

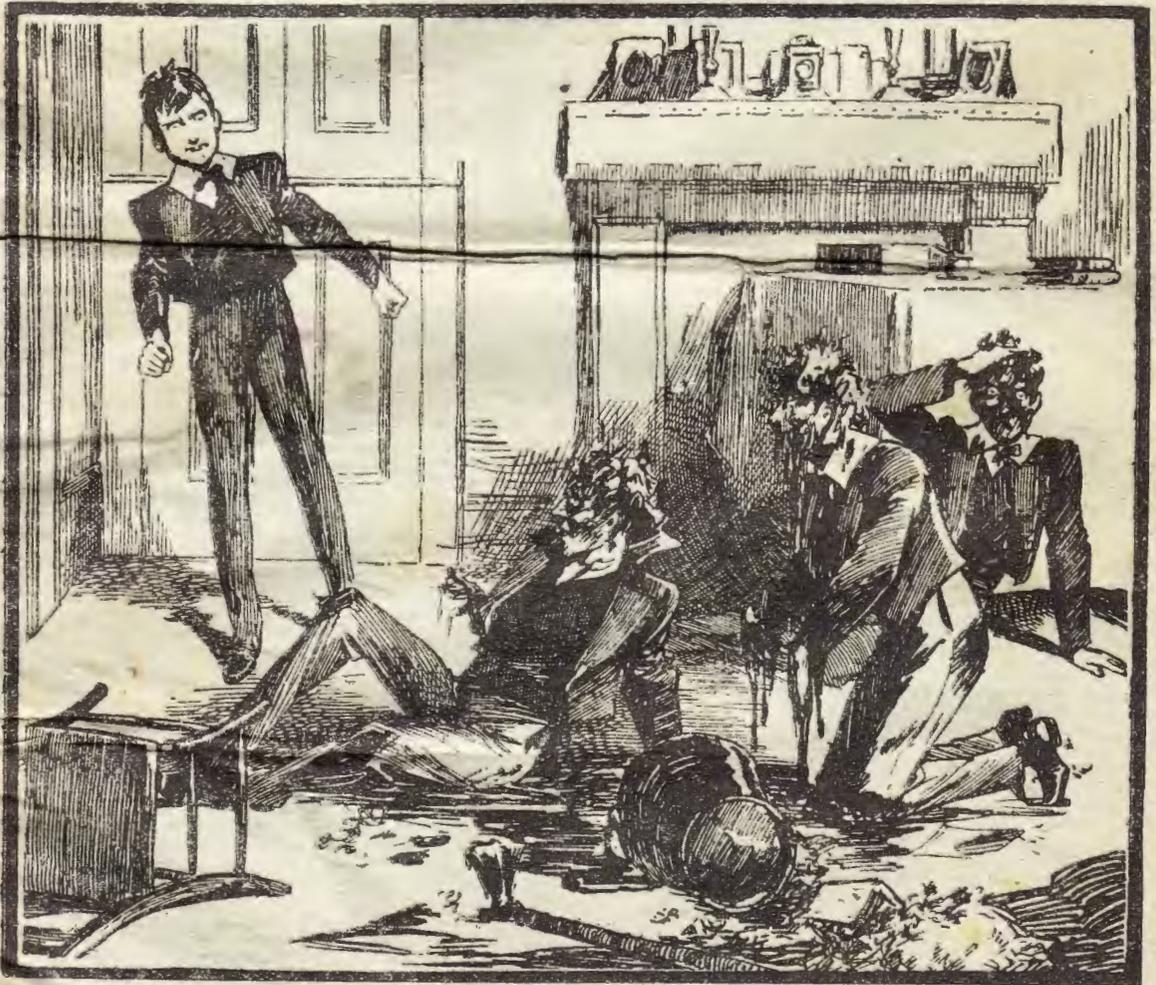
# TO NEWSAGENTS!

The Government have now stopped all returns: You should, therefore, persuade the purchaser of this paper to place a regular order with you.

# The Penny Popular

No.  
239.

Three Complete Stories of—  
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



## TAR AND FEATHERS FOR BULSTRODE & CO.

(See the Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.,  
contained in this Issue.)



### THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Ragers.

"Is he coming, Bulstrode?"

"Not yet."

"Look out!"

"I'm looking out, fathgad!"

"Keep quiet!"

It was very dark in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. As a rule, two gasjets burned in the passage, but they had been extinguished now.

The three or four juniors who crouched in an alcove half-way down the passage were invisible to one another and to anybody who might pass. It was an ambuscade.

Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, was watching in the darkness, and the other fellows were in the alcove behind him, ready to rush out at a signal.

Bulstrode was looking along the passage towards No. 1 Study. A glimmer of light came from under the door, visible from where Bulstrode stood.

"He's a jolly long time!" growled Stott. "Perhaps he's staying to tea with Harry Wharton?"

"I don't suppose so. I know he went to borrow a Greek lexicon," said Bulstrode.

"We'll give him Greek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you ass, Snoop. If he hears you cackling he'll know we're here."

"Oh, all right, Bulstrode! I—"

"Don't jaw!"

And there was silence in the passage. Bulstrode keenly watched the streak of light from under Harry Wharton's door. He was waiting for that door to open, and for Mark Linley to come out.

There was a long grudge against Mark Linley among a certain section of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form. That he had come to the old school on a scholarship which he had won by hard work ought to have been a recommendation, but Bulstrode and his friends chose to regard it as quite the reverse. A fellow who had worked in a Lancashire mill for a living was, in their opinion, quite out of place in the Greyfriars Lower Fourth.

Linley was a keen student, a keen foot-

# Cut by the Form

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

was still "cut" by several fellows in the Form.

Linley had taken it all quietly. He was very pleasant to those who were decent to him, and avoided the others, worked hard and played hard, and won the respect of the better sort of fellows. But Bulstrode and his friends were not willing to give up their grievance. And the fact that No. 1 Study backed up Linley was quite sufficient to set Bulstrode against him, if there had been nothing else.

More than once Linley had been "ragged" in various ways, but things had sometimes turned out uncomfortably for the ragers. But Bulstrode was not done yet. He had conceived the scheme of tarring and feathering the lad from Lancashire, as a strong hint that it would be better for him to get out of Greyfriars.

Even the boldest of the Removites shrank a little from the scheme, but Bulstrode had his way, as he usually did in such matters, and so the ambuscade was laid.

They had timed it carefully. Snoop had watched Linley for some time, and found that he was going to Harry Wharton's study to borrow a Liddell and Scott. The ambuscade in the passage followed. Bulstrode had turned the gas out, and it was pretty certain that Linley would walk along in the darkness fairly into the trap without knowing that it was laid.

All was ready in Bulstrode's study for the punishment to be inflicted upon the Lancashire lad when he was captured. It only remained to capture him.

"I say, Bulstrode!" murmured Skinner.

"Don't jaw!"

"Yes, but look here, you'll have to be careful. If they hear anything in Wharton's study we shall have that lot on to us."

"They mustn't hear anything, duffer! I'll collar the eed as he comes by and jam this coat over his head, and you can grip him. We'll have him into my study in a jiffy."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Silence again. There was a sound of a door-handle turning, and Bulstrode gave an excited whisper to his followers.

"He's coming! Look out!"

The door of No. 1 Study swung open. The light gleamed out into the passage, and in the light stood the well-set figure of Mark Linley.

He seemed surprised to see the passage dark, but he did not know that the "raggers" were there, and came along unsuspectingly.

The hearts of the juniors beat more quickly as his footsteps rang nearer.

There was a certain risk in the affair, for if Linley was able to call out, there was no doubt that the chums of No. 1 Study would come to the rescue.

And if Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree James had been upon the scene, the ragers would be pretty certain to get most of the ragging.

Nearer and nearer!

The unsuspecting lad came abreast of the alcove, and Bulstrode sprang upon him. Linley reeled back with a stifled exclamation. But the coat was over his head, and the cry was muffled. In a second more the Removites were grasping him, and he was swung off his feet.

"Got him!" muttered Bulstrode, with grim satisfaction.

There was a cry in the shadows. It came from Snoop.

"Shut up, you fool!"

"He—he's banged me on the nose!"

"Serve you right! Shut up, and bring him in!"

Mark Linley, vainly struggling in the grasp of four pairs of hands, and half-suffocated by the coat round his head, was whisked along the passage and into Bulstrode's study. A junior who was working at the table there jumped up in surprise. It was Hazeldene, who shared the study with Bulstrode.

"What on earth—" he began.

"Hold your row!" said Bulstrode.

"Lock the door! Where's that tar?"

"Who have you got there?"

"It's Linley! We're going to tar and feather him!"

"Hang it all, Bulstrode, that's going a bit too far!"

"Mind your own business. Lock the door, Snoop!"

"I'm not going to have a hand in it," said Hazeldene quickly. "Let me at

out! You fool, there'll be a row about this!"

"Get out if you like, but mind—not a word!"

"Oh, that's all right; it's no business of mine!"

Hazeldene left the study, and Snoop locked the door. Mark Linley was struggling still, but he had no chance against so many. There was a tarpot standing in the grate. It had been purloined from a shed which Gosling the porter was tarring that day. A pillow lay in a chair, ready to be torn open. All was ready, but Mark Linley was not a tame victim.

He wrenched his head free of the enveloping coat, and glared about him. His eyes were blazing, and his temper, usually quiet and calm, was evidently at white heat.

"You—you cads!" he shouted. "Let me go!"

Bulstrode chuckled.

"No fear! Hold him tight, you kids! Look here, Linley! Do you see that tarpot?"

"Yes, I see it."

"And that pillow?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Well, my boy, we're going to tar and feather you; but we'll let you off on one condition," said Bulstrode loftily. "You've been told before that you're not wanted at Greyfriars. This is a public school, and not a home for the deserving poor."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Skinner.

"You may be all right in the mill you belong to," went on Bulstrode, "but you're not wanted at Greyfriars. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly."

"Well, if you promise to leave quietly at the end of the term—"

"I would be cut in pieces first," said Linley quietly. "You are a cad, Bulstrode—and a coward, too, or you wouldn't attack a fellow four to one. I gave you a licking once. I'm ready to give you another!"

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"Nuff said!" he exclaimed abruptly. "We'll go ahead, and I dare say you'll find out that there are more comfortable places for you than the Greyfriars Remove. Yank that tarpot out here, Stott!"

"Right you are!"

The tarpot was dragged into the middle of the room.

Snoop slit the pillow with a penknife, and the contents rolled out in a heap on the floor.

"Now, then—the tar first!"

Mark Linley struggled desperately. The four juniors grasped him and dragged him towards the tarpot.

But so desperate were the efforts of the Lancashire lad that they had all their work out to hold him.

"Look out!" yelled Bulstrode.

Linley's foot crashed against the tarpot. It rolled over, the contents streaming out on the carpet and mixing with the feathers. Bulstrode made an effort, and hurled Linley into the midst of the spilt tar.

But the Lancashire lad clung to him like a cat, and dragged him down also, and they rolled in the tar.

"Oh!" roared Bulstrode. "Ow! Leggo! Oh!"

They rolled over and over, and the other juniors, fearful of being dragged into the horrible mess of tar and feathers, loosened their hold on Mark and jumped away.

The Lancashire lad had only one foe to tackle, and he proved that he was quite able to take care of himself on fair terms.

He grasped Bulstrode firmly, and rolled the Remove bully over again, and jammed his face fairly into the tar and feathers.

Bulstrode gave a muffled shriek.

As he tore his head away from the sticky mass, his features had disappeared in a mass of tar and feathers, and he was blinded and almost suffocated.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"

Mark Linley sprang to his feet.

His flashing glance fell upon the other raggars, and they sprang back from him. He looked dangerous.

But Linley's blood was up now.

"Come on!" he shouted.

They did not come on. They were more afraid of the sticky, smeary tar than of the fists of the Lancashire lad. But they were not to escape. Mark was so tarry already that he could scarcely become more tarry. He rushed on Skinner and dragged him down, plumping him fairly into the tar, and sending him sprawling across the gasping and stuttering Bulstrode.

Stott and Snoop made a simultaneous rush for the door.

The ragging of the Lancashire lad was not turning out exactly as they had intended. He was getting tarred and feathered, but so was everybody else, and the study was getting into a fearful state.

They grabbed at the locked door at the same moment, but Mark was upon them in a second. He grasped Stott, and hurled him upon Skinner, and then turned upon Snoop. But Snoop had the door open now, and was leaping out into the passage. Mark's boot was planted behind him, and he fairly flew.

The Lancashire lad turned round to look at the three raggars struggling up from the floor.

They were in a fearful state of tar and feathers and fury. Mark was as badly off himself; he was smeared all over with tar, and his clothes were utterly spoiled. He stood looking at the raggars for a moment with blazing eyes, and then, controlling himself, he turned and left the study.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Called Over the Coals.

"I SAY, you fellows— My only hat (Ha, ha, ha!)"

Billy Bunter stared into Bulstrode's study in amazement, and burst into a yell of laughter.

The fat junior had just come upstairs, and, finding the passage in darkness, he had looked in at the first open door to borrow a match to light the gas. He found Bulstrode, Stott, and Skinner staggering up, smothered with tar and feathers, and looking as shocking a sight as had ever been seen within the ancient walls of Greyfriars.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bunter.

"Get out!" exclaimed Bulstrode fiercely, and he picked up a cricket-stump.

The fat junior scuttled out, and darted down the passage, still yelling with laughter.

He burst into No. 1 Study like a hurricane, with an impetus that he could not control, and dashed right into the table, at which four juniors were sitting at work.

The table went flying, and so did a variety of books and papers, and inks and pens, and there was a yell of wrath from four throats.

"I'm sincerely sorry," gasped Bunter, as four wrathful juniors clutched him.

"I—I—I'm sincerely sorry, but—but—"

"You young ass! See what you've done?"

"I—I—I couldn't help it! Ha, ha, ha! Ow! Don't shake me like that, Bob Cherry. You'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

"What do you mean by bolting in here like a wild jabbawock?" roared Bob Cherry, still shaking the fat junior.

"Ow! Bulstrode's after me!"

Bob Cherry looked towards the door. There was no sign of Bulstrode. He had not followed Billy Bunter far.

Bunter, finding that he was not pursued after all, became a little more reassured. He wriggled loose from the chums of the

Remove, and then stood holding his side, chuckling.

The chums looked at their wrecked exercises on the floor, and then at the chuckling junior, and made a simultaneous movement towards him.

Bunter promptly dodged.

"Hold on! I'm sincerely sorry; but it was so funny, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It won't seem so funny to you when I've jolly well rubbed your chivvy in the ink," growled Bob Cherry.

"Hold on! I wasn't laughing at that, It's Bulstrode."

"What's the matter with Bulstrode?"

"Come and see."

Billy Bunter's explosions of mirth excited curiosity in No. 1 Study, and they followed the fat junior down the passage. Safe with the Famous Four, Bunter returned boldly enough to the dangerous quarter. The sounds of angry voices were proceeding from Bulstrode's study.

The juniors looked in at the open door.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums roared with laughter. They could not help it. The carpet was in a terrible state with tar and feathers. Bulstrode, Skinner, and Stott were smothered, and they were shouting furiously at one another. The disaster had naturally been followed by a quarrel among the unsuccessful raggars, and they were "slanging" one another at the top of their voices.

They turned round and glared at the chums as they heard them at the door. Their blackened faces were inexpressibly funny to look at, and No. 1 Study roared again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Have you been having an argument with that tarpot? What's the trouble, anyway?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get out, do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode made a rush at the door; but he hesitated to tackle the four, and he slammed the door instead. The laughter of the juniors rang along the passage, and speedily attracted other fellows to the spot.

And every moment after that Bulstrode's door was opened by some curious investigator, who sent a yell of laughter into the study, and then fled.

"What can the trouble be?" said Harry Wharton, as they walked away. "What on earth can Bulstrode have been doing with a tarpot and a lot of feathers in his study?"

"Tarring and feathering one another," grinned Nugent. "That's what they've been doing, whether they intended it or not."

"The tarrfulness and the featherfulness are terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Ah, what is this?"

There was a patter of rapid footsteps in the passage.

The gas had been relighted now, and the chums as they turned their heads saw a breathless junior racing along.

It was Snoop. He signed to them frantically to get out of the way, and they stood aside, and he dashed on.

After him came a junior whose features were almost concealed by black smears of tar, and whose clothes were tarry and feathery from head to foot.

"Great Scott, who's that?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"It's Linley!"

Mark Linley ran on. He was evidently in pursuit of Snoop, and Snoop was trying hard to escape. He dodged and doubled in the upper passage, and made a break for the stairs. But down the stairs on his track went the Lancashire lad.

The chums of the Remove stared at them in blank astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Wharton, in perplexity. "It's not like Linley to get his rag out like that. And how did he get into that state?"

"Great Scott! Look!"

"My hat!"

The chums, looking over the banisters, could see a gowned form on the first landing. It was that of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. But Snoop, in his headlong flight, did not see him. He rushed fairly into his arms, and Mr. Quelch caught him by the collar and stopped him with a jerk. "Ow!" roared Snoop. "Leggo! Oh!—I—I—I Mr. Quelch!"

"What does this mean? Dear me, what is that?"

Mark Linley burst upon the scene the next moment. He stopped abruptly at the sight of Mr. Quelch, panting and breathless.

The Form-master looked at him blankly.

"What—who are you? Is it Linley?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Mark.

"What are you doing in that state?"

Linley was silent.

The Form-master looked from one boy to the other, and something of the truth glimmered upon his mind.

"Ah! I presume Snoop was responsible for your getting into that state, Linley, and you were—ah—going to punish him?"

Still the Lancashire lad did not speak. He had certainly been going to give Snoop his due share of the tar and feathers, as was only just, but he had nothing to say to the Form-master. He knew that if Bulstrode's scheme became known it would be serious for the bully of the Remove, and though Mark Linley had suffered many a grievance at the hands of the Remove bully, he was the last fellow in the world to sneak.

Mr. Quelch looked at him hard, and then turned to the gasping Snoop.

"Snoop!"

His voice came like a hailstone.

"Snoop!"

"Ye-o-ees, sir!"

"What does this mean? How did Linley get into this state?"

"I—I—I—"

"You were responsible for it?"

"N-n-n-no, sir! It—it—it—it was Bulstrode."

Mark Linley's lip curled scornfully. He would have been flogged before he would have betrayed his enemy. Snoop had betrayed his friend without a scruple.

"Ah!" said Mr. Quelch quietly. "I might have guessed that, I think. Where is Bulstrode?"

"In the study, sir."

"Follow me there, both of you."

The juniors obeyed. Three or four fellows were chinking outside Bulstrode's door. Micky Desmond had just opened it and looked in, and retreated, shrieking with laughter. The raggars were trying to scrape the tar off, but without much success.

"Faith, and it's a sight!" said Micky.

"I—Hullo—cave!"

And the sightseers scuttled off as the Remove-master came in sight.

Mr. Quelch walked up to the door, and threw it open.

"Get out, you silly beast!" roared Bulstrode. "I'll—Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I—I thought it was Desmond."

Mr. Quelch looked sternly at the tarry juniors.

"I shall require a full explanation of this," he said quietly. "Whose idea was it to bring the tar into the study, Bulstrode?"

The Remove bully assumed a dogged expression. His eyes fairly blazed as they turned on Mark Linley. He jumped to the not unnatural conclusion that Mark had brought the Form-master to the study. Bulstrode had a great deal of dogged pluck.

THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 239.

and he was not afraid to own up and "face the music."

"Mine, sir," he replied, with a touch of defiance in his manner.

"And why was it brought here?"

"We meant to tar and feather that rotter, sir."

"Are you alluding to Linley?"

"Yes, sir."

"And why do you allude to him as a 'rotter'?"

"He's a rank outsider, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"I presume you mean that you dislike him because he is here on a scholarship, and has previously worked for his living? Is that it?"

"I—I—"

"Have you any other cause of complaint against him?"

"I—I suppose not. This isn't the proper place for fellows who have worked in a mill. He's a cad, of course."

"There are thousands of fellows who have worked in mills, Bulstrode, who are better boys and will be better men, than you can possibly be. I am afraid I must say that it is you who are a cad and a snob into the bargain. I cannot help despising you, Bulstrode. I am ashamed to have such a boy in my Form."

Bulstrode turned red under the tar. Mr. Quelch had a bitter tongue when he chose to let it go.

"You have acted in a callous and cowardly way, Bulstrode. You have been guilty of petty spite and malice. You have persecuted a boy who has given you no cause of offence. I am afraid that it is only the natural dislike of a mean nature for a manly one that has caused you to dislike Linley."

Skinner chuckled.

The expression of Bulstrode's tarry face was a study.

But Skinner was grave again immediately, as the Form-master's eye turned on him for a moment.

"Now," resumed Mr. Quelch, looking at Bulstrode again, "I should severely punish such a freak as this in any case. Under the circumstances, I shall administer the severest punishment in my power. Bulstrode, I shall report this matter to the Head, and you will be called up to-morrow morning for a flogging."

The Remove bully's bravado left him instantly.

A caning he could have stood with dogged courage; but a public flogging at the hands of Dr. Locke was a different matter.

"Oh, sir!"

"I cannot let you escape more easily than that, Bulstrode. I must impress the lesson fully on your mind. The other culprits I shall cane myself, and they can come to my study as soon as they are clean. I shall expect them in an hour's time."

And Mr. Quelch turned towards the door.

Mark Linley went out of the study with a troubled expression. It was in a sense through him that Bulstrode was to be flogged, and it troubled him. In the passage he ventured to stop Mr. Quelch.

"If you please, sir—"

"Go on, Linley," said the Remove-master, kindly enough.

"Could you—could you—I—I don't mean it for check, sir—but—could you let Bulstrode off a bit more lightly, sir?" stammered Mark hurriedly. "I—I can't help feeling it's partly my fault."

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"No, Linley. I honour you for speaking up for one who has injured you; but the malignancy Bulstrode has shown must have a fitting punishment."

He strode on, with rustling gown. It was useless to say more, and Mark knew it. And the Lancashire lad went on slowly and miserably enough to his own study.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Sneak.

THERE was a full minute of silence in Bulstrode's study after Mr. Quelch had gone. The four juniors were stricken with dismay. Bulstrode was pale where the tar did not obscure his skin; and Skinner and Stott were very grim. Snoop was trembling. He had betrayed Bulstrode, and for the moment he did not reflect that the Remove bully was unaware of it. He waited for the storm, not even daring to make a movement to quit the study, lest it should bring the bully's wrath down upon him the sooner.

It was Stott who broke the grim silence.

"I say, it's rough on you, old man."

"Beastly rough!" said Skinner. "I don't see why Quelch wanted to take so serious a view of it. After all, it was only a joke."

"And how the dickens did he know anything about it, either?" asked Skinner. "He couldn't have known unless—"

"I suppose he saw the crowd of fellows out there, and—"

"Not a bit of it!" said Skinner. "He knew all about it before he came in; and he brought in Linley and Snoop with him. How did it happen, Snoop?"

Bulstrode, who had not spoken yet, turned to Snoop, with a blaze in his eyes that told of the savage rage in his breast.

"Yes, how did it happen?" he asked.

"Did Linley fetch Quelch here on purpose, Snoop?"

Snoop drew a quick, quivering breath.

Until this moment it had not occurred to him that he might escape the punishment due to a sneak by throwing the blame on another.

Now the dastardly thought rushed into his brain like lightning. Bulstrode's question made the idea only too easy.

"Yes," he said.

Bulstrode gritted his teeth. He was only too glad to believe evil of Mark. The blacker Mark could be painted, the more justified Bulstrode felt in his hatred of him.

"The cad! The rotten sneak!"

"The miserable worm!" said Stott.

"Why, there's not a fellow in the Remove would have told if he had been flayed alive! We've had rotters in the Form, but no sneaks!"

"What can you expect?" said Bulstrode bitterly. "This worm has been bred up in a slum, and worked among cads all his life. It's only what we might have looked for. I've said so all along."

"Yes, that's true enough; you were down on him from the start."

"I knew the kind of chap he was certain to turn out. I wonder what Wharton & Co. will say when they know it? What will the Form say?"

"We'll jolly well give him a showing up!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I—I say," muttered Snoop, "are you going to make a Form matter of it? Better let the poor beast alone. After all, he's—"

"Oh, don't be a fool, Snoop! Why, you've been hardest on him up to now!" exclaimed Bulstrode, in astonishment. "We're going to show him up. He'll be sent to Coventry by the whole Form. This is where we have a chance of getting rid of the cad for good. We'll make the Remove too hot to hold him."

"Blessed if I can get this tar off!" said Skinner. "I'm going to try with some hot water in the bath-room. Ta-ta!"

And he left the study. The other followed him. But the attempts to remove the tar were not very successful. In spite of the greatest efforts, very visible traces of it clung to Stott and Skinner when they, with Snoop, presented themselves at Mr. Quelch's study to take their punishment.

The three received a dozen cuts each.

and they were hard ones. They left the room wriggling with pain, and Snoop seemed to suffer most. He never could bear pain, and now he was simply doubled up. And as he wriggled and writhed the hatred in his heart for Mark Linley was strengthened by his sufferings. His last scruple had vanished now. Unreasonably enough, he put down the severe caning to the account of the Lancashire lad, and felt that in branding Linley as a sneak he was only somehow "getting his own back."

The contortions of the three sufferers attracted the general attention of the junior common-room when they entered it. A circle of sympathisers surrounded them, and listened to their tale of woe. And the story that Linley had betrayed the ragers to the Form-master excited deep and general wrath.

"It was rough on him to be tarred," said Trevor. "And Bulstrode was a pig."

"Oh, was I?" said Bulstrode savagely.

"Yes, you were. But that doesn't excuse Linley for sneaking. I was beginning to like that chap, too! It shows that you never know a fellow!"

"You never know how one of these cads will turn out," said Skinner. "We've treated him well enough—h'm, well, quite as well as he could expect, anyway. And now for him to turn on us like this!"

"Caddish!"

"Rotten!"

"Beastly!"

"Bats!" said Russell. "You've treated him like pigs."

"Look here, Russell, if you're going to back up a sneak—"

"I'm not! I say you've treated him like pigs," said Russell cheerfully. "But that doesn't justify his turning sneak. I dare say he was awfully wild, but a decent fellow wouldn't have sneaked. As far as I'm concerned, I sha'n't speak to him again."

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

"That's the idea!" said Bulstrode.

"I've got to be flogged to-morrow morning through that unspeakable cad."

"Shame!"

"But I don't care, if it shows the rotter up in his true light. He ought to be sent to Coventry by the whole Form."

"That's the idea!"

"Send him to Coventry!"

"Faith, and if he's a snake—"

"Who said he was a snake?"

"He, ha! Micky means a sneak."

"Sure, and if he's a snake he ought to be sent to Coventry!" said Micky Desmond.

"But how do ye know he gave ye away to the Quelch spalpeen, Bulstrode, darling?"

"Snoop heard him; and Quelch marched into my study at once, bringing Linley with him."

"That's how it was," said Snoop. "It was on the landing. Quelch caught Linley with the tar on his face, and asked him how he got like it."

"I suppose the silly ass blurted it out?" said Hazeldene.

"Whether he blurted it out or not, he gave Bulstrode away, and there's a flogging to follow," said Skinner.

"And he's got to be sent to Coventry."

"And serve him jolly well right."

"And if Wharton backs him up—"

said Bulstrode, striking the iron while it was hot, so to speak.

"We'll jolly well send Wharton to Coventry, too, if he does!" shouted Ogilvy.

"Good!"

"Hallo! Here comes the cad!" Mark Linley came quietly enough into the room. He had cleaned his face and hands as far as possible, though tarry smears still showed there. He had changed his clothes, and the clothes he

was now wearing were not so good as those he had been compelled to discard. Linley's people were poor, and his mother, careful soul as she was, had hard work to keep her son clad decently enough for a school like Greyfriars. The ruining of a suit of clothes meant much to Mark—much more than the thoughtless juniors comprehended or could possibly comprehend. He hardly dared to write to his mother and tell her of the mishap; yet it must be told, and something done.

With this trouble, and perhaps other troubles, on his mind, poor Mark did not look cheerful. His evening's work, too, had been spoiled by the ragging. He had finished his prep. early, and had intended to put in a couple of hours at Greek. Greek was an "extra" at Greyfriars, and Mark could not afford it, but with the assistance of Harry Wharton, one or two kindly seniors who took an interest in the hardworking lad, he had taken the subject up, and was getting along very well with it.

Mark Linley had plenty to think about

"Sneak!" Bulstrode shouted out the word. It was echoed by the others, in a roar of condemnation that rang through the room.

"Sneak! Cad! Sneak!"

Linley stared at them. He did not understand. But it was impossible for him to make his voice heard. He spoke, but his words were drowned in the shout.

"Sneak!"

He turned quietly and left the room. And still the bitter word followed him, dying along the passages.

"Sne-e-e-e-eak!"

Mark Linley went back to his study and sat down.

On the table before him were his books—Liddell and Scott, and the "Initia Græca" and "Xenophon's Anabasis." But he could not work. He could not concentrate his mind upon it. For him, as for many studious lads, the mere sight of a Greek character had a fascination. But he could not give his thoughts to it now. "The Retreat of the Ten Thousand" had



"Who have you got there?" demanded Hazeldene. "It's Linley! We're going to tar and feather him!" replied Bulstrode.

just at that moment, and he did not notice the looks that were bent upon him as he came into the common-room.

But he could not help noticing a few moments after his entrance, a very audible sound that ran through the room.

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s!"

It was a prolonged hiss. There was no mistaking it; and the troubled lad's eyes were quickly raised. He looked round him in amazement. He knew nothing of Snoop's falsehood, nothing of the charge made against him and proved to the satisfaction of the Remove.

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s!"

The hiss was meant for him, that was certain. Why, he could not guess—unless it was simply a development of the campaign against him. But why should fellows who had not joined in the general attack—fellows who had been civil and even friendly—why should they be hissing him?

The Lancashire lad looked at the crowd, and his face went red and white.

lost its interest. For once Mark was thinking only of himself.

Suddenly the door opened, and Russell and Lacy came in. They, and the Chinese junior Wun Lung, shared the study with Linley. Mark looked up, and nodded, but received only stony stares in reply.

The colour flushed into his face. He had been on good terms enough with his study mates. They were not chums, but they met on a friendly footing. It was the cut direct he received now, and it stung him.

He started to his feet.

"Look here! What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed hotly. "What is the matter with the fellows? What are they turning on me like a set of wild beasts for?"

Russell went across to the fireplace without reply. Lacy hesitated a moment, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You know well enough," he said.

"I don't—unless you mean it's because

I'm—what I am—because I'm a working-man's son. But I thought you were getting over that."

"It's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"You know jolly well."

"I tell you I don't."

"Don't speak to him, Lacy," exclaimed Russell. "You know what's been decided on. He's sent to Coventry—he's to be cut by the Form."

"Well, I may as well explain why, if he doesn't know."

"He knows well enough. Snoop heard him sneak to Quelch."

Mark started.

"What's that? Who says I sneaked—and what about?"

"Oh, don't try to brazen it out! We know all about it. I admit Bulstrode went too far in the tar-and-feather business. But you had no right to sneak. Of course, a fellow brought up as you've been wouldn't know that," said Russell loftily.

Mark clenched his fists hard.

"Does Bulstrode think I betrayed him to Mr. Quelch?"

"He jolly well knows you did, and so do we all! You took Quelch to his study, and now he's to be flogged!"

"I did not take Mr. Quelch there—he ordered me to follow him there."

"It amounts to the same thing, I suppose. You gave Bulstrode away?"

"I did not. I—"

"Oh, what's the good of lying about it?"

That was the last straw. The Lancashire lad's temper was already at boiling-point. He lashed out with his right, and Russell sat suddenly in the fender.

He was on his feet again in an instant, springing at Linley.

They closed and struggled. Lacy started forward, and then held back. After all, if the fellow was an "outsider," still fair play was fair play, and they were one to one. But Russell was no match for the lad who knew every trick of Lancashire wrestling, and in a few seconds he was on his back.

Mark stood panting, looking down at him with blazing eyes.

Russell slowly rose. He was no coward, but he knew when he had had enough. He was aching in every bone from the concussion on the floor.

"That will do," he said quietly. "I dare say I was wrong to call you a liar, too. But—well, I don't believe you. I don't want to taunt you, Linley, or to blame you at all. I know you've never had the chances a decent fellow gets. But I don't want to speak to you again. Leave me alone, that's all."

"Same here," said Lacy. "I'm not looking for trouble, unless you're pining for it. But don't speak to me, that's all."

Mark gritted his teeth.

"I won't! I don't want to speak to you—or to anybody else here! I won't stay in the same study with you, either! I can do my work in the Form-room. Anybody who says I told about Bulstrode is a liar. That's all I have to say."

He caught up his books, and strode from the study.

Russell and Lacy looked at one another a little sheepishly.

"I—I say, Lacy, it—it isn't possible that—"

"Rats!" said Lacy. "Of course he would try to brazen it out."

"I—I suppose so."

"Didn't he bring old Quelch straight to Bulstrode's study, and show him up? Besides, Snoop heard him."

"Yes, I forget that."

"Of course he wasn't likely to own up. Jolly good riddance, I say, if he keeps his word. We don't want him here."

And Mark Linley did keep his word.

That evening he removed his few belongings from the study to his locker in the Form-room, and his old quarters knew him no more.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Wun Lung Does Not Understand.

THE next day school passed heavily enough to Mark Linley. He had taken his exclusion so quietly and calmly that some of the fellows were provoked by it, and inclined to take more active measures. He was avoided with a public pointedness that there was no mistaking. The fellows on either side of him in Form crowded away as far as possible; and, in fact, all the fellows on the same form made themselves uncomfortable by squeezing up, in order to leave the boy in marked isolation.

Mark Linley showed no sign of having observed it.

But Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, had keen eyes, and he took an interest, too, in the lad from Lancashire. He noted the exclusion of the boy at once, and though he made no remark upon it, he compressed his lips, and a wrinkle appeared for a moment on his brow.

The lessons passed off, and the class was dismissed. The Form-master made a sign to Linley to stop behind as the others went out. Mark halted by the desk.

"There seems to be something wrong between you and your Form-fellows, Linley," said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Mark quietly.

"I noticed that you were working in the Form-room last evening, instead of in your study."

"Yes, sir."

"You are on bad terms, then, with the rest of the Lower Fourth?"

Mark was silent.

The Form-master did not press him for an answer. In such a case, there was little a master could do, beyond sympathy and advice.

"I am afraid you have found a thorny path to follow at Greyfriars, Linley," he said. "No doubt your present unpopularity is due to the flogging of Bulstrode, although he was flagrantly in the wrong. It will die away, I think. At all events, if you go on as you have begun, you may be sure of this—that you are fitting yourself for an honourable place in the world, and winning the respect of those whose good opinion is really to be valued."

The tears started to Mark's eyes.

A few kindly words, at that time, meant much to the lad. He could not speak for a moment.

"Thank you, sir," he said, at last.

"Thank you. The—fellow don't understand—they don't mean to be as hard as they are. It's all right."

He left the class-room with a lighter heart for those few kind words. He left the Form-master with a thoughtful frown on his brow.

The groups of Removites in the passage looked at Mark with a new, savage contempt as he came out.

But he hardly noticed it. He was growing accustomed to that kind of thing. At the door Harry Wharton touched him on the arm, and Mark looked up.

"You won't mind my speaking," said Harry hesitatingly, "but—"

"The other fellows will," said Mark. "Can't you see how they're looking at you? You'd better leave me alone."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them look! I was going to say—you just stopped behind in the Form-room to speak to Mr. Quelch."

"What about it?"

"It's injudicious. Some of the fellows jumped to the conclusion that it was sneaking—that you were telling Quelch something—"

"And were you one of them?"

"I was not, or I should hardly be speaking to you on the subject now. I only wanted to warn you that it looks bad, and to caution you."

"I dare say you mean well," said Mark wearily, "but I've given up trying to get on good terms with the Remove. I am learning my lesson at last."

"What lesson? What do you mean?"

"The Remove don't want me. I'm not surprised at it—the son of a workman, I suppose, has no right here—unless he became a snob and a liar, and pretended he was something else. Then he might be tolerated. I never learned to be either a liar or a snob, and so I've no chance I am going to keep my place in the future. They want me to leave the school; I'll never do that till my scholarship has run out. But I'll keep out of the Form. There was more growling when I joined the sailor corps. This affair is only an excuse for sending me to Coventry. They wanted to do it all along. Well, this is the end—I shan't trouble them any more. But as for taking any trouble to conciliate them, or to gain their good opinion—it's not worth it. I despise them too much, if you want to know the exact truth."

Several fellows had gathered round while Mark was talking, and heard his words; and there were black looks at his plain speaking. The Lancashire lad walked away, his head held very high, leaving Wharton perplexed. He understood how Linley was feeling, but he knew that Linley's mood would never do. He could not live a life of exclusion from the Form—it was impossible. Unless he conciliated the Remove, life would be impossible for him at Greyfriars—unless, indeed, his courage and strength of mind were very great.

"Cad!" growled Skinner. "Despises us, does he?"

"And no wonder, if he was speaking of you particularly," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "What do you expect, Skinner?"

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"You've been talking to the outsider, Wharton," broke in Bulstrode fiercely. "You've been warned that anybody speaking to Linley will be sent to Coventry, too."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Don't let it happen again, that's all. That fellow's cut."

"Oh, rats!"

And Wharton turned on his heel and strode away. Bulstrode turned scarlet with rage, but the general opinion was on his side. There was no doubt that if Wharton took the side of the outcast, he would lose his hold on the Form.

Linley had his tea in Hall. He had an empty seat on either side of him during the meal—a fact that did not pass unnoticed by Mr. Quelch, who was at the head of the Remove table. Wharton and his friends were having tea in their study. Wun Luag, the little Chinese, came into Hall late, and dropped into a chair beside Linley.

There was a low murmur, instantly suppressed by a glance from Mr. Quelch. After tea, Mark Linley left the room first, and when the other fellows went out, they found him talking to Wun Lung in the hall.

It was not Mark who had sought the conversation; Wun Lung was showing him a Greek exercise, and demanding expert advice. It was not like Linley to refuse a favour—and, in fact, he would have lent a helping hand to any fellow in the Remove, in spite of what had passed.

Bulstrode dropped a heavy hand on the Celestial's shoulder.

"Cut that!" he said sharply.

Wun Lung looked up innocently.

"You speake to me?" he asked.

"Yes. Drop that!"

Wun Lung had a Greek lexicon under his arm. He misunderstood Bulstrode—

or affected to misunderstand him—and dropped the lexicon—on Bulstrode's foot.

Bulstrode gave a fiendish yell and jumped clear of the floor.

"You heathen beast! You've squashed my toe!" he roared.

"Me solly!" murmured the Chinese.

"You say dlop it, and me dloppee it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, you cackling idiots. I believe the heathen beast did it on purpose. You—you pigtailed rotter!"

"Me velly solly," said Wun Lung, blandly.

"Look here, you're not to speak to Mark Linley."

"No savvy."

"He's been sent to Coventry."

"No savvy."

"You stupid heathen! He's in Coventry!" shouted Bulstrode.

"No savvy. Coventry in Midlands—Gleyfiats on sea-coast. How fiend Linley in Coventry?"

"The utter savage, he doesn't know what Coventry means!" growled Bulstrode.

"I mean that nobody's speaking to Linley—he's cut!"

"No see cut," said Wun Lung, looking over the Lancashire lad, as if in search of a wound.

"You—you pigtailed dummy! I mean he's not spoken to—he's barred."

"No savvy."

"You're not to speak to him."

"No savvy."

"If you do you'll be sent to Coventry, too."

"No savvy."

"Look here, you're not to speak to Linley, or we'll jolly well yank your heathen pigtail off!" yelled Bulstrode.

"No savvy."

"I—I—I—"

"No savvy."

Mr. Quelch came out just then, and the enraged bully of the Remove had to leave the matter where it was.

But Wun Lung and he walked away with Mark Linley still discussing Greek. For the little Celestial's own sake, Mark tried to explain to him how matters stood, but Wun Lung either could not or would not "savvy," and Linley gave it up at last.

**THE FIFTH CHAPTER.**  
**A Friend in Need.**

**T**HE next morning the sentence of "Coventry" was still being rigidly carried out—more rigidly than ever, if possible. Wharton had said that he would speak to Linley if Linley spoke to him; but that Mark was careful not to do.

He did not wish to drag anybody into his troubles. Harry's attitude in the matter had brought him enough unpopularity already.

And so they did not speak, and Mark's isolation was complete—except for little Wun Lung.

The little Chinese had received dire warnings from half the Form as to what would happen to him if he persisted in speaking to the ostracised one; but the warnings made not the slightest difference to him. Apparently he did not "savvy."

He persisted in speaking to Mark on every possible occasion, and in the grim, icy silence that now enveloped his life, even the company of the quaint little Celestial meant much to the lonely lad.

Mark, indeed, expostulated with the Chinese, trying to point out to him how matters stood. But Wun Lung did not understand.

"You'd better leave me alone," said Mark at last desperately. "Bulstrode will be on your trail if you don't."

"You no wantee helpee me with lesson?"

"Yes, yes; of course I want to help you."

"Allee light; you helpee."

"Yes, but don't you understand that the Form are not speaking to me?"

"Allee light; me speakee."

"They'll be down on you, Wun Lung."

"Allee light."

"You'll be ragged if you don't keep away from me."

"No savvy."

"My dear kid, you'll be cut by the other fellows, and perhaps felled into the bargain," said Mark patiently.

Mark had to give it up.

There was one other fellow who broke the rigid rule. That was Billy Bunter. Not that the Owl of the Remove was inspired by generous feelings. Bunter thought he saw a way of grinding a private axe in the matter.

After morning school that day he tapped Mark Linley on the arm in the Close, after a cautious glance round to see that his action was not observed.

But as Bunter was extremely shortsighted, his caution was not worth very much. As a matter of fact, there were several Remove fellows within easy distance who saw him speaking to the prescribed junior.

"I say, Linley—"

"What do you want?"

Mark's question was very sharp, and not at all cordial. Billy Bunter assumed an injured expression.

"Oh, really, Linley, I think you might be a little more civil to a chap. I thought you'd be feeling lonely as you're sent to Coventry, and so I made up my mind to speak to you. I say, don't go away while I'm speaking. I've got something to say to you."

"Say it then—quickly!"

"I've had a disappointment about a postal-order. I was expecting it this morning, but it hasn't come. I'm going to inquire at the post-office about it. But I'm stony just at the moment. If you could lend me five bob—"

"I couldn't."

"I can let you have it back next week for certain. Even if there's any delay in the postal order, I've got other resources," said Bunter, with dignity.

"I'm shortly expecting three pounds a week for some picture-postcards I'm colouring for the Patriotic Home Work Association."

"I have no money to lend—"

"I could make a bob do. If you—"

"Ow! Oh really, Cherry—"

"You young whelp!" said Bulstrode, grasping the fat junior by the collar.

"You know jolly well that Linley's in Coventry. What did you mean by speaking to him, hey?"

"Ow! I didn't mean to speak to him. He spoke to me—I mean—"

Mark Linley walked away. Bulstrode shook the fat junior violently.

"You fat young porpoise!"

"Ow! I'm sincerely sorry! Don't shake me like that, Bulstrode, or you'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them. I wasn't really speaking to Linley. He wanted to borrow some money—"

"Faith, and it's a champion liar ye are!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Sure, I heard ye thyrin' to borrow of him!"

"I—I—mean—it's all the same thing, you know, really—ow—wow!"

Bulstrode walked away, leaving Billy Bunter sitting on the ground, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels. The fat junior did not speak to the outcast of the Remove again.

It was a bright afternoon. Most of the Removites turned out on the cricket-field before dinner.

Mark Linley did not join them. He knew very well that if he had done so the players would have walked off the field, which would have placed Wharton in an awkward position.

The outcast of the Remove took his books into a quiet corner of the Close, and studied there. There Mr. Quelch

saw him, as he took a stroll after lunch in the sunny Close. The Form-master frowned a little.

The feeling against Linley, which he had hoped would die away, was apparently as strong as ever. Mr. Quelch understood what the exclusion would mean to the Lancashire lad when he could hear the merry shouts from the cricket field.

Mr. Quelch's brow was very thoughtful as he went in. He felt keenly for Linley, but he did not know the true circumstances, and he could not help the boy. He went into his study—and then gave a sudden start.

The room was not empty as he had expected. A graceful girlish form rose from the easy-chair as he came in, and he found himself looking at the blushing, half-terrified face of Marjorie Hazeldene.

Marjorie Hazeldene had come to Greyfriars to visit her brother, and had, of course, heard the reason why Mark Linley had been sent to Coventry.

"Excuse me," said the girl hurriedly.

"I came here to speak to you, sir; the door was open and you not here, so I thought I might wait."

"Quite right," said Mr. Quelch, smiling.

"Please do not rise. What can I do for you, Miss Hazeldene?"

The girl remained standing, one hand on the table. The colour came and went in her cheeks.

"I—I—I want to speak to you," she said desperately at last. "I—I—I—"

"Certainly, my dear girl. Go on."

The Form-master's kindly tone reassured the girl. But her eyes were on the floor as she went on.

"I—I don't know whether you will think it presumptuous of me—I do not mean it so—but—I felt that I ought to speak. It occurred to me, you know, that—that it might set the matter right."

"What matter are you alluding to?"

"It is about Mark Linley."

Mr. Quelch started a little.

"Yes?" he said inquiringly.

"He has been sent to Coventry by the Remove, sir, because—because—"

"I was aware of that, my dear girl," said the Remove-master quietly. "The boy has a hard path before him here. But he is a brave lad—a brave and true lad, and he has courage enough to carry him through."

"But—but you do not know all," said Marjorie. "It is not only that, but—but they think he told you about Bulstrode."

"Ah?"

Mr. Quelch uttered only that monosyllable. But he understood. The girl's words had let in a flood of light upon his view of the late happenings of his Form.

"They think that he—he sneaked, as they call it," pursued Marjorie, blushing furiously, and half wondering how she found the courage to speak at all to the big, grave Form-master. "You will know whether he did or not, sir—"

"He did not."

"Ah, I was sure of it," said Marjorie eagerly. "I—I thought you might think it important enough to—to let the Form know, sir, because—"

"I certainly do think it important enough," said Mr. Quelch. "The boy who told me about Bulstrode must have spoken falsely afterwards, or the blame could never have fallen upon Linley. I will see that that is done."

"Oh, thank you, sir. And—and you don't think it—impertinent—of me—"

The girl's voice faltered.

"My dear girl, I think you have acted in a generous and womanly way," said Mr. Quelch. "I am only too glad you have spoken to me. I can set this matter right, and I have no doubt that his Form-fellows will do Linley justice. I thank you for speaking."

And he opened the door for Marjorie with as respectful a bow as if she had been a

princess, and the girl gave him a tremulous smile, and ran away with a beating heart, but feeling very glad that she had paid that visit to the Form-master's study.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Cleared!

**T**HE Remove were to be taken in first lesson that afternoon by M. Carpentier, the French master. But when they entered the Form-room, they found to their surprise that Mr. Quelch was there.

He was speaking to the French master, and he did not turn round till the Remove were in their places. Then he held up his hand for silence, and a pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove-room. The juniors were curious, and they listened eagerly when their Form-master spoke.

"I have to say a few words to you before lessons commence, with Monsieur Carpentier's permission," said Mr. Quelch. "The matter is somewhat important. A boy in this Form has been flogged for playing a dastardly trick upon another boy."

Bulstrode turned red.

"There appears to be an impression in the Form," resumed Mr. Quelch, "that Mark Linley gave me the information leading to the discovery of Bulstrode as the culprit."

The Remove gasped.

Snoop turned as white as a sheet. He could see that the truth was coming out now; his cowardly falsehood, after all, had only put off the evil hour.

"This impression," said Mr. Quelch, "is quite incorrect. I found Snoop and Linley on the stairs, the latter in a tarry condition. I questioned him, and he was silent. Mind, I do not say it was right of him to remain silent when questioned by a Form-master. I am only stating the facts."

"My word!" murmured Bob Cherry. Bulstrode's face was a study.

"There was another boy, who, in his eagerness to save himself, told at once about Bulstrode," said Mr. Quelch. "I will not mention that boy's name. He answered perfectly correctly in answering a question put to him by his Form-master; but he appears to have acted in a cowardly and contemptible manner afterwards, by attributing his own action to Mark Linley."

"Snoop!" murmured Nugent.

"As Linley seems to be suffering from a general persecution over this matter, I have deemed it my duty to make this public statement of the facts," said Mr. Quelch. "I can only hope that all right-minded boys will do all in their power to make reparation to Linley for the injustice they have done him."

And Mr. Quelch walked out of the room. There was a murmur in the Remove, a general muttering and commenting, and it was nearly time for the French lesson to end before M. Carpentier could reduce his class to anything like attention.

Glad enough were the Removites when the hour of dismissal came that afternoon. The wretched Snoop hurried away, not daring to face his Form-fellows. Mark Linley found the chums of No. 1 Study found him as soon as he left the Form-room.

"We didn't know how it was," said Harry Wharton simply. "I still think you might have explained; I, at all events, should have believed you, whatever the others had done. But it's all over now, and I think the Form are pretty well ashamed of themselves. They ought to be."

The oughtfulness is terrific."

"Faith, and it was jolly decent of Quelch to speak out, too," said Desmond.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 239.

"I'm sorry I was down on ye for snaking, Linley darling—I mean, for thinkin' ye was snakin'. I wonder how Quelch knew about it."

Mark was wondering too.

"Bulstrode, ye spalpeen, come and beg Linley's pardon, can't ye? You know jolly well now that he never sneaked of you."

Bulstrode scowled.

"I suppose he didn't," he said. "I suppose Snoop was lying."

"Then tell him you're sorry."

"Hang him! I'm not sorry!"

And Bulstrode jammed his hands into his pockets and strode away. A loud and prolonged hiss followed him. The feeling of the Form had quite veered round. It was some time before Mark Linley could escape from the Removites.

Almost all were only too anxious to make amends for unjust suspicions and hasty condemnation; and even those who had been hardest on the "mill boy" were anxious to show that the sentence of Coventry was over and done with.

Mark Linley's heart was light as he went out into the Close. His position in the school had been strengthened by the late happenings after all.

There might be snobbish and thoughtless prejudices left still, but every boy's sympathy naturally went out towards a victim of treachery and injustice. And Mark was thinking of something else too.

How had Mr. Quelch known?

Mark Linley thought over the matter for some considerable time, but it never occurred to him that Marjorie Hazeldene had intervened on his behalf, and through her alone the truth had come out.

THE END.

*Another Splendid  
Long Complete Tale of  
HARRY WHARTON  
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**"BILLY  
BUNTER'S  
PUPILS!"**

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**BETWEEN OURSELVES.**

**A Weekly Chat between The Editor  
and His Readers.**

### FOR NEXT FRIDAY!

Three more magnificent school stories are due to appear in next Friday's issue of the PENNY POPULAR. First and foremost is that dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars, entitled:

### "BILLY BUNTER'S PUPILS!"

The fat junior of Greyfriars is very prominent in this tale with his ventriloquism. Billy Bunter offers to teach ventriloquism for a small sum. Whether there are many takers of his offer you will learn next Friday. At any rate, I can assure you that this is a very laughable tale, one that you will all enjoy.

The story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, in our next number is also a very humorous one. It is entitled:

### "THE FORM MISTRESS OF ST. JIM'S!"

In Mr. Lathom's absence a woman is appointed to take the Fourth Form. Needless to say, the Fourth-Formers do not approve of the appointment, but they have to put up with it, and a good deal more. There is great fun during lessons, and, when the Form-mistress marches the juniors into the village, there is more fun, but not for the Fourth-Formers. The fun is all on the side of the village boys. There are many laughable scenes in this story, and you will roar when you read about them.

The third story in next Friday's issue of the PENNY POP. is, of course, that dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. This tale, which by the way, is entitled:

### "THE CAPTAIN'S SECRET!"

strikes a more serious vein. Bulkeley, the captain of the school, has a secret, that is to say, the secret is his until Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, manages to become acquainted with it. Bulkeley is in great trouble, but Leggett shows very little sympathy for him. He treats the captain of Rookwood most unfairly, and even stoops to blackmail. What the ultimate result of it all is, you will learn when you read next Friday's fine yarn.

In conclusion, I want to tell all my chums how necessary it is that they should order their copies of the PENNY POPULAR in advance. The Government have now stopped all returns of periodicals. Therefore, newsagents now only order those copies of the PENNY POP. for which they know they have a sale. If your copy is not on order your chances of securing one are practically nil. Be warned in time, therefore, and fill up the form on page 15 of this issue.

### REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Tommy R. (Barnesley).—Send me your full name and address and two penny stamps, and a "Chums of Greyfriars" plate will be sent you by return.

A. M. T. (Huddersfield).—The result of our Picture Competition will be published as soon as possible.

R. M. (London, N.W.).—The story you mention will be published in due course. Your other suggestions shall receive my most careful consideration.

# THE PRICE OF SILENCE!



A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Early Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER Crooke Means Business!

**T**OM MERRY laid down his pen and jerked his chair back from the table. He jerked the table in doing so, and Manners gave a howl. Two big blots had dropped from his pen, and they adorned the sheet he was engaged upon. Manners prided himself upon the neatness and clearness of his exercises; and he bestowed a glare upon his chum.

"You ass! Look what you've done!" he growled. "You've made me spill ink on my paper, you ass!"

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's a waste, but there's lots of ink; we had a new bottle to-day."

"You—you—"

"About the eight—"

"Blow the eight!" said Manners.

"I shall have to erase this somehow."

"About the eight," resumed Tom Merry calmly.

"Wait till I've done this rotten German!" growled Monty Lowther. "I can't write German and talk boats at the same time!"

"Then chuck the German!" said Tom Merry.

"About the eight, I don't know about eighth man, and we ought to settle it, as we're rowing with Figgins & Co. next week. Figgins has got a good crew—Kerr, and Wynn, and Thompson, and Redfern, and Owen, and Lawrence, and Pratt. I've seen them at practice, and they are good!"

"Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an!" mumbled Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther—"

"Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, Gethan?"

"Stop it, you ass!"

"Finished!" said Lowther, throwing down his pen.

There was another howl from Manners. He had erased two blots, and a spurt of ink from Lowther's pen, as he threw it down, bestowed upon him three new ones.

"You awful ass!" roared Manners.

"Oh, sorry! About the eight—"

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Well, do it quietly," he suggested.

"No need to make a row about it."

"You—you—you—"

"About the eight," said Tom Merry.

"There's Kangy, and there's Reilly, and there's also Bernard Glyn. They're all good."

The door opened, and Crooke, of the Shell, came in. The Terrible Three looked at him. The Shell fellow looked as if he were in a hurry. He closed the door behind him and nodded coolly to the three.

"Do they all come in without knocking in the casual ward you were brought up in, Crooke?" asked Lowther.

Crooke did not reply to the question.

"I want to see you, Tom Merry!" he began.

"Well, I'm on view!" said Tom Merry.

"Take a good look, and go!"

"It's about the eight."

"What on earth does the eight matter to you?" demanded the captain of the Shell, in surprise. "You don't mean to say that you're taking an interest in sports, Crooke? We shall hear of your playing cricket next!"

"Blow cricket! I can row—"

"Crabs caught in any number at the shortest notice!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Crooke scowled.

"I can row," he repeated; "and I want to row in the junior eight!"

The Terrible Three stared at him. Then Monty Lowther burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke gave him a glare.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"The joke!" said Monty Lowther innocently.

"What joke, you ass?"

"Aren't you joking?"

"No, I'm not!"

"My mistake—I thought you were," said Lowther blandly. "I take that laugh back, then. I certainly thought you were trying to be funny."

"I want to row in the eight!" said Crooke, looking at Tom Merry. "The fellows up and down the House say that you don't want any but your personal friends in the crew—"

Tom Merry flushed.

"I suppose the fellows up and down the House are yourself and Mellish?" he remarked. "I don't suppose anybody else would say anything so caddish!"

"Well, it looks like it!" said Crooke.

"The fellows you've selected are all your own personal friends."

"That's because the fellows I know are all decent!" said Tom Merry. "I should select a fellow I was on fighting terms with, if he could row. But we've got to get the best oars we can to beat the New House."

"You haven't taken the trouble to see what I can do!"

"I'm willing to see what you can do, if you like to turn up to boating practice," said Tom Merry. "You've never seemed to take to it before. And I certainly shouldn't risk putting you in the eight all of a sudden like this. We've got a tussle before us to beat the New House, anyway."

"Well, I want to be in the eight!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Do you mean to say that there's no chance for me, and that you won't put me in under any conditions?" asked Crooke savagely.

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've got it!" he said.

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"And do you call that fair play?" he demanded.

"Certainly! If you like to come down to boat practice, and I should see that you're quite a remarkable oar, I might

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 239.

think of it. But I don't expect anything of the sort."

"I'll come down to practice fast enough, if you're willing to give me a chance!" said Crooke. "I want to take up rowing seriously this summer. I'll be down at the river with you before brekker to-morrow morning."

"Quite welcome!" said Tom Merry. "But, I may as well say plainly, that I don't think there's any chance for you. I've got a better crew without you. Blessed if I can understand your turning over a new leaf like this all of a sudden. You've never gone in for sports of any kind, and you've always grumbled at compulsory cricket."

"I don't care for cricket; but I want to row."

"Well, come down to-morrow morning, and I'll see what you can do!" said Tom Merry. "If you mean bizney, I'm glad to see you taking up something better than smoking and playing nap for pennies anyway."

"I'll be there," said Crooke; "and if you don't give me a chance, I warn you that there'll be trouble."

"Oh, shut up!"

Crooke left the study and slammed the door behind him. The Terrible Three looked at one another in surprise.

"Blessed if I catch on to this!" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "This is quite a new line for Crooke to take up. I don't savvy at all."

And Manners and Lowther agreed that they didn't savvy, either. Certainly, rowing was not in Crooke's line. Any kind of manly sport was disliked by Crooke, and Mellish, and Levison, and their set, as a rule.

Crooke went down the passage, frowning. He stopped at Mellish's study in the Fourth Form passage, and went in. Mellish and Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth were there, and Lumley-Lumley had just finished his preparation.

He rose as Crooke came in.

Time had been when Lumley-Lumley and Crooke and Mellish had been birds of a feather. That time was past, so far as Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was concerned. When Crooke came to the study now, Lumley-Lumley generally got out of it, as he now proceeded to do. Crooke watched him with a scowl as he went. As Lumley-Lumley closed the study door, Crooke turned to Mellish, who was grinning.

"Got into the eight?" asked Mellish.

Crooke knitted his brows darkly.

"No!" he replied. "But I'm going to get in, and I want you to help me."

"How on earth can I help you?" asked Mellish in surprise.

"Look here," said Crooke, "Tom Merry's determined to keep me out of the school sports, and I'm determined to get in. If I can't do it by fair means, I'm going to do it the other way. He won't give me a chance unless I get the whip-hand of him and make him."

"Make him? That won't be easy! And how are you going to get the whip-hand of Tom Merry?" asked Mellish. "You're talking rot!"

"I've got an idea in my head, and you're going to help me. There won't be any risk for you, and I'll make it worth your while. Listen to me!"

Crooke opened the study door and glanced out, and then closed it again hurriedly. Then he began to talk in a low, muttering tone that could not have been overheard in the passage, even if there had been an eavesdropper.

And Mellish, whose manner was at first uneasy and rebellious, grew more and more interested, until at length he was in full accord with the cad of the Shell.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 239.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Quite a Windfall.

THE Terrible Three came in hungry as hunters after their pull on the river. Tom Merry and Manners went up to the study to get tea, and Monty Lowther lingered to look at the rack in the hall. He was rather hoping he would find a letter there containing a tip from his uncle.

Tom Merry lighted the fire in the study, and Manners opened the cupboard door. He turned out a loaf, a fragment of butter, and a tin of sardines. He looked at them on the table rather lugubriously.

"That all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all."

"My hat! I hope Monty gets a remittance, then. Looks to me as if we shall have to cadge a tea along the passage," said Tom Merry.

"We might have tried Gussy," said Manners, "but he's stony."

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "He had a ten bob postal order from his governor, but it appears that somebody's pinched it."

"Hallo, here's Monty!"

Monty Lowther burst into the study, all smiles. He held a letter in one hand, and a postal order in the other.

"Hurrah!"

"How much?"

"Ten bob."

"Bravo!"

"Jolly decent of nunky!" said Monty Lowther gleefully. "The curious thing is that he doesn't mention the remittance in the letter. Listen!"

"Dear Nephew,—My advice to you is to be more careful with your money,—Your affectionate uncle,

"J. LOWTHER."

"Short and sweet!" remarked Manners.

"Doesn't sound like a letter enclosing a remittance," Tom Merry remarked.

"Still, he's enclosed it, so it's all right," said Lowther cheerfully. "I'll go and get this changed with Mrs. Taggles, and bring in some tummy. I won't be long."

"Cut off, then!"

Monty Lowther scuttled out of the study. He returned in ten minutes or so, laden with packages. His face was flushed with running.

"Figgins & Co. sighted me in the quad, and gave chase," he explained. "Jolly near got raided. I dropped a little jar of jam; they're welcome to that. I saw Fatty Wynn bolting it as I came in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther spread his purchases upon the table. They made a good array. The chums of the Shell eyed them with great satisfaction.

"Three bob left," said Lowther. "We shall have to make that last us till Saturday. Eat, drink, and be merry."

"Kettle's boiling!" said Tom Merry.

"I'll make the tea, and you can poach the eggs. That ham looks ripping; and I've got a first-class hunger on."

"Same here!" said Manners emphatically.

And the Terrible Three sat down to a merry tea. They had just started when Crooke, of the Shell, looked in.

"Hallo! You fellows in funds?" he asked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Manners.

"Yes, it does. I was going to ask you to tea in my study," said Crooke. "I thought I heard you say you were stony."

"So we were," said Tom Merry; "but Lowther's had a postal-order since then."

"Oh, good!" said Crooke, with a peculiar glance at Lowther. "You're in luck, Lowther. A big one, I suppose?"

"Ten bob."

"Ten bob!" repeated Crooke, with a peculiar intonation in his voice.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, looking round at Crooke, surprised by his tone. "What is there in that?"

"Oh, nothing. I suppose Lowther gets lots of postal-orders from his uncle," said Crooke carelessly.

"No, I don't," said Lowther; "only once in a blue moon. But I don't see that it's any business of yours. You seem mighty interested in the matter."

"Oh, not at all!"

"Travel along, then!"

Crooke left the study. Tom Merry glanced at Lowther rather reproachfully.

"Might have been a bit more polite, Monty, when he said he was going to ask us to tea," he remarked. "Of course, we wouldn't have had tea with him, but—"

"He was only romancing," said Lowther. "That was his excuse for putting his fat head in. He wanted to spy, that's all, as usual. I can't stand that chap."

"I can't, either," said Manners thoughtfully. "He seems to have something up his sleeve just now, too, though I can't make out what it is."

"Oh, blow Crooke!" said Lowther. "Pass the eggs."

Kangaroo, of the Shell, and Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn looked in a little later, and were accorded a welcome very different from that which had greeted Crooke.

They stayed to tea, and Gore and Skimple came in from the next study, too. There was quite a little party in Tom Merry's study, in fact, to do justice to that excellent feed stood by Monty Lowther with the unexpected postal-order.

Meanwhile, Crooke, of the Shell, had strolled down to the tuckshop behind the elms in the corner of the old quad. Dame Taggles came out of her little parlour.

"Monty Lowther changed a postal-order here a while ago, didn't he, Mrs. Taggles?" the cad of the Shell asked.

"Yes, Master Crooke."

"Would you mind letting me see it?" asked Crooke. "Lowther wants to know the number."

"Yes," said Dame Taggles, a little surprised, but not seeing any reason to object. And she fumbled in her till and took out the postal-order.

"You give me the number, and I'll jot it down," said Crooke.

"Very well." Dame Taggles read out the number: "00186."

"Thank you, Mrs. Taggles."

And Crooke left the shop. In the quad-rangle he took a telegram from his pocket, and glanced at it with a grin. It read:

"00186. Eastwood."

"Oh, good!" murmured Crooke. "I rather think that I shall row in the School House eight, after all."

Which was certainly a very mysterious remark for the cad of the Shell to make.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### What Crooke Knew.

TOM MERRY sat alone in his study. The Terrible Three had done their preparation after that excellent tea, and Manners and Lowther had gone down. Tom Merry had fifty lines to do, and he was staying up to do them before bed-time.

Crooke, of the Shell, came into the study abruptly without knocking.

Tom Merry went on writing without looking up.

"Merry!"

"Hallo!" Tom Merry paused. "What do you want, Crooke?"

Crooke closed the door carefully.

"I want a few words with you, Tom Merry," he said, coming towards the captain of the Shell, and sinking into a chair lately occupied by Monty Lowther. "I've got something rather important to say, and I've come now because Manners and Lowther aren't here."

Tom Merry looked astonished.

"You're jolly mysterious," he said.

"May as well keep it dark if we can."

"Keep what dark?" demanded Tom Merry.

"What I'm going to tell you."

"Oh, rats! I don't want any blessed secrets with you," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "Go and tell 'em to Mellish. He'll like 'em."

"It's about the eight."

"The eight?"

"Exactly!"

"I don't understand you. What have you got to tell me about the eight that I don't know?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"You haven't decided on No. 8 yet?"

"Yes; I've practically decided on Noble—Kangaroo."

"You'd better undeceive again, then," said Crooke, with a very unpleasant glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I've told you before—that I said to you yesterday—that I want to row in the eight, and I've made up my mind on the subject."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I watched you row this morning," he said. "You didn't do so badly as I expected, but nothing up to the form we want for the eight. You haven't got a dog's chance. Now, will you buzz off, and let me get my lines done."

"Wait a bit! You refuse to put me into the eight?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then I shall have to make you."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Make me!" he repeated, as if scarcely able to believe his ears.

"That's what I said," replied Crooke coolly.

The captain of the Shell rose to his feet. Crooke did not move, but his eyes glittered unpleasantly as they fastened upon his Form captain.

"You'd better get out," said Tom Merry quietly. "I don't want a row with you, Crooke, but I don't allow anybody to talk to me like that. The sooner you get outside this study the better."

"I am going to row in the eight."

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. Now get out."

Crooke did not stir.

"I'm not finished yet," he said. "I've told you that I've made up my mind on the subject; and if you don't put me in the crew, I'm going to make you. You don't think I can do it?"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh of contemptuous amusement.

"How could you make me?" he said. "You're not proposing to lick me, I suppose? You couldn't do it, and even if you could, it wouldn't make any difference. Nothing could make me put you into the junior School House eight."

"You are going to put me into the eight," said Crooke coolly, "and you are going to take me up generally. You're going to chum with me in public; take me out to rowing practice, treat me with respect, and generally toe the line?"

"I suppose you're off your rocker."

"Not at all."

"Then what's going to make me do all this?" asked Tom Merry, in scornful wonder.

"You're going to do it because I've got the whip-hand of you, and I'm going to make you."

"The whip-hand of me!"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"Your friendship for Monty Lowther," said Crooke.

Tom Merry started.

"Lowther! What's Lowther got to do with it?"

"I have only to open my mouth to get him expelled in disgrace from St. Jim's," said Crooke icily. "If you want to save him, you've got to toe the line."

"Lowther—expelled!"

"Yes."

"How? Why? Are you mad?"

"Because he's a thief!"

"Lowther?"

"Yes—Oh!"

Crash!

Tom Merry's fist lashed out like lightning, and Crooke went backwards over a chair under the crashing blow.

The chair crashed on the floor, and Crooke bumped down beside it, and lay there gasping and panting, and stuttering.

Tom Merry stood over him with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

"You hound!" he said, between his teeth. "Get up, and say it again, and I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Crooke lay on the floor, regarding him with eyes that burned with deadly hatred.

"Get up!" said Tom Merry scornfully.

"Hang you!"

"Get up and repeat what you said, if you want to be handled again."

"I won't repeat it here," Crooke muttered. "I'll repeat it in the Head's study, Tom Merry. You shall be sorry that you treated me like this. You could have saved Lowther from being sacked; you

Crooke paused.

"What do you want?" he sneered.

"I want to know what you've got against Lowther. If it's some yarn that you've trumped up about him—as it must be—"

"You'd better accuse D'Arcy of trumping it up, not me."

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"D'Arcy of the Fourth?"

"Yes, D'Arcy of the Fourth."

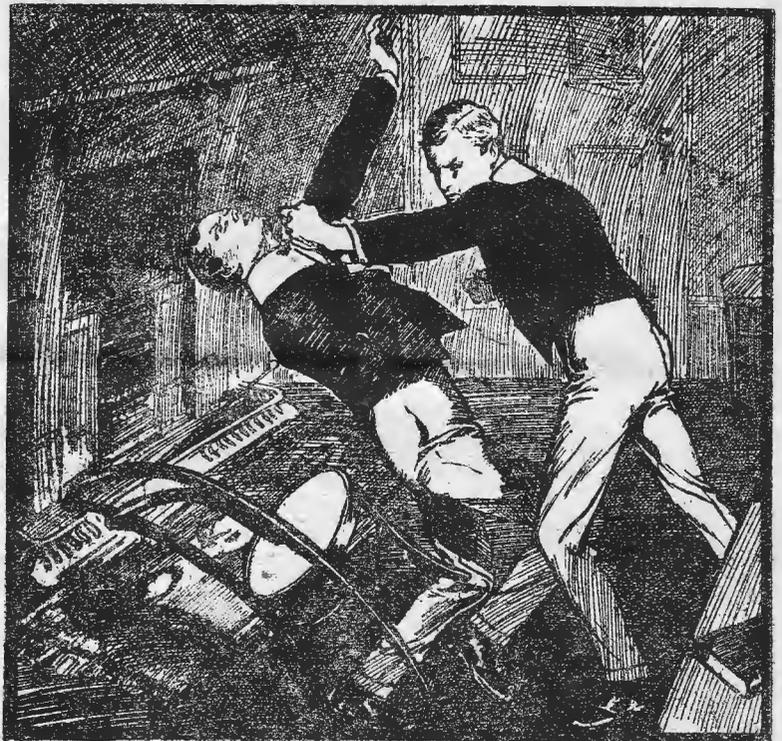
"What has he to do with it?"

"It was his postal-order."

"His postal-order!" Tom Merry repeated, his heart sinking. "You're talking in rotten riddles. What do you mean? I remember now that D'Arcy said he had lost a postal-order, but I dare say he has found it by this time. He's always losing things and finding them."

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"He won't find this one," he said, "unless he looks into Dame Taggles' till for it. The postal-order Monty Lowther changed at Mrs. Taggles' to-day was the one D'Arcy lost!"



"I have only to open my mouth to get Lowther expelled in disgrace from St. Jim's," said Crooke. "He's a thief—Oh!" Crash! Tom Merry's fist flashed out like lightning, and Crooke went backwards over a chair under the crashing blow.

haven't chosen to do it. When he goes, remember you could have saved him, that's all. I'm going to the Head."

He rose to his feet, and turned to the door.

Tom Merry watched him in silence. There was something so determined and decided in Crooke's manner that it struck a chill to the heart of the Shell captain.

Was there anything in the rascal's threat? Was Monty Lowther in danger of being expelled? It was impossible! Yet—what did Crooke mean? He had made the statement, and he could not, of course, expect Tom Merry to accept it without proof. What proofs could he have to offer? What did it all mean?

Crooke's hand was on the door. Tom Merry made a movement.

"Hold on, Crooke!"

"It's a lie!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

"The number is the same."

Tom Merry staggered.

"The number! Impossible!"

"Impossible or not, it's true. I asked D'Arcy to write to his pater to get the number of the postal-order, and he wouldn't. As a matter of fact, he more than half suspects that Lowther pinched it."

"He—he couldn't suspect Lowther!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Well, at all events he wouldn't ask his pater for the number of the postal-order. But I meant to know it, because I suspected. I sent a telegram this afternoon to D'Arcy's father, asking the number of the postal-order, in D'Arcy's name, the reply to be sent to a shop in Rylcombe. I called there in D'Arcy's name, and got the

reply wire. I had to do it in D'Arcy's name, of course, or I shouldn't have had an answer from his pater. Here is the answer."

He held out the telegram.

Tom Merry grasped it with an unsteady hand.

"Handed in at Easthorpe. '00186.—Eastwood."

That was all. It was evidently the reply of Lord Eastwood to the wire he had supposed to be sent by his son, asking the number of the missing postal-order.

"That's the number of D'Arcy's postal-order," said Tom Merry huskily. "But how dare you say that it is the same as that Lowther cashed this evening?"

"Because I've just asked Mrs. Taggles to tell me the number of that postal-order."

"And she told you?"

"Yes!"

"And the number was—"

"The same."

"Impossible!"

"You can go to Mrs. Taggles and ask her yourself," said Crook carelessly, "and you can write to Lord Eastwood, asking the number of the order again, if you choose. As a matter of fact, it's all quite clear, and you can see it as well as I can. I've got the whip-hand of you, Tom Merry, if you want to save Lowther, and don't you forget it."

"You cad! You cad! Listen to me! I shall write to Lord Eastwood, and ask him to tell me the number, and I shall go down to Dame Taggles, and look at that postal-order she has."

Crooke nodded.

"Quite right," he said. "After you've done both, and had your reply from D'Arcy's governor, we'll talk of the matter again. Till then we won't say anything more about the eight."

And he left the study.

Tom Merry sank into a chair.

What did Crooke's cooiness and confidence mean?

Tom Merry hoped against hope; but in his heart of hearts he knew that Crooke's confidence had its foundation in the fact that he knew that the numbers would be found the same.

And that meant—

Tom Merry sat in miserable thought, until it was time for him to go up to bed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Whip-hand.

TOM MERRY came down the next morning looking very different from his usual self.

There was a wrinkle in his boyish brow, and a preoccupation in his manner, that his chums noticed at once.

But it was useless to ask him what was the matter. He replied evasively, or shook his head impatiently and did not reply at all.

"The ass has got something on his little mind," said Monty Lowther to Manners.

"Saedy, perhaps," said Manners.

"It's queer."

"Yes, isn't it?"

After morning lessons that day, Tom Merry joined Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when the Fourth came out of their Form-room.

"You haven't found that postal-order yet, D'Arcy, I suppose?" he said abruptly. D'Arcy shook his head.

"Do you know the number of it?"

"No."

"Haven't you written to your pater to ask?"

"No, dear boy."

"Why not?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, I'm goin' to let the mattah dwop, you know," said D'Arcy. "I dare say the wotten thing will turn up somewhere."

"I want to know the number," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"Will you write to your father and ask—or, rather, wire to him? I want to know it. You needn't ask me why, but I want to know."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I won't ask you any questions, Tom Mewwy, dear boy," he said quietly. "I'll do just as you like. I'll wish at once, and ask my governor to write, and I shall get his weply by to-night."

"Thanks, very much."

And Tom Merry did not speak on the subject again.

Crooke avoided Tom Merry during that day. It was evidently his intention not to speak again until Tom Merry had obtained the proofs he wanted. Then, when it was

clear that the cad of the Shell held the whip-hand, it would be time to speak.

The day was a miserable one for Tom Merry.

He avoided his chums; he could not endure their inquiring glances. They had left off asking him questions, but they were evidently very much surprised and hurt by his want of confidence in them.

It was after tea when Arthur Augustus brought a letter to Tom Merry in the quad. Lord Eastwood had evidently replied immediately after receiving the wire.

"It's wathah remarkable," said the swell of St. Jim's, looking perplexed. "Weed it."

Tom Merry read the letter.

"Dear Arthur—I have already wired you the number, as you asked me. It is '00186. I hope you have found the postal-order by this time. You are very careless, and I am glad it was not the five-pound note you asked me for.—Your affectionate Father."

"I haven't had any wish, you know," D'Arcy remarked.

"Somebody else wired for the number in your name," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! What an awful nerve!"

"'00186," said Tom Merry. "That's plain enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you D'Arcy. By the way, are you going to do anything about this?" Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Nothin', dear boy."

"You are going to keep that number to yourself?"

"Yaas; I shall destwoy this letter immediately."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

He did not ask D'Arcy his reasons. He knew them already. The swell of St. Jim's suspected Lowther, and he would not be the one to begin a scandal.

Was it possible that Lowther had taken the postal-order? Tom Merry asked himself, as he walked away.

He realised that the question should rather have been—was it possible that he had not taken it?

The order Lowther had declared came in the letter from his uncle bore the same number as the one Lord Eastwood had sent to his son.

(Continued on next page.)

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Could anything be more clear ?

Two postal-orders could not have the same number, and therefore the postal-order was the same—and therefore it was inevitable that Lowther had taken the order, and had pretended to receive it in the letter from his uncle.

Tom Merry's faith in his chum had been complete, absolute. But, in the face of evidence like this, what was he to believe ?

He shrank from speaking to Lowther about it.

What could Lowther say ?

Deny that the postal-orders were the same, when Tom Merry knew that they were the same ? What could he possibly say ? Admit that he had stolen it ? It would hardly be possible for him to brazen it out.

Tom Merry shuddered at the thought of such a scene.

What had happened was utterly out of accordance with Monty Lowther's character. Tom would have staked his life upon Monty's honour.

But it had happened !

The only thing was to keep it a dead secret ; to save his chum from the consequences of his dishonest action.

Lowther had acted badly enough, but to see him disgraced and expelled from the school would be too terrible.

To keep on friendly terms with him would be hard enough. Tom Merry would have to try to bury his knowledge, as it were—to forget the horrible occurrence.

But he knew that he could not.

In spite of any efforts he could make, he would not be able to act towards Lowther as if he still believed in him.

And there was another factor in the problem—Crooke.

Crooke had said that he had the whip-hand now, and undoubtedly he had it. For he knew the whole story, and he had only to open his lips to disgrace Monty Lowther and ruin him for life.

And if Tom Merry wanted to save his misguided chum, he had to make terms with the cad of the Shell.

Crooke had already stated his terms. He wanted to be taken up, and to be put in the crew next week—that was his price.

Tom Merry went into the Form-room to think it over. He wanted to be alone. But Crooke's eye was upon him. The cad of the Shell followed him in.

Tom Merry turned round upon him, his hands clenched and his eyes gleaming. He would have given a great deal to spring upon the cad of the Shell, and knock him right and left. But he dared not, for Lowther's sake.

"Well ?" said Crooke, in his disagreeable tones. "You've seen the answer from Lord Eastwood ?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've got the number ?"

"Yes."

"You've seen Mrs. Taggles' postal-order ?"

"Yes."

"Are the numbers the same ?"

"Yes."

Crooke grinned.

"What are you going to do ?" he asked. "I suppose it's your duty as captain of the Shell to give Lowther away, and get him sacked ?"

Tom Merry shivered.

"That's not my duty, as I see it," he said in a low tone.

"Well, he's a thief, isn't he ?"

"Hold your tongue ?" said Tom Merry fiercely.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"What are you going to do ?" he repeated. "You know the truth, and D'Arcy suspects it. I know it, and there's no love lost between me and Lowther, and there never was. I've no reason for keeping the secret."

"I know that."

"Do you want it kept dark ?"

"Yes."

"You ask me to keep it dark ?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry with an effort. The cad of the Shell grinned.

"You know the price," he remarked.

"You rotten cad !" said Tom Merry passionately. "If I put you in the eight, the other fellows won't row with such an awful cad as you are ! They'll resign."

Crooke laughed.

"I'll risk that," he remarked. "If you chum up with me in a very devoted way, they will swallow me whole, I dare say."

"Chum up with you !" said Tom Merry, with a gesture of disgust.

Crooke nodded coolly.

"Yes. Why not ?"

"Do you know what you're doing—this is blackmail !"

"Well, even if it is, a blackmailer is not worse than a thief, and you've chummed up with a thief, haven't you ?"

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Besides, I shall do you credit," said Crooke coolly. "I can row, and if you give me some good coaching, I shall go ahead splendidly. The fact is, I'm tired of being a black sheep, and having to hang round with fellows like Mellish and Levison, whom nobody else wants to speak to. I'm going in for something better this term ; and you're going to help me."

"Something better—and you're beginning by blackmail !" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Well, I must make a beginning somehow. I asked you to put me in the eight, and you refused. Now I've got the whip-hand, you can't refuse !"

"I don't know—I—"

"I don't ask you to announce at once that I'm going into the eight. Just let it get out that you're taking me up in a friendly way to coach me in rowing. The rest can be let out later."

"And if I don't—"

"If you don't, I'm going straight to Mr. Linton to tell him that there is a thief in the Shell, and you and D'Arcy will be called upon to give evidence against Lowther."

Tom Merry's lips set.

"You rotten cad ! I'm in your hands, and, I suppose, you can dictate your own terms !"

"Exactly. It seems to have taken you a long time to find that out, and I'm glad you've got on to it at last !" said Crooke with a yawn.

"Get out, now—leave me alone !"

And Crooke got out, contentedly enough. He had the whip-hand, and he was using it without mercy, and he was quite willing to be good-tempered and obliging about it.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Tom Merry Causes Surprise !

"WHAT on earth's the matter with Tom Merry ?"

That question was asked up and down St. Jim's during the next day or two.

Certainly the conduct of the captain of the Shell was unusual and surprising.

Tom Merry had lost much of his old cheeriness of manner, and he did not seem so keen about cricket, and even the question of the eights did not move him to enthusiasm.

He was not so chummy with Manners and Lowther, and avoided being left alone with them.

Strangest of all, he had taken up a new chum.

And that chum, of all people, was Crooke, of the Shell.

It was amazing.

True, Tom Merry was a friendly and cordial fellow, and was always willing to be on good terms, with everybody. He had a cheery nod even for fellows like Levison and Mellish. He had taken up Lumsley-Lumsley, when that youth turned over a new leaf and reformed, and they had been good chums ever since.

But Crooke !

Crooke certainly hadn't turned over a new leaf. He had an ambition to shine as a member of the junior eight ; but he was not willing to forgo any of his bad habits as the price of shining thus.

It was perfectly well known that Crooke kept a box of cigarettes in his study and smoked them as much as usual ; that he had shady friends outside the school, and had no intention of giving them up.

Yet Tom Merry had taken up with him. It was not only that he was taking notice of Crooke, but they were seen everywhere together. Crooke would wait for him when classes were over, and link arms with him and walk with him into the old quad. He would go down to the river with him, and they would row together, and Tom Merry was evidently very keen in coaching Crooke.

He had a reason for being keen about that. Crooke demanded a place in the junior eight as the price of his silence—and if he did not get it, he would speak. And Tom Merry, as captain of the boats, could not think of putting a fellow into the crew who could not row.

If Crooke by means of practice and assiduous coaching, could so improve his form as to be able to take his place in the eight without letting the side down, one of Tom Merry's great worries would be gone. He would be able to pay Crooke's price without dereliction of his duty as junior captain.

Tom Merry's new friendship for Crooke was far from being approved by the other fellows.

If Crooke had been decent, no one would have objected.

But he wasn't decent ; and for Tom Merry to take up the waster of the Shell in this way was exasperating to the other fellows.

Manners and Lowther felt very sore about it.

Hitherto the steady friendship of the Terrible Three had been unbroken. There had been little rubs and troubles at times, certainly, but they had always blown over. The three were inseparable ; the idea of anything happening to separate them, and make them cold to one another, had never occurred to any of them.

But it was coming now.

Tom Merry avoided Monty Lowther ; and as he could not explain, and would not explain why he did it, Manners naturally took Lowther's side in the matter.

The consequence was, that Tom Merry saw less and less of Manners.

It looked as if the captain of the Shell had thrown over his two tried and true old chums for the sake of a new friend.

Disloyalty of that kind was utterly unlike all that was known of Tom Merry, and the fellows simply could not understand it.

For some days Manners and Lowther nursed their injuries in silence, growing more and more sullen about it, but too proud to say anything on the subject to Tom Merry. If he did not want them, if he preferred the society of the cad of the Shell to theirs, he could have his own way, that was all.

They were bitterly hurt ; but they would not speak. Indeed, the more they were hurt the less likely they were to speak.

But that could not last ; and it came out after a time. On Saturday afternoon there was practice with the boats. It was a fine May afternoon, and the river was flowing golden under the big trees, when the juniors turned out. Tom Merry called the eight together for practice, and they gathered outside the School House.

Kangaroo, of the Shell, joined them. The Cornstalk junior had hopes of being No. 8 in the boat when the race was rowed with the New House juniors. Crooke of the Shell, came out in a blazer, looking

more fit than usual; The rowing of the past few days had certainly done him good, and there was more colour in his pasty face, and a new alertness in his movements.

"We're going to have the eight-oar out for a run as far as the Pook," Tom Merry said.

"I suppose I'm coming?" said Crooke.

"Yes!"

Monty Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Is Crooke going to practice with the eight, Tom Merry?"

"Yes!"

"What about Kangaroo?"

"Nothing!"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Kangaroo in dismay. "I was beginning to count on it, Merry, old man. I don't want to shove myself in, of course, but I think you might give me a run with the eight. I know Reilly and Lumley-Lumley are good enough; but it's a bit thick putting a chap like Crooke over my head!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Tom Merry disapprovingly. "I weally wegard that as wathah thick, Tom Mewwy!"

Crooke sneered.

"Who's captain of the junior boats?" he demanded.

"Tom Mewwy is! But——"

"Well, then, can't you allow your own skipper to know his own business best?"

"Weally, Cwooke——"

"If Tom Merry says I'm to row, I'm going to row, and you and Noble can go and eat coke!" said Crooke.

Tom Merry looked worried.

"I haven't decided to put Crooke into the eight next week, yet!" he said. "But I want to see how he shapes in practice with a full crew to-day."

"But you don't mean to say that you think Crooke's form is up to Kangaroo's?" demanded Jack Blake.

"I should wegard such a view as widiculous!"

"What-ho!" said Manners emphatically.

Tom Merry made an irritable gesture. During the past few days his temper was not so kind as of old.

"Oh, for goodness' sake let's have a little less jaw!" he exclaimed. "If you fellows don't want me to skipper the boat, I'm willing to resign."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Nobody's suggesting that!" said Kangaroo quietly. "I suppose I'd better say nothing; but I don't understand this, that's all, Tom Merry!"

And the Cornstalk walked away.

"And I jolly well don't understand it, either!" said Monty Lowther warily.

"I don't understand passing over a decent chap and a good oar to put in a fellow like Crooke, and that's plain!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"The less you say about it the better!" he exclaimed.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Oh, rats! Let's get down to the river!"

And Tom Merry walked away to the boat-house, and the rest of the crew followed, in an extremely bad humour.

It was not the humour in which to do good rowing.

The School House junior crew contrasted very much with Figgins & Co., of the New House, who were also on the river for practice on that golden afternoon.

Figgins & Co. were in splendid form.

The sight of the New House junior eight pulling away in fine style increased the ill-humour of the School House crew.

They certainly did not make so good a show at practice, whatever they might do when the actual race came off the following Saturday.

After the practice, when they landed, Monty Lowther and Manners walked away by themselves, without saying anything to

Tom Merry. Crooke had slipped his arm through Tom Merry's in a very familiar way, and the sight of that made the chums of the Shell simply wild.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Crooke a glance through his eyeglass, and walked away after Manners and Lowther. Blake looked curiously at Tom Merry; the captain of the Shell had his eyes on the ground, and Blake was quite keen enough to see that he disliked Crooke's familiarity, and he was very much puzzled to know why Tom Merry did not resent it.

Blake slipped his arm into Tom Merry's other arm. The fellows lined up arm-in-arm to walk back to the school; Crooke, at all events, in a good temper and high spirits. He knew how everyone there resented his presence, but that only gave him a sense of power and added a zest to his enjoyment.

"We shall beat the New House all right," he remarked.

Blake granted.

"We shan't beat them if we don't do better than we've done this afternoon," he said tartly.

"Oh, you fellows will have to buck up!"

"Shall we?" exclaimed Blake angrily. "I think it's Tom Merry who will have to buck up, and kick you out of the eight, Crooke. That's all we want to make us win."

"Yes, rather," said Herries.

Crooke swung round angrily towards Blake.

"Mind your own business," he said savagely. "Tom Merry will please himself about whom he puts in the crew. I suppose?"

"He's not pleasing himself," said Blake bluntly. "I don't know what the little game is, or how you're working it, but Tom Merry doesn't want you with us any more than we do."

"Jolly plain to see, that is," said Clifton Dane, the coxswain of the School House boat.

Tom Merry coloured. The Canadian junior spoke the truth; his expression was more candid than his tongue with regard to Crooke.

"Let Tom Merry speak for himself," said Crooke. "Didn't you ask me to come down to boat-practice this afternoon, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Crooke."

"Well, I can't make it out," said Blake. "Blessed if I understand you at all lately, Tom Merry. Looks to me as if you're off your silly rocker!"

And Blake went into the School House very much puzzled.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Getting at the Truth.

CROOKE of the Shell strolled along the towing-path in great good humour.

He had been at practice with the eight again, and he was satisfied with himself. The fact that he would probably crack up under the strain of the race, owing to his being out of condition, did not trouble Crooke much.

He did not think so himself; but even if it happened, at all events, he would have had the honour of rowing in the junior eight, and he would be able to swank upon that subject for ever and ever afterwards.

Crooke had begun, in fact, to swank already. The dark looks of the other members of the crew did not trouble him. He did not care twopence for what they thought of him and his presence in the eight.

He was going to row, he was going to get his cap for the eight, and show it about at home in the next holidays. That was all he cared about—and he did not care very much even if his boat did lose.

Mellish met him on the towing-path, and nodded, with a grin.

"It's all serene?" he asked.

"Quite all right!" said Crooke. "I'm in the eight! It's settled!"

"Good luck! And not one suspicion!"

"Hush! No—nothing of the kind!"

How could there be?" Mellish chuckled.

"Quite so; how?" he agreed. "You can land me five bob, I suppose, Crooke?"

"Rats!" said Crooke. "I promised you a sovereign, and I've given it to you!"

"You'll lend me five bob, as well, I think!" said Mellish unpleasantly. "It will be safer, you know!"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"You blackmailing cad——" he began.

"Oh, come off!" said Mellish impatiently. "What are you doing with Tom Merry, if not blackmailing him, if you come to that?"

"Mind your own business, hang you!"

"It's my business to make something out of it, too. You get into the eight, I don't care twopence about the eight; but I'm hard up. Shell out!"

Crooke gave him a deadly look for a moment; and then, without another word, he counted out five shillings into Mellish's palm, and strode on down the towing-path.

Mellish slipped the clinking coins into his pocket, and walked away grinning. Crooke's face was a little clouded now. His scheme had been perfectly successful; but there was this little weakness in it, that it placed him at the mercy of his confederate, who was no more scrupulous than he was himself.

He had the whip-hand of Tom Merry, but Mellish had the whip-hand of him, in his turn. Until after the eight was rowed at all events, he would have to keep on good terms with the cad of the Fourth.

It was likely to prove expensive to him, and Crooke, although he had plenty of money, was not generous. But it was the price he had to pay for his success.

"Hallo, Blake! What do you want?"

Blake had stepped out of the trees upon the towing-path. Herries and D'Arcy were with him, and Kangaroo, of the Shell. The juniors surrounded Crooke without a word, and the cad of the Shell looked alarmed. He noticed that a boat was moored a little further up the towing-path, and Digby, of the Shell, was standing in it, evidently waiting for the others.

"I—I say, anything up?" asked Crooke uneasily.

"We want you!" said Blake tersely.

"Well, here I am!"

"Got the rope, Herries?"

"Yes; here!"

Crooke backed away as Herries produced a coil of rope from under his jacket. He backed into Noble, who promptly collared him. Crooke struggled, and four pairs of hands were laid upon him at once.

He was bumped upon the towing-path, and the rope was tied round him and knotted. In a couple of minutes he was a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot.

He opened his mouth to call for help, but Herries jammed a handkerchief into it, and the cad of the Shell spluttered into silence.

"Got him!" said Blake, with satisfaction.

Crooke spluttered.

"Bring him along!"

Crooke spat out the handkerchief with an effort.

"Where are you taking me?" he gasped.

"Into the boat."

"But—but what for?"

"You'll see. If you make a row you'll be ducked in the water," said Blake grimly. "For two pins we'd drop you in and tow you behind the boat, so be careful!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Three of the juniors lifted Crooke and carried him to the boat. Blake stepped on, and helped Digby to receive him.

Kangaroo and Herries and D'Arcy handed Croke into the boat, and followed him in. The cad of the Shell was laid on the thwarts, and Blake pushed off.

He had at first surmised that this was some rough jest, but the grim faces of the juniors warned him that it was something more than that.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, at last.

"To the island," said Blake.

"What for?"

"To leave you there."

"What!"

"Unless you tell us the truth about how you've got Tom Merry under your thumb."

Crooke turned deadly pale.

"I—I—" he stammered.

Blake held up his hand.

"We were watching you when you handed that five bob to Mellish a few minutes ago," he said. "We saw how you looked, and how he looked. It's pretty clear to us that he has helped you in this scheme of yours, or else that he has found you out, and he's making money out of you. If we wanted any proof, there it is. You've made Tom Merry believe something against Lowther, and we're going to know all about it. Understand?"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"I've got nothing to tell you," he said, "and you can't make me say anything. If Mellish has told you anything, he's told you lies."

"You're not going to leave me here?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but it's getting dusk now, and—and—"

"That's your look-out!"

"You dare not!" yelled Crooke, beside himself with fear. "You can't leave me here tied up to stay out all night. You dare not!"

"You'll soon see about that."

The juniors stepped into the boat. Crooke yelled out threats and entreaties, to which no answer was returned. He struggled with his bonds, but they were too firmly tied. Blake pushed off, and the juniors took up the oars and settled into their places.

Crooke's heart almost stood still. Night was coming on, and to lie bound on the island all night was a terrifying prospect. He knew that the darkness and the solitude would drive him to distraction.

In flood time, too, the island was covered by the waters of the Ryll. A flood was not likely just then, certainly, but it was barely possible, and the possibility was enough for Crooke. He yelled frantically to the juniors as they bent to their oars.

"Come back! Come back and take me off! You dare not leave me here!"

The oars beat time in the water.

"Blake! D'Arcy! Nob! Nob! Come back! You'll be expelled for this! Come back!"

Jove, I've a jolly good mind to take you straight up to the Head now, and Mellish, too, and let him put you through it. I'll bet he'd get the truth out of one of you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should wecommend doin' so!"

"Hold on!" panted Crooke. "I'll—I'll tell you about it. It was really Mellish's idea as much as mine. He got the postal-order out of D'Arcy's pocket."

"How did you manage the rest?" asked Blake.

"I—I—I—"

"Lend me your belt, Herries. I'll make him talk faster."

"I—I'll tell you!" gasped Crooke.

"I—I had seen a letter for Lowther on the rack, and I—I took it, you see. I opened the envelope with steam, and when Mellish gave me the postal-order I put it in, and sealed it up again. The next day I put the letter on the rack again. As the postal-order wasn't filled in, Lowther naturally imagined that it had been sent him by his uncle. It—it was knowing that D'Arcy's postal-order hadn't the name filled in that first put the idea into my head."

"Bah Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shall write to my gov'nah about that. He's always waggin' me about bein' careless with money, and I wathah think this will be one for his nob, you know."

"Of—of course, I never meant the

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"Mellish hasn't told us anything yet," said Kangaroo. "You're going to tell us. You've made out that Monty Lowther stole that postal-order."

"So he did!" growled Crooke. "D'Arcy knows it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head. "I don't know anything of the sort," he replied. "I certainly did think so, but now I know what use you have made of the thing, I suspect you of havin' got it up from the beginnin'."

"I didn't, I—"

"Here we are," said Kangaroo, as the boat bumped upon the shore of the island in the river. "Yank him out!"

Crooke was carried ashore. He was tossed down upon the thick green grass under the trees on the island. He lay bound upon the earth, looking up with dilated eyes at the juniors' grim faces. Crooke was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and he did not know how far the juniors' anger might carry them.

"Now, are you going to tell us the whole truth?" demanded Blake.

"I've got nothing to tell you."

"Sure?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Very well; we needn't stay here any longer," said Blake, "Get back, you fellows!"

The five juniors turned towards the boat. Crooke uttered a yell.

No answer; but the boat glided away in the deepening shadows. Crooke sat up, bound as he was, and peered after it with haggard eyes.

"Come back!" he shrieked. "Come back, and—and I'll confess! Come back!"

Blake stood up in the boat and looked round. His face was hard and grim. Whether he intended to fulfil his threat to Crooke, or not, he certainly looked as if he meant it.

"Do you mean that?" he called back. "Mind, if you bring us back for nothing, you won't get a second chance!"

"I—I mean it! For mercy's sake don't leave me here!" whimpered Crooke.

"Pull back, you fellows!"

The juniors rowed back to the island, and landed. Crooke's face was white, and his eyes dilated with fear. Blake looked down upon him sternly.

"Well, you blackmailing rotter, what have you got to say?" he asked.

"I—I—I—"

"Out with it! In the first place, you've made Tom Merry make friends with you, and promise you a place in the eight, by threatening to tell about Lowther?"

"Ye-es," muttered Crooke, through his trembling lips.

"You managed to fix it on Lowther somehow, so as to be able to use it to twist Tom Merry round your finger?"

"It—it was really a joke!"

"No lies!" said Blake grimly. "By

thing to get out," gasped Crooke. "I never meant that Lowther should ever be accused. It was only to work it, so that I could get into the eight. I never meant any real harm."

Blake's lip curled.

"Well, I'll believe that of you," he said. "You wouldn't have had the nerve to carry the matter through, and get Lowther expelled, I know that. You worked up the whole bizness so as to get Tom Merry under your thumb, through his regard for Lowther."

"I—I—"

"Chuck him into the boat!" said Blake contemptuously. "You can untie him. I've half a mind to chuck him into the river. Look here, Crooke, I'm going to have you and Mellish in Tom Merry's study when we get back, and you're both going to own up. You've busted up a friendship in that study, and you're going to set it right. Do you savvy?"

"I—I—"

"And if you don't do it, we'll take you straight in to the Head. I dare say you'd be villain enough to deny what you've just confessed; but if you did, Mellish would give you away, and I don't think you'd have nerve enough to brazen it out, either."

Crooke whimpered. He was only too well aware that he would not have nerve

nough to brazen it out before the stern eyes of the Head, and the sentence of expulsion loomed up before his eyes.

In his mind's eye he could see the crowded hall, the Head's stern face and raised hand, the scornful looks of his schoolfellows, as he had seen them on the occasion when Sleath, of the New House, was expelled.

"I—I'll do as you wish," he muttered. "You'd better."

And with Crooke sitting white and dejected in the stern, the boat pulled back to St. Jim's. The cad of the Shell was beaten, and the game was up.

He realised that only too clearly, and from the bottom of his heart he wished that he had played the game, and he wished that still more fervently half an hour later, when he stood with pale face and downcast eyes in Tom Merry's study, under the indignant gaze of the Terrible Three.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### The Winning Eight.

**T**OM MERRY had surprised the School House, and St. Jim's generally, by his sudden and unaccountable friendship with Crooke, of the Shell.

But the breaking off of that sudden and unaccountable friendship was more sudden and unaccountable still.

On Wednesday afternoon Crooke was chummy with Tom Merry, and it was understood by all that he was to row in the eight on Saturday.

On Wednesday evening Crooke was seen to leave Tom Merry's study headfirst, and to land with a bump on the linoleum in the passage.

A minute later Mellish, of the Fourth, was seen to leave in the same unceremonious manner, alighting beside Crooke with a wild yell.

The two cads of the School House picked themselves up, with dark and savage faces, and walked away, without replying by a single word to the many kind inquiries the Shell fellows made as they passed.

It was evident that Tom Merry's friendship with Crooke was at an end.

Curious fellows questioned Crooke and Mellish, but they obtained no satisfaction. The cads of the School House had nothing to say, or, if they had anything to say, at all events they did not say it.

It was equally useless to question Tom

Merry & Co. They had nothing to say, either. Only when asked whether Crooke was to row in the eight, Tom Merry gave a very emphatic answer in the negative. Kangaroo was to take No. 8 place, and Crooke was quite out of it.

Crooke said nothing about it; he did not even complain of being dropped from the eight. He was only too glad to let the matter sink into oblivion, and avoid the risk of an inquiry into his conduct.

Whatever Tom Merry's motives had been for dropping the cad of the Shell, the whole House was glad to hear that he had dropped him, and that the Cornstalk was to row in the eight against Figgins & Co. when the race came off.

After Blake and his chums had gone that evening from Tom Merry's study, and the Terrible Three were alone, Tom Merry turned to Lowther, with a very red face.

"I'm sorry, Lowther, old man," he said. "I—I know I oughtn't to have believed anything against you."

"You jolly well oughtn't!" said Lowther.

"It—it was too rotten for anything. But—but how was I to know, when—when you yourself thought the postal-order was yours. You owe Gussy ten bob."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"I'll settle up on Saturday," he said.

"Upon the whole, I can't blame you, Tommy, when you saw me claiming a postal-order that you knew belonged to D'Arcy. Of course, I couldn't guess that an awful rascal had opened my letter by steam and put a postal-order in—how could a chap guess a thing like that?—though I was surprised at my uncle sending me ten bob for a tip, too."

"It's all Lord Eastwood's fault for not filling in Gussy's name when he sent the postal-order," said Manners. "So there you are; and you two can shake paws over it."

And Tom Merry and Monty Lowther shook paws.

The cloud between the chums of the Shell had passed away, and Lowther and Manners, of course, were to row in the eight. The crew was complete, and every day that week the junior crew were hard at practice. Figgins & Co., too, were keeping it up, and both crews were in great form, and looking eagerly forward to the Saturday.

It was a glorious afternoon when the juniors turned out for the race.

Nearly all St. Jim's crowded down to the river to see it. Loud cheers rang over

the wide river as the two crews were seen carrying their boats down to the water.

The Head had come out, with Mrs. Holmes, to see the start. Kildare was the starter, and half the Sixth and Fifth, and all the juniors, were looking on. Grimes, the grocer's boy from Rylcombe, had paused on the towing-path, basket on arm, to look on. And when the signal was given, and the two crews bent to their oars, a thunderous yell rolled along the river.

"Go it, School House!"

"Buck up, New House!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!"

And they did pull!

It was, as all St. Jim's agreed, a ripping race. How Figgins & Co. led at the start, and how Tom Merry & Co. gained on them inch by inch, and passed them; how the New House pulled level, and kept level for half the distance, and then stole half a length; how Tom Merry & Co. put on a spurt, and drew ahead; how New House pulled level once more, but could do no more, though every gallant oarsman was rowing as if for his life; and how the School House shot a quarter of a length ahead at the finish—all this was discussed over and over again in both Houses of St. Jim's that night, and it was agreed that both crews had deserved well of St. Jim's.

"School House wins!" came a roar along the bank from the fellows who were racing along the towing-path. "Hurrah! Hurrah! School House wins!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry with a muffer round his neck, was shouldered by an enthusiastic crowd, and carried off in triumph. But after the race both crews met in a great feast in the School House, and victors and vanquished hobnobbed together on the best of terms.

When the New House fellows took their leave Fatty Wynn said, almost with tears in his eyes, that he would never forget the occasion. He said it was ripping.

"Yaas, it was a wippin' wace!" said D'Arcy, with a nod.

"Bacc!" said Fatty Wynn. "Oh, yes; but I was speaking of the feed. Good-night!"

And Figgins & Co. went home across the quadrangle, leaving the School House still rejoicing.

THE END.

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# THE FALL OF THE FISTICAL FOUR!

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 Story dealing with  
 the Early Adventures of  
**JIMMY SILVER & CO.,**  
 the Chums of Rookwood.  
 —BY—  
**OWEN CONQUEST.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Fistical Four's Wheeze.

"**G**OT the treacle?"  
 "What-ho—a seven pound tin!"  
 "Good! And the sugar—"  
 "Seven pounds of that, too."  
 "And the butter—"  
 "Two pounds of the best fresh."  
 "And a new saucepan?"  
 "Here it is, as large as life."  
 "Good!"

Jimmy Silver, the leader of the Fistical Four at Rookwood, had entered the end study loaded with parcels.

"Now we can get on with the toffee-making," said Lovell.

"What-ho!"  
 "Well, I reckon it's a jolly good idea," remarked Lovell. "Why, there's no reason why we should not make a business out of toffee-making. If we turn out really good stuff, the chaps'll be jolly keen to buy it."

"That's the wheeze," said Jimmy Silver. "And, moreover, it will be one in the eye for Tommy Dodd & Co. They couldn't think of a notion like this."

"No fear."  
 "Well, let's get to business."

Newcome stirred the fire, and Jimmy Silver slipped off his jacket, and turned up his sleeves. Jimmy Silver meant business.

"Rub the pan out with butter, Lovell," he said.

"Right-ho!"  
 The pan was rubbed with butter inside, and then some of the treacle was poured into it. Butter and sugar were added, and a ladle found for stirring. The toffee-makers were soon making good progress.

In the interest of the manufacture, the Classical chums hardly noticed how the time passed. Jimmy Silver examined and tasted the toffee from time to time, and pronounced that it was getting on excellently.

"I guess it's done now," he said, at length. "We had better pour it out now, and let it cool."

"Right you are," said Lovell. "I've got the tin ready!"

The liquid toffee was poured out into a wide flat tin to cool.

Jimmy Silver set the saucepan down in the grate, and rubbed his perspiring brow with his handkerchief.

"By Jove, it's hot!" he said. "We shall have to wait until the toffee's set a bit, before we make the grooves in it to break it into cakes. I guess we'll get a sniff of fresh air in the quad."

"Good biz!" said Lovell. "I feel almost suffocated myself."

"Same here," said Newcome.



"You'll want a meat-axe to eat that toffee with," said Tommy Dodd. "Eat this!" roared Topham, thrusting a chunk in Jimmy Silver's face. Jimmy Silver tried, but his teeth made no impression upon the toffee. It was as hard as a brick.

"Well, come on then," said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four left the end study, and walked out into the quadrangle.

"My hat! This is better!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I should say so," said Lovell.

"We'll have a little trot round," said Jimmy Silver, "and then go in: It will take us ten minutes to walk round the quad."

The Fistical Four trotted off. They came back in sight of the lighted windows when about ten minutes had elapsed, and then Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome looked at him quickly.

"What's the matter?" asked Lovell anxiously.

"Look at our study!"

Jimmy Silver's hand rose and pointed to the window of the end study. It was brightly lighted from within.

"You know we left the gas turned down," said Jimmy Silver. "I guess somebody's in that study, after the toffee, most likely."

"Come on!" muttered Lovell.

A shadow crossed the blind of the study. It was evident that there was at least one strange intruder in the end study. The juniors did not waste time in words. They broke into a run, and darted into the house.

Jimmy Silver was the first to reach the study door.

He heard the scuttling of footsteps in the passage, and guessed that the unknown visitors to the study were escaping, having doubtless heard the the Fistical Four coming.

Jimmy Silver grasped the handle of the door to open it. Then he gave a yell.

"What is it?" panted Lovell and Newcome.

"Look here!"

Jimmy Silver's hand was sticking to the door handle. He dragged it away, and a string of half-dried toffee with it.

"Toffee!" shrieked Lovell.

"Yes!"

"Then—then—"

"Tommy Dodd & Co. for a cert!" said Jimmy Silver. "What fools we were not to guess that they would be up to some game of this sort."

He jerked open the door, and the anxious chums sprang into the study. The gas was still turned full on, and they could see at once what had happened.

It was evident that an enemy had been there.

The Fistical Four looked at one another with sickly faces.

Toffee was everywhere—everywhere excepting in the flat tin, where the manufacturers had left it to cool.

There was very little left in that tin, but there was plenty everywhere else.

The table, the door, the mantelpiece, were clammy with toffee.

The clock on the mantelpiece no longer showed its dial, a great slab of stickiness concealing it. The neat little curtains at the window were stuck to the blind with toffee. There was toffee on the hearthrug, toffee on the table-cover, toffee on the carpet, toffee on the books and papers. The very ink-pots had been emptied and filled with toffee.

And as the chums stood staring in blank dismay, a squelching under their feet

warned them that they had walked into a sea of toffee, and were standing in it.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Lovell.  
"Look there!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

On the glass over the mantelpiece were streaky trails of toffee, which, as the chums looked more closely at them, were evidently meant to be letters. In a sprawling hand, written in toffee, were the words:

"With compliments.—T. D. & Co."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.  
"Tommy Dodd & Co. I guessed as much!"

"What asses we were!" said Lovell.  
"We might have guessed that they were on the look out for a chance to chip into the little game."

"They've wasted all our toffee!"  
"They've done us all along the line," said Newcome.

"Yes, they have," snorted Jimmy Silver. "But now we're going to do them. Come on! Let's go and give the bouncers socks for their cheek."

"What-ho!"  
Looking extremely warlike, the Fistical Four sallied out of the end study. They darted down the passage, but pulled up short as they came face to face with three juniors who had just reached the top of the stairs.

Jimmy Silver recognised the three immediately. They were Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side at Rookwood.

"Rush 'em, you chaps!" he exclaimed.  
Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed, with the result that, taken unawares, the Modern juniors were downed instantly.

"Got 'em?" inquired Jimmy Silver.  
"What-ho!" answered his three chums.  
"Now bring 'em along to the study," ordered Jimmy Silver.

And, struggling unavailingly, Tommy Dodd & Co. were dragged towards the end study.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Little Mistake.

"LEGGO!"  
"Lemme getrup!"  
"Ow!"  
"Oh!"

Such were the remarks made by Tommy Dodd & Co. as they were rolled into the end study. There was plenty of toffee on the floor, and it was not yet dry. Most of it was wiped up by the Moderns as they were rolled in it.

"Here's some more!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, scraping his hands round the tin and the saucapan. "They may as well have the lot!"

And a double handful of stickiness was wiped over the faces of Tommy Dodd & Co.

The unfortunate Moderns yelled and roared and struggled.

But the indignant Classical were too many for them.

Not until they had been fairly caked with half-dried toffee did the Fistical Four release them.

Then the Moderns staggered up, dazed and breathless, and sticky and bewildered.  
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.  
"Perhaps you wish you had left the toffee alone now that you've had so much of it!"

"What are you talking about?" shrieked Tommy Dodd. "We haven't done anything with your rotten toffee!"

"Too thin, my boy! Look on the glass!"

Tommy Dodd looked at the glass, and read the inscription there in dried toffee. Then he looked about the study, and as he saw its condition he grinned through the dirt and stickiness on his face.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Somebody's been making a muck of your quarters, and no mistake!"

"Yes, and it was you chaps who did it!"

"Us?"

"Yes."

Tommy Dodd sniffed.  
"Why, we haven't touched your study," he said. "We haven't been near it all day."

"Do you meaa to say you didn't do it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Of course we didn't," declared Tommy Dodd.

"Honour bright?"  
"Honour bright."

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.  
"Then we've made a little mistake!"

"A little mistake!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "A jolly big one, I reckon, you silly fathead! You've made me sticky and dirty all over, and spoiled my clothes."

"I guess we're sorry," said Jimmy Silver.

"What's the good of being sorry after you've smothered us like this?" asked Tommy Dodd furiously.

"I hope you don't bear any malice, Duddy?" asked Jimmy Silver. "It was all a mistake."

Tommy Dodd smiled.  
"No," he said. "We don't bear any malice, but I'd like to get hold of the chap who's responsible."

"So would I," said Jimmy Silver.

"Look at our study. We shall be weeks in getting it clean."

"Well, we're leave you to it," said Tommy Dodd. "Come on, you fellows, we'd better go along and get ourselves clean."

"You won't stay and help us then?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"Br-r-r-r!" snorted Tommy Dodd, and with that the Modern juniors left the study.

"Better set to work at once and clean up this mess!" said Jimmy Silver to his chums.

"You can," said Lovell. "I'm going to make some more toffee."

"All right," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod of approval. "Well, you know the proportions to mix, and here's the materials. Newcome and Raby and I will start the cleaning."

And this division of labour having been arranged, the chums set to work. Lovell soon had another pan of toffee simmering on the fire, while the other members of the Fistical Four did their best to clean up the stickiness that pervaded the study.

By the time they had done it, as well as they could, the toffee was in a satisfactory state, and Lovell poured it out into the flat tin once more.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"What's that?"

"That," was a loud bump at the door of the end study. It sounded like a body being pushed heavily against the panels.

"Come in!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Lovell pulled open the door, and Leggett, the cad of the Modern side at Rookwood, rolled in on the carpet, and after him came Tommy Dodd & Co.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER. Toffee for Leggett.

THE Fistical Four stared at their unexpected visitors in amazement. Leggett picked himself up, and made a dart for the door.

But Tommy Dodd & Co. stood in the way.

Tommy Dodd seized the cad of the Fourth and slung him back into the study, and Leggett sat down violently in the easy-chair. As the seat of the easy-chair had not yet been cleared of the toffee that adhered to it, Leggett stuck fast where he sat.

"There, you rotter!" said Tommy Dodd. "Shut the door, Doyle. I say, you chaps, we've brought that cad to you."

"Thank you for nothing!" said Jimmy Silver. "I don't think we've got any use

for him. Wrap him up and take him away."

"You don't catch on!"  
"Leggett has caught on!" grinned Lovell, as the cad tried to drag himself free from the thick toffee that was sticking him to the seat of the chair.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tommy Dodd.

"But, I say, Silver, you wanted to know who it was that mucked up your study like this—"

"Was it Leggett?" shouted the Fistical Four with one voice.

"Yes, it was," said Tommy Dodd. "I suspected the bouncer, when I came to think it over, for it was just one of his cad's tricks to play a jape and sign another fellow's name to it."

"Quite so."

"So we went to his study and found him as sticky as you like," said Tommy Dodd. "He was washing the toffee off his hands, wasn't he, you chaps?"

"Yes," said Cook and Doyle.

"He had a lot on his clothes, too, and you can see that there's some there now, for the matter of that."

The Fistical Four looked hard at the cad of the Fourth. It was true enough; he had not done the extensive damage in the end study without getting a considerable amount of the liquid toffee on his person.

Leggett cast a scared and guilty glance round. There was no doubt that he had been the perpetrator of the "jape" in the end study.

He had carried what might have been a pardonable joke to an ill-natured excess. And he had caused the Fistical Four to come to blows with Tommy Dodd & Co. by what amounted to a lie.

He deserved punishment, but as the chums looked at him they thought he didn't seem worth it.

He didn't want to come," continued Tommy Dodd. "We brought him along on his neck, so to speak. Better rub his head in the ashes for a start."

"If you touch me——" howled Leggett.

"My dear kid, I wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole if I had my choice!" said Tommy Dodd. "What about daubing him with toffee, Silver?"

"That's a good wheeze!" said Jimmy Silver. "He's not worth thrashing, and he hasn't the pluck to stand up to any of us."

"Shove him over!" said Lovell, dipping the ladle into the half-cooled toffee. "This is cold enough not to hurt him, but warm enough to stick like glue. Come hither, come hither, my dear Leggett, and do not tremble so, and I will give you the stickiest toffee that ever you did know!"

"That's a good idea," said Newcome. "Come on, you cad!"

And he jerked Leggett towards the table whereon lay the flat tin of toffee. Leggett came away from the chair with a jerk, and began to struggle. But Jimmy Silver lent his aid, and he was heaved towards the table.

There was a crash. Leggett crashed into the table, and it reeled. Jimmy Silver and Raby sprang to save it, and Leggett went staggering. The cad of the Fourth fell forward helplessly, and next moment there was a choked yell.

Tommy Dodd & Co. gave a roar.  
"He's got it now!"

Leggett had it with a vengeance. His head had gone fairly into the pan of toffee, and his face, his hair, his ears, his whole features, were simply smothered.

He jerked his head back with a muffled yell.

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd and Co. in ecstasies.

"The toffee!" yelled Jimmy Silver.  
But it was too late to think of the toffee. Half of it at least was adhering to Leggett, and it was really a question how

much was Leggett and how much was toffee.

The end of the Fourth mumbled through the sticky mass, and dug his knuckles into his eyes to clear his vision. Eyes and nose and mouth seemed crammed with toffee.

"You-you b-b-beats! You r-r-rotters!" he mumbled.

"You waster!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You've spoiled our toffee a second time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tommy Dodd & Co.

And the aspect of the end of the Fourth was so utterly ludicrous that the Fistical Four, in spite of the wasted toffee, joined the Moderns in a shout of merriment.

Leggett staggered to the door, and the Moderns took care not to oppose his passage now. They were afraid of the toffee. The end of the Fourth shambled out into the passage, mumbling, and a yell of uncontrollable laughter followed him.

How long it took Leggett to get that sticky mass off his face and hair was a question.

"Well, that's the second lot of toffee wasted!" grunted Jimmy Silver, when Tommy Dodd & Co. had left the study.

"There's only enough materials for one more lot, kids, and we have no more time to make any to-night. If anything goes wrong with the third lot, we shall have to postpone the sale in the hall till the day after to-morrow."

"Nothing will go wrong," said Lovell confidently. "We'll make the stuff at mid-day to-morrow, and it will be quite ready for the evening, and we'll take care that nobody gets it, either Leggett or Tommy Dodd & Co."

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.  
Tommy Dodd's Raid.**

Rockwood soon knew of the great toffee firm, and chuckled over them. But those who expected the firm to go out of business were disappointed. The toffee manufacture in the end study was flourishing.

In the morning the Fistical Four were asked on all sides if the toffee would be on sale in the evening—questions to which the chums of the Fourth returned an unhesitating answer in the affirmative.

And after the midday dinner of the Moderns, curious eyes peeping into the end study could see the Fistical Four engaged in the task of manufacturing more toffee.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were among those who looked in.

"Still at it, I see," remarked Tommy Dodd.

"I guess so," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Don't you feel like kicking yourself for not thinking of the wheeze—eh?"

"Not at all! Of course, we can't allow you kids to keep up this row," said Tommy Dodd, with a patronising smile. "If there's any toffee-making to be done on a big scale, we're the firm to do it."

"Rats! Travel along!"

"We're going to bust up your show for that reason!" said Tommy Dodd. "You youngsters take too much on yourselves, you see, and we— A lump of half-dry toffee whizzed through the air, and Tommy Dodd gave a jump as it plumped on his nose and stuck there. "You rotters! We'll bust up the show for you!" he shouted.

But the Moderns hastened to retreat out of range, and the Fistical Four only laughed and went on with their work.

The toffee was finished, and it was as good a success as the previous lots. It was poured out into the flat tin to cool.

"I'll come up in a quarter of an hour to put it," said Jimmy Silver, taking up his cap. "Let's get a run before lessons now. Mind you lock the door, Lovell!"

"You bet!" said Lovell.

The Fistical Four went downstairs, and

passed Tommy Dodd & Co. in the hall. Jimmy Silver grinned at them, and Lovell held up the key of the end study door.

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Dodd.

The Fistical Four grinned and passed on. They walked down as far as the cricket field, and soon forgot about Tommy Dodd & Co. But the Moderns watched them with broad grins on their faces.

"They're safe for a bit," said Tommy Dodd. "Come along!"

"What's the wheeze?" asked Tommy Cook.

"Come with me, and you'll see."

Somewhat mystified, Doyle and Cook followed their leader upstairs to the box-room. Tommy Dodd closed the door when they had entered, and opened the window. Along the old stone wall of the house ran an ornamental ledge, passing under the window of the box-room and under several adjoining windows.

"And mixed in the toffee—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When it hardened, I'd like to see the chap who could get his teeth into it!" said Tommy Dodd, with a grin.

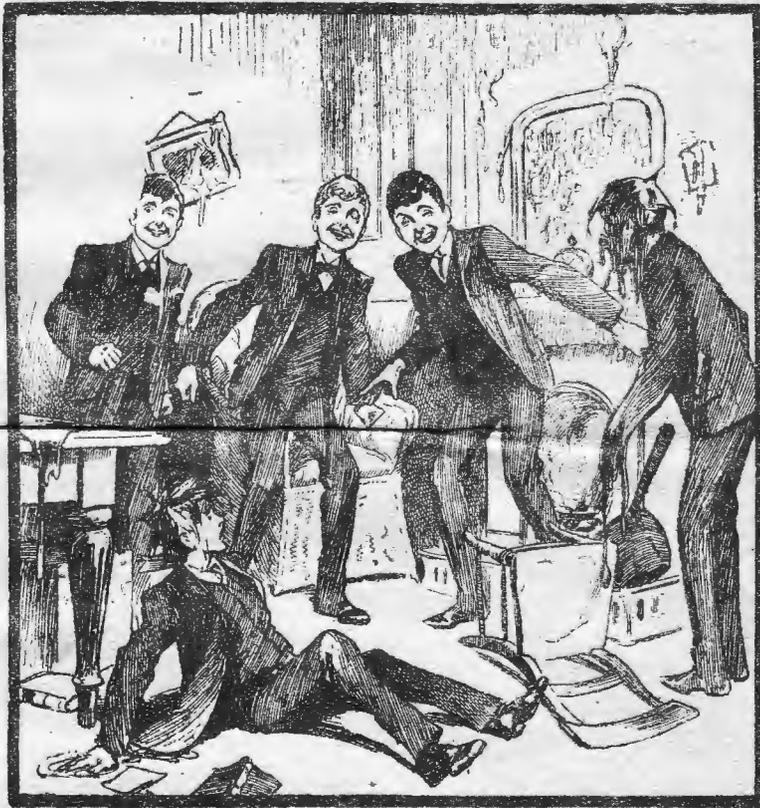
"My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, old kid, or you'll alarm the house. Help me out of the window, and I'll soon have the job jobbed."

Tommy Dodd replaced the glue in his pocket, and was soon crawling along the ledge towards the window of the end study. It was dizzy work, but Tommy Dodd had a nerve like iron.

He reached the study window and stood up before it. The Fistical Four had left it open, never dreaming of danger from that quarter. In a few seconds Tommy Dodd was in the study.

The fire was still burning red. Tommy Dodd whipped the saucepan upon it, poured some hot water in from the kettle,



A double handful of stickiness was wiped over the faces of Tommy Dodd & Co. The unfortunate Moderns yelled and roared, but the indignant Classics were one too many for them. "We haven't done anything with your rotten toffee!" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

"What the dickens are you going to do, Duddy?"

"Can't you see that ledge passes under the window of the end study?"

"Yes, I know it does; only—"

"Well, I'm going along it."

"I say, that's jolly risky, and—"

"Blow the risks!" said Tommy Dodd coolly. "I've got a steady head. I'd run a risk, too, for the sake of this howling jape on those Classical bounders. They're going to sell the toffee in the hall this evening, are they? Ha, ha!"

"What's the little game?"

"Do you see this?" Tommy Dodd drew several sheets of hard glue from his pocket.

"Yes, it's glue. What's the good of it?"

"Ha, ha! Suppose it were melted?"

"Yes." A gleam came into Tommy Cook's eyes.

and dropped the glue into it. He pounded it into small pieces, and by dint of continual stirring, and raking up a fiery heat under the saucepan, he soon had it melted.

Then he took the pan of toffee, and coolly poured the greater part of it back into the saucepan, and stirred it up with the glue.

When the two sticky substances had quite amalgamated, the grinning junior poured back the improved toffee into the flat tin, and replaced the saucepan where he had found it.

The toffee had been somewhat increased in bulk, but by leaving a little in the saucepan, Tommy Dodd left it at the same level in the tin.

Satisfied with his work, the Modern junior scrambled out of the window and crawled back along the stone ledge.

His chums met him with an anxious face at the window of the box-room.

"Thank goodness you've got back safely!" said Tommy Cook, as he helped his chum in. "Have you fixed it all right?"

"First-rate!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "The chaps who buy that toffee to-night will deserve gold medals if they're able to eat it!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. left the box-room very pleased with themselves. A little later the Fistical Four came in, and Jimmy Silver ran up to the end study just before afternoon lessons commenced. He found the toffee apparently just as he had left it, though he was rather surprised not to find it cooler.

It was cool enough, however, for his purpose. He drew deep gasps in it at right angles with a knife, so that it would be easily broken into chunks when it was cold. And then the ringing of a bell summoned him to afternoon school.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Great Failure.

THERE was a crowd of juniors in the common-room after lessons that day.

The Fistical Four had made the toffee, and they announced that it was to be ready immediately after school, and on sale in the common-room. Upon reflection, Jimmy Silver had fixed upon the juniors' room as an appropriate place for the sale.

Though seniors were not barred from participating in the benefits of the new scheme of home-made superior toffee by any means, all who had cash were welcome.

Tommy Dodd & Co., of course, were on the spot in great expectation.

"Hallo, here they are!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, as the Fistical Four came in, marching together with a great deal of dignity, as befitting a great manufacturing firm.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Topham, one of the nuts of Rookwood. "But where's the toffee?"

"Yes, that's the question!" exclaimed Townsend. "Where's the toffee?"

"The toffee is here all serene," said Jimmy Silver, laying a paper package on the table and unfastening it; "prime and fresh—"

"Sure it's fresh?" said a voice.

"I'll fresh you!" said Jimmy Silver. "Walk up gents and inspect our splendid home-made toffee."

The toffee was revealed.

The juniors crowded round, looking at it. It certainly looked very nice, and the squares were joined by the merest water, easily broken to separate them.

"Looks nice," said Selwyn.

"And it is nice, my son!" said Jimmy Silver. "Walk up, gentlemen. I guess

you'll think you like this better than any stuff you get at the tuckshop."

"You allow tick, of course!" said Topham.

"Of course we don't," said Jimmy Silver promptly. "We haven't expended all our ready cash, and taken a lot of time and trouble for the purpose of allowing you tick, Topham, my boy. The pleasure of obliging you would be great, but not great enough."

"Terms, net cash," said Lovell tersely.

"It's cheap!" said Raby. "It would be cheap at half the price—I mean it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Walk up, gents! Who wants home-made, clean, spicy toffee at half the market rates?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"I do!" "And I!" "And I!" Most of the juniors wanted some. There was a crush of customers, only Tommy Dodd & Co. standing aloof with superior smiles upon their faces.

"Won't you kids have some?" asked Jimmy Silver. "The supply's running down."

Tommy Dodd shook his head. "No, thanks! I have an idea that it is hard."

"Hard? Of course it's hard. All toffee's hard—"

"I think this is a bit harder than most toffee," said Tommy Dodd blandly. "I think you will find it so. Only an idea of mine, of course."

Jimmy Silver looked at him suspiciously. He could not quite make out what Tommy Dodd was driving at. But he was soon to know.

The toffee sold out rapidly. But almost before the last chunk was gone, loud complaints were rising from the earlier purchasers.

"I say, this is awfully hard!"

"I can't get my teeth into it!"

"It's no good!"

"It's not toffee—it's plaster of Paris!"

"It's cement!"

"It's giddy glue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"It's a fraud! The great toffee firm is a humbug! You'll want a meat-axe to eat that toffee with!"

The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"It's all rot!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "The toffee is all right."

"Have you eaten any?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Well, eat this!" roared Topham, thrusting a chunk into Jimmy Silver's face.

"If you can get your teeth into it, I'll admit it is all right."

Jimmy Silver tried, but his teeth made no impression on the toffee. It was as hard as a brick. Townsend was trying to break his bit with a poker, but in vain.

Another fellow was using a cricket stump to no better purpose—or rather to worse—

for with a terrific swipe he cracked the stump, while the toffee remained intact.

"It's a fraud!"

"It's not toffee—it's masonry!"

"I want my money back!" howled Leggett.

The cad of the Fourth was the first to raise the cry, but it was speedily taken up by others.

The Fistical Four were utterly amazed and stricken with consternation. They knew they had made the toffee all right, and what had made it harder so terrifically was a mystery to them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Give them their money back, silver! You can have the toffee, and use it to pave your study with."

"Quite so!" said Tommy Cook. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver looked at them with quick suspicion.

"You—you rotters!" he shouted. "You've got at the toffee somehow, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four looked inclined to rush upon the Modern juniors, and wreak summary vengeance there and then. But they were surrounded by a clamorous crowd demanding their money back.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had no objection to them, but the utterly ridiculous ending to the great toffee-making scheme overwhelmed them.

Tommy Dodd & Co. walked out of the room arm-in-arm, yelling with laughter in which most of the Fourth Form joined. And as the story spread, all Rookwood joined in the laughing.

It was a fall for the Fistical Four, and there was no getting out of it. For once in a way the Moderns had scored, and scored heavily.

Jimmy Silver knew how Tommy Dodd had done it, but that the Moderns had brought about the failure of the great toffee concern he knew from the first.

"They've done us!" said Jimmy Silver with a ghastly grin, as he finished paying over the money lately received for the toffee. "Done us brown, and we shall be the joke of the school."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome smiled in a sickly way. The Fistical Four disconsolately left the room. There was a roar in the passage as they emerged.

"Here come the toffee-makers!"

"What price toffee?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With scarlet faces, the Fistical Four marched on. They bore it pretty well, but the laugh was on the side of Tommy Dodd & Co. this time, and it was long before the Classical juniors were allowed to forget the great toffee fiasco.

THE END.

ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. IN NEXT FRIDAY'S ISSUE OF THE "PENNY POPULAR," ENTITLED—

# "THE CAPTAIN'S SECRET!"

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