



Rag on Roger!

by Frank Richards

the man who invented **BILLY BUNTER**

CARCROFT beaks, on fine summer days, would often take a deck-chair out into the quad, and planting the same in the shade of a wall or a leafy tree, there would sit and correct form papers, or devise exercises with neat little catches in them for unwary pupils. That was how Dudley Vane-Carter, of the

Fourth, came to fall foul of Roger Ducas, master of that form.

V.C. had retired to a quiet spot under the old Carcroft oaks, to enjoy—or otherwise—a surreptitious cigarette. That was one of V.C.'s ways—on which his form-master, as a matter of course, frowned.

Unaware that Roger, in a deck-

chair, sat on one side of a massive trunk, V.C. on the other side lighted his cigarette, and smoked happily—till the scent of it, reaching Roger, caused him to look round the tree. Vane-Carter almost swallowed the cigarette, as he suddenly found that eagle eye fixed on him.

'Detention class—Wednesday!' said Roger, briefly. He was a man of few words: but the few were always to the point.

Vane-Carter faded away; and Roger, dismissing him from mind, resumed marking form papers.

DUDLEY VANE-CARTER'S first impression was that he had got off cheaply. It might have been six up. But he remembered that Wednesday was the date of the Greyfriars match, and his feelings were deep. When Wednesday came round, V.C., instead of knocking up runs for his school at Greyfriars, was sitting in a gloomy detention class with other unfortunate youths, giving more or less attention to irregular verbs, in the worst temper ever. Like Timotheus his thoughts ran on vengeance. Roger had done him out of the biggest fixture of the season. Somehow or other, he was going to make Roger sorry that he had.

But it was not easy, and he had no help to expect in his form. In the corner study, they scoffed at the idea.

'Serve you jolly well right for being a smoky smudge!' was Bob Drake's verdict.

'You ought to be jolly well kicked, for getting detention on

a match day!' said Harry Compton.

'Let's jolly well kick him now!' suggested Dick Lee.

V.C. retired from that study without pursuing the matter further. His friends Levett and Leath were equally discouraging, though from different motives. Levett and Leath had no objection, in principle, to making their beak sit up—indeed, they would rather have liked to boil Roger in oil. Their trouble was funk.

'Too jolly risky!' said Levett, 'Roger ain't safe.'

'Forget it!' said Leath.

Lord Talboys advised V.C. not to be a howlin' ass. 'You can't beat Roger,' said the Lizard, sagely, 'Roger always comes out tops! Leave him alone.'

Only in his own study did Vane-Carter find a spot of enthusiasm. Turkey Tuck loathed Roger with a deep and deadly loathing. Roger made him work, and often made him wash. The fat Turkey was ready for anything. Unluckily, Turkey was too utter and complete a fathead to be of any use. So the vengeful V.C. was thrown entirely upon his own resources.

But the more difficult a task was, the deeper the scapegrace of Carcroft would get his teeth into it. He was going to make Roger Ducas suffer for his sins, if only to show the fellows that he had the nerve to do it. V.C. liked making the other fellows wonder at his nerve. His chance was bound to come, if he watched and waited for it long enough: and, at last, it came. The big idea flashed into

his mind after class one day, when he saw Roger depart from the House, with a deck-chair under one arm, and a sheaf of papers in the other hand.

V.C. thought it over, with glinting eyes. Harry Compton came along the corridor and touched him on the arm.

'Coming down to the nets?' he asked.

'Eh? No! Something else on,' answered V.C.

The captain of the Fourth gave him a suspicious look.

'If it's Roger, I advise you to give him a miss,' he said.

'If I'm in want of advice, I'll ask for it!' retorted Vane-Carter.

'F a t h e a d!' was Compton's rejoinder: and he went to change into flannels, leaving V.C. to his own devices.

Those devices led Dudley Vane-Carter to Masters' Studies. At the corner of the passage, he looked this way and that, like Moses of old. Like Moses again, he saw no man. Unobserved, he whipped into Mr Ducas's study, and closed the door without a sound, leaving it a few inches ajar.

He breathed rather hard in that study. It was a dreaded apartment—few juniors liked entering it. No doubt it was safe enough, with Roger somewhere out of the House, in a deck-chair, sapping Latin prose. Nevertheless, Vane-Carter did not want to linger.

But he was not going to stay long. He had some work to do before he left, but it was not likely to occupy him more than two or three minutes.

He glanced across the study at the window, which was wide open, letting in the balmy summer breeze. The sill was a good six feet from the ground, and nobody was likely to see him from the quad. In the distance, he could see several fellows: but they were quite at a distance, and none looking towards the study window. Nothing was to be seen of Roger Ducas—V.C. had no doubt that he was deep in Latin prose under the shade of an oak. A fellow could drop from the study window, and walk away,

without getting any attention whatever.

V.C. grinned—a little breathlessly. He lost no time. On the study table lay Liddell and Scott—just what he wanted. He picked up that big, heavy volume, placed a chair close to the door and stepped on it. Liddell and Scott was securely disposed, resting partly on top of the door, partly on the lintel of the doorway. The Greek lexicon was so big, and so heavy, that there was not the slightest danger of a draught shifting the door and letting it fall. That ponderous volume would not fall, till the door was pushed open from without. Then it would fall—with a crash—on the head of the person who pushed



open the door. Whoever caught Liddell and Scott with his napper, was certain to remember it for quite a long time afterwards.

V.C. stepped down, replaced the chair, and crossed quickly to the window. His work was done—and Roger, when he came back to the study, was scheduled to feel duly sorry for himself. With the booby-trap in position, it was of course impossible to leave by the door—but the window afforded a perfectly safe line of retreat. V.C. rested his hand there and vaulted lightly out.

ROGER DUCAS, for one amazed moment, wondered dizzily what could possibly be happening. Never before, in all his forty-six years, had it occurred to the master of the Carcroft Fourth to have his hat kicked off. That was what was happening, but, for a moment, Roger really could not believe that it was happening.

Roger was not so far away as V.C. had happily supposed. He had planted his deck-chair, that afternoon, by the shady wall, under his study window. V.C. had taken it for granted that he was somewhere under the oaks, at a distance. It is dangerous, in this world, to take too much for granted, at school or anywhere else. Roger Ducas, with a pile of form papers on his knee, was sitting just under the study window, though the high sill screened him from view from within. Something, like a bolt from the blue, descended on

Roger from above. It was a junior vaulting out of the study window, vaulting clear over Roger as he sat below, but kicking off his mortar-board in transit.

Roger was taken quite aback. V.C. was more so. He had expected to land lightly on his feet, and cut off round the corner of the House. Instead of which, his foot knocked against something, he landed with a stumble, rolled over, and sat up—staring blankly at his form-master.

Roger, bareheaded, stared back at him.

'What—what—what—!' came in gasps from Mr Ducas. 'What—what— You! Vane-Carter! Upon my word!'

He rubbed his head, and replaced the mortar-board. The look that came over his face, as he realised that that member of his form had jumped out of his study window, almost on his head, was indescribable. The glare of the fabled basilisk had simply nothing on it.

He wasted no more time in words. What Roger needed, at that moment, was a cane—his stoutest cane. He gripped Vane-Carter by the collar and whirled him away. To rush that reckless young rascal to his study, and there give him such a 'six' as had never before been administered in the history of Carcroft, was the one fixed idea in Roger's mind. Dudley Vane-Carter, dazed and dizzy, his brain a whirl, was swept into the House, to the door of Roger's study.

With his left hand, Roger pushed open the door: with his

right, he almost hurled Vane-Carter in.

Then it happened—though not to Roger. In another second Roger would have been in, at Vane-Carter's heels. But in that second the crash came.

Crash!

Everything went according to plan, excepting that as V.C. was the first to enter the study, it was upon V.C.'s head, not Roger's, that Liddell and Scott fell with that mighty crash.

'Oh!' gasped Roger, starting back. Now he understood why Vane-Carter had been leaving his study by the window!

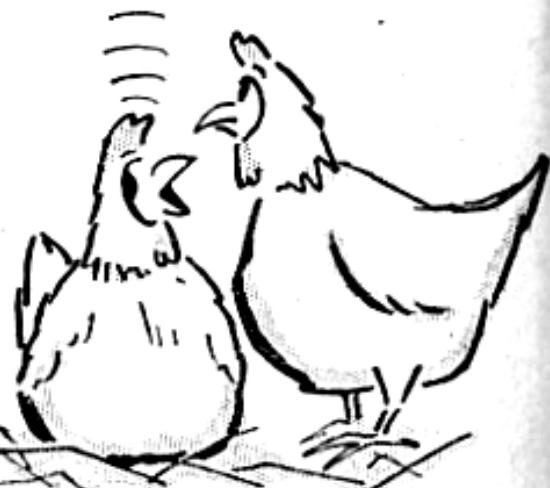
'Oooooooh!' yelled Vane-Carter.

He rolled over. Even Roger's tall head would have had a rather nasty knock from the falling lexicon. V.C.'s head was much

lower down than Roger's; the volume had further to fall: and the luckless junior got it hard and heavy. He rolled on the floor, quite knocked out.

The wrath faded out of Roger's face. He picked the junior up quite gently, and half-led, half-carried him to the matron's room. V.C. was looking quite sick when he left it later, with a bump on his head that looked like a duck's egg.

V.C. had a headache for a couple of days, and a bump for a couple of weeks. Roger said nothing further about the episode, doubtless thinking that the culprit had had enough—on which point V.C.—seldom in agreement with his form-master—for once fully agreed with him.



Smythe

'Quick, Thelma! Sit down and look busy!'