

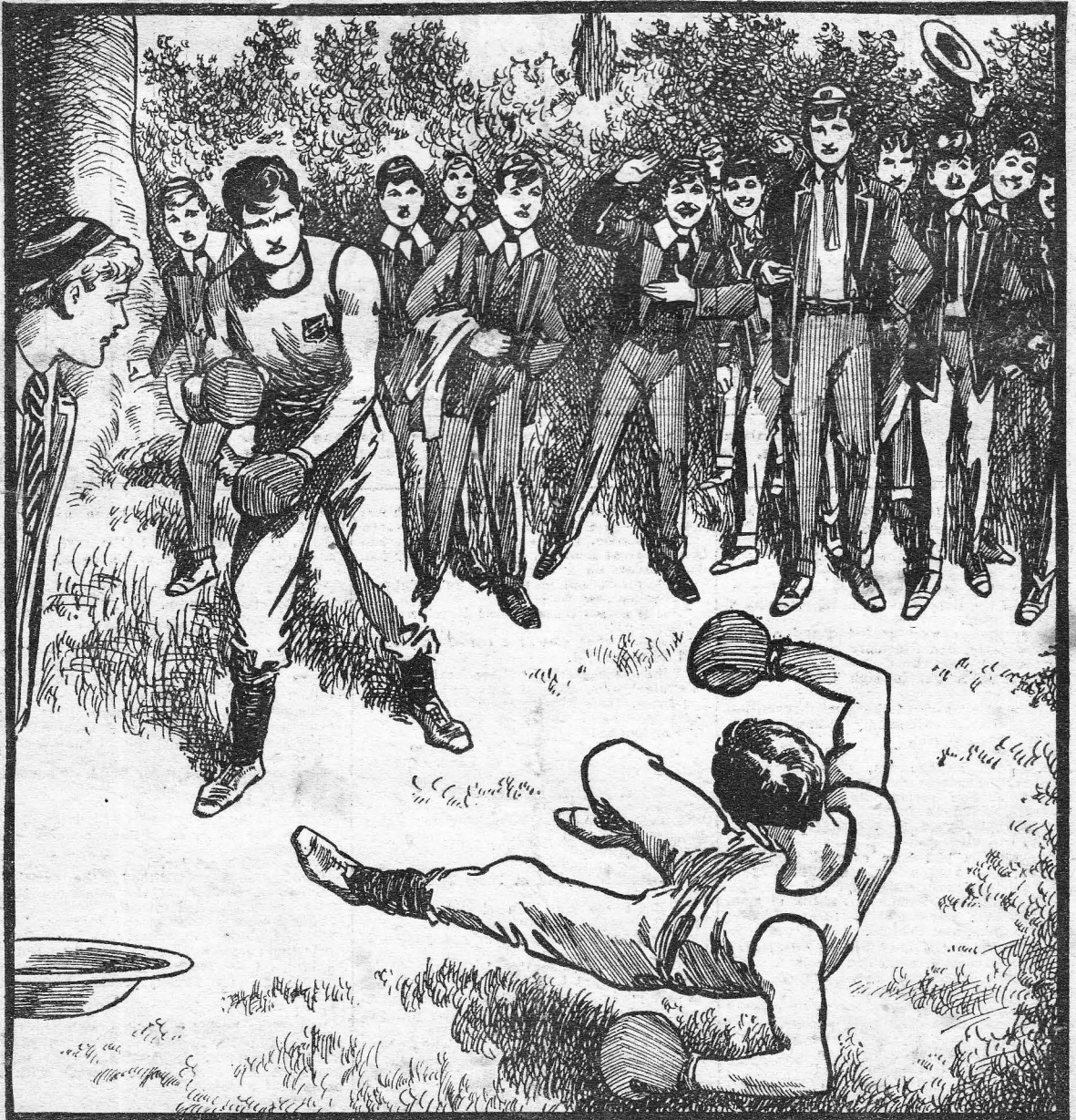
27
3 NEW COMPLETE SCHOOL TALES!

The Penny **1½!**
Popular

Week Ending
July 26th, 1919.

No. 27.
New Series.

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



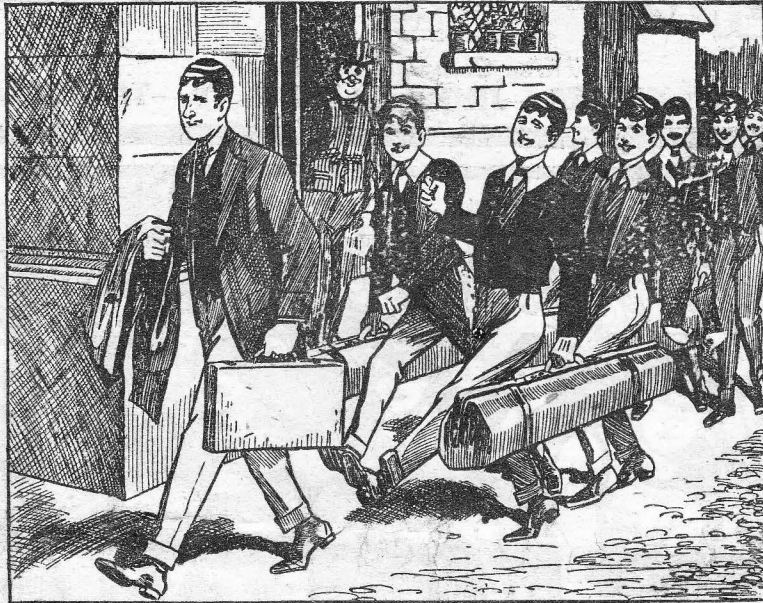
THE END OF THE GREAT FIGHT!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)

THE PREFECT'S PLOT!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Story of HARRY WHARTON
& Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



The juniors fell in behind Loder and mimicked his long stride. Gosling, the porter, grinned as the strange procession trooped out of the gates.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Loder's Bombshell!

"I AM this way!"

"Pass the sardines, Toddy!"

"Who says more tea?"

The study belonging to Vernon-Smith, of the Greyfriars Remove, was packed to overflowing.

Seven juniors were seated round a well-stacked table, and five more were occupying various odd corners.

Vernon-Smith was in high spirits—and in funds.

The sporting tour of the English counties, which had gone swimmingly from the start, was still in progress.

Harry Wharton & Co. had just returned from Sussex by the Sea, where they had covered themselves with glory; and it was now the turn of Vernon-Smith and his party to travel down to Dorsetshire, from which county they hoped to return "victorious, happy, and glorious."

The tourists had been excused prep that evening, and Vernon-Smith was holding a little celebration in his study.

Peter Todd, the Bounder's right-hand man, was present; likewise the three Dicks—Russell, Rake, and Penfold.

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, was seated on the coal-scuttle, munching steadily. Bulstrode, and Hazeldene and Wibley were ranged along the window-sill.

The occasion was, as Peter Todd pointed out, an auspicious one. Had a prefect been on the prowl in the passage, and heard the clamour, he would probably have referred to it as a suspicious occasion.

Although tea and ginger-pop were the strongest beverages on the festive board, the din had become almost deafening.

Free from prep, free from lessons for a whole week, the juniors had let themselves run riot.

When Vernon-Smith entertained—which was not often—he didn't believe in half-measures.

Mrs. Mimble, at the school tuckshop, had been in great demand, and the Bounder had given orders on a lavish scale.

"Eat, drink, and be merry!" he exclaimed.

"For to-morrow we—"

"Put it across Dorset!" said Hazeldene.

"Exactly!"

"Wonder what sort of a crowd they are?" said Dick Penfold.

"Tillers of the soil, I believe," said Wibley.

"Farmers' sons, and all that sort of thing, you know. This is how they talk: 'I see old 'Arry 'ave a-got 'is 'ay up there!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think they'll be quite so rural as all that," grinned Peter Todd. "What do you think, Dutton?"

"Not just yet," said the deaf junior.

"Eh?"

"I sha'n't want another drink for a few minutes. I've two bottles of ginger-pop to get through first."

"You silly chump—"

Tom Dutton blinked at Peter Todd in surprise.

"I don't see why you should have the hump," he said. "We're just going on a ripping tour, and everything in the garden is lovely!"

"You—you—" stammered Peter Todd.

"That's not what I meant!"

"Kent!" said Tom Dutton, in astonishment. "My hat! I thought we were going to Dorset!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd groaned.

"I shall really have to save up my tin and buy a megaphone," he said. "This is awful!"

"I say, you fellows—"

The unwelcome face of Billy Bunter intruded itself in the doorway.

"This is the wrong shop for prize por-

poises," said Bulstrode. "Run away and pick flowers!"

"Oh, really, you know! I'm sure my old pal Smithy's got no objection to my having a whack—"

"Not at all," grinned the Bounder. "Hand me that cricket-stump, Pen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter tittered feebly.

"Smithy will have his little joke, bless him!" he said. "The same old Smithy—always merry and bright. He's always pretending to threaten his old pals."

"There's not much pretence about this, I can assure you!" said Vernon-Smith. "If you're not on the other side of that door in two ticks, I'll brain you!"

"Impossible!" said Peter Todd. "Bunter's brainless!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Attracted by the presence of a huge plum-cake on the table, Billy Bunter sidled into the study.

But he didn't get far.

Vernon-Smith brandished the cricket-stump, and the Owl of the Remove beat a hasty and undignified retreat.

Billy Bunter paused in the doorway, however, and blinked appealingly at Peter Todd.

"If there isn't room for me in this study," he said, "I don't mind eating that cake in the passage. I'm awfully peckish, you know, and—"

"Biff!"

Dick Rake hurled a cushion with unerring aim, and Billy Bunter was bowled backwards into space. He landed on the hard, unsympathetic floor of the passage with a bump and a roar.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Slam!"

The door was banged to, as a warning to Billy Bunter to keep on the other side of it.

The fat junior picked himself up, and shook a flabby fist at the closed door.

From within the study came sounds of revelry. Billy Bunter was not only out of sight, but out of mind.

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter. "They haven't any sense of loyalty to an old pal. But they're not going to have it all their own way. I'll put Loder on their track."

And the fat junior rolled along to Loder's study in the Sixth Form passage.

Loder of the Sixth was standing in front of the mantelpiece, with a grin on his sallow face. He looked—and felt—exceedingly bucked with life.

The grin changed to a frown, however, when Billy Bunter rolled in. "You cheeky fat toad!" snarled Loder. "How dare you come into my study without knocking?"

"Ahem! I—I've got something jolly important to tell you, Loder!"

"Well?"

"A crowd of fellows are kicking over the traces in Vernon-Smith's study. There's port wine on the table, and—and fat cigars, and all that sort of thing."

"What?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if they're playing banker for heavy stakes by this time," said Bunter, letting his imagination run riot. "I thought I ought to mention the matter to you, Loder, from—a sense of duty."

Loder could scarcely repress a grin of malicious triumph.

He and the Removites were at daggers drawn.

The cad of the Sixth, forgetting for the moment that Billy Bunter was a second Ananias, told himself that he would make a rich haul.

Taking up an ash-plant, he strode out of his study, and headed for the Remove passage.

There was every indication at first that Bunter had spoken the truth.

From Vernon-Smith's study came the sound of voices raised in song.

Loder quickened his pace, and threw open the door of the study.

His face fell as he surveyed the interior. The port wine was conspicuous by its absence; neither was there any sign of playing-cards or of fat cigars.

Loder realised that Bunter had been romancing.

But he had one cause for complaint. Singing was permitted in the junior studies, but only in moderation. And Vernon-Smith & Co. were not singing now. Bawling would have been a more correct term.

"Stop this row!" exclaimed Loder. The noise grew in volume, swelling into a roar.

"Do you hear me?" roared Loder. The Removites went on singing, to the full extent of their lung-power.

Loder wasted no more time in words. He laid about him with his ash-plant, and there were yells of anguish from all sides.

"Ow!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Chuck it!"

Loder's ash-plant continued to curl round the legs of the feasters; and from Billy Bunter, in the passage, came a fat chuckle.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" he chortled. But he spoke too soon.

Loder strode out into the passage, and the ash-plant descended upon Billy Bunter.

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Bunter. "What's that for?"

"For telling a pack of lies!" snorted Loder.

And he prepared to deliver another stroke. But Billy Bunter didn't wait for it. He promptly scuttled away down the passage.

Loder turned back into Vernon-Smith's study, where the juniors were engaged in sorting themselves out.

"You young sweeps!" he exclaimed. "You're always kicking up a disturbance! I'll keep my eye on you during next week!"

Peter Todd grinned, in spite of the painful effects of Loder's ash-plant.

"You seem to forget," he said, "that we're going to Dorset for a week, Loder!"

"Yes, rather!"

It was Loder's turn to grin.

"I'm coming, too!" he said.

"What?"

Loder's statement had the effect of a bombshell. The juniors stared at him blankly.

"I'm going to take you in tow," continued Loder. "If I had my own way, you wouldn't go on the tour at all! But the Head organised the business in a moment of weakness, and I can't interfere. But I'll see that

you don't stray from the path of virtue while you're down in Dorset!"

"But—but Gwynne's coming down with us!" protested Vernon-Smith.

"Gwynne's otherwise engaged. I asked the Head if I could take his place, and he consented."

"Oh!"

The juniors exchanged dismayed glances.

On previous tours George Wingate had accompanied Harry Wharton & Co., and Patrick Gwynne had looked after Vernon-Smith's party.

Wingate and Gwynne were decent fellows and sound sportsmen, and there had been no trouble.

But Loder!

The presence of the rascally prefect would spoil everything.

Loder would be just as much of a tyrant outside the school as in it. He would insist upon marching the juniors in columns of fours to the railway-station. He would keep them under strict watch and ward; and, instead of spurring them on to victory in the various contests, he would give them no encouragement whatever.

Loder's rasping voice broke in upon the juniors' reflections.

"I shall expect to see you lined up in the Close at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said the prefect. "And mind you wash your necks and put on clean collars!"

"Cheek!" growled Peter Todd.

"You will write a hundred lines, Todd, when you get back from the tour!"

Peter Todd subsided with a grunt; and Loder, having exploded his bombshell, went back to his study.

He left a chorus of indignation behind him.

"The beast!" growled Bulstrode.

"This fairly puts the kybosh on our little trip!" said Dick Russell.

"Afraid so," said Vernon-Smith gloomily. "Who'd have thought that Loder would barge in like this?"

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Peter Todd.

"We must get Loder out of the way, that's all," said Hazeldene.

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"Can't he do us," he said. "We don't want to get into the Head's black books. It might squash all future tours."

"I'll tell you what we might do," said Dick Penfold. "Loder will come to Dorset, all right. We can't stop him, unless we kidnap him—and that would be altogether too thick! But we can at least dispense with his charming company on the journey."

"How?" asked Wibley.

"I was thinking that we might go as far as Courtfield Junction with Loder, and then, after he's boarded the train for Dorchester, we can leave him, and do the journey ourselves on bikes."

Vernon-Smith looked doubtful.

"Dorchester's over a hundred miles from here," he said.

"Never mind. We could do the ride in a couple of days, putting up at a wayside inn for the night."

"True, O King!" said Ogilvy. "It will be a frightful rag, but it's better than travelling down with Loder."

The juniors discussed the scheme in detail. And then Wingate of the Sixth announced that it was bed-time.

It was with many misgivings that Vernon-Smith & Co. trooped up to the Remove dormitory.

The campaign against Dorset, to which they had looked forward so eagerly, seemed like being something of a failure, with Gerald Loder presiding over it like an evil spirit.

But the juniors were determined, at any rate, that the cad of the Sixth should not have matters entirely his own way!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Loder Gets Left!

"ANSWER your names!"

Loder of the Sixth rapped out the command next morning, in the Close.

"Anybody would think he was escorting a dozen prisoners to Dartmoor, to hear him talk!" growled Peter Todd.

Loder called the names, and the juniors responded in turn.

"The next order will be, 'Take up cricket-bags, by numbers!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder frowned.

"If you kids give any more trouble," he said, "I'll get the tour cancelled!"

"My hat!"

The juniors ventured no more remarks.

They fell in behind Loder and mimicked his long stride.

Even Gosling, the porter, had a grin as the strange procession trooped out of gates.

"There's a tramp, tramp, tramping on the highway!"

There's a sound of music drawing near!" whistled Peter Todd.

And the rest of the juniors chuckled.

When the little booking-office at Friardale was reached, Loder ordered thirteen tickets to Dorchester.

"Make it one, old sport," said Dick Rake.

"We're paying for our own."

Loder looked surprised. He was acting as treasurer of the tour, and the travelling expenses came out of the funds. The juniors were not expected to buy their own tickets.

But Loder made no protest. If the fellows chose to pay their own way, it was their funeral.

Had he lingered near the booking-office, however, he would have seen them take out tickets, not to Dorchester, but merely to Courtfield Junction!

The train rumbled into the little station.

"Hop in!" said Loder. "I'm going to cram you all into one carriage, so that I can keep you under observation. I understand you've been in the habit of smoking and playing cards when going on previous tours."

Vernon-Smith blazed up indignantly, but Peter Todd gripped his arm.

"Let him rip!" muttered Peter. "We shall soon get rid of him."

The atmosphere in the packed carriage was stifling.

Loder didn't seem to mind, but the Removites were gasping and spluttering as they staggered out on to the platform at Courtfield Junction.

Loder hailed a porter.

"Which is the London train, which catches a connection to the West of England?" he asked.

"No. 1 Platform, sir."

The juniors accompanied Loder to the train, and clambered in.

The guard waved his flag, and the train moved out of the platform.

As it did so, the carriage-doors were suddenly swung open, and the juniors began to jump out on to the metals.

Loder sat rooted to his seat with astonishment.

"You—you—" he stuttered. "Come back at once, all of you!"

"Not this morning!" chuckled Dick Russell. "Some other morning!"

And Gerald Loder found himself alone in the carriage.

"The cheeky young cubs!" he muttered. "I suppose I must get out, too!"

But there were two factors which prevented this. In the first place, the train was gathering speed; and, secondly, both carriage doors were locked! The juniors had left nothing to chance.

Loder gritted his teeth with annoyance.

His first impulse was to pull the communication-cord; but he realised that the juniors would be well out of the way by the time the alarm was given.

"I suppose there's nothing for it but to go to Dorchester!" muttered the prefect.

"They'll turn up sooner or later. They can't back out of the tour."

And Loder resigned himself to his solitary journey.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith & Co., chuckling over the success of their ruse, were walking back to Greyfriars through the fields.

The Famous Five encountered them in the Close.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We thought you'd gone! Has the train broken down?"

"Has the esteemed engineful driver gone on the strikefulness?" inquired Hurree Singh.

Vernon-Smith explained the process of getting rid of Loder.

"We're going to do the journey on our bikes," he concluded.

"My hat!"

"Why not follow on by the next train?" asked Harry Wharton.

"There isn't a next train—not till to-morrow, anyway!" said Peter Todd. "Trains to Dorchester are like figs in a fig-pudding—few and far between. Besides, a bike-ride will be glorious!"

"You'll be too fagged out to do yourselves justice in the sports," said Frank Nugent.

"Rats!"

A few moments later the tourists started off.

It became early apparent that the ride would be anything but a picnic.

The heat was scorching, and, after a

miles' hard riding, the cyclists began to show signs of distress.

"Phew!" panted Hazeldene. "I'm fed-up! What about pooling our cash, and hiring a car?"

"Rats!" said Vernon-Smith. "Let's stick it out, now we've started. We've only done ten miles so far. Wait till we've ridden fifty before you start whining."

"I'm hungry!" growled Bulstrode.

"So am I," said the Bounder. "But we're going to do another ten miles before we feed."

"Oh crumbs!"
The juniors continued their gruelling ride. They cycled three abreast. The first three were Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, and Dick Penfold, and they set a pace which the others found it difficult to maintain.

The morning was well advanced when the juniors sighted an old-fashioned hostelry.

"Corn in Egypt!" gasped Dick Rake, fairly rolling off his machine. "Come on, kids!"

The juniors, panted and perspiring, and with only one-fifth of their Spartan journey completed, staggered into the house of refreshment.

"Dinner for twelve!" said Vernon-Smith, when mine host appeared.

"Very good, sir!"
The dinner was an excellent one, commencing with roast duck, and concluding with strawberries and cream.

"Billy Bunter would be in his element here!" said Dick Penfold.

"Yes, rather Loder!" said Peter Todd. "Wonder if he's gone on to Dorchester?"

"You bet he has," said Bulstrode. "He knows we'll have to follow on, or else forfeit the tour. I expect he'll be waiting for us at Dorchester with a crowbar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"He'll have to wait a jolly long time, at our present rate of progress," said Vernon-Smith. "We've got seventy miles to cover yet."

"Oh, help!"
After their hasty dinner the juniors felt disinclined for pedalling.

Ogilvy suggested a rest, and set the example by going to sleep on the settee.

By three o'clock the terrific heat had abated somewhat, and the tourists tackled their task with fresh heart.

They had passed through a couple of counties by the time dusk fell.

"What town's this?" asked Peter Todd, at length.

"Basingstoke," said Vernon-Smith. "I vote we spend the night here. Some of us haven't got lamps; and we shouldn't get much farther, anyway!"

The juniors, wearied by their exertions, retired to rest at the Station Hotel.

Each one of them fell asleep the instant his head touched the pillow.

It had been a day of achievement, for the tourists had broken the back of their journey, and they hoped to arrive at Dorchester by midday next day, ready for the cricket-match with the boys of Dorset in the afternoon.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. An Affair of Dishonour!

UNDER the scorching summer sun twelve dusty and dishevelled cyclists rode into the quaint, old-fashioned High Street of Dorchester.

"There's Loder!" said Penfold suddenly. The juniors dismounted as the prefect approached.

"Good-morning, old scout!" said Peter Todd affably. "Nice weather for the time of year!"

Loder scowled.
"You young rotters!" he said. "I've a good mind to report you to the Head for playing this trick!"

"Bow-wow!"
"Look here—"

"Ask us to look at something more attractive," said Dick Rake. "A gorilla, for instance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Loder clenched his hands, and he looked as if he were about to hurl himself upon the juniors. But he refrained.

"I arrived here yesterday afternoon," he growled, "and I've been fooling about ever since!"

"I suppose you're well acquainted with all the pubs in the neighbourhood by this time?" said Vernon-Smith. "Have you explored the George and Dragon, or the Potty Prefect?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Loder nearly choked.

"You'll pay for this!" he snarled. "Come, THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 27.

with me at once to the hotel. You're too late for lunch—"

"If you think we're going to play cricket on empty stomachs," said Peter Todd, "you're mistaken!"

"Hear, hear!"
"It's your own fault," said Loder. "You ought to have arrived hours ago."

"B-r-r-r!"
Loder strode away in the direction of the hotel, and the juniors followed, pushing their bicycles.

Loitering in the entrance to the hotel was a man in a loud check suit. He touched his cap as Loder came up.

"Can I 'ave a word with you, sir?" he asked.

The prefect nodded; and the juniors passed into the hotel, leaving Loder in close conversation with the horse-looking gentleman.

"Loder's made pals here already," said Ogilvy. "I can't say I admire his choice."

"That fellow looks like Jerry Hawke's double," said Vernon-Smith. "The sort of merchant who deals in dead certs and sure snips, which never come off!"

"Loder will be running a halter round his neck, if he's not careful!" said Dick Penfold. "Bless Loder! Let's see if there's anything doing in the way of lunch."

And the Bounder sounded the gong in the hall.

The proprietor promptly appeared.

"Lunch!" said Vernon-Smith tersely.

"Lunch!" echoed eleven voices.

The proprietor shook his head.
"Sorry, young gentlemen," he said, "but I've had instructions from the gentleman in charge of your party to the effect that you're not to have lunch."

"My hat!"
"What awful cheek!"

"If we're going to be constantly up against this sort of thing," growled Peter Todd, "there will be a dead Loder found lying about the streets of Dorchester!"

Vernon-Smith said nothing. Actions spoke louder than words, in his case. He produced a Treasury-note from his wallet, and handed it to the proprietor.

The latter became all smiles.

"I'll see what I can do for you," he said.

"But I've only got a cold fowl!"

"Trot it out!" said Bulstrode. "I could devour a whole blessed farmyard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The juniors were escorted into the dining-room, where quite a respectable meal was set before them.

"Loder's face will be worth a guinea a box when he finds us gorging!" said Wibley. Peter Todd glanced out of the window.

"Loder's otherwise engaged," he said. "He's still plotting deep, dark plots with the man in the screaming suit."

As a matter of fact, Gerald Loder was so absorbed in conversation that he had quite forgotten the existence of the juniors for the moment.

Loder's companion was Mr. Snipe, who in order to earn his livelihood "made a book."

This did not mean that Mr. Snipe wrote stories. Far from it. It meant that he dabbled in horse-racing, football, cricket—in fact, any form of sport on which bets were given and taken.

"I've 'ad a very bad season," he was saying to Loder. "People aren't keen on racin' in this part of the world. They ain't been eddicated up to it. It's a treat to knock up against a real sports'n' gent like you, sir. I 'ad all my work cut out to beat you at billiards last night."

Loder frowned at the recollection. That game of billiards had cost him a sovereign.

"Of course," said Mr. Snipe hastily, "you can 'ave your revenge any time you like. You'll always find me at the Dog an' Pheasant."

Loder nodded.

"What do you want with me now?" he said.

"I was wonderin' if you would care to back Dorset to win the cricket-match this afternoon."

"I don't care to back a team I know nothing about," said Loder shortly.

And then a sudden inspiration came to him.

He remembered that he would be one of the umpires in the match to be played. And an umpire, if he chooses to be unscrupulous, can have a very big sway in the result.

Supposing Loder backed Dorset to win, and made sure of his money by giving unfair decisions?

The prefect jumped at the chance.

In the ordinary way he didn't care the toss of a button which side won the match. He had no sense of sportsmanship, no feel-

ings of loyalty for his school. He had done this sort of thing before, and he had no scruples in doing it again.

"Anything doing?" asked Mr. Snipe.

"Yes," Loder lowered his voice. "I'm prepared to back Dorset to the extent of a fiver."

"That's the stuff!" said Mr. Snipe. And his crafty little eyes glittered.

Mr. Snipe kept in close touch with events in the sporting world, and he had seen a glowing account of the Greyfriars' team in a Wiltshire paper. It appeared that Vernon-Smith & Co. had played a great game against the boys of Wiltshire, and they would have little difficulty in trouncing the Dorset team.

Mr. Snipe did not know, of course, that Loder would be acting as umpire. Had he known this he would not have clinched with the wager.

"That's a go, then?" he said. "You're willin' to put five quids on Dorset?"

"Yes," said Loder.

Mr. Snipe produced a notebook and a stump of pencil, and duly recorded the bet.

"Wish I could come along to see the match," he said. "But I've got another engagement this afternoon."

Loder drew a breath of relief. The presence of Mr. Snipe on the cricket-ground might prevent him from putting his cherished plan into effect.

"You'll know where to find me after the match," said Mr. Snipe.

Loder nodded; and Mr. Snipe, feeling more than pleased with his latest transaction, shuffled away.

The cad of the Sixth entered the hotel and passed into the dining-room.

The juniors had nearly finished their lunch by this time.

"Alfred there's not much left, Loder," said Peter Todd. "But there's a nice bone here. You can take it on the mat, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Loder bit his lip. The proprietor had disobeyed his orders, and the Removite cricketers, instead of going hungry, were well fortified for the fray.

Loder rang the bell violently, and a waitress appeared.

"I want to see the proprietor," snapped Loder.

"Very well, sir."
The waitress retired, and returned a moment later.

"The proprietor isn't in, sir," she said meekly.

And the juniors chuckled.

"All right!" growled Loder. "I'll make it warm for him next time I see him! Come on, you young sweeps! It's time for the match!"

The Removites accompanied Loder to the cricket-ground in great spirits.

The effects of their long cycle-ride had worn off, and they felt equal to tackling anything or anybody.

At the entrance to the ground they were greeted by a cheery band of fellows.

"Nothing of the country farmer touch about these chaps!" said Peter Todd.

"No jolly fear!" said Dick Rake. "They seem to belong to schools like Greyfriars. Who's their skipper, I wonder?"

A tall boy in a coloured blazer came forward.

"I'm your man!" he said. "Delighted to meet you. My name's Marlowe."

Vernon-Smith shook hands, and the necessary introductions were made.

Loder looked on with a grin of satisfaction.

The Dorset boys looked so capable and businesslike that they seemed likely to win the match in the ordinary course of events, without any help from Loder.

The two elevens indulged in some preliminary practice, during which time quite a crowd of sightseers streamed in at the gate.

Then Marlowe spun the coin, and Vernon-Smith won the toss.

"We'll put you in first," he said.

"Good; and may you ever regret it!"
"I don't think we shall," laughed the Bounder.

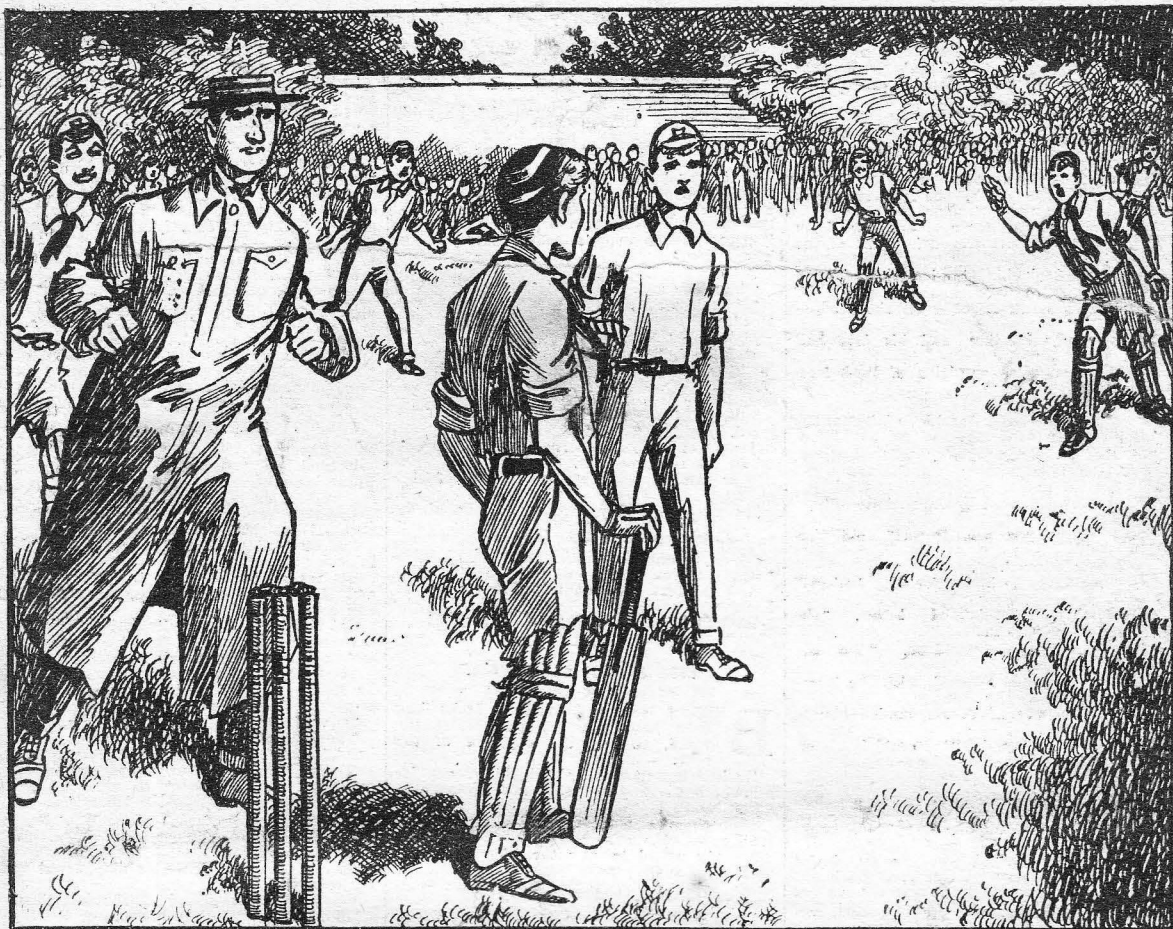
And the next moment the match was in full swing.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. In Spite of All.

OH, well hit, sir!"
"Keep it up, you men!"

Marlowe and Maxwell, of Dorset, were going strong.

For over an hour they had defied the best efforts of the Greyfriars bowlers.



"You're out!" said Loder. "The umpire's decision is final!" The prefect strode forward with the intention of pulling up the stumps. (See page 5.)

Vernon-Smith & Co. quickly tumbled to the fact that the local boys could play cricket.

Dorset is a county which, being tucked away between two counties of far greater repute—Hampshire and Devonshire—does not receive the praise it deserves.

The names of Grenville, Hawkins, Raleigh, and Drake have made Devonshire famous; and Hampshire rings with the praise of Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley.

Dorset can produce few names such as these, but although not in the first rank of English counties she is very far from being in the last.

Marlowe and Maxwell represented the rising Dorset generation. Whatever their shortcomings in other respects, they had mastered the whole art of cricket.

Under the tropical sun the Greyfriars' fieldsmen had a far from enviable time.

Loder's face was aglow with satisfaction. The game was going just how he wanted it to go.

When the hundred was hoisted, Vernon-Smith tossed the ball to Dick Russell.

"See what you can do," he said.

Russell was not a great bowler, but he was fresh, whereas the Bounder was stale.

The first ball he sent down was smitten far into the long-field.

"Come on!" shouted Marlowe gaily. "We'll run four for that!"

But it was a big risk. The Dorset skipper had not made sufficient allowance for the excellence of the Greyfriars' fielding.

Ogilvy whipped up the ball and sent it whizzing in.

The wicket was wrecked, and Marlowe was run out by yards.

"How's that?" chuckled Peter Todd. And then, to the complete consternation of the Friars, the umpire exclaimed: "Not out!"

The fieldsmen gasped and glared at Loder. "My only aunt!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

"Why, the fellow was yards out of his crease!"

"Of course I was!" said Marlowe.

"Not out!" repeated Loder firmly.

"I'm going, anyway!" said Marlowe. "I'm not going to stay and profit by an unfair decision of that sort!"

Loder flushed.

"Do you mean to insinuate—" he began.

But Marlowe was already striding away towards the pavilion.

Loder muttered an imprecation.

He had hoped that Marlowe would remain at the wickets, in order that the Dorset boys might pile up a tremendous score. Little did he dream that the local skipper would take the law into his own hands, and refuse to accept the umpire's decision.

"Loder must be off his rocker, to make a blunder like that!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"He's got bats in his belfry, or something."

After Marlowe's departure the wickets began to fall freely.

But Dorset had already amassed a good score, and when the innings closed 150 were on the board.

Against this score the Friars made a very feeble show.

Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, and Dick Penfold were clean bowled in turn; and although Bulstrode and Hazeldene made a plucky stand, the entire side was dismissed for 57.

"Hadh't we better pack up and go home?" said Dick Rake. "This is too awful for words!"

"Loder seems to be enjoying it, anyway," said Bulstrode. "He's grinning like a gargoyle."

"Loder will come several sorts of a cropper if he doesn't look out!" said Vernon-Smith grimly.

Just then a bell rang, summoning the cricketers to tea.

It was not a merry meal. The Greyfriars juniors said little, and ate less.

They were not only up against Dorset, but up against an unscrupulous umpire, into the bargain.

Either Loder didn't know his job, or he didn't choose to know it. The juniors surmised—correctly, as it happened—that the latter was the case.

"That's a queer sort of umpire you've brought down," said Marlowe. "Anybody would think he wanted you to be beaten."

"I'm pretty sure he does!" growled Vernon-Smith.

"Great Scott! Hasn't he any loyalty to his own school?"

"If he ever had any, he's either pawned it or lost it."

"Can't you get rid of him?"

"He's a prefect, and he might make things jolly unpleasant if we tried it on. Not that I care a rap about the consequences, so far as they would affect myself," added the Bounder. "But other fellows would suffer. If we did anything to Loder, our Head would come down like a thousand of bricks, and all future tours might be cancelled."

Marlowe nodded.

"It's jolly rough luck," he said. Shortly afterwards Dorset started their second innings.

They fared badly this time. Indeed, they might have collapsed altogether had not Loder given several decisions which were open to doubt.

Greyfriars wanted 160 to win—a big task, but just within the bounds of possibility.

Vernon-Smith started off in great style. He scored three boundaries in his first over, and the grin faded from Loder's face.

An hour later Loder was scowling deeply.

The Friars had already scored a hundred, for the loss of five wickets. And the Bounder was still batting.

Supposing Dorset should be beaten, after all?

Scout Skipper

Loder grew hot and cold by turns at the thought.

He could not afford to lose five pounds, for the simple reason that he hadn't five pounds to lose. And Mr. Snipe was not the sort of man to allow a debt to stand over.

Loder winced every time Vernon-Smith sent the ball to the boundary. But three more wickets fell during the next ten minutes, and the prefect's hopes revived.

When the last man in—Hazeldene—came on to the pitch, the Remove were within a dozen runs of their goal.

"Play up, Hazel!" came in a chorus from the Greyfriars juniors seated in front of the pavilion.

Hazeldene took his stand with a fixed determination to hold out till the end, while Vernon-Smith knocked off the remaining runs.

Marlowe was bowling, and his first ball struck Hazel's pad.

There was a faint suspicion of leg-before-wicket!

"Out!" said Loder.

"I wasn't!" retorted Hazeldene indignantly. "Don't argue with me! You're out!"

"Is this a cricket-match," said Marlowe, "or a pantomime? How can the fellow be out when no one appealed?"

"His leg was in front of the wicket——"

"Rot!"

"Stay where you are, Hazel!" said Vernon-Smith.

Hazeldene grinned.

"I'm not likely to budge for fifty Loders!" he said.

"Look here," exclaimed Loder, "the umpire's decision is final!"

"So's mine!" said Hazeldene. "You can go and eat coke, Loder!"

The prefect strode forward, with the intention of pulling up the stumps.

But the Dorset fellows surrounded him in a hostile group.

"No, you don't, my beauty!" said Marlowe. "We're playing this match to a finish!"

And there was a cheer from the pavilion—likewise from the rest of the spectators, who resented Loder's action.

"If you don't stand clear," said Maxwell, "we'll chuck you off the field!"

Loder realised that he was no match for eleven sturdy fellows. He stepped back out of the danger-zone, and the game went on.

Hazeldene, playing with great caution, survived his first over, and then Vernon-Smith came into the picture.

Twice in swift succession the ball was despatched to the boundary.

"Only four to win!" chanted Peter Todd, executing a Jazz in front of the pavilion.

Loder tried another dodge.

"It's half-past six," he said, consulting his watch. "The game's over."

"I think you've made a slight mistake," said the other umpire—a local man. "The arrangement was that stumps were to be drawn at seven."

And once again Loder was outdone.

Vernon-Smith stopped the next two balls dead. The third, however, was a half-volley, and the Bounder dealt with it in the approved style of G. L. Jessop.

The ball soared clean over the railings, and landed with a thud on the pavilion roof.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Smithy!"

"We've beaten Dorset——"

"And Loder!"

Marlowe and his followers joined in the applause. The Remove had richly deserved their victory, and Vernon-Smith had scored 85, not out.

Loder almost tottered off the field.

In spite of all his cunning, the Remove had won the match, and Mr. Snipe would expect a prompt payment of five pounds.

Vernon-Smith & Co. had nothing to say to the rascally prefect.

They cut him dead, and went along to their hotel for dinner.

Loder was not thinking of dinner just then. He made his way to the disreputable inn known as the Dog and Pheasant, where Mr. Snipe had his headquarters.

The bookmaker greeted him cordially. "It's very sportin' of you to come along an' settle up so soon!" he remarked.

"How did you know Greyfriars had won?" growled Loder.

"One of my pals was at the match, and he's just biked over with the result. I'll ave four pounds in notes, an' a pound in silver, if it's all the same to you."

Loder groaned.

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"I—I—a little difficulty has arisen," he stammered.

Mr. Snipe's fatuous smile changed to a sneer.

"You can't pay up—what!"

Loder shook his head.

"At the moment I'm stumped," he said. "But I'll see that you get the money at the first opportunity. You won't have to wait long."

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever!" chanted Mr. Snipe. "No, my son. You don't get round me so easy as that. Unless you pay up this evenin', I'm afraid I shall ave to drop a gentle int to your 'eadmaster."

Loder turned pale.

"You wouldn't dare——" he began.

"Ho, wouldn't I! Jest you wait an' see!"

Loder saw that he would get no mercy from this man. Mr. Snipe would bring about his ruin just as cheerfully as he would sit down to breakfast. No sentimental appeal would save Loder's skin.

Visions of the sack floated before Loder's mind. He had been troubled by these visions before, but he had contrived to wriggle out of all his tight corners.

How was he going to wriggle out of this one?

He gave a wild glance round the stuffy bar-parlour. Mr. Snipe watched him as a cat watches a mouse.

"Well," said the bookmaker at length, "what are you goin' to do about it?"

And in that moment inspiration came to Loder.

He had hit upon a way out, after all!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Marching Orders!

BEFORE leaving Greyfriars, Loder had been handed thirty pounds by the Head, to pay the expenses of the tour.

He had forgotten all about this money for a time; but a way of escape now occurred to him.

Supposing he paid Mr. Snipe out of the funds?

Nobody would be any the wiser; and, by making the Greyfriars juniors go short at their hotel, Loder could easily make ends meet.

No one would know, no one would even suspect, that he had misappropriated some of the money entrusted to him by the Head.

Loder clutched at the opportunity like a drowning man at a straw.

To do him justice, he was not, in the ordinary course of events, a thief. But this was his only chance.

Unless Mr. Snipe were promptly paid, exposure would follow.

"What are you goin' to do about it?" repeated Mr. Snipe.

Loder plunged his hand into his pocket, and produced a bundle of crisp fivers.

"My eye!" gasped Mr. Snipe. "So you were pullin' my leg all the time? You tried to pretend you were stony—what?"

"This money isn't mine," said Loder. "It represents the funds of the tour. I can't pay you out of my own pocket, so I'll pay you out of this."

Mr. Snipe looked uneasy.

"Is it safe?" he asked.

"Perfectly," said Loder. "No one will know anything about it."

"Isn't there a check on the money?"

"I can get over that all right."

"You are sure of that?"

"Positive!"

Loder extracted one of the notes from the bundle, and handed it to the bookmaker.

In doing so, he felt a wave of colour rush to his cheeks.

The baseness of his action was apparent to him.

He was a thief—not fit to associate with any decent fellows.

Mr. Snipe's hand closed greedily over the fiver.

"I want a receipt, please!" said Loder.

Mr. Snipe nodded. He shuffled out of the bar, in order to make out the document.

When he had gone Loder experienced a feeling that he was not alone in the stuffy little parlour.

The prefect spun round with a guilty start. Standing behind him were Marlowe and Maxwell, of the Dorset team.

"You!" muttered Loder. "What do you want here?"

"It isn't often we play the spy," said Marlowe; "but we concluded you were up to no good, and we followed you here. We've

watched your merry antics from the billiard-room, and we've seen enough to get you sacked from your school—and perhaps sent to prison into the bargain!"

Loder's bluff evaporated before Marlowe's accusing glance.

"I—I——" he stammered.

"You're a thief!" cut in Maxwell.

"Look here——"

"We can understand now why you wanted your own school to lose the cricket match," said Marlowe. "I think the best thing we can do is to send a little note to your headmaster, telling him exactly what's happened."

"You—you——"

This little transaction of yours with Comrade Snipe, followed by your theft from the sports fund, will make a pretty story!" said Maxwell.

Loder clenched his hands in impotence.

He was fairly caught.

From the open doorway of the billiard-room the two Dorset boys had seen and heard everything. They knew him for a thorough-paced scoundrel, and they would not hesitate to expose him.

The tolls were closing in upon him fast. In his mind's eye he saw himself being drummed out of Greyfriars—a common thief, whose contaminating presence was no longer required at the old school.

Loder's first impulse was to resort to personal violence.

But he realised that this would avail him little.

His second impulse was to bribe Marlowe and Maxwell to say nothing of what they had seen and heard.

But this would be equally futile.

There was nothing for it but to throw himself upon the mercy of his accusers.

"I—I admit taking a fiver from the funds," he said. "Of course, I was going to replace it at the first opportunity."

"Oh, of course!" sneered Marlowe.

"You've got me in the hollow of your hand," said Loder. "A word from you, and I shall be kicked out of Greyfriars. But I know you're too decent to give the show away. You wouldn't ruin a fellow!"

"I'm not so sure," said Maxwell. "If ever there was a rank outsider who wanted showing up, it's you!"

At that moment Mr. Snipe reappeared with the receipt.

The bookmaker glared at the intruders.

"Who are you——" he began.

"It's all right," said Loder. "They're pals of mine, Mr. Snipe."

"Cut it out!" said Marlowe. "Take your precious receipt, and come along with us. And if you attempt to bunk, we sha'n't hesitate to call a policeman!"

Loder followed his two captors into the street.

"I appeal to you fellows," he said, "not to take this any further! I'll do anything you want, provided you say nothing about this affair!"

"Very well," said Marlowe, at length. "We won't give you away, provided you comply with our conditions."

Loder licked his dry lips.

"What are the conditions?" he asked.

"We'll make good that fiver, and you're to hand over the entire funds to Vernon-Smith."

"I'll do that."

"After which," said Marlowe, "you're to go straight back to Greyfriars!"

"How can I? The tour's only just started."

"You'll go straight back," repeated Marlowe firmly. "I don't care what excuse you make when you get there. You can say you're indisposed, or any old thing you like. But you've got to go!"

Loder did not relish an immediate return to Greyfriars.

But anything was better than exposure. Anything was better than being sacked from the school in disgrace.

"I'll do it!" muttered the prefect. "But you—you'll say nothing about this to the juniors?"

"Not a word!" said Marlowe. "Here's the fiver. You'll hand this, together with the other money, to Vernon-Smith, and you'll quit Dorchester by the first train in the morning. If you fail to carry out these conditions, we'll communicate with your Head at once, and tell him the whole story!"

"And thank your lucky stars you've got off so lightly!" said Maxwell.

Loder returned to the hotel feeling greatly relieved.

It would not be difficult to invent some excuse for his early return to Greyfriars. He was a fluent liar, and could represent that he was too ill to continue to conduct the tour.

Vernon-Smith & Co. saw nothing more of the objectionable prefect.

On Vernon-Smith's plate, at the breakfast-table next morning, was an envelope containing the funds of the tour, also the following note:

"Dear Vernon-Smith,—I am feeling very groggy, and have caught the first train back to Greyfriars.

"I am handing over the funds of the tour herewith.—Yours,
GERALD LODER."

"My only aunt!" gasped the Bounder.

"What about her?" asked Peter Todd.

"Has she sent you a remittance?"

"This is a note from Loder," said Vernon-Smith. "He's gone!"

"Gone!"

There was a chorus of excited exclamations from the juniors.

"He says he feels groggy and has gone back to Greyfriars," said the Bounder. "You can believe that or not, as you like. If you ask me, he's got into difficulties with that horse-looking cove, and made the place too hot to hold him."

"Ours not to reason why," said Dick Russell. "He's gone, anyway—and a jolly good riddance!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now that we're left on our own," said Hazeldene, "we might be able to put it across Dorset. If Loder had stayed, he'd have given wrong decisions, and we should have been in the soup."

"Yes, rather!"

Breakfast was a merry meal.

Loder's mysterious departure had given the Removites a clear field.

They felt that they would be able to do themselves justice now.

But little did they dream how much they owed to Marlowe and Maxwell, who had shadowed the cad of the Sixth with such splendid results!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Victors and Vanquished!

"**W**HEREFORE those sunny smiles?" asked Marlowe, as the Greyfriars juniors arrived on the sports ground.

"We are smiling," explained Peter Todd, "because our pet Loder has disappeared."

"Disappeared!" echoed Marlowe, in well-feigned wonder.

Peter nodded.

"He's handed over the funds of the tour to Smithy, and gone back to Greyfriars."

"How jolly queer!" said Maxwell, with a grin.

"I suppose you fellows don't know anything about it?" said Vernon-Smith, darting a keen glance at Marlowe.

"Ahem! Supposing we get to business? The first race is to be run at ten o'clock, you know."

And Marlowe and Maxwell strolled away to the dressing-ten.

A local schoolmaster had been engaged to take Loder's place.

Promptly at ten he rounded up the runners for the hundred yards race.

"Here we go gathering nuts in May!" said Peter Todd. "In other words, a bunch of victories!"

But Peter spoke too soon.

Marlowe won the hundred yards in great style, winning fairly easily from Vernon-Smith.

The high jump came next.

"Methinks we shall come a cropper here," murmured Dick Penfold. "We all ate too much brekker, in our excitement at getting rid of Loder."

Penfold was right.

A tall Dorset boy named Tarrant won the high jump on his head, so to speak. And he followed up this success by finishing first in the crowd race.

The hurdle grew very excited.

"These 'ere scholars from the collidge," said a local farmer, "is 'aving it put across 'em fair and proper!"

"Which they can't 'old a candle to our bonnie lads!" said another.

The boys of Dorset carried all before them.

The quarter-mile, the half-mile, and the sack race, were all won by the locals.

"A few minutes ago," said Peter Todd sadly, "I predicted a bunch of victories. I was quite right. The only drawback is that the victories have gone to the wrong side!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the strength of what we had for brekker," said Dick Rake, "we ought to manage the tug-of-war."

Unfortunately, Dorset had designs on this event as well.

The Friars won the first pull fairly easily; and then their opponents swiftly turned the tables, winning by two pulls to one.

"They bain't no good," said the farmer, who had first spoken, pointing derisively to the Greyfriars juniors. "Our lads be a sight too swift for the likes o' they!"

"This 'ere," said the farmer's companion, "fair warms the cockles of my 'eart. It's better than a quart of 'ome-brewed ale, as ever was!"

Greyfriars scored one single, solitary success that morning.

Vernon-Smith hurled the cricket-ball farther than anyone else, thus saving the Friars from being completely exterminated.

After lunch, however, the tide of battle was turned.

The rival teams adjourned to the river, and the Friars came into their own once more.

They could do nothing wrong.

Vernon-Smith won the first race; Peter Todd won the second; and the next three fell to Penfold, Rake, and Bulstrode respectively.

"This is heaps better!" said Vernon-Smith, as the competitors lined up for the last race of all.

"If we can only pull off this race," said Peter Todd, "we shall make a clean sweep of the board—so far as swimming's concerned, anyway. What do you think, Dutton?"

"I never do," said Tom Dutton indignantly; "unless it happens to be ginger-pop!"

"What!"

"You know jolly well I don't drink, Todd!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Dutton glared.

"I drink a lot, do I?" he said furiously.

"All right! You wait till afterwards!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The word of command was given, and the swimmers plunged into the cool, sparkling water.

Tom Dutton was in a wrathful mood—which was fortunate, for it lent power to his stroke. He forged ahead of all the others, and won a magnificent race with several yards to spare.

And he was so overwhelmed by the congratulations of his schoolfellows that he quite forgot to take summary vengeance on Peter Todd.

"The sun's beginning to shine again," said Ogilvy. "If Dick Russell wins the boxing, everything in the garden will be lovely!"

An hour later, Dick Russell found himself matched with Marlowe, the Dorset skipper.

The contest took place in the open-air, as in the days of the Corinthians, the only difference being that it was not a bout with bare fists.

A ring was formed, and there was a cheer as Russell and Marlowe, shaking hands, plunged into the fray.

Marlowe was the taller of the two, and he possessed a longer reach. Moreover, his footwork was dazzling.

Before the end of the first round, Dick Russell found himself lying in a dazed condition on his back, blinking up at the bright sunshine. How he got there only Marlowe knew.

The referee began to count. Russell heard his comrades urging him to rise.

He staggered to his feet, and remained on the defence for the rest of the round.

"That fellow's hot stuff!" he muttered to Ogilvy, as the latter spouted his face. "He wants careful watching. Goodness knows how he came to break through my guard!"

"Never mind!" said Ogilvy cheerfully. "You'll break through his before long!"

Dick Russell went up for the second round with a determination to study Marlowe's methods. He contended himself with defensive work, and it was not until he got the measure of his man that he commenced to hit.

It was Marlowe's turn to go down at the end of the round. He stopped a sledgehammer punch from Russell with his nose, and almost turned a somersault. Only the call of "Time!" saved him.

Ogilvy said nothing as he nursed his man. There was no need for speech.

Dick Russell was well into his stride by this time, and he meant to win.

Rounds three and four were fairly quiet, and the crowd grew fidgety.

But in the fifth round they were given plenty of thrills.

The two boxers clinched, and each beat a merry tattoo upon the other's ribs.

"Break away, there!" said the referee.

Russell sprang clear, and shot out his left.

Marlowe warded off the blow in the nick of time, and he, in turn, essayed a right swing,

which lifted Russell off his feet and stretched him on the grass for the second time.

Russell lay perfectly still until the referee had counted eight; then he bounded to his feet, and went at his man like a tiger.

Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!

There was a swift interchange of blows, and then Marlowe was seen to throw up his hands and pitch backwards.

"Hurrah!"

"Well hit, sir!"

The referee was counting. Marlowe lay motionless.

"Buck up, old man!" shouted Maxwell. "You're not beaten yet!"

But only Marlowe knew the force of that knock-out blow. It was a blow from which few boxers could hope to recover in ten seconds.

The referee concluded the count, and the contest was over.

Dick Russell was the winner, but he looked a sorry spectacle.

"I shall have a couple of black eyes to take back to Greyfriars!" he said ruefully. "And my nose seems to have got round to my left ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've won, old scout, and that's all that matters!" said Ogilvy. "Well played, Dick!"

The tour was over, and once again the Friars had covered themselves with glory.

The cricket-match stood to their credit—like-wise the swimming races and the boxing contest. The Dorset boys had proved themselves fitter of foot, and that was all.

Marlowe was assisted to his feet, and he managed to muster a smile.

"I was always under the impression that I could box," he said. "I now see that I'm a mere novice. How much do you charge for boxing lessons, Russell?"

"Rats!" said Dick Russell, with a laugh. "I don't suppose I should lick you again in a month of Sundays!"

"Now that the strife is o'er, and the battle won," said Peter Todd, "what price a feed at the hotel, to wind up with?"

The Dorset boys readily consented; and it was a very happy throng that sat down at the big table in the dining-room.

"We've been jolly lucky," said Vernon-Smith, as dinner was being served. "If Loder had stayed, he'd have decided against us in all the swimming races, to say nothing of the boxing."

"It beats me," said Marlowe, "how a fellow like that can keep a prefectship at a public school."

"Loder believes in the eleventh commandment—'Thou shalt not be found out,'" said Dick Penfold. "He's managed to steer to windward of the authorities, so far. In the long run, I dare say he'll be bowled out."

"And a jolly good job, too!" growled Bulstrode. "Loder's a pig and a tyrant!"

"Hear, hear!"

Ginger-pop and orange-wine gurgled down many parched throats, and the revels continued until a late hour.

Then the Friars bade farewell to their guests, and retired for the night.

"Are we biking back to Greyfriars?" asked Hazeldene, next morning.

"Those in favour, show their hands!" said Vernon-Smith.

Not a hand went up.

Cycling-tours, as Peter Todd pointed out, were all right in moderation; but one could have too much of a good thing.

Accordingly, the juniors took their bicycles on the train, and reached Greyfriars before locking-up time that evening.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry's cheery voice in the Close. "How did you get on, you fellows?"

"Top-hole!" said Vernon-Smith.

"You won the cricket-match?" asked Wharton.

"Yes. Loder jolly nearly lost it for us, though. He gave unfair decisions, but the Dorset fellows refused to profit by them."

"Loder's a howling cad!" said Nugent. "Why did he come back so early, by the way?"

"Give it up," said the Bounder. "He was supposed to be ill, or something."

Loder of the Sixth had doubtless given a satisfactory explanation to the Head; but he kept his own counsel, so far as the juniors were concerned.

And Vernon-Smith & Co. never knew of the part played by their Dorsetshire friends, Marlowe and Maxwell, in frustrating the Prefect's Plot!

THE END.

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HONOURS EVEN!

A New Long, Complete Story
of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the
Chums of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Jimmy Silver's Idea.

JUST look at that ass!" Jimmy Silver uttered that remark as he was leaving the playing-fields on his way to his study. With him were his chums, Raby, Newcome, and Arthur Edward Lovell.

They looked, and chuckled. "Got it badly!" laughed Newcome. "Poor old Morny!"

Valentine Mornington, to whom they were referring, came dancing towards the gates of the playing-fields, his cricket-bag slung over his shoulder, and a pair of pads in his hand.

"Chin-chin! Gangway!" he roared. But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not move. Mornington apparently thought they would, for he careered full-tilt into the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver collapsed to the ground, and Mornington sat down on top of him.

"Drag him off me!" hooted Jimmy Silver wildly.

"Why didn't you get out of the way?" demanded Mornington wrathfully.

He dragged himself to his feet, and stood surveying the leader of the Classical Fourth.

"That was your own fault!" said Mornington. "You might have caught a clump on the napper with this bat!"

"And then you'd have caught a licking with the whole cricket set!" snorted Jimmy Silver, as he picked himself up.

"But why did you stop right in the gang-way for, ass?"

"My hat! You cheeky——"

"I wouldn't have that, Jimmy!" interrupted Raby solemnly.

"I'm jolly well not going to!"

"Peace, my little children—peace!"

It was Tommy Dodd who thus came along, to pour oil on the troubled waters, so to speak.

The cheerful junior from the Modern House was with Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, the three being more generally known as Tommy Dodd & Co.

Jimmy Silver glared round as he heard Tommy Dodd's remark.

"Peace, you say! More like pieces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, look here, young Silver——"

"Pshaw! Young Silver—you dummy! I'm older than you are!"

"How much?" asked Tommy Dodd sweetly. Jimmy Silver reddened.

"We've had all that out before, Tommy Dodd, and you know jolly well I'm more than three days older than you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then in that case you ought to know better!" said Dodd calmly. "Fancy a handsome youth——"

"Chuck it, Tommy! This silly ass bumped into me—thought he was at a flannel dance, or something like it. I've a jolly good mind to——"

"Oh, come on, Jimmy!" interrupted Newcome. "Are you going to stick there arguing all the giddy night?"

"Who's arguing? I'm just going to wipe up the ground with Morny, then I'm coming right along! Here, Morny——"

But Valentine Mornington did not stop for Jimmy Silver to wipe up the ground with him. He chuckled, and danced merrily away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked after him, and shook their heads solemnly.

"Heat!" said Jimmy Silver laconically. "The chump's mad!"

"Oh, no!" said Tommy Dodd calmly.

"Oh, yes!" mimicked Raby. "If he's not

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mad, what's he dancing about like a giddy Second-Former for?"

"That's not his fault," said Dodd. "That runs in the House, so to speak."

Jimmy Silver glanced at his chums, and they returned a simple nod.

They rolled back the sleeves of their blazers in a business-like manner, and Tommy Dodd & Co. looked on with twinkling eyes.

"I think young Tommy Dodd——" began Jimmy Silver impressively.

"That you have passed the limit of cheek allowed a Modern House chump!" broke in Lovell quietly.

"So we must just let you know, for the better of your health in the future, just where you must stop!" said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, young Dodd!"

"We're coming!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "In fact, we've gone! Sorry we can't stop, dear things!"

And Tommy Dodd & Co. suddenly took to their heels and ran.

"Come back! Yah! Funks!" shouted Raby derisively.

Tommy Dodd turned when he was about fifty yards from the Classical Juniors.

"Funks! Jolly good job I know you don't mean that, Raby!" he shouted, "or I might feel inclined to come back!"

"Rats!" snorted Raby angrily.

He was not angry with Tommy Dodd & Co. He was angry with himself for having hurled that epithet at the retreating Modernites. Cowardice was about the last thing any member of the Co. could be accused of.

Evidently they had other arrangements, and were not disposed to row with Jimmy Silver. Perhaps they realised that four to three was not giving them very much chance.

They would get bumped for a certainty. Jimmy Silver & Co. could manage that at those odds.

"Too hot to chase them!" said Newcome. "Perhaps now you'll come up to the study, Jimmy Silver?"

"I will!" chuckled Jimmy Silver, and heaved a great sigh.

The other juniors stared.

"What's the matter with you, dummy?" demanded Lovell.

"I was thinking how dull and rotten school life would be if there were no decent chaps like Morny and Tommy Dodd & Co. about with whom one could kick up a shindy now and again."

Raby and the others nodded, and chuckled. Arm-in-arm, the Fistical Four made their way to their study, and Raby went straight to the cupboard.

"Jolly good job I made some lemonade!" he said. "I'm thirsty—why—who's——"

"Don't tell us it's gone!" cried Silver, in alarm.

Raby took the jug from the shelf in the cupboard, and held it upside-down.

He had no need to say it was empty.

The juniors glared.

"What rotter——"

"The thieves—burglars——"

"Oh, my hat! And I've been looking forward to that lemonade for nearly two hours!"

"I'll bet my cricket-bat to a sausage-roll that it's Tubby Muffin!"

Jimmy Silver flung himself down in a chair morosely.

"That's what I call a rotten trick!" he said. "If I wasn't so blessed hot, I'd pay a call to Tubby Muffin's study. But he can wait!"

"But I can't!" growled Raby. "I'm going to chat with Master Muffin!"

And Raby stamped out of the study.

A few minutes later there came to the

juniors in the study the muffled howls of Tubby Muffin. Raby's "chat" with Tubby Muffin was not being appreciated!

Tubby Muffin was a fat Fourth-Former with a gluttonous appetite which led him into all sorts of trouble. Tubby could never pass a meat-pie or a bottle of ginger-beer without feeling either frightfully hungry and fearfully thirsty.

He succumbed, as a rule, to temptation, and then nearly succumbed to the wrathful Rookwoodite to whom the goods belonged. But Tubby always chose to forget that which would follow his feed, living only in the present.

Raby came back, red and wrathful, in a few minutes, but Tubby's howls followed him along the corridor.

"It was the fat thief!" growled Raby. "I've been exacting payment."

"So we heard!" said Jimmy Silver drily.

"It's a dry supper, you fellows!" said Lovell, who was searching the cupboard.

"Biscuits, cheese—my hat, they've gone, too!"

"Oh, come on, we'll bump the fat bouncer!" snorted Raby. "The blessed comorant—what are you shaking your nut like that for, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver wagged an admonishing finger at his chums.

"Tubby Muffin has already had one whacking!" he said solemnly. "We'll leave the rest until to-morrow. Besides, I've got an idea I want to talk over with you fellows."

"Let it wait until we've finished with Muffin!" growled Raby.

"No, 'nuff' as good as a feast, chaps! Let the fat bouncer have dreams of mountainous pork-pies on his chest all night. Now, my idea——"

Jimmy Silver broke off as Raby reluctantly shut the door, and the three juniors sat down. Tubby Muffin did not know what a narrow escape from a record bumping he had had.

"Now, my idea——"

"You've already said that umpteen times——"

"Shut up, Lovell! I'm doing the talking now. I was thinking of Mornington——"

Raby snorted, and jumped to his feet.

"If you're going all over that row again——"

"Sit down—sit down! Don't get excited. It was Mornington who really gave me the idea——"

"Thought you wouldn't have one of your own," growled Raby, sitting down again.

Jimmy Silver did not reply to that Partisan shot.

"If you remember, he was dancing about. So I think to myself—he looked rather chip-top dancing in flannels—why shouldn't we have a flannel dance?"

Jimmy Silver wound up triumphantly and looked at his chums expectantly. If he expected surprise, then he wasn't disappointed.

Raby & Co. looked very much surprised, and their eyes gleamed excitedly.

"Top-hole! Morny's idea is——" began Raby.

"Fathead! It's my idea!" howled Jimmy Silver.

"Well, your idea. The only thing is we must keep it dark, or these Modern asses will have one, too, and that'll spoil the effect of ours."

"You can't have flannel dances without girls!" said Lovell practically. "It's a stunning idea, Jimmy. But call it a picnic. Perhaps we'll invite Tommy Dodd & Co. at the last moment, and Mornington, and Teddy Grace, and a few others."

"That's the ticket!" assented Jimmy Silver enthusiastically. "I'm glad you like my

idea, you fellows. But you've got to keep frightfully dark, or Tommy Dodd & Co. will be getting up a rag and spoil it."

"They won't hear!" said the Co. emphatically. "Not unless you go blurring the show away."

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver witheringly. And with that Jimmy Silver took pencil and paper, and scribbled out a list of those whom the Co. would ask to their flannel picnic.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

And Tommy Dodd's.

RATTLING good stunt!" Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, looked up from their prep as their chum and leader, Tommy Dodd, made that remark.

Tommy Dodd should have been doing his prep, but he was not. He was sitting back in the comfortable armchair, fingering his chin, in a pensive mood.

"Eh? And you'll get a rattling good licking if you don't get on with your prep, fat-head!" growled Tommy Cook.

"I am prepared to risk that," replied Dodd calmly. "When I get hold of a rattling good stunt I'm prepared to go through with it, whatever the cost."

"Ass!" Tommy Dodd shrugged his shoulders. "P'raps maybe," he murmured. "But even an ass gets hold of some good wheezes."

"Is it against the Classical chaps?" "Well, no; although they'll be chewing their heads off when they find it out, because they didn't think of it themselves."

Tommy Cook and Doyle flung down their pens and looked at their leader.

"We'll give you just two minutes!" said Tommy Cook threateningly.

"Exactly two!" snapped Doyle.

"Quite enough," said Tommy Dodd easily. "Jimmy Silver gave me the wheeze, really, but he is a little too thick-headed to see it."

"Get on with it!" roared Tommy Cook excitedly. "We've got to get our prep done yet!"

"Jimmy Silver spoke about flannel dances," went on Tommy Dodd, unheeding. "So what I say—why shouldn't we have a flannel dance?"

"Eh?" "A flannel dance, you poor dummy! Why not?"

"My hat!" "Ah! I thought you'd be interested!"

"But—but you can't have a dance unless you have girls! And there's no girls' school near here. I suppose the nearest is Cliff House, by Greyfriars."

Tommy Dodd looked thoughtful. It was apparent he had not thought of that.

"Any old how, we could have a flannel picnic, and—and jazz afterwards," he said slowly.

"M'yes. But we should want more than three."

"We could ask Jimmy Silver & Co., and Mornington, and Grace, and some of the Modern chaps."

"Yes, ask Jimmy Silver, and he would get up the biggest rag you've ever struck, and stash the whole thing up!" said Tommy Cook derisively. "Better keep it dark, and ask them when we're all ready."

"Not a bad idea. Well, we'll keep it dark."

And Tommy Dodd also took pencil and paper, and made a list of the fellows that he would ask to join them in their little picnic.

It was perhaps as well that he did not know that Jimmy Silver & Co. were at that moment doing precisely the same. Tommy Dodd & Co.'s names were on the top of their lists as guests, even while they were getting ready to play the part of hosts!

"We'll have to go and see about the launch. I suppose funds will go to the motor-launch for the day?" said Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Cook nodded. "I haven't spent very much of my birthday fiver yet," he said.

"Ripping! That's great, if you don't mind!"

"Ass!" Tommy Dodd chuckled and proceeded with his prep.

The Modern Fourth were late leaving classes the next day, mainly owing to trouble that had arisen during the night in their dormitory.

But as soon as they were released Tommy

Dodd & Co. lost no time in hurrying out of the gates and down to the river.

They met with no difficulty in the matter of booking the launch. The manager of the boathouse had just left, but his assistant booked the launch to Tommy Dodd & Co. for the coming Saturday.

They met Jimmy Silver & Co. as they were returning, and the Classical Co. hailed them cheerfully.

"Cheerio, Tommies!" "What-ho! Jimmies!"

"Been for a feed in the village?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"N-n-no!" said Tommy Dodd quickly. "Jolly nice evening, isn't it?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the Modern junior hastily changed the subject. When Tommy Dodd & Co. started to discuss the weather there was something doing!

"What's the weather got to do with a feed?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Nothing!" said Tommy Cook cheerfully. "Come on, Daddy!"

And the three Modern House juniors hurried away.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Jimmy Silver. "What's the matter with those dummies?"

Raby shook his head doubtfully. "Can't say," he said slowly. "I say, they haven't tumbled to our wheeze, have they?"

"No; couldn't have done that! We've only just booked the launch, you see, and they couldn't know we've been down to the river. The Moderns were detained this afternoon."

"That's so. But this bizz looks mighty suspicious to me."

"And me!" said Lovell.

The Fistical Four strolled on, and entered their study some time later in a puzzled frame of mind. To their way of thinking, Tommy Dodd & Co. were acting in a suspicious manner. They would not have changed the subject so quickly to the weather if everything was as it should be.

"We shall have to look into this," said Jimmy Silver firmly. "It's my belief the bounders are preparing a rag. Let's wait until they leave the Modern House, and then we'll stroll casually up to their study and have a look round."

His chums nodded.

"Won't do any harm to leave a little ink in their jam in any case," murmured Newcome, "or a little soot in the marmalade."

No sooner thought of than acted upon. Jimmy Silver & Co. retraced their steps as far as the gates, and stood, to all intents and purposes, admiring the roadway.

They had a good view of the Modern House, and had not long to wait. Tommy Dodd & Co. came out of their House before they had been waiting and watching five minutes.

The Modern House juniors hurried across the quad and into the Classical House.

"Like their blessed cheek!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "Walking into the Classical House without being asked!"

"Better see about that soot," said Raby. "We'll leave a little present for them. I wonder what jam tastes like when mixed with ink?"

The Fistical Four chuckled.

"Come on!" said Newcome. "Better not waste too much time. They might be going over to see us, you know."

The juniors nodded and ran towards the Modern House, and up the stairs and into the Modern Fourth's corridor.

"Now for the doings!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

And the four chums set to work to find out what Tommy Dodd's little jape was. But they were not successful. The jape, if there was one, was a safe secret, for Tommy Dodd & Co. had not left a single atom of evidence.

"The silly asses!" growled Newcome. "I wonder what their little game is?"

"P'raps there isn't one," murmured Raby. "But I really think we ought to do something for them now that we are here!"

"Hear, hear!"

Lovell scraped a handful of soot from the chimney, and emptied it into the jar of marmalade that he found in the cupboard.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he poured the ink from the pot on the table into a half-empty pot of strawberry jam.

"Pity to spoil strawberry jam," he said. "I'm rather fond of strawberry jam."

"More than Tommy Dodd & Co. will be when they taste this little lot!" chuckled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, come on! They may come back quickly."

Jimmy Silver led the way out of the house, and half-way across the quadrangle they met Tommy Dodd & Co.

Tommy Dodd looked suspiciously at the rival Co.

"Hallo!" he said. "What have you chaps been up to?"

"Just paying a visit to your rotten dog-kennel," replied Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Where have you chaps been?"

"Calling on some Classical chaps," chuckled Tommy Dodd. "They were out."

And the Modern House Co. hurried on. Jimmy Silver stared after them.

"I say, you chaps," he said, turning quickly to his chums, "I suppose those rotters haven't been up to our study, have they?"

Raby & Co. stared.

"No; they wouldn't do that!"

"I'm going to see."

And when Jimmy Silver saw, his eyes nearly started from his head.

Tommy Dodd had been there all right. There was a huge notice stuck on the wall—not with paste, with jam. Curiously enough, it was strawberry jam, and it showed signs of ink having been mixed with it.

There was soot on the table, and the chairs were all upturned.

"M-m-mmy hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"The—the— Oh, goodness!" panted Raby.

"The—my only Aunt Sempronia!" said Newcome.

Lovell was speechless.

"They've done us to a frazzle!" snorted Jimmy Silver.

"Ah, but they've got a little lot as well!" said Newcome consolingly. "I'm jolly glad we went over there, Jimmy!"

"It all only goes to prove that there's a rag on!" said Lovell. "My stars! If only we'd known they were here!"

"But we didn't, and what we've got to find out is what we're going to do to find out all about the jape!"

And that was a question to which they could find no answer. The days passed, and Saturday drew nearer and nearer, and still there were signs that Tommy Dodd & Co. had something up their sleeves.

What that "something" was did not come to light until after morning lessons on Saturday.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

And How They Worked!

READY?"

Jimmy Silver asked the question as he put his blazer over his flannels after dinner on Saturday.

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell were very nearly ready.

"Shan't be a minute!" said Newcome. "Don't hurry, Jimmy; it's too hot!"

"We want to catch Tommy Dodd & Co. before they go down to cricket," said Jimmy Silver. "My hat! I guess they'll be surprised!"

"What-ho!" grinned the Co.

They were ready at last, and Jimmy Silver led the way out of the Classical House. They had no sooner turned the corner than they saw, coming from the Modern House, the three Modern juniors they were going to ask to join them in their flannel picnic.

Raby looked at them critically.

"They don't seem to have any bats or stumps," he said, puzzled. "Surely they're not going to lounge the afternoon away like Peele & Co. do?"

"Not them!" said Jimmy Silver. "They've got something on, you bet!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. could be seen whispering together as they came towards the Classical juniors. They appeared to be surprised at something or other.

"Daddy!" cried Jimmy Silver. "We want to speak to you!"

Tommy Dodd grinned cheerfully as he came up to the rival Co.

"About the jam?" he asked cheekily.

"No!" growled Jimmy Silver. "We're not out for a row this afternoon. We're going to do you a good turn, as a matter of fact."

Tommy Dodd started.

"Do us a good turn! Why, we were just going to do you one!"

"Eh? Well, never mind—"

"But we do mind. We've got a tophole wheeze for this afternoon, and although you're Classical chaps, we don't mind taking you with us."

"Thanks very much, Tommy Dodd, but we're already engaged."

Tommy Dodd & Co. looked at one another in dismay.

"You've simply got to come; we'll be short without you," said Tommy Cook eagerly. "Can't you put off your stunt, and come to ours?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. shook their heads. "Sorry, but ours is frightfully important. We've booked things up, and all that. We made sure you'd come with us."

"But—but where are you going?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"On the river."

"The river?"

"Yes—a flannel picnic, in fact!"

"What?"

"What's the matter now? Nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"My stars! But that's what we're going to ask you to—a flannel picnic!"

Jimmy Silver turned wrathfully on his chums.

"There you are! I told you the dummies would find out about it! Why couldn't you keep quiet?"

"But—but you must have found out that we were going to have a flannel dance!" roared Tommy Dodd excitedly. "I tell you it was our wheeze!"

"It was mine!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"No—mine!"

Raby pulled Jimmy Silver back, and Tommy Doyle performed the same office for Tommy Dodd. Had they not done this, it was extremely likely Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd would have come to blows.

"Anyhow, we've got the motor-launch!" said Tommy Dodd triumphantly.

"That you haven't!" declared Jimmy Silver. "I've booked it long ago!"

"But—but—"

"Got it from the manager himself, in fact!"

"Oh, stars and stripes, where are we now?" murmured Tommy Cook. "Look here, you chaps, let's talk this over. We thought you were up to a jape, so—"

"And we thought the same of you!" grinned Lovell.

"But look here, Tommy," said Jimmy Silver quickly. "Did you book the launch before you saw us in the lane the other day—when we asked you if you'd been to the village tuckshop?"

"Yes; we were on our way back."

"And who took your order?"

"The assistant."

"Then we bag the launch, because we booked it from the manager some time before you. So it's ours!"

The rival Co.'s eyed one another a trifle sheepishly. Half the pleasure of asking the other Co. to the picnic was gone now that they had both thought of the same wheeze.

It was Valentine Mornington who was really responsible, inasmuch as he had been dancing about in flannels on his return from the playing-fields a few evenings before.

"Well, Tommies, are you coming with us?—that's the point!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

Tommy Dodd & Co. hesitated.

"Well, considering we were going to ask you, perhaps we will," said Tommy Dodd slowly.

"Awfully good of you to consider us!" murmured Lovell sarcastically.

Tommy Cook glared at him, but did not speak.

This was no time for rows. There was a

real liking between the two Co.'s, and the rivalry that existed between Modern House juniors and Classical juniors was not a rivalry of hatred by any means.

"Well, come on; let's get off!" said Jimmy Silver briskly. "Are you chaps taking any grub?"

"We thought of buying some down at the tuckshop in the village," replied Cook. "I've got a fiver; they'll get us up a decent basket."

"Top-hole!"

And the juniors set off in high spirits for the river.

Tommy Dodd & Co. felt very sore that they were guests instead of hosts. But Jimmy Silver had proved beyond doubt that the launch was theirs by right of first order.

If they could not be hosts, Tommy Dodd & Co. could be very good guests.

Jimmy Silver had had the launch out on the water many times before, and had no trouble in controlling the craft.

"Pity there will only be we seven!" said Tommy Dodd.

"That's all right," said Jimmy Silver.

"Teddy Grace, Mornington, Conroy, and his chums, and a few other Classical chaps are coming along. They're going to pull up river, and we shall tow them home."

"Good enoughski!" said Tommy Cook heartily. "I hope we don't have to tow you home!"

"Eh?"

"Well, we've got a lot of ginger-beer, you know—"

"Rats!" growled Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd had started as his chums mentioned the towing home of Jimmy Silver & Co., and his eyes glimmered curiously as he sat, thoughtful and silent, in the back seat of the launch.

But of whatever he was thinking he made no mention.

Jimmy Silver took the launch well up the river, where there was an island all the Rookwood fellows knew and liked.

It was quite a small island—just big enough for a picnic-party of about twenty members. More than that it could not accommodate.

Running the launch neatly alongside the bank of the island, Jimmy Silver brought it to a standstill.

"Hop out, you chaps!" he said briskly. He held on to the long grass on the bank as the juniors tumbled out of the launch, dragging the basket that had been obtained at the village tuckshop with them.

When the last one had climbed out, Jimmy Silver stepped cautiously ashore, and tied the rope to a stump. That stump had been used many times before for the same purpose.

And from that moment the fun was fast and furious.

Tommy Cook provided the music, having brought his largest mouth-organ for the purpose. Conroy & Co. came up very soon after the party from the launch had landed, and brought more comestibles with them.

Mornington and Grace rowed up a short time after Conroy, and they were closely followed by Errol, Topham, and Townsend, the Classic juniors.

After a sumptuous tea the juniors rested under the shade of the trees. They did not feel like dancing in the hot sun.

Tommy Cook obliged them with selections from all the latest plays and revues, until his mouth was sore with rubbing against the instrument.

As soon as the sun began to lose its power, however, Jimmy Silver and Lovell set the rolling. Tommy Cook looked a bit down-

hearted as he could not join in the dancing; but, with true sportsmanship, realised that unless he played the mouth-organ there would be no dancing for anybody. So he played.

Nobody noticed that Tommy Dodd & Co. slipped off just before the time to start on the way home. It was fast getting dark.

Jimmy Silver flung himself down on the grass after a particularly strenuous "Jazz" with Newcome, and fanned himself down with his handkerchief.

"Phew! It's jolly warm, Doddy!"

There was no reply.

Jimmy Silver looked round at the dancing couples, but he could not discern either of the Modern House juniors.

He jumped up with alacrity.

"Doddy!"

Still there was no reply.

"Here, I say, any of you chaps seen Tommy Dodd & Co.?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Nobody had seen them.

"The launch!" howled Newcome suddenly.

With one accord the juniors rushed to the waterside, and there were Tommy Dodd & Co., sitting comfortably in the launch, but about six yards from the bank of the island!

Jimmy Silver shook his fist excitedly in their direction.

"What's the giddy game, you rotters?" he demanded wrathfully.

"That is not a nice way to speak to your superiors!" he said remonstratively.

"Superiors! Just you put in—"

"Likely, isn't it? Now, look here, you Classical asses! I hired this launch—"

"After I had already done so!"

"That doesn't alter things, young Jimmy Silver! I've got it!"

Jimmy Silver looked helplessly about him.

"The ass has got us on the hon!" he said.

"What the— Oh dear, Doddy!"

"Hallo!"

"Is this the way you treat chaps who ask you out?"

"Not always. You scored ever us a bit there, Jimmy. You brought us out—we'll take you back."

"Then come in, fathead!"

"Is that the way you speak to a chap, issuing an invitation?" asked Tommy sweetly.

"You—you—"

"Are you—I should say, would you like to come back with us, you Classical asses?"

Jimmy Silver & Co., with the rest of the juniors on the island, were helpless. There were rowing-boats, it is true, but to pull against the stream after their strenuous dancing was a little too thick to contemplate.

"Yes, we are!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Ask us nicely, then!"

"Oh, you—you—"

But in the end, Tommy Dodd had his way, and Jimmy Silver asked him, very sweetly, if he would mind taking them back in the launch he had hired himself.

Tommy Dodd, always a cautious youth, made them promise "pax" until they reached Rookwood, at least.

Five minutes later, with the rowing-boats in tow, the launch was making for home at great speed.

Honours were even, Tommy Dodd declared, and as the tired juniors got into bed that night, they voted the flannel picnic a huge success. Not even Tommy Dodd's coup with the launch spoiled that!

THE END.



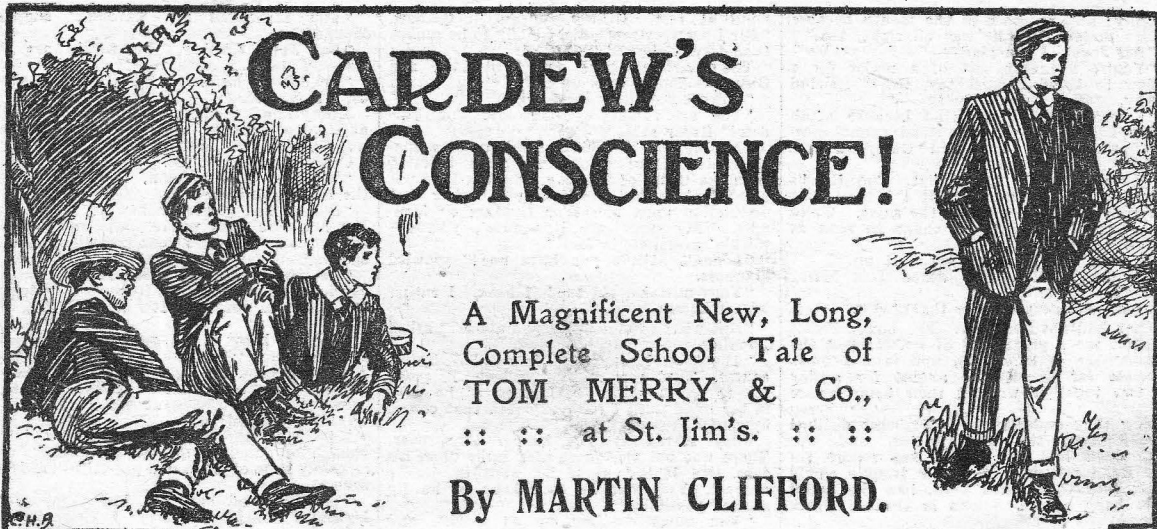
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Sword of Damocles.

"IT'S like the giddy sword of Damocles!" sighed Monty Lowther.

"It's jolly well not!" retorted Tom Merry. "I'll admit that it wasn't all beer and skittles for old Damocles, with the blessed sword hanging over his head by a single hair—though I never could see why the silly ass didn't move, so that his napper was out of the way of it. Anyway, he wasn't certain that it would ever fall; and after he'd sat under it for twenty years or so I daresay he got to believe that it never would. But we—"

"Know pretty well that 'ours will!" put in Manners gloomily.

The Terrible Three were in their study—No. 10 on the Shell Passage, at St. Jim's.

All of them looked badly under the weather.

They were in for a big row. That much was as certain as anything well could be.

The storm must break. But it had not yet broken. Mr. Selby was holding his hand, and they could not guess why.

It was not at all like Mr. Selby. He had a report to make against quite a small crowd of the St. Jim's fellows; and they were all fellows whom he disliked.

Only one of them was a senior—Darrel of the Sixth.

The Terrible Three represented the Shell. Levison major, Cardew, and Clive of the Fourth were also in it.

Then there were seven of Mr. Selby's own Form, the Third—D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, Manners minor, Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Gibson.

Darrel had fought without gloves against a rank outsider named Williton. The combat had taken place on a bowling-green attached to the White Hart Inn at Wayland. None of those concerned had been inside the inn itself; but the bowling-green was technically licensed premises, and Mr. Selby could be trusted to make the most of that fact.

Tom Merry and Manners major had seconded Darrel. Lowther had acted as time-keeper. The rest had been present as uninvited spectators. And Mr. Selby had caught them all out.

They had expected to be sent for by the Head almost as soon as they got back to the school.

But they had not been sent for that day at all. And now the next day had drawn on to noon, and still they had heard nothing.

It was impossible, however, for any of them to entertain hopes that Mr. Selby meant to let them off.

That was not his way. Few things are more trying to nerve and temper than waiting for certain trouble, and it spoke volumes for the real friendship that bound together the Terrible Three that thus far they had managed to refrain from snapping at one another.

"If this is a reprieve," said Lowther, "I can't imagine why any condemned criminal should want one. I want the giddy execution over and done with!"

"I do, too, in a way," Tom Merry said slowly. "But have you fellows thought at all of what we shall feel if it's the sack for us? It—it will be awful!"

And Tom stared out of the window at the sunny quad and the green old elms and the smooth-tufted playing-fields beyond.

"Don't talk about it!" muttered Manners. "We've got to face it," Tom replied resolutely. "Selby is dead sure to make it as black for you as he can, and it is pretty black, you know. I ought never to have let you fellows into it! That's what bothers me most!"

"And that's just what doesn't bother us at all," said Lowther. "Tommy, we'd never have forgiven you if you had left us out! We sha'n't like getting sacked—it's a nasty operation. But if any of us is to go, we'd better all go together!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Manners. "We've hung together for a long time, and we've hardly ever had a real row among ourselves; and, good place as the old show is, it would be pretty rotten for any of us without the others. You must see that, Tom!"

Tom had to swallow a lump in his throat. The utter loyalty of his chums touched him to the quick.

It was not entirely his fault that they had been let into the secret that had led to all this trouble. They had pressed him hard to be let into it, and he had given in against his better judgment. He felt now that he had been weak.

Yet what they said was true beyond all argument. Tom would not have cared to stay on at St. Jim's after Manners and Lowther had been sacked; and it was only natural that they should feel as he felt.

"Tap!" "Oh, come in, if you must!" yelled Manners. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who responded to that not very cordial welcome.

Gussy looked very serious indeed. He was as immaculately attired as usual; but to-day he seemed to be taking no pride in nicely-creased trousers, high collar, resplendent tie, and chaste pearl-grey waistcoat. One might almost have thought that sackcloth and ashes would have suited better his mood.

"I have come to speak to you fellows on a vewy grave matter," he said, with his monocle firmly fixed in his right eye and a stony stare in his left.

"Go on! We can stand it!" replied Tom resignedly. "Rub it in!" said Manners, with some bitterness.

"But do keep off the good advice gadget! That's more than we can be expected to bear," added Lowther.

"I have no desiah whatever to wub it in, I assuah you," Gussy said. And as he spoke the stony stare faded out of his left eye, and he took his monocle out of the right, and wiped it, as if it had grown misty of a sudden. "I have the vewy highest regard for all you fellahs, an', bai Jove, I wealdy do not know what I shall do if you are sacked! Blake an' Hewwies an' Dig all feel the same about it. We—we almost wish that we were goin' to be sacked, too, upon my honah!"

"We're not sacked yet," replied Manners. But his tone was not hopeful.

"I feah—I wealdy feah—"

"You're a Job's comforter, I must say, Gussy!" said Lowther.

"I assuah you— But that is not what I came to speak about. Tom Mewwy, I can't

undahstand how you could have led young Wally into this—I can't, weally! I—I have always thought such a heap of you, an'—an'—"

Arthur Augustus paused, finding words difficult.

"So that's the trouble, is it, Gussy?" said Tom. "Well, if that's all, I can soon put it right. I'm a silly ass, but I'm not the sort to lead a kid like your minor into trouble. You can take my word for it that we had nothing to do with their turning up. Didn't tell them, didn't know they were coming, and would have jolly well hooded them out of it if we hadn't been too busy!"

"And you're a fat-headed ass to have thought for a moment that we had any hand in it!" snapped Manners.

"Besides, they won't get the boot," said Lowther soothingly. "There will be enough victims without taking any from the Third, you know."

"I—I— You fellahs mustn't think I don't caah about what happens to you," faltered Gussy. "I do—I caah most howwibly! But the patah's ill, an' if Wally went home sacked—"

"I'm not going to be sacked, you silly chump!" spoke the voice of Wally—D'Arcy's minor—of the Third behind him. "Who told you I was going to be sacked? I never saw such a chap as you are for imagining things and then making a silly fuss about them!"

Reggie Manners was with Wally, and Reggie sidled across to where his brother sat with rather a shamefaced look.

Like Wally, Reggie was accustomed to pretend that he rather despised his major than otherwise.

But in Wally it was all pretence. He did not really despise Gussy in the least; he was genuinely fond of him, and, in a curious way, proud of him.

Reggie was fond of Harry, and certainly he could not despise him. But in several ways Reggie was still rather an unlucky young cub; and he often showed sullen resentment at his brother's efforts to keep him straight. He accused his major of preaching, and seldom displayed any gratitude for the many sacrifices Harry had made for him.

But it was plain that some real brotherly feeling had been aroused in Reggie now.

He laid a hand timidly on Harry's shoulder, and his voice trembled as he said:

"I say, Harry, you're not going to be sacked, are you? It would be beastly if you were—all of you, I mean; Tom Merry and Lowther as well as you! Why didn't you ask old Selby to let you off with a licking?"

All three looked at Reggie in some astonishment. It had not occurred to any of them that he had any special feeling for his brother's chums, even if he had for his brother.

"Have you been licked?" asked Lowther. Reggie nodded.

"The licking of our lives!" said Wally cheerily. "Old Selby did lay it on—some!"

"But he didn't get a howl out of any of us," added Reggie.

"Curly was pretty near it," Wally said. "But the kid went through it like a good plucked 'un. And I was a bit worried about

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Franky; he's so down in the mouth because of his major. But he was all right, too."

"Bai Jove! I am glad—"
"You're a pretty sort of a major for a fellow to have, I must say, Gus!" snorted Wally. "Glad because we've—"

"I mean that I am glad because aftah Selby has licked you the Head cannot possibly sack you," explained Gussy, almost wumbly.

"He won't. We know that. The Head's fair," Wally answered. "But I believe that old Hun thinks he will, all the same. We're to be reported with you chaps as soon as the Head comes back."

At that the Terrible Three sat up. "Is the Head away?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"Yes. Didn't you know that?"
They had not known it. The Lower Forms did not see a great deal of Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, and it was quite possible for him to be absent for a day or two together without their being aware of it.

Now they understood. Mr. Selby disliked Mr. Raitton, the Housemaster, and was jealous of him. He would not report till the Head returned. So their trouble would hang over them until then, like the sword that hung over Damocles in the old Greek legend.

"If Selby gave you a licking, the Head wouldn't—"

Reggie was plainly keen on his scheme. But Tom Merry interrupted him.

"I'm not really proud, kid, but I'm hanged if I'd go to Selby and ask for a licking, even if I were dead sure it would get me off! I can't stand the old huns."

"Same here," said Manners. "But don't you worry, Reggie; we aren't sacked yet."
"Only going to be," Lowther said gloomily. "Hallo, Cardew!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Working of Cardew's Conscience!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW had just made his appearance at the open door of No. 10.

There was a cheery smile upon his face and rose in his buttonhole. He did not look in the least like a fellow in danger of expulsion.

Yet they all knew that if Mr. Selby had been allowed to choose a single victim from among the fourteen culprits, Cardew would probably have been that victim.

Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison would have been in danger also. But, on account of a recent occurrence, the choice would probably have fallen upon Cardew.

"Come along, Reggie!" said Wally. "We can't stay here talking to these old fogies all the blessed day. Cheerio, you fellows! We'll make it hot for the old Hun if you are sacked! But I don't a bit believe you will be."

Reggie departed rather reluctantly. He seemed to feel that he wanted to be near his major till the best or worst was known, though he had sniffed at Levison minor for showing a similar desire in the case of his brother.

"You don't seem to be worrying much, Cardew," remarked Tom.

"Wrong, dear boy! I'm worryin' simply no end. But I don't show it. The heart-on-the-sleeve bizny is not in my line. At least, not in public. But if my noble kinsman will only shut the door, we will be sad together—as sad as you can wish."

Arthur Augustus obligingly shut the door. Cardew stared at him.

"Is anythin' the mattah, Cardew?" asked the swell of the Fourth, in all innocence.

"Nothin' much," yawned Cardew. "You've made the mistake of shuttin' yourself on the wrong side of the door, that's all. It's hardly worth mentioning, of course."

Gussy flushed painfully, and Tom Merry spoke.

"This is our study, you know, Cardew, and we don't want to turn Gussy out."

"Do I want to, dear boy? Not in the very least, I assure you. But my noble kinsman can hardly be properly sad with us, since he is not involved in our trouble."

"You are weally an extremely cwasid idiot if you fancy that I do not cash!" retorted Arthur Augustus warmly. "I should be sowway even to see you sacked, Cardew, an' much more sowway to see Tom Mewwy an' Mannahs an' Lowthah!"

"The elaborately made distinction, though not exactly flatterin' to my vanity, sets my

mind at rest, D'Arcy," drawled Cardew. "For I am very much more likely to be sacked than these fellows."

The Terrible Three stared at him, and Gussy's monocle went up to his eye.

"I don't see that," said Tom. "You are talkin' wot—absolute wot, Cardew!" Gussy said.

"Not at all! I think there is quite a considerable chance that I may be invested with the Order of the Bag, whereas I do not at all believe that the Head will bestow that distinction upon Merry or Lowther or Manners. My conscience is workin', y'know—workin' overtime, in fact."

"I don't believe you have one!" growled Manners.

"Your mistake, old top! I have. I rather wish I hadn't."

"But what's it troubling you about?" asked Lowther.

"The trick I played on dear old Selby, of course. That was really too bad. It pains me to think of it. I shall never be easy in my mind until I have expiated that crime, by gad!"

They stared at him harder than ever. There was not the ghost of a smile upon his face. He looked as if he were in deadly earnest. Yet that he should be so hardly seemed possible.

"You mean dressing up as a girl, and making Selby believe that you were Miss Graeme, I suppose?" said Tom doubtfully.

"That is what I mean, dear boy. Do not refer to it again in that very outspoken manner, I beg of you! You have no notion how dashed uncomfortable it makes me feel to think of it."

"You're spoofing, you ass!" snorted Manners.

"No, no! It is merely conscience workin' upon me."

"And what does conscience prompt you to do?" inquired Lowther.

"The course it suggests is one that I shall find painful. It insists that nothin' but a full confession to the Head can possibly be the correct thing. An', as my noble kinsman is aware, one does the correct thing or one does nothin'."

"In this particular case I should do nothing," replied Tom. "I can't see what you're driving at. Selby didn't report you for that, and we all know why he didn't. It wasn't kindness to you."

"Bai Jove, no! It was because it would have made him look such a howwible ass. Cardew an' Selby were both howwible asses, but I must say that I considah Selby was the biggah ass of the two."

"I thank you!" said Cardew, bowing gracefully. "I am in agreement with you all as to dear old Selby's motives for keepin' the incident dark. But what I ask myself is—ought it to be kept dark? Ought not the Head to know? What has justice to do with Selby's feelin's—or with mine, for that matter? I will not pretend that I care as much for his as for my own. But there it is. My conscience says—"

"Bless your conscience!" broke in Tom. "Here you are up to your neck in trouble, with the rest of us. You stand quite a chance of getting the sack, anyway. If you go to the Head with that silly yarn it's a dead cert you'll get it!"
"But I must obey the dictates of my conscience," answered Cardew, with the utmost gravity. "I appeal to my noble kinsman. Is not the voice of conscience to be regarded, D'Arcy?"

"Well, yaas, that is so," Gussy said, wrinkling his brow. "But, weally, Cardew, I cannot see that you are called upon to give yourself away in that mannah. The extremely foolish an' weckless thing you did was not actually wicked, I considah. I do not think my conscience would wepwoach me bittably with it had I done it—though I weally cannot imagine myself doin' it, you know."

"Ah, but it is my conscience that is concerned, not yours, sweet youth! And mine—"

"What do Levison and Clive say about it? I suppose you've told them that you're thinking of doing this?" Tom interrupted him.

Cardew sighed.

"The astute Ernest an' the ingenuous Sidney are at present very difficult people to live with," he said. "That is partly why I came along here. They refuse to look at anythin' whatever in a truly philosophical light. They are irritable. They actually sneer at my conscience. Levison goes so far as to say that he has no belief in its existence. But let him wait!"

"You fatheaded ass, Cardew!" snapped Manners.

"Bai Jove, Cardew, you weally are the cwasest idiot I evah mef!"
"He doesn't mean it. He's trying to spoof us," Tom said.

Monty Lowther alone was silent. He looked at Cardew intently, and over his face there was coming the dawn of comprehension.

Cardew's eyes met his.
"What is your opinion, Lowther?" asked the Fourth-Former.

"Oh, I think you're an ass, all right. But I'm not sure that you're quite such an ass as appears. And I don't believe you're spoofing. I fancy you mean to do it."

"Do what?" demanded Manners. "Cardew can't be such a chump as to think of going to the Head to confess. It's fairly asking for it!"

"I don't know about going to the Head," said Lowther. "The Head's away, you know. And, of course, it's only fair that he should tell old Selby first what he thinks of doing."

And Lowther winked at Cardew. Cardew winked back.

But none of the others saw the interchange of signals of understanding; and certainly none of them had got on to Cardew's scheme.

"Let us wend our way hence, my noble kinsman!" said Cardew, taking Arthur Augustus by the arm. "I must return to my sorrowin' colleagues in No. 9. You can repair to No. 6, an' share with Blake, Herries, an' Digby the pharisaical delights of knowin' the you are not as other men are—that you are out of this dashed imbroglia, by gad!"

Gussy snatched his arm away, his eyes blazing.

"That's rot, Cardew!" said Tom Merry. "If those four had known anything about it they'd have been in with us."

"I wish we had!" cried Gussy, with evident sincerity. "And I considah it's caddish for Cardew to talk about us as if we were Pawwees! We would do a heap more to help you fellows than he would—I know that!"

"Possibly," said Cardew coolly. "I make no pretence to altruism, an' if I ever take thought for anyone but myself I'm always rather surprised with myself for doin' it. Luckily it seldom happens."

And with that he went.
There was a very queer look on Lowther's face.

"Look here, Monty—" began Tom, observing it.

"Why, I do believe the silly chump thinks Cardew's doing the right thing!" said Manners, in amazement.

"Don't you?" asked Lowther.

"Of course I don't! It's the limit in idiocy!"

"Goin' to the Head to confess—"

"But he can't mean it!"

"He does mean it," said Lowther. "Not to go to the Head, perhaps. But he'll go to Selby and tell him about that conscience of his. Ha, ha! Cardew's conscience! My hat! It's the joke of the term!"

"I don't see any joke in it," Manners said, utterly puzzled.

"Of course not! I wergard it as simply the outside edge in cwasid folly!" agreed Gussy.

"I'm not so sure—I'm not so sure," Tom said slowly. "I think I begin to catch on. But it's a risky game."

Lowther nodded.

"Bluff's generally risky," he said. "But just remember, Tommy, that old Selby's a funk!"

"You fellows are talking riddles!" said Manners crossly.

"But most riddles have an answer, and it won't be very long before you learn the answer to this one, old top," was the oracular reply of Monty Lowther.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Kildare on the Warpath!

ERIC KILDARE, who had been skipper of St. Jim's, but was so no longer, strode out of the gates with a frown upon his usually sunny face.

Under his jacket he carried something that gave rather a stiff appearance to the upper part of his body.

It was a riding-whip. But it was not for horse exercise that he was going out.

He should not have been going out at all, for the Head had gated him, and he knew that he ran a heavy risk in this flagrant defiance of the mandate.

But it was not the absence of Dr. Holmes that encouraged him to disobedience. He had debated with himself whether he could decently go in the circumstances; and his



Cardew flung himself recklessly upon Buck Williton, and bore him backwards. The door opened and Eric Kildare riding-crop in hand strode into the room. (See page 15.)

decision had been that he could—provided that he reported his offence to Mr. Railton directly he got back.

He did not care much what happened to him. Everything seemed to have gone wrong at once; and worst of all was his quarrel with Darrell, who had so long been his best chum.

Clear of the gates, he slipped out the riding-whip and flicked at his legs with the short thong as he hurried towards Rylcombe Station. He was dressed in Norfolk jacket, and knickers cut in the fashion of riding-breeches, and there was little about him to suggest the schoolboy—even the senior schoolboy at a big public school, who is often almost a man in years.

And he told himself that he was sick of being a schoolboy—of being tied down, hampered at every turn, treated like a mere child when he felt himself all the man!

But he knew at heart that he was not really sick of it—that St. Jim's, where he had spent so many happy years, had still a spell to hold him—that his liberty was not really curtailed in any unreasonable fashion—that to leave in disgrace would leave a scar that must last all his life long.

A quarter of a mile or so from the gates he passed the Terrible Three.

He did not see them. They were sitting under a spreading tree on the edge of Rylcombe Wood; and Kildare strode past them with his face set forward, quite unheeding.

But they saw him, and the sight did not make them feel any happier.

Dinner was over, and still Mr. Selby had not made a move. Tom Merry and his chums had not felt like cricket. There was a match on; but it was with a weak side, and the absence of the junior skipper would be felt. Talbot or Noble or Figgins could captain the team. It spoke volumes for the state of mind in which Tom was that he did not know which of the three was deputising for him, and did not care. He was not even aware that Ernest Levison had also cried off.

The culprits were not gated, and there was nothing against their leaving the school precincts. It seemed certain now that Mr. Selby would do nothing until the Head returned. So they had come out here to be

miserable together in the open air, instead of sitting miserably indoors.

"Where's Kildare off to?" asked Manners, breaking a silence that had lasted fully twenty minutes.

"To Wayland, I should think," said Tom, dropping the blade of grass he had been chewing. "And I'm hanged if I don't believe he's looking for more trouble!"

"The riding-whip would rather seem to indicate that it is someone else for whom trouble is in store," replied Lowther.

Monty Lowther was the least depressed of the three. Somehow, he seemed to have quite a lot of faith in Cardew's conscientious wangle. Tom, who only partly understood it, had little; and Manners had none at all.

"Ass! Kildare will make bigger trouble for himself than he does for anyone else," said Tom.

"He's asking for the sack!" Manners groaned. "Everyone knows he's gated. My hat! There's going to be a bigish clearance some time next week! Kildare, Darrel, we three, Levison and Cardew and Clive. We shall all have to go. I'm sure. Perhaps some of the kids, too. Arcey minor and Levison minor, if that old Hun Selby can manage it. I don't know about young Reggie—I hope not. I should be afraid to face the pater if he had to go as well as me—it will be bad enough anyway!"

Tom got up.

"Something's got to be done!" he said.

"That's all very well. But what?" asked Lowther.

"The only thing I can think of is to go and tell Darrel," Manners said.

"What's the use of that?" replied Tom gloomily. "Those two have had a row. They're not on speaking terms now."

"Well, nothing's more certain than that we can't do a thing ourselves," said Lowther. "If we ran after Kildare and tried to argue with him we should only get that blessed whip about our shoulders. Did you twig his dial? He looks ripe for slaying someone!"

"I think we ought to tell Darrel!" persisted Manners.

"Oh, come along and let's do it!" cried Tom. "I don't suppose it will be a scrap

of use, but I can't for the life of me think of anything else!"

They started off at a run. The road lay white and dusty under the hot July sun; only a fleck of cloud here and there disturbed the blue of the sky. The ancient buildings of St. Jim's, with their frame of green made by the elms in the quad, formed a picture well worth gazing upon.

But the Terrible Three did not halt to gaze at that picture. They did not even notice it; and if they had thought of it the only result would have been to make them feel more miserable, even as the cheery sounds from the playing-fields did.

There was a school match on, and Monty was captaining the home side, and both Kildare and Darrel were absent from it. And from the junior game Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners and Levison were all away. Would any of them ever play for St. Jim's again?

Levison stood at the gates, with Clive and Cardew, when the trio pattered up through the dust.

Cardew still smiled; but Levison's face was lowering, and Clive looked worried.

"May I inquire the cause of this haste, oh, comrades in misfortune?" drawled Cardew.

"Idiot!" snapped Levison.

Lowther stopped. Tom and Manners ran on.

"Kildare's gone over to Wayland!" said Lowther.

Levison's eyes gleamed, and Clive looked interested. But it was Cardew who asked:

"What for?"

"He didn't stop to tell us," replied Lowther, with a touch of sarcasm. "But he's taken a riding-whip with him, and his face is like a thunderstorm."

Cardew chuckled.

"It looks slightly unhealthy for the dear Williton, by gad!" he said.

"That chap had enough yesterday," Clive put in. "And it means any amount of trouble for Kildare if he gets meddling with him."

"But what can we do to stop it?" asked Levison.

"Tommy's gone to see Darrel about it,"

Lowther said. "But I can't say I think that's very hopeful."

"Much better take it in hand ourselves, by gad!" observed Cardew.

"Brrrr!" growled Levison. "Haven't you made a big enough giddy mess of things without wanting to butt in again?"

"I? Made a mess of things? My dear, good fellow, what are you talkin' about? Haven't I already explained that I propose to put everythin' straight for everybody?"

"Oh, rats! That dodge of yours won't come off. And I can't see that it's any use at all our thinking we can do anything. All the same, I'm game to run over to Wayland if anyone else is. It would be interesting to see if anything happens, and we might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

It was the reckless Levison of old times who spoke then, and Clive looked doubtful but Lowther backed up Levison.

"I'll go, if Tommy and Manners will!" he said.

They waited for a few minutes, and then Tom and Manners came out and joined them.

"What does Darrel say?" asked Lowther.

"Not very much. But I rather fancy he's going over. He will have to ride; it's too late for the train now."

Darrel came from the School House at this moment, and went straight to the bicycle shed.

He had had a struggle with his pride, but it had only been a brief one.

There had been a bitter quarrel between him and Kildare the day before.

Darrel had met and fought Buck Williton on Friday, so that it should be impossible for Kildare to meet and fight him on Saturday.

It was not done because he feared that his chum would be licked. It was done to save Kildare from the almost certain expulsion that hung over him if he broke gate for such a purpose.

And Darrel had not expected that Kildare would be pleased. But he had hardly expected such bitterness as the ex-skipper showed.

Last night he had believed that their long friendship was at an end. Now—well, it might be so far as Kildare was concerned. But it was not at an end for Darrel.

He was sure that Tom Merry's guess was right.

Kildare was on the warpath. He was going over to Wayland to thrash Williton, as he had threatened to do.

Darrel did not care in the least about Williton, though he doubted whether the fellow was in a very fit condition to take a thrashing without the risk of serious damage after his fight of the day before.

But Darrel cared very much indeed about the probable result to Eric Kildare of this foolish action, and he was going after Kildare to stop him, if argument might prevail, and if he could not stop him to share the risk with him.

So George Darrel got out his bike, and wheeled it to the gates and mounted, to ride on what must have seemed to him rather a hopeless errand.

He nodded in friendly fashion to the group of juniors, and gave them the ghost of a smile; but he did not speak to them. And it is quite certain that if they had offered to accompany him he would have refused the offer.

They understood that, and they let him get well ahead before they started, and took care not to catch him up on the way.

Four of the six were still badly under the weather, and even Lowther was more serious than usual, and refrained from jesting.

But Cardew appeared quite cheerful.

"Some brainy American once remarked," he said, "that life was just one dashed thing after another." Personally, I don't mind that so much. What I object to is when it seems just the same dashed thing all the time!"

Which summed up the philosophy of Ralph Reckness Cardew very well.

He wanted things to happen. He did not specially ask for unpleasant things; but he always seemed able to extract some change out of even them.

But that is a philosophy which not everyone can share.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. At Wayland.

"ERIC!"

It was Miss Nina Dalglish—Nora Graeme on the theatre bills—Kildare's pretty girl-cousin, who spoke.

She had come out of a shop just behind THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 27.

Kildare as he strode down the High Street of Wayland.

Kildare made a hurried and quite unsuccessful attempt to conceal the riding-whip he carried.

"I didn't expect to see you, Nina," he said, rather confusedly.

"Haven't you come to see me, then?" asked the girl in surprise.

"Er—yes, of course! But I didn't expect to see you here."

"It isn't so very surprising, is it? I do come out of doors sometimes, you know, and I happen to have some shopping to do this afternoon."

"Oh, yes! Look here, dear, you just get your shopping done, and I'll come along to your digs in an hour or so."

Nina looked at him intently. She was very fond of this handsome, generous boy-cousin of hers, and she knew that he was in trouble. His face would have told her that. But she had information from other sources.

She slipped her right arm under his left.

"I'm going to talk to you now!" she said resolutely. "I can't make out why I haven't seen you for the last two days, and have had only a brief note from you that didn't explain things a bit."

Kildare laughed mirthlessly.

"It wasn't exactly my fault," he replied.

"I couldn't come. But I'll explain all that later. I must go now, really! I—I've an appointment."

"Eric, I—I understand! I— Oh, don't go yet!"

Her grasp on his arm tightened. But Kildare tore himself away almost roughly. He was in anything but a normal state of mind, or he would never have done that, for Kildare was the soul of chivalry.

But the desire to thrash Williton had taken such possession of him that he felt incapable even of thinking about anything else until he had put through that task.

In part, at least, he realised the folly of it. There was a chance left for him even now, if he elected to go back without any such row as was bound to mean scandal and expulsion for him.

But was there any chance at all that Darrel would escape the sack?

That doubt, as much as anything, drove Kildare on.

If Darrel had to go, he must go too. He felt that he owed it to his honour.

And he felt that his honour called upon him to thrash Williton. Darrel had taken his place in the fight. But that did not set him clear.

He would thrash the scoundrel. He would go straight to Mr. Railton and confess what he had done. Then he would await the return of the Head, and the doom that he and his chum must meet.

It was a mad plan, and perhaps he knew how mad it was. But within him was a driving force that urged him on.

"Nina, I must go!" he panted. "I'll see you later. But I must go now!"

And he went, leaving the girl staring after him, half-dazed.

Had Mr. Selby failed her?

To avert trouble from the head of Kildare she had told Mr. Selby her story. That story afforded sufficient excuse for her cousin's breaking bounds to visit the Empire Music-Hall—a misdemeanour of which the Third Form master had intended to make the most.

It was but natural that Eric Kildare should want to see as soon as possible the girl cousin who had run away from home two or three years before to go on the stage. He might have seen her elsewhere than at the Empire, it is true; but no broad-minded man would consider his going there, in the circumstances, a very grave offence.

Mr. Selby had seemed to think it a comparatively slight matter. Nina held that he had promised her that either he would not report Kildare at all, or that, if he did report him, he would tell Dr. Holmes the whole story.

But Mr. Selby had convinced himself that he had made no such promise. The girl had enraged him by her amusement at the impudent spoof Cardew had played upon him, and he had taken his revenge.

He had reported Kildare to the Head, but had kept back Nina's confidence.

It was thus made to appear that the captain of St. Jim's had broken bounds out of infatuation for a music-hall artiste, and thus he had come to be deprived of the captaincy and gated, whereas if the Head had known the whole truth he would have been let off with a rebuke.

To Nina it seemed that Mr. Selby must have failed her. Although she had had cause

to be grateful to him for interposing between her and the odious attentions of Buck Williton, she had not been able to like him, and she knew that her cousin despised and distrusted him.

She stood looking after Kildare with her head in a whirl.

What could she do? What did that riding-whip mean?

Easier to answer the second question than the first!

Kildare was going to see Williton! That was what the riding-whip meant.

She could not trust herself between them. Eric would never forgive her if she did that. And, perhaps, apart from the chance of further trouble for Eric, she did not altogether dislike the notion of Williton's getting the thrashing he deserved.

As she stood on the pavement, beginning to draw the attention of the passers-by, an arm was thrust through hers, and she turned to see her friend, Miss Mandeville, leading lady of the "Lights Down" company, with whom she shared diggings.

"What's the matter, ducksy?" asked Miss Mandeville—fair, fat, forty, and the soul of good nature.

"Oh, Mabel!" was all Nina could answer. At that moment George Darrel rode past them.

"Why, that must be the young knight-errant!" said Miss Mandeville. "Did you see his battered face, dear? You ought to be proud to think that you should have two such champions as him and your handsome cousin—not to mention Grim-and-Gruff, though one could hardly allow him the stage in the same scene as those two!"

"What do you mean, Mabel? I don't know what you are talking about—indeed, I don't!"

"Then you haven't heard? Lashmar brought the news to me—that young man always gets on to any story that's going. It seems that yesterday our dear friend, Mr. Buck Williton, who has always prided himself on his prowess as a bruiser, met one of the St. Jim's seniors without gloves on the White Hart bowling-green, and was very soundly thrashed—knocked out, I believe they call it."

"Oh! It must have been Eric!" gasped Nina.

"That's what I can't understand, sweetheart. It wasn't! The young man's name is Darrel, and I am almost sure that it was he who has just ridden by. Wasn't he with your cousin at the Empire on Monday night? Oh, yes. And it must have been he who called to see you the other day when we were both out."

"I know now. Eric told me about him. They are great chums. But still I can't quite understand, for I am sure Eric has gone after Williton now, and—"

"Have you just seen your cousin, then, my pretty?"

"Yes. Oh, there are some more St. Jim's boys! I wonder what they are all doing here?"

Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Cardew, Levison, and Clive rode past now.

Miss Mandeville gave them only a glance. "Mere small fry, my dear," she said. "They can hardly have anything to do with our affair."

But there, of course, Miss Mandeville was mistaken.

Cardew and the rest were riding straight for the White Hart, trusting to find Williton there. Cardew wanted to see that gentleman, and they all thought it likely he might be found at the White Hart.

Darrel also thought so; but Darrel was looking for Kildare rather than for Williton, and he did not think Kildare had any definite idea where the enemy was to be found.

"See here, Nora, my dear," said Miss Mandeville sympathetically, "we had better trot along home. There's nothing we can do, and you're really looking too upset and worried to be fit for the public gaze."

"Yes, let's go," replied Nina. "Eric said he would come along later."

Cardew turned his head just in time to see them move away.

"That's the lady," he remarked.

"What lady?" asked Tom.

"Kildare's charmer. An' I must say Kildare has taste!"

"Rot! There's nothing of that sort in it!" snapped Tom.

"Think not, old top?"

"I know there isn't."

"An' how do you know, by gad?"

"Because Darrel told me."

"Well, Darrel's word should be good enough. But I'm rather disappointed. I

don't mind ownin' that I could fall fathoms deep in love with that charmer myself. She's a peach!"

Levison and Lowther grinned. Clive and Manners looked their disapproval.

"Here we are!" said Cardew. "Neither Kildare nor Darrel about, I see."

"They may be inside," Levison said. "I can soon find out about that. No, I don't want anyone's moral or physical support, thanks, an' I'm not goin' to lure any of you Puritans into a pub."

"Don't rot, Cardew! Any of us is willing to come with you," said Manners. "Of course!" chimed in Clive.

Cardew grinned. "If you two are," he said, "I haven't any doubt about Ernest here an' the humorous Lowther an' the dear Tommy. But, quite seriously, I want to put this thing through on my own, an' I'm sure that's the best way to work it."

"But we don't even know—"
"Ask Levison, Manners. He can tell you all that's needful. It's bluff, I admit; but I think it will come off."

"More bluff!" groaned Tom, as Cardew popped into the White Hart, leaving the five in the lane outside.

"Yes, more bluff," replied Levison. "But if the time wasn't so short I should have some hope of this particular bit of bluff. For Ralph really is about the coolest hand I know at that kind of thing."

And he proceeded to tell the Terrible Three what Cardew's plan for getting Williton out of Kildare's way was.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Saving His Chum!

"YESSIR?" said the portly landlord of the White Hart, meeting Cardew in the passage that led to the private bar.

"Good-afternoon!" said Cardew. "May I inquire whether you have a gentleman named Williton stayin' here?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew had a self-assured, mature manner which was apt to make people overlook the fact that he was a mere boy; and Peter Warris, licensee of the White Hart, answered him as he would have answered a grown man.

"I have, sir. By the way, didn't I see you at the fight yesterday?"

"It's possible," replied Cardew coolly. "I was there. Will you tell me where I can find Mr. Williton? I would prefer, on the whole, not to be announced."

"First floor, second door on the right past the landing," said Warris. "No partic'lar business of mine, I know, sir, but are you a friend of his?"

"I have not that honour," answered Cardew gravely. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, well—it ain't no great matter—but between you an' me an' the gatepost I sha'n't be sorry when Mr. Buck Williton clears out 'ere. I seem to scent trouble movin' this way on account of him. That vinegar-faced master of yours—"

"I do not think you need worry about Mr. Selby. But, if it comforts you at all, I may say that it would be quite a good notion to make out Mr. Williton's bill at once, an' to see that he doesn't do a bunk without settlin' it!"

And with that Cardew passed on. He met Mr. James Rosher, Williton's hanger-on, upon the landing.

"Look 'ere," said Mr. Rosher, "what do you want?"

"I do not want you," returned Cardew. "I am here to see Mr. Williton."

"Well, I don't know that you can. Buck ain't seemin' anybody to-day, I reckon! What's your name?"

"That's hardly your affair, is it? But my name's Cardew, if the fact interests you."

"What, old Reckness' grandson?"

"Lord Reckness is my grandfather certainly," Cardew said frigidly.

"Well, I don't see but what you can go in. You ain't big enough to do much 'arm, I reckon!"

Cardew tapped at the door of the bedroom as Mr. Rosher went on his way downstairs, grinning weakly.

"Come in!" called Williton.

And the Fourth-Former passed into the bedroom.

Mr. Williton lay on the bed. He looked very decidedly the worse for wear. His face was bruised; both eyes were partially closed; and his pose suggested that he was still feeling the effects of the body-blows Darrel had dealt him.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I don't actually want anythin'," replied Cardew blandly. "I've merely come to give you a bit of interestin' information. Jack Harragin is—"

He paused. Williton sat bolt upright, and a sickly pallor overspread his bruised face.

Men of his type may have courage. Williton had courage. But there is almost always a yellow streak in them; and this fellow had that yellow streak. If he did not fear anything else in the world he feared Jack Harragin, who had vowed to shoot him on sight wherever met.

"What? You're lying!" he gasped. "The man isn't in this country! He was in Mesopotamia when I heard last."

"Quite a comfortable distance away—eh?" drawled Cardew. "But men do come back even from Mesopotamia, y'know."

"Who are you, and how do you know anything about Harragin?" quavered the blackguard.

Cardew looked at him with scorn. That Williton would desire to clear out directly he was led to believe that Jack Harragin was at hand Cardew had not actually said that he was, it may be observed—he had felt sure. But he had not looked to see such a complete surrender, such an exhibition of utter cowardice.

"It doesn't matter who I am, or how I knew," Cardew said coolly. "You can put it down, if you like, to old family friendship an' a disinclination to hear of Harragin's swinging for a cur like you! But—"

"Is he near? Is there time for me to clear out?" broke in Williton. "I'm not afraid of any ordinary danger. But that fellow's mad—stark, raving mad! He'll shoot me down like a dog! Is there time?"

"Oh, I think there may be time!" replied Cardew. "But you mustn't lose a minute! Don't wait to get your traps together—clear! Get out by the backway, an' make tracks for the station!"

"I'll do it! I— Oh, look here, you must think me an awful funk, but it's no joke to face—"

"Does it matter what I think? Go, an' don't waste your breath!"

As the door closed, the voice of Rosher was heard lifted in protest.

Williton cast around him a wild, hunted look—such a look as Cardew had never before seen on the face of any man. For the moment he felt almost sorry for the fellow, in spite of the knowledge of the black story of the feud between him and Harragin, in spite of what he had gathered as to the cause of Kildare's detestation of him.

But that feeling lasted only for a moment. In the next instant Cardew realised that his bluff might have terrible consequences.

For Williton had thrust his hand into a portmanteau which lay on the floor, and had brought out a revolver!

"It's self-defence!" he cried, as he levelled the weapon at the door. "I know he means to kill me—why should I hesitate to shoot him?"

Cardew did not know what fear meant. He flung himself recklessly at the fellow, striving to snatch the revolver from his hand.

It was not Harragin who came, he knew. Probably Harragin was still in Mesopotamia. But Eric Kildare, riding-whip in hand, was on the stairs; and Williton was hardly in a condition to distinguish between one enemy and another.

Cardew might have courage enough; but he had not the strength for a grapple with Buck Williton.

He was hurled back against the bed, half-throttled, as the door opened, and Kildare appeared.

The St. Jim's senior stood there a moment in utter amazement. Behind him Cardew had a glimpse of the anxious face of Mr. Rosher. Then he saw Rosher thrust roughly aside, and Darrel stood behind Kildare.

"I've come to horsewhip you, you skunk!" flashed Kildare. "Put that thing down, and put up your fists or take a licking!"

For a moment Williton wavered. Doubtless he had a brief sensation of relief at finding that it was not Jack Harragin who had sought him out. But then he saw Kildare as a barrier in his path of escape, and something like frenzy came upon him at that thought.

His right hand, with the revolver in it, had dropped. Now it was lifted again, and the barrel of the weapon pointed straight for Kildare's heart.

"I'll not bear this!" roared the desperate man. "Stand aside, or I fire!"

Cardew pulled himself together, and made a dash at Williton's legs, designing to collar

him low, and overthrow him. Kildare took a stride forward.

Bang!

Williton had fired the second before Cardew gripped him. They rolled over on the floor together, struggling, and the revolver was dashed out of the scoundrel's hand.

Someone else went down with a crash. But it was not Eric Kildare.

George Darrel had flung himself in front of his chum, and had taken in his shoulder the bullet that might otherwise have found Kildare's heart!

Hurrying footsteps on the stairs—cries of alarm—Warris rushing in, almost distraught with fear—Tom Merry and the rest behind him!

The smoke was clearing away. Cardew had got on top of Williton, his knees on the fellow's chest, his hands at his throat. Darrel lay on the floor, and Kildare knelt by his side.

Such was the sight that they saw. "George! George, old man!" Kildare almost wailed.

"It's all right, Eric!" answered Darrel, smiling up into his face. "I don't think I'm badly damaged, though he got me somewhere."

"Hold him!" cried Kildare. But there was small need for that adjuration. Tom Merry and the rest were fairly all over Williton. Levison wrenched Cardew's hands from the scoundrel's throat; and it was time, for Mr. Buck Williton's face was going purple.

"Ere, ere, what's all this!" puffed Peter Warris. "Nice goin'-s on for a respectable 'ouse, I must say! You, Williton, you clear out of this, an' sharp about it! I'll 'ave no shootin' 'ere!"

"I'm ready to go, if you'll take these young fiends off me!" gasped Williton. "I call you to witness, Warris, that I fired only in self-defence! My life was threatened!"

"That's a lie!" snapped Kildare. "You were threatened with this whip—that was all. As for your going at once, we may have something to say about that. If you are allowed to escape, you'll be out to the police, it will be out of no consideration for your feelings, that's certain."

He turned to Warris. "You're the landlord, I suppose?" he said sharply. "Well, do what you can to keep out anyone else. We don't want this affair to become public property, if we can avoid it. And send at once for a surgeon—my friend here is wounded."

Tom Merry and Clive were helping Darrel off with his clothes now. He sat upon the bed, and it was plain that the injury done him was not so serious as it might have been. But the removal of his jacket showed the left sleeve of his shirt soaked with blood, and he fell back fainting as it was removed.

All the madness had passed from Kildare now. He had no longer any wild desire to break his riding-whip to fragments over the broad back of Buck Williton. He saw trouble—blacker trouble than ever—ahead at St. Jim's; but, for the sake of all concerned, and especially for the sake of his cousin, he was anxious to avoid any public exposure at Wayland.

But the madness had not passed from Williton. He was still possessed by the fear that at any moment the man who sought his life might appear upon the scene.

"All right, sir," said Warris submissively. "I'm sure nobody wants to avoid trouble more than what I do. I don't think as the report was 'eard outside—it wasn't a very loud one—an' if anyone else inside 'ad 'eard it we should 'ave 'ad them up 'ere before this. I'll run myself for Dr. McGillivray—'e's only just round the corner. No, I'll send Rosher. May as well make 'im useful."

"Let me go!" panted Williton. "That youngster's not really damaged. It's a mere flesh wound. And I'm not to blame for it. I tell you that there's a man coming to kill me! A fellow must defend his life, I suppose? Let me go!"

"What's this yarn about a fellow coming to kill him?" asked Kildare scornfully. "You may know something about it, Cardew—you were here with the rotter. Is this one of your tricks?"

For once in his life Ralph Reckness Cardew looked quite shamefaced.

His bluff had not worked out at all nicely. Acting with the very best intentions, he had come near to getting Kildare killed, and had actually got Darrel wounded. He knew that he had a reckoning with Tom Merry and the rest to come, as well as with Kildare and Darrel.

But his customary assurance did not desert him altogether.

"I'm sorry to say that it is, Kildare," he drawled. "I meant well, I declare; but my game failed. Mr. Williton, you may be able to resign yourself to stayin' here a little longer if I tell you that, as far as I'm aware, Jack Harragin is still in Mesopotamia. I'm not considerin' your feelin's in the least in tellin' you this, I may remark."

"You—you young fiend!" snarled Williton. Darrel opened his eyes and sat up.

"You'll stay here till the surgeon tells us how much damage is done," said Kildare to Williton. "I'm not promising to let you go then; but you very certainly won't go before. Hold your tongue now, and be thankful that you haven't a murder charge to answer!"

The landlord had slipped out of the room to find Rosher. But Mr. James Rosher had discreetly made himself scarce, and Warris himself went for the doctor.

Dr. McGillyvray arrived in a few minutes, with his surgical instruments in a small bag. He asked no questions, appearing to have learned from Warris what had happened. He cut away the sleeve from Darrel's arm, looked at it, selected an instrument, and picked out the bullet.

"Then, still silent, he bound up the arm. "Is it serious?" asked Kildare.

"Nay, nay," replied the doctor. "There's little damage apart from the shock, and the wound should begin to heal at once. The young man must carry his arm in a sling for a bit, that's a'—There's plenty things that may make a man carry his arm in a sling, ye ken. And my fee's two guineas."

Kildare put his hand in his pocket, but he knew that he had not two guineas upon him. Nether had Darrel. It was Cardew who paid the fee, though the two seniors did not half like his doing so.

"An old customer of mine," said Warris, as the doctor lumbered downstairs. "Comes 'ere every night reg'lar. Knows how to keep 'is mouth shut, 'e does."

The St. Jim's fellows were very glad to hear that, though it did not give them the highest possible opinion of Dr. McGillyvray, a gentleman of whom none of them had ever even heard before.

"What are we to do about this skunk, George?" asked Kildare.

"Oh, let the fellow go!" replied Darrel. Williton glowered at them both. But he seemed relieved to find that the affair was to be hushed up.

"I must have a reckoning with you later, Cardew," Kildare said, as they were conducted downstairs by the obsequious landlord. Mr. Warris was at least as much relieved as Williton. He had had grave fears for his licence.

"Oh, don't mention it, Kildare," replied the Fourth-Former. "Any time will do."

"I don't mean about the cash you advanced," Kildare said grimly. "There are other things, you know!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bluffing Again!

"YOU'RE the silliest ass I ever knew, but I shouldn't think even you will be quite so silly as to try that on after what happened this afternoon," said Clive.

"My dear Sidney, your unctuous rectitude is only surpassed by the extreme shortness of your views," said Cardew blandly. "What has happened this afternoon only makes it all the more dangerous that the righteous Selby should report what happened yesterday. Surely you must see that! Let it be known that Darrel thrashed Williton on Friday, and the fact that Darrel went to Wayland on Saturday with no more damage than a bruised chivvy, but came back with his arm in a sling, is sure to arouse inquiry. But if those in authority know nothin' about the fight the other bizney may pass unremarked. To that end I trust to prevail upon the revered Selby to keep his clapper silent for once."

"Sounds like blackmail to me," said Levison bluntly. "You talk about your conscience, but I don't see where that comes in. What you mean to do is to threaten that old Hun that if he doesn't let us all off reporting you'll give away the yarn of how he was spoofed into thinking that you were Miss Graeme."

"Very succinctly put, Ernest, dear boy! An' you really think—that it is a kind of blackmail, an' not conscience at all?"

"I don't think—I jolly well know! It's just another bluff. And I should have thought that you would have had enough of bluffing this afternoon."

"So should I," agreed Clive.

Cardew rose.

"It's bluff, but it's not all bluff—or, anyway, it's somethin' more than bluff," he said quietly. "We'll drop the conscience yarn, if you prefer. But you fellows know that, though I may say the thing which is not when I'm spoofin', I give you but straight talk. Well, listen here! I'm goin' to Selby, an' nothin' you can say or do will hold me back. But I sha'n't simply threaten him an' then back down. I swear to you that if he doesn't cave in I really will go to the Head an' tell him all about the actress spoof!"

"Cardew!" protested Clive, aghast. "But he was gone before they could get out any further protest."

Mr. Selby chanced to be in his study when Cardew tapped at the door.

He looked up with a scowl when he saw who his visitor was.

"I have no time to waste upon you, Cardew!" he snorted.

"Excuse me, sir, but I must press for an interview," returned Cardew politely. "I have a matter of urgent importance to broach to you."

"Be brief, then! And please understand that it is not of the least use to plead with me either on your own behalf or on that of those concerned with you in yesterday's gross breach of rules."

"It was not exactly upon that ratter that I came to speak to you, sir. May I sit down? I do not feel quite—"

"Sit down if you like!" snapped Mr. Selby.

He was more than half afraid of Cardew. On the whole, he would have preferred that the reckless Fourth-Former should not have been one of those incriminated in the bowling-green affair. It would be all very well if he could succeed in getting Cardew sacked, but even then there was the danger that the junior might tell something before he went.

Cardew sat down, and put his elbow on Mr. Selby's table. Then he laid his forehead upon his upturned hand, and gave something between a sigh and a groan.

"If you are going to be ill, Cardew—"

"It is not bodily illness, sir. It is the effect of the pangs of conscience."

"Fiddiesticks! I do not believe that you have a conscience, Cardew!"

"You are wrong, sir—very wrong! My conscience is troublin' me heavily at the present moment."

"That may be so, though I find it hard to believe," said Mr. Selby sourly. "But, in any case, your conscience is no affair of mine, and I am at a loss to know why you—"

"There you are wrong again, sir, for what is troublin' me concerns you very nearly. I shall never feel at ease in my mind until I have made full confession of the wicked trick I played upon you a few nights ago."

Mr. Selby's sallow face went almost green.

"But—but this is absurd, Cardew!" he quavered. "Confess to whom, pray?"

"To the Head, sir. I feel that he ought to know," replied Cardew.

"You would tell that disgraceful story to the Head?" panted the Third Form master.

"Yes, sir. It is disgraceful, as you say, but only to me. I cannot think what possessed me to do such a thing. Surely you, as an innocent victim, of my wives, will have no objection to my clearin' my conscience by a frank an' full confession?"

"But I have! Cardew, reckless and feather-brained as you are, you are no fool! Do you not see how much harm the divulgment of that absurd story may do me? There is nothing in it that is really to my discredit, but—"

"I dare say the Head would laugh, sir, but that doesn't really matter, does it?" asked Cardew innocently. "I've been wonderin' why I haven't been brought to book for it before. An' now I can't stand the suspense any longer. I feel that I must go to the Head an' make a clean breast of it."

Mr. Selby leaned forward until his anxious face was within a foot of Cardew's.

"My boy, I had no intention of reporting that matter," said the master, almost paternally. "I recognise that—that—"

"That it would rather show you up, eh,

sir?" struck in Cardew, as Mr. Selby paused.

"That is not the way in which you should put it, I consider," replied the master, frowning. "But I admit that—there are considerations, upon which I do not care to dwell—but well, in short, I would very much prefer that—that Dr. Holmes should know nothing about your freak—for your own sake as well as mine, of course!"

"It's very kind of you to consider me, sir," replied Cardew demurely. "An' naturally after that I'm bound to consider you. But if I don't go to the Head there is somethin' I shall have to ask you to do to oblige me. That's fair, I think?"

Mr. Selby gritted his teeth. He could not guess exactly what was coming; but he hated the notion of making conditions with this impudent junior.

He was in a corner, though. He simply could not bear the thought of having that audacious spoof recounted to the Head.

"What is it?" he ground out.

"Oh, nothin' much, sir! It's easily enough done. I only want you to let that business at Wayland yesterday slide—not to report it, I mean."

"I— Really, Cardew, this is impossible!" he faltered. "I cannot—"

"As you like, sir. Of course, if it's a matter of conscience with you there's simply nothin' more for me to say. I'm bound to respect a scruple of that sort."

"I—I— That absurd story must not get to the ears of the Head, Cardew! At any cost—"

"The cost isn't such a very heavy one, sir. Darrel had excellent reasons for doin' what he did, an' the rest of us were only lookers-on."

Mr. Selby groaned aloud. "I consent!" he said bitterly. "Now go—go at once!"

And Cardew went, glad to go.

He looked in at No. 9.

"I've worked the oracle, dear boys!" he said.

"You're spoofing again!" shouted Clive.

But Cardew passed on to No. 10 in the Shell passage, unheeding their cries.

The Terrible Three were at tea, and they looked as if they were not enjoying the meal much.

"I have the pleasure to inform you, gentlemen, that the dear Selby has relented. Nothin' is to be said about yesterday's little bizney," Cardew announced to them.

"What? You don't mean to tell us that it worked?" cried Lowther.

"Worked? I don't quite follow you, old top. It was a matter of conscience—my conscience and dear old Selby's. But it's all right. You can bank on that. Can't stop now. Oh, ask Lowther, if you don't understand, Manners! Lowther twiggled long ago."

And Cardew departed to seek out Kildare and Darrel.

He found them, as he had expected, together. Darrel's bruised face was pale, and he carried his left arm in a sling; but he looked quite cheery. There had been no formal reconciliation between him and Kildare, nothing but a few muttered words of thanks. But their quarrel was all over, and things were as they had been before it.

"You wanted to rag me, I believe, Kildare?" said Cardew.

"I did. But I'm not going to. It occurred to me afterwards that you really went for that fellow in fine style. Thanks! And here's the cash you lent us."

Cardew pocketed the notes and the florin handed over. He knew that he must not argue about that.

Then he said:

"Oh, by the way, Darrel, there won't be any report about that little affair of yesterday! I've had a chat with my dear old friend Selby, an' he's kindly consented to overlook it."

He was out of the door before either Kildare or Darrel could question him.

"He's potty!" said Kildare.

"I don't think so," replied Darrel. "I think he means what he says, though it's a mystery how he's worked it. Well, that's something to the good, Eric! And, after all, we may weather the other storm. Let's hope for the best, anyway."

Cardew's conscience—whatever doubts his chums might entertain, as to its existence—had served others as well as himself a good turn. But it still remained to be seen how the two seniors would come out of their trouble.

THE END.