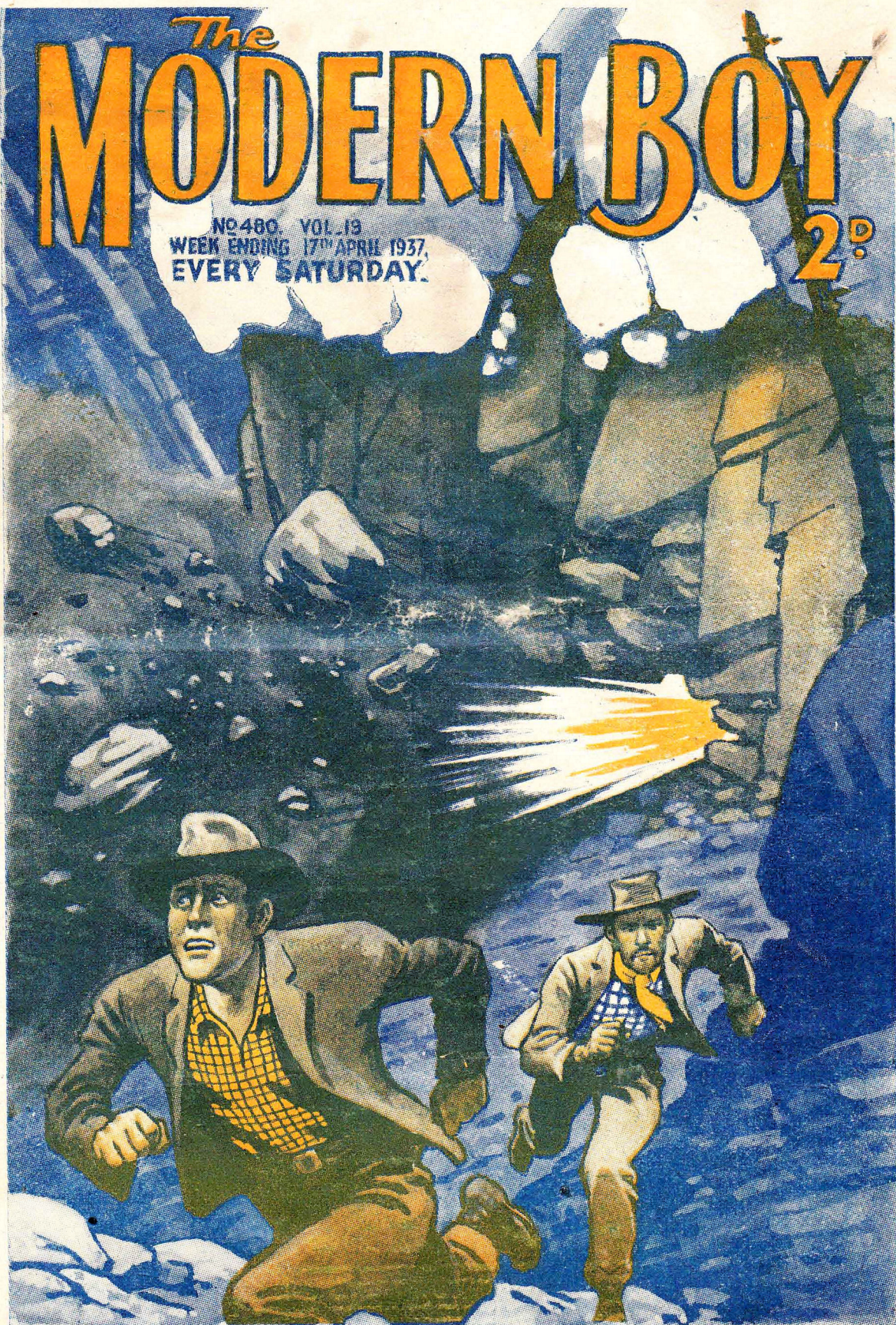


A FINISH IN FLAMES! Capt. G. E. T. EYSTON'S Own
Story of Motor-racing Thrills!

The MODERN BOY

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2^D



DYNAMITERS DEFY THE AVALANCHE!—See "THE GREAT BARRIER!"
Splendid New Picture-Story

LEN LEX, SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE, has a big problem to solve—why the new Fifth Former is deliberately—

ASKING for the SACK!

Pie Pipes Up!

MR. CHOWNE, master of the Shell at Oakshott School, was taking roll in hall. Chowne was plump, but he was curt and irritable, and he snapped the names off almost as if he was biting them off. "Adsum" had been answered to every name till he came to that of Eric Tunstall, the new fellow in the Fifth Form. Then there was a pause.

The Forms stood ranked in their places, Champion of the Sixth, head boy, standing beside Chowne as he called the roll, his ash under his arm. Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth, was speaking in an undertone to Oliphant, captain of Oakshott. Otherwise there was silence, save for a buzz or murmur now and then from the mob of the Lower School. The Fifth Form, as became their dignity as seniors, were quiet and sedate, though probably as keen as the juniors to hear the last of Chowne's squeaky voice, and scamper out. But there was a low murmur of whispering in the Fifth when Tunstall failed to answer to his name.

Len Lex glanced round. The Schoolboy Detective had his own reasons for being interested in Tunstall of the Fifth, who had come that term, only a few days ago. Banks and Harvey, and Porrynge, Len's chums, looked round, too. The new fellow belonged to their study, No. 8.

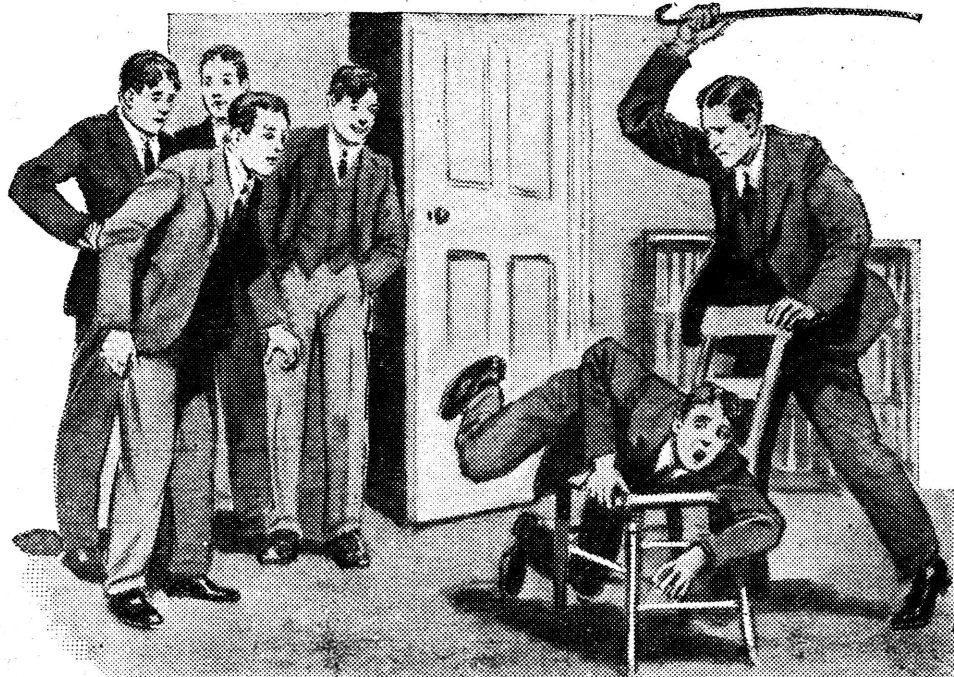
"He's not here!" whispered Banks. "He went out just before lock-up," whispered Porrynge. "I saw him."

The sharp voice of Mr. Chowne came down the hall again, as he repeated the name, in a raised tone of annoyance.

"Tunstall!" "Adsum!" came back from the ranks of the Fifth.

And Chowne, satisfied, went on calling the names.

Len Lex, Banks, and Harvey concentrated their gaze on Pie Porrynge. Pie winked at them. Pie, in the cheery kindness of his heart, had chanced it, and answered for the absent Fifth Former. It was fearfully good-natured of Pie, for he loathed Tunstall. But old Pie was



Howling, wriggling, and squirming did not save Tunstall. Champion of the Sixth brought down six whops in steady succession!

all good nature. He would have done his worst enemy a good turn, without stopping to think of risk.

Luckily, Chowne was in haste to get through, and suspected nothing. But they saw the eyes of Champion of the Sixth turned in their direction. They dreaded to see him speak to Chowne. That particular prefect had a very keen eye, as wrongdoers at Oakshott knew only too well. To their relief, Champion said nothing, though they were sure he scented a rat. Chowne squeaked on, and the danger was past.

It was the rule at Oakshott for all the school to keep their places till the last name was called. Roll-call over, they swarmed out. Porrynge grinned complacently. He had got by with it. Tunstall, when he came meandering in later, would not be walked off to the Head. Pie was as pleased as if he liked Tunstall, instead of loathing him.

In the senior day-room, where the Fifth Form congregated, Pie's friends

surrounded him, gazing at him more in sorrow than in anger. They liked Porrynge—everybody at Oakshott liked old Pie, except Tunstall, the new man, who seemed to like nobody. They liked Pie all the more for having, as he happily fancied, done a good turn to a fellow he disliked, at considerable risk to himself. But they wondered, as they had often wondered before, how any fellow could be such a priceless goat as Porrynge of the Fifth.

"What's the row?" asked Pie, glancing from face to face. "It's all right for that swab now. Chowne took it like milk!"

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Well, you can call a fellow names, old Banker, if you like," said Pie warmly. "But I call it decent to see a fellow through a scrape, even a swab like that man Tunstall."

"You think you've seen him through?" asked Len.

"Eh? Yes! I tell you Chowne lapped it like milk."

"And how," asked Len, "is Tunstall going to get in without letting all Oakshott know that he cut roll? If you'd played this potty trick at first or second roll, all right; but what's the good of playing it at lock-up roll, when you know the man is out of gates?"

"Oh!" said Pie, taken aback.

Porrynge hadn't thought of that. He had acted, as usual, without thinking. Slowly his jaw dropped, and his face registered dismay.

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON**

Asking for the Sack!

Tunstall could not possibly have the faintest idea that a friend in need had answered for him, and when he came back, he would ring at the school gates for old Wegg to let him in. The porter, of course, would take his name, to be reported. Whereupon the fat would be in the fire.

"Tunstall's going to be lagged," said Harvey, "and we shall have our beak inquiring who answered for him in hall. Tunstall will get lines, and you'll bend over in the Head's study, Pic."

Pie gave a wriggle, as if in anticipation.

"Jever hear of such an idiot?" asked Banks.

"Never!" said Harvey.

Len Lex strolled across to the window—a big casement that looked out on the quad. He gazed out into thickening dusk. He was thinking of Eric Tunstall, coming back late, but more of poor old Pic, who had meant well, and could not help being a goat. There was one chance for both of them. If Tunstall knew, he could get in over a wall, unseen and unsuspected, and the situation would be saved.

Stepping down from the casement was a quick and easy matter, but it was, unfortunately, what the beaks called breaking out after lock-up—an awfully serious matter at Oakshott, as at any other school. But that was what Lex was thinking of. One word to Tunstall before he got in would be enough.

Len paused a moment or two. But if old Pic could run risks for a fellow he loathed, Detective - Inspector Nixon's nephew could run risks for a pal he liked. Len pushed the casement open.

"Hallo! What's the game?" asked Cayley of the Fifth, who had sat down by the window.

"Shut it after me, old bean, and keep mum!" murmured Len. "I'm going to tip that new man, and keep Pic clear, if I can."

He dropped out and vanished. Cayley whistled and shut the window.

A Hunter of Trouble!

LEN LEX shivered, grunted, and experienced a strong desire to punch the head of Eric Tunstall. There was a cold wind from the Sussex downs, and a clammy mist in the air. Hatless and coatless, just as he had slipped out of the House, Len had little protection against either, and he was not enjoying life. Moreover, he had taken it for granted that Tunstall would be along in ten minutes or so; but after half an hour had passed, he still saw nothing of him.

The fellow could not have passed unseen. Len had parked himself in the trees by the roadside, almost opposite the school gates—now shut for the night. From whichever direction Tunstall came, he was certain to hear him, and see him, before he arrived at the gates. What the dickens was keeping him? Any fellow might be

a few minutes late—but no fellow need be half an hour late, and more. Another half-hour, and Len was due for prep in Study No. 8—and he could hardly stay out longer than that, if Tunstall did not come. If he had not been missed already, he would be missed then. But surely the fellow could not mean to cut prep, as well as roll? Not, surely, unless he was deliberately asking for trouble.

So far as Tunstall was concerned, Len would have gone in, and left him to it. But for Pie's sake he hung on, impatiently watching the dusky road.

What was Tunstall up to? Not late back from a walk—he was a slacker of the first water, and little given to walking or any other form of exercise. His chief pleasure seemed to be smoking cigarettes in the study, for which all the fellows in Study No. 8 had booted him in turn. Len fancied that he could guess only too well what Tunstall was up to. The grandson and heir of Sir Gilbert Tunstall had been sacked from Higham School, in Yorkshire, for breaking bounds, betting, and so on. Len knew that, though nobody else at Oakshott knew it.

Detective - Inspector Nixon had asked his nephew to keep an eye on Tunstall. According to the fellow's own story, he had been innocent, and expelled for nothing! This did not look like it! Somehow, old Sir Gilbert's grandson had favourably impressed Bill Nixon, and he more than half-believed in him. Len could not help wondering why.

The Schoolboy Detective's keen ear caught the sound of footsteps on the shadowy road. The footsteps came from the direction of Oakways, near which lay the Peal of Bells, a rather unsavoury inn strictly out of bounds for Oakshott men. Len Lex stepped out from the trees, and looked along the road. It was a schoolboy that was coming, through the deep dusk—lounging along at a leisurely pace, with his hands in his pockets, plainly in no hurry. As he came closer, Len saw that it was Tunstall, and he stepped out into the road to stop him.

"Hold on, Tunstall!" he said quietly.

The new Fifth Former gave a start, and stopped. He peered at Len, and recognised him.

"You—out of gates!" He was a rather good-looking fellow, in his way, but there was a sneering expression on his face that detracted considerably from its good looks. His sneer now was very pronounced. "You—of all people! I thought you were rather a model character, Lex."

Len's eyes gleamed for a moment. "I've been waiting for you!" he snapped. "I suppose you know you're late for roll, Tunstall?"

"Quite! I can stand the racket!" drawled the other. "No bizney of yours, Lex, that I can see."

"A fellow answered for you in hall, and they've not missed you yet. If you cut in, in time for prep, it's all right. I can show you a way in. That's why I'm here. We can get in over the wall by the fives court. Come on—there's no time to lose."

Tunstall stared at him blankly. He did not stir. Unpleasant fellow as he was, Len expected him to look pleased at a chance of escaping punishment. But he did not look pleased. He scowled.

"Don't you understand?" asked Len impatiently.

"I've not asked you to meddle, that I know of," answered Tunstall coolly. "Leave me alone, can't you?"

"You ass! Do you want to go up to the Head?"

"No bizney of yours."

"You fool!" breathed Len. "Haven't you any sense? Why, I can smell baccy about you now! Think the Head won't spot it? Do you want to be booted out of Oakshott?"

"I want you to mind your own business, and leave me to take care of mine," retorted Tunstall. "I never asked you to answer for me in hall!"

"Think I'd be ass enough, if you did?" snapped Len. "It was that goat Porryng sang out for you, and he will get into a fearful row for doing it, if you're spotted."

"The meddling fool! I'm asking no favours of him, or of you, either!" said Tunstall stubbornly. "Go your way, and leave me to go mine."

He brushed past Len Lex, and walked on towards the school gates. Len stood as if rooted to the road. The fellow was going to ring for Wegg to let him in—after the way of safety had been pointed out. It was so puzzling as to be bewildering. Was the fellow going to risk the sack for the sake of mere obstinate ill-nature? If that was what he wanted, he could have it—if Pic had not been involved!

Len stood rooted with astonishment for a moment or two, then he cut after the new Fifth Former at a rapid run, and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Stop!" he snapped. "You're going to ring at the gate and let old Pic be hauled up for trying to do you a good turn?"

"He should have minded his own business."

"He should!" agreed Len, with bitter scorn. "A cad like you wasn't worth bothering about. But, as it happens, he didn't—and you're not going to land him in a row. You're going in over the wall!"

"I'm not!" said Tunstall savagely. "I'm going to do as I jolly well choose. I'm going to ring to be let in."

He wrenched his shoulder loose, and ran for the gates. Len, panting wrath, shot after him, and grabbed him again. Tunstall, with a snarl of rage, struck him in the face. It was the last straw.

Len hit out. Full on the new fellow's angry, sneering mouth his fist landed, and Tunstall pitched over on his back with a crash.

Strong Hand Methods!

IT was seldom that Len, cool and calm by nature, lost his temper. But it was in a blaze now.

He disliked this fellow, as all Study No. 8 did; but it was partly for his sake, as well as Pic's, that he

had taken the risk of breaking out after lock-up. And this was the fellow's thanks. Anything like good-nature or gratitude he did not expect from a sneering, cynical fellow like the new man in the Fifth. But he had expected him to play up, as a matter of course, for his own sake, if for nobody else's. And he was going to play up, if Len could make him.

Tunstall staggered to his feet. He gave the Schoolboy Detective a bitter look—and turned towards the gates again. Len leaped into his way.

"Will you let me pass?" hissed Tunstall.

"No! You're coming in with me, over the wall!" answered Len. "You can come before I thrash you, or after. That's your choice—and if it's scrapping you want, come on."

Tunstall came on. Whatever his motive, he was determined to have his own way. He came on, hitting out fiercely—and Len Lex met him with left and right.

For one minute Tunstall stood up to Len, urged on by savage temper—then the yellow streak in him showed, and he backed off. He dropped his hands and stood panting.

Len followed him up.

"Keep off!" muttered Tunstall. "Keep off, you bully! I've chucked it. Don't touch me!"

"I wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole, if I could help it!" answered Len contemptuously. "You're not nice to touch! But you're coming in with me—"

"I tell you I won't!"

"And I tell you that I'm going to thrash you till you do."

Tunstall backed across the road.

"You rotter! You meddling rotter! I'll shout to the porter—he will hear me from here!"

"Do," said Len—"if you want to be thrashed till you can't crawl on your hands and knees!"

Tunstall did not shout. The gleaming eyes and clenched fists were only a foot from him, and he dared not. Only too clearly, Lex was going to be as good as his word.

The bad hat of Higham, now the bad hat of Oakshott, stood panting and gasping for breath. Len waited a few moments, and then grasped his arm.

"Are you coming?"

"You can let go my arm! I'll come!"

"I'd trust you as soon as I'd trust a fox! Come."

With a grip on a weedy arm that was like a steel vice, Len Lex led the new Fifth Former up the road, turned into the lane that led by the Oakshott fives court, and stopped where a low wall, in the deep shadow of one of the ancient oaks for which the school was famous, offered an easy climb.

Tunstall, with his free hand, mopped his nose with a handkerchief. That handkerchief was deeply dyed with crimson. Brief as the combat had been, he had collected a good many damages.

"We get in here!" snapped Len.

"You go first—"

"Shut that! Get in."

Tunstall gritted his teeth and clambered up. Len clambered by his side, with a wary eye on him, ready to grab him if he tried to drop back. As he fully expected, Tunstall did try—only to be grabbed by the collar. After which Len dragged him, without ceremony, headlong over the wall, and they dropped within together.

"Let go!" Tunstall hissed shrilly. "You rotter! I'll yell for a prefect—"

"The prefect will have to carry you in, if you do!" said Len. "You're not going to make a sound till we're inside the House. You can yell as loud as you like then—and if you give me any lip I'll give you something to yell for. Now shut up!"

Breathing rage, the new man was led away in silence, Len's grip on his arm again. In the quad, Len suddenly dragged him behind a tree as two figures loomed up in the glimmer of lighted windows. Bullivant, the games master, and the master of the Fifth paced by unseeing. Len heard the fellow at his side catch his breath, and read his thoughts: he was thinking of drawing the attention of the masters. Len's grip closed on the imprisoned arm till the bones almost cracked—and Tunstall was silent.

Voices and footsteps died away as the two masters walked on. A couple

of minutes later, Len and Tunstall were under the window of the senior day-room. The casement was partly open, and Harvey was peering out anxiously. He gave a gasp of relief at the sight of the two dim figures outside.

"Douse that glim, Banker!" he called.

The light was shut off suddenly. Surprised and protesting voices were heard all over the room. The light was turned on again in a few moments—but in those few moments Len had clambered in, dragging Tunstall after him, and Harvey had shut the window.

"Caley told me," said Harvey. "I've been watching! You're back none too soon for prep." He stared at Tunstall's scowling face and crimsoned nose. "You two been scrapping?"

"Sort of!" admitted Len.

"I say, this is all right!" chuckled Pie, grinning at them. "Right as rain now! I say, Tunstall, it's all serene—I answered for you at roll, and nobody knows—"

"You meddling fool!"

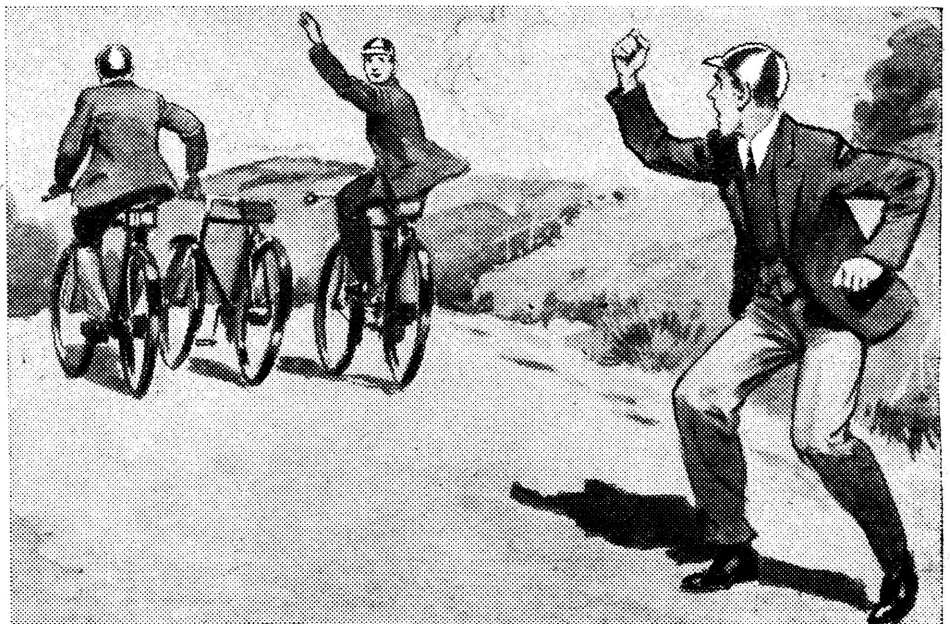
"Eh? What?" ejaculated the astonished Pie.

Tunstall tramped across the room and went out at the door, leaving Pie staring after him blankly!

A Hot Chase!

"LOOK out!" roared Harvey.

Porryge did not look out. He was holding his bicycle in the middle of Trant Lane, his eyes fixed on the back tyre. The tyre was as flat as a pancake. Its state annoyed Pie, and seemed to surprise him. He had mended a puncture in that tyre just before starting out with his friends for a spin, and was surprised to find the tyre quite flat again, only three or four miles from Oakshott. His friends were not surprised, as Pie had mended the puncture!



By the time Pie was on his feet again, Len and Banks were riding off with his bike. "Here, I say! Bring me back that bike!" yelled Pie.

Asking for the Sack!

Len, Harvey, and Banks had dismounted to wait, and had leaned their machines against the roadside fence. But Pie stood in the middle of the road with his deflated jigger—and forgot that the road was not wholly reserved for the use of Oakshott cyclists. A little green Austin came along from Trant—hence Harvey's roar, which Pie did not heed.

"Blow!" said Pie. "That rotten puncture—it's broken out again! I say—"

Len Lex and Harvey interrupted him. Len grasped the bike and swung it to the roadside. Harvey grasped Pie and pitched him over on the grassy bank beside the road. These prompt proceedings, though annoying to Pie, left the road clear for the car that came buzzing along.

Pie sat on the grass and spluttered. His friends smiled down at him. The little Austin glided by. Pie, sitting on the bank, faced it as it passed; the other three, looking at Pie, had their backs to it. As his eyes fell on the man who drove it—a man with a beaky nose—Pie gave a sudden bound.

"Him!" he ejaculated.

The car glided on. The driver had not even glanced at the group of schoolboys at the roadside. He drove on towards Greenwood, unheeding. Pie scrambled to his feet, staring in wild excitement after it.

"It's him!" he gasped.

"Him? Who, fathead?" asked Banks. The three looked round at the car. But they had only a back view of it, and could not see the man who drove. Pie had seen him, and had apparently recognised him—a hostile recognition.

"That rotter!" gasped Pie. "That tick! That beaky blighter— By gum, I'll smash him!"

Pie broke off. He made a stride at his bike, remembered its condition, turned to the other bikes, and grabbed the nearest. It was Harvey's. Pie whirled it into the road, threw a leg over the saddle, and shot away after the Austin.

"Bring that bike back!" shrieked Harvey.

Pie did not heed. Grinding at the pedals, he shot in pursuit of the green Austin.

"Is he potty?" gasped Banks.

"Is he ever anything else?" sighed Len. "After him!"

Len and Banks rushed for their machines, mounted in hot haste, and shot after Porryng. Harvey was left with Pie's deflated machine, spluttering with wrath.

The green Austin was going at a good speed, though not all out. Behind it, about fifty yards, flew Pie in pursuit. About the same distance behind Pie, Len Lex and Banks ground at their pedals.

Foot by foot, Porryng overhauled the car. His pursuers kept pace, but that was all they could do. A mile flew under the flashing wheels. Then there came a rise in the road, up the hill towards Greenwood. The car rose to it without slackening—but it was a different matter with a push-bike. Pie began to lose the ground he had

gained. Len, putting on a spurt, shot ahead of Banks and came level with Pie, labouring up the hill.

"You potty ass!" gasped Len. "Chuck it! What are you up to? Stop!"

"It's him!" panted Pie.

"Who?" yelled Len.

"Him!"

"Him"—whoever "him" was—seemed to be the object of Pie's bitterest hostility. Pie's teeth were set, his eyes gleaming. He laboured at the pedals, going all out. Len could only have stopped him by grabbing at him, with disaster to both. He rode level, prepared, at all events, to butt in if Pie did succeed in getting at the man in the car.

Half a mile on the road levelled again, and Pie picked up speed. The Austin was now a considerable distance ahead, and only a fellow with a very hopeful nature could have fancied that there was a chance of running it down. Pie, undaunted, flew on; Len flew on at his side. In the rear, Banks came pedalling after them. The dust flew from the rapid wheels. Pie was red, spluttering for breath. He put every ounce into it, his long legs going like machinery. But he was not gaining an inch now.

There came a dip in the road, and the Oakshott fellows free-wheeled down it, getting a much-needed breather, and relief for their legs. Down they went at a dizzy speed. Len yelled again:

"Will you chuck it, you fathead? What are you up to?"

"It's him!" Pie, having recovered a little breath, expended it in speech. "That tick! That cheeky rotter! Pitched my bag out of the train first day of term—made me lose the train! I told you fellows! I'll smash him—I said I would! And I jolly well will!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Len.

He understood now. He had forgotten Pie's weird adventures on the first day of term. So had Pie—till the sight of the man in the green Austin recalled them. That motorist, it seemed, was the man with the beaky nose, who for some unaccountable and inexplicable reason had caused Pie to lose his train coming back to school after the holidays. Pie had hardly expected ever to see the man again. Now, unexpectedly, he had seen him. The smashing process was the next item on the programme, if Pie could get at his enemy.

At the end of the dip was another rise, over the downs to Greenwood. The Austin took it like a bird. Not so the push-bikes. It was little more than a green speck in a cloud of dust far up the hill. Pie, apparently still hopeful, slogged on.

"You idiot!" hissed Len. "Stop! We've left old Harvey about four miles back! Will you chuck it, you fathead?"

Pie slogged on, without answering. It was a rut in the road that caused Pie to chuck it—suddenly! Len jammed on his brakes and jumped down as Porryng sat in the road beside a clanging jigger.

"Oh!" gasped Pie. "Ow!"

Banks arrived, and dismounted. He

glared at Pie as if he could have eaten him.

"You mad ass!" he gasped.

"He thinks that motorist was the man who lost him his train, first day of term!" said Len.

"The goat! Most likely he wasn't! If he was, does the mad ass think he can haul a man off a car and punch him?"

"Yes," gasped Pie, "I jolly well do! I'm going to!" He staggered up and grabbed the bike. "He's heading for Greenwood, and I dare say I shall pick him up there!"

Len and Banks exchanged glances. This enterprise, which seemed attractive to Pie, seemed to his friends one to be nipped in the bud.

"Harvey's waiting, miles back—"

said Len.

"Never mind Harvey now!" But Len and Banks did mind Harvey! Likewise, they were quite determined that Pie was not going to amuse himself by punching a motorist.

"Will you come back?" demanded Banks.

"No," said Pie, "I won't!"

Argument, it was clear, was futile. Only action was useful—action was prompt and effective. Len Lex twirled Porryng away from the bike and sat him down on the spot from which he had just risen. Pie, surprised and exasperated, sat and gasped. By the time he was on his feet again Len and Banks were riding down the hill, Len taking the disengaged bike with him. Banks, having a hand free, waved farewell to Pie.

"Here, I say! Bring me back that bike!" yelled Pie.

He started to run in pursuit. Pie, as a pursuer, had little luck; but he was a stickler. Not till the cyclists were out of sight did he sit down by the roadside for the rest he sorely needed.

Six of the Best!

THE door of Study No. 8 shook and groaned as Pie banged on it, but it did not open. Banging on a locked door might be a relief to the feelings, but did not, of course, produce any effect on the lock.

Pie, with flaming face, banged and banged again. His comrades smiled—but Pie was far from smiling. He was in an extremely bad temper. It had been a day of disaster. First, that rotten puncture had let him down, then that offensive tick with the beaky nose had escaped his just wrath, then he had had to walk miles and miles, rejoining his friends at last in a mood to handle them even more severely than he had desired to handle the man in the Austin. Only the fact that they had mended his puncture while they waited for him averted vengeance. The spin had had to be cut very short, and Pie came in very cross, to find the door of his study locked against him.

Tunstall was in the study, and Pie could guess why he had the door locked—the outsider was smoking there! Called on to let the just owners of the study into the same,

Tunstall did not unlock the door, and did not even take the trouble to answer.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went Pie's infuriated fist on the panels. It was past tea-time, and most of the Fifth were in their studies. Most of them looked out of their doorways at that terrific banging from Study No. 8. A dozen voices inquired what the row was about.

"That swab!" hissed Pie. "Keeping a man out of his study while he smokes! Jevver hear of such neck? I'll mop him up! I'll spifficate him!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang! Harvey and Banks joined in the pounding on the door.

Len Lex stood watching them, more puzzled than angry.

The din was tremendous, and obviously could not go on much longer without drawing either a master or a prefect to the Fifth Form studies. Really, it looked as if that was what Tunstall wanted. But how could he want it? The study reeked with smoke—and he would have to open the door at the voice of authority. A master barging in would march him off straight to the Head. A prefect would either march him off to the Head or give him a whopping. In either case, the fellow was booked for bad trouble. If it was imaginable that a fellow wanted to be sacked, Tunstall was heading for exactly that!

Bang, bang, bang! Thump, thump! Kick! Bang! Pie, wildly excited, seemed bent on hacking a way through the thick oak. Harvey and Banks thumped, while Pie kicked. Strong as the oak door was, it groaned and creaked under the combined assault. The fellow within paid no heed. He knew—he must have known—that the din could not pass unheeded. He could not fail to know what the outcome would be. What was his game? Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew was very keen, but he was not keen enough to penetrate this puzzle.

"Cave!" called out Cayley from his door. "Here comes a pre!"

Campion came along the passage with a knitted brow. The head boy of Oakshott was wrathful.

"Stop that row!" he roared. "What the dickens do you think you're up to? Do you know you can be heard all over the House? Gone mad, or what?"

The battering at the study door ceased. Campion arrived on the spot, glaring at the four. He had his ash under his arm. It was uncommon for a prefect to whop a Fifth Form senior. Nevertheless, Campion looked extremely inclined to do so at this moment.

Smoky swab as Tunstall was, nobody wanted to hand him over to the tender mercies of a prefect. But the fat was in the fire now. As none of the four answered, Campion slipped the ash down into his hand. Then, no doubt realising that the Fifth Formers had not been banging on the door simply for amusement, he turned the door-handle, and divined the trouble.

"What's the door locked for?" he snapped.

No answer! Then the prefect gave a sniff. A scent from the locked study smote him. With a very grim face, he tapped on the door.

"You in there, Tunstall? Open this door!"

A Sixth Form prefect was not to be denied. The door opened, revealing Tunstall, standing in an atmosphere thick with cigarette smoke, and with a half-smoked cigarette between thumb and finger. Campion stared at him dumbfounded. Pie & Co. and a dozen Fifth Form men stared at him. There were other fellows at Oakshott who disregarded rules. But cool impudence like this was the limit. There was a moment of deep, tense silence. Then the head prefect spoke quietly:

"You locked these fellows out of their study while you smoked here?"

Tunstall made no answer to that. He dropped the cigarette from his fingers and put his foot on it. Every fellow there had seen it, however.

Campion of the Sixth stepped into the study. The new fellow moved back with a sullen face. Pie and his friends stepped in after Campion. The prefect's presence saved Tunstall from what was due to him. Pie and Banks and Harvey gave him grim looks. Len watched him curiously. He could not understand this—and the Schoolboy Detective was not used to being up against a problem he could not solve. Tunstall's face was sullen, his eyes furtive; he was uneasy and seared. Yet he had asked for this—deliberately asked for it. Why?

"You rotter!" Campion spoke in quiet, measured tones. "A silly fag might put on a cigarette, but this—" He glanced round the study. It was not a matter of one cigarette, or of two or three. A dozen stumps lay on the fender, with as many burnt matches. The room was in a haze. The fellow had sat and smoked and smoked till he must have smoked himself almost sick. Campion was angry and contemptuous; but he was as much surprised as either. This was a new thing in his experience.

"If you weren't new here, I'd take you straight to the Head!" he said, after a pause.

"I'm ready to go to the Head!" muttered Tunstall.

Len's gaze, fixed on his furtive face, grew more concentrated. Any other fellow thus caught would have been glad to get through with six from a prefect's ash. From the headmaster he had something much more severe to expect. Yet Tunstall preferred to go to the Head. What, in the name of wonder, was the fellow's game? Eric Tunstall, sacked from Higham, had barely scraped through at home by protesting his innocence. Sacked from Oakshott after that, he was booked for disinheritance. And he was heading for the sack about as fast as a fellow could!

Campion was swishing his ash. He intended to deal with this matter himself; he did not want to take a fellow who was only a few days at Oakshott to Dr. Osborne.

"Shove that chair over here, Por-

ringe!" he said. "Thanks! Tunstall, bend over that chair!"

"Look here—"

"I don't usually speak twice!" said the head boy.

"I'd rather go to the Head."

"You silly ass!" Cayley spoke from the passage. "The Beak would take the hide off you if he knew this. Might sack you, you dummy!"

Len, watching, saw the momentary glint that came into Tunstall's eyes. A fellow could not want to be sacked—especially a fellow who was going to be disinherited if he came a second mucker. Why was this fellow asking for what he could not possibly want?

Campion pointed to the chair with his cane.

"If you'd been a bit longer at Oakshott, Tunstall, you wouldn't be keen on going up to the Head," he said. "I suppose you don't understand what it means. Anyhow, I've told you what I'm going to do. Now bend over!"

"I've said that I'd rather—"

"It's not what you'd rather, but what I'd rather! Bend over that chair this minute!" roared Campion.

Slowly, sullenly, reluctantly, the new fellow bent over the chair. Up went the ash, and it came down, laid on with the scientific precision that came of long practice. The "whop" sounded through the study like the crack of a rifle. It was followed by a fearful howl from the unlucky recipient. He wriggled, and howled, and squirmed.

The Fifth Formers looking on exchanged glances of contempt. The fellow had asked for it, begged for it, but he had not the nerve to stand for it. A fag of the Third would have been ashamed to make such a fuss over a licking. A fellow who was wildly reckless, and at the same time wanting in courage, was rather a phenomenon.

Howling, wriggling, and squirming did not save him. Six whops came down in steady succession. Campion of the Sixth put his beef into it. By the time he had finished there was little doubt that Tunstall was sorry that he had asked for it.

"That's that!" remarked Campion, tucking his ash under his arm again.

"Next time, look out for a real whopping. Better not have any next time."

He walked out of Study No. 8, leaving Tunstall wriggling and gasping. Even Pie thought that he had had enough, and raised no hand as the new fellow wriggled out of the study. The chums of Study No. 8 did not have his company at tea, for which they were duly thankful.

Three of them forgot him. But Len Lex was thinking of him, and he was asking himself the question, to which there seemed to be no answer—why did Sir Gilbert Tunstall's grandson want to be sacked from Oakshott School?

That's going to take some considerable puzzling-out by Len! Meanwhile, read next week how he makes very short work of THE BULLY OF THE FIFTH!