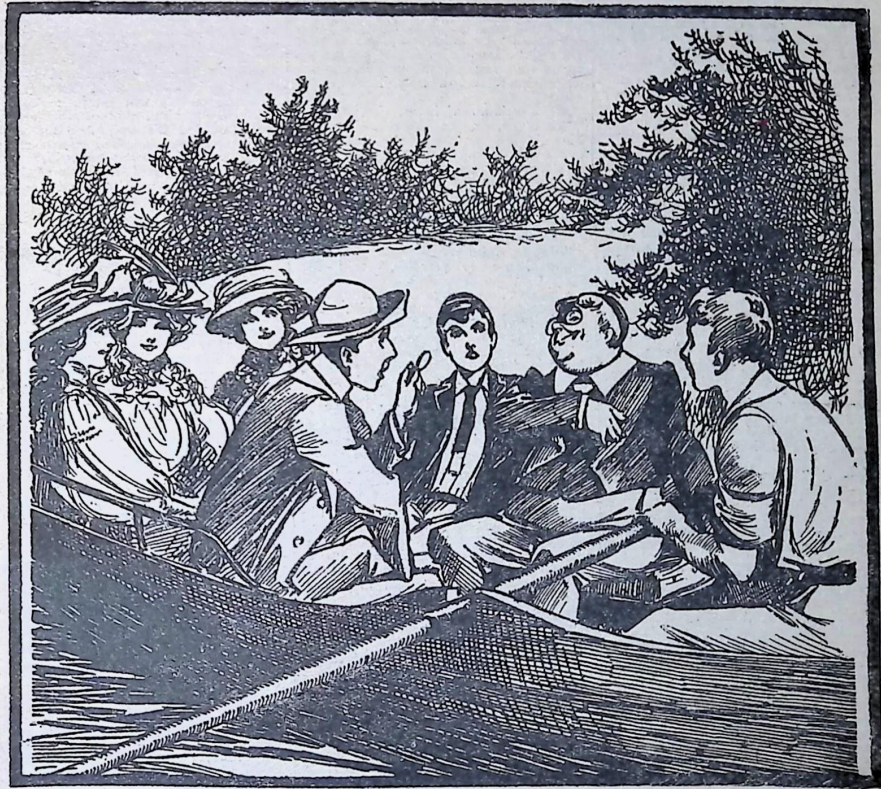


EVERY SCHOOLBOY SHOULD READ—

The Penny Popular

No.
262.

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



WHAT'S WRONG WITH BILLY BUNTER?

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

A Grand
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!

By
Owen
Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Invitations.

"SEEN that notice about an Old Country Fair?"

Jimmy Silver, the leader of the Fiestal Four at Rookwood School, asked the question of his chums, Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, as they were walking one evening down a quiet country lane in the direction of the school.

"Yes," replied Lovell. "It's to raise funds for the Cottage Hospital, isn't it?"

"That's the idea! Wonder if there'll be anything worth going to see?"

"I should think it'll be pretty decent, because they're making a big splash about it."

"Here comes Mr. Jarvis!" exclaimed Raby suddenly.

"So it is!" said Jimmy Silver, as the four chums approached an elderly gentleman who was walking towards them.

Mr. Jarvis, who owned a great deal of property around Rookwood, was a jolly, red-faced gentleman, with white hair. He was known by sight by all at Rookwood School, and he always had a kindly smile for the juniors.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had come in contact with him on two or three previous occasions, and as his eye fell upon them now he hailed them heartily.

"Hallo, my boys!" he cried. "Where are you off to?"

"We're just out for a stroll, sir," replied Jimmy Silver.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Jarvis cheerfully. "Suppose you've finished work for the day?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jimmy.

"And jolly glad, too!" put in Raby.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Jarvis. "I wasn't too fond of work myself when I was at school. But, I say, have you seen the bills about the fair which you are going to hold here?"

"Yes, sir," said Lovell. "We were just talking about it when we met you."

"Ah, good! Well, you're just the boys I want to help me. I'm the secretary of the committee, you know!"

"Us?" queried Jimmy Silver, in surprise. "Of course, we shall be only too pleased to help you. But what can you do?"

"Ah, well, I'll just tell you. I'm arranging a little concert for the Saturday evening in the hall at Coombe. I want you boys to give some items. I expect you can sing or recite, or do something or other?"

"Well, we can all sing a bit," said Jimmy Silver hesitatingly.

"Good! That's just the thing!" exclaimed Mr. Jarvis. "I shall count on you then!"

"Very good, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"We'll do our best."

"That's the style!" exclaimed the man.

"Let me have your items as soon as you

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can, as I shall want to put them on the programme, you know."

"Very good, sir!"

With a pat on the shoulders and a cheerful smile, Mr. Jarvis bade them good-bye.

He was moving away when Jimmy Silver called him.

"Mr. Jarvis!"

"Hallo, my boy!" was the quick reply.

"Would you mind, sir," continued

Jimmy, "allowing us to do our practising in that empty house of yours in the lane, about half a mile from Rookwood?"

Mr. Jarvis stared in surprise.

"You see, sir, it's like this," went on Jimmy. "we don't want the other kids in the school to know what we're going to do, and if we practise in the study they'll hear us."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the old gentleman. "Going to spring it on 'em as a surprise—eh?"

"That's the idea, sir!"

"You're quite welcome to go to the empty house to practise," said Mr. Jarvis. "The door isn't locked, as the men are working there between whiles."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said Jimmy Silver. "Good-evening!"

"Good-bye, my lads—good-bye!"

"What the merry dickens are you thinking about?" exclaimed Lovell, when they had walked a little way down the lane.

"He must be off his giddy rocker!" put in Raby. "What do we want to go and practise in an empty house for?"

"You kids are a little slow of understanding," said Jimmy Silver, in a superior tone.

"What the—?"

"Look here," went on Jimmy, disregarding the interruption, "we've all got pretty good voices, and there's no reason why we shouldn't dress up as pierrots and give some quartettes!"

His chums stared at him in amazement.

"My hat!" muttered Raby.

"Well, I'm hanged!" murmured Newcome.

"But we don't know any quartettes!" exclaimed Lovell, in bewilderment.

"Well, we can learn some, can't we, fathead?" cried Jimmy Silver.

"But we've only got just over a week to do it in!" declared Lovell.

"What of it? We can start at once, and I'm pretty smart at music. I'll do the coaching!"

"It's a spanking idea," said Lovell, "if we can carry it out."

"Anyway, we can only try," said Jimmy Silver enthusiastically. "And we've promised Mr. Jarvis we'll do our best."

"We should look spiffing in pierrots' costumes!" said Raby, with a grin.

"It's the singing you've got to think about!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "If we

don't sing decently we shall look like a pack of giddy fatheads dressed up like that!"

When they reached Rookwood once more they adjourned to the end study immediately to discuss the matter in detail.

"Seeing that you've let us in for it like this, I suppose you know of some quartettes we can sing?" said Newcome, addressing the leader of the Fiestal Four.

"Of course I do!" replied Jimmy Silver. "There's 'Sweet and Low', that's a quiet sort of thing. Then there's 'Playing on the Old Banjo'; that's a quick, lively thing. And—well, there are several others. We can go and buy copies in the morning, and then go straight to the empty house to try 'em over."

"All right," said Lovell doubtfully. "It's up to you! You're running the show!"

"It's up to all of us," replied Jimmy Silver quietly. "If you kids don't pile in I can't make the thing a success."

"Oh, we'll rally round!" put in Raby.

"Hear, hear!"

Meanwhile, Mr. Jarvis had continued on his way to Coombe, and shortly after leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. had run across Tommy Dodd and his chums Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood.

Mr. Jarvis did not know them, but he recognised them as Rookwood juniors, and hailed them cheerfully.

"I say, boys," exclaimed the old gentleman, "can any of you sing?"

Tommy Dodd & Co. stared.

"Sing?" queried Tommy Dodd, mystified.

"Yes," replied Mr. Jarvis. "I'm getting up a concert in connection with the old country fair, and I'm on the look-out for items. It's next Saturday!"

"Oh! I said Tommy Dodd. "I see! I can sing a bit, and Tommy Cook can recite, and—"

"There you are, then!" said the old gentleman heartily. "May I count on you for some items?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tommy Dodd. "We should like to do something. Might we give a sketch that we did at a school concert a little while ago?"

"Excellent—excellent!" cried Mr. Jarvis. "I've been looking out for something like that! Let me have all the details early next week, so that I can put them all down on the programme."

"All right, sir!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Good-evening, my boys—good-evening!" said Mr. Jarvis hastily. "And thank you very much!"

"Not at all, sir!" answered Tommy Dodd, as the old gentleman hurried off.

"Well, that's the giddy limit!" exclaimed Tommy Cook a moment later.

"When is the fair, anyhow?"

"To-morrow week," replied Tommy Dodd.

"Not much time, then," remarked Tommy Doyle.

"Oh, we can soon swot up our parts again," said Tommy Dodd. "And you can crack up one of your rotten recitations, if you like," he continued, turning to Tommy Cook.

"My recitations are not—" "We shall have to run through the sketch to-morrow," went on Tommy Dodd, "and see how much we've forgotten. We've got the costumes, anyway, that's something."

The Modern chums returned to Rookwood full of the idea, and retired to their study, as the Fistical Four had done, to go into the affair more thoroughly.

"Fancy that old chap pouncing on us like that," mused Tommy Cook.

"Yes; he evidently trusts us to turn out something decent," said Tommy Dodd, "because he can't know whether we're any good or not."

"All the masters know him," said Tommy Doyle, "and very likely he'll make some inquiries about us."

"That's so," admitted Tommy Dodd. "If we go all in, though, we ought to be the best turn of the evening."

"I expect the audience'll get a 'turn' if Cook gives one of his recitations," said Tommy Doyle, with a grin.

"What's the matter with my recitations?" exclaimed Tommy Cook warmly.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with the recitations!" declared Tommy Doyle humorously.

"Well, nobody could render 'em—" "Oh, shut up about your giddy recitations!" cried Tommy Dodd, "The sketch is what we've got to think about."

"As a matter of fact, I dare say my recitations would go down—"

"With a bang!" interposed Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "If you're not careful, I won't have anything to do with the business at all," growled Tommy Cook. "Then where will you be?"

"Faith, an' we should be there just the same!" replied Tommy Doyle.

"Look here," said Tommy Dodd despairingly. "Listen to what I've got to say. To-morrow morning we'll have a go at the thing, and see how we stand. Then we'll swot up the parts we've forgotten, and run it through again in the afternoon."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Cook gave a growling assent. He was a bit nettled by the sly insinuations about his recitations.

"Won't those Classical asses be wild about this?" chuckled Tommy Cook, as he and his chums retired for the night.

"If we carry the thing through properly," said Tommy Dodd. "Otherwise they'll have the laugh of us."

"We'll see to that!" said Tommy Cook confidently.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tommy Dodd & Co. Score.

THE next morning the Fistical Four arose full of their plans for the forthcoming concert.

Soon after breakfast they set off for the village to procure copies of the quartettes they had decided to work up.

"Those Modern bouncers'll be done in the eye over this," said Raby exultantly, when they were on the road.

"Yes," said Newcome. "We must get 'em to come to the concert and hear us score a great success."

"Rather!" The Classical juniors succeeded in obtaining what they required in the

village, and started off excitedly for the empty house.

"This'll be just the thing," said Jimmy Silver as they reached their destination. "It's well cut off from the road, and we sha'n't get any interruptions."

They found the door unfastened as Mr. Jarvis had said, and they all trooped in, Jimmy Silver going first with the copies under his arm.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly through the empty passage as they walked round, looking in at the doors of the rooms.

"There'll be a fearful echo," said Lovell, "when we start singing."

"That won't matter," replied Jimmy Silver. "There'll be no one to listen, and it won't hurt us."

delighted at the prospect of being able to score over the Modern chums.

Doubtless everything would have gone off excellently but for one thing.

Just as the Fistical Four were in the middle of "Playing On the Old Banjo," Tommy Dodd & Co. happened to pass along the lane in which the empty house was situated.

"Listen!" exclaimed Tommy Cook suddenly, pulling up.

"What's that awful howling noise!" said Tommy Dodd, with a startled look on his face.

"It's coming from the direction of that empty house," said Tommy Doyle, glancing over the hedge.

"It must be haunted!" said Tommy Cook.

"Don't talk rot!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "It's someone singing!"



Tommy Dodd appeared at the top of the ladder and handed up the pail. Then the Modern juniors continued their preparations for japing the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver had procured a tuning-fork with which to give the note for starting off, and shortly afterwards the sweet strains of "Sweet and Low" were echoing through the empty house.

Except for a little trouble with Raby, who was taking third part, the quartettes went remarkably well. At any rate, there was every reason for Jimmy Silver to feel confident that by the day of the concert they would be well trained up to give some very interesting items.

The Classical juniors were very pleased with themselves, and Jimmy suggested that they should run through the items once more before returning to Rookwood.

Both he and his chums commenced singing again, with renewed enthusiasm,

"What should anyone want to go to an empty house to sing for?" asked Tommy Cook, looking anxiously over the gate.

"That's what we've got to find out," replied Tommy Dodd. "Come on, we'll investigate this little business."

The Modern chums stealthily entered the gate and crept towards the door of the house. The voices were heard more distinctly as they pulled up on the doorstep.

"Doesn't sound at all bad!" whispered Tommy Dodd. "They've got decent voices, whoever they are."

"Try the door," said Tommy Cook, "and let's have a look in."

Tommy Dodd turned the handle, and the door opened noiselessly
 "Don't kick up a row," he whispered, as he stepped inside. "Follow me quietly."

In a few moments the three Modern juniors were in the passage and creeping towards the door from which the singing voices were heard.

An expression of perplexity was dawning on Tommy Dodd's face. He was getting a faint suspicion of the real facts of the case.

Followed by Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, he advanced towards the door. Tommy Dodd's two chums were now beginning to recognise the voices which were lustily mingled in harmony.

The leader of the Modern chums bent down and gazed his eye to the keyhole. One glance was sufficient to reveal to him the mystery of the empty house.

Standing in the middle of the room, in a line, were the Fistical Four, now singing "Sweet and Low" once more, with seraphic expressions on their faces.

Tommy Dodd stood up and turned towards his chums.

"Outside!" he whispered.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle realised the truth from the expression on their leader's face.

Without a word, they turned and tipped out of the house.

"That's done it!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, when they were outside.

"What's it mean?" asked Tommy Cook mystically.

"It means this, my dear chump," replied Tommy Dodd, "old Jarvis has already been on to those asses about his concert, and they're going to sing!"

"My hat!"

"Faith, an' ye're right, Tommy, darlin'!"

"Well, we can't stop 'em!" said Tommy Cook philosophically.

The Modern chums had strolled round to the side of the house, and Tommy Dodd was gazing before him blankly.

Suddenly his gaze fell on the bottom of a ladder which was jutting out from the back of the house. He stepped forward a few paces until it was in full view, making no remark to his chums.

"What's the matter with him?" muttered Tommy Doyle. "Has he gone to sleep on his feet?"

"Goodness only knows," said Tommy Cook, staring at their leader in surprise. "I was just thinking!" murmured Tommy Dodd, as though half to himself.

"Do you always act like a giddy maniac when you're thinking?" asked Tommy Cook, in a tone of mock concern.

"Faith, an' what we've got to think about is those silly asses inside!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle, indicating the door of the house from which the sweet strains of youthful voices still floated.

"Ah!" ejaculated Tommy Dodd, as he espied a pail and a number of paint-tins partially covered over by an old sheet.

"What's the wheeze?" Come on, out with it!" exclaimed Tommy Cook impatiently.

"Well, as you said, we can't stop 'em from giving some items at the concert," said Tommy Dodd, with a gleeful light in his eye; "but we can give 'em a shock when they come out of there."

He indicated the house as he spoke.

"What's the use of that?" asked Tommy Cook disapprovingly.

"Why, fathhead, it'll show them in no uncertain signs that we know what they're up to," answered Tommy Dodd, going towards the sheet on the ground.

He lifted up one corner of it, and revealed a pail nearly full of soot, which had doubtless been taken from one of the

chimneys of the house by the workmen, in the course of the repairing.

He looked up to his chums with a broad grin upon his face.

"We'll give them the fright of their little lives!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Here's everything to our hands—ladder, soot, and sheet!"

"What's the idea?" asked Tommy Cook, brightening up at the prospect of scoring off their rivals, the Fistical Four.

"Well, look here!" said Tommy Dodd.

"We'll take this sheet and the pail of soot up on to the roof."

"Yes?" said Tommy Doyle excitedly.

"Then we'll empty the soot into the sheet, and hang over the edge with it, just above the front door, where they've got to come out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, ass, or they'll hear us!"

"All we have to do after that is to drop the sheet when they come out, and hey presto!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" giggled Tommy Cook.

"Now, then," said Tommy Dodd, "come on with the stuff! You go up with the sheet first, Cook; and you can take the pail from me when I hand it up, Doyle!"

In a moment Tommy Cook was shining up the ladder with the sheet, followed closely by Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Dodd brought up the rear, carrying the pail with him.

Tommy Cook stood upon the roof, with the sheet in his hands, waiting, and Tommy Doyle perched himself across an attic window ready to receive the painful of soot.

In another moment Tommy Dodd appeared at the top of the ladder, and handed up the pail.

Then he clambered up, and together they continued their preparations for japing the Fistical Four.

The soot was poured into the centre of the outstretched sheet, and the corners were gathered loosely together, so that they would fall apart when it was dropped.

"What's all right!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "Now you two had better get down to the bottom of the ladder again, and I'll wait up here to drop this on the rotters when they come out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll know when it's dropped," he continued, "because you'll hear 'em yell. Then get ready to run!"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle descended the ladder, and Tommy Dodd took up his position on the edge of the roof, just over the front door.

They had not long to wait. About five minutes later the leader of the Modern chums heard the door opened below him and the excited voices of the Fistical Four, congratulating one another on the results of their practice.

Then Jimmy Silver stepped outside, closely followed by Lovell, Newcome, and Raby.

Tommy Dodd released his hold of the sheet full of soot, and it sailed down straight over their heads.

"Yarough! Ow! Oooooo!"

The Fistical Four, smothered and half-choked, spluttered out exclamations.

"What's the— Ow! Groogh! Yarough!"

For a few moments they were unable to see at all. They rubbed their eyes and mouths, smearing the soot over their faces until they looked like niggers.

Lovell was wiping his hand round the back of his neck, a quantity of the stuff having fallen down the back of his collar.

There were little heaps of soot standing on each of their shoulders, and more of it was mingled in their hair.

Meanwhile, Tommy Dodd, immediately after dropping the sheet, had

scrambled to the top of the ladder, and, not troubling to ascend in the regulation manner, had put a leg round each side and slid down like a shot.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were eagerly awaiting him, and together they ran towards the gate.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were still spluttering and muttering, when the gate in front shut with a click.

"Look!" yelled Lovell. "Modern bouncers! There they go!"

His chums swung round just in time to see Tommy Dodd & Co. run off down the lane.

"The rotters!"

"The beasts!"

The Fistical Four could think of nothing bad enough in their rage at having been so absolutely done by—the Modern chums.

They stood, brushing themselves down and uttering threats of vengeance on their rivals, and making no attempt to chase the offenders.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Lovell. "To think we've been done like this!"

Then, in spite of himself, he roared with laughter at Raby, who was trying to remove the soot from his ears.

"The rotters!" he yelled. "I'll—I'll—"

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver disgustedly. "Let's go back, and have a bath and a change. That's the only way we shall get rid of this."

Utterly beaten, and looking like four young sweeps, they took their departure from the scene of their downfall.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Revenge!

"THAT'S better!" said Jimmy Silver, an hour later, as he and his chums emerged from their dormitory.

They had each had a bath and a complete change of clothes, including clean collars, and they were now making for the end study to discuss a scheme for getting square with the Modern chums.

"Look here!" said Jimmy Silver, as soon as the door was shut. "I vote we go and rag the rotters in their study now, straightaway!"

"I'm willing," replied Lovell. "I'm simply aching to get my hands on the bouncers!"

"All agreed?" asked Jimmy promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"Right-ho! Left turn! Quick march!"

The Fistical Four hastily made their way downstairs and over to the Modern side.

They proceeded very cautiously as they approached the corridor leading to the study of the Modern chums.

They were advancing stealthily towards the door of the study, and were but a few yards from it when the handle was turned.

Quick as lightning the Classical chums darted into an empty study a few yards away, the door of which chanced to be open.

They heard hurried footsteps coming along the passage from the direction of the Modern chums' study, and Jimmy Silver peeped round the door of the room in which they had taken refuge.

He could scarcely suppress an exclamation as the figure passed.

It was Tommy Dood, but he was resplendent in a costume of the period of Charles the First.

He wore buckle shoes and a velvet suit adorned with lace, knee breeches, and a hat which sported a magnificently-curlled feather.

Jimmy Silver drew back, an expression of amazement and surprise upon his face.

"Who was it?" whispered Lovell.

"What's up?" exclaimed Raby.

Before Jimmy had time to recover from his surprise and make a reply, they heard the footsteps returning.

They remained hidden and perfectly still until the door of Tommy Dodd & Co.'s study was heard to shut.

"Come on," said Jimmy Silver, "we're going back!"

"Going back?"

"What about ragging those bounders?"

"It's not coming off to-day," replied Jimmy Silver.

"What the—"

"Wait till we get back, and I'll tell you."

The four chums hastily made their way back to their own quarters, and into the end study.

Lovell, Newcome, and Raby looked at their leader questioningly.

"What's the whee-ee?" asked Lovell.

"It was Tommy Dodd who went along the corridor just now," said Jimmy Silver, "and he was wearing the costume that he had for that rotten sketch they did at the last school concert!"

"My hat!"

"Then they're going to give it at old Jarvis's concert!" exclaimed Lovell.

"That's about it," said Jimmy. "He must have collared them as well, and asked them to do something."

"Well I'm hanged!"

"The giddy rotters!"

"Now, what are we going to do?"

Jimmy Silver did not reply for a moment; then he looked up with a broad grin upon his face.

"I've got an idea!" he said eagerly.

"Trot it out, then!" exclaimed Lovell.

"We'll get even with the rotters!" said Jimmy chuckling. "When the show comes off, we'll get them out of the way for a few minutes while the other items are on, then we'll pour some gum into those lovely hats of theirs and fasten up the swords in their sheaths."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know, there's a part where they have to draw their swords out quickly," continued Jimmy; "well, when they grab at them, you see, they won't come out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then there'll be a commotion, and the audience will begin to laugh."

"It's a splendid wheeze!" exclaimed Lovell enthusiastically. "They'll be absolutely dished!"

"It ought to work out all right," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully.

"It won't be our fault if it doesn't," said Raby eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha! Won't they be furious!"

Most of the spare time during the days immediately preceding the concert were spent by the Fistical Four and the Modern chums in practising up their efforts for the great occasion.

The Fistical Four, when they were not practising, eagerly discussed their plan for getting their own back on Tommy Dodd & Co.

At last the eventful evening arrived. Long before the hour for the commencement of the concert people were flocking into the none too spacious hall.

There was quite an appreciable audience from Rookwood itself, as the news that the Classical and Modern

chums were among the performers had spread round the school like wildfire. Juniors and seniors alike poured up to support the school element.

The Fistical Four's first quartette appeared quite early in the programme, and loud cheers greeted the Classical juniors, as they stepped on the platform, rigged out in their pierrots' costume, with their faces whitened.

"Playing on the Old Banjo" was their first number, and they rendered it perfectly. The cheering, clapping, and stamping was deafening as they made their bow at the end.

The last item on the first part of the programme was a dramatic recitation by Tommy Cook, which received loud applause from the back row, because he did not once forget the words. This, of course, may have been due to the fact that Tommy Dodd was just behind the curtain prompting him in stage whispers when necessary.

The Fistical Four gave two more quartettes in the second half, which were a huge success, and well merited the applause they received.

The Modern chums' sketch was the last number on the programme, and there were still some half a dozen items to be heard, when Lovell sauntered over to Tommy Dodd & Co.

"What do you say to a glass of ginger-pop, kids," he said, "just to fortify yourselves for the great event of the evening?"

"Well," replied Tommy Dodd, in some surprise, "there isn't much time, but in the cires we should like to avail ourselves of your giddy generosity."

"Come on, then!" said Lovell. "You can spare about three minutes."

Lovell, accompanied by Newcome and Raby, led the Modern chums to the refreshment-room at the back, and immediately they had disappeared Jimmy Silver got to work with the liquid glue, which had been concealed in the bag in which they had brought their pierrots' costumes.

He smeared a generous allowance in the gorgeously-plumed hats, and poured a quantity into the sheaths of the swords.

By the time the juniors returned all was ready.

Tommy Dodd & Co. hastily donned their costumes and powdered wigs, and by that time Mr. Jarvis was announcing the sketch.

Cramming his hat over his wig, Tommy Dodd stepped up on to the stage.

Ear-splitting yells greeted the appearance of the leader of the Modern chums from the back row, much to the amusement of the rest of the audience.

Then, Tommy Dodd, walking backwards and forwards across the stage, commenced reciting the opening sentences of "The Gallant Gentleman."

He had just reached the passage where he had to face the audience and throw out his hands, when Tommy Cook, to the roars of the piece, dashed on to the stage, causing a giggle from the audience as he nearly tripped over his sword.

"I challenge thee to a fight, thou scurvy knave!" he cried, rushing towards Tommy Dodd, and fumbling for his sword.

Tommy Dodd dramatically stepped back a pace, and grasped the hilt of his

sword, Tommy Cook, doing likewise, rushed on.

But the swords did not budge.

They struggled frantically with the weapons, but to no purpose.

The Fistical Four were seated in the front row, and they began to giggle.

"What's the matter with this rotten thing?" they heard Tommy Cook mutter.

"Give it a good tug!" cried Raby, which set the audience into roars of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stick it!"

These and like utterances were yelled from the back of the hall. Tommy Doyle had now rushed on to the stage to try and render some assistance. This created a fresh burst of merriment, to the discomfort of the Modern chums.

At last Tommy Dodd gave up the struggle, and advanced towards the front of the stage to make an explanation and an apology to the audience.

"Take your hat off before you address ladies of gentleman!" cried Jimmy Silver from the front row.

Tommy Dodd jibbed at the Classical leader, and instinctively obeyed.

The hat jibbed a little, so he gave it an extra tug. Then roars of laughter broke from the audience, and roaring cheers from the back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Tommy Dodd!"

Then Tommy Dodd realised to his horror that, with his hat, he had taken off his wig as well!

The people roared again and again.

Then, grasping the wig with one hand and the hat with the other, Tommy Dodd tore them asunder, leaving some of the hair from the wig sticking in the hat.

The Fistical Four yelled with mirth.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were still tugging with the sword, and suddenly it gave. But with its release Tommy Doyle lurched heavily against Tommy Cook, knocking off his hat and his wig.

"Hooray!"

Tommy Dodd had given up the attempt to explain matters to the audience, and he stood aside despairingly, not knowing what to do.

At last Mr. Jarvis, who had been joining in the laughter, thought it was time to put an end to the discomfiture of the Modern chums, and he ordered the curtain to be dropped.

Tommy Dodd & Co. slunk off the stage, too beaten and done to raise their heads.

"Absolutely dished!" howled Tommy Dodd, for he had long since realised the cause of the disaster.

"A complete giddy fiasco!" growled Tommy Cook.

But although Tommy Dodd & Co. voted the sketch a dead failure, it is certain that the audience did not. Most of them agreed that they had never laughed so much in their lives.

And, curiously enough, Mr. Jarvis shared that view, and gave the Modern chums a hearty slap on the back as they took their departure.

Tommy Dodd & Co., however, did not appreciate the situation, and passed out of the hall muttering threats of vengeance on the Fistical Four.

THE END.

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Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

HONOURS DIVIDED!

By
Martin
Clifford

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Tom Merry's Scheme.

"A NYRODY got any money?" Tom Merry made the announcement to Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Jack Blake & Co., the chums of the School House. The latter were in the Common-room, discussing a coming football-match, and they looked up in surprise as Tom Merry entered.

"Money!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "I've got about ninnence." Tom Merry snorted.

"What's the good of ninnence?" he said. "I want pounds!"

"Phew!" gasped Blake. "What do you want quids for?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"A little scheme I've got in mind," he explained. "You fellows ever heard of Cedric Lacy, the Cornstalk?"

The juniors scratched their heads in thought.

"What! Cedric Lacy, the wonderful schoolboy footballer?" asked Blake.

"The fellow who played last week for a first-class club, and scored four goals?"

"The very same," said Tom Merry.

"Well, what about him?"

"He's coming to St. Jim's, and he's to be allowed to join which ever House he likes."

"Good bizney!" said Blake. "We shall have to bag him—shove him into the eleven. He'll be a capture with a vengeance! And, my word, sha'n't we be able to whack those New House bouncers with Lacy in the forward line!"

"Of course we shall," replied Tom Merry. "That is, if he'll come into the School House."

"We shall have to do our best to get him here."

"Quite so; but supposing Figgins & Co. collar him first?"

"Don't suppose they know he's coming to St. Jim's," said Jack Blake. "We'll go and see Railton, and fix the fellow up for the School House."

"Fathaid!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That won't do."

"Why not?"

"Because Figgins & Co. know the fellow's coming, and because they're arranging to meet him at Rylecombe station to-morrow afternoon."

"Phew!" gasped Jack Blake. "That's rotten! What are we going to do about it?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"That's where my little scheme comes in," he said. "Now, what about the fix? Come on, Gussy! Where's that tin? Don't say you haven't got one?"

"As it happens, Tom Merry," said Arthur Augustus, "I received a fiveah from my governah this morning, and—"

"Well, roll it out, fathaid!"

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"I shall be only too pleased to do so," said the swell of St. Jim's grandly, "if it will help to bag Lacy for the School House."

Arthur Augustus handed the crisp fiveah to Tom Merry, and the latter grabbed it quickly, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "my idea is to take the wind out of Figgy's sails by going to Wayland instead of Rylecombe, and catching the bouncer on the bound, as it were."

"Oh, good!"

"I remember we did that once—"

began Blake.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"This isn't a time for giddy reminiscences of your early youth," he said.

"We meet Lacy at Wayland, and bring him to St. Jim's, not by rail."

"But Figgy will have his scouts out," said Blake. "They'll spot the wheeze before we get him to St. Jim's, and way-lay us on the road."

"That's why we're going to have the motor-car."

"The—the what?"

"The motor-car," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, my aunt!"

"That's what we want the quids for—"

"The soveiwigns, deah boy—"

"Shurrup! Now we've raised the tin we can hire a car in Wayland. Gussy can drive a car. -He's driven us in a car at his ancestral halls. I don't know whether it did the car much good—"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm a wathah wippin' dwivah, you know," said D'Arcy.

"I'll drive the car, with pleasure."

"Better drive it with petrol," said Lowther. "You see—"

"Shurrup!"

"We'll all get over to Wayland, but we'll go in twos and threes, so as not to be spotted by those New House bouncers," continued Tom Merry.

"Figgy won't suspect anything; but that chap Kerr is awfully deep. I am afraid of those blessed Scotchmen when I am trying to do one. We'll arrange about the car to-night, and have it all ready for to-morrow afternoon. We capture Lacy at the station, explain to him that we're going to take him to St. Jim's in state, because—because—"

"Think of a reason, somebody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Because he's an Australian," suggested Digby. "Hands across the sea, and that kind of thing, you know, draw tighter the bonds between the Colonies and the Mother Country."

"Good erg! That's a jolly good reason. We're taking all this trouble about him because he's a giddy Colonial!" agreed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's settled, then," said Tom Merry, with great satisfaction.

Ten minutes later Tom Merry was riding off to Wayland on his bicycle, in

great spirits at the prospect of a victory over the New House. And at the same time Redfern, of the Fourth, looked into Figgins' study in the New House, and announced:

"There's something on."

"You've been scouting?" asked Figgins.

"What do you think?" said Redfern. "Tom Merry's gone out on his bike, and he's taken the road to Wayland. I don't suppose it's got anything to do with the Lacy affair, but you can't be too careful in dealing with those School House rotters!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins. The chief of the New House juniors rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "Lacy will change trains at Wayland, of course; but he's not coming to-night, so I don't see what Tom Merry can want over there. But—"

"But it may be a dodge," said Kerr sagely.

"It may or it may not," said Figgins. "If it isn't, it doesn't matter; if it is, we've got to be on to it. Get out your bike, Reddy, and search over to Wayland, and keep an eye on him."

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Counter-plot.

"H A, ha, ha!"

Redfern staggered into Figgins' study, an hour or so later, yelling.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wyn were having tea, but they left off at the sight of Redfern. It was evident that he had news. Even Fatty Wynn paused in his operations upon a gigantic cake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern sat down in the armchair and yelled.

"News?" asked Figgins eagerly.

"Yes, Ha, ha, ha!"

Lawrence and Owen followed Redfern into the study. They were ginning joyously. Apparently Reddy had imparted the news to them before coming to report to his leader.

"Leave off cackling!" said Kerr.

"What's the news?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern roared again, and wiped his eyes.

"We've got 'em!" he said.

"Got whom?"

"The School House bouncers!" Redfern went off into another explosion. "Oh, if they only knew! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come to the point, you chuckling inane!" roared Figgins.

"Right-ho! I biked over to Wayland after Tom Merry, and saw him stop at the Hotel Royal garage."

"The Hotel Royal?" said Figgins.

"What on earth did he want there?"

"They hire out motor-cars there," said Kerr. "Surely he wasn't hiring a motor-car?"

"You listen to me," said Redfern.

"Listen to your uncle, my infants, and I will be a tale unfold. As soon as I spotted him going in there I sloped, and he didn't spot me. I kept out of sight in a bun-shop to watch for him, and about a quarter of an hour later he came out and peddled away."

"I saw him come in," said Lawrence. "And then," said Redfern, with a fresh explosion—"then, my children, I hopped into the garage myself. I didn't say I was a scout on war duty, I asked if my chum Merry had left. He had."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I said how sorry I was to miss him—I should be sorry to miss him, you know, if it was a case of snowhalling or chucking cushions—"

"Get on!" said Figgins, grinning. "Well, I talked to the motor-man. He hadn't a single suspish, of course. I got it all from him. Tom Merry had engaged a car—a four-seater—for to-morrow afternoon, at three o'clock."

"Engaged a car! My hat!" "For three o'clock," grinned Redfern. "And if you know anything about the time-tables, you know that a chap coming to Rylcombe by the three-thirty train changes at Wayland Junction at three-fifteen."

"Oh, oh!" said Figgins. "I smell a rat! A motor-car, by Jove! They're going to catch Lacy as he changes trains, and bring him to St. Jim's in a motor-car! Of all the cheek—"

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Kerr. "It must have cost them a lot of money."

"It would be worth it to capture the new kid," said Redfern. "Well, after I had jawed to the motor-man, I mentioned that my chum Merry—ha, ha, ha!—had made a mistake in the time. But, to make sure, I said I'd speak to Merry when I got back to the school, and then vice him if it was all right; otherwise, the correct time."

"Oh!" "As soon as I got in I spoke to Tom Merry—"

"What!" roared Figgins. "You've told him we know! You ass! You fractious ass!" "Oh, you awful duffer!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Easy does it!" said Redfern calmly. "I told the man I'd speak to Tom Merry before I sent the wire, and it was bound to keep my word, wasn't it? But I didn't speak to him about any old motor-car! I simply said to him, 'Where did you get that face?'"

Figgins & Co. chuckled. "Oh," said Figgins. "I see!" "Time you did!" said Redfern politely. "Having spoken to Tom Merry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I trotted down to the post-office and sent the wire to the Wayland garage. I wrote: 'Car required at two-thirty—mistake—Byerns.'"

"Oh, my hat!" "You see, I'd got it all schemed out in my head," said Redfern, with a chuckle. "We got to the garage at two-thirty and got the car. When Tom Merry & Co. got there they find the cupboard is bare, like Mother Hubbard—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It will take some time to get another car ready; they don't keep a heap of them at a little place like that, you know. And while they're tearing their hair we're off with the car. Now, we can't pick Lacy up at the junction, because the School House chaps will be there in a crowd, and we shouldn't get him away. There's a better scheme than that. Suppose you pack the station with our chaps with orders to keep all School House voters out by force. Then when Lacy comes, he changes trains as usual, they

won't be able to get at him. He hops into the Rylcombe local without a suspish, and comes on to Rylcombe while the School House chaps are scrapping at Wayland. We're at Rylcombe Station with Tom Merry's motor-car to meet him. We take Lacy into the car and bring him to St. Jim's in giddy triumph."

Figgins jumped up. He hugged Redfern to his manly breast.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "What a wheeler! What a sell! What a scorcher! Reddy, my son, you're worth your weight in jam tarts!"

"Ripping!" said Kerr. "I only want to see their faces when they get back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "They'll all be at Wayland," grinned Redfern. "We shall have Rylcombe Station all to ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Figgins & Co. roared. So did the rest

made things run differently. But he did not know, and the New House fellows did not breathe a word. Tom Merry & Co. were very cheerful that evening, in anticipation of the triumph of the morrow.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Taken In.

AFTER morning lessons, the next day, Figgins & Co. left the Form-room and walked over to the New House with preoccupied looks. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and football practice was going strong now. But Figgins & Co. were not thinking of football.

There would be plenty of time for football later, when Cedric Lacy was a member of the New House, and playing in the junior House team. The pressing business of the hour was the capture of Cedric Lacy, that remarkable young



TROUBLE FOR THREE!

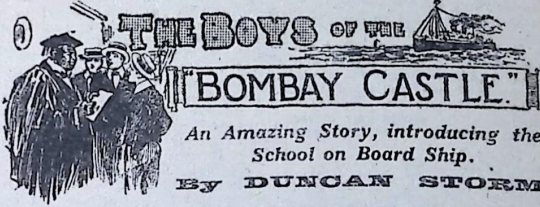
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of the New House juniors when they heard of Redfern's stratagem. It did not seem as if it could fail, so long as the secret was carefully kept. And the idea of capturing the School House motor-car and carrying off the coveted prize in it tickled the New House fellows very much.

Figgins breathed threats of fire and slaughter if a word were whispered about it on the wrong side of the quadrangle. But there was no danger of that. The New House fellows were all as keen as Figgins himself for that gigantic score over the School House.

The secret was well kept. Over in the School House, Tom Merry & Co. had not the remotest suspicion of the counter-plot brewing in the New House. Redfern had kept carefully out of sight when he was scouting at Wayland, and Tom Merry did not know that he had been watched at the garage. Had he known that it might have

been both for whose services as a footballer both the Houses were competing.

After dinner Figgins marshalled his men, and the New House fellows crowded down to the gates, and took the road to Rylcombe. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were lounging in a casual sort of way at the gates, and they nodded and grinned at the New House fellows.

"Going for another little walk, Figg?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; just down the road," said Figgins airily.

"As far as Rylcombe?" "Don't ask questions, my son!" said Figgins.

And the New House crowd went down the road. The Terrible Three looked after them with much amusement.

"Figgins & Co. are going to wait at Rylcombe Station," grinned Tom Merry. "They'll be rather surprised

when we don't turn up there—and Lacy doesn't either."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three, having seen Figgins & Co. safely off for Rylcombe, returned to the School House to prepare for their own expedition. They would have been surprised if they had seen Figgins & Co. a little further.

The New House crowd walked towards Rylcombe, till they were well out of sight of St. Jim's, and then they turned into the footpath through the wood, and headed for Wayland town.

Quite unconscious of the real destination of their rivals, Tom Merry & Co. made their preparations. Tom Merry and D'Arcy and Lowther were to call at the garage for the motor-car; the fourth seat in it was to be left vacant for Lacy when he arrived.

The rest of the School House fellows were to cram themselves into Wayland Station, and take possession of the arrival platform from London. When Lacy descended from the train he was to be collected, by persuasion of force, and brought out of the station and helped into the car.

After all, a new fellow was not likely to object to be taken to the school in a motor-car, instead of going by a local train, and then taking an old hack from the village.

Lacy was certain to be pleased; but, pleased or not, he was coming in the car, and he would not leave the hands of Tom Merry & Co. until he had solemnly undertaken to become a member of the School House.

Figgins & Co. had been long gone when Tom Merry had gathered his faithful followers for the expedition to Wayland. The thought of the New House fellows garrisoning Rylcombe Station made the juniors chuckle.

Figgins & Co. might wait there long enough before the Australian junior arrived. They would have looked rather blue if they had known that Figgins & Co. were not at Rylcombe at all.

"Now, you know what to do, you chaps," said Tom Merry, as his followers gathered in array in the quadrangle. "While we three get the car round to the station, you're to fill up the arrival platform and get hold of Lacy."

Tom Merry & Co. departed from the school gates. There was hardly a New House junior to be seen about the school.

"The whole blessed family are down at Rylcombe—waiting for nobody!" grinned Digby. "I should like to see Figgins' face when the three-thirty comes in!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

"We're doing them brown," he said. "At the same time, I think we ought to keep an eye on that crowd. Never ought to leave anything to chance in warfare. I think we'd better send a scout on a bike down to Rylcombe, to keep an eye on them."

"That's a good idea."

"Dig can go on his bike," said Tom Merry.

"I'm ready," said Digby. "When the three-thirty comes in without Lacy, Figgys will guess that you've got him at Wayland, and the whole crowd will come over there, most likely. I'll keep an eye on them, and come over top speed and warn you."

"That's right."

Dig returned for his bicycle, and peddled down to Rylcombe. Tom Merry & Co. walked through the wood to the market town of Wayland.

They arrived in the old town, and Tom Merry and Lowther and D'Arcy went on to the garage, while the rest of

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the crowd proceeded to the station. It was close upon three o'clock now.

The man in charge of the garage touched his cap to Tom Merry, and was apparently a little surprised to see him.

"Nothing wrong with the car, I hope, sir?" he said.

"I jolly well hope not," said Tim Merry, surprised, too. "We've come for it."

The man stared.

"Bai Jove, isn't it weady?" asked D'Arcy.

"You arranged for three o'clock, didn't you, Tom?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove, where is the cah, my deah man?"

The man looked puzzled.

"Isn't it ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Isn't what ready, sir?"

"The car!"

"The car—the car!" stammered the man.

"Yes; the car I ordered for this afternoon!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We've come for it. What's the matter with you? Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't, sir. Ain't you had the car?"

"Had it?"

"Yes, sir. Your friend said he was going to take you in."

"M-m-my friend!"

"Yes; Master Redfern, from St. Jim's," said the man, in astonishment. Tom Merry staggered.

"My friend Redfern, from St. Jim's!" he murmured faintly.

"Yes, sir."

"Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry grasped the startled attendant by the shoulder.

"Do you mean to say that you've given my car to Redfern?" he roared.

"Yes, sir. Didn't I do right?"

"Right! Oh, my hat!"

"How on earth did Redfern know?" gasped Lowther.

Master Redfern came in here yesterday evening a few minutes after you had left, sir," said the garage attendant.

"He explained that there had been a mistake in the time you ordered the car for. I—I thought naturally that he was one of the party going in it, as he belongs to your school, sir. He said he would speak to you and send a wire if the time wasn't right. We had the wire—making it two-thirty to-day for the car. Master Redfern called at two-thirty, and took out the car. There was another young gentleman with him—

Master Figgins, I think his name was."

"Figgins! Oh, crumbs!"

"They asked for a chauffeur, as it had been decided to take one, and I gave them a driver. Master Redfern said they were going to take you in later."

"Take us in!"

"That's what he said, sir."

Tom Merry groaned.

"The awful blunder! The spoiler! Take us in! He's taken us in, and no mistake!"

The man grinned, as the double meaning of Master Redfern's words dawned upon him.

"I'm sorry, sir! Of course, we hadn't a suspicion as he came from your school—and I understood from you that you had a party for the car. Of course, it wouldn't have been handed to him if we had known, and under the circumstances the bill will be sent to Master Redfern, at St. Jim's."

"Blow the bill! Blow the bill! It isn't a question of bills!"

"Wathah not! We'dy would waise cah on his best twousands, if necessary, to do us in the eye like this!" said D'Arcy.

"You can have another car, sir," said

the attendant. "We have another one in the garage now, and it won't take a quarter of an hour to—"

Tom Merry looked at his watch. "No time," he said. "The train's in less than ten minutes now. Look here! You can get the car ready, and if we want it we'll call for it. Come on, you fellows; we've got to find out what Figgins is doing!"

The three juniors hurried out of the garage. Tom Merry was doing some hard thinking.

"I'm blasted if I get on to it," he exclaimed. "Figgins has colored our car, but he hasn't got Lacy. Our chaps will get him at the station, all the same, and we can hire another car or a trap to take him to St. Jim's. I don't quite see why Figgins and Redfern have taken the car, after all."

"Let's get to Wayland Station," said Lowther. "I fancy that Figgins & Co. never went to Rylcombe, after all. We may find them blocking the station here—as we were going to do. And the car outside waiting for Lacy!"

Tom Merry snapped his teeth. "If the car's there we'll jolly soon have it away from Figgins. Come on!"

The three juniors came up to Wayland Station at a run. There was no sign of a motor-car outside. The usual station cabs were there, but there was no motor vehicle at all in sight.

"Not here!" said Lowther.

"Look there!" roared Tom Merry.

"What is it—the car?"

"No; Blake! Look!"

A form came hurtling through the doorway of the station. It was the form of Jack Blake of the Fourth. He rolled on the pavement.

After him came whirling Kangaroo of the Shell, and then Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn. And after them came Vayassour and Kerenski, and Herries and Mauners, and more School House fellows, all ejected by force from the station.

Tom Merry rushed up desperately, and grasped Blake by the shoulder and dragged him up.

"What's happened?" he roared.

Blake panted.

"We're done! The station's crammed with New House chaps, and they won't let us in!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Where's the car?" gasped Blake.

"Figgys got it. He was there before us!"

"Oh, my hat! Figgys! The—the villain! That's why the station's full up, then. It's simply swarming with New House rotters—nearly all the blessed New House! But Figgins isn't here, or Kerr, or Reddy!"

"They're in the motor-car somewhere!"

There was a roar from the station vestibule.

"Yah! Come on!"

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"New House! New House!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Last Chance.

Tom Merry felt like kicking himself and everybody else within reach.

He realised now how he had been done.

Figgins & Co., under the pretence of starting very early for Rylcombe, had gone over to Wayland, and had taken possession of the station long before the School House juniors arrived.

Figgys, Kerr and Redfern had taken the car, and had gone—goodness knew where! That part of the scheme was still unexplained. Fatty Wynd, and

Lawrence and Owen, and the rest of the New House crowd were in Wayland Station, ready for the arrival of the new boy, and they had pitched out the School House fellows who tried to enter. And they were evidently prepared to hold the station vestibule against all comers.

Tom Merry ran towards the entrance. Inside, in compact array, were the New House army, prepared for battle. Some of them had brought cricket-balls and stumps, and stuffed socks, with them, in case weapons were needed. There were no porters to be seen, and Tom Merry strongly suspected that some heavy tipping had been going on to prevent interference.

The man in the ticket-office was grinding out of his little window. The new passengers who came by the afternoon trains were graciously allowed to pass, and they stared at the juniors in great astonishment. But a School House fellow from St. Jim's had no chance of passing.

Tom Merry glanced at the station clock. It indicated three-fifteen. The train was due now which was to bring Cedric Lacy to Wayland Station. In a minute or two he would be changing into the local train for Rylcombe. And the School House Co. could not prevent it. The New House fellows might have defeated in a pitched battle, but that would have taken too long; before they were beaten the local train would have started for Rylcombe, bearing the Australian in it.

The New House were masters of the situation.

They knew it, and they chuckled and chortled with glee. There was a shrill whistle in the distance from the incoming down train.

"Here comes the train!" gasped Blake.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth. The New House fellows drew closer together, facing the enemy ready for a rush. They expected an attack now. But it would have been useless.

The train was stopping in the station; the passenger for Rylcombe must now be crossing the platform to the local train, which was always in the station in readiness.

The School House fellows could never have got to him in time, even if they had beaten their rivals; and that was doubtful for the New House were in a strong position. The New House juniors chuckled and cheered; and the School House fellows glared in at them with fury in their looks.

Tom Merry was debating in his mind the chances of a desperate charge, when there came the sharp ring of a bicycle-bell in the street outside.

Ting-ting-ting-buzz!
Tom Merry ran out of the entrance again. He suspected that it might be Digby, with news from Rylcombe; and it was.

Digby, crimson with exertion, and with the perspiration pouring down his face, flung himself breathlessly from his bicycle.

"Hey—ther—" he stammered.

"What's the news?"

"Figgins—" gasped Digby.

"Figgs—" said Tom Merry anxiously.

"Figgins is at Rylcombe," gasped Digby.

"When I got there there wasn't a New House rotter in sight—not one—"

"They're all here," said Blake. "Get on!"

"I looked into the station—I couldn't make it out," said Digby, panting.

"Then Figgins and Redfern and Kerr came in sight—in a motor-car! They've got a four-seater, and a chauffeur driving—and they came buzzing up to the

station. Figgy's got the car from somewhere, and he's waiting there for Lacy—I could see that—only—I guessed the rest of the rotters would be here, so I scoured over—"

"Right!" said Tom Merry.

"Have you got him?" asked Digby.

"Got whom?"

"Lacy, of course! Hasn't he come?"

"I suppose he's come," groaned Tom Merry. "Yes, of course he's come! He's in that train that's just going out of the station—the local for Rylcombe. The place is crammed with New House beasts, and they've kept us out, and we weren't able to see Lacy. He's changed trains—and started for Rylcombe."

"Oh, my hat!" said Digby, in dismay. "Then Figgy had it all arranged—that's why he's waiting outside Rylcombe Station in a motor-car!"

"We're dished!"

"Foiled, diddled, dished, and done!" said Monty Lowther tragically. "This is where we sit down and weep."

"There may be a chance yet," said Blake hopefully. "We can't get across to Rylcombe before the train gets in, I suppose?"

"Impossible!"

"But we can get to the road between Rylcombe and St. Jim's. We may have a chance of stopping the car before it gets to the school."

"Stop a motor-car?" said Manners dubiously.

"Shove something across the road if necessary," said Blake desperately. "My word, yes! We can get out a farmer's waggon or something, and block the road. The car will have to stop then, and we—"

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"It's a chance," he said. "If Figgy delays a bit at Rylcombe, or the train's a bit late, we can intercept them. And if we can stop the car—"

"There's only three New House rotters in it, and we're a giddy army," said Lowther. "We can eat them if we like!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll leave some chaps here to keep these bouncers penned up in the station," said Tom Merry, with brilliant strategy. "We'll take all the best sprinters with us—nine or ten chaps will do—and leave the rest to keep Fatty Wynn & Co. busy in the station."

"Bravo!"

It was really a brilliant idea. Tom Merry called out ten juniors by their names, and rapped out orders to the rest to keep the station blockaded, and make a prisoner of any New House juniors who tried to get out. And leaving two score of determined fellows guarding the station entrance, blocking in Fatty Wynn & Co., Tom Merry and his chosen band started for the Rylcombe Road.

Tom Merry and Blake and Digby, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and D'Arcy, Herries and Lumley-Lumley, and one or two more, started off, running as if for a wager.

They turned out of the Wayland Road into the wood, they sprinted along the footpath as if it had been a cinder-path, running as they had seldom run before. Upon their speed depended the last chance of the School House—and they ran for their lives!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The New Boy.

CEDRIC LACY stepped out of the train as it stopped in Rylcombe Station.

A handsome, athletic-looking lad, with a sunburnt face and very bright and merry blue eyes—that was Cedric Lacy, the new boy for whom the juniors of the rival House at St. Jim's were contending so obstinately.

Quite unconscious of the excitement his arrival was causing in his new school, Lacy stepped from the train, and glanced casually round the platform.

Two juniors in St. Jim's caps came across the platform towards him, and they raised their caps very politely. Lacy looked at them rather hard, and raised his own cap in return, a little surprised by the excessive politeness of the two strangers. He guessed that they belonged to St. Jim's easily enough, but he did not know why they greeted him with so much embarrassment.

"Cedric Lacy, I suppose?" said Figgins.

The Cornstalk nodded.

"The new chap for St. Jim's?" added Kerr.

"That's right!"

"Good!" said Figgins. "Jolly glad to meet you!"

And Figgins held out his hand. Lacy shook hands with him cheerfully, and then with Kerr.

"Thanks very much!" he said. "I suppose you belong to St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather—New House!"

"It's very kind of you to greet me like this," said Lacy. "I suppose you haven't mistaken me for one of the governors of the school, or anything of that sort?"

The juniors grinned.

"We know you, you see," explained Figgins. "We've heard of you."

"Oh, I see!"

"You're the giddy infant prodigy—the kid who played for a professional football team before he was fourteen years old—the fellow who scored four goals in a first-class match—"

Lacy laughed.

"I see you've heard all about it," he remarked.

"Yes, rather! We're a footballing school, you know," said Figgins. "What St. Jim's doesn't know about football isn't worth knowing. We're jolly pleased to have you at St. Jim's. I can tell you!"

"I'm pleased to do that, for that matter," said Lacy. "I sha'n't be playing much football, though. You see, I—"

"Won't you, grinned Figgins. "I say, we've got a car outside; we're going to take you to the school in state, you know. You'd like to come in a car instead of the station hack?"

"I should rather say so!" remarked Lacy. "But what are you making all this giddy fuss about me for? I didn't know—"

"This way to the car," said Figgins, taking the new boy's arm affectionately, and leading him out of the station.

The motor-car was waiting outside. The chauffeur was seated at the steering-wheel, and Redfern was beside him.

"This is Reddy, another of our chaps," said Figgins, and Lacy cheerfully shook hands with Redfern.

Figgins opened the door of the car.

"There's room for three," he remarked. "Hop in."

"My box—" said Lacy.

"That's all right! The porter understands. It will sent on to the school."

"Haddn't I better tell him—"

"No need; he understands."

"Yes; jump in!" said Kerr.

"You fellows in a hurry?" asked Lacy.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

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PARIS.

"Well, yes, in a way," said Figgins, pushing Lacy into the car. "There are a lot of School House bouncers out this afternoon looking for a chance to rag us. We shouldn't like them to do anything of that kind now, and give you a bad impression of St. Jim's on your first day—them!"

"Go ahead!" said Redfern to the chauffeur.

"Yes, sir."

The car glided away from the station. The New House juniors swept the street with their eyes; there was no sign of the enemy. Some minutes had been lost at the station; the juniors could not very well have rushed Lacy into the car without even introducing themselves.

Figgins grinned cheerfully as the car ran lightly out of Rylcombe, and took the country road to St. Jim's. It was a bright afternoon, and the weather was glorious.

"Jolly place," said Lacy, with a glance of appreciation over the wide meadows, the shadowy woods, the purling streams, and trim hedges.

"Oh, jolly!" said Figgins. "And you'll find St. Jim's jolly, too. By the way, have you decided which House you are going into? I suppose you know there are two Houses—the School House and the New House?"

"Yes, I've been told so."

"The School House is a regular old casual ward," said Figgins confidentially. "It's the older House of the two, you know—everything out of date and stick-in-the-mud-kind of midway with ago you know. It's masters here and masters there, you know—simply rotten! You wouldn't like the School House?"

"You belong to the other House, I suppose?" said Lacy, with a grin.

"Yes, we're New House chaps. Much better show in every way—you'll find it so. We're cock-house at St. Jim's, you know. The House that has the best record at footer, cricket, swimming, rowing, running, and boxing, and—and everything else—is considered cock-house at St. Jim's. We're early first in everything, so we're cock-house. The School II you don't admit it; sheer rot, you know—they don't know when they're beaten."

"Of course, you'd like to be in the New House, Lacy," said Kerr. "We should like you there, too. We haven't any Australians there now, and we should regard it as a real distinction."

Lacy grinned again.

"I must say you're flattering," he remarked. "I never expected to be made a fuss of like this. I don't quite see that I'm worth it, as a matter of fact."

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins. "We want you in our House—we shall be proud of you. I hope you'll decide to join us. The Head's left it to you. Decide now, there's a good chap, and it will save argument with the School House fellows."

"Do they want me, too?" asked Cedric Lacy, in surprise.

"Well, yes; they'd be glad to get you into their mouldy old barn, if they could, just to give us one in the eye," said Figgins. "Awful lot of spoofers, you know—regular tramps, some of them. No New House fellow would be found dead in the School House, if he could possibly help it."

"I suppose not," said Lacy, with a chuckle. "I'd rather not be found dead anywhere, myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, seeing that this was a joke. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Redfern dutifully.

"Oh, good!" said Lacy calmly. "I didn't know I was such a giddy humorist."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 262.

I must say you fellows are making things very pleasant for a new chap."

Figgins nodded eagerly.

"That's just what we want to do," he said. "You see—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kerr. "What are you slacking for, driver? Full speed ahead! We're in a frightful hurry!"

"Sorry, sir—"

"Drive on!" roared Figgins.

"Can't, sir! The road's stopped!"

"What?"

Figgins jumped up in the car. He glanced ahead down the road. A farmer's wagon was in the middle of the lane, completely blocking up the road, and on the other side of it was a butcher's cart with a butcher in it almost raving.

There were no horses to the wagon—it had been pulled out of a cart-track in the adjoining field by human hands, evidently, and left in the road. There was no danger of a collision—the wagon was certainly big enough to be seen. On one side of it the butcher's cart had halted, and on the other Figgins' motor-car came to a stop.

"Figgins almost danced with rage.

"The careless asses," he roared, "to leave a cart standing in the middle of the road! Why, it's dangerous, if it's left there after dark. We shall have to get down and shove it out of the way. The farmer ought to be prosecuted, stopping up the public road like that!"

"Charge!"

It was a yell from the hedge, and Figgins knew the voice.

"T-T-T-Tom Merry! My hat!"

Before the words were fairly out of his mouth the hedge became alive with School House juniors. With a rush they surrounded the halted car, and clambered into it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Bravo, School House!

FIGGINS gave a roar.

"Turn round! Drive off!"

"Get a move on!" yelled Kerr.

"Move, you ass!" Move, you fathead!" bellowed Redfern, grasping the chauffeur by the shoulder and shaking him, in his excitement.

But it was of no use. The chauffeur was not likely to turn the car in a narrow lane, in the midst of a crowd of reckless juniors. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for the car to turn at that spot at all. And it could not have been backed away at sufficient speed to escape.

The car was captured—or, rather, recaptured!

The chauffeur sat quite still, leaving the juniors to fight it out as they liked, only determined upon one point—that he wasn't taking any risks with the car.

Figgins, Kerr, and Redfern put up a gallant fight.

But they had simply no chance. Nearly a dozen School House fellows were swarming into the car on all sides.

Monty Lowther and Manners grasped the mighty Figgins, and yanked him bodily out of the car into the road, struggling desperately. Kerr was seized by Blake and Herries and Digby, and rolled in the dust.

Redfern knocked down three School House juniors in succession, and was then torn from his seat beside the driver, and Kangaroo sat on his chest in the grass beside the road.

The brief but excited struggle was over! Tom Merry & Co. had conquered! Cedric Lacy sat in the car, with his hands in his pockets, looking on with an amused grin.

He could understand that these juniors who had waylaid the motor-car also belonged to St. Jim's, and he realised that it was a school row of some sort, with

the cause of which he was unacquainted. It was no business of his, and he sat and looked on with perfect calmness.

"Done the bouncers brown!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!"

"Huwwah for us!"

"You rotters!" roared Figgins. "Owl Gerroff!"

"No fear!" said Monty Lowther, settling down a little more heavily upon Figgins' chest. "I am quite comfy here, thanks!"

"Oh! Ow! You're squashing me, you fathead!"

"Well, can't you be squashed quietly?" demanded Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep those bouncers safe!" said Tom Merry. "It's no good saying things, Figgie. We've done you this time!"

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Figgins.

"Don't get excited, dear boy! You did us first; you collared our car, and did us brown," said Tom Merry. "We've had a fearful chase to get across here in time. We just did it. We'd only just got the cart out of the field into the road when we heard you coming."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Another three minutes would have done it."

"Oh, what rotten luck!" groaned Figgins.

"I guess you come out at the little end of the horn this time!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "We've got the giddy prize!"

"Hurrah for us!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwwah!"

Tom Merry turned to the grinning Cornstalk in the car. He raised his cap very politely. Lacy nodded to him cheerfully.

"You're Lacy, I suppose?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, I'm Lacy."

"Good! I suppose these bouncers got you at the station, and they've been talking some silly rot to you about going into the New House at St. Jim's?"

"Well, yes, it's been mentioned."

"You haven't agreed to it?"

"No."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, in great relief. "If the rotters had had time, they'd have got a promise out of you, and we should have been dashed. You can't go into the New House, you know. It's a regular old casual ward—a rotten, mildney old shed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the new boy.

Tom Merry looked at him suspiciously.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"Nothing; only your description of the New House matches the other fellows' description of the School House!" grinned Lacy. It struck me as funny."

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "You—you see, opinions differ about the Houses, and—and—"

"Yes, I see they do!" agreed Lacy.

"Then the New House bouncers will never admit that we're cock-house of St. Jim's, but we are, all the same—"

"You're not!" roared Figgins.

"Here, you be quiet!" said Lowther, jabbing Figgins gently with his elbow.

"Ow!"

"Time we got on," said Blake.

"These New House bouncers will get out of Wayland Station sooner or later, and we want to be at St. Jim's before them. Chauffeur, this is our motor-car."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It is, really," said Tom Merry, laughing as he caught the chauffeur's doubtful look. "I ordered it yesterday, but these bouncers raided it! You remember my coming to the garage; you were there?"

"Yes, Master Merry," said the driver, touching his cap. "But—"

"See, you see it's all right." Anyway, we're going to have the car," said Tom

Merry. "If it had belonged to Figgins, we should have shifted you out, and tied you to a tree if you objected. But as it's our car, all you've got to do is to drive us to St. Jim's; and we shall pay the hire of the car, as originally arranged. See?"

The chauffeur grinned. He evidently saw.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Good! Ready to go on, Lacy?"

"Certainly," said Lacy. "What about those chaps, though?"

"Oh, they're nobodies—only New House chaps!" said Tom Merry. "Keep there till we're gone, you fellows, and then pitch them somewhere, and they can go!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Manners and Lowther can get into the car; there's room for us three as well as Lacy," said Tom Merry. "The other fellows sit on these New House bouncers till we're gone."

"Pewwaps I had bettah come in the cah, Tom Merry—"

"Drive on, chauffeur!"

"I was makin' a wemerk, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, you can go on doing it," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it doesn't matter if we start before you've finished, does it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fwabjous ass—"

"Drive on!"

The School House juniors dragged the farm waggon out of the road. The infuriated butcher on the other side had driven round by another way long ago. The big waggon was backed into the cart-track in the field, whence the School House fellows had drawn it. Then the chauffeur set the car in motion.

Figgins and Kerr and Redfern made desperate efforts to get loose. After all their plotting and planning, after being within an ace of complete success, they saw the prize snatched from their grasp. They struggled with desperation; but it was useless.

There were too many of the foe for them. They were sat upon heavily, and pinned down in the dust; and the motor-car slid swiftly up the road towards St. Jim's.

It disappeared along the white road in a cloud of dust, followed by a cheer from the School House fellows.

"Bai Jove, this is where we score, and no mistake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Jollay lucky we got across here in time, you fellows!"

"What-ho!" grinned Blake. "Figgy, old man, I'm sorry for you; but we were bound to have the Cornstalk, you know. Woe to the giddy vanquished!"

"Ow! We'll make you sit up for this!" groaned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is where we smile!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake looked at his watch. He allowed ten minutes to elapse before the three New House juniors were released.

True, there was little chance of Figgins and Kerr and Redfern overtaking the car, but it was best to be on the safe side in dealing with such redoubtable foes.

Blake allowed ample time for the car to reach St. Jim's before the prisoners were released.

"They'll be in the School House by this time, you chaps," said Blake, putting away his watch at last. "These rotters can clear now, if they like. Let 'em go!"

And the three New House fellows were released.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

By Main Force.

"WHERE'S the kid?"

Jack Blake asked the question as he entered the School House. The Terrible Three were in the doorway, smiling cheerfully, and looking out into the quadrangle.

"I tust you haven't let him out of your sight, deah boys?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously.

"He's all right," said Tom Merry.

"But where is he?" asked Kangaroo.

"In Mr. Railton's study. He's had to go and report himself to the House-master, you know, and we couldn't very well go in with him," said Tom Merry.

"We're just lounging in the deor here to keep an eye open for him. If he had a fancy to stroll out of the House, he would have to be persuaded—ahem!—not to!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

too," said Lowther. "Nothing like a good feed to cement a friendship."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite so," said Tom Merry. "There's still some of Gussy's liver left, luckily. I've sent the motor-car back. Figgins & Co. can have it now if they want it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway blue what is left of the fivah in a feed, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "and some of us had bettah awrange to keep an eye on Lacy for the west of the aftahnoon. If those New House bouncers get a chance at him, they may persuade him to change his mind. Has he promised?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; he simply said he's coming into the School House; but it doesn't amount to a promise. He can change his mind if he likes—only he's jolly well not going



Figgins glared ahead down the road. A farmer's waggon was in the middle of the lane, completely filling up the road, and on the other side of it was a butcher's cart.

"But hasn't he made up his mind to to join the School House yet?" asked Blake anxiously.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes," he said. "He's going to ask Mr. Railton to give him a study in this House, and he will have a bed to-night in the Shell dorm. It's settled."

"Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove! We've weally got the bounbah, then?" said D'Arcy.

"Yes," The Head will have to say something about it; but it's really settled. It was understood that Lacy was to choose which House he'd go into. All the same, we won't let him out loose to-day. May as well keep an eye on him till Figgins & Co. understand how things are," grinned Tom Merry. "We are not going to run any risks."

"Good egg!"

"We'll stand him a feed in the study,

to have a chance. We'll take care of that!"

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically.

"Some of you fellows go and get the tuck, and the rest can get the study ready," said Tom Merry. "We'll stay here to meet the chap after he comes out from Railton's study."

"Wight-oh!"

And the Terrible Three remained on guard. They did not mean to run any risks with the prize they had captured after so much trouble.

Lacy came out of Mr. Railton's study with a grin on his face, and nodded to the chums of the Shell.

"Settled with Railton?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," said Lacy. "I'm a School House chap now."

"Bravo!"

"We're going to have tea in the study—something extra special," said Tom Merry hospitably. "You're coming, of course?"

"Pleased!" said the Corn-stalk. "I'm jolly hungry after my journey, I can tell you."

"It will be a regular brew," said Manners. "Sort of feast of celebration over the victory, you know. We've done the New House in the eye this time."

Lacy laughed.

"Blessed if I know why you should take so much trouble over me," he said. "I suppose it's really just to have a bone of contention, isn't it—without regard to the value of the bone?"

"Well, there's something in that," Tom Merry admitted. "We wanted to give the New House a fall. But we wanted you, too—we wanted you badly. We know your record, you know—the School House will be proud of you."

"Thanks, awfully," said Lacy, laughing.

"Besides, hands across the sea, you know—draw tighter the bonds of empire, and all that," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"I see," said Lacy gravely; "though the bonds of empire would have got on just as well, I suppose, if I'd been in the New House. I think I'll take a stroll round the place till tea's ready."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. "Ahem! Tea won't be long," said Tom Merry. "The chaps are all busy getting it now. It won't be more than ten minutes."

"That's enough to have a look round," said the Australian.

"Like to see the library?" asked Tom Merry. "Down this passage—"

"I'd rather see the quad and the gym, if you don't mind, and the footer ground," said Lacy, in surprise. "They were playing football out there when I came in. I'm interested in football, of course."

"There's the Form-room. You might see that—"

"I shall see that to-morrow in class, and I'm not gone on Form-rooms, anyway," said Lacy, with a grin. "Look here, what are you fellows getting at? Why shouldn't I take a walk round the quadrangle if I want to?"

"Well, if you really want to—"

"I jolly well do," said Lacy.

"We'll call up some fellows in the quad, and make a party of it," said Tom Merry. "Come on, then, kid."

And the new boy and the Terrible Three strolled out into the quadrangle together.

Tom Merry called to several School House fellows as they went down to the football-field. He was feeling uneasy in his mind. He would greatly have preferred to keep Cedric Lacy within the walls of the School House; but Lacy seemed likely to prove rather restive in the hands of his kind friends. He was very much flattered by their great desire to have him in their House, but he had a will of his own. That was plain.

Suddenly there was a rush of feet. A swarm of New House juniors came tearing round from behind the pavilion. Under cover of the pavilion the deep-scheming Figgins had gathered his forces immediately the new boy was sighted in the quad by a New House scout.

Round from the back of the pavilion came twenty-five or thirty fellows with a terrific rush, and the group of School House juniors were surrounded in a moment.

"Line up!"

"Rescue!"

"Back up, School House!"

"Collar him!" roared Figgins.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 262.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn laid violent hands upon Lacy, while the rest of the crowd piled on Tom Merry & Co. School House fellows came dashing up to the rescue on all sides, and Figgins & Co. whirled Lacy off his feet, and rushed him off bodily towards the New House.

Redfern and the rest covered their retreat, meeting the furious charges of the School House fellows and keeping them off, while Figgins & Co. bore away the prisoner at a run.

Lacy struggled in the grasp of his captors.

"Let me down, you asses!" he roared.

"It's all right, Lacy!" gasped Figgins. "We're rescuing you from those cads!"

"I'm a School House fellow now!" roared Lacy, exasperated.

"Your mistake. You're not!" panted Fatty Wynn.

"I am. It's settled!"

"Then it's got to be unsettled."

"Look here—"

"Bring him in!" gasped Figgins, as they reached the steps of the New House.

"Get him up to the study! Quick! Before any rotten prefects come nosing round!"

And Lacy, in the strong grip of three athletic juniors, was rushed up the stairs, and plumped down in Figgins' study.

There was a roar of voices in the quadrangle. Tom Merry and strong reinforcements of School House fellows had pursued the raiders to the very doorway of the School House. In the doorway the New House juniors massed for defence, and they would have charged but for the arrival of a prefect on the scene.

"Hallo! More House rows!" said Darrel, the prefect, a School House fellow. "All School House boys get across the quad—sharp!"

"Weally, Dawwel—"

"I say, Darrel—"

"Clear!" rapped out Darrel. "If Mr. Ratcliff hears you, and comes out, you'll be sorry you came over this side. Clear off!"

There was no help for it. Tom Merry & Co., raging, retreated across the quadrangle, Darrel shepherding them back to their own side. They gathered in the School House simply writhing with rage.

Figgys got him!" panted Tom Merry. "Got him! Got him! Oh, it's rotten! Oh, my hat!"

"Yaas, it was vewy unfortunate that I wasn't present—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Tom Merwew—"

"You shouldn't have let him go out into the quad," said Blake. "You might have known Figgins was waiting for a chance, you awful ass! Poof!"

"But he would go out—"

"B-r-r-r! Better have tied him to the giddy banisters by the neck than have let those bouncers swindle us out of our Cornstalk like this."

"He's a School House fellow, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "We'll have him back."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll raid the New House! We'll pull the blessed place down but we'll get him," said Herries.

And the School House juniors raged and talked, and talked and raged. But over in the New House there was rejoicing without limit.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Methods of Barbarism.

CEDRIC LACY sat up in the armchair in Figgins' study in the New House, and gasped for breath.

The raiders had not meant to handle him roughly, but they had not had much time to waste. They had been bound to

get Lacy into the New House, and they had got him there. They had bumped him down in the armchair like a sack of coke. They crammed the study between Lacy and the door, and they chortled triumphantly.

There was great glee in Figgins' study, but the Cornstalk did not share it. He was an easy-going fellow, but the easiest-going fellow might be excused for getting "wratly" at being dragged and yanked about like a bag of potatoes, and dumped down like coal or coke.

The New House juniors chortled, and Lacy glared.

"Got him!" sang Figgins.

"Hurrah for us!"

"Good egg! Bravo the New House!"

"Look here, you silly asses!" gasped Lacy.

"Hope you're not shaken up at all," said Figgins, with solicitude.

Lacy snorted.

"Did you think you could drag me up and bump me down without shaking me at all?" he demanded.

"I'm sure we're sorry," said Figgins. "We didn't mean to be rough. You see, we were bound to rescue you from these cads."

"Had to stand by you, you know," said Kerr. "We couldn't let these worms sneak you into their wretched House."

"Couldn't think of it," said Redfern; "but you'll get your second wind soon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to stand a good feed," said Figgins. "You must be hungry after your journey."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll cut down to the tuck-shop—"

"And Lacy can come down with me to the Housemaster and sign his name," said Figgins. "You have to put down your name for the House list, you know."

Lacy grinned.

"But it can't be done," he said. "I'm awfully flattered, and so forth, but I belong to the School House now. I've seen Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, over there, and he's assigned me a study, too."

"That's all right. You can tell him you've changed your mind. Railton's a very good sort, and he won't make any trouble."

"But I haven't changed my mind."

"No; but you're going to."

"I'm not going to," said Lacy calmly. "The New House fellows looked at one another darkly and dubiously. This was a somewhat unexpected difficulty. All their efforts hitherto had been directed towards getting possession of Cedric Lacy. They had got possession of him now, but he was proving intractable. Still, one thing there could be no doubt about at all—they weren't going to let him return to the School House. That was quite decided.

"Let's get the feed ready," murmured Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn had a great faith in the powers of a feed as a persuader. If anything could have induced Fatty Wynn to change Houses, it would have been the prospect of a big feed.

"Go ahead, Fatty," agreed Figgins.

"Now, look here, Lacy, I want to put it to you fairly. You look like a sensible chap. You're going to belong to the New House."

"I'm afraid it can't be done."

"We're going to keep you here, anyway. We shan't let you go back to the School House. We don't want to adopt rough measures, do we, chaps?"

"Certainly not," said all the chaps at once.

"We'd much rather persuade you—"

Hallo, what's that?"

There was a tap at the study door, and it opened. Kildare of the Sixth came in. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was a School House fellow, and the Co. looked at him in surprise. They were surprised to see him in the New House. The juniors gathered round Lacy.

"You've got Lacy here," he said. "Yes, I can see you have. I've come for him."

Figgins gave a gasp. "You—you don't mean to say Tom Merry's asked you—"

"Tom Merry hasn't spoken to me," said Kildare. "Mr. Railton asked me to come over here and see if Lacy was here. He saw you carry him off from his study window."

"Oh, crumbs!" "You shouldn't rag a new fellow, you know," said Kildare. "You should keep House ragging for fellows who know the ropes."

"But Lacy isn't a School House fellow, and this isn't ragging," Figgins explained eagerly. "Mr. Railton has made a mistake. We didn't buzz Lacy off because he was a School House chap, but because he wasn't."

"I don't quite see," said Kildare. "His name is down on the House books; Mr. Railton says he is in the School House by his own choice."

"He's changed his mind," said Figgins. "I—I mean he's changing it now."

"We're helping him," said Redfern. Kildare laughed.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "You want him in this House. Mr. Railton had the impression that it was a House rag, and he sent me over here to fetch him."

"You see, it was a mistake," said Figgins. "You—you can mention to Mr. Railton that it's all right—and—and leave Lacy free."

"Do you want to stay here, Lacy?" asked Kildare.

"No fear!" said Lacy. "I'm a School House chap! I wouldn't be found dead in this rotten old casual ward!"

Kildare chuckled. Lacy was evidently getting into the way of things at St. Jim's already.

Figgins & Co. glared at him. That finished it! Lacy walked out of the study with Kildare. He turned in the passage to kiss his hand to the enraged New House juniors, and then disappeared.

"Well," said Figgins, with a deep breath, "that's rotten! It's the finish! They've got him!"

And the New House juniors agreed that it was rotten. But there was evidently nothing more to be done.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Figgins & Co. Laugh.

"THERE he is!"

"Hurrah!" The School House juniors gathered joyously round Cedric Lacy as he came into the School House once more.

He was marched up to Tom Merry's study, in the midst of the rejoicing juniors. Tom Merry & Co. had hardly expected to get him out of the hands of the raiders, and they rejoiced accordingly over the good luck. Lacy explained how it had happened.

"Well, it was a bit of luck Kildare chipping in like that," said Tom Merry.

"Of course, we shouldn't have dragged a prefect into it—still, I can't say I'm sorry Kildare dropped in. It's all right now. And they had the cheek to bump you for not wanting to join their dismal old show!"

"The awful cheek!" said Blake. "Yaas, wathah!" said Augustus D'Arcy. "Of course, we should have bumped him if he had refused to join us, but that's a different matter. I weally considah that Figgins is a cheeky ass, and—"

"Oh, you'd have bumped me, would you?" said Lacy.

"Shut up, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake, stopping those indiscreet revelations. "Of course, we knew that you'd come into this House, as a sensible chap, Lacy. We really hadn't any doubt about it. Is tea ready, you fellows? Lacy's hungry, aren't you, Lacy, old man?"

Lacy grinned. "Yes, I could eat a bit," he said.

And Cedric Lacy took his place in the place of honour at the tea-table in Tom Merry's study, and cast an appreciative eye over the well-spread board.

The Co. had certainly done very well in providing for their guest. And Lacy started on the viands with a keenness which showed that the exciting experiences of the day had not robbed him of his appetite. And the triumphant School House juniors backed him up nobly.

The study was crammed with juniors, all in the best of tempers. They had beaten the New House, and were in possession of the prize. And the prospect of playing Cedric Lacy in the junior House eleven was simply gorgeous.

"We'll put your name down as a member of the School House Junior F.C. after tea, Lacy," Tom Merry remarked.

Lacy nodded. "Thanks!" he said. "I should like to belong to the club, though not as a playing member."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll jolly well be a playing member, too," he said. "My dear chap, do you think we don't know your record?"

"Yaas, wathah! You're goin' to be our big gun this season, deal boy!"

Lacy stared at the juniors for a few moments, and then burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at him inquiringly. They could see no cause for this sudden and irrepressible mirth of the new junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lacy. "Oh, my only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!"

Lacy wiped his eyes.

"I wondered what the dickens you wanted me so much for," he gasped. "Do you mean to say that you've taken all this trouble so that I can play football for you?"

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"Well, not only that," he said. "We wanted you as well!"

"Hands across the sea!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"But—but, of course, you'll play football for your House," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, what are you cackling

at?" demanded Tom Merry, with an uneasy feeling in his breast.

"I'm awfully sorry!" gasped Lacy. "It's a shame to disappoint you, as you've been so flattering! I feel that I've got this feed under false pretences—but I didn't know. You didn't explain, you see, that you wanted me as a footballer."

"You are Cedric Lacy, ain't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'm Cedric Lacy!"

"The Australian—the infant prodigy at football?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Chap who scored four goals in a first-class football-match?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then," said Tom Merry, with a breath of relief, "it's all right, then."

Lacy burst into a chuckle again.

"I'm afraid it isn't all right from your point of view," he said. "You see, I'm not playing football this season."

"But you must," said Tom Merry warmly. "Football is compulsory here, for one thing—and a chap like you can't want to give the game a miss for a season."

"I don't want to," said Lacy; "but I've got to."

"If you'd told me what you wanted, I'd have explained, and saved all the trouble," grinned Lacy. "But you didn't tell me. You see, I had an accident some time ago, and my leg is damaged. I'm under strict orders from the surgeon not to try even to play football this season."

"Oh!"

The School House juniors uttered that monosyllable together, in varying tones of dismay, and then there was silence.

They had beaten Figgins & Co. They had got the famous footballer into the School House. And now they had got him, he couldn't play football!

It was the ghastliest frost in their experience.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Monty Lowther at last. "Sold! You—you awful fraud! You've sold us a pup!"

Won't Figgins & Co. chuckle when they hear!"

"Bai Jove—wathah!"

"You—you spoofer!" said Blake.

Lacy laughed.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I'd have told you if you'd asked me. But you didn't. It's not my fault. I'm booked for the School House now; but I'm afraid I've got this feed on a misunderstanding, and I'll clear out, if you like."

But Tom Merry rose to the occasion.

"No, you jolly well won't!" he said.

"Of course, it's rotten—simply rotten! But we're glad to have you in the House—you're the kind of chap we want, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah."

So Lacy sat down again.

Monty Lowther was right—Figgins & Co. did chuckle when they heard.

They chuckled loud and long.

The School House had captured the wonderful footballer, but, as he would not be able to play football for them, the triumph was discounted—indeed, Figgins & Co. considered that the laugh was on their side. And they laughed!

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled:

66 THE SCHOOLBOY SUSPECT! 66

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry is Persuasive.

"LINLEY!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Linley!"

"I say——"

"Linley!" bawled Bob Cherry. "Where are you, ass? Tumble up, duffer! Linley! Mark Linley!"

Bob Cherry's tremendous voice rolled along the Remove passage. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent added their voices, but the combined shouts brought no reply. Billy Bunter blinked at them peevishly through his big glasses.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But, I say——"

"Where's that chap Linley?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I jolly well told him we were going on the picnic this afternoon, and told him to be ready!"

"He said he'd come?" asked Nugent.

Bob shook his head.

"Oh, no; he said he wouldn't!"

"Well, then," exclaimed Wharton, staring, "perhaps that accounts for his not turning up, you fathead! Let's be off!"

"Rats!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter! Linley! Marky! Tumble up, you lubber!"

"Look here, Bob——"

"Bosh! Linley's coming!"

"But if he doesn't want to come?"

"He does."

"But if he said——"

"Never mind what he said," replied Bob Cherry obstinately. "He's coming. I'm not going to have a chap in my study left out."

"You ass! But he's not in your study now—his back in his old quarters while No. 13 is being repaired."

"That makes no difference."

"And while you're with us in No. 1

"Makes no difference. I tell you! Linley's coming!" And Bob Cherry bawled along the Remove passage again: "Linley! Mark Linley!"

Billy Bunter eyed the big baskets the juniors were carrying. There was to be a picnic up the Sark that afternoon, a very big affair, to which Marjorie and Clara were coming from Cliff House, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, was bringing his cousin, Ethel.

Billy Bunter was anxious to get to the ground, and start operations on the lunch-baskets, and this delay for Mark Linley seemed to him mere "rot," as he would have called it.

More especially as Mark Linley was in very bad odour in the Remove just then.

A black shadow of suspicion hung over him—the suspicion of dishonesty. His staunch friends—Harry Wharton & Co., and Tom Brown, the New Zealander, and a few more—stuck to the Lancashire. THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 262.

lad through thick and thin. But the great majority of the Lower Fourth were against him.

Perhaps that was why Bob Cherry was so obstinately determined to include him in the picnic-party.

If he remained behind, it might look as if his own friends were beginning to have doubts of his honour.

Harry Wharton had not thought of that, but as soon as he understood it, he became as determined as Bob Cherry was that Mark should join the picnic-party if it could possibly be managed.

"Linley! Lin—Lin—Linley!"

"Marky!"

Still there was no reply.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Here, amble up and down the passages, and look in the studies!" he exclaimed. "Marky's going to this blessed picnic if I have to take him by the scruff of his neck."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I shan't shut up! We're wasting time! We've got to meet D'Arcy and the girls by the river, too, and——"

"We'll be in time. Anyway, we're not going without Linley."

"Blessed if I can see why you should make so much fuss of a factory kid, a bouncer who came here on a scholarship!" grunted Bunter.

Bob Cherry turned on him suddenly.

"What's that?"

"Besides, you jolly well know he's a thief!" went on Bunter. "I wouldn't say it before Linley, because——"

"Because he'd lick you, you rotten little worm!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Certainly not! Because I wouldn't like to hurt his feelings!"

"You wouldn't like him to hurt you, you mean!"

"Well, you know jolly well somebody took those things that have been stolen in the dormitory!"

"I shouldn't wonder if it turns out to be a silly jape even now," said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Anyway, you shut up! Mark Linley's not a thief, and if you say it again, Bunter, I'll roll you over and—jump on you and burst you!"

Billy Bunter retreated a step or two. He was about to speak again, but the Famous Four did not stay to listen. They separated, and went up and down the Remove passage, looking for the Lancashire lad.

Bob Cherry looked into No. 13, the study he usually shared with Linley, but which was now in the hands of the workmen, owing to an accident following a Remove row. Mark was not there. But a call from Hurree Janset Ran Singh, the genial Nabob of Banipur, called the juniors to the right track.

"I have discoverfully found him, my worthy chums."

"Where is he?"

"In the esteemed box-room."

Bob Cherry rushed into the box-room. There was Mark Linley, seated on a small box, with his books on a large trunk, and hard at work.

He looked up with a smile as the juniors came in.

His face was somewhat troubled and lined, and it showed very plain traces of his late encounter with Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove. But it was a very prepossessing face, all the same—the face of a strong, hearty, wholesome, hard-working lad.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are, then!"

"Yes, here I am!"

"Didn't you hear me calling you?"

Mark smiled.

"Well, yes."

"Why didn't you answer, you image?"

"Well, I had told you I wasn't coming, Bob, and I thought I wouldn't have any more argument."

"That's just where you make your mistake, my pippin," said Bob Cherry, taking hold of the Lancashire lad by the collar and jerking him off his seat.

"You're coming!"

"I'm not! I——"

"I insist, my boy."

"The insistfulness is terrific."

"Come on, Linley," said Harry Wharton. "Better come. You'll enjoy it, too. It's going to be a ripping afternoon for so late in the season."

"But——"

"Where's your cap?" asked Bob.

"I—— Look here, you chaps, exclaimed Mark abruptly, "you know jolly well the Form has sent me to Coventry, on suspicion of having committed the thefts in the dorm——"

"More fools they!" said Nugent.

"Yes; but it won't do you fellows any good to chum up with me like this. I don't want to drag you all into my troubles."

"Bosh!" said Wharton.

"But——"

"Where's your cap, Linley?"

"But I was saying——"

"Never mind what you were saying," said Bob Cherry. "Take his other arm, Nugent, and we'll give him a run downstairs. Wharton and Inky can bring the baskets."

"But—but, look here!" exclaimed Mark desperately. "How can I go to a picnic with the girls with a face like this?"

"Well, you can't help your face!"

"You ass! I mean the bruises on it."

"Oh, they're nothing! It doesn't matter."

"But——"

"The girls will probably be looking at me, not at you, and they mayn't notice," said Bob cheerfully. "Come on!"

"But——"

"Blessed if he doesn't run on like a

giddy gramophone. Here, take hold of him, and give him a run!"

"It's all right!" exclaimed Mark, laughing. "I'll come!"

"Why couldn't you say that at first, and save all this bother? Come on!"

And so Mark Linley joined the picnic party.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bulstrode is Sorry!

"BUCK UP!"

"The backupfulness is terrific!"

"Righto!"

At a run, swinging heavy bags between them, the Removites went down towards the Sack. The river gleamed through the trees ahead.

A boat was already swinging to a rope from the wooden landing-stage. Wharton had taken it out ready. But just as the chains of the Remove arrived, four other juniors were stepping into the boat.

Bulstrode, Snoop, Skinner, and Stott had evidently taken a fancy to Wharton's craft, and they were going to calmly take possession of it without going through the formality of asking permission.

Harry Wharton stopped, with an exclamation, as he saw the four entering the boat. The coolness took his breath away.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Let that boat alone!"

Bulstrode caught the words, and looked round with a disagreeable grin. He picked up an oar to shove it off hastily.

Harry Wharton dropped the bag he was carrying, and bounded forward like a stag. The boat was leaving the plank stage, and in a few seconds more it would have been out of reach. Then it would not be much use to call upon the bully of the Remove to return it. Bulstrode would laugh at the idea. And there was a run upon the boats that fine afternoon, and it might have been very difficult to obtain another.

Harry did not stop to think. He ran directly to the edge of the planking, and made a flying leap into the boat.

The boat was gliding out fast under the propulsion of the violent shove Bulstrode had given with the oar against the planks. But Wharton's leap was well calculated, though so rapid, and he landed fairly in the boat.

Large as the boat was, the bump of the junior into it made it rock violently—with disastrous results to some of the occupants.

Wharton, unable to keep his footing, sprawled over, and bumped heavily against Snoop, who rolled over the gunwale helplessly into the water.

A wash of the river came over the side, and Skinner yelled as he was soaked to the skin. Bulstrode lost his footing in the shock, and sat down violently in the boat, and gasped.

"Bravo!" roared Bob Cherry from the bank.

"Help, help!" yelled Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cad of the Remove was struggling in the water. He got a grasp upon the edge of the boat, and clung there.

Skinner was shaking himself, like a dog, in the stern.

Wharton was upon his feet in a moment.

"You rotter!" howled Bulstrode.

"You cad!" exclaimed Wharton fiercely. "This is our boat."

"Rats!"

"I had got it out ready!"

"Bah!"

"Give me that oar!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll jolly well take it!"

And Wharton started towards the bully of the Remove. Bulstrode's eyes were blazing with rage as he sprang up, grasping the oar. He swung it back over his head, and his eyes seemed to flame at Wharton.

"Stand back, or I'll brain you!"

Wharton did not stand back, though Bulstrode looked quite capable in his rage, of carrying out his threat.

But before the Remove bully could do so, if he had intended it, a bag whirled from the bank and caught him in the side, left exposed by his arms being in the air.

He gave a gasp, and staggered over. "Well hit, Bob!" roared Nugent. "Well bowled! Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode plunged headlong over the gunwale. The bag dropped into the boat, the oar into the water.

Wharton picked it up in a moment, and swung the boat back to the landing-stage.

swam to the timbers, and dragged himself ashore.

Harry Wharton's chains were all in the boat now, and the bags with them. Billy Bunter settled down in the stern to steer.

Bulstrode shook the water from his clothes, and knuckled it out of his eyes. He stood regarding the boat and its crew with a savage look.

"Sorry we haven't room for you, Bulstrode!" said Nugent politely.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur murmured that the sorrowfulness was terrific.

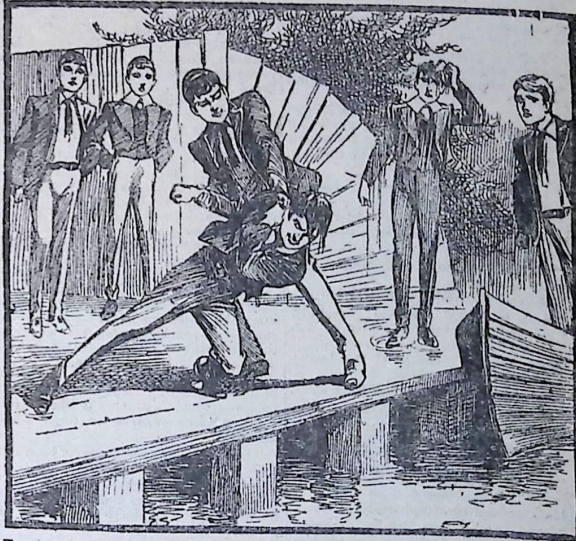
Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"I wouldn't come!" he said.

"Blessed if I want a picnic with a thief! I should be afraid of getting my pockets picked!"

Mark Linley turned deadly pale, and his lips tightened convulsively. He made a movement as if to spring towards Bulstrode.

"Hold on, kid!" muttered Bob Cherry. "He's only trying to draw you.



"Now then, Bulstrode," said Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, "apologise to Mark Linley, or in you go!"

Neither Stott nor Skinner offered any resistance. Bulstrode was swimming, and Snoop clinging to the boat.

The bow bumped against the timber, and Mark Linley caught the painter.

"All right!" he said.

"Good! Get in, and kick those rotters out!"

Stott and Skinner did not wait to be kicked out. They scrambled ruefully ashore.

"It was only a j-j-joke, Wharton," ventured Skinner.

"Oh, cut off!"

"Help!" gasped Snoop.

"Certainly!" said Nugent, leaning over, and grasping the cad of the Lower Fourth by the collar, and dragging him out of the water, depositing him in a gasping heap on the planks. "That all right?"

"Ow, ow, ow?"

"Shall I lend you a hand, Bulstrode?"

The Remove bully did not reply. He

Remember, we're going to meet the girls. You don't want to fight now."

Mark nodded silently.

Bulstrode's lip curled as he saw that the Lancashire lad turned quietly to his place and picked up his oar.

"I wish you a pleasant voyage," he said. "There's one comfort for you—if you miss your watches, you'll know who to ask for them."

"Hold your tongue, you cur!" broke out Wharton savagely.

"Bah! You know Linley is a thief—Oh, oh!"

Bulstrode broke off as an arm was thrown round his neck from behind, and he was forced over till he was bent down to the timber stage. Tom Brown, of New Zealand—the new boy at Greyfriars—was the fellow who had seized him, and the strength he displayed in thus quelling the burly Removite astonished the juniors in the boat.

Tom Brown looked down calmly into the face of the furious bully of the Remove, who glared up at him savagely.

"Quite enough on that topic," he said. "You've jawed more than enough about it, Bulstrode. And you are a liar! I don't believe you really think Linley is guilty of the thefts in the dormitory!"

"Liar!"

"And now you are going to apologise to Linley for what you said," said the New Zealander quickly, taking no notice of the epithet applied to himself.

"I won't!"

"You will!"

"Hang you! Lemme get up!"

"You can get up when you've apologised," said Tom Brown cheerily; "not before!" He gave Bulstrode a twist that brought him right to the edge of the planking, hanging half over the water, which mirrored his furious face below. "Now, then—apologise, or in you go!"

"Never!"

"If you go in, you won't get out till you've apologised!"

"Bravo!" grinned Bob Cherry. "First lesson in decency to Bulstrode! Gentlemen are admitted to the show without charge!"

A great many of the Greyfriars fellows were crowding up to see what was going on, but no one offered to help Bulstrode. And he was quite powerless in the iron grip of the New Zealander.

"Let me go!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll fight you—"

"You shall fight me as soon as you like—after you've apologised to Linley!"

"I—I won't!"

"Oh, let him go!" said Mark. "It doesn't matter."

The New Zealander looked at him.

"Rats to you!" he said cheerfully. "I'm running this show. You go and eat cokes!"

Mark laughed. He liked the breezy lad from New Zealand.

"Now, Bulstrode, your last chance!"

"No!"

"Then you're going—"

"Hold on, I—I—"

"Get it out!"

"I—I apologise!" gasped Bulstrode.

"I—I'm sorry, Linley!"

Mark nodded contemptuously.

"Good!" said Tom Brown, dragging the Remove bully back, and rolling him over on the timber. "That will do!"

Bulstrode scrambled up. The New Zealander watched him with cool, quiet eyes, and the Remove bully did not "come on."

"I'll make you answer for this, Brown!" he said between his teeth.

"Any time you like," said Tom carelessly.

And Bulstrode, who was dripping with water, hurried away in his squelching boots towards the school. Tom Brown waved his hand to the juniors in the boat.

"The show's over, gents," he remarked. "You can buzz off!"

"Hold on," said Harry Wharton.

"We're going to a picnic. I was looking for you to ask if you'd care to come, but I couldn't see you. Will you come?"

"It will be ripping," said Nugent.

"Plenty of tuck, and Miss Hazeldene and Miss Trevelyan are coming, to say nothing of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his cousin Ethel."

"Right you are!" said Tom cheerily.

And he jumped lightly into the boat, and the juniors pushed off.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is Concerned for Bunter.

"BAI Jove!"

"What is it, Arthur?"

"Nearly three o'clock, dear boy—I mean dear girl."

"They won't be long," said Marjorie Hazeldene.

Hazeldene of the Greyfriars Remove was looking down the river, shading his eyes with his hand. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was looking at his gold watch with his cyeglass jammed tightly into his eye, as if to assist his vision in seeing the time.

The party from Cliff House had arrived at the rendezvous. Hazeldene of the Remove had gone over to fetch his sister and her friends, and they had taken a short cut to this point on the Sark, where they were to meet the boaters. A quarter to three had been fixed as the time of the meeting; but Harry Wharton & Co., for once, were late.

Marjorie and Clara were surprised. Harry Wharton never was late, so they couldn't understand it. D'Arcy's cousin, Ethel Cleveland, sat on the grassy bank, with an untroubled brow. Ethel was a sweet-tempered girl, and she did not mind waiting.

The three girls and the two boys had been waiting nearly ten minutes. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had looked at his watch about ten or twelve times. Not that D'Arcy minded waiting himself. But he felt doocid bad form, as he would have expressed it, to keep a lady waiting. What the dickens were Harry Wharton & Co. thinking of?

"Povwaps—" began D'Arcy, when suddenly Hazeldene pointed down the river.

"There they are!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the gleaming Sark. Sure enough, there was the boat, coming steadily up the gleaming water, propelled by four oars, and at a spanking rate.

"Jolly good!" said D'Arcy, in the tone of a connoisseur. "They can row. We do some rowin', and we'd like to meet a Gweyfwialhs crew some day. Hallo, there!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" sang back Bob Cherry's powerful voice.

"We've been waiting for you."

The boat glided up and bumped on the grassy bank, and Hazeldene caught the painter.

The Greyfriars juniors jumped up and raised their straw hats.

"Sorry," said Harry Wharton. "It's too rotten to be late, but we've had a chapter of accidents."

"I say, you fellows—"

"P'rwy, don't mention it, as fah as I'm concerned," said D'Arcy. "If the ladies will obvahlook the occurence—"

"Of course. We know you couldn't help it," said Cousin Ethel, smiling. "I hope nothing serious has happened."

"Oh, no! In the first place, we couldn't find Linley, and we had to dig him up in a box-room. Then there was a a-a-a-argument with some chaps who wanted to borrow our boat. It was really too bad, you know."

"Nevah mind, dear boys, it's all ovah now," said D'Arcy. "I was wathah anxious about you, as a mattah of fact, and I wished I had come straight to Gweyfwialhs to look afah you."

"Thank you very much," said Wharton, while Bob Cherry grinned. "It was awfully kind of you, but we pulled through."

"Yaas, I am glad to see that you pulled through."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! Get out of that seat, and put the cushions in place."

"But I say—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I think you might allow me to make a suggestion for the comfort of the ladies, Bob Cherry."

"Oh, go on! It's the first time you've ever made a suggestion for anybody's comfort but your own—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Put those cushions there."

"Yes, but I was going to suggest that the ladies are probably hungry after their walk from Cliff House, and it would be a good idea to take a snack here before going up the river—"

"Shut up, you young pig!"

"But really—"

Bob Cherry gave the fat junior a prod in the ribs, and Bunter collapsed on a seat gasping. Before he could recover his breath the party of picnickers were all in the boat, and Harry Wharton was pushing off again.

The craft was a roomy one, but its capacity was well taxed by the picnickers. There were three girls and eight boys, so the party was numerous enough.

Tom Brown, who was now introduced to the Cliff House girls for the first time, made a good impression upon them. This made a good impression upon the party only disagreeable element in the party was Billy Bunter, and several times as they pulled up the river Bob Cherry was they pulled up the river, and was only restrained by the presence of Marjorie.

Billy Bunter regarded himself as fascinating, where girls were concerned, and he gave both Marjorie and Clara some killing looks from behind his big spectacles.

Marjorie and Clara seemed quite unconscious of them, and Harry stamped on the fat junior's toe without having any effect upon him, except to make him yelp.

Billy Bunter decided that Marjorie and Clara were being coy for the sake of disguising their real feelings, and he turned his fascinating glances upon Cousin Ethel.

Ethel was talking to D'Arcy, who, as guest, was not asked to take an oar. She did not even notice what the fat junior was doing; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy noticed it, and it puzzled him very much.

The swell of St. Jim's carefully adjusted his eyeglass, and examined the countenance of the Greyfriars Falstaff.

Bunter was casting what he believed to be a killing look in the direction of Ethel; but so D'Arcy it seemed as if the fat junior must be ill, to draw so curious an expression to his face.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

Harry Wharton, who had taken the rudder-lines for a change, looked across at him.

"Anything amiss?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's extwawordinawy."

"What is?"

"Bunyah."

"What's the matter with Bunter?"

"No," said Billy. "I'm a bit hungry, that's all. I'll have a snack from one of the bags, if you like."

"I don't like."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"It's extwawordinawy," repeated Arthur Augustus, still with his monocle turned upon the fat face of William George Bunter.

"Oh, you're thinking of his face," said Nugent. "Yes, it is a bit out of the mask, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Extwawordinawy!"

"But what is it?" asked Hazeldene.

"The curious expression upon Buntah's face. Did you feel any swavage pain, Buntah?"

"Certainly not."

"You do not suffah from St. Vitus' dance?"

"Of course I don't," said Bunter indignantly.

"You have no feafal disease?"

"I—I haven't. Of course not. I took to sleep-walking once, but that's not a disease, and it was caused by shortage of grub, I believe. What are you driving at? There's nothing wrong with me."

"It is gone now."

"What is gone?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The extraordinary expression on Buntah's face, an expression as if he were about to expiah in feafal agony."

"By Jove!"

"Turn your face to the left again, Buntah, please. That's how it was when I caught that extraordinary expression. You were lookin' towards my Cousin Ethel."

Bunter splattered. Whether D'Arcy was really puzzled, or whether he was solemnly pulling his leg, the fat junior could not guess; but he knew now what was the "extraordinary expression" Arthur Augustus was alluding to.

He turned his face as D'Arcy requested, but the swell of St. Jim's only shook his head.

"No, it is gone now."

The boat pulled on. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass every now and then upon Billy Bunter. As soon as he thought he was unobserved—and Bunter was a great deal like an ostrich in that respect—the fat junior started again.

There was a sudden exclamation from D'Arcy.

"There it is again!"

"What?" demanded three or four voices.

"That extraordinary expression upon Buntah's face. It comes on him when he turns his head towards my Cousin Ethel."

Bunter turned crimson. The Greyfriars fellows were looking at him with accusing eyes.

Cousin Ethel's cheeks were pink. Only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked frankly perplexed.

"Oh, Bunter's all right," said Bob Cherry blandly. "It's a sort of—a sort of facial contraction he has, and he gets over it if he's smacked on the back. I smack him on the back, you know, because I have a light hand—sometimes."

And Bob Cherry promptly put the cue into practice.

Billy Bunter, who guessed that punishment was coming, tried to squirm out of the way; but that was not easy in the crowded boat.

Bob's left hand fastened on his collar with a grip of iron, and his right hand rose and fell as if he were beating a carpet.

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"You see how much good it's doing him?" said Bob, looking round. "What a healthy yell he gives."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Ow! Ow! Wharton, stop him! I—ow—yow—oh!"

"Are you feeling better?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"No—yes—ow!"

"Do you think you are quite cured?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"I don't mind giving you a few more snacks. It's practically no trouble to me."

"I'm all right!" shrieked Bunter.

"Lemme alone."

"Very good!" said Bob Cherry, sitting down. "Notice if he has any more of those expressions, you chaps, and we'll pat his back for him again. We have to look after Bunter. He may go off into a decline any time if we're not careful with him."

Billy Bunter collapsed, gasping for breath. He was still gasping and silent and sulky, when the boat pulled up to the place chosen for the picnic. But Billy Bunter had been cured. There were no more killing looks during that picnic.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Sugar for Bunter.

"WHAT a lovely spot!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel in delight.

"Lovely!" said Miss Marjorie and Clara together.

"Ripping!" agreed the boys.

"Bai Jove! I weally regard it as wippin', and no mistake," observed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is quite as nice as some of our scenery about St. Jim's."

"Go hon!" murmured Hazeldene.

It was indeed a beautiful spot. The greensward sloped gently down to the river, on the margin of which the bushes grew thickly. Big old trees, still in thick green foliage, shaded the spot.

The sun was blazing with summer heat, and the foliage intercepted the rays, and cast a pleasant shade upon the scene.

Round about the stretch of green were big, thick bushes, which screened the spot from view except in the direction of the river.

A better spot could not have been chosen for the picnic.

It did not take the juniors long to secure the boat and to land their cargo.

Bob Cherry, who was a handy man in camping, selected the spot for a fire, and found three or four big stones to make a natural grate, and piled up fuel from the thickets and lighted it.

Billy Bunter turned cooking utensils out of one of the bags, and his fat face wore a cheerful smile as he did so. To the fat junior cooking was the second greatest enjoyment to eating.

While most of the juniors were engaged in preparations for tea the girls were equally busy. Marjorie and Ethel laid the cloth on the grass for tea, while Miss Clara helped to unpack the provisions.

The quality and quantity of the latter caused some widening of eyes among the guests of the picnic.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon them, and noted the jam and the marmalade, the cake, and the tarts, and the jellies and the preserves, as well as more solid items like pork pies, ham patties, beef puddings, and so on, and his eye glistened behind his monocle.

"Bai Jove!" he remarked. "How Fatty Wynn would like to be here, wouldn't he, Ethel?"

"Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I think he would, Arthur."

"I like that chap Wynn," said Billy Bunter, looking up from greasing the frying-pan.

Bunter had declared that no picnic was complete without fried sausages, and, as Billy's fried sausages were a dream, his chums had allowed him to have his way.

"I like that chap, you know. I am going to visit him at St. Jim's one of these times. He's a chap I can chum with."

"Yas, wathah!"

"He can cook, and he knows a good thing when he sees it. I jolly well wish

he were here!" Then Billy Bunter glanced at the provisions, and remembered that Fatty Wynn's appetite resembled his own. "Ahem! I—I mean, I should always be glad to see him at Greyfriars."

Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle!

Bob Cherry sniffed appreciatively.

"Nice!" he said.

"Bai Jove, it's wippin'! Do you know, dear boys, I am gettin' wathah hungry, you know. I don't eat a great deal as a wale, but on the present occasion I weally think I shall distinguish myself."

"Good!" said Billy Bunter. "I think you'll like these bassingers, D'Arcy. Remember the time we were cooking in your study at St. Jim's, and a rotten perfect walk-off the tuck. We made him sit up for it—hey?"

"Yas, wathah—through your vent-wathah, dear boy. I wegard that as a loathah, deeah twick of yours. I couldn't do it myself, you know."

"Bet you couldn't!" said Bunter. "It's a wonderful gift. I have marvellous abilities as a ventriquist—even more than I have as an amateur photographer and a boxer. There'd be a great deal more heard about me at Greyfriars if I hadn't to contend with jealousy in my own study."

"Bai Jove!"

"Measly old study, too," said Bob Cherry. "No. 1 used to be a study in the Remove, you know, D'Arcy, till No. 13 was started. Now—"

"Now, don't tell D'Arcy any fairy-tales, Bob," said Nugent. "I shall be bound to undeceive him, you know."

"Now, don't be an ass, Nugent."

"Then don't you be a duffer, Bob."

"Look here—"

"Order!" exclaimed Wharton, laughing. "This is a picnic, not a study row. It's all right, Miss Cleveland; don't be alarmed. This is a way they have when I don't keep them in order."

And Cousin Ethel laughed.

"The sosses are getting browned," said Bunter. "Who's going to make the tea?"

"I am," said Marjorie.

"Good! Then it won't want any sugar," said Bunter, with a simper.

"Won't it really?" said Marjorie, with perfect gravity.

"Mine won't, anyway. He, he, he!"

Marjorie made the tea.

The cloth was spread, and really the array of good things was very imposing. It was quite enough to make any junior's mouth water.

Marjorie poured out the tea, and Cousin Ethel and Miss Clara passed round the teacups. Billy Bunter disposed of a couple of sausages, and stirred his cup at intervals, and finally tackled the tea. He put the cup to his mouth and took a deep, deep draught.

Then his fat face twisted up as if he had taken a dose of quinine, and he choked.

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter?"

"Ow! Yow!"

"My hat, what's the matter with him?"

There was a lurking smile on Marjorie's face; but the others were perplexed.

"Anything wrong with the tea?" demanded Wharton.

"Ow! Yes."

"Bai Jove! What is it?"

"N-n-n-no sugar in it!"

"Eh?"

"There wasn't any sugar in my tea!" gasped Bunter. "I—I've got a sweet tooth, as you know. I distinctly said three lumps. There wasn't any sugar in it!"

And he blinked at Marjorie.

"Dear me!" said Marjorie. "You said you didn't take sugar."

"What?"

"I am sure you said, when I said I would make the tea, that you wouldn't want any sugar in yours."

Bunter blinked, and the juniors grinned. Marjorie's face was quite serious, and the Owl of the Remove was too short-sighted to see the humorous twinkle in her eyes.

"Owl!" grunted Bunter. "I—I didn't mean that."

"But you said so."

"I meant it would be sweet enough if you made it—see?"

Marjorie looked perplexed.

"But now you say it is not sweet enough! I made it."

"Yes; but—Owl! Who trod on my foot?"

"Nuff jaw, Bunter. Ring off."

"Oh, I say, you fellows—"

"Dry up, for goodness' sake!"

Billy Bunter looked up at the warlike expression on Bob Cherry's face, and took the hint. The tea continued, and a most enjoyable tea it proved to be.

There was not a moment when nobody was talking, and everybody seemed to be happy, and eager to join in the conversation. Bunter said practically nothing. The Owl of the Remove had quite enough to do to demolish the good things that were spread on the ground.

The time passed all too quickly for the Remove juniors. In fact, to many of them it seemed that they had only been in the company of the Cliff House girls for a matter of minutes, when Harry Wharton announced that this time for their return to Greyfriars had arrived.

After a pleasant drift down-stream in the boat, the juniors saw the girls safely back to Cliff House, and bade them good-bye. Naturally, they were sorry to part, but one and all felt that, apart from their unfortunate meeting with Bulstrode & Co., the afternoon had been very well spent.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Something New for Bulstrode.

BULSTRODE was in the common-room when the juniors came there later in the evening. The bully of the Remove was looking sulky.

"Mind your pockets!" he called out.

Some of the juniors laughed. Mark Linley turned fiery red, and then pale. He knew, of course, what Bulstrode's meaning was.

Wharton caught his sleeve.

"Don't take any notice," he whispered.

And the Lancashire lad nodded, though his teeth came together hard, and his eyes were glinting like steel.

But taking no notice was not exactly the best way of dealing with Bulstrode. He noted the change of colour in the Lancashire lad's face, and when he saw how one spot told, he was not slow to follow it up with another.

"Anybody lost anything lately?" he asked, addressing the whole room.

"Yes," said Snoop; "Linley's lost his temper. He, he, he!"

"New thing for Linley to lose anything," remarked Bulstrode. "It's Linley's neighbours who lose things, as a rule."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Linley believes that 'findings are keepings,' of course, wherever he finds anything—even if it's in another fellow's pockets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley gritted his teeth.

"I can't stand that," he said.

"Give him a hiding," said Bob Cherry. "He won't be happy till he gets it."

The Lancashire lad strode straight up to Bulstrode, who put his hands in his pockets, and greeted him with an insolent stare.

"No good," he said. "I'm looking after my money, and I've locked my watch up in my box. Better try somebody else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You coward!" said Mark Linley.

"Put up your hands!"

"Rats!"

"Then take that!"

Smack!

Bulstrode reeled under the smack of the open palm, which sounded like the crack of a whip on his face. He caught his breath.

"Chaps, I'm not going to fight a convicted thief. If he can't take it calmly, he's got to be ragged. Collar him!"

"Good! Let's rag him!"

"Give him the frog's march!"

"Kick him out! We don't want any thieves in the Remove!"

"Kick him out! Hurray!"

A dozen hands reached out for Mark Linley.

The Lancashire lad faced his enemies, his chest heaving, his eyes blazing.

"I am no thief!" he said, his voice almost choked with passion. "And you know it, too; most of you. The thief is among you. I defy you all, you cad!"

"Kick him out!"

"Roll him over!"

"Down with him!"

Mark Linley struck out right and left as the excited Removites closed in upon him, like waves upon a rock.

But he had no chance against so many. Bulstrode and Stott rolled on the floor under his heavy blows, but then he was dragged over and hauled down.

It would have gone hard with the lad from Lancashire if he had had no friends at hand at that moment.

But he had friends—staunch chums who were ready to stand by him through thick and thin.

"Come on!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Come on! Kick it to the rotters!"

"Hurray!"

"This way!" shouted Harry Wharton, and he dashed among the adherents of Bulstrode, hitting out right and left.

His chums followed him fast.

The rush of half a dozen stalwart juniors broke up the crowd round the Lancashire lad, and enabled Linley to get upon his feet.

Mark was red and gasping, his collar was torn out, his nose streaming red; but he was as full of pluck as ever.

The Removites closed in upon him again, and at last it was seen that Harry Wharton's influence was broken. His backing up of the Lancashire lad had had the inevitable effect, which he had more than half expected. The Remove had turned against its captain.

The fellows crowded up from all sides, and Bulstrode was the Form leader now—Wharton was the outcast, and his friends were few.

But that made no difference to the chums of Study No. 1.

They stood round Mark Linley, and met the rush of a score or more of foes with heavy blows, that made some of the assailants sorry they had not been a little slower.

Still, the odds were too great for the conflict to last.

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Bulstrode. "We'll give them a lesson now—it's time they had their combs out. Wharton's bossed the Remove too long!"

"Hurray!"

"Roll 'em over!"

"Down with the thieves!"

"We must get out of this," muttered Wharton. "They're too many. Make for the door!"

"Right you are!"

"The too-muchfulness is terrific!"

The chums, in a compact body, fought their way to the door, the excited juniors howling round them, rushing on every few moments, only to be hurled back again.

The chums gained the doorway, and the passage beyond; and then the Remove made a final rush at them.

There was a wild and scrambling conflict in the passage.

In the midst of it, Mr. Chesham appeared in his hat and coat, dressed to go out. He stared at the fighting juniors in blank amazement and horror.

"Boys! Boys!"

The Removites were too excited even to hear him.

"Boys!"

"Sock it to them!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Down with the rotters!"

"Down with the thieves!"

"Cads!"

"Yah!"

"Boys! Cease this instantly! I—oh! Oh!"

A rush of the juniors swept the Form-master off his feet.

Harry Wharton & Co. went rushing past and gained the staircase. Mr. Chesham staggered to his feet in the midst of a swarm of pursuing juniors.

He caught the nearest one by the ear. It happened to be Bulstrode; and Bulstrode squirmed and wriggled.

"Boys!"

"Gave!" gasped Skinner.

There was a rush to escape, as soon as the juniors saw that it was a Form-master whom they had upset.

They disappeared in various directions, with amazing speed; only Bulstrode, who could not escape, remained in the grasp of the Form-master.

Mr. Chesham gasped and blinked, and blinked and gasped.

"Bulstrode! It is you!"

"Yes," growled Bulstrode.

"What is all this riot about? You are the oldest boy in the Form, and you should know better. Bulstrode, surely you are aware that it is extremely bad for the health to indulge in this excited horsing.

You are flushed, and in a feverish state."

"I'm all right, sir," growled Bulstrode, nervously apprehensive of a remedy for his supposed feverishness. He knew Mr. Chesham.

"You are not all right, Bulstrode. Come with me."

"W-y-where, sir?"

"To my study."

"But—but—!—it's not fair, sir. I wasn't any worse than the others, any way."

"I'm not going to punish you. Bulstrode, I have been upset and roughly treat'd, but I am a patient man. I am not going to punish you. I am going to give you something for your feverishness."

"But I'm not feverish, sir."

"I suppose I know better about that than you do, Bulstrode."

"But, sir, I—!—feel all right."

"The feelings are a very deceptive guide in a case of illness. Sometimes a man feels all right, as you express it, on the very verge of death."

"Oh!"

"Your state is not as serious as that—at least I hope not—but the fact that you feel all right is a sure sign that you are in a more feverish state than I believed at first. I shall give you a double quantity of the Electric Elixir."

"If you please, sir—"

"That will do, Bulstrode."

The Remove bully, inwardly chafing, was dragged to the Form-master's study, and Mr. Chesham carefully mixed a doubly strong dose of the elixir. He stood over Bulstrode while he drank it, and Bulstrode had no chance of wasting a drop.

What it was made of the junior did not know; but it tasted as if it were made of a mixture of the sourest possible lemons with bitter almonds and quinine. It nearly doubled Bulstrode up.

He groaned and gasped when the dose was finished down.

"How do you like it, Bulstrode?"

"Owl Rotten!"

"Do you feel better?"

"No," groaned the Remove bully.

"Worse! A thousand times worse!"

"Dear me, that is quite alarming!"

The only thing is to repeat the dose—"

Bulstrode made one bound for the door.

"Bulstrode! Boy! Come here!"

But Bulstrode was gone.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"I was going to say that my

offer's still open—"

"So is your mouth. Shut it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you fellows like to stand something in the way of supper, I'll stay awake and look for the Chesham ass to-night—"

"Rats!"

That was all the gratitude Billy Bunter received for his generous offer. The Remove went up to bed; most of them in a bad temper.

Bulstrode was still suffering inwardly from the effects of the medicine administered by the faddist Form-master. Most of the others were suffering from hard knocks received in the combat in the Common-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not speak to the others.

It was definite now that they were to be sent to Coventry along with the Lancashire lad. They took it quietly enough. With so many in "Coventry," Coventry lost half its terrors; and there were, too, a good many juniors in the Remove who would never carry out the sentence completely against the chams of Study No. 1.

Harry Wharton went to bed without showing a sign that he cared a rap for the latest move of Bulstrode & Co. Billy Bunter had been warned by Bulstrode not to speak to his study mates, or he would have to share their exclusion; but Bunter was wise in his generation, and he knew that the feeds in Study No. 1 were worth more to him than anything he was likely to get from Bulstrode & Co.

Therefore he remained loyal, and plumed himself a great deal upon sticking to his friends in the hour of distress—but he did not receive so much gratitude as he expected.

The fat junior turned in in a discontented mood. If his offer had been accepted, he would probably have remained awake as long as the provisions lasted, and fallen asleep a few seconds after the last month.

The juniors were quite aware of that. As it was, Bunter dropped off to sleep about a minute after getting between the sheets, and he was asleep when Wingate looked in to turn out the lights and say good-night.

Tom Brown sat up in bed.

"Going to wait for the medicine man, chaps?" he asked.

Sure!

"Oh, I think I'll sit up a bit, anyway!"

And the New Zealander sat up a bit—for exactly three minutes. Then he put his head upon the pillow and went to sleep.

Slumber reigned in the Remove dormitory.

The hours tolled from the clock tower, unheard by the tired and soundly sleeping juniors.

They did not hear the chimes, and they did not hear a quiet footstep in the Remove passage—they did not hear a door open in the dormitory. They did not see a lamp glimmer from the gloom of the passage.

Mr. Chesham looked into the room. "Ah, all asleep!" he murmured. "It is a pity to have to wake them up, but if the medicine is not taken, they will be in an unenviable state by to-morrow morning. I must do my duty, however unpleasant it may be to myself and to—er—others."

He glanced at the beds occupied by the

It was Bunter, in his night-shirt, looking very much like a ghost in the dimness of the Remove dormitory. Mr. Chesham turned the light of the lamp full upon him.

"Bunter!"

The fat junior did not reply.

He came straight on, as if he did not see Mr. Chesham, and was unaware of the presence of the Form-master in the dormitory.

Mr. Chesham felt a creepy sensation. He did not quite know what it was, but there was something very uncanny about Bunter at that moment.

"Bunter!" His voice quavered in spite of himself. "Bunter! Get back into bed immediately!"

The junior did not reply. He strode straight on, and Mr. Chesham had to step out of the way, or Bunter would have crashed right into him.

Then, as the fat junior passed (Jose, the mystery was explained. His eyes were closed; he was walking in his sleep.



"Whatever is that extraordinary expression on Bunter's face?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It comes on him when he turns his head towards my cousin Ethel."

picnickers of the afternoon, and gave a slight start.

One of them was empty.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Chesham.

It was Billy Bunter's bed.

As it was past eleven o'clock, Mr. Chesham's surprise was natural. He immediately concluded that the fat junior was out of bed for the purpose of obtaining a surreptitious feed; not an uncommon happening in the Remove dormitory.

"Dear me! How fortunate I came here! I shall be able to save the unfortunate youth from the effects of his foolish gluttony!" murmured Mr. Chesham.

The next moment he gave a jump, and the lamp almost fell from his hand. A figure in white loomed up in the gloom, advancing straight upon him.

Mr. Chesham backed away in alarm.

"Dear me! Bunter!" he gasped.

Mr. Chesham shivered a little.

He remembered now that Bunter had mentioned in his presence that he was addicted to somnambulism. His visit to the dormitory had caused him to discover the fat junior in a somnambulist fit; and the kind-hearted Form-master was very glad that he had come. It was quite possible that he would save Bunter from breaking a limb on the stairs.

Hardly knowing what to do for the moment, Mr. Chesham stood holding the lamp up, and looking at Bunter. There was a subdued exclamation from Bulstrode's bed.

"Hallo! Who's there?"

"It is I," said Mr. Chesham. "Do not make a noise, Bulstrode. Bunter is walking in his sleep, and it may be dangerous to awaken him suddenly."

"My hat! He's done that before, the young ass."

Several other juniors had awakened now. Mr. Chesham set down the lamp, and lighted the gas. Every waking eye was fixed upon Bunter.

"My only hat!" murmured Harry Wharton. "Look at him!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Look!"

"Phew!"

Bunter had stopped beside Nugent's bed, where the junior's clothes were placed on a chair, and was methodically going through the pockets.

He turned out the loose cash and several small articles, and tucked them under his arm, and then visited Wharton's clothes and repeated the same actions.

Half the Form were awake now, and they all watched Bunter breathlessly.

Mark Linley met Harry Wharton's eyes.

"The thief!" he muttered.

"The truth's out now, Linley."

"Yes—thank Heaven!"

"It was Bunter—in his sleep."

"My only hat!" muttered Bulstrode.

"The only-hatfulness is terrific!"

Mr. Chesham seemed petrified. Bunter was finished at last, and he concluded by gathering up several pairs of trousers, socks, and some jackets and boots, and thus laden he made for the door of the dormitory.

Harry Wharton whipped out of bed.

"Let's follow and see what he does with them. This may show us where the last lot were put—Bunter won't remember when he's awake."

"Good egg!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Chesham.

"Please come with us, sir, as a witness," said Wharton. "Linley has been accused of stealing things in the dormitory, and you can see what really happened now."

"It is amazing!"

The Form-master and a crowd of excited juniors followed the sleep-walker. Billy Bunter, walking with the curious precision of the somnambulist, went along the passage, and into the box-room.

There he opened a long disused cupboard in the wall, and Mr. Chesham flashed the lamp into it. There, in the damp, disused opening lay a pile of clothes, and a little heap of glittering articles—money, gold and silver watches, and tie-pins.

This was the store where the mys-

terious raider had deposited his plunder. The money had not been spent—it was here, to the last shilling.

Bunter deposited his fresh loot in the cupboard, carefully closed the door, and then left the box-room. He brushed against Mark Linley in passing, but did not look round. He walked straight back to the dormitory, followed by the juniors.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "This simply beats everything! Fancy it's being Bunter, walking in his sleep, all the time!"

"He's getting into bed now," muttered Wharton. "The young ass! We'll chain him down to-morrow night."

There was a suppressed chuckle. Billy Bunter tumbled into bed, drew the clothes about him, and was soon quiet, sleeping peacefully.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Chesham. "This is a most remarkable case, and I will make notes of it. I think I shall be able to prepare a medicine to cure Bunter of this. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The door closed behind Mr. Chesham, and Bob Cherry gave a chuckle.

"Jolly good!"

"What's good?"

"The Chesham-ness has forgotten what he came here for, that's all!" chuckled Bob. "He's gone away without doing us, with medicine."

"My hat! So he has!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky for us Bunter's a sleep-walker!" grinned Nugent. "But I say, you rotten sweeps, what do you say about the thief now?"

There was a general silence.

"All you mongrels who have been barking round Mark Linley—what have you got to say for yourselves?"

"Oh, rats!" said Skinner. "How were we to know that Bunter was playing these giddy tricks?"

"What have you got to say, Bulstrode?"

"Rats!"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Bah!"

"Well, you ought to be—and if you don't apologise to Linley, I hope the Remove will have the decency to send you to Coventry."

Bulstrode grunted, and went to sleep.

There was no more surprised person than Billy Bunter when the story was told in the morning.

The fat junior knew that he was subject to somnambulism, and he had been a victim of it, at Greyfriars before. But he had never dreamed of connecting it with the mysterious thefts in the dormitory. He was somewhat incredulous at first, but he had to believe it, and he had an explanation forthcoming at once.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said. "It was rough on Linley, I know. But it's all the fault of you fellows."

"They stared at him.

"How on earth do you make that out?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Blessed if I know how we could possibly have had anything to do with it." "It comes of being underfed," explained Bunter. "I'm a delicate chap, as you know, and I can only keep myself going at all by taking constant nourishment. When I go short of grub, it has a bad effect upon my system. You chaps are always keeping me short of grub, and this is the result. I think you ought to apologise to Linley."

Mark Linley laughed. The Lancashire lad seemed to have grown years younger since the previous day.

"I'm liable to have these attacks again, unless I'm well fed," went on Bunter. "The best thing you fellows can do is to raise a subscription in the Form, to stand me some decent suppers. Then it will be all right."

"I don't think!" remarked Nugent.

"It's more likely the effect of over-eating, and the best thing you can do is to cut down your meals."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"As a friend, I'll help you. In future, I'll scold your tea as well as my own."

"That you jolly well won't! I—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bulstrode!"

Bulstrode came up, looking very shamefaced.

"I want to speak to you, Linley," he said. "I was an ass! It's all right—I know now you weren't the thief. It looked suspicious, but—oh, hang! I'm sorry, I can't say more than that."

Mark nodded.

"It's all right, Bulstrode. I'm glad to hear you say so."

There was no more talk of Coventry in the Remove. Mark Linley's face was very cheerful that day. The Removites almost all did what they could to atone for their injustice, and it was admitted on all hands that Mark Linley had come out of the time of trouble with flying colours. And with that he was content.

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

is entitled:

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