SPLENDID SCHOOL STORIES!

The Penny Popular

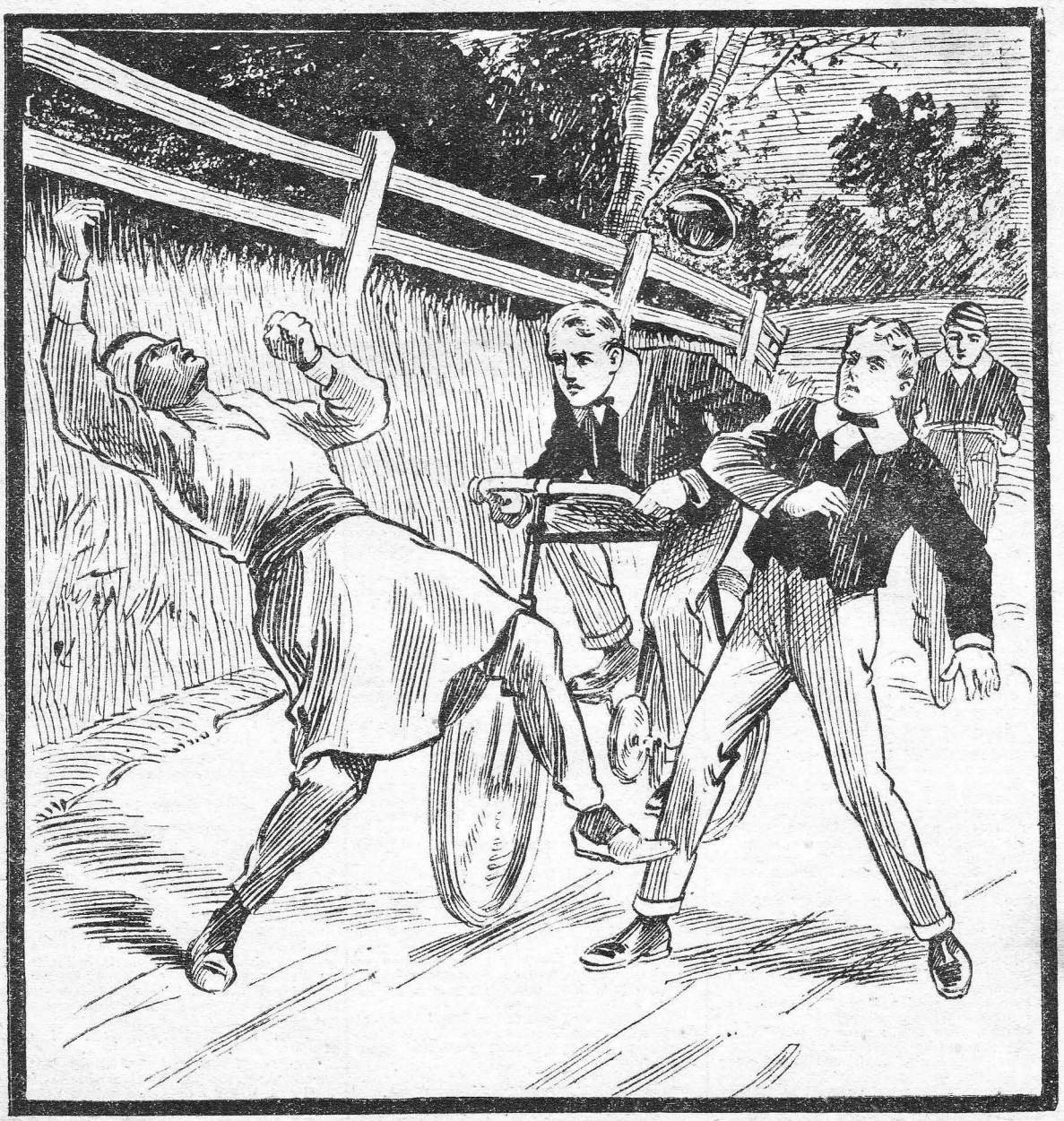
1½D

Week Ending
April 5th, 1919.

No. 11.
New Series.

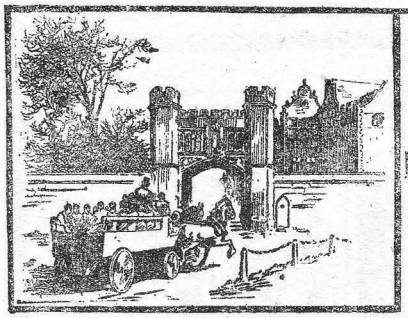
Three Complete Stories of—

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



JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME!

(An Exciting Scene in the Splendid Long, Complete School Tale in this Issue.)



A JOURNEY OF PERIL!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Story, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Off for the Holidays.

"HURRAH!"

"Off at last!"

"Hip-pip!"

Greyfriars had broken up for the Easter Vacation, and the brake containing Harry Wharton and his chums rolled down the lane towards the village, and from it proceeded a noise that showed how extremely exuberant the Remove were at breaking up for the holidays.

Every fellow had made up his mind to be jolly, and jolly they all were.

Some of them sang, and some of them played tin-whistles.

Some hurled cat-calls and chipping remarks at passers-by, and some hurled nuts or oranges.

Some of them simply cheered, again and again, exuberantly.

Harry Wharton & Co. had cause to be excited, for they were going down to Devonshire to stay with an uncle of Hazeldene's. Hazeldene's sister, Marjorie, was to be there, and they were looking forward to an enjoyable time.

The station came in sight at length, and the brake rolled up and halted.

"Train's in!" said Bob Cherry.

The juniors poured into the station.

Harry Wharton & Co. secured a carriage for themselves; and, of course, Billy Bunter planted himself in it.

Frank Nugent shook him by the shoulder.

"This isn't your train!" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

Bunter blinked at him, apparently not understanding.

"This is the London train!"

"Well, what about it?" grunted Bunter peevishly. "I can go by the London train if I like, can't I?"

"Ass! We've got to get to London to change for the Great Western; but you haven't. You're in the wrong train!" bawled Nugent.

"I'm going to change at London."

"Nonsense! You——"

"I think I ought to know best where I'm going to change," said Bunter.

"Oh, have your own way!" said Nugent resignedly. "You're in the wrong train, that's all. It's your own look-out."

"There's Hazeldene!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

He leaned out of the carriage door and waved to Hazeldene, who came running up.

"Luggage all right?" he asked.

"Yes. We've seen to that."

"Good!"

Hazeldene climbed into the carriage.

There were still crowds of Greyfriars fellows on the platform, waiting for the next train, which was leaving five minutes after the present one.

On breaking-up day at Greyfriars extra "locals" were run on the local railway.

Nugent minor came up to the carriage to bid his brother good-bye. Frank shook hands with him.

"Hope you'll have a good time!" said Dick Nugent. "Don't get into mischief."

Which advice, from a Second Form fag to a Removite, was received with a good-humoured grin.

Wun Lung, the little Chinee, also came to say good-bye.

"You havee goodee timee," he remarked. "Me hopee. What you tinkee?"

"Thanks, Wun Lung; same to you!"

"The samefulness is terrific!"

"I say, Wun Lung," exclaimed Billy Bunter, catching the Chinese junior by the sleeve as he stood at the carriage door. "I say, my postal-order didn't come before I left. I suppose it will be delivered after I'm gone. It's very annoying, because I'm rather short of money. Would you mind handing me a sovereign now, and having the postal-order when we get back next term?"

"No, savvy."

"You see, it's certain to be there, and I'll——"

"No, savvy."

"If you hand me a sovereign now——"

"No, savvy! Goodee-by-by!"

And Wun Lung walked away.

Bunter sank back in his seat and blinked at the grinning Removites.

"Blessed if they ought to allow a stupid heathen like that in a decent school!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! We're starting!"

The train gave a jerk. There was a slamming of doors along the train.

Frank Nugent shook Billy Bunter by the shoulder once more.

"You're in the wrong train, I tell you, Bunter! There's still time to jump out!"

"Rot! My box is in the guard's van."

"Well, I tell you——"

"It's all right."

The door slammed, and the engine shrieked, and the train moved out of the station.

Nugent shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

"It's too late now," he remarked.

Bunter did not seem to mind.

He made himself comfortable in his corner seat, and calmly appropriated a rug belonging to Bob Cherry to cover over his legs.

"I say, you fellows," he remarked presently, "did any of you think to order a lunch-basket to be put in the train for us?"

"No."

"Then what are we going to do?"

"Go without, I expect."

"I shall be awfully hungry."

"Go hon!"

"Luckily, I thought of bringing some sandwiches," said Bunter, groping in his pocket. "Yes, here they are. I had better have a snack now, I think. Mrs. Kebble makes jolly good sandwiches."

"Did Mrs. Kebble make those for you?" asked Nugent curiously; for the fat junior was far from being a favourite with the Greyfriars housekeeper.

"Well, she made them," said Bunter. "I suppose they were for me. I told her I should like some, and she didn't say anything. Then I saw her put this packet down by Wingate's bag, and I supposed they were for me."

"You young ass! They were for Wingate! He has a jolly long journey to make."

"Well, I dare say they can give Wingate some more," said Billy Bunter comfortably. "It's jolly lucky I thought of bringing them. I should have been awfully hungry before I got to London. I'm sorry you fellows haven't any."

"Oh, we'll have some of them!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked uneasily.

"Well, you see, there's only enough for one. I should like to share out with you chaps awfully, but I have my constitution to think of. I'm a delicate chap, and I can only keep going by having plenty of good nourishment. You wouldn't like to have me ill on your hands in London, would you?"

"We should jolly soon shift you off!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"We could send you to the Dogs' Home at Battersea," said Nugent. "Or I dare say there's a Home for Sick Porpoises somewhere."

"Oh, really——"

"Who says a chorus?" said Hazeldene.

"Jolly good idea!"

And the melodious strains of "Honey, Will You Lub Dis Coon?" rang out from the carriage windows, while the train rushed on through the spring landscape.

Billy Bunter didn't sing. He rather prided himself upon his voice; but he was too busy now.

He had said that he would have a snack. But when Bunter began eating it was difficult for him to leave off.

He ate steadily till the last sandwich had disappeared, and then he sighed—like Alexander sighing for fresh worlds to conquer.

Then he curled himself up in his corner, with his feet upon the only foot-warmer in the carriage, and Bob Cherry's rug round his knees, and a muffler of Wharton's over his shoulders, and went to sleep—and slept soundly, in spite of the rocking of the train and the vigorous choruses of the Removites, and did not wake again until the train stopped in a murky station, and Bob Cherry shook him by the shoulder.

Then Bunter started out of slumber, and blinked sleepily.

"Where are we?" he mumbled. "What are you waking me for? Where are we?"

"London!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Bunter Gets His Way.

"LONDON!"

Billy Bunter sat upright, and blinked round him.

The juniors were crowding out of the train upon a crowded platform.

There was a general crowding and jostling, and endless voices and rolling of trolleys.

Harry Wharton ran down the train to look after the baggage.

It had to be changed to another platform for the Western train. Billy Bunter was the last out of the carriage.

Bob Cherry looked up and down.

"When does the train start?" Nugent asked.

"Just an hour."

"Time for some lunch," said Nugent.

"Just what I was thinking."

"Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm awfully peckish, you know."

"With a dozen sandwiches inside you, and we've had nothing!" said Nugent, with a sniff.

"Oh, really, I offered to share them with you, you know!"

"Shut up, Ananias! Where's the buffet?"

"This way," said Mark Linley.

Billy Bunter walked behind with Hazeldene as the party went towards the buffet.

There was an ingratiating grin on his fat face.

"I say, Hazel, old chap——"

"Hallo!" said Hazeldene.

"Wharton wants to have me with him for the vac——"

"Rats!" said Hazeldene bluntly. "He doesn't!"

"I—I mean Nugent wants me——"

"More rats!"

"The fact is, Hazel, an invitation I had for the holidays has fallen through. A titled friend of mine——"

"Rubbish!"

"Oh, really——"

"Stop lying, then!" said Hazeldene unceremoniously. "What do you want? Speak plain English, and come to the point."

"Well, you see, I—I've lost my train now," stammered Bunter. "Some of the fellows might have told me I was in the wrong train, but——"

"Why, Nugent did tell you! I heard him!"

"Ye-e-es, of course; but—but the fact is I haven't told my people that the invitation from my titled friend has fallen through," said Bunter. "They're not expecting me home. I supposed, of course, that I should be going with Wharton. He kept it awfully

dark about his spending the vac. at your place."

"It isn't my place," said Hazeldene. "It's my uncle's place, on the Devon coast."

"Well, your uncle's place, then. The fact is, Hazeldene, I shouldn't mind coming with you for the vac."

Hezeldene looked at him grimly.

"Does it matter whether I mind?" he said sarcastically.

"Oh, really, Hazel——"

"Stop calling me Hazel, you soapy rotter! Look here, if Wharton cares to bring you you can come," said Hazeldene abruptly. "I don't care."

"Oh, all right! I'll settle it with Wharton."

Harry Wharton had consigned the baggage to the care of a porter, and he was coming to join the juniors at the buffet, when Billy Bunter intercepted him.

"Hadn't you better look for your train, Bunty?" asked Wharton, glancing at him.

"Ahem! I'm coming in your train."

"What do you mean?"

"It seems that there has been some mistake," explained Bunter. "Hazeldene says that he didn't know you wanted me to come to——"

"I don't want you to come."

"Oh, really, Wharton! What I mean is, Hazeldene has just been pressing me in the warmest way to come with him, if you fellows would like me to. He thinks you ought to be consulted about it, that's all."

"Bosh!"

"I suppose you're not going to be beastly about it!" said Bunter indignantly. "I don't particularly want to come, but Marjorie and Clara will be there, and you know jolly well that they'd be glad to see me!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed danger.

He dropped his hand upon the fat junior's shoulder, with a grasp that made the Owl of the Remove wriggle.

"Now, look here, Bunter, enough of that!" said Wharton. "Another word of that kind, and I'll ask Hazeldene as a special favour to kick you out of the party!"

"I—I—I——"

"I suppose you can come if you like, if you've got round Hazeldene. But mind, you're to be on your good behaviour. If you play any of your dirty tricks, you'll get brought to order in jolly quick time! Do you understand?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Do you understand?" exclaimed Harry sharply.

"Ye-e-es."

"That's enough, then."

Wharton strode away to the buffet.

Billy Bunter followed with an injured expression on his face.

He joined the juniors there, and began to order refreshments.

The juniors all had good appetites, but Billy Bunter, in spite of the sandwiches, exceeded any of them.

The fat junior, indeed, "wired into" the refreshments as if he had eaten nothing for a couple of days.

"Better get to the other platform now," said Harry presently, with a glance at the station clock.

"Right-ho!"

The juniors made their way to the other platform, where the Western express was already on the line, though it was not due to start for some time yet.

"We'll get a carriage to ourselves, if we can," said Wharton. "Here's a first-class, empty. Collar the seats."

The carriage was supposed to seat six, and there were seven of the juniors; but they preferred a little crowding to separating.

Besides, Nugent suggested that Billy Bunter could sit on the floor—a suggestion that brought a most indignant blink from the Owl of the Remove.

The bags and cloaks were put into the carriage, and then the juniors strolled up and down the platform to wait for the train to start.

A man who was smoking a big, black cigar on the platform watched them curiously, and he seemed so interested in at least one of the party that the juniors observed him at last.

"Blessed if I know what that chap's watching us for!" Bob Cherry remarked. "He doesn't look like a pickpocket."

"What chap?"

"That dark fellow yonder. He hasn't taken his eyes off us for ten minutes."

Wharton glanced towards the man.

He was a dark-skinned fellow with black eyes, and had a foreign look, increased by the curling black moustache and the big cigar. Wharton would have taken him for a Spaniard.

His bold, black eyes looked at the juniors, and did not fall before Wharton's questioning gaze.

"He seems to be staring at Hazeldene more than anybody else," said Mark Linley. "Do you know him, Hazel?"

Hazel shook his head.

"Never seen him before, that I know of."

"He's coming over here," said Bob Cherry. "He's going to speak to us."

The dark-skinned stranger crossed the platform towards the group of juniors.

The chums of Greyfriars stopped dead, looking at him as he came.

He was quite a stranger to them; yet curiously enough each of the lads felt a feeling of hostility, as if it were an enemy that approached.

Perhaps there was a gleam in the deep black eyes, a curl of the tight lips, that hinted that the stranger did not come with friendly intent.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Man From South America.

THE swarthy stranger stopped close to the group of juniors, and slightly raised his broad-brimmed hat.

His glinting black eyes rested upon Hazeldene.

The look in his eyes was not pleasant, but there was no question that his manner was politeness itself—polite with a certain Spanish exaggeration.

"Pray excuse me, senorito!" he exclaimed, addressing Hazeldene. "I think I have seen you before. I think I know your name."

He spoke in perfect English, but with a slight lisping accent.

If he were a Spaniard, he had certainly had ample acquaintance with English people.

Hazeldene stared at him.

"I have never seen you before," he said bluntly.

The foreigner smiled, showing a row of white teeth under his black moustache.

"Quite possible. I have never been in this country before, nino."

"Then how can you know me?"

"By your likeness to my old friend."

"Oh! You know my father, perhaps?"

"Perhaps? Your father has been in South America?"

"Oh, no! Never out of England, I believe—except to Bologne," said Hazeldene. "He has certainly never been to America."

"Ah! Perhaps my friend is your uncle, then, or some other relation," said the stranger, with an agreeable smile.

"Perhaps," said Hazeldene, with a grin; "but, excuse me, you are a stranger to me, and one doesn't take strangers on trust in London. I'm not exactly from the country, you know; I'm from a school where we have our eye-teeth cut!"

The stranger laughed, apparently not at all offended by Hazeldene's plain speaking.

The juniors all grinned; they had already made up their minds that this was a new variety of the old, old confidence-trick frequently worked off on strangers in the metropolis.

"Ah! I am not a London swindler, as you imagine," said the man, with perfect coolness. "My name is Ijurra. I will tell you your name."

"You might have seen it on my trunk," said Hazeldene. "But go ahead."

"Your name is Cunliffe."

Hazeldene started.

The juniors burst into a laugh. The stranger glanced round at them with a puzzled expression.

"What! Is that not correct?" he exclaimed.

"Hardly," said Bob Cherry.

"Then I am mistaken."

"Looks like it," grinned Nugent. "You'd better look a little farther for your Cunliffe. Let's get into the train, you chaps."

"But—but——" The dark-skinned man seized Hazeldene by the shoulder. "Listen to me, nino. If your name is not Cunliffe, you have relations of that name."

"Mind your own business!" said Hazeldene. "Let go my shoulder!"

"I tell you——"

"Let go, confound you!"

The man's grip tightened, and an extremely ugly look came into his dusky face.

The juniors did not need telling that his story of an "old friend" was not true.

There were no friendly feelings in the man's brest, that was certain.

"Listen to me——"

Hazeldene jerked himself away.

Wharton grasped the man's dusky wrist, and forced him to release his hold.

The foreigner glared at him savagely.

"You young puppy——"

"'Nuff said! You'd better clear off!" said Wharton crisply.

The man stood biting his lips, and evidently puzzled how to act, while the juniors crowded into the train.

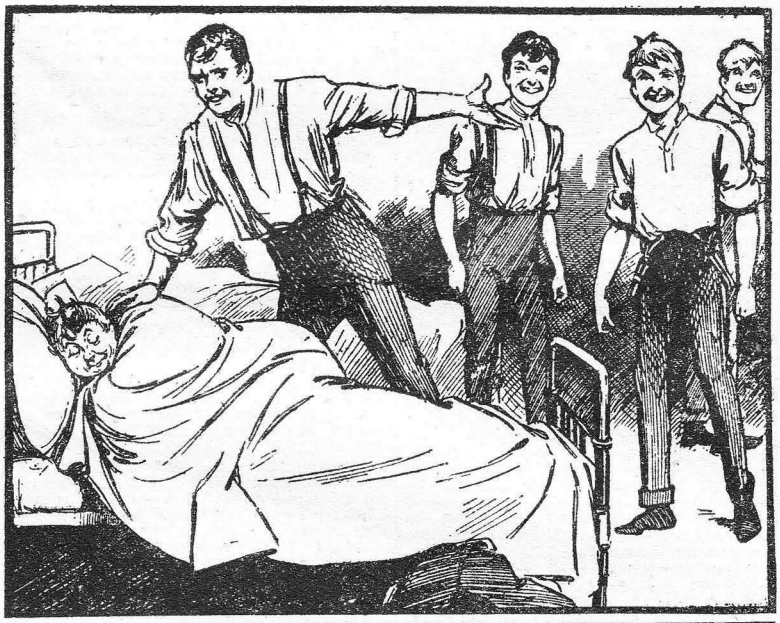
The doors were slamming now.

The dark-skinned man looked after the boys, and then went slowly down the platform. Mark Linley glanced from the window, and saw him get into the train farther along.

The train started.

"Blessed if I can quite make that chap out!" said Bob Cherry, with a perplexed look. "He didn't look like a common confidence-trick man. More like a giddy desperado masquerading in civilised clothes!"

Hazeldene sat silent, a slightly worried look



The Owl of the Greyfriars Remove was fast asleep, and did not seem inclined to waken. "Hand me that water-jug, Bob," said Wharton.

on his face. The other fellows glanced at him, wondering that the affair should trouble him at all.

"You're not letting it bother you, surely, Hazel!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I can't help wondering about it," said Hazeldene. "It was curious that that chap should know that name."

"But he didn't know your name."

"Cunliffe is my uncle's name."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

"I suppose I forgot to mention it to you," said Hazeldene. "I suppose I took it for granted you knew. The uncle of mine we're going to stay with is named Cunliffe."

"By George!"

"He's my mother's brother, you see. The curious thing is, that he's been a sea-captain, and spent years and years in South American waters. He's only lately returned to England—not more than six months ago."

"Then perhaps this chap really knew him in South America!" exclaimed Nugent.

"That's what I was thinking."

"He may be an old friend, as he said——"

"He didn't look like a friend."

"You're right there," said Harry thoughtfully. "If he wants to see your uncle, he doesn't want to do so from friendly motives, I should say. He looked too savage for that. Anyway, you were quite right to tell him nothing, and you can mention that matter to your uncle."

"Yes. He must know my uncle well," said Hazeldene musingly. "You see, he knew me by the likeness between us. I am very like my uncle—that's why he's taken to me, I dare say. He's taken a lot of notice of me since he's been home, and I spent a vac at his place in Devon. It's a curious place—as I told you when I asked you there. I don't know whether you'll like it."

"We'll manage to dig up some fun, anyway," said Bob Cherry.

"What I mean is, it's a lonely place," said Hazeldene.

"It's all right for an adventurous sort of holiday—there's plenty of cliff-climbing, boating, swimming, and so on; but not much society—no parties or dances, or anything of that sort, like we had at your place, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"My dear chap, you're describing just the holiday that will suit me," he said. "A week or two's boating and climbing and sailing on the Devon coast—I'd give all the parties and dances in the world for it."

"Then Black Rock will suit you," said Hazeldene, with a grin. "You can have all the rough-and-tumble amusements you like there; but it's a bit off the track of civilisation. My father thinks Uncle Hugh must be dotty to live in such a place—I suppose it's because he doesn't want to leave the sea, and he doesn't seem to mind solitude. He's fond of young people, though—and he jumped at the idea of my bringing some fellows down from Greyfriars for the vacation."

"Sounds like a jolly good sort," said Bob Cherry. "I like him in advance. But one thing's jolly certain—that Spanish-looking chap doesn't feel very friendly towards either you or your uncle, to judge by his looks, and I'm glad we've given him the slip."

"We haven't given him the slip, Bob," said Mark Linley quietly. "He's in this train."

"What?"

"I saw him get in."

"Great Scott!"

"He's following us," said Hazeldene.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Wharton thoughtfully. "He was waiting on the platform when we saw him. He was most likely waiting for this train."

"The likefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Singh. "But when we alightfully get out at Exeter it would be a wheezy idea to keep our honourable eyes open for the esteemed rotter."

"What-ho!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Plain English.

"EXETER!"

The Greyfriars juniors, somewhat stiff from sitting so long, alighted from the express.

They did not forget to look out for the foreigner when they alighted.

The express had made several stops en route, and at each of them they had looked from the window; but the dark-skinned man had not stepped out. He had evidently come as far as Exeter.

There the juniors were to change trains, and if the foreigner were really following them, as Hazeldene half suspected, he would have to do the same.

Hazeldene grasped Wharton's arm suddenly.

"Look! There he is!"

The swarthy man had stepped from the train.

He had no luggage in his hand, and did not seek for any. Evidently he was travelling just as he was.

Had he intended to leave London on that long journey without any personal belongings, or had he, indeed, followed the juniors on the spur of the moment?

He did not look at the juniors, however—or, if so, it was imperceptibly.

He strolled past, and entered into conversation with a porter near the exit from the platform.

Harry Wharton & Co. had their luggage trolleyed away for the train they were to change into, and followed it.

The train for Okehampton was already in, and the juniors crowded into a carriage in silence.

The South American hesitated a moment on the platform, but the doors were already closing, and he stepped into the carriage next to that occupied by the Greyfriars party.

Wharton had noticed his hesitation, and he had wondered for a moment what it meant.

But the explanation flashed quickly into his mind.

The man had not known what train the juniors were taking, and he had no ticket. He had entered the carriage without one.

Wharton felt certain of it. But before he could think of a plan for getting rid of the man the train had started into motion.

At length the train drew into Okehampton, and the juniors alighted. The South American stepped out of the train, too.

He lounged away up the platform, keeping a keen eye on the group of juniors.

"Better see the luggage out, Wharton?" suggested Nugent. "We change here, you know."

Wharton shook his head, but he hurried away towards the guard's van.

There was a great deal of luggage being turned out on the platform.

Harry Wharton was seen to talk to the guard for a couple of minutes, and hand him a couple of shillings, and then he came back and rejoined his chums.

"Luggage out?" asked Hazeldene.

"No. It's not coming out, either."

"I don't see——"

"It can go on," said Wharton. "I've told the guard I've changed my mind, and I want the luggage to go on in this one to the next station, and be put off there."

"But why?"

"It will be put out there," said Harry. "We sha'n't be there to claim it, but we can send for it afterwards. If we're to dodge the rascal yonder we can't carry it about with us. My idea is to come rushing out of the refreshment-room just in time to miss this train, and the rotter will think that it's the train we should have gone by—it will give him a wholly mistaken idea of the direction of the place we're going to. Then, when we've shaken him off the track, he'll take up the trail here again, and start off in a totally wrong direction."

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Bob Cherry admiringly. "What a head you've got! You ought to have been a detective or a giddy criminal!"

Wharton laughed.

"Thanks! Let's get into the buffet!"

"That's a jolly good idea!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm feeling quite ill——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I—I mean I'm quite well, Cherry!" said Bunter hurriedly. "I—only I'm hungry, you know!"

"Come on!" said Harry.

They went into the refreshment-room, and the South American lounged in after them. He began to eat sandwiches and to drink rum-and-water.

Billy Bunter was ordering right and left, and all the juniors were piling into scones and sandwiches and cake when the bell rang.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the train bell!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, loud enough for the South American to hear.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Bunter. "I haven't really begun yet! I say, wait a minute! The train never starts till a long time after the bell goes, you know!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Besides, we could catch the next train," said Bunter, who had been too busy thinking about his feeding to bestow any attention upon Wharton's plans, and who was therefore unconsciously aiding in them. "There's no great hurry."

"Oh, buck up!"

"I am bucking up, but I've hardly started." Bunter took a great gulp of coffee, and gasped.

"Ow! Oh! Yah! It's hot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The coffee was indeed hot, and Bunter had taken in a huge gulp in his hurry.

He pranced up and down, clasping his fat hands to his chest, and the juniors roared.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "The train's going!"

"My hat!"

"Come on, you kids!"

The juniors rushed from the buffet.

The train was already in motion, and gliding fast out of the station. The juniors ran towards it. A porter dashed in the way.

"Stand back, you young donkeys!"

"But——"

"Stand back!"

The Greyfriars juniors halted. The train dashed away, and disappeared into the night.

"Gone!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh dear!"

"Rotten!"

"Now we're stranded!"

"Well, let's go back and finish the feed," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, we shall have time for a really good feed now, and we can catch another train."

The juniors returned to the buffet.

The South American had followed them out; he paused, with a mocking smile, in their path as they turned back.

"You have lost your train, senoritos," he remarked.

"That is our business!" said Harry curtly.

The man's eyes gleamed.

"True. But I also—I have lost mine. It seems that we are fated to keep one another company," said the South American, laughing. And he went back to his sandwiches and rum-and-water.

The juniors resumed the interrupted feed.

Billy Bunter did not give the train a single thought; he did not even know that it was not really their train which had been lost.

The train the juniors had really intended to proceed by did not start for a quarter of an hour yet.

The question was, could they get rid of the South American in time to take it? It did not seem likely.

"I'll go and send the wire to Captain Cunliffe if you fellows can keep that brute off my track," said Hazeldene. "There's a telegraph-office at this station, I believe. But if he managed to find the address of the telegram——"

"He sha'n't follow you."

"You will keep him back——"

"Yes. Or, on second thoughts, let him follow you," said Wharton, with a grin. "You're the chap he wants to keep in sight. If we separated, you're the chap he would follow. Look here! You and Bob take a stroll into the town, and while you're gone I'll send the wire."

Hazeldene chuckled.

"Good! He's bound to follow me, and that'll give you a free field."

"Exactly!"

"I'll write out the wire, then."

"Go ahead!"

Hazeldene scribbled the address and the message upon a sheet of paper from his pocket-book, and Wharton crumpled it in his hand.

It was done without the South American observing it, Hazeldene carefully keeping his back to the man while he was writing.

Then Hazeldene and Bob Cherry strolled towards the door.

The South American started and looked round. He was evidently perplexed for a moment.

So far, the juniors had not thought of separating, and the South American had observed that they were one party going to one destination.

Now that Hazeldene left the others, the man was puzzled how to act.

He looked at Hazeldene and Cherry, and glanced back at the group of juniors still eating cake and drinking coffee at the counter.

Then he knitted his brows, and followed the two juniors out of the buffet.

Wharton smiled.

"He's caught!"

Hazeldene and Bob Cherry left the station, and the South American followed them out.

He was evidently determined not to lose sight of Hazeldene, at least.

Wharton watched them clear of the place, and then he despatched the telegram.

It occupied but a few minutes, and then he rejoined his chums.

Hazeldene had not yet returned.

"All right?" asked Mark Linley.

"Right as rain!"

It was seven or eight minutes more before Hazeldene came back.

He brought a bag of tarts in his hand, as a reason for having left the station at all. Wharton gave him a quick nod.

"All serene!" he said.

The South American sat down at a little table near the juniors, and lighted a fresh cigar. He was evidently tireless.

"And now what's the next move?" said Bob Cherry.

Wharton was looking over a time-table. He did not reply for some moments.

"There's a local train leaves here in ten minutes for a place called Fernwood," he said. "I think we'll take that, and we'll stay the night in the place."

"Jolly good!"

"Captain Cunliffe will not be expecting us now, and we can take our time. We'll get to bed early at Fernwood, and start early in the morning again, and take the whole day, if necessary, to shake off that rotter."

"Good enough!"

And when the local train started the juniors were seated in it, and the South American was smoking a cigar in the next carriage.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Early Risers!

"FERNWOOD!"

The train had been a slow country local, with many stops.

It was late in the evening when the juniors alighted at a sleepy country village, in the midst of hills and deep woods.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The South American stepped out of the next carriage.

He showed no sign of fatigue; but the Greyfriars juniors were getting tired. They had had a long day.

Billy Bunter, as usual, was complaining.

He was tired, and he was hungry again, and he did not fail to make his sufferings known.

"I suppose there's an inn here?" he grumbled. "Nice state of things if it turns out that there's no inn in the place."

"We could sleep under a haystack," said Linley.

Bunter grinned.

"I'm jolly well not going to sleep under a haystack, Mark Linley. I dare say it would be all right for you. Ow!"

Linley coloured, and turned away, and Bob Cherry compressed his finger and thumb upon Billy Bunter's ear.

The fat junior squealed.

"Ow! Leggo!"

Bob compressed his grip till Bunter writhed, and then let go, without a word of explanation. But Bunter knew what it was for.

Wharton was inquiring of the porter who collected the tickets for an inn.

He was told that the Fernwood Arms was just outside the station, and the juniors repaired there at once.

The South American followed them, but he was looking very puzzled now.

Perhaps it was dawning upon his mind that the juniors had relinquished their real journey, and were deliberately leading him upon a wild-goose chase.

The landlord of the Fernwood Arms, a jolly-looking, ruddy-faced man, with a broad Devon accent, greeted the juniors hospitably.

Custom was not overwhelming in a quiet little place like Fernwood, and the landlord was glad enough to see seven fellows asking for accommodation, especially as they looked as if they could pay well for it.

"Four beds will do," said Wharton; "and if you can shove them all in one room, so much the better. Supper first, anyway."

And the juniors sat down to a substantial supper, for which Billy Bunter was quite prepared, in spite of the supplies he had lately laid in.

"I say, you fellows, I've heard that Devonshire cream is awfully good," he remarked. "You may as well order some. Better order a lot while you're about it."

And Bunter made an inroad upon the cream which made even those who knew him well open their eyes.

The cream was certainly excellent; but Bunter consumed so much that he was in danger of a bilious attack, and he was looking a little green when he rose from the table.

The juniors went to bed.

They saw the South American having his supper in the inn before they went up.

He had put up at the same place.

Wharton closed the door when they were in their room.

The landlord had had the beds put in one room, as Wharton wished.

With the South American so near, the lads naturally did not wish to separate.

"That chap is staying here," he remarked. "I've got an idea. Suppose we don't sleep to-night, but get out of the window and buzz off, and leave that rotter still sleeping. We could leave money for the landlord here."

"Good idea!" said Bob Cherry, but not very heartily.

As a matter of fact, the juniors were fagged out, and there was no way of leaving the village but by walking.

Wharton's idea was a good one, but his comrades were not in a state to carry it out.

Billy Bunter blinked at Harry in silence for some moments as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

Then he burst out:

"You—you utter ass! I'm jolly well going to bed!"

"Look here, Bunter——"

"I'm going to bed; and I'm not going to get up early, either. I'm going to have a good night's rest. I never came across such a selfish bounder in all my life. You seem to have no consideration whatever for a chap with a delicate constitution."

"Oh, shut up!" said Wharton roughly. "Get into bed! I suppose it would be a little too thick, you chaps, under the circumstances. We're tired."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm fagged out," said Hazeldene. "I'm not so hard as you are, you know."

"And I must admit that I could do with a snooze," said Nugent.

"All right. We'll turn in; but we shall be up at daybreak."

"Look here, Wharton——" began Bunter.

"Bunter can stay in bed if he likes; but if he does he'll be left behind," said Harry, kicking his boots off.

"I'm jolly well not going to be left behind! Owing to that disappointment about my postal-order, I haven't any money. I owe you for my ticket from London, and I shall have to pay my way if you leave me behind in this place."

"Then you'd better be up at daybreak, that's all."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Go to sleep!"

Bunter grunted, and turned in.

The prospect of having to be up at daybreak was almost enough to keep him awake. But he dropped into slumber soon, and snored loudly.

Bob Cherry yelled at him from his bed to keep quiet, but Bunter did not hear.

He only turned over and grunted when a pillow was hurled at him, and then Bob gave it up, stuffing the sheets round his ears to keep out the steady reverberation.

Wharton had not asked to be called in the morning, in case the South American should learn at what hour he intended to rise.

Harry could generally depend upon himself to awaken.

He slept soundly, but his eyes opened when the first gleam of dawn was stealing in at the little diamond-paned window.

Wharton sat up in bed.

He was still sleepy, but he never yielded to any feeling of that sort when it was necessary to get up. There was nothing soft about him.

He pushed the bedclothes back and stepped out quietly.

Then he shook his comrades one after another, awakening them. They all rose quietly, and commenced dressing, with the exception of Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Greyfriars Remove was fast asleep, and did not seem inclined to awaken, though Wharton shook him vigorously.

He grunted at last, but did not open his eyes. Wharton compressed his lips; he felt certain that the fat junior was shamming.

"Hand me that water-jug, Bob," he said at last.

Billy Bunter sat bolt upright with surprising suddenness.

"Oh, I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, you're awake, are you, you worm?"

"I—I've just woke up. What are you fellows getting up for? It's not light yet."

"It's dawn."

"I can't see any light."

"Put your barnacles on, then," said Hazeldene, "and shut up. I believe that Spanish chap is in the next room."

"But I say——"

"Hold your tongue, and get up!" said Harry, in a tone that Bunter knew it was useless to argue with; and the fat junior turned discontentedly out of bed.

"Blessed if I like this idea of a holiday!" he grumbled. "I shall be jolly sorry soon that I accepted your invitation, Hazeldene!"

"Rats!" said Hazeldene.

"I suppose you think that's a polite way to treat a guest?" said Bunter.

"Yes—a guest of your sort."

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Don't talk, Billy," said Harry, "and don't make a row."

"My boots haven't been cleaned."

"I didn't put them out last night, any of them. We wanted them this morning before we could have had them, you see."

"You may have wanted them!" grunted Bunter. "I didn't! I don't see how I can travel to-day with dirty boots."

"You've travelled often enough with a dirty face," said Bob Cherry. "Don't talk rot! Get your boots on, and shut up!"

Wharton was the first ready. He stepped out into the passage.

A large pair of tan leather boots stood outside the door of the next room, and Harry Wharton recognised them as belonging to the South American.

He smiled quietly; it was evident that the man was not yet up.

He had not calculated upon the move the juniors were making, and in that he had made the mistake of underrating his opponents because they were mere lads.

Wharton quietly picked up the boots and carried them into his room.

"What on earth have you got there?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Boots!"

"My hat! That chap's boots?"

"Exactly! A capture from the enemy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say, Wharton," said Bunter, looking round with a dab of soap on his nose, that dab constituting his morning's wash—"I say, you know, I don't approve of stealing a chap's boots, even if he's no good. I——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Harry sharply.

"That's all very well, but I don't think you ought to be dishonest while you're with me," said Bunter, who had a way of pretending to misunderstand people, and then posing as a rigid moralist on the strength of the misunderstanding. "I've got to consider my good name. Stealing a chap's boots——"

Wharton's fist closed for a moment, and Bunter backed away in alarm.

"Here, hold on!" he said shrilly. "I suppose you don't want me to wake the chap in the next room? I——"

Wharton unclenched his fist. After all, Bunter was not worth licking. He quietly opened the window. He had noticed a water-butt outside the previous night. The juniors chuckled softly as Wharton dropped the boots into the butt.

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Ripping!"

"If he comes after us, he'll have to come in his socks!" grinned Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry closed the window. The slight splash in the water-butt had been unnoticeable. The juniors finished dressing, and quitted the room, taking their bags with them. The house was very silent, and the landing creaked as they came out of the bed-room.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
An Early Start.

MARK LINLEY paused, and signed to Wharton to stop.

The others were stealing quietly down the stairs.

"What is it?" whispered Wharton. He knew that the Lancashire lad would not waste time, and he had stopped at once.

Mark pointed to the South American's door.

"That's his room, isn't it?"

"That's it."

"There may be some noise before we get out," whispered Mark. "What price fastening his door on the outside? I've some cord, and a piece tied across from his door-handle to the banisters would make him a prisoner."

Wharton suppressed a chuckle.

"Good egg! You're a giddy genius!"

Linley whipped a length of cord from his pocket, and silently knotted the end round the handle of the South American's door.

He stretched it taut across the landing, and knotted the other end to the thick oaken banisters.

There was no likelihood of anyone stirring for at least an hour, upstairs.

And if the shadower tried to leave his room, it would certainly take him some time to attract attention to his predicament.

From inside he could not possibly open the door.

It opened inwards, and the taut cord would not give an inch.

The juniors grinned as they hurried downstairs. They would have time to get clear now, even if the South American woke.

Wharton unbarred the door and opened it.

The sun was glimmering on the woods now, in a greyish light, and a fresh breath of morning came to the juniors as they looked out into the shadows.

An early ostler was stirring, and he looked curiously at the juniors.

He walked across their path as they left the house.

The thought had evidently come into his mind that they were leaving thus early to avoid paying their bill.

Strong suspicion was written upon his face.

"We are going away early," said Wharton quickly. "I suppose you know what the charge will be for our accommodation. I don't want to waken the landlord."

The ostler looked at him still suspiciously.

"Don't you want any breakfast?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bunter; "I'm hungry. I——"

"Shut up, Bunter! No, we don't want any breakfast; we're in a hurry to get off."

"Oh, really, Wharton—— Oh!"

Billy Bunter subsided as Bob Cherry pinched his arm. The ostler looked at Harry in an extremely doubtful way.

"I'd better call the landlord," he said.

"We are going now," said Wharton. "We haven't a second to spare."

"You be in a great hurry, young master."

"That's our business," said Harry crisply. "Here's the money; you can take it or not. You can take it straight to your master if you like, but we're not going to wait. I asked the charge last night; it is one pound. Here's a shilling for yourself."

The ostler took the money, his doubts appearing to vanish at the sight of gold and silver. He bit the coins to ascertain that they were good.

"That be all right," he said. "I——"

"Good-morning!"

The juniors strode on. The ostler stared after them for a minute or two, and then went into the house.

He had gone to acquaint the landlord with the sudden departure of his guests.

Harry knew that, and he quickened his pace.

The juniors went down a lane that led directly away from the railway-station.

An early labourer stopped to stare at them.

The sun was rising higher now, and dawn was stealing over the fields.

There was no sign of pursuit so far.

They were feeling exhilarated.

There is something very exhilarating and refreshing in the keen air of early morning; but, besides that, the juniors had the exultant sense of having "done" the enemy—of having thrown their obstinate shadower off the track.

"We've done him brown," Bob Cherry remarked, with great satisfaction. "When he gets out, he won't know in what direction to look for us. We've only to get a lift in some farmer's cart to a town, and take the railway again, and then we're all right."

"The allrightfulness will be terrific."

"I—I say, you fellows, there's a farmhouse!"

It was high morning now.

A bright sun peeped over the woods, and lighted the wide, green fields and the deep lanes and the verdant slopes of the hills.

A farmhouse, standing in the midst of great green trees, burst upon the view of the juniors as they came round a bend in the lane they were following.

A gate gave admittance to a rough cart-track leading up to the house.

All the juniors were hungry enough, and all were as ready for breakfast as Billy Bunter was.

Wharton stopped at the gate.

"We'll try and get some grub here," he remarked.

"Good enough!"

A buxom dame came to the farmhouse door as the juniors presented themselves in the porch.

She smilingly agreed to provide them with a substantial breakfast at sixpence a head; and when the juniors saw the breakfast, even Bunter had to acknowledge that they were receiving their money's worth.

The fare was plain, but plentiful—bread-and-butter and cheese in any quantity—and such bread, such butter, and such cheese!

They had milk to drink, and only Bunter was disposed to grumble at not having the usual tea.

The juniors sat at their breakfast in the porch, and rose from it a quarter of an hour later feeling much refreshed.

Bunter was inclined to go to sleep on his seat, but Bob Cherry kindly shook him into broad wakefulness.

"Time to get on!" he remarked.

"Ow!" grunted Bunter. "Don't s-s-shake me, you ass. If you make my glasses fall off——"

"Get a move on!"

"They'll very likely get broken, and then you'll have to p-p-pay for them, so I tell you!"

"This way!" said Bob, jerking the fat junior out.

Wharton settled with the good dame, and the juniors raised their caps, and set off towards the lane they had left.

They entered it, and Harry climbed a high tree near the gate, to look back the way they had come from Fernwood, to ascertain whether, by any chance, the South American was in pursuit.

His chums watched him from below.

They saw him reach a high branch, and shade his eyes with his hand and stare back, and then he came shooting down the tree so abruptly that for a moment they thought he would fall.

He jumped to the ground, panting.

"Quick!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"Quick!"

There was no time for words.

Wharton dashed away up the lane, and the others followed at top speed.

Harry sprang through a gap in a hedge, and headed for a large hayrick a little way back from the lane, ran round it, and threw himself into the grass and loose hay on the other side.

"Just in time!" he gasped.

"Was it—he?"

"Yes."

"The South American?"

"Yes; coming up the lane! He's followed us, after all!"

"My hat!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Left Behind.

"WE'D better run for it!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, rather!"

The juniors rose to their feet, and, breaking into a run, raced over fields and meadows, and tore along quiet, country lanes.

Billy Bunter proved a great handicap, but Bob Cherry took charge of his left hand, whilst Nugent collared his right. Between them they forced the fat junior along at a great pace.

Bunter grunted and groaned, but his groans had little effect on the chums.

They were determined to make their escape from the South American at all costs, and they had scant sympathy for the Owl of the Remove at that moment.

At length, when they had covered some two or three miles, and outpaced the South American, Harry Wharton pulled up.

"I think we might take things a bit easy now," he said, breathing hard.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter dismally. "I'm dying. I'm sure——"

"Shut up, Billy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"But really——"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton. "We can't afford to hang about. We must keep up a fairly good pace if we're to dodge that rotter!"

For two hours at least the chums kept up a steady pace, without catching sight of the South American.

At noon they stopped at a farmhouse, where they obtained dinner.

Nothing having been seen of the South American, there was no reason why they should not head for Black Rock, the house of Captain Cunliffe, on the western coast.

They had wandered a great deal out of their way, but Wharton had a time-table in his pocket, and inquiry of the farmer at the house elicited information as to where they were now.

After a talk with the farmer, Harry rejoined his chums, who were finishing a plentiful repast.

"We can get a lift in the farmer's cart as far as a town called Moorback," said Harry. "There we can get a train for the nearest point to Black Rock. We shall arrive some time this afternoon, I expect."

"Good enough," said Hazeldene.

And the meal being over, the juniors clambered into the farmer's waggon, and were driven off to the westward.

They kept a keen look-out for any sign of the South American, but he was not to be seen. The town was reached, and the juniors found they had a quarter of an hour to wait at the station.

"Shall we have a stroll round the town?" asked Hazeldene.

Wharton shook his head.

"Better keep in here. That rotter may be on the prowl."

"I think we've quite dropped him."

"Yes; but one can't be too careful. He's a dangerous villain!"

"Well, you're right. We'll lie low."

"There's no need to go out," said Billy Bunter. "There's a buffet here, you know."

"Oh, go to the buffet, and be quiet!" said Nugent.

"Will you lend me a bob? I've left all my ready cash at Greyfriars by an oversight——"

"Cheese it!"

Nugent handed over the shilling, and the fat junior walked away to the buffet. He stood there negotiating buns and ginger-beer with a reckless disregard for his digestion.

The juniors, having taken their tickets, walked up and down the platform.

The train came down the line.

Wharton breathed a deep breath of relief. Though he thought, like the others, that the shadower was shaken off, he had a lingering doubt, and he would feel much easier in his mind when he was speeding away behind a locomotive.

The train stopped, and the juniors were about to start towards it, when Mark Linley uttered a sudden exclamation

"Stop! Cover, quick!"

"What the——"

"Cover!"

Mark pushed his companions back into the waiting-room. They obeyed him unquestioningly. The Lancashire lad's face was greatly excited.

"What on earth is it?" muttered Hazeldene.

"The South American!"

"Where?"

"In the train."

"My only hat!"

The juniors peered out of the doorway. It was true—the Lancashire lad's keen eyes had not deceived him.

The South American was in the act of stepping from the train almost opposite the door of the little waiting-room.

The man glanced carelessly up and down the platform, but evidently with no expectation of seeing the juniors there.

It was the unexpected thing; but Wharton easily understood it.

Ijurra had lost their track, and sought for it in vain, and he had taken the train in the direction he knew the juniors were travelling in the hope of picking up the trail again.

Fortune had led him to alight at the very station where they were waiting for the train—the train he had come by.

"Keep in cover," whispered Harry. "He hasn't seen us—he doesn't suspect we're here. He'll go out of the station in a minute."

"We shall lose this train."

"We can wait for the next. If he misses us now, all's serene."

"Good!"

"That shows that he's still sticking to the trail, though," said Hazeldene, with a troubled look. "He must have some fearful grudge against my uncle to be so keen to get on his track."

"All the more reason why we should baffle the rotter."

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry, in dismay. "Bunter!"

"What?"

"Look!"

Billy Bunter was coming along the platform, blinking round in search of his companions. He had not left the buffet because the train was in, but because he had come to the end of the shilling.

"I say, you fellows," he called out, "where are you? Where——"

Wharton suppressed an exclamation. Bunter had betrayed them.

The keen, black eyes of the South American were on the fat junior at once.

He stopped on his way to the station exit, and turned towards Bunter.

His eyes were scintillating.

"Ah, that is one of them!"

The juniors heard him mutter the words.

Ijurra strode towards the Owl of the Remove, and grasped him by the shoulder.

Bunter started and blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Nino!"

"Ow! Ow! It's—it's that murderous beast!" stuttered Billy Bunter. "Ow! Help! Murder!"

"Boy——"

"Murder!" yelled Bunter. "Help! Fire!"

"Fool! Be quiet! I shall not hurt you——"

"Leggo! Help! Murder!"

"Where are the others?" said the South American, releasing the fat junior, for Bunter outcries were attracting attention.

"Lemme alone! Get away! Help!"

"You fat fool——"

"I—I say, you fellows, where are you? I say!"

"I know they are here," said the South American, shrugging his shoulders, and taking out a fresh cigar from his case. "That is enough."

Concealment, of course, was useless now. The Greyfriars juniors came out of the waiting-room. The South American looked at them with gleaming eyes.

"I have found you!"

"Yes, you cur!" said Wharton angrily. "And I warned you what would happen if you followed us again! Collar him!"

"Stand back! I——"

"Collar the cad!"

The juniors rushed at him.

The South American, as if by force of habit, thrust his hand into his coat for his knife, but no knife was there.

He sprang back, dodging the rush of the juniors, and backed away.

The train was starting.

"Get in!" muttered Harry. "Get in quick!"

"But——"

"Quick—do as I tell you!"

"Oh, all right!"

Bob Cherry dragged Bunter into the train, which was already beginning to move.

The others scrambled in pell-mell.

A porter shouted and rushed up.

Harry dashed after his comrades, and just entered the train.

The South American rushed at the train, too, though it was now gathering speed, but he was too late.

The porter grasped him and pulled him back, and they fell to the platform together. The train whirled out of the station, the shadower was left behind.

Wharton had fallen in the bottom of the carriage amongst the legs of his comrades. He gathered himself up, gasping for breath.

"Did he get in?"

"No," grinned Bob Cherry, who was looking from the window. "He's left behind."

"Jolly good!"

"Hurrah!"

The station disappeared in the distance.

Bunter grunted and sorted himself out from among the boots of the Greyfriars juniors.

He was breathless and indignant, but no one minded him.

They had beaten their shadower, and that was all that mattered to them at that moment.

"Thank goodness we've shaken that rotter off!" said Harry Wharton, with a sigh of relief. "But—but I wonder what the dickens he followed us for? It fairly beats me!"

"And me, too," agreed Bob Cherry. "One thing, I shall be jolly glad to get to Black Rock!"

"So shall I!" chorused the juniors.

"We may meet the rotter again," said Harry Wharton pessimistically. "He's a cute villain, you know, and we've got a long way to go yet. There's still a chance he may manage to follow us somehow."

"Well, let's hope we've beaten him for good this time," said Nugent; and the others chimed in with:

"Hear, hear!"

For once in a way, the juniors' hopes were fulfilled.

At length they reached the station for Black Rock.

They alighted from the train, and, tired and footsore, they started to tramp towards the house of Hazeldene's uncle.

All the while they kept their eyes open for sight of Ijurra, the South American, but they saw no sign of him.

They had succeeded in shaking him off at last.

Suddenly Hazeldene pointed ahead. It was getting dark, but the juniors were able to see the great cliff which loomed out in the dusk.

"That's the Black Rock," he said.

"And your uncle's house——" began Wharton.

"At the foot of the cliff," said Hazeldene. "Here's the path which leads down to it. Now we sha'n't be long!"

At last the juniors came to the end of the path. At the same moment a light twinkled through dim trees in the distance.

"Home!" said Hazeldene.

The long journey was over. The juniors followed Hazeldene towards the house, and for once they all agreed cordially with Billy Bunter, that supper, and a jolly long sleep, would be exactly the proper "caper."

THE END.

(Next Friday's Grand Long, Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled: "THE JUNIOR'S ENEMY!" by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of THE PENNY POPULAR in advance.)

A Journey of Peril!

(Concluded from page 16.)

But ten yards still separated them from Tom Merry, when the bounding form of the pursuer leaped upon the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry felt him coming, and swung desperately round and faced him. There was a glimmer of steel in the gloom.

"Stand aside, Tom!"

It was Lowther's voice.

Tom Merry made a sideways spring, and the blow that was descending upon him missed him.

Then there was a terrific crash.

Lowther had ridden right at the ruffian, and his front wheel struck the Hindu and hurled him to the earth.

The bicycle buckled up in the collision, and Monty Lowther went sprawling into the road.

He was up in a second, and Manners was off his machine, rushing forward. The Hindu lay in the road.

His right leg was twisted under him, and his head lay like a log on the ground. The back of his head had struck the earth with stunning force in his fall, and he was insensible.

"Stunned!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry panted for breath.

"You came just in time!" he gasped. "You've saved my life!"

"Jolly lucky we came to meet you," said Monty Lowther. "Let's make sure of this scoundrel while we can. Tie the brute up."

When Hurree Das came to himself he was a prisoner, and he wriggled helplessly in the tight bonds upon his limbs.

His black eyes rolled and gleamed. Tom Merry looked down upon him grimly.

"You hound!" he said. "You're laid by the heels now, and you won't get away in a hurry! One of you chaps scorch to the police-station, and get the bobbies here. I'll stay and look after him. One of you fetch the general."

"The general's coming!" grinned Manners. "He was in a way when he found you were out alone and hadn't come in, I can tell you!"

"I'll go for the police," said Lowther. "I'll take your jigger, Manners; mine will have to be walked home—that beast has buckled up the front wheel. And you, Mister Hurree Das, you can get ready for a little trip to the Andaman Islands."

Hurree Das did not reply. His black eyes gleamed, but otherwise he made no sign. His fate had come upon him, and he bore it with Oriental stolidity.

Ten minutes later General Merry was upon the scene. He gave the bound Hindu a grim look, but did not speak to him. He grasped his nephew's hand with an emotion he did not attempt to conceal.

"Thank Heaven you are safe, Tom!" said the general huskily. "You should not have taken the risk, but it is over now. That scoundrel will be safe for life."

And when the police arrived, Hurree Das, with handcuffs on his wrists, was taken away, and General Merry went with him. He did not mean to lose sight of the prisoner until he was disposed of in safety.

The Terrible Three walked their bicycles back to St. Jim's in a subdued mood. Tom Merry was still breathing hard after his run, and his narrow escape had made a deep impression upon his mind.

"I'm jolly glad they've got that chap," he said at last. "It was touch-and-go for me, and but for you fellows——"

"All's well that ends well," said Monty Lowther, rather huskily. "He'll be safe enough for the future, Tom, and you're done with the Sign of Three."

* * * * * * * *

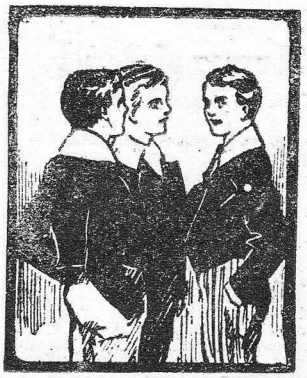
Tom Merry did not see Hurree Das again.

The rascal went to the convict settlement at the Andaman Islands, and the outer world had finished with him.

But it was likely to be a long time before Tom Merry forgot the terrible peril that he had so narrowly escaped, or the dark face of Hurree Das and the Sign of Three!

THE END.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 11.



SHOWING UP SMYTHE!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Warning to Adolphus.

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE, the ornament of the Shell and junior captain of Rookwood, reposed in an armchair in his elegantly-furnished study. He had a cigarette between his lips. That was one of his little ways. It was a most expensive gold-tipped cigarette. Adolphus was an expensive youth.

Three juniors of the Fourth were in the doorway, talking to Smythe. They were Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook of the Modern side. They were all talking at once, and their voices were not gentle, nor were their remarks complimentary. Adolphus surveyed them with calm disdain as he blew out little clouds of smoke. Adolphus looked more Olympian than ever at that moment.

"So you're playing the giddy ox, as usual!" Tommy Dodd was saying.

"It's making a howling ass of yourself you're after," said Doyle.

"You want to give the Greyfriars fellows another cackle," said Cook.

Adolphus Smythe raised a manicured hand to remove the cigarette from his lips to speak.

"Shut the door after you!" was his remark.

"Let's have him out of that chair and scrag him!" said Cook.

"There's a prefect down the passage!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Run away and play, dear boys!" said Smythe calmly. "Your voices get on my nerves a bit. I can't stand you Modern fellows, you're so raucous."

"You've really settled about the team?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Yaas."

"Not a Modern fellow in it!" howled Doyle.

Smythe shook his head.

"I want cricketers," he explained.

"Cricketers! There isn't one of your silly gang who can play cricket!"

"By gad, these Modern kids are noisy!" said Smythe. "How's a fellow to put up with these young hooligans, Tracy, old man?"

Tracy shook his head.

"Don't ask me," he replied. "Why don't they go away and study stinks or mug up German? That's what Modern kids are born for. I wonder what they think they know about cricket?"

Smythe & Co. were satisfied with themselves, but nobody was satisfied with Smythe & Co. They did not seem to mind that. They bore their many defeats in the cricket-field quite cheerfully. Indeed, Adolphus had been heard to declare that no game was worth a chap's while if he had to fag over it.

Fagging over anything certainly wasn't in Adolphus' line at all. When he was got up for cricket, he was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever to look at. It was quite a sight to behold Adolphus lounging down to the wicket, elegantly drawing on his gloves.

It was another sight to see him lounging away again, quite unperturbed, when he had been bowled, stumped, or caught, often without breaking his duck. But it was not a sight to be enjoyed by fellows who were keen on cricket and jealous of their school's record in games.

Tommy Dodd & Co. shook their fists at the placid Smythe, and debated whether they should rag him and chance the prefect. The Fistical Four—Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—arrived in the doorway, and Tommy Dodd glared at them. But the

rivals of Rookwood met without a rag for once.

"Don't go," said Jimmy Silver. "I've come here to talk to that tailor's dummy, and you Modern kids can back me up."

"I've been talking to him!" growled Tommy Dodd. "He hasn't the sense of a bunny rabbit. He's going to let Rookwood down again!"

"By gad," said Adolphus, lighting a fresh cigarette, "it's a regular deputation! Any more fags coming here to jaw?"

"I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle," said Jimmy Silver. "You've made up a rotten team to play Greyfriars. You've put in every slacker you could dig up, and left out every fellow who can play! Well, I want you to make some changes."

Smythe yawned.

"I want you," continued Jimmy Silver calmly, "to make seven changes at least. Put in us four and these three Modern chaps."

"We'd be satisfied with that," said Tommy Dodd. "We're willing to be reasonable."

"Well, do you agree, Smythey?"

"Hardly!" yawned Smythe.

"You're going on your own way?"

"Yaas."

"Well, then, now I come to the second point. Do you think that your team can beat Greyfriars Remove?"

"Yaas."

"You don't think they'll beat you?"

"Very improbable, dear boy."

"It's a dead cert!" growled Tommy Dodd. "If Greyfriars bat first they'll declare, and they'll beat you with runs to spare and nine wickets in hand!"

"What a pleasant prospect!" said Smythe pleasantly.

"Yes, you care a fat lot if Rookwood is let down all through the season!" growled Lovell savagely.

"By gad!"

"Now I'm coming to the point," said Jimmy Silver.

"Time you did, dear boy!" agreed Smythe.

"We're going over to Greyfriars to see the match."

Smythe shook his head.

"Can't have a lot of fags tagging along after the team!" he said decidedly.

"We're coming, all the same."

"You jolly well won't come in the car!"

"We shall bike it."

"By gad!"

"And we'll see the match and——"

"What the thunder are you driving at?" demanded Tommy Dodd angrily. "Do you think I'm going over there to see the Greyfriars fellows cackling at our eleven?"

"Let me finish, my son. Smythe says he can beat Greyfriars Remove. I say that he'll be beaten with wickets to spare. Well, we'll watch the match. If the Greyfriars Remove lick you hopelessly, Smithey——"

"Yaas?" drawled Smythe.

"Then we'll give you the ragging of your life!"

"What!"

"And give the Greyfriars fellows something else to laugh at as well as Rookwood cricket!" concluded Jimmy Silver.

"By gad!"

The Fourth-Formers burst into a chuckle. Jimmy Silver's scheme just jumped with their inclinations.

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Tommy heartily. "We're on!"

"Faith, and we are intoirely!"

"Good egg!"

"You savvy, Smythey? You've picked the team, and if you win the match or give the Greyfriars team a good tussle, you're all serene; we'll cheer you no end. But if you have a licking that makes them cackle, we rag you baldheaded!"

"By Jove!"

"Now will you make some changes in the team?"

"Hardly."

"Then you know what to expect."

"Thanks!"

"You idiot!"

"Would you mind shutting the door after you?"

The Fourth-Formers retired from the study. They closed the door after them with a bang. In the passage they looked at one another expressively.

"The burbler thinks we're bluffing," said Tommy Dodd.

"He'll find out to-morrow!" growled Jimmy Silver. "We're going?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll tell Towle," said Tommy Dodd. "That'll make eight of us. Eight will be enough to handle eleven slackers like that crew."

"More than enough," said Jimmy Silver. "All of you get your bikes out after dinner to-morrow. It's a long ride——"

"It's a long, long way to Greyfriars!" sang Newcome.

"But we'll get there; and if they put up their usual funny game we'll make 'em look funny afterwards!"

"Hear, hear!"

And so it was settled.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
"Cricket!"

HARRY WHARTON, the captain of the Greyfriars junior team, greeted Adolphus Smythe with great politeness. Smythe was gratified to see that a goodly crowd of Greyfriars fellows was gathering about the ground to see the match.

He would not, perhaps, have been so gratified if he had divined the reason that drew the Greyfriars juniors to the spot.

Harry Wharton & Co. were keen cricketers, and in the Remove cricket club it had been debated more than once whether they should drop the Rookwood fixture. They did not take that fixture very seriously. But Bob Cherry, a humorous youth, maintained that the Rookwood match was as good as a cinema of the most comic variety; and the other fellows agreed that to see the Rookwood slackers leather-hunting was a sight for gods, and men, and little fishes. It wasn't cricket, but it was an entertainment. But it never dawned upon the sublime Adolphus that he was regarded in that light.

Smythe gave Harry Wharton two fingers to shake. The Greyfriars fellow bestowed a grip upon them that made Smythe yelp.

"By gad!" said Smythe, gasping.

"Eh?"

Smythe rubbed his fingers. He was very glad that he had not given Wharton his whole hand. As a matter of fact, it was the offering of two cold fishy fingers that had earned him that iron grip.

"Any of your fellows coming over?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yaas, I think there are some fags on the road, biking it," said Smythe. "They may get here; I don't know."

"Biking it!" said Bob Cherry, a little surprised. Judging by what he had seen of the Rookwood fellows, he would never have supposed that any of the Rookwooders were keen enough about cricket to ride over twenty miles to see a match.

"Yaas," said Smythe. "I dare say they'll crack up on the road, though."

"Very likely," agreed Bob Cherry. "I sup-

pose you're going to give us a thumping licking this time, and they're coming to see it—what?"

"Yaas."

"Well, it would be worth the ride."

Harry Wharton gave his chum a warning glance. The egregious Smythe could never see when his leg was being pulled, but some of his team might. And, comic as the Rookwooders were considered as cricketers, courtesy came before everything.

Greyfriars won the toss, and Harry Wharton elected to bat first.

Bob Cherry and a sunburnt youth whom his comrades called Squiff went out to open the innings.

Adolphus led his merry men into the field.

Round the field the crowd was thickening. They had smiling faces. They were prepared to enjoy the acrobatic performances of Smythe & Co. in search of the elusive ball.

Smythe bowled the first over. He fancied himself as a bowler. He also fancied himself as a bat; and he fancied that as a fieldsman he was hard to beat. He had quite a number of fancies. But if he fancied that he could make any impression upon Bob Cherry's wicket, never had his fancy so deluded him.

The batsman knocked the ball carelessly away, giving Townsend at point a pretty easy catch, if Townsend had been wide awake. Townsend woke up after the ball was on the ground, and the Greyfriars crowd smiled audibly.

Smythe sent down another ball. Bob Cherry let himself go at that, and the ball soared away, and the batsmen ran. Four times they crossed the pitch before the leather was fielded and sent in.

Harry Wharton was smiling. He had never had a good opinion of Rookwood play; but this was a little "thicker" than he had ever expected. It looked as if Bob Cherry and Squiff would not require any assistance to finish the match.

However, after a few overs—which gave Greyfriars a total of forty-five—Bob Cherry obligingly gave Townsend a catch, and came out.

"What the dickens did you let that duffer catch you out for?" demanded Wharton.

The batsman chuckled.

"Thought I'd give you a turn, old chap."

Wharton laughed, and went in. Smythe varied the bowling with Howard and Tracy and Townsend. By a miracle, Squiff's wicket fell when the score was at sixty. Mark Linley went in to take his place.

It was just then that eight dusty fellows in Norfolks arrived. Bob Cherry, guessing that these were the Rookwood visitors, gave them a cordial greeting as they came up to the pavilion.

"Come to see us licked—what?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver gave an expressive grunt.

"Come to see our team play the giddy goat," he replied.

"My hat! Was that worth biking twenty miles?"

"Oh, it's funny!" said Lovell. "Too good to miss! I see a lot of your fellows think so. My only summer hat, look at the way Townsend's bowling! Does he take the wicket for a barn?"

Mark Linley knocked the ball away.

"Look out in the slips!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

Slips were not looking out. The ball glided past them and vanished. Mark Linley and Harry Wharton sauntered along the pitch, stopped for a little chat in the middle, and then went on lazily to their wickets. The crowd yelled with laughter.

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums expressively.

"That's what we've come to see!" he said, between his teeth. "To see a Rookwood team guyed by these bounders. Simply guyed, by gum!"

"It's too sickening!" said Tommy Dodd wretchedly. "The Greyfriars chaps bat well, but we could give them something to think about. But those dummies—oh, it's too rotten!"

"There they go again!"

It was quite an easy catch this time, and Smythe, that brilliant field, looked like getting it. But it passed his fingers and dropped. Smythe did not seem perturbed. He shrugged his shoulders, and remarked calmly:

"By gad!"

"Yah! Butterfingers!" yelled Jimmy Silver, exasperated.

Smythe looked round calmly.

"Hallo! You fags there?" he said. "Don't make a row here, dear boys! Even the Fourth are supposed to have some manners."

The Fourth-Formers of Rookwood were not thinking about manners just then. They were in such a state of exasperation that they were inclined to invade the field, and "mop up" the egregious Smythe on the spot. Fortunately, they restrained their feelings.

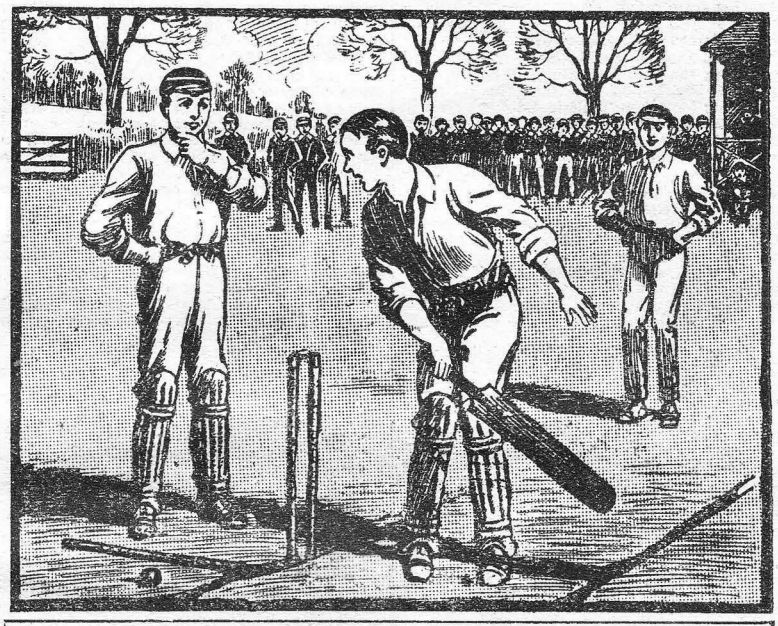
What they felt was almost too deep for words, as the picturesque innings went on. To see batsmen strolling across the pitch while the Rookwood slackers dawdled after the ball was too irritating. And the sublime Adolphus appeared to have not the slightest inkling that he was being "guyed."

It was a relief to Jimmy Silver & Co. when the innings ended. It was not played out. With three down for a level hundred, Harry Wharton declared. The Greyfriars bats could have stayed in all the afternoon if they had liked, but they generously decided to give their visitors a look-in, and Smythe jumped at the chance.

"Only made a hundred, by gad!" said Smythe, as the field came puffing and panting off. "Expect at least that in an innings—what!"

It did not matter a rap to Smythe that the Greyfriars team had made the hundred with seven wickets in hand. If he beat them, he beat them, and Wharton would be sorry that he had taken chances. It did not even occur to Adolphus that he had no more chance of beating Harry Wharton's team than the Huns had of beating the British Army.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. were perfectly aware of it. They knew that the Greyfriars team would not need to bat again. That hundred would never be equalled by Smythe & Co. in a couple of innings—or in half a dozen, if half a dozen had been allowed. But Smythe & Co. came off to discuss cake and ginger-beer with placid faces—only a little breathless—and looking as if they thought that they deserved well of their country.



"By gad!" ejaculated Smythe as he stared down at his wrecked wicket, evidently in a state of surprise. "Yaas, it's out!"
(See this page.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Licked to the Wide.

JIMMY SILVER & Co., in spite of their exasperation, found the Greyfriars fellows very agreeable. They were a little sore over the guying of the Rookwooders; but they did not blame Wharton & Co. for that. They could not expect keen cricketers, as the Greyfriars fellows evidently were, to take such a team seriously. There was an interval before the Rookwood innings started—which the visitors were glad to prolong—they needed a rest. Harry Wharton & Co. were very hospitable, and the ginger-pop flowed freely. Jimmy Silver found himself chatting with Bob Cherry as if he had known him whole terms.

And he felt that he was bound to explain a little. He found Bob a sympathetic listener.

"Don't you run away with the idea that those burblers represent Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver emphatically. "They don't! Our First Eleven is a terror, I can tell you! You should see old Bulkeley's boundary hits. And Knowles is a topping bowler—I'll say that, though he's on the Modern side."

"Better than any rotten bowler you can dig up among your mouldy Classics, and chance it!" said Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy proceeded to explain the somewhat complicated politics of the Lower School at Rookwood, which had led to such an egregious duffer as Smythe of the Shell being junior captain, with the unhappy consequence that a team of howling asses went forth to represent Rookwood in the playing-fields.

"Why don't you get a better skipper, then?" asked the puzzled Bob Cherry.

"It's all the fault of those Modern cads! They won't vote for a Classical man!"

"It's all the fault of those Classical cads! They won't vote for a Modern chap!"

Those two explanations were made simultaneously by Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, and Bob chuckled. An argument seemed about to commence, which would have been more suitably conducted at Rookwood than at Greyfriars; but, fortunately, the resumption of play came just then.

Smythe and Howard went in to open the innings for Rookwood, and Harry Wharton & Co. sauntered into the field.

Smythe came to his wicket with a swanking stride that made the spectators chuckle, knowing what they had to expect.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on morosely. They knew what to expect, too.

Harry Wharton tossed the ball to a dusky youth, whom he called Inky, but whose name, Jimmy Silver learned, was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and who was a nabob or rajah or something in a far-off Indian land. And as soon as the dusky bowler went on to bowl, Jimmy Silver said at once:

"That fellow knows something."

Jimmy Silver's keen eye had not deceived him. The dusky junior did know something. He did not seem to take much trouble about his delivery, but the ball knocked Smythe's off-stump out of the ground without giving the Rookwood captain the slightest chance.

Smythe stared down at his wrecked wicket, evidently in a state of great surprise.

"By gad!" he ejaculated.

"How's that, umpire?"

"Ha, ha! Out!"

"Yaas, it's out!" agreed Smythe. "By gad!" And he strolled elegantly off with his bat under his arm.

"What price ducks' eggs?" howled Jimmy Silver.

Smythe did not deign to reply to that question. He signed to Tracy to go on.

"Oh, don't talk about ducks' eggs!" said Tommy Dodd. "It's going to be a pair of spectacles for Smythey! Wait till he bats again!"

"There goes Tracy!"

Tracy was staring at his wicket. The middle stump had gone, and the wicket looked as if a dentist had visited it. Tracy had the grace to look glum as he came off. His armour of self-satisfction was not quite so thick as Adolphus'.

Townsend went in next, and the third ball of the over laid him low. After that it was quite a procession. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was not satisfied with the hat trick. He was evidently a deadly bowler, and he was putting in all he knew, whether for the sake of putting the batsmen out of their misery, or for a lark, Jimmy Silver could not guess.

Batsmen followed batsmen, and all failed to score.

"Oh, what a giddy entertainment!" groaned Jimmy Silver, as the sixth wicket went down to the sixth ball.

It was the double hat trick, and a roar of cheering from the crowd greeted the performance. It was good work, even against such poor batsmen as the Rookwooders.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned, and went into the field, and Harry Wharton took the ball. Rookwood were six down for nil.

Matters looked up a little for Rookwood in the second over. Harry Wharton, either from good-nature or carelessness, gave them a run for their money. Howard almost chirped when he took a two. Selwyn chuckled when three came to him.

Nugent of Greyfriars bowled the third over. Then Howard went back to the pavilion, his joys suddenly cut short. Another and another bat followed him.

"For mercy's sake, buck up a bit!" Smythe whispered, as the last man went in.

Last man in tried to buck up, with the result that Bob Cherry caught him out at point.

"All out for five!" said Jimmy Silver, with a gasp. "All—all—all out—out—out for five!"

"Oh, don't!" said Lovell. "It's a bad dream!"

"And look at Smythe!" breathed Tommy Dodd. "Only look at him!"

Smythe seemed to have recovered his self-satisfaction. After all, what was a blessed game of cricket, that a chap should worry about it?

"By gad," said Smythe, "you seem to have licked us rather badly, Wharton!"

"Rather badly!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Only rather, my infants. Not very!"

"It's an uncertain game," said Wharton blandly.

Smythe nodded assent.

"Yaas. Astonishin' number of flukes occur in a game like this—astonishin'! Some of your bowling was good though—some of it."

"Only some of it?" murmured Bob Cherry, almost overcome.

"And I noticed some of your batting," said Smythe. "You've got a couple of good bats."

"Only a couple!" grinned Harry Wharton.

"A couple quite good," said Smythe, "and some of the bowlin' was good; you've got a couple of bowlers that I'd be willing to play in my team, by gad!"

And Smythe sauntered into his dressing-room with his team, not looking in the slightest degree downhearted. He left the Greyfriars cricketers almost in convulsions.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the team into the dressing-room, and closed the door.

And for the next quarter of an hour the only sounds emanating from the dressing-room were biffs! and the "Ow's!" of the recipients of the biffs. A short silence followed, then the door of the dressing-room was flung open.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Adolphus Smythe Sings Small.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Ha, ha, ha!"

From the open door of the visitors' dressing-room a human centipede emerged.

Adolphus Smythe, with his nose adorned by a pair of huge spectacles, led the way, and behind him, in file, trooped the remainder of the Rookwood Eleven. All wore pointed dunces' caps, and all their faces were adorned with red paint. A rope stretched from end to end, and to it all their wrists had been tied.

Jimmy Silver had done his work well. There was no chance of escape for the unhappy nuts, and with sullen faces they trooped out.

The Greyfriars fellows stared at them, and shrieked. Bob Cherry threw himself down in the grass, and kicked. Yells came from everybody within sight, and the yells drew others to the spot.

Smythe & Co. almost wept with wrath and shame. They would have given whole Golcondas of wealth if the earth would have opened and swallowed them up. There were eleven of them, and they let eight fellows handle them like this—helplessly.

Even the ineffable Smythe realised that it does not always pay to be a hopeless slacker. Some of the care he had spent on parting his hair and curling that beautiful curl—now lost for ever, for Jimmy Silver had cruelly clipped it off—would have been better expended in the gym. with the gloves on. There was no doubt about that now. Ever so dainty a touch in hairdressing could not save him from this!

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" groaned Bob Cherry. "I'm having fits! I'm having apoplexy! Oh, my ribs—my poor ribs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"B-b-but what does it mean?" gasped Wharton. "What the dickens—what the thumping dickens——"

"Halt!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

The centipede halted, the different members bumping on one another, and backing with their heels.

"Look at them!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha! We're looking!"

"Help!" wailed Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These fellows are the nuts of Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen of Greyfriars, I have great pleasure in presenting the nuts of Rookwood, and can guarantee them genuine filberts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The honourable nuts came here to play the giddy goat, and to cause their school to be guyed by the way they play cricket. We came over here to exhibit them in a get-up suitable for giddy goats! They can't play cricket, but they part their hair beautifully. They can't box, but they have a topping taste in scent. They can't make runs or stop a ball, but they can mop up all the places in the eleven, and play the giddy ox on the cricket-field. Here you behold them suitably attired as giddy oxen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, I leave you to contemplate our happy nuts! Good-bye!"

"You villain! Don't leave us like this!" screamed Smythe.

Jimmy Silver did not reply. The Greyfriars crowd were shrieking and rolling with merriment. The slackers of Rookwood wriggled and panted with fury. Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered up their bikes, which they had left at the lodge, and rushed them out through the gateway.

They mounted their machines, and sailed away gaily for Rookwood.

They did not ride fast. They couldn't. At every turn of the pedals they burst into a fresh roar of laughter.

The ridiculous defeat of Rookwood had suffered—the loss of a match wholly due to the fatuity of Adolphus Smythe & Co.—was avenged now. And with the promise of similar attentions to come next time he threw away a match, it was possible that even the egregious Adolphus would begin to consider himself, and see the error of his ways. Certainly he could not want to go through such an experience again.

"Oh, what'll they say at Rookwood?" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pity we couldn't have brought 'em home like that——"

The juniors yelled at the idea.

"And I wonder what the dickens the Greyfriars chaps think of it!" gurgled Raby; and he went off into a fresh roar.

Jimmy Silver released a handle-bar to wipe his eyes.

"It'll show Greyfriars that we're not all fatheaded chumps at Rookwood!" he said. "Smythe has given them the impression that we were. After Smythey's been through this a few times, he'll see light!"

"A few times! Ha, ha, ha!"

The cyclists rode on in happy humour. They had to light their lamps before Rookwood was reached, but they succeeded in getting in before the gates were locked. The cricketers had permission to remain later. Tired, but quite happy, the heroes of the Fourth put up their bicycles, and went in to supper.

In a quarter of an hour nearly all Rookwood had heard the story.

Needless to say, when Adolphus' whacking big car came home, nearly all Rookwood turned out to meet the returning heroes.

The quad was swarming with the juniors and the Middle School; and even the Sixth came to their windows to look out, chuckling.

A roar of laughter greeted Adolphus & Co. as they descended from the car.

The unhappy nuts slunk into the House. They did not reply to a single remark. They had not nerve enough left for that. They slunk away, and shut themselves up in their studies, and locked their doors; and all that evening they "sported" their oak against all comers.

There were plenty of comers. Everybody in the school wanted to speak to Smythe & Co. that evening—especially to Smythe. They wanted to ask him lots of things—about cricket, and ducks' eggs, and pairs of spectacles, and painted noses, and gummy hair, and fools'-caps—but Adolphus was not in a mood to impart any information whatever upon those interesting topics.

For once—probably for the first time in his happy career as a nut—Adolphus Smythe shrank from public gaze, and made himself very small indeed.

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On the following Wednesday there was another cricket fixture to come off, and Jimmy Silver & Co. wondered grimly what kind of a junior team was to play. They soon heard some news—news which made it unnecessary for Jimmy Silver to purchase any more gum, red ink, or fools'-caps. One lesson had been enough. Adolphus' beautiful curl had not had time to grow again yet. Perhaps he was afraid of losing his back hair next time. Anyway, there was news.

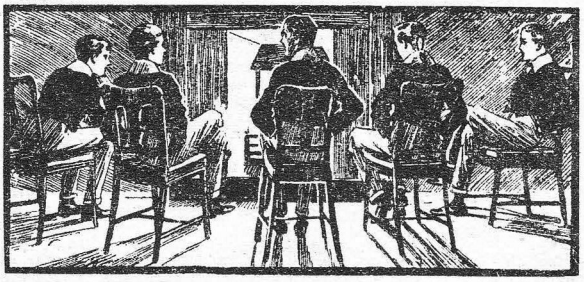
There were to be changes in the team!

When Jimmy Silver & Co. heard that news, they grinned, they chuckled, but they nobly forbore to gloat over Adolphus. They resolved to give Adolphus a chance, content that the school would no longer be represented in the cricket-field by the slackers of Rookwood, and that they had done good by Showing Up Smythe!

THE END.

THE SIGN OF THREE!

A Grand Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's.



By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Warm Work.

TOM MERRY & Co. were very busy! It was Wednesday afternoon—which meant that it was a half-holiday at St. Jim's. But unhappily for the chums of the Shell Form, they were very busy during the first half-hour of that holiday in writing lines they had earned by an exploit the previous night.

Tom Merry, in spite of being worried by a strange missile received from India that day, had led a daring raid on Figgins & Co., their rivals of the New House. But when the victorious raiders endeavoured to return to their dormitory, they found a strange man—a Hindu—had entered the school and barred them out.

The juniors had wasted no time in raising a hue-and-cry; but the mysterious visitor, although he left a sort of clue behind him in the shape of a slip of cardboard, blank save for three dots in red ink in a triangular form—made good his escape, and Tom Merry & Co. were faced with a very trying problem in their endeavours to justify to Mr. Railton, their Housemaster, their reasons for being out in the middle of the night.

However, Tom Merry & Co. took their punishment well, and they wrote out their lines in the Form-room and conveyed them to Mr. Railton, and then they were free for the afternoon. The Terrible Three were coming away from the Housemaster's study when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, met them. Blake and the rest were on the footer-field, but Arthur Augustus had been waiting for Tom Merry.

"I understand you have your uncle from India coming to-day, deah boy?" he said.

"Quite right, Gussy," said Tom. "He won't be here until five."

"Then there is still time."

"Time for what?"

"Ewectin' a twiumphal arch," said the swell of St. Jim's, with some severity. "If you fellahs like to back me up, I'll undahtake to awwange the whole affaih. A twiumphal arch with fauwels and things would be about the wight capah now. I wegard it as bein' up to us to give him a gweat weception. Aftah all, your uncle is a genewal, Mewwy, with a Victowia Cwoss, and we don't have that sort of johnny come here evewy day."

"We don't," agreed Monty Lowther solemnly. "But I heard that Figgins had given you a cheque to help pay for a triumphal arch."

"That was only a wotten joke. It was a wotten cheque on the Bank of Allan Watah, you know, which is not a weal bank at all!" explained Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha! That reminds me of the cheque that Pharaoh got!" said Lowther.

"Wats! There were no cheques or banks either in the days of Phawaoh," said Arthur Augustus.

"Fact," said Lowther. "Pharaoh received a check on the bank of the Red Sea, crossed by Moses!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Chestnuts!" groaned Tom Merry and Manners.

"If you fellows like to subscwibe a substantial sum——"

"Oh, I could let you have a cheque!" said Lowther. "Play me at chess, you know——"

"What has chess got to do with it, you ass?"

"Why, then I could give you a check, mate."

That was too much for Arthur Augustus. He sniffed and walked away, and from that time forth nothing was heard of the proposal for erecting a triumphal arch in honour of General Merry, V.C.

The Terrible Three walked over to the tuckshop for liquid refreshment, in the shape of ginger-beer, after their arduous labours in writing out so many lines from Virgil. They were still discussing ginger-beer and doughnuts under the big elms outside the tuckshop in the corner of the quadrangle, when there was a shout from the direction of the gates.

"Tom Merry!"

"Buck up!"

"Here's your uncle!"

Tom Merry jumped up from his stool, and set down his glass.

"My uncle already! My hat! Come on, you chaps, and back me up!"

And Tom Merry hurried down to the gates, and Lowther and Manners loyally followed him to back him up in greeting his honoured relative from India's coral strand.

A little old gentleman had halted in the old stone gateway of St. Jim's, and he was talking to Taggles, the porter, in a crusty voice. Taggles was treating him with the great respect due to a general, a V.C., and a man rolling in rupees. He was a man barely as tall as Tom Merry himself, with a face as brown as a berry, and a white moustache that gleamed in startling contrast with his mahogany face. His eyebrows were also white, and very bushy and bectling, and shreds of white hair escaped from under his silk hat. He was not in his general's uniform, somewhat to the disappointment of the juniors, who had hoped to see him arrive covered with glory and medals. Not even his V.C. was to be seen; but perhaps the general did not consider it the thing to wear a V.C. upon a tightly-buttoned frock-coat.

He carried a malacca cane in his hand. His boots, which gleamed with polish, were evidently high-heeled, which gave him an appearance of strutting when he walked, and the juniors smiled at the thought that the brown-skinned veteran, who had fought Afghans and Afridis and all sorts of fearsome natives, was not above the vanity of trying to appear a little taller than Nature had made him.

"Huh!" the visitor was saying as the Terrible Three arrived, letting out that ejaculation with almost the sharpness of a pistol-shot. "Huh! Is my nephew here? Huh! So this is St. Jim's, hay? Huh!"

"Looks a rather terrifying old boy," murmured Monty Lowther, as they drew near. "Did you know he was like that, Tommy?"

"Haven't seen him since I was a kid," said Tom Merry. "But he's all right—he's often sent me tips and presents from India."

"Well, we'll back you up," said Manners. "Lucky we're in funds. We can have him to tea in the study, if he'll come, and make much of him. Looks as if he'd lived a thousand years or so on curries or brimstone and brandy hot, doesn't he?"

The Terrible Three raised their hats very gracefully as they came up to the old gentleman.

"Uncle!" said Tom Merry.

The brown-skinned veteran raised an eyeglass, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed Tom Merry critically.

"You are my nephew, hay?" he demanded.

"If you are General Merry, I'm your nephew, sir," said Tom Merry demurely. "I'm Tom."

"Huh! You're Tom, hay?" said the general, surveying him through the eyeglass, and then allowing the monocle to drop to the end of a silken cord. "Huh! Come here, and shake hands with your uncle, Tom."

Tom Merry shook hands dutifully with his uncle.

The general reached out, after shaking hands, and gave the junior a sudden rap on the chin.

"Chin up!" he growled.

Tom Merry started back.

"Wha-a-at!" he gasped.

"Chin up! Don't go hanging your head like a week-old recruit!" rapped out the general. "Chin up!"

"Oh, crumbs! I—I mean, all serene, uncle," said the dismayed junior.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had joined the crowd round the gateway. "Wathah a peppewy old sport, bai Jove!"

"I can foresee a high old time for Tommy," murmured Blake, in great delight. "I'm going to keep an eye on Nunky."

The general put up his eyeglass again and scanned Tom Merry, who was growing rather red as the other fellows grinned.

"That's better," he growled. "Chin up, and shoulders back! Don't be a slacker—hay?"

"I'm glad to see you, uncle," faltered Tom.

"Won't you come into the School House, sir?" said Lowther suavely. "We've been looking forward to your visit, sir."

"My chum Lowther, and this is Manners, uncle," said Tom Merry. "I've mentioned them in my letters to you, you remember."

"Hay. If they're your friends, I'll do as much for them as for you," said the veteran. "Chins up, you slacking civilians!"

Rap! Rap!

Manners and Lowther jumped back in alarm as the general's knuckles rapped their chins up.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lowther, rubbing his chin.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rest of the juniors.

The general looked round, with the suspicion of a smile upon his mahogany face.

"Huh! Let's get into the house," he grunted. "I'm shivering here. Is it always as cold as this in England?"

The juniors chuckled. It was quite a hot afternoon; some of the fellows thought it too hot, and some that it was too warm to breathe. But, apparently, the general found it cold after India.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Lowther, who was never at a loss. "This is one of our bad days. But we'll get a fire going for you if you like."

"Good!" said the general. "And the sooner the better. Come on, Tom. Chin up!" he roared suddenly, rapping Tom Merry's chin with the head of his malacca.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"March!" said the general.

They marched. Tom Merry escorted his uncle to the School House, and half St. Jim's followed them. Tom Merry's military uncle had made a sensation. Tom's face was a study. He had not known very clearly what he expected his Indian uncle to be like, but certainly he had not expected him to be quite like this. The afternoon was not likely to be so pleasant as he had anticipated. Indeed, unless the general improved on acquaintance, the Terrible Three were "in" for a decidedly bad time. For Lowther and Manners, dismayed as they were, had no intention of deserting their chum. It was "up" to them to stick to Tom Merry in this emergency.

"Well, if that old boy doesn't take the giddy cake!" murmured Jack Blake, as he followed the Terrible Three and the terrible uncle. "I don't envy Tommy this afternoon with him."

"Bai Jove! No. Of course, a chap would be pwoud of an uncle like that, but I—I'd wathah be pwoud of him at a distance," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Would you like to see the Head, uncle?"

asked Tom Merry submissively, as he led his relative into the School House.

The general waved his hand.

"That can wait," he said. "Take me to your study. Where you have the study feeds, hay? You are going to feed your old uncle, hay?"

"Oh, yes; rather, sir! We've got a ripping tea——"

"You haven't forgotten the curry, hay?"

"They—they don't keep curry at the tuckshop, uncle," Tom Merry faltered.

The general snorted.

"Huh! And I suppose you don't know the difference between a catipash and a calipee?" he demanded.

"Nunno!"

"Huh! Well, let's get to a fire—that's the chief thing," said the general, with a shiver. "Don't you boys feel the cold?"

"Ahem! No."

"We're used to the rigours of an English climate, sir," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Hay? Well, that's right—grow up strong and hardy—quite right," said the general. "But I'm an old boy, and I must have my fire in this dreadful climate—what?"

"We'll have a fire going in two ticks, sir," said Manners.

"Good! Huh! So this is your study, hay?" said the general, as the juniors showed him into the famous apartment in the Shell passage in the School House.

"Yes, sir."

The general put up his monocle and blinked round the study. As the juniors had not expected the visitor till some hours later they had not had time to put the study in order for him, and it must be reluctantly confessed that the Terrible Three were not the tidiest youths possible. The general grunted.

"You want three months in my regiment to teach you order," he growled. "Huh! If a man in my regiment had his quarters in this state I'd court-martial him, sir! Gad, I would!" He turned on Tom Merry. "Chin up!"

Tom Merry dodged away just in time.

"I—I forgot!" he gasped. "All right, uncle! Will you take the armchair, sir?"

The general sat down, with his back to the window.

"Light the fire!" he grunted.

The juniors hesitated. The sun was streaming in at the window, and the study was decidedly warm. But the general was not to be denied. He pointed to the grate with his malacca. And the Terrible Three, with an inward groan, set to work bringing in wood and coals, and lighted the fire.

"Pile it on!" said the general, getting a little nearer to the open window, however. "More coal! Make it roar!"

The juniors obeyed. There was soon a roaring fire in the study, and the atmosphere grew insufferably hot. The Terrible Three perspired, and grew crimson in the face. All the fellows who had intended to have tea with Tom Merry and his uncle, the general, had hurriedly cleared off. They might have stood the general, but they could not stand the heat. But the general purred with satisfaction.

"That's better, hay?" he said.

"Yes!" gasped Tom Merry, fanning himself with an exercise-book.

The general gave a howl.

"Don't make that draught here!" he roared. "Do you want me to catch my death of cold, hay? When I want you to act as a punkah-wallah I'll tell you!"

"Ye-es!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I—I think I'll go down to the tuckshop and—and see about the grub!" gasped Manners.

"I'll come and help you get it," murmured Lowther.

But for Tom Merry there was no escape.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Terrible Uncle!

"WARMER now, hay?" said the general.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Too warm for you, hay?"

"Oh, I'm all right!"

"Put on some more coal, then."

The fire was already roaring up the chimney, and the study was like an oven. Coals were piled high in the open grate, and were blazing away. Tom Merry cast a look of alarm at the chimney, down which sparks were dropping. He was seriously afraid of setting the chimney on fire. But the general was not to be denied. He pointed to the fire with his malacca, and Tom gasped and panted and obeyed. The roar of the fire could be heard outside the study now, and the heat made the very air swim. The general, seated close to the open window, perhaps did not feel it so much as Tom Merry did.

There was a thump at the door, and it flew open, and Kildare of the Sixth strode in, with a knitted brow.

"You young ass!" he shouted. "Are you trying to set the school on fire? You've got sparks and a mountain of smoke coming out of the chimney! What the—— Oh!" Kildare broke off suddenly at the sight of the little old gentleman with the fierce white moustache. "Oh! I—I didn't know you had a visitor!"

"It's my uncle!" panted Tom Merry.

"Is this another of your friends, Tom, hay?" demanded the general.

"It's Kildare, the captain of the school, uncle."

The general reached out with his cane, and gave the astounded Sixth-Former a rap on the chin with the head.

"Chin up!" he thundered.

Kildare staggered back, clasping his chin.

"Wha-at?" he gasped.

"Chin up! Don't come into the presence of an old soldier with that hang-dog look!" exclaimed the general. "Gad, sir, I wish I had you in my regiment for a week! I'd make you as stiff as a ramrod, sir!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kildare. And he retreated incontinently from the study. He did not want to be uncivil to a general officer and a V.C. And Tom Merry's terrible uncle was evidently not to be argued with politely. Kildare rubbed his chin ruefully as he went down the passage.

The general chuckled.

"I'd make you young slackers sit up if I were here a week!" he growled. "You are an awkward squad at the best in this House! What?"

"I—I suppose you would, uncle."

"There's another House at this school, isn't there?" demanded the general.

"Yes; the New House. Would you like to see it?" asked Tom Merry, who would have given all his uncle's rupees to get out of that study just then. He felt that the heat would make him faint soon, and the general and his armchair barred him from the window.

"Yes," said the general. "I hope it is a little more orderly than this House appears to be, hay? Lead the way, young shaver!"

Tom Merry gladly led the way.

The general followed him from the study, and outside the School House they met Manners and Lowther, returning, laden with good things for tea.

"Hallo! Not going to have tea yet?" asked Lowther, with relief. He was glad not to have to go into the study again.

"No. My uncle's going to have a look at the New House," said Tom; and he added, in a whisper: "Get somebody to go up and put that awful fire out."

"Right-ho!"

"Stuff for tea, hay?" said the general, surveying the packages with which the chums of the Shell were laden.

"Yes, sir," said Manners.

"Bring 'em into the other House. I'll have my tea there. I dare say Figgins will take us in, hay?"

"You know Figgins, sir?" asked Manners, in surprise.

The general hesitated a moment; but only a moment.

"I know something of this school's record in sports," he explained. "Figgins is the champion junior athlete, isn't he?"

"No fear!" said the Terrible Three together.

"The New House is the cock-House here, I understand, hay? All the best athletes, and the best of everything—what?"

"Not much!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "Why, it's a regular old casual ward. The School House is cock-House, and always has been. Figgy isn't bad for a New House chap; but he isn't up to School House form. No fear!"

"Huh! Bring the stuff over to the New House. I'm not accustomed to having my orders questioned, sir!" roared the general.

"Come on, you fellows!" muttered Tom Merry imploringly.

He was feeling quite ashamed of his uncle, and his chums could feel for him. And Lowther repressed the desire to remark that he wasn't under the general's orders, at all events. The chums of the Shell accompanied the general across the quadrangle.

"Well, my hat!" said the Kangaroo, as he watched them go. "If I had an uncle like that I'd boil him in oil, and scalp him afterwards!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm not sowwy upon the whole that I dwopped that ideah of a twiumphal arch," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "He appeahs to me to be a most iwascible old boundah!"

"Horrid!" said Blake. "Lowther's asked me to go and put the fire out. Some of you fellows come and lend me a hand. Anybody going to tea over there with Tom Merry's uncle?"

And the reply came like a chorus:

"No fear!"

The Terrible Three and the general reached the New House. There was no denying the Anglo-Indian veteran; but Tom Merry could not help wondering how Figgins & Co. would receive such a fearsome guest. If the general rapped New House chums with his cane there might be trouble, for they were now in the enemy's country, so to speak. But fortunately the general seemed to get into a great good humour the moment he entered the New House.

He glanced round him with an expression of great satisfaction.

"Huh! This is better!" he exclaimed. "These boys look more fit, hay? They ought to be an example to you young wasters—what?"

Quite a crowd of New House juniors had gathered to see the visitor, and they grinned assent to the general's observation. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were prominent among them, but Kerr was not to be seen.

"Figgy, old man," murmured Tom Merry, "my uncle's got a fancy for having tea in your study. Do you mind?"

Figgins rose to the occasion.

"Delighted!" he exclaimed. "Come in, sir!"

"Huh! Is that Figgins?"

"Yes, sir, I'm Figgins."

"Good! I like your looks, Master Figgins. And I hope that you will take these School House kids in hand, and teach them things. Make 'em keep their chins up, and toe the line generally."

"Certainly, sir," said Figgins. "We do keep the School House kids in order now, sir. When we have time, we teach 'em lots of things."

The Terrible Three looked daggers at Figgins. The New House juniors burst into a chorus of chuckles.

"This way, sir," said Fatty Wynn.

And the general wheezed up the stairs, and strutted into Figgins' study, with the Terrible Three and a crowd of juniors in his wake.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The New House Enjoys Itself.

THE terrible visitor seemed satisfied with Figgins' study. He did not ask for a fire to be lighted, much to Tom Merry's relief. Tom did not know how Figgins and Fatty Wynn would have taken it. The general sat with his back to the light as before, and his keen eyes peered at the juniors from under the thick, white brows.

"This is better!" he announced. "Now then, I am ready for tea. Ask some of your friends in, Master Figgins—hay? The more the merrier!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins. "How many, sir?"

"As many as the study will hold," said the general. "My nephew is standing treat—what? Hospitality was always the great trait of the Merry family, Tom. If you haven't enough stuff there for a large party, go and get some more, hay?"

"Oh, yes, uncle!" said Tom.

"And be quick about it!" added the general, giving Tom Merry a lunge with his cane. "Chin up, you young slacker!"

"Ow!"

Figgins obligingly laid the cloth. There were an unexpectedly large number of chairs in the study and an unusually good allowance of crockery—a circumstance that was very fortunate for the occasion. The Terrible Three were too bothered and worried just then to notice how peculiar that circumstance was. It was really as if Figgins and Fatty Wynn had expected the feed to be held in their study.

The good things Lowther and Manners had purchased from Dame Taggles were spread on the table. But as Figgins' friends came crowding in, it was evident that there would not be enough for the party.

Figgins was a popular fellow, and he had many friends; but Tom Merry would not have suspected him of possessing so many pals as now proved to be the case. Figgins' list of

friends seemed only to be limited to the size of the study.

Redfern and Owen and Lawrence came in, smiling. Pratt of the Fourth, and Thompson of the Shell, and then French and Dibbs and Jimson followed them in. Then came more and more and more. The study was simply crammed. But more were coming.

Chairs were brought from the other studies and arranged in the passage to accommodate the endless flow of juniors.

Even Jameson of the Third came along with a crowd of fags. It seemed that Figgins' friends included every junior that belonged to the New House.

The Terrible Three gasped in dismay and worry. A feed for that tremendous crowd was a strain upon their financial resources, which those resources were not quite calculated to bear.

As the general was Tom's uncle, and known to be rolling in riches, he might naturally have been expected to hand out a tip of a sovereign or two, or even a fiver. Nothing, however, seemed further from his thoughts.

He contented himself with making complimentary remarks about the New House and the juniors of that House, which, considering that his nephew was a School House fellow, seemed to the Terrible Three to be in the worst of taste.

Above all, he exhorted Figgins to remember to take the School House boys in hand, and teach them to come up to the form of the New House. And Figgins promised that he would—a promise that earned him deadly glares from Tom Merry & Co.

"We shall have to get some more stuff," Lowther whispered to Tom Merry. "There won't be a bite all round—especially with Fatty Wynn here. He's scoffing all the cold chicken already, the fat bounder!"

"You two chaps buz off to the tuckshop, and get all you can!" said Tom.

"What about the tin?"

"Haven't got any?" groaned Tom. "I'm stony now."

"Only a bob left."

"Oh, crumbs! Borrow some of Gussy and Blake and Kangy. Explain to them, and they'll help us out."

"Right-ho!"

Manners and Lowther departed. The general was generously inviting the New House juniors to fall in; but they hardly seemed to need inviting. They were falling to with great gusto.

Most of them were laughing and chuckling and whispering, as if regarding the whole matter as an excellent joke—and doubtless it was, from a New House point of view.

But it did not seem funny to Tom Merry. He was kept hard at work handing out things to the fellows who were picnicking in the passage. He had not time to eat anything himself; and, indeed, his terrible uncle had taken his appetite away.

And the general gave him no rest. When Tom ventured to refresh himself with a glass of ginger-beer the general asked him whether he was going to neglect his guests, and Tom resumed his duties as a waiter. The throng in the passage increased. Every junior in the New House, with the exception of Frank Kerr, seemed to be present.

Lowther and Manners were breathing hard as they emerged from the New House, and tramped furiously across the triangle.

"What do you think of him?" asked Manners.

"Beast!" said Lowther.

"Horrible old blighter!" said Manners.

"Disgusting savage!"

"Beastly outsider!"

"Frabjous old frump!"

"Poor old Tommy!"

"Well, we shall have to stick to Tommy. But if he wasn't Tommy's uncle I'd—I'd—oh, I'd scalp him!"

Somewhat relieved by that expression of opinion, the chums of the Shell arrived at the School House. The crowd of curious fellows there greeted them with questions. They were all deeply interested in Tom Merry's Indian uncle, though none of them wanted to enjoy the pleasures of his company.

"How are you getting on with Nana Sahib?" asked Blake.

"Havin' a good time, deah boys?"

Monty Lowther brandished a clenched fist in the air. Manners sparred into space as if he could see before him a sunburnt face, with white moustache and eyebrows. The School House juniors grinned.

"That's what I think of him!" said Lowther. "The beast is having tea in Figgy's study. He's buttering up Figgins & Co., and running down the School House. He's asked Figgins to take us in hand—us!—and teach us things."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's asked the whole blessed New House to tea! They're cramming in Figgy's study, and camping in the passage!" groaned Manners. "They think it's a joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Manners and Lowther together ferociously.

"Well, it's a joke," grinned Blake. "It's the joke of the season! I suppose the old johnny's mad."

"Must be as mad as a hattah! It's the sun in Indiah that does it," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "I've heard of lots of lots of chaps there goin' off their wockahs. I've got a cousin there who's as potty as ——"

"As his cousin at home!" grunted Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"We've run out of tin," said Lowther. "Will you chaps lend us some money? We'll settle up next week, somehow. We shall want pounds and pounds to feed that crew. Every blessed worm in the New House has crawled out for the feed. It's like magic. Not a chap of them gone out, as it happens. All ready to pile in, the beasts! Lend us some money, for goodness' sake! If we don't get back with the grub Tom's life won't be safe with that awful uncle of his."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle! Hand out the tin!"

"Yaas, wathah! Anythin' to help a chap out of a beastly awkward posish," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "I've got a couple of sovereigns."

"I've got half-a-quid," said Blake.

"And here's five bob."

"And a quid."

"And half-a-crown."

"Small contributions thankfully received; larger ones in proportion," said Monty Lowther, gathering the generous offerings in his hat. "We'll settle it all up next week, unless the old ruffian stands Tommy a good tip. He may, but he doesn't look it. If he were my uncle, I'd boil him in oil! Thanks, you chaps! I think this will see us through."

And Manners and Lowther trotted off to the tuckshop with nearly five pounds in their possession—a sum which was quickly transferred to Mrs. Miggles' till. And then the Shell fellows dragged heavy consignments of tuck over to the New House.

Their arrival in Figgins' study was timely. The supply was running short, and the general was already beginning to shout at his nephew.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry in great relief.

"Here's the stuff!" said Manners.

"My aunt! That looks good!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, with glistening eyes. "I'll trouble you for the chicken."

"Jam-tarts for me, please!" said Redfern.

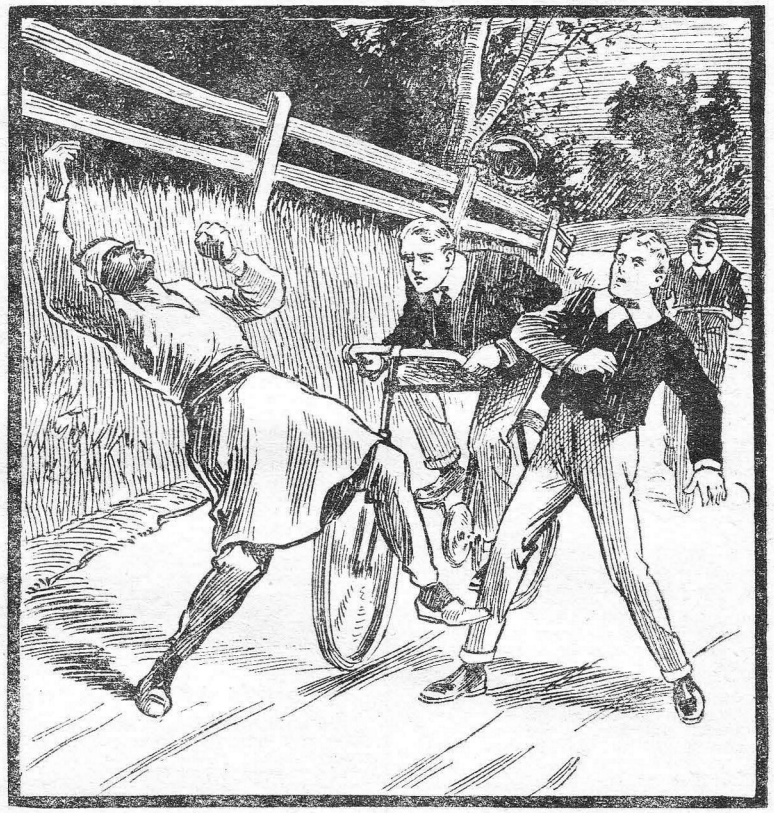
"Cream-puffs this way!" said Lawrence.

"Where's the ginger-beer?" howled Owen.

"Lemonade, please! Now, then, stir your stumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The feed proceeded gloriously. It was the time of their lives for the New House juniors. Seldom, or never, had such a feed been stood in Figgy's study—and the passage adjoining. Even some of the Fifth-Form fellows, hearing what was on, had come to join in it. The fresh supply of tuck, enormous as it was, was not more than adequate for the numerous and hungry company.



"Stand aside, Tom!" shouted Lowther. Tom Merry made a sideways spring, and the descending blow missed him. Then there was a terrific crash. Lowther had ridden right at the Hindu, and hurled him to the earth. (See page 7).

The general surveyed the scene with satisfaction through his eyeglass. He was eating with a good appetite himself, and his diet was remarkable for a veteran fresh from India. He had as good an appetite for jam-tarts and marmalade-tarts, and cream-puffs and ginger-beer, as any junior present.

"Quite a merry party—hay?" he said.

"Ripping!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"Enjoying yourself, entertaining your friends—hay, Tom?"

"Awfully!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Master Figgins has promised me to show you how to play cricket," said the general.

Tom glared at Figgins.

"Has he?" he gasped.

"Yes. And Redfern is going to show you how to row."

"Oh!"

"Huh! Haven't you a word of thanks for

their kindness?" demanded the general in a voice of thunder. "What?"

"Th-th-thank you, Figgins!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Not at all, dear boy!" said Figgins airily. "Always willing to show you School House kids how to do things."

"Oh!"

There was a sudden interruption in the passage. Toby, the School House page, came pushing his way through the feasters, amid many loud objections. But Toby persisted in advancing, and he reached the study doorway at last. Tom's round, pink face was illuminated with a broad grin as he looked in.

"Master Merry here?" he asked.

"Here I am!" said Tom Merry dismally. "What's wanted?"

"You are, Master Merry. Your uncle's come."

Tom Merry stared at Toby blankly.

"What?" he said faintly.

"General Merry has arrived, sir!" said Toby.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Spoofed!

TOM MERRY stared at Toby as if he were dreaming.

Manners and Lowther gasped.

There was a momentary silence in the study. It was broken by a wild yell of laughter from the New House juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter rang through the study and through the passage. Fellows choked over their ginger-beer and their jam-tarts. Even Fatty Wynn ceased his operations upon his second cold chicken to join in that exuberant roar.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Toby grinned broadly. The little brown-faced general chuckled. He had risen now, and his eyes were warily upon the Terrible Three. Figgins and Redfern drew closer to him.

"My uncle?" panted Tom Merry at last.

"Yessir," grinned Toby.

"General Merry?"

"Yessir."

"He—he's arrived?"

"Yessir."

Tom Merry turned a dazed look upon the white-moustached veteran in the study.

"But my uncle's here!" he exclaimed. "Are you dotty, Toby? This is my uncle, General Merry."

"I'm afraid it ain't, sir," said Toby. "General Merry 'ave arrived, sir, and he's with the 'Ead now, and I've been sent to fetch you."

Then, for the first time, a glimmering of the truth dawned upon the Terrible Three. They fixed their eyes upon the white-moustached face.

The general put his hand up to his white moustache, and it came off in his hand. Then he cheerfully removed his wig and his white eyebrows. And then, in spite of the dark complexion and the skilfully-done wrinkles, the juniors recognised him.

"Kerr!" roared Tom Merry.

"Kerr!" shrieked Monty Lowther.

"Kerr!" howled Manners.

The disguised junior—recognisable now—bowed calmly over his moustache and eyebrows and wig. The New House juniors shrieked with merriment.

"Huh!" said Kerr, in the crusty voice he had adopted as appropriate to General Merry. "Huh! Rather a take-in, hay? Who's cock-House at St. Jim's now, hay?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You—you fraud——"

"You villain——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co. "Thanks for the feed! Ha, ha, ha! Who's cock-House at St. Jim's? Who's been done right in the eye? Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three glared at the impostor. Kerr had played his part wonderfully well, though it was really not a difficult part for the amateur actor of the New House to play. The School House fellows had not had a single suspicion.

Tom Merry's first feeling, as he recovered from his amazement, was relief—deep and great relief that this terrible uncle was not really his uncle at all.

But Manners and Lowther were simply furious. They had borrowed money right and left to stand a feed for the New House; that they had slaved away half the afternoon playing waiter while Figgins & Co. fed; that they had been utterly, thoroughly, and hopelessly taken in, naturally made them wrathy.

The Terrible Three made a wild rush at Kerr.

They wanted, more than anything else at that moment, to collar the practical joker; to bump him and roll him over, and jump on him, hard!

But Figgins and the rest closed round Kerr, and the School House three were seized in a dozen pairs of hands. Kerr grinned at them serenely.

"Chuck the young ruffians out, hay?" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme get at him!" roared Monty Lowther frantically. "Lemme gerrat the beast! I'll smash him! I'll squash him! I'll pulverise him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chin up, hay?" said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three struggled wildly to get at Kerr. But the odds were too great.

Figgins & Co., almost suffocating with laughter, whirled them off their feet, and bore them bodily, kicking and struggling, out of the study.

"Chuck them out, hay?" said Kerr. "Chin up! Who's cock-House at St. Jim's, hay? Gad, if I had you in my regiment for a week——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, dishevelled and breathless, were whirled down the stairs in the grasp of the chuckling New House juniors, and rolled down the steps into the quadrangle.

There they picked themselves up, gasping, and shook their fists at the grinning crowd of New House juniors that packed the doorway. Figgins waved his hand to them.

"Go home!" he said.

"Yah! Go home!"

"Thanks for the feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three charged furiously up the steps. They still wanted to get at Kerr. But Kerr was not get-at-able just then. A score of pairs of hands grasped the chums of the Shell, and they were rolled down again.

"Come on!" cooed Figgins invitingly.

"Coming to see your uncle, Tom, hay?"

Dishevelled and dusty and crimson, the chums of the Shell tramped away towards their own House, followed by yells of laughter from Figgins & Co.. From the study window Kerr frantically waved a white wig after them.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "All the fellows know it now. Look!"

Outside the School House was a hilarious crowd waiting for them. The arrival of the real General Merry was known to all the fellows there, and that had, of course, enlightened them. The School House crowd seemed to be in hysterics as the three dusty and draggled juniors limped up.

"Here's another uncle for you, Tommy!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! A much bettah one, deah boys."

"You've been taken in!" hooted Kangaroo. "Who was it? Who was the giddy impostor?"

"Kerr!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Might have guessed it, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" growled Lowther. "Let's get in and get tidy before we see the real article, you chaps."

"Yes, rather!" Tom Merry gasped.

But that was not to be. As the dusty and dishevelled trio limped into the School House they were met by a sturdy, broad-shouldered gentleman, with a deeply sunburnt face and a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"By Jove!" ejaculated the sunburnt gentleman in surprise.

"Your uncle, Tommy!" giggled Blake. "Oh, my hat!"

"Is one of you my nephew?" asked General Merry, gazing at the dusty three, with a smile curving the corners of his mouth.

"Yes!" gasped Tom Merry. "I'm the chap! Oh, crumbs!"

The general gazed at him, and the smile became a laugh, and the laugh a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
The Genuine Article.

GENERAL MERRY laughed, and laughed again, and the crowd of School House juniors laughed, too. The Shell fellows looked at one another sheepishly, and then joined in the laugh.

After all, it was funny, and certainly the appearance they presented was calculated to excite risibility. They were torn and rumpled and ruffled, and smothered with dust, and looked more like three hooligans fresh home from a very specially rough "scrap," than three nice boys at school.

And Tom Merry was glad to hear his uncle laugh—especially that hearty roar. It relieved him of his terrors. It showed that the real uncle was not at all like the spoof uncle.

"I—I'm afraid I look a bit dusty, uncle," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! You do, my boy, you do!" said the general, wiping his eyes. "What is it—one of the House rags you have told me about in your letters?"

"That's it, uncle," said Tom Merry. "We've just been ragging with Figgins & Co., and—and we've got it in the neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It looks like it. Never mind, my boy, you must take the downs with the ups. But what is this I have heard about someone having arrived already calling himself by my name?"

"Oh!" murmured Tom. "You've heard?"

"Yes, begad!" said the general. "What does it mean?"

"It was a New House jape," Tom Merry explained reluctantly, for he did not know how the general was likely to take it. "They knew you were coming, uncle, and—and as I hadn't seen you for so long, they palmed off a fellow on me—disguised as a general—a blessed amateur actor——"

The general gasped.

His sunburnt face grew purple with merriment, and he burst into that hearty roar again.

"Ha, ha, ha! The young rascals! And they took you in!"

"Yes," confessed Tom Merry. "Of course, the rotter wasn't anything like you really; only I didn't know just what you were like, you see. He was made up jolly well, and we never bowled him out till Toby brought us the news you had come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was very glad to see the general take the joke with such hearty good-humour. When the old gentleman had recovered from his merriment, which was some time, the Terrible Three went to put themselves in order, and General Merry strolled in the quadrangle with some of the fellows with whom he had made friends already.

Arthur Augustus was very attentive to him, and, finding the general such a really ripping old boy, he was mentally regretting that he had not erected that triumphal arch, after all.

The general showed the keen pleasure of a boy in roaming over the historic old school. He looked at the cricket pitch and the gym, and chatted to the seniors and the juniors and the masters whom he met. He explored the ruined chapel, and looked into the old tower. Then he walked over to the New House.

"Nothing worth seeing there, sir," said Jack Blake. "That's the New House—rotten old show!"

"Wegulah casual ward, sir!" said D'Arcy.

"Regular old barn!" said Kangaroo.

"Awful young ruffians dig there!" remarked Herries.

The general grinned.

"Yes, I've heard about it from Tom in his letters to me. I take a great interest in the question which is cook-House at St. Jim's. Which is cock-House, by the way?"

"School House, sir!" said all the juniors, together.

"Rats!" came a voice from Figgins' study window. They were quite near the New House now. "New House is cock-House! Who's been done in the eye?"

"School House!" yelled Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Who's been taken in and done for?" yelled Figgins.

"School House!" hooted the chums.

Blake shook his fist at the juniors at the window, withdrawing a little behind the general to do so, unseen by the veteran.

Figgins & Co., at the window, grinned at him, and bowed politely to the general.

"Welcome to St. Jim's, sir!" said Figgins courteously. "This visit is a great honour to the school, sir!"

"Great honour, sir!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Is that why you young rascals have been using my name, and disguising yourselves as myself?" demanded the general.

"Ahem! Only one of us, sir," said Figgins.

"Which one was it?" demanded the general, with a terrific frown.

"Ahem! It was I, sir," said Kerr.

"Oh, it was you! Come down here at once!" said General Merry.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another in dis-

way. If the general was going to take it like this, there was trouble in store. But Kerr had to go, for if the general wanted to cause trouble, he had only to speak a single word to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins. "After the feast the reckoning, you know. We've called the tune, and now we've got to pay the giddy piper."

And Figgins & Co. descended into the quadrangle. The School House fellows were grinning; but Figgins & Co. looked serious enough as they faced the broad-shouldered, sunburnt veteran from Hindustan.

The general shook his finger sternly at Kerr.

"So it was you, hay?"

"Yes, sir," said Kerr meekly.

"You made up as a general, hay?"

Kerr grinned.

"I made up as a stage Anglo-Indian johnny, sir, good enough to take in the School House chaps. They're not very keen, you know."

"Weally, Kerr——"

"Kerr, you cheeky ass——"

"Well, you are a young rascal, sir," said the general, the frown disappearing from his face as he burst into a laugh. "A regular young rascal! It was like your impudence! Ha, ha, ha! Give me your fist, sir!"

And the general shook hands with Kerr, and, to the junior's astonishment, left a couple of pound notes in his palm. Then he sailed off with his escort.

"My hat!" ejaculated Kerr. "Look here!"

"Quids!" said Figgins.

"Two quidlets!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Well, he is a ripping old johnny, and no mistake! I'd swap all my uncles for him!"

"Good old sport!" said Figgins.

"Let's go and change 'em at the tuckshop, Kerr."

"My hat! Haven't you fed enough this afternoon, Fatty?"

"Well, that's half an hour ago, and I'm——"

"Come on!" said Kerr.

And one of the sovereigns was forthwith changed. And Figgins & Co. declared with conviction that General Merry was a ripping old johnny, and undoubtedly they were right.

The general strolled back to the School House with the juniors of that House, and found the Terrible Three clothed and in their right minds again, as Blake expressed it. They had washed and brushed and changed their clothes, and certainly looked a great deal more presentable.

"Tea's ready in the study, uncle," said Tom.

"Good!" said General Merry.

It was a merry party that sat down to tea in the Shell study. A further loan had been raised among the School House juniors, and a good repast was spread on the study table, and a select company invited to tea with the distinguished guest. General Merry made a great impression upon the juniors. He was affability itself, almost boyish in his good humour. And yet the juniors knew that the keen old eyes, looking out of the bronzed and scarred visage, had looked upon fearful scenes of danger and death.

The trouble given him by the "spoof" New House general had driven the Sign of Three out of Tom Merry's mind; but he thought of it again now. When tea was over, and the guests dropped off, leaving the Terrible Three alone with the general, Tom determined to speak on the subject.

General Merry had lighted a big, black, pungent cigar, and was filling the study with smoke as from a railway train. He was sitting contentedly in the armchair, his eyes on the open window and the quad, and the green playing-fields beyond.

"I've got something to tell you, uncle," said Tom. "I want to ask your advice."

"Certainly, my boy," said the general, with a chuckle. "I think I can guess the difficulty."

Tom looked surprised.

"You can guess it, uncle?" he exclaimed.

"I think so. When I was at school I always found that the expenditure outran the income to an alarming extent."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; it isn't that, sir. If it were, I'd tell you like a shot. But my other uncle makes me a good allowance, as you know, and you have always been generous. No, I'm not in any difficulty of that sort."

"Glad to hear it, my boy," said the general. "A boy can't be too careful. But what is the trouble, then? You want me to ask the Head for an extra holiday?"

"Well, that's a good idea, too; but it isn't that. I've had a letter."

"And not a dunning one?"

"No, sir. A letter from India."

"From me, do you mean?"

"No. Since your last letter, uncle. I received it yesterday."

The general sat up in his chair.

"I wasn't aware that you had any other correspondents in India, Tom!"

"Neither was I, sir," said Tom Merry ruefully. "I can't make head or tail of it. I suppose whoever wrote the letter must have got my name and address from you somehow. I don't see how it could be got there otherwise. Have you ever seen anything like this before, uncle?"

He laid the card and the letter upon the table beside the general.

General Merry glanced at them, and a sudden change came over his face at the sight of the three red dots in the form of the triangle.

He started to his feet with a sudden, sharp exclamation. For a moment the colour had wavered in his bronzed cheek.

"The Sign of Three!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
For Life or Death.

TOM MERRY and Manners and Lowther stared at the general. It was evident that he knew the mysterious sign.

General Merry remained standing, and his brows were knitted. His glance was almost stern as it rested upon his nephew.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "What do you know about this, Tom?"

Tom shook his head.

"Nothing, sir. I received the letter by post from India—that's all, and——"

"And the card?"

"That was placed in my dormitory last night."

"By whom?

"Good heavens!"

The general sank into his seat again. His hand went to a pocket behind him, and the juniors realised, with a thrill, that the old soldier carried a revolver. The movement was instinctive. He withdrew his hand in a moment.

"Tell me all about it, Tom," he said curtly.

Tom Merry explained the circumstances of the mysterious visit the unknown Hindu had made to the school the previous night.

The general drew a deep breath when he had finished.

"It was a great mercy that you were not in the dormitory," he said.

"You think he came there for me, sir?" asked Tom.

"I know it."

"And—and what did he intend to do, sir?"

The general was silent. The three juniors exchanged startled glances. They had been puzzled and mystified by the Sign of Three. But the general's look showed that there was real cause for alarm. A trifling matter would not have disturbed the equanimity of the old soldier in this way.

"Do you mean that he meant to—meant to injure me, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't know," said the general, after a long pause. "It is likely enough. Whether he intended real mischief, or simply to scare you and me, I cannot be sure. But I know the character of the man."

"You know him, sir?"

"I knew them all three," said the general quietly.

"All three?" repeated Tom Merry.

"There were three of them. I will explain to you," said the general. "I had no idea that you knew anything about the matter, and it is not a matter I should have told you; but now you had better know. You may have heard that I was engaged last year in suppressing a revolutionary movement in Bengal?"

"Yes, I heard about that, sir."

"There were three leaders—three ringleaders who were at the bottom of the whole mischief—three Indians educated in England, and as full of mischief as an egg is of meat," said the general, knitting his brows. "They had the usual babyish ideas of the Indian revolutionaries—a new Mutiny, and the expulsion of the English, the fools! If they succeeded in driving us out, how would they handle the Russians who would step in in our place? They would find the little finger of the Cossack heavier than the right hand of the Briton. There was some fighting and some bloodshed before their nonsense was suppressed—not much, but some. Two of them were caught and hanged—two of the leaders, I mean."

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

"The Third—Hurree Das—escaped. They were the three. That was the sign of the secret society—the three red dots in the triangle. It was the secret signal that was sent to all the accomplices before the outbreak. After it was over, and Hurree Das had been hunted out of the country, that sign was sent to me." The general's lip curled in a grim smile. "It was to let me know that the vengeance of the Three was awaiting me. Two were hanged, and the other would be sent to Andaman Islands if he was caught. Hurree Das was more fool than rascal. The other two were the worst. But he is a revengeful scoundrel. Two attempts were made upon my life in Calcutta. But—but I did not think that the villain would have the nerve to come to England. Yet he is here, that is certain, from the visit you received last night."

"And that was Hurree Das?" asked Tom Merry breathlessly.

The general nodded.

"Then he came to—to——" Tom Merry faltered.

"I fear so. They found me too tough a nut to crack, and the cowardly villain thought of reaching me another way—through you. By gad, it was a cunning thought, too!" The general's brows contracted in wrath.

"But why send that warning if he meant mischief?" asked Tom Merry. "It was like placing me on my guard."

The general smiled.

"You know what Kipling has said of the black man, my boy—half devil and half child. That was a theatrical flourish—the Oriental can do nothing without that. All their revolutionary schemes are like stage plays—luckily their revolts are very much like stage fighting, too. The Sign of Three was to mystify and terrify you, and so to gratify the conceit of the miserable rascal, to make him feel himself terrible and terrifying."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I think I understand," he said. "It's jolly lucky for me I was out of the dorm last night, then."

"Very lucky, indeed. Hurree Das may intend to take his vengeance through you, or it may be a warning to me to cease the pursuit. The police are hunting for him, and when he is caught, he goes to penal settlements for life in the Andaman Islands. By threatening danger to you, he may hope to induce me to hold my hand."

"He knew, then, that you were returning to England, and guessed that I should tell you——"

"Exactly."

"And will he come again?"

"That is what we shall see," said the general grimly. "But I can promise you that you are in no danger now, Tom, whatever you may have been in last night. He must be in this neighbourhood still, and Hindus are not common on the countryside here. It will not be difficult to run him down, I should think. Don't talk about this matter in public, my lad—least said the better. I will go now and borrow the telephone, and ring up the police. I shall ask the Head's permission to stay at the school to-night."

And the general quitted the study.

The Terrible Three looked at one another. They were feeling strangely thrilled and excited. Into their quiet life at St. Jim's there had come an element of tragedy. The Sign of Three seemed to bring them into contact with that far-away land where the millions lay in uneasy subjection to the rule of a few thousand white men, where any day or night might come a terrific explosion of rage and hate and bloodshed.

"Well, this takes the cake!" said Manners at last.

"The whole giddy Peak Frean!" said Monty Lowther, who was never serious for long. "Tommy, my son, you are playing a leading role in a giddy melodrama."

Tom laughed, but a little uneasily.

"It's a melodrama that may become a real thing," he said. "That Hindu chap last night didn't look a pleasant customer. I'm jolly glad I wasn't in the dormitory when he got there, whether he meant business or not."

"The police will soon have him now," said Lowther, "and they have a delightful establishment in the Andaman Islands where they keep 'em; the place is chock-full of noble patriots who have left their country for their country's good. Master Hurree Das will be laid by the heels soon."

"I don't think I shall sleep very soundly until he is," said Tom Merry.

"The general thinks there is danger," said Manners. "He's going to stop here to-night, and I believe he's got a pistol about him. Jolly, ain't it?"

The Terrible Three left the study. They

came downstairs, and as they went out into the quadrangle, the messenger from the post-office was crossing towards the School House. He had a letter in his hand—evidently an express letter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon him in the quad.

"For me, deah boy, I pwesume?" he said. "It's all wight, Blake. My patah has sent that fivah by expwess."

The post-office boy grinned.

"You General Merry, sir?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! It's for your uncle, Tom Mewwy."

"Come in," said Tom Merry to the post-office boy. "General Merry is here."

He hurried in to tell his uncle that a message had come for him. His face was excited. He felt that it was a message in some connection with the Sign of Three. The general came out to take the letter.

He opened it immediately and read it, his brows knitting over it. Tom Merry waited quietly until he had finished.

"Is it Hurree Das, sir, may I know?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom."

"And—might I see it?"

The general smiled and handed him the letter. At the top of it appeared the sign Tom Merry was beginning to know well.

Three red dots in the form of a triangle headed the letter.

Underneath was written the message, but it was unintelligible to Tom Merry. It was written in the Deva-Nagari characters used in India, and was as incomprehensible to the St. Jim's juniors as Runic or Chinese would have been.

"My hat!" said Tom. "Can you read it, uncle?"

"Yes," said the general, with a smile. He lowered his voice. "It is as I suspected, Tom. Hurree Das wishes to make terms. If he is pardoned he will spare you, he says; but if his purusit continues, he will strike at me through you. His visit here last night was to prove that he holds your life in the hollow of his hand."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You won't let that make any difference to you, sir?"

"What do you say, Tom?" asked his uncle, looking at him with searching eyes.

Tom reflected.

"That depends," he said. "If the man is harmless, I'd let him clear off; but if not, it depends on what use he'll make of his pardon."

"He will return to India and begin his mischief over again—more carefully this time," said the general. "He will induce better and braver men than himself to risk their lives while he stays in the background, ready to profit by their success if they succeed, and ready to fly if they fail."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Then he ought to be put where he can't do any more harm, sir."

"Exactly!"

"Then if it depended on me, I should say, let him do his worst, and don't make any terms with the scoundrel!"

The general's bronzed face lighted up.

"Spoken like your father's son!" he said. "It was the answer I expected from you, Tom; but unless I give him the assurance he demands, your life is in danger until he is laid by the heels."

"I'm not afraid."

"Right, my boy. I expected that of you!" The general set his teeth. "This is the last round between Hurree Das and me, and I think he will finish in the Andaman Islands. But until he is safe in shackles, Tom, you will keep your eyes open. It is a matter of life or death!"

But there was no sign of faltering in Tom Merry's face.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Shadow of Peril.

GENERAL MERRY remained at St. Jim's.

The distinguished officer stayed as the guest of the Head, and few of the fellows knew of his reason for remaining.

The Terrible Three kept their own counsel, and other matters, of more interest to the juniors, had almost made the fellows generally forget the mysterious visit of the unknown Hindu to the school.

The Head, of course, had been taken into the general's confidence, and General Merry had offered to remove his nephew for a time from the school, in order to save any unpleasant happenings there, if the Head wished.

But Dr. Holmes would not hear of that. He was as anxious about Tom Merry's safety as the general himself, and he wished him to remain, with proper precautions taken.

Precautions enough were taken. The general was in communication with Scotland Yard, and the school was being watched. If Hurree Das reappeared, it seemed certain that he would be taken, and meanwhile the search for him was going on.

That he was still in the vicinity the general felt assured; but, if so, he was lying very low, and was not to be found.

The next day, and the next, there came a letter for Tom Merry, with widely different postmarks on each; and each of them contained nothing but a slip of paper bearing the now familiar sign.

If the intention of the hidden enemy was to wear down the nerves of the marked victim he did not succeed. Tom Merry was made of too stern stuff for that. He was the son of a soldier who had fallen in battle for his country, and he was not easily to be frightened. He only wished that, instead of sending his threats by post, the black man would come to within hitting distance. In that case, as he confided to his chums, he felt fully equal to putting a stop to his tricks.

Th general was very popular with the Co. He witnessed the cricket matches, and cheered the good hits and the good catches as loudly as the juniors themselves. He stood a "feed" in the Common-room, to which the heroes of the New House were invited, and he made Kerr adopt his famous disguise as an Anglo-Indian officer, and go through a performance of "General Merry," and laughed at it till the tears ran down his bronzed cheeks.

Several days had passed, and apart from the threat of the Sign of Three nothing had been seen of the Hindu.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Hurree Das' Last Blow.

TOM MERRY jammed on his brake with a frown.

It was getting dark, and Tom had been over to Wayland on his bicycle, and was in a hurry to get back to the school before locking-up.

He was following the bridle-path that skirted Rylcombe Wood, and in the dusky shadows of the trees he had suddenly caught sight of a branch thrown across the narrow path.

If he had ridden into it in the dark, it would certainly have overturned him; but, fortunately, it was still light enough for him to see the obstacle.

"What silly ass chucked that there?" muttered Tom angrily. "Idiotic idea of a joke, I suppose! Might have busted some chap's jigger."

He jumped off his bicycle, and dragged the loose branch to the side of the road.

There was a rustle in the underwood, and a dark form leaped out, and Tom Merry was borne with a crash to the ground.

The suddenness of the attack and the heavy fall almost stunned him.

He rolled in the grass under the weight of his assailant, gasping for breath.

With a great effort he twisted over, so that he could look up at the man who had so suddenly attacked him.

A chill ran through his very veins as he saw a brown face looking down upon him—the same brown face, with the glittering black eyes, that had looked down upon him from the window of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's a week before.

He knew the man at once.

It was Hurree Das.

And he realised that the scoundrel, lurking in the woods and awaiting his opportunity, must have seen him in the distance on his machine, and laid that trap for him upon the lonely bridle-path.

The Indian was above him, with a knee planted on him, pinning him down with cruel force to the earth.

Two savage brown hands were grasping him, and the strength of that grasp showed Tom Merry how little chance he had in a struggle with the Last of the Three.

His eyes looked up into the glittering orbs of the Hindoo. The cruel mouth above him curved in a smile of mockery.

"The sahib knows me!" muttered the Hindu in English.

Tom Merry tried to calm his throbbing heart. He realised his terrible danger, but his courage did not desert him.

"I know you," he said. "You are Hurree Das!"

"I am Hurree Das!"

"What do you want with me?" said Tom Merry, as quietly as he could. He wondered whether Manners and Lowther had ridden to meet him. It was probable that they would, as he was late for calling-over.

If they came, if there was time, or his uncle? He had not told the general that he was going out; he had intended to return before dark. He was courageous, but he had not intended to be foolhardy. But he had been delayed in Wayland, and now he was in the hands of his foe.

"What do I want?" the black man grinned. "You know what I have asked the sahib general, and what he has refused?"

"Yes."

"You will die, to pay for the lives of Nalouth and Swadi Das," said the Hindu, showing his white teeth. "I shall leave you lying here like a dead dog, with the Sign of Three upon your forehead."

Tom Merry shuddered.

The man looked desperate. He was travel-stained, torn and dusty. Evidently the hunt for him had been close, and he had been for days in the open air. Yet, with fanatical persistence, he had remained in the vicinity of the school, resolved upon his revenge before he fled.

As he looked into the savage face, the fierce, rolling eyes, Tom Merry realised how little mercy he had to look for.

Even as he spoke the Hindu was feeling for a weapon.

Tom Merry half-closed his eyes, and sank back limply in the ruffian's grasp. He looked as if he was fainting with terror. And so the rascal believed. His grasp unconsciously relaxed.

It was Tom Merry's chance.

He was not fainting; never had he been more alert—more resolute. He had his life to fight for, and he knew it.

He made a sudden, tremendous effort, and the unprepared Hindu reeled sideways from him. Tom Merry's fist, clenched, and as hard as iron, came with a thud upon his jaw, and Hurree Das uttered a shriek of pain and rolled in the grass.

Tom Merry leapt to his feet.

His glance went to his bicycle, but it was lying on its side. Before he could reach it and mount the man would be upon him—and he was armed.

Tom turned and dashed away at top speed.

There was a fierce cry behind him, and then the sound of heavy footsteps pounding in pursuit.

All depended on his fleetness of foot now. He had no chance in a struggle with the muscular man behind.

He could never reach the school! He felt it, but he dashed desperately on! If only his chums had come to meet him——

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

It was the ring of a bicycle-bell on the darkened road.

Two cyclists loomed up in the dusk, and Tom Merry ran desperately towards the on-coming machines, shouting:

"Help! Help! Rescue!"

"Here we are, Tom!"

"We're coming!"

Manners and Lowther shouted back as they scorched on.

(This story is concluded on col. 3, page 7.)

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