

WALKING *the* PLANK!

By TOM BROWN



The New Zealand junior of Greyfriars chose an unfortunate moment to get his own back on the bully of the Remove.

WHEN I first came to Greyfriars, George Bulstrode was captain of the Remove. Harry Wharton had not then arrived at the school. As Bulstrode was a bit of a bully, he could make things warm for a new kid.

I was put into his study (where I still am). Bulstrode did not like this. He said the study was already full, without shoving a South Seas Island kid into it. I replied that I had no choice in the matter, since Mr. Quelch had told me to come to Study No. 2.

"Blow Quelch!" snorted Bulstrode. "We don't want you in here, new kid! So clear off!"

"I'm sorry, but I must do as I'm told," I answered.

That started the first fight. Bulstrode came at me like a lumbering elephant. I managed to get in two or three good punches, but I was nowhere near his weight in those days and he soon slung me into the passage on my neck and slammed the door. As it happened, Quelch came along a moment later and quickly took in the

situation. He stepped in to speak to Bulstrode, accompanied by a stout cane. I was sorry for that, because I knew I should catch it, and I did.

Bulstrode accused me bitterly of sneaking. He knew—he must have known—that I hadn't sneaked, but that made no difference. He declared war against me from that moment, and things rapidly grew very uncomfortable in Study No. 2. Besides actual kicks and punches—which I repaid as far as possible—he resorted to what I considered mean tricks. With his elbow he would accidentally knock the inkpot flying over my preparation. He would fling my books about and tie the sleeves of my jacket, and so on.

In the end I went to Quelch and asked him if I could change my study, as I did not agree very well with Bulstrode and Hazeldene in Study No. 2.

"No," replied Quelch at once. "I see no reason why you should change your study, Brown. Boys are expected to get over these trifles and make themselves as agreeable as they can. I recommend you to try again, my boy."

This was all right, but he took the opportunity of speaking severely to Bulstrode on the quiet, so my last state was worse than my first. Bulstrode certainly ignored me, more or

less, in the study, but he set himself to make things hard for me wherever he could. For instance, being captain of the Remove, he could leave me out of the cricket—and he did, until the rest of the Form demanded that I should be put in the eleven against Highcliffe.

Unfortunately, I had the ill luck to run Bulstrode out. It was his own fault, but he blamed me bitterly for it. When I came out, after scoring a dozen, he wanted to fight me, but the other fellows held him back. For days afterwards he taunted me about my running.

"You can't run!" he jeered. "Why didn't you bring your crutches? Why, I could run faster on my hands and knees."

"Prove it!" I retorted hotly. "I challenge you to a race. We'll start from the gates, go down Friardale Lane and Oak Lane to the towing-path, and back through the wood to the gates. That'll make it about a mile."

With all the Form clustered round, Bulstrode couldn't back down, so we fixed up the race for the next afternoon.

Now I had deliberately suggested the course of the race because I had thought out a plan to get my own back on the bully. In Friardale Wood there is a deep stream crossed by a plank. I meant to lodge this plank on the very edge of the stream and then let Bulstrode be in front as we reached the spot. He would go in, and serve him right.

Accordingly, just before the race, I dodged into the wood and fixed the plank. Then I came back and we both started together from the gates, to the cheers of the Remove.

Bulstrode was no runner, really. He was too big and heavy. I could have left him standing, but that wasn't my plan. I wanted to show him that I could beat him, so I forged ahead and was well in front as we raced along the towing-path towards the wood. Then, however, I had an "accident." I stumbled and twisted my ankle.

"Ricked my ankle!" I called out, concealing a grin, as Bulstrode lumbered up. "I'm out of it!"

I had never doubted for a moment that the bully would go on his way rejoicing. That was my mistake. Under his rough surface, Bulstrode's not a bad fellow. He stopped and hoisted me on his back.

"Can't walk back to school with a ricked ankle," he said gruffly. "Better let me carry you!"

"Oh, I—I—you needn't bother!" I gasped. "I'll manage all right."

"Rats! You'll make it worse if you try to walk on it. Hang on to my neck!" And he trudged away towards the plank, with me on his back.

It was an awful situation. I wasn't worrying about the fact that I should share Bulstrode's ducking—though that wasn't nice. It was the underhand trick I had played on a fellow who was decent enough to sink his spite when I was in trouble—that's what worried me. I couldn't go through with it. I jumped off his back as we reached the plank.

"Hold on!" I exclaimed. "I'm not injured at all!" And I told him the truth, and then—walked the plank!

Spla-a-ash!

I got my ducking, and from that awful moment good resulted, for he and I have been friends ever since.