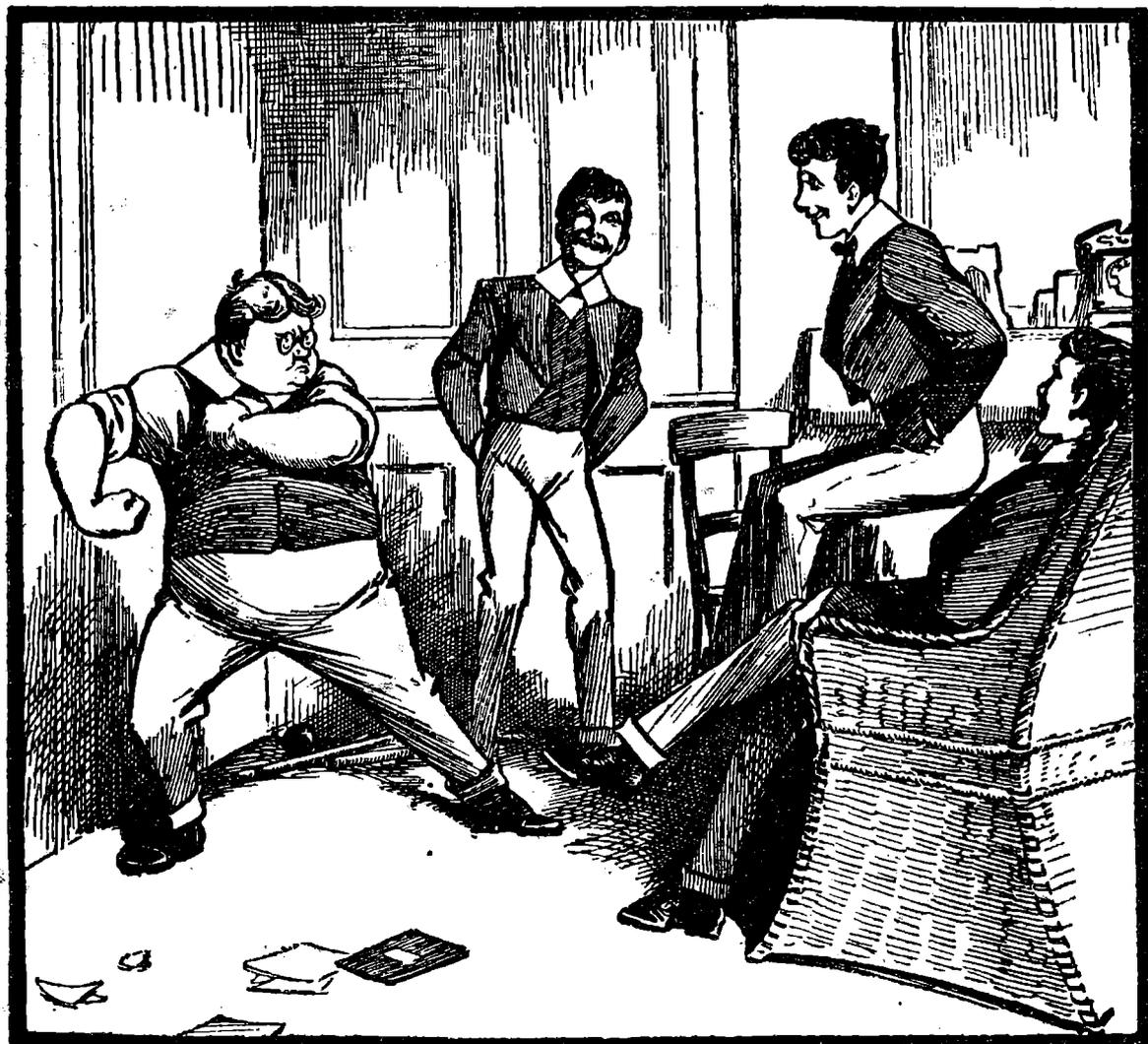


ROOKWOOD, GREYFRIARS, ST. JIM'S!

The
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Popular**

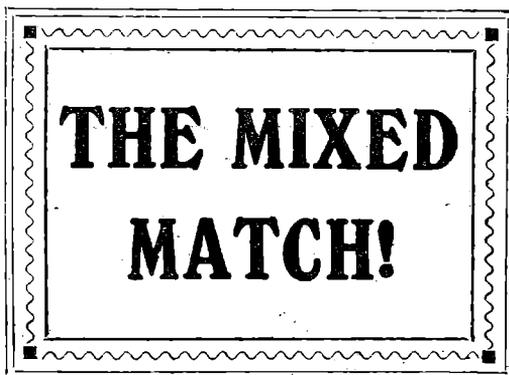
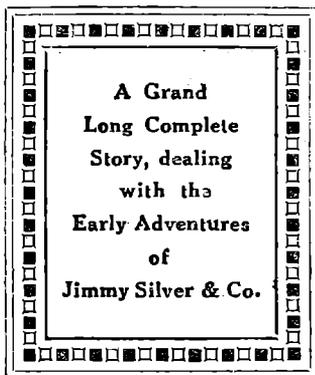
No.
257.

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



BILLY BUNTER IN WARLIKE MOOD!

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



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Accepting a Challenge.

JIMMY SILVER, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, known as the Fistical Four at Rookwood School, had assembled in the end study to reply to a letter which contained a challenge of an unusual order.

It had come about in this way. A few days previously Raby had met in the train a friend of his of the name of Sullivan.

In the course of the conversation which ensued Raby had dilated to some considerable extent upon the football prowess of the Rookwood juniors.

The result was the following letter from Sullivan, who was captain of the Muggleton Wanderers:

"Dear Raby,—You may remember the piffle you were talking in the train the other day about Rookwood juniors being able to wipe any other team of the same age off the face of the earth. We're going to give you a chance.

"When I got home to Muggleton, I asked the fellows about you, and they all said they had never heard of Rookwood, and didn't believe there was such a place. But they agreed to give you a lesson, if you did exist, and we're setting aside Wednesday afternoon for you, and we'll be glad to hear by return if you want to make your words good. We shall have the finest pleasure in the world in running you off your legs and sending you home on an ambulance!—Kindest regards,

"PATRICK SULLIVAN."

Needless to say, the Fistical Four were not a little perturbed by this epistle, especially the sentence which stated that the Muggleton Wanderers had never heard of Rookwood.

They immediately decided to accept the challenge, and had secured the support of Tommy Dodd & Co., the Modern chums of the Fourth, in order to make success a certainty.

Jimmy Silver had remarked that a letter like Patrick Sullivan's couldn't be replied to offhand; it needed a little thought.

"A curt, formal note would look as if we'd got our backs up," Jimmy Silver remarked. "At the same time—"

"Let's think it out," said Lovell, with a wrinkle in his brows. "Suppose you begin: 'Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand—'"

"Well, that's good. 'Bosh' is strong, but the 'Dear Sullivan' shows we mean to be polite," agreed Jimmy Silver. "I think that will do. 'Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand—' Next?"

"We shall be happy to accept your challenge for Wednesday afternoon. We had a match on, but are putting it off

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 257.

for the special purpose of knocking some of the conceit out of you—"

"That's coming to the point!" said Raby.

"As for sending us home on an ambulance, we'll see that you want all your ambulances for home consumption—"

"That won't do, Lovell."

"Why not? Consumption's a good word."

"Yes; but that means eating, doesn't it? They don't eat ambulances!"

Lovell looked thoughtful.

"It might be misunderstood," he admitted. "We want the letter to be crushing, with nothing at all funny in it for them to giggle at."

"That's so."

"Well, then, 'we'll see that you want your ambulances for yourselves. We hope that you will be able to last out the game, so that we can have a good chance of wiping you off the earth.'"

"Off the earth. Good! Next?"

"We must be careful not to make the letter at all bombastic," said Lovell thoughtfully. "Nothing's more rotten than a fellow bragging about what he can do at footer. Let's see. Suppose you say next: 'We hope that after the game is over your friends will be on the spot to collect up what is left of you—'"

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Don't forget that we've never heard of Muggleton," said Raby.

"But you have, ass!"

"Well, I'm not writing the letter, am I? Besides, if they've never heard of Rookwood, it would be beneath our dignity to have heard of Muggleton."

"Good! I'll put that in. I've never heard of the place, anyway. Anything else?"

"That's all, I think. Put in 'kindest regards.'"

"Good! That will do, I think."

Tommy Dodd & Co. looked into the study, and grinned good-humouredly at the Fistical Four.

"Got that letter written?"

"We've just finished it," replied Lovell.

"I'll read it out to you," said Jimmy Silver. "We've tried to keep our end up, you know, without saying anything that might be construed into boastfulness."

"Go ahead!"

"Dear Sullivan,—Your bosh to hand. We shall be happy to accept your challenge for Wednesday afternoon. We had a match on, but are putting it off for the special purpose of knocking some of the conceit out of you. As for sending us home on an ambulance, we'll see that you need all your ambulances for yourselves. We hope you will be able to last out the game, so that we can have a good chance of wiping you off the earth. We hope that after the game is over, your friends will be on the spot to collect up what is left of you. We have never

heard of Muggleton.—Kindest regards, etc."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd. "That will hit the mark, I think. What I like about it is the way you avoid anything like boasting."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite so!"

"We've got to keep our end up, you know."

"Oh, of course! That letter will do.

They haven't fixed the time in theirs, so you had better tell them we shall be over at three. Make it a P.S."

"Good!"

Jimmy Silver added the postscript, and the letter was sealed up. Lovell cut across to the school letter-box to post it. It would get to Muggleton on the following morning, in plenty of time to let the Wanderers know that the Rookwood fellows were coming.

"Now, about the team," said Tommy Dodd. "We'd better put our heads together over that. I've got a list here of about sixteen for you chaps to look over."

"Good! Hand it over!"

Lovell returned to the study, and the seven juniors conned over the list of the junior footballers. Almost every member of the Fourth Form at Rookwood belonged to the Fourth Form Football Club.

It was always possible for the Fistical Four and the Modern chums to get up a twenty-two for a match among themselves. And so they had a good selection for making up a combined Form eleven.

Knowing nothing whatever of what the Muggleton fellows were like, or what Form they might be in, the Rookwood leaders were naturally anxious to put the best possible junior team in the field.

They went over a long list of names, selecting and rejecting. They wanted four fellows beside themselves, and slowly they made up the four from the list.

"We'll put Towle in goal," said Jimmy Silver. "He's been improving very much lately, since he's given more attention to footer. Lacy and Hooker for the backs; Jones minor, Dodd, and Doyle, halves; Silver, Lacy, Lovell, Newcome, and Cook, forwards. How does that strike you?"

"I reckon that's about the best we can fix up."

"Quite so!"

And so it was settled.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Beaumont is Amused.

THE next morning both the Fistical Four and the Modern chums were down early, and they brought down with them Towle, Jones minor, Lacy, and Hooker, the other selected members of the junior eleven. It was a fine, fresh morning, and Jimmy Silver, who was junior football captain, meant to give his team some hard practice before breakfast.

The footballers were in good condition, but when they were going to face an unknown team, Jimmy Silver naturally wished to put them through their paces at least once first.

On the football-ground the mutual chipping of the Fistical Four and the Modern chums ceased from troubling, and they threw themselves into the play with their whole hearts.

The result of the practice satisfied them. They were fit to face any team of their own age and weight, or even a little bit over, and they were quite prepared for the tussle with the Muggleton Wanderers.

"I think we shall do!" Jimmy Silver remarked, as they walked back to the House, glowing with the splendid exercise. "Muggleton Muscatchers will have to be in very good trim to walk over us, anyway!"

The junior footballers were in high spirits. They met Beaumont, the prefect, in the hall as they went in. Beaumont was the most unpopular fellow in the Sixth, and on very ill-terms with the heroes of the Fourth. He looked at them as they came in, apparently taking exception to their high spirits.

"Hallo, you noisy rats!" he said, in his amiable way. "What mischief have you been up to now to make you so jolly?"

"It's all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "We're going to play Muggleton Wanderers this afternoon, and we're going to lick them!"

Beaumont stared at them. "You're going to play Muggleton Wanderers?"

"That's so!" said Jimmy Silver. "At football?"

"Yes. Why not?" Beaumont's face relaxed into a grin. The juniors looked at him in surprise. They could see nothing in the matter to excite the merriment of the prefect.

"Nothing surprising in that, is there?" asked Lovell. "By the way, you know Muggleton, don't you, Beaumont? I've heard you speak about it, now I remember!"

"Yes," said Beaumont. "I've got a cousin there—in the Muggleton senior team."

"We're playing the juniors, of course! Do you know anything of their form?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I can see anything to laugh at in that, Beaumont!" said Tommy Dodd. "I asked you if you knew anything of their form?"

"Well, I do!" said Beaumont, still laughing. "They're hot stuff—very hot!"

"Perhaps you think they'll lick us!" said Lovell, turning red. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't play them, Beaumont!"

The Sixth-Former roared. "Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps you will when you get on the ground!"

Jimmy Silver looked at the prefect keenly. He could see that Beaumont's mirth was not assumed. It was genuine enough; the prefect was almost weeping with merriment. But for the life of him Jimmy Silver, cute as he was, could not see where the laugh came in.

"I don't see it!" said Lovell. "Why shouldn't we meet them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Do you think they're above our weight?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Well, we'll show you, anyway!" said Lovell; and he marched on into the dining-room.

Beaumont held to the wall and roared again. Bulkeley came along, and stared in surprise at Beaumont and then at the juniors.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" he asked. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy Silver. "Beaumont's got a pain somewhere, I think, and he's trying to laugh it off!"

"Oh, it's nothing!" gasped Beaumont. "Only those young rotters are going to play Muggleton Wanderers this afternoon!"

"Well, why shouldn't they?" demanded Bulkeley.

"Ha, ha, ha! No reason at all, if they want to! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Beaumont almost staggered away, with tears of laughter in his eyes. Bulkeley stared after him, and then went into the dining-room. The junior footballers looked at one another rather uncomfortably.

"What the dickens does it mean?" muttered Tommy Dodd. "I don't see why Beaumont should cackle like that at the idea of us playing Muggleton!"

"Blessed if I do, either!" "I reckon he thinks they're above our

Muggleton was a considerable distance from Rookwood, and the admirers of the junior team were not inclined to spend the railway-fare to see the match, apart from the other attractions of the afternoon—a Sixth Form match being in progress on the home ground, and attracting general attraction. A crowd of juniors gave the team a cheer at starting, and they set out.

A swift train bore them on their way, and after changing twice—Jimmy Silver having carefully looked out the route in a railway-guide—they entered the local train for Muggleton.

"Here we are at last!" exclaimed Lovell, as the slow train stopped in a sleepy little station. "This is Muggleton!"

"Muggleton" was visible on the station wall, and the juniors poured out of the train and took their bags. They left the station, and found a somewhat ancient-looking brake standing outside.



Sullivan, who was playing three-quarter, captured the ball, and with the leather under his arm, sped up the field. There was a wild yell from Rookwood. "Hands!"

weight, and we've bitten off more than we can chew! We'll show him!" said Jimmy Silver, with a gleam in his eyes. "Anyway, Beaumont's cackling won't make any difference to us. We're going to play Muggleton, and either lick them or get licked!"

And the juniors went in to breakfast. But some of them could not help remembering that curious outburst of merriment on Beaumont's part, and wondering what it meant, and they looked forward with curiosity—not without a tinge of anxiety—to their arrival on the Muggleton ground.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Surprise for Rookwood.

WEDNESDAY was a half-holiday at Rookwood. Immediately after the midday dinner the junior footballers prepared for the journey to Muggleton. Most of the other fellows were busy at football practice, and the eleven went on their journey alone.

A lad of about fifteen was sitting in it, with his feet over the side.

He jumped down as the Rookwood fellows came in sight. He was a pleasant-looking lad, but he did not look like a schoolboy. Lovell remembered that the Wanderers were a town team, and he guessed who the youth was.

The stranger came towards the Rookwood team, and lifted his cap slightly.

"From Rookwood?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver.

"Good! I've brought the brake to take you to the ground. Sullivan sent me, you know. I'm Harris—Jack Harris—very much at your service!"

"I'm Silver. Thanks awfully for the brake! Is it far?"

"About a quarter of an hour's walk, or twenty minutes in the brake!" said Harris sarcastically. "But it will save your legs. You'll want 'em this afternoon. Hallo, there, Johnny! Wake up! Your passengers have come!"

"Werry good, sir!" said the driver, clambering up to his seat.

Harris looked the Rookwood fellows over with a quick eye.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"The others?" said Jimmy Silver.

"What others?"

"The other fellows?"

"Oh, nobody's come with us!"

"But—but—" Harris looked puzzled.

"I mean haven't you any more players?"

"Oh, no! We haven't brought any reserves, if that's what you mean!"

"But—" Harris broke off. "Well, jump in! There's room for the lot of you with squeezing. If there had been any more you'd have had to sit on one another's knees. I expected—but never mind; you can settle that with Sullivan. I've got my bike here. Drive on, Johnny!"

"Yes, zur!"

Harris jumped on his machine and shot ahead. The brake followed. The Rookwood footballers gave one another puzzled looks.

"Anybody know what he was driving at?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I believe he's grinning," said Tommy Dodd, looking after the cyclist. "What the dickens does it all mean? What was Beaumont laughing at, too?"

"Oh, hang Beaumont!"

"With pleasure! But I'm beginning to feel a bit uneasy about this match. What

large crowd already gathered round the ropes.

It was a fine, clear afternoon, and it had evidently tempted out a large number of the Muggleton folk. Doubtless the locals took a great interest in the doings of their junior team. There was a shout in the field as the brake turned in at the gate and drew up.

Jimmy Silver stared in blank amazement at the goal-posts. A glimmering of the truth dawned upon him.

"There's Sullivan!" exclaimed Raby.

A number of fellows were already punting a ball—an oval-shaped ball—about. They stopped, and looked towards the brake. A big, handsome fellow of about sixteen came quickly towards the Rookwood fellows as they alighted.

"Glad to see you!" he exclaimed heartily. "But—what—why—faith, where are the rest of you?"

"That's the lot!" yelled Harris.

"How many did you expect?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "I suppose eleven is the right number for a footer match, isn't it? Unless I don't know anything about footer!"

Sullivan stared blankly at the Rookwood crowd.

"Holy Moses!" he yelled. "And do you mean to say that ye didn't know we were a Rugby team?"

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Lovell, shaking his fist at Raby.

"I could have told you," said Tommy Dodd, but—

"Well, you didn't, anyway."

"I mean I could have told you, you fellows were bound to come a mucker somehow."

"Oh, ring off, Duddy! Don't you start! I say, Sullivan, it's rotten, but I don't see what's to be done. We don't play Rugger. Some of us know the ropes, but some haven't played the game in their lives. And there's only eleven of us."

"Sure, we could get you some of our reserves, and make up a fifteen."

"And then wipe us up," said Lovell. "No, thanks! I'll tell you what—drop four of your players, and then make it a Soccer match."

Sullivan grinned, and shook his head. "Bedad, but it can't be done! You see, most of my fellows never played Soccer, and you'd win hands down."

"Well, it seems rotten to come all this way for nothing!"

"I guess so."

"Play up!" came a yell from the spectators, who were waiting impatiently for the kick-off.

"Why don't you start?"

Sullivan looked uneasy.

"Faith, and I forgot the crowd!" he

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did that chap mean by saying we could settle it with Sullivan? Settle what with Sullivan?"

"He seems to be keeping something back."

"Well, he's grinning at something or other."

"I fancy there's something wrong somewhere, somehow," said Tommy Dodd, with a shake of the head. "First Beaumont, who knows Muggleton, went off into a fit at the idea of us playing the Wanderers, then this chap grins like a hyena when we arrive! There's something fishy about it somewhere. I suppose, as a matter of fact, you fellows have made a muck of it."

"I reckon—"

"It was Raby who fixed it up, and you know what he is."

"But I—"

"Well, we shall soon see," remarked Lovell.

The brake drove on after the cyclist. There was no doubt that Harris was grinning, for they caught full sight of his face at a corner of the road. He was wearing, as Tommy Dodd expressed it, a grin of the largest size.

The brake came in sight of the football-ground—a pleasant-looking field, with a

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Curious Compromise.

"RUGBY!"

"Rugger!"

"A Rugger team!"

"Great snakes!"

"My only hat!"

These, and various other exclamations, burst from the amazed Rookwooders. Then, with one accord, they turned upon Raby. They grasped him, and they jammed him, breathless, against the brake.

"You howling lunatic!" roared Jimmy Silver. "You lunatic! Why didn't you tell us Muggleton was a Rugger team?"

"Well, I—"

"You dangerous lunatic!" shrieked Lovell. "Fancy bringing us all this way to play a Rugger team! So that is what Beaumont was laughing at!"

"But I—"

"Scrag him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" yelled Raby. "I didn't know! Sullivan never told me! How was I to guess it was a Rugger team?"

Sullivan burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! I never thought of mentioning that. He was bragging about wiping us up, and, sure, I never thought he was talking about Soccer!"

"Well, I didn't know you were talking about Rugger!"

exclaimed. "You see, they've come out to see the match. A lot of them have had to get off from business on purpose, and they'll be wild at having to miss the sight. I don't know what's to be done."

"Suppose you adopt my suggestion, and make it a Soccer match?"

"Suppose you adopt mine, and make it a Rugger?"

"Can't be did!"

"I've got a ripping idea!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "Sullivan can cut down his team to eleven, and we'll play the match on mixed rules!"

"Eh?"

"We'll play Soccer, and they can play Rugger, and—"

"You utter ass!"

"Faith, and it's not such a bad idea!" exclaimed Sullivan eagerly. "It's the only way out of the difficulty, anyway, without missing the match. And the people yonder have a right to be considered. I'll explain to them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if they take it as a joke, sure it will be an entertainment, anyway! Suppose I put it to them, as the best thing we can do not to disappoint them? I'll explain that it was a misunderstanding."

"Well, of all the ideas—"

"I guess we can manage it," said Jimmy Silver, grinning. "It will be fun, anyway—and a record match."

We'll play by Soccer rules, and you fellows play by Rugger rules. Of course, you'll play an equal number of men."

"Oh, of course; equal numbers, and different rules!"

And so it was settled. Sullivan made a speech to the impatient spectators, which was received with stares of blank amazement, and then with yells of laughter.

And the Rookwood fellows went into their dressing-room to prepare for the most peculiar match they had ever played in.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Rather Mixed Match.

THERE was a cheer from the crowd as the Rookwood footballers came out, in the pink-and-white shirts of Rookwood School. Most of the spectators were laughing, which was not to be wondered at. A football match played with Association rules on one side, and Rugby rules on the other, was likely to be a curious one.

The kick-off fell to the visitors. Lovell kicked-off the ball, and the game started.

"Play up, Rookwood!"

Rookwood played up. The forwards were on the ball in no time, and rushing it through the Muggletonians. But Sullivan, who was playing three-quarter, captured it, and, with the leather under his arm, sped up the field.

"Hands!"

"It's all right!" gasped Lovell. "It's Rugger—on their side!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Jimmy Silver.

"After him!"

The Rookwood player sped after Sullivan. The Wanderers' captain was very near to getting a try. But Towle was in goal—according to Soccer rules—and he was ready. Sullivan was accustomed to dodging a full-back, but Towle was standing under the posts.

The Wanderers swerved off to touch the ball down behind the goal-line, but Towle dashed forward, and biffed against him, and he rolled over.

Harris picked up the ball ere it touched the ground, and rushed on, and, amid a roar of cheering from the crowd, scored a try.

"Try! Try!"

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "It seems

to me that Rugger gets all the advantage in a game of this sort."

Harris brought the ball out to take his kick. As he had to get it over the bar, the goalkeeper hadn't much chance of interfering with him. But the try had been taken well towards the touch-line, and the angle was too great. The ball bounced back among the players.

Rookwood's chance came then. The forwards dashed away with the ball at their feet, passing in beautiful style, and brought it right through the opposing side.

The full-back raced up to defend his goal, but was charged over by Doyle, and Lovell dribbled the ball straight on, and kicked it between the posts. As he was playing Soccer, he put it under the bar.

"Goal!" shouted the crowd, in great delight. "Hurrah!"

The sides had played about equally, so far. The struggle continued, but most of the players were laughing too much to play hard. There was no doubt that the Rugby players, with the privilege of handling the ball, had the advantage.

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Still, in passing, the Soccer party considered they scored. Jimmy Silver thought he had the better team of the two, apart from the game. But the Muggletonians were hot stuff, as Beaumont had warned the Rookwood juniors.

The score remained at a try for Muggleton, and a goal for Rookwood, when the interval came. After a brief rest, the players turned out again with renewed ardour. They were getting more used to the curious phases of the mixed game now, and the second half was more serious and more like football than the first.

Sullivan dropped a goal from mid-field, and shortly afterwards one of the Wanderers scored a try, which, however, failed to materialise.

Then Jimmy Silver put in a goal for Rookwood, and it was followed by one

from Tommy Dodd, after a brilliant run up the field.

As the game wore on, the footballers warmed to their work, and the interest of the crowd grew very keen. Loud cheers greeted every bit of good work on either side.

The second half had been slogging, and both sides looked red and breathless, and in need of a rest. Both, however, played up splendidly to the finish.

With Towle under the bar, tries on either side of goal were not difficult for the Wanderers, and they mounted up at an alarming rate. Dropped goals, too, were not rare.

At the same time, the Rookwood forwards frequently went right through the defence, passing the ball splendidly, and put it into the home goal.

The score mounted up on either side.

"Seven tries, three goals, and four dropped goals!" gasped Sullivan, when the shriek of the whistle at last announced the close of that very mixed match. "Holy mother of Moses, that's fifty-two points!"

"Eight goals!" howled Tommy Doyle.

"My hat! We've won, then. I guess!"

"I say, fifty-two points——"

"Eight goals!"

"Who's won this blessed match?" demanded Sullivan. "If you go by points, we've won it!"

"Ha, ha! If you go by goals, we've won it!"

"I guess we've both won!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Muggleton's won according to Rugby rules, and we've won according to Association rules!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then if we've both won, there's nothing up against either side!" grinned Sullivan. "It's a case of honours divided."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The result was more entertaining than the game had been. But if both sides had won, both had reason to be satisfied; and satisfied they were.

The Rookwood footballers laughed most of the way home; and when they related their adventures at Rookwood, all Rookwood laughed, too. But it had been fun, anyway; and the chums of the Fourth Form often enjoyed a hearty laugh over the remembrance of that mixed match.

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night.

TOM MERRY moved restlessly in his sleep, and awoke. It was very dark in the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's. It was long past midnight, and the house was very still. Tom Merry lay half awake in bed, blinking at the dim, high windows, and wondering what had awakened him. There was a sound of steady breathing from the other beds. Nothing was moving in the dormitory; nothing stirring in the House.

Suddenly Tom Merry sniffed, and sat up in bed.

He sniffed again suspiciously. Then he knew what had awakened him. There was a smell of smoke in the dormitory—a smell of burning!

"My hat! What's that? Something's on fire!"

He groped in the pockets of his clothes beside the bed, and found a matchbox. The match scratched, and flared out. Tom Merry held it up, and looked towards the dormitory door. There was a dim haze in the dormitory. Under the door a curl of white smoke was crawling. The match went out.

Tom Merry leaped out of bed, his face pale with excitement. There was a fire somewhere—fire in the old School House of St. Jim's! Tom Merry's voice rang through the sleeping dormitory.

"Wake up, you fellows! Manners! Lowther! Kangaroo! Wake up!"

He ran to the switch, and turned on the electric light. The dormitory was flooded with illumination in an instant. Fellows sat up in the long row of beds, blinking in the sudden light, and sniffing.

"Wharrer marrer?" murmured Manners sleepily.

"Lemme alone!" mumbled Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his two chums in turn.

"Get up! Fire!"

"What!"

"Fire!"

Manners and Lowther did not need any more than that; they were wide enough awake now. They tumbled out of bed in the twinkling of an eye, and grasped their clothes. Kangaroo jumped up, and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and Skimpole turned out, and then the other fellows, one by one, as they realised what was the matter.

Tom Merry stayed only for his trousers and boots, and then rushed to the door and threw it open.

A thicker roll of smoke came in as he did so, and he started back, coughing.

"Fire!" yelled Croke of the Shell.

"Oh, we shall be burnt to death! Ow!"

"Shurrup!" growled Lowther.

"Fire! Help! Fire!"

Tom Merry ran out of the dormitory. On the stairs the smell of smoke was

thicker. He dashed down the stairs, and down the study passage. But on the lower staircase there was no smoke. It was evident that the fire had not originated below stairs. Tom Merry turned back, and ran to Kildare's door. He thumped at the door and threw it open.

"Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's started up in bed.

"Hallo! What the—"

"Something's on fire!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!"

Kildare was out of bed in a moment. Tom Merry did not wait. He dashed away to the door of Mr. Railton's room, and hammered on it, calling to the Housemaster. Mr. Railton's voice replied in a moment:

"Coming!"

Mr. Railton came whisking out of the room in his pyjamas.

The smoke was rolling along the passage now; the smell of burning was stronger, and Tom Merry thought he could hear a crackling of flames. But he could see no flame as yet. The fire was not far advanced, wherever it was.

"Where is it, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I don't know, sir. The place is on fire somewhere. It's not downstairs, though. In one of the studies, I think."

"Ring the alarm-bell, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry dashed off to the alarm-bell. He grasped the rope, and tugged, and the clang of the bell ran through the silent night. There were loud voices on all sides, shouts of inquiry and alarm. Fellows were turning out on all sides now. Across the quadrangle, lights flashed in the windows of the New House. The fellows over there were startled out of slumber by the clanging of the bell.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The cries of alarm rang through the House.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Keep your heads!" rang out Mr. Railton's steady voice. "There is no danger. The prefects will see that all the juniors get out into the quad at once."

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

Fellows were streaming downstairs now, in nightshirts and pyjamas, or half-dressed, or carrying their clothes on their arms.

The great door of the quadrangle was thrown open, and the night air rushed into the house, blowing the clouds of smoke along the passages.

Out into the quadrangle the juniors swarmed, and the seniors, too, but all of them did not go. Tom Merry was still ringing the alarm-bell.

Clang, clang, clang!

He left the bell at last. All St. Jim's

was wide enough awake now. Manners and Lowther joined him on the stairs. The prefects were filling the fire-buckets that were kept hanging up at the end of each passage. The smoke was thickest in the Shell passage, and the smell of burning was strongest there.

"It's one of the Shell studies," said Tom Merry. "Some ass left his fire burning, most likely. Come on!"

"All juniors into the quad!" shouted Kildare.

The Terrible Three of the Shell appeared deaf. They ran into the Shell passage, and four other juniors joined them there—Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth. The smoke was thick in the passage, and they gasped for breath.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "This is fearful! But buck up, deah boys. I'm with you, you know. Don't be scared!"

Tom Merry threw open the study doors in turn as he passed them.

The door of Gore's study, next to Tom Merry's own, was heated to the touch. As Tom Merry threw it open a thick volume of smoke rolled out, and there was a glimmer of flame, and the juniors reeled back, almost suffocated.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Grooh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry dashed down the passage again.

"Here it is!" he shouted. "It's in Gore's study. Bring the water here!"

"Right!"

A dozen seniors with fire-buckets ran along the passage.

Tom Merry & Co. clutched up buckets and any other vessel they could find, and hurriedly filled them at the tap at the end of the passage.

Water was hurled into Gore's study by the bucketful.

The study was a mass of flame and smoke, and little tongues of flame licked out into the passage, now that the door was open. If the fire had been given more time it would probably have obtained too firm a hold to be quenched. But fortunately the alarm had been given before it was too late.

"Water! Water here!"

All the masters were on the scene now; even the new Head, half-dressed, had arrived. Seniors from the New House joined those of the School House in carrying water. There was a dearth of fire buckets, but jugs and basins and even silk hats served the turn. Water was swamped into the study in floods.

Tom Merry & Co. worked with the seniors, and no one said them nay. The rest of the juniors were out in the quadrangle. A huge crowd was gathering there, excitedly calling and talking. The window of Gore's study was the object

of all eyes; the heat had cracked the panes now, and smoke was pouring out into the night in a dense volume.

"Bai Jove, we're gettin' it undah!" D'Arcy exclaimed, as he hurled a pail of water into the study, and caught Monty Lowther a crack with the empty pail as it swung back. Lowther roared.

"Oh, you ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yow! You've hurt me, you dangerous ass!"

"This is no time to think of twifles, Lowthah!"

"More water here!" shouted Kildare. "Don't waste time jawing, you kids!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

Kildare was inside the study now, in the thick smoke. The flames were out, but the smoke was still thick. It rolled out of the window into the quad, and out of the door into the passage. Water was swamped into the room again and again, till Mr. Railton called halt.

"The fire is out," he said.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "We've had a feckfully nawwow escape, deah boys. Luckily I was here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Mr. Railton examined the study carefully. There was not a spark left, and the smoke was clearing off. The study was gutted; furniture, books, everything, was a charred mass, and the walls were burnt and discoloured, the flooring blackened, the ceiling cracked. The School House had undoubtedly had a narrow escape. Mr. Railton came out of the burnt study, smoke-begrimed and blackened, gasping for breath.

"There will be an inquiry into this tomorrow," he exclaimed. "Someone has been very careless here. It is very fortunate that the fire was discovered in time. Who was it gave the alarm?"

"Tom Merry, sir," said Manners.

"You have done us all a great service, Merry. The boys can return to their dormitories. There is no more danger."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tom Merry Has an Idea.

ST. JIM'S was in a state of the most intense excitement.

The fellows who had extinguished the fire were blackened with smoke, with smarting eyes, and some of them scorched by the flames.

"Jolly lucky you weren't all toasted in your little beds, you fellows!" said Figgins of the New House. "You School House chaps do get into scrapes, and no mistake!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"How did it start?" asked Kerr.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't know! Perhaps Gore left his fire burning and—"

George Gore snorted.

"I didn't!" he said. "I wasn't in the study after I did my prep. I suppose it was Skimpole—he was there!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I should not be surprised. I remember there was a good fire here when I went to bed, and I forgot to rake it out. I had been writing some new paragraphs in my book, and I had thrown some sheets of paper into the grate, and so perhaps—"

"Perhaps, you boiled owl!" hooted Gore. "It's a wonder you didn't burn us all to death, you dangerous fathead!"

"My dear Gore—"

"Get off to bed, you kids!" called out Kildare from the passage. "You New House fellows go back to your own House at once!"

"Right-ho, sonny!" said Figgins cheerfully.

The juniors returned to their quarters.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther washed off the grime as well as they could before turning in. The juniors were not inclined to sleep; the excitement had made them too wakeful for that.

"We've had a narrow escape!" Tom Merry remarked. "If that fire had got a firmer hold, we shouldn't have been able to put it out with those giddy buckets. We've been jolly lucky!"

"We want a giddy fire brigade in the school!" Lowther remarked. "Some schools have 'em—amateur fire brigades, you know."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter now?"

Tom Merry clapped his chum on the shoulder.

"A wheeze, my son—a giddy wheeze! A big score over the New House—the biggest score we've ever made!"

"But what—"

"Shush! Can't talk here—too many to hear!" said Tom Merry, lowering his voice. "Crooke would give us away—and the other fellows might jaw."

"Yes, but what—"

"Whisper, and I shall hear!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed and whispered:

"What price an amateur fire brigade for the School House? We can work it up, and get it into going order, without letting the New House bounders get a whisper of it. Then when it's wanted, out it comes—ready for use! What?"

"My hat! What a stunning wheeze!"

"And when it's in working order, we can get Skinny to set his study on fire again!" grinned Manners. "Just to show what we can do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows cackling about?" demanded Crooke.

The Terrible Three did not answer the question.

They had no intention of taking the cad of the Shell into the secret. It would have to be kept a dead secret, if they were to score over the New House by forming an amateur fire brigade unknown to Figgins & Co.

The juniors turned in, and the Shell dormitory got to sleep at last—and the Shell fellows showed a great disinclination to rise when the rising-bell clanged out on the morning air.

Skimpole of the Shell was called into the Head's study in the morning, and he received a severe lecture on the subject of carelessness with fire, and a caning to drive the lesson home; with the additional information that the bill for damages would be sent to his father.

But Skimpole did not worry over the lecture, the caning, or the bill. He was thinking of those three hundred and seventy chapters of his great book that had been destroyed—to say nothing of the great volume of Professor Balmycrumpt on the thrilling subject of Determinism.

During morning lessons, Tom Merry was thinking very much of the new wheeze. The study was not likely to be habitable again for a day or two; and meanwhile Gore and Vavasour and Skimpole were quartered in other studies along the Shell passage.

The Terrible Three had the pleasure of receiving Skimpole—a very doubtful pleasure. But Monty Lowther warned him solemnly that he would be severely bumped if he ventured to utter the word "Determinism," and the genius of the Shell held his peace.

After lessons that day, Tom Merry called a meeting in his study. The chums

of Study No. 6 came to the meeting, and Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Reilly of the Fourth. To the meeting Tom Merry propounded the new scheme.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as a wippin' ideah! We shall want a captain of the fire brigade, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, that's settled; the most suitable chap takes that job!" said Tom Merry modestly.

"Good! If you fellahs back me up—"

"Eh?"

"I wepeat that if you fellahs back me up we shall make a wippin' success of it, and make Figgins & Co. turn gween with envy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughin', you Shell boundahs. I suppose it is understood that I am going to be the fire-captain?"

"Something's wrong with your understander, then," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "When we start a tailor's shop, Gussy, we'll make you head of it. But a fire brigade is a different matter."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Of course, I am fire captain," Tom Merry remarked casually. "I said the most suitable fellow, you know."

"What is required for a post of that kind, Tom Mewwy, is a fellah of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am not the kind of chap to put myself forward in any way, but I weally considah you had better leave it to me."

"All right. I'll leave the job to you—"

"Good!"

"In my will!" added Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Now, that important point being settled," said Tom Merry, "we've got to consider ways and means—"

"But it isn't settled, Tom Mewwy."

"Your mistake. It is."

"I put it to all you fellahs," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass into his eye, and looking round at the grinning meeting with a great deal of dignity. "I am willin' to leave it to the majowity. Gentlemen, hants up for me as fire-captain!"

The juniors put their hands into their pockets.

D'Arcy looked round through his famous monocle in search of a hand elevated, but he failed to find one.

"Well, are you satisfied?" grinned Blake.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No; upon the whole, I am inclined to agree with Ibsen that majowities are always in the w'ong," he said. "A majowity of this kind ought to go by the minowity. Therefore—"

"Order!"

"I considah—"

"Order!"

"I w'efuse to ordah—I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Blake. "I move that if Gussy doesn't shut up immediately we bump him forthwith!"

"Carried unanimously!" said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and relapsed into indignant silence. And then the fire-committee of the School House proceeded to the discussion of ways and means.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
And So Has Figgins.

FIGGINS of the Fourth was looking very thoughtful. Figgins sat in his study in the New House, his feet resting gracefully upon the table, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

There was a deep wrinkle on the thoughtful brow of the great Figgins, showing that his brain was unusually hard at work.

The Co. were in their study, and they were respecting the silence of their great leader. Fatty Wynn was thoughtfully cracking and eating nuts. Kerr was completing an article for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Both of them glanced occasionally at the great Figgins, wondering what was the subject of his meditations. Figgins broke the silence at last.

"It will work!"

"Go hon!" said Kerr.

"It's a good idea!"

"What is?"

"The one I've been thinking out. Put that rot away, and listen!"

"It isn't rot! It's an article for the 'Weekly'."

"Well, shove it away, and listen to me! Leave those nuts alone, Fatty, and lend me your ears!"

"I'll lend you my ears," said Fatty Wynn, cracking another nut. "But you won't want my jaws, I suppose? These nuts are prime!"

"You know there was an outbreak of fire in the School House last night?" said Figgins.

"I believe I've heard something of the sort," said Kerr sarcastically. "Is that what you've been thinking about?"

"Yes."

"It's been put out," said Kerr, still in a sarcastic vein.

"Ass! Suppose it hadn't been put out!"

"Then I suppose the School House chaps would have been put out!" chuckled Kerr.

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "That will do for the comic column in the 'Weekly'!"

"Blow the comic column in the 'Weekly'!" said Figgins. "I tell you I've got a wheeze—a first-class, first-chop, Al wheeze!"

"Pile in!"

"Suppose the fire had caught a real hold on the house. Those School House duffers would have been burnt out of house and home. They couldn't handle a fire," said Figgins. "Might have been burnt right out!"

"I shouldn't wonder. But—"

"What this school wants," said Figgins impressively, "is an amateur fire-brigade, all ready to deal with an outbreak of that sort."

"Oh!"

"The nearest fire-brigade is at Wayland," resumed Figgins. "Suppose there was a really terrific fire. What would happen? The place might be burnt down, especially if it was in the School House, with those duffers over there dealing with it. It's up to the New House to take time by the forelock. What!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea," said Figgins. "We'll keep it deadly dark, of course—not a hint of it to those School House bouncers. We'll make up a fire-brigade—get hatchets and shoots and things down from London—and fairly make the thing hum! Then, when the necessity arises, we—"

"We arise, too!" suggested Kerr.

"Don't be funny. That's where we shall score over the New House!" said Figgins triumphantly. "Tom Merry & Co. wouldn't dream of a thing like this

in a dog's age! And when we've covered ourselves with giddy glory, those bouncers will have to own up that the New House is cockhouse of St. Jim's, I fancy."

"It's not half a bad idea," said Kerr thoughtfully. "More giddy kudos in that than in a House raid, after all. An amateur fire-brigade will be a jolly useful thing—good exercise, and plenty of fun—and it would be useful, too, in case of fire," he added innocently.

Figgins snorted.

"It's in case of fire I'm thinking of, fathead! Now, about ways and means. It will cost money."

"Ahem!"

"We'll get all the New House chaps into it," said Figgins eagerly. "There can be a subscription from every member. If it's a lot of chaps the subscriptions won't be very heavy. And what does it matter, anyway? It's for the good of the cause."

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall have to get supplies down—unknown to the School House, of course. We can practise with the patent fire-escape from the back windows. We can test those things with Fatty. If they'll stand his weight they'll stand anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" said Kerr heartily.

"Let's call a meeting of the fellows, and put it to them. They're mostly in the Common-room now."

Figgins jumped up.

"Come on, then! Let's strike while the iron's hot!"

"What about tea?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Well, we haven't had tea yet, you know, and—"

Figgins caught his fat chum by the shoulder and ran him out of the study.

"Blow tea!" he said. "Blessed if you're not like Nero, fiddling while Rome was burning! Come on!"

And the famous Co. descended to the junior Common-room in the New House.

Figgins closed the door when they were inside, and that action caused all eyes to turn upon him.

"What's the matter?" asked Prait.

"School House raid?" asked Thompson.

"No; I've got something to say to you chaps," said Figgins.

"Something awfully important?" yawned French of the Shell.

"Yes."

"Go ahead!"

Figgins went ahead.

He explained his idea in many words, and some of the New House juniors nodded seriously, and some of them grinned. Evidently there was a diversity of opinion as to the excellence of the idea.

"Now, I think it's a ripping idea," said Figgins, in conclusion, "and if there's any chap here who doesn't, I'm willing to meet him in the gym, with or without gloves."

No one accepted that generous offer. Perhaps Figgins's method was not exactly logical, but at all events it had the advantage of saving argument.

"Every junior in the New House ought to be a member of the fire brigade," went on Figgins. "It's up to us, you know—the call of duty, and so forth. ~~Every~~ expects every man to do his duty."

"I shouldn't wonder if she get's disappointed, then," remarked Thompson.

Figgins did not heed that remark.

"All fellows present being enrolled in the New House Fire Brigade, the next question is subscriptions," he said.

"Oh!" said the juniors. And fellows who had looked humorous before looked serious enough now.

"We shall want a lot of things," said Figgins. "Of course, we can't afford fire-engines, and ladders, and things. But we can get hatchets, for chopping a way into burning buildings—all firemen have them, you know—and we can get patent fire-escapes, for sliding down from windows, and ropes, and things. Then we're going into training as firemen. Any chap who wants to be a slacker can keep out, but he will be expected to subscribe. Slackers can't expect to be protected by other chaps doing all the work for nothing."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"I'll write out an order for a London firm this evening, and post it," said Figgins. "The tin can be raised to-morrow. All fellows who want to pay in more than their regular subscriptions will be at liberty to do so."

"H'm!"

"But how much is the giddy subscription going to be?" asked Thompson of the Shell.

Figgins considered.

"I think an entrance fee of half-a-crown for every member would cover the initial expenses," he remarked. "We can raise more afterwards if we need it. It's worth that to score over the School House, I should say."

"Hear, hear!"

And Figgins, having taken down the names of prospective members of the New House Fire Brigade, and collected as many subscriptions as were obtainable on the spot—the number was not large—returned to his study, to write out the order for the London firm to supply the requisites.

The order was carefully considered and written out, and Figgins sealed it and addressed it and stamped it. Then he rose.

"Nothing like striking while the iron's hot," he remarked, with great satisfaction. "There may be a fire to-morrow, for all we know. I'll slip out and post this letter now, and they'll get it in the morning."

"Mind none of the School House bouncers get wind of it," said Kerr.

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

And the New House junior captain slipped out of the house, scuttled across the dusky quadrangle to the school letter-box. Through the dusk of the quadrangle another figure was making for the same spot, from the direction of the School House.

They met at the letter-box, and Figgins gave Tom Merry a feeble grin and a nod, keeping his letter behind him in case the Shell fellow should accidentally see the address. Tom Merry nodded genially, and also kept his hand behind him with a letter in it.

Of course, he knew that Figgins wouldn't actually look at the address on another fellow's letter, but he might see it by accident, and if he did he would suspect. For Tom Merry was also sending off an extensive order that evening to a big London firm for supplies.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, keeping his hand carefully behind him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Collection's not gone yet, I think?"

"I think not."

"Nice evening," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, ripping!"

"Got a letter to post?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; have you?"

"Yes. Shove yours in!"

"After you," said Figgins, with great politeness.

"Not at all; after you, Figgy!"

But Figgins had become suddenly punctilious. He retreated a step.

"It's all right," he said. "You post your letter."

"You post yours."

"You're jolly polite all of a sudden, Tom Merry," said Figgins suspiciously. "Well, so are you, if you come to that," said Tom Merry.

Figgins coloured. He didn't want Tom Merry to suspect that there was anything unusually important about the letter he was going to post. But he would not risk showing it.

"I'm waiting for you, Figgy."

"Now, look here, Tom Merry, don't be an ass—"

"My dear Figgins—"

"Nothing like manners," said Figgins firmly. "After you."

And they looked at each other.

Of course, either could have carefully concealed the address on the letter while slipping it into the box. But that would have implied the suspicion that the other might look at the address, which would have been insulting. It would also have roused suspicion in the other.

"Oh, shove your letter in, Figgy, and don't be an ass."

"After you."

"Rats! I'm off!"

Tom Merry walked away. Figgins slipped his letter into the box with a chuckle, and cut away towards the New House. Then Tom Merry returned to the letter-box and put his letter in, and walked away smiling towards the School House.

Skimpy sets the House on fire. You have got to start when I give the word, and all of you be outside the House in one minute."

"Yaas."

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry led the way to the box-room. The patent fire-escape had been left fastened to the window, and was all in readiness. It was quite dark outside, but that was all the better.

Practice after dark was more like the real thing, as, of course, fires generally happen at night. It had the additional advantage of being safe from the observation of the New House juniors—or so Tom Merry & Co. thought, at all events.

Tom Merry glanced from the open window. All was dark and silent without. If there were any juniors concealed in the shadows, they could not be seen, and Tom Merry did not suspect their presence.

"Start when I give the word," said Tom Merry. "Lowther first, then Manners, Blake, Herries, Dig, Gussy, Kangy, Reilly, myself last. Got that?"

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go!"

Monty Lowther plunged into the canvas tube, and went sliding down. Down he went, and Manners plunged in and slid after him. The moment he had

There was no opening at the end, and they were bunched together, struggling. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's got stuffed up somehow! Oh!"

"Yah!"

"Lemme gerrouit!"

"Groogh!"

There was a yell of laughter from the shadows. Figgins & Co. of the New House gathered round the swaying tube, yelling.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at the window. "It's the New House bounders, deah boys! They've fastened up the end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful wottahs! How vevy lucky that I didn't get in, bai Jove!"

"Yow!"

"Help!"

"Yah!"

"Oh! Help! Yowp!"

"Rescue!"

"Figgins & Co!" roared Digby.

"Come on! We've got to get at them!"

"Not down the shute, be jabbers!"

grinned Reilly.

"No; down the stairs."

Digby, Reilly, D'Arcy and Kangaroo rushed out of the box-room and down the stairs. They called for reinforcements as they went, and quite a crowd of School House juniors came rushing round the House to the rescue of the unfortunate amateur firemen in the tube.

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The letter was posted safely, and the New House had been given no clue. And Figgins at that precise moment was congratulating himself that his letter had been posted safely, and the School House given no clue! And so both were satisfied.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Little Mixed.

"**R**EADY, you chaps?"

"Quite ready!"

"Yaas, rathah!"

It was two days later, and the amateur firemen of the School House were gathered in Tom Merry's study. It was the time for the training, and they were all ready. Tom Merry had a manner of importance that befitted the captain of a fire brigade.

"You understand, I suppose?" he said. "We've got to do this thing in order. The test is to see how long it takes the lot of us to get out of the House in case of fire. Of course, as firemen, our business is to save others, not to save ourselves; but this is good practice, and may be useful next time

disappeared Blake plunged in, and after him went Herries.

There was a muffled roar inside the fire-escape.

"Yah! Oh!"

"Getroff my neck!"

"Yowp!"

"Yah!"

"Help!"

Tom Merry looked out of the window in surprise. He could not see the lower end of the patent shute in the darkness, but it was evident that something was wrong.

"They're not getting out!" he exclaimed. "Are you out, Lowther?"

"Groogh!"

"Yough!"

"Help!"

"My hat! What's the matter?"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry slid into the tube, and shot downwards. His feet came into contact with something hard, and a roar like muffled thunder announced that the something hard was Herries of the Fourth.

The fire-escape swayed and sagged to and fro as the juniors rolled, and struggled in its folds.

A yell of laughter from the distance announced that Figgins & Co. had retreated to safer quarters.

The juniors dragged at the fire-escape, and opened it, and the imprisoned firemen rolled out one after another, red and flustered and furious.

"Oh! Oh! M-m-my aunt!"

"Groogh! Some silly ass put his boot in my eye!"

"Somebody's busted my ribs!"

"Yaroooh! Oh! Oh! What the dickens—"

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy consolingly. "The New House bounders had fastened it up, but it's all wight now."

"Ow!" groaned Herries. "I don't feel all right. Some frightful idiot clumped his silly boot on my head!"

"I'm squashed!" gasped Lowther. "I felt like a pancake, with all those chumps rolling on me! Ow!"

There was a yell from the distance.

"Who's cock-house of St. Jim's now? Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors breathed fury.

"This is where we smile!" yelled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New House juniors smiled loudly.

"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "They've got on to the wheeze, somehow, but we can snatch them bald-headed, anyway! Collar the rotters!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed in the direction of the voices. There was a sound of chuckles dying away in the distance. Figgins & Co. had beaten a retreat to their own House, and in the doorway they turned to kiss their hands to their baffled pursuers.

Tom Merry & Co. shook their fists in return, and departed. In the School House, they exchanged glum looks.

"It's all out now!" growled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! They've bowled out the wheeze, deah boys."

"Rotten!"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry. "There's only one thing to be done now—"

"What's that?"

"We shall have to amalgamate, and form a united fire brigade," said Tom Merry. "After all, that's a jolly good idea!"

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah! And, undsh the cires, I wathah think it would be a good ideah to choose the most suitable chap for the post—"

"We've done that," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Meywy—"

"Seat!"

"I refuse to seat—I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, Gussy," said Tom Merry kindly. "I'll see that boulder Figgins in the morning, and we'll settle it!"

And they did!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In Training.

AND after school the next day, the juniors went in for firemen practice, the two Houses joining on the best of terms for the purpose.

It was really better, as they all admitted on reflection, to make a School instead of a House affair of it.

The New House fellows were certainly a little doubtful how the brigade would get on under School House leadership; but they loyally resolved to do their best to make the thing go, in spite of that obvious defect.

There being no further need for secrecy, fellows were enrolled on all sides in the amateur fire brigade. Most of the juniors of both Houses were eager to join.

A few, like Levison and Mellish of the Fourth, and Crooke of the Shell, sneered and kept out of it; but they were not wanted anyway, as a good many fellows explained to them.

The idea of a junior fire brigade was generally voted to be a ripping one, and members poured in—subscriptions pouring in a little less rapidly.

Quite a large number of fellows were willing to be captain; even Skimpole of the Shell offered his services for the post—declined with thanks.

But Skimpole joined the brigade. When the amateur fireman trained, a hatchet was served out to Skimpole with the rest, and Tom Merry warned him not to chop anybody with it. He was rather uneasy about the scientific junior. Skimpole blinked at him seriously through his big spectacles.

"My dear Merry," he said. "I consider that you would have been better

advised to entrust the command into my hands. Intellectual attainments are more requisite to a commander than mere muscular development, and—"

Tom Merry stopped his ears.

"Don't Skiminy!" he implored. "Keep 'em for that book of yours. Talk to me in words only of three syllables."

Skimpole smiled indulgently.

"However, intellect can always find an outlet," he said. "I shall do my best to make the fire brigade a success. You will see!"

"Ow!" roared Tom Merry, suddenly leaping into the air.

Skimpole had absent-mindedly dropped his hatchet, and it had alighted on his captain's foot.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "What is the matter?"

Tom Merry was dancing on one leg, and clapping the other foot with both hands. Skimpole blinked at him in mild astonishment.

"Yaroooh! Oh!"

"My dear Merry—"

"Grooh! You've busted my toes, you silly ass!"

"Dear me! I have allowed my hatchet to fall," said Skimpole. "I did not observe it, my dear Merry—"

"Tom Merry did!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"It's all right, Tommy!" said Manners. "The thing admits of an easy scientific explanation, as Skiminy would say. When an article becomes detached from the hand that holds it, the centripetal attraction of the earth causes it to descend in a perpendicular line, and to alight with a concussion proportioned to the impetus caused by the rapidity of the descent. When a fellow's foot is in the way—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow!" groaned Tom Merry.

"The best thing under the circumstances," resumed Manners, "is to project the fist in a horizontal line towards the respiratory apparatus of the silly ass who dropped the thing—"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. And he projected his fist in a horizontal line towards Skimpole's nose, and the scientific youth sat down quite suddenly in the quadrangle.

"Oh!" said Skimpole.

"Thus, my young friends," said Manners, in a delightful imitation of the learned manner cultivated by Skimpole—"thus are the first principles of scientific knowledge easily demonstrated. A force acting horizontally upon a perpendicular object causes that object to assume a horizontal position on the surface of the earth—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" said Figgins. "I say, Taggles has been using the garden-hose, and he's left it out. It's a good chance to get some hose-practice."

"Hear, hear!"

And the amateur fireman rushed off, leaving Skimpole still sitting on the ground and rubbing his nose in a surprised manner.

Taggles had been using the hose, and he had left it temporarily, not knowing anything of the amateur fire brigade of St. Jim's.

The firemen seized upon the hose with joy. Tom Merry directed operations, swooping water in all directions, and there were yells of remonstrance from the other firemen as they dodged out of the way.

"Yawoooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he jumped a foot from the ground, the jet of water sweeping round his legs.

"You silly ass! Do you see what you're doing?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"You—you fwabious-duffah, stop it! Oh!"

"Here, you let that there hose alone!" roared Taggles, coming on the scene.

"Give that to me at once, Master Merry?"

"Certainly!" said Master Merry, turning the hose upon Taggles.

Whiz! Whoosh!

"Oh!" roared Taggles.

Whoo-oooh!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles roared as the jet of water caught him, and nearly bowled him over. He danced in the playing stream, trying to avoid it; but it followed every movement. His hat was swept off, and he sat down at last, gasping.

"That all right!" asked Tom Merry.

The juniors yelled.

"Ow!" gasped Taggles. "Ow! I'll report yer!"

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"But you asked for it," he said.

"Ow! Asked for the 'ose, you young himp, not for the water!" said Taggles.

"You should make yourself clear, Taggles," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "You can't expect me to guess what you mean."

"Ow! I'll report yer! Gimme that 'ose!"

"Here you are!" said Tom Merry, pressing the nozzle again as he handed it to Taggles.

Whiz! Whoosh!

"Yaroo-ooop!"

Taggles fairly fled, and the juniors roared. Taggles did not reappear; he was too wet, and the juniors enjoyed half an hour's hose-practice, at the end of which they were very nearly as wet as Taggles. Indeed, Monty Lowther remarked that they were rather qualifying for watermen than firemen.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Fire!

CLANG, clang!
Figgins started up in bed in the New House.

Clang, clang!

Figgins rubbed his eyes, and listened. "It can't be rising-bell," he muttered. "It's the middle of the night. Unless Taggles has got squiffy, and started ringing the bell in his sleep. Kerr, old man!"

"Hallo!" came drowsily from Kerr's bed.

"Do you hear that bell?"

"Yes."

"It can't be the rising-bell?"

"Of course it isn't, fathead!" said Kerr. "It's a mile away, I should think! It's an alarm-bell of some sort!"

Figgins jumped.

"Might be a fire!" he exclaimed.

Kerr yawned.

"Shouldn't wonder!"

Figgins was out of bed in a twinkling. He ran to the window, and clambered up and looked out. Only the dark sky, with stars twinkling there, met his gaze. But the sound of the bell came to his ears more clearly. It was evidently ringing at a distance, and it could be nothing but an alarm-bell.

"It must be fire, Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"Long way away, if it is!" said Kerr.

"Comes from the direction of Rylcombe," said Figgins. "There's no fire brigade nearer than Wayland, excepting—"

"Excepting ours," chuckled Kerr.

"Just so! This is where we come in!" said Figgins, bundling on his clothes in a hurry. "I'm going out to see what's the row, Kerr! If it's a fire, we're on!"

"But we shall have to break bounds!"

Figgins snifled.

"Blow bounds! Firemen can't stop to think of such things as bounds when

there's a giddy fire raging, can they, fathead? What an idiot you are, Kerr!"

"But I say, Figgins—"

But Figgins was gone.

The New House junior was out of the house in a minute more. He dashed across the quad. From the top of the school wall he would be able to see if there was any reflection of a fire in the sky towards Rylcombe. He had almost reached the wall when he ran into a dark figure, and there was a startled exclamation.

"Ow! Who's that?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Tom Merry!"

"Is that you, Figgy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You ass," said Tom Merry, greatly relieved, "I thought it was a prefect for a moment!"

"What are you doing out here this time of night?" demanded Figgins, peering at the School House junior in the gloom.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Same as you, I expect," he said. "I've heard an alarm-bell, and I've come out to see if it's a fire."

"Same here," said Figgins, groping at the wall. "Give us a bunk up!"

They were on top of the wall in a few seconds. The two juniors stared in the direction of Rylcombe. There was a red flare in the sky. It was a fire, undoubtedly.

"It's in Rylcombe," said Figgins.

"This side of Rylcombe, a bit south," said Tom Merry.

"I believe it's the Grammar School, Figgy."

"My hat!"

"Anyway, it's a fire, and we're going to be on the scene!" said the amateur fire-captain promptly. "Get your chaps out, Figgy, and I'll get the School House fellows!"

"Right-ho!"

Figgins raced back to the New House.

Tom Merry dashed off in the darkness, and climbed into the window he had left open in the School House. He rushed into the Shell dormitory. "Wake up, you chaps!"

"Wharrer marrer?"

"Fire!"

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther, sitting up in bed. "Has Skimmy been setting fire to his study again? He'll never get that book finished!"

"It's not in St. Jim's!" said Tom Merry hurriedly. "And it's a more serious thing than the fire we had. The sky's red for miles! I think it's at the Grammar School!"

"Great Scott!"

"Wake up! Tumble up, firemen!"

The Shell fellows turned out of bed. Tom Merry dashed away to the Fourth Form dormitory to call up Blake & Co. Some of the Fourth were already awake. They had heard the alarm-bell clanging in the distance through the silent night.

"Firemen wanted!" Tom Merry called into the dormitory.

"You fellows awake?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tumble up! We're going!"

"Good!" said Blake.

"And quiet," added Tom Merry warningly. "We're going to save lives and property and things. But the prefects mightn't approve if they knew. We've got to get out of the House without a sound."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Get your things!" said Tom Merry. "We may need the hatches and the fire-escape and the ropes! Don't forget anything!"

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, we are not likely to forget anythin'!"

"Buck up!"

"Undah the cires—"

But Tom Merry was gone. He returned quietly to the Shell dormitory, and found the amateur firemen ready. They had dressed hastily in the first things that came to hand.

Some of the brigade, indeed, were sleeping, or appearing to. Not all of the juniors were anxious to leave their warm beds for the cold night outside, with the additional penalty for breaking bounds to be faced in the morning. But most of the firemen were keen and eager, and they followed Tom Merry from the dormitory, with their hatches and ropes and other appurtenances in their hands, all ready for business.

The Fourth Formers joined them in the passage; and the jamors dropped from the Hall window, one by one, into the dusky quad.

"What about Figgins & Co?" asked Blake.

"They're out!"

"Oh, good!"

"Here we are!" sang out Figgins from the school wall, "waiting for you bounders! Hurry up, slow coaches! We've been here nearly a minute!"

"Weally, Figgins—"



Snap! The rope had been burnt through in the burning room above. The severed rope came lashing down and Tom Merry fell like a stone! Would he miss the blanket?

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.
 "Follow your leader!"
 "Right-ho!"
 And the amateur firemen of St. Jim's dashed away through the night at top speed.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Fighting the Flames!

A RUDDY glare of light danced over the Grammar School. The alarm-bell was clanging out noisily; the Close was crowded with fellows, half-dressed, turned hastily out of their beds.

A whole wing of the school was in flames and smoke.

The alarm-bell rang far through the night, and two messengers had been sent off at top speed for Wayland to summon the fire-brigade. But there was no sign of the fire-brigade so far.

Dr. Monk, the Head of the Grammar School, was in the Close, looking dazed and almost hopeless. Delamere, the captain of the school, was shouting to the fellows to keep back from the fire.

Mr. Hilton, the second master, had just brought out a bag from the burning building and deposited him in the Close. The crowds of Grammarians looked on at the fire with fascinated eyes.

Dr. Monk, in great agitation, tapped Mr. Hilton on the arm.

"Please call over the boys at once," he said. "We must make sure that no one is left in the building."

"Quite so, sir."

The boys ranged up for the calling-over. As Mr. Hilton was calling their names in turn, and the Grammarians answering "Adsum!" to their names, there was a shout as a crowd of fellows came pouring in at the gates.

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived.

"My hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

"Here's the St. Jim's chaps!"

"Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry.

"We're the St. Jim's Fire Brigade!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Line up with the buckets!" ordered Tom Merry. "Get anything you can, and chuck water in. Help to carry things out of the part that's not on fire!"

And the St. Jim's firemen set to work. They worked hard. They carried out things from rooms that were not in the slightest danger of being reached by the fire, and piled them in the Close.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn came staggering out under the weight of a big arm-chair, and other fellows followed with all sorts and conditions of things. Some of them found buckets and pails, and helped to swamp water on the flames.

The fire was raging with terrible violence now, and heat fanned the faces of the crowd in the Close. The roar of the flames could be heard at a great distance, and people were arriving from Rylcombe to lend aid.

Mr. Hilton was rapping out the names of the boys. He believed that everybody was out of the house, but it was necessary to make sure. But suddenly there was a pause.

"Blanc!"

No answer.

"Gustave Blanc!"

Silence.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "Mont Blong hasn't got out! I remember him getting out of the dorm. I thought he came down with me."

"Mont Blong! Mont Blong!" shouted the juniors.

But there was no reply to the call.

The French junior was evidently still in the house.

Gordon Gay turned white.

"He's inside!" he exclaimed. "The

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smoke must have done it! I know he started from the dorm!"

Gay made a rush towards the house. Mr. Hilton caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Stop!" he commanded sternly. Gordon Gay struggled in the master's grasp.

"Mont Blong's in there, sir!"

"Stay where you are. I am going in."

"But, sir—"

"Silence! I order you to stay there!"

Mr. Hilton released the junior, and ran into the house. The thick, rolling volumes of smoke swallowed him up in a moment.

There was a dead silence in the Close, broken only by the hurried breathing of the crowd and the roar of the flames amid the dull clang of the alarm-bell.

"Good heavens!" inquired Dr.

Monk. "He has gone to his death!"

And the old gentleman wrung his hands.

The crowd waited for Mr. Hilton to reappear.

A minute passed.

Then another!

Mr. Hilton did not appear.

The faces were white now. The fellows

looked at one another in horrified silence.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

The St. Jim's Fire Brigade had not bargained for this. But duty was duty, and Tom Merry was not afraid.

He tied a handkerchief over his mouth, and drenched himself with water. Figgins caught his arm, his face chalky white.

"You're not going in, Tom?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.

"You can't! You shan't! It's

death!"

"I'm going in."

"But—but—"

"You can't, Tom!" muttered Lowther.

"It's death!"

"Firemen mustn't be afraid," said

Tom Merry, with a faint smile. "Let

me go, Monty!"

"Then I'm coming, too," said Lowther.

"Stand back. I'm captain," said Tom

Merry sharply.

"But—"

"Stand back, all of you!"

"I'm coming," said Figgins grimly.

"Where the School House can go the

New House can follow. Don't jaw—I'm

coming."

"Yaas, wathah! And I—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If

there's anything to be done two can do it.

Figgys can come with me; the rest keep

back."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"He's right," muttered Blake huskily.

"Keep back, Gussy. But if they don't

come out again, I'm going in for them,

and chance it."

"Come back—come back, boys!" cried

Dr. Monk. "You can do no good—come

back!"

They did not heed.

The crowd watched them fascinated as

they ran into the smoke of the doorway.

Tom Merry knew the way inside. He

had paid many visits there to Gordon

Gay & Co. At the foot of the stairs he

stumbled over something that lay prone.

He grasped Figgins by the arm, and

stopped him.

It was an insensible man who lay there, overcome by the smoke. The two juniors grasped him, lifted him by a great exertion of strength, and staggered out into the open air.

There was a shout as they appeared.

"They've got Hilton!" roared Wootton

major.

Scores of hands received the insensible

master from the amateur firemen.

"Now for the others!" panted Figgins.

They plunged in again.

They groped their way to the stairs.

The smoke was thick about them, and

from the burning rooms on their right and left came the dull roar of flames and the crash of falling woodwork.

But the staircase was not yet burning, and they scrambled up through the blinding smoke. They had wet handkerchiefs tied over their mouths, but the smoke seemed to be choking them. Tom Merry felt his brain reeling, but he kept an iron grip on himself.

Up through the blinding vapour, into the dormitory passage. Here the smoke was thinner, and they could see. A form lay huddled close by the door of the dormitory, and Tom Merry recognised Gordon Gay. The Australian junior had reached so far when the smoke overcame him.

Tom Merry and Figgins raised him up. Tom pushed him into the arms of the New House junior.

"Get him out, Figgys—there's another yet."

Figgins nodded; he was past speaking. He scrambled down the stairs with Gordon Gay in his arms, hanging insensible over his shoulder. How he reached the ground floor, Figgins never knew. A wild and blinding struggle through the smoke—with the heat seeming to melt the very marrow in his bones!

There was a rush of flame—and it scorched him—he groaned with the pain—but fought on! Thicker and thicker smoke—a crash—crash—crash! He reeled—but the smoke was thinner—the cool air of heaven blew upon his scorched face. There was a roar:

"Here he is!"

They seized Figgins and his insensible burden, and bore them far from the flames.

"But Tom Merry!" muttered Lowther, hoarsely.

Figgins panted.

"He's looking for Mont Blong!"

Then he fainted.

There was a rush of fellows towards the house. But a roar of flame in the doorway, a rush of licking blaze, stopped them. The staircase and the hall were on fire now—and no living being could have passed that fearful barrier. They stumbled back, scorched and panting. Flame—flame everywhere, cutting off the retreat of the brave junior who had gone in—cutting off help from him!

Where was Tom Merry?

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Fight for Life!

TOM MERRY, fighting against the heat, the smoke, the faintness that was seizing upon him, struggled on in his search. He knew from Gordon Gay that the French junior had got out of the dormitory; but where was he! He groped in the passage—the stairs! He stumbled at last over an inanimate form.

He stooped down and grasped it.

In the smoke he could not see—but he knew that it must be Mont Blong. The French junior was quite insensible.

Tom Merry lifted him in his arms—fortunately, Gustave Blanc was a slimly-built fellow, and no great weight. The junior of St. Jim's staggered towards the staircase.

A rush of flame met him and drove him back.

Before him was a sea of fire!

Tom Merry groaned, and staggered back. There was no escape downwards; he was shut up in the burning building!

He staggered towards the upper stairs. He knew the way; he could not see an inch with his smarting eyes.

The smoke was intense, blinding, stinging. But he reached the upper stairs, and scrambled up with his burden.

Higher and higher!

There was a door before him now—he grasped at it—it did not open. He knew that it was the door of a room looking on the Close—and it was locked!

If he could get to the window there was a chance yet!

He tugged at the door; he realised that it was locked. But his hatchet was at his belt—and he felt a wave of thankfulness that the St. Jim's firemen had come prepared for work! He dragged out the hatchet, and crashed it upon the door.

Crash, crash, crash!

Mont Blong hung heavily upon his left shoulder, as he wielded the axe with his right hand.

Crash, crash, crash!

The lock gave at last!

The door swung open—he was through. The room was thick with blinding smoke. He staggered across to the window; it was shut. His hatchet crashed upon it, sending glass and sashes out—and he breathed once more the pure air!

Crash, crash!

The window was smashed out in a few seconds. He could lean out into the air and look down into the Close now.

The crash of the breaking window had drawn all eyes upward. There was a shout from below as Tom Merry was seen:

"There he is!"

The juniors waved their hands to him. They had seen him! But below him was a sheer wall—fifty feet of sheer descent to the ground.

Behind him the smoke eddied, the flames roared!

He laid Mont Blong upon the window-sill, his legs in the room, his head in the open air. Then, with steady hands, he uncoiled the long rope that was wound about his body under his jacket.

Again he thanked his good fortune that he had come ready—that he had forgotten nothing. He uncoiled the rope steadily, and he fastened one end to Mont Blong, round his body under the armpits.

From the ground below—strangely far away it seemed—they watched him intently in terrible silence. They could see almost every movement of the junior at the window.

They knew that, even in that fearful moment, he was thinking only of saving the boy he had come to save, and not of himself. He knotted the rope securely round Mont Blong, with hands that did not tremble. Then he lowered the unconscious junior carefully from the window.

Now there was a shout below. Fellows rushed forward to take the insensible junior when he was lowered. They stood ready to catch him if he fell.

Tom Merry paid out the rope steadily. Lower and lower went Mont Blong—

lower and lower—till the hands that were reaching upward grasped him, and he was carried back.

Tom Merry turned back into the room. The door of that room was burning now; flames were licking through the walls and the floor. Under him was the rumble and roar of the conflagration.

The floor trembled beneath his feet. At any second, as he well knew, it might yield, and precipitate him into the flames below. But he fastened the rope to the bars of the grate with a firm hand.

It was the only thing to secure it to. And the flames were licking round it; might burn through it at any moment. But it was his only chance, and he took it.

He climbed out on the window-sill, grasping the rope. His brain was reeling; he was acting now like a fellow in a dream. His senses were leaving him, and he knew it. The flames roared dully in his ears. Below, the ground and the sea of upturned faces seemed to swim.

But, keeping a grip upon himself, he grasped the rope with both hands, and swung clear of the window. Down the rope now, hand below hand. They watched him in hushed terror from below. Down, lower and lower.

The rope cut and bruised his hands. From a lower window the flames licked at it. They scorched him as he passed. Would he lose his hold and fall—fall to a horrible death on the hard stones below?

Hands were raised up to receive him. A blanket had been obtained from somewhere, and half a dozen fellows were holding it for him, if he fell.

Snap!

Rope and junior fell together. The rope had been burnt through in the burning room above. The severed rope came lashing down, and Tom Merry fell like a stone. But he was only a dozen feet from the ground now, and the blanket was ready. He fell into it heavily, dragging it down, but not quite to the ground.

There was a husky shout.

"Safe!"

"He's saved!"

They bore him back in triumph.

Saved!

Tom Merry rolled out of the blanket upon the ground, scorched, blistered, and panting. Lowther and Manners were sobbing over him, unashamed of tears that were rolling down their cheeks.

"Oh, Tom—Tom!"

"I—I'm all right!" muttered Tom Merry thickly.

And then he sank back into unconsciousness.

Tom Merry recovered his senses, to find himself at home in bed in the old Shell dormitory at St. Jim's. Figgins

was in the next bed to him, and fellows were all round them. Tom Merry opened his eyes, and Figgins grinned at him with his blistered face, and nodded.

"All right, Tommy?"

Tom Merry sat up.

"Yes," he said. "How are you, Figgys?"

"Blistered," said Figgins. "Never mind, the St. Jim's Fire Brigade is a giddy success."

"What-ho! What about the fire—"

"The fire brigade got there from Wayland soon after you got out," said Blake, who was sitting beside the bed. "They've saved most of the school; but—but if it hadn't been for you, Tommy, it would have been horrible. Poor old Mont Blong!"

"He's not badly hurt?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"No; less than you are. It was only the smoke. He's in sanatorium now, along with Gay. They're both scorched, that's all. And you?"

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "And I can tell you I'm jolly well not going to be made an invalid of!"

"I'm afraid you will have to stay in the school hospital for a time, Merry," said Dr. Short; and Tom Merry blinked at the medical man. "You have been scorched, and your hair is burnt."

"And you haven't any giddy eyebrows left!" grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry put his hand up to his face.

"Oh, my hat! Never mind, they'll grow again!" Then he grinned at Figgins. "You don't look much better, old chap! You look like a pancake that's dropped into the fire!"

Both Tom Merry and Figgins, in spite of their desire not to be considered as invalids, had to pass a week in the school sanatorium before they were allowed to rejoin their Forms.

And when they appeared among the fellows again, they bore very visible marks of their experience as amateur firemen. It was many weeks before all traces of that adventure left them. But they did not mind.

They had proved that the St. Jim's Fire Brigade was a success—a howling success, as Figgins jubilantly said. And all St. Jim's agreed that the scars they bore were a distinction that any fellow might have envied. And they were not called over the coals for breaking bounds that night; that was not likely.

When they were recovered, the whole school was assembled in the Hall, and the Head of St. Jim's publicly complimented and thanked the two juniors, and the old Hall rang with cheers for the schoolboy fire-fighters.

THE END.

Next Friday's Long Complete Tale of **TOM MERRY & CO.**
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BUNTER THE BULLY!

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter in a New Role.

I WANT you fellows to listen to me—

"Rats!"

"I want to explain—"

"Bosh!"

"I am going to put it to you straight—"

"Rubbish!"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"For the last time, will you listen, or shall I have to use violence?"

There was no reply to that remark. It took the chums of Study No. 1 too much by surprise.

Billy Bunter stood in a threatening attitude, his fat face red with annoyance, and his round eyes gleaming behind his big spectacles.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, the chums of Study No. 1 in the Remove, stared at him blankly.

They were accustomed to all sorts of things from Bunter. He was an incurable borrower; he was an incurable romancer. He was several varieties of a worm, as Bob Cherry had expressed it.

But Bunter had never appeared in this light before.

Bunter, who had been known to back down before a Third Form fag, and to pelt off helter-skelter before the smallest butcher's boy in Friarsdale—Bunter was standing in a warlike attitude, threatening the chums of No. 1.

Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, and the best athlete in the Lower School at Greyfriars, looked at him. Nugent, who could have eaten Bunter in a fistical encounter, looked at him. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looked at him, with an astounded expression transfixing his dusky face.

"Now, are you going to listen?" demanded Bunter, imagining that his threat had taken effect.

"It's real!" said Nugent faintly. "It isn't a dream that's Bunter talking—it's the fat porpoise himself!"

"Who are you calling a porpoise?"

"You, Bunty."

"You'd better be careful what you call me, you fellows! I've had enough of the raggings I used to get in this study. I'm going to keep up my end in future!"

"Which end?"

"Oh, don't be funny! Look here, you fellows, things have got to go on a new footing now. I'm not going to stand—"

Nugent hooked his foot into the leg of a chair, and sent it spinning towards Bunter. The back of the chair unfortunately crashed upon the best-filled part of Bunter's waistcoat, and the fat junior staggered back to the door.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did you do that for, you rotter?"

"You said you weren't going to stand."

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so I was offering you a chair," said Nugent blandly.

"Ow!" Bunter rubbed his waistcoat tenderly. "Ow! You beast! You've nearly winded me. Yow!"

"Go it! It sounds like a locomotive letting off steam!"

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Harry Wharton.

"I'm trying to work."

"The ring-off-fulness would be the wheezy good idea," suggested the Nabob of Bhanipur, in his purring voice and his beautiful English.

"I say, you fellows, the time has come for a change in this study. You chaps have always lorded it over me—"

"Oh, don't talk rot, Billy! We've only kept you in your place, because you have always been such a miserable worm."

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Nugent?"

"A—a thick ear!" said Nugent dazedly. "Yes; you're jolly near getting one, anyway!" said Bunter fiercely.

Nugent could only stare at him blankly.

"Now, you fellows," went on Bunter victoriously, "you see how matters stand. I'm not going to stand the sort of thing I used to put up with any longer. I'm not going to be of less account than any other chap in the study."

"You wouldn't be, Billy, if you were a decent chap," said Wharton. "It's because you're a fat little rotter that you're sat upon."

"Do you want a hiding, Wharton?"

"What?"

"If you don't you'd better be a bit more civil. Look here, you fellows may as well understand it once and for all. I'm the head of this study!"

"The—the head of this study?"

"Yes."

"He's off his rocker," said Nugent, in a faint voice. "I always felt that it would come to this. It's the direct result of over-feeding."

"Be careful, Nugent! I'm half inclined to lick you as it is!"

"Lick me!"

"Yes, rather. I'm willing to live on amicable terms with every fellow in the study. But I'm not going to be put upon any longer."

"Look here, Bunter," said Wharton, in his crisp way, "what's the game? What are you talking all this piffle for?"

"It's not piffle; it's business. Since I've taken up boxing—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've developed a wonderful gift for it."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"And I've licked Bob Cherry in a stand-up fight."

"Oh!" gasped Nugent. "The murder's out now! He's—he's licked Bob Cherry! Oh, hold me while I shriek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked wrathfully at the chums of the Lower Fourth.

He had licked Bob Cherry in a stand-up

fight, as he said, and Bob Cherry was one of the toughest fighting-men in the Remove. He had only three superiors in that line—Bulstrode, Wharton, and Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire—until Bunter licked him. Now, of course, Bunter made a fourth.

That the fight had been a mere piece of "rotting," that Bob had allowed himself to be licked for a huge hoax upon the stupidest junior in the Remove, was perfectly well known to the whole Form.

Bunter had been told so, but he did not believe it. He fancied himself as a boxer, and it was very gratifying to think that he had licked one of the best fighting men in the Form; and, like most of us, he contrived to believe what it pleased him to believe.

The conviction was firmly fixed in his mind that he had fairly and squarely licked Bob Cherry, and he regarded explanations to the contrary simply as attempts to lower his prestige and minimise his exploits.

His illusion was encouraged by Bob Cherry, who was a confirmed practical joker. Ever since that memorable contest in the barn, Bob Cherry had made it a point to treat Bunter with an exaggerated air of respect, and to stand in fear and trembling if the fat junior hectoring him.

The fellows who saw Bunter hectoring a big junior who could have knocked him to pieces with a blow would roar with laughter, but Bunter was quite satisfied with himself.

And as the persuasion that he was a great fighting-man was more and more firmly fixed in Bunter's mind, it developed the worst traits in his character; not a very pleasant character to start with.

Bunter was a little bit of a sneak, and a little bit of a poltroon, and those attributes, when united with great physical strength, usually produce a bully. Billy Bunter's prowess was imaginary, but it was real to him. Hence Bunter was fast developing into a bully.

It was amazing to his study-mates.

It was hard for them to catch on; but as Bunter proceeded, the real state of the case dawned upon their minds. They had noticed, for the past few days, a certain truculence in Bunter's manner; but as he always had some nonsense or other in his mind, they had taken no particular notice of it.

The merriment with which his remarks were received naturally made Bunter feel very annoyed.

He blinked at the chums of the Remove and clenched his fists.

"Look here, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better be careful—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter pushed back his cuffs.

"Very well. Which of you will come on first?"

"C-c-come on?"

"Certainly. I'm going to lick you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific."
 "Come on!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Yah! You're afraid!"
 "Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha! Oh!"
 "Cowards!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter glared at them wrathfully and scornfully. They were rolling in their chairs in helpless merriment, but to Bunter it was perfectly clear that they were putting it on, because they didn't care to come to close quarters.

"Well," he said, turning towards the door, "I despise you. You're a set of cowards. I'll jolly well let all the Remove know the kind of worms you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter went out and slammed the door. Harry Wharton rocked to and fro in his chair, breathless with laughter. Hurree Singh was cackling away like an alarm-clock, and Nugent, utterly overcome, rolled on the hearthrug and kicked up his feet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

"To Your Knees!"

BILLY BUNTER went down the Remove passage with a frowning brow and a swagger in his walk. His shoulders were thrown well back, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, and his fat chin was well up in the air. Bunter was taking his new role seriously, and living up to it. Snoop of the Remove came hastily out of his study, and ran fairly into the majestic Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Snoop.

Billy Bunter reeled against the opposite wall. He could not get his fat hands out of his tight trousers' pockets in time to save himself with them, and so his head struck the wall with a crack.

Bunter gave a roar.

"Ow! Oh! Gerroob! Oh, really, Russell—"

"Sorry!" gasped Snoop. "Why don't you look where you are going?"

"Oh, it's you, Snoop!"

"Yes. You've knocked all my wind out, you short-sighted owl!" said Snoop, putting.

Billy Bunter frowned.

He remembered that he was a great fighting-man, and he had been hurt. Snoop, too, was a wretched coward, the sneak of the Form, and he had been known to run from an angry jag in the Third. Bunter's courage rose at the thought. Filled with new ideas of his own importance, and determined to be cock of the walk in the Remove, he thought he could not possibly start upon a more favourable object than Snoop.

"What's that?" he demanded sharply.

"What did you say?"

"Short-sighted owl!" grunted Snoop.

The next moment he gave a yell.

Bunter's knuckles rapped on his nose, and he staggered back with the water shooting into his eyes.

"Ow—ow—wow—why—"

"Take that!" said Bunter impressively.

"Ow—why—you—"

"I've had enough cheek from you Remove kids," said Bunter, while the astonished Snoop gaped at him with wide-open mouth. "You called me an owl!"

"Why, you—you boiled owl—you silly owl!"

"Put up your fists!" said Bunter.

"What?"

"I'm going to lick you!"

"Lick me!"

"Yes. Ready?"

"Oh, you're off your rocker!" gasped Snoop. "You couldn't lick a worm! You're afraid of the smallest jag in the Third, you know you are! You've been drinking or something."

"I've licked Bob Cherry, and—"

Snoop gave a snort.

"You utter ass! He was only rotting" at the time."

"Nothing of the sort. I've challenged him since, and he's refused to meet me again. He says he couldn't possibly put up anything like a show against a chap like me."

"He was fooling you."

"I'll jolly soon show you whether he was fooling me. Put up your fists!"

"I—I—"

As a matter of fact, Snoop was even a greater coward than Bunter, and he would not willingly have fought a child of seven. He backed away from the warlike Bunter, waving his hands deprecatingly.

"It's all right, Bunter—I say—"

"It's not all right. You've insulted me."

"I—I didn't mean to—"

"Are you going to fight?" roared Bunter, his courage rising higher as Snoop retreated more and more.

"N-n-n-o. I—you see—"

"Come on, you coward!"

"I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites. Bob remained perfectly solemn.

"If we hadn't had the gloves on, some damage would have been done," he said. "Bunter is simply a terror when he's roused. My idea is, that he ought to fight it out with Wharton, who's to be captain of the Remove."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

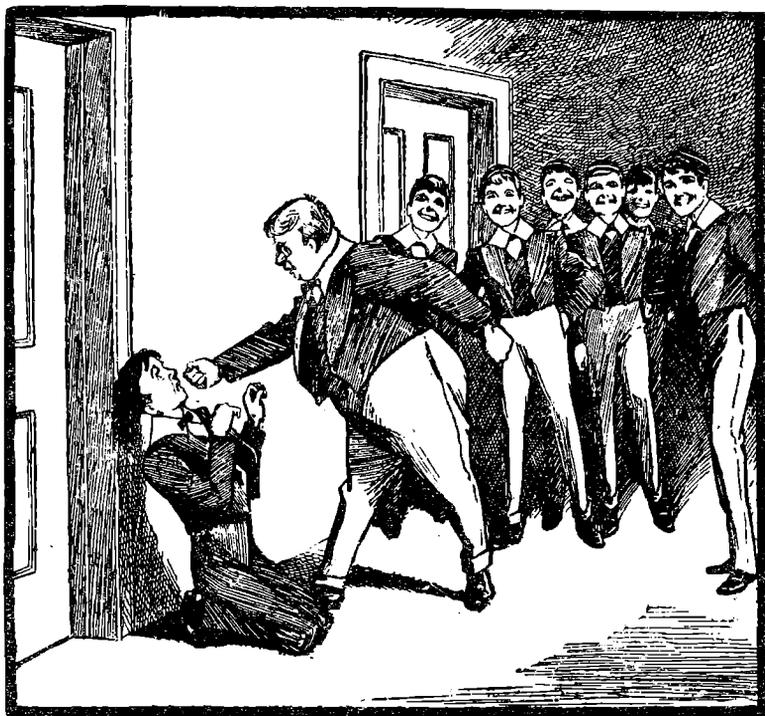
"Better knuckle under, Snoopey, before he slays you."

Snoop's knees were already knocking together.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, blinking round, "I'm going to make an example of Snoop. I haven't been treated with proper respect in this Form, because I'm a peaceable sort of a chap. I can lick anybody in the Form. I've challenged Harry Wharton, and he's crawled out of it."

"Amazing!"

"I'm going to make an example of Snoop. I'm jolly well not going to stand any nonsense in the future. To



"Do you humbly apologise?" said Bunter ferociously. "Yes," "Horribly humbly?" "Yes," answered the unhappy Snoop, in a trembling voice.

"Then you'll jolly well apologise," said Bunter severely. "Before all these fellows, too!"

The altercation in the passage had brought many of the Removites out of their studies to see what was the matter. Most of them were laughing.

"I—I didn't mean to insult you!" panted Snoop.

"That's not enough. You're going to apologise, on your knees," added Bunter, as an after-thought.

Snoop looked round helplessly. Bunter's determination made him think that the fat junior must really have developed some new fighting powers; anyway, he was not the sort of fellow to put Bunter the bully to the test.

"Better do it, Snoopey," said Bob Cherry gravely. "You know what a fearful fellow Bunter is when he's roused. You remember the awful licking he gave me in the barn the other day."

your knees!" roared Bunter suddenly, turning upon the unhappy sneak of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha! To your knees!" roared Bob Cherry.

Snoop sank upon his knees.

"Now apologise," said Bunter ferociously.

"I—I—I—ap—apologise," mumbled Snoop.

"Humbly?"

"Yes."

"Horribly humbly?"

"Yes."

"Then you can get up," said Bunter, with a wave of the hand. "I pardon you. All you fellows had better take this as a warning. I'm not going to be trifled with."

And Bunter strode away. He left the crowd in a roar.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter is Called In!

THE next morning, Bunter was fast asleep while the rising-bell was clanging, and he did not wake till Bob Cherry kindly squeezed a wet sponge over his fat face. Then he awoke with a gasp.

"You—you beast!" he spluttered, as the cold water ran down his neck. "I'll—I'll give you a jolly good licking."

"I'm only trying to save you from a row," said Bob Cherry, innocently. "Rising-bell's gone long ago."

"Oh, I didn't get much sleep last night."

"You won't get much breakfast if you don't get up."

Bunter grunted, and turned out of bed. His ablutions did not take him long; they never did. Even if he started six or seven minutes later, he would finish as soon as anybody.

He was in a bad temper that morning. Ordinarily, Bunter in a temper was not much trouble. He would growl and complain, and somebody would throw a boot at him, and all would be calm and bright again. But Bunter, with the knowledge that he was a great fighting-man—Bunter the Bully—was more troublesome when his temper was "rocky."

He blinked savagely round the dormitory. Harry Wharton & Co. were soon gone down, but Snoop was not yet out of bed. Bunter went over to his bed, dragged him out, and administered several sound spanks to his person.

Snoop said nothing, but his eyes burned. Somewhat annoyed in his mind, Bunter went to the washstand for the infinitesimal wash he indulged in of a morning. He blinked wrathfully at Snoop, who was dressing himself.

"There's not going to be any rotten laziness in this dormitory," he said. "I don't like this sticking in bed till the last minute. You look out, my boy, that's all."

"You stick in bed yourself!" growled Snoop.

"That's no business of yours!" said Bunter, in his most bullying tone. "As head of the Remove, I can do as I like. You do as I say, not as I do!"

And Snoop scowled and was silent.

"Head of the Remove!" growled Skinner, as he went downstairs. "My only Panama hat! Head of the Remove—ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner chuckled as he went down. Some new and humorous idea seemed to have come into his mind. He might have been seen whispering and chuckling with several other Removites that morning, and from their looks it might have been guessed that some big joke was on.

After morning school, Billy Bunter swaggered down the passage with his new manner on. The Removites made way for him respectfully. As he went into the Close, Skinner and Bob Cherry and Nugent and Bulstrode came up to him, all with the most respectful manner possible.

Billy Bunter blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows, I'm jolly thirsty!"

"Yes, it's a warm day," said Bulstrode.

"Come along to Mrs. Mumble's and have some gingerpop."

"Jolly good idea!"

Billy Bunter came along willingly enough.

Bulstrode stood him unlimited gingerpop. The juniors stood round him in attitudes of respectful admiration, and Bunter swelled visibly with importance. This was something like! He was jolly glad that he had taken up boxing, and worked hard at it. At last he was taking his proper place in the Form!

"Now to come to business," said Skinner.

"That's it," said Bob Cherry. "Botter

come to business. Only I don't know, whether it's worth Bunter's a life."

"Well, he's so jolly brave, it will be all right."

"Yes; but he'll hardly like wasting his time on a chap like Champigny."

"Yes, that's so. Still, to oblige us—"

"And as head of the Remove, Bunter is bound to protect us," said Skinner.

"Yes, Bunter will admit that."

Billy Bunter looked a little uneasy.

"What are you fellows talking about?" he asked.

"It's about that fellow, Champigny, at Herr Rosenblau's Foreign Academy over the way," said Skinner. "You've seen him—he goes about with Meunier. He's rather a big fellow—taller than you, though not so splendidly built."

"Not half," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, I've seen him," said Bunter.

"I'll have another gingerpop."

"Gingerpop this way, Mrs. Mumble."

"Certainly, Master Bulstrode."

"He swaggers about a lot, and thinks he can lick us," said Bob Cherry. "We were thinking of getting Wharton to take him on, and knock some of the conceit out of him. But as you have developed so wonderfully as a fighting-man, we thought of you."

"Wharton's all right," said Nugent, shaking his head; "but he doesn't box like Bunter."

"No; he would admit that himself."

"He hasn't Bunter's style—that splendid finish, you know."

"Oh, I don't doubt I could lick the fellow," said Bunter. "I don't think it's quite worth my while, though. I prefer a foeman worthy of my steel, you know. I'll have another gingerpop, and some jam tarts."

"You might tackle him," said Skinner.

"We look to you to protect us. You could lick him quite as easily as you could Bob Cherry or myself."

"That wouldn't be very hard."

"Let's go down to the Cloisters and look for him," suggested Nugent. "Give me your arm, Bunter. You don't mind if I take your arm, do you? I know it's a distinction to be seen with you. You ought not to pass over your own study mates, you know."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Billy Bunter, as he left the tuck-shop arm-in-arm with Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent, with Bulstrode and Skinner grinning in the rear. "I don't mind taking you chaps about. I'm not proud. So long as I'm treated with suitable respect, I'm quite willing to chum up with anybody. As for this French chap, I'll knock him into a cocked hat."

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"Oh, that's all right. I'm perfectly willing to protect you fellows!"

"I suppose there's no doubt that Bunter will get in as captain at the next Form election," Skinner remarked.

"Hardly!" said Bulstrode.

"This way to the Cloisters. Come on!"

Bunter simply puffed with pride. Form Captain! In his wildest dreams he had hardly dared to hope for anything like that, though the thought had crossed his mind.

Captain of the Remove—William George Bunter, captain of the Remove! The thought was quite enough to turn Bunter's empty head.

At that moment he would have faced a whole army of French juniors—until he came to close quarters with them. The juniors entered the Cloisters, on the other side of which lay the grounds of Herr Rosenblau's Foreign Academy.

Between the Greyfriars juniors and the foreign fellows rows were frequent, as was only to be expected, and the honours were mostly on the side of the English school.

But there was a new boy at the Foreign Academy now—a French boy named Champigny, who was a swaggering bally

—very much like Bunter himself in that respect, but bigger and more powerful in every way.

He rather overbore Meunier and Hofman, who had been the leaders of the aliens, and had administered several lickings to small boys belonging to Greyfriars. The Greyfriars fellows had thought of matching Harry Wharton against him, and putting him into his place; but it had occurred to Skinner to choose Bunter as the Greyfriars champion, by way of a joke.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as they entered the Cloisters. "There's the boulder, with Meunier and Charpentier."

The French boys sighted them at the same time.

Billy Bunter blinked nervously at the new French boy.

Champigny was head and shoulders taller than Bunter, and looked a tough customer in every way.

Bunter believed that he had licked Bob Cherry, but— The more he looked at Champigny, the less he liked the prospect of a fight with him. He pulled at Bob Cherry's sleeve.

"I—I say, Cherry, I—I don't want a row with a chap I don't know, you know!" he stammered.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob cheerfully. "I'll introduce you!"

"Ye-es; but—"

"Come on!" said Bob, dragging him towards the French juniors.

"Certainly, but I—I—I'm sincerely sorry, but I've forgotten something. I—"

"This way! Here we are!"

And Bob Cherry rushed Billy Bunter onward at top speed, and sent him bumping right upon the chest of Henri Champigny.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Champion of Greyfriars.

CHAMPIGNY gasped, and staggered back. Billy Bunter was no light weight, and he had rolled heavily upon the French boy's chest.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Mon Dieu!" panted Champigny.

Bob Cherry took off his cap.

"Gentlemen, allow me to make you known to one another. Monsieur Champigne—I mean Champigny—is this William George Bunter, of ours!"

"Ciel!"

"William George Bunter, this is Monsieur Henri Champigny, of theirs."

"Ow!"

"Now you know one another."

"Ciel! I zink zat you insult me, you fat thing!" exclaimed Champigny, bending his brows fiercely upon Bunter.

The fat junior retreated in alarm.

"I—I—I—"

Bob Cherry ruthlessly pushed him forward again.

"Of course you mean to insult him, Bunter," he said. "That's what you've come here for. He insults you horribly, Piggy. You don't mind my calling you Piggy for short, do you?"

"Ciel! I am insult."

"Punch his nose next, Bunter."

"I—I—I—"

"I zink zat I not have ze nose punch viz myself. I zink zat I goes for zat pig, and zrases him."

"Look here," began Bunter,

"Pig!"

"I'm not going to be called names by a blessed alien, so I tell you," said Bunter.

"That's the music, Bunter."

"Go it, William George."

"Pile into him!"

Thus encouraged from all sides, Billy Bunter showed a little more spirit. As a matter of fact, the juniors had only brought him there for a "rag," and they meant to interfere before he was much hurt.

A few hard knocks were no more than he deserved for his arrogance. That was how Bob Cherry looked at it. But the affair was to turn out in a way they were far from suspecting.

It had not occurred to Bob that the big French boy, with all his swagger and bluster, might be no braver than Billy Bunter at bottom.

Bob had forgotten the old saying—generally a safe one to follow—that bullies are cowards as a rule.

The moment Bunter assumed a warlike attitude, a great deal of the ferocity died out of the manner of Champigny.

He retreated a few paces in his turn. "Ciel! Who is this fat peeg?" he asked.

"I've introduced him," said Bob Cherry. "Now begin."

"I—I—I—I'm r-r-ready," said Bunter. "Ciel! I zink I fight not viz vun smaller zan myself."

"Oh, Bunter doesn't mind."

Meunier and Charpentier grinned at one another. Champigny had lorded it over them a great deal, owing to his size; but his unwillingness to tackle Bunter gave them a hint that he was not the great fighting-man he pretended to be.

And with one accord they determined that the fight should take place, whether Champigny wanted it or not.

"Go eet," exclaimed Meunier. "Zat garcon is a terrible fightair, but you are not afraid of heem."

"You vill leek him, so easy," said Charpentier, snapping his fingers.

"Ciel! Zat is true. Mais—but—"

"Rats! Get to business," said Bulstrode. "I think you're afraid."

"Afraid! I, Henri Champigny afraid?"

"Well, get to work, then."

Billy Bunter puffed out his chest. He took his spectacles off and handed them to Nugent to hold. He rubbed his eyes and blinked at the aliens. The more doubtful Champigny appeared about beginning, the more Bunter's courage rose, of course.

He felt the proud consciousness that he was a Britisher, after all, and that Champigny was a blessed alien, as he would have put it.

"Come on," he exclaimed, brandishing his fists. "Make him come on!"

"I zink—"

"Shove him this way, Meunier, do you hear?"

"I zink zat—"

"Go on, garcon—fight heem!" exclaimed Meunier, giving Champigny a violent push behind the shoulders that sent him staggering towards Bunter.

Billy Bunter landed out, and caught the Frenchman a sounding rap on the nose.

Champigny gave a roar, and clapped his hand to that organ.

"Ow! Ciel! Ow!"

Bunter danced round him. The fact that Champigny was unwilling to fight was now apparent to everybody, and Bunter, in consequence, was as brave as a lion.

If the bully of the Foreign Academy had known Bunter's true character, he would, of course, have tackled him readily. But all he knew of Bunter was that the Greyfriars fellows had brought him forward as a champion.

He naturally concluded from that that appearances were against Bunter, and that he was in reality an athletic and rather terrible antagonist.

Bob Cherry gave a giggle, as he saw Bunter dancing round the big French boy.

It was too funny to see Bunter as a fighting-man, urging Champigny to "come on," when Champigny could have knocked him sky-high with a single blow, if he had had the courage to deal it.

Meunier and Charpentier were sniffing with disgust. They had their funny ways, but they were brave enough. They had no mercy for the coward.

"Return zat blow!" shrieked Meunier.

"Go for heem!" yelled Charpentier.

"Ciel! I'm hurt!"

"Come on!" roared Bunter, making frantic passes at Champigny, and tapping him all over the ribs and chest. He could hardly reach the French boy's face, and without his glasses he could hardly see clearly where to hit him. But many of his blows took effect, all the same.

"Come on! Put up your hands, you rotter! Stick to it! Come on!"

"I zink zat I am fatigue."

"Yah! Take that!"

Champigny rolled on the ground.

Bunter, more excited than ever, pranced round him, brandishing his fat fists and shrieking to him to get up and be licked.

Champigny, who apparently had no taste for being licked, remained where he was.

"Get up!" roared Bob Cherry, almost choking with laughter. "Get up, you bouncer! Oh, this is as good as a circus!"

"Better!" gasped Nugent, wiping his eyes. "Oh, Bunter, Bunter, you'll be the death of me yet! Fancy Bunter striking terror to the hearts of his foes. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up!" shrieked Meunier.

"Coward!"

"Coward!" yelled Charpentier, stirring Champigny with his foot.

"Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ciel! I am hurt! I zink zat my back is sprain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Licked!" roared Bob Cherry. "The great champion is licked, and Bunter has done it. Come on, Bunter. You're a great chief!"

"I'd rather make a complete job of it," said Bunter. "He's not half-licked yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I zink zat ve lick him, zen," said Meunier. "He is disgrace to la Belle France. I avenges ze insult myself presently. Charpentier, mon ami, lend me ze hand, and ve vill giff him ze march of ze frog."

"Good! Ve vill!"

Champigny began to struggle, but the two French lads, bubbling over with indignation, seized him, and marched him off into the gates of the Foreign Academy, giving him "ze march of ze frog" in a way that made him roar.

Bunter put on his jacket with a satisfied smirk.

"That's all right," he remarked. "You fellows can always look to me for protection. I'll look after you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in that. Bulstrode, come along; I am thirsty. I shall want some more gingerpop."

"Go and eat eoke!" said Bulstrode.

"Are you looking for a thick ear?"

"Oh, come on!" said Skinner, linking arms with Bunter and dragging him off before Bulstrode could reply, afraid that the bully of the Remove might spoil the joke. "I'll stand the gingerpop."

"I'm jolly well not going to have any cheek from Bulstrode."

"Of course you're not. But he wouldn't dare to be cheeky to you. Now, put it to yourself calmly, Bunter. Do you think any chap in the Remove would dare to be cheeky to you?"

"Well, I suppose not."

"That's right! Come along and have some gingerpop."

And Bunter went along and had it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Free Kicks.

IT was a half-holiday that day at Greyfriars, and as the weather was fine, most of the juniors were looking forward to a pleasant time.

Hazeldene's sister, Marjorie, said her

friend Clara were coming over to see Hazeldene, and Harry Wharton & Co. were more than usually attentive to Hazeldene on account of it.

They were laying little plans for a pleasant feed of cakes and ices and ginger-beer under the trees in the Close.

Other fellows in the Remove were laying other plans. Skinner borrowed a fragment of cardboard from Bob Cherry, and a camel-hair brush from Ogilvy, and spent ten minutes in concocting a little placard.

This he affixed to a hooked pin, and concealed it under his jacket. Then he went to look for Billy Bunter.

He found the fat junior engaged in living up to his new role. Bunter was bullying a Third Form fag in the Close, and the fag was scowling. As he was about half Bunter's size, he couldn't do anything else. Bunter pulled his ears, and sent him away scowling, and blinked at Skinner.

"Jolly thirsty this afternoon," said the fat junior.

"Yes, it's dry," said Skinner. "By the way, there's some dust on your jacket—let me rub it off."

He rubbed the back of the jacket, and affixed the placard to it at the same time, quite unknown to Billy Bunter.

"Any gingerpop going?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Not so far as I'm concerned," said Skinner. "I'm stony."

"You'll jolly well stand me a gingerpop, or you won't be able to stand at all!" said Bunter threateningly.

Skinner became immensely submissive all at once.

"All right," he said. "Come on!"

Bunter trotted off with him to Mrs. Mumble's. He hadn't the faintest idea that there was a placard on his back, and that it bore in large, staring black letters on a white ground:

"PLEASE TAKE A FREE KICK!"

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were standing outside the tuckshop, and they were the first to sight that peculiar invitation pinned to the back of the Falstaff of the Remove.

Temple chuckled.

"Can't refuse a chap a thing like that," he said.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Here you are!" said Temple, landing out with his foot, and lifting Bunter a couple of feet along upon his way.

The fat junior gave a roar.

"What on earth—"

"Well, you asked for it," said Temple as he walked away with his friend, chuckling. Bunter blinked after him.

"The utter ass! I've a jolly good mind to go after him and lick him!" he growled.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming along. "Free kick—certainly! Here you are!"

And Bob Cherry's boot—which was a good size in boots—drove the fat junior fairly into the tuckshop, and sent him rolling there on his hands and knees.

"Ow! Yow!" spluttered Bunter.

"What beast was that? What do you mean? Ow! I'm hurt! I'll jolly well pulverise you!"

He staggered to his feet. Bob Cherry was gone, and so was Skinner, and the promised gingerpop was not forthcoming. Bunter knew better than to ask Mrs. Mumble for it when he was out of cash.

He went out of the school shop, in the worst possible temper. Snoop was just coming in, and Bunter gave him a bullying push that sent him to the door-post.

Snoop did not make any return for that little favour. Only his eyes glowed. Bunter went out, and almost ran into

Bulstrode. The Remove bully glanced at him as he passed, with a grin.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed.

Bunter blinked round at him.

"Eh! Did you speak, Bulstrode?"

"Yes, I'll take a free kick."

"You jolly well won't! I—Ow!"

Bunter went staggering forward.

Bulstrode walked away, laughing.

Bunter blinked after him, in growing amazement. It seemed to him that a sudden attack of insanity had descended upon the fellows of Greyfriars. What did they all mean by kicking him like this?

"Hallo!" exclaimed Carberry of the Sixth, as Bunter passed him. "Well, blessed if that doesn't take the cake!"

"What does?" asked Inionedes.

"Look at that!"

"Ha, ha, ha! We must do as requested."

"Good! Both together!"

Two Sixth Form boots, planted at the same moment behind Bunter, fairly hurled him off his feet. He went down in the grass on his hands and knees, and then rolled over and sat up, blinking. The two Sixth Formers were walking away. Bunter wondered whether he was in a dream.

"They're all mad!" he said to himself with conviction. "All as mad as hatters! The silly asses! Fancy kicking a chap!"

And the fat junior, feeling decidedly disturbed and sore, went on his way. He received several more kicks before he reached the door of the School House, and the curious thing was that the kickers seemed to think that they were obliging him.

Ogilvy gave him the last as he was entering the School House, and sent him staggering into the arms of Harry Wharton, who was coming out.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wharton, catching Bunter by the collar with one hand, and holding on to the door with the other.

"Where are you running to?"

"Ow!"

"Can't you see where you are going?"

"Yow! A beast has just kicked me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton, catching sight of the notices on Bunter's back. "Ha, ha, ha! Well, you must expect it, if you ask for it."

"Ask for it! What do you mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Wharton walked away without any further explanation. Bunter wandered in, thinking that Wharton was as mad as the rest.

Wun Lung the Chinese caught sight of him, and crept up quietly behind the fat form of Bunter, and took the free kick.

Bunter gave a whoop and tottered forward, just as Mr. Quelch came out of his study. He caught at the Remove master to save himself from falling, and tore a huge rent in his gown.

Mr. Quelch uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Bunter! What do you mean?"

"Ow! Some beast kicked me! Yow!"

"Wun Lung, did you kick Bunter?"

"Me kickee," said the little Chinese cheerfully.

"What! You admit that you kicked Bunter?" demanded the Form-master.

"Me kickee, allee light."

"You young heathen beast—"

"Silence, Bunter! Why did you kick Bunter, Wun Lung?"

"He askee."

"What?"

"Bunter askee," said the Chinese, with a smile that was childlike and bland.

"It's a lie!" hooted Bunter. "I didn't ask—I wouldn't. As if I should ask to be kicked, you rotten heathen!"

"Silence! Wun Lung, you must intend this for impertinence. What do you mean by saying that Bunter asked to be kicked?"

"He askee takee freee kick."

And Wun Lung pointed to the notice on Bunter's back. Mr. Quelch glanced at it, and could not suppress a smile.

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He jerked it off and showed it to Bunter.

"Look at that, Bunter. Am I to understand that you deliberately wore this absurd placard on your back?"

Bunter's jaw dropped as he stared at it blankly.

"N—n—n—no, sir. Of course, I didn't know anything about it. Some beast has done that for a joke, I suppose."

"Ha, ha!—I mean, very foolish indeed. Wun Lung, you surely knew perfectly well that Bunter had not placed that notice on his back himself?"

"No savvy."

"You must have known that Bunter did not really wish you to kick him," said the Remove master sternly.

"No savvy."

"Did you think so, Wun Lung?"

"No savvy, sir."

"Come, you must give me a plain answer. You certainly did not imagine that it was Bunter's wish to be kicked?"

"No savvy."

The Form master looked intently at the Oriental junior. Wun Lung's face was perfectly mild and innocent.

"You may go, Wun Lung."

"Me tankee you, sir."

And Wun Lung went his way. As soon as he was out of sight of the Form master the little Chinese doubled up in a paroxysm of silent merriment. Mr. Quelch went on his way with a rather perplexed look.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Shut Up.

"MARJORIE!"

Four voices uttered the name simultaneously. Four juniors started to run to meet the two girls who entered the old gateway of Greyfriars with Hazeldene of the Remove.

Marjorie Hazeldene and her friend Clara looked very charming in white summer dresses and big shady hats.

But more charming than the dresses or the hats were the two pretty faces with their bright eyes and agreeable smiles.

Four hats went off as if by clockwork.

"Good afternoon!"

"So jolly glad to see you!"

"The gladness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows!" broke in a voice.

Billy Bunter rolled up.

Bunter was clad in white ducks, with a sash and a wide-brimmed hat, and looked more fat and heavy than ever.

But he was evidently pleased with himself, and fancied that he was cutting a very handsome figure in the eyes of the girls.

He raised his hat to the girls with that half-impertinent, half-patronising air that made all girls dislike him, and grinned amiably.

"Ripping afternoon, isn't it, Marjorie?"

"Yes," said Marjorie Hazeldene shortly.

She was "Marjorie" to her friends in the Greyfriars Remove; but somehow she did not like Bunter to address her by her Christian name. But a little thing like that was not likely to affect Bunter, and he was not afraid of a licking now.

"We're going to have tea under the trees," said Bunter, speaking as if he were quite master of the ceremonies; whereas, as a matter of fact, he was not even invited to the feed.

Bob Cherry looked daggers at the fat junior, and then, as Miss Clara's eyes turned upon him, he tried to change the expression of his face in time. He pretended to be coughing, and became as red as a beetroot.

"My goodness," said Miss Clara, "are you ill?"

"Groo—oo—! No, thanks."

"You have a cold?" said Marjorie anxiously.

"No—n—no! Groo!"

"I didn't know you had a cough, Cherry," said Hazeldene in surprise.

"I—groo—oo—haven't."

"What are you barking for, then?"

"I—groo—oo—oo—! I'm not barking."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here, I want to speak to you, Bunter," said Nugent, suddenly taking the fat junior by the arm and leading him aside.

The others, who guessed that what Nugent had to say would be better said out of the presence of the girls, contrived to walk on with Marjorie and Clara, leaving the fat junior behind with Nugent.

"I—I say, Nugent—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I—I shan't shut up! I'll give you a jolly good licking!"

"Rats! You young ass! That was a jape so far as it went, but it's time to write fins. Do you see?"

"Look here—"

"You're not really a fighting-man—you're a rotten, cowardly, beastly little fat toad!" explained Nugent.

Bunter turned as red as a turkey-cock with indignation.

"You—you rotter!" he ejaculated.

"I'll—I'll give you the licking of your life. Come into the gym."

Nugent hesitated a moment, and then he nodded quickly.

"All serene. I'll come into the gym."

And he linked arms with Bunter and led him thither. Bunter blinked at him several times doubtfully. He had an idea that this was bluff on Nugent's part.

If Nugent turned out to be in earnest—Bunter's new courage sank a great deal at the thought.

He was in a less boastful frame of mind as they reached the gym. The big building was almost empty, most of the fellows being out in the playing-fields or on the river.

"I—I—I say, Nugent—"

Frank Nugent made no reply.

He led the way to a little room where some of the gymnastic requisites were kept, and opened the door.

"Come in here," he said.

"Wh-wh-what for?"

"Get in."

"I—I won't!"

Nugent seized the fat junior by the shoulders and bundled him in. Billy Bunter rolled over in the midst of an overturned confusion of foils and masks and ropes and other paraphernalia.

"Ow!" he roared. "I'm hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door slammed to.

Billy Bunter jumped up and ran at it fiercely. But before he could touch the handle the key clicked in the lock on the outside.

Bunter hammered on the door furiously.

"Open the door!" he yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent's laugh was the only reply he received.

He heard the junior hurrying away, and he hammered on the door in vain. Few had seen the trick Nugent had played; and they, guessing that Bunter was making himself obnoxious to the girls, were not inclined to interfere.

Nugent left the gym with a grin on his face and joined his friends. Harry Wharton gave him a quick, inquiring look.

"Where's Bunter?" he asked in a low voice.

"In the gym."

"Staying there?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Lumber-room—door locked," said Nugent briefly.

Wharton laughed.

Marjorie and Clara had heard nothing of the exchange of words, and they had no suspicion. They did not care in the least what became of Bunter.

The juniors had already made their preparations for that pleasant little afternoon tea.

Under the shade of one of the large, overhanging elms a little table had been

set out, with a spotless cloth, and upon the table were arranged plates and glasses, and bottles of gingerpop and lemonade, cakes, and strawberries in little neat baskets, and little brown jugs of cream.

It was a very pleasant and enticing array, and the girls smiled cordially as they sank into the deep, comfortable garden-chairs.

In the Close the sunlight was falling in great sheets of heat, but under the thick branches of the elm all was shady and calm.

As the juniors and their girl chums sat there, a happy little group, many an envious glance was turned upon them by fellows who passed in the hot sun.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Fall of Billy Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER hammered on the door of the room till he was tired. His knocking did not pass unheard.

As he desisted, at last, he heard a voice of inquiry from the other side.

"Anybody in there?"
"Ob, yes, Ogilvy," exclaimed Bunter, putting his mouth to the keyhole, "I'm locked in!"

"Dear me!" said Ogilvy.
"The key's in that side of the lock."
"So it is."

"Will you unlock the door? I've been shut up here by that beast Nugent because he's jealous of me."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footsteps of Ogilvy could be heard dying away. Bunter kicked on the door.
"Ogilvy! I say, Ogilvy!"
There was no reply.

Bunter removed his spectacles, wiped his perspiring nose, and replaced them. He blinked at the immovable door in wrath.

"Hallo! Anybody in there?"
It was the voice of Snoop.

Bunter started with hope. Snoop, at least, would let him out; Snoop would not dare to keep him a prisoner there!

"Yes, Snoopey, I'm here. Open the door, there's a good chap."

"He, he, he!" giggled Snoop.
"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! Open the door!"

"Ho, he, he!"
"Will you let me out!" roared Bunter.
"I'll give you the hiding of your life if you don't unlock the door!"

Still that disagreeable snigger of the sneak of the Remove was all that Bunter received in reply.

"He, he, he!"
"I'll give you an awful licking!" roared the fat junior through the keyhole.

"Rats! You couldn't lick a mouse."
"Wh—what! What's that?"

"They've only been fooling you. You couldn't lick a tame rabbit. I'm going to give you a hiding."

"You wouldn't dare to say that if the door wasn't locked!" roared Bunter.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter snorted with wrath. It was bad enough to be shut up there by Nugent, and to be mocked by a fellow like Ogilvy; but to have the very worm turn on him in that manner was too galling. Snoop the sneak—Snoop whom he had cuffed and bullied—even he was defying him now that there was a locked door between them!

And then that tea under the trees—the cake—the gingerpop—the strawberries and cream!

Bunter groaned in anguish of spirit. He tapped on the door again, resolving to speak to the sneak of the Remove fair, since threats were of no avail through a locked door.

"Snoop! I say, Snoopey!"
"Hallo, Porker!"

Billy Bunter bristled with wrath. Snoop was venturing to call him Porker—because the door was locked. But he controlled his wrath.

"Snoopey! Open the door, there's a good chap!"

"He, he, he!"
"Don't be a cad, Snoopey."

"He, he, he!"
"You mongrel!" roared Bunter, losing patience.

"I'll break you into little bits when I get hold of you!"
"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop.

Then suddenly the sound of the snigger died away. A heavier footstep sounded outside the little door. Bunter heard a voice he knew well—the deep voice of Wingate of the Sixth.

"Who's been locking this door? Young rascals!"

"There was a sound of the key turning in the lock. The door opened, and Wingate came in, snorting.

He gave a start as he nearly knocked over Billy Bunter.

"Thank you, Wingate. I——"
"What are you doing here?"

"You see, I——"
"Get out!"

"I was shut up——"

nashun, with wrath and thunder in his contracted brows.

It did not take him long to reach the spot where the chums were discussing strawberries and cream under the big tree. Snoop was there now, and he was relating something that made the chums chuckle and brought smiles to the faces of Marjorie and Clara.

Bunter simply snorted. They were daring to make fun of him before the girls! The cheek of it!

Ho resolved to bring them to their senses. He strode up to the spot and scowled at Snoop, who retreated a few paces.

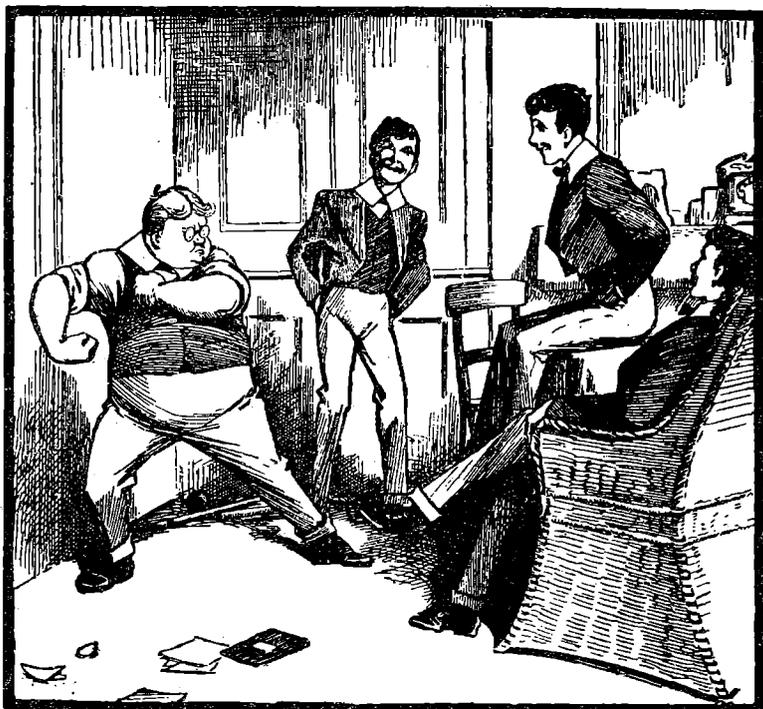
Bunter blinked at Frank Nugent.

"I've been let out!" he exclaimed. Nugent nodded.

"I see you have," he said. "Jolly careless of the authorities at Bedlam, that's all I've got to say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here, Nugent——"

"I'm looking."
"You shut me up——"



"Which of you will come on first?" asked Billy Bunter. "I'm going to lick you!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Yah! You're afraid!" said the fat junior scornfully.

"Well, shut up again, and get out!"
"You see——"

"Oh, get along, do, and don't bother!"
Bunter got out of the room, sniffing with indignation. He was in a state of towering wrath, but he did not dare to argue with Wingate.

He looked round for Snoop, but Snoop was gone.

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his nose.

"The rotters!" he muttered. "They think they're going to do me out of my tea, I suppose. I'll shew 'em! I'll jolly well give Nugent a licking before the girls. That'll make him feel small! I'll kick him out and won't let him have any tea: and if the others don't like it, I'll give them a licking all round. I'll jolly well show 'em who's master. Let 'em look out!"

And Billy Bunter strode from the gym.

"Then I ought to have a medal from the Humane Society for shutting up a chap like you on a hot day," said Nugent. "It's jolly hard to shut you up."

"Oh, don't be funny. I'm not going to be treated——"

"Not by me."
"I'm not going to be treated in this fashion!" roared Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton turned a quiet but meaning glance upon him.

"You seem to forget who's present," he said.

Bunter sniffed.
"No, I don't."
"Well, buzz off!"

"I won't!"
"Bunter!"

"I can lick any fellow here," said Billy Bunter. "I'll lick you if you give me any check."

"Now, look here, you funny merchant," said Wharton, leaning forward a little. "You've been japed by the Remove till you don't know where you are. You can't fight—you can't do anything but eat. You're the worst figure as a bully that ever was made. Don't be an ass. Buzz off, or be quiet."

"I'll lick you!"

"Oh, Bunter!" said Marjorie.

"I'm sorry, Marjorie, but I have to be firm," said Bunter. "I'm the head of this Form. These fellows are cheeking me. I shall have to make an example of them."

"He, he, he!"

It was an irresistible snigger from Snoop. Bob Cherry, who had had enough of the joke on Bunter, had fully explained matters to Snoop, as he realised that Bunter would not be cured of his hallucination without a licking, and he didn't want to hurt him himself.

Bunter turned upon Snoop fiercely. Snoop was about the easiest fellow to tackle for the purpose of showing his prowess before the girls from Cliff House.

"What did you say, Snoop?" he roared.

"He, he, he!"

"I'll teach you to cackle at me!" snorted Bunter.

"Hold on, Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who didn't want even such a farcical fight as Billy was likely to put up, before the girls.

But Billy Bunter was not to be restrained. He was on the warpath, so to speak, and he meant business. The reputation of Bunter the Bully was tottering, and it had to be sustained.

"Come on, Snoop, you worm!"

"He, he, he!"

"Come on, and I'll lick you!"

"He, he, he!"

As Snoop did not come on, Bunter came on himself. He rushed upon Snoop, smiting out at him in a good deal of the manner of the sails of a windmill.

"Don't be alarmed, Marjorie," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Bunter won't hurt Snoop and Snoop won't hurt Bunter. They're too much afraid of one another."

Bunter and Snoop closed in deadly conflict. Bunter's hat went flying in one direction and his glasses in another. Snoop, clutching the fat junior tight and close, so that Bunter could not hit him, danced about with him, dragging him hither and thither.

The girls had looked alarmed for the moment, but the fight was so absurd that they were smiling now.

It was perfectly plain that the combatants were afraid of each other, and were grasping one another so close to avoid blows.

But Snoop was a trifle the less afraid of the two. He made an effort presently,

and hurled Bunter into the grass. The fat junior lay gasping like a newly landed fish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up!" yelled Snoop, simply bursting with courage now. "Up with you!"

"Hold on," said Wharton. "Nuff's as good as a feast. You buzz off, Snoopey!"

And Snoop buzzed off. Bunter slowly rose to his feet and set himself to rights.

It was dawning even upon his obtuse brain that he had been "rotted" in a way that could only have been done with a silly, conceited fellow, and that he had made a most egregious ass of himself.

And as that conviction forced itself into his mind the truculence died away out of his manner.

"Of course, you fellows knew it was all a joke?" he said, helping himself to strawberries without being invited.

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "We did."

"I—I mean, a joke on my part. I

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knew what you were up to, you see, and I entered into the spirit of the thing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Funny, wasn't it? I made you believe that I—that I—I was a bully like Bulstrode, only in fun, of course."

"Yes, it was funny," agreed Wharton—"more funny than you think. We know now what a nice fellow you would be if you were as big and strong as Bulstrode; so we're more satisfied with you as you are—a fat, lazy worm!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Have some strawberries and shut up!"

And Bunter obeyed. He ate his strawberries and cream in silence, while the juniors and girls chatted merrily. Bunter had little to say, for once in his life. Even he had been made to feel very small indeed; and, needless to say, from that time, though Billy Bunter continued to vex his friends in many ways, nothing more was heard of Bunter the Bully.

THE END.

BETWEEN OURSELVES.

A Weekly Chat between The Editor and His Readers.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY!

Three magnificent long, complete stories are due to appear in next Friday's issue of THE PENNY POPULAR. The first, which deals with the arrival of Tom Brown at Greyfriars, is entitled:

"THE CHUM FROM NEW ZEALAND!"

The second is that introducing Tom Merry & Co., and entitled:

"ASHAMED OF HIS NAME!"

The third deals with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, and is entitled:

"THE ROOKWOOD COOKS!"

Each of the stories is of the highest quality, and I am sure they will appeal to every one of my readers.

I hope my chums will excuse me for not describing at length the tales due to appear in our next issue, but I want to acquaint you with all the splendid attractions which are now appearing in our companion paper, "The Boys' Friend."

The stories in "The Boys' Friend" have never been better than they are at present. Perhaps the chief of the attractions is a great, new series of complete tales dealing with the school-days of Frank Richards, the famous author.

Then there is a splendid new serial story, dealing with the School Afloat, and entitled, "The Boys of the Bombay Castle!" Every week "The Boys' Friend" contains a long, complete story introducing Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood, a long, complete tale of Bob Travers, the boy boxer, and a thrilling tale of Dick, Frank, and Joe, the popular Crusoe Island adventurers.

Altogether, "The Boys' Friend" cannot be beaten for real, high-class, attractive reading, and those readers who are not supporters of the good old "B. F." would be well advised to purchase a copy and judge for themselves whether my remarks concerning "The Boys' friend" are not justified.

YOUR EDITOR.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

is entitled:

"THE CHUM FROM NEW ZEALAND!"

Please order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance, and hand this number, when finished with, to a non-reader.