BILLY BUNTER ALWAYS APPEARS IN—

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Three Complete Stories of—

HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.

THE GREAT BUNTER.

THE REMOVE TO THE RESCUE!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Help Wanted.

HARRY WHARTON looked inquiringly at Hazeldene of the Remove at Greyfriars. The latter was reading a telegram, with a somewhat puzzled expression upon his face.

"Well, is it from Marjorie?" demanded Nugent.

"Yes."

"Any news for us?"

"Yes."

"Read it out, then!" exclaimed Tom Brown. "What on earth do you mean by keeping it to yourself? What's the news?"

"Blessed if I understand!"

"Read it out, then, and let a superior brain have a chance," suggested Bob Cherry.

Hazeldene grinned, and read out the telegram.

"'We are in a fix, and want you to help us.—Marjorie.'"

"In a fix!" said Harry. "What does that mean? What kind of a fix can they be in that we can help them out of?"

Hazeldene shook his head.

"Oh, girls are always getting into some bother or other!" he remarked. "They always need a chap to fish them out, you know. I shall buzz over on my bike."

"What about us?" said Nugent. "I think we'd better all buzz over on our bikes."

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry.

"You might as well come over, if you're doing nothing this afternoon," said Hazeldene. "The telegram is as much to you as to me, I know. And if the girls are in any fix, I dare say you chaps will be as useful as I should be."

"Or more so!" suggested Nugent.

"Rats! Well, I'm going to get my machine."

"I haven't one," said Mark Linley, colouring a little. "I can't come."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Bob. "I'll lend you Inky's. He's staying in to write letters to India, and he won't come."

"Well, if he won't mind."

"I'll ask him afterwards, to make sure. Come on!"

Mark laughed, and followed the rest of the juniors to the bike-shed. In a few minutes the six juniors were wheeling the machines down to the gates.

They mounted in the road, Mark Linley mounting the handsome "jigger" belonging to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur—more familiarly known as "Inky."

The chums of the Remove were glad enough of a little excursion over to Cliff House. It was a fine, clear, spring afternoon, just the weather for riding.

What the kind of help could be that Marjorie & Co. wanted they had no idea; but they were ready to give it, whatever it was.

The bunch of cyclists swept along the country road at a good speed.

Suddenly Mark Linley, who was a little in advance, rang his bell furiously, and stopped his machine dead with a jam of the brake.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The bicycles rattled to a halt. But Bob Cherry, who was going too fast to stop immediately, ran right on.

His front wheel ran upon a rope stretched across the road, and his bicycle curled round and fell over, and he went sprawling in the dust.

He jumped up with bruised hands and dusty clothes and an enraged face.

The other juniors had dismounted in time.

"What does that mean?" roared Bob Cherry. "What howling idiot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a laugh from the thick hedge that bordered the road.

Across the road a rope was stretched, about a foot above the ground, and if the cyclists had ridden on, they would have been brought to the ground in a heap.

It was evidently a practical joke, and the perpetrators of it were hidden by the thick hedge at the side of the road. On the other side the end of the rope was tied to a stump in the opposite hedge.

Harry Wharton's face flushed with anger.

It was a terribly dangerous trick to play, and might have resulted in broken limbs, though the practical jokers had been too thoughtless to consider that.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A head rose above the hedge—a head wearing a mortar-board cap, which the juniors recognised at once.

The cap belonged to a fellow from Highcliffe School, a college some distance up the coast, beyond Cliff House.

Highcliffe was too far from Greyfriars for the boys to come much in contact; but when they did happen to meet, it was not in a friendly fashion.

Greyfriars had challenged Highcliffe to a football match on one occasion, and the challenge had been declined, not in the politest way.

The real reason of the refusal probably was that the Highcliffe fellows knew they would be licked; but they had couched the refusal in a way that hinted that they didn't consider Greyfriars quite good enough to meet them.

And Greyfriars had chafed, and yearned to get a Highcliffe team on the footer-field, to give them a lesson in football and manners.

Once or twice since then the fellows had met, and there had been exchanging of compliments, followed by the punching of noses.

Wharton looked over the hedge at the Highcliffe cap and the face under it, and his brows darkened. He recognised Vavasour, the junior captain of Highcliffe.

On a previous occasion Vavasour and Harry Wharton had occupied a lively ten minutes at the tuckshop in the village, pommelling one another, and the combat had only been terminated by the inopportune arrival of a Highcliffe master.

Vavasour grinned at the Greyfriars junior.

"You utter ass!" exclaimed Wharton wrathfully. "You ought to have more sense than to play a trick like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly chump!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha! He looks dusty, doesn't he?" exclaimed Vavasour. "Look at him!"

Five or six faces rose behind the hedge. The Highcliffe fellows were evidently out in force. There were more, too, peering through the foliage, and joining in the laughter at the discomfiture of Harry Wharton & Co.

"Well, it's a dusty road, and it's kind of him to dust it," remarked Hilton. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Greyfriars lads exchanged angry glances.

The laugh was on the side of the Highcliffe fellows, but Harry Wharton & Co. did not feel in the least inclined to leave it at that.

"The cads!" muttered Wharton. "They might have smashed our bikes, and perhaps us, too, with a mad trick like that."

"I'm jolly well going for them!" said Bob Cherry.

"Come on, then!"

"Right-ho! Down with Highcliffe!"

And the Removites rushed to the attack.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Highcliffians' Defeat!

VAVASOUR did not seem to be alarmed by the attack. As a rule, the Highcliffe fellows preferred to avoid close quarters.

They regarded themselves as being extremely select, and they were averse to having their clothes rumpled, or their faces marred, by fighting. But when every advantage was on their side they were not so unwilling.

They were in a strong position now behind the hedge, at the top of a high bank that ran along the lane, and the Greyfriars lads would not find it easy to get at them. Added to that, there were nine or ten of them against half a dozen.

But Harry Wharton & Co. meant business.

Harry dashed up the steep bank, with his comrades close behind, and they plunged through the snapping twigs of the hedge.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Give 'em socks!"

"Hurrah for Greyfriars!"

"Go it!"

Crash into the hedge went the charging juniors.

But the Highcliffe fellows met the attack well.

As the attacking juniors crashed and tangled in the hedge, the defenders hit out at them, and the assailants had a bad time of it.

Tangled in the hedge, and on lower ground, they were at a terrible disadvantage, and they were sent whirling back one after another.

Bob Cherry and Tom Brown rolled in the dusty road, and Mark Linley came rolling down upon them, gasping.

As they scrambled up again, Frank Nugent whirled down, and after him Harry Wharton. Hazeldene was grasping Vavasour, whom he had seized through the hedge, and trying to drag him through.

Hilton rushed to his leader's aid, and Hazeldene found that he had caught a Tartar. He was dragged through the hedge himself, and was a prisoner in the hands of the Highcliffians.

Two or three of them squashed him down on the ground, and sat on him.

"Got one of them!" grinned Hilton. "The others seem to have had enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the lane below the bank the Greyfriars juniors gathered, panting.

There was a shout from Hazeldene.

"Rescue, Remove!"

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"Come on, you chaps!"

"Right-ho!"

They dashed up the bank again.

"Look out!" yelled Hilton.

The attack was desperate, and it was not to be repulsed this time. The Greyfriars juniors burst through the hedge, and came fairly among the Highcliffians. Then there was a change.

The odds were against them, but at close quarters the champion athletes of the Lower School at Greyfriars were more than a match for the dandies of Highcliffe.

The enemy were knocked right and left. Vavasour went whirling down the bank, to bump heavily in the lane, and Hilton was sent flying after him.

They staggered up, but did not return to the fight, taking to their heels instead across the lane and the opposite field.

The other Highcliffe fellows were already scattering.

Breathless and bruised but victorious, the Greyfriars chums remained masters of the field of battle.

"We've done 'em!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah for Greyfriars!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The juniors had certainly won the victory. The Highcliffe fellows were scattered far and wide. But the chums looked at one another grimly, as the thought occurred to them of the kind of appearance they would present at Cliff House.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "We look a pretty family, I must say! We can't go to Cliff House in this state!"

"By Jove, no!"

"What shall we do, then?" said Nugent. "We'd better have left the Highcliffe rotters alone, though there was a lot of satisfaction in punching their heads."

Wharton thought for a moment.

"There's old Dame Pelly's cottage on the road," he said. "She would let us clean up there, I know. It would save the time. It would take a jolly long time to go back to Greyfriars. Let's get to Mrs. Pelly's cottage."

"Good egg!"

The juniors descended into the road again. Bob Cherry cut away the rope the Highcliffe jokers had fastened across the road, and threw it into a ditch. Wheeling their bicycles, the juniors turned from the lane into the footpath that led to Mrs. Pelly's cottage.

Mrs. Pelly was a well-known character in the district. She was an infirm old lady, and often received charitable visits from the girls of Cliff House, who came to bring her broth and medicine, and articles of clothing they had made for her, and to read to her sometimes.

She did a sort of trade in ginger-beer, and had a dozen bottles or so in the window of her little cottage.

The Greyfriars fellows, when they were near Mrs. Pelly's cottage, frequently stopped for a bottle of pop, whether they wanted it or not. It did not take the juniors long to reach the cottage.

Harry Wharton tapped at the door.

There was no reply for a moment, but the juniors fancied that they could detect a faint sound of suppressed laughter within.

They looked at one another curiously.

Dame Pelly might have seen them from the window, but she would rather have been shocked than amused by the state they were in. As for the rector's wife, certainly prim and stately Mrs. Buxton would not have laughed.

"I heard a snigger, I'm certain!" muttered Nugent.

"So did I!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Shall we go in?"

"Oh, yes! After all, chaps have had noses running with gore, and dusty chivvies, before now," said Bob Cherry. "I feel as if I'd been wrestling with a lawn-mower. We can't show our faces at Cliff House in this state, that's certain. I'd rather anybody but Marjorie saw me like this."

"Same here."

"Then we'll chance it!" said Harry.

He knocked at the door again.

The cottage door was opened, and Dame Pelly, with her red shawl round her head, and grey locks escaping under it, looked out at the juniors.

"Master Wharton," she said, a smile lighting up her old face at once, "pray come in! Do come in at once, my dear boys!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Pelly! We want you to let us——"

Harry Wharton broke off.

He was stepping into the cottage as he spoke, and in the light of the window he caught sight of Mrs. Pelly's visitors.

There were two of them.

They were both girls of nearly fifteen, and both of them were trying their hardest not to laugh.

Harry stopped dead.

"What's the trouble?" muttered Nugent from behind.

"My hat!"

"What is it? Who is it?"

"Marjorie!"

"Oh!"

The juniors of Greyfriars, dusty, dishevelled, and stained with the stains of desperate battle, stood in the doorway, looking and feeling as rough and ruffianly a crowd as possible, and looking sheepishly at the laughing face of Marjorie Hazeldene.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Difficult Situation.

MARJORIE tried not to laugh, and Clara tried not to laugh; but it was in vain. They simply could not help it. The dusty and dishevelled appearance of the Greyfriars juniors was not so comical as their sheepish looks at being discovered in such a state.

The juniors stared at the girls in silence, glumly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of all the rotten luck!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene, coming forward. "I could not help it. You looked so surprised."

"We—we didn't expect to see you here," said Harry.

"No, I suppose not."

"My hat!" said Miss Clara, who had picked up many boyish expressions from the juniors of Greyfriars. "You seem to have had a rough time."

"We have. It was only a row, you know."

"And you have so many of them," assented Miss Clara sympathetically.

Harry coloured.

"Well, you see——"

"You see, we couldn't help it," said Nugent.

"Impossible!" said Tom Brown. "We'd have kept out of it if we could."

"I suppose the Upper Fourth were in the wrong, as usual?" suggested Clara.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It wasn't the Upper Fourth at all," he said. "It was the Highcliffe fellows."

Marjorie and Clara exchanged quick glances.

"The Highcliffe fellows!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Yes. Vavasour and his set," said Harry. "We really would have avoided a row if we could, this time, as we were coming over to Cliff House. Of course, as a rule, we're just as ready as they are."

"Or a little more so," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, I see!" said Marjorie. "So you have met those horrid boys!"

"Yes, they're horrid, and no mistake," said Nugent. "But it's a satisfaction to have licked them, isn't it? And we did!"

"Hollow!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good!" exclaimed Miss Clara. "I wish we could lick them, too!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"So I do, Marjorie. I suppose you have had the telegram Marjorie sent?" went on Miss Clara.

"Yes," said Hazeldene. "That's why we were coming over to Cliff House."

"It's on account of the Highcliffe boys," said Marjorie. "We want you to advise us, and to help us if you can. We were just going back to Cliff House. Will you walk with us?"

"In this state?"

Marjorie laughed.

"Oh, we will wait!"

And the two girls went out of the cottage.

"Deary me, what a state you are in!" said Dame Pelly, as she led the juniors to a room where they had a liberal allowance of hot water and soap, and by dint of washing and scrubbing and brushing down, they restored themselves to something of their usual tidy appearance.

Then they joined Marjorie and Clara, and the party walked down the footpath to Cliff House, the bicycles being left at Dame Pelly's cottage to be called for later.

Harry Wharton & Co. were feeling very curious to hear the news from Cliff House.

What connection Marjorie and her friends could have with the Highcliffe fellows was a mystery to them; but they were quite ready to lend their aid against Highcliffe if required—in fact, more than ready.

There was a slight wrinkle on Marjorie's smooth brow as she walked beside Harry Wharton down the footpath.

It was clear that the difficulty, whatever it was, was causing the girl a considerable amount of anxious thought.

"I really don't know what to do!" she exclaimed at last. "I wonder if you can help us? It's really a ridiculous situation."

"But what is it?" said Harry.

"It's through the Highcliffe boys," said Marjorie. "Of course, it was silly of us. But then, we felt so angry."

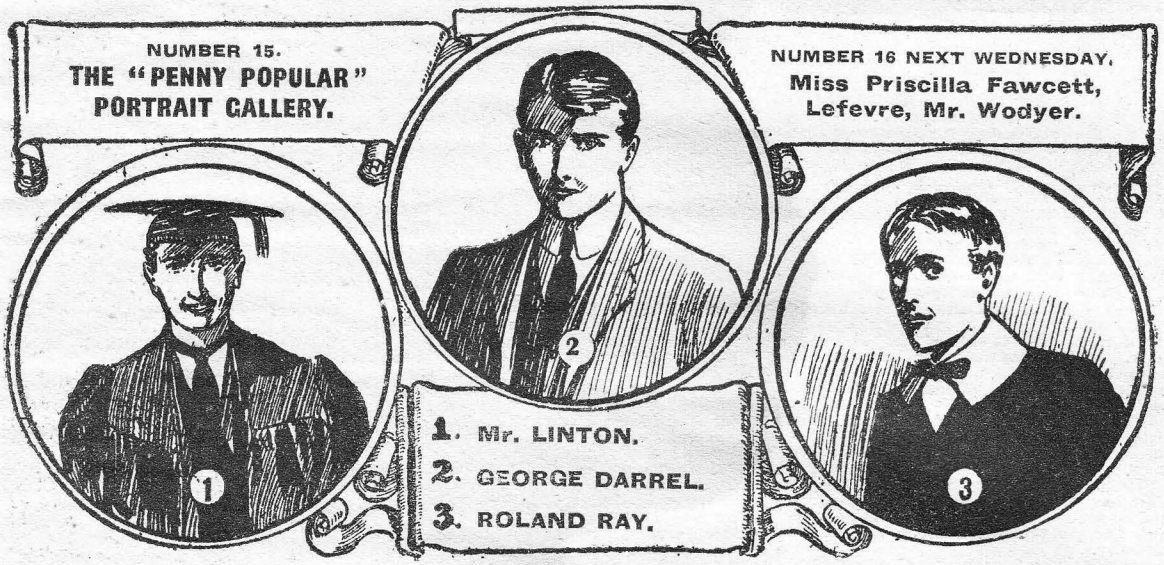
"You did!" exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.

Marjorie coloured.

"Yes, I did."

"Then they must have been awfully caddish!" said Harry.

"Well, I will tell you how it was," said Marjorie. "Some of us went to tea at the vicarage yesterday, and the vicar had invited a few of the Highcliffe boys. We played tennis after tea; and you know the unpleasant way they have, those boys. They thought tennis was a soft game, and only fit



The juniors of Greyfriars, dusty, dishevelled, and stained, stood in the doorway, and looked sheepishly at the laughing face of Marjorie Hazeldene.

for girls, and talked about football, and I——"

She paused.

"And you?" said Wharton.

Marjorie Hazeldene laughed ruefully.

"Well, I told them we played football at Cliff House—we do, you know, in a way, though it is not exactly the kind of football you boys play. We have an Association ball, and we often practise with it, and we can play the game. But, of course, we couldn't stand up to a boys' team."

"I suppose not."

"But Vavasour annoyed me so much by his superior manner, that I told him we played football, and that we would be willing to meet his team in a match, and show them that girls could play as well as boys."

Harry Wharton gave an expressive whistle.

"My hat!"

"Of course, it was silly of me," said Marjorie. "If Vavasour had been a nice boy, like—like some boys, he would have taken it as a joke, and turned it off somehow; but he is as keen as anything to make us look ridiculous. So he accepted at once, and made me fix the date, and—and we're to meet the Highcliffe team on Saturday afternoon."

Wharton looked very serious.

He had not expected anything of this sort, and he could see at once that the Cliff House girls had got themselves into a very serious difficulty.

Vavasour was very much of a cad, and Wharton could quite understand that he was looking forward very keenly to the prospect of humiliating and annoying the girls, that being his idea of fun.

It was just like Vavasour to jump at the chance Marjorie's unguarded words had given him, and to nail the girl down to her challenge.

If the Cliff House girls withdrew from the match they had themselves proposed, the laugh would be against them, and it would be a standing joke among the Highcliffe fellows, and Marjorie & Co. would certainly never hear the end of it.

On the other hand, if they met the Highcliffe junior eleven, a certain defeat, by a ridiculous number of goals, would be the result.

It was probable, too, that some of the girls would get hurt; for Vavasour and his team had a reputation for playing roughly when they were dealing with a weaker eleven; and, of course, the Cliff House team would be much weaker.

Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought. Marjorie looked anxiously into his face. She had great faith in Harry's judgment.

"Of course, we don't want to meet them," said Marjorie. "We know we should have no chance. But we'd rather be licked than withdraw the challenge. That would make them laugh at us. They are so horrid and mean!"

Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"Then you're determined not to scratch in any case?" he asked.

"Oh, quite determined!"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Miss Clara emphatically. "We'd rather be beaten to the wide—we simply won't withdraw!"

"But if you don't withdraw you'll have to meet them," said Nugent.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then you'll get an awful licking. I know jolly well that the Highcliffe lot will play roughly, for what they would call the fun of the thing."

"I suppose so."

"Well, that would be worse than withdrawing," remarked Bob Cherry.

"I suppose it would."

"Then——"

"But we can't withdraw, and we don't want to be licked by those horrid boys," said Marjorie pathetically. "Can't you advise us?"

"We thought you fellows might be able to suggest some way out of the difficulty," said Miss Clara, with a slight sniff.

"Exactly," said Marjorie. "We want you to advise us."

The Greyfriars juniors looked at each other rather helplessly.

There seemed to be only the one alternative—to play or not to play; and how they were to advise, when the girls refused to take one of the only two possible courses—and there was no possible third course to take—was a mystery to them.

But it was clear that Miss Clara, at least, expected them to find some way out of the difficulty, and that Marjorie at least hoped they could.

Bob Cherry rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Well, I've got a sort of idea," he remarked.

"Go it!" said Harry, not very hopefully.

"Suppose we go and look for the Highcliffe chaps, and give them such an awful licking that they won't be able to play on Saturday?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's not a bad idea," said Bob, "and it would serve them jolly well right for being so beastly caddish!"

"Well, it's a little drastic!" said Harry, laughing.

"All the better."

"And it would have to be an awful licking to lay them up for half a week. I'm afraid we shall have to think of something a little less heroic."

"But you will think of something?" said Marjorie.

"We'll try."

"We rely on you," said Miss Clara. "You see, you're all we have to rely upon. It was really my idea to get you to help us. Marjorie thought you wouldn't be able to do anything."

"I thought they couldn't help us out of an impossible position, dear," said Marjorie gently.

"Yes, that's what I meant; but I thought they could," said Miss Clara triumphantly. "I'm sure they will think of something."

"We'll try."

"And you'll succeed, won't you?"

"You see——"

"We simply can't meet the Highcliffe team on Saturday, and we can't withdraw and scratch the match," said Miss Clara. "Now, you'll think of a way out, won't you?"

Harry smiled ruefully. What was he to say?

"Yes," he said. "I'll do my best."

"Then we can rely upon you?"

Harry gave his chums a helpless look.

"Yes!" he said at last.

Miss Clara clapped her hands.

"Good! It's all right, Marjorie!"

And, having shifted the burden of the trouble off upon the shoulders of Harry Wharton & Co., Miss Clara seemed quite satisfied, and assured that everything would turn out well.

Harry Wharton was not quite so sure about it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Wonderful Wheeze.

DURING the next day the chums of the Remove gave the matter a great deal of thought, but without any result.

As a matter of fact, the situation seemed an impossible one, and they had set themselves a hopeless task.

Harry Wharton ransacked his brains, so to speak, for a plan for helping the Cliff House girls, but without result.

"If only we could meet the Highcliffe chaps instead of the girls meeting them," Tom Brown remarked, "then it would be all O.K."

"Yes, by Jove!" said Wharton. "If we were playing Highcliffe it would be all right—we could take the matter up for the girls. But, of course, Vavasour wouldn't meet us. If he did, it wouldn't be the visiting team that would get licked at Highcliffe."

"The foot would be a boot on the other leg," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"But, of course, that's impossible."

It was at this moment that Frank Nugent, who had been silent for some minutes, suddenly gave a wild yell.

"My hat!"

They all looked at him.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Are you ill?"

"Off your rocker?"

"Shut up!"

"I've got it!" yelled Nugent.

"Got what?"

"It!"

"Do you mean to say you've got a scheme?" exclaimed Wharton eagerly.

"Yes."

"A wheeze?"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors gathered eagerly round Nugent.

"What is it?"

"Go ahead!"

"Get it off your chest!"

"Propound."

"You see——"

"Yes, we see—buck up!"

"You see, the Highcliffe chaps are determined to meet a team of girls——"

"We know that."

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"And the Cliff House girls are not up to their form——"

"Tell us something we don't know."

"But there's nothing to prevent Marjorie from getting in recruits to strengthen her team if she likes from outside Cliff House."

"Well?"

"Well, that's the wheeze."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, you ass! The Cliff House girls can play footer quite as well as other girls, I suppose; and besides, where——"

"I haven't finished yet."

"Then for goodness' sake finish!"

"You remember the time we had a contest with the Boy Scouts of Pegg?" began Nugent.

"Blow the Boy Scouts of Pegg!"

"What on earth have the Boy Scouts of Pegg got to do with it?"

"Stick to the subject."

"That's what I'm doing, as much as I can

with a set of howling asses interrupting me!" exclaimed Nugent. "Do shut up and let a fellow get on!"

"Oh, go ahead!"

"You remember the contest with the Boy Scouts?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"We had to send a fellow through the wood without his being stopped by the scouts, and we succeeded," said Nugent. "I was the chap, and I was dressed up as a girl, and that was the way we dished them."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Get on!"

"Well, don't you see?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Hazeldene. "What on earth has that old affair got to do with the girls playing a footer-match at Highcliffe?"

Nugent sniffed.

"Oh, you're dense! If I could dress as a girl for a scouting contest, I could dress as a girl for a footer-match."

"Oh!"

"And you fellows could do the same."

"Oh!"

"And we could go to Highcliffe and lick those bragging bounders hollow!" exclaimed Nugent triumphantly.

"Oh!"

The Removites stared blankly at Frank Nugent. The scheme was simply stupendous, and it almost took their breath away. But as they thought over it, it appealed more and more to their imagination.

The prospect of meeting the Highcliffe fellows in fair fight on the football-field was a very attractive one, and they all looked forward to it.

And if the trick could be played without discovery, it was a certain way of extricating Marjorie & Co. from their difficulty.

"My only hat!" said Harry Wharton, at last. "It's—it's splendid! But it will have to be kept awfully dark."

"The darkfulness must be terrific."

"I don't see why it shouldn't work."

"It's tremendous!" said Tom Brown. "Fancy the faces of the Highcliffe chaps when the girls begin to score goals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just picture Vavasour, with a girl charging him off the ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's ripping!"

"I think it's splendid!" said Harry Wharton. "We shall have to consult Marjorie, and see what she says, that's all."

"And the sooner the better," said Hazeldene.

"I'll get a pass from Wingate, and buzz over there on my bike now," said Harry.

"Then off you go!"

And in five minutes Harry Wharton was pedalling rapidly over to Cliff House.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Puzzled.

BILLY BUNTER was puzzled.

There was something going on in Study No. 1 to which he was not admitted—a secret was being kept from him, and anything of that kind greatly incensed the fat junior.

He had come up to Study No. 1 unsuspiciously for tea. He had not been admitted. Wharton had handed him a shilling, and told him to go to the tuckshop.

And when Billy Bunter began explaining that a shilling was a ridiculous amount to be expended in a feed for a fellow like himself, Wharton had cut the argument short by closing the study door and locking it.

Bunter had not taken long to dispose of the shilling. Then he had returned to the study, in time to see Harry leave and take out his bicycle.

The fat junior was allowed in the room now—but the meeting had broken up. He caught hold of Tom Brown's sleeve as the New Zealand junior came down the passage.

"I say, Brown, what's going on?"

"I am," said Brown.

And he went on, leaving Billy Bunter blinking. The fat junior buttonholed Mark Linley next, and asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing," said Mark.

"But what were you all meeting in the study for?"

"To discuss a matter."

"Yes—what was it?"

"Don't ask questions."

"But I want to know."

"Rats!"

And Mark Linley jerked himself away from Bunter's detaining clutch, and walked off. The fat junior next applied himself to Bob Cherry.

Bob Cherry took him by the ears, turned him round, and applied his foot gently to Bunter, and Bunter moved rather hastily along the passage. Then Bob followed Mark Linley.

The fat junior gasped.

"Beast! But I'll jolly well know what's going on, all the same!"

And he went into Study No. 1. Nugent was roasting chestnuts, and chatting with the Nabob of Bhanipur. The two juniors ceased speaking at once as Billy Bunter came into the study.

Bunter blinked at them wrathfully.

"Look here! What's going on here?" he demanded.

"I'm roasting chestnuts," said Nugent innocently.

"What were you saying to Inky?"

"Words!"

"Eh? Don't be funny! I want to know what's the matter. You're jolly well not going to keep me out of it. I suppose you know I'm to be trusted?"

"That's just what we don't know," said Nugent, with a grin. "We'll tell you to-morrow, perhaps—and perhaps we won't."

"Look here——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Bunter snorted angrily. He waited for Harry Wharton to come back. When the captain of the Remove came in, Bunter was in the study.

"It's all right, you chaps!" exclaimed Wharton. "Marjorie thinks it's a jolly good idea."

"Careful," said Nugent.

"Oh, all right!"

"What's a jolly good idea?" exclaimed Bunter.

"Oh, never mind!"

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "I want to know all about it!"

"Then you can go on wanting," said Wharton cheerfully, "because you are jolly well not going to know a word."

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent.

"The hear—hearfulness is terrific!"

"Then I'll jolly well find out!" said Bunter.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Why don't you mind your own business, Billy?"

To which question Bunter returned no answer but a sniff. He was on the look-out for the rest of the evening. He saw Wharton speaking to Ogilvy and Jones minor, and caught the word football, and saw them laugh and nod, but that was all—and that did not convey much information.

But he caught a few words in Study No. 1 later, as he came along the passage.

"Marjorie laughed like anything," said Harry. "She and Clara think it's a good idea. They are going to get the things we shall want, and we're to get over to Cliff House as soon as possible after dinner to-morrow. Then we can be fixed up. We shall have a brake from Pegg to Highcliffe."

"Good!" said Nugent.

"Marjorie and Clara have undertaken to have the things ready, and we can depend on them. As for altering our faces a bit, we must do what we can. After all, what's the good of belonging to an amateur dramatic society if you can't change the look of your chivvy?"

"Oh, we can do that!"

"Yes, rather. The wigs will do a lot towards it, and then a little rouge and chalk will make better complexions for us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The eyebrows can be darkened, and the mouths made smaller by shoving on some red, and whitening the corners," said Wharton. "We shall pass all right."

"Oh, I've no doubt of it! We——"

"Sh! There's somebody at the door!"

Wharton stepped quickly into the passage, and dragged Bunter into the study by the scruff of his neck.

"You young cad!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "You were listening."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"I've a jolly good mind to lick you."

"I—I—I didn't hear a word. I don't know that you're going over to Cliff House to-morrow immediately after dinner, or——"

"Ha, ha! You young ass! Get out!"

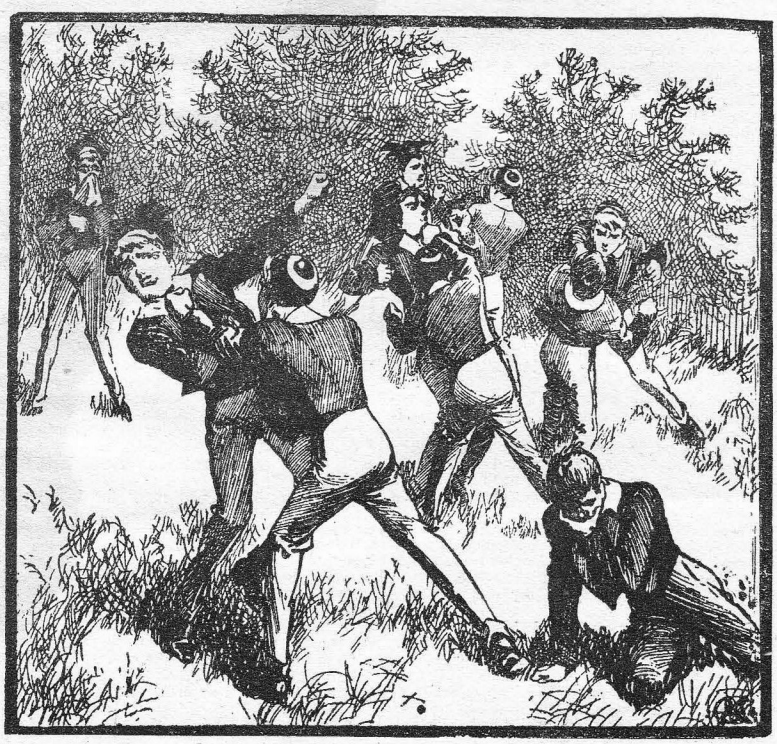
And Bunter got out.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

In Deep Disguise.

WHEN Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at Cliff House the next afternoon, they found Marjorie and Clara ready for them.

The two girls were smiling gleefully. The joke on the Highcliffe fellows was an excel-



"Hurrah for Greyfriars! Go it!" shouted Bob Cherry excitedly. "Give 'em socks!"

lent one, and it was a way out of their difficulty that they had never dreamed of. They welcomed the chums of the Remove eagerly.

"We mustn't say a word about it," said Marjorie—"at least, not till afterwards. Miss Primrose might not see the joke. But it is very funny."

"It's simply shricking—the joke of the season!" said Miss Clara.

"Are the things ready?" asked Harry.

"Yes. We have nine dresses ready for you."

"Good! Where are they?"

"In the shed," said Marjorie. "We placed them there for you to change. There are coats for you to put on, too, and you can do your making-up there. We've engaged a brake from the Anchor, and it's to be here at half-past two. Will that be all right?"

"First-rate."

"That's plenty of time."

"There's a path through the shrubbery, from the shed down to the side gate," said Marjorie. "You can go out that way. You'll find us in the brake."

"Right-ho!"

And the juniors of Greyfriars made their way to the shed.

They were chuckling gleefully over the enterprise. The more they went about it, the better they liked it.

Harry Wharton had brought over a bag containing the make-up necessary for the occasion. The juniors all belonged to the Amateur Dramatic Society of Greyfriars, and they had had some experience in this line.

They had a great many "props," too, and Harry had obtained additions to the supply, on hire, from the costumier in Friardale.

The juniors had no doubt of their ability to make-up in a way that would completely blind the Highcliffe fellows.

In the shed, they found all was prepared. Marjorie had hired a number of ready-made dresses of a strong serge, and the nimble fingers of the Cliff House girls had made such alterations in them as were deemed requisite.

Harry Wharton closed the door, and they proceeded to change.

The chums of the Remove took off their outer garments, and donned the serge skirts and jerseys. Wharton had thoughtfully brought a huge supply of safety-pins, and they were needed.

The appearance of the juniors, with boys' faces and close-cut hair, appearing over the girls' dresses, was curious enough. But that was only a beginning.

They pulled on the stockings, and then donned the football boots. Certainly their feet looked decidedly large for girls. But then, as Nugent remarked, footballing girls would have pretty, well-developed feet; and, besides, football-boots were bound to look substantial.

Then the make-up commenced.

Wharton and Nugent and Tom Brown were the most skilful in that line, and they touched up each other's faces, and the faces of the rest.

The difference in their appearance was soon marvellous.

Wigs of long and curly hair, of various hues, were fastened on, and the hair looked very natural, and made a great alteration in their looks.

Then eyebrows were darkened, and eyelashes touched up, lips reddened, and cheeks made pinker.

By the time the make-up was finished, the juniors' nearest relations would not have known them, and it would have needed a very keen observer indeed to detect that they were not girls.

True, a close observation would have detected the rouge and the powder, but the natural assumption would have been that they were the kind of girls who assist Nature in her work of beautifying by one or two touches.

Harry Wharton surveyed his team with great admiration when the work was finished.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed.

There was a tap at the door, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came in. The nabob was looking a little dusty, but smiling cheerfully.

"My solitary hat!" he exclaimed. "It is rippingful!"

"What do you think of us, Inky?"

"Amazeful!"

"You think we shall take in the Highcliffe cads?"

"The thinkfulness is terrific!"

"Good!"

Harry Wharton looked at his watch.

"Time to get to the brake," he remarked.

"Good!"

The team left the shed, and took the path through the shrubbery down to the gate. They left the grounds by the side gate into the lane. A brake was waiting there, with Marjorie and Clara sitting in it, and the driver in his seat.

The driver glanced at the girls, but did not smile. It was evident that no suspicion crossed his mind. Marjorie and Clara gave a shriek.

"Oh, splendid!"

"Ripping!"

"Better put on your coats," said Marjorie.

With the girls' coats wrapped round them, the juniors looked more like girls than ever, as their sturdy proportions were more concealed.

They took their places in the brake, and Hurree Singh stood in the road and waved his hand as the vehicle rolled away.

"Good luckfulness, my worthy chums!" exclaimed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I hope to hear that you have lickfully beaten the esteemed rotters at Highcliffe."

"What-ho!" said Wharton.

"Good-bye, Inky!"

The brake rolled away.

Several fellows were standing about the gates of Highcliffe as the brake drew up, evidently watching for the arrival of the Cliff House team, and they raised their caps and smiled.

There was not a single glance of suspicion.

The general feeling seemed to be one of amusement.

The idea of a girls' team coming over to play Vavasour's Eleven struck the Highcliffe fellows as funny.

Vavasour, with a wide smile upon his face, came to welcome the team.

He helped Marjorie to alight from the brake, but the others jumped down without assistance.

"So you've come," said Vavasour.

"Certainly!" said Marjorie. "We arranged to come, didn't we?"

Vavasour laughed.

"Yes; but I thought something might turn up to prevent you, you know."

"Oh, not at all!"

"You see, we hardly took you seriously," said Vavasour, with that insufferable air of condescending patronage that made Marjorie long to shake him. "Girls can't play footer."

"Of course they can't," said Hilton.

"Rats!" said Miss Clara warmly. "We're jolly well going to lick you, anyway!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we're ready to be licked," said Vavasour, with a laugh. "Here, I'll show you into your dressing-room. Kick-off at three. You'll be ready?"

"Quite!"

The girls went into the pavilion.

A general chuckle from the Highcliffe fellows followed them.

Highcliffe anticipated fun. And fun was coming, though not exactly of the kind that the Highcliffians anticipated.

The home team were already in their football garb, ready to begin. The Cliff House team had no changing to do.

Round the field a big crowd was gathering.

The match was an unusual one, and it excited great interest at Highcliffe. Fellows of all Forms were turning up to see it.

Vavasour and his team went out into the field, and laughed in response to the general chuckle that greeted them.

"My hat! It will be funny," said Byng. "The funniest thing of the season. The girls seem to be pretty confident about it, too."

"Ha, ha!"

"The only thing I'm sorry for is Wharton and his friends not being here," said Vavasour.

"I should awfully like them to see the fun."

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I suppose they will hear about it," grinned Hilton. "The Cliff House team will go home with a tale of woe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They will explain to the sympathetic Greyfriars chaps that football is really a rougher game than tennis or croquet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that the Highcliffe fellows are dreadfully rough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here they come!"

Marjorie & Co. were coming out of the pavilion.

All the Highcliffe crowd looked very curiously at them as they came out. They were not exactly as the fellows had expected to see them. There was very little feminine delicacy about most of them.

A running fire of comments from the crowd greeted their appearance in the field.

"My hat! There are a couple of pretty ones, but the others——"

"Look at their feet!"

"And their waists!"

"Enormous!"

"And their chivvies!"

"Phew! That one's got powder on!"

"And that one has painted her face!"

"Phew! Nice, isn't it, at fifteen or so?"

"Nice crowd, I must say!"

"And look at their fists! Did you ever see girls with hands that size?"

"My hat! What a team!"

"They may be able to play footer, but they wouldn't take prizes in a beauty show."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the remarks reached the ears of the Cliff House team, but only made them smile. Harry Wharton & Co. were not touchy on the point of their personal beauty.

The chief point was, that they were not recognised or even suspected, and that the Highcliffe crowd had not the faintest idea of the real state of things.

And that was enough for the Greyfriars juniors.

Vavasour tossed with Marjorie for choice of goals.

Marjorie lost the toss, and Vavasour chose the goal from which the wind was blowing, placing his own team at an advantage to begin with. The teams lined up, and Marjorie went into goal, and Miss Clara took the position of left-back.

With the Greyfriars juniors between them and the enemy, the Cliff House girls were not likely to get any of the rough handling Vavasour intended for them.

The disguised juniors took the places they were accustomed to take in playing, in their own proper persons, for Greyfriars.

A senior of Highcliffe was refereeing the match. He blew the whistle, and Harry Wharton kicked off.

The Highcliffe fellows lounged round the ball.

They did not suppose for a moment that any exertion on their part was required, and they were content to walk through the match, so to speak.

But a change came o'er the spirit of their dream.

The Cliff House forwards followed up the kick-off with a rush into the home half, and Wharton was on the ball all the time.

He drove it down the field with a tremendous kick, and the forwards followed it with a rush that scattered the Highcliffe defence.

Right through Highcliffe the attackers rushed, and the ball was brought right up to goal. The goalkeeper stared dazedly. He hadn't expected anything of this sort, and he was far from being ready for the attack, or capable of dealing with it if he had been ready.

The ball flew in from Mark Linley's foot, and found a lodging in the net.

There was a surprised gasp from the crowd.

"Goal!"

Marjorie clapped her hands ecstatically in her own goal.

"Goal! Goal!" she cried.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Miss Clara. "Goal!"

Vavasour & Co. looked simply aghast.

How the goal had been taken they hardly knew; but it certainly had been taken, and there it was—one up for the visitors.

"My word!" muttered Vavasour. "I—I don't know what to make of this!"

"Blessed if I do, either!" grunted Hilton. "They seem to know how to play footer, after all, Vav."

"Well, we weren't prepared for anything of the sort. We really let them take that goal."

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"We shall have to look out," said Byng.

"Play up, hard," said Vavasour. "And look here, don't mind being a bit rough. They can't expect chaps to play footer with kid gloves on, even if they are girls. If they don't like a little roughness, they should keep out of a game like football."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Then go it!"

The sides lined up again. The Highcliffe fellows were looking very spiteful. They did not mean to allow another goal to be taken if they could help it. The Cliff House team grinned at one another.

The fun was beginning!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Something Like Football.

VAVASOUR & Co. meant business this time!

They kicked off, and then followed some hard play; and the Highcliffe fellows played as hard as they knew how.

But they found their opponents unexpectedly tough.

The natural supposition was, that when a fellow charged a girl roughly, the girl would fall down, or, at least, lose her head and begin to shriek. But nothing of the sort happened.

Vavasour rushed at the Cliff House centre-forward, who was on the ball, in a desperate attempt to charge her off it.

But the forward stood the shock like a rock, and Vavasour reeled back and crashed to the ground himself, lying there for several moments in a dazed state.

Several more little incidents like this occurred, and it dawned upon the Highcliffe team that if rough play was to be the order of the day, the Cliff House side could give as good as they got.

And, in fact, as soon as it was made manifest that the Highcliffians meant to play with intentional roughness, the Cliff House team took up the gauntlet, and began to indulge in heavy charging and shoving themselves.

And the last state of the Highcliffe team was worse than its first.

For the disguised juniors were ahead of them in every way—in physical strength as much as in skill in the noble game of football.

The Highcliffe forwards toiled after the ball in vain.

They sometimes had possession of it, but they seldom succeeded in getting it near the visitors' goal.

Once only came a chance in the first half for a shot, and then Vavasour sent in the ball with a really good kick.

But Marjorie Hazeldene, in goal, was on the alert.

She fisted out the ball, and Clara cleared it, and then the forwards were upon it again, and it was taken out to midfield.

The chance did not return to Highcliffe.

The visitors kept them too busy defending for them to have much time for attacking.

Highcliffe had their hands full, and they realised it. And hard shoves and sly kicks were returned with so much interest that Vavasour & Co. dropped that game at last.

In every way the girls seemed more than their match, even at rough play.

The crowd looked on in amazement.

Their sympathies were all with the home team, and all of them were conscious of how ridiculous it would be for Highcliffe to be beaten by a team of girls.

But even so, they could not restrain a cheer at times when some fine bit of play on the part of the visitors caught their attention.

Another goal was added to the Cliff House score, and then, just before the whistle went for half-time, a third.

At half-time Highcliffe had not scored a single goal. Cliff House were three to nil. The girls walked off the field laughing.

Highcliffe did not feel like laughing. They were puzzled, savagely angry, and very much fagged. Some of them had hardly a run left in their legs when the welcome whistle brought them a spell of rest.

Of the two teams, the most casual observer could have seen that the Cliff House side were the fresher, and in better form in every way. Even Vavasour could not blink the obvious facts of the case.

"We're jolly well done!" said Hilton despondently. "Who on earth would have expected girls to play footer in this way?"

Vavasour shook his head.

"Blessed if I can understand it!" he said. "No wonder Marjorie Hazeldene wouldn't scratch the match when she had a team in form like this!"

"I simply can't get on to it!" said Hilton, as he ruefully sucked a lemon. "Most of the girls, too, are strangers to me. I don't remember having seen them among the Cliff House crowd at church, or anywhere."

"Nor I!"

"Well, I suppose Marjorie Hazeldene has roped in recruits from all quarters—all the girls she knew who could play footer," said Vavasour thoughtfully.

"By George, she has succeeded, too!" said Byng. "Look here, it jolly well looks to me as if we shall be licked!"

"Well, three goals to nil in the first half does look like it, doesn't it?" said Vavasour with a shrug of the shoulders. "And the wind will be against us when we change ends."

"We haven't a look in, and that's a fact."

"What a set of giddy asses we shall look if we let the girls beat us!" said Vavasour restlessly. "I wish we had never accepted the challenge now."

"It's rather late in the day to wish that."

"I suppose there's no excuse we could work up for abandoning the match?" Hilton suggested.

"It's no good making any bones about the matter, you know. We're booked for a licking, and if we can get out of it, we must."

"What excuse is there?"

"That's what I was asking."

Vavasour shook his head hopelessly.

He would have been glad enough of any excuse, the smallest and slightest, of getting out of the match without finishing it. But there was none.

The game had to be played out to the bitter end; and bitter enough it was likely to be for the Highcliffe fellows.

Vavasour groaned in spirit at the thought of the endless chipping he and his team would be subjected to for having been beaten by a team of girls.

And the worst of it was, they had taken on the match in such an airy way, with the declared determination of making the Cliff House girls look ridiculous.

The ridicule was on the other side now, with a vengeance.

While the Highcliffe fellows were despondently discussing the situation the Cliff House team were chuckling gleefully.

The scheme had worked like a charm.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Eight to Nil.

PHIP! rang the whistle, and the ball was kicked off for the second half of that peculiar football match.

The Cliff House team were looking very fresh after the brief rest, but the same could not be said for Vavasour & Co.

The gruelling they had had in the first half had told on them, and there were very few of the Highcliffe eleven that had any freshness left.

Several of them did not seem to have a run in their legs at all, and played through the second half a great deal as if they had been skittles.

The Greyfriars juniors were entering into the spirit of the thing now.

Victory was in their hands, and they were not disposed to spare the enemy.

Vavasour & Co. were "in" for it.

With hair streaming in the wind, as it escaped from its fastenings—for the juniors naturally were not accustomed to having their hair done up—and with skirts flying as they ran, the disguised juniors threw themselves into the game.

They rushed Highcliffe all over the field, till the unfortunate defenders hardly knew whether they were standing on their heads or their heels.

Vavasour, early in the second half, gave up all hope of attempting to equalise, and packed his goal to defend, with the sole idea of reducing the margin of goals by which the Cliff House team would beat him.

But even in that the unfortunate junior captain of Highcliffe was not destined to have any success.

In the visitors' goal Marjorie Hazeldene kept a useless watch and ward. Ever since the whistle had gone for the second half she had had nothing to do. Not once had the ball been anywhere near the Cliff House citadel.

The struggle was all in midfield or in the home half; and most of the time it was just in front of the home goal.

The Highcliffians exerted themselves to keep their goal intact, but their exertions were in vain.

In the first ten minutes the Cliff House forwards slammed the ball in, and it was slammed in again and again.

Six goals to nil!

And twenty minutes more to play. Vavasour & Co. were utterly knocked out. Some of them were simply standing about the field without a run left; the others defended feebly, and prayed inwardly for the whistle.

The spectators were laughing.

Although it wasn't pleasant to any Highcliffe fellow to see Vavasour & Co. licked by a team of girls, the comic aspect of the matter appealed to all irresistibly.

The utterly absurd figures cut by the one-time self-sufficient, boastful Highcliffe team would have provoked a misanthrope to merriment.

Another goal! Seven to nil!

A shout of laughter greeted it—a shout that stung Vavasour & Co. into one more effort. They made a struggle to get possession of the ball and to get away with it, but it was only a flash in the pan.

The Cliff House team soon put "paid" to it, and the home team were driven back to defend their own goal.

Their defence was more feeble than ever. Again the leather went in, and lodged in the net. The goalkeeper was nowhere against the Cliff House shooting.

How many goals the visitors would have taken if the match had lasted a half-hour longer it is difficult to say.

Fortunately for the pride of Highcliffe, the whistle went then, and the match terminated with the visitors victors by eight goals to nil!

Eight to nil!

The "girls" smiled as they walked off the field. The crowd did more than smile. They yelled with laughter.

Vavasour & Co. fairly crawled away. They were stiff and aching from their unusual exertions.

The match which was to have been a joke and a walk-over had turned out the toughest in their experience—tougher, in fact, than anything they had ever gone through before.

And the licking had been so sound, so complete, that there was no explaining it away.

But Vavasour & Co. were not inclined to say anything, indeed, just then.

They wanted to sit down and rest, and pour forth gallons of embrocation, and gasp for breath. That was their cheerful occupation for some time after the match.

The Cliff House party, in gleeful triumph, donned their coats and mounted into their brake. They did not feel inclined to linger at Highcliffe after the match. As soon as they were clear of the field they departed.

As the brake rolled down the road they burst into a yell of laughter that rang far and wide over the countryside.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes, and wiping away some of his complexion at the same time.

"Did you ever——"

"Never!" sobbed Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it was ripping!" said Hazeldene. "The biggest joke of the season!"

It was a happy party that drove up to Cliff House. Marjorie and Clara were in high glee. They had beaten Highcliffe, and the vainglory of Vavasour & Co. had received a check it would probably never recover from.

From the date of that match the Highcliffe fellows would have to hide their diminished heads, and in case of any boastfulness on the part of Vavasour & Co. it would only be necessary to whisper the word "Football."

"It's been ripping fun!" exclaimed Clara, as Cliff House came in sight. "And it was awfully good of you fellows to stand by us like this and get us out of a difficulty."

"Awfully good!" said Marjorie softly.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It was ripping fun!" he said. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds! Hallo, Inky!" The Nabob of Bhanipur came up as the brake stopped. "It's all right, my son! Eight goals to nil!"

"The allrightfulness is terrific!" grinned the nabob. "The esteemed Vavasour will have to sing smaller with his diminished head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors changed their clothes in the shed, and removed their make-up. They stopped to tea at Cliff House without Miss Penelope Primrose having the faintest idea that her boyish guests had lately been playing a football match in feminine attire.

That secret was kept; and at Greyfriars the chums of the Remove chuckled over it among themselves, but said never a word to anyone else.

And so Highcliffe never knew the real identity of the "girls" who had licked them so soundly on the football field.

THE END.

SHUNNED BY THE FORM!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Paying the Penalty.

"NOW I've caught yer!"

Old Mack, Rookwood's renowned porter, ground out the words.

He had been walking from Coombe to the school, and had taken the path through the woods.

Suddenly he had heard the sound of excited voices, and had made for the direction from which they came.

Mack's curiosity was aroused.

He forced his way through the undergrowth, and at length observed four juniors, wearing the Rookwood caps, sitting on some fallen trees in the distance.

Mack crept quietly forward, and when at length he approached near enough to observe that the juniors were engaged in a game of cards, his eyes glinted with satisfaction.

The four juniors were Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, and Smythe and Howard of the Shell.

They were more generally known as the nuts of Rookwood, and their nuttiness never allowed them to be on friendly terms with the old porter.

Smythe, in fact, had recently turned up his nose at Mack.

The porter considered that the great Adolphus had been most insulting, but now he saw a chance of getting his own back.

It was not a chance to be missed, so Mack chipped in just as money changed hands between the young rascals.

The nuts started and turned pale at sight of the old porter.

For a moment none of them spoke.

At length Townsend broke the silence.

"Cheero, Mack, old sport!" he said, endeavouring to be cheerful. "Going to join us in a friendly game—what?"

"Friendly game!" grunted the porter. "I likes that. Why, you was playing for money. I saw——"

"You're dreaming!" interposed Townsend. He pointed to the improvised table on which the cards rested. "There ain't no money there. You've been out in the sun."

"Yaas," agreed Adolphus Smythe, growing bold. "He's got sunstroke, and he's imaginin' things!"

The old porter glared.

"Young himps!" he growled. "I hain't imaginin' nothin'. With my werry eyes I saw you playing for money. It ain't no good your denyin' it!"

"Oh, buzz off, Mack!" said Howard impatiently. "You've been drinkin'."

"Insultin' young himps!" exclaimed the porter wrathfully. "I hain't been doing nothing of the kind! I'm perfectly sober, I am, and I defies anybody to prove I'm not!"

"Well, if you're sober, why don't you join in a game of cards?" asked Townsend, shuffling the pack.

"Because I strongly disapprove of young gents like you playin' cards for money!" said Mack, emphasising each word. "Now, if it was nuts——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the nuts.

"Waccher laughing at?" demanded Mack fiercely.

"You, Mack!" said Townsend hilariously. "You're too funny for words. Do you mean to say you've lived to a hundred and ten and never played cards for money?"

The old porter gave the dandy of the Fourth a freezing glare.

"You're insultin', Master Townsend," he grunted. "I hain't nearly a hundred and ten yet. And even if I was, I should still be able to say that I'd never played cards for money."

"What a pity!" remarked Topham.

"It's disgraceful that young gents should behave in such a manner," remarked Mack.

"What the 'Ead will say when 'e knows, I can't guess."

The nuts started at once, but Townsend recovered himself quickly.

"But the Head won't know," he said.

"Oh, won't he!" growled Mack, with a shake of the head.

"You don't mean you're going to tell him a lot of lies about us gambling with cards?" asked Townsend.

"I shall tell 'im no lies," said Mack, striking a superior attitude. "I shall tell 'im the frozen truth. I shall tell 'im that you young rascals was playing for money, and I 'opes he gives you all a thundering good hiding."

"I say, Mack," drawled Adolphus Smythe glumly, "don't be such a beastly outsider, you know."

"No, play the game, Mack," said Topham pleadingly. "It ain't fair for you to round on us like that just because we were enjoying ourselves."

"Ho!" grunted Mack. "You won't enjoy yourselves when the 'Ead's done with you. I'm going along now to——"

The old porter paused, for Townsend had clutched him by the arm.

"Look here, Mack," began the dandy. "You're not quite well. You're——"

"I'm in the best of health," said the porter cuttingly.

"Perhaps your throat's dry, and——"

"My throat hain't dry!"

"But you could do with a drink, couldn't you?" asked Townsend, slipping his hand in his pocket, and drawing forth a coin. "Now, supposing——"

Townsend broke off abruptly.

The dandy had noticed the indignant expression on the old porter's face, and he did not like it at all.

"Now you have done it!" snapped Mack, with a resentful air. "Not content with gambling and tellin' lies, you've added blackmail to your misdeeds."

"What do you mean?" demanded Townsend, his voice shaking.

"What I ses," replied Mack. "You were going to offer me money for a drink, so that I should say nothin' about you gamblin' 'ere."

Townsend shifted uneasily. The other nuts had gone paler than ever.

"You've made a mistake, Mack, you have, really," said Adolphus hastily. "Townsend didn't mean——"

The old porter wagged a finger at the dandy.

"I know werry well what Master Townsend meant," he said. "I'm not going to enter into any argument. You've put your foot in it now with a wengeance."

"Look here——" began Townsend; but Mack cut him short.

"I told you I didn't intend to enter into any argument," he said finally. "I'm goin' along to the 'Ead now to acquaint him with your disgraceful behaviour."

With that the old porter turned on his heel, and with his head held high in the air, he strolled in the direction of the school.

"Mack, old man!" shouted Townsend dismally.

"Mack, old fellow!" yelled Adolphus.

Endearing words were lost on the old porter. He did not even turn his head, and at length disappeared from the view of the nuts.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Townsend savagely. "I'll make the beast sit up for this!"

"I guess we've got to sit up first," said Topham dismally.

"Yaas," agreed Adolphus. "I'm very much afraid the Head will lay it on. You know how he's down on cards and anythin' sporty!"

"We can swear we weren't playing for money," suggested Howard.

Townsend grunted.

"He's likely to believe that, isn't he?"

"He might. Supposing——"

"Oh, shut up, do!" growled Townsend disagreeably. "Let's get back to the school, and get it over. Then I'm going to make that beastly old porter sit up."

"What are you going to do, Towny?" asked Topham.

"You wait and see," said Townsend.

With that the four nuts set off for the school.

They met Mack at the gates, and the old porter, with an exultant grin on his face, informed them that Dr. Chisholm wanted to see them in his study at once.

Without a word in reply the nuts went straight to the Head's room.

They emerged some ten minutes or so later, their hands tucked under their arms, and as they went to their own quarters they muttered remarks that were neither complimentary nor polite towards the Head or the old porter.

The Head had laid it on pretty thick.

Mack met the juniors in the Fourth Form passage, and grinned to himself.

The old porter considered he had scored over the nuts, but he little realised what the outcome of his success would be.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Eavesdropper.

TING-A-LING! A-ling!

As soon as he had closed the gates that evening, old Mack sat down by the fire in his little back parlour, and took up the daily newspaper.

He had just settled down comfortably, when there came a ring at the bell.

Mack grunted.

An interruption of this sort always tended to upset his never reliable temper.

He took down the keys from off the nail, and strode out into the quad.

As he made towards the gate, he caught sight of four figures on the other side.

"Who's that?" asked the old porter.

"Only little us," exclaimed Jimmy Silver with a laugh. "You must be jolly glad to see us."

"What-ho!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "Can't you see he's going to welcome us with open arms?"

"Which as you're late!" grunted Mack, turning the key in the lock.

"Awfully sorry if you've been worrying over us," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "If we'd only known you'd have been upset, we would have made a special effort to get back earlier, wouldn't we, you fellows?"

"Oh, rather!" concurred Lovell & Co. quickly.

"You're being imperent, Master Silver," said the old porter, dragging the gate open.

"Oh, I say——"

"I am determined to put down imperence in any shape or form," went on Mack. "You've been imperent; you will have to suffer for it. You're also half an hour late; you've got to suffer for that, too."

"You're not going to report us, surely?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Duty, Master Silver," said the old porter. "I would let you off willingly, but duty must be served. If I failed to do my duty, I shouldn't be a fit person to hold the position of porter at this 'ere school!"

"My hat!" gasped the Fistical Four.

They had never heard Mack talk like this before.

They stood rooted to the ground.

"I'll trouble you young rascals to move out o' the way," said Mack. "I've got to shut this 'ere gate!"

"Certainly, Mack, old sport!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "We wouldn't impede a gentleman in the execution of his duty for anything."

"Not likely!" agreed Lovell brightly.

"You're trying to be funny, Master Silver!" said Mack resentfully.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We try to help you and——"

"I don't want none o' your help!" ground out the porter. "I'll trouble you to 'op it!"

"Certainly, Mack," said Lovell. "Anything to oblige a gentleman. Of course, we understand we're forgiven for coming in late."

"You hain't forgiven!"

"But——"

"Out of my way, you young himps! I'm going to see your Form-master!"

The old porter pushed by the amazed juniors, and went in quest of Mr. Bootles, the Classical master.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went up to their study, voicing their opinions of Mack on their way.

Needless to say, these opinions would hardly have been appreciated by the old porter.

The chums started on their prep at once, and were thus engaged, when the door of the study was opened, and in walked Mr. Bootles.

The Classical master wasted little time. He bestowed a hundred lines on each of the juniors for being late, and then took his departure.

As soon as he had gone Jimmy Silver threw down his pen.

"I guess I'm fed up with old Mack!" he said.

"Absolutely!" agreed Lovell. "After all, we were only ten minutes late."

"Nine!" corrected Newcome.

"Well, nine then," said Lovell. "If it had been ninety, I don't see that the old buffer need have reported us!"

"No fear!"

"Seems to me," went on Lovell fervently, "that the old bounder's got a bit of the Prussian spirit in him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, I reckon it's up to us to knock it out of him!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Now, I've got a jolly good wheeze."

"Oh, good!"

"You remember I disguised myself as my Cousin Hilda the other week?" went on Lovell.

"Yes, but what——"

"You must admit I did it pretty well."

"Oh, if you like."

"Now, supposing I disguised myself as a Prussian, with straggling hair, a turned up moustache, and spectacles, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jimmy Silver. "I should say you'd look rather Hunnish!"

"Of course I should, fathead!" snapped Lovell. "That's just what I want to look!"

"Whatever for?"

"For the purpose of ragging old Mack," went on Arthur Edward. "If I went into his lodge disguised as a Hun, and if he didn't do what I ordered him to, I threatened him with a revolver, and——"

"Phew!" whistled Jimmy Silver. "But what do you intend to make him do?"

"Paint himself."

"Eh?"

"I shall take a can of paint, and a brush with me," said Lovell, "and I shall threaten to shoot him if he doesn't paint himself all the colours of the rainbow."

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver appreciatively. "That doesn't seem half a bad wheeze!"

"Of course it isn't bad!" said Lovell resentfully. "If it had been bad I shouldn't have suggested it. I reckon it's a ripping wheeze."

"Naturally!"

Lovell looked at his chum questioningly.

"Look here, Jimmy," he said. "If you don't want to get your own back on that beastly old porter."

"All serene!" said Jimmy cheerily. "I'm jolly keen, really. When do you intend to carry out the wheeze?"

"To-morrow evening, after dark."

"Oh, good!"

"Now we'd better buck up and finish our prep," said Jimmy Silver, taking up his pen. "It's getting late, and—— Hallo, what's the row about?"

Jimmy Silver had suddenly heard the tramping of feet in the passage. He rushed to the door, and pulled it open.

Four juniors were rushing down the passage in the direction of the stairs.

Having recognised them as Townsend & Co., Jimmy Silver re-entered the end study, and closed the door.

The nuts' actions did not interest Jimmy Silver in the least, but had he known why the juniors were in such a hurry his curiosity might have been aroused.

The fact was, the dandies had emerged from Study No. 5 to discover Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, with his ear to the keyhole of the Fistical Four's study.

Leggett was a Modern, and a bitter enemy of Townsend & Co. Hence the reason for the pursuit.

The nuts came up with the cad in the quad.

Townsend clutched him fiercely by the shoulder.

"You little cad!" he exclaimed, giving Leggett a hearty shake. "You were listening at the keyhole!"

"I—I—I——"

"Suppose we bump the Modern rotter?" asked Townsend.

"What-ho!"

"Here, leggo!" muttered Leggett. "Don't be so hard on a chap. I reckon it was lucky I did listen, otherwise——"

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," said the cad of the Modern side. And he related to the nuts the conversation he had overheard between the chums of the end study.

Townsend smiled with satisfaction the while, but when Leggett concluded he pretended to be wrathful and indignant.

"You low-down cad!" he exclaimed angrily. "If you breathe a word of this to anybody I'll give you the hiding of your life!"

"But, I say," stammered Leggett. "I reckon somebody ought to prevent Lovell from——"

"You leave that to me!" said Townsend, hurling the cad aside. "But don't forget. If you mention a single word we'll make you suffer for it!"

"I sha'n't say anything," said Leggett.

"Mind you don't!"

Townsend & Co. returned to their study, and, once inside, Townsend began talking to his chums in a whisper.

The faces of the others gradually became wreathed in smiles.

The fact was Townsend had hit upon a wheeze for getting his own back on not only the old porter, but on the Fistical Four.

And he was only enabled to do this by what Leggett had told him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Ragging of Mack.

"ACH! Vat is dis?"

Old Mack almost jumped out of his chair the next evening as the door of his little parlour was thrown open, to reveal on the threshold the most Hunnish of Huns imaginable.

Lovell had certainly disguised himself well.

The disguised junior closed the door, and, after drawing a long-barrelled revolver from a bag which he carried, he strode towards the quaking porter.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Lovell in a husky voice. "I haf found you, you spy!"

"Spy yourself!" grunted the old porter.

"I am no spy! I am a Pritisher through and through," said Lovell, stepping closer to the porter. "I know you, Von Rotterstein!"

"Hass!" growled Mack. "My name's Mack, and I've been born and bred in England. If you dare to say—— Ow! Yow! Take that beastly thing away!"

Lovell had pointed his revolver at the porter, causing that worthy to stagger against the table.

"Fool!" cried the disguised junior. "Lying vill not assist you. You are in great danger—deadly danger!"

"Waccher mean?"

"Ach! You vant to know, don't you? But vhy should I safe your life?"

Mack turned pale.

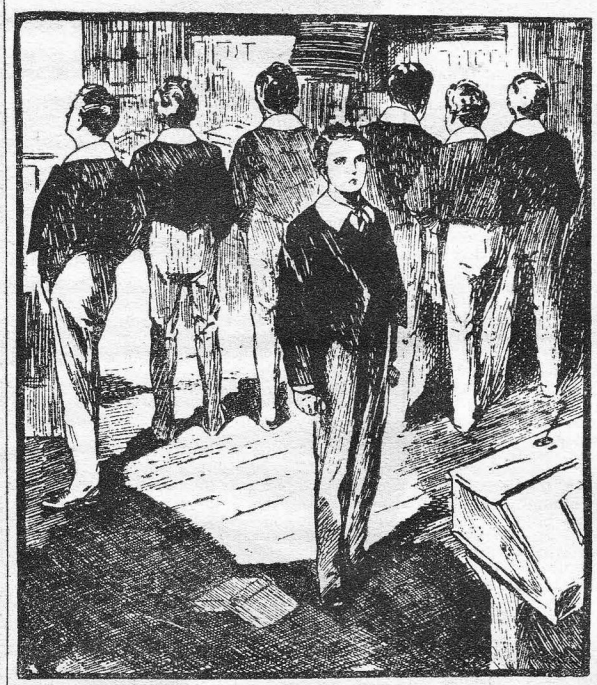
"'Ere," he said in a quaking voice, "is this a joke?"

"Ach! It is no joke. It is a very serious matter. You are known to be a dangerous spy, and——"

"Good 'evings!"

"Ten thousand men are now scouring dis country for you! If you are found, ach, your life vill not be vorth anyting! You vill be shot at dawn!"

"Hoh!"



"Liar!" Lovell flushed under the insult, and was about to raise his voice in protest when the whole Form turned their backs on him.

With a dismal grunt Mack sank back into his chair and gasped.

"B-b-but you are a German!" he muttered feebly.

"Mein Gott! I am no German. I am an Inglishman in disguise. I come to varn you of de danger dat encompasses you. Dere is no hope for you unless——"

"B-b-but I ain't a spy!" protested Mack, breathing hard. "I hain't never done any spying in my life! I wouldn't dream of——"

"Ach! Vat is de good of you telling me dat. I know oderwise. You are a fool to argue. I vish to help you, and——"

"Wh-wh-what can I do?" faltered the old porter.

"I vill tell you," answered the disguised junior. "You must disguise yourself."

"But how——"

Lovell stooped to the little bag he had placed on the floor and brought to view his tins and a brush.

"You see dese tins of paint?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Very vell. You must paint yourself according to my instructions."

"But I—I—I shall look awful!" mumbled the porter.

"All de better!" said Lovell, who could hardly restrain himself from laughing. "De vorse you look, de better chance you vill haf of dodging de ten thousand men who are looking for you."

"Oh!"

"Now take dis tin of paint!"

Mack held out a trembling hand and grasped the tin of paint.

"Now de brush!"

The old porter took it.

Then Lovell ordered him to dip the brush into the paint and to paint a line across his forehead.

"S-s-supposing it won't come off!" faltered Mack.

"It vill be a good ting for you," said the disguised junior.

"But——"

"Now a line down de side of your face!"

Very gingerly the old porter passed the brush over his face.

Some of the paint, which was of a bright red hue, trickled down his neck, and the old porter uttered a moan of anguish.

Lovell made a warning gesture, and the old porter subsided.

The disguised junior continued his orders, and Mack carried them out, trembling nervously, and muttering to himself in his misery.

At length Lovell gave the order to stop, and willingly enough Mack dropped the pot of paint to the floor.

The old porter looked a sight.

He was plastered from head to foot with paint, and he was weird and wonderful to behold.

Lovell put the tins of paint back into the bag, and slipped his revolver into his capacious pocket.

"Now I must go," he said, turning towards the door. "If de ten tousand find you now, dey vill not recognise you. You are as safe as houses!"

"But how long am I to stay like this?" stammered the old porter.

"For ever!"

The reply came in a deep, guttural voice that made Mack stagger backwards.

"Oh!" he grunted. "Oh!".

The old porter's discomfiture was complete, and it was with this knowledge that the disguised junior took his departure.

Once outside, he burst into a roar of uncontrollable laughter.

Meanwhile, Mack flopped down into the nearest chair, muttering incoherently to himself.

For fully a quarter of an hour he remained in this position.

Then, suddenly, the door opened once again, and in strode a short, thick-set figure, who looked every inch a Hun.

"Good 'evings!" gasped Mack. "Y-y-y-you've come back again!"

The other did not answer, for he was doing his very utmost to keep himself from laughing at the paint-daubed porter.

Mack did not notice this, otherwise his suspicions might have been aroused.

"Ach!" grunted the new-comer, controlling himself at last. "I haf returned, ain't it?"

"Waccher want this time?"

"You vait and see."

"But—— 'Ere, what's the game?"

The new-comer had suddenly stepped towards the mantelshelf, and, whisking off all the ornaments, sent them hurling to the floor.

Then he turned over the table, up-ended the chairs, turned the contents of the coal-scuttle on to the carpet, hurled off all the crockery from the dresser, and disarranged everything in the room.

Mack watched him with open mouth and dilated eyes, but he was too nervous to interfere.

He raised his voice in protest, but at the sight of a revolver in his mysterious visitor's pocket he subsided.

At length the visitor desisted, and surveyed the disordered room with a satisfied smile.

Then he turned to the shivering porter.

"This will teach you not—— I mean—— Ach! Dis serves you right, ain't it!"

With this remark he took his departure.

Mack stood in the centre of the room, and scratched his head in thought.

The way in which his visitor had spoken in proper English, and then dropped into the voice of a German, struck him as being rather curious.

He remained in thought for quite a long time.

Then he procured a bottle of turpentine, and spent a busy hour in getting the paint from his face and clothes.

The nervous, frightened look had disappeared from Mack's face.

Had he guessed that it was merely a disguised junior who had given him the scare of his life?

If he had, it was pretty sure that he had not realised that his second visitor was not Arthur Edward Lovell, but Townsend, the nut of the Fourth!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

One Against Many.

"THE whole school to assemble in Hall!"

Such was the statement made after breakfast the next morning.

The Fistical Four were amongst the first to hear it.

"Wonder what's up now," remarked Jimmy Silver with a serious look.

"Perhaps old Mack has complained to the Head about the ragging I gave him last night," suggested Lovell.

"By the way," said Newcome reflectively. "I saw old Mack crossing the quad as I was dressing this morning. He looked jolly happy over something."

"Happy?"

"Well, he was grinning to himself. He didn't look scared as you'd expect after——"

"Buck up, you kids, and get into Hall!"

The juniors looked round, to see Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, striding towards them.

"All right, Bulkeley, old man," said Jimmy Silver cheerily, "we're just going!"

The Fistical Four marched into Hall, and found most of the fellows there.

There was a buzzing of voices, which ceased abruptly as Dr. Chisholm, the headmaster, stepped on to the raised dais.

A moment or two later the doors of the Hall were closed, and the Head faced the assembly.

"Boys," he said, in a serious tone, "I have this morning received a very serious complaint from Mack to the effect that last evening some person of German appearance entered his lodge, and treated him in a most outrageous manner."

There was a buzz of conversation at this, and Jimmy Silver gave Lovell a meaning glance.

"Can't be helped," said Lovell in a whisper. "I shall have to face it out now."

"I suppose so."

The Head held up his hand for silence.

"This person," went on the Head, in the same serious voice, "had the effrontery to accuse Mack of being a spy, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" rapped out the Head. "Please control your merriment. To accuse Mack of being a spy was not only absurd, but preposterous. But this person went further than that. He offered to assist Mack to escape, and compelled him to paint himself in a most grotesque manner."

There was a further giggle at this, but the stern expression on Dr. Chisholm's face had the effect of establishing silence once again.

"Mack strongly suspects that his mysterious visitor was a junior at this school in disguise," continued the Head, in measured tones. "To prove whether this is the case, I appeal to the boy who committed the act to step forward."

As the Head concluded, there was another buzz of conversation. Eyes were turned in all directions in order to catch sight of the culprit.

Suddenly a junior rose from his seat, and immediately there was an exclamation from over two hundred throats:

"Lovell!"

Arthur Edward Lovell faced the Head with unfaltering gaze.

"Well, Lovell," said Dr. Chisholm, "have you anything to say?"

"Yes, sir," replied Lovell firmly; "it was I who committed the act!"

"Please step forward!"

All eyes were fixed on Lovell as he made his way to the dais.

He stood before the Head, determined to take his punishment unflinchingly.

"Lovell," said the Head sternly, "I regard your behaviour as most unbecoming to a boy at this school. I would, however, have excused you for disguising yourself in such a way, and for compelling Mack to paint himself in a most ludicrous manner. But the other I cannot excuse."

Lovell changed colour. What was the Head referring to?

"Not content with daubing Mack with paint," said Dr. Chisholm coldly, "you returned to his lodge, and I presume out of sheer spite and malice, you damaged his property. You broke the greater part of his crockery, damaged his carpet, and left the rest of his furniture in a most dishevelled state. It was a disgraceful act to perform against a man whose income is a meagre one, and whose means for replacing the damaged articles are of a slender nature. What have you to say for yourself?"

Lovell was astounded. He had never expected this.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were struck spellbound. Lovell had not mentioned this part of the wheeze to them.

"Lovell," rapped out the Head sternly, "I am waiting for your answer!"

Lovell stared the Head straight in the face.

"I admit painting Mack's face, sir," he said, in a quiet voice; "but I am not responsible for damaging his property."

"How dare you make such a statement!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm, frowning at the junior before him. "It is hardly conceivable that two people, disguised as Germans, should enter the porter's lodge in the same evening, and one almost directly after the other. You have added lying to your other misdeeds. I am surprised and disappointed with you!"

"But, sir," protested Lovell fervently, "there is some mistake. I——"

"Enough!" said Dr. Chisholm, with a gesture. "I will not listen to another word. Your guilt is proved without question. You have proved yourself a dishonest, untruthful boy, and my faith in you has gone. You will follow me to my study!"

The Head then dismissed the school, and led the way to his study.

Lovell followed, his face pale and anxious. He was amazed by the accusation which had been made against him.

He followed the Head into his study, and received the greatest hiding of his school life.

Then, still puzzling over the strange happenings of the last half-hour, he went into the class-room.

Immediately accusing glances were turned in his direction.

"Liar!" muttered one of the juniors; and next instant the word burst forth from practically every throat:

"Liar!"

Lovell flushed under the insult, and was about to raise his voice in protest, when the whole Form, with the exception of his three loyal chums, turned their backs on him.

They thought he had been guilty of lying, and had shunned him in consequence. Townsend was amongst those who had despised him. There was a self-satisfied look on Towny's face; he felt that his triumph was complete. But was it?

THE END.

A MAGNIFICENT LONG COMPLETE STORY, DEALING WITH THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

THE ROAD TO RUIN!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Lumley-Lumley Asks Advice.

"I GUESS I'm in a quandary!"

Thus Lumley-Lumley.

The St. Jim's juniors were standing by the pavilion, looking on at a Sixth Form match and chatting. The Terrible Three had finished their practice, and had come over to the senior ground to watch Kildare.

"Anything up?" Tom Merry asked, noting the wrinkle of thought in the brow of the Outsider.

"I guess so."

"Confide it to your uncle," said Monty Lowther blandly. "I guess I can give you some good advice right slick."

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"Do you fellows remember the time when you used to call me the Outsider—you and the rest of the House?" he asked.

"Ahem!" said Monty Lowther. "Don't talk about that! Since you've taken example by me you have been quite a nice boy."

"But you remember?" said Lumley-Lumley. "I was a wild beggar when I first came here—nothing like what I was before I came here, though!" And he chuckled. "I used to bet on horses, play cards at night, and so forth. Awfully wild and rorty for St. Jim's, but pretty tame to me after punting at a faro bank in the Bowery before I was twelve years old, and playing chemin-de-fer in Montmartre when I wasn't fourteen."

"You've been a pretty specimen, I must say," said Manners. "Blessed if I know how you've turned out so respectable in your old age!"

"Us good boys did it," said Lowther. "We Ericked him. We gave him Little by Little, and he gave us the World of School!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well," said Lumley-Lumley, "I'm not proud of my record, and you chaps are witnesses that I've turned over a new leaf and gone as straight as a die since."

"So you have!" said Tom Merry heartily. "My dear chap, we've forgotten all about that time, and if anybody calls you the Outsider again I'll punch his head."

"Thanks! That's why I guess I'm in a quandary."

"What on earth's a quandary?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"That's one of the words I picked up in my giddy youth," he replied. "In the American language, a quandary means a difficulty—when you run up against a snag, you know, and there doesn't seem any way round."

"Oh, I see! You're in trouble!"

"Oh, no; somebody else is!"

"Oh, I see! Pal of yours?"

"No fear! Chap I don't like."

"My only hat!" said Lowther. "Here's Lumley setting up as a Good Samaritan. We shall see giddy wings sprouting through his Eton jacket soon."

"If you're going to be funny——" began Lumley.

"Shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry again. "Now, pile in, Lumley!"

"It's a rotten quandary," said the Outsider. "Considering my record, I'm not the kind of chap to preach to anybody, am I? I'm not in a position to tell a fellow he's on the road to ruin, and so forth, and ask him to chuck it. He'd throw my own record up in my face, for one thing, and I shouldn't have a word to say. That's what's worrying me now. I don't like to see a chap going the way I was going, when I had sense enough to draw up. He hasn't sense enough to draw up, and he'll go on till he's ruined if he ain't stopped."

"Chap in your Form?" asked Tom Merry.

"No; in the Shell!"

"Then you must mean Gore."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"I do mean Gore," he said. "Gore used to pal with me when I was playing the giddy ox, in my first days here. He thought he was a wild beggar, and a regular dog, and all that, you know, though I guess I could have opened his eyes to a few things. But when I chucked it up, Gore didn't. He did have a try once, that time when his pater was down on him, but he's fallen back since, owing to Cutts of the Fifth as much as anything. Now I don't pull with Gore at all, but I used to be his pal, you know, and I don't like to see him going to the dogs and being done in. Only it sounds so much like humbug for a fellow with my record to preach at anybody, doesn't it?"

"I've spoken to Gore about it," said Tom Merry quietly. "He wasn't even civil. He doesn't want good advice."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Lumley-Lumley. "Ought a chap to stand by while a fellow is done brown, and perhaps ruined for life?"

"Not if he can do anything to stop it," said Tom Merry.

"That's the quandary I'm in. There's one way, I think, of curing Gore of playing the silly ass—show him that he's being made a fool of, and made use of, and that his precious friends are swindling him and making money out of him. But it's no good telling him that—he would want it shown up pretty plainly."

"I don't see how you're going to do that, Lumley."

"Well, I guess there is a way; but I'm rather doubtful about taking it. Suppose I went in with Gore—let him take me to his giddy little parties, wherever they are, where he gets swindled—and point it out to him on the spot——"

Tom Merry looked grave.

"That's jolly serious, Lumley-Lumley. You might do that with a good motive, but you wouldn't find it easy to convince the Head of it, if you should happen to be caught there. You might be expelled."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"That's a risk to run," he said.

"It's more risk than a fellow can be expected to run," said Manners. "I think you're an ass if you run it."

"If anything should come out, you'll be judged by the company you keep," said Monty Lowther. "Better leave it alone."

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

"I think it's awfully risky. Gore goes to some place where gambling goes on, and he would be sacked instantly if the Head knew. Such a thing might come out any day. And if you were mixed up in it, you'd suffer the same as the rest."

"I guess that's so. But——"

"But you're going to do it?"

"I guess so. I've mentioned it to you chaps, in case you should think wrongly about it, if you see me chummy with Gore again," said Lumley-Lumley quietly, "and I wanted your advice."

"Well, you've got our advice," said Lowther.

"Yes; and I guess I'm not going to take it," said Lumley-Lumley, laughing. "I used to do what Gore's doing now, and I backed out in time, and escaped getting it in the neck—as I deserved. It's up to me to help that silly fool out of the same scrape; and if there's only one way of doing it, I guess I've got the nerve!"

And Lumley-Lumley put his hands into his pockets, and walked away whistling.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Red and Black.

VAVASOUR of the Shell stood in his study, with an expression of utter amazement upon his face.

He had a card in his hand, which he had picked up on the study floor, and he was regarding it with a gaze of astonishment.

It was a peculiar card. It was oblong in shape, and ruled down in columns from top to bottom. The columns were headed alternately "Red" and "Black."

They were filled with numbers—all sorts of numbers that seemed to have no connection at all with one another:

Red.	Black.
1	—
—	15
36	—
—	33
5	—
—	22
25	—
—	31
21	—
—	15
—	15
—	24
—	8
5	—
19	—

So the card began, and the apparently meaningless numbers were continued down column after column, sometimes Red and Black running alternately, sometimes in groups of two or three, and sometimes in "runs" of nine or ten.

Vavasour read down the numbers, and tried to make some meaning out of them; but there was apparently no meaning to be made. He was amazed.

He observed that the numbers entered under the head of "Red" never appeared under the other heading, and those entered under "Black" never appeared under "Red."

Evidently the numbers belonged permanently to one colour or other in the scheme under which the card was drawn up.

Vavasour wondered blankly what the card might possibly mean, and how it had come into his study. It occurred to him that it might be some weird scientific formula belonging to Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor. But, in that case, how had it come into his study?

It must surely belong to either Skimpole or to Gore. Yet, what could they have to do with a card like that, crammed with meaningless numbers, in equally meaningless divisions of colour?

Vavasour put the card in his pocket, and left the study. Tom Merry's study was next door, and he could hear the Terrible Three getting tea ready. He knocked at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry.

Vavasour came in.

Tom Merry was laying the table. Lowther was in his shirt-sleeves, poaching eggs, and Manners was telling him how to do it better

—gratuitous information that Monty Lowther received with a series of snorts.

"Just in time for tea, Vavasour!" said Tom Merry cheerily. Then, catching sight of the Shell fellow's expression, he added: "Anything up?"

"I've found something jolly queer in my study," said Vavasour. "I don't know whether it's a joke or what it is. Will you look at it?"

"Certainly!" said Tom, in surprise.

Vavasour handed him the card.

Tom Merry stared at it blankly.

"You found this in your study?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; it was on the floor."

"You know whom it belongs to?"

"No. It's not mine. But I don't see how it can be Gore's. There's no sense in it, so far as I can see. And if it's a joke, I don't see where the joke comes in."

"It's not a joke," said Tom Merry quietly. "But you're not quite right about there being no sense in it. Shut the door!"

Vavasour, surprised by the serious looks of the captain of the Shell, closed the study door. Lowther had left off poaching eggs, forgetting all about them as he stared at the card with its alternate columns of figures.

"You know what it means, Tom Merry?" asked Vavasour.

"Yes."

"Blessed if I do, then! It can't be mathematics. I thought it might be something to do with Glyn's blessed inventions."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's a roulette-card," he said.

Vavasour gasped.

"Roulette?"

"Yes."

"That's a gambling game, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What on earth do you know about it?" asked Vavasour curiously.

"We had a vacation on the Riviera once," said Tom Merry. "We visited Monte Carlo, where they play this game at the Casino. We had an opportunity of seeing the game played. It's a game played with numbers on a wheel, and the players take down the numbers every time on cards to calculate the run, though I expect the croupiers know pretty well in advance what sort of a run there is going to be. This is the same thing, only this card says Red and Black instead of Rouge et Noir. This card has been written down by some utter idiot who has been gambling here!"

"But roulette isn't allowed in England!" said Vavasour, in astonishment.

"I know it isn't. But you see every now and then in the papers that gambling places are raided by the police, and they find roulette machines," said Tom. "It's done against the law—in secret. There are silly mugs everywhere who want to get rich quick, and are willing to be fleeced for the chance—not that they have any chance, the silly asses! When we had our holiday in the South of France we saw lots of these cards—people leave 'em in railway trains and in cafes, after leaving the Casino. This card belongs to Gore. I wondered what he had been sneaking out at night after lights out for, the awful idiot! Some utter scoundrel is running a gambling den in this neighbourhood, and Gore is one of the silly idiots being swindled there!"

"Great Scott! If it came out——"

"If it came out," said Tom Merry grimly, "Gore would be flogged, and sacked from the school on the spot—and serve him right!"

"It would serve him right," said Vavasour. "But—but—but we've got to keep this awfully dark. Gore isn't a pleasant chap, but we don't want to have a hand in getting any fellow the push."

"Quite right!"

"He ought to be stopped, though," said Monty Lowther.

"Better destroy this," said Tom thoughtfully. "You can see the state of reckless idiocy the fellow is getting into by his leaving it about the study. If the Head knew there was such a thing inside the school, I verily believe he would have a fit. Why, any fellow might have seen it—a prefect, or a master even! The crass idiot!"

Tom Merry shoved the card into the fire, and it crackled up and was consumed. That evidence of Gore's guilt, at all events, was gone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Gore's Great Loss.

GEORGE GORE came into his study with an anxious frown upon his face. His brows were puckered up, and his eyes gleamed furtively.

Vavasour was at work in the study. Gore did not speak to him. He looked round the room anxiously, as if in search of something he had lost.

Vavasour knew very well what he was looking for, but he did not speak. He waited for his study-mate to ask him.

Gore stammered out a question at last.

"I—I say, Vavasour, have you seen a—a card anywhere about the study?"

"A card with columns of figures on it?" asked Vavasour.

"Yes. You've seen it?"

"It belongs to you?"

"Yes, yes! Where is it?"

"I picked it up," said Vavasour, looking at him steadily. "I showed it to Tom Merry, and he told me what it was—a roulette card!"

"Hush!" muttered Gore. "Do you want all the House to hear, you ass? Where is the card? It is very important!"

"You have been playing roulette?" said Vavasour.

"No business of yours if I have! I suppose you're not thinking of giving information to the Housemaster, are you?" sneered Gore.

Vavasour shook his head.

"I'm not a sneak. But it was for that that you borrowed five pounds of me last week?"

"Yes, it was!"

"You can't settle up, by any chance?"

"I've lost!" said Gore sullenly. "If you'd like to hand me over a tenner for capital, I'd get the five back, and a hundred quid along with it!"

Vavasour gave him a compassionate look.

"You think they'd let you?" he asked.

"You don't know anything about roulette," said Gore. "They can't help it if you win. If your number comes up you get your money. They can't help the number coming up."

"Then, if you had a run of luck, you might clear them out of every quid they've got?"

"Of course I might!" said Gore eagerly. "If you like to lend me a tenner——"

"Do you think they'd run the risk of being cleared out by a fellow with a run of luck?" asked Vavasour.

"They can't help it."

"Do they ever go broke?"

"Well, no!"

"Then I should suggest that they can help it," said Vavasour drily. "You ass! It must be as easy to cheat with a roulette wheel as with a pack of cards."

"You don't know anything about it," said Gore. "When I'm old enough I'm going to Monte Carlo to break the bank. I shall save up enough money out of my winnings here to do it."

"How much do your winnings amount to as yet?"

Gore grunted.

"I haven't won, so far; I've lost!"

"Then you will have to save it up out of your losings."

"Oh, don't be an ass! You needn't lend me money, if you don't want to. Where's my card?"

"I gave it to Tom Merry, and——"

"Oh, you fathead!"

Gore did not wait for Vavasour to explain further. He hurried out of the room and opened the door of the next study. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had finished their tea, and they were doing their preparation.

Gore dashed into the study, and closed the door behind him. The Terrible Three looked up from their work.

"You've got something of mine, Tom Merry," said Gore. "Vavasour says that he gave it to you. It's mine, and I want it."

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"You mean the roulette card?"

"Yes."

"I've burnt it."

Gore started back.

"You've burnt my card!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Yes. It wasn't safe to leave it about, you ass! Don't you know that you would be ruined if it were found?"

"You—you meddling fool!" hissed Gore. "You've burnt my card, and I hadn't a copy of it!"

"What on earth did you want a copy of it for?"

"For the numbers, you fool! I was making a system on the run of the numbers; and now it's mucked up! Oh, you crass idiot!"

"I should have burnt it all the same if I'd known," said Tom Merry quietly. "Have you got the awful cheek to tell us that you go out gambling at some secret den, and that you're making a system? You idiot!"

Gore clenched his hands.

"You fool! You fool!" he muttered.

"I don't think I'm the fool in this case," said Tom Merry, rising to his feet. "I won't lose my temper with you, Gore. You're more a fool than a rascal; I can see that. Do you know you'd be sacked if this came out?"

"I don't care if I am!"

"You don't care if you're sacked?" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"No, I don't!" said Gore defiantly. "Do you think I want to go about fooling over Latin and mathematics in a rotten Form-room when I've got a system for making a fortune? I don't care twopence!"

The chums of the Shell looked at him blankly. To them and to all other fellows at St. Jim's—and to Gore, when he was in his right senses—the idea of being expelled from school was the very worst thing that could happen.

To be kicked out of the school, disgraced for life—it was the heaviest punishment that could fall upon any fellow.

And Gore did not care!

It showed the depth to which he had fallen, and the extent to which the madness of the gambling fever had taken hold of the wretched boy.

"I think you must be mad," said Tom Merry at last.

"You can think what you like."

"What about your father?"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"I shouldn't go home if I were sacked. I know a trick worth two of that. I can make money—heaps of it!"

"Have you made any so far?"

"Yes, I have; only I lost it again simply from want of capital to play the game thoroughly and stick to my system. I shall raise the money somehow and bust them! I know I could if I had a chance. And when I'm older I'm going to Monte Carlo to break the bank there," said Gore. "It has been done before."

"Has it?" said Tom.

"I've seen it in the papers."

"You've seen it announced in the papers, you awful idiot!" said Tom Merry, with pitying contempt. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you that such yarns are spread to entice silly fools to go there and lose their money?"

"Oh, rot!" said Gore. "You don't know anything about the game, and I do. You've never played it."

"That's true enough."

"Look here," said Gore. "I'll take you with me, if you like, and——"

"You jolly well won't! We're not looking for the sack," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats! I suppose you think you've got me under your thumb now that you've found this out!" said Gore savagely. "Well, I tell you that you can go straight to the Head, if you like, and give me away. I don't care two straws!"

"We sha'n't do that," said Manners. "But you ought to see that you're ruining yourself, and very likely damaging us. If you keep on like this, it will come out some time; and if it comes out that we know of your rotten doings, it will get us into trouble."

"Mind your own business, then!" said Gore. "It was like your rotten cheek to burn my card! If I lose now, I shall owe it to you!"

"Oh, rot!"

Gore left the study, and slammed the door after him.

He turned his steps in the direction of Lumley-Lumley's quarters. Gore was "stony"—his wonderful prospects of wealth had not panned out very prosperously so far, and the Outsider of St. Jim's was his only hope now.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

For Old Times' Sake.

LUMLEY-LUMLEY was not surprised to see Gore, and he could read in the Shell fellow's face what he had come for. In times past the two had been very "thick," though at last the parting of the ways had come, and they had gone their different roads.

Lumley-Lumley was alone in his study, and Gore was glad to see it. He came in and closed the door, and the Outsider of St. Jim's nodded genially.

"Long time since you've dropped in to see me," he remarked.

"Not my fault," said Gore.

"No; mine," said Lumley-Lumley, with a smile. "You're looking rather seedy."

"I'm not seedy. I'm bothered," said Gore. "What would you feel like if you had a fortune right in your hands, and couldn't collar it because you hadn't a little capital?"

Lumley-Lumley tried not to smile.

"I guess I should feel rotten," he said.

"That's how I feel. Look here, Lumley," said Gore, "we used to be good chums. You used to be in with me, and Cutts, and Tickey Tapp and Griggs, and the rest. You knew how to look after yourself, and they never got much change out of you. You chucked it all. I dare say it was sensible. But you must be getting fed up with the Eric bizney by this time. I could show you life now—something a bit better than you used to get."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore glared at him.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"My dear kid, I know all about it—all about it," said Lumley-Lumley. "I've had kind offers from Tickey Tapp to take a hand in it."

Gore started.

"Then you know about the game?"

"I guess so."

"Oh!" said Gore, evidently taken aback. "Why don't you go in for it, then?"

"I've chucked up that rot. It's rotten, and it's stupid. Besides, I've got all my wits about me, and when they used to try to swindle me at nap I could keep my end up. But their latest dodge is too deep for me."

"You know what it is?"

"I know they've got a roulette machine in the old Manor House, to run a gambling club there till the police drop on them," said the Outsider coolly. "Tickey Tapp used to run one in Southampton, and he was fined hundreds of pounds over it. He was imprisoned in Manchester for the same thing. But, bless you, he comes up smiling every time. There is always a supply of mugs—the supply of silly idiots never will run short. There isn't a town in England where you won't find chaps who want to get rich quick, and think they can beat professional swindlers at their own game."

"But this isn't a swindle!" said Gore. "You don't understand. They've got a roulette machine, exactly the same as at Monte Carlo. You stake on the numbers, and if the numbers come up you win. They can't help it!"

"Much the same as staking on the thimble that the pea's under," said Lumley-Lumley. "Have you ever tried that way of making a fortune?"

Gore frowned.

"Don't talk rot, Lumley! How can they possibly cheat with a roulette-wheel?"

"Poor old innocent duck!" said Lumley-Lumley compassionately. "Have you ever handled a roulette-wheel?"

"Of course I haven't!"

"Well, I have. When I was half your age, Gore, I was in some queer places in the world, and there are precious few gambling games I haven't had a hand in. I've had a lot of experience, and I've learned one lesson—that it's all rot, cheating from beginning to end, without a chance for the outsider. The way to make money out of roulette is to start a casino in some country where it's allowed. That's the only way."

"Rot! Every player has a chance."

"Every player has exactly the chance that the croupier allows him, and no more," said Lumley-Lumley. "Look here, Gore, I want to back you up for the sake of old times. You know my pater wasn't always a millionaire. I've been through some rough times. When I was a mere kid I had a job in San Francisco—the pater was laid up with a bullet in his leg that he'd got in a row there—and I had to get in the money somehow. Well, I had a job in a roulette den that was run in Chinatown there to swindle the sailors off the ships. After the game was over for the night, and the punters had gone, I used to amuse myself sometimes with the roulette-wheel, practising."

"Practising what?"

"Bringing up the numbers the same as the croupiers do," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

Gore jumped.

"Do you mean to say they can bring up what numbers they like?"

"I guess so. I know they'd be sacked if they couldn't."

"But—but it's impossible!"

"It's easier than bowling at cricket—easier than making a good break at billiards. After one hour's practice, I was able to bring up zero whenever I wanted to. After I'd practised an hour a night for a few weeks I had as much command of the roulette-wheel as I have now of my bicycle or my cricket-bat. It's quite easy. The wheel goes round in one direction, the ball in another. You put exactly enough speed on both to make them slacken down at the right moment, and the ball drops into whichever hole on the wheel you have calculated upon—the number you want. It looks difficult to an outsider—same as it looks difficult to see a billiard chap making a long break, with the balls in a position that looks impossible to the amateur. But they can do it."

Gore drew in a deep breath.

"But in roulette you're allowed to lay your stakes on the table after the ball has started," he said. "They can't alter it then."

Lumley-Lumley grinned.

"And suppose some lucky player jammed down a big stake on the number the croupier intended to bring up?" he said. "Do you think the bank is prepared to pay out a big sum of money for want of taking a few precautions?"

"But they can't alter it when the ball's started."

"Rats! They have different methods. Some roulette machines are made with a secret brake, to make the wheel slacken down in time and avoid a number. Some of the rotters have other dodges. But they never let you win unless they choose."

Gore shook his head.

"I can't believe all that," he said. "It sounds too thick."

"I guess I don't expect you to believe it. A gambler won't believe anything that will stop him from gambling," said Lumley-Lumley. "I don't say people never win. At that den in 'Frisco I used to watch the gamblers. New-comers were generally let to win to encourage them to come again with more money. By the way, did you win at first at Tickey Tapp's place?"

Gore turned red.

"I won jolly well for three nights," he said. "Then the luck changed."

"Ha, ha, ha! It wasn't the luck that changed—it was the croupier's mind that changed," chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "Roulette isn't a game of chance, my infant; it's a game of dead certs, with all the certs on the side of the bank."

"And do you mean to say that only newcomers win?"

"Oh, no! I used to see sharps win—keen fellows who knew the game. They'd wait till nearly every number on the green cloth was loaded up with heavy stakes. Then they'd put small stakes on the other numbers, and win."

"Oh!" said Gore.

"Only, after they'd done that a dozen times or so, they'd be spotted," said Lumley-Lumley. "Then they had to quit. The bank would put up some employee in plain clothes to collar the stakes and pretend they were his, or else he would be accused of passing false money, and kicked out!"

"Oh!"

"You see, I saw the game from the inside," said Lumley-Lumley.

"But all the places aren't run on the same lines."

"Not all, certainly; but in results it comes to the same thing. Different places have different dodges, that's all."

"I believe Tickey Tapp plays squarely."

"I guess you'll go on believing that so long as you can raise a red cent to play with. Lots of people go on playing after they've found out that they've been welshed. It's a kind of fever; they can't help it. But you didn't come here for good advice; you came here to borrow some tin."

Gore grinned rather sheepishly.

"Well, yes," he said.

"You want to play, after what I've told you?"

"I think Tickey Tapp is all right. After all, what you saw happen in a den in San Francisco mightn't happen everywhere."

"Suppose I prove it to you?"

"You can't."

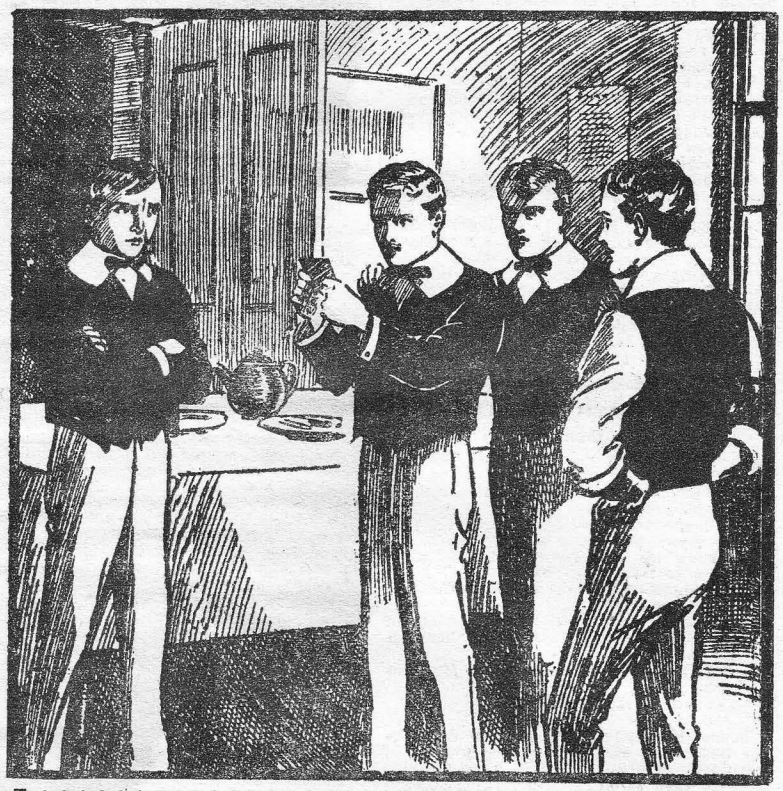
"I guess I'll try. When are you going to Tickey Tapp's place again?"

"To-night."

"I guess I'll come with you."

"And—and you'll lend me some money?"

"I'll lend you a couple of quid, if you like, though it's simply throwing money away."



Vavasour handed over the card he had picked up in his study. "Do you know what this is, Tom Merry?" he asked. "Yes," said Tom, with an expression of amazement on his face. "It's a roulette card!"

"I—I want a good sum to play the game on big lines," said Gore, hesitating. "Twenty pounds would do. Then I could make a big win."

"My dear chap, I haven't twenty quid to throw away!" said Lumley-Lumley, in astonishment.

"Your pater's a millionaire——"

"But he wouldn't hand out sums like that for me to give away, you ass!"

"I'd pay it back to-morrow."

"After you'd won?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore scowled savagely.

"Look here, you might lend me the money. I owe money to a lot of fellows that I've borrowed. I've sold a lot of my things—my bat, my bike, and fishing-rod—and now I'm stumped. If I don't win I'm done in. And I must have some capital to play with if I'm to win. If you could hand me twenty quid it might save me from doing something desperate."

"But you'd be in the same state to-morrow. You wouldn't win."

"I shall win—I must!"

"I guess I've heard that kind of talk before. When you get into that frame of mind you lose whatever chance you might have had; you simply chuck money away."

Gore rose to his feet.

"I'll find some way," he said.

"Look here," said Lumley-Lumley, eyeing him narrowly, "don't play the fool, Gore! You don't want to be sacked from the school, and perhaps sent to a reformatory."

"I know what I'm going to do."

"I'll make it a fiver," said Lumley-Lumley, "on condition that you promise to chuck it up if I prove to you that they cheat."

"Done!"

And Gore left the study feeling satisfied. Lumley-Lumley wrinkled his brows in thought. He was in a troubled frame of mind.

"The silly ass—the awful chump!" he muttered. "I guess I know what's in his mind—taking somebody else's money to play with. Those rotters will get him sent to prison before they're through with him. I guess it's high time I put a spoke in their wheel!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Gamblers.

LATE that night Gore and Lumley-Lumley made their way to the gambling den run by the rascally Tickey Tapp.

The house was situated on a lonely part of the moor. The night was very dark, but Gore knew his way too well to the place for them to lose their way.

Gore tapped on the door of the house three times in a peculiar way.

It opened. But there was no gleam of light. Inside the room were heavy hangings to shut off the light.

"What's the game?" said a voice from the darkness.

"Red and black," said Gore.

"Step in."

Lumley-Lumley grinned in the darkness. He understood that this was a system of passwords arranged by the secret gaming club for their safety.

The juniors entered, and the door was carefully closed and locked behind them by the unseen attendant. Then the hangings were drawn aside, and the light burst upon their eyes as they advanced into the room.

Lumley-Lumley gazed about him with cool, keen eyes.

The room was a large one. It was sparely furnished—a table, and a number of plain deal chairs. The windows were thickly covered with hangings of coarse canvas to keep the light from escaping.

There was a crowd in the room.

The table was covered with a green cloth, marked out in thirty-six numbers for the game of roulette, and with the squares for red and black, pair and impair, passe and manque, and the spaces for the "dozens" and "columns."

In the centre of the table was the roulette machine.

A deep wooden bowl, with a revolving wheel in the centre. The wheel was marked off into thirty-seven compartments—one for each number, and one for zero.

At the wheel sat Tickey Tapp in person—a low-browed, cunning-faced man in evening-clothes, which seemed to show up, as no other attire could have done, his half bullying, half cajoling countenance.

Tickey Tapp was acting as croupier—doubtless having more reliance upon his own skill with the wheel than anyone else's.

Behind him Mr. Griggs, the bookmaker, sat on a raised chair, acting the part of chef-de-partie, or overlooker of the game.

Two or three other men in dingy evening-clothes sat at the ends and sides of the long table, acting as croupiers for paying out or placing the stakes.

Round the table was a crowd. Lumley-Lumley looked them over with great curiosity. Except for the bareness of the furnishing, the room was very much like gambling-dens he had seen in many a low quarter of a Continental town.

But the visitors to Tickey Tapp's precious establishment were different.

There were St. Jim's fellows there. Lumley-Lumley recognised Cutts of the Fifth, Knox and Sefton of the Sixth. They were "seeing life," and paying pretty handsomely for the sight.

There were others that Lumley-Lumley knew by sight; tradesmen from Wayland, also seeing life; shop-assistants and betting men; men and youths of all classes and stations.

Some of them wore moustaches that were evidently false, not caring to have their faces recognised in such company in such a place.

There were fifty or sixty people in the room altogether.

Tickey Tapp had his hand upon the wheel as the juniors came in, and was inviting the punters to play.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

He gave Gore a nod, and smiled to Lumley-Lumley. Evidently he was glad to see the millionaire's son coming back to the fold.

"Glad to see you again, Master Lumley-Lumley!" he said.

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

Stakes were being placed on the green cloth. The simplicity of the punters made the Outsider of St. Jim's smile compassionately. It did not seem to occur to most of them that Tickey Tapp had any control over the wheel, and could bring up any number he chose. Even before the roulette wheel started on its revolutions the players mostly put down their money. Gold and silver coins were scattered over the numbers, or in the spaces devoted to the colours.

Some, however, seemed to know the game better. They waited till Tickey Tapp had started the wheel, and sent the ball whizzing round the bowl, before they laid down their stakes.

They knew better than the others, or they suspected. But they did not suspect that Tickey Tapp could control the wheel up to the very last moment when the ball dropped into one of the sockets.

"Make your game," said Tickey Tapp. "Game made? Rein ne va plus!" he added in French, in the approved style of a Continental croupier, meaning that it was now too late to place fresh stakes, or to alter those already laid.

The ball was still whizzing round.

It slackened, and sloped down the rim of the bowl towards the still revolving wheel, and clicked as it came into contact with it, and rolled into one of the sockets.

The hole into which it fell was numbered five, in red.

"Five, red, impair, and manque!" said Tickey Tapp.

Lumley-Lumley closed one eye at Gore.

Number five had not been staked at all, but there were plenty of stakes on other numbers—all of which were immediately raked in by the croupiers.

Gore avoided Lumley-Lumley's eyes.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Hawk and the Pigeons.

"MAKE your game, gentlemen!"

A new round was commencing. Lumley-Lumley did not play; he stood looking on with his hands in his pockets. Gore changed his five-pound note, and began to stake.

A fat gentleman in evening-clothes, with a huge diamond blazing in his shirt-front, was staking heavily with gold.

The fat gentleman's face looked something like a prize-fighter's; and his diamond would have been worth a thousand pounds at least—if it had been worth anything.

He seemed to have plenty of money. He staked sovereigns on a dozen numbers at least, in some cases piling up the golden coins in little heaps.

On number five he placed six sovereigns in a pile. As the bank paid out thirty-five times the amount of a stake on a winning number, he stood to win two hundred and ten pounds if number five came up.

Lumley-Lumley watched with a cynical smile.

He knew that number five would come up, unless Tickey Tapp missed it by accident, as sometimes happens to the most skilful croupiers.

Lumley-Lumley had, as he had told Gore, seen the game worked from inside. And he knew at a glance that the fat gentleman was a "stool pigeon"—one of the "gang" whose business was to win with large stakes, to encourage other players.

For if the fat gentleman won over two hundred pounds on a single coup, and was paid up on the nail, how could the other players suspect that the bank was dishonest?

The unfortunate dupes did not know that it was all part of the scheme, and Tickey Tapp could afford to pay out the money to his partner, as every sovereign of it remained, of course, in the firm.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

The ball whizzed round again.

Click!

It dropped into number five.

"By Jove, five's repeated!" said Cutts of the Fifth, with quite the air of an old habitue of casinos.

Gore had lost his money—he had played on number thirty-six. He turned to Lumley-Lumley with a sneer on his face.

"What does that look like?" he said in a low voice. "You see that fat chap's won!"

"I guess so."

"Tickey Tapp has to pay him over two hundred quid—look at him handing over the banknotes," said Gore enviously.

"They won't go far!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that people who win big sums at roulette are either new-comers who are being encouraged to play, or else 'stool-pigeons' employed by the bank to encourage the fools. That money remains in the firm."

"Oh, I don't believe it!"

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if it's true," said Gore, "I can win by backing the same number."

"Ass! It won't come up then."

"I won't put my money down till after the ball's started."

"I guess it will come to the same thing."

"I'm going to try.'

Gore approached the table again.

He waited till the fat gentleman was playing. The heavy punter placed five sovereigns on number seventeen. Gore waited till Tickey Tapp had started the wheel and the ball, and then placed five shillings beside the five sovereigns.

Tickey Tapp had his eyes on the table. He gave Gore a quick, searching look. That look said as plainly as words could say: "So you tumble, do you?"

The next instant Tickey Tapp's face was quite expressionless again.

Gore watched to see whether he meddled with the wheel in any way. There was no evidence that he did. But when the ball dropped into a hole, it was into thirty-four, the next number to seventeen on the wheel.

The fat gentleman had lost his five sovereigns. Gore had lost his five shillings. If Lumley-Lumley was not mistaken, the bank had made more profit out of the five shillings than out of the five pounds.

Gore looked blank for a moment.

What had happened had borne out Lumley-Lumley's warning to him.

But a gambler is the last person in the world to take warning. He would rather play and lose than not play at all.

Gore went on playing.

In a quarter of an hour his five pounds had melted away, and he came over to where Lumley-Lumley was standing, watching the game.

"All gone?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

Gore nodded.

"Sorry, old man," said Lumley-Lumley. "But you've got no chance, you know."

Gore gritted his teeth.

"I'm just getting on to the game," he said, "and I don't believe a word about their cheating. Lend me a quid."

"What's the good?"

"Lend it to me!"

"Look here," said Lumley-Lumley, "there's a chap there—he's a grocer in Wayland, and can't be one of the gang. He's backing red with two pounds a time. Put five shillings a time on black, and you'll win—excepting when Tickey Tapp makes a mistake, and lets the ball drop into red."

"I'll do it if you lend me the money."

Lumley-Lumley handed Gore a sovereign. Gore changed it into silver, and took his companion's advice. He won on black, and won again; and in spite of himself he had to admit that Lumley-Lumley had given him good advice. Tickey Tapp was regarding him very queerly.

Gore determined to make a good thing out of his last chance while it lasted, and he placed all he still had on black for a "run of colour." The Wayland grocer was still playing on red, and he had placed a five-pound note there.

And it was red that came up!

The Wayland grocer—who had just sworn inwardly that if he lost that fiver he would clear out—won! And went on playing—and that fiver did not remain his very long. It departed, and drew other fivers after it! Gore had lost, and was cleared out!

The Shell fellow clenched his hands.

"Had enough?" asked Lumley-Lumley, as George Gore retreated, dispirited and wretched, from the table.

"Got any more money?"

"No!"

"You saw what a narrow shave it was!" muttered Gore.

"But I told you that——"

"Oh, rot! I don't believe a word of it! He can't control the wheel."

"If you still believe that, old man, I'm afraid you're a hopeless case, and it's no good my staying here," said Lumley-Lumley. "Anyway, you're stony now, so let's go."

"I'm going to speak to Cutts."

Gore approached Cutts and Knox and Sefton in turn. He was evidently trying to borrow money, and his face when he rejoined Lumley-Lumley showed that he had not succeeded.

"Sure you've got nothing left?" he asked desperately.

"Quite sure."

"You might have brought some more with you!"

"For you to chuck away! Thanks!"

"Oh, let's get out!" said Gore miserably.

They left the place. Gore hardly spoke a word as they tramped away over the moor and back to the school under the midnight sky. It was not till they were within the walls of St. Jim's that he revealed what was working in his mind.

"Look here, Lumley," he muttered, catching the Outsider's arm, "you've got some more money in your study——"

"Well?"

"Lend me some, and I'll go back——"

"You haven't learned your lesson yet, then?"

"I know I can win, with sufficient capital."

"After what you've seen with your own eyes?"

"Oh, rot! I don't believe a word of it! It's all chance—and luck must change."

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a bigger ass than I took you for, that's all," he said. "You've had seven pounds from me, and you'll never be able to pay a shilling of it back. I've tried to get you out of this, for old times' sake. If you can't be cured, I'm done. And I've got no more money to chuck away to those thieves!"

"I'll pay it all back——"

"When you win?"

"Ye-es!"

"When the cows come home!" said Lumley-Lumley contemptuously. "Rats!"

"You won't lend it to me?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then go and hang yourself!" snarled Gore. "I'll get it from somewhere else—somehow—and I'll break that bank yet!"

"Gore, what are you going to do?"

"Mind your own business."

Gore disappeared into the darkness. Lumley-Lumley followed him more slowly towards the School House. He climbed in at the box-room window, and went to the Fourth Form dormitory. But Gore had not gone to his dormitory. He had gone to his study—the study he shared with Vavasour.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Gore's Crime!

TOM MERRY moved in his bed, and awoke.

It was very dark in the dormitory; and in the darkness someone was standing beside his bed, and shaking him by the shoulder.

"Grooh!" murmured the captain of the Shell. "Wharrer marrer? 'Tain't rising-bell."

"Wake up!"

It was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's voice.

Tom Merry started up in bed. It was past midnight, and he was amazed. He was wide-awake enough now.

"That you, Lumley?"

"I guess so."

"What on earth are you doing out of bed at this time of night?"

"Trying to wake you up, I guess."

"Well, I'm awake now. What's the matter?"

"Matter enough." Lumley-Lumley struck a match. "Look at Gore's bed!"

Tom Merry blinked in the light of the match. George Gore's bed was empty; the black sheep of the Shell was absent.

"He's gone out, then," said Tom. "It's happened before, Lumley. How did you know?"

"Because I've been to Tickey Tapp's gambling-den with him."

Tom Merry started.

"You have?"

"I guess so. I told you I was going into the game with him, to teach him better. I've tried it."

"What are they doing there?" asked Tom, in a low voice, as the match went out, and the Shell dormitory was plunged in darkness again.

"Playing roulette."

"And Gore——"

"He played, too—and was swindled like the rest."

"Blessed if I know where he gets the money from!"

"I guess he got some from me; and he's sold things, and owes money all round. He was swindled under his very nose, but he wouldn't believe it. I came back to the school with him, but I guess I didn't go back to bed. I waited to hear if he came up to the dorm."

"And he didn't?"

"No. He's gone out again."

"Gone out again!" said Tom Merry. "Gone back to that place?"

"You bet!"

"But what's the good of his going back if he's got no money?"

"I'm afraid he's found some," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley quietly. "That's why I've come to you, Tom Merry."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Do you mean to say that—that he's taken money—money that isn't his?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

"I know he's gone back, and he wouldn't go without money—and he had no money of his own."

"Good heavens!"

"I want you to come down with Vavasour."

"Why Vavasour?"

"To see whether he misses anything from his study. You know he shares his study with Gore, and Gore would know where he keeps his valuables; and he's always got such a blessed lot of tin."

"I understand."

Tom Merry slipped out of bed, and stepped to Vavasour's bedside. The new boy of the Shell woke as Tom shook him.

"Hallo!" he said drowsily.

"Will you get up, Vavasour, and come down to our study? It's important," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't talk now; I don't want the fellows to hear."

"Right-ho!" said Vavasour quietly.

Tom Merry and Vavasour dressed quietly and quickly in the darkness. Lumley-Lumley waited for them. They left the dormitory silently, leaving the rest of the Shell asleep.

Vavasour followed his companions to the study without a word. He knew that something unusual must have happened, but he waited patiently to be enlightened.

"What is it?" he asked at last, as they stopped in the Shell passage.

"Come into your study."

"My study?" said Vavasour.

Tom Merry nodded, and opened the study door. The door was closed, and the blind carefully lowered, before Lumley-Lumley lighted the gas. Then Vavasour looked at his two companions in amazed inquiry.

"What on earth does this mean, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry's face was pale and excited. Lumley-Lumley's was hard and grim.

"Do you keep any money in the study?" Tom asked.

"Yes; in my desk."

"Much?" asked Tom.

"I have twenty pounds there."

"See if it's safe!"

"Oh!" said Vavasour. He went to his desk, and examined it, and uttered a sudden sharp exclamation. "Somebody's been here."

"Is the money there?"

"No!"

Vavasour pointed to a drawer of which the lock was broken. It had evidently been forced open with some tool.

"The drawer was always kept locked, and I have the key on my chain," he said. "The lock has been busted."

"I guess that settles it," said Lumley-Lumley.

"You know who did it?" asked Vavasour.

"I know that Gore came in here. I suppose he knew that you kept money there?"

Vavasour nodded.

"Yes; he knows that, of course. So does Skimpole. But—but has Gore taken it? He's got his faults; but I should never have believed him to be a thief."

"The next step to gambling is stealing," said Tom Merry quietly. "It's like drink, I suppose—takes hold of a chap and drives him out of his senses. Gore isn't in his right senses now; he's like a madman. He's done this—the fool!"

"The rascal, you mean!" said Vavasour.

"Rascal, too; but more fool than rascal!" said Tom. "He has been gambling to-night, and Lumley-Lumley has seen him swindled. The idiot has gone back for a last chance—not that he has any chance—and he's taken your money to play with. I don't think he means to steal it. He's going to put it back, when he comes back—if he wins——"

"But he won't win."

"No; and that makes him a thief, but he doesn't mean to be one. It's in your hands, Vavasour, to show him up, disgrace him, and get him kicked out of the school. And he hasn't treated you well!"

"He hasn't," said Vavasour grimly. "He showed me up once—you remember that."

"I haven't forgotten it. Only——"

"Only what?"

"You've the right and the power to ruin him," said Tom Merry. "Only—he's a St. Jim's chap, and he's more fool than rogue. I wouldn't be hard on him if I were you."

"I can't lose twenty pounds."

"I don't mean that. We shall have to stop him, and take the money back—and then I think we might keep mum."

"That's what I was thinking, I guess!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I was taking a hand in this game to save him, not to ruin him."

"I'll do as you think best," said Vavasour, after a pause. "The money isn't very much to me; though, of course, it would be a big sum to lose. But I don't want to be hard on Gore. I think he must be feeling pretty bad as it is—he must have been simply desperate before he came to this."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"Then you'll help us to save the poor idiot, instead of crushing him down?"

"Yes, I will."

"You won't be sorry for it, Vavasour. And we shall get the money back."

"I guess I've got that cut and dried," said Lumley-Lumley. "You fellows and the others will have to come. There's only one way of stopping this game."

"Informing the police?" asked Vavasour.

"That's one way. It would serve Tickey Tapp right enough. But it would mean utter ruin for the St. Jim's chaps mixed up in it. I dare say they deserve it, but we don't want to be the cause of it."

"Then what can we do?"

"Take the law into our own hands," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

Tom Merry looked at him quickly.

"You—you mean——"

"I mean, take a big gang of fellows we can rely on, and smash up the place!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

Tom and his chums had discussed the matter more than once, trying to think of some plan of campaign for rescuing Gore from his evil associates, and punishing the rascals who were leading him to his ruin.

But any scheme so daring as this had not occurred to their minds. Yet its very daring recommended it to Tom Merry.

"Good egg!" he said.

But Vavasour looked very startled.

"Smash up the place!" he repeated blankly.

Lumley-Lumley nodded coolly.

"I guess that's my idea. Look here! The place is run against the law. If the police knew they'd raid the old Manor House, and arrest every man jack found in the place. Well, we don't want to get the police in, so we'll raid it ourselves."

"Great Scott!"

"I was there," said Lumley-Lumley. "There were about fifty or sixty people. But they wouldn't show fight. At the first alarm, they'd be scared to death of being recog-

nised and had up before the magistrates. You must have heard of gaming-dens being raided by the police. At the first alarm there's a rush to escape. It's nobody's business to put up a fight for the croupiers. Everybody wants to get away without being recognised. But even if they showed fight, we could handle them."

"It's a go," said Tom Merry. "We'll wake up the fellows, and they'll come right enough. What Gore's done we'll keep dark among us three. We'll take twenty chaps and raid the show. If I'd thought of the idea myself I should have done it. It's a bit startling at first, but it's a good idea!"

"I'll go!" said Vavasour.

"I'll call the fellows," said Tom Merry. "I wish we could have Figgins & Co. with us; but we can't wake them up in the New House. But there are plenty of School House chaps game for it, I know that."

"Sooner the quicker," said Lumley-Lumley. "I'll get the Fourth, and you get the Shell fellows out. Every chap take a cricket-stump or something in case it's wanted."

"Right-ho!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Raid!

TICKEY TAPP looked at his watch.

The roulette-room was still crowded, though a number of the gamblers had gone, for the hour was growing very late.

The meetings of the secret gambling club were held at night, and at a late hour, for very good reasons—to escape discovery by the police, and to enable the foolish punters to come and go unseen.

When he had a good crowd there with money to lose, Tickey Tapp would keep the wheel spinning till close upon dawn.

Tickey Tapp knew that the game could not last long in any one place, and he wanted to make hay while the sun shone—to extract all that was to be extracted from his victims before the police fell upon him and closed his nefarious establishment.

It was close upon two o'clock now, and the crowd was thinning off, and Tickey Tapp was thinking of closing down the game.

George Gore had re-entered, and Tickey Tapp's eyes glimmered as he saw him come back. He knew that the foolish lad had been away for more money, and had come back to try his luck once more; not that "luck" had much to do with the game of roulette, but Gore firmly believed that it had.

"Make your game, gentlemen!" said Tickey Tapp blandly.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

It was a new-comer at the door. The punters were placing their stakes, and they did not take any notice of the knocking at the door. But as the door was opened by the man in charge there was a sudden disturbance.

Instead of the password being given there was the sound of a tussle, and the man in charge of the door came whirling through the heavy canvas hangings, dragging them down from the hooks with his weight.

Tickey Tapp started to his feet with an oath.

Pheep!

It was the shrill blast of a police-whistle.

Tickey Tapp turned pale.

"The police!" muttered Cutts of the Fifth.

"The police!" The words were repeated in various tones of fright among the players.

"The police!"

Cutts of the Fifth made a dash for the window.

Knox and Sefton of the Sixth followed him like lightning. They were out of the window, and running as if for their lives, almost before the blast of the police-whistle had died away.

Some of the players followed them through the window, and some fled by another door. Some stood transfixed, too scared and startled to act.

Among the latter was George Gore.

Tickey Tapp & Co. could not bolt. They had too much money on the table. And in another few moments they saw that it was unnecessary to run.

It was not the police.

The fellows who came crowding in at the doorway, pitching the doorkeeper out of the way, were certainly not policemen.

They were juniors of St. Jim's.

Tickey Tapp glared at them in angry amazement. He was relieved to find that his den had not been raided by the police. His sudden terror and dismay had changed to rage.

Gore swung round, and looked at the juniors blankly.

"Tom Merry!" he muttered. "You here!"

Tom Merry's hand was on Gore's shoulder the next moment.

"Where is Vavasour's money?" he said, in a low voice.

Gore blanched.

"Vavasour's money! What do you mean?" he muttered thickly.

"I mean that you have taken twenty pounds from Vavasour's desk, and you are going to give it back to him."

"Is that what you've come for, hang you?"

"That, and other things."

"Hang you!"

Vavasour and Lumley-Lumley took Gore by the arms. The other juniors had other work to do. Tom Merry left the bully of the Shell to Vavasour while he devoted his attention to Tickey Tapp & Co.

"My banknotes, please!" said Vavasour quietly. "Don't be afraid. We're going to keep it dark on conditions, Gore. But you've got to hand back the money."

Gore groped in his pockets, and without a word he handed the money back to its owner.

Vavasour slipped it into his pocket.

"Now get out, and leave me alone!" muttered Gore.

Vavasour shook his head.

"We've come here to shut up this place," he said.

"What! What!"

"And you're going to promise never to see any of that gang again, or else you're going to be exposed in public as a thief!"

Gore groaned.

"Let me go! Hands off!"

Lumley-Lumley tightened his grip on Gore's arm.

"I guess we're sticking to you," he said.

Tickey Tapp and his associates had drawn together. The players had gone, or were going; they had no wish to be mixed up in a row. Only the gang remained, among them the fat gentleman whose great winnings had excited Gore's envy earlier in the evening.

Tickey Tapp brandished a heavy fist at Tom Merry.

"'Ow dare you come here?" he roared.

Tom eyed him scornfully.

"We've come here to get a schoolfellow out of your clutches, you swindling thief!" he said contemptuously.

"Don't you call me names!" said Tickey Tapp furiously. "I'm an honest man, and I run a fair game!"

"Rats!"

"You've got him, anyway!" said Tickey Tapp. "Take 'im away! Clear out!"

"We're not finished here yet."

Tickey Tapp clenched his hands.

"You impudent young scoundrel! What do you want?"

"We're going to smash up the place, and to-morrow the police will know that a gambling club has been run here!" said Tom Merry calmly. "You had better clear out while you've got time, Mr. Tapp."

"I tell you——"

"Shove the table over!" shouted Blake.

"Hurrah!"

"Ovah with it, deah boys!"

Tickey Tapp simply danced with rage.

"You let my property alone!" he roared. "You—you young villains!"

"Shut up, or we'll shove you over, too!" said Blake.

"Hands off my property——"

"Now, then; all together!" said Kangaroo of the Shell, grasping the roulette-table.

Crash!

Tickey Tapp and Griggs and several more rascals rushed at the juniors to rescue their property. Tom Merry gave a shout—

"Collar them! Bump them! Wallop them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"

The excited juniors piled on the gang of gamblers. Tickey Tapp & Co. were simply overwhelmed by numbers. They were bumped on the floor, and rolled over, and sat upon by a dozen fellows, and pinned down helplessly.

In that position they had the pleasure, or otherwise, of watching the remorseless destruction of their property.

Tickey Tapp, who had paid twenty guineas—of somebody else's money—for that roulette machine, groaned as Monty Lowther's hammer descended upon it.

Crash, crash, crash, crash!

The wheel flew into pieces under Lowther's terrific drives.

Meanwhile, the other fellows were busy on the table and the chairs and everything else that belonged to the gambling club.

Smash, crash, smash! resounded on all sides. The gambling gang looked on in fury.

Tom Merry looked round the wrecked room with a grin.

"I fancy that's pretty complete," he said. "Now for those swindlers! They ought to be put through it a bit."

"Don't you dare to lay your 'ands on me!" roared Tickey Tapp. "I'll 'ave the law of yer!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; I think I can see you having the law of anybody," he said contemptuously. "The law would be very glad to get hold of you, Mr. Tapp. You know very well that if the police had found you here you would have been shoved into prison. There ought to be a law for giving rotters like you the cat! As there isn't, we'll give you the stump!"

"Roll 'em over and give 'em a dozen each!" said Blake.

"'Ands off!" shrieked Tickey Tapp.

"Lemme alone!" roared Mr. Griggs.

But the juniors did not heed them. Each of the gang, in turn, was rolled over and given a dozen cuts with a cricket-stump. They roared, and yelled and struggled, but that was all they could do.

"I guess we're finished here," drawled Lumley-Lumley. "Tickey Tapp, old man, you'd better vamoose the ranch. The police will be looking for you to-morrow. Gentlemen, chaps, and kids, it's time we got back to bed!"

And the raiders, quite satisfied with the results of their visits to the old Manor House, crowded out of the wrecked room.

* * * * * * *

Upon arriving back in the dormitory Tom Merry put out the light; then he sat on the edge of Gore's bed to speak to him before he turned in himself.

"What do you want?" muttered Gore sullenly.

"I want to tell you that if you stop this foolery—and you'll have to stop it now—you've got nothing to fear."

"Vavasour——"

"Vavasour has agreed not to say a word. Lumley-Lumley knows, and he's going to keep mum. If you run straight after this, not a word will be said about your taking Vavasour's money."

Gore drew a deep, deep breath.

"You haven't told the others?"

"Not a syllable!"

"I've been a fool," muttered Gore—"a confounded fool! I was an idiot to think I could beat Tickey Tapp at his own game! Now I've had time to think over it I can see that Lumley-Lumley was right—the game isn't run fairly. And——"

"Chuck it right out of your mind, Gore, old man. There are better things to think about than rotten gambling."

"You're right, Tom Merry. I've made up my mind about that. And—and if you fellows keep dark what I've done, I swear that I'll never make a fool of myself like that again!"

Tom Merry's hand gripped Gore's.

"Stick to that, old man, and you'll never be sorry for it," he said.

And Gore did stick to it; and certainly he never had any reason to be sorry that Tom Merry & Co. had saved him—though by somewhat rough-and-ready methods—from the road to ruin.

THE END.

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