POPULAR TALES & PLENTY OF PICTURES!

1d THE POPULAR NEW STORY BOOK 1d

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Vol. 1. No. 20.

JACK LYON HOLDS HIS OWN!

THE SCAPEGRACE OF THE REGIMENT.

A Thrilling NEW Story.

En Route for Dunchester.

In order to receive the princely sum of one shilling, their first day's pay as infantrymen of the line, was put into their hands, and away went Jack Lyon and Napoleon Pott first to the pay-office, and then to the coffee-bar.

By excellent luck it turned out that their joining enabled a draft of ten recruits of the Fighting Fits to be despatched to the depot that evening. So that there was no weary waiting on the threshold of their new world, a fact for which Percival Napoleon Pott was even more devoutly glad than Jack.

"You see, I've got people," he stammered, turning a nervous eye on the barrack gate as he spoke. "It isn't the guv'nor. He thinks me such a fool that he'll be more than glad to see the back of me p'raps."

"No," added Percival, beginning to snivel. "It's the dear old matah. She'll take it pretty bad, I'm afraid. I suppose yours will, too, won't she?" he added quickly, as if the thought comforted him.

"Mine?" answered Jack, with a catch in his voice and a wry smile, which faded little by little, in spite of all he could do. "Yes, mine would, no—if—if——"

Percival looked at him, then closed his hand on his with rough sympathy. "Sowwy, old chap," he blurted—"beastly sowwy! Infernally clumsy of me, I'm sure."

"Oh, it's all right! How could you know?" laughed Jack, with a shrug. "It happens just that I've neither father nor mother left, nor any soul really that cares two straws what becomes of me. I'm on my own, in fact, like the Miller of the Dee:

"'I care for nobody, no, not I,
Since nobody cares for me.'"

Again he laughed, but with such a bitter bitterness that Percival shuddered.

"No, no, it's not as bad as that, I know," he protested.

"Yes it is, every bit," answered Jack. "You hear the officer ask whether I had ever served before, and my answer about having left in disgrace?"

Percival nodded.

"Well, what do you think I was fined out for?" demanded Jack.

Percival shook his head from side to side.

"Cheating at cards," answered Jack. "Yes, cheating at cards," he repeated as he saw the other's eyes grow round with horror at such a despicable crime. "That's what I got kicked out of my regiment for. They told me off as a common, dirty swindler, who stuffed aces up his sleeve to diddle honest men out of their cash. Do you believe that I could be capable of a trick like that?"

Percival only stared until his eyes started dropping out of his head.

"Go on, man; speak out!" cried Jack bitterly, for he thought his chum was hesitating. "I'm not going to tell you more, because I can't, but you're bound to hear the talk about me sooner or later, so you may as well try and make up your mind about me now. Do I look like a cardsharper? Am I one to be cut by every honest man, or will you take my word for it that the whole thing's a lie—a cruel, dirty lie?"

For answer Percival slowly rose and stood straight up. Then, as slowly, he held out his hand:

"Old fellah," he began deliberately, "I've nevah seen you before to-day, but I'll wagah my bally life you nevah did a dishonest act since you were born. And, what's more, if any bally fellah evah says you did, he'll have to reckon with this!"

And he held up a fist which beside Jack's leg-of-mutton one looked more fit for making pastry than punching heads.

But Jack gripped it and laughed over it, and swore that that settled it, and they would stand by one another even if the Woldshires were all cannibals, from the colonel to the drummer-boys.

And two hours later, when they had sealed their vow of eternal friendship over fourpenny steak-puddings in the canteen, and two bottles of ginger-pop, the word came that the Woldshire recruits were to get ready to march.

Out the gallant ten straggled, in go-as-you-please fashion, to find a strange recruiting-sergeant awaiting them, and beside him, sullen and venomous as a wildcat to look at, the same orderly that Jack had ducked in the bath that morning.

The man was clad in private's uniform now, for the prophecy of the sergeant in the office had been fulfilled.

As the result of his incivility, Private Green—better known as "Pasty" by his pals of the Fighting Fits—had been sacked from his soft billet at St. George's Barracks and was being sent back in disgrace to rejoin his regiment.

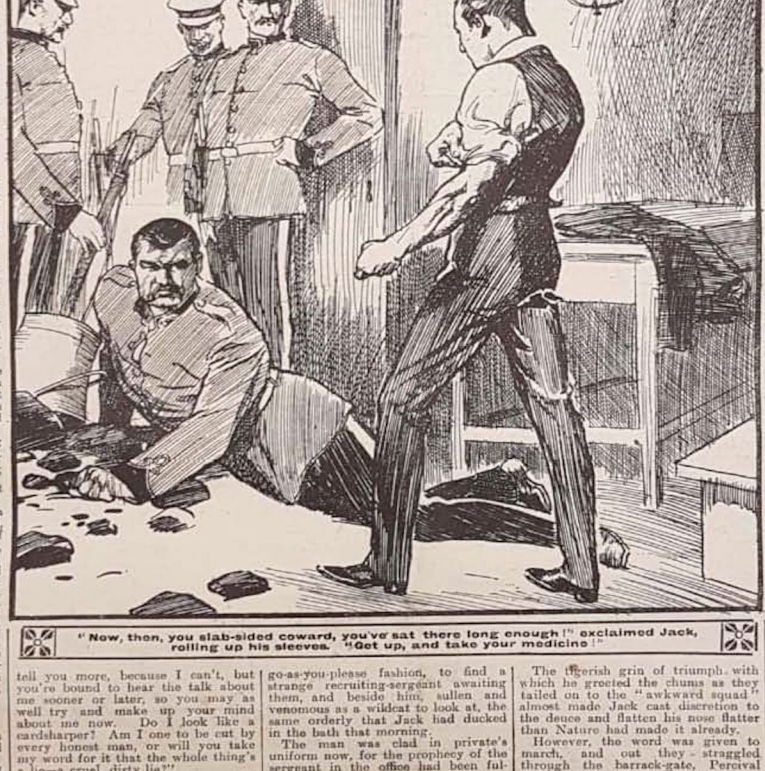
He was going back with the one intention of making it just as hot as he knew how for the lad who had been the cause of his downfall.

Pasty had plenty of pals, vicious and shifty as himself, to back him, if for no other reason than that Jack, their victim, had been an officer once.

"What-ho! They would give him 'officer' before they had done with him—not 'arf!" chuckled Pasty, smacking his lips in anticipation.

But—sweetest thought of all!—his enemy had been an officer who had been kicked out of the Service in disgrace.

"Disgrace!" quoth Pasty. "I'll have to find out all about that, and then, by hookey, I'll teach him to lay his dirty maulers on me!"



"Now, then, you slab-sided coward, you've sat there long enough!" exclaimed Jack, rolling up his sleeves. "Get up, and take your medicine!"

The fiendish grin of triumph with which he greeted the chums as they tailed on to the "awkward squad" almost made Jack cast discretion to the deuce and flatten his nose flatter than Nature had made it already.

However, the word was given to march, and out they straggled through the barrack-gate, Percival Pott squaring his narrow chest manfully, and keeping stride for stride with his new chum, but the rest loafing along just how they pleased.

Nearly all had bundles, and one or two bags. Jack and Percival carried only the clothes they wore on their backs. They noticed how Pasty and the sergeant dropped to the rear here and there on route, where side streets and narrow alleys were plentiful.

This evidently was in case one of their motley crew tried to make a bolt for freedom. Nor, to judge by the hang-dog look on some of their faces, was the precaution unjustified.

The wastrel who joins the Army for the sake of the first day's shilling and a warm bed in barracks, and then coolly "does a guy," is a gentleman they have to keep a sharp eye open for down at "'Cruities' Corner."

But Euston Station was reached at last without any such excitements. Tickets were taken, and the sergeant led them to their compartment.

Jack had been comforting himself with the thought that he would be travelling with them, and thus Pasty would be kept in his proper place. But he was disappointed.

The sergeant had spotted a civilian friend travelling by the same train, and preferred his company to theirs.

"Now, then, my lads," he said to the squad, as the guard locked them in, "I put you in charge of Private Green here till we get to Dunchester, so don't forget. Take your orders from him, and see you don't get up to any larks, 'cause I'll have my eye on you. You understand, Green?" he added, with a nod to Pasty, and then departed.

Jack could scarce stifle a groan of disgust. His chum and he would be at the mercy of this brute all the way; to be sneered at and insulted as he chose.

It was evident that Pasty appreciated his opportunity just as clearly as his victims did.

First of all, he proceeded to ingratiate himself with the bigger and rougher of the recruits. He borrowed a fag off one and a light from another, and, cracking questionable jokes, soon had the carriage in a roar.

Everyone thought him an amazingly fine fellow at once; that is, all except Jack and Percival, who sat quietly in their corner.

"Yus," said Pasty grandly at last, blowing a long puff of smoke into Percival's face and making him choke, "the Service 'd be all right in itself if there was no one in it but honest working coves like yourselves!"

He was careful to make it clear that this applied to everybody except Jack and Percival.

"No," he went on; "it's the wrong 'uns that manage to sneak in that queers it; down-at-'eel crooks wot call themselves 'gentleman rankers'! Pah!" And he expectorated to show his contempt.

The rest of the draft eyed the two chums furtively and leered. Certainly it looked as if Pasty was digging at them in their fine clothes and collars. By a wink and a grimace the private showed that they were quite right in their opinion.

"I will say that for the Fighting Fits, though," he continued. "We know how to put the scum in their places. Ho, yes, it ain't long I tell you before they're sorry they joined our crush. 'Ere, you," he said, turning suddenly on Percival. "Wot's your name when you're out of quad?"

"Don't answer him," said Jack, before his friend could reply.

"Wot!" grated the soldier, in pretended surprise, though it was plain he anticipated the rebuff. "You dare to interfere 'tween me and a man when I gives an order. Do you know I'm in command here?"

"Unfortunately I do," answered Jack. "Otherwise I should have allowed myself the pleasure of punching your head before this."

Pasty exploded like a soda-water bottle.

"Because the sergeant chooses to neglect his duty," Jack rattled on impulsively. It was a tactless remark to make, and bitterly was Jack to rue it.

"Sergeant neglects his dooty?" echoed Pasty, snapping him up in a trice. "Oh, 'ark at 'im—'ark at Mister Hofficer, wot got kicked out of the Service, giving hisself airs!"

The other recruits gasped and

Continued on the next page.

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The Most Popular School Story.

THE RIVALS OF St. WODE'S

THIS HAS TAKEN PLACE.

Dick Penwyn, a shaggy Cornish lad who has been to a Council school, obtains a scholarship at St. Wode's. On his arrival there he is received with open arms by Blagden & Co., who mistake him for another new fellow—Lord Lovell. On discovering their mistake, Blagden & Co. become bitter enemies of both the new juniors, who at once chum together. To the disgust of his Form-fellows, "Bunny" Lovell is taken up by Crawcour & Co. of the Fifth. The Blades, as Crawcour & Co. are called, invite him to spend the evening with them in their study, and Penwyn, as Bunny's chum, is invited too. "What do you say, Pen?" asks Bunny. "Will you come?"

(Read on from here.)

— A —

New School Tale.

By

CHARLES HAMILTON.

Author of

"THE RIVALS OF St. KIT'S."

Pen Accepts.

It was an awkward and uncomfortable moment for Pen. He knew he was only asked because the Blades wanted the viscount in their party. At the same time, if he refused, Lovell was certain to refuse, too, and he would thus deprive Bunny of a pleasant evening. There was nothing for it but to accept the invitation.

"I will come with pleasure," he said.

"Good!" said Crawcour carelessly. "My study at seven!"

And he walked away.

"What did he mean by a little game?" asked Dick Penwyn, looking after the slim and somewhat elegant figure of the captain of the Fifth. "What sort of games do they play? I shouldn't think there was much room for a game in a study, even a Fifth-Form study."

Bunny laughed.

"Bridge," he replied.

The Cornish lad gave a start.

"But that's a card game," he exclaimed.

"Yes, my boy. Don't you play cards?"

"I have played cards at home," said Pen, looking troubled, "but—but not bridge. I can't play that game."

"Oh, you'll pick it up quickly enough; there's nothing in it to learn."

"But—but——"

Pen paused. He wanted to ask if the Blades of St. Wode's played bridge for money, but he felt that it would be an insult to Lovell to suspect that he might gamble. He did not ask the question, but he was feeling very troubled and uneasy when he took his way with Lovell to Crawcour's study at seven o'clock.

Crawcour opened the door to Lovell and Pen, with a most agreeable smile. Brayo and Vernon were in the study. The room was a somewhat large one for a Fifth-Form study, and it was very nicely furnished. There was a cheerful fire in the grate, a handsome cover on the table, and good leather chairs. There were some good pictures on the walls, and some handsomely-bound volumes in a revolving bookcase. The room looked more like a room belonging to some young man about town, in some street off Piccadilly, than the study of a Fifth-Form boy at a public school. Crawcour, though his people were not rich, certainly contrived somehow to do himself down" very well.

The room looked so cheerful and inviting that Pen's face lightened unconsciously. The manners of the Fifth-Formers were very polite and polished, too. These did not seem to be the same fellows who cuffed Lugs in the passages. They were courtesy itself to Lord Lovell, and very much the same to Dick Penwyn. As a matter of fact, Crawcour had already "caught on" to the peculiar notions, as he regarded them, of the viscount, and he was so courteous to Dick Penwyn that the viscount could not possibly take exception to anything in his conduct. At the same time, Pen knew perfectly well, and saw perfectly clearly, that he was regarded only as a necessary evil—a trouble-some person without whom the viscount would not come. It was not a gratifying position.

"So glad you could come," said Crawcour, just as if it were not a great honour to Fourth-Formers to be invited to a Fifth-form fellow's study. "We shall try to give you a pleasant couple of hours."

"Delighted, I'm sure," said Bunny.

"You had all the luck last night, Bunny, old man," said Vernon.

His lordship smiled.

"Oh, I'm an old hand, you know!" he said.

"We're going to give you an awful licking this evening, you know."

"Ha, ha! We shall see!"

"Penwyn plays, I suppose?" said Crawcour.

Pen coloured a little.

"You are going to play bridge?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have never played the game," said Pen; "but I haven't played it. It is not a game usually played in fishermen's cottages on the Cornish coast."

The Blades laughed.

"No, I suppose not," said Crawcour, good-humouredly. "Well, suppose you stand out of the first rubber, Penwyn, and look on. You will be able to pick up the game—there's nothing in it for a chap of intelligence. Then you can take a hand perhaps in the second rubber."

"Certainly," said Pen.

"Oh, lovely!" said Bunny.

"Sit down, Lovell," said Crawcour. "Make yourself comfy. Get the cards, Verny."

"Here you are!"

The three Blades and the viscount sat down at the table. Pen took another chair, to look on at the game. He knew that bridge was something like whist, and that was all he knew. He had played whist to amuse his old uncle many a time, and was a good player of that game. He realised quite clearly that his ignorance of bridge was very agreeable to the Fifth-Formers. They did not want him to play, and it was an excellent excuse for making up a game without him.

Whether it was because he was a Council-school boy, or because the black sheep of the Fifth found some fault in his manners, or because they guessed that he had very little money, he did not know. But certainly Lord Lovell was the fellow they wanted to make a fourth at the little party.

Lovell evidently knew bridge very well, but he was far too confiding and unsuspicious a fellow to play bridge with the Blades in safety. As they sat down to the table, Dick Penwyn saw a quick glance pass among the Blades, which he did not quite comprehend; but which showed him quite clearly that there was some secret understanding among Crawcour & Co.

Crawcour and Lovell became partners, and Brayo and Vernon, and the deal fell to Crawcour. He slipped the cards round deftly, with the practised manner which, as somebody has remarked, is a sign of a misspent youth.

Crawcour looked over his cards carefully, and put on a very wise look.

"No trumps," he said.

Brayo looked across at Vernon gravely.

"Play?" he asked.

"I double," said Vernon.

Crawcour looked at his lordship, who shook his head. They declined to redouble. Brayo led a card, and then Lovell exposed his hand.

He laid the thirteen cards down in suits, and Dick Penwyn, to whom this was a surprising proceeding, looked over the cards. He realised without asking questions that this was an essential part of bridge.

The viscount had no aces, and few picture cards. Crawcour leaned over, selected a card, and placed it on Brayo's. Then Vernon played an ace. Crawcour followed with a card of the same suit from his own hand, and Vernon collected in the trick.

The lead was now Vernon's.

It remained to him and his partner till the eighth trick had been gathered in by one of them, and then it fell to Crawcour. Crawcour captured three tricks between his own hand and dummy's, and then the twelfth went to Vernon. The thirteenth was Crawcour's.

Vernon and Brayo had taken nine tricks—three to count. Three tricks in no trumps valued thirty-six points, and as the value had been doubled, the partners scored seventy-two, and had easily gone out on the first round.

"Lucky bargees," said Crawcour.

"Jova yang!" said Lord Lovell.

Brayo dealt for the next round.

Dick Penwyn was watching the game more closely now. He was picking up the points of the game very quickly; wherein the game was the same as whist, he knew it already, and the distinctions were not at all puzzling when he had once seen a game played. That the dealer's partner exposed his hand, leaving the cards to be played by the dealer, and that dealer declared what should be trumps, were the chief distinctions. But Pen was not only learning now that he was watching.

He was suspecting.

Little as he knew of the game, he thought that Crawcour's play was not so good as it might have been. It really seemed as if Crawcour had been not unwilling to lose that round. If Crawcour lost, of course, Lord Lovell, his partner, and the fellows were playing for money, and the rubber finished in the same way, Crawcour and Lovell would both have to pay up to their opponents. That is to say, Lovell's money would remain in Crawcour's study.

Pen was not naturally a suspicious fellow. But the Fifth-Formers felt so complete an indifference to any intelligence the Council-school boy might have had, that they were far less careful than they might have been.

Bunny saw nothing. But Pen, looking on, had not failed to mark the secret understanding among the Blades.

Yet the natural inference, that Lovell was asked to play bridge in the Blades's company in order to relieve him of his money, without giving him a chance, was too black. Pen was still somewhat under the first glamour of St. Wode's. It seemed impossible that fellows who swaggered prominently at that ancient public school, were actually capable of cheating at cards when dealing with a simple and unsuspecting lad.

Pen did not care to think so. But he made up his mind on one point—Lovell should not be cheated if he could help it.

He mapped it out in his mind. If the Blades were acting in collusion, their programme would almost certainly be to let Lovell win one game in the three, in order not to excite comment by beating him too hard.

And the second game of the rubber, sure enough, Lovell and his partner did win, though Brayo had all the advantage of being dealer and making the declaration.

Pen watched the third game of the rubber very attentively.

Whoever won two games out of three scored 100 points for the rubber, and the other fellows would have to pay up; and Pen was already certain in his mind that Lovell would do most of the paying.

He was right.

Lovell had very good cards, as it chanced—the manœuvres of the Blades did not go so far as to give them complete mastery of the pack. It was Lovell's deal, and he had given himself good cards, and he declared hearts.

Pen saw a glance exchanged among the Blades. They did not think of him—indeed, in their keenness on the game, they seemed to have forgotten his existence. He was no more to them than the bookcase or the fire-irons.

Lovell proceeded to play his hand and dummie's with considerable skill. As he was pretty strong in trumps, he had every expectation, with so high a declaration, of going out on the single round. Pen glanced at the Blades in turn, and he could see the gathering anxiety in their faces.

Lovell being dealer, and playing his partner's exposed hand without assistance from his partner, it was impossible for Crawcour to influence the game in any way. But the Blades had probably not expected Lovell to play so well, and it was, they just saved themselves, Lovell scoring only nine tricks—three to count, valuing twenty-four in hearts. He wanted six to win, but he was not destined to get those six.

The next deal was Vernon's.

He declared no trumps, which Crawcour promptly doubled. Pen watched Crawcour's cards, as he played, to see whether he had a hand strong enough to justify doubling no trumps, and he saw that Crawcour had not. Crawcour had doubled so that the score against Lovell would

Pen, feeling utterly miserable, left the study and closed the door behind him. As he went he heard Crawcour say, quite calmly, as if nothing had happened, "My deal, I think!"

be heavy in the final reckoning, knowing that Brayo and Vernon would win.

And they did win.

Two tricks ahead gave them 43 points, and they had won the third game and the rubber.

"Jove! Beaten!" said Lovell, suppressing a yawn.

Pen's eyes gleamed.

Exactly to what extent the Blades had played foul, he did not know; but that there had been foul play was abundantly clear.

"Lemme see," said Crawcour lazily. "You and I pay up, Bunny. It's only a sov. a hundred, so it won't break us."

"I—I—no!" said Lovell smiling.

Pen started up.

"You are playing for money!" he exclaimed.

It was the last proof he needed that the Blades had been "spoofing." Of course, if they had not been playing for money, they would have had no object in cheating.

They all turned and stared at him. There was disapproval in Lovell's look. He did not want his friend to make a scene in another fellow's study. As to what he had been doing being wrong, Bunny had not even thought about it.

Crawcour smiled sarcastically.

"Did you think we were playing for buttons, Penwyn?" he asked.

And Brayo and Vernon laughed.

Pen flushed red.

"I did not know—that is, I was not sure!" he exclaimed. "I would not have come here to play for money. It is gambling!"

"Dear me!" said Crawcour.

"Shut up, Pen, old man!" said Lovell, turning very red. "It's all right. Don't play the giddy goat, you know."

But Pen did not shut up.

He had been brought up to regard playing for money as what it was—gambling and wrong. Wrong, especially as a lad, and ten times wrong in these Fifth Form fellows, who were leading a younger and simpler lad into wickedness.

"I can't shut up, Bunny!" said Pen. "I don't know much about public schools—we're backward! Bunny, you can't do it! Come away, old fellow."

Pen's voice was deeply earnest. He moved towards Lord Lovell, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

Crawcour burst into a mocking laugh.

"Are you going to be talked to like that, Lovell, by that low-bred outsider? Did you bring that chap here to make a row in my study?"

Lovell flushed crimson. The words touched him on his tenderest point. The viscount had a natural horror of a scene, and a scene made by a friend of his, in another fellow's quarters, was the extreme of bad form in his eyes.

"Shut up, for goodness' sake, Pen! If you don't like it, go away, but don't make a doocid scene. Shut up, old man!"

"Bunny——"

Crawcour yawned.

"Let's see, a sov. a hundred," he said. "That will be——" he calculated.

"Come away, Bunny!"

The viscount jerked himself away from Dick Penwyn's hold.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "Don't be an ass. I won't, I tell you!"

Pen stepped quietly back. Lovell would not come with him, and after what he had said, he could hardly remain in Crawcour's study. It was on his lips to tell what he suspected—what he was sure of; but it would not have done. He had no proof—nothing but suspicion. He could say nothing. He made one last appeal.

"You won't come, Bunny?"

"No, I won't."

Dick Penwyn said no more. He left the study, and closed the door behind him; and, as he went, he heard Crawcour say quite calmly, as if nothing had happened:

"My deal, I think!"

Then he heard no more.

Pen went slowly to his study.

He was feeling more miserable than he had felt at any time since his arrival at St. Wode's.

In the few days he had been at the school he had had more than one trial. Blagden's snobbish dropping of him on discovering that he was the "scholarship boy," had cut him more deeply than he cared to show. The knowledge that the St. Wode's fellows generally regarded him as something other than themselves—as one marked out from the rest—hurt the proud, high-spirited Cornish lad.

He would not show the wound, but it was there. He did not wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at. But he felt the slights that had been put upon him—felt them all keenly.

But the friendship of Bunny had seemed likely to outweigh all the trials that were in store for him. Pen sincerely liked the kind, generous lad, and the knowledge that Bunny was what the other fellows would have termed "soft" only made Dick Penwyn like him the more. There was something of sacrifice, or protection, in Pen's idea of friendship, and he was only too glad to think that his strength and his courage might stand between the viscount and many a ragging from the rougher set of juniors. He was ready to fight for Bunny to the last gasp, and to stand anything for his sake.

But here was a danger he could not save Bunny from; here was a peril he could not share, a pitfall from which he could not protect the generous and too-trusting Lord Lovell.

In the clutches of the Blades—the blackguards of the Fifth—Bunny was like the helpless fly in the web of the spider.

The lad was amenable to flattery. Pen did not despise him for it. He was hardly likely to be otherwise, considering what his upbringing must have been—the heir to a great title and a great fortune reared in the midst of dependents. The wonder

(Continued on the next page.)

ST. WODE'S.

(Continued.)

was that Bunny was as frank and kind and unassuming as he was. His faults were the faults of a kind and unsuspicious character.

The Blades were leading him into gambling. Bunny had plenty of money, and he threw himself into the amusement as he might have carelessly purchased a new bicycle that he did not need or a pony he would never ride. He was extravagant with money, and that was odd and disquieting to a lad who had always been careful of every sixpence—who had had, indeed, but too few sixpences to be careful with. Bunny had no idea that he was doing wrong in playing cards for money; indeed, why should he think about it when he saw fellows in the Fifth—fellows with influence in the school—doing so, and inviting him to follow their example?

Pen was feeling thoroughly miserable as he walked away from Crawcour's study.

He knew—he felt—how wrong it was—how utterly rotten it was! But he knew that some of the fellows at St. Wode's, if they knew of his scruples, would laugh at them as the queer ideas of a fellow who had been brought up at a Council school, and did not know the manners of his betters.

All the same, if Bunny were discovered in the pursuits into which his friends in the Fifth were initiating him, it was extremely probable that he would be expelled in disgrace from St. Wode's. The Blades might be able to shield themselves from punishment, but Bunny was just the kind of fellow upon whom blame might fall, just the fellow to suffer all that was to be suffered, while cunning rascals escaped.

Pen went up to No. 4 Study.

It was not a cheerful apartment. The furniture was not there yet, and the room was nearly empty, and there was no fire. The weather was very cold. Pen did not remain in the study. He descended to the junior common-room, unwilling as he was to face just then the gauntlet of all eyes in the Fourth.

Many of the fellows looked at him as he came in. Blagden, who was talking with Corton and Bamford, gave him a sneering grin.

"The Fifth had enough of you!" he asked.

Pen did not reply.

He was in no humour for another row with Blagden.

He crossed over to the fireplace, where Newcome was sitting by himself, wrestling with his Horace. Newcome looked up at Pen.

"I suppose you don't have much of a gripron this?" he said.

Pen looked at the book.

"I can construe it easily enough, if that is what you mean," he said.

"H'm! Of course, you've passed the scholarship exam. I believe it's a stiff one, too," said Newcome.

Pen nodded.

"It was stiff enough to me," he said.

"How the deuce did you learn enough to enter for it?" asked Newcome, curiously. "You didn't have Latin, for instance, at the Council school, did you?"

Pen laughed.

"No," he said. "I didn't. I attended the night school—evening classes, you know, and the curate of our village took pupils, and I was one of them. You can guess that his fees were small. It was chiefly hard work that was wanted—and I worked hard. Of course, it was a wonderful chance for me."

"I suppose it was," agreed Newcome. "Are you glad to be at St. Wode's?"

"Yes, in a way."

(Another grand instalment of this popular school story next week.)

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A Capital Complete Tale by Prosper Howard.

A GREAT FIGHT

Being the Adventures of **Gordon Gay & Co.**

CHHPTER I.

The Fourth-Form Bully.

"TAKE that, you young sweep!"

"Ow!"

"And that!"

"Oh-h!"

Carpenter, the worst bully in the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, brought his fist down with a thump on the trembling figure of the roughly-clad boy before him.

"You call these boots clean, do you?" cried Carpenter, after a moment's pause. "You call them clean, do you?"

"Yes, Master Carpenter," replied the bully's latest victim. "I know you complained about them the other day—and rightly, too, then—b-but I wasn't well then. I—I—I felt almost too ill to work, and I know your boots wasn't cleaned properly. I tried, I say—I—I——"

Thump!

Carpenter gave a snort of disgust as he interrupted the frightened school boot-boy with another blow.

"Tried!" he cried. "Tried to clean 'em! D'you hear that, Larking? Ha, ha, ha! Fancy that young rat saying he tried when he's paid for the job!"

Larking grinned at Carpenter.

"Yes, my hat!" he replied. "That is a bit thick, considering the bounder is paid for the job!"

"Thick!" growled Carpenter, gripping the unfortunate "boots" by the collar and shaking him. "I should think it is, and I'll make him pay for it now!"

"Oh-h!" groaned "Boots."

"Leggo, Master Carpenter! I——"

"Stop, you cad!"

A voice rang out sharp and clear, and so authoritative was the tone that Carpenter released his hold of the victim with alacrity.

"Gordon Gay!" he muttered.

The handsome, well-built leader of the Fourth Form had come upon the scene quite unexpectedly, and for a moment or two he watched the proceedings in amazement. His face was now crimson with indignation.

"You cad, Carpenter!" he said sternly. "This is the third time I have found you at your bullying tricks within three days."

The bully scowled.

"Bullying!" he growled. "What do you mean, Gay? It's like your beastly interference taking the part of a bounder of a boot-boy against a chap in your own Form! I can tell——"

"Oh, dry up, Carpenter!" interrupted Gordon Gay. "I told you yesterday that you had better stop your beastly bullying ways unless you are looking for trouble."

"You mind your own business," said Carpenter, turning away. "I was going to tell you that a good many chaps in the Fourth are getting fed up with your 'bossing' ways, and if they hear that you are taking the part of a beastly boot-boy against one of your own chaps you had better look out. Considering the loafer hardly brushed my boots even, and then lied to me that he had cleaned them, I've got a perfect right to give him a licking whether you——"

"But I did clean them, Master Gay!" interrupted the boot-boy. "I spent extra time on them, because Master Carpenter complained before. They were all covered with ink, and—and I felt queer——"

"That's all right, Jenkins!" said Gordon Gay kindly. "You go back to the shed, and I'll join you in a minute."

Jenkins, the white-faced "boots," turned without another word, and with a look of contempt on his face Gordon Gay followed. The next moment the door of the shed was shut with a bang in Carpenter's and Larking's scowling faces.

Once in the shed, Gordon Gay's stern look relaxed, and he looked sympathetically towards the white-faced boot-boy.

"Now, Jenkins," he said, in a kindly tone, "don't you trouble yourself about Master Carpenter. I heard what the row was about, and believe you did your best to clean his boots decently——"

"I did, sir—I did," interrupted Jenkins, "though Master Carpenter wouldn't believe me! They might have looked better, but—but——"

"Go on!" said Gordon Gay encouragingly.

Jenkins turned his head away from the Fourth-Form leader.

"I—I haven't been feeling well just lately," he faltered. "My mother has been ill, and—and I've had to sit up with her of a night——"

"And get here early in the morning, too, I know," said Gordon Gay. "That's jolly bad luck, Jenkins, but why didn't you tell Dr. Monk? The Head's a sport, you know, and he would have soon set the matter right."

"I know, Master Gay."

"Well, why didn't you tell him, you young chump!" said Gordon Gay.

Jenkins's white face flushed.

"I—I—that is, we want money at home," he said. "My wages, you know, Master Gay."

Gordon Gay frowned, and there was a long silence in the shed.

"You're as big as I am, Jenkins," said the Fourth-Form leader at last. "Why don't you hit a chap back when he bullies you? You look strong, although a dummy with half an eye could see you're ill now."

"I'm getting better, sir," replied Jenkins. "But I can't fight—I never could; and I should get sacked if I fought one of the young gentlemen. If I got knocked about my mother might notice it, and—and——"

"I understand," interrupted Gordon Gay. "And I think I can see how we can manage to stop Carpenter and his cronies from bullying you."

"You can do that, Master Gay!" cried Jenkins eagerly.

"Yes," he replied. "You just listen to me. It's a good wheeze, and if we can make Carpenter look an ass in front of the chaps it will be quite sufficient to stop his bullying."

And then he leader of Study No. 13 at Rylcombe Grammar School lowered his voice to a whisper. When he had finished the white, pinched face of the delicate boot-boy brightened up considerably, and his smile boded ill for Carpenter and his cronies.

CHAPTER II.

The Boot-boy's Challenge.

JACK and Harry Wootton and Horace Tadpole—Gordon Gay's study-mates—were seated round the study table entertaining their three rivals of the Fourth Form to tea. These were Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy, and although the two factions were deadly rivals where japes were concerned, they often buried the hatchet and partook of tea in one another's studies.

The only missing junior from the festive scene was the leader of Gordon Gay & Co. himself.

Gordon Gay had made some excuse to the juniors just before tea, and although his study chums had attempted to detain their leader until tea was over, they had not been successful, for Gordon Gay had slipped out of their clutches.

"I wonder," mused Frank Wootton, as tea was finished, "why the dummy cleared off? It's not like Gay to have tea out when we're entertaining chaps from——"

A kick at the panel of the door interrupted the Australian junior, and

Carpenter stepped back in true boxing fashion, and there was a yell from behind him. "Look out!" roared Murray major. "You've stepped on my toe!"

the next instant a youth dashed into the room.

"A fight, chaps!" he cried. "A fight in ten minutes behind the fives-court!"

The Grammarians jumped to their feet in surprise.

"What?" they cried.

"Yes," said Snipe, one of Carpenter's cronies. "That young cad Jenkins has had the cheek to send a challenge to Carpenter and Larky!"

"My hat!"

"He says that he's willing to take both on at once on condition that all three use gloves."

"My only fat aunt!"

"They're going to half kill the young bounder for his cheek," said Snipe, with a broad grin on his face. "And they'll be able to do it, too! Fancy Carpenter and Larking fighting Jenkins at the same time!"

"Why, that's not fair!" cried Horace Tadpole, blinking round at the juniors. "That's two to one."

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Monk. "We don't expect Carpenter to play the game, but that's a bit too thick, especially as Jenkins doesn't look as if he could knock a——"

"But Jenkins has written the challenge!" howled Snipe. "It's his look-out, ain't it?"

The chums did not answer, but as Snipe hurried away to spread the news they donned their caps and made their way to the spot where the fight was to take place.

Behind the fives-court they found a huge crowd of excited Grammarians. The whole thing was being treated as a joke, and many of the juniors were sparring in a comical manner.

"Two to one on Jenkins!" cried someone, and a huge roar of laughter greeted the bid.

"Only a Bootjack," laughed Murray major; "and How He Slays His Opponents.' Price one penny—price one penny! Come on, my lads! Read how the bootjack trains for his great fights! Price one penny!"

And once again the laugh was against Jenkins.

CHAPTER III.

The Great Fight.

THE excitement of the Grammarians was on the wane when fortunately Carpenter and Larking arrived on the scene, clad in running shorts and vests. They also had boxing-gloves tied to their fists, and they each gave a grin as a derisive cheer greeted them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Look at the two bantam light-weights!"

"Bandy light-weights!" corrected another humorist, and the sally was greeted with a roar of laughter. The next moment a shout was raised as Jenkins, the boot-boy, was seen coming towards the crowd with a pair of gloves tucked under his arms. Jenkins didn't look well, but he certainly did not look afraid.

"Why, the young fool hasn't even changed!" muttered Carpenter.

"N-no," replied Larking. "H-he hasn't even changed."

"My hat, we won't half give the bounder a jolly good licking!" cried Carpenter, making imaginary blows in the air. He stepped back in true boxing fashion, and there was a yell from behind.

"Look out!" roared Murray major. "What are you playing at?"

"Sorry!"

"But you stepped on my toe, you——"

A rush of juniors interrupted Murray, and in less than a minute a large ring had been formed.

"I'll ref.," cried Frank Monk. "Even if it is going to be two to one, I am going to see fair play."

"Of course we're going to fight fair," growled Carpenter. "It's just like you to think we shouldn't."

"Now, then, dry up!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "Wootton major, you'll second Jenkins, won't you?"

"Certainly!" Jack Wootton replied, stepping into the ring. "I should like to if Jenkins will let me."

The boot-boy came forward and slipped off his ragged coat.

"Thank you!" he said, holding out his gloves. "Will you please fix these on for me, Master Wootton?"

Frank Monk held his watch in his hand, and everything was ready for the fight to commence. Jenkins's face was white, but he looked by no means afraid. On the other hand, Carpenter and Larking did not look very pleased with themselves. They were beginning to feel the cold through inaction, and their convulsive shivering was at once put down to "funk" by the spectators.

Frank Monk held up his hand.

"Time!" he cried. And the next moment Carpenter and Larking made a rush at their opponent.

Jenkins dodged back, and concentrated his attention on Carpenter—the bigger of the two.

Bang!

"Oh-h!"

Carpenter's head went back with a jerk as Jenkins's left got past his guard, and as the boot-boy's blow went home there was a murmur of surprise from the spectators.

The Fourth-Form bully soon recovered, and he scowled round at Larking.

"Come on, you funk!" he gasped. "We'll soon finish—— Oh!"

Jenkins stepped in and rained a series of blows home, first on Carpenter and then on Larking.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the spectators. "Go on! Go on! Carpenter! Larking!"

Jenkins bit his lips in anger as he recognised that the crowd were cheering only for his opponents.

Not one voice had been raised on his account. He was unpopular, though the odds were against him.

"These chaps will have it, anyway!" he muttered, and the next instant he dashed into the fray with determination shown in every line of his face.

His blows were rammed home until Carpenter and Larking were in a state of collapse, and at last the two bullies flung off their gloves in surrender.

"My hat!" roared Murray, as Frank Monk announced the result in the formal fashion. "The bootjack's won, and good luck to him! It was two to one, and he's won! Let's shoulder him!"

"Rather!" roared the juniors, and a rush was made at the panting Jenkins.

"Let go, you chumps," he cried, as he was hoisted on to their shoulders—"let go! Wootton, you dummy, let go!"

The crowd started off, but Wootton, in his surprise, made a grab at the hero's head, and the next instant there was a yell of surprise.

"He's got a wig! It's not Jenkins!"

There was complete silence for a moment, and then a terrific roar went up.

"It's Gay!"

The shouldered junior rubbed his gloves over his face, and then looked down at the astonished juniors.

"It's me, chaps!" he cried. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I made up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay grinned through the smeared grease-paint which still remained on his face.

"Somebody had to stop those bounders from bullying," he said. "This is one up to Study No. 13."

"Rather!" roared the excited juniors. "Serves the bounders right!"

And then they carried the hero of the hour to the bootshed, where they found the unfortunate Jenkins happy but shivering in the scanty garments which Gordon Gay had left him until his return.

THE END.

(Another of these amusing school stories next Wednesday.)