads very thoroughly. They had lost hours of sleep on account of them, and they meant to get satisfaction.

But their hopes were dashed.

For Forrest & Co. crumpled up without having the slightest desire to give battle. At the very first touch they succumbed. Even Bernard Forrest himself gasped with agony as Handforth laid a fist on him.

"Stop!" he panted hoarsely. "We give in!"

"Pax!" moaned Gulliver.

"We'll take it quietly," said Bell, with a yelp of pain.

All three of them crouched on the floor, completely cowed.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church, staring. "I knew they were a bunch of cads, but I never thought they were such frightful funks! I say, this is enough to make a chap feel sick!"

Handforth gave a snort of indignation.

"Forrest, you beast, get up and let me knock you down!" he said fiercely. "How the dickens can I slosh you if you cringe there on the floor? How can I give you a good hiding if you won't stand up to it?"

Forrest simply moaned.

"All right—do as you like!" he said dully. "We're not going to fight; we want to get to bed. Swish us, and get it over!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Handforth, in amazement.

He pulled out an electric torch and switched it on. The fan of brilliant light cut through the darkness and illuminated the three wretched juniors with dazzling effect. Handforth & Co. gave one bewildered stare, and they uttered a simultaneous exclamation of horror.

"What's happened to them?" asked McClure.

There was every reason for their stupefied astonishment. They had been surprised at Forrest & Co.'s reluctance to fight. But they were surprised no longer. For Forrest & Co. were not exactly pleasant to look upon.

Bernard Forrest himself was almost unrecognisable. Both his eyes were three-parts closed by swelling alone. They were puffy, greeny-black all round them, and the effect was grotesque. Handforth, indeed, had never seen such a beautiful pair of black eyes in all his career. And Handforth was a specialist in black eyes, too!

But Forrest's nose was swollen in proportion. It stood out upon his face like a round bulbous protuberance. His lip was cut, and both his ears were huge and puffy. He was smothered in mud from head to foot, his hair was tangled and matted, and his own mother would have had difficulty in recognising him.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said Church. "They must have been through a mangle!"

Gulliver and Bell were almost as badly off as their leader. Each possessed superb black eyes—not two each, to match Forrest's, but they were probably more than satisfied. Gulliver's thin nose was battered out of all recognition, his under lip was cut and all puffed up, and his left ear was a perfect sight. Bell was even worse off. And both of them were as muddy and dishevelled as Forrest. No wonder they had funk'd a fight! For it was all too evident that they had all sorts of bruises which were not visible at all. One had only to touch them, and they winced with agony.

"They've been under a steam-roller!" said Handforth indignantly. "Somebody's dished us! We can't slosh these human wrecks! We can't fight these masses of debris! Who's done it, Forrest?"

"It would be sheer torture," agreed Church. "It looks to me as if a dozen chaps have set upon them, and done the job thoroughly."

"A dozen!" said Handforth. "More like a hundred!"

Forrest tried to glare at them.

"When you've finished being funny, perhaps we can go?" he asked wearily.

"You can go in a minute, but we want to know who did this good work," said Edward Oswald. "We want to send a vote of thanks——"

"Oh, don't be funny!" muttered Forrest. "Fullwood's got a lot to answer for to-night! By gad! The maniac! He wasn't like a human being! He was a crazed animal! Can't you let us go, confound you?"

Handforth stood aside.

"All right—slink off!" he said curtly. "I've sat up for hours, just to have the pleasure of smashing you to pulp, and now I find that you're pulp already! It's a bit thick, but I won't grumble. I now know that there's such a thing as real justice in the world!"

CHAPTER 6.

NO SLEEP FOR FULLWOOD!



Y only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth, utterly aghast.

"Who—who are they?" asked Church breath-

lessly. "I don't recognise them!"

The three wretched juniors crawled off, so bruised and battered that it was an agony for them to drag themselves along. And as soon as they had gone, Handforth snapped off his light.

"Bed now?" asked Church hopefully.

"Yes, we've seen them in, and our duty's done," replied Handforth. "You chaps can get to bed. I'm just going to have a word with Fullwood."

"I say, have a heart!" protested McClure. "Don't go and wake the chap up just after he's got to sleep. Can't you wait until the morning?"

"A thing like this can't wait for a minute," replied Handforth firmly.

He went along to Fullwood's bed-room and opened the door. All was dark and quiet. A sound of regular breathing came to Handforth's ears, and he hesitated. After all, perhaps it was a bit too bad to awaken the tired juniors. But it would be as well to make sure.

"I say, Fully," whispered Handforth.

"All right, I'm not asleep," came Fullwood's voice, slightly quivery. "But Clive is. Don't speak too loud."

Handforth crossed over to the bed.

"Good man!" he said eagerly. "I was hoping that you were awake. Those three cads have just come in."

"Have they?" asked Fullwood, without interest. "I say, Handforth, there's something I'd like to tell you—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Edward Oswald. "Forrest & Co. look as though they'd been under a steam hammer. Who did it? Who helped you to perform this great work?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Fullwood impatiently. "Haven't I told you that they trapped me? Haven't I explained that they got me into that rotten night club? Well, when they came out I went for them."

"You went for them?"

"Yes, and enjoyed myself for five minutes," said Fullwood. "But I didn't want to talk about that just now. If you'll listen—"

"Listen be blowed!" interrupted Handforth. "I want to know who helped you to reduce Forrest & Co. to mincemeat."

"Nobody."

"Nobody?"

"I went for them—that's all."

"All!" gasped Handforth. "You mean to say that you did all that damage single-handed?"

"Yes, it didn't take me long," said Fullwood.

Handforth gazed down at him with reverent awe.

"Fully, old man, here's my fist!" he said breathlessly. "A chap who can do a job like that single-handed is my friend for life! I've seen a few wonders in my time, but this takes the biscuit! Shake, old son!"

He seized Fullwood's hand, which was lying on the counterpane, and pumped it up and down.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" muttered Fullwood unhappily.

"You can tell me the details to-morrow," muttered Handforth. "Good-night!"

"Handy, I want you to listen—"

"You're not to say a word!" interrupted Handforth. "To-morrow I'm going to get up a meeting, and the Remove is going to give you a vote of thanks. In fact, I think we ought to present you with an illuminated address. You're too good for the Remove, old man! You ought to be on exhibition!"

He went out, with the settled conviction upon him that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was a sportsman of the very first order. Handworth always judged a fellow by his boxing prowess. That was the first consideration. And a man who could fight three chaps single-handed, reduce them to monstrosities, and escape unmasked himself, was simply a super-human wonder. For such a fellow, Handforth's admiration was unbounded.

Left alone, Fullwood groaned with anguish.

There had been no mistaking Edward Oswald's tones. Wouldn't anybody believe the truth? Fullwood was tortured. Just when his companions ought to have spurned, they were praising him and making a hero of him.

Sleep for Fullwood was out of the question. Clive Russell had slumbered off peacefully and happily, refusing to listen to his chum's faltering confessions.

And Fullwood wondered. His mind was active—so active that he could not even close his eyes, let alone compose himself for sleep. Perhaps he could keep this awful secret of his! The very thought made him quiver. Was there any way in which he could allow the fellows to maintain their faith in him?

No. Forrest & Co. knew of his activities in that gambling club, and it was as certain as the dawn came that they would talk freely. But couldn't he deny it? The juniors would believe him, whilst they would scorn the story of the cads as a lie. Yes, he could get over it all right like that—

"No, no!" breathed Fullwood angrily. "I'm a rotter, I'm a weak, contemptible fool, but I'm not a liar! If I try to deny this thing, it'll mean lying, and more lying, and then a continuous programme of lying! I couldn't do it—I wouldn't do it! No, I'll confess to everybody. I'll tell Clive first, and then I'll let all the others know. They'll cut me dead—they'll finish with me for good. And that's what I deserve! By gad, I'm not going to be beastly enough to get out of my punishment!"

His spirit was genuine. He had had an hour of folly, and he had repented. But he had no desire to escape the just punishment.

When all the Remove knew, he would naturally be ostracised, for he had been guilty of theft as well as dishonour. He had taken Clive Russell's money, and he had gambled it all away. So the sooner he was cast out, the better.

Fullwood didn't sleep once that night.



"You dare to call Fullwood a thief!" The Canadian junior could contain himself no longer. His fist shot out and caught Forrest full on the point of the jaw, sending the cad toppling over. "Ooooh! You—you rotter!" Forrest yelled, scrambling to his feet. "You'll find out the truth for yourself before long!"

Occasionally he dropped off into a fitful doze, but it couldn't be called a real sleep. Every time he awoke with a start, bewildered and trembling. His guilt was on his mind, and it would be a sheer relief for him to make his confession and receive his deserts.

CHAPTER 7.

NO SATISFACTION!



"GOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne, the genial ass of the Remove, came to a halt in the Ancient House lobby and

adjusted his famous monocle.

"Odds sights and exhibitions!" he ejaculated. "I mean to say, what a frightful mass of frightfulness! If you weren't such priceless blighters, I'm dashed if I wouldn't wrap a few words of sympathy round you!"

Bernard Forrest and his two cronies had just come downstairs, and Archie was regarding them with a mixture of astonishment, compassion, and satisfaction. It was morning now, and the majority of the juniors were down. Forrest & Co. had just managed to scrape out of their bed-room before the Vigilantes had made their round.

"I suppose you think it's funny?" asked Forrest harshly.

"Well, not absolutely funny, laddie," said Archie. "But I must observe, dash it, that somebody has shoved it across you well and truly. I mean, the marks of battle are bally plentiful."

Forrest turned his back and walked out side into the Triangle. Gulliver and Bell followed him, and they all walked rather stiffly, as though their muscles were strained and bruised.

It was fine outside, and the sun was shining. The high wind had dropped, and the weather was surprisingly mild now.

Although Forrest & Co. bore many marks of their encounter with Fullwood, they looked quite respectable in comparison to their appearance when Handforth had inspected them at two a.m.

In fresh suits, with clean linen, washed and spruce, the nuts of Study A were more like themselves. But nothing could hide those black eyes, or the other scars of battle. Their noses had assumed more reasonable proportions, and other swellings had gone down, too. A sleep, to say nothing of sundry massaging, had done a great deal to restore the injured members to the normal. But the pains were still acute, and Forrest & Co. were feeling revengeful.

The previous night Forrest had paid his debt, as he thought, to Fullwood. He had lured him into that gambling den, and he had caught him in the trap. But afterwards Fullwood had incurred a new liability by administering that thrashing. Bernard Forrest was determined to get even.

And what a chance he had!

He would spread that story far and wide, he would show Fullwood up in his true colours! There was no risk attached to it, for everybody knew that he and his chums broke bounds after lights out. Besides, Forrest didn't care who knew. Under the present honour system there were no punishments, except those meted out by the Vigilantes, and there was nothing to fear from the school authorities.

"Come on," muttered Forrest, "we'll start on Pitt and Grey, over there! By gad, we'll tell them what kind of a bounder Fullwood is! We'll show him up in his true colours!"

"By the time we've done, nobody will speak to him!" said Gulliver, nodding. "He'll be sent to Coventry by the whole Form."

Bell hesitated.

"Oh, I don't know," he said dubiously. "Why should they send him to Coventry? They don't send us to Coventry, do they? If you ask me, the chaps will simply put him in the same class as us. And that won't be much of a revenge, will it?"

Forrest smiled eagerly.

"You've forgotten something," he said. "What about that twenty quid?"

"I hadn't forgotten it," said Bell.

"Then you haven't used your brains," retorted Forrest. "Oh, perhaps you have used them and they're no good! That's more like it."

"Chuck it!" said Bell, flushing. "There's no reason why you should be so confoundedly sarcastic. I don't see how that twenty quid can make so much difference."

"Then you're blind," said Forrest. "Don't you understand that Fullwood stole that money?"

"Stole it?"

"Of course he stole it," said Forrest. "It wasn't his to use. He hadn't the slightest right to it, and yet we saw him gamble it all away. The Remove doesn't give much sympathy to a thief."

"By gad, that's right!" admitted Bell, with satisfaction.

They approached a small group of West House fellows—Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Clarence Fellowe, and Dick Goodwin.

"Good-morning!" said Pitt politely. "You'll find the chemist's straight down the lane, the first on the right."

"Don't be funny!" said Forrest, flushing.

"Or you might prefer the butcher's," continued Reggie. "A piece of raw steak, I am told, is an excellent remedy for a black eye. By Jove, Forrest, somebody's presented you with a pair of corks! How do you manage

to see with all that canopy overhanging your face?"

The three Ancient House juniors were not feeling so happy.

"We came here just to tell you something, not to listen to your cheap humour!" said Bernard Forrest irritably. "We thought you'd like to hear about Fullwood."

"Yes," said Jack Grey, nodding. "There's a rumour going about that he smashed you up single-handed. I must say he did the job in a workmanlike fashion. Good luck to him! We shall have to strike a medal."

"Without the slightest doubt he knew what he was about," agreed Clarence Fellowe, with a smile. "He's marked these rotters well, as we can plainly tell."

"Good old poet!" chuckled Pitt.

"He was mad, or something!" snapped Forrest. "He caught us in the dark, too, and smashed me up before I could defend myself. Then he went for these two chaps like a tiger—and they're no fighters, anyway."

"Still, one against three was pretty good," said Pitt. "We shall certainly have to go over to the Ancient House and give Fullwood the glad hand. These chaps who make history are never given their full due——"

"He made history last night all right!" interrupted Forrest sourly. "I suppose you know that the reformed Fullwood—the plaster saint—gambled at the roulette table as merrily as the rest of them?"

"Wonderful!" said Reggie Pitt appreciatively.

"I suppose you know he stole Russell's money?"

"Fullwood's a genius!"

"I suppose you know he gambled every cent of it away?"

"Curiouser and curiouser!" said Reggie, nodding. "Now, don't tell me that I've pinched that from 'Alice in Wonderland'—I know it. Or was it in 'Through the Looking-glass'? It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to visit a looking-glass, Forrest. Only take my advice, and choose a strong one."

"You silly fathead!"

"Looking-glasses are delicate things," said Pitt. "If you place yourself in front of an ordinary one, you'll shatter it at the first glance. My dear chap, have you seen yourself this morning? Do you know that you look positively indecent? I'm not sure that we ought to allow you to remain out here."

Forrest's brow went black, and the West House juniors all chuckled.

"I'm not talking to you!" shouted Forrest, glaring at Pitt. "These other chaps will listen to me. I'm telling you that Fullwood gambled twenty pounds of Russell's money away last night."

"Liar!" said Goodwin contemptuously.

"Confound you——"

"By gum!" shouted Dick Goodwin. "Do you think we believe that lie? Fullwood's a good chap! Aye, and he's a champion fighter, too!"

"Forrest has an inkling of that, I believe," murmured Reggie Pitt.

"What's all the trouble here?" demanded Handforth, coming up with several other juniors. "Oh, you're here, are you?" he added, with a cold glance at Forrest. "H'm! You're looking a bit more respectable now."

"These cads have been telling lies about Fullwood," said Grey indignantly.

"It's the truth!" roared Forrest. "Fullwood forgot all his good resolutions last night, and he played roulette——"

"Don't tell lies!"

"He took twenty pounds of Russell's money——"

"Tell that to the Marines!"

"I tell you——"

"It's no good, Forrest," interrupted Cecil de Valerie, shaking his head. "We all know that Fullwood fell into your trap, and we all know that your trap fizzled out. And then Fully proceeded to knock you into mince-meat, didn't he? And you're a bit peevish, eh? And so you're trying to spread a false yarn? Very simple—but very dirty!"

"Something ought to be done about it," snapped Handforth.

"Something lingering," said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "Something nice and fruity, with a touch of the thumb-screws, or the rack! But as we can't bother with those elaborate methods, how about the fountain as a handy substitute?"

"Fine!" said Handforth. "The fountain it is!"

"And we could frog-march them afterwards," suggested De Valerie.

"And make them run the gauntlet to finish up with," said Goodwin.

"Hear, hear!"

The cads of Study A backed away in alarm.

"Stop, confound you!" gasped Forrest. "We've only told the truth! I tell you that Fullwood stole Russell's money!"

"He gambled it all away!" panted Gulliver. "We saw him!"

"We all saw him!" urged Bell fearfully. "Ask him yourselves!"

The nuts were acutely afraid. They had thought that it would be so easy to go about telling the truth about Ralph Leslie Fullwood. They hadn't realised that nobody would hear a word against that junior! Fullwood, indeed, had earned the Remove's gratitude by disfiguring the three cads so wonderfully.

As for believing that he had gambled, that he had taken any of Russell's money, that he had done anything dishonourable at all—why, such imputations were not only farcical, but anybody who uttered them deserved to be kicked. And what was more to the point, they were kicked.

Before Forrest & Co. could utter their truthful story again, they were set upon and ragged unmercifully. They were luckily spared the fountain, but they were subjected to such a storm of angry objections that they fervently wished they had never spoken.

It wasn't often that Forrest & Co. told the truth, and they were finding that the truth was harder to tell than they had ever believed!



CHAPTER 8.

BACK TO THE OLD STUDY!

LIVE RUSSELL opened his eyes and blinked.

Dick Hamilton, the popular captain of the Remove, was standing over his bed. Dick was fully dressed, and he wore a Vigilante armlet.

"This will mean four swishes with the cane, my lad!" he said, with mock severity.

"Eh?" gasped Russell. "I—I didn't know——"

"You're late!" interrupted Hamilton. "Everybody else is down."

Clive leapt out of bed, and noticed that he and Dick were the sole occupants of the room. Fullwood's bed was empty.

"I say, what's the time?" asked Clive anxiously. "I—I don't remember hearing the rising-bell——"

"That's all right, old man," interrupted Dick, smiling. "I was only kidding you. After what happened last night, you're exempt. Fullwood was exempt, too, but he seems to have got up. It was thoughtful of him to let you sleep."

"I wish he had dragged me out," said Clive, as he started dressing. "I hate being behind, you know. All right, Hamilton; I'll turn out now. Strictly speaking, you and the other Vigilantes ought to swish me."

But the Remove captain only smiled, and went out. He knew that Russell had had a short night, and he was therefore excused. However, Russell was glad to be awake, and he particularly wanted to get down so that he could find Fullwood. Besides, he wanted to take all his things back to Study I. They were friends again now, and there was no reason why Clive should remain with Adams. Adams was decent enough, but it would be far better to get back into his old quarters.

The Canadian boy felt better this morning than he had felt for days. The lack of a little sleep didn't worry him in the least. Morning after morning he had awakened with a dull sort of ache within him, only to realise that it was caused by his bitter quarrel with Ralph Leslie. Russell was a very peaceful sort of youngster, and any unpleasantness upset him.

It was good to know that the wound was healed.

He made short work of his toilet, and hurried downstairs, en route for Study I. In the lobby he came upon Forrest & Co. The three cads were looking flustered and considerably untidy. They had escaped from their tormentors, and were rather afraid to go out of doors again. Everything was going wrong. They weren't obtaining anything like the satisfaction they had anticipated.

"My hat!" said Clive Russell, as he looked at them.

Bernard Forrest returned the Canadian boy's stare.

"Do you think you'll know me again?" he asked viciously.

"I'm not sure that I know you at all," replied Clive promptly. "I believe it's Forrest, but I'm not sure. So this is what Fullwood did, is it? He told me that he'd biffed you about a bit. Good luck to him!"

"You're mad!" snarled Gulliver, who was thoroughly fed-up. "Hasn't that cad told you what he did last night? Hasn't he explained about that money?"

"What money?"

"Your twenty pounds, of course," said Forrest.

"Oh, my twenty pounds!"

"Yes, I told you I'd given it to Fullwood, didn't I?"

"Now I come to think of it, you mentioned something of the kind," nodded Clive. "And you gave it to him, I guess? All right, it's safe enough with him."

"Safe enough!" shouted Forrest. "Don't you know what he did with it?"

Clive shook his head.

"I haven't the faintest idea! But if you gave it to Fullwood, it's safe."

"By gad, he's fooled you pretty nicely!" snapped Forrest. "He played roulette with his own money, and lost it. Then he started on your twenty quid—and lost every penny of that, too."

Clive Russell clenched his fists.

"Say that again!" he invited.

"Hang you, it's the truth!" snarled Forrest.

Crash!

Clive's fist shot out, and Forrest went down.

"You fool!" he yelled, scrambling to his feet. "Haven't you got more sense than to lash out like that? Ooooh! You—you rotter!"

"All right, you'll find out!" he panted, with vicious venom. "You think I'm lying, do you? That's what the other fools think! But it's your money, and you'll soon know. Fullwood's a thief! I tell you——"

"If you say another word, Forrest, I'll knock you down again!" interrupted Clive furiously. "I don't believe a single one of your dirty lies! And I'm glad to hear that the other chaps don't believe them, either. If you had your deserts, you'd be kicked out of St. Frank's altogether!"

He turned away and walked off, fuming. And Forrest & Co. gave one another sickly glances, and decided that everybody was mad. They were particularly astonished to find that Clive Russell should stand up for Fullwood in such a way.

Clive was indignant as he went down the Remove passage and turned into Study I. He didn't believe Forrest. His faith in Ralph Leslie Fullwood was complete. He knew that Fullwood had been trapped the previous night, but he held the view that was general in the Remove. He took it for

granted that Fullwood had easily withstood the doubtful temptation of that questionable resort.

Study I was already occupied, for Fullwood was standing in front of the window, looking unseeingly out into the West Square. He had come straight down before any of the other fellows, and had sought the seclusion of his study. The truth was, he was afraid to meet anybody. His conscience was hurting him like some physical pain.

"Hallo, Ralph!" said Clive cheerfully.

"Oh, hallo!" replied Fullwood, looking round with a start. "I—I was thinking, you know. I say, I'm glad you've come, Clive. I suppose you'll fetch your things back into this study."

"That's just what I'm going to get busy on now," replied the Canadian junior, nodding. "It won't take me two shakes——"

"Before you shift back here, there's something you ought to know, and then you'll probably keep out for good," said Fullwood quietly. "You've made a mistake, Clive. I've been a cad. I've played a contemptible trick, and I've got to tell you the truth about it."

He spoke very quietly. He was composed and cool now. His mind was thoroughly made up. He would get the thing off his chest, and abide by the result. Indeed, it would be an enormous relief to tell Clive the truth.

But Clive at once assumed that Fullwood was only referring to the unjust suspicions he had entertained earlier.

"Cut it out, Ralph, for goodness' sake!" he said hurriedly. "What did I tell you last night? Let's forget it!"

"But this can't be forgotten!" insisted Fullwood. "I tell you you're deceived in me. I'm an absolute blackguard. Yes, Clive, it's the truth! I'm not worth your friendship, or anybody else's. And I want to put things on a proper footing now. So listen to me."

"I'm bothered if I will!" retorted Clive gruffly. "I don't want to hear a word. That business is over and done with, and we're starting afresh from this morning. I guess you'll do me a big favour by forgetting all about it. I'm going to fetch my things now, and we'll look upon last week as though it hadn't happened. That's all I've got to say."

Fullwood's distress was acute. Even now that he was on the point of confessing, Clive refused to listen!

"About that money of yours," said Fullwood steadily.

"Oh, you mean that twenty pounds?" asked Clive. "Forrest took a pretty fine liberty with that money, the rotter! He fetched it out of my desk last night, and told me that he was going to hand it to you. Did he keep his word?"

"Yes, he handed it to me," replied Ralph.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Russell. "If you've got it, there's nothing to worry about; but I shouldn't feel safe if it was

in Forrest's keeping. He might put it on a horse, or something like that! The idiot gave it to you so that you would be tempted!" he added, with fine scorn. "I say, what a pitiful idiot! Just as if you'd fall for a cheap stunt of that sort!"

Fullwood was almost at a loss for words. He was glad that he was standing with his back to the light, so that Clive couldn't see his set expression very distinctly. He took a quick step forward.

"That money," he said hoarsely. "I want to tell you—"

"You've got it in your pocket, eh?" interrupted Clive. "Yes, I know. Well, don't bother about it now. Keep it!"

"Keep it?" gasped Fullwood.

For a brief moment he wondered if Clive had guessed the truth—if he was just doing this to make things easier for him. Then he dismissed the idea. Clive hadn't guessed anything! His faith was so strong—his assumption that the money was perfectly safe—was the cause of his attitude.

"Yes, keep it," said Clive. "My pater sent it to me, you know—to buy a home film camera and a little projector. You know the thing—you make your own movies with it. A cute idea, Ralph. But the outfit is in Helmford, and we shan't be going over there until next week. So you'd better stick to that money until then."

"Yes, but—but—"

"You've got a cash-box, and I haven't," went on Clive briskly. "I don't want to put it in my desk again—Forrest might take another fancy to it, the burgling rotter. If you lock it in your cash-box, it'll be safe. Now, be a good chap, and finish with this thing altogether. We're on the old footing now, and we don't want to let anything interfere with us again. I'll go and collect my things from Adams' study."

He hustled out, and Fullwood sat down heavily on the nearest chair. His face was pale, and he stared in front of him through a sort of mist.



CHAPTER 9.

INDECISION.

CLIVE RUSSELL completely dismissed the whole subject.

He was full of the matter in hand—collecting his books and things, and getting back into Study I. He didn't want to hear anything about that sordid exploit in the night club. He knew that Fullwood had been tricked into going there—Forrest had boasted about it. So he hadn't any suspicions against his chum.

As for the money, this was dismissed also.

If it had been Clive's own pocket money, things would have been different. But that twenty pounds was for a special purpose—to buy something which was in a Helmford shop, and which Clive had secured by a

deposit. So he didn't want to touch the money until next week.

And, as he had said, it would be much safer in Fullwood's strong-box. Clive assumed that Fullwood would lock it away, and he therefore forgot all about it. He quite took it for granted that the money was safe.

As for Fullwood, he clutched at the chance as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

He had done his best to confess the truth, but nobody would listen. He was growing desperate. The more he tried to explain the difficult facts, the more Clive balked him! And it appeared that the rest of the fellows were equally reluctant to believe the truth. It was a strange situation.

And here was Clive, positive that Fullwood had got the money, and that he would lock it away in his cash-box until next week.

Next week!

The thought fascinated Fullwood overwhelmingly. Perhaps he would be able to get the money together somehow! If only that was possible, Clive would never know that his cash had been gambled away!

Fullwood had never dreamed of a development like this. He had naturally assumed that Clive would expect to see his money—that he would want it handed back to him. But he was perfectly content to trust Fullwood, without even catching a glimpse of the money at all.

"Next week!" murmured Fullwood, as he rose to his feet. "How can I get hold of twenty pounds? I might write to the pater— Oh, but he'd never part with twenty, unless I gave him a good reason. And what reason can I give? There's Uncle Gregory— No, no! I can't do it!"

He dismissed the idea. It had suddenly become distasteful to him. It would be a lot better to tell the truth outright, and to shame the devil. If he kept this guilty secret to himself, he would suffer continuously. His conscience would never give him any rest.

For Fullwood was no longer the cynical scamp that he had been at one time. Since his reformation he had completely changed—he had learned that life held far more joys for a fellow who was honest and straightforward. And he had an awful fear that if he entered into this deception now, it would be the forerunner of further deceptions. It would be the beginning of a backslide. For one lie would lead to another, and once he had started on such a course, there would be no pulling up.

His dilemma was a sore one.

And nobody seemed to give him a chance to solve the problem. Reggie Pitt and a number of other West House juniors crowded into the study, congratulated him, thumped him on the back, and expressed their heartiest approval of his treatment of Forrest & Co.

"You did famously, old man," declared Pitt. "Forrest tried to drag you down, and he failed. If he had had any sense, he would have known that such a rotten piece of trickery would fail."

"Perhaps it wasn't such a failure," muttered Fullwood desperately.

"It doesn't look like it, does it—after the way you converted them into sausage meat?" grinned Reggie. "They forced you into that place by telling you that Russell was there, and then they expected you to take the swift, thorny path into perdition. And you smashed them up instead! Why, you've proved to everybody that you're as true blue as we gave you credit for being."

"Hear, -hear!" said the other juniors.

"It's awfully decent of you," murmured Fullwood. "But I don't deserve it. I—I feel pretty rotten—"

"I'm not surprised," interrupted Pitt, misunderstanding him. "You look a bit squiffy, old man. But after that fight, and considering that you've only had half your proper sleep, what else can you expect? Besides, you've been worried for days—and you've shown it. Well, it's over now."

They went out, and Fullwood had no chance to compose himself before Clive came in, his arms filled with books.

"Here we are!" he said cheerfully. "Help us with 'em, old son."

"Oh, I say, I ought to have come along to the other study!" exclaimed Fullwood hastily. "I'm sorry, Clive! I—I didn't realise—"

"Oh, Fully, just a word!" said Dick Hamilton, bustling in.

Fullwood turned, bewildered.

"I wanted to see you, Hamilton," he said awkwardly. "You're the captain of the Remove, and it's right that you should know everything that happened last night. So I want to tell you—"

"My dear old chap, I know all about it," interrupted Dick smilingly. "We've had the whole story from two or three different sources, and I'm here, as a matter of fact, to congratulate you."

Fullwood held the table in order to steady himself.

"To congratulate me?" he said dully.

"Yes, for upholding the best traditions of the Remove," replied Dick, nodding. "The way you smashed Forrest & Co. is all the proof we need of your sense of honour. And the Remove is proud of you."

"Proud of me!" shouted Fullwood thickly. "Good heavens! You don't understand! Oh, why don't you listen to me? I've been an unutterable blackguard! I've discredited the Form—"

"Don't take any notice of him," interrupted Clive. "He's saying that just because he had a few rotten suspicions about me. It's all nonsense, of course. He was wild at the time, and anybody's liable to do silly things when he's wild. Besides, he's worn out, too."

Dick Hamilton nodded.

"Yes, Fullwood, you'd better take things pretty quietly," he advised, giving the wretched junior a curious look. "You're seedy, old son. Your nerves are on edge. You shouldn't let a study quarrel affect you to such an extent."

"But it's over now," said Clive.

"I'm glad to see it," nodded the skipper. "It was a bit rotten when you two fellows were going about like a couple of bears with sore heads. Right-ho, Fully. We'll forget the whole business."

"What about Forrest?" asked Clive. "Isn't the Vigilance Committee going to get up some special punishment?"

Dick smiled.

"After having inspected them, it seems that Fullwood was a Vigilance Committee, all on his own," he said. "We can't very well give them any more physical punishment, anyhow. It would be akin to torture. So the Vigilantes have decided that justice has been done."

"Oh, well, I'm glad," said Clive. "That settles the whole business, and we can go ahead as though it hadn't happened."

"Exactly," agreed Dick. "Of course, those cads will have to be pretty careful in future. We shan't allow them to do any more breaking bounds after lights-out. We've got them taped now, and they'll have to go easy."

And Dick Hamilton walked out. Fullwood felt extraordinarily helpless. What was the good of attempting to confess the truth when nobody would listen to him? In a way, he was relieved, but in another sense he was acutely conscious of his position. It was like piling on the agony.

Out in the lobby, Dick Hamilton came to a halt. His eyes became stern. Forrest and Gulliver and Bell were just against the doorway, talking to Hubbard and Long and one or two other unimportant Removites. And they were listening eagerly.

"That's what Fullwood did!" Forrest was saying. "He gambled at roulette, lost all his own money, and used Russell's as well."

"Then he's nothing but a thief?" asked Hubbard blankly.

"Of course he's a thief," said Forrest. "Only the fellows won't believe—"

"Just a minute, Forrest," said Dick Hamilton, striding forward.

His tone was grim, and his words fell like the lash of a whip. Forrest turned, and quailed before the skipper's angry glance.

"I'm only telling the truth—" began Forrest.

"That's enough!" snapped Dick. "The Vigilance Committee has decided to let matters stand as they are, as you know—but only on condition that you stop all this dirty scandal. If you spread any more of these rotten stories about Fullwood, there'll be a heavy punishment. It's got to stop—understand?"

He turned to the other juniors.

"And you've got about as much sense as a lot of rabbits!" he went on scathingly. "Since when did Forrest become truthful? Can't you tell the difference between truth and lies? After Fullwood smashed him up like this, isn't it likely that he'd do the best he could to get the chap into bad odour? Don't listen to him—that's my advice to you."

"Then Fullwood didn't steal Russell's money?" asked Hubbard.

"Don't be an idiot!" retorted Hamilton curtly.

"You clever, cocksure know-all!" sneered Forrest, thoroughly exasperated. "Do you think we'd tell all this about Fullwood if it was a lie? There were heaps of people there who saw him. I can produce a dozen witnesses—"

"Yes, of your own breed!" interrupted Dick. "We don't want them. We're perfectly satisfied about Fullwood, and there's an end of it. You're trying to tell us that he acted dishonourably. Well, we know him better than that!"

"All right—have your own infernal way!" snarled Forrest. "I'm fed-up!"

He strode off, furious. It irritated him beyond measure to see all this confidence in Ralph Leslie Fullwood. For Forrest, the position was galling indeed. Just when he had a first-class discreditable story to tell, nobody would believe him!



CHAPTER 10.

WITHIN THE MESHES!

HE next hour, for Fullwood, was refined torture.

Every fellow he met smiled upon him genially, and studiously ignored all reference to the recent events. They talked about football, about boxing, about the weather—about everything, in fact, except that which was uppermost in Fullwood's mind.

It was clear to him that the Remove had come to a sort of tacit arrangement. That unfortunate night club episode was closed! Even Forrest & Co. had given up talking about it. They could get no listeners, for one thing, and they were afraid of the Vigilantes, for another.

Fullwood managed to escape by himself—but only by going off along the lane, on the pretence that he wanted to get a lot of fresh air. He was terribly anxious to be alone. For even Clive's companionship just now was uncomfortable. Until he finally decided what to do, he desired solitude.

And he pondered deeply as he trudged in the lane.

He couldn't remember an exact situation like this. It was a complete reversal of the time-honoured state of affairs. Fullwood could recall many occasions when a perfectly innocent fellow had been deemed guilty by every member of his Form. But it was something new for a guilty fellow to be deemed innocent! That was the devastating part of it.

Nobody would believe a word against him! His attempts to confess were frustrated! He was guilty all the time, but the Remove ridiculed the very suggestion, and honoured him as a sportsman!

It was all so bewildering.

"I don't know what to do—I can't think clearly!" muttered Fullwood wretchedly. "I'm nothing but a complete cad! If I had an ounce of courage, I could shout them down, and tell them everything! But as soon as they start showing their faith in me, I'm like a rabbit!"

And yet he wondered if they would believe him, whatever he said! He was sure that Clive would laugh at him—would think that the affair had got on his mind. Clive's confidence was of such a nature that he wouldn't credit a word which told against his chum.

As for the twenty pounds, even this didn't count.

Clive assumed that Fullwood had got it, and he didn't want to see it. The unfortunate junior's anguish was rather pitiful. He couldn't think of enough venom to apply to himself. What an outsider he was! What a fraud—what a blackguard!

Everybody believed in him—everybody who was really decent refused to credit that he could have been tempted in that gambling den. And all the time he *had* been tempted. He had given way as weakly as a half-witted clown. Just the clicking of that roulette wheel, and the atmosphere of the place had got into his blood, and had swept away his reason.

The terrible part of it all was that Bernard Forrest was right all along the line. Forrest had predicted what would happen, and his guess had been a true one. Fullwood had experienced an hour of folly. During that time, which now seemed like a dream, he had lost his head.

He wanted to shout aloud—to force everybody to believe that he was guilty. Why wouldn't they believe him? It would bring him relief—it would be a keen pleasure to hear the words of scorn and condemnation that he deserved.

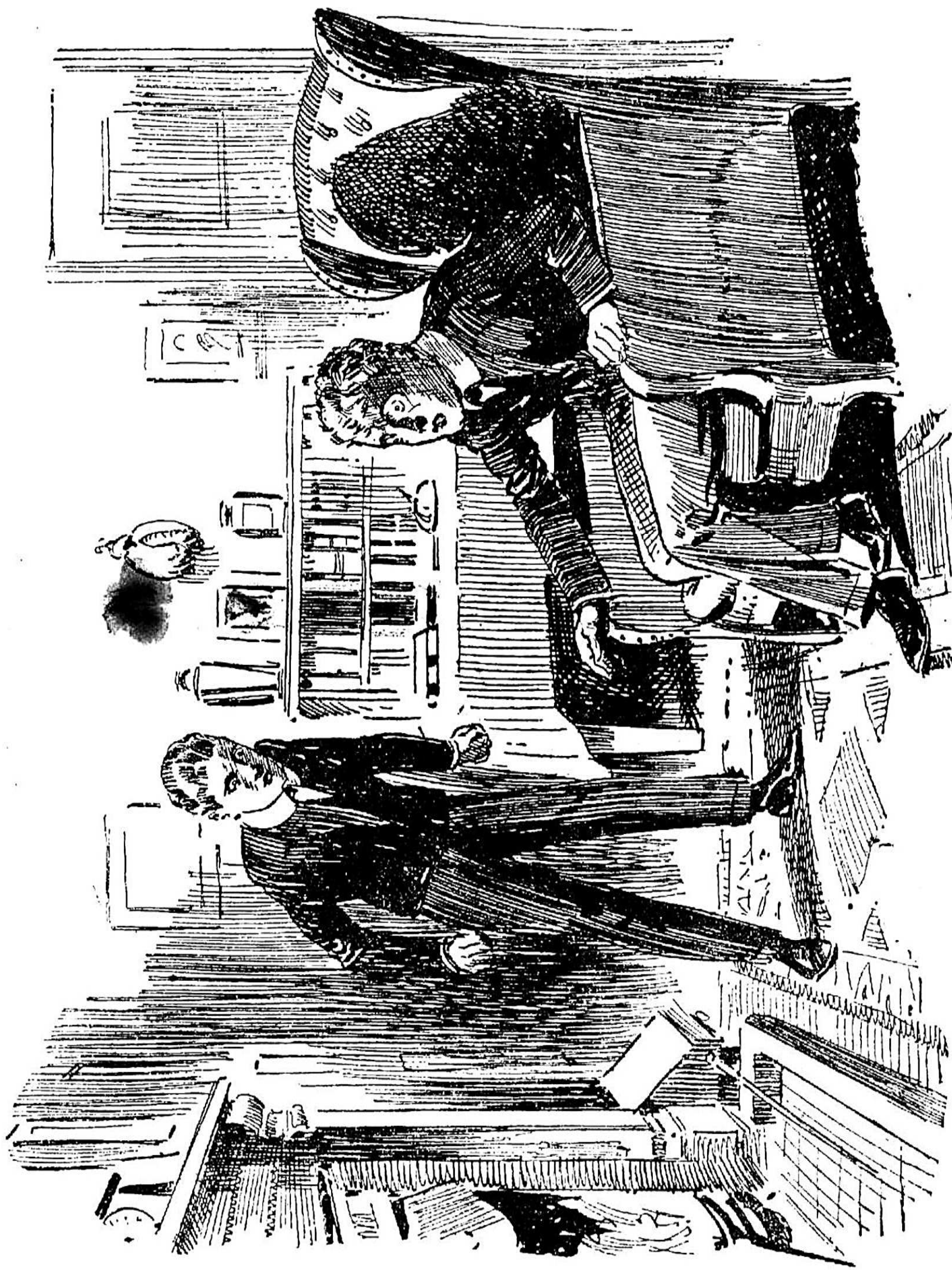
Those congratulations had hurt him deeply, had cut him to the quick. For he knew how undeserved they were. How much better to hear scorn and contempt! He had earned that sort of thing, and in his present frame of mind it would give him satisfaction to be ostracised by his fellows. Disgrace of that kind would be better than this stolen glory.

And there was always that question of the money. What on earth could he do about it? If things drifted on until the following week, the inevitable exposure must come—and then it would be infinitely worse, for Clive and the rest would know that he had accepted unmerited laurels.

What about that forthcoming trip to Helmford? Clive obviously meant to buy his movie outfit on that day, when the Junior Eleven went over to play Helmford College. And he would expect Fullwood to produce the money.

That would be the day of exposure!

For even Clive could not maintain his confidence when Fullwood would be obliged to confess that the money was gone. Clive would then know the full truth—and his scorn would be tenfold more bitter. For he would know,



Clive Russell was thoroughly scared as he stood there listening to Fullwood's strange talk. His chum sat forward, groping with his hands at an imaginary table, his eyes looking vacantly into space. "I've lost again—there's only Clive's money left! It's all going! My luck's out!" he muttered. It was quite apparent that Fullwood was talking and acting in his sleep.

that his chum had been living a lie ever since the night of Forrest's trickery.

"I don't know what to do!" muttered Fullwood, in despair.

And that was the real truth. He was so worried that he couldn't think clearly. He found his mind wandering. More than once he asked himself if it was all a ridiculous dream. Were the fellows right? Perhaps he hadn't gambled at that roulette table at all—perhaps it was only a delusion! He even decided to go to his cash-box to see if Clive's money was actually there.

But before he had taken half a dozen strides, he pulled himself up and stood in the lane, aghast at his own stupidity. What was the matter with him? Was he going out of his mind, or what? Why try to fool himself—why attempt to throw dust into his own eyes? That money had gone for ever—gone into the greedy coffers of that wretched night club!

Now and again he would think of Forrest, and would allow his eyes to blaze in sudden anger. Then he would fiercely call himself a weakling. Why should he blame Forrest for his own folly?

"If I had had an atom of decency, I should have laughed at Forrest's wiles," he told himself bitterly. "What Forrest did was nothing. He just tricked me into that place to see what I'd do. That's the terrible part of it! I did what he expected! And any honourable fellow, of course, would have proved Forrest to be wrong in his rotten assumptions."

And while Fullwood was out there, reviling himself, and wondering what he could do, Clive Russell was having a word with Dick Hamilton. Clive was looking rather concerned.

"He's taken it to heart, poor chap," he was saying. "I can't quite understand it, either, because we shook hands, and the whole thing's finished. Why should he be so cut up?"

"Well, after all, you two have had a pretty hefty row," said Dick. "You haven't spoken to one another for nearly a week, have you? And Fullwood was thinking all the time that you had been guilty of gambling, and goodness knows what else. Last night he discovered that all his suspicions were unjust, and that he had been accusing you falsely. It's quite natural that he should be thoroughly upset."

"Yes, I guess so," agreed Clive thoughtfully. "But when a thing's over with me, it's over. I wish you'd have a word with him on the quiet, if you get a chance."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know—he went out, I believe."

"Oh, well," said Dick, "I shall spot him during the day. Of course, you mustn't forget that he didn't go to bed until after two, and I imagine he had practically no sleep. Worrying about you, I expect. And there was that fight, too. He's probably feeling groggy."



Clive Russell was thoroughly scared as he moved forward, groping with his hands at an imaginary barrier. There's only Clive's money left! It's all gone! Fullwood was talking.

"I don't like the look of him at all," confessed Clive. "Just before he went out there was a sort of feverish look in his eyes."

"He's hardy enough—he'll get over it," smiled Dick. "Forrest & Co. didn't mark him much in that fight, although he marked them. But it's quite likely they got in a lot of body blows that hurt, but don't show. And that, on the top of a sleepless night, won't tend to give him a lively feeling!"

"Well, there goes the bell," said Russell. "Lessons!"

But when he went into the Form-room with the rest of the Remove, there was no sign of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. This was unfortunate, for the Vigilantes had got the Form into such shape nowadays that there were never any absentees from school. Such a proceeding was too costly!

And this morning, Fullwood, of all fellows, failed to answer his name at calling-over. Clive was very worried about it, and he asked



to Fullwood's strange talk. His chum sat staring vacantly into space. "I've lost again—" he muttered. It was quite apparent that

Mr. Crowell's permission to go and look for his chum. Under the Honour System, such permission was not really necessary, for the juniors could walk in and out as they pleased, but it was a mark of respect for Mr. Crowell to carry on in the usual way.

Clive went out, and looked in the study. Fullwood wasn't there. He hurried out of doors, searched the Triangle and the squares, and then went to the gateway. He came to a halt, staring.

Fullwood was only twenty or thirty yards away, standing in the middle of the road, his hands thrust deeply into his overcoat pockets. He was idly kicking a stone about, obviously wrapped in thought.

"The ass!" muttered Clive. "He needn't keep it up like this!"

He ran up, giving a hail.

"Say, Ralph!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "What's the idea?"

Fullwood turned, and started.

"Oh, hallo!" he said. "I—I was just thinking, you know. I—I suppose it must be nearly time for lessons?"

"Nearly time!" echoed Clive. "How long have you been here?"

"Why, ever since I came out," said Fullwood, rather awkwardly. "I've just been ambling up and down, you know."

"And didn't you hear the bell?"

"The bell?"

"Look here, Ralph, you're day-dreaming!" said Clive quietly. "The bell has gone, and everybody is in school. Mr. Crowell gave me permission to come out and look for you. Gee, you must be deaf!"

Fullwood was startled.

"I—I'm awfully sorry!" he said, with concern. "I—I don't remember hearing the bell at all, you know. All right, I'll come in now. It was decent of you to come out for me, Clive."

Clive hooked his arm into the other's.

"If you want to know the truth, Ralph, you're several kinds of an idiot!" he said confidentially. "Why on earth should you take this to heart so much? There's nothing in it. Besides, the whole thing's over. Why worry about a thing that's completely finished and forgotten?"

Fullwood swallowed rather hard. Finished and forgotten! What a hollow sound those words of Clive's had! The Canadian boy little imagined that the affair had only just started!



CHAPTER 11.

EXCUSED FROM LESSONS.

HANDFORTH gave Fullwood a very severe glance as the latter walked quietly to his place in the Form-room. Clive Russell gave Mr. Crowell a brief smile, and the Form-master nodded. He thoroughly understood that this was one of those little matters which were better left alone. Mr. Crowell possessed a very keen understanding, and he was well aware of the fact that Fullwood was not quite himself this morning.

But Handforth was not so indulgent.

"There's no excuse for disobeying the rules," he declared firmly. "Fullwood was within earshot of the bell—that's clear enough, or Russell couldn't have fetched him so quickly. What's the obvious inference? That Fullwood deliberately ignored lessons! To a chap with a deductive brain, a little problem of this sort becomes simple."

"Dry up, you ass!" murmured Church.

"The Vigilantes must hold a full inquiry during interval, and if Fullwood hasn't got a good excuse—two swishes!" went on Handforth inexorably. "We can't make any exceptions. Rules are rules, and they've got to be obeyed!"

"You're a fine chap to gas about breaking the rules!" murmured McClure sarcastically.

"You'd better begin by giving yourself a couple of swishes! That's the punishment, isn't it, for persistently talking in class?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Oh, well——"

"You can't get out of it," said Mac. "Churchy, we're both Vigilantes, and it's our duty to report Handforth to the Committee. Is that settled?"

"Passed unanimously!" said Church promptly.

"In other words," grinned Mac, "carried!" Handforth glared.

"What about you chaps?" he roared. "Aren't you talking?"

Mr. Crowell looked up from his work.

"Really, Handforth!" he protested.

It was quite sufficient. Mr. Crowell uttered no threat, and his tone was not even severe. But Handforth became as silent as though he had been muzzled. Nowadays, all the decent chaps in the Remove realised that Mr. Crowell was not in a position to give drastic punishments. Under the Honour System, the fellows were supposed to behave themselves of their own free will. So it was only necessary for the Form-master to make a slight protest, and he was heeded to a far greater extent than formerly. And if any of the "Blots" cheeked him, they were promptly dealt with a minute after dismissal. The Blots had found that the pastime of baiting Mr. Crowell was decidedly costly.

The first lesson was arithmetic, and Mr. Crowell was testing the mental capacities of his class. It was always a trying ordeal, for the Form-master had a habit of selecting any fellow at random, and shooting out a quick-fire succession of devastating queries.

All went well until he chanced upon Ralph Leslie Fullwood. And he was somewhat surprised when Fullwood took not the slightest notice of him. He just sat at his desk, staring straight at his ink-pot, and with a pencil idly performing circles on a blank page of his exercise-book.

"Fullwood!" said Mr. Crowell sharply.

"Wake up, ass!" whispered De Valerie, nudging the junior.

"Eh?" said Fullwood, with a start.

"Don't do that, Val!"

De Valerie turned red.

"It is entirely unnecessary for you to give Fullwood these prods, De Valerie," said Mr. Crowell. "Fullwood, stand up. Do you realise that I have been talking to you?"

Fullwood got to his feet, and held on to his desk.

"I—I didn't hear you, sir," he muttered. "Sorry, sir!"

"What is the subject of our lesson, Fullwood?" asked Mr. Crowell.

The unfortunate junior looked helpless.

"I—I don't know, sir," he confessed. "I wasn't listening."

"Knowing you to be a conscientious boy, I can only conclude that you are not well, Fullwood," said the Form-master quietly. "Indeed, your very looks are significant. I think you had better go to your study, my boy, and lie down."

"Oh, but—but I don't want to, sir!" said Fullwood, trying to pull himself together. "I'm all right. I—I was only just——"

He swayed rather giddily, and sat down with a thud, although he vainly attempted to hold himself up straight. He was on his feet again in a moment, and the pallor on his cheeks had changed to a dull flush.

"I'm all right, sir," he repeated thickly.

"On the contrary, Fullwood, you are very far from right," said Mr. Crowell. "Come out here. I mean it!" he added sternly. "At once!"

"Can I help him, sir?" asked Clive quickly.

"Yes, Russell, I think you had better."

"Oh, rot!" muttered Fullwood, as Clive took his arm.

But although he resented this aid, it was really necessary. His head was positively dizzy from the effects of his continuous worry—his mental anguish and agony. He hardly knew where he was, or what he was doing. And, but for Clive Russell's steadying arm, he might have swayed over.

He stood in front of Mr. Crowell, pale again now—with a haggard expression on his face, and with his eyes heavy and dull. Fullwood didn't even realise how unfit he was. He thought it was a passing phase of giddiness. He did not know the truth, for he had always been so healthy and robust. But in addition to his having had no sleep whatever, he had been worrying himself for eight or nine hours, until he was now in a condition bordering on mental prostration. Lessons meant nothing—Mr. Crowell meant nothing—for his whole world was filled up by the problem of his guilty secret.

By a sheer effort, he managed to drag himself to attention.

"I'm all right, sir," he said unsteadily. "I—I'd rather go on with the lesson, if you don't mind, sir. I'll get the hang of it in a couple of minutes if you'll——"

"You are very unwell, Fullwood," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "I can see quite plainly that there is something wrong. And I judge the trouble is mental. You are worried—eh? I don't want to press you to confide in me, but if there is anything I can do——"

"Nothing, sir," broke in Fullwood hastily. "Please don't bother, sir."

"You had better go straight to the school doctor, and——"

"No, sir!" gasped Ralph Leslie, in alarm. "I tell you I'm all right, sir! There's no reason why I should go to the doctor. He couldn't do anything for me—I'm not ill. Only a bit worried, sir."

"Then at least go to your study and lie

ANSWERS

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down," said Mr. Crowell. "I will excuse you from lessons, and in your study you will be quiet for an hour or two. Go along, Fullwood; don't be obstinate."

"Thank you, sir," muttered Fullwood gratefully.

"Shall I see him safely there, sir?" asked Clive.

"No! I—I can go alone!" said Fullwood, with sudden vehemence. "Don't be an ass, Clive! I'm not so rocky as all that! I don't want to be led like an invalid."

He walked out of the class-room without another word, and closed the door. And Clive Russell gave Mr. Crowell an anxious glance.

"He'll be all right, Russell," said the Form-master. "When you go to him in the interval, you'll probably find him fast asleep. Don't awaken him on any account. He and you have had a little tiff, haven't you?"

"It's all over now, sir," replied Clive. "But that's the cause of his condition, I think. I can't understand it, sir."

Handforth rose to his feet.

"I'll tell you what, sir," he suggested brilliantly. "If you like, I'll go along and give the poor chap some soothing advice."

"I appreciate your motive, Handforth, but I don't like," replied Mr. Crowell drily. "I am afraid that your soothing methods would be rather too drastic. Fullwood is in need of rest—not an earthquake!"

The Form tittered, and Handforth sat down, looking indignant.

"All right!" he said bitterly. "That's all I get when I offer my help! I could put Fullwood right in two ticks if I had him alone for five minutes!"

"Why waste five minutes if you could do it in two ticks?" murmured Church.

Handforth glared at him.

"Nature made you funny!" he retorted. "You needn't try to improve on it!"

And while Clive Russell went back to his own seat, impatient for the time to pass until the interval came, Fullwood reached his study in the Ancient House, and dropped wearily into the easy chair.

Sleep!

The very thought of it struck him as being farcical. The load on his mind was too heavy for him to find forgetfulness in slumber. Fullwood was a prey to every kind of torture. He exaggerated his hour of folly until it became, in his own eyes, a terrible crime.

If he had been able to get a good sleep during the night, he would have viewed the situation in its true proportion. It was serious enough—there was no getting away from the fact. He had weakly fallen back into his own vicious habits, but, at least, he knew his fault. It had only been a temporary slip. And during that evil period he had gambled away twenty pounds that belonged to Clive Russell.

From first to last he had been weak—he had succumbed to Bernard Forrest's cunning wiles. But he was not half so detestable

and crooked as he deemed himself. He regarded himself as something unclean—as something unfit for any decent fellow to touch. And it was all preying on his mind so much that his sense of proportion became utterly distorted.

How could he tell Clive Russell now? Fool! The opportunity was gone—he had allowed it to slip by! He should have confessed everything to his chum during the night, as soon as they had made up their quarrel. If he told the truth now, Clive would finish with him for good.

And the truth would have to be told!

He might be able to keep it back for a few days—until the Canadian boy wanted his money—but then the inevitable exposure would come. And the greater the delay, the greater the disgrace.

Fullwood tossed about in the chair, undecided. He lived in a continual state of suspense. What should he do? What could he do? He found it impossible to make up his mind. The torture was growing worse, for the more he thought of his dilemma, the worse it became.

But Nature, after all, knows best—and will never be denied, although the power of the human will may defy it for a certain length of time. And this hour of Ralph Leslie Fullwood's agony, Nature took matters firmly in hand, intent upon solving the problem for him.



CHAPTER 12.

THE REVELATION.

LIVE RUSSELL opened the door of Study I softly, and peeped in.

An expression of satisfaction came into his eyes as he saw the figure of Fullwood sprawling motionless in the arm-chair. Obviously, he had fallen asleep at last. Clive edged into the study, and closed the door without a sound.

"Ralph!" he whispered.

There was no response, and Clive tip-toed over towards the fireplace. There were only a few embers left, and he was determined to put a few knobs of coal on, so that a bright blaze would crackle up. There was another hour of lessons yet—the interval only lasted a few minutes—and Clive didn't want to find the fire out when he came again.

He frowned as he heard shouts from the square. It was a pity the chaps couldn't have enough sense to keep in the Triangle! Clive was somewhat unreasonable perhaps—he could hardly expect the fellows—especially the Fourth-Formers and the fags—to go about like shadows just because Fullwood was a bit off colour!

"Good!" he murmured, as he took a glance at his chum. "Fast asleep. It was a ripping idea of Mr. Crowell's to tell him

to come here. An hour's nap will do him all the good in the world!"

He looked down at Fullwood, and his expression softened. His eyebrows were puckered into a puzzled frown, too. What was the matter with the chap? Why was he taking that affair to heart so much? Clive had always looked upon Fullwood as such a self-reliant, strong-willed junior. It was so strange that he should worry himself almost to the point of illness.

"It's rummy, and it seems to me there's something more behind it," Clive decided. "I guess he'll come across with it, sooner or later. I'd better put that coal on, and beat it."

But before Clive could "beat it," Nature played her hand.

Fullwood muttered something in his sleep, and turned from one side to the other. And Clive, who was in the act of creeping to the door, came to a halt. He didn't want his chum to know that he had been there.

"That's mine!" said Fullwood gloatingly. "I tell you it's mine! I backed number twenty-three, didn't I? Give me my winnings!"

Clive heard the words clearly, although they were mumbled in a low tone. He glanced back, rather startled, and the expression on his face became more compassionate than ever. It was fairly evident that Fullwood was having a nightmare.

"Now I'll try sixteen again!" said Full-

wood, his voice becoming louder. "That's it—sixteen! I was lucky on that number two or three times! Why doesn't it turn up again? Oh, help! Nineteen! Another fiver gone!"

Clive didn't realise what the dream was about yet, but it was evident that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was living through that unfortunate hour again—dreaming about it in the tortured state of his mind. And so vivid was the nightmare that he was talking aloud.

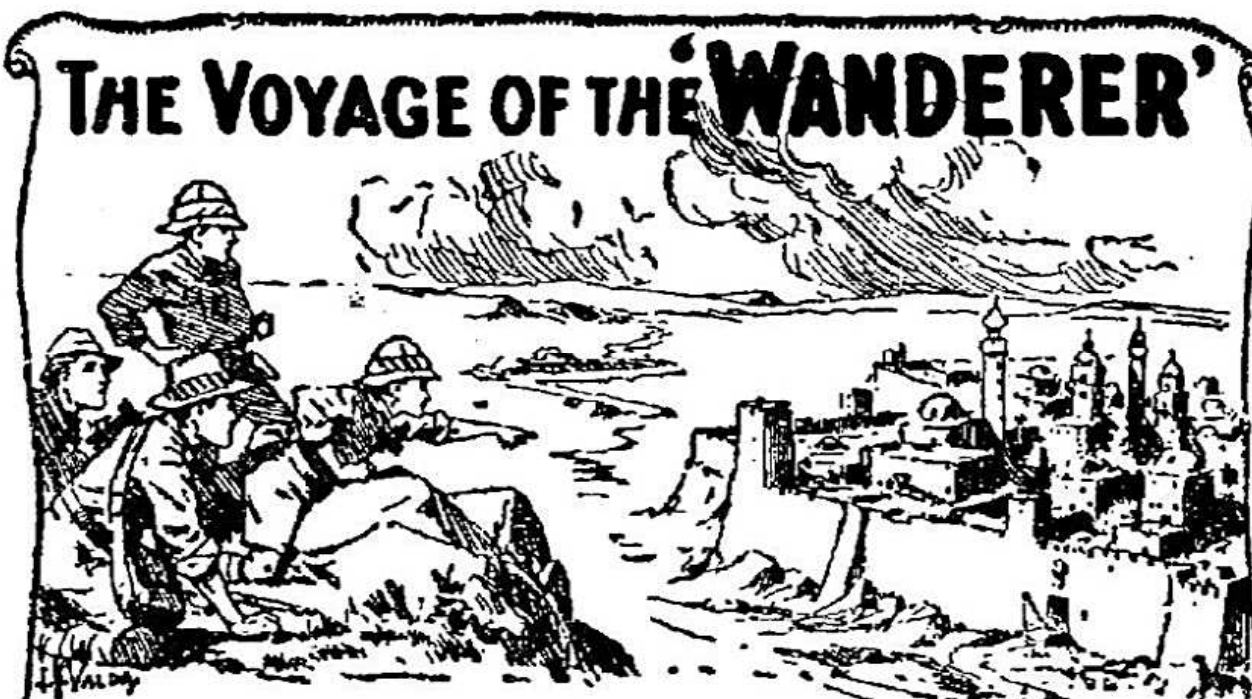
Clive was not only startled, but rather scared.

He had never had an experience like this before. There was something rather uncanny in standing there, listening to a fellow who was talking unconsciously. Now and again one may mumble a few words in one's sleep, but this affair here was totally different. Fullwood was talking as though he were wideawake. Indeed, he sat forward, in the chair, and groped with his hands, as though he were placing something on a table.

"Ten pounds this time!" he muttered. "I've got to win!"

His eyes were wide open, and Clive felt a queer little shiver run down his back. He knew that Fullwood was fast asleep, but there was something unpleasant in watching him sitting up in the chair, his eyes looking vacantly into space. Fullwood's face was tense and drawn.

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"Ralph!" muttered Clive. "Ralph, old man! Say, take it easy——"

"Twenty-four!" shouted Fullwood thickly. "I've lost again! And I've hardly got any money left—Clive's money! It's all going! What's the matter with me? Why can't I guess the right number?"

Clive caught his breath in.

"Number!" he breathed. "What on earth——"

A suspicion came to him—an inkling of the truth. Although he had never actually seen a real roulette table, he had read of them, and he had also played with a toy roulette wheel at home, just for fun. He knew that numbers could be backed—and Fullwood's disjointed talk was significant. Was he referring to the numbered slots of the roulette wheel?

"It's the last chance!" breathed Fullwood, falling back into the chair again. "I'll try sixteen once again! Every cent I've got! And if I lose—— But I can't lose! I daren't lose! It's Clive's money!"

"Good heavens!" murmured Clive, aghast.

He stood, staring rather dazedly.

"Lost!" gasped Fullwood, his voice sounding strangled and harsh. "I've lost everything—my own money and Clive's! And there's Forrest—gloating over me! Look at him—grinning, because he knew I should fall into his dirty, cunning trap! But I'm a fool—a weak, contemptible fool! If I had the strength of a mouse, I should have resisted this mad temptation! And now it's too late!"

The last words were almost a wail, and Fullwood sagged in the chair, breathing heavily. He was still sound asleep—still gripped in the throes of that torturing dream. And Clive Russell didn't move an inch. He was thunderstruck. He forgot all about lessons, and could only ponder over what he had just heard.

Was this merely a nightmare—a fiction—or was it a repetition of something that had already occurred? It was impossible for Clive Russell to have his doubts. He knew the truth in an instant. Fullwood was living something over again in his sleep. He was going through an actual experience.

And that meant—the worst!

It was a dreadful shock to Clive. His faith in his chum had been absolute. He had taken it for granted that Bernard Forrest's high-sounding yarns were all lies. He had been positive, in his own mind, that Fullwood had resisted all the temptations of that night club, and that he had come through the ordeal unscathed.

But now he knew the opposite, and with this realisation came another flood of light. A dozen little things which had previously been puzzling was now explained. He hadn't given them a moment's thought until now, but, in face of what he had just heard, they obtruded themselves rather glaringly.

Fullwood's peculiar behaviour in the bedroom during the night, his talk that he

wasn't worthy of Clive's friendship; his absent mindedness this morning, when he had failed to hear the school bell; his haggard appearance in the Form-room; his talking in his sleep, now, at the very moment—all these things became instantly explained.

Fullwood wasn't worrying because of his recent quarrel with Clive Russell, but because he possessed a guilty secret, and had not revealed it. So this was the cause of his worry and his strange behaviour!

Clive knew the whole truth. Fullwood had "fallen" exactly as Forrest had predicted, and he had gambled away his own money, and had used Clive's twenty pounds, too! That was the cold truth.

The money didn't worry Clive in the least—he hardly gave it a thought—but for an instant he was filled with a feeling of unutterable contempt. So he had reposed his faith in Fullwood for nothing! His brow became black as he stared down at the heavily sleeping junior. Everybody in the Remove had expressed their confidence in this fellow, and he was unworthy of it! While they deemed him innocent, he was guilty all the time! That was the realisation which hurt Clive more than anything. It was almost like a physical pain.

He knew what Fullwood had been in the past, and he had stoutly declared that he would never fall back into those old vicious habits. Indeed, Clive would have fought any fellow to a standstill who suggested such a thing. And yet Fullwood had weakly succumbed to the very first temptation!

"You fraud!" said Clive furiously.

Perhaps it was his voice which caused Fullwood to stir. He did not awaken, but he rolled over in his sleep, and he uttered a kind of choking sound.

"It's no good, Clive!" he muttered wretchedly. "I'm a cur! I'm not worth your trust, or your friendship, or anybody else's! Don't speak to me! I shall be a lot happier if I'm turned adrift and spurned!"

"Ralph, old man!" said Clive tensely. "I—I didn't know you could hear——"

And then he realised, with rather a shock, that his companion was still asleep—still oblivious of his surroundings. He sat forward in his chair again, and held his head in his hands.

"I'm guilty!" he said, in such a low voice that Clive hardly caught the words. "I'm guilty—and I'm a swindler! They think so well of me, and I don't deserve it! What can I do to make up for it? How can I tell Clive? What can I do to get that money? It's too late—I'm finished!" He raised his voice. "I deserve to be, too!" he added fiercely. "I'm only a cad and a fraud! The best thing I can do is to run away—clear out—before I'm exposed! I can't stand their scorn—I can't bear it!"

Every atom of Clive's anger went.

"Poor old Ralph!" he muttered huskily. "I say, poor old chap!"

He felt rather a lump in his throat as he stood watching—he felt guilty, too. He had heard something that was not intended for his ears, or any other ears. Yet he felt glad that he knew. It was much better. The air was cleared. And Fullwood himself didn't know that he had blurted out the pitiful story. This, too, was all to the good.

"Don't worry, old son," murmured Clive. "We'll put this right, somehow. Hang it, it's a pity if a chap can't make a slip without going through all this torture! We're all liable to make a bloomer now and again, I guess."

Fullwood was sleeping more peacefully now. His eyes had closed, and he was resting back in the depths of the chair, with a more relaxed expression on his face. The nightmare had passed, and he was sleeping normally.

And Clive Russell crept out of the room, his mind already made up.



CHAPTER 13.

THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE'S DECISION!

R. CROWELL glanced at Clive inquiringly as the latter entered the Form-room.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said the Canadian junior. "I had a look at Fullwood, you know, and he was asleep. And I forgot the time—"

"Under the circumstances, Russell, we will say no more about it," said Mr. Crowell. "So Fullwood is sleeping, eh? Good! It will make a big difference, I hope."

Nothing more was said, and Clive pretended to take an interest in his lessons for the rest of the morning. But it was only a pretence, for he could think of nothing else but Fullwood's unhappy position. There was the problem, too, of what should be done. Clive had already come to a decision, and he was anxious to get a move on.

He felt that this problem was altogether too big for him to handle alone. He would have to tell others, and gain the benefit of their advice. Clive's reasoning was sound. Unless some sort of action was taken, an exposure was inevitable. And then the whole school would know of Ralph Leslie Fullwood's temporary fall from grace. There could be no preventing the disaster, except by one method.

And Clive argued that it was better to take a few trusted fellows into his confidence at once, than to do nothing and allow the whole school to know. At all costs, Forrest must be prevented from scoring a public triumph. He had been effectively silenced, and it would be better to keep him silent.

So, as soon as the Remove was dismissed, Clive got to work.

He requested an immediate meeting of the Remove Vigilance Committee—Ancient House

section only. There was no reason why Reggie Pitt and his men of the West House should be drawn into this affair. It was, after all, purely connected with the Ancient House.

Dick Hamilton realised at once that there was some special reason for Russell's request, and he promptly gave orders for a full meeting. The Vigilantes consisted of Dick Hamilton himself, Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Archie Glenthorne, De Valerie, and Handforth & Co. They all collected together in Study C.

"What's the idea of this meeting, anyhow?" demanded Handforth, as he bustled in. "We ought to be out on Little Side, practising for our match against Bannington Grammar School. I can spare one minute—and one minute only!"

"Considering that we've all been waiting for you for about eight minutes, you've got a nerve, haven't you?" asked De Valerie tartly.

"I can't help that," said Handforth. "Footer practice—"

"Steady, Handy," said Dick Hamilton quietly. "This isn't an ordinary Vigilance meeting. I think Russell has got something special to say—concerning Fullwood."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "Well, that's different."

"Listen, you fellows," began Clive. "What I've got to say is serious, and I'm afraid you'll be a bit upset. But there's no sense in breaking a thing of this sort gently. Fullwood is guilty."

There was a moment's silence.

"That's bad," said Dick, at length. "I was half afraid of it."

"Guilty?" said Handforth, staring. "Guilty of what?"

"You—you mean he really went to that night club—" Church paused, and looked alarmed. "Oh, rot! I don't believe it!"

"I wouldn't have believed it this morning," said Dick Hamilton, "but after Fully's rummy behaviour in class, I got thinking. Poor old scout! He must have been passing through a pretty beastly time."

"Thanks," said Clive gratefully.

He deeply appreciated Dick Hamilton's attitude—which contained not one atom of condemnation or scorn. Some of the other juniors were looking frankly puzzled, and Handforth became noisy.

"What the dickens are you talking about?" he demanded. "What do you mean—Fullwood's guilty? What's he guilty of? By George! You—you don't mean—"

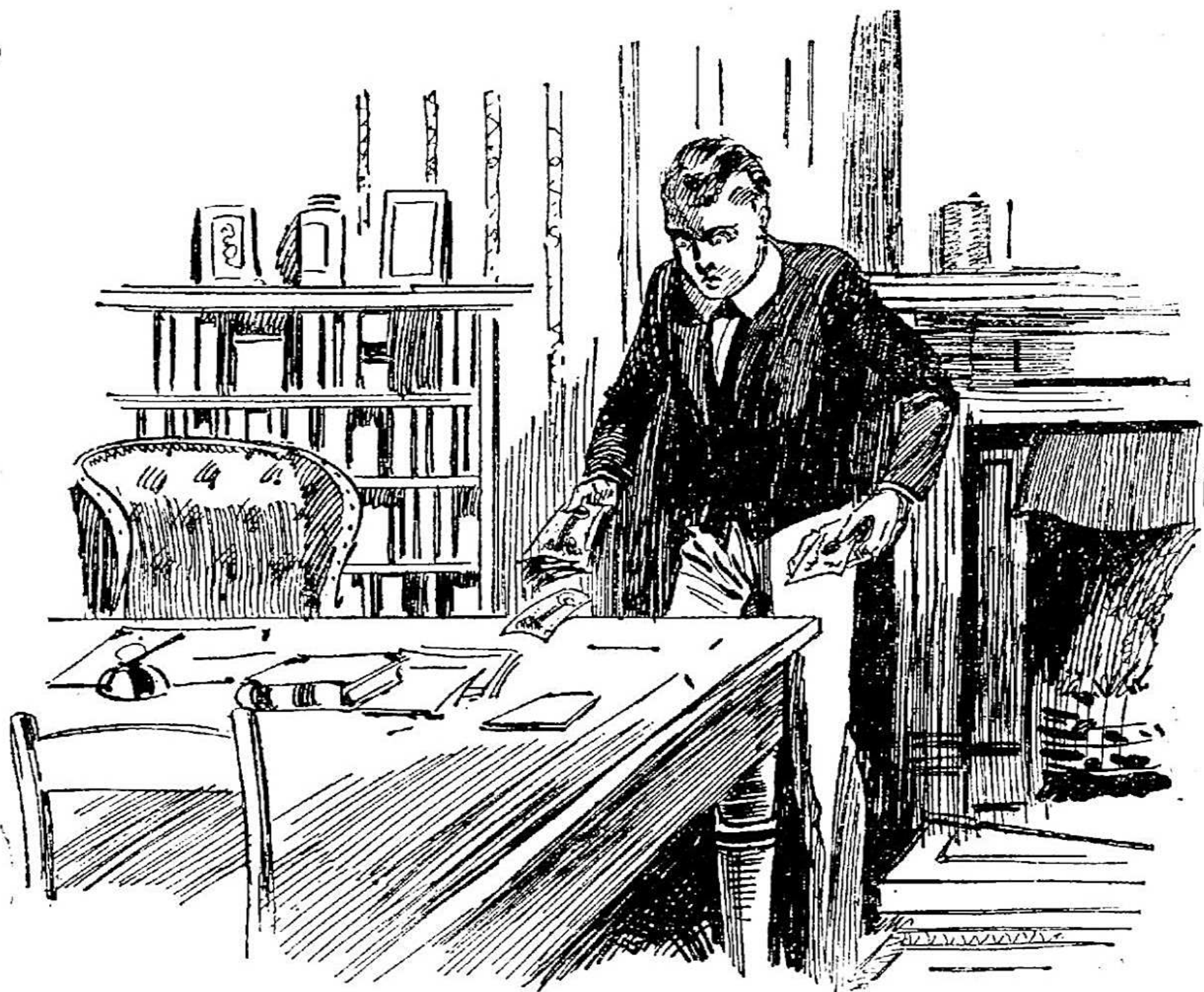
"Yes," said Clive quietly.

"Good gad!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "I mean, how utterly frightful!"

"Then—then Fullwood *did* gamble in that night club?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "And Forrest has been telling the truth? He lost twenty quid of your money? And we've all expressed faith in him!"

"The rotten fraud!" said Watson indignantly.

"The awful hypocrite!"



Fullwood could not imagine who would want to send him an express letter. Breaking the seal, he tore open the envelope and, to his utter amazement, a bundle of notes fell out. He counted them. There was exactly twenty pounds—just the amount he needed!

"Of course," said Handforth, "there's only one thing to be done. We've got to take Fullwood, put him on trial, give him about twenty swishes, send him to Coventry, and bar him from all decent society!"

"That's about it," agreed De Valerie, nodding.

"The man's nothing more than a hollow sham!" went on Handforth hotly. "By George! So he gambled, did he? And he pretended——"

"He didn't pretend anything!" interrupted Clive sharply. "In fact, he tried to explain two or three times, but nobody would listen to him. I expected you to be bitter and scornful, but we've got to give Fullwood his due. At least, his slip was only a temporary one. He knows he's done wrong."

"It's easy enough to snivel——" began Watson.

"Well, you're wrong again!" interrupted Clive. "He hasn't snivelled—and it's about the last thing in the world I should expect him to do."

"Sorry!" growled Watson. "I didn't mean that."

"But how do you know?" asked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Pray let us have the

details, dear old boy. We're frightfully anxious."

Clive explained.

"And he said all that in his sleep, did he?" asked Dick Hamilton thoughtfully. "He gave the whole game away. And he hasn't the faintest suspicion, I suppose, that you know?"

"Not the faintest," replied Clive.

"Where is he now?"

"Still in the study—and still asleep," said Clive. "That's why I called this meeting so quickly. I wanted us to come to some decision before he woke up, so that we should know what to do. It's no good leaving a matter of this sort to run its course."

"You're right there," agreed Hamilton. "With a weight like that on his mind, Fully will be a wreck by to-morrow."

"Doesn't he deserve to be a wreck?" asked Handforth. "Goodness knows I'm not a hard chap—I don't want to have a row with Fullwood. But this is a question of honour. He's besmirched the Remove's record——"

"No more than Forrest has—and not a quarter so much," interrupted Clive quietly. "Forrest does these things deliberately—and Fullwood was drawn into it by a trick. And he's sorry now. I wish you could have heard

his talk in his sleep! The poor old chap is nearly off his head with remorse."

"You're sure he wasn't fooling you?" asked De Valerie. "He wasn't just pretending to be asleep, and—"

"No, of course not," interrupted Clive impatiently. "Do you think I can't tell the difference? He was sound asleep—in a nightmare—and he blurted everything out unconsciously. And I guess he's dead sorry, too. You ought to have heard him!"

"Yes, I think he's genuinely sorry," agreed Dick Hamilton.

"He made a break, and now he doesn't know what to do to square it," continued Clive. "You see, he knows that the truth must come out sooner or later, because he lost that twenty pounds of mine. I'm supposed to think that he's got it in his cash-box. Can't we think of something to help him out?"

"He doesn't deserve it," said Watson. "He's failed the Remove—he's disgraced himself—and it's only right that he should suffer the penalty. If I had done the same thing, I shouldn't expect any mercy."

Clive Russell flared up

"He doesn't expect any mercy, either—but is that a reason why we should withhold it?" he asked hotly. "I'm the fellow who's lost by Fullwood's backsliding, but I'm not grumbling. I tell you, the whole thing is Forrest's fault. I'm ready to forgive Ralph on the spot. He was tricked—he was duped. Any one of us might have done the same thing, and it's not our place to judge him."

"Rot!" retorted Handforth. "We're Vigilantes, aren't we?"

"That's all the more reason why we should be broad-minded," said the Canadian junior quickly. "If Fullwood had gone to that night club of his own accord, and had deliberately taken my money to gamble with, it would have been a different thing. I should have finished with him for good."

"Well, it was nearly as bad, wasn't it?" asked Watson.

"You're dotty!" shouted Clive. "You know as well as I do that Fullwood was trapped. He thought I was in that club, and he only went there to drag me out. Was that an unworthy action? And even after he was in the place, Forrest still tricked him. Forrest gave him that money of mine, and left him within a yard or two of the roulette table."

"Yes, that was a rotten, dirty trick!" agreed Handforth indignantly.

"And is it right that we should judge him because he slipped?" went on Clive breathlessly. "We all know his past—and we know that he's been jolly decent for weeks and months. Then that snake, Forrest, plants him next to a roulette table! The poor chap simply couldn't withstand the temptation—that's all. But I maintain that he would never have gone near the place of his own accord. And now that it's all over, he's sorry—he's so cut up that he's on the point of running away from school!"

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Dick Hamilton gravely.

"He said something about running away in his sleep," replied Clive, with a gloomy nod. "The poor fellow is on the point of brain fever! This isn't a time to be superior and critical! Fullwood has made a slip, he's sorry, and I think it is up to us to help him."



CHAPTER 14.

THE LETTER!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH thumped the table.

"Yes, by George, you're right!" he said firmly. "We've got to help the chap! And we've got to work things so that nobody ever knows."

"Then it would be a good idea to start by reducing the tone of your voice a bit," said Dick Hamilton. "There's no need to shout, Handy. I thoroughly agree that this is an occasion for swift action—and kindly action."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne brightly. "Allow me to make a brainy suggestion, laddies. I have here, in the good old wallet, a bunch of notes that I absolutely don't know what to do with. Kindly permit me to produce twenty of the best, and shove them into Fullwood's grasp. I'll trot along and have a few words with the dear old scout—"

"We admire your spirit, Archie, but it wouldn't do," interrupted Dick.

"But, dash it, I mean—"

"In the first place, we're not going to let you bear all the burden of that twenty pounds," said Dick. "And in the second place, Fullwood would never accept it from you. Don't you realise that he couldn't possibly take it? It would only be piling on the agony for him."

Archie started.

"Odds problems and dilemmas!" he ejaculated. "Absolutely! Now that you come to shove it in that light, laddie, I see the trend. Dashed embarrassing, if you know what I mean."

"It's awfully decent of you to take it like this," said Clive gratefully. "Somehow I was certain you would. I want you all to understand that Ralph is genuinely sorry. I wish I could prove it—"

"You don't need to," interrupted Hamilton with a smile. "There's nothing to equal Fullwood's own behaviour. His misery this morning—his worry—his look of dull despair—they tell us all we want to know. If he had gone back to his old nature, he would have carried off this thing with an air of complete indifference. We're quite satisfied that he's sorry. And that's why we're going to help. When a fellow is genuinely cut-up, it's the time to hold out a helping hand."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Handforth firmly.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR!"

Fullwood is troubled! He must find £20 to pay a debt of honour.

Handy offers a few hints.

They visit a local fair and start a vegetable-and-fruit shy.

Loads of fun and excitement in next Wednesday's lively long complete yarn!

Don't miss next week's stirring chapters of our great new war serial:—

"SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!"



Look out for this cover! The yarn inside is the real goods! On sale everywhere next Wednesday!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

"If we go for him baldheaded, and send him to Coventry, it'll make him so miserable that he'll probably do something desperate. Who was the ass who suggested sending him to Coventry, anyhow?"

"I think it was your own idea," said Dick gently.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "By George! I—I— Oh, well, I was talking out of the back of my neck!" he admitted frankly. "At a time like this we've got to forgive and forget. And if there's anybody here who wants to scrag Fullwood, he'd better understand that he'll have to scrag me, too! And I'll take on any two of you with one fist!" he added grimly.

"Dry up, Handy—we're all with you!" said Church hastily.

Handforth looked rather disappointed.

"All right, then!" he said gruffly. "Let's get to business!"

"Easier said than done," declared Clive. "It's the money that worries him most, I guess. If only we can think of something to put that straight, he'll be himself again. But we've got to do it tactfully."

"It'll need some thinking out," said Tommy Watson, shaking his head.

"Of course, I don't mind about the money," went on Clive. "Fullwood's lost it, and as he was more or less dragged into the rotten affair against his will, I'm ready to drop the whole thing." But that's where the snag comes in. He wouldn't allow it for a minute."

"What we've got to do is to let Fullwood get that money back without you knowing anything about it," said Dick Hamilton thoughtfully. "It ought to be fairly simple, if only we can get hold of a good idea."

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth tartly. "How can Fullwood get it back without Russell knowing anything about it, when Russell's here all the time?"

Clive smiled.

"Dick means that Fullwood mustn't know that I know," he explained.

"Don't waste time on the point," said Dick, frowning. "Supposing we wangle it, Russell? Supposing we make Fullwood think that everything is square again about the money? Do you think he'll be all right?"

"He'll be so mad with joy that he'll soon be himself again, and will be more than ever determined to keep decent," replied Clive, with conviction. "We want to work some-

thing so that he'll never suspect that we know the truth. If he believes that the secret is only his, he'll be his old self in no time."

And the Vigilance Committee discussed idea after idea—until, finally, one was put forward by Dick Hamilton, which seemed thoroughly efficient. The whole matter was threshed out, and quick action was taken.

Clive Russell left before the final conclusions had been arrived at, as he was anxious about Fullwood on two scores. He wanted to see how Fullwood was now, after that bad nightmare of his—and he also wanted to prevent his chum from jumping to any awkward truths. Fullwood might suspect things if he heard that the Vigilance Committee was in session.

But when Clive went into Study I, he found Ralph Leslie still asleep. The Canadian boy was glad. This rest would do his chum a world of good. Clive was grateful to the other juniors for their sympathetic attitude. Not that they could have adopted any other.

They were all good fellows, with plenty of common sense, and they could easily tell that Fullwood was repentant. His every action proved how deeply he was regretting his folly, and how sincere his remorse was.

To deal harshly with such a sinner was opposed to their natures. But they could well imagine what would happen if the whole school knew. There were plenty of fellows who would be only too ready to treat Fullwood with scorn and contempt, and thus send him, perhaps, along that very road which he had fought so hard to avoid—and which, for one fatal hour, he had wandered into again.

A movement from the chair drew Clive Russell's attention, and he found Fullwood sitting up, and looking at him.

"Oh, I say, I'm sorry!" said Clive. "I didn't mean to awaken you."

"You didn't," muttered Fullwood wearily. "I just woke up naturally, you know. I say, is it the interval yet?"

"The dinner gong will go at any minute," smiled Clive.

Fullwood got to his feet in alarm.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Then I must have been asleep for two hours and more!" He pressed a hand to his brow. "Crumbs! My head's splitting! But I'm feeling a bit better, I believe."

"That's the idea," agreed Clive heartily.

But Fullwood was very reluctant to talk. He moved across to the window, yawned, and stood looking out into the West Square. He was fighting with himself again. Here was Clive—alone with him. A golden opportunity to tell him the whole truth! Fullwood knew that he had been having nightmares—he remembered them vividly. He had been living through that night again. But he hadn't the faintest suspicion that he had unconsciously made the confession that he was consciously afraid to utter!

"There goes the gong!" said Clive suddenly.

"Wait!" muttered Fullwood, turning. "Clive, old man, I can't go on like this!"

I want to explain something to you. I've been tortured all the morning—tortured ever since last night! I want to tell you——"

"Rot!" interrupted Clive hastily. "It's dinner-time."

He was alarmed. He guessed—correctly—that Fullwood was about to tell him the whole truth. And he didn't want to hear it, for he knew it already. He didn't want Fullwood to ever know that his secret was revealed.

And before Ralph Leslie could even commence to say anything, Clive got him on to another tack.

"Sure you're fit to come in for dinner?" he asked anxiously. "Perhaps you'd better report to Dr. Brett, and go to bed for this afternoon? Gee, that's a good idea, Ralph! Go to bed, and get up for tea. I'll have a special spread ready, so that we can enjoy our first tea together properly—our first tea together since we had that row."

"I'm not going to bed—I'm a lot better now," urged Fullwood. "Look here, Clive, hang dinner! I've got something important——"

The door opened, and Handforth appeared.

"Buck up, my lads!" he said briskly. "Don't forget the rules! Late-comers get no food! Hallo, Fully! Feeling a bit better? Good man! Let this be a lesson to you not to have any more study rows."

"If we want to know the real meaning of peace and harmony, Handy, we'll come along to Study D!" chuckled Clive. "Come on, Ralph!"

Fullwood found himself escorted into the dining-room as though he were some hero—and this undeserved treatment seared him like acid. He didn't know that the juniors were aware of the whole truth!

Moreover, they were deliberately trying to make him believe that they put his indisposition down to his recent quarrel with Clive. They had thought that at first, so they continued in the same way. And it was necessary to waste a few hours before their little plot could come into action.

Immediately dinner was over, Fullwood was whirled upstairs by Handforth & Co. and Clive, and they all changed into footer things. And then they went out to Little Side, and spent a brisk half-hour in practice.

And the exercise did him a world of good, too. By the time the Remove went indoors for afternoon lessons, Ralph Leslie was feeling immensely better. His head was clearer, and his whole outlook was more rational. He had ceased to regard the position with an exaggerated sense of tragedy.

He had made a bad blunder, but he knew his fault—and there is always plenty of hope for a fellow who knows his own weaknesses.

Mr. Crowell was very pleased to see the great change in Fullwood when he came in. But the effect of the quiet class-room revealed itself later on, before lessons were over. Fullwood's attention wandered constantly, and before the dismissal came, he was again looking haggard and worried. He had had

time to drift back into that condition of self-condemnation and misery.

At last the Remove were set at liberty, and Clive took Fullwood by the arm, and rushed him out into the Triangle.

"Buzz along to the study, Ralph, and I'll get some things from the shop," he said briskly. "No, you needn't come; this is my treat. I'm paying all exes to-day, don't forget. See you within five minutes!"

"Yes, but——"

Fullwood was not allowed to say anything. Clive hurried off, and as Ralph Leslie was anxious to avoid conversation with any of the other fellows, he went straight off to Study I. But before he could get there he was intercepted by Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy.

"Letter for you, Master Fullwood," said Tubbs brightly.

Fullwood paused, bringing himself back to reality with a jerk.

"Letter for me?" he repeated. "But the post isn't in——"

"This is a special one, sir," said Tubbs, with an air of importance. "Came only five minutes ago by telegraph-boy. Express letter, Master Fullwood. I thought I'd let you have it at once."

"Thanks, Tubbs," said Fullwood, with assumed interest.

He took the letter and glanced at it. It was boldly marked "Express," and it was addressed to Fullwood in typewriting. It felt rather bulky, and it was heavily sealed. And it bore the Bannington postmark.

"I—I——" Fullwood paused, as he felt in his pocket. "Sorry, Tubby, old man, but I haven't got any change on me. Remind me that I owe you a bob!"

Tubbs looked indignant.

"Not likely I won't!" he said. "Lummy, it's a pity if I can't bring a letter without expecting a tip every time! I don't want no bob, Master Fullwood, thanks all the same. I don't mind takin' a tip when I've done something for it, but I ain't one o' them who shoves their 'ands out for nothink!"

And Tubbs went off rather loftily. Fullwood went into his study, closed the door, and idly turned the letter over. He couldn't imagine who it was from. He didn't know anybody in Bannington who would send him an express letter.

He broke the seal, and withdrew a sheet of notepaper and a bundle of other papers, too. He looked at them dazedly.

Money! Pound notes! Twenty of them!

CHAPTER 15.

A STAGGERER FOR FULLWOOD.

ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD stared in amazement.

"Twenty pounds!" he muttered, as he feverishly counted the notes. "Yes, twenty right

enough! But—but—— Why, that's exactly the amount of Clive's money! Twenty pounds!"

He was dazed and bewildered. With a sense of growing unreality, with a feeling that this was merely another dream, he unfolded the sheet of notepaper. It bore neither address nor date. And there was just three lines of typewriting upon it. He read them through, and caught his breath in with a gulp.

"The croupier!" he whispered tensely. "Oh, my only hat!"

He continued to stare at the typewritten words, but they became blurry. He could not read them properly. The very paper shook in his hand. But, with an effort, he steadied himself, and forced himself to read them again:

"We're not all crooks in these places. Take this money back, and keep it. Don't be tempted again. You're not the sort we want here. We heard how you were tricked—the trickster went too far.

"THE CROUPIER."

Never for an instant did Ralph Leslie Fullwood suspect that this was another trick! He had been lured into that night club by Forrest's contemptible act, and now he was being led to believe that his money was returned by the croupier of that infamous roulette table.

For a moment or two Fullwood was utterly bewildered.

How was he to guess that the twenty pounds had been collected by the members of the Remove Vigilance Committee? Dick Hamilton and Tommy Watson and Handforth and the others had all contributed. Archie Glenthorne had wanted to supply the full amount, but they hadn't allowed this. He had done no more than his proportionate share.

And Dick himself had taken the letter to Bannington, as he had already planned to go over to the Grammar School early that afternoon, to make arrangements for a forthcoming football match.

It had been an easy matter to type that note, and to seal it up in such a way that Fullwood could never guess the true origin of it. It had been even easier to post it in Bannington. Dick Hamilton had known that it would be delivered by about tea-time. And here it was!

Exactly as the Vigilantes had hoped, so Fullwood believed.

The thing seemed obvious. Forrest had boasted about the contemptible way he had tricked Fullwood into playing roulette. And the croupier, who wasn't such a rascal, had acted in a generous spirit.

Knowing that the money had been lost by Fullwood in a fit of temporary weakness, he had had the decency to send it back—but, of course, in such a way that he was perfectly safeguarded. No matter who saw that



letter, there was nothing to be gained from it in the way of information.

"By gad, what a sportsman!" muttered Fullwood breathlessly.

His whole outlook changed. In that one moment, his brain cleared. He had actually lost more than twenty pounds, but here was Clive's money, anyhow—and he deserved to lose all his own.

"The croupier knows everything, I expect," murmured Fullwood. "Forrest must have been talking—he must have blabbed that I used twenty quid of another chap's money, and that's why the croupier has done this. He may be a crook, but he's a brick! The man's white!"

His joy was good to behold, although, at the moment, there were none to behold it. For this money, arriving from such an extraordinary quarter, put everything on a square footing again. Without a moment's delay, Fullwood went to his cashbox, opened it, and slipped the notes within. Then he locked the box with a sigh of happiness.

"Clive!" he muttered. "He might come back——"

Grabbing up the opened envelope and the sheet of notepaper, he thrust them both into the fire, and watched them blaze. Dick Hamilton had prophesied that he would take this action. He had burned the evidence before he had had the slightest chance of examining it, or to test its authenticity.

At any other time, perhaps, Fullwood might have been very dubious. He might have suspected something fishy. For he was normally shrewd and hard-headed. But today his mind was so confused and agonised that he received this spoof without a trace of suspicion.

If that money had come from any other course, it would have been a very different affair. But this was actually Clive's money—the precious money that had been lost! So his folly was wiped out—and from this minute he would be able to hold his head erect—and to work quietly and consistently to redeem his honour in his own eyes. The others didn't know—and now they never would know! Even Clive would continue to be in ignorance!

The Vigilantes had made their plan very carefully.

They knew that Fullwood would gain no satisfaction if the money came from some anonymous source. For it wasn't the money itself which mattered—it was the fact that this twenty pounds was the self-same twenty which Fullwood had gambled away. Being Clive's own money—so Fullwood believed—he was under no obligation to anybody, except, perhaps, the croupier. But Fullwood was not likely to recognise this obligation, for the money had only been won from him by a trick. And the croupier had apparently had the decency to see this.

Outside, Clive Russell found Handforth and a few others in the lobby. Clive was carrying his parcels, and he paused, eager.

"Buck up, you ass!" said Handforth briskly. "Tubbs took the letter to him five minutes ago. We want you to hurry in, and watch the effect. Then we'll carelessly stroll in a bit later, and have a look at him for ourselves."

"We don't want to ruin it by being too speedy, old chap," said Church, with concern. "Give him a chance to get settled down, you know. I think Russell ought to wait a bit before he barges in."

Dick Hamilton came up, and agreed.

"Yes, it'll take him about ten minutes to adjust himself properly," he said. "And it's not a particularly brilliant idea to stand here, jawing about it. Go to your studies in just the ordinary way, and forget the whole business."

"Absolutely," said Archie Glenthorne, nodding. "I'm frightfully keen to see the poor old onion, but we don't want him to get any dashed suspicions. So let us trickle into our various chambers, and sample the good old brew. After which, forty of the best and brightest will be the order of the hour."



CHAPTER 16.

ALL SERENE.

LENTHORNE'S cheery suggestion could not curb Clive's impatience.

"He's had time to get his mind settled by now, I guess," he said briskly. "You fellows can drop in when you like, of course; but give us ten minutes or so, won't you?"

"Leave it to me," said Handforth firmly. "You buzz along, and I'll follow in half a minute or so. But nobody else will be allowed until after tea. I think it's rather necessary that I should see Fullwood, and cheer him up a bit."

"And I think it's rather necessary that you shouldn't!" said Dick Hamilton. "Who votes for Handforth being firmly but sternly squashed?"

They all voted for it, including Church and McClure. And while Clive Russell hurried off, Handforth was jammed against the lobby wall, and held there. And he wasn't released until he gave his solemn promise that he would steer clear of Study I for a solid half-hour.

Clive assumed an air of cheery indifference, and hummed loudly to himself before he reached the study—in order to give Fullwood plenty of warning that he was approaching. Then, instead of walking straight in, he partially opened the door and dropped one of his bags. He wasted quite a lot of time picking it up, and in fumbling about with his other packages.

Fullwood was provided with plenty of warning.

He needed it, too. He felt thankful that he had burned the envelope and paper so

(Continued on page 42.)

Powerful New War Serial!**Just Started!**

SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By

ROGER FOWEY

FIRST CHAPTERS.

Immediately following her declaration of a war of revenge, Germany lands troops on the South Coast and shells Cliff House School. All the boys manage to win clear except TOM LEE, JACK BENNETT and BUSTER KIRK, three Fourth-Formers, who make the discovery that a master of the school is a spy and has been directing enemy forces by wireless; the master's real name is STUTZ. The chums don the khaki uniform of the Cliff House cadets, and, aided by a member of the Tank Corps, named Bill Jennifer, get an old tank and assist in the defence of Denge Village, near the school. The tank is disabled, and the chums go down into the cellar of the village tuck-shop while the Germans mass for a fresh attack. After a meal, they fall asleep; when they waken, they discover that

the village is in the hands of the enemy and the British have been forced to retreat. Assisted by Bill Jennifer, the three boys manage to get clear of the shop, and are just in time to see the village policeman placed against the wall at the back of the police-station by a firing party. Bill and the boys rescue Constable Hazlett, who then insists on going to the station to let a poacher out of a cell; just as they get Sneaky Bates out, two German officers appear from the side entrance of the police cottage. Jack Bennett drops his rifle and goes for the nearest of them: "Collar them," he exclaims, "we'll take them with us!" and he all but knocks the nearest man out with a smashing punch to the jaw—to discover that the fellow is Stutz, the spy!

(Now read this week's exciting chapters.)

Swift Work!

JACK stood staring open-mouthed at the reeling figure of the man before him. There was no mistaking the grim, tense features revealed by the momentary flash of the electric torch—it was Stutz!

It was the spy who had guided the German forces to their landing-place by the old school—the man for whom the whole of the British Secret Service was seeking!

The fellow slumped backwards against the white-washed wall of the police cottage, then he seemed to rally, and his right fist crashed at the side of Jack's head. For the fraction of a second, Jack reeled under the force of the punch, and in that moment a tornado seemed to whirl past him.

It was Buster Kirk, fists flying—his chubby features strained and pale as he tore with both hands into the spy. In Stutz, Buster saw the man who had been the cause of killing little Fatty—the Third Former who even now lay still

behind the school. Fatty—Buster's young brother, the first to die by enemy shells!

Stutz was a grown man—but he could not withstand the fierce, vengeful attack that Buster launched. The schoolboy had weight, and there was a surprising strength in his well-padded limbs. He plastered Stutz from his square jaw down to the belt, he flogged him sick and gibbering back against the wall, smashed him to the ground, and, when he staggered up, knocked him down again, until the German lay half on his face—knocked out by a last, terrific right-hander that had shattered his waning senses.

"You beast!" Buster bent above him, his whole figure trembling. "You rotter! I'd—"

"Steady, young 'un!" Bill Jennifer laid a hand on his shoulder. "Don't make a row, for the love o' Mike! There's Germans all round us, and— Got the other one?"

Constable Hazlett was sitting astride the other German's chest, with Sneaky at his legs and with

Tom Lee gagging him effectively with the Hun's own gold-braided cap.

"Let's capture 'em!" Jack exclaimed softly. "Let's take 'em back with us as prisoners!"

"Can't!" Bill Jennifer was brief. "We'd never get 'em through. There's thousands o' Germans between us an' our own troops—we'll be lucky if we get clear ourselves. We'll search 'em an'—Here, drag 'em into that cell! Quick, now!"

He searched on the ground for the electric torch which Stutz's companion had dropped, and which had extinguished itself. He found it as they dragged the two Huns into the little cell from which Sneaky Bates had just been released. Stutz was still unconscious when Jack and Bill went through his pockets; he carried papers in plenty, but there was no time to examine them to ascertain their value.

They relieved the spy and his companion of every shred of paper that they could find, then Hazlett sneaked into the scullery of his cottage and came back with a couple of dozen yards of rope and cord, together with two tough huckaback towels.

"Bind 'em an' gag 'em," he said. "Then we'll lock 'em in here, an' I bet they don't get out afore mornin'—not then, mebbe!"

The little party of Britishers worked swiftly by the shielded light of the torch.

"By rights, we ought to shoot 'em," Constable Hazlett rumbled. "That's what they was a-goin' to do to me!"

"We can't do that in cold blood," Jack told him. "Stutz ought to be shot, but—Oh, well, we can't do a thing like that, you know!"

"Course not," agreed Buster. "I gave him a jolly good hidin', anyway, an' that squares us up a bit. Tighten up those gags, Tom—we don't want the perishers to work them loose and yell for help!"

Securing the Huns was the work of barely five minutes—and all the while the street outside the ruined police cottage was alive with moving Germans. They could hear their guttural voices and the rattling of their transport waggons and guns over the shell-pocked road. They heard a squad of infantry halt somewhere near, their rifle-butts grounding on the roadway.

"That'll do," said Bill at last, and he made a swift examination of the prostrate men. "They'll be marvels if they get out o' that lot! Lock the door, Mr. Hazlett—make sure of it!"

The village policeman did make sure of it; he turned the key in the stout cell lock and then drove all the bolts home. That done, they made for the dark field from which they had come, after regaining their rifles. They waited a few moments, while Bill Jennifer went over to the near-by pigsties and got rifles and ammunition for the policeman and the poacher, then they set off across the field.

Through the German Lines!

IN the ditch at the far side of the field, they paused to take stock of the situation. Over to the right they could just see where Germans were still landing from the Rye Bay side of Dungeness Head. The flat-bottomed boats were still coming in, packed tight with infantry, from the ships anchored in the West Road. Beyond, dim-seen in the darkness, showed the shapes of war-vessels spread in a cordon on the horizon, marked by the red slashes that gouted from the muzzles of their guns as they fired on British vessels in the Channel.

Occasionally, shells plunked to the sea or the sand near the landing parties—shots from British weapons far inland.

Towards Rye itself, the night was lit by the glare of guns and by fires in the ancient town, where a violent battle still raged. Across Walland Marsh there was comparative quietness, although on the far side it was plain that a fight was in progress.

"Where d'ye want to get to?" Sneaky Bates' voice came through the darkness.

"We've got to get right across the marsh—to somewhere near Fairfield, I think," Bill Jennifer told him. "I ain't sure exactly. But so long as we get into touch with our own chaps it don't matter where it is. You see, the whole o' the marsh is packed wi' Germans all goin' up to the firin' line. They're still landin' up t'other side o' the Head an'—"

"I reckon I knows Walland like I do the back o' me right hand," said Sneaky cheerfully. "You blokes came an' got me out o' that cell, an' I reckon I can get ye out o' this mess all right. You follow me; say when ye're ready, an' we'll start!"

There was nothing for which to wait, and they started right away, with the old poacher in the lead and Jack bringing up the rear. Soon they were climbing over the low embankment and the single railway track that ran from Lydd to the old batteries commanding Rye Bay; beyond stretched the misted darkness of Walland Marsh itself, and, though they could see nothing, they knew it to be peopled by the enemy.

Sneaky led the way onwards. They crossed a road, and then waded a narrow stream. Mist began to wreath all about the cautiously moving party, and every few yards they stopped to listen.

Old Sneaky turned off at times and took a fresh direction, for no reason that Jack could discover—save that he guessed the poacher's trained ears had caught some warning sound the rest had not heard.

Jack could see that the poacher was about the one man who could have taken them across the marsh—even with his skill and craft they missed parties of Germans by bare yards. Once they all but blundered into a squad of two score men who were laying a corduroy road across the yielding surface, preparing the way for a couple of heavy guns which bulked blackly through the mist.

Gigantic guns, they seemed to Jack, with squat muzzles and broad, heavy wheels; they were swathed in waterproof wrappings, which served only to accentuate their might.

They skirted the weapons and waded knee-deep in a ditch for a quarter of a mile before they reached the grass again and went onward. Jack and the rest were absolutely lost; only Sneaky knew the direction in which they were going, but always they headed towards the indistinct blur of firing ahead.

Once they came upon a line of troops bivouacked on the lush grass, lying by their weapons—obviously supports waiting to be hurried forward. Getting through them was ticklish work and they accomplished it by using a low hedge for a cover and crawling along the watery ditch which ran beside it.

After that they experienced a dozen alarms as they sighted still figures on the ground near them—men who had died in the fighting which had raged across the marsh. Presently, from out the misty gloom ahead, there showed a continuous stream of vehicles—low-built motor lorries, interspersed with marching men.

"That'll be th' Ashford road," Sneaky told them. "Fairfield's a couple o' miles yonder. We'll get across soon's they've gone!"

For five minutes they waited, then the road was clear and they stole to the open land beyond. Now, they could clearly trace the line of the railway which ran from Rye to Appledore. The embankment was marked by continuous rifle-fire, from out which came the spurting white of

Very lights. Plainly enough, the British were making a stand on the line of the embankment, which meant that the defenders would lie some little distance on the far side of Fairfield, where the railway passed the town.

Sneaky bore to the right, and hereabouts, strangely enough, the going was easier. The ground lay between the enemy's front line and his support troops and was comparatively clear—save for batteries of field guns blazing from behind copses and clumps of bushes; these were easily avoided.

Marching troops loomed up, moving slowly along a road which led direct to Fairfield. Jack and the rest waited to let them move off the lane and make for the embankment, then the little party scuttled across the road and soon the buildings of Fairfield Village showed against the sky-line ahead, with the embankment bulking beyond.

They skirted the village easily enough, and then Sneaky reminded them that the road beyond ran beneath the embankment.

"Our boys'll have a barricade there," he said. "I'll go in front, find a way to it an' then let 'em know we're comin', so's they don't shoot when they sees us!"

He left them in a clump of bushes that grew fifty yards off the road. Somewhere between them and the little bridge were Germans, but the chums could see nothing of them, and for the moment, that particular area was dead quiet.

Sneaky was gone half an hour, then he came crawling back, and with a whispered word, led the way forward. They accomplished the last quarter of a mile on their stomachs, crawling over the grass, sighting the prostrate forms of Germans as they moved. The Huns were lying in shallow fire-trenches, and it was by a gap in their line that the chums got through.

They reached the barricade and Sneaky went over it first. Strong hands helped the chums over the piled sandbags, they stumbled across the little trench beyond, then passed through the arch to the far side of the embankment—safely within the British lines.

Promotion for Jennifer!

"**D**ARNED if it ain't them chaps what was in that tank!" gasped a sergeant as, behind the shelter of the embankment, he flashed an electric torch on the chums. "We're the chaps what was in Denge Village—or what's left of us!"

"Then Brigadier Gordon's here?" asked Bill Jennifer quickly.

"He is, mate—I'll take you to Battalion H.Q., an' they'll send an orderly with you, if you want to see him."

The troops from Denge Village had retired almost in a straight line to Fairfield, and on the embankment they joined with troops which had been rushed across country and who now held the line as far down as Rye. Battalions rushed from London lined the embankment as far west as Ashford; from there down to Hythe and Sandgate the fighting was very open and with no definite front.

Brigadier Gordon found time to see them; he smiled when he saw Constable Hazlett and heard about Sneaky, the poacher.

"Glad you fellows have got out of it, anyhow," he said. "I understood from the message you sent in that you had something to report?"

Bill Jennifer told the old soldier what had happened in the village and how they had trussed up Stutz, then Jack produced the documents they had taken from the two Germans and handed them over.

"They mean nothing to me," said the brigadier, "but if you took them off Stutz, they are probably of some importance. Do you think you would care to take them up to London. I'll give you a note to General Marlow, he is commanding the armies in this sector?"

"Glad to do anything," said Jack quickly.

"Right!" The brigadier looked at Bill Jennifer. "Now, Jennifer, I've got seven whippet tanks coming down to me—they may be here now—and a big Mark V star tank. They've all got skeleton crews, and there is no officer to the big one. I want you to take charge of that—and I promote you to the rank of sergeant here and now. You'll take that tank on for me, I suppose, and—"

"Thank you, sir!" Bill Jennifer's eyes were shining—he was being promoted on the field and was to take over one of the latest type of tanks!

"Can we go with him, sir?" It was Hazlett who spoke and the brigadier smiled as he looked at the robust figure in the mud-stained uniform.

"If you wish," he said. "I suppose the Police Force can spare you?"

"Me beat's gone, anyway, sir," said Hazlett. "There's only this poacher here to—"

"This poacher's a-goin' in that there tank wi' young Bill," said Sneaky stoutly. "I don't know much about 'em, but I can soon learn. That'll be all right, sir, won't it!"

"Yes—if you get into some sort of uniform," answered the brigadier. "I like your spirit—and as I gathered that you and the policeman have some sort of difference to settle, you'd better let me see you shake hands and fix the matter now!"

Policeman and poacher gripped fists before the brigadier, because little things like poaching were wiped out now in the bigger business that was on hand.

"There's a car outside," Brigadier Gordon said to Jack and his chums. "Take that and get to London as fast as you can. You can get on the road to Wittersham and— Can either of you drive, by the way?"

"I can, sir," Jack told him; although he wasn't old enough to hold a driving licence, he had long since learned to handle his father's car.

"Good, then get away now, all of you, and good luck go with you!"

Outside headquarters, the three cadets took leave of Bill Jennifer and the others.

"Dunno when we'll meet agin," said Bill. "But here's wishin' you all the best!"

They saw the chums off in the long, powerful touring car which stood in the narrow lane outside brigade headquarters; it was a commandeered car and there was no one in charge of it.

War-Worn London!

A MINUTE later, and the chums were headed for Wittersham. They reached the village and got on to the Maidstone road then headed north as hard as Jack could send the car. They reached Biddenden before they met much traffic—from there to Maidstone they passed continuous columns of lorries and of marching troops, all pressing forward to stave the invader.

On the great arterial road beyond Maidstone they met guns and tanks, troops and cavalry—headed southwards. The purple cloak of night made everything seem strange, hiding all but the clean might of the men and weapons and strengthening the atmosphere of war.

More tanks were met sliding down the long slope that forms Wrotham Hill; soon after the chums were threading a way through the choked crossing at Eltham, and then they headed for Westminster.

Brigadier Gordon had given them a note for General Marlow, and it was with this note ready to his hand that Jack sent the car along the Embankment towards the Houses of Parliament. They were streaking under Hungerford Bridge when, without warning, three anti-aircraft gun lorries came sweeping to the Embankment, skidding round in tearing sweeps ere they came to a dead stop in the centre of the road.

Jack braked to a halt, then almost jerked out of his seat as the nearest gun tongued a length of searing flame and roared a challenge to the star-studded skies above. The other two followed suit, and looking up, the chums saw that the sky was slashed and rent by the shifting rays of searchlights.

At the entrance to Northumberland Avenue, a searchlight suddenly came into action, its beam joining those above.

High up, flitting like silvered moths in the sky, Jack and his chums could just make out the shapes of enemy air-craft as they dodged the beams from the giant lights below.

Around the enemy planes leaped the red splashes of bursting shells, with woolly puffs of white smoke showing when some ray caught them.

Streaking up between the searchlights, they glimpsed the odd, bluish lines of "tracer" bullets—phosphorescent and glowing as machine-guns blazed them upwards, their crews watching the train and using it to sight the guns on their targets.

It was as they sat in the car, half deafened by the piercing explosions of the three anti-aircraft guns near them, that the Cliff House cadets saw the nearest searchlight abruptly dip its beam and fling it full across the black shape of Hungerford Bridge and the train just crossing it with lights doused.

"Gosh—look!" Jack pointed as he caught the words. The searchlight fully limned a squadron of enemy craft, all flying low and barely a quarter of a mile distant.

They did not trouble to evade the beam, but, in wedge-formation, streaked along it. The brilliant light illumined the Iron Crosses on their wings, and in the leading machine, Jack could distinctly see the head and shoulders of a machine-gunner as he blazed viciously to the streets over which the squadron was flying.

There came a barked order from the officers in charge of the guns and the weapons swung round, muzzles dipping. They fired at point-blank range; for an instant the squadron was blotted out as the three shells burst in unison.

When the smoke cleared, Jack saw one of the machines pitching headlong downwards, with a second swinging in a crippled circle and dropping slowly. The first pitched out of sight, and as it struck the roof of a Thames factory, its cargo of bombs exploded in a stupendous streak of livid flame and a burst of cataclysmic sound that seemed to shake the railway bridge itself.

An instant later, and the enemy squadron was all but over the Thames.

Jack leaned to the back of the car and snatched up his rifle as he leaped from the machine. The gun was loaded and he blazed madly at the craft above him. Three shots he got in, while Tom and Buster gained his side and loosed a round each, then—

The embankment, the bridge, the roadway—the whole earth seemed to split! Jack saw white-edged flame loft before his eyes, he felt himself flung backwards and he had a momentary glimpse of his chums reeling with him.

He saw their car up-ended—he saw one side of the bridge melting to nothingness—and then he was lying face downwards across the tramlines with a soft weight pressing across his legs and a vicious singing in his ears.

But for the buzzing in his head, everything

seemed blanketed to sudden silence. He did not move for a while. In a little, he became conscious that the buzzing was lessening, and then he caught the wicked, vicious barks of the "Archies" and the crash of bursting bombs.

He tried to get up then, but could not shift the weight from his legs. Propping himself on his hands, he twisted his head, and he found Buster lying across him, staring upwards into the sky, his head moving slowly as he followed the flight of the now disappearing squadron.

"Buster—you're sitting on my legs!" gasped Jack.

"Eh? Your legs?" Buster blinked at him by the reflected glow of the searchlight, then he rolled off and sat up. "Crumbs!" he gasped. "D'you see that? They dropped a bomb on us!"

A couple of yards away, Tom was kneeling, looking round him dazedly.

Their car lay upside down, with the body half torn from the chassis. On the other side of it was a tremendous hole where the bomb had exploded, and from the depths of the cavity a burst water-main was sending up a veritable fountain.

One side of the railway bridge hung in a mass of debris. In the centre of the river, some of the pillars had been shattered and, just at this point, the whole parapet was shorn away. Through the gap, four carriages hung, the last half submerged in the river.

It was fairly clear that the enemy machines had been told off to bomb the bridge, an invaluable link in the despatch of troops to the south. The chums did not know it just then, but every other bridge across the river had been subjected to a similar, swift, concentrated bombardment, and nearly all of them had been hit.

Hungerford Bridge was ruined. It was just a twisted, tumbled mass of metal-work, with the railway lines fused and writhed about the girders.

From high above, the rest of the aerial army was dropping bombs on London itself—showering high explosives from Dulwich to Hornsey and from West Ham to Hammersmith. The German airmen worked swiftly and to a pre-arranged plan, with the destruction of the Thames bridges as the first consideration; that done, they swung round, and with British machines engaged in grim fighting with their battle-planes, headed for the Fatherland.

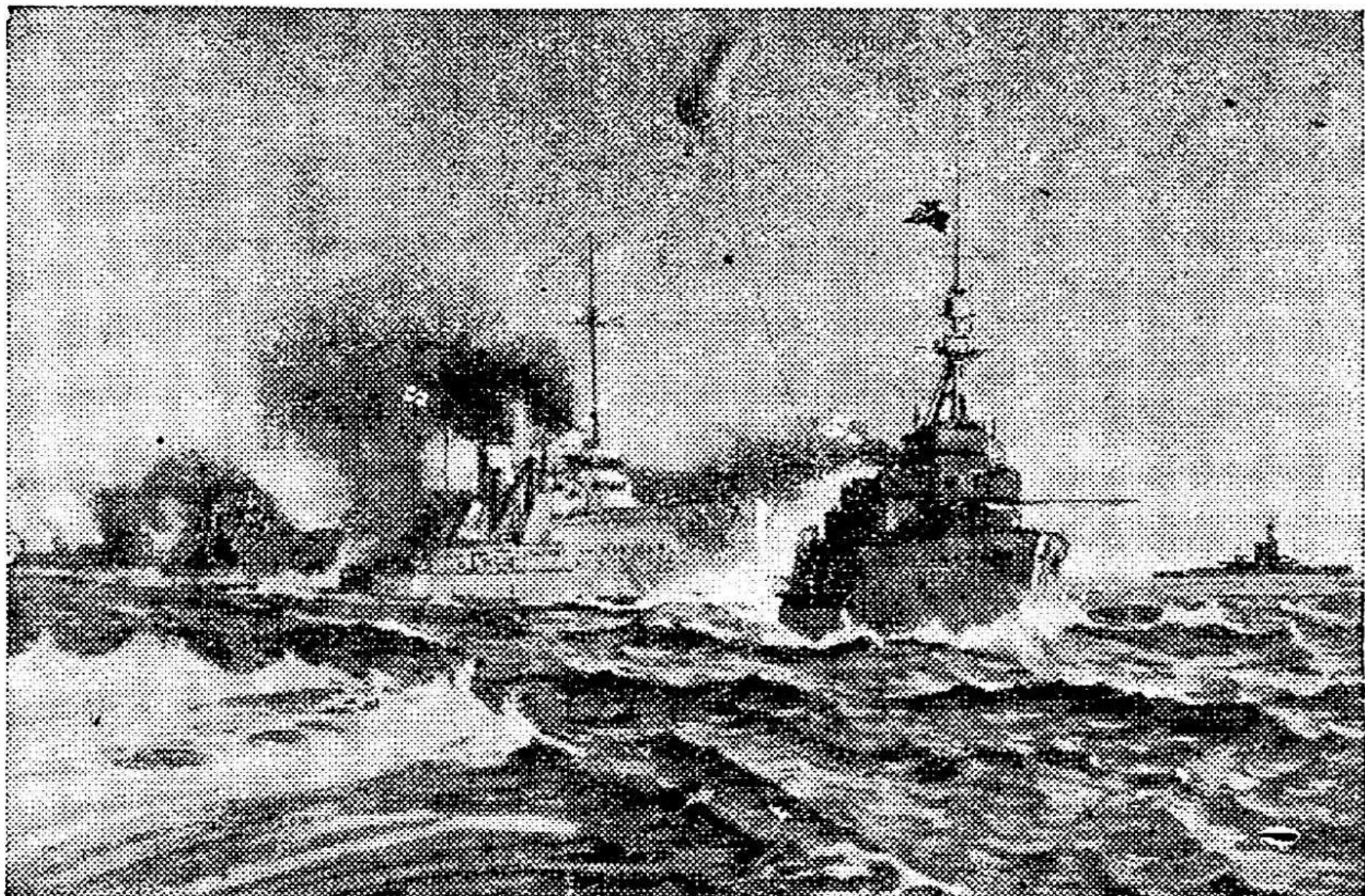
Many returned—but many did not! They had to fight their way against British squadrons that came roaring down from the East Coast and up from Farnborough. Dawn was riding the sky when sick and weary Hun machines limped clear of the North Sea mists and winged for home and safety, leaving their consorts by the score as muddled wreckage that heaved a while on the surface of the water and then dragged down to the green depths.

When Jack and the rest got to their feet, it was plain enough that their car was of no further use, and they moved slowly along the Embankment towards the Houses of Parliament. They saw Westminster Bridge, with its parapets shattered and its road-surface upturned; one pier had gone and the bridge sagged in the centre—with Red Cross men searching the debris for wounded.

At the end of the bridge, almost at the foot of Big Ben, there was an enormous bomb crater, and the whole frontage of the Underground station opposite had been blown completely out. There was another crater at the bottom of Whitehall, and a third bomb had buried itself in the roadway ten yards from the Cenotaph—without exploding.

These things the chums discovered as they made their way towards the War Office. The note to General Marlow—bearing the brigadier's signature on the outside—got them past the military police, then an orderly took the note

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RULE BRITANNIA! The vanquished German Fleet being escorted by the British battleship H.M.S. Cardiff on Thursday, November 21st, 1918, after the declaration of the Armistice. This stirring sea-picture, splendidly reproduced in **FULL COLOUR**, is given away with this week's "Union Jack"—2d., published Thursday.

from them and kept them waiting a while. Soon, however, the orderly came back, took them along the bare corridors of the War Office, tapped on a panelled door and bade them enter.

The room in which the chums found themselves was a large one, with four other doors opening from it. Half of one wall of the room was covered by a huge map of the war area from which the chums had just come.

At a long, broad table in the centre of the room stood Lord Marlow, the brilliant electrician, lighting up his grey hair and his strong features. Grouped near him were members of his staff.

The chums found themselves confronted by a battery of keen eyes as they entered and the door closed behind them. Smartly, they jerked to attention and saluted, then stood waiting.

Those men—each one a veteran of the Great War of years before—saw before them three boys in cadets' uniform. Their uniforms were mud-stained and torn, caked with marsh mire from heels to thighs. Buster's knuckles were dark with dried blood—where he had skinned them on the hard features of Stutz; on his cheek, too, was a blood-smirched scar where a flying splinter from a shell had just gashed his flesh.

Tom was looking lean and grimy—stiff as a ram-rod, and in his bearing showed something strong and alert, reflex of what he had endured since the old school had been shelled.

Jack stood with his chin up, his grey eyes keen. He was as dirty as any of the others, just as mud-stained and as tattered.

These three boys had come out of the inferno of the invasion, with the grime of war fresh on them. They had been where the fighting was thickest—and Brigadier Gordon had said things

in his note which made General Marlow and the rest eye the lads with more than normal keenness.

"You have some papers taken from Stutz?" the General asked.

Jack hauled them out of his pocket and stepped forward, setting them on the table.

"Some are from Stutz, and the rest are from a German officer who was with him."

"I see!" General Marlow took them up and glanced at them, then turned to one of his companions. "Take those—see what you can make of them and report immediately!" he barked. The officer took them and left the room, then the General turned to Jack again. "Now, my boy, I want you to tell me, as quickly as you can, how you came to meet Stutz and all that you know about him."

Jack told him everything, and he made it brief, because he knew that the General hadn't much time to spare.

"And this spy is now locked up, gagged and bound, in the cell at Denge Village police-station, eh?" asked the General, when Jack had done. He smiled a little.

"Yes, sir, and I think he's likely to stop there for a good while," Jack told him.

"All right. Now, find that orderly who brought you in, and tell him I want him to give you all a good meal and a chance to clean yourselves up. Be out in the passage there at the end of an hour—I may be able to use you again."

The chums saluted and left the room. They found the orderly; he seemed to be a friendly sort of fellow, and he did all he could for them. By the time that the hour was up, the chums were washed and had generally smartened themselves, also they had done justice to a meal

which would not have disgraced the appetites of half a dozen hard-working navvies.

For fifteen minutes they waited outside General Marlow's room, then one of his staff beckoned them inside. The papers they had taken from Stutz were spread out on the table, together with typewritten transcriptions.

"Now, you boys," said the General. "Brigadier Gordon speaks of you very highly in his note to me, and I had it in my mind to make use of you as headquarter's orderlies, but something else has turned up. In this kind of warfare, age doesn't matter much; you lads have the right spirit and I want you to do something which may be easy, and which, on the other hand, may be very dangerous. It's—"

"We're game to have a shot at anything, sir," Jack cut in.

"I guessed as much. Now, let me explain. We have learned from these papers that the Germans intend, at dawn, to make an offensive from Ashford and along the low ground which stretches by Wye up to Chilham, while the party that has landed north of Canterbury will drive southwards and link up with the enemy from Ashford. If they do this, it will cut off all our troops lying between Ashford and Dover.

"I don't think the Germans will be successful, but that isn't the point. At a little place called Hastingleigh, three miles from Wye, is some high ground. Big guns on that would command the whole of the valley and would help the German advance. On this high ground is a quarry called Chillen Quarry—and it isn't a quarry really. The workings conceal emplacements for big guns, which may already have been installed by the Huns.

"I want you boys to go to Hastingleigh with a despatch to Colonel Dunton, who is in command there. Deliver the despatch and he will raid the quarry. But if, as I very much fear, the quarry is in the hands of the enemy, I want you to get together what troops you can and raid the place yourselves, putting the guns out of action, if they are there, or blowing up the emplacements if the weapons haven't arrived. If, again, you find it impossible to get to the quarry, then find

the nearest officer, tell him what I have told you and request him to get into touch with the nearest aircraft and have the place bombed. That all clear?"

"Quite clear, sir!" answered Jack.

"Good, then here is an ordnance sheet which will show you the exact location of the quarry, and here is an order for Captain Somers, whom you will find on the Horse Guards Parade. He will hand over to you a small armoured car in which to travel—and use if necessary."

Jack took the map and the chit, saluted, and then left with his chums.

The car Captain Somers passed over to them was a fierce-looking, low-built machine carrying two machine-guns and a supply of small, high-explosive bombs.

Neither Jack or his chums knew what Brigadier Gordon had said about them. Nor did he know that if the Germans won Chillen Quarry their advance up the Wye Valley was almost a certainty. General Marlow wanted to be sure that the big guns would not blaze death and destruction from the quarry; he knew enough about the trio to be certain that, somehow or other, they would see that nothing of the sort happened.

If, as he feared, Hastingleigh was on the fringe of the fighting, putting the quarry out of action was a job which must be entrusted to someone direct from Headquarters—because communications in the fighting area would be disorganised, and it was certain that the enemy would make for the quarry before they did anything else.

The job might, as Tom suggested, come to nothing. On the other hand, it might lead the cadets into the heart of a desperate battle upon which the fate of the invading armies might depend.

(How will the chums get on? They have got a tough job in front of them, and that powerful little armoured car is going to carry them into a whirl of thrills. Read about the Battle of Hastingleigh next Wednesday, and of the chums' wonderful fight at Chillen!)

"Yah, Yah, Yah! Here I am Again!"

"Pete calling, old hosses! You've all heard ob Jack, Sam, and Pete, habn't you—well, I'm de Pete part ob dat famous trio. But dere's a fourth member ob de party now. Dat's Fido, my pet tame Peruvian mouse-hound—in udder words, my pet lion. Old 'Gumboil'—his real name is Gumbriil and he's mayor ob Seahaven—don't like Fido; he don't like me either. Yah, yah, yah! Anyway, old hosses, come and read about me in

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(Continued from page 34.)

promptly, and that he had put the money into the cash-box. His one fear was that Clive should ask what his express letter was, or where it had come from. He didn't want to tell lies.

"Got the kettle boiling?" asked Clive, as he came in. "Afraid I've smashed up these jam tarts—they dropped. Why, you lazy ass, you haven't even put the kettle on to boil!"

"I—I didn't think of it," said Fullwood lamely.

"Well, never mind—you're an invalid," declared Clive.

"Rats!" grinned Fullwood. "That sleep must have done me a heap of good this morning. Anyhow, I'm as fit as a fiddle again. And I'm going to help with the tea, or we shall have another row."

"In, that case—help all you like!" replied Clive.

Although he had expected to see a change in his chum, he was rather startled at this remarkable difference. Fullwood was not merely his old self again, but he was bubbling over with high spirits. He was so happy that he was incautious, and if Clive had not been involved in the plot, he would certainly have suspected something queer.

But there was no doubt as to the success of the scheme!

Ralph Leslie Fullwood's misery had gone. There was no longer that wild, desperate expression in his eyes. Instead, a look of untold relief was written all over him. Clive was infinitely glad that his chum had no inkling of the real truth!

For Fullwood thought that the letter was genuine—and his joy was the result.

What a lesson! And what a lucky beggar he was to escape the results of his folly so lightly! He resolved that he would never be such a fool again. He had had an experience that would keep him to the honest road—an adventure that warned him of the madness of gambling.

Clive, of course, took great care to talk about football, boxing, or any subject as far as possible from the one which was uppermost in both their minds.

Fullwood had scarcely touched his dinner, and he had told himself that he would never enjoy any food again. But this study tea struck him as being the most enjoyable meal of his life.

Before it was over, Handforth & Co. dropped in.

"Hallo! Still gorging?" asked Edward Oswald, with an exaggerated air of carelessness.

ness. "I must say you're looking a bit better, Fully. All honey in this study now—eh? Good! There's nothing like peace!"

"You ought to know," said Fullwood, smiling.

"Come on, Handy—we can't stop," said Church, dragging at Handforth's arm. "Have you forgotten about Irene?"

"Irene!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "Where?"

"My dear chap!" protested Church, pained. "What's the time? We'd better get back to our study at once."

Handforth hurried out, and he and his chums were behind the door of Study D within twenty seconds. Handforth was looking intensely worried. On one famous occasion he had invited Irene Manners, of the Moor View School, to tea, and had forgotten all about it. He always had a horror of doing the same thing again.

"Now then, my lad!" he said sharply. "What about Irene?"

"Nothing," said Church, grinning.

"What do you mean—nothing?"

"Well, I only said it to get you out of Fullwood's study," replied Church. "You know what a chap you are for putting your foot into—I—I mean you know how careful we've got to be. And I was afraid that you might say too much."

"You—you spoofing rotters!" snorted Handforth. "You got me out of that study by a trick—"

"Just think of the good we've done with our money," interrupted Church enthusiastically. "Instead of squandering it on pictures, or feeds, we've done Fully a good turn."

Just after tea, Fullwood made a pretence of going to his cash-box for something. But Clive could easily read his real object. Just as Fullwood was about to close the box again, he looked up.

"Oh, by the way, about your money," he said carelessly.

"That's all right," said Clive. "Leave it in your cash-box."

Fullwood took out the money with a feeling of untold relief.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I'd rather you kept it, Clive, if you don't mind. After all, it's yours, and you'd better hang on to it."

Clive understood—and took the money.

Fullwood wanted to feel that everything was straight—that the money was paid over to its rightful owner. Thus, he felt, the matter was indeed thrust into the past.

Neither he nor Clive Russell guessed that Fate was planning the cruellest blow of all! Ralph Leslie Fullwood was to learn that an act of folly is not so easily wiped away!

THE END.

Coming next week—"ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR!" Handy will keep you in fits of laughter in this topping yarn of the Boys of St. Frank's. Make sure of your copy by ordering in advance!

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT.

Owing to the great demands on my space this week, I have been obliged, very reluctantly, to hold over for the time being the League Form and that ever-growing popular feature, Correspondents Wanted. The absence of the League Form should not make any difference to the good work being done by members in securing new introductions. As we are getting very near the Silver Medal stage, it is up to every Bronze Medallist to add the additional 6 introductions to his credit as soon as possible, and so qualify for the higher award.

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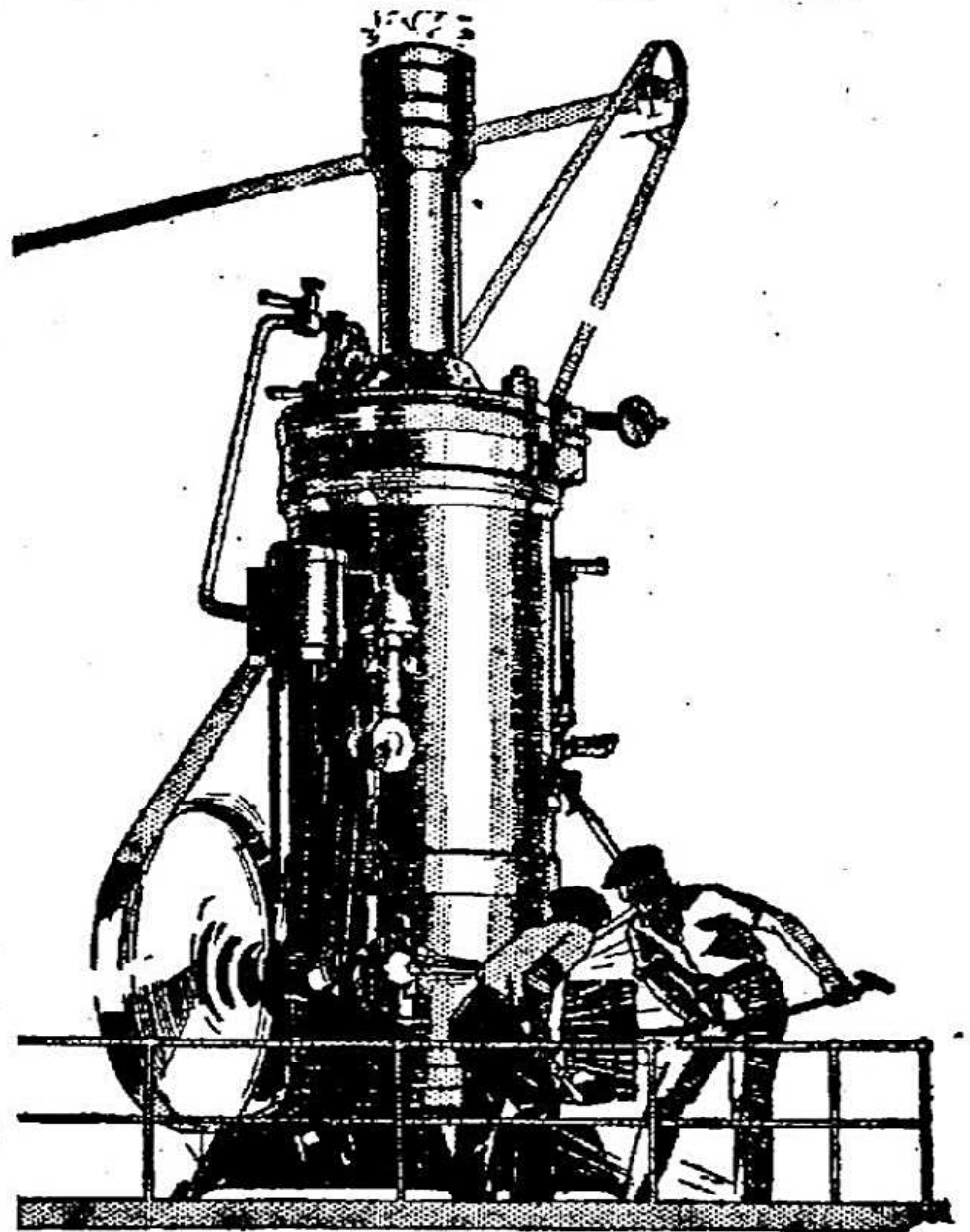


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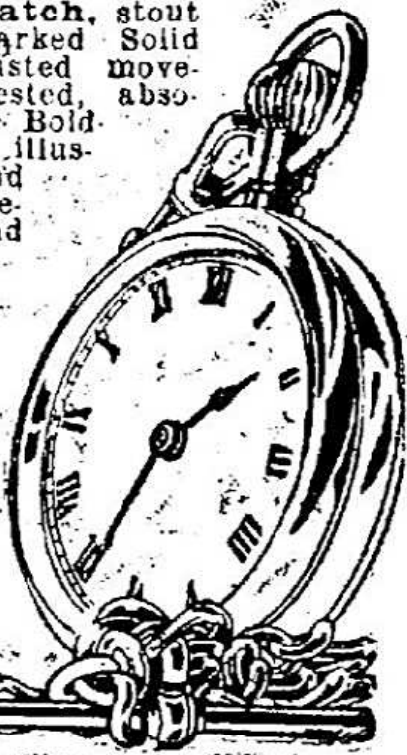
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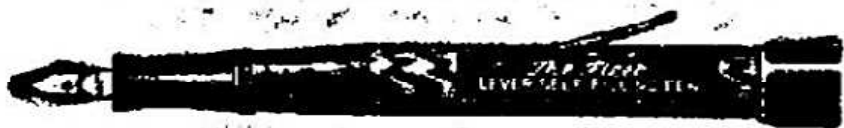
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