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THE "BUCKING UP" OF ST. ESMOND'S



CLIFFORD'S FIRST SHAVE.

A Rattling Long, Complete Tale of Jack Noble and Pelham School.

THE 1st CHAPTER.

Clifford pays the Barber a Visit

"ALLO! At it again?" jeered Bayne. "I say, have a bit of pity on the looking-glass; it ain't guaranteed to stand more than its share!" "Shut up!" snapped Clifford, flushing to the roots of his spiky hair. "What the dickens do you want to spy round me for? Go and eat grass!" "More your sort of fodder than mine," retorted the offended Bayne.

Clifford slipped a small pocket-mirror into his trousers pocket before replying to this piece of insolence. He had suddenly grown most interested in his own reflection, and his chums had noticed his growing weakness of late. Hence Bayne's opening remark, on surprising his captain in the quad, at Pelham School one afternoon admiring himself.

"Eat coke, then!" snarled the angry Clifford. "Do anything, so long as you get out of my sight. I'm busy!"

"If you think that dirty smear on the top lip of your dial is anything like a moustache," gibed Bayne, "you're jolly well mistaken! If you don't believe me, go and ask a barber; he'll tell you to wash your face!"

He departed hurriedly as Clifford, with a snort, charged at him, intent for blood. Seeing he could not catch him, Clifford stopped, looked around him, and again took out his pocket-mirror. He gazed long and earnestly at his own image. At all events, there was one fellow at Pelham School who thought Clifford was good-looking, even though that was Clifford himself. But what Clifford saw was not merely his own face; he looked closer than that, and saw, by dint of a great strain on his eyesight, the faintest suspicion of hair on his upper lip, and a little very indistinct fluff on his chin.

It is one of the proud moments of a boy's life, that in which he discovers for the first time the symptoms of beard on his erstwhile smooth countenance. But to Clifford it might have seemed that these few embryo hairs were a phenomenon of the strangest kind.

"Yes," he chuckled, "I'll have to start shaving soon! Not sixteen, and shaving! That's a record, I'll bet!"

He stroked his cheek fondly. He was a little hurt to find that he could not feel much hair; but another keen glance in the mirror told him that, felt or not, it was there. He tried to pull his budding moustache with his thumb and finger-nails. Even then he could not secure a hold.

"But I'll not shave my moustache off," he added to himself. "It'll help to show that Noble lot that they're only kids. Perhaps they'll be a bit more civil. By Jove, I believe I'll go down to the barber's now, and see what it feels like to be shaved!"

He lost no further time, but went down the hill to Pelham Town, in the High Street of which was located the single barber of the place. On entering, to his surprise, he felt a vague nervousness. To make sure that he had good cause to consult the tonsorial artist, he passed his hand over his face again. He didn't feel much hair, of course; but he knew it was there; he had seen it not ten minutes ago.

The barber-shop was empty of customers. The barber himself was out. His assistant, who was but newly promoted from the position of lather boy, saw him, and grinned widely. This barber's assistant, be it known, was one of the townies against whom the Pelham boys were waging a perpetual warfare. Clifford wished devoutly that the barber himself had been there; but he was now inside the shop.

"Hallo!" said the barber's assistant. "Want yer 'air cut?"

Clifford tried to wither him with a glance. He made no reply; but, with all the nonchalance he could summon up, sat himself down in the shaving-chair, and laid his head back on the rest, as he had seen many a man do.

"You'll 'ave to sit up straight before I can cut yer 'air," the youthful hairdresser told him. "Ow can I get to the back if yer lay like that?"

"Shut up!" snapped the captain of the junior eleven. "I don't want my hair cut, you silly owl!"

The young barber's eyes began to grow red. "Ave a bit more care!" he warned. "It's you who's a howl! If yer don't want yer 'air cut, wot do yer want? Shampoo? Yer 'ead could do with a wash," he added, setting his own head on one side, and viewing Clifford's rusty locks critically.

"I want a shave!" raved Clifford. "Buck up, and get your work done, or else I'll

report you to your master! Shave—shave—S-H-A-V-E!"

"Well, you don't suppose I think that spells 'air-cut, do you?" said the barber surlily. "Anyway, what do you want shavin'—yer 'ead? Got water on the brain?"

Clifford threw off the towel the insolent youth had fixed round his neck, stood up, knocking the chair over with a crash as he did so, and faced his tormentor angrily. He was outraged. He was receiving the grossest incivility from the employee of a man he was patronising.

"I want you to save my fashe—no, face my shave—er—I mean—"

He lost all control of himself; he lost all grip on his tongue. He was so angry that he began not to know altogether what he wanted.

"Save yer face?" asked the barber's 'prentice, with a wider grin. "It's impossible. It was spoilt too had years ago. It's like a newly-smacked pat of butter now!"

This wielder of the lather-brush was every whit as angry as Clifford. He had a dim idea working away at the back of his by no means brilliant brain that Clifford was trying to work off a joke on him. He did not realise that the captain of Pelham's second eleven was serious when he demanded a face-shave—and who could blame him? Clifford's whiskers were microscopic, as has been hinted before.

Face to face they stood, bickering thuswise, and neither noticed the entry of Jack Noble and Bob Russell, of the Third. Finally, seeing he was gaining nothing by bullying, Clifford changed his demeanour, sat down again, and spread himself out.

"Just lather me, and pass the razor over my face, as you would to any other man," he said wheedlingly.

Just then the young barber caught sight of the two new arrivals, and his face went all to one side in a wink.

"What's that?" gasped Jack Noble. "Clifford having a shave? Oh, my hat! Say, Cliffy, what have you got to shave anyway?"

"Oh, stash it!" cried Clifford, turning his head round, and failing to look dignified, as he would have liked to have looked. "It's nothing out of the ordinary, is it? Ow!"

His yell broke out spasmodically, for the lather-brush that was suddenly applied to his cheeks was scalding hot. He half rose from his chair, but the barber forced him back with an ungentle hand, and splashed the hot, moist lather freely over his face.

Bob Russell winked seriously over to his chum, then at Tebbs, the youthful barber.

"Make a good job of it, old chap," he said; "and don't try any of those monkey tricks we've been reading about lately."

"Wot monkey tricks?" asked Tebbs, grinning widely.

"Why, you're a barber, and yet you don't know how easy it would be for you to let the razor slip, just as it hovers over your victim's avuncular jumpeter?" cried Russell. "Why, I saw in the paper the other day that a man got just the slightest cut, and went home and bled to death. At the inquest they set it down as a case of exposure—exposure to the razor, you know. It was very sad!"

And Russell wiped away an imaginary tear. Tebbs was slow-witted, but he scented a joke at Clifford's expense, and determined to have a little sport.

"Yus," he said, in reply to Bob Russell's tragic story; "but I hope it'll never be my lot to 'ave a haccident like that. Still, one never knows. We say in the profession that, until we've made our first cut, we're never quite sure wot'll 'appen. Now, I 'aven't made my first cut yet, and I never can say when I shall. Keep still, please!"

He glared ferociously at Clifford, who was now squirming in his seat.

"Let me up!" shouted Clifford, wriggling. "I won't be shaved! I'll wait till your master comes in. Let me up!"

But Tebbs hadn't finished with the boy who had insulted him yet. He forced the Shell fellow's form back into the chair again. Clifford never till that moment realised how helpless one could be when laid almost on his back in a barber's chair. Finally, he lay still, though, in his nervousness, he kept a wary eye on the barber.

"Wot do you think of the soap?" asked Tebbs, splashing more lather about, and rubbing Clifford's bare face till it smarted.

"Very good, I suppose," mumbled Clifford. "Like the taste?"

And, before his customer could answer, Tebbs pinched his nose hard. Clifford opened his mouth to yell. Tebbs was quick to seize the opportunity. He stuffed the whole of the bristly, soap-laden brush into the cavity.

The junior captain gave a gasping, spluttering shriek, writhed till he turned the chair and himself into a heap on the floor, then—for he had closed his mouth involuntarily, snatching the brush out of Tebbs's hand—he dashed out of the shop, his face all covered with soap, and with the brush firmly gripped in his teeth.

Noble and Russell lay back in their seats, choking with laughter. The sight of Clifford would have made a sphinx laugh. But the lordly one of the Shell, soap dribbling from the

corners of his mouth, did not stop until outside on the High Street; there he spat out brush and fierce anathemas against his tormentors.

"Ugh!" he said, hawking and spitting to get rid of the soapy flavour. "What a rotten trick! Ugh—ugh!"

He felt almost sick; but his sickness vanished, and a dull rage took its place on beholding Noble and Russell in the doorway of the shop, shrieking with laughter. That rage increased when Tebbs came out to him.

"Gimme my brush back!" he howled.

Then, seeing it lying on the pavement, he stooped to pick it up. Clifford saw a chance of getting his own back. He literally caught the barber's 'prentice bending, for, as the latter stooped, Clifford's foot reached the most conspicuous portion of his anatomy.

With a grunt, Tebbs lurched forward, right into a heap of dust left by the street-sweepers; but, in falling, he clutched one of Clifford's legs with his wildly-waving hands, bringing the Shell fellow down with him. Together they clawed and scrambled in the dustheap, which soon was no longer a heap, but a cloud that obliterated the landscape.

"Two to one on the barber!" cried Russell, enjoying the scene to the full. "Who'll take me on? Two to one, I say!"

"Three to one that Clifford gathers most dust though!" roared Jack Noble. "Phew! Pretty thick, ain't it, old chap?"

Jack would prove an easy winner, so Russell wisely refrained from taking him on. Clifford's state was such as could not help collecting dust. The sticky lather, which was not only on his face now, but, thanks to Tebbs's clawings, all over his head and shoulders, speedily changed from white to black. The nature of the soil around Pelham was black loam—the sort that shows up well on white.

Of course, there was soon a crowd of interested village children and dogs to witness the scene. One mongrel wanted to take a hand in it; he singled out Clifford as the one in the wrong, and fixed his teeth in the leg of that youth's trousers. He didn't catch the flesh, so Clifford did not know what was happening until a ripping sound struck upon his ears, which had no sooner occurred than a

keen draught told him that his pants were ruined.

Tebbs finally got on top, and set about giving him his quietus. The lather-brush, which was now thick with soapy mud, was wielded in a businesslike manner. One of Clifford's eyes was bunged up; he opened his mouth again to yell, and Tebbs grimly put his weapon of offence there. It seemed as though the brush was going to find out every place where Clifford least wanted it to go. Just then, however, the same cur that had added fourteen-and-six to Clifford's tailor's bill, proceeded to demolish Tebbs's eight-and-elevenpenny "reach-me-downs."

Tebbs, with a yell, sprang to his feet, found the dog was clinging to his person in a distressing manner, and bolted into the shop, taking the dog with him.

Sympathetically, Russell and Noble offered their assistance to the crestfallen Clifford. The captain of the juniors looked in dire trouble. His face was a horrible sight, what with soap and dust. His collar had got torn in the encounter, while the sticky mess mingled with his never-straight hair, making it stand bolt upright. But, instead of thanking them, Clifford shouted his wrath at them.

"Better go inside and get cleaned up," suggested Jack Noble. "Tebbs has a wash-basin in there. You can't go up to the school like that."

There was good advice in that, and Clifford had the sense to see it. He re-entered the shop, and found Tebbs ruefully examining the tear in his nether garments. Naturally, at the sight of his enemy, he showed no marked cordiality. In fact, he reached out, and snatched up one of those brushes used by barbers, which are driven by machinery. With this he dashed at Clifford, who, with a yell, turned and bolted outside, nearly knocking over Noble and Russell. Headless now of his appearance, he charged through the High Street, out on to the road, and up towards the school. He never stopped in his run until he had passed through the school gate.

"Well," said Noble, going into the shop, "I came here to get my hair cut originally. One never knows, though, what one is going to see while Clifford's on deck. Never mind that hole in your trousers, Tebbs, but cut my hair, please."

THE 2nd CHAPTER.

Clifford's Barbarous Shave.

THAT "beard" of Clifford's became a mania with him. The next morning, on looking at himself in the glass, he was nearly sure it was a bit more pronounced than it had been; he was certain that

(Continued on the next page.)

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it was absolutely necessary that he should have a shave. But, his visit to the barber's having ended so disastrously, he could only see one other way out of his difficulty, and that was to shave himself.

The next thing was how to get hold of the requisite apparatus. He overhauled his supply of cash, and found he possessed exactly elevenpence-halfpenny. That wouldn't buy a very good razor and lather-brush, he concluded. Even when he raised sixpence from Marker, he was doubtful as to the quality of the materials he would be able to secure. However, after morning school, he went down to Pelham, to the ironmonger's there. But it was unfortunate for him that, just as he entered the shop, young Tebbs should put in an appearance. On the face of it, he couldn't ask the shopkeeper to show him razors; he had to buy something, seeing the shopkeeper was expecting custom; so he expended sixpence on a trashy knife that was no good to him, and left, without his mission accomplished.

"I'll have to borrow one, that's all," he said to himself. "A man can't do without his shave, anyway. Now, I wonder who'll lend me one?"

He went over in his mind all the list of possible possessors of razors at the school. Snark, the porter, possessed one, no doubt; but Snark, he knew, wouldn't lend him anything. Snark hated him.

There were now only the masters, with the exception of Lecky, the captain, who undoubtedly shaved twice a week. But Lecky wouldn't lend him one, either, for the captain was very particular about his razors, as most shavers are. Finally, he decided to borrow one without leave, and fixed upon Mr. Slaney, the Third Form-master, as the man who should lend it to him.

That afternoon they took mathematics under Mr. Slaney's charge. Some of the Fourth and Shell sat in the same room as the whole of the Third in that branch of study. Now, Mr. Slaney invariably forgot something he required to conduct this class every day. Clifford remembered this, and looked about him to see what the master lacked, in order that he might volunteer to go and get it, which would mean a visit to the master's room. Once there, he meant to look about him for razors.

"Dear me," said Mr. Slaney, at length, sure enough, "I want a penknife. Can anyone lend me his?"

"I'll go and get yours, sir!" shouted Clifford, before any of the others could offer their knives. Clifford had three in his pocket, but he jumped to his feet and was at the door before he could be stopped.

"Really, Clifford, that is totally unnecessary," said Mr. Slaney. "I will borrow Noble's. Thank you, Noble!"

And he proceeded to sharpen his blue pencil with the borrowed knife. Clifford resumed his seat, disappointed, but determined to carry out Mr. Slaney's desire at the first opportunity. At length, Mr. Slaney wanted his Todhunter's Euclid. It had a specially worked-out list of answers to the riders, and Mr. Slaney had to use his own.

"I'll get it!" shouted Clifford again. "I'm up in your room, I suppose, sir?"

"You've turned into a very obliging boy all at once," said the master, in surprise. "But as you're so willing, you may go. You will find the book in my bed-room. You know the room? Three doors past the Third Form dormitory. Thank you!"

And Clifford, with his tongue in his cheek, went. The book he soon found; but the razors were another matter. He looked all about him, but was not able to find the case; then, thinking them to be in Mr. Slaney's study, entered that room, which was an inner room adjoining the apartment in which the master slept. They were not there. Clifford, his temper never of the sweetest, grew exasperated. There was only one more place where they could be found, and to reach that place meant a ransacking of Mr. Slaney's chest of drawers. To a fellow like Clifford, such an act was nothing outrageous. Others would have set it down as cheek, pure and simple.

Ties, collars, handkerchiefs, all came out in a hopeless muddle as he groped through the top right-hand drawer; but he found what he wanted, and he was satisfied. He made some show of returning the trifles of clothing to their place, but he suddenly remembered he was pressed for time. Hence, the ties, etc., suffered.

Slipping a razor into his pocket, he bolted out of the room; it was not until he was half-way downstairs that he remembered he still was without his Todhunter's Euclid. He muttered an angry word, doubled back, seized the book, and, at length, panting, dashed into the class-room.

"Here you are, sir!" he shouted, slamming the volume down on to Mr. Slaney's desk, and turning towards his seat. But he was careless as to the manner in which he had laid it down; it fell to the floor with a bump, bringing out a snigger from several of the boys. Mr. Slaney eyed him with marked disapproval. "Please pick it up, Clifford!" he said testily. "Really, you are most rough in your manners! And why were you so long?"

"Couldn't find it at first, sir," mumbled Clifford untruthfully. And he stooped to restore the book to the desk.

Now, a boy's Eton jacket is a poor thing as to pockets. There is only one—the inside breast-pocket. Clifford had slipped the razor into this. As he stooped, his coat sprang

open, and, with a tinkle, the shaving utensil fell where the book had been. He was quick, however, and snatched it up almost before it had fallen, quite before anyone had noticed it. Still, his face was very red as he returned to his bench and busied himself with his studies.

The rest of the lesson seemed to drag for him. He shifted about restlessly, until Mr. Slaney was compelled to make him leave the room and stand out in the corridor. Far from being ashamed of himself, he took advantage of the opportunity to examine his find. He opened the beautiful, keen blade, tried it gingerly with his thumb, then, acting on a sudden impulse, stropped it with his boot. His first intimation of his mistake was seeing a thin slice of leather peeled from that article of apparel. The shaving of leather fell to the floor. And, it might be said, the razor wasn't at all improved. But, being ignorant of the care of such articles of toilet, he tried it again with his thumb. This time he nicked the skin ever so slightly, making the blood to flow. He grunted, stuck the injured member into his mouth, closed the razor, and slipped it back into his pocket, just as Mr. Slaney came out and summoned him back to class.

"What's the matter with your thumb?" the master asked quickly. "I didn't know you'd hurt it. I didn't notice it a few minutes ago."

"Er—oh, it's nothing, sir!" said Clifford lamely. "Er—er—the cat came along the passage, and as I tried to stroke it, it stuck its beastly claw into me!" he said glibly. "It's only bleeding a bit, sir."

"Well," ejaculated the credulous master, "it really is a remarkable animal! I'm afraid, Clifford, you must have been teasing it. However, you are sufficiently punished. Wrap your handkerchief round the wound."

"Yes, sir," said Clifford humbly, and obeyed.

A few minutes afterwards the mathematics class was dismissed, and those of the Shell and

Just then, however, the door opened. Clifford started guiltily, wheeled round sharply to see who the intruder was, and in doing so inflicted a nasty gash on his chin.

The new-comer was Gavin, of the First Form. The youngster started back aghast at the sight of Clifford, blood and lather mingled on his face, and with a razor in his hand and a very fierce expression in his eyes.

"I say," he began, "what are you up to, Clifford? Trying to cut your throat? Well, what a blessed silly trick!"

"Get out!" said Clifford curtly. "You measly worm, what are you doing here? Get out, I say, before you're kicked out!"

Gavin backed away uneasily. He was only a kid—a small boy with a large and vivid imagination. He was not a little frightened at the sight of Clifford bleeding; but as he opened the door, he remembered his errand, and opened his mouth to speak.

"Lecky says—" he began.

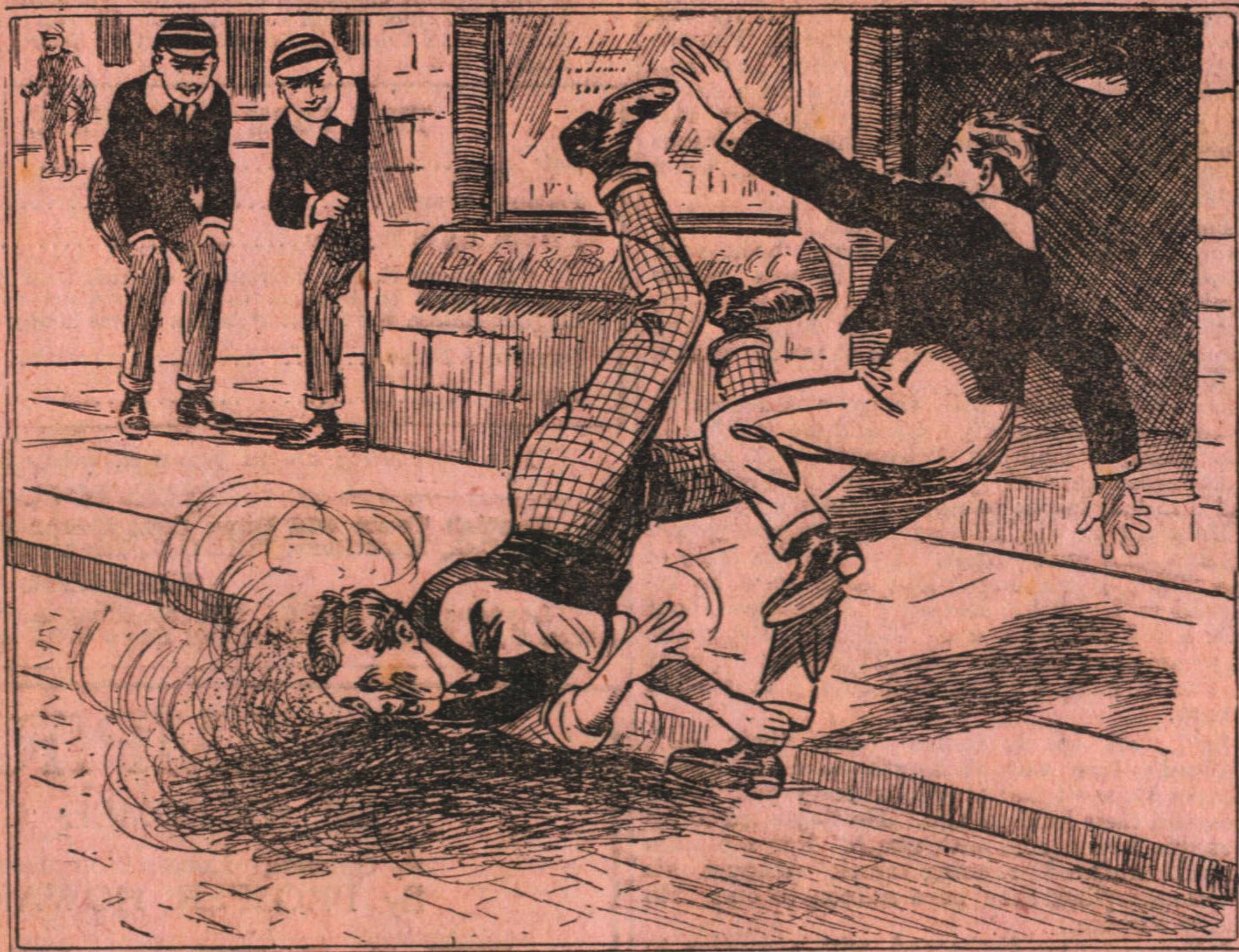
But, with a howl, Clifford dashed at him. With a shriek, the mite of the First turned tail and bolted. Clifford, forgetting he had the razor in his hand, followed him out into the passage, down it, muttering threats of chastisement, and unconsciously flourishing his weapon.

He met several of the Second Form, who were clustered about a notice-board. These kiddies, on beholding the terrifying sight, broke into a simultaneous yell of terror, and fled, Clifford hard after them.

As the stampede passed the study of Noble and Russell, the two latter Third-Formers came out, and started back with a combined gasp at what they saw.

"It—it's Cliffy, gone as mad as a hatter!" cried Russell. "Great Scott! He's got a razor in his hand, and he looks fit to kill anyone! After him, Noble, old chap, before he does any damage! Crikey!"

The skipper of the Pelham Third Form



With a grunt, Tebbs lurched forward right into a heap of dust left by the road-sweepers; but in falling he clutched one of Clifford's legs, bringing the Shell fellow down with him.

Fourth who had been present adjourned to their own class-room. At twelve o'clock, morning school over, the boys betook themselves to their various studies.

Clifford congratulated himself that his study-mates, Bayne and Marker, had received detention. This left him free to put his ill-gotten razor to practical use. Setting his teeth, he prepared to shave.

He had not been able to secure a lather-brush, but there was a new blacking-brush in a cupboard near at hand. He went to the dormitory, and secured a jug of water—cold—and a piece of soap. He rummaged into Bayne's box, and fished out a leather belt. With his prizes, he returned to the study chuckling with glee.

He first tried to work up a lather out of washing-soap and cold water. His success was not marked, but he managed to get a thin, greasy paste over his features.

Next he tried his hand at stropping on Bayne's belt. The first sweep he gave with the sharp blade cut the belt clean in two. He surveyed his misfortune with disgust; then, not to be beaten, he tried again with one half. After gashing the strap several times, and after making the razor ten times as dull as it had been before his hands had been laid on it, he considered he was ready for action.

Gingerly he dabbed at his face with the steel. He managed to wipe off a little of the lather, but there was none of that pleasant rasping he had associated with a good shave. He plastered again. Still the hair would not stand up against the cutting edge. He lost his temper, a proceeding which has never done anyone any good. He grew reckless, as well as impatient. Then, to his satisfaction, he felt a slight tug as the dull edge caught a single hair.

eleven made no reply, but, digging his elbows into his sides, gave a yell, and darted off in pursuit.

Clifford caught young Gavin just at the moment when Noble caught him. A scuffle took place in the corridor.

The noise was tremendous—so great, indeed, as to attract the attention of Mr. Slaney, who came puffing along to the scene. His bespectacled eyes took in the scene with a little more than his usual mild surprise. Long years at Pelham School had taught him to expect almost anything from the boys there; but this was, to all appearances, something entirely uncommon, even to Pelham.

"What—what is this, boys?" he asked. "Clifford, what is the matter with your face? And what is that in your hand?"

Neither questions needed answering. Clifford maintained a surly silence, and struggled in the grip of Noble and Russell, who were now holding him tight.

But he glanced down at the razor, and his jaw dropped. The razor did the same the next moment, falling, open, on its edge, to the floor. Mr. Slaney stooped to pick it up, recognised it, and turned with a wrathful face to the junior captain.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded. "It is my best razor—or was!" he added, examining the now ruined blade.

Clifford was sullenly silent. Mr. Slaney turned to his captors, and repeated the question. Of course, no one was able to answer it.

"And what were you doing here with it in your hand?" the master went on. "Really, the doings of some of you boys are outrageous!"

Again Clifford kept mum. When Jack Noble was interrogated, he attempted to evade

the question. Noble hated anything approaching tale-telling; but Mr. Slaney insisted.

"Well, sir," Noble said grudgingly, "he looked rather dangerous, and so we caught him. But what he was up to, I'm sure I don't know."

Mr. Slaney approached and gripped Clifford's shoulder.

"Are you not going to speak, boy, or are you mad—which?" he said sternly. "Answer my question, or go to the Head-master. Where did you get that razor, and what were you doing with it?"

Clifford lifted his head, and glared savagely at Noble and Russell.

"I—I found it in Noble's study," he said. "I wanted to shave myself."

"Liar!" shouted Russell indignantly. "You never did!"

"Pray be more contained in your expressions of disbelief!" reproved Mr. Slaney. "And you, Clifford, are palpably telling an untruth—trying to shield yourself at the expense of another. That is my razor, so you cannot have found it in Noble's study. Hah, I recollect you were very willing to go into my room this morning! Tell me, did you—er—borrow it, then? The truth, now, mind!"

"Yes!" gritted Clifford, struggling again. "Let me go, you rotters!"

"Then you will take a thousand lines for your impertinence and untruthfulness! And consider yourself lucky I haven't taken you to Dr. Hillingford! Let him go, boys!"

Noble and Russell obeyed. Clifford, free, glared about him at the grinning faces that surrounded him. He looked ghastly, his face covered with dry lather and blood; but he cared little how he looked. His heart was afire with rage against the world generally, and Mr. Slaney and the two Third-Form chums in particular.

"Strange," muttered Mr. Slaney, walking away, "but I sometimes have my doubts as to that boy's soundness of mind. It would be a pity—a very great pity—and a scandal to the school if he had to be removed to some place of safe-keeping. However, he is working that way lately."

Clifford heard the remark, and when the master was out of earshot, turned to his enemies.

"I'll get even with you for this!" he yelled. "You're always getting me lines and trouble, hang you!"

"You should behave yourself, then you'd miss 'em," said Jack Noble, with a shrug. He turned away. Russell followed him. "I believe Slaney's right," he added.

Then a great idea dawned on him, and he drew Russell into the study again to talk it over. For the next few minutes they had something to laugh about, for Clifford had paved the way towards a capital joke, which could be worked off on himself with good effect.

THE 3rd CHAPTER

Clifford Learns His Lesson.

"Clifford wants a shave, does he?" murmured Russell. "Then he shall have one—a beauty! Oh, won't he enjoy it!"

Four Third-Formers were stealing along the corridors, groping their way through the darkness towards Clifford's dormitory. They were Noble, Russell, Macalpine, and Micky Murphy, and the sides of all four were shaking with suppressed laughter, as were those of all the boys left in the Third-Form dormitory, who were in the secret.

"Yes, the dirty omadhaun!" chuckled the Irish lad, gripping a pillow tight in both hands. "He tried to intimidate Noble over that razor, for one thing. We'll teach him to tell lies about us, bedad!"

When the four reached their destination they were greeted by a long drawn-out chorus of snores, telling them that their rivals in the football-field were sound asleep.

They knew the geography of the place very well; they knew that Clifford slept in the bed to the left-hand side, on entering the room, which was nearest the door. Like cats, they crept up to and surrounded the junior captain's bed.

Jack Noble reached out and touched Clifford, who stirred in his sleep, stopped snoring, and made the bedclothes rustle, as if he had turned over.

"Clifford!" he said softly. "Wake up!"

"Wasmarrer?" asked Clifford sleepily. "Who's callin' me? Is it you, young Prince? G'way!"

"It's us," Jack Noble said ungrammatically—"Jack Noble & Co. We want you. Don't make a sound, now, or we'll not be so gentle with you!"

For answer, Clifford opened his mouth to yell out some angry protest. But Jack Noble had anticipated this, and Murphy's pillow was placed over the Shell fellow's face before a sound could pass his lips.

Of course, he struggled; but the other three Third-Formers, who had received close instructions from their leader, were atop of him, bearing him down and preventing his freeing himself. Still gagging him with a quantity of pillows, Noble gave other hurried, whispered orders. Clifford was lifted bodily from his bed, and, with scarcely a sound, was carried out of the dormitory, into the passage, and along to the room where Noble and his Form-mates slept.

Once in there, and the door securely locked, the junior captain saw a sight that would have made him gnash his teeth had he been able. A fair attempt at forming a court had been made

in the space between the double row of beds. A dock was formed of three towel-rails, cunningly arranged. Twelve boys were gravely seated in two rows—the jury—while the others squatted on the beds and waited for developments. They were all in the know, and were looking forward to some healthy fun.

"Ha," said Jack Noble, glancing about him at these preparations, "I see the court is ready. Then place the prisoner in the dock, and let the first witness give his evidence, while I get ready. I'll be judge."

He deftly arranged a towel about his head, so that it formed a good imitation of a judge's wig; after which he gravely seated himself at the foot of the centre-most bed of the "court."

But the others were not going to be rushed through thuswise.

"You silly ass!" said Russell, blissfully oblivious to the fact that he was committing an almost unpardonable offence—namely, contempt of court. "Wait till we're ready, too, can't you? For one thing, if we put the prisoner in the dock, no one'll be able to see him; he'll have to be kept lying down. If we let him stand up, he'll wreck the place. Again, you owl, a witness can't give his evidence until the charge has been read. I ought to know; my pater's a barrister."

"Have it your own silly way, then," was the reply, made in no very judicial tones. "But move the dock, and lay the prisoner where we can see his villainous countenance. Clerk, read the charge!"

Taffy Evans got up and cleared his throat. "The prisoner is charged with having willfully and maliciously told a whopper, whereby he undoubtedly hoped to catch our honoured judge in the neck," he said. "Also, not content with that, he is charged with swanking—with pretending he's got a beard, when he's under age. Ahem!"

And the clerk sat down, amidst murmured approval from the "public," seated about on odd beds.

"First witness. Robert Russell, stand up, please, and swear to tell the whole truth, no whackers, and keep nothing dark," said Judge Noble.

"But I'm a jurymen!" objected the hair-splitting Russell. "I can't be both, you know; 'tain't law."

"It's the law of this dormitory," said the judge, glaring at his chum. "Why, fathead, I'm going to appear against him myself next; and I'm judge. So you, a common jurymen, needn't turn up your pug nose."

Russell was overruled, and took up his stand near Noble, while the other eleven men hung on his every word. He related how, after capturing Clifford red-handed with a razor in his hand, Clifford had told the fib that he had hoped to shield himself by. Also, he mentioned the fact of prisoner's face being lathered.

"It's only logic, m'lud," he said, "that a chap who splashes soap on his face, then goes about with a razor, means shaving. It's the unwritten law not to shave till you're eighteen at this school."

"Stand down!" said the judge, who whipped off his towel-wig, stuck Russell in his place temporarily, and gave his own evidence, which was identical with that of Russell.

"As there's no counsel for the defence, we won't bother with Clifford's side of the story," said the fair-dealing Noble, who, after a tussle, had managed to unseat his deputy on the throne. Russell did not like the idea of going back to jury-work, after having been a judge for a moment. But Noble was adamant. "Besides," he continued, "if we let him open his mouth to speak for himself, he'll let out a yell that'll bring Slaney up. So we'll dispense with defence, and put it to the jury. Guilty or not guilty, gentlemen?"

"Guilty!" said the jury solemnly, as solemnly as though they had been sitting on a murder case. "Let him die!" said one boy, wishing to be more impressive.

Jack Noble cleared his throat to give the sentence.

Clifford, who had lain helplessly beneath his three custodians—Fighting Mac, Murphy, and Drake—still gagged, began to struggle again. He almost regained his feet, for he was a hefty fellow; but two jurymen, whose work was now finished, went to their comrades' assistance, and Clifford was kept down.

"I have decided—no, I mean, the sentence of this court is, that the prisoner be forcibly detained in this room for the next ten minutes, in which he shall be punished for his crimes, as follows:

"It is against the rules for any below the Sixth to shave at Pelham; but prisoner, knowing this, has broken the law. He shall be shaved by this court in the following manner: Razors being dangerous to young boys, he shall have his face liberally smeared with the best cream, after which Thomas Henry, the Mrs. Snark's Persian cat, shall be induced to lick the cream

off. Let me add, gentlemen," Noble continued, growing confidential, "that this is the correct way for every man to take his first shave."

"Hear, hear!" said the court approvingly.

"Bring out the lather!"

A jug of cream, smuggled from the side-table of the dining-hall for the purpose, was produced.

"And the razor!"

Evans stepped across to a closet in the far corner of the dormitory, which he opened. There, snugly curled up, was a magnificent tabby Persian cat—Mrs. Snark's private property—a beast with the manners of a perfect gentleman, and with the patience of Job. The Welshman picked Thomas Henry up in his arms, stroking his fur gently. The cat began to purr comfortably, snuggled against Taffy's breast, and went to sleep.

Clifford, knowing now what was going to happen to him, succeeded in freeing his mouth of the gag, and let out a squeak, which was choked off short by Fighting Mac, who had a way all his own for keeping prisoners silent. At length, blubbering, Clifford lay still.

There was not the slightest roughness used. Russell poured the rich cream over the junior captain's face freely, stroked it about evenly, then made way for Evans, who stepped up with the sleeping cat. Thomas, reluctant to awake at first, opened one eye halfway, then closed it again, purring contentedly. Evans put him down to the floor, close by Clifford's head, gently forced his nose until it was dipped in the cream, then left him to finish the job.

Cream was Thomas Henry's favourite luxury. The very smell of it would lure him from the strict path of virtue at any time. Here, when his feline instinct told him that cream was to be had without any objections being made, he took full advantage of the opportunity thrust literally under his nose.

Clifford squirmed again as Thomas Henry's rough little tongue swept over his face with a soft, rasping sound. But his captors had him down fairly; Clifford at length gave up the attempt, not even moving his head as Thomas gradually cleaned his creamy features. Lap, lap, went the little red tongue, making a clean sweep every time. Clifford cringed as his skin was rasped; but he wisely bore the ignominious punishment. It was a case of needs must when certain personages drive.

The spectators, crowded about the strange scene in nightshirts and pyjamas, shook with suppressed mirth. After all, it was rather comical to see a fellow being cleaned by a cat, just as a mother-cat cleans her kittens. The humour of the situation struck them all, except Clifford.

But Jack Noble, with many a threatening gesture, kept down any very audible laugh. It was silent, convulsive enjoyment that all his room-mates showed; they were well-behaved, and also had learnt to respect Noble's wishes.

Many a time did Thomas Henry pause to lick his lips, and gaze wonderingly into the faces of the Third Form boys. But each time he returned to his task. Russell had emptied about half a gill of cream over Clifford's aristocratic physiognomy; and, for once, Thomas knew what it was to have an unstinted supply of his pet luxury.

Still, all good things have their end. Clifford's face was at length as clean as—or cleaner than—it had ever been for years. They loosened their hold on him. He staggered to his feet, his face purple with wrath. For a minute he contemplated running amok amongst his tormentors; but they were sixteen to one. He wisely forbore.

"You are now discharged, with a caution to improve your behaviour!" said Noble severely. "You've had your first shave, which you couldn't get by yourself, though you tried twice. You ought to be grateful to us for helping you out. You may go! And remember we of the Third are always ready to keep our end up when our honour is attacked. Go, base varlet!"

Clifford went, vowing vengeance. But his lesson was learnt; he fell out of all love with the idea of shaving for many months to come.

THE END.

(Another fine Jack Noble yarn next week. Meanwhile, tell all your chums about "The Bucking-up of St. Esmond's," our grand new school tale.)

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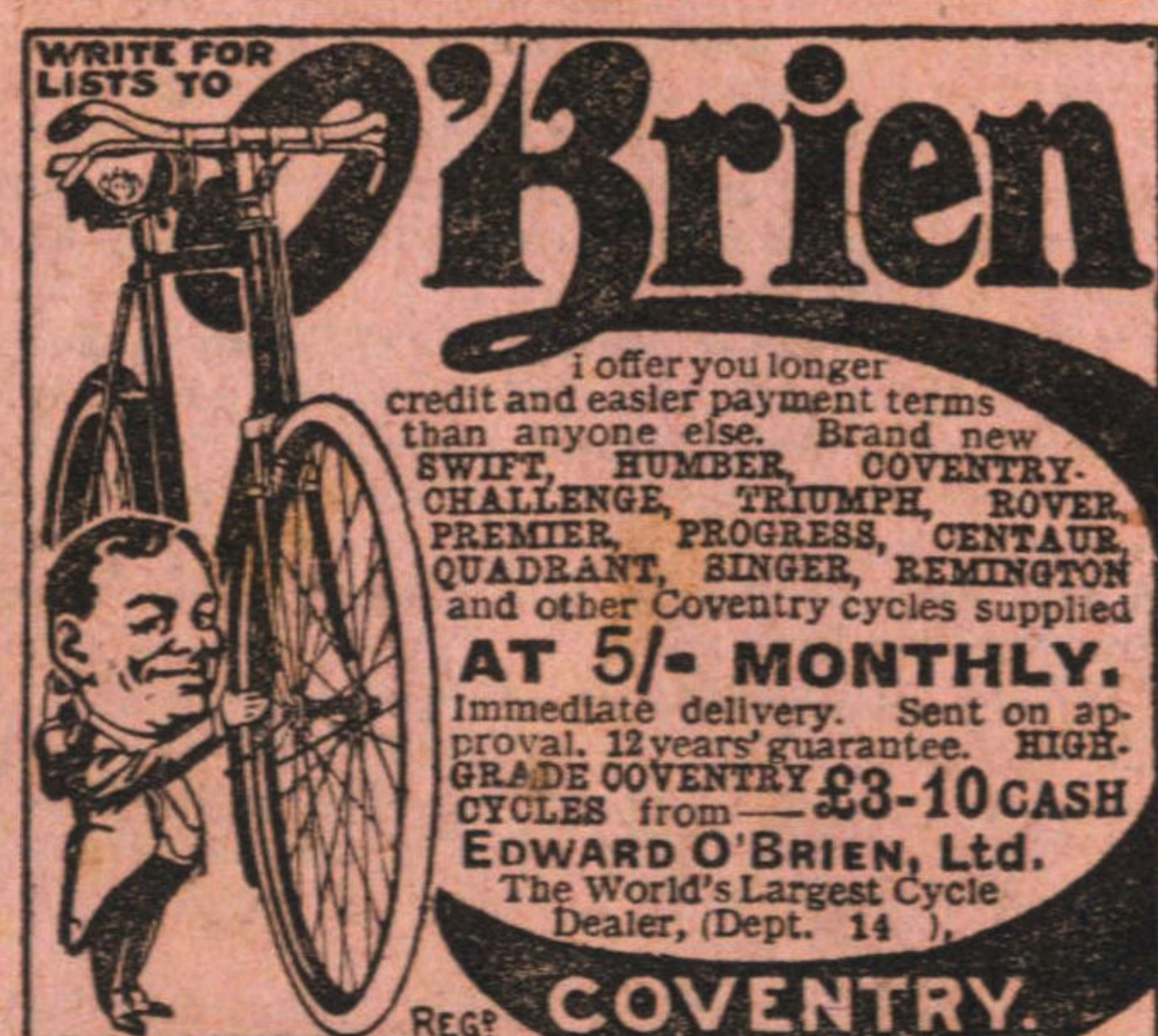
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