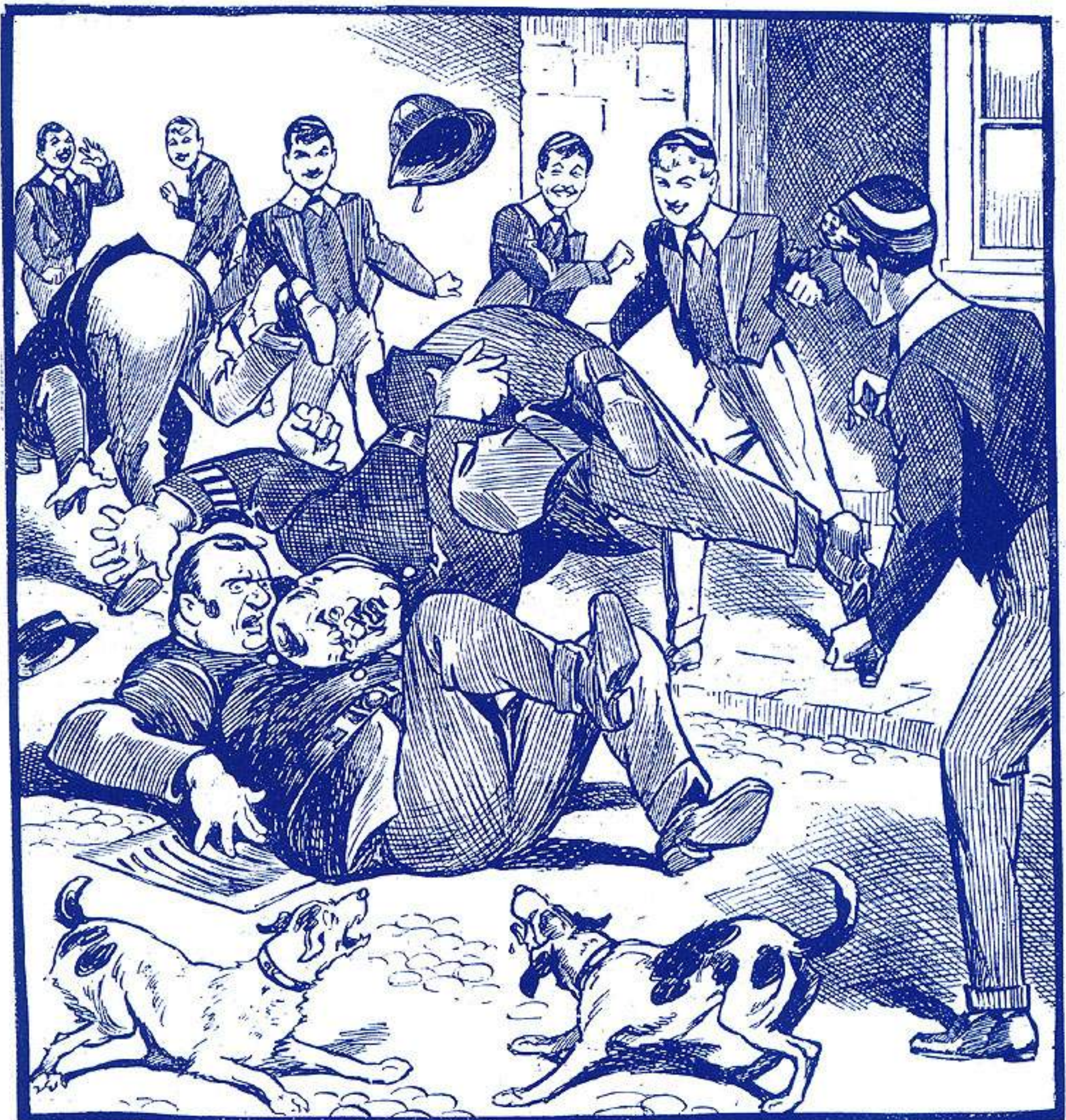


**RIVALS OF THE CHASE!**

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**RUSHING THE CONSTABLES!**

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A Magnificent New  
Long Complete Tale  
of  
Harry Wharton & Co.  
at  
Greyfriars School.

# RIVALS OF THE CHASE!

By  
Frank  
Richards.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### A Young Man in a Hurry!

"It is really a shame—a burning shame!" Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was very emphatic on that point.

He was standing at his study window, and in his hand was a letter from his nephew, Private Jack Archer, of the famous Loamshire Regiment.

The Form-master, although often the subject of ridicule among the Greyfriars fellows, had many good points, and one of them was an affectionate regard for his relatives. Some men there are who regard nephews in the light of an encumbrance; but Mr. Prout was not of their number.

"It's a shame!" he rapped out again. "Jack goes to France this afternoon, and he can't get leave to come and see me before he sails. He's probably at Southampton by now, so it is no use my going over to his billet at Courtfield. How very annoying!"

Mr. Prout was feeling decidedly aggressive towards the military authorities; indeed, his wrath at that moment was like a consuming fire. But he evidently overlooked two things—that Jack Archer might have already had some leave; and that he might have preferred to spend it in the society of his parents, or his sweetheart, or with some regimental pals. The average Tommy, with a week-end at his disposal, usually gives uncles the go-by. There are far more exciting things doing.

The bitterness of war had never been brought home to Mr. Prout so forcibly as now. He glanced down into the Close, where Harry Wharton & Co. were engaged in punting a footer about, and secretly wished that Jack Archer were a few years younger. For Mr. Prout's nephew was a fellow whom the country could ill afford to lose. He was an inventive genius, and some of his handiwork had already proved extremely useful, in a small way.

Supposing he lost an arm? Supposing he received some injury the nature of which prevented him from continuing the work that lay so near his heart?

Mr. Prout brooded over these possibilities—rather selfishly, perhaps—for Jack Archer was not the only young man of his time who had thrown ambition, ease, and comfort into the melting-pot of war. But he was one of the very best, so there was some excuse for Mr. Prout's indignation.

"He may come yet," muttered the Form-master. "It is not too late. Drafts get delayed sometimes, and he may not sail until to-morrow, or perhaps the next day. Jack, my boy," he added, looking out across the Close, "I would give a great deal to see you again!"

And at that precise moment Mr. Prout had his heart's desire.

Climbing over the school wall with the agility of a monkey came a dusty, dishevelled figure in khaki. His tunic-

collar was undone, and his puttees looked as if they had been in a mix-up with some barbed-wire entanglements.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, pausing in the act of taking a dropping shot. "What's the merry game?"

"It's Prout's nephew!" said Harry Wharton.

"My hat!"

The juniors suspended their game, and looked on at the scene in wonder.

A couple of sturdy soldiers, with red bands round their hats, came leaping over after Archer.

"Looks like a game of hide-and-seek," said Peter Todd.

"Or hare-and-hounds," said Vernon-Smith, "with precious little hope for the hare!"

He was right.

Jack Archer streaked frantically across the Close, tripped over one of his puttees, which hung loose, and pitched on all-fours on the flagstones, with the two red-caps sprawling on top of him.

"Got you, my beauty!" panted one of the military policemen. "You led us a rare dance, but I don't think you'll break away again in a hurry!"

"No fear!" chuckled his companion.

Jack Archer struggled to his feet, with clenched fists and blazing eyes. It looked at first as if he were going to make a fight for it; but prudence prevailed. Private soldiers who mistake military police for punching-balls are likely to find themselves up against it.

Mr. Prout, who had witnessed the scene with startled eyes, had hurried down from his study; and quite a crowd had collected in the Close by this time.

The master of the Fifth strode up to Jack Archer's captors.

"How dare you!" he stormed. "You have no right to molest my nephew in this way!"

"That's your mistake!" answered the senior man. "There's such a thing as a war on!"

"My nephew is perfectly justified in paying me a visit before proceeding to France!" snapped Mr. Prout. "Unhand him at once!"

The military policeman smiled grimly.

"Best not to interfere with us in the execution of our duty!" he said. "And as for your nephew being perfectly justified in takin' French leave, that's all my eye! Have you ever served in any sort of Army? No, I s'pose not. They'd never take you, except for a blessed box of tin soldiers. If you know anything at all about this game you'd understand that there's such a thing as military discipline."

"He's quite right, uncle confound him!" exclaimed Jack Archer. "Better not make a scene!"

"But, my dear lad—"

"Cut it short! There's no time for sympathy. These merchants will only give me a few minutes, and I've got something frightfully important to get off my chest!"

Mr. Prout nodded.

"It concerns an invention of mine,"

Jack Archer went on. "I've been working on it for dog's ages, and the plans are now complete. They're lying in the safe in my old billet at Courtfield. I'll hand you the key of that safe now. This morning I had a letter from the Inventions Committee, asking to see the plans. I put in for leave like a shot, so that I could get them and take them up to town; but the Colonel thinks it's a cock-and-bull story. That's the worst of being an inventor! People never think you're serious!"

"That is true, Jack. But how can I help you?"

"You must get somebody—somebody reliable—to search for dear life into Courtfield, recover the plans, and bring 'em here. Then you yourself can take 'em to London, and hand 'em in to the proper quarter. Got me?"

"Yes, my boy. I think it is quite clear."

"Don't forget that it's fearfully important, uncle!" said Jack. "I have reason to know that others are at work on an invention of the same kind, and it will be a case of first come first served. There will be a small fortune in it if it comes off; but it isn't that that I'm in such a desperate tear about. It's more with the idea of getting on with the war than anything else. The plans are of a new telescopic sight for an aeroplane, and it ought to be of jolly great value, though I say it. In a few months' time—"

"Look here," broke in one of the military policemen brusquely, "we refuse to stop here and listen to this twaddle any longer. Come on!"

And they jerked their captive away, and marched him down to the school gates, leaving considerable excitement behind them.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### A Chance for Coker!

"WELL, if that doesn't fairly beat the band!" gasped Bob Cherry, as he watched the retreating figures of captors and captive.

"We're in for some movement, if you ask me," said Harry Wharton. "The question is—whom will Prout send to Courtfield?"

"He'll send us—if he's got a grain of gumption!" said Frank Nugent.

"Hope so," remarked Johnny Bull. "Archer's a good sort. He's no end keen on winning the war, too, and that's the sort of fellow I like. Some people seem to have got it into their heads that war's a natural state, and they won't buck up and try and make bad better. But Jack Archer's different. He's all out for licking the Hun."

"Prout's nosing round in search of somebody," said Bob Cherry suddenly. "Shall we offer our services?"

Before the juniors had a chance to do this, however, Mr. Prout was already shouting:



"Coker! Does anyone know where Coker is?"

Potter and Greene, who heard the shout, raced off into the building.

"We'll rout him out, sir!" called Potter, over his shoulder.

"That's done it!" groaned Nugent. "He's sending that prize idiot Coker, who's bound to make a mess of the job."

When Coker arrived on the scene he was fairly bursting with importance. Coker considered that there was only one fellow in all Greyfriars who combined the brains of a Balliol scholar with the smartness of a sleuth-hound, and that his name was Horace Coker.

"You want me, sir?" he said politely. "Yes, yes!" said Mr. Prout. "Were you here just now, when my nephew spoke of his invention?"

"Yes, sir."  
"Then you will know exactly what to do. The address is No. 7, West Street, Courtfield, and the plans will be in the safe in my nephew's private room. He has handed me the key, which you must guard with jealous care. For all I know, there may be some scoundrels about who would not scruple to take advantage of you, and rob you of the key, in order to secure the plans for their own shady ends. That is why I have selected you—on account of your size and weight."

Coker beamed. "Rely on me, sir!" he said. "I'll see that you get the plans safe and sound."

"Very well, Coker. You will bring them at once to me in my study."

And Mr. Prout rustled away into the building, feeling that he had chosen the right man for the job.

"Coker, you lucky bounder," said Peter Todd enviously, "I bet you make a hash of it!"

"Rats!"  
"Prout showed shocking judgment," said Harry Wharton.

"Eh? What's that? D'you think he'd send a cheeky young cub like you? If he did, those plans would be public property by to-morrow."

"They'll be public property by to-night if you get hold of them!" said Harry. "How do you intend to go?"

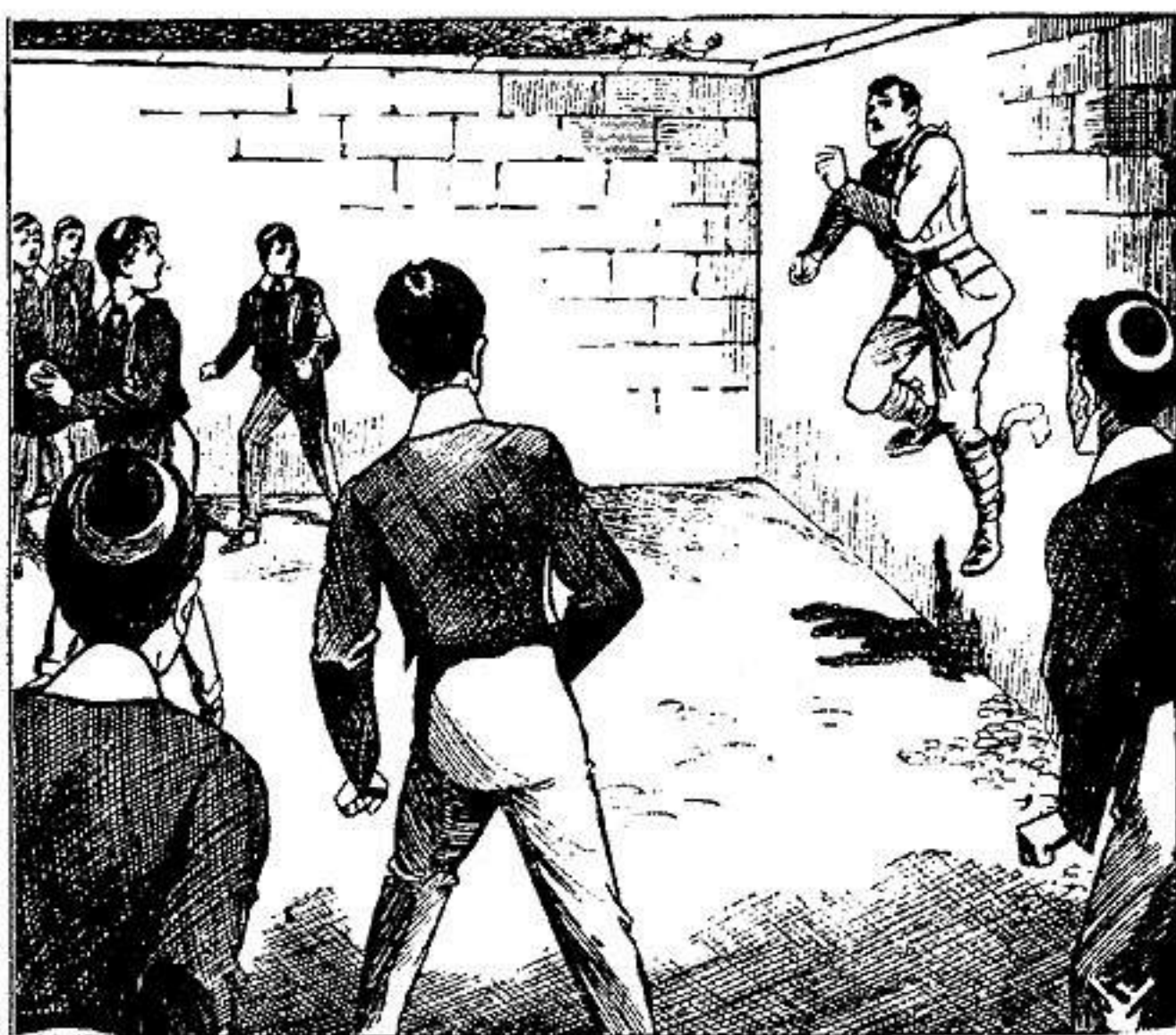
"By motor-bike, of course."  
The juniors stared. They had forgotten for the moment that the mighty Horace was the proud possessor of a motor-bike.

Many misadventures had occurred, both to the machine and to its owner, and more than once the authorities had come down heavily on Coker. Since Wibley's flight on it during the summer term, the motor-cycle had remained rusting in the shed, and when Coker dragged it forth into the light of day it looked scarcely strong enough to support itself. There were a number of spare parts missing, too; but Coker wasn't interested in spare parts. He forgot that the absence of a few of them would probably cause the complete collapse of the whole.

"Mind your eye, Coker darlint!" sang out Micky Desmond. "Sure, an' the old 'bus looks as if it had come off a dust-heap, entirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Oblivious to the chaff slung at him, Coker set the machine in motion. It stolidly refused to budge at first, but eventually, in a sudden fit of frenzy, it bucked and reared, leapt forward like a thing possessed, and snorted its way down to the school gates.

Fortunately for Coker, the gates were open, for he had little control over his errant machine. Instead of turning when he got into the roadway, he shot straight across the road, bounced over a ditch, and climbed a bank, and finally alighted wrong end up in a prickly bush of briar. "Yow-ow-ow!" he groaned.



The fugitive! (See Chapter 1.)

The crowd, which had witnessed the frantic flight from the Close, roared with laughter, and Skinner and Bolsover, who had been standing close to the school gates, promptly rushed over the road to Coker's aid.

"Hurt, old man?" inquired Skinner. "Ow! I'm punctured all over!" muttered the hapless Horace. "The beastly bike's done in, too. It's a total wreck!"

"So it was when you started," said Bolsover, "so that's no odds."

Skinner assisted the victim of the calamity to his feet, and as he did so he deftly slipped his hand into Coker's pocket. Bolsover noticed the action, but Coker himself was quite unconscious of the stealthy action of the cad of the Remove.

"Shall you try and patch your old 'bus up?" asked Bolsover.

"Nummo! I've had enough!" gasped Coker. "Old Prout can get somebody else to fetch his beastly plans!"

"Indeed! Very well, Coker. 'Old Prout' will follow out your excellent advice!"

Coker nearly fell down. For the speaker was Mr. Prout himself!

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated the Fifth-Former. "I didn't know! I didn't think—"

"You never do!" said Mr. Prout drily. "Kindly remove that—that vehicular obstruction to a place where it will not be a menace to the public, and take a hundred lines for having referred to your Form-master with such gross disrespect!"

And Coker, fairly and squarely squashed, slunk away.

"Shall I take on the job, sir?" asked Skinner.

"No, you will not!" snapped Mr. Prout. "You would probably bungle things to a greater extent than Coker, if that were possible. I shall have to make a further selection in due course."

"And meanwhile the war will have to stand still for want of this new invention!" muttered Bolsover, as Mr. Prout departed.

"There's just one point that Prout has overlooked," said Skinner, gripping his companion's arm tightly.

"And that is?"

"I've got the key of the safe! Bolsover, old man, I believe there's going to be something in the nature of a competition to get those plans, and if that's the case, you and I, with the key in our possession, win hands down! 'Twig?'"

Bolsover chuckled.

"That's ripping!" he said.

"Look here," went on Skinner. "We might find those plans of some use. There's money to be made in connection with inventions, you know. Perhaps we could sell 'em to somebody—what?"

That was just the sort of unscrupulous suggestion which might have been expected to come from Skinner. Neither he nor Bolsover thought much of Private Jack Archer in the matter. The young inventor was going out to risk life and limb in the trenches, and to take advantage of his absence to sell the plans of his invention to a rival was a shameful notion.

"Shall we make tracks for Courtfield now?" asked Bolsover.

"Rather!" replied Skinner. "Let's get off the mark at once. It's true we hold the trump card, but some of these fellows are as deep as they make 'em, and they may smell a rat if we hang about."

And the two young rascals started off forthwith on their nefarious mission.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Neutrals Come In!

"WHARTON! What are you doing here?"

Mr. Prout's voice resembled the barking of a dog. Recent events had subjected his nervous system to a good deal of wear and tear; and the sight of the captain of the Remove, standing meekly before the grate in the Form-master's study, seemed to goad Mr. Prout to anger.

"I came," said Harry, "to see if I could be of any use to you, sir."

"Then you may go away again! Your services are not required!"

But Harry Wharton stood his ground. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 506.



"Just say the word, sir, and I'll have these plans in this study within an hour!" he said.

Mr. Prout wavered. Delay, he knew, was dangerous.

"You see, sir," said Wharton, driving home his opportunity, "if you refuse the assistance of everyone who offers, you'll get no forrader. The plans will stay where they are, and the details of your nephew's invention might reach London too late."

"You are quite right, Wharton," said Mr. Prout. "Twenty precious minutes have already been wasted, thanks to Coker. I rely upon you to see the thing through."

Harry Wharton nodded, and strode out of the study.

A clamorous crowd of Removites stood waiting for him in the passage.

"What's the little game?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Wharton grinned, without replying.

"I believe you've stolen a march on us," said Nugent. "You've persuaded Prout to let you get the plans."

"Right on the wicket!" said Harry.

A chorus of exclamations arose. They were not of a hostile nature: at the same time, the other fellows didn't see why Wharton should be given a clear field. They were every bit as interested in Jack Archer's invention as he was, and they were inclined to regard him as having butted in.

"I'm on in this act!" said Peter Todd. "We're not going to let you bestride the narrow world, like a Colossus, as old Shakespeare says."

"Rather not!" said Vernon-Smith. "I think I'll take a hand in the bizney, too."

"Same here!" echoed at least half a dozen voices.

Harry Wharton laughed, good-humouredly.

"All serene!" he said. "I seem to have a good many rivals in the field, but I think I can hold my own. I'll have a jolly good shot, anyway!"

The quick-witted Removites were already making swift calculations as to the best means of getting to Courtfield. Some had bikes; some hadn't. Some thought of boarding the local train at Friardale; others wondered how many minutes it took to sprint across the fields.

And then, just as they were about to disperse, Bob Cherry exploded a bombshell.

"We haven't the key," he said.

"What?"

"No use trying to bust the safe open with our fists," said Bob. "Mine ain't exactly fragile, but they ain't up to anything like that."

There was a moment's pause: then, with a cry of "Coker!" Peter Todd raced off in search of that celebrity.

The others, remembering that Mr. Prout had handed Coker the key, were swift to follow.

Horace Coker was sprawling in the armchair in his study, eloquent on the subjects of Form-masters, interfering fools of inventors, and motor-cycles. A fourth grievance was shortly added to the list, in the shape of the invading party of Removites.

In their eager haste to secure the key of the safe, the enthusiastic juniors swarmed upon Coker from all sides, and he stood a very good chance of being torn limb from limb.

Many hands were plunged into the Fifth-Former's pockets; but, although they did not come empty away, there was no trace of the key.

"Let up!" panted Coker, struggling in vain to free himself. "Have you all gone potty?"

"The key!" roared Peter Todd.

"Where is it?"

"Trot it out, you prize maniac!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Gimme a chance, you cheeky fags," gasped Coker, "and I will!"

His assailants drew back, and Coker went slowly and methodically through his pockets.

When he had finished his face was a study. For the key was not there!

"I—I—it's gone!" he stuttered. "I can't make out what's become of the blessed thing!"

"Well, if that ain't the absolute giddy limit!" ejaculated Nugent. "Prout trusts you with a job like this, and you start your innings by losing the key! I don't know whether we ought to shove you in boiling tar or bash your brains out with the poker!"

"That would be quite impossible," said Bob Cherry. "Firstly, because we don't want to damage the poker; and, secondly, because we can't bash out what Coker doesn't possess!"

"We can bump him, anyway!" said Harry Wharton. "The unspeakable ass! Those plans will have to stay rotting in the safe, and Archer will be forestalled by somebody else. It fairly makes a chap sick!"

Coker had a warm time of it during the next few minutes. The juniors fell upon him with one accord, and bumped him till he hadn't a breath in his body.

But there was one fellow who didn't join in the general onslaught. He strolled out of the study with a peculiar smile playing about his lips.

It was Vernon-Smith. He had put two and two together. He recalled the motorcycle incident, and remembered that he had seen Skinner and Bolsover assisting Coker to his feet.

While doing that, the Bounder guessed, they must have relieved Coker of the key. And, of course, they would at once make tracks to Courtfield to get the plans. The Bounder realised that, if he went the right way to work, there was still time to nip their plot in the bud.

He made his way to Mr. Quelch's study, which was happily deserted, and, locking the door on the inside, crossed over to the telephone.

He gave the number of Highcliffe School, and the sour voice of Mr. Mobbs greeted him at the other end.

"Hallo! Who's that?"

"Vernon-Smith, sir, of Greyfriars. I wonder if you would be kind enough to do me a favour? I want to speak to Courtenay over the 'phone on a most important matter."

"Courtenay is on the football-ground, I believe."

"Then would you mind sending for him, sir?"

"Very well," said Mr. Mobbs.

Had the request been made by anyone else at Greyfriars but the Bounder, he would probably have banged down the receiver without more ado.

Vernon-Smith held on at his end, while Mr. Mobbs shuffled out of the study. The Highcliffe master was feeling very sleepy, and it was with great relief that he sighted Ponsonby in the passage.

"Ah, Ponsonby! Would you mind telling Courtenay that Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars is waiting to speak to him on the telephone?"

Ponsonby nodded. He watched Mr. Mobbs depart down the passage and disappear into the library; and then, quick as thought, he darted into the master's study, and seated himself at the telephone.

"That you, Smithy?" he said.

"Yes," came the Bounder's voice at the other end. "Am I speaking to Courtenay?"

"You are!"

"Well, look here, Courtenay. I want you to do me a favour. I can trust you. I couldn't say as much for some of your chaps. There's no time to lose. This is the whole thing in a nutshell. The plans of a very important invention are lying in a safe at Courtfield—at No. 7, West Street—and Skinner has stolen the key, and is well on the way over there—with Bolsover. I want you to stop 'em."

Ponsonby was amazed, as well he might be, but he did not give the game away.

"All serene, Smithy!" he said. "I'll lie in wait for 'em on the road, and tackle 'em. D'you want me to hand the key over to you?"

"Yes, rather! Take the best sort of care of it till I come. I'll meet you at the gates of Highcliffe at five o'clock."

"Right!" said Ponsonby, an evil grin on his face as he bent over the telephone. And he rang off.

Meanwhile, Frank Courtenay, blissfully unconscious of the little drama which had just been enacted, still urged the bouncing ball on the playing-fields.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Rogues of the Road!

"GOT the key safe?" asked Bolsover.

"Safe as houses," said Skinner. "I was half expecting that somebody would be on our track by now, but we seem to be unsuspected. Between you and me, Bolsover, this is going to be a good thing for us. We ought to make fifty, or p'r'aps a hundred quid, by selling the plans of that invention!"

"There's just one drawback," said Bolsover. "I don't want to raise obstacles, but p'r'aps it hasn't occurred to you that the people who live at Archer's old billet will see us come for the plans, and be able to identify us again, if necessary. That won't do."

Skinner whistled.

"You're right," he said. "I hadn't thought of that. Still, we must try and sneak into the house without attracting anybody's attention."

They had crossed the fields, and were coming out into the road, when suddenly four figures sprang out from nowhere, and rushed to the attack.

"Highcliffe cads!" muttered Skinner.

"Buck up!" exclaimed Bolsover, clenching his big fists. "We've got to keep 'em at bay somehow!"

Skinner was staggered. He was not at feud with the Highcliffe nuts, and a fistic encounter with them had not entered into his calculations.

But Ponsonby seemed out for scalps, and Gadsby, Vavasour, and Monson, who were backing him up, also looked very business-like.

"This is a trap!" hissed Skinner, to his companion. "Don't you see? Somebody's put 'em up to waylay us, and get the key!"

"They'll have all their work cut out!" said Bolsover grimly. "Don't give in, whatever you do! Hold on and hold out, and—"

Bolsover's sentence trailed off abruptly as Ponsonby's knuckles came crashing into his face.

Biff! Thump! Biff! Thump!

The struggle that ensued was a very bitter one. Bolsover was enraged by that blow in the face, and he went for reprisals. He pounded away at Ponsonby as if his one desire was to exterminate that youth from the face of the earth.

Gadsby and Monson, and even the oily Vavasour, fought doggedly. The odds were two to one, and this strengthened their courage. Besides, Ponsonby had



let them into the secret of the plans, and they saw a chance of big plunder.

Bolsover sent Ponsonby sprawling into the ditch, and Monson was overweighted.

On the other hand, Gadsby and Vavasour were fast overpowering Skinner, who, however, continued to fight desperately, realising how great would be his loss if his opponents succeeded in getting hold of the key.

"If you like to call it pax, and hand over the key of that safe, Skinny," said Gadsby, "we'll let you down lightly. If not, you'll go through the mill!"

"Absolutely!" panted Vavasour.

Skinner looked round wildly for a way out. His heart gave a jump as he caught sight of a Greyfriars cap approaching.

But when he saw that the cap belonged to Billy Bunter of the Remove his spirits sank. Bunter was anything but a fighting-man.

"I—I say, you fellows!" exclaimed the Owl of the Remove. "What are you scrapping about?"

"Lend a hand, you barrel of lard!" growled Bolsover. "Go and help Skinny!"

And Bunter went—not to help Skinner, but to take a seat on the grass at the side of the road. The scrap was getting decidedly interesting, and the fat junior's curiosity as to what had caused the trouble was great.

No sooner had Bunter seated himself than Gadsby, letting drive desperately with his left, sent Skinner sprawling.

At the same instant something fell with a clink at Bunter's feet, and he fastened on to it with a muttered exclamation of triumph.

No one saw it as it glittered in the sunlight, save Bunter. It was the key to the safe!

Leaving the fighters to sort themselves out as best they could, Billy Bunter slipped the treasure into his pocket, and waddled away as fast as his fat legs would take him.

"What ripping luck!" he chuckled to himself. "I know now why those bounders are scrapping. It's all on account of this key. It must have fallen out of Skinner's pocket when Gadsby bowled him over. My hat! This is where I come in!"

And Billy Bunter quickened his speed, and trotted on towards his goal, congratulating himself that, although quite a large number of fellows were already travelling by divers routes towards Courtfield, he had the pull over them all.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Bad Luck for Bunter!

"HANG him!"

Vernon-Smith kicked his heels impatiently at the gates of Highcliffe.

Frank Courtenay had promised—so the Bounder believed to meet him there at five, to hand him the key. And the hour had chimed some minutes ago, but there was no sign of Courtenay.

The Bounder was not only annoyed, but surprised. It was not like Frank Courtenay to break his word and let another fellow down.

"If he doesn't turn up soon," muttered the Bounder, "I shall have to go inside and rout him out, that's all. There's been a good deal of delay about this business as it is, and if somebody else gets there first, and manages to break open the safe somehow, all my efforts will be in vain."

The thought was not a pleasant one. Vernon-Smith was one of those fellows who, once having taken a job in hand, spared no pains to put it through. He knew that Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Peter Todd, to say nothing of other

enterprising juniors, would not be put off their stroke because the key was missing. If they couldn't get at the plans with a key, they would do their best to get at them by some other means. There were more ways than one of killing a cat.

The Bounder waited till twenty-past five; then, his patience exhausted, he brushed past the sleepy gate-porter, and went straight to Frank Courtenay's study.

Courtenay and the Caterpillar, ruddy from their exertions on the football-field, were seated at tea—a homely meal, and one which bore considerable traces of war economy. There was no jam, for one thing; neither was there a sign of sugar.

"Come right in, Smithy!" said Frank Courtenay amiably. "Is there any more hot water, Caterpillar?"

"There's some more tea."

"Well, it's the same thing. Sit down, Smithy, and tell us why we are honoured with this visit."

The Bounder didn't sit down. He didn't smile at Courtenay's pleasantry, either.

"Promises seem to be like pie-crusts, so far as you're concerned," he said. "I was counting on you. I didn't think you'd let me down!"

Vernon-Smith's tone carried with it such a sting of reproach that Frank Courtenay jumped to his feet.

"Let you down?" he exclaimed. "My dear fellow, what are you driving at? How have I let you down, and when?"

"Don't look so thundering innocent! It's not like you to play a spoof game!"

"Smithy," said the Caterpillar solemnly, "this is not Bedlam, or a Home for Tame Lunatics. It's Highcliffe. Are you merely rottin', or have you been out in the sun?"

The Bounder ignored the remark, and turned impatiently to Frank Courtenay.

"It may stir your memory a bit," he said, "when I tell you that we had a telephone conversation less than an hour ago."

"Rats!" said Courtenay, with emphasis. "I was playing footer then."

"And Mr. Mobbs sent for you to come and answer the 'phone?"

"Excuse me! Mobby did nothing of the sort!"

There was certainty in Frank Courtenay's tone. The Bounder knew that Courtenay would not lie. Yet he was puzzled.

"If you didn't speak," he said, "somebody else did in your name. I distinctly remember him saying he was Courtenay."

"It's the old, old game of leg pullin'," said the Caterpillar. "Somebody possibly our dear friend Pon—was tryin' to be funny."

Vernon-Smith clicked his teeth savagely together.

It was only too plain what had happened. One of the cads of Highcliffe had tricked him into giving away information concerning the invention, and by this time somebody had probably secured the key of the safe from Skinner!

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned the Bounder. "This is a smack in the eye for me, and no mistake! I made sure it was you on the 'phone, Courtenay!"

"I'm sorry if it's landed you in an awkward posish," said Courtenay.

"Can't we help you at all?"

"I—I don't think so."

"Say but the word," said the Caterpillar dramatically, "and we'll beard the tyrant—there's bound to be a tyrant on the scene—to his face!"

"Thanks!" said the Bounder. "But I believe it's too late now for either of you to be of any use. So-long!"

And he walked out of the study, leaving Courtenay and the Caterpillar staring at each other in astonishment.

Vernon-Smith was too stunned by the blow he had received to think, at first, about continuing his quest. Gradually, however, he pulled himself together, and resolved to hurry round to No. 7, West Street. After all, it was possible that the present possessor of the key would meet with some misadventure which would prevent him from carrying out his object.

The Bounder swung out of the gates of Highcliffe suddenly so suddenly that he cannoned heavily into a fat junior who was hurrying along in the direction of Courtfield.

"Oh, really, Smithy?" gasped Billy Bunter. "You might look where you're going, you know! I consider—"

Clink!

The Bounder heard that clink, and the next instant he stooped, with a cry of exultation.

"The key!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Bunter, old man, you're better than a giddy Santa Claus!"

"Here, I say! Hold on! That's my property!" yelled Bunter.

But his protest was wasted on the desert air. It was not likely that the Bounder would let him have his own way, and return from Courtfield with the honours of war. In a case of this kind, the weakest went to the wall.

Billy Bunter sped after the Bounder at a really surprising pace. He didn't relish the loss of that key at all.

"Come back!" he howled. "Come back, I say! Yah! Stop, thief!"

But the alleged breaker of the Eighth Commandment went on his way with a radiant smile, totally deaf to the voice of the charmer.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Ponsonby's Plot!

FIGHTING against odds is all very well so long as those odds are not unduly heavy. But two fellows, unless they are extremely useful with their fists, can seldom hope to overcome four.

After Bunter's departure Skinner was fairly floored; and Bolsover, although he put up a dogged fight, was slowly but surely conquered. Gadsby attacked him face to face; and Vavasour darted in from time to time and jabbed home some vicious blows. Ponsonby, too, crawled out of the ditch and joined in the fray once more, with disastrous results to the burly Removeite, who, getting in the way of a fierce upper-cut from Gadsby, joined Skinner in the roadway.

"Now," said Ponsonby, with malicious satisfaction, "sit on 'em, you fellows, while I run through their pockets! One of 'em's sure to have the key."

"You cads!" hissed Skinner. "You'll hear more of this!"

"Bow-wow!"

Skinner writhed with fury as Ponsonby went carefully through his pockets, turning them inside-out; but his chagrin gave way to surprise when no key came to light.

Bolsover was subjected to the same process, and once again the nuts of Highcliffe drew blank. There was no sign of a key; and Skinner and Bolsover were just as nonplussed at its absence as their opponents.

"We've been hoaxed!" said Ponsonby savagely. "Vernon-Smith must have been pulling my leg on the 'phone when he said these rotters would have the key of the safe. I thought we were on to a good thing at first; but we've sort of missed it. But there's a



vice green slimy pond over in that meadow, and it'll ease our feelings a bit if we give these beauties a duckin'!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't you dare——" began Bolsover. But the Highcliffians dared.

They heaved the two Removites over into the meadow, and, despite their fierce and frantic struggles, Skinner and Bolsover were despoised in the odorous water. Struggling to their feet, they were up to their knees in slush, and even their tormentors, bitterly disappointed though they were at not having secured the key of the safe, had to laugh at the spectacle before them.

"If ever I get a fair chance, you cads," spluttered Bolsover, gouging mud out of his eyes and hair, "I—I'll pulverise you!"

"I don't mind that," grinned Pon, "as long as you wash your hands first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Highcliffians strolled away, chuckling. They were as far from getting hold of the plans as ever; but they had certainly scored a crushing victory, and this took the edge off their disappointment.

"What's the next move, Pon?" asked Gadsby. "You're not goin' to chuck the idea of gettin' those plans—what?"

Ponsonby shook his head.

"There might still be time for us to be in at the death," he said. "The key may have got into the hands of somebody who doesn't know what it's good for, an' in that case our chances are as good as anybody else's."

"True, O King!" said Monson. "But supposin' we get at the safe all serene, how are we goin' to open it?"

"We might not be able to open it ourselves," said Pon, "but there's one thing we can do—we can keep everybody else from openin' it!"

Vavasour's face suddenly glowed as a brilliant idea came to him.

"Tell you what, Pon," he said. "Let's try an' square the people who are livin' in the house, an' get them to clear out of it for a bit; then we'll take possession as if we owned the show. Everybody who comes round posin' about for plans will get it in the neck!"

Ponsonby embraced Vavasour as if he were a long-lost brother.

"My dear chap," he chuckled, "you've hit it! It's a great stunt, and it'll work like a charm, provided we get to the house before anyone else does. Hallo! What in thunder——"

He broke off abruptly.

A long stream of Greyfriars fellows was going along the road in the direction of Courtfield. Some were on bikes, some were running. Evidently the Greyfriars juniors had made up their minds that, key or no key, they would risk it. To get to the safe first would be an achievement, even if the door of that safe refused to budge.

Whatever his faults were—and he had many—Ponsonby was not slow. He realised that he must act, and act swiftly, if he did not want the ground cut from under his feet.

Accordingly, he drew a box of tacks from his pocket, and scattered a handful of the biggest and sharpest in the roadway.

"I think that'll jigger up most of the tyres," he remarked, with satisfaction. They'll come to grief at the first hurdle, so to speak. Now, then, you fellows, there's some hot work ahead! Follow me—an' run like fury!"

The Highcliffians dashed off pell-mell towards Courtfield. A series of dismayed exclamations and sounds of bursting tyres behind told them that the tacks had done their deadly work.

Glancing back, they could see that

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Peter Todd, and two or three more cyclists had come to grief.

Those of the fellows who were on foot held on; but the Highcliffians were at least two hundred yards to the good, and they were certain to reach Courtfield first.

And so it proved. The margin between the two parties was slightly lessened; but Ponsonby & Co. had achieved their object.

Ponsonby rushed straight into the little police-station, where an inspector and a couple of sturdy constables were dozing by the fire.

"Quick!" he rapped out. "There are about a dozen Greyfriars fellows tearin' along the road. They're runnin' away from school, an' must be stopped! You must on no account let 'em come into the town!"

"But—but——" stammered the amazed inspector.

"Don't sit 'buttin' there!" snapped Ponsonby. "Get a move on you! It'll be a good thing for you if you succeed in stoppin' 'em. The Head of Greyfriars will be awfully bucked, an' it may mean promotion for some of you!"

Ponsonby could have chosen no term which acted as such a spur as the word "promotion." The sleepy constables responded to it as if by magic; the inspector, who had not yet reached the summit of his ambition, sprinted out into the street, and the oracle had been worked!

"Just in time!" panted Pon, as he and his chums emerged from the police-station. "The outsiders would have been through in another minute. As it is, they're fairly trapped!"

And trapped they were!

It was useless for Harry Wharton and the rest to deny the absurd charge laid against them. Their very haste belied the assertion that they were not running away. And the inspector and two constables, armed with truncheons, barred the entrance into the main street of the little country town.

"So far so good," said Gadsby. "I doubt if they'll hold 'em at bay longer than half an hour, though. We must nip round to No. 7, West Street, an' square the owner of the house right away."

No. 7, West Street, in spite of all the hubbub and sensation which centred around it, stood quiet and still. The blinds were drawn in the upper windows, and the hearts of the Highcliffians leapt with joy. It looked very much as if the place was unoccupied.

But Monson spotted through a window a fire burning in the basement, and drew the attention of the others to it.

"Somebody there!" said Pon. "Never mind. We must take the bull by the horns."

He rapped at the street-door bell, and from the depths of the basement came a deep growl.

"Who's there?"

"We're Highcliff fellows," shouted Ponsonby. "Let us in, there's a good chap. It's frightfully important!"

The growl was repeated; but a moment later the shuffling of slippered feet could be heard. Someone was evidently coming up to open the door.

He proved to be a burly fellow, with a fierce moustache, and a complexion which clearly proved that he was either in the throes of indigestion, or that it was a little habit of his to look upon the wine when it was red.

"Are you the owner of this noble pile?" asked Pon, indicating the house with a sweep of his hand.

"No; I'm the caretaker."

"Good! What's happened to the people who usually hang out here?"

"They've cleared off to the seaside for a month, for the benefit of their 'ealth."

"And you're the man in charge? Right-ho! Nothin' could suit us better. Do you happen to have heard of a fellow called Archer?"

"Jack Archer of the Loamshires?"

"That's the cove. Well, I'm a—brother of his, don't you know?"

"He ain't got no brothers!" said the caretaker promptly.

"What I meant was," said Pon blandly, "that I'm his—er—ah—cousin. He's instructed me to call here for some plans—some mouldy old drawings that aren't of any value, but he'd just like me to keep them for him. They're in the safe in the room he used to occupy."

The caretaker eyed Ponsonby with suspicion.

"I don't believe you," he said bluntly.

"You look a jolly sight too fishy to be a relative of Jack Archer's!"

Ponsonby scowled at this doubtful compliment; but this was no time for resenting it. He drew from his pocket a wallet, and displayed a crisp five-pound note, on which the caretaker feasted hungry eyes.

"Would this be of any use to you?" asked Pon.

"I should jest about say so! What d'you want me to do?"

"Let us come in, an' stay in as long as we like."

"Done!" said the caretaker.

He was beginning to see his profit in this. Five pounds goes a long way in a bar, even in these days of advanced prices.

Ponsonby handed over the fiver, and turned to his confederates.

"In you go!" he said gaily. "I think we can safely say that we're top dogs in this bizney."

"Absolutely!" chuckled Vavasour, as they passed in.

And the serene calm of No. 7, West Street, was broken by the "men in possession."

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Ponsonby in Power!

**A**FTER his interview with Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar at Highcliffe, Vernon-Smith lost no time in getting from that seat of learning to Courtfield.

When he came to the entrance of the old High Street, however, he stopped short.

The sight which met his gaze was truly remarkable.

Two stout policemen and an inspector, armed to the teeth, or thereabouts, were holding at bay a heated crowd of Removites.

"My hat!" muttered the Bounder, in amazement.

He pushed his way to the fore, and attempted to pass; but the inspector's hand descended with a vice-like grip on his shoulder.

"No, you don't!" said the inspector grimly. "You're another of 'em, are you? Well, you can stay where you are until I've had a chance to 'phone your headmaster."

"Wherefore this thasness?" gasped the Bounder.

"You're running away from school!" said the inspector severely.

"Pon's told them some cock and bull story about us, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "We're held up. Goodness knows when those plans will get to Greyfriars!"

"They'll be at Greyfriars before another hour's up, anyway!" muttered the Bounder under his breath.

The juniors who were held up had



grown decidedly wrathful. All their haste had proved of no avail. If they ever did reach No. 7, West Street, it looked as though they would arrive there in a solid phalanx.

Little did they dream that Vernon-Smith had the key, and the Bounder was too downy a bird to throw out any hints on the subject. The key was safe and sound on his person, and he was determined that no human power should wrest it from him.

"Look here," he said, "surely you're not going to let these idiots bottle you up till further orders? Wade in and slaughter 'em!"

Wharton hesitated.

"It's a pretty serious thing to start in on policemen," he said.

"And it's a serious thing for Jack Archer if his invention doesn't reach the Committee in time!" retorted the Bounder.

"I agree with Smithy!" growled Johnny Bull. "The only way is to show fight!"

The juniors were fast growing rebellious, and Vernon-Smith had now fairly hoisted the red flag of revolution.

"All together!" he shouted.

The next instant the Greyfriars fellows, heedless of the lashing truncheons, rushed to the attack.

The struggle was very brief—only a few seconds. At the end of that period the two stout constables were embracing each other in the gutter, and the inspector seemed to be making frantic efforts to walk on his head. It was quite an inspiring picture. In fact, as Bob Cherry pointed out, the cinema people had missed a real plum.

Having broken through the defences, Harry Wharton & Co., keeping in close formation, charged up the High Street.

It was a matter of speculation who would reach No. 7, West Street, first; but Vernon-Smith took the lead. He wanted to rush into the house, unlock the safe, and turn upon the baffled crowd with a smile on his face and the coveted plans in his hand. It would be a dramatic moment!

The Bounder was a fine runner, and he possessed sufficient agility to worm his way through the throngs of people who were gaping open-mouthed at the strange spectacle. He rounded the corner into West Street in great style; and his keen eye lighted up with anticipation as he spotted No. 7.

But he never reached his objective.

He was in the act of bounding up the steps when a perfect shower of missiles rained down upon him from above.

Rotten eggs, old boots, fruit which had long since seen its best days, and ammunition projected from pea-shooters, rained on him; and the Bounder, right in the line of fire, reeled backwards, and collapsed at the foot of the steps, rather as if he were giving an imitation of Cæsar's fall at the base of Pompey's statue.

Harry Wharton & Co. fell back in disorder. This reception was totally unexpected. It seemed as if they were destined to be thwarted at every twist and turn.

"Yarooooop!" yelled Bob Cherry, as an odorous egg squelched on his chin, and failed to improve his waistcoat. "We seem to have drifted on to the Western Front by mistake!"

"Where's this little lot coming from?" asked Peter Todd angrily, as a hail of hard peas, like bullets from a machine-gun, sang through the air.

Harry Wharton caught sight of Ponsonby's grinning face at an upper window.

"The Highcliffe cads!" he shouted. "This is the result of their precious

plotting! They spoofed the bobbies that we were running away from school, and then stole a march on us."

"D'you think they've got hold of the plans?" asked Frank Nugent, dodging a storm of the pea shrapnel.

"Shouldn't think so. They'd be making a song about it by now if they had."

"What shall we do about it?"

"Do!" roared Bob Cherry, trying to erase portions of the ancient egg which had smitten him. "Why, rush 'em!"

But it was not so easy. Ponsonby & Co. were in an impregnable position. The doors and lower windows of the house had been skilfully barricaded, and nothing had been left to chance. And the invading party were being bombarded with missiles of all sorts and sizes.

But the Removites were not chicken-hearted. No sooner were a couple of their men down than another couple sprang up the steps, only to be thwarted in turn. There was no denying that Ponsonby & Co. had matters all their own way.

"Look here," roared Johnny Bull, glaring at the grinning group of Highcliffians, "if you don't come down and let us in, we'll lynch you!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Open this door, you howling cads!" rapped out Vernon-Smith.

"Not this evenin'," said Ponsonby.

*Eat less  
Bread*

"Some other evenin', when your ickle tempers have simmered down a bit."

"I suppose you know all about Jack Archer's invention?" said Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!" chuckled Pons.

"Have you got the plans?"

"Find out!"

"If you've got them, you cad, are you going to take them to Prout?"

"That's my affair!"

Harry Wharton saw the futility of further argument. He saw, too, that it would be useless to try and force an entry into the house. He consoled himself with the reflection that the Highcliffians would have to abandon their position at nightfall, because of calling-over; and he determined to try his luck again then.

"I don't know how you fellows feel about it," he said, "but I'm going to cave in, for the time being. It's n.g. hanging about here. Besides, we haven't the key."

Even as Wharton spoke the majority of the Removites were already in retreat. They were not cowards, and could have given Ponsonby & Co. beans in a hand-to-hand tussle; but the poisonous fumes of those eggs were altogether too much for them.

Harry Wharton was the last to leave. As he turned away, with the tormenting jests of Ponsonby & Co. ringing in his ears, he became aware of the fact that an eggshell was clinging to the crease of his trousers.

Harry stooped to brush it away, and the next instant he nearly toppled over in his excitement.

For there, at his feet, glimmered—the key of the safe!

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### The Bounder Carries On!

VERNON-SMITH had the surprise of his life when, alone in a little country lane half an hour later, he felt in his pocket to assure himself that the key was safe, and discovered that it was missing.

The Fates were certainly dealing the Bounder a series of straight lefts. He had hoped to be in possession of the actual plans long ago, and to be the centre of envy and congratulation; but Ponsonby's unexpected barricade had spoiled his chances.

And now—now that he had lost the key—he was no nearer to success than when he had started. The labour and energy he had expended in his quest were in vain.

He tried to think how he could possibly have lost the key. It seemed an enigma at first, but gradually it began to dawn upon him what must have happened.

He remembered, during Ponsonby & Co.'s fierce onslaught from the windows of the house in West Street, having taken out his handkerchief to wipe away the effects of some of the missiles. In doing so he must have swept the key out of his pocket, and even now it might be lying unobserved in the street.

This gave the Bounder a gleam of hope.

The Greyfriars juniors had all dispersed, leaving Ponsonby & Co. masters of the situation; so he resolved to go back and search for the key.

He found the street deserted. The Highcliffians had disappeared from the window. There were numerous traces of the recent bombardment, the pavement in front of the house being strewn with missiles; but although the Bounder made an exhaustive search, glancing up at the windows from time to time to make sure he was not being watched, he failed to find the key.

"What beastly luck!" he muttered. "It's as clear as noonday what's happened. One of the other fellows must have found the key, and is simply waiting for the Highcliffe cads to clear out. My hat! It's a pretty dismal outlook, I must say. What chance have I got?"

But the Bounder lingered at the spot, dubious as to whether it was worth while taking any further part in the chase.

The present possessor of the key would probably wait until nightfall before coming to obtain the plans; and if the Bounder lay in wait for him, and dispossessed him of the key, everything in the garden would be lovely.

But the thing savoured of meanness. Vernon-Smith had had no compunction about taking the key away from a fat, conceited fool like Bunter; but supposing Wharton or Bob Cherry had it? It would not be playing the game to pounce upon them unawares just as they were in sight of their goal.

And then, just as he was beginning to despair of carrying out the mission, a sudden inspiration came to the Bounder.

He remembered that among his many acquaintances was a man in Courtfield named Tommy Crouch, who in his time had been anything but a law-abiding citizen. He understood locks and keys far better than anyone else in the district—hence his numerous escapes from various places of confinement.

Tommy Crouch had turned over a new leaf of late. He had put in a year's



active service in France, and had just got his discharge. He had had his fill of adventure, and was starting to settle down to a sober and steady existence; but he would not mind helping an old friend out of a difficulty, and the Bounder realised this with a thrill of anticipation.

"I must get into the house somehow," he told himself, "and measure the lock of the safe. Then I'll get Tommy Crouch to make me a key that'll fit. Jove, I shall have to be slippy, though!"

He cast his eye up to the windows, which—in front, at any rate—were unassailable.

"I'll nip round to the back, and see if there's anything doing there," murmured the Bounder.

But the position was exactly the same. Ponsonby & Co. had been thorough in their efforts to keep all invaders at bay. Every window in the house was shut, and fastened on the inside.

"There's only one thing for it," said Vernon-Smith. "I must slide down the chimney."

To do this would not be a very difficult matter, but the task of climbing up to the roof was one which many fellows would have shuddered to contemplate.

But the Bounder had iron nerve and inflexible determination. Sliding down chimneys was not a job he fancied; but he would have gone through fire and water to achieve his object.

A long rain-pipe ran up the side of the house, and in parts it looked very shaky. The Bounder had to take a big risk, and at any moment he might be detected by Ponsonby & Co. But he stuck gamely to his task, and a few minutes later was crawling up the sloping roof.

It was, as the Bounder had foreseen, a simple matter to get down the chimney; but as the latter had not been swept for some time he got his share of soot.

But the inconvenience was well worth while, for the fire-grate, from which he presently extricated himself, was situated in Jack Archer's old room.

Gouging the soot from his eyes, Vernon-Smith glanced round the apartment, and discerned, to his intense joy, the safe.

There was a bath-room near by, and, after removing the soot from his hands and face, and brushing it from his clothes, he took the measurements of the lock, being careful to include every little detail likely to be of help to Tommy Crouch.

His task accomplished, it was an easy matter for the Bounder to get down into the street again, for he now had access to the windows.

As he passed down the stairs he could hear peal upon peal of laughter ringing out from one of the rooms. Evidently Ponsonby & Co. were keeping high level.

The Bounder silently let himself out of the front door, and he felt serenely cheerful as he walked round to Tommy Crouch's house.

"Cheerio!" said the man of many parts, as he sighted the Greyfriars junior. "Not playin' footer this afternoon—what?"

"There's something much more important in the wind, Tommy. I want to help to win the war."

That roused Tommy Crouch at once. Anything which helped at crushing Germany appealed to him with great force. At that very moment he carried a Hun bullet in his back, and no operation to remove it had yet proved successful.

Rapidly Vernon-Smith told his story. He explained how essential it was that a key should be made at once, lest the possessor of the real key should

secure the plans of the invention before the Bounder got back to the house.

Tommy Crouch took the design of the lock which Vernon-Smith had sketched, and proceeded at once to his workshop.

The Bounder looked on with great interest, and watched the new key being fashioned by Tommy Crouch's nimble fingers. The work occupied a long time, for it was quite dark when Vernon-Smith, having thanked his benefactor, stepped out into the street once more.

"It'll be touch-and-go!" he said to himself. "But I don't deserve to be on the losing side after this!"

And the Bounder's heart beat high with hope as he strode onward through the night.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### The Coward's Part!

**H**ARRY WHARTON'S first impulse, on picking up the key outside No. 7, West Street, was to execute a sort of cake-walk down the street, and shout his discovery from the house-tops.

But it wouldn't do. He would be playing into Ponsonby's hands if the Highcliffians got to know of his find; and it wouldn't be safe for his schoolfellows to know, either. So, like the gentleman in the 'Bing Boys,' Wharton preserved a calm and dignified composure, and was careful to conceal his good fortune.

He had given up the idea of taking the house by storm. Later on that evening, he felt certain, Ponsonby & Co. would evacuate it, and return to Highcliffe.

So Harry wended his way back to Greyfriars, and resolved to obtain a late pass from Wingate, with the object of returning to Courtfield anon.

In the Close at Greyfriars the captain of the Remove encountered Mr. Prout.

The thunderclouds had gathered on the Form-master's brow, and he glared at Wharton as if he could eat him.

"Well, Wharton? Some hours have elapsed since I sent you for the plans of my nephew's invention. I presume you have not come empty away?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Harry; "but it was quite unavoidable. You see, I started off at a terrific disadvantage. I hadn't the key to the safe."

"Did you not recover it from Coker?"

"He'd lost it, sir."

"Bless my soul! How very annoying! Has it come to light yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have it in your possession?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why," roared Mr. Prout, "have you returned without the plans? Are you not aware that my nephew's future is at stake? Do you not realise that I must have those plans at once, or he may be forestalled by one of his rivals?"

"Nobody realises it better than I do, sir. But I can't do impossibilities. The house where Private Archer was billeted is absolutely out of my reach at present."

"Why?" snapped Mr. Prout.

Harry Wharton coughed. He didn't wish to make things hot for the nuts of Highcliffe with the authorities.

Unofficially, he would have smitten them hip and thigh, if possible; but to tell tales to masters was another matter.

"The—the house is fortified, sir," he said at length.

"Fortified?" gasped Mr. Prout. "Incredible! By whom fortified—and why?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"This is monstrous!" snapped Mr. Prout. "I will not have my nephew's career ruined by such means. Give me the key, Wharton, and I will go in person and recover the plans!"

"I should advise you not to, sir," said

Harry. "They'll give you a beastly reception—pelt you with rotten eggs, and things of that sort!"

"What?"

"It's a fact, sir. I'm only warning you. Besides, another point has just occurred to me."

"Yes?"

"Even supposing you had the plans now, sir, what could you do? You might get them to London all serene, but nobody would be there to receive them in the middle of the night. The Inventions Committee won't be at work until tomorrow morning, so your only way is to catch an early train."

"You are quite right," said Mr. Prout at length. "I hadn't thought of that. So long as I get the plans to-night, then, all will be well. But can you guarantee that I shall get them?"

"I think so, sir. With your permission, I'll go into Courtfield after locking-up time, when I fancy I shall have the free run of the house."

"Very well, Wharton. I rely upon you implicitly. Bring the plans to me in my study."

"Bolsover, old man," whispered Skinner, dragging his companion into the shadows, "did you hear what Prout said just then? It means that Wharton's jolly well got the key of that safe!"

"And he'll be going along to Courtfield to-night," said Bolsover.

The two young rascals exchanged significant glances.

They had given up the chase at one time, but this information placed them in the running once more.

"We shall have to get hold of that giddy key," said Skinner, in tones of determination. "And this time we'll make sure we don't run our heads up against a brick wall."

"I'm with you," said Bolsover, "all along the line! How shall we wangle it?"

Skinner's thin lips set tightly together, and an ugly expression came over his face.

"No use going into the game with kid gloves on," he said. "We shall have to lie in wait for Wharton to-night in Courtfield, and bowl him over."

"Spring on him in the dark, d'you mean?"

"That's it!"

Bolsover wavered a little. He was a bully; morally, he was a coward; but deep down in his heart was a feeling that to trip a fellow up in the dark was dastardly and cruel.

But his dislike of Wharton, and his mad desire to get hold of the plans of the invention and use them for his own private ends, overcame any scruples he had. The moment of temptation had come to him, and he yielded.

"All serene!" he said. "We'll down him in next to no time. And if we don't make a small fortune out of this invention I'll eat my hat!"

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### The Power That Intervened!

"**T**IME for prep, Harry," said Frank Nugent.

No reply.

"Time for prep, fathead!" repeated Frank. "Are you dreaming, or what?"

Harry Wharton came to himself with a start.

"Were you speaking, Frank?" he asked.

"Of course, you prize idiot! I nearly broke a blood-vessel telling you it was time for prep."

Wharton grinned.

"I've got no use for prep," he said.

"Don't be an ass! Quelch will come





The rivals meet! (See Chapter 11.)

down on you like a thousand of bricks. You daren't dodge it!"

"I'm going to, anyway. There's something far more important than prep to think about."

Frank regarded his chum curiously.

"Still on the invention stunt?" he asked.

Harry nodded.

"Then you've a jolly sight more stick-at-it than I have! I wish you joy of the job!"

"I shall win through all right," said Harry cheerfully. And, nodding to Nugent, he strolled out of the study.

Down in the dusky Close the night wind whistled through the trees, and not a star relieved the monotonous stretch of bleak sky.

It was a night for dark deeds and mysterious happenings.

Wharton shivered a little. It had been an exciting afternoon, and his nerves were on edge. But he pulled himself together with an effort, and set out on his walk to Courtfield.

Some distance ahead of him he fancied he could distinguish a couple of shadowy figures; but, after peering carefully through the gloom, he told himself it was all imagination.

It took him exactly half an hour to reach Courtfield, though to him it seemed like hours.

At last!

The subdued lights of the old High Street greeted his gaze, and he quickened his pace.

The two shadowy figures had vanished, and this seemed to be clear proof that they were only figments of the junior's fancy.

Yet it was such a dark and sinister night that the bravest heart might have quailed, and Wharton began whistling the refrain of an old school song to keep up his spirits.

It was so dark that he had to scan his surroundings very closely to find the turning into West Street.

As he swung round the corner his whistle sounding strangely out of keeping with the scene around him, Harry Wharton became suddenly aware that the shadowy figures were not imagination, but fact.

They seemed to spring suddenly out of

the blackness of the night, and were coming straight at him. The foremost one swung aloft something that looked like an Indian club.

Down it came, and Wharton, realising his danger, sprang swiftly to one side.

But he was too late to avoid the cowardly attack. The club certainly missed his head, for which it had been intended, but it crashed down upon his shoulder, and, with a sharp gasp of pain, the captain of the Remove reeled and fell.

"Good man!" said a voice; and Harry recognised it as Skinner's.

Then, before he could struggle to his feet his assailants pinned him down, and began to go through his pockets.

It was obvious what their little game was. They knew that Wharton carried the key, and were searching for it.

"Oh, you cads!" muttered Harry. And then, raising his voice he shouted: "Rescue!"

Skinner and Bolsover seemed to be having matters all their own way.

"Rescue!" yelled Harry Wharton again, with such vigour that Skinner instantly clapped his hand over the victim's mouth.

But Wharton's cry for help was not in vain.

There came the sound of scurrying feet, and two running figures loomed up through the darkness.

Skinner and Bolsover rose hastily to their feet, and turned to flee; but they ran right into a hornet's nest.

"I'll tackle the burly one, Franky," drawled the cool voice of the Caterpillar.

"Good! And I'll deal with the other beauty!"

A wild and whirling fight was in progress as Wharton rose with difficulty to his feet.

Skinner and Bolsover had already done battle with one party of Highcliffians that day; and they were up against a decidedly tough proposition this time.

The usually lazy and languid Caterpillar fought like a demon. Bolsover, big and tough though he was, stood no chance against the lightning drives which shot out at him from the darkness.

The struggle did not last long. Frank Courtenay settled Skinner's

bash in a twinkling. Only a couple of powerful straight lefts were needed.

Then, when the Caterpillar planted his sharp knuckles straight between Bolsover's eyes, the bully of the Remove measured his length by the side of Skinner.

Harry Wharton stepped forward with outstretched hand and shining eyes.

"Thank you, Caterpillar!" he said quietly. "And you, Courtenay! I—I don't know what might have happened, if you hadn't turned up!"

"It was a pleasure, dear boy," said the Caterpillar, "to feel one's knuckles grindin' into Bolsover's criminal face. But why were these delightful youths tryin' to brain you?"

"I had something important on me, which they'd have give a good deal to get hold of," said Harry.

"And they didn't have any scruples about their method of doing it!" said Frank Courtenay.

Then he turned to the grovelling couple on the pavement.

"If you're not out of this street inside one minute," he said grimly, "we'll boot you out!"

"Which would be rather a pity," observed the Caterpillar, "seem' that we don't wish to soil our shoe-leather!"

Skinner and Bolsover had had quite enough to go on with; and they took Courtenay's advice, realising, with bitterness in their hearts, that the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley.

"What are you fellows roaming about for at this time of night?" asked Harry Wharton, turning to his rescuers.

"We were huntin' for our errin' play-mates!" said the Caterpillar. "It's a problem where Pon an' his merry band have got to! We've scoured the district, like ragin' lions seekin' whom we might devour, but it seems as if the earth has opened an' swallowed 'em up!"

Wharton smiled.

"I think I can put you on the right track," he said. "Ponsonby and the rest are in a house at the other end of this street. I shouldn't try and smoke them out, if I were you. They hold all the trump cards at present. Just wait outside till I've broken in and got what I want, and then we'll hold a council of war on the subject!"

"How shall you get in?"

"Via the chimney!" said Harry promptly. "I had hoped that they would have cleared off to Highcliffe by locking-up time, in which case I could have gone tamely in by the door; but as they're still there, I shall have to fight my way through the soot!"

So saying, Wharton left his rescuers, and started to climb the identical rain-pipe which Vernon-Smith had ascended.

Courtenay, with the Caterpillar, waited.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Face to Face!

**H**ARRY WHARTON'S shoulder was aching painfully, and he found it a far more difficult matter to scale the rain-pipe than the Boulder had done earlier in the day.

How he kept his nerve he never knew; but the thought of Jack Archer inspired in his breast a determination to see things through.

He paused, when he reached the roof, to fill his lungs with the cool night air. He found that he needed it, for the soot he encountered when he began descending the chimney nearly suffocated him.

The room containing the safe was unoccupied, but Wharton could see, after



switching on his electric torch, that someone had recently been there, and that a big attempt had been made to break the safe open, for hammers and chisels were strewn about the floor.

Wharton stole out of the room and along the passage.

A light gleamed through the half-open door of another room, and, standing in the shadows and peering in, Wharton saw the nuts of Highcliffe, together with the caretaker of the house, seated round a table. They were smoking, and playing cards, and it was evident that Ponsonby & Co. had no intention of vacating the premises just yet. They would probably resume operations with the safe later on.

Had a party of Greyfriars juniors dared to spend a night away from the school, without permission, they would undoubtedly have got it in the neck. But discipline was at a discount at Highcliffe, and Ponsonby possessed a good deal of influence with those in authority. He would be able to square the easy-going prefect whose duty it was to see lights out that night, and he could pitch a plausible story to Mr. Mobbs.

Wharton tiptoed silently away, and, returning to the safe, proceeded to unlock it.

A thrill of triumph ran through him as he did so.

He was the winner of the chase after all! Disappointments had rained upon him from the outset; difficulties and drawbacks had been many; yet he had surmounted them all. It was an achievement, and an act of patriotism, too, in a way!

The door swung open, and Wharton swept his gaze over the contents of the safe.

Yes! The plans were there!

With a murmur of satisfaction the captain of the Remove took them out, and scanned them by the light of his electric torch.

There were two drawings, and they did not look very interesting. But to the Inventions Committee they might prove as welcome as a gold-mine.

Harry folded them up carefully and put them into his pocket. Then he locked the safe; and while he was in the act of doing so an avalanche of soot came rattling down the chimney.

The junior sprang back, his heart beating fast.

Someone was coming!

A couple of boots dangled in the fire-grate, and a pair of trousers followed.

Wharton did not wait to see more, but darted behind the screen and crouched low, awaiting developments.

He could hear footsteps crossing the room, and, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he peeped round the edge of the screen.

Then a curious smile played about his lips.

The intruder was the Bounder!

Vernon-Smith knelt before the safe, which, to Wharton's intense surprise, he calmly proceeded to unlock.

There was a moment's silence; then a cry of dismay broke from the Bounder's lips:

"Too late!"

"It was a near thing, though," interposed a quiet voice.

Vernon-Smith spun round, startled.

Standing before him, scoty and grimy from head to foot, but still recognisable for all that, was Harry Wharton!

"M-m-my hat!" gasped the Bounder. "You here!"

"Yes," said Harry. "You've been beaten by a short neck, Smithy. I'm awfully sorry, in a way. You seem to have been put to a lot of trouble."

"Then you've got the plans?"

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"Rather!"

"Oh, good man!" said the Bounder generously. "I got a new key made, and counted on getting the plans before you or anyone else came along. If only I'd been a few minutes earlier! Still, I don't begrudge you your good luck!"

"The Highcliffe cads are still here," said Wharton.

"So I thought. Hadn't we better chuck them out on their necks? I've had very little change out of this bizney, and it would level things up a bit at the finish."

"All serene!" said Harry. "Courtenay and the Caterpillar are hovering about outside. I'll nip downstairs and let 'em in. Then we can pulverise the bounders!"

Wharton stole down the stairs, and saw that the street door was heavily barricaded. He succeeded in clearing the way without being heard by the revellers, however, and, opening the door, beckoned to Courtenay and the Caterpillar, who were on the other side of the street.

"You can deal with your cheery playmates now!" he said, with a grin. "Smithy and I will give you a hand, if you like!"

"Smithy!"

"Yes. He turned up just now."

"Where are these scurvy knaves who are makin' night hideous with their din?" asked the Caterpillar dramatically.

"I'll show you!" said Harry. "There are four of them and one man. We're slightly outnumbered, but I don't think it matters. If you do the Bolsover touch again, Caterpillar, there'll be short shrift for 'em!"

A few moments later Ponsonby & Co. had the surprise of their lives. Just as their revelry was at its height four young and athletic youths, two of white complexion and two of black, bounded into the room.

The card-players leapt to their feet on the instant, and their faces, which had been flushed with excitement, grew pale. The only person who seemed cool and self-possessed in the crisis was the caretaker.

"How, in thunder, did you get in here?" demanded Ponsonby.

"That, as the immortal Shakespeare says, is the question," murmured the Caterpillar. "Still, we're not concerned so much with how we came here. The most pressin' item of the moment is that we're here."

"You've no right to come buttin' in!" snapped Pon.

"On the contrary," cut in Frank Courtenay, "we have every right. Late nights and dissipation ought to be discouraged. I don't know who your friend is"—he indicated the caretaker—"but he's going out on his neck, anyway!"

The burly man seemed to regard this as a huge joke.

"If you was to lay as much as a finger on me," he said, "I'd knock you into the middle of next week!"

"This is where you can start, then," said Vernon-Smith, rushing to the attack.

Ponsonby and his cronies lined up against the wall, and fought desperately. They did not know that the plans of the invention were in Wharton's possession, or they might not have troubled to put up such a fierce resistance.

The caretaker threw himself into a fighting attitude with a careless laugh; but his expression changed completely when Vernon-Smith's fists came thudding right and left against his ribs.

"Ow-ow-ow! I—I'll brain yer!"

"Go ahead, then!" said the Bounder calmly.

The caretaker made a dive for the poker, and as he did so Vernon-Smith

plunged low, and succeeded in standing him on his head. Then, summoning all his strength, he hurled the man across the room. There was a thud, and a muttered imprecation, and the caretaker had shot his bolt.

Ponsonby & Co. were not having a very gay time of it, either. They were outpointed at every turn; and after five minutes' fierce fighting Gadsby and Vavasour made for the door. Then the panic spread, and No. 7, West Street was cleared once and for all of its undesirable tenants.

"Somethin' attempted, somethin' done, has earned a night's repose," murmured the Caterpillar. "I think we can retire now, Frankie, knowin' we have deserved well of our country. Cheero, you fellows!"

The Highcliffe chums followed in the wake of their defeated schoolfellows; and Wharton and the Bounder, after a much-needed wash and brush-up, walked back to Greyfriars on the very best of terms.

Mr. Prout was in his study, and his face glowed with pleasure when Wharton handed him the plans. But his words of gratitude would have been far more fervent had he known how stern and strenuous a chase there had been between the rivals of the Remove.

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Jack Archer Makes Good!

EARLY next morning Mr. Prout travelled up to London with the plans; and although he had almost to fight his way into the office of the Inventions Committee, he managed to get a hearing, and was told that the invention would be brought up for consideration at an early date.

Events at Greyfriars pursued the even tenor of their way, and Wharton came in for a good deal of congratulation from his chums. The only persons who failed to join in were Skinner, Bolsover, and Billy Bunter. The latter, in particular, could not understand why Wharton, with a chance of making perhaps a hundred pounds by selling the plans of the invention to a rival of Jack Archer's, had failed to take advantage of his opportunity.

About a week later a telegram arrived for Mr. Prout from Folkestone to the effect that Sergeant Jack Archer—promotion comes swiftly to the deserving soldier—had been wounded, fortunately not seriously. He was being sent back to England for a month's sick leave, at the expiration of which period he was to be recommended for a commission.

The Greyfriars fellows gave him a tremendous ovation when he came. Among the people most deserving of praise in the war are the men who fight their way through every stage of the rank and file before gaining commissions.

Jack Archer had caught a dose of German shrapnel in the thigh; but it was not much more than a flesh wound, and he was able to get about with the aid of a stick.

Yet behind his sunny smile and charming disposition the juniors read tragedy. A cloud had sailed into the clear blue sky of Archer's existence. Something was radically wrong; yet for the life of them they could not guess what it was, until one day the young soldier put it into words.

"A month's leave!" he exclaimed rather bitterly. "What use is it to me, when I haven't a cent in the world? A commission! Of course, it's all very fine to be an officer, but I should find it a bit difficult to live on my pay. It's rotten!"

"I didn't know things were as bad as



that," said Harry Wharton, sympathetically. "Can't your uncle help you?"

Jack Archer shook his head.

"Form-masters at public schools may be fairly well off, but they're very far from being millionaires," he said ruefully. "Besides, I must fight my own battles. I don't like the idea of sponging. All the same, its beastly, being broke. Makes you feel so small and insignificant. When I'm an officer I shall have to stay at fifth-rate hotels while I'm in England, and sneak into cheap restaurants without being spotted. Ugh! I've a jolly good mind to decline the commission."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "You're looking on the blackest side of things, and all the time, if you only but knew it, your luck might be on the turn."

And so it proved. Within a few hours of Jack Archer's conversation with the juniors a sealed Government letter arrived for him—a letter which caused his eyes to dance and sparkle as he read it.

"The Inventions Committee,  
London, S.W."

"Dear Sir,—We have carefully considered the plans of the invention which you set before us, and, after experiment, have decided upon its acceptance.

"The new aeroplane device, as suggested by you, will be used extensively throughout the Service.

"We enclose herewith a cheque for £100 (one hundred pounds) in payment of your invention, and a further sum shall be sent you if and when its value shall have been proven in aerial warfare.

"Your plans reached us only an hour or so in advance of those of another inventor, who had hit upon very much the same idea.

"Yours faithfully,

"The Inventions Committee,  
per J. Smith, Secretary."

"Good news?" asked Bob Cherry. "You're looking pretty bucked."

Jack Archer hobbled round Study No. 1 in an ecstasy.

"It's caught on!" he exclaimed joyfully. "This was worth goin' to the Front and gettin' wounded for, by Jove! A hundred quid now, and more to come!"

And Jack Archer rounded off his merry antics by singing words to the effect that he had come to the end of a perfect day.

The Greyfriars juniors shared in his excitement, of course. They had seen enough of the soldier-inventor to know

that he was thoroughly true-blue and a rattling good fellow; and when Mr. Prout heard the good news, it seemed as if ten years had slipped suddenly from his shoulders.

"This is indeed glorious news, Jack!" he said. "You will be able to have a mouth of riotous living now, and no one will begrudge it you, after what you have been through for the Old Country's sake."

Jack Archer smiled, and placed his hand affectionately on his uncle's shoulder. Looking ahead into the future, he saw himself garbed in the red-and-gold of a Staff officer, ever evolving new ideas to increase Britain's mastery of the air.

The world lay at his feet for him to conquer, and when he left Greyfriars, to become an active unit in the great world-war once again, none were more sincere in wishing him good luck than the Rivals of the Chase!

(DON'T MISS "PONSONBY'S PAL!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

## THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 42.—ROBERT DONALD OGILVY.

THOUGH Ogilvy has been in the stories from the very outset, we have not seen quite so much of him as we might have expected; and Scots readers complain now and then that he has but a small show, especially as he is the only representative Bonnie Scotland has at Greyfriars. But here they are not correct, for Elliott is a Scot from the Border country. However, as Elliott is distinctly less prominent even than Ogilvy, one cannot make much capital out of that fact.

We come across Ogilvy now and then in the earlier yarns—chiefly as what one may call a member of the chorus. It was he who told Mr. Chesham that King John had a successful reign, and justified himself by saying that the temporary Form-master had told them King John succeeded in 1199. It was he from whom Bunter "borrowed" a camera—you all know Bunter's borrowing method! We meet him as a photographer again later, when a prefect had been given a study in the Remove passage for disciplinary reasons, and Ogilvy got a flashlight photo of the card-party in Loder's study after the supper which had been confiscated from the Remove purely in the interests of discipline, of course!

Ogilvy was one of quite a crowd who wanted to be Mark Antony when the Remove first tackled "Julius Caesar." But he wasn't. He sang a song in Gaelic at one of the Form concerts, though; and that was a feat no one else at Greyfriars could have accomplished.

He is quite a good cricketer and footballer, and has often played in the Remove team at both games. At one time he looked like training on into a first-rate bowler. He did the hat-trick twice against the Lambs; but the Lambs were pretty soft stuff, in a cricket sense. It was he who was chosen to complete the team when the Bounder had spoiled Rake's chance by thrashing him; but he did not play then, for Vernon-Smith got him and Bob Cherry kidnapped while they were taking a walk which Bob had insisted upon because of the danger that Ogilvy's Highland pride might no longer be able to bear the strain of the Bounder's taunts, and he might be treated even as was Rake. Ogilvy is no duffer with his fists; but he is not up to the Bounder's weight. He fought Bulstrode once, in the days when Bulstrode was a far less decent fellow than he now is; but he was licked. Later, Morgan and Skinner helped him to chuck Bulstrode—for good reason—into a ditch.

But Skinner is no chum of Ogilvy's. His principal chum is Dick Russell, with whom he shares a study; and Russell played a big part in a story which showed up Donald Ogilvy at his best. The Scot interposed between Temple and Bunter, whom the Fourth Form skipper had accused of theft and



Robert Ogilvy

was treating drastically, and Temple struck Ogilvy. Thereof came a fight, and Temple won, and Ogilvy refused to shake hands with the victor. Then Bunter, in revenge, threw a stone at Temple's head, and bowled him over, badly hurt; and Ogilvy, having been foolish enough to promise the fat rascal not to tell, was man enough to keep his word in spite of all the suffering it cost him. It was hard lines to hear the doom of Coventry for so worthless a specimen as Billy Bunter; but Ogilvy's word is his bond, and he stood firm. It was not through him that the truth came out at last. But the Remove and the Upper Fourth, too, had learned to know the sturdy Scot better when it was known.

There was some reason for suspicion in this case, for the circumstantial evidence was strong; but all Ogilvy's previous record was against the likelihood of his having done a mean and cowardly thing. He has gone very straight, with Scots level-headedness and

pluck. He has the dry Scots humour, too, and it crops up now and again—as when he told Bunter, seeking vainly a seat at a study meeting, to sit in the grate. Bunter objected that there was a fire in it; but Ogilvy appeared to consider that that only made it a more eligible seat for Bunter!

He is all there in a jape, too—not as noisy or as demonstrative as some of the Remove, but quite as appreciative. He helped to dress Alonzo up in Loder's dress-suit to go to tea with the Head; in fact, Bulstrode and Hazeldene left to him the procuring of the suit from the Sixth-Former's study—no inconsiderable part of the undertaking, that, for Loder is not kind to Removeites caught trespassing. He helped to spoof Lonzy into digging up the Head's lawn—that was a trick hardly worthy of Ogilvy, but Lonzy's innocence must have been very tempting.

Then there was the trick on Lonzy in getting him to read aloud "The History of a Potato," sitting on a wet seat in the Third Form-room. Desmond and Bulstrode were with the Scot in that.

Ogilvy has been a pretty consistent supporter of Harry Wharton, but never to the extent of backing up Wharton right or wrong. He voted for Harry as Form captain after he had been beaten by Bulstrode in a fight, but did not like Harry's staying away from the election, which he held a slight on those who adhered to his cause. So for a time he backed up Bulstrode. But he grew very fed up with that worthy, and was among those who were keen on having Wharton back.

As he was not in the Form Eleven, he agreed to play for the Bounder's Crusaders; but he thought he ought to explain matters to Wharton first. He went to do so, and they quarrelled; but the blame for that quarrel was scarcely the Scot's. He had done the decent thing, as no doubt Wharton saw later.

It was to Ogilvy that Fish sold the mouldy beefsteak-pie. But the Scot had his money back. He planked the thing down in the middle of a pile of tarts, and gave Fishy the alternative of repaying fivepence or taking a thick ear. He was willing to take ginger-beer in lieu of the pie at first; but the business man of the Remove could see no profit in such an exchange, the pie being of no value, while the pop was!

Ogilvy was among Rake's Rebels, and shared in that licking from the supposed girls' school. But there was no malice in Dick Rake's rebellion, or in most of those who backed him up—certainly not in Ogilvy.

He and Desmond helped Holson, the skipper of the Shell, to escape from confinement to play for his Form against the Remove for the Colonel's Cup, and took a caning from Mr. Haeker for kicking a football straight at him—which was done to prevent his seeing Holson go.

One of the rank and file, Ogilvy, a fellow with no very striking achievements to his credit; but a good fellow, a sound fellow, with his heart in the right place, and his head well screwed on!



## Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

### THE SECRETARY'S DOUBLE!

An Adventure of Herlock Sholmes.

:: :: ::

By PETER TODD.

#### I.

**H**ERLOCK SHOLMES had been on a visit to Hanwell, where he had many friends. He was looking unusually grave when he returned to our rooms in Shaker Street.

I could see that something had occurred to disturb the tranquillity of my amazing friend.

He did not hook his umbrella upon my ear, or knock the ashes of his pipe down the back of my neck, in the usual playful manner that so endeared him to me.

He sat silent and thoughtful at lunch, and absent-mindedly consumed my kipper as well as his own. I did not venture to interrupt him.

"My dear Jotson!" said Sholmes, at last. "Something has happened during your visit to Hanwell, Sholmes?" I asked.

"Yes." He lighted several cigarettes at once, a proof of extreme concentration of thought. "A most puzzling problem, Jotson. You have heard of Lord Loosetop?"

"The Secretary of the Chinwag Department?" I asked.

"The same."

I have heard of him, Sholmes. "But you are probably not aware, Jotson, that this great statesman has a double; a relation who resembles him very closely, and has, indeed, been mistaken for him. A very awkward position for his lordship, Jotson, as his relation, the Honourable Loonie Loosetop, is an incurable lunatic."

Sholmes knitted his brows.

"The Hon. Loonie, Jotson, was confined at Hanwell for his own good. Naturally, he did not like it, and on more than one occasion he attempted to escape from the asylum. It was, however, a great relief to Lord Loosetop. Being, however, a humane nobleman, he sometimes visited his unfortunate cousin at Hanwell. Now, Jotson, this is where the problem arises. During my visit to-day I saw the Hon. Loonie—the idiot of the family. He told me a most remarkable story."

"Go on, Sholmes!" I murmured, deeply interested.

"According to the statement made to me, the man now confined in Hanwell is not the Hon. Loonie at all, but Lord Loosetop himself."

"Sholmes!"

"His story is that, visiting his cousin in his room, he was suddenly seized by him. The lunatic changed clothes with him, and left—leaving his lordship in his place."

"Good heavens!"

"A terrible blow for his lordship, if true," resumed Sholmes. "The change of quarters was not a severe hardship, for after many years passed in a Government department his lordship was naturally fitted, to a certain extent, to take his place with distinction in a lunatic asylum. But he has been kept away from his important work in the Chinwag Department in war-time, too, Jotson, when chinwag is playing so great a part in the nation's affairs. Worst of all, the escaped lunatic, relying upon his resemblance to his lordship, has taken his place as Secretary and Member of the Cabinet. A very serious position, Jotson."

"But surely, Sholmes, the asylum warders must have noticed a difference—"

Sholmes shook his head.

"To the trained eye of a detective, Jotson, there is a distinct difference between a Cabinet Minister and an ordinary lunatic. But the asylum warders are not accustomed to taking note of fine distinctions of this kind."

"True!"

"If I saw them together, Jotson, I could doubtless pick out the Government official from the lunatic. There are many shades of difference which would not escape an

experienced eye. But of late the Secretary of the Chinwag Department has carefully avoided visiting his relation in Hanwell. Jotson, this seems to hint that the story I have heard to-day may be well founded. It looks like a lunatic's cunning."

"Most true!"

Sholmes rose, and began to pace the room, his dressing-gown whisking behind him. My amazing friend was evidently much disturbed.

"Consider the position, Jotson. If this story is true, and it is Lord Loosetop himself who is confined in the asylum, and a lunatic who has taken his place at the Chinwag Department, the matter is serious. The Honourable Loonie may make alarming mistakes in the management of the department. There may be an interruption of the steady flow of chinwag the nation expects from its rulers. There is no telling what absurd freak the man may not commit, unused to the routine of Whitehall as he is. It may be said, in a general way, that there is little to choose between the denizens of Hanwell and those of Whitehall, and this is doubtless true. But there are limits, Jotson. Inspired by maniacal energy, the unfortunate man may answer letters by return of post—he may see callers without keeping them waiting twelve hours in the ante-rooms—he may place black sealing-wax upon documents that require to be sealed with red sealing-wax—he may even use ordinary tape instead of red tape—"

"Good heavens, Sholmes!"

"Such are the possibilities of the situation, Jotson, if the story I have heard to-day is true."

I sprang to my feet.

"Sholmes! Something must be done!"

"Undoubtedly. The traditions of the Chinwag Department may be totally revolutionised, otherwise. The fate of the war may even tremble in the balance. By some act of mad energy it may be brought to an end in our own lifetime, instead of being continued to the thirtieth or fortieth generation."

"Sholmes!"

"It is up to me, Jotson," said Herlock Sholmes resolutely. "Come, my dear fellow! Let us proceed to the Chinwag Department at once!"

He took me by the coat-tails and led me from the room.

#### II.

**S**HOLMES was silent and thoughtful as we walked rapidly towards Whitehall.

It was a problem that seemed likely to tax even the astounding intellectual powers of my amazing friend.

There was no clue, so far as I could see, to follow.

The personal resemblance between Lord Loosetop and his cousin was complete. It was only in their actions that Sholmes could hope to detect a difference which would indicate which was the lunatic and which was the Cabinet Minister. Placed together, Sholmes' eagle eye would doubtless have discerned subtle distinctions which escaped the ordinary view. But Sholmes could not see them together; the places they occupied, though similar, were far apart. I confess that I could not see upon what grounds Sholmes hoped to detect the genuineness, or otherwise, of the man who claimed to be the Secretary of the Chinwag Department.

But my faith in my amazing friend never faltered.

Difficult as the task was, impossible to any other man, I never doubted that Sholmes would accomplish it.

We arrived at the Chinwag Department, and Sholmes sent in his card.

We were admitted to the Minister's bureau. He rose to greet us courteously.

I saw Sholmes' eyes gleam as he exchanged

greeting with the secretary. Had he discerned some clue already?

For my own part, I confess that I was wholly at a loss. I scanned the Minister with intent interest, but I could perceive no sign that he was any weaker in the head than is usual in gentlemen of his high position.

Sholmes sat down, in his usual elegant attitude, with his feet resting upon the table. He conversed genially with the Minister.

He touched upon many subjects; and I could guess that he was testing the man, to ascertain by his replies whether he was what he represented himself as being.

But if the secretary was playing a part, he sustained it well.

He showed a statesmanlike ignorance of every subject broached by Sholmes; and though he had evidently heard of the war, he manifested very little interest in it.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger.

He carried an important letter, which required the immediate attention of the Secretary of the Chinwag Department.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sholmes," said the Minister. "Business first, you know."

He took the letter.

Herlock Sholmes drew a deep breath.

There was a clink as he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a pair of hand-cuffs.

The next moment they clinked upon the wrists of the pretended secretary.

"I am sorry, Loonie Loosetop," said Herlock Sholmes ironically. "I am afraid I must ask you to accompany me. Your place in Hanwell is waiting for you; and your cousin, Lord Loosetop, is ready to resume his duties here."

#### III.

**I** WAS in my usual state of amazement when we returned to Shaker Street.

The unfortunate lunatic had already been despatched to Hanwell, and Lord Loosetop recalled to his duties at the Chinwag Department.

Sholmes was in a very satisfied mood. He gave me a smile as we sat down to our winkles at tea.

"You are surprised, Jotson?" he remarked.

"I am astounded, Sholmes. I do not doubt, of course, that you are right, but I confess that I see no grounds—"

"Yet you have studied my methods, Jotson," said Sholmes. "My dear fellow, the moment I entered the secretary's bureau in the Chinwag Department I was certain that it was the Minister's double I had to deal with. His utter want of acquaintance with the manners and customs of Whitehall was the clue."

"But—"

"You surely noted, Jotson, that he was wide awake when we entered?"

"True!"

"That was the clue, Jotson. However, proof was necessary. I had already arranged for the messenger to bring in the letter of importance from the Red Tape Office. That was the test; and that test, Jotson, was too much for the insane impostor. He stopped an agreeable conversation, Jotson, with the remark that he must attend to business first. No one acquainted with the routine of the Chinwag Department, Jotson, would have made so deplorable an error. Lord Loosetop, trained in diplomatic and Ministerial circles, would never have made so egregious a blunder. It was clear, therefore, that the man before me was not the genuine Secretary of the Chinwag Department."

Herlock Sholmes shrugged his shoulders. "Your amazement is out of place, Jotson. So far from being a difficult problem, it is one of the simplest cases I have handled. Pass the winkles!"

THE END.



# THE EPISODE OF THE DAMP SQUIB!

## A Drama in Seven Bursts!

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The first part of this exciting story was found on Monty Lowther's desk, where he had abandoned it, after getting into a muddle which refused to be straightened. I therefore showed it to Manners, who, by drastic action, got over the difficulty, only to plunge into another. So the story went the rounds, and here it is, the sixth author being so tired of it that he nearly brought it to a summary conclusion.]

### I.

By MONTAGUE LOWTHER.

"HIST!" It was Black Dick who spoke thus. He was standing by the barrel of gunpowder, clutching a squib. His three companions eyed him with alarm. "Hist!" said Black Dick again. The others histed. But they heard nothing. "What's the matter?" inquired Ginger Rufus at length.

Black Dick shook his gnarled fist. "In five minutes," he said, in a voice which might have been termed uncanny, only it was more so, "I throw this blazing squib into the barrel of gunpowder! Then what will happen?"

No one answered the question. "I know!" Black Dick said at length. He was a shrewd man, was Black Dick. No secret remained hidden from his clever brain for long. "The gunpowder will go off. And then Lord Houghton and his beautiful bride will go up in the air! Ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Ginger Rufus, who was bolder than the others, having drawn back to a place of safety round the corner.

"Who was that?" thundered Black Dick, in alarm.

Almost instantly a voice came from the other end of the vault. Black Dick spun round in alarm, to see that Lord Houghton was watching him. He had come on the scene unawares.

"What is the matter?" he asked tensely. Black Dick snarled, gritted his teeth, and scowled. This all happened in the twinkling of an eye—Ginger Rufus' eye, to be exact. Then Dick struck a match and put it to the squib.

"Curse you!" he shouted, as he flung it into the gunpowder. "We will all die together!"

There was a fizzling sound.

### II.

By H. MANNERS.

NOTHING much had happened. There was no explosion. The fizzling sound was caused by Lord Houghton uncorking a bottle of champagne.

"So it is you, Dirty Richard," he said calmly, as he poured the bubbling liquid out. "And I have caught you!"

"My name," said Dick, in great passion, "is Black Dick!"

"All the same to me!" said Lord Houghton, as he tossed off the wine at one gulp. "By the way, who are your friends? I have not been introduced to them."

"Curse you for your coolness!" growled Dirty Richard. "I wish to hold no conversation with you! If that squib had not been a damp one, you would have been dead by now!"

Lord Houghton laughed. "The next time you take your merry boys out to blow someone up," he said calmly, "get some decent squibs. You behave like an amateur, my son! You should—"

He paused, and gazed wild-eyed at the barrel. The squib had not gone out. It was spluttering again.

"Ho, ho, ho!" cackled Black Dick. "We die together after all!"

There came a tremendous crash!

### III.

By HARRY NOBLE.

THE crash was caused by Ginger Rufus making such a hasty flight that he fell over an old biscuit-tin. Otherwise, nothing to speak of happened. The squib had calmed down again.

Black Dick looked distinctly disagreeable. That was a gift he had inherited from his father, who was a tax-collector.

"Fling the luck!" he shouted.

"You needn't trouble," said Lord Houghton. "I am sorry to see a handsome young man like you wishing to die; but I never like to urge a man to do anything which he does not want to. If you want to expire, and you care to come into the garden, I can soon drown you. I've done it with kittens."

He uncorked another bottle of champagne as he spoke. This he drank quietly while Black Dick stood and fumed. Ginger Rufus at the same moment commenced a noisy exit from the interior of the biscuit-box.

"We will die together!" snapped Black Dick, as he seized the slow match again. (Lowther said it was a squib.—Ed. Then Lowther is a liar.—Kangaroo. But you can't mess the characters about like this.—Ed. I'm not trying to mess them about; it's Black Dick doing that.—Kangaroo.)

As Black Dick struck another match Lord Houghton was startled to see the firework flare up and fall into the gunpowder. Surely this was the end!

### IV.

By ERNEST LEVISON.

IT was not the end, as it happened. The reader must remember that since the noble lord had come in he had been quietly drinking champagne, and what he saw was quite imaginary. To put the matter bluntly, Lord Houghton must have been a bit tipsy.

What really occurred was this: The squib flared, and then fell on the floor. By the time Reckless Richard had picked it up it had seemingly fizzled its damp existence out again.

"Not exploded?" queried Lord Houghton, after a pause. "Then you are my prisoner, Richard! Please accompany me to the strong-room. I will lock you up without further delay."

"I won't!" snapped Black Dick, who was now grey, having made an effort to go white with rage. "I 'ate, 'ate, 'ate you!"

"Three eights are twenty-four!" drawled the noble lord.

(No more old jokes, please. That one has whiskers!—Ed.)

(I don't care. Black Dick hadn't heard it before.—Levison.)

There was the sound of a light step in the cellar, and Lord Houghton spun round, to behold his beautiful bride.

"Algernon!" she cried.

"Evangeline!" he echoed.

And Black Dick said:

"Jumping Jupiter!"

That was all. And then Evangeline dashed forward.

"What are these men doing here?" she demanded.

Lord Houghton waved his hand.

"They are trying to blow us up," he said.

"As a matter of fact, they are a set of incompetent fools! I could have done the trick in half the time!"

"Algernon!" cried Evangeline, noting the noble lord's flushed face.

"It's a fact!" he said calmly. "Dirty Richard—the gentleman opposite me, who has shown his patriotism by saving soap since the beginning of the war—has made several attempts to light that barrel of gunpowder, but he has been unsuccessful. Now I will show you how it should be done."

As he spoke he stooped and caught up the damp squib. Before his beautiful spouse could stop him he had applied a match to it.

Then he threw it into the barrel—

### V.

By CLIFTON DANE.

THIS romantic history might have ended right here if it had not been for a fact which has already been commented upon. That is, that Lord Houghton had had too much champagne.

When he threw the squib, he was looking at two barrels. And he threw it into the wrong one. In consequence, it fell on to the floor.

The next moment Evangeline threw herself on to her husband and forced him to the ground. She had been a Suffragette in her time, and she was more than the master of any man.

"Old 'un, missis!" wheezed Black Richard. "E'll be the death o' me!"

Lady Evangeline rose.

"You men will come with me!" she said.

Ginger Rufus shook his head round the corner.

"No, we won't!" he said.

Evangeline stamped her pretty foot. It happened to be on Lord Houghton's head, but that did not seem to hurt her.

"You are my prisoners!" she shouted.

The corners of Black Richard's mouth twitched. That was a trick he had inherited from his grandfather.

"You're outnumbered," he said. "You are my prisoner!"

That was enough for Lady Evangeline. Although Richard was taller than she, she dashed across the cellar and smacked his face.

"Coward!" roared Dick, retreating towards the door from which she had come. "It one your own size, carn't you?"

Evangeline breathed deeply. Lord Houghton did the same, and sat up. He was just beginning to feel convalescent.

"The correct thing to do now," he said, "is to smoke a cigarette. Has anyone got one?"

Evangeline ignored him.

"What shall I do?" she breathed hoarsely.

"My retreat is cut off! I cannot escape! Oh, what shall I do?"

"Have a try at the squib," said Lord Houghton peevishly. "We've all done our best with the rotten thing!"

Evangeline took a step forward.

### VI.

By REGINALD TALBOT.

WHAT was Lady Evangeline going to do? (Hanged if I know.—Ed.)

She was in a terrible predicament. Being of Irish descent, she was naturally impetuous, and her first impulse was to end it all.

But, on second thoughts, she saw the possibility that she would be blown up as well. Could she not devise some better method?

She leaned back against the wall, panting. Lord Houghton dragged himself slowly to his feet and leaned against the gunpowder barrel. Not wishing to behave like her spouse, Evangeline stepped away from the wall again. Lord Houghton, endeavouring to do a similar thing, fell over.

But he quickly staggered to his feet, and, dashing the gunpowder out of his eyes, gazed sternly round him. He had pulled his fleeing faculties together by an effort, and now, he saw, it was up to him to protect the lady from the efforts of these ruffians, who were as eager to blow her up as they were to exterminate themselves.

All the chivalry in his nature came to his rescue.

"Now, you dogs!" he shouted. "You shall pay for this!"

As he spoke he snatched a revolver from his pocket. Black Dick rushed at him.

Then Lord Houghton fired, and Richard rolled over on the floor. Ginger Rufus followed his example, and the same thing happened. But before the noble lord could fire again the other two were on him, struggling like mad.

Everyone had forgotten the squib. But that useful article, which had dried partly from the efforts of Richard in trying to light it, and partly from excitement, now got under the foot of one of the ruffians. It exploded with a tremendous bang.

The next instant the explosion had spread to the gunpowder barrel. There was a flash of flame, and a shower of sparks, a great crashing, and then silence, at last, in the vault.

(I say, Talbot, you can't kill the heroes as well as the villains, you know. Besides, I don't want any killing done in my yarns.—Ed. Can't help that. They're dead now. Give it to Skimpole!—Talbot.)



## VII.

By HERBERT SKIMPOLE.

**T**HE following is an extract culled from a nocturnal broadsheet (Skimmy means evening newspaper.—Ed.) published recently:

"A new film will shortly be on show throughout the country, the most exciting scene taking place in an old disused vault in the country mansion of Lord Houghton, Secret Service agent.

"A gang of spies endeavour to blow him up, but are surprised by Lord Houghton, who lanters with them while endeavouring to think of a plan. They endeavour to blow him up, but unsuccessfully.

"Still acting, he drinks a bottle of champagne in their presence. This, however, in accordance with a previous plot of theirs, is drugged, and almost immediately has its effect on him.

"Then his beautiful wife appears upon the scene. Her voice and heroic actions rouse the drugged lord, and he deals successfully with the intruders, until the charge which was to have blown up the house is unfortunately exploded by an accident.

"Hero and heroine, however, escape with their lives, Lady Houghton being behind a pillar, and Lord Houghton underneath two of his assailants. And so a pretty little story is drawn to a conclusion."

I just give one other extract, culled from

"Film Spoofs," a book recently put on the market:

"We fear that if picture-goers could have heard the actual conversation which took place during a most thrilling film recently issued, and seen how many times the camera stopped for a part to be rehearsed, and how, finally, they were deceived, they would never trust again in the realism of films.

"In the taking of a film, however, the actors must say something in order to get the movements of their mouths upon the screen, and it is a good thing for the realism of films that the public never hears what is said."

(Well done, Skimmy! You got Talbot out of a nasty position.—Ed.)

## THE RAIDERS OF ROOKWOOD!

By KIT ERROLL.

"THERE'S a war on!"

Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, made that observation seriously, with a thoughtful expression.

Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook stared at him.

"I fancy I've heard of it!" Cook remarked sarcastically.

"Sure, and I've heard it spoken of, now I come to think of it!" remarked Doyle, with equal sarcasm.

Tommy Dodd did not heed.

"In war-time," he went on, "one of the chief things to do is to cut off the supplies of the enemy."

"Well?"

"Raiding the enemy and intercepting his supplies and confiscating them for one's own use is a justifiable military measure," continued Tommy Dodd.

"Phwat are you driving at, entirely?"

"Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, ass!" said Cook. "But what are you driving at, all the same?"

"I mean what I say. Being in a state of war, it's up to us to raid the enemy and cut off his supplies for our own use."

"You howling ass! How can we raid the Germans?" shouted Cook.

"Who's talking about Germans?"

"You are, I suppose!"

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd. "I'm not talking about Germans. I was alluding to the state of war existing between Moderns and Classics at Rookwood."

"Oh!"

"And to come to the point, Jimmy Silver is in the school shop!"

"Oh!"

"And I've seen him ordering things from a list he had with him," explained Tommy Dodd. "Now, as I've said, there's a war on!"

"Ha, ha!"

"A war between Moderns and Classics. We're Moderns and Silver's Classical, so it is up to us to raid Silver and confiscate his supplies. That's as certain as anything in the war books. As a military measure, I think it's the proper caper."

"Hear, hear!" said Doyle heartily. "All the more because, by the same token, we're short of tin, and there's nothin' in the study for tay."

"Come on, then!" said Tommy Dodd briskly. "We shall catch Jimmy Silver on the hop as he comes out. He was still ordering things when I left him."

"Good egg!"

The three Tommies bore down on the tuckshop at once, prepared to put that military measure into practice without delay.

They caught a glimpse of Jimmy Silver, of the Classical Fourth, inside the shop.

Jimmy was filling a basket with his purchases. Those purchases were unusually extensive, and really seemed to hint that Jimmy Silver was in danger of exceeding the grub rules.

"My hat! This will be a merry feast of the gods!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "It being quite justifiable to raid the enemy's supplies in war-time, we shall have rather a whacking tea in the study after all."

And the three Moderns chuckled softly.

They remained under cover of the big beech near the tuckshop, waiting for Jimmy Silver to sally forth with his purchases.

The Classical junior emerged at last.

With his well-filled basket in hand, Jimmy started for the School House.

"Now!" rapped out Tommy Dodd.

The three Moderns rushed from behind the tree upon the startled Jimmy.

They were upon him in the twinkling of an eye.

Tommy Dodd grabbed at the basket and jerked it away, what time Cook and Doyle grasped Jimmy Silver, and sat him down in the quad with a heavy bump.

"Oh!" roared Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hook it!" ejaculated Tommy Dodd. "There's some Classical rotters yonder! Hook it!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were running across from the School House.

The three Moderns did not wait for them. Tommy Doyle sprinted for Mr. Manders' House with the captured basket. Cook and Doyle stayed only to bump Jimmy Silver and roll him over, and then dashed after him.

Jimmy Silver sat up dizzily.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow, yow! Stop, you thumping asses! Bring that basket back! Do you hear?"

But the three Tommies were in full flight with their prize. Like the dying gladiator of old, they heard, but they heeded not.

Right across the quadrangle they dashed, and they dodged into the porch of Mr. Manders' House gasping, but victorious.

"Our win!" panted Tommy Dodd.

"Hurrah!"

"Hallo! What have you got there?" called out Towle.

"Classical grub!" chorled Tommy Dodd.

"Prize of war! Come up to the study, my pippins! It's tea-time, and here's tea—kindly provided by Jimmy Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The prize was borne up to Tommy Dodd's study.

Towle and three more Moderns came in to share the loot.

With gleeful faces the successful raiders unpacked the basket.

It was a tremendous prize.

There was a three-pound jar of jam, there was a box of preserved fruits, there were biscuits and cheese and sugar and tea, and several other good things, all in ample quantity.

"My hat! The Classics must have been in funds!" grinned Tommy Cook. "This is a bit in excess of the grub rules, I fancy."

"It is—it are!" chuckled Tommy Dodd.

"But we can bring it just within the grub rules again by sharing it out among seven—us seven!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Towle.

There was a step in the passage. The door opened, and Jimmy Silver, in a somewhat dusty state, looked in excitedly.

"You Modern duffers—" he began.

"My hat! You've got cheek to come here, hearing us in our own merry den!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Give him socks!"

"That grub—"

"Kick him out!"

"Mr. Bootles—"

"Outside!"

"I tell you—"

Jimmy Silver had no time for more. The Moderns rushed on him in a body, and the next moment he was struggling with seven.

His sublime cheek in pursuing the Modern raiders into their own quarters required severe punishment, in the opinion of Tommy Dodd & Co.

They proceeded to administer the severe punishment.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yaroo! Oh! I tell you— Yah!"

"Give him another!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroo! Leggo! I came to tell you—

Yoop! I came to warn you— Yah! Oh!"

gurgled Jimmy Silver.

Bump, bump!

"Put his head in the ashes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrrrrgg!"

In the excitement of the moment the juniors did not hear a heavy tread outside. Jimmy was wriggling in seven pairs of hands, with his head in the ashes, when a deep voice broke in upon the scene.

"What, what! Bless my soul, boys—bless my soul!"

It was Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth.

Tommy Dodd & Co. let go Jimmy Silver as if he had suddenly become red-hot. They faced round towards the Classical master. Jimmy Silver sat up and spluttered.

"Groogh-hooh!"

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "I am amazed! Dodd, I saw you from my study window seize the provisions for which I had sent James Silver to the school shop!"

"Wha-a-at!" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"I am astounded, Dodd, at your impertinence in playing tricks upon the property of a Form-master!" thundered Mr. Bootles.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mr. Lane and Mr. Loftus are actually waiting for tea in my study, while you are playing tricks with the provisions intended for the repast!" pursued Mr. Bootles wrathfully. "It is unheard of! Unparalleled! You have actually unpacked my property! Bless my soul!"

"I—I—we—we— Oh, crum's!" groaned Tommy Dodd.

Never for a moment had it entered the Modern leader's mind that Jimmy Silver had been performing an errand for his Form-master.

Certainly, the boldest of Modern raiders would never have dreamed of laying lawless hands upon the supplies for Mr. Bootles' tea if he had known.

"Oh, howly mother ay Moses!" gasped Doyle. "We've done it now!"

"Ow!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "I tried to tell you, you silly asses! Groogh!"

"Dodd," thundered Mr. Bootles, "pack that basket immediately!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

With great haste the Modern juniors hurried to pack the basket.

Mr. Bootles watched them with a stern eye.

"I shall report your conduct to the Head, Dodd!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Only a lark, sir!" gasped Cook. "We—we—we—"

"I—I—I—I—"

"We—we—we—we—"

"Oh, dear!"

"The silly duffers thought it was my stuff, sir," said Jimmy Silver, getting on his feet



and rubbing ashes out of his hair. "It was only a lark, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Awfully sorry, sir!" murmured Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, sir, awfully sorry!"

"Well, well!" said Mr. Bootles, allowing himself to be placated. "Perhaps there is no harm done. On another occasion, however, I shall be more severe. Silver, kindly carry that basket to my study."

"Certainly, sir!" said Jimmy.

Mr. Bootles strode out, and Jimmy, closing one eye at the Moderns, picked up the newly-packed basket and followed him.

"Oh, begorra!" gasped Doyle, when they were gone. "Lucky it was Bootles, and not

old Manders! Mandy would have scalped us!"

"Might have been jolly well licked all round," said Towle. "Of all the silly idiots, Tommy Dodd takes the cake! Fancy raiding a Form-master's grub!"

"Only fancy!"

"Of all the chumps!"

"Of all the silly fatheads—"

"Of all the hurbling jabberwocks—"

"How was I to know?" demanded Tommy Dodd hotly. "I—I saw that Classical ass buying the stuff, and I—"

"Yah!"

"Fathead!"

"Look here, Doyle! Look here, Cook! Why, you rotters, you helped me—"

"Oh, bump him!" said Cook.

"Why, you—you— It was a ripping idea, only—"

"Bump him for his ripping ideas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Oh, my hat! Leggo! I tell you it was a corking idea, only—"

Bump!

"I tell you— Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The Modern juniors streamed out of the study, having thus testified their opinion of Tommy Dodd and his ripping ideas. Tommy Dodd sat on the rug and struggled for his second wind.

## GUSSY'S LATE CROP!

By SIDNEY CLIVE.

I.  
"WHAT on earth's that?"  
Six voices asked that question in unison.

It was tea-time.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had dropped into Study No. 6 to tea. Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, to whom the study belonged, had asked them to tea, upon the usual condition that they brought their own bread and sugar.

Blake and Herries and Digby were there when they arrived.

Arthur Augustus was absent. He had gone down to Rylcombe for further supplies, Blake explained, having received a whole quid that day from his noble governor.

Naturally the six juniors were eagerly awaiting the return of the great Arthur Augustus.

There were still one or two comestibles upon which the eagle eye of the Food Controller had not fallen, and in which hungry juniors could indulge without being guilty of food-lagging.

So six faces lit up with smiles as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in with a big bundle under his arm.

But as he laid that bundle on the table and proceeded to open it, six indignant voices were raised in chorus.

A peculiar chemical smell preceded from the parcel.

Evidently it contained nothing of an edible nature.

"What is it?" roared Blake.

"What the thunder—"

"What the merry dickens—"

Arthur Augustus smiled an expansive smile at the indignant tea-party.

"It's all wight, deah boys," he said reassuringly.

"What is it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Give it a name!"

"It can't be anything for tea!" shouted Herries. "It smells like carbide of calcium!"

"The—the howling ass can't have gone and bought carbide of calcium!" gasped Digby.

"Why, there must be a hundredweight of the stuff!"

"There is not a hundredweight, Dig; though I weally wish there were, as it is feahfully useful. There is ten pounds, and it was wathah heavy, cawwyin' it home."

"But what is it?" shrieked all the tea-party, in exasperation.

"Fertilisah, deah boys!"

"Fuf-fuf-fuf-fertilisah!"

"Lumpkins' Lightning Fertilisah!" announced Arthur Augustus proudly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I was just goin' to do some shoppin', you know," explained D'Arcy. "and the man was in the shop twyin' to sell some of the stuff to Mrs. Murphy. Mrs. Murphy, for some reason, would not purchase it. But the man saw I was intewested, and he explained its properties to me. It is the vewy best fertilisah on the market."

"How do you know?"

"The man said so, deah boy."

"Oh!"

"The results," continued Arthur Augustus, "are weally extraordinary, if you use plenty of the Lightning Fertilisah. At two shillin's a pound, it is simply givin' it away to the public—the man said so. You see, his firm is patriotic, and instead of twyin' to make profits, they are thinkin' only of helpin' on amateur vegetable-growth, you know. I regard it as bein' vewy noble of them."

"But how do you know—"

"The man told me so."

"Oh, dear!"

"Put a couple of ounces to each squah yard of gwound, and you get a weally wonderful cwop—"

"Of what?"

"Anythin'! Put a pound to the yard, and you get a phenomenal cwop. That was the man's vewy word—phenomenal!" said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "He was a vewy nice-spoken man, and vewy polite and respectful; and seemed vewy intewested in our school allotments when I told him about them. He said it was a pity he had not known about them earliah in the yeah, as he would have sold us a ton of the stuff at a weduced pwice. It was wathah unfortunate, wasn't it?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Howevah, it is all wight. We shall get our second cwop of peas first-wate with the help of the Lightning Fertilisah!" said D'Arcy cheerfully. "Aftah tea you fellahs can come and help me on the allotment, you know. I am goin' in for a fine cwop of late autumn peas."

"And what are we going to have for tea?" roared Herries.

"Nevah mind tea, Hewwies."

"You—you—you—"

"Weally, Hewwies, this is not a time to be thinkin' of your inside!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Are we not twyin' to beat the Huns on the allotment system? If the war goes on for ten yeahs longah we shall want all the vegetables we can gwow. And you must wemembah, Hewwies, that the war may last pewpaws twentay yeahs or so."

"You—you—you—" stuttered Herries.

"Pway don't be unpatwiotic, Hewwies! With this magnificent fertilisah we shall get a splendid cwop of gween peas on the gwound where we have taken up the main cwop potatoes. It is always best to change the cwop, you know—a farmah chap told me that."

"Kill him, somebody!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake! By plantin' first-early peas at this time of the yeah, you get a second cwop, if the season is good. Well, with the assistance of this splendid fertilisah, we shall make sure of a splendid cwop of peas. We shall be able to send a feahful lot to the wounded soldiahs at Wayland Hospital. They will be vewy glad to get fwesh gween peas in the wintah."

"In the winter?" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! How are you going to raise green peas in the winter?"

"By the help of the Lightning Fertilisah, deah boy."

"You can't do it!" shrieked Blake.

"I am assahled, Blake, that it is not too late in the season yet to gwow another cwop of peas. Undah ordinary cires, it would be considered wathah late to put them in, but with the help of this fertilisah it will be as easy as waddin' off a form. I expect them to beat a splendid cwop about Novembah—"

"Novembah! Oh, jiminy!"

"Gard! We'll have fwesh green peas on the Fifth of Novembah," said Monty Lowther. "Please to remember the Fifth of Novembah, when Gussy's green peas will be—er—such a whooze!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats?" said Arthur Augustus. "You duffahs don't know anythin' about gardenin'. I have often considered that I could have done a lot of work of national importance if I had been appointed Garden Contwollah. I weally do not see why cwops should not be gwown all the yeah wend by usin' plenty of this splendid fertilisah. Aftah tea—"

"Have you spent the whole quid on fertilisah?" demanded Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, you ass!"

"You frabjous ass!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an ass! You wait till you see my gween peas all a-gwovin' and a-blowin'—"

"In Novembah!" roared Lowther.

"Or Decembah!" chortled Tom Merry.

"Or January!" shrieked Manners.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass severely upon the Terrible Three.

"You are pleased to be funny," he said, with dignity. "I wegard this mewwiment as Wibald myself. By usin' lots of this fertilisah it would not be imposs to have fwesh gween peas for dinnah on Chwistmas Day. The man said so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Tea in Study No. 6 was exceedingly frugal after all. It was, as Monty Lowther remarked, the most warlike of war teas. But there was one individual in the study at least who did not mind at all, and that was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was in a vewy cheery mood, and anxious to get to work on the junior allotments, and to prove to these Doubting Thomases the wonderful qualities of Lumpkins' Lightning Fertilisah!

### II.

MONTY LOWTHER had been silent for three minutes—an unusual circumstance with Lowther. Prep was over in Tom Merry's study.

"I've been thinking," said Lowther at last.

"Time you started," agreed Manners.

"Ass! About Gussy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear old Gussy has been working like a Trojan. He's got in a row of first-early peas along the south wall of the allotment, and he's smothered them with pounds of fertilisah. If they had any chance of coming up at this time of the year, he's spoiled it with the muck he's shoved on them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got my suspicions about that fertilisah," continued Lowther. "I've looked at it and sniffed it. I've got a very strong suspicion that the dear man who sold it to Gussy made it himself, out of anything that came to hand, and stacked it into old fertilisah-tins that he'd gathered up from dustbins."

Tom Merry and Manners yelled.

It was only too probable. They, too, had had their suspicions about the Lightning Fertilisah.

"You know how war-time locks up enterprises," said Lowther. "Lots of people who are thoroughly honest in peace-time take to swindling in war-time as a duck takes to water. My opinion of Gussy's cheery old fertilisah is that it's made of sawdust, brick-dust, old mortar, and clay, with a dose of carbide to give a chemical puff."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The only genuine thing about it is the tins it's stacked in, which the merry merchant must have filled on dust-heaps. Under the circumstances, with that fertilisah, and a month or two late in the season, Gussy's peas are not likely to be growing and blowing under the snow at Christmas-time."

"Ha, ha! Not likely."

"But it's a shame for Gussy to be disappointed. It's a rule for allotment-holders to help one another, isn't it?"

(Continued on page 16.)



## GUSSY'S LATE CROP!

(Continued from page 15.)

"Certainly!"  
 "Then I propose helping Gussy. We helped him before, when he was growing cabbages. Let's help him again."  
 "How, ass?"  
 "Follow your leader!" said Monty Lowther. "Gussy's at prep now, and he won't know. Let's do good by stealth."  
 And the Terrible Three left the study and proceeded to the school allotments—to do good by stealth, as Monty Lowther suggested.

### III.

"**B**AI JOVE!"  
 Arthur Augustus stared. He rubbed his eyes and stared again.

It was morning, and Arthur Augustus was first down.

Even with the aid of the Lightning Fertiliser he did not really expect his peas to be up the first morning. But he went to have a look at them, like the enthusiastic amateur gardener he was.

And, to his amazement, he found the whole row above ground.

A blade of green showed above the newly-turned earth, all along the row.

"Blake! Hewwies! Dig!" yelled Arthur Augustus, in great excitement.

"Hallo!"

"Come heah! Quick! Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great pip!"

The three juniors stared at the blades of green. Then they exchanged a glance.

"Isn't it wonderful?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Comin'-up in a single night like a mushroom, you know! That's the result of the fertilisah. I am glad I gave them plenty of fertilisah."

"Splendid!" said Blake.

"Marvellous!" chorused Herries and Digby.

"Tom Mewwy! Lowthah! Mannahs! Come and look!"

The Terrible Three came and looked, and joined in the chorus of wonder. It was indeed a surprising sight. Arthur Augustus, full of glee, trotted off to spread the wonderful news.

"Well, this beats everything!" said Monty Lowther. "Fancy green peas coming up in a single night—"

"With shoots like ordinary blades of grass, too," said Blake. "Wonderful!"

"Amazing!" grinned Herries. "It must have taken somebody a long time to plant grass all along that row last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I wonder when it will dawn on Gussy that those merry shoots are not exactly in the style of green peas?" said Blake reflectively. "What Gussy doesn't know about gardening ought to get him a big job on the Board of Agriculture."

Quite a crowd of fellows gathered on the allotment to admire Arthur Augustus' wonderful crop.

Nobody pointed out to him that the fresh shoots did not look much like newly-springing green peas.

And Arthur Augustus, who had very vague ideas as to what the shoots ought to look like, was quite satisfied.

Several times that day he applied fresh doses of the Lightning Fertiliser to the row.

Gussy's idea was that his green peas could not have too much of a good thing.

And the next morning he was down before rising-bell in order to see what progress the crop had made during the night.

His eyeglass dropped from his eye in his astonishment as he gazed at the row by the south wall.

It was quite a sunny morning for late autumn. But it was amazing to think that an autumn sun had had this effect upon the row of peas. For each was now a plant about four inches high. The character of the shoots had entirely changed. Instead of resembling separate grass-shoots, they now bore a strong resemblance to dandelion-plants.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Wonderful!" chorused Tom Merry & Co., when they came down to see the amazing sight.

"The results of usin' that fertilisah are weally wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall have to send them a wippin' testimonial. There is one thing that wathah puzzles me, and that is, that these peas do not much wesemble those we waised in the sunnah, though I have used some of the seed that was left ovah fwom the same lot."

"Probably the result of the fertiliser," said Monty Lowther gravely. "The effect may be so tremendous as to produce a new variety of green pea."

"Bai Jove! That is poss! Certainly, it does appeah to be a somewhat difewent vawlety."

"It does—it do!" agreed Blake.

After lessons that day the enthusiastic gardener hardly waited for tea before he marched his comrades down to the allotment. Blake & Co. had work to do there, but they obligingly visited the south wall first to see how the peas were getting on.

"Gweat Scott!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as he sighted the row.

During the day, the wonderful peas had made another striking change.

They were now much taller, and prickly to the touch, and bore a surprising resemblance to thistles.

Arthur Augustus gazed at them speechlessly.

"B-b-bal Jove!" he gasped. "I—I nevah saw gween peas quite like that befoah! Wow! They are all pwickly!"

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated Blake. "I should go easy with that fertiliser, Gussy. They may turn into cocconut-palms next."

"Wats! But it is weally a vewy extwaw-ordinary weseult of the fertilisah," said D'Arcy, in bewilderment. "I still have some left, and I think I shall put it on. It is weally vewy wemarkable in its effects."

The remainder of the Lightning Fertiliser was duly administered. The next morning there was a regular procession to the allotment to see how that amazing row of peas was getting on.

Arthur Augustus almost fell down. The wonderful plants had changed again. Each of them had turned into a bare, wooden twig, with no sign of leaves of any kind.

"Oh, cwunbs!" said D'Arcy, almost overcome. "L-look at that, deah boys! Some-thing has happened to my peas! Pewwaps I wathah ovah-did the fertilisah! Do you think I ovah-did the fertilisah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Looks like it," agreed Tom.

"Must have!" said Lowther, with a nod. "That accounts for it!"

"I wathah think I shall examine one of them, and see how it is gettin' on at the woot," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"You'll kill it," warned Lowther.

"Yaas; but it is worth while to discovah how the fertilisah is affectin' them," explained D'Arcy. "This is weally a vewy unusual expewience, you know, and I am thinkin' of w'itin' to the gardenin' papahs about it. I can afford to sacwifice one plant in the intewests of science, you know."

And the swell of St. Jim's pulled up the nearest.

To his amazement, it came up quite easily, and there was no root at the lower end.

A yell of merriment burst from all the juniors. D'Arcy's expression, as he stared at the elm-twig in his hand, was too much for them.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This—this is not a gween pea at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus, a light dawning upon his noble brain at last. "Some howwid wottah has been pullin' my leg—"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some feahful beast has been plantin' wubbish heah, I firmly believe."

"Not really!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, weally! Where are my gween peas, you awful wottahs?"

"Still in the ground," grinned Monty Lowther. "They may come up next spring, and they may not. Aren't you glad to have this crop to be going on with?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you Hun! I wegard this as a wotten twick!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "It is too bad!"

"As bad as spending all the tin on spoof fertiliser when it was wanted for tea in the study!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed at the grinning juniors with feelings too deep for words.

"What a pity Gussy pulled up that beautiful plant!" sighed Monty Lowther. "You've disappointed yourself, Gussy; you were going to find a row of cabbages there to-morrow morning! Gardeners shouldn't be so hasty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—you—you—you—!" Words failed Arthur Augustus, and he stalked off the allotment with his noble nose in the air, leaving the juniors yelling with laughter. And for a long time afterwards, a favourite tonic in the School House—excepting with Arthur Augustus himself—was Gussy's Late Crop.

THE END.

## The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

### "PONSONBY'S PAL!"

By Frank Richards.

No, this is not a story about Philip—otherwise Flip—Derwent, as readers of the "Twins from Tasmania," which seems to be delighting everyone, in the "Gem," might imagine.

Derwent does not come into the story at all. The only nuts we meet besides Pon himself are Gadsby and Monson minor.

Jack Wingate is "Ponsonby's Pal," and you will guess that it is not for the benefit of Wingate minor that Pon takes him up.

The Bounder plays his part in the story—a sympathetic part, and yet a doubtful one. Some of you, I fear, admire the Bounder rather too indiscriminately. There is much in him that is worthy of respect—his pluck, his coolness, and other qualities. But don't get thinking that the part he plays in next week's fine yarn is really a fine one. It is not. He does evil that good may come of it

—and it is a perilous doctrine that one may do this.

What is the story about? Oh, you will know that next week!

### TWO MESSAGES.

I have no room to reopen the old popular Replies in Brief column, and those who ask for answers in the paper ask in vain. But I have messages to two readers which I can only get to them in this way. It must not be taken as a precedent—in general, if you cannot send me your name and address, you must not expect an answer, that's all!

Miss J. S. (Hampstead).—The suggestion you make is being acted upon. You are very keen, and have quite good ideas. But why—oh, why—instead of worrying yourself week after week with doubts, don't you send your postal address?

E. L. R. (Walthamstow).—Over a year ago you wrote me, asking a favour. You had been up here once or twice, and we had corresponded in friendly wise. You never got an answer to that last letter, and I dare say you thought me rude. But it had no address! And we don't file old letters for reference—haven't room. I have been meaning to get at you through this column for

months past; but work is always with us, and Chats have to be written in a hurry, and no one can remember everything. Having forgotten this some fifty times, I have now remembered.

### NOW ON SALE.

Four new numbers of the "Boys' Friend 3d. Library," entitled respectively:

No. 397.—"The League of Seven." By Maurice Everard.

No. 398.—"The Stowaway's Quest."

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Two new numbers of the "Sexton Blake Library," with these titles:

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All the right sort, of course. Threepence each, anywhere and everywhere. And if your newsagent says he cannot get them—as I have lately heard was the case with one country reader's shop—it only means that he won't take the trouble. But 4d. in stamps to this office will bring any one of them, unless you delay too long and it is sold out!

YOUR EDITOR.

20-10-17