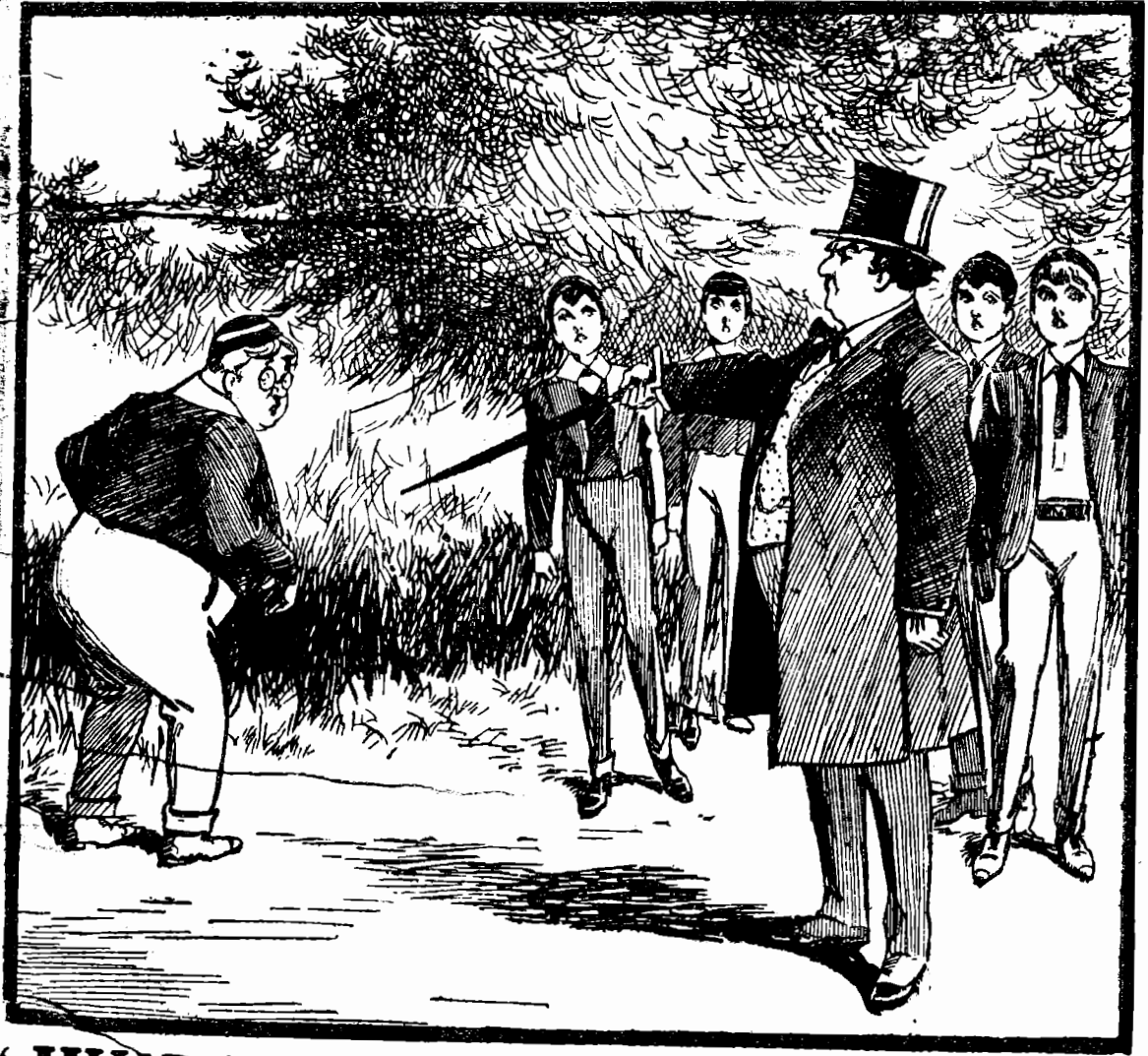


HIDDEN TREASURE AT ST. JIM'S!

(See the Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)

The Penny Popular

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



“JUMP INTO THE DITCH, BUNTER!”

(An Amusing Incident from the Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.,
contained in this Issue.)

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRYPT!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Change at Greyfriars.

"THE Head looks queer!" It was Bob Cherry, of the Remove—the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars—who made the remark.

The fellows were all looking at the Head. They had been assembled in the hall for the doctor to address the school, and when Dr. Locke came in, all eyes were turned upon him.

The Head did indeed look, as Bob expressed it, "queer." He was very pale, and moved very slowly, and there was a worn look about his face that struck most of the boys at once.

"By Jove, he does!" murmured Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove. "I wonder what he is going to say to us."

"Perhaps an appeal for less noise," murmured Nugent. "He may be going to request Bob, as a special favour, to take his feet off—I mean his boots off—when he goes upstairs."

"Look here, Nugent—"

"You see, it would make two stone difference in your weight, Bob—"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Wharton. "Quelch has his eye on you."

The faint sound of whispering had caught Mr. Quelch's ears, and the Remove-master was looking round with a frown.

The chums of the Remove were silent at once, assuming, mechanically, lambl-like expressions, as they were wont to do when the eye of authority was upon them.

Mr. Quelch frowned heavily at Bunter, the worst chatterbox in the Form, and turned his head away again. But his frown did not worry Billy Bunter, who was too short-sighted to see it.

The Head looked at the gathered school, which waited in respectful silence for him to speak.

Most of the fellows were sympathetic. The Head was greatly liked and respected at Greyfriars, and he certainly looked ill.

"I have a few words to say to you this morning, before lessons commence," said the Head quietly. "I am going away for a few days. I have been far from well lately, and my doctor has advised me to seek a change. A gentleman of my acquaintance, upon whom I place the utmost reliance, has kindly consented to take my place here while I am absent."

There was a slight buzz. A new Head at Greyfriars—even for only a few days—would mean a change at the old school—a great change in many respects.

"I am leaving this afternoon," said Dr. Locke. "I expect Mr. Lothrop to arrive before I go. I am not quite certain, however, that he will be able to do so. Therefore, as I may not be able to introduce him to the school, I am speaking a few words on the subject now. You will find Mr. Lothrop an able, a kind, and an agreeable headmaster, for the few days that I am absent. I may mention that he is a headmaster of a school, and is now having a holiday, part of which he has kindly consented to sacrifice to oblige me. I wish to make an appeal to you all before I go. My words are particularly addressed to the Junior Forms."

Dr. Locke's eyes rested for a moment upon the ranks of the Remove. He knew very well which Form at Greyfriars was likeliest to give trouble, if any excuse could be found for the same.

The Removites tried to look unconscionous.

But that was not easy, for the Upper Fourth and the Shell and the Fifth all turned their heads a little to stare at the reprobate Form, with the most severe frowns they could muster up.

"I appeal to you to make Mr. Lothrop's task easy while he is here," went on the Head. "I hope you will all obey him cheerfully, and not cause him to regret his kindness in doing me this service. Some of the juniors in this school are prone to indulge in an excess of liveliness on occasions."

"Good old Remove!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Three shies a penny! Anybody can have a hand in chucking something at the Remove."

"I have never been harsh in condemning boyish spirits," said the doctor. "But there is a limit, and I trust that the Lower Forms will be careful to keep this limit in view during the next week or so. I trust that they will give their masters the smallest possible trouble, and make everything work quite smoothly while Mr. Lothrop is here. I am sure my appeal will not be wasted."

The Head paused. Wingate, the captain of the school, stepped out of the ranks of the Sixth.

"You may rely upon us, sir," said Wingate. "You can rely on the prefects to keep the juniors in order. But under the circumstances I am sure the kids—ahem!—I mean the junior boys, will play the game and meet your wishes in every way, sir."

"Blessed if I don't think somebody ought to speak up for the Remove," growled Bob Cherry. "I don't see why we're to be classed as black sheep. You're Form captain, Wharton; get up on your hind legs and bark."

Wharton hesitated. He did not wish to appear to put himself forward. But while he was thinking it over, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, stepped out from the Remove.

There was a delighted murmur from the juniors.

Hurree Singh—more familiarly known as "Inky," from his beautiful complexion—was the most urbane of juniors, one of the politest, and one of the longest-winded. If he began an assurance to the Head, in his best Oriental style, and in the native Bhanipur variety of the English language, it was certain to be funny.

Mr. Quelch made a slight gesture to the nabob, but Hurree Singh, bent upon assuring the Head that he had nothing to apprehend from the Remove, did not observe it. He advanced into full view of the dais where the doctor stood, and received a surprised glance from Dr. Locke.

"If you pleasefully deign to listen, revered Head sahib—"

"Have you anything to say to me, Hurree Singh?"

"The yesfulness is terrific, worthy sahib. I desirefully wish to speak on the behalffulness of my honourable Form," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Your esteemed and august self has expressfully declared a wish that the honourable Lower Forms in this respected school shall play the game cricketfully during your welcome absence."

There was a suppressed tinkle. The Head smiled slightly.

"Really, Hurree Singh—"

"I desire, speaking for my worthy self and the honourable Form to which I have the august happiness to belong, to assure the revered sahib that his fearfulness is ungrounded. The Remove will set an honourable example to the esteemed Senior Forms in the terrific behaviorfulness."

"You—"

"They will play up gamefully, and back up the new Head like winking," said Hurree Singh. "I desirefully wish, with my hand upon my esteemed heart, to assure the noble and respected doctor that he can rely upon us. We are all there. We are, as the honourable Shakespeare says in his justly celebrated poem, 'We are Seventeen—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As the honourable poet Shakespeare says in his poem—"

"Really, Hurree Singh—"

"Never mind the honourable Shakespeare, Inky," said Bob Cherry in a stage whisper. "Get on with the washing!"

"As the honourable Shakespeare says," repeated the Indian junior obstinately.

"To be or not to have the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunes, which are nobler in the minds to suffer than the little life that is rounded by a sleep. Therefore we shall playfully make the game, and the relyfulness upon our honourable selves is complete. I feel called upon to make this personified assurance to the honourable doctor, that while he is awayfully absent he may be easy in his mind, and bet his esteemed boots that the Lower Forms are setting the revered example to their elders."

And Hurree Singh, having delivered himself of his sentiments, stepped back into his place with a smile of conscious merit.

The whole hall was giggling. The quotation from Shakespeare appeared about the funniest part of the nabob's speech, but it was all pretty good, to judge by the grins and chuckles on all sides.

The Head passed his hand over his mouth to conceal a smile.
 "I accept this assurance in the name of the Remove," he said. "I shall expect a perfectly clean record for the Form when I return."
 "Hear, hear!" shouted Bob Cherry. And the school was dismissed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The New Head.

DIRECTLY after dinner that day Harry Wharton & Co. strolled out of the gates. It was a clear, bright summer's afternoon, and as they turned out of the hot, dusty lane into the woods the green shade and shelter was very cool and grateful.

They strolled through the shadowy woods. Bob Cherry cast a rather wistful glance down the footpath that led towards Pegg Bay—where Cliff House, Miss Penelope Primrose's school for girls, fronted the North Sea. He was thinking that a cycle ride with Marjorie Hazeldene would have been very pleasant that sunny afternoon.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a cyclist on the path!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.
 "Check!" said Wharton.
 "Yes, rather! Wait till he comes by, and bump him."

The juniors grinned and scuttled into the bushes. The footpath was a narrow one, and cyclists were forbidden to ride there, though they might wheel their machines.

The Greyfriars juniors might have ridden it themselves, perhaps, if they had been in a hurry; but that did not make any difference. It was against the rules to ride there, and the cyclist was to be bumped.

There was a whir of tyres over the grass of the footpath. Through the thick green bushes the juniors saw him very indistinctly. They could make out a Norfolk jacket and a cloth cap, and that was all.

As he came abreast, Harry Wharton gave the signal.

"Bump him!"
 And the juniors rushed out of their ambush.

The cycle was stopped, and the cyclist yanked off the saddle and bumped into the grass in the twinkling of an eye.

The astounded rider gave a yell of surprise, and struggled.

Bob Cherry uttered a shout.
 "Hold on! Ha, ha, ha! It's one of our fellows!"

"My hat!"
 They released the cyclist, and he sat up, with a very red face.

"You silly asses—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You frajious idiots!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

It was Hazeldene of the Remove. He had evidently been over to Cliff House to see his sister Marjorie. He rose to his feet, glaring at the Removeites.

"You burbling lunatics! What's the matter with you?"

"We didn't know it was you," said Harry, laughing. "We were upholding the rights of pedestrians on the footpath."

"Why, you've ridden here yourself!"
 "My dear chap, that makes no difference to the principle of the thing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Hazeldene snorted.

"You've given me a bump!" he growled. "Gimme my machine. You're a set of dangerous maniacs—more dangerous than the chap who's just escaped from Grimwood!"

"Chap, escaped from Grimwood?"
 "Yes," growled Hazeldene disconcertedly. "A lunatic chap has got cut,

and has been free twenty-four hours, so they are saying in Pegg. He's a harmless lunatic, you know; but Miss Primrose is alarmed, and won't let any of the girls come out till he's been captured. Rotten, isn't it? I went over to take Marjorie for a spin, and she's gated because of this Grimwood chap."

"Hard cheese!"
 "Blessed if I didn't think he'd got hold of me, too, when you duffers collared me," grunted Hazeldene. "So-long!"

And he jumped upon his machine and rode away. The juniors, laughing over the affair, which seemed funnier to them than it did to Hazeldene, walked on towards the ruined priory. They had reached the cross-paths, a short distance from the ruins which were embosomed in the woods, when a gentleman came in sight, entering upon the footpath through the thickets.

They glanced at him carelessly. He

It's always a half-holiday on Wednesday afternoons."

"Ah! I perceive. What Form do you belong to?"

"The Remove, sir—the Lower Fourth."

"Ah!" The gentleman fished an eye-glass out of his pocket, jammed it into his eye, and regarded the juniors more attentively. "I am glad to have met you!"

The juniors exchanged glances of surprise. There did not seem to them the remotest reason why the stranger should take any interest in them. But his face was so jolly and cheerful that they rather took a fancy to him.

"Thank you, sir!" said Bob Cherry solemnly; "the pleasure is reciprocated, I assure you. We are awfully pleased to have met you!"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Nugent.



The Juniors stared at the stranger blankly—a stranger no longer, but the new Head of Greyfriars in person!

was a man with a plump, pleasant face, a pair of very bright and sparkling eyes, and a continual jovial smile. He was dressed in black frock-coat and silk hat, and carried a tightly-rolled umbrella.

He glanced at the boys, and seemed to regard them with some interest.

As they were passing him, he held up his hand for them to stop.

"Can you tell me which of these paths leads to Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Wharton, raising his cap. "We've just come from there. It's this path—a straight walk to the lane."

"Thank you. Perhaps you belong to Greyfriars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! Then what are you doing out of school?"

It did not appear to Harry that this was any concern of the stranger's, but he answered politely enough.

"It's a half-holiday at Greyfriars, sir."

"Bosh! Why shouldn't I say the polite thing?"

The gentleman laughed.

"Where were you going?" he asked.

"To explore the ruined priory, sir."

"Ah! A lonely place, is it not?"

"Yes, a little, sir."

"Then I am afraid I cannot allow you to go," said the gentleman, shaking his head. "You may not have heard that there is a lunatic escaped from Grimwood Asylum. It might not be safe. The man might be lurking in the ruins—a very safe place, I should think, for a lunatic to lurk."

"Possibly," said Harry Wharton. "But—you will excuse me, sir, we're not afraid of the lunatic, and we don't mean to turn back."

"But I cannot permit you to go."

Harry Wharton smiled.
 "I don't want to be rude, sir, but we shall not ask your permission. You are a stranger to us. Good-afternoon!"

"Stop!"

"Really, sir—"

"You apparently are not aware who I am."

"I have never seen you before that I know of."

"Probably not; but you will see a great deal of me during the next week. I expect. My name is Henry Lothrop."

"Oh!"

And the juniors stared at the stranger blankly—a stranger no longer, but the new Head of Greyfriars in person!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter's Jump.

MR. LOTHROP laughed pleasantly as he met the surprised stares of the juniors. They took off their caps respectfully.

"I am sorry, sir!" said Wharton at once. "Of course, I didn't know you."

"Quite so, my lad. I excuse you. How were you to know me? No one at Greyfriars knows me personally except the doctor—my old college friend, Locke. I trust the doctor is better now?"

"He was very queer this morning, sir."

"Ah! Has he gone yet?"

"He left in time for the half-past two train, sir."

"Then I have missed him. It was very unfortunate—through missing a train, and then walking from the station."

The new Head dropped his eyeglass again.

"You had better come with me to Greyfriars," he said. "You can show me the way, and we can make each other's acquaintance en route."

"With pleasure, sir," said Harry, with an effort. He was a dutiful boy enough, but it was hard to have the afternoon's excursion "messed up" in this way.

"I am sorry to spoil your excursion," said Mr. Lothrop gently, as if he read the juniors' thoughts, as doubtless he did. "But, under the circumstances, I do not think the ruins would be a safe place for you to visit. I shall curtail the liberty of all the boys in this direction."

"Very well, sir."

They turned back the way they had come. The walk back was not so pleasant, needless to say, as the stroll out had been. Yet Mr. Lothrop made himself very agreeable. He chatted cheerfully with the boys, asked them their names, and asked them many questions about the school.

Harry and Mark soon found themselves talking quite cheerily to him, while the other juniors walked mostly in silence. They came in sight of Greyfriars, and in the lane ran into a crowd of Removites. Billy Bunter was talking to a group of them, and they were grinning as if his statements were of an amusing kind.

Bunter blinked round at the Famous Four as they came into the lane. He came over towards them, not knowing who they were with, of course.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Billy!"

Mr. Lothrop was close behind with Wharton and Linley, and Bunter's want of caution might have got him into trouble.

"I'm not going to shut up," he said, "and I'll thank you to talk to me a little more politely, Frank Nugent! I'm not going to be bullied!"

"Eh?"

"If you want a thick ear, you've only got to say so. I've licked Bob Cherry, and I can lick you!"

Nugent could only stare at him dumb-founded.

"I've got something to say to you THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 256.

chaps," went on Bunter, with an air of consequence that astounded the Removites. "I think you ought to stand a feed. I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and I'm stony. I'm hungry, too. Are you going to stand me a feed, Bob Cherry?"

"Not much!"

"Then you can jolly well put up your fists!"

Bob Cherry gasped.

"I've had enough of you chaps' airs and graces," said Bunter airily, while the fellows around looked on with broad grins. They knew what was the matter with Bunter, though Bob did not yet make it out. "I'm blessed if I'm going to stand any more of them! I don't see why Wharton should be captain of the Remove. In my opinion there ought to be a new election. Why shouldn't I have a chance?"

"You!"

"Et tu, Brute!" murmured Skinner.

"Yes, I'm going to take my proper place in the Form," said Billy Bunter. "And look here, there's not going to be any of this rot about knuckling under to the new Head. I think that it's time for the Remove to get its ears up, and I'm going to show the way. I've already made up my mind to jape the new Head—"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lothrop, who had come up in time to hear that remark.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Blessed if I know you!" he said.

"Don't you interrupt me—"

"I am the new Head."

"Oh!"

"So you have made up your mind to jape me?" said Mr. Lothrop, with a genial smile.

"Ow! I—I—I was only joking, sir. I—I—"

"I fear that I cannot allow a joke of that kind to pass. What is your name?"

"William George Bunter, sir, of the Remove."

"Well, I think I shall have to teach you obedience, Bunter."

"Ye-es, sir."

The new Head raised his umbrella and pointed to the ditch, deep and wide, and full of water, that ran beside the lane at this point. The boys, of whom there was now a great crowd round the spot, looked at him in surprise.

"Bunter!" rapped out Mr. Lothrop.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You must learn the lesson of obedience."

"Ye-es, sir."

"Jump into the ditch!"

Bunter fairly gasped.

"Eh, sir? Wh-w-w-what?"

"Jump into that ditch!"

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Did you ever!"

"Well, hardly ever!" gasped Nugent.

Harry Wharton looked utterly astounded. That a headmaster should give such an order to a junior was amazing. He could not be in earnest. Yet if he were in jest, surely such a jest was not in keeping with the grave character of a headmaster of a public school.

But Mr. Lothrop seemed in earnest.

The pleasant look was gone from his face, the pleasant tones from his voice. His face was hard, his eyes glinting, and his voice rang sharply.

Bunter blinked at him, and blinked at

the ditch. Then he blinked round helplessly at the other fellows.

"I—I—I—I say, sir, you—y-y-you're j-j-joking?"

"I am not joking, Bunter. Jump into the ditch!"

"But, sir, I—I shall spoil my clothes."

"You will learn the priceless habit of obedience, which is more valuable than clothes. Obey me at once!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," said Bunter feebly, "I—I—"

"I give you one minute," said Mr. Lothrop sternly. "If you do not obey me I shall expel you from Greyfriars."

Wharton started. Bunter met his eye pleadingly. In spite of his lately assumed airs, and his opinion that he would make a better Form captain than Harry, he instinctively turned to Wharton for guidance at this moment.

But Harry could only nod to him. The order was astounding, but the Head of Greyfriars was entitled to obedience.

Bunter took a shivering little run towards the ditch. The fellows round simply held their breaths. Surely the new master would relent at the last moment.

There was no sign of relenting in Mr. Lothrop's face.

Bunter passed on the edge of the ditch, and cast a pleading glance backward. The new Head waved his umbrella threateningly, and Bunter, with a gasp of affright, plunged in.

He had meant to jump into the shallowest water at the edge, but the short-sighted junior missed his footing, and went staggering backwards, and fell forward with a terrific splash.

"Oh—ow—er—groo—gugg!"

Bunter disappeared.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch is Astonished.

BILLY BUNTER was quite out of sight for a second.

When he rose into view a startling change had come over him.

Standing in the water to his waist, he blinked at the juniors through his wet spectacles. He was soaked through, of course, and smothered with mud. Mud and slime clung all over his face, and green ooze was festooned in his hair.

His aspect was so utterly ridiculous that the juniors could not help laughing, but Bunter did not laugh. He was gasping and gurgling.

"Ow! Help! Murder! I'm drowning!"

Harry Wharton dragged him out. Mr. Lothrop fixed a stern glance upon him.

"Let that be a lesson to you!" he exclaimed, and he marched in at the gates of Greyfriars, and disappeared from sight, leaving the drenched and muddy Billy surrounded by the astonished juniors.

"Well, if this doesn't take the cake!" ejaculated Ogilvy, with a loud whistle.

"The man must be off his rocker!"

"Groo—oo!"

"Mad as a hatter."

"Can't catch on at all."

"If this is how he is going to rule at Greyfriars there will be rows—big rows," said Bulstrode emphatically.

"What-ho, there will!"

"What does this mean?"

It was the sharp voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. He was returning from a quiet walk, with a book under his arm, and he stopped in utter amazement as he caught sight of the drenched and dripping Billy.

"If you p-p-please, sir—"

"Bunter! Is that you?"

"Ye-es!" stammered Bunter.

"How did you get into this state? Is

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it possible that anybody here has been brutal enough to throw the boy into a ditch?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, his brow darkening.

"I—I—jumped in, sir!"

"You—jumped—in!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"And why did you do that, Bunter?" asked the Remove-master, in an ominously quiet tone.

"The new Head ordered me to, sir!"

"What!"

"The new Head—Mr. Lothrop—ordered me to!"

"Take a thousand lines for impertinence, Bunter!"

"If you please, sir, it's true," said Harry Wharton.

Mr. Quelch stared at him.

"Wharton! Do you venture to join in this insolent jest?"

"It isn't a jest, sir. The other fellows will bear me out. I can't understand it—I don't pretend to. But Mr. Lothrop ordered Bunter to jump into the ditch."

"Impossible!"

"It's true, sir," said Linley and Nugent and several others together.

The Remove-master looked utterly astounded.

"There must be some absurd mistake!" he exclaimed. "I cannot possibly imagine Mr. Lothrop giving such an order. I have never seen him yet, it is true; but it is impossible that he could tell Bunter to jump into the ditch."

"But he did, sir."

"I shall inquire of Mr. Lothrop directly," said the Remove-master. "If this turns out to be a jest I am sorry for the jesters. Bunter, go in and change your things and wash yourself at once."

Billy Bunter crawled away. He left a trail of water and mud and green slime wherever he moved. Mr. Quelch, with a clouded brow, strode in at the gates. He walked straight into the School House, and the astounded boys remained in the Close discussing the strange event.

The Remove-master entered the hall, and started a little as a pleasant-faced gentleman, who had just divested himself of his gloves and silk hat, met him with a cheery smile.

"Ah! One of my masters, I suppose?"

Mr. Quelch looked directly at him.

"Are you Mr. Lothrop, the head-master's substitute, sir?"

"Exactly!"

"I am pleased to meet you, sir. Of course, you have your credentials with you," said Mr. Quelch, with a faint glimmering idea that the affair might be a trick of some sort; exactly how and why he did not formulate in his mind.

Mr. Lothrop nodded and smiled.

"Certainly! The doctor's letters and my own papers," he said. "My luggage will arrive from the station shortly, if it is not already here. Pray come into my study. I must ask you to show me the way to it."

"Certainly!"

Mr. Quelch showed the way into the Head's study. The new master was to occupy the Head's old quarters. His manners were so pleasant that Mr. Quelch found himself, in spite of his uneasy surprise, taking quite a liking to him. His credentials were satisfactory enough, as the Remove-master could not doubt for a moment. Mr. Lothrop remarked how sorry he was that he had missed Dr. Locke.

"There has been a very curious occurrence, sir," said Mr. Quelch, as the new Head paused. "I have just seen a junior, who had been in the ditch—"

"Indeed!"

"And he had the amazing impertin-

ence to declare that you had ordered him to jump into it, Mr. Lothrop."

The new Head smiled.

"Quite correct, Mr. Quelch."

The Remove-master jumped.

"You—you ordered Bunter to jump into the ditch?" he said faintly.

"Certainly."

"But—but may I ask why?"

"As a lesson in obedience. I have my own methods, Mr. Quelch," said the new Head, rubbing his hands, with twinkling eyes. "I shall make some extensive changes at Greyfriars while I am here."

"Excuse me, sir, as your stay is so short—"

"A week, I believe."

"Exactly. May I ask if you have Dr. Locke's authority to make extensive changes in that short space of time?"

"What a question, Mr. Quelch! Did not Dr. Locke inform you that I was to take his place here, and that his whole authority was delegated to me?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Did he not say that I was to be treated with the same respect that was shown to himself?"

"Something to that effect, certainly."

"Under those circumstances, Mr. Quelch, can you question the authority of my actions?"

"I—I suppose not."

"I should say not, Mr. Quelch," said the new Head, with emphasis; "I should say not, sir."

"But—but—but the junior may take cold."

"Let him take cold."

"His health may be injured."

"Is his health so important as the establishment of a principle?"

"Really, sir—"

"I am a disciplinarian, Mr. Quelch. Now, if I order you to jump into a ditch, I should expect you to obey me," said Mr. Lothrop.

Mr. Lothrop staggered.

"Eh! Did I hear you aright?"

"I hope such an occasion will never arise, certainly, but if I gave you the order, I should expect instant obedience."

"I can only conclude that you are jesting, sir," said Mr. Quelch, with frigid dignity; "as I am not in an especially merry mood myself, I will take my leave."

And Mr. Quelch quitted the study very abruptly.

He closed the door hard, and went down the passage. He passed Harry Wharton and his chums, and they looked at him curiously; but he did not glance at them. Mr. Quelch was in a state of amazement that he was not likely soon to recover from. He passed on to his own study, walking like a man in a dream.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. The Mystery of the Crypt.

"A WHOLE holiday!"

There was great excitement in the Remove the next morning, for the new Head had granted a whole day's holiday.

"Jolly decent of him," said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"The question is," said Harry Wharton, "what are we going to do with ourselves?"

"Why not go and explore the old priory?" suggested Bob Cherry. "The new Head turned us back yesterday, but he didn't say we were not to go another time."

"Quite so," said Harry Wharton.

"He said he was going to place the priory out of bounds; but he hasn't done it, so we are free to go."

"He has forgotten all about it, I believe," said Bob Cherry.

"Then it can't be important for us to remember."

"Right-ho! Anyway, as the priory hasn't been placed out of bounds, we're free to go there if we like, and I vote that we go."

"Good enough!"

And the chums of the Remove strolled away to the ruined priory in the heart of the dense woods.

It was a fine autumn morning, and the walk was very enjoyable. Their feelings were kindly enough towards the new Head. This was better than the class-room.

But as they turned from the footpath to the faintly-marked track leading to the ruins Harry Wharton's face became grave.

"We'd better remember why the Head was going to place the ruins out of bounds," he remarked. "There's a lunatic at large in the neighbourhood somewhere, and the ruined priory is just where he would go."

"Very likely," agreed Bob Cherry.

"The likefulness is terrific."

"I've heard about that chap," said Nugent. "One of the keepers came to the school, and was speaking to Mr. Prout at the gate last night. They're inquiring for him everywhere. He's quite a harmless chap."

"Still, one needs to be careful in dealing with a lunatic, harmless or not."

"Oh, yes; that's right enough!"

They plunged through the thick bushes that surrounded the ruins. Little of the old priory of the Grey Friars remained standing.

In some places the ruin was so complete that the stone foundations, deep in the earth, could be seen. In other spots the huge stone flags of the floor and parts of the walls were intact.

A yawning cavity revealed where a stone staircase, still whole and strong, led down to the crypt. The oaken door was long since rotted away.

"Shall we go down?"

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry.

The spirit of adventure was strong in the juniors. The crypt was dark and dreary, and a lunatic might be lurking in the shadowy depths.

But there were four of them, and they were all plucky. Nugent had brought his cycle lantern. They lighted it and descended.

The crypt was quite dark, and sunlight above had no chance of penetrating into those gloomy recesses.

The rays of the lanterns glimmered through the murk with an eerie effect. Harry Wharton shivered a little.

"Shivery place!" he remarked. "A good deal like a tomb."

"Yes, rather! Hark!"

"What's the matter?"

"I heard something."

The juniors grouped quickly together with beating hearts. Harmless or not, a lunatic was not a pleasant person to meet in those underground recesses.

"Blessed if I can hear anything!" said Nugent, after a long pause.

Harry Wharton held up his hand.

"Listen!"

Tap!

The sound came clearly, with a strange distinctness, through the eerie silence of the crypt.

Tap, tap, tap!

The boys looked at one another with startled faces.

"It's the lunatic," whispered Bob Cherry. And the Nabob of Bhanipur whispered that the lunaticfulness was terrific.

Tap, tap, tap!

Wharton knitted his brows.

"Blessed if I can see why a lunatic

should be tapping on the stone," he said. "More likely there's another chap in here exploring the vaults, and he's playing a trick to scare us."

"My only hat! If that's it—"

"We'll warm him," said Nugent. "We'll teach him to play his giddy tricks on Greyfriars fellows! Let's have a look for him."

"Come on, then!" said Harry determinedly.

Bob Cherry carried the lantern, holding it up before him, and casting the light into the gloom. The juniors advanced with their eyes on the alert, and their fists clenched.

Tap, tap, tap!

Harry Wharton stopped. The sound was fainter now. Yet they had passed no one. It seemed to be upon the stone wall they were following, and yet it sounded behind them. The Removites looked amazed.

"Blessed if I catch on!" murmured Bob Cherry. "He's dodging us."

"The dodgefulness is terrific."

Nugent uttered a sudden exclamation.

"It's all right. I know what it means."

Nugent had been longest at Greyfriars of the Famous Four, and he knew many things in connection with the school and its surroundings that the other fellows had not yet discovered. They looked at him inquiringly.

"There's a secret chamber in the wall here," said Nugent. "It was discovered a long while ago, and the skeleton of a man was found in it. The door always remained open so that the chamber could be explored. Somebody has got in, and the door has closed somehow."

"Phew!"

Tap, tap, tap!

"Nugent's right," said Harry Wharton. "I notice now it has a muffled sound, as if it comes from the other side of the wall. Show us where the place is, Frank."

"We've passed it. Come back!"

They returned on their tracks along the wall, Bob Cherry flashing the lantern-light upon the grim cold stone blocks.

There was no sign of the secret door; but it was well known to Nugent, as to most fellows who had been more than a term or two at the school. The Greyfriars lads often explored the priory.

Tap, tap, tap!

Nugent stopped.

"Here it is!"

The tapping was loudest at this point, and it was clear that it proceeded from the other side of the great block of stone upon which Nugent had laid his hand.

"Poor chap, whoever he is!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't envy him, shut up there! I wonder who it is? Some village kid exploring the place, or the lunatic?"

"The lunatic, I should say," remarked Nugent. "I don't see how a kid could close this great stone door on himself. It swings on a pivot, and it takes a man to move it. Only a lunatic would make a big effort to shut himself up in a place like that, I should think."

"Some crazy notion of getting away where the keepers couldn't find him, perhaps."

"H'm! I'd prefer Grimwood Asylum, I think."

"The preferfulness would be terrific on the part of my worthy self."

"Yes; I'm blessed if I see how he could pull the door shut from inside, either," said Nugent, perplexed. "It wanted shoving hard to move it."

"Well, he's in there!"

"I suppose he can't have been shut up on purpose, whoever he is!" Harry Wharton suggested, with a startled look.

"Whew!"

Tap, tap, tap!

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"Well, we'd better jaw to him before we open the door," said Nugent uneasily. "We don't want the lunatic bursting out on us, you know. If he's in there he'd better remain there till we can fetch the keepers."

"Good egg!"

Harry Wharton tapped on the stone.

"Hallo, there!"

A faint voice responded:

"Help!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery!

"HELP!"

"By Jove!"

"It is somebody shut up there who can't get out!"

Wharton tapped on the stone again.

"Who are you?"

"Help!"

"How did you get in there?"

"I was shut in."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Lothrop—Henry Lothrop."

The juniors simply jumped.

"Your name is what?" yelled Wharton.

"Lothrop!"

"Who are you?"

"I am a schoolmaster."

The Greyfriars juniors looked at one another in the lantern-light. Nugent grinned a little.

"Mad!" he murmured. "He's heard the name somewhere, of course, and he says he's Lothrop, so as to keep it dark that he's the lunatic. Madmen are awfully deep, you know."

"I suppose so."

"Of course, he doesn't know that we know Lothrop. If we had been strangers to the name, we should have believed him."

"That's so."

"The sofulness is terrific."

"The best thing we can do is to go for the keepers," said Wharton, in a low voice. "The poor chap must be in a bad state if he has been in there ever since he escaped from the asylum. It was some time yesterday morning."

"Nearly starved, I should think."

"I suppose he shut himself up to keep safe, without thinking that he'd ever want to get out again. He wouldn't reason it out with his rocky brain. Let's get off and fetch the keepers here. It's a short cut to the asylum through the wood."

Tap, tap, tap!

The man imprisoned in the stone chamber was knocking again.

"All right!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Don't be afraid!"

"Cannot you open the door?"

"We'll get it open soon!"

"I have been here for days, I think. I am cold and famished!"

"Poor chap!" murmured Nugent.

"He hasn't been there twenty-four hours yet. Another hour won't hurt him—better than getting loose in the woods and giving the keepers a long hunt. He might break his neck on the cliffs, or tumble into one of the sand-pits if he gets going again."

"Look here, one of you must cut off to Grimwood," said Harry Wharton, "the rest of us can stay here and watch, and keep the poor beggar company. We don't want him to think we've deserted him."

"Right-ho! I'll go!" said Bob Cherry. And he left the crypt at once.

It was likely to be a good hour before the keepers from Grimwood Asylum arrived upon the spot, even if they lost no time on the way; and the Greyfriars juniors settled down to wait.

They filled in the time by exploring the crypt, and sometimes exchanged words

with the unfortunate man behind the stone door; but the door they did not open.

For the man's own sake, it was necessary for him to be delivered to the keepers.

A lunatic wandering on the rocky coast near Greyfriars was likely to come to a sudden and violent death, even if there were no other reasons.

A sound of footsteps on the stone stair at last drew Harry Wharton's attention there. Bob Cherry came down, followed by two men—one a sturdy fellow in uniform, and the other a kindly-looking old gentleman in a silk hat. The latter was Dr. Benson, the proprietor of Grimwood Asylum.

Harry Wharton raised his cap. "I'm glad you've come," he said. "I suppose Cherry has told you about it. The chap has been asking to be let out all the time."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Benson, with a shuddering glance round the dim old crypt. "What a place! What a place! He is really shut up here! Poor, poor fellow! Where is he?"

"This way, sir!"

Harry Wharton led the way to the stone door in the wall.

Dr. Benson looked at it in surprise.

"Ah, I see! How does it open?"

"I can open it, sir," said Nugent. "You'd better be ready, in case he dodges out, sir. He may try to bunk for it."

"Yes, very true. He is usually very quiet and good-tempered—in fact, I have never known any man so good-tempered as Valence. I was quite surprised when he left the asylum. We allowed him every liberty, because he was so good and so amiable. His only weakness was a continual recurrence of absurd illusions, which led him to suppose he was somebody else—different persons at different times."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"He has just told us that his name is Lothrop, sir, and that he's a schoolmaster," he said, as Nugent fumbled at the door.

"Ah! That latter fact is correct. He certainly was a schoolmaster a few years ago," said Dr. Benson. "He was headmaster at St. Austin's."

Wharton started.

"St. Austin's?"

"Yes; a public school in Cornwall."

"It's coming open, sir," said Nugent.

"Look out!"

"Harris, stand steady!"

"Yes, sir," said the asylum attendant.

The great stone swung back. A dark cavity was revealed, and in the cavity a white face that looked out into the light of the lantern.

A dark figure rushed forth, with a gasp of passionate relief. The attendant had him by the collar in a moment, and Dr. Benson spoke in soothing tones.

"Quiet, my friend, quiet! Don't be unruly, Valence, my dear fellow! We are only going to take you home again!"

"What?" gasped the other, struggling in the grasp of the attendant. "What? Why do you call me Valence? My name is Lothrop!"

Dr. Benson started.

"That is not Valence's voice! There is some mistake! Show the light upon his face!"

Wharton obeyed. The lantern light illuminated a white, haggard face—a face totally unknown to the juniors of Greyfriars, and apparently to Dr. Benson also.

"This is not the man!"

"Not the man?" gasped Wharton.

"No; I have never seen this man before."

"Great Scott!"

The juniors were dumbfounded.

"But—but he must be mad!" gasped

Nugent. "He says his name is Lothrop—unless there are two Lothrops. We thought—"

"My name is Lothrop!" shrieked the stranger. "I am a schoolmaster. I was going to Greyfriars School, when I was kidnapped by a mad villain!"

"To Greyfriars School, sir?"

"Yes, certainly; to take the place of Dr. Locke, who is away ill."

"W-w-w-what!"

"I tell you—"

"But Mr. Lothrop, Dr. Locke's substitute, is at the school!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, almost stupefied. "There can't be two."

"What!"

"Mr. Lothrop arrived last evening." The unfortunate man gave a yell.

"Then that is why he took my clothes!"

"What?" ejaculated Dr. Benson.

"I tell you I was kidnapped here. I came in the train to Lindale, and as I found I should have to wait at the station for the local to Friardale, I decided to walk. I met that villain—"

"What villain?"

"The villain who kidnapped me! I met him on the footpath. He seemed a very pleasant and agreeable man."

"Ah, it was Valence!"

"He offered to show me the way, and I accepted. We talked freely. I told him who I was and where I was going, and he told me he was Dr. Benson, the proprietor of an asylum in this neighbourhood."

"Dear me! I am Dr. Benson!"

"You!"

"Certainly. What you are telling me shows me that you have encountered Mr. Valence, a patient who escaped from my care yesterday. Pray go on! I hope this will lead to his recapture. But—but—the doctor looked at the stranger in amazement—"you are wearing his clothes! They are Valence's clothes!"

"I should think so, sir, when he took mine!"

"He—he took your clothes?"

"Yes, sir. He led me here, then he suddenly seized me, without a moment's warning, and dragged me into the crypt. He seemed to have the strength of ten men, and I was helpless in his hands. He made me take my things off and change into his clothes. He took my letters, my papers. I did not know why then. Now I surmise that he has passed himself off as me at Greyfriars, doubtless for purposes of robbery."

"Oh, no; an insane freak, that is all."

The stranger, who was calming down a little now, turned to the juniors.

"Do you belong to Greyfriars?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton. "I hope you will forgive us for not letting you out sooner, sir; but when you said you were Mr. Lothrop, we—we naturally thought—"

"Quite right—quite right! You must have thought me mad. But is this lunatic, then, at the school?"

"I suppose so, sir. He came last evening. We met him near the ruins here, and he wouldn't let us come here as we intended."

"His reason for that is plain enough. He was afraid you would find me here."

"I suppose so, sir."

"I am very much obliged to you boys," said the ill-used master. "It will be best to proceed to the school at once, Dr. Benson, and secure this man."

"Certainly, certainly! I have a carriage on the road, half a mile from here; we shall have to walk to it, and then we shall soon get to Greyfriars."

"Very good!"

And the party left the crypt. Mr. Lothrop, who seemed weak and spent after his long confinement in the stone chamber, leaned on the arm of the

asylum attendant as they went. The juniors discussed the matter in low tones as they followed.

"Jolly lucky we came here." Bob Cherry remarked. "If that lunatic chap didn't speak on the subject, Lothrop might have starved in the secret chamber."

"Quite possible."

"The hardness of the cheese upon the honourable Lothrop would have been terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"No wonder there has been a high old time at Greyfriars, with a lunatic as headmaster!" chuckled Nugent. "I wonder what he's been up to while we've been here? We'll jolly well be on the scene when he's captured!"

"What-ho!"

They reached the carriage, and Dr. Benson and Mr. Lothrop entered it, with the attendant. There was no room for the boys, but they preferred to walk. They were strictly cautioned not to enter

"Hear, hear!" shouted Billy Bunter enthusiastically.

"Bravo!" yelled Bulstrode.

"I have ordered the housekeeper to send up all the food there is in the house, and have also ordered the whole stock of the school shop," said the new Head. "All who are inclined to join me may do so."

"Hurrah!"

"Hip-pip!"

"The feast is now ready!" said the new Head. "Come in! Walk up! Roll up! Hear, hear!"

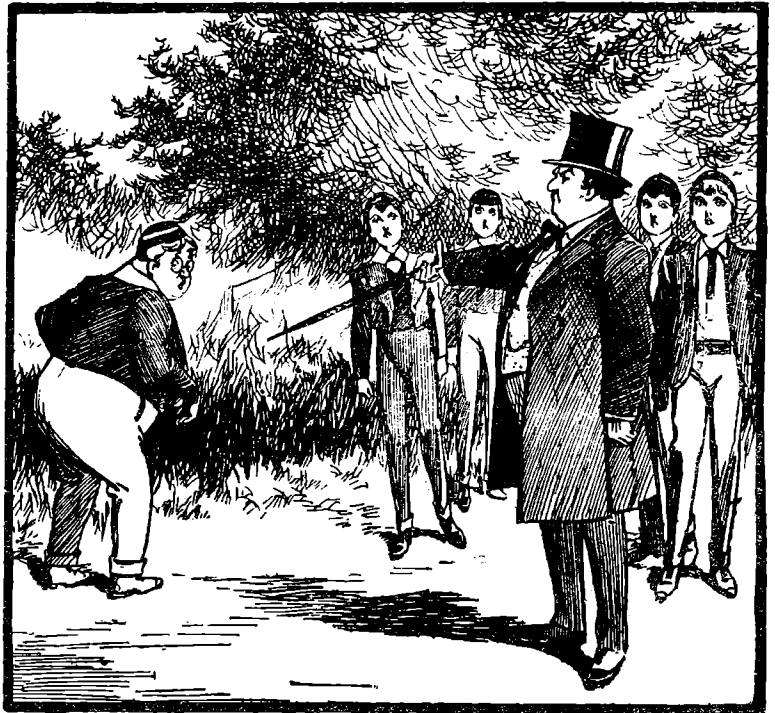
"My only hat!" said Wingate. "He's mad! There's no other explanation. He's as mad as a giddy hatter!"

"Right off!" said Blundell. "Absolutely off. What will be the end of this?"

"I wonder what Dr. Locke will say when he gets back?" grinned Bland.

"My hat! I wonder."

But, whatever they might think of the Head's strange freaks, there was no



"Bunter," rapped out Mr. Lothrop, "jump into that ditch!" The new Head waved his umbrella threateningly, and Bunter turned round with a gasp of affright!

Greyfriars until the carriage had arrived, in case of giving the alarm to the new Head.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Last Scene.

"BOYS!"

"I say, you fellows, there he is again!"

The new Head had appeared on the steps of the School House. Every eye in the Close was turned upon him at once.

"Boys!"

The new Head stamped his feet to attract attention, but it was hardly needed. Seniors and juniors crowded round.

"Boys! To celebrate my coming to Greyfriars, I am going to stand a big treat!"

reason why the fellows should not join in the feast. It was getting towards dinner-time, anyway, and schoolboys are generally ready for a feed.

Billy Bunter led the way.

The tables in the dining-room were loaded—in novelist language, they groaned under the goodly viands.

The astonished maids had obeyed the Head's orders—everything eatable in the house was brought up, and the whole stock of the school tuck-shop had been added.

The boys' eyes naturally glistened at the sight of such a feed.

Billy Bunter wasted no time upon the order of his beginning, but began at once. He was in the seventh heaven.

The new Head waved his hand hospitably.

"Fall to, my lads!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

It was a splendid feed.

Amazement did not take away the boys' appetites, and at the most generous picnic they had never had so splendid a spread.

Billy Bunter travelled through the eatables at express speed, and his fat, round face soon assumed a shininess and greasiness that told of over-feeding; but he did not leave off.

He kept on till by no possibility could he eat more; and then he began to cram things into his pockets. He would be hungry again, and now was the time to prepare for it.

When every available pocket was crammed with oranges, apples, cakes, nuts, mince-pies, and similar articles, Bunter left the table at last. He was the last to leave, of course.

The Head, during the feast, had not eaten; he walked up and down the room, gesticulating a great deal, and making remarks to the boys, many of them without any connected sense or meaning.

"You have finished, boys?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir," said Temple.

"Good! Then clear away the crockery! Follow your leader!" said the new Head, taking up a dish of potatoes.

He hurled the dish through the dining-room window, and there was a smash of glass and broken crockery in the Close.

"By Jove!" gasped Wingate.

Orders from the Head had to be obeyed, and it is to be feared that the spirit of mischief was strong upon the junior boys, too. They readily followed his example. The crockery was hurled through the windows, with crash on crash.

"A little excitement livens the scholastic day," said the new Head. "Let us live while we are alive, for, as the poet remarks, we are a long time dead. Come, come!"

"Ruin beggar," said Wingate. "He grows rummier every moment. I wonder Quelch doesn't stop him."

Mr. Quelch was in the passage when the boys crowded out. Mr. Quelch did not know that day whether he was on his head or his heels. Everything was topsy-turvy, and he hoped that it was all a terrible dream.

The new Head nodded to him genially.

"We are getting on, Mr. Squelch."

"My name is Quelch, sir!" said the Remove-master frigidly.

"Nonsense! Your name is Squelch. Bosh, sir! Do you think I do not know your name, sir? But no matter! We are getting on, are we not?"

"I am glad you think so, sir," said Mr. Quelch drily.

"I am filling up the time pretty well, I think."

"You are, certainly. But I must speak out, Mr. Lothrop. If this frantic conduct does not cease, I shall wire to Dr. Locke!"

"Oh, come, Squelch—"

"Yes, sir. I can only conclude that you are under the continual influence of liquor," said the Remove-master sternly.

"Oh, come! You have indigestion this morning, Squelch, and it is bad for your temper. Why not be jolly?"

"Sir!"

"Grin and bear it, my boy. Banish dull

care!" said the new Head. "Look at me. I am enjoying myself!"

"I think you must be mad."

"Of course I am!" said the new Head genially. "I make no secret of it. We are all mad, you know!"

"Upon my word!"

"I am mad, thou art mad, he is mad, we are mad, you are mad, they are mad!" said the Head. "Of course! What else are we here for?"

"Really!"

"But there is no reason why we should not enjoy life, even if we are mad," said the Head, smiling. "I have never been so jolly as since I was mad. Consider the narrow, cramped life of a sane person. He has but a single identity to last him all his life. Now, I am the Emperor of China one day, and the Kaiser the next. One day I make myself King of Siam. Another day, President of the United States. I get variety that way. You understand? A sane man has only one identity. Has it not occurred to you that he must get dreadfully bored with himself in the course of his life. Fancy being named Williams for seventy years. Absurd!"

Mr. Quelch stood petrified.

There was no doubt about it now, if there had been any before. The man was a lunatic. It might be sunstroke. Whatever it was, he was mad now.

At the thought of that, all Mr. Quelch's bottled-up anger dissolved away. One could not be angry with an insane person.

His only thought now was to get the new Head quietly into a room where he could be shut up till a medical man could be sent for.

"I see you agree with me," said the new Head, smiling. "Consider, too, a sane person is always his real age. Now, I am any age it suits me to be. I am at the present moment twenty years of age, and this is a ball-room. You are a charming girl I am going to waltz with. You understand?"

"Really! Oh! Help! Upon my word!"

The new Head had seized the Remove-master, and was beginning to waltz. The boys crowded back with yells of laughter.

Mr. Quelch was so weakling, but he seemed a child in the hands of his partner. The new Head grasped him firmly and waltzed.

They waltzed round the hall, bumping into several of the fellows and sending them flying, the Remove-master gasping and struggling spasmodically.

"Help! Oh! Oh dear!"

And still they waltzed.

There was a sound of wheels on the drive, and several forms darkened the open door. Dr. Benson looked in, and the real Mr. Lothrop; behind them the asylum attendant and Harry Wharton & Co.

They were petrified at what they saw. The wildest freak of the new Head, so far, was that of dancing a waltz with the Remove-master in the midst of a crowd of yelling boys.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Dr. Benson. His voice reached the ears of the new Head.

The waltz suddenly stopped, and the breathless and exhausted Remove-master staggered away, and Harry Wharton caught him and helped him to a seat.

The new Head stared at Dr. Benson.

The jollity faded out of his face, and a hunted look came there, as of an animal caught by its master after running away.

"Valence!"

The new Head cast a quick glance round. He was evidently meditating flight. But the asylum attendant was by his side in a moment, with a hand on his arm.

"Don't try it, Mr. Valence," he said quietly.

The new Head smiled again. He held out his hand to Dr. Benson, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"I am glad to see you, Roberts!" he exclaimed. "Your name is Roberts, is it not?"

Dr. Benson smiled.

"Anything you like, my dear fellow," he said. "Are you ready to come with me?"

"I shall be very happy to accept your kind invitation," said the new Head, in a stately way. Then he laughed. "Is that the other fellow?"

"Yes; that is Mr. Lothrop."

"Ah! I shut him up, you know."

"Dear me!" said the real Mr. Lothrop. "He is quite mad. But he seems to be harmless."

"Certainly!" said Valence cheerily. "I am as mad as you are, sir!"

"Oh!"

"I have been looking after the school for you, and I trust you will find everything to your satisfaction now you have returned after your illness, Dr. Locke," said the new Head, having already forgotten Mr. Lothrop's identity. "Let me see. Your name is Herbert Henry Harrison, is it not?"

"Come, come!" said Dr. Benson, slipping his arm through that of the lunatic.

"With pleasure, my dear Robinson."

And the new Head was gently led down the steps to the waiting carriage. He turned to look at the crowd of staring boys, and waved his hand.

"Good-bye!" he said. "I am sorry to have to leave you. I am compelled to go away, owing—"

"Come, come!"

"Certainly! Good-bye, gentlemen; and I hope you will all recover shortly," said the new Head, waving his hand—apparently under the impression now that he was quitting a lunatic asylum, and the patients were seeing him off. "In cases of mental disease, I can recommend my friend, Dr. Benson, who has completely cured me. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!" called out the boys.

And the carriage drove away with the polite lunatic.

Mr. Quelch shook hands with Mr. Lothrop with a gasp of relief.

"It has been an astounding affair!" he exclaimed. "But I am very pleased to be able to welcome you to Greyfriars, my dear sir."

And Mr. Lothrop went in with the Remove-master, to explain and to be explained to. Under the circumstances, as the whole school was in a state of utter confusion, the day's holiday was not rescinded, and the boys enjoyed the rest of it to the full; and so—though they were satisfied with the real Mr. Lothrop when they came to know him—they always retained very kindly recollections of the other fellow.

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. Manners Explains.

TOM MERRY and Monty Lowther were sitting in their study doing their prep when suddenly their door was violently thrown open, and Manners rushed into the room.

So unceremoniously did Manners enter that he collided with the table. He stood there grasping its edge and panting for breath.

"You ass!" howled Tom Merry. "Look what you've done!"

"Upset all the giddy ink!" roared Monty Lowther.

The sudden jerk of the table had tipped the inkpot over, and the dark fluid was flowing all over the tablecloth. Monty Lowther endeavoured to shift in time, but the ink reached the table-edge and splashed on to his trousers. Lowther let out a fendish yell.

"Ow! My trousers are ruined!" he roared, starting to his feet. "You—you fattedhead lunatic, Manners! What the—"

"Sorry!" gasped Manners, his eyes gleaming. "I say, I—"

"You'll feel in a minute!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Bump him!"

"Collar the rotter!"

Manners started back and dodged. He banged the door to, and waved a dirty piece of paper in the air.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "Look at this! I've found something that'll make you go off your nappers with excitement! I'm a bit excited myself—"

"You're mad!" panted Monty Lowther.

"You're off your rocker!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm not! This parchment—"

"Blow the parchment! What do you mean by bursting into the room like a babbling lunatic? Have you been seeing ghosts down in the crypt, or—"

"I've found a treasure!" roared Manners excitedly. "A giddy treasure!"

"You'll find a thick ear before you've done!" growled Tom Merry.

"And a black eye!" added Monty Lowther wrathfully.

Manners looked at his chums excitedly.

"You asses!" he yelled. "Don't you understand? This parchment's thousands of years old!"

"Go it!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically. "Why don't you say it's millions of years old? You'll be telling us it's an Egyptian papyrus next!"

"Well, it's hundreds of years old, anyhow!" said Manners.

"Rot!"

"Tosh!"

"It is!" shouted Manners.

"Yes, I said it is tosh!" grinned Tom Merry.

"No!" howled the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "I mean it's hundreds of years old! Can't you chaps realise that I've made the biggest discovery of—of modern times? This parchment is a key to a hidden treasure!"



"It doesn't look like a key to me," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "I'll bet it wouldn't fit the lock of this door, anyhow!"

"Not that kind of key, ass! I tell you I—"

Manners paused, unable to frame his words. The parchment still waved in his hand, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther advanced on their chum, and grasped him firmly. They could see that he was very much excited, and knew there must be some reason for it. They were beginning to be curious.

"What's up with you, Manners?" asked Tom Merry severely. "What do you mean by coming into this study like a howling Red Indian?"

"Yes; give us an explanation!" said Lowther.

Manners, in swift sentences, told his chums that he had found the parchment under a stone in the crypt.

"It must have been under that stone for hundreds of years!" he finished excitedly. "The thing couldn't have been up before, or the paper would have been found!"

"Let's have a squint at it!" said Tom Merry quickly.

Manners moved across the table, followed by his two interested chums. He planked the parchment down, and all three bent over it. For several minutes there was no sound in the study, except the quick breathing of the juniors, and then, as though with one accord, they straightened their backs and stared into one another's face.

"Well?" demanded Manners abruptly.

"I—I— Blessed if I know what to say!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"It—it can't be true!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Why can't it? The thing was buried hundreds of years ago, and it's absolutely genuine! Anybody can see that with half an eye! Look at the parchment! Look at the old writing! Look at the dirt stains! Why—why, the thing's as genuine as—as I am!"

Manners was becoming more excited than ever.

"Can't you realise what it means?" he went on animatedly. "Don't you chaps realise that there's a giddy treasure hidden in the castle ruins? It's been there ever since—ever since it was hidden!"

"Go hon!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Marvellous!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't rot!" Manners exclaimed.

"The chap who wrote this thing—"

"Jasper Townshend."

"Yes, that's his name. He said he wrote this parchment so as to let the finder know that he'd hidden gold and silver in the castle. Of course, at that time the castle wasn't in ruins. But the spot must be the same, although now it will be all grass-grown. I tell you, chaps, it's the biggest thing that's ever happened."

"I wonder how much treasure there is?" said Monty Lowther, with gleaming eyes. "He says there's a 'goodly sum.'"

"That's it," said Tom Merry. "A goodly sum in an oaken chest. Wealth untold. My only aunt, I—I can't believe it, you know!"

"Let's read the thing again!"

And the Terrible Three hastily scanned the faded, crabbed handwriting.

Tom Merry looked up at length.

"There's no swank about it," he said.

"Manners, old man, you've hit upon something that's really big! I vote we rush along to Study No. 6, and tell Blake & Co. My hat, what a smack in the eye this'll be for the New House!"

"Yes, rather!"

"What-ho!"

The Terrible Three hurried out of their study, Tom Merry carrying the parchment. They were all very much excited, and ran along the passage to Study No. 6, the famous apartment occupied by Blake & Co. of the Fourth.

The Terrible Three burst into the study with a crash. Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy were busy at their prep, and they started to their feet in alarm, thinking, for the moment, that it was a study raid.

"What the—"

"Who the—"

"Bai Jove, dear boys, it's a waid!"

"It's Tom Merry!"

Blake & Co. stared at the invaders with warlike looks.

"Any more of you?" inquired Blake, putting up his hands. "Because, if you Shell bounders are looking for a scrap—"

"Don't be an ass, Blakey!" said Tom Merry. "We've come to let you into a secret—the biggest thing imaginable!"

"Bai Jove, you know, you make me cuivious, dear boy! Pwaw let us know what this wemarkable discovery is!" said Arthur Augustus. "Has it got anythin' to do with that piece of papah you are wavin' in your hand, Tom Mewwy?"

"It has, Gussy; a lot to do with it," replied the captain of the Shell. "You may not believe, but it'll probably be the means of our finding thousands of pounds!"

"What?"

"Which?"

"How much?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Thousands of pounds!" repeated Tom Merry firmly, and with an impressive air. "It's a key to a hidden treasure, kids. And we've only got to follow out the directions to make ourselves millionaires!"

Blake & Co. stared.

"Rot!" said Jack Blake.

"Piffle!"

"You're pulling our giddy legs!" said Herries.

"Yaae, wathah!"

"You wait till you've read this parchment!" said Manners excitedly. "Of course, we knew you wouldn't believe it at first, but you'll jolly soon be convinced!"

"Rot!"

"I found it under the stones in the old chapel crypt," went on Manners. "It's been there for hundreds of years, and it tells all about a treasure that was hidden by the monks."

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye.

"Bai Jove, you know," he ejaculated, "this is wathah intewestin'! I always wondahed if there was a hidden treasure somewhere about. Those old monks were queah johnnies, an' there's no tellin' what they were up to."

"Let's have a look at that paper," said Blake practically.

"That's the idea!"

The Fourth-Formers pushed their way to Tom Merry's side, and the latter held up the old parchment so that it could be read. Then, with breathless interest, Blake & Co. perused the quaint document. When they had done, they looked at the Terrible Three with fast-rising excitement.

"I—I say!" exclaimed Blake. "Do—do you think it's genuine?"

"Of course it is!"

"But—but—"

"There are no 'buts' about it, my son," declared Tom Merry. "The whole thing's as plain as a pikestaff! Now, as nobody else knows, I vote we keep it a secret among ourselves, and then form an expedition!"

"That's the word," said Blake heartily—"an expedition!"

"Sounds like the real thing!"

"Bai Jove, I should wathah say that a search-party would sound bettah!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "A search-party, you know, deah boys—"

"Search-party be jiggered!" interrupted Monty Lowther. "We're not looking for somebody who's lost! Still, it doesn't matter what you call it. It's a good idea, and I second it. We'll keep mum, and search for the treasure by daylight!"

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"Pway let me inspect the parchment again, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus pored over the "ancient" key to the "treasure," and his chums followed his example. Blake & Co., in addition to the Terrible Three, were quite interested in the parchment.

"I say," exclaimed Digby suddenly, "suppose we rush off to the old crypt, and have a squint down that hole? There's a chance there might be something else!"

Manners looked doubtful.

"I didn't look very thoroughly," he admitted; "but I don't think there's anything else there. Still, it wouldn't be a bad wheeze to go and make sure!"

"All serone!" said Tom Merry. "We'll go!"

And the juniors moved towards the door in a body. Their interest was

thoroughly aroused, and this new suggestion of Digby's struck them all as being very practical. There was just a chance that the cavity in the crypt might contain something else, and it would be best to make sure.

So, excited and eager, they wrenched open the study door and simply poured into the passage, those behind pushing their chums headlong out.

There was a sudden yell, then a wild scuffle.

"Ow!" yelled a well-known voice. "Great Scott! You young rascals, I'll—"

"Cave!" hissed Blake, in a low voice.

In their hurry to leave the study the juniors had biffed into Knox, the School House prefect, with considerable violence, causing Knox to flounder to the floor and knock his head with a crash against the wall.

The temper of Knox was very uncertain, as the juniors knew to their sorrow, and they all followed Blake's example without hesitation. The Terrible Three scrambled past their chums of the Fourth, and took to their heels, Blake & Co. following immediately behind.

"Come back, you young rascals!" roared Knox furiously. "Come back, or—"

But his voice fell on deaf ears. The juniors fled, and emerged into the dark quad in a scattered group.

"My hat!" panted Tom Merry. "That was a narrow escape! What the dickens did you chaps want to bowl Knox over for?"

"It was your fault for pushing!" growled Blake.

"I say, deah boys, hadn't we bettah hurwy across to the cwypt?" suggested D'Arcy. "The quad is deserted now, and we shall not be ovahlooked. The chaps might think it funny if they saw all of us goin' into the chapel!"

"Yes, we'll go across straight away—"

Tom Merry uttered an ejaculation.

"I—I say," he exclaimed, in a startled voice, "who's got the parchment?"

"You have, you ass!" said Blake.

"I haven't!" said Tom Merry quickly.

Nobody else had, and the juniors looked at one another in dismay. It was evident that it had been brushed out of Tom Merry's hand in the scuffle with Knox. In the excitement Tom Merry had not noticed its disappearance.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Manners blankly.

"The parchment's gone!"

"Tom Merry's lost it!"

"I—I had it in my hand!" exclaimed Tom Merry quickly. "My hat! I believe I know when I dropped it! I pushed past Herries, and my hand caught his arm! The parchment must have slipped from my fingers!"

"You careless ass!" said Manners excitedly.

"I didn't do it on purpose!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "It was Knox's fault, really! If he hadn't come along at that moment we shouldn't have biffed into him. I expect the parchment's in the passage!"

"Go and fetch it, then!" exclaimed Blake anxiously.

"If that's lost—"

"Somebody else will get the treasure—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry crossly. "You chaps get into the crypt, and I'll buzz back and find the parchment!"

And the hero of the Shell, feeling greatly worried, hastened back into the School House.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Knox Makes Up His Mind.

TOM MERRY had dropped the parchment in the excitement of knocking Knox over, and he and his chums had dashed off without knowing of their loss. Knox picked himself up, with a black brow, and scowled round him furiously.

Not a sign of the juniors could be seen. They had conveniently vanished.

Knox was very unpopular at St. Jim's. His bullying tendencies, his bad temper, and his disagreeable spirit generally made him one of the most cordially-disliked fellows in the school. He indulged in bullying whenever occasion offered, and gave juniors lines with a heavy hand.

"The young brutes!" he muttered, as he glared down the passage. "They knocked me down on purpose! But I know who they were, and I'll—"

Knox paused, and his attention became riveted upon the floor.

"What on earth's that?" he muttered. He bent down, and picked up the parchment, which had been lying against the wall, and turned it over in his hand.

"Queer looking lot!" he muttered. "Those young rascals must have dropped it!"

He stuffed it into his pocket, and walked away to his own study. Arriving there he turned on the gas, and seated himself in an armchair.

He pulled the parchment out of his pocket, and slowly turned it over in his hand, finally frowning at it in a puzzled manner.

"Hanged if I can make out what it is!" he murmured. "Seems to be some old faded parchment, with some faded writing on it. I reckon it's—"

Knox paused as he began to take in the sense of the writing. He bent forward eagerly, reading the words aloud. At last, in some excitement, he rose to his feet and stepped across to the gas-jet, and stood beneath it scanning the parchment. Presently he looked up, and in his eyes was an expression of disbelief and amazement.

"It can't be right!" he muttered. "It must be some silly trick of the juniors!"

He looked at the parchment again, and noted the brown, faded writing.

"And yet it can't be," he told himself. "This thing wasn't written yesterday, I'll swear! By Jove, I wonder—"

Knox paused, and paced up and down his study.

"I wonder if it can be genuine?" he thought. "I can't make inquiries as to where it came from, because I should let the young beggars know I've got it! They must have dropped it when they bowled me over!"

Knox's excitement was growing, and he still continued to pace his study with short, nervous strides. At last he sat down in his chair, and bent over the parchment.

For ten minutes he sat there, examining it closely, then he looked up.

"It's the real thing right enough," he said to himself: "there's no swank about it. Those kids must have found it somewhere. Perhaps Manners has been playing with his camera in the chapel crypt. Of course, that must be it! The writer of the parchment says he was going to hide it in the crypt. That explains why the kids were so excited, and why they dashed out of the study at such a rate. By George, I—I hardly know what I'd better do!"

Knox was perfectly aware that the parchment was not his, yet the thought that it would be the means, perhaps, of finding a priceless treasure, caused him to become thoroughly excited.

"Why should I give it back to those

Shell kids?" he thought. "After all, I found it in the passage. I don't know for certain whose it is, so I can't give it back to the owner."

A disagreeable grin passed across the Sixth-Former's face.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed aloud. "I'll keep it for myself! I found it, and I've got a perfect right to it! If those kids ask me anything about it, I'll say that I haven't seen it, and send them about their business. But I believe they will ask; they'll be too funky."

Knox did not possess many scruples, and he came to his decision after very little thought. To his mind there was nothing dishonourable in what he was going to do. He had found the parchment, and, therefore, it was his to do as he liked with.

"I'll study the thing thoroughly," he decided, "and then go over the old castle ruins to-morrow before lessons, and search for the treasure. If I find it, I shall explain that I found the parchment, and that it's mine. Anyhow, I'm hanged if I am going to take it to those juniors to play about with!"

And Knox turned to the table again, and re-read the document from beginning to end. He was very much excited, and forgot all else but the ancient parchment and its amazing message.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Tracking the Parchment.

TOM MERRY glanced at his watch as he hurried down the steps of the School House into the quad.

"There's an hour before supper," he murmured. "Time to do a lot if we hurry. Prep can go to the dickens for to-night! With such a thing as hidden treasure on the board, we can't afford to think about prep!"

And the captain of the Shell crossed the quad to the old chapel.

Tom Merry was feeling rather worried. He had searched the Shell passage, but had seen no sign of the parchment. He had also dropped into several studies and into the Common-room, but everybody seemed to be in their normal state, and no excitement prevailed. So Tom Merry took it for granted that the parchment had not been found by any of the juniors. He had asked one or two boys if they had seen a piece of paper lying in the passage, but nobody had any knowledge of it.

He descended into the old crypt with a worried look upon his face, and his chums crowded round him in the light of Manners' red lamp—the red side being removed.

"Well?" demanded Manners quickly. "Have you got it?"

"Have you found the giddy parchment?"

"Yaas, wathah! Have you discovered it, deah boy?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No," he replied shortly.

"You haven't got it?" exclaimed Blake blankly.

"No, you ass!"

"Then you're a silly cuckoo!" declared Manners excitedly. "What the dickens do you mean by losing the thing, Tommy? You're a nice chap, I must say, to be trusted with the parchment!"

"You ought to have kept it yourself, Manners," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "You don't think I dropped the parchment on purpose, do you?"

"Well, it wasn't far off it!" growled Herries.

"What?"

"I say it wasn't far off it," repeated Herries obstinately. "You must be off

your rocker, Tom Merry! How the dickens could you drop the parchment without knowing it? I've never heard of such a careless ass!"

"Look here, you cheeky Fourth Form kid—"

Monty Lowther held up his hand. "Peace, children!" he exclaimed. "A row won't do any good; will it?"

"Well, Tom Merry shouldn't—"

"Well, Herries shouldn't—"

"What's the good of rowing?" repeated Monty Lowther, with a shout. "The thing is to get the parchment back before any harm is done. I wouldn't mind betting Manners' camera that Knox has collared it. It's just the kind of thing he would do."

"That's what I think," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I'm awfully sorry, you chaps, that the parchment's lost, but it wasn't my fault!"

"Of course not!" said Herries sarcastically.

"Well, it wasn't! The blessed thing

in his den, as it were! It needs a fellow of tact and judgment for a job like that, and I'm just the right chap!"

"I don't know about being white," growled Monty Lowther; "you're green enough!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yes, dry up, you punning rotter!" said Blake. "It wouldn't matter so much if you made decent puns. But, I say, it's no good us standing here in a group, talking. We shall never get the parchment that way."

"That's my idea," said Tom Merry. "We'd better get to work! I'm jolly certain that Knox has collared the parchment, so we must search his study!"

The others stared.

"Search his study?" repeated Blake, aghast.

"Yes!"

"But Knox is a prefect!" exclaimed Digby.

"And we should get into a fearful row if we were found out!" added Manners.



Manners wrenched the door of Tom Merry's study, and waved the yellow parchment. "I've got it!" he shouted. "Look at this, you chaps!"

was jerked out of my hand! I vote we make Knox give it to us back!"

"That's all very well," said Jack Blake; "but I don't see how you're going to do it, my son. Knox is a prefect, and a beastly rotter at that! We can't go up to him and demand the thing. Besides, if we did, he'd give us lines all round for biffing him over!"

"Oh, hang the lines!" said Tom Merry, with a worried look. "What are a few lines compared with treasure? But it's my opinion that if Knox has got the thing he won't give it up. He's cad enough for anything!"

Arthur Augustus polished his monocle. "Well, what's to be done, deah boys?" he asked. "I wathah think it would be a good ideah if I bearded the boundah

"But we shouldn't get found out, you chump!" replied Tom Merry. "Arc we going to stand by and see that rotter Knox collar our parchment? Arc we going to let him get the hidden treasure for himself?"

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Well, some of you chaps seem to be in favour of it," said the hero of the Shell. "In a matter like this we must take certain risks without hesitation! It's practically certain that Knox has pinched our parchment, and I therefore propose that we search his study on the quiet, and see if we can find it!"

"Good idea," said Manners. "Knox is a beastly rotter, and it would be just THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 256.

like him to keep the parchment to himself, just because he happened to pick it up. It's mine, and I'm blessed if I'm going to be diddled out of it! Why, the thing may be worth thousands of pounds! Think of it, chaps—thousands of pounds, and that cad has got it, and won't give it up!"

The juniors began to get excited again, and were all in favour of Tom Merry's suggestion to pay a visit to Knox's study. "One moment, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't you think it would be bettah to find the parchment, and then make a copy of it for our own use?"

"Why, Gussy?"

"Well, deah boy, in that way Knox would not know that we had been, for he would still have the parchment, and we could take a wise out of him by awwivin' at the tweasuah gwound first!"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"It's a good wheeze, Gussy," he admitted. "A jolly good wheeze. In fact, we could get up early to-morrow morning, and go over to the castle before breakfast. I suppose you chaps would be game?"

"Rather!"

"Of course!"

"We're game, Tom Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Then I vote that Manners and I leave the supper-table ten minutes before the usual time—we can easily give an excuse—and search Knox's study. You other chaps will be able to keep your eye on the Sixth-Form table, and see that he doesn't surprise us. When he does come, he'll find everything untouched, but we shall have made a copy of the parchment."

"Good egg!" said Blake. "That's a ripping fine idea, Tom Merry. Of course, Knox may not have the parchment at all, but I don't think there's much doubt."

"I don't think there's any doubt at all," said Tom Merry, looking round the old crypt. "By the way, did you find anything else in that hole?"

"No," said Manners; "nothing at all."

"Well, if you don't find the parchment again, it'll be rotten!" growled Jack Blake. "Why, it makes me go hot all over to think of it! I'm jolly certain there is a treasure, and if we're going to lose it—"

"We're not!" said Tom Merry firmly. "Don't be an ass, Blake. Knox is bound to have it—if some of the other fellows had collared it, I should have heard about it."

"You wouldn't have heard much about it if Mellish or Levison had collared it," replied Blake. "They're rotters enough for anything."

"I know that," said Tom Merry; "but I got to know that both of the cads had been in the Fourth Form Common-room for over an hour, so they couldn't have had a hand in it. It's Knox, I tell you, and we'll do the bounder yet!"

And the treasure-hunters, all of them still thoroughly excited and eager, discussed the plan further. Finally, they all ascended to the chapel and passed out into the quad.

Their ardour was a little damped by the sudden disappearance of the parchment, but all of them had high hopes of its being recovered before bed-time.

They knew that it would be practically useless asking Knox for it if the prefect made up his mind not to give it up. So they had, therefore, decided upon the only likely course of action.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Found at Last!

"WE shall have to buck up, Manners, old man. If Knox comes along and finds us here, there'll be a fearful shindy!"

"Oh, we sha'n't be more than ten minutes, and I don't suppose Knox will come along yet," replied Manners. "I don't care for the job of searching another fellow's study as a rule, but this time I've got an idea that we're justified."

"We shall be justified if we find that Knox has got it," said Tom Merry. "While I look through these drawers, you search the bureau!"

But Manners did not have to do much searching. Before Tom Merry had been looking at the desk-drawers two minutes, he uttered a low exclamation.

"Here it is!" he murmured excitedly. "As large as life, and twice as natural! I know the rotter had it!"

"The bounder!" ejaculated Manners. "I say, we'd better start making a copy."

"Rather!"

And for the next five minutes there was nothing to be heard in the study save an occasional murmur, and the scratch of pen on paper.

"Done it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Now, Knox, my beauty, we've got you on toast! If you think you're going to collar the treasure, you're jolly well mistaken. It's ours, and we're not going to be done out of it by a beastly bully!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Manners elatedly. "My hat, it was a ripping idea of yours to search this study! Just fancy Knox collaring the parchment and sticking to it! I say, he's a blessed burglar!"

"I expect he thinks he has a right to it, as he found it. Of course, he hasn't, really; but Knox is rotter enough for anything!"

"I don't care what he does now!" grinned Manners delightedly. "We've got a copy of the parchment, and we'll be on the scene before him! He'll never dream of this move, and think he's got plenty of time!"

And the two Shell fellows, very much elated, hurried out of Knox's study, and dashed off to the Fourth Form passage, a copy of the parchment safely in Tom Merry's pocket. The juniors had just come from supper, and Blake & Co. and Monty Lowther looked at their two chums rather anxiously.

"Have you got a copy?" asked Jack Blake quickly.

"Was the giddy parchment in Knox's study?"

"Was—"

"Yes, it was!" grinned Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's all right, kids; you needn't worry any more! We've got a copy of the parchment, and Knox will have to take a back seat! He'll never suspect that we've been to his study, and we shall be able to steal a march on him!"

"Hurrah! That's ripping!" exclaimed Blake, his spirits rising rapidly. "I'd begun to think that we should be diddled! That idea of yours, Tommy, was ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, deah boys, I feel all of a fluttah! If this tweasuah is a weally big one, I shall buy a motor-car with my share!"

"Why not go further, and have a giddy yacht, Gussy!" grinned Monty Lowther. "But I say, chaps, I'm blest if I know how I'm going to sleep to-night! There's no doubt about the parchment being genuine, and there's no telling how much gold there is buried at the old castle!"

"That's why I'm so jolly impatient!" said Manners. "Hanged if I don't feel like breaking bounds and going to the ruins now!"

"We all feel like that," said Tom Merry, "but it can't be done, my son! And, after all, there's no such hurry as that. Now that we've got a copy of the parchment we can all hurry off to the ruins, and be there long before Knox is up."

"Of course!"

Reilly and Lorne, of the Fourth, came along the passage.

"Hallo, what's all the excitement about?" asked Lorne curiously. "You chaps look jolly pleased over something."

"Faith, perhaps somebody's left 'em a fortune!" grinned Reilly.

"Can't we look happy now?" asked Blake.

"Sure, ye're welcome to look happy," replied the Belfast junior, "but is it some jape against the New House?"

"Not this time, Reilly, old man," replied Tom Merry.

And to avoid further discussion, the juniors entered Study No. 6.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Treasure Hunters Set Out.

KNOX the prefect sat in his study after the juniors had gone to bed. Before him on the table was the piece of ancient parchment which was causing so much excitement. Knox was reading it word for word, and in his eyes there was a look of great excitement.

"It's great!" he murmured. "The thing's as genuine as I am. Just before bedtime all those kids were collected in the quad, discussing the loss of this parchment. I can see as plain as anything that they were excited."

Knox rose to his feet and paced the room.

"I'll bet a quid the little idiots never guessed that I've got it!" he said to himself with a chuckle. "They think they've lost it in the quad or about the grounds. Well, I found it, so I'm going to stick to it."

Knox picked the parchment up, and stood regarding the closely-written, crabbed handwriting.

"And to think this was written hundreds of years ago!" he murmured. "Why, anybody with half an eye could see it was!"

He read over the faded characters.

"The wording of this parchment, although speedily written, owing to necessary haste, is of very great significance," Knox read out. "I, Jasper Townshend, a monk of this noble monastery, am penning these brief words in order to set down certain facts which are necessary to the finding of untold wealth. Indeed, I am in sore fear that the soldiers of his Majesty will swoop down upon us, like the vultures they are. Therefore, before it is too late, I am setting down knowledge of the gold and silver which I and my worthy colleagues have placed safely in the grounds of the castle—which is, indeed, but a short distance from here—lest it be wrested from us. The money—a vast hoard—is contained in an oaken chest, and it represents the savings of years. In faith, it is indeed a goodly sum. I verily envy the finder of this scrap of paper, which I am concealing beneath the floor of the chapel crypt. A rough plan below will guide the finder of this paper to the spot where I have hidden the treasure. If he follows the directions closely it is impossible to go wrong. I need write no more."

Knox stared at the paper, after he had finished perusing it, with gleaming eyes, and glanced at the rough plan below.

"It's genuine enough," he told himself for the twentieth time. "Great Scott, there's no telling how much money there is in the oaken chest! Those old monastery johnnies used to have pots of money hidden away!"

Knox pored over the parchment and the old books, and at last stowed the former in his pocket, and turned the gas out.

"I'll get up early, and go before breakfast," he told himself excitedly. "I've got a jolly good alarm clock, and I'll be up before anybody else. When I come back to breakfast I may be a second Rockefeller!"

And Knox, full of his dreams, went up to bed.

Soon St. Jim's was all asleep. The morning dawned clear and fine—a beautiful autumn dawn. Long before the rising-bell was due to ring, Jack Blake of the Fourth hopped out of bed. The sun, already risen, was shining slantwise over the landscape, making everything look fresh and beautiful.

"Ripping morning!" murmured Blake. "My hat, we'd better get up and rout those Shell bounders out!"

And Blake turned from the window, and bent over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bed.

"Wake up, Gussy!" he whispered. D'Arcy sat up, blinking. "Bai Jove, Blake, I was only dozin'!" he exclaimed. "Is it time to get up, deah boy?"

"Of course it is, chump!"

"Weally, Blake—"

But Blake was rousing the others, and D'Arcy hopped nimbly out of bed and commenced dressing. In less than five minutes the juniors were ready, with the exception of Arthur Augustus.

"Ain't you ready, Gussy?" asked Herries impatiently.

"Bai Jove, I have been scarcely no time, deah boys!" protested D'Arcy. "Pway allow me anothah ten minutes to conclude my dweessin'. I have only to—"

"You've only to hung on your jacket and come with us!" said Blake firmly. "No fancy dressing this morning, Gussy."

"I uttally wufese to come immediately," said Arthur Augustus. "I have to dweess carefully, deah boys, or—"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus, much against his will, was forced to leave the dormitory before he had dressed to his satisfaction. But he was consoled by the remembrance that he could finish his toilet after the return from the castle.

Blake & Co. hurried along to the Shell dormitory, and they were just going to enter when the door opened, and the Terrible Three emerged.

"Oh, you're up!" said Blake in surprise.

"Of course we're up, ass!" replied Tom Merry. "We were just going to rout you chaps out."

"Well, we've routed ourselves out, thanks!" grinned Blake. "Come on, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The little crowd of juniors descended the stairs, and quietly unbolted the outer door. In a few moments they were crossing the quad. Taggles, the school porter, was already about, and the gates were unlocked.

Just as the juniors were passing out of the gate the door of the lodge opened, and Taggles stood in the portal, gazing at the juniors in surprise.

"My heye!" he ejaculated.

"Hallo, Taggy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Nice morning!"

"My heye!" repeated Taggles. "If you young rips ain't hup!"

"Go hon!" said Blake. "We're not up, Taggy—we're down."

"Nice goings hon!" said Taggles. "Seems to me the 'ole school's a-gettin' up hearly!"

"No, not all the school, Taggy," said Monty Lowther; "only the most important members of it."

"Young rip!" growled Taggles.

The juniors passed out of the gates chuckling. They were intensely eager to get to the ruins, and as they walked Tom Merry carefully examined his copy of the plan, and memorised the directions beneath it. Suddenly Herries came to a stop.

"We've forgotten something," he said. "Forgotten something?"

"Yes. We ought to have brought Towser along," said Herries blankly. "My bulldog would have sniffed out the treasure in no time! I—"

But Herries' voice was howled down. "Blow your bulldog!" growled Tom Merry. "He ought to be drowned."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "As a wule I don't believe in puttin' animals to death, but Hewwies' bulldog is wathah above the limit, you know! I entirely agree with Tom Mewwy."

"Look here—" began Herries. "Towser's not coming!" roared Blake.

So the party proceeded without the pleasure of Towser's company. They soon forgot about the matter, Herries included, and hastened on to the ruins with eager footsteps and expectant hopes.

So eager were they, in fact, that they proceeded on their way without once glancing behind. Had they done so they might possibly have caught sight of several lurking forms, like shadows, following them.

Tom Merry & Co. were unaware of the fact, but the rival Co.'s of the New House were hot on their track.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Hidden Treasure.

"MY hat, don't the ruins look fine!"

Blake uttered the words. The juniors were crossing the meadows to the ruins, and they were now within half a mile of their destination. The old castle stood out magnificently in the morning sunlight, its old walls, covered with clinging ivy, looking picturesque in the extreme.

But the other juniors were too intent upon their object to take any notice of the beauty of the scene. They proceeded on their way excitedly. Manners, who had been looking ahead with eager eyes, suddenly came to a halt with a surprised ejaculation.

"My only Aunt Josephine!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Well, what about her?" asked Monty Lowther.

"You ass!" exclaimed Manners excitedly. "This isn't a time to rot! There's—there's somebody at the ruins! I just saw him moving!"

"What?"

"Eh?"

"Somebody there?"

"Yes," said Manners, in dismay. "I tell you I saw him moving!"

One name flashed through all the juniors' minds.

"Knox!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"That's who it is—Knox!"

"He's there before us!"

"He's forestalled us!"

"Bai Jove, this is wotten!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, deah boys, that fwithful boundah has played the same game as us. He's come heah to awwix at the scene of action first. He will catch the tweasuah!"

"My hat, he won't!" yelled Manners. "It's ours! I found the giddy parchment, and I—"

"What's the good of talking here?" interrupted Tom Merry briskly. "The best thing we can do is to hurry to the ruins and see if it really is Knox. It may not be him, after all."

"There's not much doubt about it," said Blake.

"No; but there's a chance," replied the captain of the Shell, "and I vote we steal up without letting him know. Then, if it is him, we can watch him dig the treasure out, and pounce on it afterwards."

"Let him do all the work, you mean?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"That's the idea!"

"Good!"

And the juniors, feeling more excited than ever, hurried forward, now proceeding with great caution. At last they arrived at the old ruined wall of the castle.

"We shall have to go easy," whispered Tom Merry. "The hiding-place of the treasure is just against the north wall, and we can see it if we dodge round these old heaps of stone. I'll go and have a peep first, and if Knox is there you can all come up and watch proceedings."

Tom Merry crept forward among the old stones, and cautiously pushed his head round a jutting piece of masonry. Then he caught his breath in quickly.

For, at exactly the spot marked on the treasure-chart, Knox the prefect was digging away at the loose stones with considerable energy.

"It is Knox!" murmured Tom Merry, turning his head to the others. "Come on, chaps! There's plenty of room for all of you round about these stones."

Two minutes later the School House juniors were all crouching against various chunks of masonry, only their heads showing from Knox's side.

"I say, you know, this is wotten!" declared Arthur Augustus. "If Knox weally unearths the tweasuah he will vewy likely claim it all for himself!"

"If he does, we'll jolly soon make an alteration!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Come to think of it, it would be best for us to reveal ourselves now, and ask him what the dickens he means. I—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Digby suddenly.

His tone caused the others to rivet their attention on Knox again. The prefect was bending over the hole he had dug, and the juniors could see that he was very much excited.

Knox had dug for a considerable depth, and the loose stones were piled about him.

Now he bent over the hole, and laboriously lifted out a square, heavy oak box.

"My only hat!" he exclaimed aloud. "It's true! The parchment was right! I've found the treasure, and by the appearance of this box it looks like a valuable one!"

With feverish haste and shaking hands Knox inserted the edge of his spade under the box-lid and wrenched it open. The lid gave a creak, and finally flew back.

Knox gazed into the box with expectant and eager eyes. Then, with startling abruptness, all the colour fled from his cheeks, and he started back with a loud exclamation.

"Good heavens!" he shouted.

Blankly, scarcely realising the truth, he bent over the chest. It was half-full of loose stones, while on the top of them a small book rested. It was a well-thumbed volume, entitled "The Fretworker's Treasure," and its cover was

decorated with gaudy gold and silver lining.

Knox picked it up dazedly, and gazed at a piece of paper which was stuck on the back cover. It simply bore the words: "The Treasure! The gold and silver will be found on the front cover." The words were written in the same handwriting as the parchment, and with the same faded ink.

Knox staggered back as though struck, and his brow grew black as thunder.

"It's a jape!" he gasped, his fury rising rapidly. "It's a jape! Great Scott, those young sweeps left the parchment in the passage on purpose—on purpose for me to pick up!"

Tom Merry & Co. were gazing at Knox with amazed and startled faces. They, too, could not realise that the whole thing was a jape.

Yet there was obviously something wrong, for the prefect's face was a study of rage, disappointment, and chagrin.

Suddenly he moved, and the box, half on its side, was revealed to the juniors. They could see that it contained nothing but stones!

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus aloud, starting to his feet. "Bai Jove, Knox has found the tweekah, deah boys!"

Knox turned quickly, and his angry looks intensified. The next moment he came striding across to the juniors, and was upon them before they could make their escape.

"You—you young humbugs!" roared Knox, black in the face with fury.

"Here, I say—" began Tom Merry wrathfully.

"What do you mean by daring to jape a prefect?" roared Knox, with an angry scowl. "Great Scott, you shall pay for this!"

"J-j-jape you!" gasped Manners. "W-w-what d-do you mean, Knox?" panted Blake in dismay.

The juniors were too flabbergasted to attend to the prefect's questions. They, themselves, could scarcely realise that the parchment was nothing more nor less than a gigantic jape.

"What do I mean?" shouted Knox. "I mean that I'm going to report you to Mr. Raiton, and that I'm going to have you flogged! Good heavens, I—I—"

Words failed the enraged prefect, and forgetting himself in his fury, he hurled himself at Tom Merry, who was foremost.

Before the captain of the Shell could realise it he was flung violently to the ground, and Knox stood glowering round him, almost unconscious of his action.

But the juniors forgot their dismay in a moment. They sprang forward in a body.

"You rotten bully!" roared Blake.

"What?"

"You cowardly bully!" shouted Blake in ringing tones. And before the others could stop him he hurled himself at Knox, and punched the prefect violently upon the nose.

At St. Jim's it was against all rules to strike a prefect, and Blake started back, dismayed at his own action. Blood was streaming from Knox's nose.

But the blow had calmed him, and his face was now pale and set.

"All right!" he muttered thickly. "You shall pay for this, you young hounds! You're all in it, and you'll all be severely punished!"

And Knox, realising that if he stayed he might let himself go, pushed roughly through the juniors, and strode off towards St. Jim's.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Tom Merry & Co. Catch It.

TOM MERRY looked round him with a rather sickly expression.

"I—I'm dashed if I know what to say!" he exclaimed. "It's a jape, kids—a gigantic jape of those New House rotters! My hat, they'll grin over this for weeks!"

"It was all Manners' fault!" said Blake, anxious to clear himself.

"My fault!" roared Manners indignantly.

"Yes; you found the parchment!"

"Well, how was I to know it was a giddy fake thing?" shouted Manners wrathfully.

"Well, it's rotten!" growled Blake dismally.

"Horrible!" agreed Manners.

"Diabolical!" said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Suppose we go and look at the 'oaken chest,'" said Tom Merry.

"After all, kids, the jape wasn't against us, really. Knox stepped in and saved us in the nick of time."

Blake grinned in spite of himself.

"So he did!" he said. "My hat, wasn't he wild! It just served him right for sticking to the parchment!"

The jape's compensated for by old Knox falling into the trap!"

And the School House juniors, feeling a little more cheerful, slowly walked across to the spot where Knox had been labouring. But they were very silent. Even now they felt a little dazed, as though unable to realise the awful truth.

Tom Merry grinned as he looked at the "treasure."

"They did it jolly well, you know," he said. "There's a treasure here, right enough. But not the sort we expected."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that?" ejaculated Blake, startled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somebody's laughin', deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

"Found the treasure?" yelled a voice, full of merriment. "You're giddy young millionaires now!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared at one of the old walls, with their wrath rapidly rising. Over the top of the wall six faces were visible, and upon each face a grin of delight could be seen. The New House combine was immensely enjoying itself!

"You awful spoofers!" yelled Manners.

"You swankers!"

"Bounders!"

"Diddlers!"

"New House wasters!"

"Go on!" yelled Figgins encouragingly. "We like being called those names, you know. Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"New House!" roared his chums.

"Rats!" howled Manners wrathfully.

"School House for ever! If you bounders come down here, we'll shove you in this hole and bury you!"

"Not this morning!" said Redfern sweetly. "It's nearly brekker time, children, and the morning air has made us hungry. Good-bye! Hope you have a nice time with old Knox. We didn't mean him to be japed, but accidents will happen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be a different kind of accident happen in a minute!" said Tom Merry significantly. "We'll get our own back, Eggy!"

But the New House juniors only roared with laughter, and, joining arm-in-arm, they strolled away chuckling and hugging one another. Fatty Wynn was walking unusually fast, for a change—perhaps because he knew that breakfast

was waiting for him upon his arrival at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at one another with grim looks.

"Well, we're done!" said Tom Merry. "We're diddled, kids!"

"Dished and spoofed!"

"Done as brown as a berry!"

"Well, it's only the ups and downs of war," said Jack Blake philosophically. "The luck has turned against us this time, but we'll soon get our own back!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Those New House boundahs will crow like anythin'."

"The whole school will crow—that's the worst of it!" growled Manners.

And, in a dejected group, the School House juniors wended their way back to the school, enraged with themselves for having fallen so easily into the New House trap. They did not attempt to disguise from themselves the fact that they had been utterly and completely beaten.

When they arrived at Rylcombe Lane, they looked ahead at the gates rather apprehensively. And their fears were justified. For at the gates, nearly the whole of the New House juniors were gathered, waiting to welcome them!

Figgins & Co. had hurried back in order to acquaint the fellows with the news.

Tom Merry & Co. passed in the gateway with crimson faces.

"Who's cock-house now?" yelled Pratt defiantly.

"New House!" came a roar.

"Who was completely spoofed?"

"School House!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry, glaring round. "You claps can grin—"

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "Much obliged to you for giving us permission!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackling fatheads!" said Manners loftily. "What was your old jape, anyhow? If I couldn't think of a better one than that, I'd bury my head!"

"That's what you'd better do now," chuckled Redfern. "I should think you all ought to bury your heads after being shown up!"

"Shown up!" roared Blake.

"Yes, shown up, my sons!" replied Redfern. "You're all shown up as the representatives of the least important House at St. Jim's! New House is cock-house, and if you get too fresh again, we shall have to—"

"Salt the beggars!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All the juniors were in the very best of spirits—all the New House juniors, that is! A small crowd standing on the School House steps looked at their returning comrades with cold looks.

"You're a nice leader," growled Bernard Glyn.

"Properly messed things up, haven't you?" said Kangaroo, the Cornstalk.

"My hat, Tom Merry, the New House have hit us one this time!"

"Faith, an' ye're right, Glyn de-licious!"

"That's what comes of having a rotten leader like Tom Merry," sneered Levi-son of the Fourth.

"Rather!" said Mellish. "The rotters ought to be kicked off their perch! They're played out—"

"Dry up, you cad!" interrupted Lumley-Lumley warmly. "Tom Merry & Co. are all right! We can't expect to win every time. Besides, it's rather a change for the New House to get the better of us—and a change is good for everyone!"

"Well, that's not a bad way of looking at it!" said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Hallo, there goes the breakfast-bell!"

Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three

rushed up to the dormitories to complete their unfinished toilets, and when they appeared in the dining-hall, a low murmur of laughter ran through the big room from end to end. But Tom Merry & Co. were getting accustomed to the laughter by now, and they merely grinned in response.

After breakfast, Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's, put his head into Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

"Hallo, Kildare?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "How are you going?"

"You young rascal," said Kildare sternly. "What have you been up to? Mr. Railton wants you at once in his study. I've already told Blake and his chums to go there!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners. "Cut along," said Kildare sharply. "You'd better not keep Mr. Railton waiting, you know."

The captain of St. Jim's withdrew, and the Terrible Three looked at one another grimly.

"Well, this is a nice thing!" said Monty Lowther. "I say, what a cad Knox is!"

"He's an outsider," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose we'd better go."

"No help for it," said Manners. And the Terrible Three left their study and made their way to Mr. Railton's room. The Housemaster of the School House was there, and before him Blake

"Yes, sir," admitted Blake reluctantly.

"I—I punched his beastly nose!" Mr. Railton's brow grew stern.

"You admit that, Blake, and then try to make excuses," he said coldly. "Let me tell you all that I am very much surprised at your action. As a rule, you are well-behaved; but on this occasion you have evidently forgotten yourselves. To play such a joke upon a prefect, and afterwards assault him, is a serious offence. You will all be punished alike, and I shall make it very severe, in order that you may realise the seriousness of your offence. Every boy in this room is forbidden to leave the school grounds for a fortnight!"

"Gated for a fortnight!" ejaculated Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes, Merry," said Mr. Railton sternly. "And I hope you will realise in that time that you have acted very wrongly. You may all go."

"Thank you, sir!"

The juniors filed out of the room, their thoughts very bitter against Knox. The disagreeable prefect had evidently told Mr. Railton a whole string of lies—or had twisted the facts so that they were as good as lies—and the Housemaster had accordingly punished them very severely.

"It's rotten!" said Blake bluntly, as they paused in the passage. "We couldn't say anything to excuse our-

gins & Co. for daring to get us into such a hole as this!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Figgins & Co. Explain.

MORNING lessons were rather gloomy from Tom Merry & Co.'s point of view. Their thoughts were continually wandering, and by the time the bell for dismissal had rang lines had been showered liberally upon the unfortunate juniors.

"It seems to me we've caught it both ways," said Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three met Blake & Co. in the passage. "We've been successfully japed by Figgins & Co., and, to finish off, we're gated for a fortnight because of it—because Knox was cad enough to pinch the parchment and stick to it himself. I feel jolly indignant!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we go oah to the New House, deah boy, and waise a dust?"

"How about your trousers, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"In a mattah of this sort, Lowthah, my twousahs are of secondawny importance," replied Arthur Augustus. "I am quite willin' to wisk gettin' them wumped. Figgins & Co. need bumpin', deah boys!"

"They do," agreed Tom Merry.

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& Co. were lined up, all of them looking as though butter would not melt in their mouths.

Apparently, they were exceedingly surprised to find themselves there, and were racking their brains to find an adequate reason.

But Mr. Railton was very stern. "Knox has told me of a very disgraceful affair!" he exclaimed. "I do not interfere with juniors as long as they keep their jokes to themselves, but I cannot allow you to play practical jokes upon prefects."

"But, sir—" protested Tom Merry. Mr. Railton held up his hand.

"It is useless making excuses, Merry," he said severely. "Knox has informed me that a joke has been played upon him connected with an imaginary treasure, hidden in the castle ruins. This sort of thing will not do, my boys—I cannot allow you to play tricks with a prefect in such a manner. In addition—and this makes your offence very serious—you set upon Knox when he discovered the trick, and treated him with gross disrespect and violence!"

"We didn't, sir!" protested Blake. "Did you touch him at all, Blake?"

selfes, because it would have come out then that it was Figgins & Co.'s jape, and we don't want to get those bouders into a row."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "Old Railton's a brick, as a rule, but this time he's cut up rusty."

"Which is proof that Knox has been telling whoppers," said Monty Lowther. "Of course, Knox thinks we japed him on purpose, and that makes it worse. We—we can't do anything."

"Gated for a fortnight!" groaned Manners. "How rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah! I agree with you, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vevy wotten indeed!"

"We're helpless," said Blake. "Can't do a thing."

"Can't we, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "We can't sneak, of course; but there is nothin' to pvevent us goin' across to the New House, and waggin' Figgins & Co. That would weleave our feelin's a bit."

"Good egg, Gussy! We'll bunk over directly after dinner!" said Tom Merry, brightening up. "Even if we're gated we'll make things jolly warm for Fig-

"They've let us in for all this trouble, and we're not going to let them off scot-free!"

"Rather not!"

And the seven juniors, gazing indignantly, sallied out into the quad, and marched across to the New House. They were just going to enter, regardless of the consequences to themselves, when Blake suddenly paused.

"I say," he exclaimed quickly, "Figgins & Co. are round by the gym! Suppose we buzz round there and put them to the torture? We can find Redfern & Co. afterwards."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

And they hastened across the quad with all speed. As Blake & Co. said, Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr were round by the gymnasium. When the School House juniors came up, in fact, their deadly rivals were already in the building.

"We've got them fair and square!" said Manners quickly. "The silly asses ought to have kept out of the quad, where they could call for assistance. We

can go in there now and simply pulverise them!"

And the juniors, excited and indignant, pushed open the doors of the gymnasium and burst in.

A sudden cry arose.

"Look out! School House rotters!" yelled Figgins suddenly.

"School House avengers, you mean!" exclaimed Tom Merry, dashing across the floor of the gym. "We've come to avenge our wrongs, Figg, and we're going to put you through your paces!"

Fatty Wynn raised his voice.

"Rescue!" he roared. "Rescue, New House!"

"Collar him!" panted Blake.

Fatty Wynn was seized before he could cry out again, and the next moment Figgins & Co. were in reclining positions on the floor, with their deadly rivals piled on the top of them.

"Here, I say," exclaimed Figgins, "what's this for, you asses?"

"We're going to rag you, my sons!" said Tom Merry grimly. "You've let us in for no end of trouble, and the only thing we can do is to give you a sound ragging to wipe out the insult!"

"But, you silly asses," gasped Kerr, "you don't mean to say you're going to rag us because we japed you?"

"I do mean to say it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We're wild, and the only thing we can do is to vent our anger on you! You needn't worry, we shan't break any bones!"

"But—but," spluttered Fatty Wynn, "I'm blest if I can see why you should be so wild, you chaps! After all, the laugh wasn't so much against you as it was against Knox."

"Perhaps not," replied Blake grimly: "but you were the perpetrators of the jape, and through it we've got gated!"

"Gated!" repeated Figgins.

"Gated for two weeks!" growled Manners.

Figgins struggled to sit up.

"My hat," he exclaimed, with concern, "that's rotten!"

"It's fearful!" said Digby.

"But why are you gated?" asked Kerr. "The masters don't interfere with our japes, as a rule."

"It's through that cad, Knox!" Tom Merry said; and he proceeded to explain how the circumstances had come about.

Figgins & Co. listened concernedly. Their interest was so genuine that the three New House leaders found themselves released, and they straightened out their ruffled clothing without attempting to be cross with their assailants.

"So Knox collared the parchment, thinking it was genuine?" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"The—the giddy thief—the burglar!" gasped Figgins. "Why, it's unheard of! And fancy him having the utter sauce to go to Mr. Railton!"

"But you've forgotten one thing," put in Blake. "Knox thought that we japed him—that we left the parchment there especially for his benefit. Of course, it doesn't alter the fact that he's a burglar; but it made him wild!"

"Well, I know what I shall do," said Figgins.

"And what's that?"

"Go straight to Mr. Railton," replied

the long-legged chief. "What do you say, chaps?"

"Rather!" agreed Kerr and Wynn in one voice.

"We may get ourselves into trouble," went on Figgins; "but we're not going to stand by and see you chaps gated for nothing! We're the perpetrators of the jape, so we shall have to pay the piper!"

"It's jolly good of you, Figg!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Figgins hastily. "Why, we should be nice sort of chaps if we saw you gated, and didn't do anything! Come on, we'll rout out Redfern & Co., and take them with us!"

And Figgins & Co., now on good terms with their rivals, hurried out of the gym into the quad. The New House juniors were thorough sportsmen, and determined that their rivals should not suffer for a jape which had been all against them.

Knox's caddishness and misrepresentation of facts to Mr. Railton—for the prefect had evidently made the most of Blake's blow—should not end in Tom Merry & Co. being the sufferers.

"Hallo, Figg, what on earth are you doing?" inquired Redfern, from the other side of the quad, where he and his two chums were sunning themselves. "Why are you chumming with these School House bounders?"

"Because there's been a miscarriage of justice," said Figgins grandiloquently.

"A which?" asked Redfern, coming across to the others.

"A miscarriage of justice," repeated Figgins. "The poor chaps are gated for a fortnight, all because of Knox's interference."

And Figgins told Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen what had happened.

"Well, there's only one thing for it," said Lawrence readily. "We must go and explain things to Mr. Railton."

"Of course," agreed Redfern. "When he knows everything, he'll—he'll remit the sentence. That's what they call it, isn't it?"

"Something like that!" grinned Tom Merry. "Well, if you chaps really mean to come—"

"We do mean to come!"

"Right-ho!" said the hero of the Shell. "We'll go now, and get the bizney over before dinner. I don't like you chaps having to own up, because you might be reported to Mr. Ratcliff, and we all know what a bounder he is!"

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins. "We're not going to let you chaps be tomatoes—I mean martyrs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co., together with their School House rivals, went straight to Mr. Railton's study. The House-master was at home, and he gazed at the troop of juniors in surprise. There were thirteen of them, and the room was pretty full.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mr. Railton, "what is the meaning of this, boys? How dare you enter my study in this—"

"Please, sir, you said 'Come in,'" said Tom Merry demurely.

"Yes, but—but— Good gracious, I'd no idea there were so many of you!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What is it you wish to speak to me about, boys? I see many of you belong to the New House."

Figgins stepped forward.

"It's about the gating you've given these chaps, sir. They don't deserve it!" Mr. Railton frowned.

"Figgins," he exclaimed, "how dare you? How dare you dispute my—"

"I'm not, sir," interrupted Figgins quickly. "You see, sir, that jape about the hidden treasure was ours—I mean it was a New House jape, sir."

"A New House—er—jape, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

And Figgins proceeded to explain, with occasional interruptions from Redfern & Co. When the long-legged, New House chief had done, Tom Merry explained that he had accidentally dropped the parchment, and that Knox had accidentally found it.

Mr. Railton nodded, a smile at the corners of his mouth.

"I think I begin to understand," he said. "Well, boys, I will ring for Knox, and see what he has to say."

Three minutes later Knox entered the study.

"I think there has been a little mistake, Knox," said Mr. Railton quietly. "These juniors did not deliberately play a practical joke upon you. The parchment was dropped by accident!"

"It's a lie, sir!" shouted Knox angrily. "It was placed there on purpose for me to find! I know, them, the young scoundrels!"

"Knox," said Mr. Railton sharply, "please be careful what you say!"

"Well, sir, the young beggars set upon me at the ruins," growled Knox.

"They didn't!" said Redfern quickly.

"Knox went for Tom Merry, and knocked him down! Blake, like a sensible chap, dotted him on the boko—I mean—"

"That will do, Redfern," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I think, Knox, that this matter had better come to an end immediately. I do not wish to inquire into it farther. The punishment I gave is remitted, and there is nothing more to be said."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry gladly.

"But—" began Knox furiously.

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed the House-master sternly. "I may say that I am surprised at the part you have taken in this affair, and I do not wish to inquire too closely into the details. Knox, you may go!"

And Knox went, feeling very small.

The juniors trooped out of the study, all of them feeling pleased.

"Old Railton's a brick!" said Figgins. "All's well that ends well. And the New House is cock-house at St. Jim's."

"Tosh!"

"Piffle!" grinned Tom Merry. "We'll get our own back, Figg, don't you worry!"

And the School House juniors vowed to themselves that before long they would wipe out the stain. Really, there was not much stain to wipe out, for the jape had been against Knox more than anybody else.

And there was never any more reference—in the School House, at least—to the time when there had been hidden treasure at St. Jim's.

THE END.

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THE ROOKWOOD HOBBYISTS!

A Grand Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Forestalled.

"WHAT the—how the—why the—" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, leader of the Modern Fourth, as an excited form came tearing wildly into the study.

He jumped up from his desk, and was about to land out at the intruder when he discovered that it was his bosom chum, Tommy Cook, who, with Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle made up the Co.

"What the dickens do you mean by dashing into the place like that when I'm busy?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"I've got—got on—to a wheeze!" gasped Tommy Cook, who had scarcely a breath in his body.

"Out with it, then!" said Tommy Dodd. "Anything up in the end study?"

"Yes!" gasped his chum.

Tommy Dodd fairly started. The end study was the one occupied by Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, the Fistical Four, and the sworn enemies of the Moderns.

"Quick, then—let's have it!"

"I was passing there just now," panted Tommy Cook, "and heard Jimmy Silver propounding a scheme. Of course, I didn't stop to listen, but I heard him mention a hobby club—for the winter evenings, you know! He said something about making us join in!"

"Did he? By Jove, though, it's a ripping idea! Why didn't we think of it first?"

"We can forestall their scheme if we're sharp, because they were still discussing it when someone in the room slammed the door."

"My hat! We'll call a meeting in the Form-room and get the club in full swing before those kids wake up to what's on!"

The juniors rushed from the study down to the Form-room, and Tommy Dodd speedily explained his idea. There were to be no fees, and in order to help the juniors to make up their minds more quickly he offered a free feed to all who put down their names.

This was merely because he was afraid that the Fistical Four would come in and discover what was going on before he had got the thing going properly.

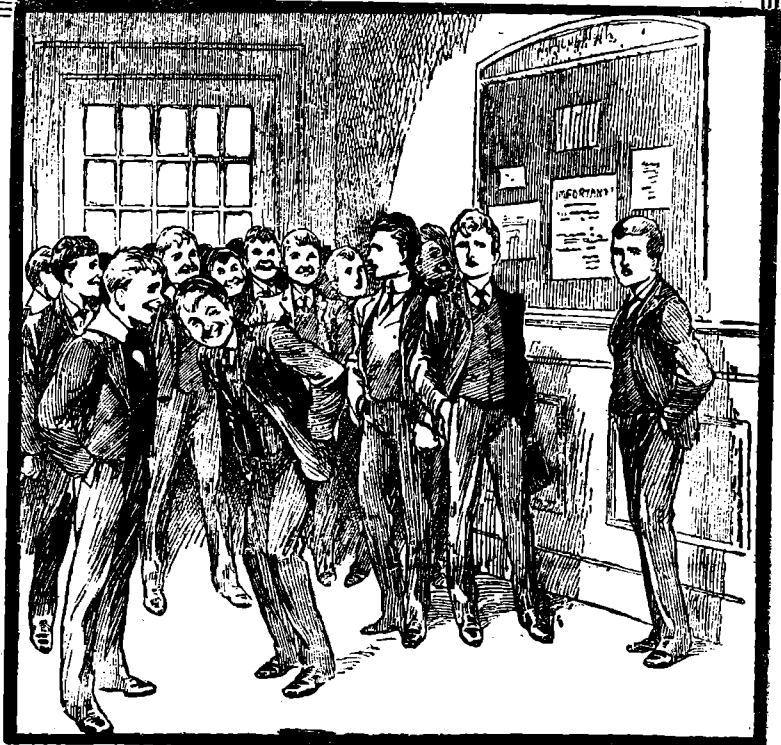
Immediately the free feed was suggested there was a rush of juniors to put down their names. In less than five minutes twenty-five of them had entered their names as members of the Modern Hobby Club, and Tommy Dodd had declared himself president.

Just as he was shutting up his book the four Classical juniors entered the Form-room.

There was an air of great importance about them as Jimmy Silver advanced and pinned a notice upon the wall in a good light.

Then the Fistical Four stood in a group and watched the effect of the announcement upon the Fourth-Formers.

The notice announced a hobby club similar to the one which had been suggested by Tommy Dodd a few minutes previously, except that there was no mention of a free feed, and there were to be subscriptions of one shilling per annum.



"if you'll kindly explain what you're cackling at—" began Lovell.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tommy Dodd, leading off a fresh burst, and the room rang with it.

All the members of the Fistical Four were, of course, to hold official positions.

When the occupants of the Form-room had read the notice, the effect was a surprising one.

The Fistical Four were prepared for surprise, approval, disapproval, anything in reason; but they were not prepared for a gasp of amazement and then a general roar of laughter.

Tommy Dodd & Co. led off the laughter, and the rest of the Fourth followed suit, yelling with merriment.

The Fistical Four looked at one another. They were usually very quick to catch on to anything, but they did not understand this reception of their grand idea at all.

They looked amazed at first, and then uncomfortable, and then annoyed. Their countenances began to assume a warmer hue.

"If you'll kindly explain what you're cackling at—" began Lovell as soon as there was a lull in the laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tommy Dodd, leading off a fresh burst; and the room rang with it.

"I reckon they're off their rockers," said Jimmy Silver. "Right off, I should say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're a set of lunatics!" exclaimed Raby. "I never saw anything like it before in my life."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you silly asses can't explain what you're hee-hawing at—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, with the tears running down his cheeks. "You four innocent kids will by the death of me! What do you mean by sticking your mouldy old ideas up on the wall? That's what I want to know!"

"It's a new, ripping idea!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha! He says it's a new idea!" howled Tommy Cook.

The room rang with laughter again.

"I say, you're late with your new ideas!" grinned Lacy.

"And you're off the track with your subscriptions," remarked Leggett. "Our hobby club is going to be run without subscriptions, Silver."

"Eh?"

"Are you going to stand a feed to members, Silver?" demanded Towle.

"No, certainly not!"

"Oh, come, don't let Dobby put you in the shade like that! I don't mind belonging to two hobby clubs at once," said Towle, "if it means two separate feeds."

"Dodd! Hobby club! What are you driving at?"

"Oh, I say, you do it well, Silver!" said Lacy. "But it's no good pretending that you didn't know."

"Didn't know what?" roared Jimmy Silver, getting exasperated. "I know

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you're a set of silly asses, if that's what you mean!"

"That isn't what I mean. I mean that you know very well that Tommy Dodd & Co. have just started a hobby club, and taken down all our names as members. Then you come along with your mouldy old ideas. Yah!"

"Tommy Dodd & Co.—have—just—done—what?" gasped Jimmy faintly.

"Do you mean to say you didn't know—you hadn't heard something?"

"Of course I didn't—I hadn't—I wouldn't—I wasn't," said Jimmy Silver somewhat incoherently. "Do you mean to say that—that—that—"

"Well, this gets me," said Lacy, shaking his head. "It's the most remarkable coincidence I ever heard of."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd & Co.

The Fistical Four looked at one another helplessly for a moment. The same idea had flashed into four brains at once. Tommy Dodd & Co. had somehow discovered the idea and had forestalled them. They glared wrathfully at the three chums, who were almost hysterical with laughter.

"You—you—you—" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You trio of—of horrid, rotten plagiarists—"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

floor underneath the wrathful Fistical Four.

"Buck up!" gasped Tommy Cook. "Members of the clobby hub—I mean the hobby club—lend a hand, and turn out these hooligans. Lend a hand!"

The members of the hobby club obeyed the command. The Fistical Four were dragged off their foes, and ignominiously hurled forth into the passage.

They jumped up again and rushed back to the attack, too furious to care for the odds, but the odds were too heavy. Forth they were hurled again, and then they gave it up as a hopeless task, and retreated to their study.

Four dishevelled, dirty, exhausted juniors crawled into the end study, and sank down, gasping for breath. It was a crushing defeat for the Fistical Four for once, and Tommy Dodd & Co., their rivals, reigned supreme.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Fistical Four Seek Vengeance.

NEEDLESS to say, the Fistical Four were mercilessly chipped over that hobby club idea.

The Modern Hobby Club was in full swing, and was in going order now, and Tommy Dodd & Co. had all the credit of it.

"We're going to get our own back, and that's settled," said Jimmy Silver. "My

"And what are we going to do when we get there?"

"You are aware, my infants, that there is only one door to the wood-shed, and only one window," said Jimmy Silver, with the air of an oracle. "The window is small, rather too small for any kid to climb out easily. The door opens outwards. A wedge of wood placed under it when it's shut would keep it shut if there were an elephant inside trying to get out."

"You think we can make them prisoners?"

"I know we can. But that's not all." "Go on!" said Lovell, deeply interested.

"The window is where we come on the scene. We are going to take three garden squirts, and a pail of water carefully mixed according to prescription—one part of red ink to three parts of water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And when we open fire," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile of seraphic satisfaction. "I think it's very likely that Tommy Dodd & Co. will wish they hadn't boned our idea, and that their giddy members will wish they hadn't joined the hobby club in such a hurry."

"My hat! What a ripping wheeze!"

"Of course, our intentions are of the best. We approve of hobby clubs, but

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"You've boned our idea!"

"He, he, he!"

"You—you—you rotters—you pinchers—you burglars—you've boned the wheeze!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "We start a hobby club and take down the names of the members, and then Jimmy Silver marches in and tries to do the same thing over again, collars our idea under our very noses, and then says we've boned his wheeze! I like that!"

"It's no good," said Tommy Cook, shaking his head solemnly at the Fistical Four. "You're bowled out—fairly bowled out!"

"What do you mean?" almost shrieked Jimmy Silver. "I—I—say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was our idea!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "I tell you, chaps, we've been half an hour talking it over, and then we came—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a solid fact," exclaimed Raby. "We came here to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole room rang with laughter. Tommy Dodd & Co. were doubled up with merriment. The Fistical Four were growing more and more excited. Jimmy Silver exchanged a glance with his chums, and went for Tommy Dodd & Co. Lovell, Newcome, and Raby backed him up in a twinkling.

The three plagiarists went rolling on the

idea is to bust up the hobby club, and stamp it out. Then we might start one."

Lovell, Newcome, and Raby looked doubtful.

"How are you going to do the trick, Jimmy?"

"First of all," said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy Dodd & Co. are giving a feed to the early members of their giddy hobby club. That was what brought in such a rush of membership, I fancy. The greedy bounders thought that the early bird would catch the worm. To do Tommy Dodd justice, he is keeping his word nobly. I saw the three Modern rotters in the school shop laying in the provisions, and they're bluing ten bob on it, if they're bluing tenpence."

"A giddy treat for those kids," said Lovell, "and cheap at signing your name in a book, I reckon. Then there's no subscription; that's where Tommy Dodd comes in strong, too."

"Well, about that feed. There are twenty-five members, I believe, to the hobby club. Anyway, there are too many for Dodd to be able to make it a study feed. As a matter of fact, I've learned that he's going to give it in the wood-shed."

"He's forgotten to ask us," said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Only members of the club are going," he said, "and we've kept out of their mouldy old club. But we shall be there, all the same."

we like 'em to be run on a sound business footing, none of your free feeds, and no subscription rot," explained Jimmy. "We regard it as our duty to bust up this special hobby club, and start a better one, under better management—er, our own management, in fact."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Raby. "You talk like a dictionary."

"It's a go, then, kids?"

"Rather!"

"Then we may as well prepare the ammunition," said Jimmy Silver. "The feed is coming off some time this afternoon, as it's a half holiday, and we'd better get ready."

And the churas of the Fourth were soon busy.

To borrow four large-sized garden squirts of Mack, the school-porter and gardener, was the work of a few minutes—and sixpence. To scout round in the deserted studies for bottles of ink, and commandeer them, and make a large collection of them in the end study, took longer, but it was accomplished.

"I reckon that's enough," said Jimmy Silver.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The First Meeting.

TOMMY DODD looked round the wood-shed with an eye of pride.

The preparations for this feed were really on a fine scale.

There was a clear space of considerable extent, and in this a large table had been

made by planking across boxes and benches. Benches and faggots made the seats, and if the quarters were somewhat rough-and-ready, the guests were not squeamish, and were not inclined to grumble at trifles.

"Night-ho!" said Tommy Dodd. "Factor for poor Cooky. We don't want any of those Fifth Form rotters swooping down on us, or those kids out of the study, either. Gentlemen, this is where we feed."

"Well, well!" said Tommy Cook. "You gentlemen fell to with a will. This snipping!" said Towle. "I say, Dodd, you know how to give a feed! I like this!"

"Yes, Diddy," said Lacy, with a grin, "it would be a good idea if we had a weekly institution, wouldn't it?"

"That's all right!" said Towle. "You—Hullo, who's that?"

There was a sound at the door. The hobbyists all turned their heads to look at it. Tommy Cook grinned.

"It's all right," he exclaimed, "I've locked it! He can't get in, whoever he is."

The sound at the door ceased. The club members, chucking, resumed the feast. A few minutes later a shadow appeared at the little window.

It was jerked open on its hinges from outside. The Fistical Four looked into the woodshed, each with an amiable smile on his face.

"Hullo!" said Jimmy Silver. "Hullo!" growled Tommy Dodd. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," said the intruder, "and go."

"Don't you dare!" said Tommy Cook. "Can't travel alone."

"Thank you!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm not going just yet. Have you got any more of that?"

"Here it is!" said Tommy Cook. "Squirts to the fore!"

There was a sucking sound outside the door, and the four heads disappearing for a moment. Jimmy Silver's smiling face came into view again, and the nozzle of the large-sized squirt looked into the woodshed.

Tommy Dodd started at his feet. "I say!" yelled Tommy Cook. "Don't you dare—"

"Stop it!" said Tommy Cook. "Don't!"

"Ow!" said Tommy Cook. "Swish! Swosh!"

Jimmy Silver, without heeding the ranting exclamations of the club members, squirted into active play. The nozzle, now brightly coloured with red ink, was held at a swift jet across the shed, and the intruder, who was standing nearly in the middle of the hobby club, was drenched.

"You—you beast!" yelled Tommy Cook. "You—you!"

"You—you!" shouted Tommy Cook. "You—you!"

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The juniors inside the shed were yelling with rage. As fresh-filled squirts looked upon them, they dashed round the shed in search of shelter from the jets.

"Follow me!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Come on, and we'll kill the rotters!"

He dashed to the door of the woodshed, and shoved at it. The door refused to budge.

"It's locked!" yelled Tommy Cook. "I forgot!"

Tommy Dodd unlocked the door, and shoved again. It still refused to move. He pushed, and shoved, and banged. Still it did not budge.

"They've fastened it outside!" gasped Towle. "A shout of laughter rang from the window."

"There's a wedge under the door!" called out Jimmy Silver. "You can't get out till we choose to let you out. You may as well take your medicine quietly."

Swish! A fresh jet of inky water fell among the hobbyists.

They dashed to and fro, seeking shelter and finding none. A fresh rush was made at the window, but it was too small to be easily climbed, and the four squirts played upon the would-be climbers with telling effect.

The faces of the club members had assumed a beautiful crimson, the effect of the red ink in the water, and their collars were streaked with red, their hair matted and sticky.

"Stop it!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Stop it!"

"Stop it!" growled Tommy Dodd. "Stop it!"

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"You—you!" yelled Tommy Cook. "You—you!"

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"You—you!" yelled Tommy Cook. "You—you!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Classics' Victory.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Loud sounds of laughter were proceeding from the end study.

It was the hour of the triumph of the famous Fistical Four. They had triumphed over their rivals of the Fourth Form in the most complete manner, and they had reason to be satisfied.

"Ha, ha, ha!" They laughed themselves almost into hysterics in the end study at the recollection of the adventure of the woodshed.

"We've done 'em!" gurgled Jimmy Silver. "The hobby club is busted first try, before it had time to do any hobbying."

noble president and the hon. sec. the order of the boot," chuckled and before they had time to presiding or hon.-seeking," Jackson we've scored this time, well. They can't stand against us for the head of the Fourth. "Are we are!"

"You remember Tommy Dodd's proposition after we had finished? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tommy Cook's? Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tommy Dodd's? Ho, ho, ho!"

"It is all right," said Silver, "but I don't like to take them down. I don't like to see their hobby club, and they would be a hot and hot."

"I think we'll start a hobby club now," said Jimmy Silver. "Daddy's club is up, but we want one of our own. We'll carry out our original idea, and make Tommy Dodd & Co. join it."

"What?" asked Raby.

"I made 'em!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "There are lots of ways of persuading a fellow besides pulling his ears. I think that's what we want now, to prove to all our fellows that we're the bosses of the Fourth Form—a hobby club of our own, and Tommy Dodd & Co. to join it as members."

"I'll be contented," said Lovell thoughtfully.

"I'll be contented at the present moment," said Jimmy Silver, "they're preparing for a party on Thursday. Did you see young Dodd's? He's a good fellow, but I don't like to see him. I don't like to see him. I don't like to see him."

"Well, I don't like to see him," said Lovell, and the other fellows in the room nodded.

The Second-Former was passing the doorway on his return. He looked in and stopped. In a moment Jimmy Silver had him by the collar.

"No; don't be scared," said the leader of the Fistic Four reassuringly. "I only want to ask you a question, kid. Was that a tin of pepper you were taking up the corridor just now?"

"Yes," grinned Snooks.

"You were taking it to Tommy Dodd?"

"Ye-es," said Snooks. "Tommy Dodd gave me twopence to bone it out of the kitchen. He wanted it for something, and he said he would be spotted if he went down."

"I see. Nice of him to bone other people's pepper!"

"Oh, he'll pay for it!" said the Second-Former.

"That's all right. Seat!"

The youngster scuttled away. Jimmy Silver turned to his chums with a broad grin.

"You see the wheeze?" he said. "The moment I saw that kid pass, I guessed he was going to Tommy Dodd; and I knew what the game was. Come along!"

"But what?"

"We're going to hoist the engineer on his own giddy petard! Follow me!"

"Right-ho!"

And Lovell, Newcome, and Raby

hurried after their leader, who led the way with his long strides to Tommy Dodd & Co.'s study.

The door had been left open by the youths—Snooks, and the chums, advancing on tiptoe, peered into the study. Tommy Dodd & Co. were in full view. They had cleaned themselves up after the adventure of the woodshed, and now they were looking decidedly gleeful.

The large tin of pepper was open on the table. Tommy Dodd was scooping it out into a thin paper bag. Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were sniffing.

"Of all the wheezes we've ever worked off on those rotters," said Tommy Dodd, "this is about the best. I fancy it will make them sorry they squirted us in the shed, kids!"

"I fancy so," said Tommy Cook.

"You see, as we're three, and they're four, it's not much good trying to lick them," said Tommy Dodd; "and we can't get anybody to back us up just now. They're all wild at the way the feed turned out."

"They are, old chap. They're more inclined to go for us than to back us up."

"But we shall get our own back with this wheeze," Tommy Dodd remarked, with a grin. "It will beat that squirting business hollow. We've only got to open the door of the study and chuck the bag of pepper into the middle of them. It will burst, and they will have the highest old time they've had in all their innocent little lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I have time," said Tommy Dodd, "I'll be back in a moment."

Four of the door, the four chums rushed in, and in a second the unprepared three were seized, and they went sprawling on the floor with the victorious Fistic Four on top of them.

"Got 'em!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd & Co. struggled furiously. But they were at a disadvantage, and they had no chance against the Fistic Four. Jimmy Silver, Newcome, and Raby held them pinned down, while Lovell seized the bag of pepper. A gush of the fiery condiment escaped the bag and scattered itself over the upturned faces of the three prisoners.

"Ow!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Ow! You—ooooooooo-atchoo-choooo!"

"Atchooooo!" sneezed Cook. "At-at-atchooooooooo!"

They sneezed together, they sneezed alternately. They sneezed solo, and in a trio. They gasped and sneezed till they were crimson in the face, and the water ran in streams from their eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "How do you like it, Daddy? This is the little treat you prepared for us, isn't it?"

"You—you b-b-beats—atchoo—beasts—atchoo-oo-oo-oooo!"

"Rotters!" gasped Tommy Cook.

"Choo-oo-ooooo—atchoo!"

"Ha, ha! What's sauce—or, rather,

pepper—for the goose, is pepper for the gander!" said Jimmy Silver. "Nice little treat you had ready for us!"

"Give 'em some more!" exclaimed Raby.

"Smother 'em!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

The Modern chums struggled desperately. But it was in vain. They were pinned down, and they could not escape. Lovell balanced the bag of pepper thoughtfully over their upturned faces.

"You were going to give me the lot," he remarked. "I suppose we had better let you have it. There's nothing mean about us!"

"Don't!"

"Oh, don't!"

"We give in!"

"You'll choke us!"

"You'll smother us!"

"Don't—Oh, don't!"

"Make it pax!"

"Pax! Pax!"

"Ahem!" said Lovell. "I don't know about making a pax. You remember borrowed an idea and spoiled it. Let 'em off if they come to our rescue," said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, if they don't smother them!"

"Right-ho! Daddy, we are going to start a hobby club in the Fourth Form—not a rotten half-baked hobby club like yours, but a really good and sensible hobby club, run on first-class business principles."

"Gr-r-r!"

"Atchooo-oo-ooooo!"

"We intend to get the whole of the Fourth Form. It's a grand idea, and we want you to join in."

"Are you going to join the hobby club?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Good! And, it's honour bright!"

"Honour bright!"

"Then we'll make it pax," said Lovell, graciously, putting down the bag of pepper. "I'll rise to the occasion, kids!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. were very sore-footed. They were blind with pepper, and they sneezed and sneezed as they bolted from the study to the school lavatory to plunge their faces into cool water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fistic Four. "Once more we beat 'em. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the four marched out in a grand, and cake-walked into the Fourth Form room in high glee.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were very sore, especially about the nose. But they were fellows of their word. The hobby club was started, and they joined in under the presidency of James Silver. Equally and it flourished. And, as the members of Rookwood were at bottom very friendly fellows, and never bore malice, they pulled together very well, and the Rookwood Hobby Club was quite a success.

THE END.

Another Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Friday's issue of the **PENNY POPULAR**, entitled

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