

GRAND NEW CIRCUS STORY BY SIDNEY DREW.

The Boys' Realm. 1st

of Sport & Adventure.

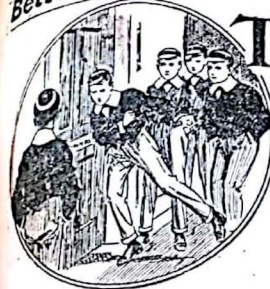
PRINCE of the CIRCUS.

A Story of
the Ring & Caravans.
by Sidney Drew.



THE SILVER CUPS.

A Rattling Complete Yarn of Pelham School.



THE CHAPTER
Dinner's Water Sports.
REMEMBER when I was in the Third
"Lucky Third!"
"It was the best Form in the

"And if I had a face like yours I should paint it with galvanic acid and use it for a dread-ought!" Jeffy yelled, advancing with a threatening air.
Marker was of a bellicose tendency only when he had a mob of assistants. He retreated precipitately, calling on his fellow Fourth-Formers for aid, and a pitched battle seemed imminent, when Jack Noble lethargically himself of a more artistic method of harassing the enemy.
"Half-time, my sons!" he howled. "Let's go and bag the gym, and do a little practice."
"Higgins won't let us," retorted Macleopine, commonly known as "Fighting Mac."
Higgins, he it said, was the gymnastic instructor, and the natural bugbear of those enthusiastic spirits who regarded the gym as an ideal spot for ragging. Higgins held other views, which he never hesitated to impress with a swagger-stick.
"Higgins is up in London, buying a new tennis-net," Noble roared, "and everybody else is down at the river. Come on!"
The Third-Formers needed no second invitation. They swept Clifford & Co. aside, poured out of the quadrangle, and charged towards the gymnasium with speed.

The Fourthites were not slow in realising the meaning of this sudden move. They followed foot-pace; but Noble and his men arrived with a swift and sure, and hurled him outside. The Third-Formers cooed, as they discovered that it was tenanted only by Ginger Dickinson, a Fifth fellow, of mild aspect and gentle nature, and hurled him outside. A dismal yell of protest was drowned by the closing of the door, and the Third-Formers burst into a shout of delight as they shot the bolts just in time to prevent the ingress of Clifford and his minions.
"What a stunning lark!" Bob Russell grinned. "This'll make old Clifty's hair curl two feet!"
"And the Head'll make us curl one way, if we're copped!" added Poddles sentimentally.
"Rate! The Head's down by the river, where we could have been if it hadn't been for old Graham's speech. The last race we don't come off until a quarter to six. We've an hour yet."

"What about Dickinson?"
"He's forgotten what happened by this time," returned Jack Noble. "Probably he thinks some Greek god reached down and gave him a short-arm job, just for old time's sake. Ha! ha!"
"Hi, hi, hi!"
"The lordly Clifford has arrived."
There could be no doubting this last assertion.

Clifford had delivered himself against the door with all the gay abandon of a sack of coals, and a moment afterwards his voice rose protestingly.
"You're in, you beasts!"
"It's fine having the gym to ourselves like this, ain't it, Jack?" said Bob Russell loudly, as he performed a noisy clog-dance on the floor just in time to prevent the Third-Formers coming barging in just when you want the apparatus.
"Cliffy and his worms won't have a chance to win those cups," returned Noble, in tones which would have been excessively loud if Russell had been a quarter of a mile away.
"Fancy that windy ass Marker thinking he's any good at gym! I've seen a pig-dance sell, and he vanished from view with these remarks through the keyhole. 'We'll give you beans for this!'"
"Dile beans!"
"You'll get jolly well lammed when we get in!"

"You're not in yet, my mannie!" retorted Fighting Mac. "You may stand outside, and listen to us practising, if you're good!"
Clifford's response was apparently couched in Zulu, or some other obscure language, and was therefore not so clear as it might have been.
"Don't take any notice of those sweeps!" ordered Jack Noble, in a thunderous voice.
"Remember, we've got to pick out our eight for the competition. Fall in, boys!"
"Of course, I shall be one of the eight, Noblo!" inquired Poddles, as he waddled into line.

"We don't need any spare mattresses, thanks!" was the cruel retort. "Come on, you chaps. Follow me over the horse."
A word of command was followed by the regular beat of the springboard as the Third-Formers, through the prescribed routine of vaults, back-lifts and jumps. There were some smart gymnasts among their number, Poddles being the only one to disturb the graceful ensemble of their work to any extent. He performed the exercises by the simple method of hurling his body into the air, and alighting heavily on the other side of the horse, his efforts did little else but create dust.
Meanwhile, Clifford had passed from wrath to ecstasy, and from ecstasy to madness, as the cheerful sounds of arduous practice filled

the air. Jack Noble's voice, barking commands in imitation of the instructor, seemed more irritating to their ears than the sound of a two-and-a-half-inch plumb-line running backwards. Convinced that no good could be gained by assaulting the door, they drew back, and surveyed the building with emouldering eyes.
"My hat!" ejaculated Bayne suddenly. "I have it!"
"We didn't think anybody else had it, you ast!" snarled Clifford.
The suspense was telling on his temper.
"I don't mean that. I was going to say that we might be able to get in through the bathroom window. Chaps have gone out that way, so why shouldn't we get in?"
Before the sentence was fairly concluded the Fourth-Formers, who numbered close upon thirty were trooping on one another's heels as they crowded to the rear of the gym. Sure enough, the bathroom window was open to the extent of a couple of inches. Clifford emitted a yell of triumph as he turned to the others.
"Gimme a leg-up, Marky," he whispered hastily. "You chaps follow as quietly as you can, and we'll bag the sponges, and wipe those asses out!"

Poised on Marker's back, he was able to grasp the sill and draw himself up. Gently, and by inch-plunge-bath were in imminent peril of being pitched into the still water. At the opposite end of the apartment were the washstands, and from these the avengers appropriated a score of sponges, which were rendered fat and weighty by a dip into the bath.
Until that moment the proceedings had gone with delightful smoothness. It was distinctly unfortunate that Jenkins should have lost his footing. He alleged afterwards that Bayne pushed him; an accusation which was warmly denied by the gentleman in question. Be that as it may, there is no disputing the fact that he suddenly made what looked like a violent attempt to sit down in mid-air, with the result that he fell flat on his back in the plunge-bath. A noisy splash was capped by a half-strangled yell, and he vanished from view with a swift-ness that smacked of magic.
"The hild-head clump!" Clifford wailed, from his post by the door. "Shut up that ghastly row, if you please!"
"Guzzle-tuggle-wow!" observed Jenkins, with force and enthusiasm, bringing his head into view for a second.
"They'll hear us in the gym!" hissed the leader of the lower school frantically. "Make the ass shut—"

"Siss-ss-ss-ss!"
As he turned to emphasise his remarks, Clifford inadvertently steeled himself by laying hold of the chain which controlled the shower-bath. Instantly a drenching downpour commenced, and in the excitement three more boys were hurled on top of the others, despite their frozen efforts to the contrary.

For the next few moments the bath-room could scarcely have been recommended to any body a search of rage and quiet. Half the Fourth-Formers were bawling for somebody to turn off the icy shower; others were struggling desperately on the verge of the fatal plunge; while the remainder were fighting like an old-time galley crew to reach the window. A yell of despair burst from Clifford's lips, and he made a hasty clutch at the chain which had done the mischief. So much energy did he put into the action, that it came away in his hand, and the downpour continued with redoubled force.
"Clifford, you fellow, fought like a man with a sudden inspiration. 'Follow me, and help smash those Third Form inces!'"

This was a master-stroke. The Fourth-Formers were seething with rage and chagrin, and felt equal to the sanguinary massacre of an army. A short, sharp cheer rose as Clifford kicked the door open, and they poured, like a released torrent, along the short passage leading to the gymnasium.
But Nemesis, once she takes a job in hand, seldom fails to see it to a finish.

During the spell of excitement in the bath-room, the Head observed in his best goodly manner. "The building itself was the gift of one of our distinguished alumni—Sir Grant Travers. We have since been the recipients—"

"A well-appointed and commodious gymnasium," the Head observed in his best goodly manner. "The building itself was the gift of one of our distinguished alumni—Sir Grant Travers. We have since been the recipients—"

"Hi!"
The Head was allowed to proceed no further with his speech, which he was in the habit of firing off some scores of times during each term. At that moment the door leading to the bath-room burst open, and thirty dripping boys propelled themselves into the gym. Giving vent to a series of yells which would have made a band of Red Indians pale with envy, they discharged their sponges point-blank at the party of eighteens.

The missiles were heavily charged with water, and weighed something like two pounds apiece. Therefore, it is not surprising that the visitors were deeply impressed by the display. A rather stout lady, who had just come forward to inquire why the punching-ball was fastened to the floor at both ends, received seven of the sponges in her hat, which was, fortunately, a large sample of the "Merry Willow" brand, and bore up nobly under the strain. The Head himself was very nearly drowed by a sponge that descended from above, like some new species of shooting-star, and settled on his bald head, and a little gentleman who was bringing up the rear took an unpremeditated back-somersault over the vaulting-horse with an esse and agility that surprised himself.

But, if the feelings of the visitors were disagreeable, they were nothing to those that surged in the breasts of the Fourth-Formers as they realised what had happened.

For one terrible second they remained rooted to the floor, gazing on the scene of havoc, and the gathering storm in the Head's eyes. Then they wavered, broke, and fled ignominiously, and a dripping interior of the bath-room swallowed them from above.

(Continued on the next page.)



Fighting Mac leapt forward and butted Clifford in the region of the waistcoat. At the same moment Jack Noble seized a large ham, and wielded it with telling effect. Clifford's jaws were not turning out the success he had expected.

THE 2ND CHAPTER.

A Fall in Provisions.

"OMING down to Morrison's, old son!"
"Rather a sweat-what!" returned Marker, who was lying at his ease in the only comfortable chair that Clifford's studio possessed.

"You'll miss the treat of your young life, if you don't come down to Morrison's," he grinned meaningly.

"Hallo, hallo! Is there a jape on it?"
"Jape! Have you forgotten that the competition comes off to-night?"

"And do you think I'm going to let Jack Noble and his crowd come up to the scratch all cool and smiling?" pursued the unscrupulous Fourth-Form captain, in a low tone.

"What are you going to do?" he asked doubtfully.
"Something better than that. I've found out that Noble and a few of his pals go down to Morrison's every afternoon and have a bit of a tuck-in."

"No, you howling ass! It's some money I boxed out but they'll feel more like dish-cloths than gymnasts to-night. Come and see the fun!"

"Morrison's, he it explained, was not a regular school shop. It was owned by those businesses commonly described as a huxter's, and obtained a fair share of custom by reason of its remoteness from other shops.

"I wonder you don't use a squeezer-lean in here, Mr. Morrison," he grumbled. "It's awfully nifty! I could cut a smell like this with a safety-razor."

"Nobly as you try to come in!" growled the old man scornfully. "Them as don't like it, can stop outside!"

"We stopped outside. If we hadn't, we would have gone past. Hallo, Noble!"

"Clifford, with feigned surprise, turned to Jack Noble, Bob Russell, Fighting Mac, Drake, Tally, and Lanky Stow, these stalwarts of the Third were all seated in the parlour adjoining the shop, and were obviously awaiting the ices and ginger-beers which Morrison was engaged in preparing.

"Is that you, Clifford?" Noble returned politely. "The air in this shop is so rank that I did not smell you coming in! I suppose you are going to scratch to us to-night?"

"There won't be anything left to scratch to when we have done with you, kid," said Marker, eyeing the Third-Formers' refreshments with a fearful interest. "You don't stand a dog's chance!"

"Then we haven't as much chance as you have!"
"Don't try to be funny."

"Ah, we're not all alike, my boy!"
"What do you mean?"

"You're the funniest thing I've ever seen, and you don't try, either. It comes natural."
Marker grinned, but felt himself unequal to convincing the other three of his opinion.

"You seem of the Third-Formers' refreshments with a fearful interest. "You don't stand a dog's chance!"

"Then we haven't as much chance as you have!"
"Don't try to be funny."

"Can't you hear when a gentleman speaks, you do it old porcupine?"
"I'll find out when a gentleman comes in," retorted the huxter. "I'ven't any chanc with present company."

"The Fourth-Formers accepted this impertinent as a compliment. As if drawn by a magnet, their eyes had returned to Jack Noble and his chums, who had demolished the ices, and were lingering in a leisurely fashion over the ginger-beer.

"You chaps are getting the best of the competition as nervous as an old woman on a fire-escape, Cluffy. I bet that you— Oh, I'm feeling rotten, you chaps!"

"It must be the air in here," he muttered. "It smells like a well-oiled house! I'll—I'll go outside for a bit, I think!"

"It's funny," Bob Russell ejaculated. "I feel as if somebody was stirring up my inside with a pudding-spoon."

"My inside feels like a cinematograph show!" moaned Drake. "Ouch! I believe we've been poisoned!"

"The Third-Formers certainly looked a most unhealthy collection. Jack Noble had drooped forward like a weed in the sun, and was hanging with his head on the table. Bob Russell was leaning against the wall, as if his bones were cracking each other for mutual support, while Drake and Fighting Mac were sliding gently under the table.

"Monkey tricks!" groaned Noble, rolling up his eyes. "Ugh, I'm dying! I've been a grand pain gnawing at my innards! Good-bye!"

"Yarrah! Ouch!"
Jack Noble's pathetic farewell was marred by a Gaelic shriek from Fighting Mac.

"The other victims of Clifford's little plot were no Jack Noble had seized a large ham, and was using it as a club with which to play golf and ping-pong with whatever came in his way.

"I believe this is some jape of Clifford's crowd, after all," he muttered, halting in the doorway. "The ass must be going off his nut! Ah!"

"He started slightly as a hushed but distinctly audible whistle sounded from the direction of the cellar. The alarm had not been a false one, after all. Without more ado, he clambered through the most dangerous competitor from the gymnastic competition.

"Who are you?" he hissed. "It's me—Noble. Hurry up, I haven't got much."

"Not if I know it!" he growled, hurrying forward. "I'm going to get out of here, if I have to bust creation!"

"He was not long in realising what had happened. He had fallen a victim to Clifford's spite. The note had been a decoy, and by his wily and unscrupulous trick, the leader of the Fourth had ousted the most dangerous competitor from the gymnastic competition.

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"They were out in the open now, and he had a heavy mass of cheese, jam, sides of bacon, four, eggs, butter, and cardboard boxes, from

which arms and legs emerged occasionally, to wave wildly for a few seconds, ere being buried by some new parcel of groceries. The sight by some means created a weird fascination for the two Fourth-Formers. They remained open-mouthed and staring, eyeing the colossal wreckage with quivering, speechless horror. Clifford's joke was proving a bigger thing than they had expected.

"From the interior of the shop Jack Noble emerged, arm-in-arm with Fighting Mac. Behind came Drake, Lanky Stow, and Tally. They were a little dishevelled and somewhat macabre as regards complexion, but otherwise as cool and calm as if they had been on the way to church. Like the animals leaving the Ark, they came forth two by two, favouring Baynes and Marker with pleasant smiles as they passed.

"There was nothing to recover from, old fellow," Tally happened to overhear our dear friend Morrison, and we put a spoke in his wheel. We charged that stuff you got in the lab, for sota, which didn't do us any harm, though it tasted beastly."

"You idiots!" wailed Baynes willy. "This'll cost you two or three for a cert!"

"Cliffy can arrange that with old Morrison, and then send an account of the affair to the Head." Jack returned, with meaning. "We shan't trouble ourselves about it. For my part, I think it jolly well serves our trick for leaving Morrison."

Marker and Baynes said nothing, for the simple reason that they had nothing to say. They cast a frightened glance at the shop, which looked as if it had been visited by several earthquakes and an earthquake, then they revealed their true calibre by sinking hurriedly away and leaving Clifford to face the music alone.

THE 3rd CHAPTER. Winning the Cups.

"WELL, that's funny!"
Spick and span in his smart gymnasium costume, Jack Noble hesitated on the threshold of the dormitory, starting at a sheet of notepaper which had just been pushed under the door.

"Come to the cellar under the pavilion at once, if you would help a friend in need. That's queer," Jack muttered, turning the paper over and over in his fingers, and frowning a little. "I wonder if it's a jape!"

"With pursed lips and wrinkled brow he spent a few minutes in cogitation. He had not much time to spare. Most of the fellows had already gone to the gymnasium, and only twenty minutes remained until the time fixed for the competition. But Jack was noble by nature as well as by name, and it was more than he could do to resist the mysterious plea for aid.

"Running swiftly, he gained the pavilion before another five minutes had elapsed, and halted in the shadow of the scoring-box. Apparently the place was deserted, and he looked around, as if puzzled only by the long tree-shadows that stretched from the setting sun, and the pavilion itself was as silent as the grave.

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covered by an iron grating. A faint attention to the floor, and he had been outside. It seemed that he had fallen across the rocky masses over the top-post, and with a gasp he possessed himself of the door.

"The fate seemed against him. length he had leaped against him, to admit of the passage of his body. He scrambled through, only to find himself caught in the splintered wood of the door. Finally he gave a wailing cry, and left the pocket of coat adhering to torso himself away, and stumbled to the steep stone steps.

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Another rattling coming was heard in the Pelham School. Jack was in the Pelham School and Sports League. New on the scene.