

SEE BACK PAGE AND ORDER NOW!

2^p



No. 1,298. Vol. XXVI.]

EVERY MONDAY.

[April 24th, 1926.

The Heronscourt Mystery!



By MAURICE EVERARD.

A 15,000-word complete detective story.

The 1st Chapter.

A Strange Proposition.

"NOW that the trouble is all over," said his lordship, settling himself in the luxurious depths of his armchair and regarding the quaint, hunched-up figure opposite with a look of admiration he found it hard to conceal, "I am curious to know something more about the wonderful man who has lifted such a terrible load from my life. A week ago, Mr. Pym, I was distracted—the victim of as cruel a system of attempted blackmail as it would be possible to conceive. But now, in a remarkably short time—"

A glow of satisfaction replaced the customary good-natured twinkle in the mild blue eyes of Cornelius Vanderbilt Pym. All the same, he negated his lordship's compliment with a slow shake of his head.

"I don't admit there is anything wonderful about me or my methods," he replied modestly. "If you asked Scotland Yard what they thought of the 'Blue-Disc' detective, as I am called, they might possibly tell you he was a retired 'down-and-out' with 'just one or two trifling successes to his credit.' Professional jealousy, my lord—professional jealousy. But, really, I don't mind. I am perfectly happy in using my own peculiar methods to fight crime and criminals, and if, as in your case, they meet with success—"

"Success! Success!" repeated Lord Scrymgeour ironically. "I should just say it is success—to rid me in seven days of a nightmare which has haunted me for years. This gang of would-be blackmailers whom you put out of action has made my life unbearable until I had the inspiration to call you in. Now, Mr. Pym, if without divulging any professional secrets you can lift the curtain a little and let me see how you did it—"

Pym heaved a sigh of satisfaction, took the second cigar offered by his lordship, lit it, and, calmly watching the blue spirals curl to the panelled ceiling of the library, remarked in a quiet voice:

"Ten years ago, when I said good-bye officially to the Criminal Investigation Department, I hit upon a little notion of my own to deal with criminals—at least, it was really a borrowed idea. All the same, it has proved remarkably successful. Your lordship will remember Black Dog in Stevenson's 'Treasure Island'—the terror which came upon him when the blind man, one of his former companions in villainy, tipped him the 'black spot.' He looked upon it as his death-warrant. I decided to follow out the same notion—to tip every crook on whose trail I was a blue disc. The disc signified that sooner or later the 'game was up,' and in no single case has it failed. Whenever the blue disc has been tipped, the recipient has either thrown it in his hand and vanished or has been quickly brought to justice. In the case of the men who tried to blackmail you into parting with some of your immense wealth I simply delivered one of the discs to each, word went round the confraternity of crime that this had happened, and your enemies—who know me and my methods quite well—rather than risk arrest, decamped for America. So, you see, my lord, there's nothing very wonderful in what I've done—merely the application of a common-sense principle to a weakness of human nature. And as for the reward you have paid me—well, I certainly don't feel entitled to take so much from you."

Algy leaped far out and dropped like a stone through space!

I had known, for he had told me himself, how Captain Moonlight had come to take to the road. I had known, too, of the story of the young duke, who had once been the idol of London, the leader of fashion, the greatest Corinthian England had ever known, the friend of King George himself. But how could I have ever connected those two tales and realised that Moonlight was indeed the young duke himself?

No one in the great cobbled square moved so much as a finger. Wide-eyed, all were staring at the proud, graceful figure on the balcony of the Hare and Hounds Inn.

"I had intended," went on Moonlight, as I must still call him, "to let Captain Moonlight die without any knowing his real name." And at that he glanced down for a moment to where I hung upon his words in the cart below. "Tis a shame to stain a noble family." And at that his voice trembled ever so slightly. "But this villain here knows well enough who Captain Moonlight is, though it has never suited his mind to tell—not yet. He has been too afraid of vengeance being enacted. But once I were dead, it has occurred to me, he would doubtless have spread far and wide the true story of Captain Moonlight, and, needless to say, I vastly prefer that the story shall come from my own lips rather than from this man's."

He still kept a grip upon Jacob Hollow's shoulder. A yard away Percy Hollow stood gripping the balustrade, motionless as a statue, his face white and terrified. Moonlight gave a little laugh.

"And so there's the truth of it," said he carelessly, and shook Jacob Hollow as a dog will shake a rat. "This man is responsible for any wrong-doings that have been laid at the door of Captain Moonlight, for he drove that gentleman upon the road."

He leaned over the balcony. A group of sturdy countrymen were standing immediately beneath. He called to them.

"A last present from Captain Moonlight!" he cried gaily. "Canst catch?"

And with that he picked up Jacob Hollow by the scruff of his neck and the seat of

his breeches and tossed him, kicking madly, over the balustrade. With a scream, he fell into the midst of the laughing countrymen. They caught him, but none too tenderly. I glimpsed a furious, snarling figure, clothes torn to shreds, that fought free at last and stumbled into the inn.

Up above, Captain Moonlight laughed. "And now that this little explanation has been made public, as I wished it to be done ere I died," he cried merrily, "why, now for the scaffold, to die like a true knight of the road!"

He put a hand upon the balustrade of the balcony, as if to vault back into the cart. I saw Percy Hollow draw a sharp breath of relief. He had feared terribly to suffer the same fate as his father at the highwayman's hands.

But ere Moonlight could jump there came a sound. He turned his head suddenly, staring up the road.

In the hush a wild clatter of hoofs had rung out. All heads were turned. And then a horseman, riding furiously, came clattering into the square.

I cried out at sight of him. For 'twas Sir Maurice Melladew.

The Corinthian was in a terrible state, but I knew that proud figure too well to fail to recognise Sir Maurice. His clothes were covered in dust; his face was the same but for the streaks washed clean by perspiration. He had no hat, and his wig was all awry. Mouth open and panting, eyes bloodshot. But then when he caught sight of Moonlight on the balcony of the inn, his handsome face lit up so wondrously that 'twas like a dead man coming to life.

He drew rein and sat swaying in his saddle.

"Heaven be praised!" I heard him cry aloud in a thick, choking voice. "I have ridden from London. I thought that I must be too late!"

And then he plunged a hand inside his weather-stained coat and drew out a sealed paper, which he waved half stupidly above his head.

"A reprieve!" he shouted. "A reprieve for Captain Moonlight and Red Dick, the

highwaymen, signed and sealed by his Majesty King George! God bless him!"

And then Buck Melladew, worn out and fainting, crumpled sideways and fell from the saddle into the arms of the excited throng.

Farewell to Moonlight.

THERE is little more to tell of the story of Captain Moonlight. For there, on the balcony of the Hare and Hounds Inn, in old Marchester, Captain Moonlight ceased to be, and Charles Edgerton, the young Duke of Grayle, came back into the world of men.

Little more to tell? Ay, but it must be told, at least, how the will that Captain Moonlight had found in the little, forgotten room at the top of the tower at Darksley Hall was proved a true one, whilst that which purported to leave all to Jacob Hollow was found to be a forgery. And 'twas for forgery that the Hollows, father and son, found themselves for many days in the quiet of a prison cell, there to think over their misdeeds. But in the world outside I entered into my own.

'Twas found that the two men who had witnessed the true will of old Michael Wing had been killed shortly afterwards in a coaching accident on the Great North Road; and that was why there had been none to tell of the will in the tower-room, that room of which the Hollows had, by lucky chance, known nothing during their time at the great old house.

And Moonlight, too, entered into his own.

And this was the way of it. Reprieved though he was from sentence of death, he was still, despite his words from the balcony of the inn at Marchester, branded as a cheat at cards in the eyes of the lords and gentlemen in London. But the true tale of that shameful business came out, and his name was cleared when Sweet, the bruiser, forsaken by Jacob Hollow after his defeat in the prize-ring at the hands of Tom Bayes, for spite told the truth of the matter; of how Jacob Hollow had placed the marked cards which were found on the

young duke, and which had at the time seemed such certain evidence of guilt.

What a welcome they gave Moonlight in London the night he first appeared again within its fashionable streets! And I was there to share the joy of it.

And so was Buck Melladew and Tom Bayes, too, who since those days has fought his way to Champion of England at his own weight, with Sir Maurice Melladew for his patron, thus fulfilling his splendid ambition.

That, then, is all—or almost all. But you must hear of how we four used sometimes, for old times' sake, to meet together at the Black Goose Inn. And there, round the crackling logs, we would smoke our pipes and talk. Tales, as you may imagine, that were all of the prize-ring and of the King's highway. Tales of Darksley Moor, crisp as the turf on it, merry as the wind in the trees of it, manly tales all. Tales of the time when Captain Moonlight and Red Dick, the highwaymen, rode abroad by night with high hearts.

And I would tell you, in finishing, of the changes at Darksley Hall. For so soon as I came into my own the sound of the woodmen's axes could have been heard all round the old house. Down came many of those gloomy trees that had girdled it so close around, and in streamed the sunlight, joyous and cleansing. And at night lights and dancing.

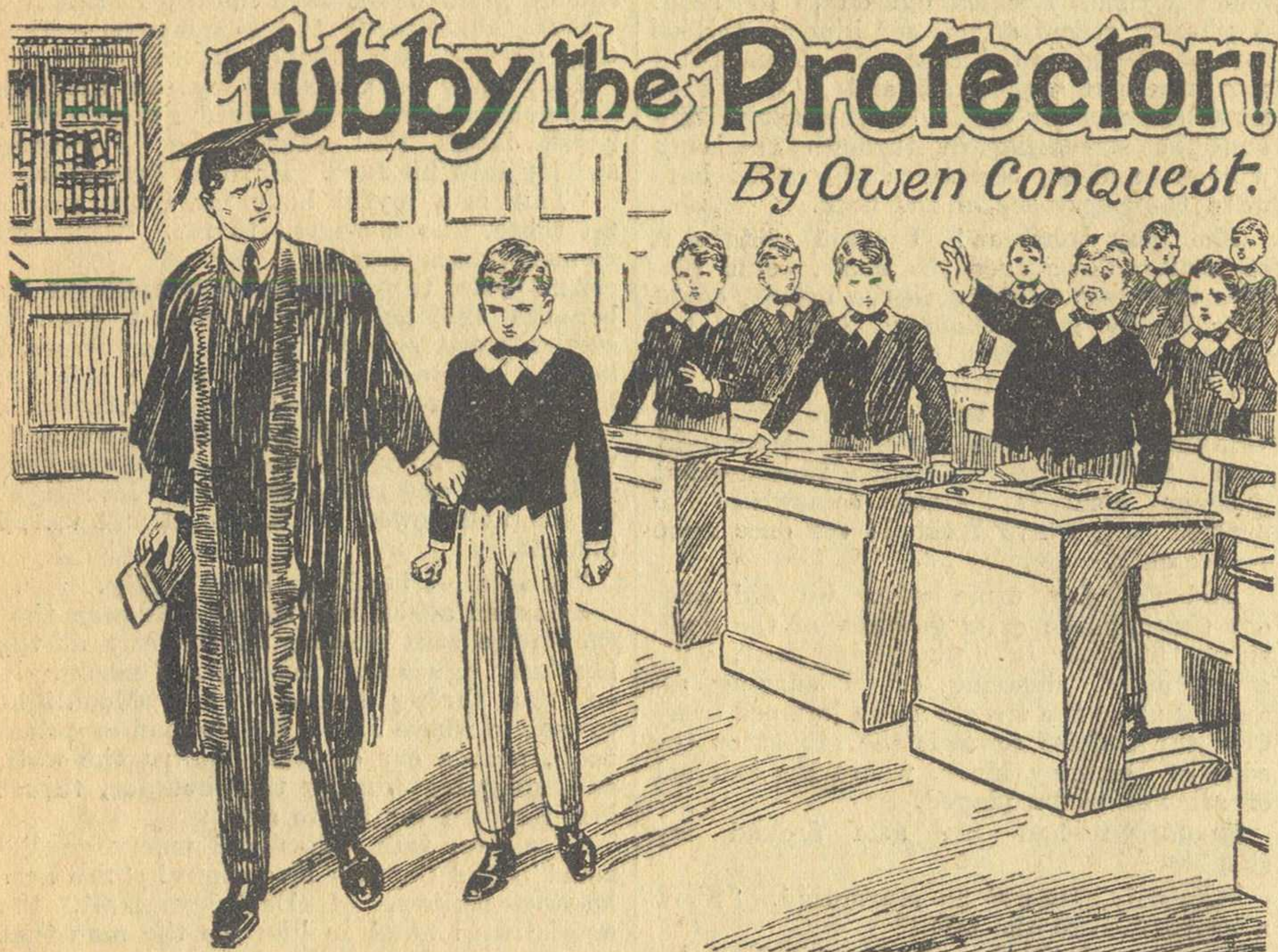
But one was spared of those trees.

'Twas the great elm up which Captain Moonlight—if I may call him so yet once again—and I had climbed upon that desperate night when the will was found—the night that Sweet's bullet had all but let the life out of me after that strange duel in the dark, in which my comrade had fooled Sweet and Jacob Hollow into fighting one against the other.

That tree still stands, for memory's sake.

THE END.

(Francis Warwick again! Don't miss his splendid new adventure story—"Roving A-Roving!" in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. Full details of our bumper new programme of high-class stories for next week will be found on the back page.)



An amusing long story of the chums of Rookwood School.

The 1st Chapter.

Jimmy Silver to the Rescue.

"Ow! Stoppit!" Jimmy Silver paused. The captain of the Rookwood Fourth has just come upstairs and was passing the door of Study No. 2 on his way to the end study.

It was from Study No. 2 that a sudden howl proceeded in the well-known tones of Tubby Muffin.

"Ow! Peele, you beast! Gower, you rotter! Stoppit!"

There was a chuckle in the study.

It was a fine spring afternoon, and most of the Classical Fourth were out of the House. The studies were deserted with one exception. That exception was Muffin's.

Jimmy Silver had lines to do, and he had come in very reluctantly to get through his task. But he forgot his lines for the moment as he heard the dolorous howls of Reginald Muffin.

"Look here, you rotters!" went on Muffin's voice. "I tell you—Ow! Wow!"

Bang!

B. F.—No. 1,298.—April 24th, 1926.

It was the sound of a heavy concussion, and the yell that followed hinted that Muffin's head had come into contact with something as hard or harder.

"Yaroooh!"

"Have another?" asked Peele.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver's face set grimly.

He pushed open the door of Study No. 2 and looked in.

Peele and Gower of the Fourth were holding Reginald Muffin by either fat arm. Muffin wriggled spasmodically in their grasp. The three had their backs to the doorway and did not for the moment observe the captain of the Fourth standing there.

"We'll keep this up as long as you do, Muffin!" said Cyril Peele. "Will you have another?"

"Ow! Beast!" wailed Muffin.

"Where's the jolly old cake?" grinned Peele.

"Find out!" gasped Muffin.

"Is that what you call civil?" demanded Gower. "We've come to tea with you, Muffin—"

"Two nice chaps like us!" said Peele. "We've come to tea—"

"I never asked you to tea!" wailed Tubby.

"My dear man, we don't stand on ceremony with a pal like you. We've asked ourselves."

"And you shove the cake out of sight!" said Gower severely. "Not what I call pally!"

"Trot it out, Muffin!"

"I won't!" roared Muffin. "And I'll jolly well tell Jimmy Silver if you bully me, you rotters!"

"Dear man, nobody here cares a brass button for Jimmy Silver!" said Peele. "Bother Jimmy Silver! Are you trotting out the cake, old fat bean?"

"Ow! No!"

"Look out for your napper, then!"

"Give him another!" grinned Gower.

"Leggo!" roared Muffin, resisting frantically as the two grinning juniors propelled him towards the study table, with the evident intention of knocking his hapless head on it again.

Muffin's resistance would not have availed him very much. But there was help at hand.

Peele and Gower jumped as a hand of iron was laid upon their collars from behind.

They released Muffin as suddenly as if he had become red hot, and twisted round in surprise and alarm and stared blankly at the captain of the Fourth.

"Ow! Let go, Silver, you cad!" gasped Gower.

"Let go my collar!" roared Peele.

Tubby Muffin gave a chirrup of glee.

Jimmy Silver did not let go. His right hand grasped Gower and his left grasped Peele. He swung them apart and then he swung them together.

Bang!

Two yells were blended into one as the heads of Peele and Gower came into violent contact.

"He, he, he!" chortled Muffin.

"You see, I can play at this game as well as you!" said Jimmy Silver amicably. "Have another?"

Bang!

Peele and Gower had another—they could not help it. Then Jimmy Silver released them and they rubbed their heads, with furious looks.

"Give 'em some more, Jimmy!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "They're after my cake—the cake I had from home to-day, you know! Making out that they'd come to tea! I never asked them to tea!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I catch on!" he assented. "Do you fellows want any more before I kick you out of Muffin's study?"

Peele and Gower exchanged a savage glance. As a rule they were not fighting-men, but their heads had suffered rather severely from mutual contact and they had been disappointed in their designs on Tubby Muffin's cake. They exchanged a glance and rushed together on Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy's hands went up like lightning.

"Come on!" he said cheerily.

Uncle James of Rookwood was a great man with his hands. He was quite prepared to tackle the two slackers of the Fourth—or more than two of them, for that matter.

For a minute there was an exciting scrimmage in Study No. 2. At the end of that minute Gower had rolled under the table and Peele was sitting in the fender, nursing his nose with both hands.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Muffin.

"Ow! Oh! Oh crumbs!" moaned Gower, under the table.

"Ow! My nose!" groaned Peele.

"Have a little more?" asked Jimmy Silver genially. "Lots more on tap if you're not satisfied!"

Peele and Gower did not answer. Apparently they were satisfied, though their looks certainly did not express much in the way of satisfaction.

Jimmy Silver stooped, grasped Gower by a leg, and jerked him out from under the table. Peele continued to nurse his nose in the fender.

"Muffin," said Jimmy, "you don't want this fellow here?"

"No fear!"

"Kick him out, then."

"He, he, he!"

The captain of the Fourth swung Gower into the doorway. Tubby Muffin rolled after him and planted his boot on Gower's trousers with terrific vim.

Gower rolled into the passage. He did not remain there, however. He vanished in the direction of the staircase at record speed.

"Your turn, Peele!" smiled Jimmy Silver.

"You—you rotter! You—!" gasped Peele. "I'll make you sorry for this, Jimmy Silver!"

"Perhaps!" assented Jimmy. "But you're going to be sorry at present, old bean! Out you go!"

He grasped Peele by the collar and swung him into the doorway.

"Penalty kick, Muffin!"

"He, he, he!"

Crash!

Tubby Muffin put all his beef into it and

all his weight, which was considerable. Cyril Peele fairly flew out of the study.

He sat in the Fourth Form passage and gasped.

Tubby Muffin rolled out after him with his boot ready. But Peele did not wait for more; he leaped up and fled.

"All serene now, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "You'd better lock your door while you scoff that cake."

"I jolly well will!" grinned Muffin. "I knew those rotters were after it, you know, and I had just time to shove it out of sight before they came in. Look!"

Tubby Muffin stepped to the open window, reached out, and drew in a parcel which had been lodged in the thick ivy outside.

"Jolly cute, what?" he said complacently. "They never thought of looking there, you know."

Jimmy Silver laughed and turned to the door. Muffin unwrapped the cake.

"I—I say, Jimmy—" he said hesitatingly.

Jimmy turned back.

"What?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing!" said Muffin hastily.

Jimmy Silver grinned, easily reading the thought of Reginald Muffin in his fat face. In his gratitude for that timely rescue, Muffin felt that it was up to him to "whack out" the cake with his rescuer. It was a generous thought; but, at the same time, Muffin did not want to whack out the cake. It was a large cake, but had it been ten times larger it would not have been too large for Reginald Muffin.

The captain of the Fourth turned to the door again. Muffin threw the wrappings off the cake.

"Jimmy!"

"Eh?"

"I—I say, Jimmy—"

Jimmy Silver stepped back into the study.

"Well?" he said.

Muffin looked at him, and then he looked at the cake. The cake was large, it was rich, it was stacked with fruit, and it was covered with marzipan. The mere sight of it made Muffin's mouth water. He wanted—he really did want—to whack it out with his rescuer. But his fat heart failed him. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

"Nothing!" he gasped. "All right."

"Fathead!" said Jimmy, and he stepped into the passage again.

"Jimmy!" shouted Muffin. The willingness of the spirit overcame the weakness of the flesh. "Jimmy, come—come and have some of this cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Have you made up your mind at last?"

"I—I say, Jimmy, I—I mean it!" gasped Muffin, with real heroism. "I—I want to whack out this cake with you, Jimmy."

"All serene, old top—I'll take the will for the deed," said Jimmy, laughing, and he walked away to the end study.

"Oh! Good!" gasped Muffin.

And Tubby Muffin turned the key in the lock and proceeded to begin operations on the cake—what time Jimmy was beginning on his lines in the end study. The cake was finished before the lines.

The 2nd Chapter. Painful for Peele!

"WHERE did you get it?" Arthur Edward Lovell grinned as he asked Peele that question.

Peele stared at him sourly.

"What?" he asked. "Where did I get what?"

"That nose!" grinned Lovell.

Peele's sour look became a scowl, and he passed his hand tenderly over his damaged nose.

It looked very damaged, and it felt more damaged than it looked.

"Did you win it in a raffle?" continued Lovell good-humouredly.

Raby and Newcome chuckled.

Peele pressed his aching nose and turned away with a black brow. The chums of the Fourth smiled and went on to the staircase. There they encountered Tubby Muffin, coming down.

There was a fat and shiny and satisfied look about Tubby's plump countenance, and he walked slowly and seemed to have to make some little effort in breathing. Reginald Muffin had disposed of his cake, not wisely but too well.

It had been a beautiful cake, and Tubby had enjoyed it. But he had a feeling that it might have been wiser to "whack it out" with some other fellow, after all. He felt as if he had loaded rather recklessly over the Plimsoll line.

Tubby blinked at Peele, lounging with a scowling face at the foot of the staircase, and caught Lovell by the arm.

"Keep him off, old chap!" he said.

"Eh! What? Whom?"

"That rotter Peele!" said Tubby. "I kicked him out of my study for trying to bag my cake, you know—"

"You did?" ejaculated Lovell.

"Yes, Jimmy Silver helped me—"

"Oh, I see! Is that what's the matter with his nose?" grinned Lovell.

"Jimmy punched it. I say, the beast is waiting for me!" said Muffin dismally. "He's going for me, you know."

Lovell laughed.

"It's all very well to cackle," said Muffin indignantly. "But I can tell you I don't feel up to a scrap now."

Peele eyed the fat Classical evilly from the foot of the staircase. Lovell & Co. glanced round at him.

"Waiting for Tubby, what?" asked Lovell.

"Find out!"

"That's why I'm asking you, old pippin," said Arthur Edward cheerily. "Look here, Peele! If Jimmy Silver gave you that nose, you can come along to the end study with us and give Jimmy one like it—if you can. But you're not going to handle Muffin, see?"

Peele did not answer, but his eyes gleamed at Muffin.

Lovell stepped down the stairs again, taking Muffin by his fat arm. Muffin eyed Peele very uneasily.

"You heard what I said, Peele?" asked Lovell genially. "You're not going to handle Muffin. If you're spoiling for a scrap there's four fellows in my study ready to oblige you, see?"

"Ready and willing, old bean," said Raby.



"I've done my lot. You've got to do the letter, Peele."

"Anxious, in fact," said Newcome.

"Muffin, old man, tell me at once if Peele so much as lays a finger on you," said Lovell. "I'll give him the hiding of his life if he does."

"You can't mind your own bizney?" asked Peele between his teeth.

"I'm minding yours and Muffin's, old bean," said Lovell. "Leave Muffin alone, or I'll give you an eye to match that nose."

Lovell & Co. went on, and Muffin, with an uneasy blink at Peele, rolled on his way.

Peele looked after him, but did not follow. Arthur Edward Lovell's warning had been enough. Peele evidently did not want an eye to match his nose.

The three Classics went on up the stairs and strolled along the Fourth Form passage to the end study.

Jimmy Silver was just finishing his lines there.

A volume was propped open against the inkstand, and Jimmy was scribbling from it at a great rate. It was an impot from Monsieur Monceau, the French master, and Mossou had given Jimmy a section of "L'Histoire de Charles XII." to write out, which was just a little more disagreeable than Latin lines from Mr. Dalton. Monsieur Monceau took his own beautiful language with great seriousness, and when lines were written for him he insisted upon all the accents being put in with absolute correctness. It was futile to put in a scratch which might have been either acute or grave; it had to be definitely one or the other, which was quite an unnecessary worry, in the estimation of Mossou's pupils.

"Finished?" asked Lovell.

"Just," said Jimmy.

And he rose from the table, threw down his pen, and picked up the "History of Charles the Twelfth," and punted it across the study.

After going over his French impot, and putting in his accents with more or less correctness where he had left them out, it was a slight relief to punt "Charles the Twelfth" across the room. Jimmy was really feeling as if he could have punted the author thereof after the volume, and Monsieur Monceau after the author.

"Good!" said Raby. "Morny's asked us to tea, and if you're ready—"

"I've got to get these lines to Mossou," said Jimmy. "You fellows get along to Morny's study, and I'll join you."

"Right-ho!"

The Fistical Four left the study together, Jimmy Silver going down the staircase with his imposition for Monsieur Monceau. He passed Cyril Peele in the passage without heeding him.

Fortunately, Mossou was satisfied with the impot, and Jimmy came back to the Fourth Form passage and joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome in Morningson's study.

Peele strolled along the passage a few minutes later.

He paused outside the door of Study No. 4, and heard the buzz of cheery voices within.

Then he sauntered on to the end of the passage.

The end study was vacant, the door open.

Muffin was taking a gentle walk, still considerably oppressed by the cargo of cake he had taken on board.

Anything in the nature of a "rag" was distinctly unwelcome to Reginald Muffin just then. He had not a run left in his fat carcass, and he shuddered at the thought of exertion. And, in spite of the protection of the end study, Muffin was not easy in his mind. The state of Peele's nose was only too plain an indication of the state of Peele's feelings.

Tubby Muffin, sighting the two black sheep of the Fourth coming in his direction, backed out of sight behind the gym.

There he paused to reflect, and after a moment's reflection he hurried away to the wood-shed.

Old Mack was supposed to keep that shed locked, but, as a matter of fact, the door was seldom fastened. Muffin found it unfastened, and he rolled in with a grunt of relief.

It was a safe refuge while Peele and Gower were in the offing.

Tubby Muffin blinked out of the little window, and, to his utter dismay, sighted Peele and Gower again.

They were coming directly towards the wood-shed.

For a moment Muffin supposed that they knew that he was there, and were coming after him. But he soon realised, from their looks, that they did not know that anyone was in the wood-shed.

He remembered, too, that the two young rascals sometimes chose that secluded spot to indulge in smoking cigarettes, safe from the eyes of masters and prefects.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Muffin again.

It was too late to escape; there was only one door, and the two juniors were coming directly towards it. To step out was to show himself at once—in a secluded spot far from help.

Muffin blinked round the shed and backed out of sight behind a stack of faggots in a corner.

He was only just in time; a minute later the door was opened and he heard Peele and Gower come in.

"Safe enough here," said Peele.

"Safe as houses," said Gower. "Somebody might butt into the study. All serene here."

The door was closed.

Muffin grinned in his hiding-place. He supposed that the next item on the programme would be cigarettes.

But rather to his surprise there was no sound of scratching matches, and no smell of tobacco.

Peele and Gower had not, apparently, come there to smoke. Tubby wondered why they had come.

For some minutes he could hear them moving and then he heard them sit down.

In great curiosity he peered round the faggots very cautiously.

Peele and Gower had seated themselves on a couple of old boxes, at a bench under the window. As they faced the window they had their backs to Muffin at the back of the shed, and he was able to watch them without much danger of discovery.

He blinked in amazement at what he saw.

Peele had put a pocket inkpot on the bench and was dipping a pen into it. He had laid a newspaper on the bench, and on the newspaper he had laid a small sheet of white paper. It looked like a leaf cut out of a book.

"You've got the envelope, Gower?"

"Yes; here it is."

"You address it, while I write the note to Dalton."

"You'd better do it, old chap."

"Rats! We're whacking this out—don't be a funk!"

Gower unwillingly took the pen.

Tubby Muffin could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears. Apparently Peele and Gower had come there to write a note to Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form.

Why they should write a note to Mr. Dalton and why they should select a secluded spot for writing it were deep mysteries for Tubby.

Scarcely breathing, in his curiosity and excitement, Muffin watched them at work.

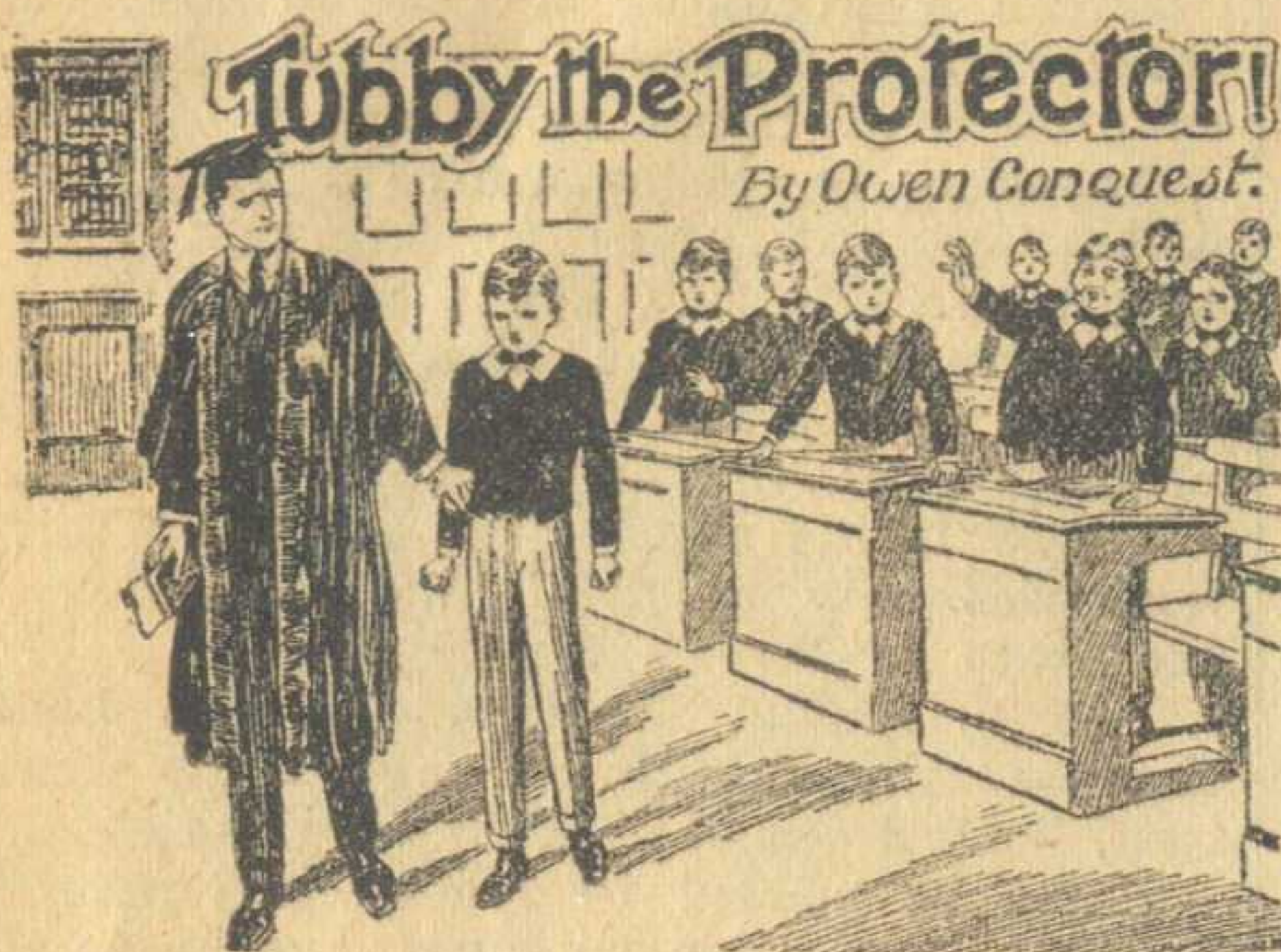
Gower addressed the envelope, not in handwriting, but in large block capitals. Evidently Richard Dalton was not to know from whom the letter came. The address was so large that Muffin was easily able to read it across the width of the shed.

"RICHARD DALTON, ESQ.,
ROOKWOOD SCHOOL,
NR. COOMBE."

"There you are!" said Gower. "I've done my lot. You've got to do the letter, Peele."

The 3rd Chapter. Peele's Plot!

"Oh, dear!" Tubby Muffin murmured those dismayed words as he caught sight of Peele and Gower.



(Continued from previous page.)

"I'm ready."
 "I—I say, if it came out—"
 Gower was evidently nervous.
 Peele gave a scoffing laugh.
 "It will come out all right," he answered. "Dalton will be wild, and he will go after the anonymous writer, and he will find out who sent him this letter—Jimmy Silver."
 Tubby Muffin almost jumped.
 "Here's the giddy letter," said Peele, who was busy with the pen.
 Muffin, staring across the shed from his hiding-place, had a full view of the letter written in large block capitals:

**"MR. DALTON!
 WE'RE FED-UP WITH YOU!
 GET OUT OF ROOKWOOD!"**

Tubby Muffin's eyes almost bulged from his head.
 That any fellow could have the nerve and the impudence to send such a letter to his Form master was amazing.

But Tubby realised that Peele was, somehow, covering up his tracks. Somehow, that letter was to be supposed to come from Jimmy Silver.

In what way, Tubby could not guess. But he could guess what would happen if a Fourth Form fellow was found guilty of inditing such a letter to his Form master. A Head's flogging was the least that was to be expected.

This was Peele's return for the licking in Muffin's study; this was his vengeance for the ornamental nose which marred Cyril Peele's good looks.

"I—I say, that's rather thick!" murmured Gower.

"The thicker the better, as Silver is to get the benefit of it," said Peele.

"Yes, but—"

"Look at my nose!" snarled Peele.

"Yes, but—"

"But what?" snapped Peele.

"Suppose—suppose it came out—"

Gower shivered.

"How could it come out?" sneered Peele.

"This letter will be posted in Coombe; Dalton will get it in the morning. Think anybody could trace who printed these capital letters?"

"No; but—"

"Dalton will spot at once that it's written on a page torn from a school book," went on Peele.

"There's the title on the other side—'L'Histoire de Charles XII.' That's his giddy clue."

"Yes, but—"

"He will make the fellows show their books, and spot the one that has the title-page missing," said Peele.

"That will be Jimmy Silver's, as I cut this page out of his French book."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, chuck butting!" said Peele derisively. "It's as safe as houses. Even if Jimmy Silver squirmed out of it somehow, who's to guess that we had a hand in it?"

"That's so," said Gower.

"Not that he'll be able to squirm out," said Peele savagely. "It will be as clear as daylight. He will get a Head's flogging, and serve him jolly well right—a flogging for insulting his Form master!"

Gower laughed.

"And that will get him into Dalton's black books, too," went on Peele. "Dalton thinks a lot of him now; perhaps he won't think so much of him after he's had this letter from him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ink's dry now—shove it in."

The page was folded and placed in the envelope, and Peele licked the flap and fastened it down. Then he stuck a stamp on, and put the letter in his pocket.

"Come on," he said. "We've got lots of time to walk down to Coombe and post this."

The two young rascals moved, and Tubby Muffin popped back behind the faggots like a jack-in-a-box.

Peele & Co. left the wood-shed, little dreaming that they left it tenanted.

B. F.—No. 1,296.—April 24th, 1926.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tubby Muffin, when they were gone.

For full five minutes Tubby Muffin did not venture to move lest the two plotters should return. He rolled out from behind the faggots at last, and peered from the window.

There was no sign of Peele and Gower to be seen. Evidently they had started for Coombe to post the letter there.

Tubby Muffin left the wood-shed, almost trembling.

"Seen Peele?" he asked, as he came on Jones minor in the quadrangle.

"Peele? Yes; he went out with Gower."

Muffin rolled on to the House. The letter would be posted—there was no stopping that. Richard Dalton would receive it by the morning's post—with what feelings, Tubby could imagine. And then—

The 4th Chapter.

Tubby is Mysterious!

"PENNY for them, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

Tubby Muffin started.

He was seated in the window seat in the Fourth Form passage, with a wrinkle of deep thought on his fat brow.

Tubby was thinking deeply; so deeply that he had not noticed Jimmy Silver coming along. He blinked at the captain of the Fourth.

"Anything up, old man?" asked Jimmy good-naturedly. "If you're bothering about Peele, it's all right. I'll give him another nose like the first one if he rags you."

Tubby grinned.

"I was thinking," he said.

"Does it hurt?"

"Suppose—" said Tubby.

"Suppose what?"

"Suppose a fellow saw a fellow playing an awful dirty trick on a fellow—"

"What a lot of fellows!" said Jimmy.

"Well, if a fellow did see a fellow, you know, and a fellow was going to get a Head's flogging, why, a fellow ought to put a fellow on his guard, what?" said Tubby.

"My hat! I suppose so, though it sounds rather mixed," said Jimmy, staring at the fat Classical.

"And suppose the fellow had helped a fellow when a rotter was after his cake—"

Jimmy chuckled.

"Then a fellow ought to take a fellow under his protection," said Tubby.

"What?"

"Blessed if I quite make it out!" said Jimmy.

"Do you mean that Peele, or Gower, is thinking of playing some jape on me?"

"Well, suppose—"

"If so, let them rip," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "You're awfully good, old fat bean, but I'm not in need of protection."

"Look here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver, quite tickled at the idea of being taken under Tubby Muffin's protection.

"Hullo, what's the giddy joke?" asked Lovell, coming out of the end study with Raby and Newcome.

"Muffin's going to take me under his protection," said the captain of the Fourth.

"Peele is cross, and Muffin's going to protect me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co. Tubby Muffin frowned.

"You can cackle," he said warmly. "Thanks—we will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the same, I know what I know," said Muffin.

"That's not very much," said Raby, with a grin.

"Wait and see!" said Muffin mysteriously. "I suppose you don't want a Head's flogging, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"A Head's flogging! Nunno! Is the Head on the warpath, and are you going to bar him off?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Muffin. "But you'll feel a bit different to-morrow if I don't chip in."

"Yes. And he would think you did it, all the same."

"Did what?" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"That's telling. I'm not going to tell you, old chap, because I can handle the thing better than you can."

"What? Which? How?"

"Rely on me," said Muffin. "I'll see you through. You see, nothing you could say would get you clear."

"Clear of what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

The Fistical Four blinked at Muffin. Really, it seemed to them that the fat Classical's mind was wandering a little.

"It's the cake!" said Jimmy at last.

"It's got into his head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean, Muffin, if you mean anything?"

"That's telling."

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver; and he walked away down the passage with his chums, giving no further thought to Reginald Muffin's peculiar vagaries.

Muffin smiled the smile of superior knowledge.

Little as the junior captain of Rookwood supposed it, he was in need of Muffin's protection. Without Muffin to help him out, there was no help for Jimmy Silver. If

HUNDREDS OF WONDERFUL AUSTRALIAN BOOMERANGS
 (as sold at Wembley Exhibition)
OFFERED TO READERS!

SPRINGO MECHANICALLY PROPELLED
BOOMERANG
 SPRINGO
 The Real Thing In Miniature
 Performs the same as the actual full-sized boomerang as used by the Australian blacks

See next Monday's grand new story number of
"THE BOY'S FRIEND!"

he escaped the vengeance of Peele of the Fourth, it would be thanks to Tubby. That was quite an exhilarating reflection to Reginald Adolphus Muffin.

After the Fistical Four were gone, Tubby resumed his deep reflections. Peele and Gower came in from Coombe, and noticed Muffin in the window-seat, deep in reflection, without heeding him. Certainly they did not suspect the subject of the fat Classical's cogitations.

Muffin rose at last and went to his study. It was not yet time for prep, and he had Study No. 2 to himself.

He sat at the table and scribbled. Having scribbled to his satisfaction, he sealed up the result in an envelope.

He left the study with the envelope in his fat hand, and went downstairs. A few minutes later he tapped at the door of Richard Dalton's study.

"Come in."

Muffin entered.

"What is it, Muffin?" asked Mr. Dalton. He glanced at the envelope in the fat Classical's hand.

"If you please, sir—" began Tubby. "A message for me?"

"Oh, no, sir! If you please, sir, would you mind taking charge of this letter for me?" asked Muffin.

"Eh?"

"It—it's valuable, sir," said Tubby. "I—I'd like you to take charge of it, sir, if you'd be so kind, till—till I ask you for it, sir."

"Certainly, Muffin."

"I—I shall want it again to-morrow morning, sir," said Muffin. "Perhaps you'd put it in your pocket-book, sir."

"Really, Muffin— Oh, very well!" said Mr. Dalton.

"Thank you, sir."

The Form master slipped the envelope into his pocket-book, and Tubby Muffin left the study.

He rolled away with a fat grin on his face.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at prep in the end study when Reginald Muffin looked in.

"It's all right, Jimmy!" he announced. The captain of the Fourth glanced round.

"What's all right?" he asked. "I'm protecting you."

"What?"

"Rely on me!" said Tubby. "Wandering in your mind again?" asked Jimmy.

Tubby smirked. "You wait and see!" he said. "Don't you be alarmed. You're under my protection, and—"

Jimmy Silver picked up a Latin grammar. "Where will you have it?" he asked.

Reginald Muffin backed hastily out of the study, apparently deciding that he did not want it at all.

"Potty!" said Jimmy. "Oh, quite!" said Lovell.

And the chums of the Fourth went on with their prep and forgot the unimportant existence of Tubby Muffin.

The 5th Chapter.
Trouble for Jimmy Silver!

MIND your eye this mornin'!" murmured Valentine Mornington. The warning was unnecessary to the Classical Fourth.

Every fellow in the Form-room that morning noticed the thunder in the brow of Richard Dalton as he came in to take his class.

All eyes were turned on the Form master, and all the Form were wary. As a rule Mr. Dalton was a good-tempered and genial man, but evidently something had happened to change all that on this particular morning. Never had the master of the Fourth been seen to look so black and angry.

"Something's up, Jimmy!" whispered Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Looks like it!"

Peele and Gower exchanged a glance. They, at least, knew what was "up." Richard Dalton had received and read the anonymous letter.

Tubby Muffin glanced at the two young rascals and grinned.

Richard Dalton stood before his class, his eyes on them. The juniors waited anxiously, wondering what the trouble was.

"Before we commence this morning," said Mr. Dalton, "I have an inquiry to make. I have received a letter, apparently written by a boy in this Form. It is an insulting letter, and the writer of it will be taken to the headmaster to be flogged."

"Phew!" murmured Lovell. "I shall show you the letter," said Mr. Dalton. "The boy who has written it will be given the opportunity of confessing. Here is the letter."

All eyes were fixed on the sheet held up by the Form master.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at it blankly. It was a little difficult for the Fourth Form to believe their eyes as they read in large capitals:

**"MR. DALTON!
 WE'RE FED-UP WITH YOU!
 GET OUT OF ROOKWOOD!"**

"Some boy present wrote this letter!" said Richard Dalton in a voice of thunder. "I order that boy to step out before the class!"

No one stirred.

Silence followed, and a pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth Form room. The juniors scarcely breathed.

Mr. Dalton waited a full minute. Probably he did not expect the anonymous-letter writer to own up. Certainly nobody in the Form was likely to admit the authorship of that epistle.

"Very well!" said Mr. Dalton at last. "I shall investigate the matter! This letter is written upon the title-page of a school book used in this Form. As your second lesson this morning is with Monsieur Monceau, I presume that you have your French books with you?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"Very good. Each boy here will show me his volume of the 'History of Charles the Twelfth.'"

The juniors began to sort out their books. There was alarm in a good many faces.

It was not at all uncommon for title-pages, and other pages, to be missing from school books. Every fellow tried to remember at once whether his French book was intact.

"You will file past my desk, my boys, and show me your books," said Richard Dalton. The juniors obeyed.

Jimmy Silver, as head of the Form, led the way. He laid his "Charles XII." on Mr. Dalton's desk, and the Form master opened it.

He uttered an exclamation. "Silver!"

"Yes, sir." "The title-page of your book is missing."

"Is—is it, sir?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "I—I—I hadn't noticed it, sir."

"You will stand aside, Silver, while I examine the other books."

"Oh, my hat! Fancy it being Silver!" whispered Peele, loud enough for everyone in the Form-room to hear.

Jimmy crimsoned. "Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

He proceeded to examine volume after volume. Three more were found with title-pages missing, but these had been carelessly torn out and the ragged edges showed.

But the owners of the books—Flynn, and Oswald, and Jones minor—trembled under Mr. Dalton's eyes when they were told to stand aside.

The examination was finished, and the juniors went back to their places, with four exceptions.

Mr. Dalton fixed his eyes on the four. "I have found four title-pages missing," he said.

"Three have been carelessly torn; one has been cut out with a penknife or scissors. The page which contains that insulting letter has been cut out, as you may all see. Flynn, Oswald, Jones minor—you may go back to your places. You are exonerated."

The three went gladly enough. Jimmy Silver remained alone, facing his Form master. His face was crimson, his heart beating painfully fast.

Mr. Dalton fixed his eyes on the flushed face of the captain of the Fourth.

"What have you to say, Silver?" he demanded.

Jimmy Silver gasped. "I know nothing about it, sir."

"You see for yourself, Silver, that the title-page is missing from your book. It is the only missing page that has been cut out."

"I—I see that, sir," stammered Jimmy. "This page, containing the anonymous letter, fits into your book—the cut edges fit exactly."

"Ye-es, sir." "Do you still deny writing that miserable letter, Silver?"

"Certainly I do!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver hotly. "I never wrote it, and never knew anything about it."

"Then how do you account for its being written upon a page from your book?"

"I—I can't account for it."

"Doubtless," said Mr. Dalton—"doubtless you supposed that such a page would leave no clue behind, as pages are often missing from school books. You were mistaken, Silver."

"I never did it, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "I—I wouldn't! Only a cheeky cad would write a letter like that!"

"I am glad you can see it," said Mr. Dalton dryly. "I am not aware, Silver, of ever having given you cause to treat me with such disrespect and insolence. I have been mistaken in you."

"I—I did not—"

"Nonsense! I shall now take you to your headmaster, Silver, and place the matter in his hands. If you choose to make denials, you may make them to Dr. Chisholm."

"But, sir, I—I—" stammered Jimmy helplessly.

"Follow me!" Mr. Dalton moved towards the door. Jimmy Silver, his mind in a whirl, followed him with dragging footsteps.

Tubby Muffin jumped up. "Mr. Dalton—"

The Form master did not heed. "Mr. Dalton!" almost shouted Tubby.

"You must hear me, sir—"

"Silence, Muffin!"

"Jimmy Silver did not write that letter, sir—"

"Nonsense!" "I can prove it, sir!" shouted Tubby. And there was a sensation in the Fourth Form room.

Gower fixed their eyes feverishly on Reginald Muffin. Up to this moment all had gone well for the two plotters. It looked now as if matters were not going quite so well for them.

Jimmy Silver stared at Muffin. Back into his mind came Muffin's mysterious words of the previous evening.

Muffin knew something about this; and Jimmy realised it at once.

"Muffin!" rapped out Mr. Dalton. "Stand out before the class."

"Yes, sir." Tubby Muffin rolled out, his fat face full of confidence.

"Now, Muffin, you declare that you know something about this matter?"

"All about it, sir. I know that a fellow sneaked into Jimmy Silver's study yesterday and cut that title-page out of his book!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin triumphantly.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell. "Did you see this done, Muffin?"

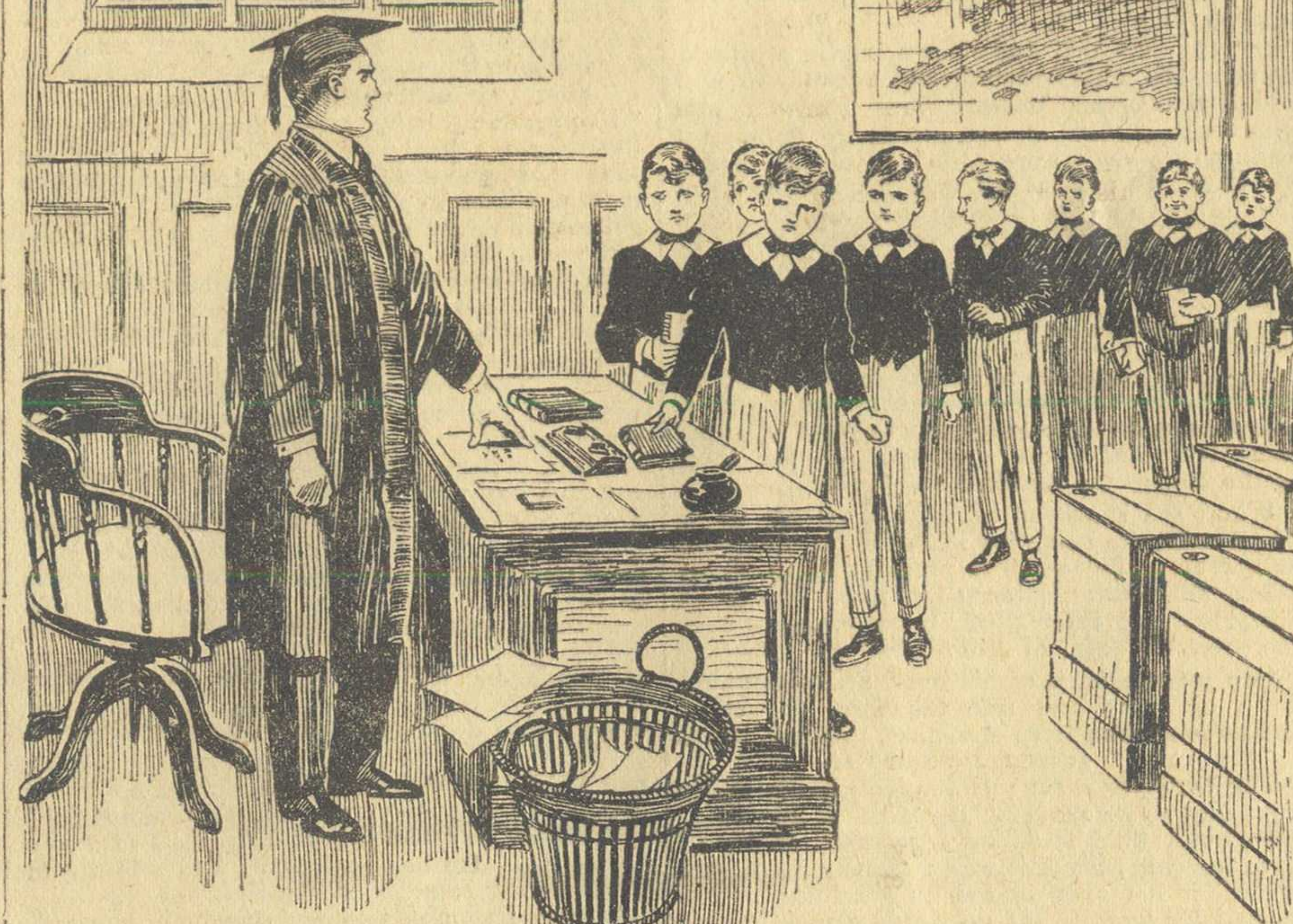
"No, sir." "Then how can you know—"

"Because I saw the letter written, sir, and saw the fellows writing it together, two of them!" chuckled Muffin. "I saw the whole thing."

Peele and Gower turned quite white. "Their names?" rapped out Richard Dalton.

"Peele and Gower, sir." Every neck was craned in the Fourth to stare at Peele and Gower.

"The two boys named will stand out," said Richard Dalton.



Jimmy Silver laid his "Charles XII" on Mr. Dalton's desk.

Peele and Gower dragged themselves out before the class.

"It's not true, sir!" said Peele, with dry lips. "We know nothing about it. Muffin is a friend of Silver's, and he's made this up."

"He's saying this to get Silver off, sir," said Gower. "Why, he might say the same about any fellow in the Form."

"I am quite aware of that, Gower. Muffin, what proof have you to offer of your statement?"

"You've got the proof in your pocket, sir."

"What?" "That letter I gave you yesterday, sir, to

mind for me," said Tubby. "Look at it, sir."

"I do not understand this, Muffin." "Look at the letter, sir," said the fat Classical, with a gleeful grin. "Gower says I've made this up to clear Silver—"

"So you have!" hissed Gower. Tubby chuckled.

"Then how did I know about it yesterday, when I gave Mr. Dalton my letter?" he demanded triumphantly.

"Silence!" said Mr. Dalton. A glimmering of the truth was in Richard Dalton's mind now.

He took out his pocket-book and took therefrom the envelope Muffin had handed him the day before. He opened the envelope, and drew from it a folded sheet of impot paper. The impot paper was unfolded, and the following epistle met Mr. Dalton's eyes:

"This is to certify that I, R. A. Muffin of the Forth Form, saw Peele and Gower writing the letter to Mr. Dalton, in the wood-shed this afternoon, Wednesday, and heard Peele say he had taken the titel-paige from Jimmy Silver's French booke, to get him into a rowe with Mr. Dalton, and Peele wrote the letter in cappitals and Gower wrote the envelopp in cappitals and they walked down to Coombe to post it and Jones minor saw them go, and I asked some felows afterwards and they told me they had seen Peele and Gower going to the wood-shed, one of them was Erroll and one was Oswald, and I was doing this because I have taken Jimmy under my protekshun.

"Sined,"

"REGINALD A. MUFFIN."

"Yes, sir," said Oswald. "And I know now why Muffin asked me about it."

Peele shivered, and Gower almost groaned aloud. "This letter was posted in Coombe," said Mr. Dalton. "Do you deny going to Coombe yesterday, Peele and Gower?"

"Yes, sir!" said Peele desperately. "I never went out of gates at all."

"Neither did I, sir," said Gower. Mr. Dalton glanced at Tubby's effusion again.

"Jones minor!" "Yes, sir."

"You saw these two boys going out of gates yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; Muffin asked me, and I told him."

"The matter is quite clear now," said Richard Dalton, in an ominously quiet voice. "Silver, I am sorry that you have been suspected. You have been the victim of a base trick; and, but for Muffin, I greatly fear that you would have been punished unjustly. Silver, I am sorry."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "You may go back to your place, Silver; you are completely exonerated."

"Thank you, sir." And Jimmy went back to his seat. Peele and Gower stood with their knees knocking together.

"And now," said Mr. Dalton, fixing his eyes on them, "have you anything more to say?"

Even at that moment Peele would have denied desperately, though without hope of being believed. But Gower broke down helplessly.

"It was all Peele's idea, sir!" he gasped. "I only helped him. I was really against it, and—and—"

"That will do! Come with me to the Head!"

Mr. Dalton left the Form-room, with the two young rascals cringing at his heels.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath.

There was a fat chuckle from Tubby Muffin.

"Didn't I tell you to rely on me, Jimmy? Didn't I take you under my protection, what?"

Jimmy Silver laughed. "You did, old fat bean, and I'm no end obliged. Good old Tubby!"

Peele and Gower squirmed uncomfortably through lessons that morning. They looked wan and dismal through afternoon classes. The Head had not spared the rod.

That day there was a celebration in the end study—a royal spread of unusual extent; and the guest of honour was Reginald Muffin. It was the most welcome manner in which Jimmy Silver & Co. could testify their thanks to Tubby!

THE END.

(The greatest school story ever written—"Ripplingham!" by John Lance, appearing in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. For full particulars of our great new programme of high-class stories for next week see back page.)

POPULAR BOOKS FOR READERS OF ALL AGES!

THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY New Series.	No. 41.—THE FACTORY FOOTBALLERS. A Grand Yarn of Footie and Factory Life. By HOWARD GRANT. No. 42.—BILL FURY—FIGHTING MAN! A Magnificent Story of Boxing and Adventure. By ERIC W. TOWNSEND. No. 43.—CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY. A Gripping Tale of Adventure on the Railway. By ROLAND SPENCER and FRANCIS WARWICK. No. 44.—WINGS OF ADVENTURE. An Exciting Yarn of Schoolboys on an Air Trip. By PAUL QUINTON.
THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY New Series.	No. 41.—THE ISLAND OF THE GUILTY. A Story of Thrilling Adventure and Amazing Detective Work. By the Author of the Popular "Dr. Huxton Rymer" Series. No. 42.—BEHIND THE WALLS. A Fascinating Story of Stirling Detective Adventure in England and the Wild Balkans. By the Author of "The White Death," etc. No. 43.—THE RIDDLE OF THE LASCAR'S HEAD. A Tale of Baffling Mystery and Clever Deduction. By the Author of "The Impersonators," etc., etc. No. 44.—THE AFFAIR OF THE SEVEN WARNINGS. A Wonderful Story of Mystery and Adventure. By the Author of the Well-known "Zenith the Albino" Series.
THE SCHOOL-BOYS' OWN LIBRARY	No. 25.—THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS! A Rousing Story of School Life with a Particularly Novel Theme. By FRANK RICHARDS. No. 26.—SACKED! A Dramatic Tale of Tom Merry & Co., the Popular Chums at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NOW ON SALE! PRICE FOURPENCE EACH!

ALL THE WAY TO WEMBLEY

Wonderful long complete Soccer Story and **ALL ABOUT THE CUP FINAL.**

See this week's **FOOTBALL FAVOURITE**

On Sale Wednesday April 21. Make sure of a copy!

B. F.—No. 1,298.—April 24th, 1926.

The 6th Chapter. Thanks to Tubby!

MR. DALTON stopped and turned back to his class. There was a buzz in the Fourth, and two faces there were startled and alarmed. Peele and